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THE PICKWICK PAPERS

By Charles Dickens

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THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF THE PICKWICK CLUB

CHAPTER I. THE PICKWICKIANS

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom, and converts into a

dazzling brilliancy that obscurity in which the earlier history of the

public career of the immortal Pickwick would appear to be involved, is

derived from the perusal of the following entry in the Transactions of

the Pickwick Club, which the editor of these papers feels the highest

pleasure in laying before his readers, as a proof of the careful

attention, indefatigable assiduity, and nice discrimination, with which

his search among the multifarious documents confided to him has been

conducted.

‘May 12, 1827. Joseph Smiggers, Esq., P.V.P.M.P.C. [Perpetual Vice-

President--Member Pickwick Club], presiding. The following resolutions

unanimously agreed to:--

‘That this Association has heard read, with feelings of unmingled

satisfaction, and unqualified approval, the paper communicated by Samuel

Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C. [General Chairman--Member Pickwick Club],

entitled “Speculations on the Source of the Hampstead Ponds, with some

Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats;” and that this Association

does hereby return its warmest thanks to the said Samuel Pickwick, Esq.,

G.C.M.P.C., for the same.

‘That while this Association is deeply sensible of the advantages which

must accrue to the cause of science, from the production to which they

have just adverted--no less than from the unwearied researches of Samuel

Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., in Hornsey, Highgate, Brixton, and

Camberwell--they cannot but entertain a lively sense of the inestimable

benefits which must inevitably result from carrying the speculations of

that learned man into a wider field, from extending his travels, and,

consequently, enlarging his sphere of observation, to the advancement of

knowledge, and the diffusion of learning.

‘That, with the view just mentioned, this Association has taken into its

serious consideration a proposal, emanating from the aforesaid, Samuel

Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., and three other Pickwickians hereinafter

named, for forming a new branch of United Pickwickians, under the title

of The Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club.

‘That the said proposal has received the sanction and approval of this

Association.

‘That the Corresponding Society of the Pickwick Club is therefore hereby

constituted; and that Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., Tracy Tupman,

Esq., M.P.C., Augustus Snodgrass, Esq., M.P.C., and Nathaniel Winkle,

Esq., M.P.C., are hereby nominated and appointed members of the same;

and that they be requested to forward, from time to time, authenticated

accounts of their journeys and investigations, of their observations of

character and manners, and of the whole of their adventures, together

with all tales and papers to which local scenery or associations may

give rise, to the Pickwick Club, stationed in London.

‘That this Association cordially recognises the principle of every

member of the Corresponding Society defraying his own travelling

expenses; and that it sees no objection whatever to the members of the

said society pursuing their inquiries for any length of time they

please, upon the same terms.

‘That the members of the aforesaid Corresponding Society be, and are

hereby informed, that their proposal to pay the postage of their

letters, and the carriage of their parcels, has been deliberated upon by

this Association: that this Association considers such proposal worthy

of the great minds from which it emanated, and that it hereby signifies

its perfect acquiescence therein.’

A casual observer, adds the secretary, to whose notes we are indebted

for the following account--a casual observer might possibly have

remarked nothing extraordinary in the bald head, and circular

spectacles, which were intently turned towards his (the secretary’s)

face, during the reading of the above resolutions: to those who knew

that the gigantic brain of Pickwick was working beneath that forehead,

and that the beaming eyes of Pickwick were twinkling behind those

glasses, the sight was indeed an interesting one. There sat the man who

had traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead, and agitated

the scientific world with his Theory of Tittlebats, as calm and unmoved

as the deep waters of the one on a frosty day, or as a solitary specimen

of the other in the inmost recesses of an earthen jar. And how much more

interesting did the spectacle become, when, starting into full life and

animation, as a simultaneous call for ‘Pickwick’ burst from his

followers, that illustrious man slowly mounted into the Windsor chair,

on which he had been previously seated, and addressed the club himself

had founded. What a study for an artist did that exciting scene present!

The eloquent Pickwick, with one hand gracefully concealed behind his

coat tails, and the other waving in air to assist his glowing

declamation; his elevated position revealing those tights and gaiters,

which, had they clothed an ordinary man, might have passed without

observation, but which, when Pickwick clothed them--if we may use the

expression--inspired involuntary awe and respect; surrounded by the men

who had volunteered to share the perils of his travels, and who were

destined to participate in the glories of his discoveries. On his right

sat Mr. Tracy Tupman--the too susceptible Tupman, who to the wisdom and

experience of maturer years superadded the enthusiasm and ardour of a

boy in the most interesting and pardonable of human weaknesses--love.

Time and feeding had expanded that once romantic form; the black silk

waistcoat had become more and more developed; inch by inch had the gold

watch-chain beneath it disappeared from within the range of Tupman’s

vision; and gradually had the capacious chin encroached upon the borders

of the white cravat: but the soul of Tupman had known no change--

admiration of the fair sex was still its ruling passion. On the left of

his great leader sat the poetic Snodgrass, and near him again the

sporting Winkle; the former poetically enveloped in a mysterious blue

cloak with a canine-skin collar, and the latter communicating additional

lustre to a new green shooting-coat, plaid neckerchief, and closely-

fitted drabs.

Mr. Pickwick’s oration upon this occasion, together with the debate

thereon, is entered on the Transactions of the Club. Both bear a strong

affinity to the discussions of other celebrated bodies; and, as it is

always interesting to trace a resemblance between the proceedings of

great men, we transfer the entry to these pages.

‘Mr. Pickwick observed (says the secretary) that fame was dear to the

heart of every man. Poetic fame was dear to the heart of his friend

Snodgrass; the fame of conquest was equally dear to his friend Tupman;

and the desire of earning fame in the sports of the field, the air, and

the water was uppermost in the breast of his friend Winkle. He (Mr.

Pickwick) would not deny that he was influenced by human passions and

human feelings (cheers)--possibly by human weaknesses (loud cries of

“No”); but this he would say, that if ever the fire of self-importance

broke out in his bosom, the desire to benefit the human race in

preference effectually quenched it. The praise of mankind was his swing;

philanthropy was his insurance office. (Vehement cheering.) He had felt

some pride--he acknowledged it freely, and let his enemies make the most

of it--he had felt some pride when he presented his Tittlebatian Theory

to the world; it might be celebrated or it might not. (A cry of “It is,”

and great cheering.) He would take the assertion of that honourable

Pickwickian whose voice he had just heard--it was celebrated; but if the

fame of that treatise were to extend to the farthest confines of the

known world, the pride with which he should reflect on the authorship of

that production would be as nothing compared with the pride with which

he looked around him, on this, the proudest moment of his existence.

(Cheers.) He was a humble individual. (“No, no.”) Still he could not but

feel that they had selected him for a service of great honour, and of

some danger. Travelling was in a troubled state, and the minds of

coachmen were unsettled. Let them look abroad and contemplate the scenes

which were enacting around them. Stage-coaches were upsetting in all

directions, horses were bolting, boats were overturning, and boilers

were bursting. (Cheers--a voice “No.”) No! (Cheers.) Let that honourable

Pickwickian who cried “No” so loudly come forward and deny it, if he

could. (Cheers.) Who was it that cried “No”? (Enthusiastic cheering.)

Was it some vain and disappointed man--he would not say haberdasher

(loud cheers)--who, jealous of the praise which had been--perhaps

undeservedly--bestowed on his (Mr. Pickwick’s) researches, and smarting

under the censure which had been heaped upon his own feeble attempts at

rivalry, now took this vile and calumnious mode of--

‘MR. BLOTTON (of Aldgate) rose to order. Did the honourable Pickwickian

allude to him? (Cries of “Order,” “Chair,” “Yes,” “No,” “Go on,” “Leave

off,” etc.)

‘MR. PICKWICK would not put up to be put down by clamour. He had alluded

to the honourable gentleman. (Great excitement.)

‘MR. BLOTTON would only say then, that he repelled the hon. gent.’s

false and scurrilous accusation, with profound contempt. (Great

cheering.) The hon. gent. was a humbug. (Immense confusion, and loud

cries of “Chair,” and “Order.”)

‘Mr. A. SNODGRASS rose to order. He threw himself upon the chair.

(Hear.) He wished to know whether this disgraceful contest between two

members of that club should be allowed to continue. (Hear, hear.)

‘The CHAIRMAN was quite sure the hon. Pickwickian would withdraw the

expression he had just made use of.

‘MR. BLOTTON, with all possible respect for the chair, was quite sure he

would not.

‘The CHAIRMAN felt it his imperative duty to demand of the honourable

gentleman, whether he had used the expression which had just escaped him

in a common sense.

‘MR. BLOTTON had no hesitation in saying that he had not--he had used

the word in its Pickwickian sense. (Hear, hear.) He was bound to

acknowledge that, personally, he entertained the highest regard and

esteem for the honourable gentleman; he had merely considered him a

humbug in a Pickwickian point of view. (Hear, hear.)

‘MR. PICKWICK felt much gratified by the fair, candid, and full

explanation of his honourable friend. He begged it to be at once

understood, that his own observations had been merely intended to bear a

Pickwickian construction. (Cheers.)’

Here the entry terminates, as we have no doubt the debate did also,

after arriving at such a highly satisfactory and intelligible point. We

have no official statement of the facts which the reader will find

recorded in the next chapter, but they have been carefully collated from

letters and other MS. authorities, so unquestionably genuine as to

justify their narration in a connected form.

CHAPTER II. THE FIRST DAY’S JOURNEY, AND THE FIRST EVENING’S ADVENTURES;

WITH THEIR CONSEQUENCES

That punctual servant of all work, the sun, had just risen, and begun to

strike a light on the morning of the thirteenth of May, one thousand

eight hundred and twenty-seven, when Mr. Samuel Pickwick burst like

another sun from his slumbers, threw open his chamber window, and looked

out upon the world beneath. Goswell Street was at his feet, Goswell

Street was on his right hand--as far as the eye could reach, Goswell

Street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell Street was

over the way. ‘Such,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, ‘are the narrow views of

those philosophers who, content with examining the things that lie

before them, look not to the truths which are hidden beyond. As well

might I be content to gaze on Goswell Street for ever, without one

effort to penetrate to the hidden countries which on every side surround

it.’ And having given vent to this beautiful reflection, Mr. Pickwick

proceeded to put himself into his clothes, and his clothes into his

portmanteau. Great men are seldom over scrupulous in the arrangement of

their attire; the operation of shaving, dressing, and coffee-imbibing

was soon performed; and, in another hour, Mr. Pickwick, with his

portmanteau in his hand, his telescope in his greatcoat pocket, and his

note-book in his waistcoat, ready for the reception of any discoveries

worthy of being noted down, had arrived at the coach-stand in St.

Martin’s-le-Grand.

‘Cab!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Here you are, sir,’ shouted a strange specimen of the human race, in a

sackcloth coat, and apron of the same, who, with a brass label and

number round his neck, looked as if he were catalogued in some

collection of rarities. This was the waterman. ‘Here you are, sir. Now,

then, fust cab!’ And the first cab having been fetched from the public-

house, where he had been smoking his first pipe, Mr. Pickwick and his

portmanteau were thrown into the vehicle.

‘Golden Cross,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Only a bob’s vorth, Tommy,’ cried the driver sulkily, for the

information of his friend the waterman, as the cab drove off.

‘How old is that horse, my friend?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his

nose with the shilling he had reserved for the fare.

‘Forty-two,’ replied the driver, eyeing him askant.

‘What!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand upon his note-book. The

driver reiterated his former statement. Mr. Pickwick looked very hard at

the man’s face, but his features were immovable, so he noted down the

fact forthwith.

‘And how long do you keep him out at a time?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick,

searching for further information.

‘Two or three veeks,’ replied the man.

‘Weeks!’ said Mr. Pickwick in astonishment, and out came the note-book

again.

‘He lives at Pentonwil when he’s at home,’ observed the driver coolly,

‘but we seldom takes him home, on account of his weakness.’

‘On account of his weakness!’ reiterated the perplexed Mr. Pickwick.

‘He always falls down when he’s took out o’ the cab,’ continued the

driver, ‘but when he’s in it, we bears him up werry tight, and takes him

in werry short, so as he can’t werry well fall down; and we’ve got a

pair o’ precious large wheels on, so ven he does move, they run after

him, and he must go on--he can’t help it.’

Mr. Pickwick entered every word of this statement in his note-book, with

the view of communicating it to the club, as a singular instance of the

tenacity of life in horses under trying circumstances. The entry was

scarcely completed when they reached the Golden Cross. Down jumped the

driver, and out got Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr.

Winkle, who had been anxiously waiting the arrival of their illustrious

leader, crowded to welcome him.

‘Here’s your fare,’ said Mr. Pickwick, holding out the shilling to the

driver.

What was the learned man’s astonishment, when that unaccountable person

flung the money on the pavement, and requested in figurative terms to be

allowed the pleasure of fighting him (Mr. Pickwick) for the amount!

‘You are mad,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Or drunk,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Or both,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Come on!’ said the cab-driver, sparring away like clockwork. ‘Come on--

all four on you.’

‘Here’s a lark!’ shouted half a dozen hackney coachmen. ‘Go to vork,

Sam!--and they crowded with great glee round the party.

‘What’s the row, Sam?’ inquired one gentleman in black calico sleeves.

‘Row!’ replied the cabman, ‘what did he want my number for?’

‘I didn’t want your number,’ said the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

‘What did you take it for, then?’ inquired the cabman.

‘I didn’t take it,’ said Mr. Pickwick indignantly.

‘Would anybody believe,’ continued the cab-driver, appealing to the

crowd, ‘would anybody believe as an informer’ud go about in a man’s cab,

not only takin’ down his number, but ev’ry word he says into the

bargain’ (a light flashed upon Mr. Pickwick--it was the note-book).

‘Did he though?’ inquired another cabman.

‘Yes, did he,’ replied the first; ‘and then arter aggerawatin’ me to

assault him, gets three witnesses here to prove it. But I’ll give it

him, if I’ve six months for it. Come on!’ and the cabman dashed his hat

upon the ground, with a reckless disregard of his own private property,

and knocked Mr. Pickwick’s spectacles off, and followed up the attack

with a blow on Mr. Pickwick’s nose, and another on Mr. Pickwick’s chest,

and a third in Mr. Snodgrass’s eye, and a fourth, by way of variety, in

Mr. Tupman’s waistcoat, and then danced into the road, and then back

again to the pavement, and finally dashed the whole temporary supply of

breath out of Mr. Winkle’s body; and all in half a dozen seconds.

‘Where’s an officer?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Put ‘em under the pump,’ suggested a hot-pieman.

‘You shall smart for this,’ gasped Mr. Pickwick.

‘Informers!’ shouted the crowd.

‘Come on,’ cried the cabman, who had been sparring without cessation the

whole time.

The mob hitherto had been passive spectators of the scene, but as the

intelligence of the Pickwickians being informers was spread among them,

they began to canvass with considerable vivacity the propriety of

enforcing the heated pastry-vendor’s proposition: and there is no saying

what acts of personal aggression they might have committed, had not the

affray been unexpectedly terminated by the interposition of a new-comer.

‘What’s the fun?’ said a rather tall, thin, young man, in a green coat,

emerging suddenly from the coach-yard.

‘Informers!’ shouted the crowd again.

‘We are not,’ roared Mr. Pickwick, in a tone which, to any dispassionate

listener, carried conviction with it.

‘Ain’t you, though--ain’t you?’ said the young man, appealing to Mr.

Pickwick, and making his way through the crowd by the infallible process

of elbowing the countenances of its component members.

That learned man in a few hurried words explained the real state of the

case.

‘Come along, then,’ said he of the green coat, lugging Mr. Pickwick

after him by main force, and talking the whole way. Here, No. 924, take

your fare, and take yourself off--respectable gentleman--know him well--

none of your nonsense--this way, sir--where’s your friends?--all a

mistake, I see--never mind--accidents will happen--best regulated

families--never say die--down upon your luck--Pull him \_up\_--Put that in

his pipe--like the flavour--damned rascals.’ And with a lengthened

string of similar broken sentences, delivered with extraordinary

volubility, the stranger led the way to the traveller’s waiting-room,

whither he was closely followed by Mr. Pickwick and his disciples.

‘Here, waiter!’ shouted the stranger, ringing the bell with tremendous

violence, ‘glasses round--brandy-and-water, hot and strong, and sweet,

and plenty,--eye damaged, Sir? Waiter! raw beef-steak for the

gentleman’s eye--nothing like raw beef-steak for a bruise, sir; cold

lamp-post very good, but lamp-post inconvenient--damned odd standing in

the open street half an hour, with your eye against a lamp-post--eh,--

very good--ha! ha!’ And the stranger, without stopping to take breath,

swallowed at a draught full half a pint of the reeking brandy-and-water,

and flung himself into a chair with as much ease as if nothing uncommon

had occurred.

While his three companions were busily engaged in proffering their

thanks to their new acquaintance, Mr. Pickwick had leisure to examine

his costume and appearance.

He was about the middle height, but the thinness of his body, and the

length of his legs, gave him the appearance of being much taller. The

green coat had been a smart dress garment in the days of swallow-tails,

but had evidently in those times adorned a much shorter man than the

stranger, for the soiled and faded sleeves scarcely reached to his

wrists. It was buttoned closely up to his chin, at the imminent hazard

of splitting the back; and an old stock, without a vestige of shirt

collar, ornamented his neck. His scanty black trousers displayed here

and there those shiny patches which bespeak long service, and were

strapped very tightly over a pair of patched and mended shoes, as if to

conceal the dirty white stockings, which were nevertheless distinctly

visible. His long, black hair escaped in negligent waves from beneath

each side of his old pinched-up hat; and glimpses of his bare wrists

might be observed between the tops of his gloves and the cuffs of his

coat sleeves. His face was thin and haggard; but an indescribable air of

jaunty impudence and perfect self-possession pervaded the whole man.

Such was the individual on whom Mr. Pickwick gazed through his

spectacles (which he had fortunately recovered), and to whom he

proceeded, when his friends had exhausted themselves, to return in

chosen terms his warmest thanks for his recent assistance.

‘Never mind,’ said the stranger, cutting the address very short, ‘said

enough--no more; smart chap that cabman--handled his fives well; but if

I’d been your friend in the green jemmy--damn me--punch his head,--‘cod

I would,--pig’s whisper--pieman too,--no gammon.’

This coherent speech was interrupted by the entrance of the Rochester

coachman, to announce that ‘the Commodore’ was on the point of starting.

‘Commodore!’ said the stranger, starting up, ‘my coach--place booked,--

one outside--leave you to pay for the brandy-and-water,--want change for

a five,--bad silver--Brummagem buttons--won’t do--no go--eh?’ and he

shook his head most knowingly.

Now it so happened that Mr. Pickwick and his three companions had

resolved to make Rochester their first halting-place too; and having

intimated to their new-found acquaintance that they were journeying to

the same city, they agreed to occupy the seat at the back of the coach,

where they could all sit together.

‘Up with you,’ said the stranger, assisting Mr. Pickwick on to the roof

with so much precipitation as to impair the gravity of that gentleman’s

deportment very materially.

‘Any luggage, Sir?’ inquired the coachman.

‘Who--I? Brown paper parcel here, that’s all--other luggage gone by

water--packing-cases, nailed up--big as houses--heavy, heavy, damned

heavy,’ replied the stranger, as he forced into his pocket as much as he

could of the brown paper parcel, which presented most suspicious

indications of containing one shirt and a handkerchief.

‘Heads, heads--take care of your heads!’ cried the loquacious stranger,

as they came out under the low archway, which in those days formed the

entrance to the coach-yard. ‘Terrible place--dangerous work--other day--

five children--mother--tall lady, eating sandwiches--forgot the arch--

crash--knock--children look round--mother’s head off--sandwich in her

hand--no mouth to put it in--head of a family off--shocking, shocking!

Looking at Whitehall, sir?--fine place--little window--somebody else’s

head off there, eh, sir?--he didn’t keep a sharp look-out enough either-

-eh, Sir, eh?’

‘I am ruminating,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘on the strange mutability of

human affairs.’

‘Ah! I see--in at the palace door one day, out at the window the next.

Philosopher, Sir?’

‘An observer of human nature, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah, so am I. Most people are when they’ve little to do and less to get.

Poet, Sir?’

‘My friend Mr. Snodgrass has a strong poetic turn,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘So have I,’ said the stranger. ‘Epic poem--ten thousand lines--

revolution of July--composed it on the spot--Mars by day, Apollo by

night--bang the field-piece, twang the lyre.’

‘You were present at that glorious scene, sir?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Present! think I was;\* fired a musket--fired with an idea--rushed into

wine shop--wrote it down--back again--whiz, bang--another idea--wine

shop again--pen and ink--back again--cut and slash--noble time, Sir.

Sportsman, sir?’ abruptly turning to Mr. Winkle.

\* A remarkable instance of the prophetic force of Mr. Jingle’s

imagination; this dialogue occurring in the year 1827, and the

Revolution in 1830.

‘A little, Sir,’ replied that gentleman.

‘Fine pursuit, sir--fine pursuit.--Dogs, Sir?’

‘Not just now,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Ah! you should keep dogs--fine animals--sagacious creatures--dog of my

own once--pointer--surprising instinct--out shooting one day--entering

inclosure--whistled--dog stopped--whistled again--Ponto--no go; stock

still--called him--Ponto, Ponto--wouldn’t move--dog transfixed--staring

at a board--looked up, saw an inscription--“Gamekeeper has orders to

shoot all dogs found in this inclosure”--wouldn’t pass it--wonderful

dog--valuable dog that--very.’

‘Singular circumstance that,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Will you allow me to

make a note of it?’

‘Certainly, Sir, certainly--hundred more anecdotes of the same animal.--

Fine girl, Sir’ (to Mr. Tracy Tupman, who had been bestowing sundry

anti-Pickwickian glances on a young lady by the roadside).

‘Very!’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘English girls not so fine as Spanish--noble creatures--jet hair--black

eyes--lovely forms--sweet creatures--beautiful.’

‘You have been in Spain, sir?’ said Mr. Tracy Tupman.

‘Lived there--ages.’

‘Many conquests, sir?’ inquired Mr. Tupman.

‘Conquests! Thousands. Don Bolaro Fizzgig--grandee--only daughter--Donna

Christina--splendid creature--loved me to distraction--jealous father--

high-souled daughter--handsome Englishman--Donna Christina in despair--

prussic acid--stomach pump in my portmanteau--operation performed--old

Bolaro in ecstasies--consent to our union--join hands and floods of

tears--romantic story--very.’

‘Is the lady in England now, sir?’ inquired Mr. Tupman, on whom the

description of her charms had produced a powerful impression.

‘Dead, sir--dead,’ said the stranger, applying to his right eye the

brief remnant of a very old cambric handkerchief. ‘Never recovered the

stomach pump--undermined constitution--fell a victim.’

‘And her father?’ inquired the poetic Snodgrass.

‘Remorse and misery,’ replied the stranger. ‘Sudden disappearance--talk

of the whole city--search made everywhere without success--public

fountain in the great square suddenly ceased playing--weeks elapsed--

still a stoppage--workmen employed to clean it--water drawn off--father-

in-law discovered sticking head first in the main pipe, with a full

confession in his right boot--took him out, and the fountain played away

again, as well as ever.’

‘Will you allow me to note that little romance down, Sir?’ said Mr.

Snodgrass, deeply affected.

‘Certainly, Sir, certainly--fifty more if you like to hear ‘em--strange

life mine--rather curious history--not extraordinary, but singular.’

In this strain, with an occasional glass of ale, by way of parenthesis,

when the coach changed horses, did the stranger proceed, until they

reached Rochester bridge, by which time the note-books, both of Mr.

Pickwick and Mr. Snodgrass, were completely filled with selections from

his adventures.

‘Magnificent ruin!’ said Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, with all the poetic

fervour that distinguished him, when they came in sight of the fine old

castle.

‘What a study for an antiquarian!’ were the very words which fell from

Mr. Pickwick’s mouth, as he applied his telescope to his eye.

‘Ah! fine place,’ said the stranger, ‘glorious pile--frowning walls--

tottering arches--dark nooks--crumbling staircases--old cathedral too--

earthy smell--pilgrims’ feet wore away the old steps--little Saxon

doors--confessionals like money-takers’ boxes at theatres--queer

customers those monks--popes, and lord treasurers, and all sorts of old

fellows, with great red faces, and broken noses, turning up every day--

buff jerkins too--match-locks--sarcophagus--fine place--old legends too-

-strange stories: capital;’ and the stranger continued to soliloquise

until they reached the Bull Inn, in the High Street, where the coach

stopped.

‘Do you remain here, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Nathaniel Winkle.

‘Here--not I--but you’d better--good house--nice beds--Wright’s next

house, dear--very dear--half-a-crown in the bill if you look at the

waiter--charge you more if you dine at a friend’s than they would if you

dined in the coffee-room--rum fellows--very.’

Mr. Winkle turned to Mr. Pickwick, and murmured a few words; a whisper

passed from Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Snodgrass, from Mr. Snodgrass to Mr.

Tupman, and nods of assent were exchanged. Mr. Pickwick addressed the

stranger.

‘You rendered us a very important service this morning, sir,’ said he,

‘will you allow us to offer a slight mark of our gratitude by begging

the favour of your company at dinner?’

‘Great pleasure--not presume to dictate, but broiled fowl and mushrooms-

-capital thing! What time?’

‘Let me see,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, referring to his watch, ‘it is now

nearly three. Shall we say five?’

‘Suit me excellently,’ said the stranger, ‘five precisely--till then--

care of yourselves;’ and lifting the pinched-up hat a few inches from

his head, and carelessly replacing it very much on one side, the

stranger, with half the brown paper parcel sticking out of his pocket,

walked briskly up the yard, and turned into the High Street.

‘Evidently a traveller in many countries, and a close observer of men

and things,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I should like to see his poem,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘I should like to have seen that dog,’ said Mr. Winkle.

Mr. Tupman said nothing; but he thought of Donna Christina, the stomach

pump, and the fountain; and his eyes filled with tears.

A private sitting-room having been engaged, bedrooms inspected, and

dinner ordered, the party walked out to view the city and adjoining

neighbourhood.

We do not find, from a careful perusal of Mr. Pickwick’s notes of the

four towns, Stroud, Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton, that his

impressions of their appearance differ in any material point from those

of other travellers who have gone over the same ground. His general

description is easily abridged.

‘The principal productions of these towns,’ says Mr. Pickwick, ‘appear

to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard

men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the public streets are

marine stores, hard-bake, apples, flat-fish, and oysters. The streets

present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the

conviviality of the military. It is truly delightful to a philanthropic

mind to see these gallant men staggering along under the influence of an

overflow both of animal and ardent spirits; more especially when we

remember that the following them about, and jesting with them, affords a

cheap and innocent amusement for the boy population. Nothing,’ adds Mr.

Pickwick, ‘can exceed their good-humour. It was but the day before my

arrival that one of them had been most grossly insulted in the house of

a publican. The barmaid had positively refused to draw him any more

liquor; in return for which he had (merely in playfulness) drawn his

bayonet, and wounded the girl in the shoulder. And yet this fine fellow

was the very first to go down to the house next morning and express his

readiness to overlook the matter, and forget what had occurred!

‘The consumption of tobacco in these towns,’ continues Mr. Pickwick,

‘must be very great, and the smell which pervades the streets must be

exceedingly delicious to those who are extremely fond of smoking. A

superficial traveller might object to the dirt, which is their leading

characteristic; but to those who view it as an indication of traffic and

commercial prosperity, it is truly gratifying.’

Punctual to five o’clock came the stranger, and shortly afterwards the

dinner. He had divested himself of his brown paper parcel, but had made

no alteration in his attire, and was, if possible, more loquacious than

ever.

‘What’s that?’ he inquired, as the waiter removed one of the covers.

‘Soles, Sir.’

‘Soles--ah!--capital fish--all come from London-stage-coach proprietors

get up political dinners--carriage of soles--dozens of baskets--cunning

fellows. Glass of wine, Sir.’

‘With pleasure,’ said Mr. Pickwick; and the stranger took wine, first

with him, and then with Mr. Snodgrass, and then with Mr. Tupman, and

then with Mr. Winkle, and then with the whole party together, almost as

rapidly as he talked.

‘Devil of a mess on the staircase, waiter,’ said the stranger. ‘Forms

going up--carpenters coming down--lamps, glasses, harps. What’s going

forward?’

‘Ball, Sir,’ said the waiter.

‘Assembly, eh?’

‘No, Sir, not assembly, Sir. Ball for the benefit of a charity, Sir.’

‘Many fine women in this town, do you know, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Tupman,

with great interest.

‘Splendid--capital. Kent, sir--everybody knows Kent--apples, cherries,

hops, and women. Glass of wine, Sir!’

‘With great pleasure,’ replied Mr. Tupman. The stranger filled, and

emptied.

‘I should very much like to go,’ said Mr. Tupman, resuming the subject

of the ball, ‘very much.’

‘Tickets at the bar, Sir,’ interposed the waiter; ‘half-a-guinea each,

Sir.’

Mr. Tupman again expressed an earnest wish to be present at the

festivity; but meeting with no response in the darkened eye of Mr.

Snodgrass, or the abstracted gaze of Mr. Pickwick, he applied himself

with great interest to the port wine and dessert, which had just been

placed on the table. The waiter withdrew, and the party were left to

enjoy the cosy couple of hours succeeding dinner.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said the stranger, ‘bottle stands--pass it

round--way of the sun--through the button-hole--no heeltaps,’ and he

emptied his glass, which he had filled about two minutes before, and

poured out another, with the air of a man who was used to it.

The wine was passed, and a fresh supply ordered. The visitor talked, the

Pickwickians listened. Mr. Tupman felt every moment more disposed for

the ball. Mr. Pickwick’s countenance glowed with an expression of

universal philanthropy, and Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass fell fast

asleep.

‘They’re beginning upstairs,’ said the stranger--‘hear the company--

fiddles tuning--now the harp--there they go.’ The various sounds which

found their way downstairs announced the commencement of the first

quadrille.

‘How I should like to go,’ said Mr. Tupman again.

‘So should I,’ said the stranger--‘confounded luggage,--heavy smacks--

nothing to go in--odd, ain’t it?’

Now general benevolence was one of the leading features of the

Pickwickian theory, and no one was more remarkable for the zealous

manner in which he observed so noble a principle than Mr. Tracy Tupman.

The number of instances recorded on the Transactions of the Society, in

which that excellent man referred objects of charity to the houses of

other members for left-off garments or pecuniary relief is almost

incredible.

‘I should be very happy to lend you a change of apparel for the

purpose,’ said Mr. Tracy Tupman, ‘but you are rather slim, and I am--’

‘Rather fat--grown-up Bacchus--cut the leaves--dismounted from the tub,

and adopted kersey, eh?--not double distilled, but double milled--ha!

ha! pass the wine.’

Whether Mr. Tupman was somewhat indignant at the peremptory tone in

which he was desired to pass the wine which the stranger passed so

quickly away, or whether he felt very properly scandalised at an

influential member of the Pickwick Club being ignominiously compared to

a dismounted Bacchus, is a fact not yet completely ascertained. He

passed the wine, coughed twice, and looked at the stranger for several

seconds with a stern intensity; as that individual, however, appeared

perfectly collected, and quite calm under his searching glance, he

gradually relaxed, and reverted to the subject of the ball.

‘I was about to observe, Sir,’ he said, ‘that though my apparel would be

too large, a suit of my friend Mr. Winkle’s would, perhaps, fit you

better.’

The stranger took Mr. Winkle’s measure with his eye, and that feature

glistened with satisfaction as he said, ‘Just the thing.’

Mr. Tupman looked round him. The wine, which had exerted its somniferous

influence over Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle, had stolen upon the senses

of Mr. Pickwick. That gentleman had gradually passed through the various

stages which precede the lethargy produced by dinner, and its

consequences. He had undergone the ordinary transitions from the height

of conviviality to the depth of misery, and from the depth of misery to

the height of conviviality. Like a gas-lamp in the street, with the wind

in the pipe, he had exhibited for a moment an unnatural brilliancy, then

sank so low as to be scarcely discernible; after a short interval, he

had burst out again, to enlighten for a moment; then flickered with an

uncertain, staggering sort of light, and then gone out altogether. His

head was sunk upon his bosom, and perpetual snoring, with a partial

choke occasionally, were the only audible indications of the great man’s

presence.

The temptation to be present at the ball, and to form his first

impressions of the beauty of the Kentish ladies, was strong upon Mr.

Tupman. The temptation to take the stranger with him was equally great.

He was wholly unacquainted with the place and its inhabitants, and the

stranger seemed to possess as great a knowledge of both as if he had

lived there from his infancy. Mr. Winkle was asleep, and Mr. Tupman had

had sufficient experience in such matters to know that the moment he

awoke he would, in the ordinary course of nature, roll heavily to bed.

He was undecided. ‘Fill your glass, and pass the wine,’ said the

indefatigable visitor.

Mr. Tupman did as he was requested; and the additional stimulus of the

last glass settled his determination.

‘Winkle’s bedroom is inside mine,’ said Mr. Tupman; ‘I couldn’t make him

understand what I wanted, if I woke him now, but I know he has a dress-

suit in a carpet bag; and supposing you wore it to the ball, and took it

off when we returned, I could replace it without troubling him at all

about the matter.’

‘Capital,’ said the stranger, ‘famous plan--damned odd situation--

fourteen coats in the packing-cases, and obliged to wear another man’s--

very good notion, that--very.’

‘We must purchase our tickets,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Not worth while splitting a guinea,’ said the stranger, ‘toss who shall

pay for both--I call; you spin--first time--woman--woman--bewitching

woman,’ and down came the sovereign with the dragon (called by courtesy

a woman) uppermost.

Mr. Tupman rang the bell, purchased the tickets, and ordered chamber

candlesticks. In another quarter of an hour the stranger was completely

arrayed in a full suit of Mr. Nathaniel Winkle’s.

‘It’s a new coat,’ said Mr. Tupman, as the stranger surveyed himself

with great complacency in a cheval glass; ‘the first that’s been made

with our club button,’ and he called his companions’ attention to the

large gilt button which displayed a bust of Mr. Pickwick in the centre,

and the letters ‘P. C.’ on either side.

‘“P. C.”’ said the stranger--‘queer set out--old fellow’s likeness, and

“P. C.”--What does “P. C.” stand for--Peculiar Coat, eh?’ Mr. Tupman,

with rising indignation and great importance, explained the mystic

device.

‘Rather short in the waist, ain’t it?’ said the stranger, screwing

himself round to catch a glimpse in the glass of the waist buttons,

which were half-way up his back. ‘Like a general postman’s coat--queer

coats those--made by contract--no measuring--mysterious dispensations of

Providence--all the short men get long coats--all the long men short

ones.’ Running on in this way, Mr. Tupman’s new companion adjusted his

dress, or rather the dress of Mr. Winkle; and, accompanied by Mr.

Tupman, ascended the staircase leading to the ballroom.

‘What names, sir?’ said the man at the door. Mr. Tracy Tupman was

stepping forward to announce his own titles, when the stranger prevented

him.

‘No names at all;’ and then he whispered Mr. Tupman, ‘names won’t do--

not known--very good names in their way, but not great ones--capital

names for a small party, but won’t make an impression in public

assemblies--incog. the thing--gentlemen from London--distinguished

foreigners--anything.’ The door was thrown open, and Mr. Tracy Tupman

and the stranger entered the ballroom.

It was a long room, with crimson-covered benches, and wax candles in

glass chandeliers. The musicians were securely confined in an elevated

den, and quadrilles were being systematically got through by two or

three sets of dancers. Two card-tables were made up in the adjoining

card-room, and two pair of old ladies, and a corresponding number of

stout gentlemen, were executing whist therein.

The finale concluded, the dancers promenaded the room, and Mr. Tupman

and his companion stationed themselves in a corner to observe the

company.

‘Charming women,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Wait a minute,’ said the stranger, ‘fun presently--nobs not come yet--

queer place--dockyard people of upper rank don’t know dockyard people of

lower rank--dockyard people of lower rank don’t know small gentry--small

gentry don’t know tradespeople--commissioner don’t know anybody.’

‘Who’s that little boy with the light hair and pink eyes, in a fancy

dress?’ inquired Mr. Tupman.

‘Hush, pray--pink eyes--fancy dress--little boy--nonsense--ensign 97th--

Honourable Wilmot Snipe--great family--Snipes--very.’

‘Sir Thomas Clubber, Lady Clubber, and the Misses Clubber!’ shouted the

man at the door in a stentorian voice. A great sensation was created

throughout the room by the entrance of a tall gentleman in a blue coat

and bright buttons, a large lady in blue satin, and two young ladies, on

a similar scale, in fashionably-made dresses of the same hue.

‘Commissioner--head of the yard--great man--remarkably great man,’

whispered the stranger in Mr. Tupman’s ear, as the charitable committee

ushered Sir Thomas Clubber and family to the top of the room. The

Honourable Wilmot Snipe, and other distinguished gentlemen crowded to

render homage to the Misses Clubber; and Sir Thomas Clubber stood bolt

upright, and looked majestically over his black kerchief at the

assembled company.

‘Mr. Smithie, Mrs. Smithie, and the Misses Smithie,’ was the next

announcement.

‘What’s Mr. Smithie?’ inquired Mr. Tracy Tupman.

‘Something in the yard,’ replied the stranger. Mr. Smithie bowed

deferentially to Sir Thomas Clubber; and Sir Thomas Clubber acknowledged

the salute with conscious condescension. Lady Clubber took a telescopic

view of Mrs. Smithie and family through her eye-glass and Mrs. Smithie

stared in her turn at Mrs. Somebody-else, whose husband was not in the

dockyard at all.

‘Colonel Bulder, Mrs. Colonel Bulder, and Miss Bulder,’ were the next

arrivals.

‘Head of the garrison,’ said the stranger, in reply to Mr. Tupman’s

inquiring look.

Miss Bulder was warmly welcomed by the Misses Clubber; the greeting

between Mrs. Colonel Bulder and Lady Clubber was of the most

affectionate description; Colonel Bulder and Sir Thomas Clubber

exchanged snuff-boxes, and looked very much like a pair of Alexander

Selkirks--‘Monarchs of all they surveyed.’

While the aristocracy of the place--the Bulders, and Clubbers, and

Snipes--were thus preserving their dignity at the upper end of the room,

the other classes of society were imitating their example in other parts

of it. The less aristocratic officers of the 97th devoted themselves to

the families of the less important functionaries from the dockyard. The

solicitors’ wives, and the wine-merchant’s wife, headed another grade

(the brewer’s wife visited the Bulders); and Mrs. Tomlinson, the post-

office keeper, seemed by mutual consent to have been chosen the leader

of the trade party.

One of the most popular personages, in his own circle, present, was a

little fat man, with a ring of upright black hair round his head, and an

extensive bald plain on the top of it--Doctor Slammer, surgeon to the

97th. The doctor took snuff with everybody, chatted with everybody,

laughed, danced, made jokes, played whist, did everything, and was

everywhere. To these pursuits, multifarious as they were, the little

doctor added a more important one than any--he was indefatigable in

paying the most unremitting and devoted attention to a little old widow,

whose rich dress and profusion of ornament bespoke her a most desirable

addition to a limited income.

Upon the doctor, and the widow, the eyes of both Mr. Tupman and his

companion had been fixed for some time, when the stranger broke silence.

‘Lots of money--old girl--pompous doctor--not a bad idea--good fun,’

were the intelligible sentences which issued from his lips. Mr. Tupman

looked inquisitively in his face.

‘I’ll dance with the widow,’ said the stranger.

‘Who is she?’ inquired Mr. Tupman.

‘Don’t know--never saw her in all my life--cut out the doctor--here

goes.’ And the stranger forthwith crossed the room; and, leaning against

a mantel-piece, commenced gazing with an air of respectful and

melancholy admiration on the fat countenance of the little old lady. Mr.

Tupman looked on, in mute astonishment. The stranger progressed rapidly;

the little doctor danced with another lady; the widow dropped her fan;

the stranger picked it up, and presented it--a smile--a bow--a curtsey--

a few words of conversation. The stranger walked boldly up to, and

returned with, the master of the ceremonies; a little introductory

pantomime; and the stranger and Mrs. Budger took their places in a

quadrille.

The surprise of Mr. Tupman at this summary proceeding, great as it was,

was immeasurably exceeded by the astonishment of the doctor. The

stranger was young, and the widow was flattered. The doctor’s attentions

were unheeded by the widow; and the doctor’s indignation was wholly lost

on his imperturbable rival. Doctor Slammer was paralysed. He, Doctor

Slammer, of the 97th, to be extinguished in a moment, by a man whom

nobody had ever seen before, and whom nobody knew even now! Doctor

Slammer--Doctor Slammer of the 97th rejected! Impossible! It could not

be! Yes, it was; there they were. What! introducing his friend! Could he

believe his eyes! He looked again, and was under the painful necessity

of admitting the veracity of his optics; Mrs. Budger was dancing with

Mr. Tracy Tupman; there was no mistaking the fact. There was the widow

before him, bouncing bodily here and there, with unwonted vigour; and

Mr. Tracy Tupman hopping about, with a face expressive of the most

intense solemnity, dancing (as a good many people do) as if a quadrille

were not a thing to be laughed at, but a severe trial to the feelings,

which it requires inflexible resolution to encounter.

Silently and patiently did the doctor bear all this, and all the

handings of negus, and watching for glasses, and darting for biscuits,

and coquetting, that ensued; but, a few seconds after the stranger had

disappeared to lead Mrs. Budger to her carriage, he darted swiftly from

the room with every particle of his hitherto-bottled-up indignation

effervescing, from all parts of his countenance, in a perspiration of

passion.

The stranger was returning, and Mr. Tupman was beside him. He spoke in a

low tone, and laughed. The little doctor thirsted for his life. He was

exulting. He had triumphed.

‘Sir!’ said the doctor, in an awful voice, producing a card, and

retiring into an angle of the passage, ‘my name is Slammer, Doctor

Slammer, sir--97th Regiment--Chatham Barracks--my card, Sir, my card.’

He would have added more, but his indignation choked him.

‘Ah!’ replied the stranger coolly, ‘Slammer--much obliged--polite

attention--not ill now, Slammer--but when I am--knock you up.’

‘You--you’re a shuffler, sir,’ gasped the furious doctor, ‘a poltroon--a

coward--a liar--a--a--will nothing induce you to give me your card,

sir!’

‘Oh! I see,’ said the stranger, half aside, ‘negus too strong here--

liberal landlord--very foolish--very--lemonade much better--hot rooms--

elderly gentlemen--suffer for it in the morning--cruel--cruel;’ and he

moved on a step or two.

‘You are stopping in this house, Sir,’ said the indignant little man;

‘you are intoxicated now, Sir; you shall hear from me in the morning,

sir. I shall find you out, sir; I shall find you out.’

‘Rather you found me out than found me at home,’ replied the unmoved

stranger.

Doctor Slammer looked unutterable ferocity, as he fixed his hat on his

head with an indignant knock; and the stranger and Mr. Tupman ascended

to the bedroom of the latter to restore the borrowed plumage to the

unconscious Winkle.

That gentleman was fast asleep; the restoration was soon made. The

stranger was extremely jocose; and Mr. Tracy Tupman, being quite

bewildered with wine, negus, lights, and ladies, thought the whole

affair was an exquisite joke. His new friend departed; and, after

experiencing some slight difficulty in finding the orifice in his

nightcap, originally intended for the reception of his head, and finally

overturning his candlestick in his struggles to put it on, Mr. Tracy

Tupman managed to get into bed by a series of complicated evolutions,

and shortly afterwards sank into repose.

Seven o’clock had hardly ceased striking on the following morning, when

Mr. Pickwick’s comprehensive mind was aroused from the state of

unconsciousness, in which slumber had plunged it, by a loud knocking at

his chamber door.

‘Who’s there?’ said Mr. Pickwick, starting up in bed.

‘Boots, sir.’

‘What do you want?’

‘Please, sir, can you tell me which gentleman of your party wears a

bright blue dress-coat, with a gilt button with “P. C.” on it?’

‘It’s been given out to brush,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, ‘and the man has

forgotten whom it belongs to.’

Mr. Winkle,’ he called out, ‘next room but two, on the right hand.’

‘Thank’ee, sir,’ said the Boots, and away he went.

‘What’s the matter?’ cried Mr. Tupman, as a loud knocking at his door

roused him from his oblivious repose.

‘Can I speak to Mr. Winkle, sir?’ replied Boots from the outside.

‘Winkle--Winkle!’ shouted Mr. Tupman, calling into the inner room.

‘Hollo!’ replied a faint voice from within the bed-clothes.

‘You’re wanted--some one at the door;’ and, having exerted himself to

articulate thus much, Mr. Tracy Tupman turned round and fell fast asleep

again.

‘Wanted!’ said Mr. Winkle, hastily jumping out of bed, and putting on a

few articles of clothing; ‘wanted! at this distance from town--who on

earth can want me?’

‘Gentleman in the coffee-room, sir,’ replied the Boots, as Mr. Winkle

opened the door and confronted him; ‘gentleman says he’ll not detain you

a moment, Sir, but he can take no denial.’

‘Very odd!’ said Mr. Winkle; ‘I’ll be down directly.’

He hurriedly wrapped himself in a travelling-shawl and dressing-gown,

and proceeded downstairs. An old woman and a couple of waiters were

cleaning the coffee-room, and an officer in undress uniform was looking

out of the window. He turned round as Mr. Winkle entered, and made a

stiff inclination of the head. Having ordered the attendants to retire,

and closed the door very carefully, he said, ‘Mr. Winkle, I presume?’

‘My name is Winkle, sir.’

‘You will not be surprised, sir, when I inform you that I have called

here this morning on behalf of my friend, Doctor Slammer, of the 97th.’

‘Doctor Slammer!’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Doctor Slammer. He begged me to express his opinion that your conduct

of last evening was of a description which no gentleman could endure;

and’ (he added) ‘which no one gentleman would pursue towards another.’

Mr. Winkle’s astonishment was too real, and too evident, to escape the

observation of Doctor Slammer’s friend; he therefore proceeded--

‘My friend, Doctor Slammer, requested me to add, that he was firmly

persuaded you were intoxicated during a portion of the evening, and

possibly unconscious of the extent of the insult you were guilty of. He

commissioned me to say, that should this be pleaded as an excuse for

your behaviour, he will consent to accept a written apology, to be

penned by you, from my dictation.’

‘A written apology!’ repeated Mr. Winkle, in the most emphatic tone of

amazement possible.

‘Of course you know the alternative,’ replied the visitor coolly.

‘Were you intrusted with this message to me by name?’ inquired Mr.

Winkle, whose intellects were hopelessly confused by this extraordinary

conversation.

‘I was not present myself,’ replied the visitor, ‘and in consequence of

your firm refusal to give your card to Doctor Slammer, I was desired by

that gentleman to identify the wearer of a very uncommon coat--a bright

blue dress-coat, with a gilt button displaying a bust, and the letters

“P. C.”’

Mr. Winkle actually staggered with astonishment as he heard his own

costume thus minutely described. Doctor Slammer’s friend proceeded:--

‘From the inquiries I made at the bar, just now, I was convinced that

the owner of the coat in question arrived here, with three gentlemen,

yesterday afternoon. I immediately sent up to the gentleman who was

described as appearing the head of the party, and he at once referred me

to you.’

If the principal tower of Rochester Castle had suddenly walked from its

foundation, and stationed itself opposite the coffee-room window, Mr.

Winkle’s surprise would have been as nothing compared with the profound

astonishment with which he had heard this address. His first impression

was that his coat had been stolen. ‘Will you allow me to detain you one

moment?’ said he.

‘Certainly,’ replied the unwelcome visitor.

Mr. Winkle ran hastily upstairs, and with a trembling hand opened the

bag. There was the coat in its usual place, but exhibiting, on a close

inspection, evident tokens of having been worn on the preceding night.

‘It must be so,’ said Mr. Winkle, letting the coat fall from his hands.

‘I took too much wine after dinner, and have a very vague recollection

of walking about the streets, and smoking a cigar afterwards. The fact

is, I was very drunk;--I must have changed my coat--gone somewhere--and

insulted somebody--I have no doubt of it; and this message is the

terrible consequence.’ Saying which, Mr. Winkle retraced his steps in

the direction of the coffee-room, with the gloomy and dreadful resolve

of accepting the challenge of the warlike Doctor Slammer, and abiding by

the worst consequences that might ensue.

To this determination Mr. Winkle was urged by a variety of

considerations, the first of which was his reputation with the club. He

had always been looked up to as a high authority on all matters of

amusement and dexterity, whether offensive, defensive, or inoffensive;

and if, on this very first occasion of being put to the test, he shrunk

back from the trial, beneath his leader’s eye, his name and standing

were lost for ever. Besides, he remembered to have heard it frequently

surmised by the uninitiated in such matters that by an understood

arrangement between the seconds, the pistols were seldom loaded with

ball; and, furthermore, he reflected that if he applied to Mr. Snodgrass

to act as his second, and depicted the danger in glowing terms, that

gentleman might possibly communicate the intelligence to Mr. Pickwick,

who would certainly lose no time in transmitting it to the local

authorities, and thus prevent the killing or maiming of his follower.

Such were his thoughts when he returned to the coffee-room, and

intimated his intention of accepting the doctor’s challenge.

‘Will you refer me to a friend, to arrange the time and place of

meeting?’ said the officer.

‘Quite unnecessary,’ replied Mr. Winkle; ‘name them to me, and I can

procure the attendance of a friend afterwards.’

‘Shall we say--sunset this evening?’ inquired the officer, in a careless

tone.

‘Very good,’ replied Mr. Winkle, thinking in his heart it was very bad.

‘You know Fort Pitt?’

‘Yes; I saw it yesterday.’

‘If you will take the trouble to turn into the field which borders the

trench, take the foot-path to the left when you arrive at an angle of

the fortification, and keep straight on, till you see me, I will precede

you to a secluded place, where the affair can be conducted without fear

of interruption.’

‘Fear of interruption!’ thought Mr. Winkle.

‘Nothing more to arrange, I think,’ said the officer.

‘I am not aware of anything more,’ replied Mr. Winkle. ‘Good-morning.’

‘Good-morning;’ and the officer whistled a lively air as he strode away.

That morning’s breakfast passed heavily off. Mr. Tupman was not in a

condition to rise, after the unwonted dissipation of the previous night;

Mr. Snodgrass appeared to labour under a poetical depression of spirits;

and even Mr. Pickwick evinced an unusual attachment to silence and soda-

water. Mr. Winkle eagerly watched his opportunity: it was not long

wanting. Mr. Snodgrass proposed a visit to the castle, and as Mr. Winkle

was the only other member of the party disposed to walk, they went out

together.

‘Snodgrass,’ said Mr. Winkle, when they had turned out of the public

street.’Snodgrass, my dear fellow, can I rely upon your secrecy?’ As he

said this, he most devoutly and earnestly hoped he could not.

‘You can,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass. ‘Hear me swear--’

‘No, no,’ interrupted Winkle, terrified at the idea of his companion’s

unconsciously pledging himself not to give information; ‘don’t swear,

don’t swear; it’s quite unnecessary.’

Mr. Snodgrass dropped the hand which he had, in the spirit of poesy,

raised towards the clouds as he made the above appeal, and assumed an

attitude of attention.

‘I want your assistance, my dear fellow, in an affair of honour,’ said

Mr. Winkle.

‘You shall have it,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass, clasping his friend’s hand.

‘With a doctor--Doctor Slammer, of the 97th,’ said Mr. Winkle, wishing

to make the matter appear as solemn as possible; ‘an affair with an

officer, seconded by another officer, at sunset this evening, in a

lonely field beyond Fort Pitt.’

‘I will attend you,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

He was astonished, but by no means dismayed. It is extraordinary how

cool any party but the principal can be in such cases. Mr. Winkle had

forgotten this. He had judged of his friend’s feelings by his own.

‘The consequences may be dreadful,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘I hope not,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘The doctor, I believe, is a very good shot,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Most of these military men are,’ observed Mr. Snodgrass calmly; ‘but so

are you, ain’t you?’

Mr. Winkle replied in the affirmative; and perceiving that he had not

alarmed his companion sufficiently, changed his ground.

‘Snodgrass,’ he said, in a voice tremulous with emotion, ‘if I fall, you

will find in a packet which I shall place in your hands a note for my--

for my father.’

This attack was a failure also. Mr. Snodgrass was affected, but he

undertook the delivery of the note as readily as if he had been a

twopenny postman.

‘If I fall,’ said Mr. Winkle, ‘or if the doctor falls, you, my dear

friend, will be tried as an accessory before the fact. Shall I involve

my friend in transportation--possibly for life!’

Mr. Snodgrass winced a little at this, but his heroism was invincible.

‘In the cause of friendship,’ he fervently exclaimed, ‘I would brave all

dangers.’

How Mr. Winkle cursed his companion’s devoted friendship internally, as

they walked silently along, side by side, for some minutes, each

immersed in his own meditations! The morning was wearing away; he grew

desperate.

‘Snodgrass,’ he said, stopping suddenly, ‘do not let me be balked in

this matter--do not give information to the local authorities--do not

obtain the assistance of several peace officers, to take either me or

Doctor Slammer, of the 97th Regiment, at present quartered in Chatham

Barracks, into custody, and thus prevent this duel!--I say, do not.’

Mr. Snodgrass seized his friend’s hand warmly, as he enthusiastically

replied, ‘Not for worlds!’

A thrill passed over Mr. Winkle’s frame as the conviction that he had

nothing to hope from his friend’s fears, and that he was destined to

become an animated target, rushed forcibly upon him.

The state of the case having been formally explained to Mr. Snodgrass,

and a case of satisfactory pistols, with the satisfactory accompaniments

of powder, ball, and caps, having been hired from a manufacturer in

Rochester, the two friends returned to their inn; Mr. Winkle to ruminate

on the approaching struggle, and Mr. Snodgrass to arrange the weapons of

war, and put them into proper order for immediate use.

It was a dull and heavy evening when they again sallied forth on their

awkward errand. Mr. Winkle was muffled up in a huge cloak to escape

observation, and Mr. Snodgrass bore under his the instruments of

destruction.

‘Have you got everything?’ said Mr. Winkle, in an agitated tone.

‘Everything,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass; ‘plenty of ammunition, in case the

shots don’t take effect. There’s a quarter of a pound of powder in the

case, and I have got two newspapers in my pocket for the loadings.’

These were instances of friendship for which any man might reasonably

feel most grateful. The presumption is, that the gratitude of Mr. Winkle

was too powerful for utterance, as he said nothing, but continued to

walk on--rather slowly.

‘We are in excellent time,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, as they climbed the

fence of the first field; ‘the sun is just going down.’ Mr. Winkle

looked up at the declining orb and painfully thought of the probability

of his ‘going down’ himself, before long.

‘There’s the officer,’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle, after a few minutes

walking.

‘Where?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘There--the gentleman in the blue cloak.’ Mr. Snodgrass looked in the

direction indicated by the forefinger of his friend, and observed a

figure, muffled up, as he had described. The officer evinced his

consciousness of their presence by slightly beckoning with his hand; and

the two friends followed him at a little distance, as he walked away.

The evening grew more dull every moment, and a melancholy wind sounded

through the deserted fields, like a distant giant whistling for his

house-dog. The sadness of the scene imparted a sombre tinge to the

feelings of Mr. Winkle. He started as they passed the angle of the

trench--it looked like a colossal grave.

The officer turned suddenly from the path, and after climbing a paling,

and scaling a hedge, entered a secluded field. Two gentlemen were

waiting in it; one was a little, fat man, with black hair; and the

other--a portly personage in a braided surtout--was sitting with perfect

equanimity on a camp-stool.

‘The other party, and a surgeon, I suppose,’ said Mr. Snodgrass; ‘take a

drop of brandy.’ Mr. Winkle seized the wicker bottle which his friend

proffered, and took a lengthened pull at the exhilarating liquid.

‘My friend, Sir, Mr. Snodgrass,’ said Mr. Winkle, as the officer

approached. Doctor Slammer’s friend bowed, and produced a case similar

to that which Mr. Snodgrass carried.

‘We have nothing further to say, Sir, I think,’ he coldly remarked, as

he opened the case; ‘an apology has been resolutely declined.’

‘Nothing, Sir,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, who began to feel rather

uncomfortable himself.

‘Will you step forward?’ said the officer.

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass. The ground was measured, and

preliminaries arranged.

‘You will find these better than your own,’ said the opposite second,

producing his pistols. ‘You saw me load them. Do you object to use

them?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass. The offer relieved him from

considerable embarrassment, for his previous notions of loading a pistol

were rather vague and undefined.

‘We may place our men, then, I think,’ observed the officer, with as

much indifference as if the principals were chess-men, and the seconds

players.

‘I think we may,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass; who would have assented to any

proposition, because he knew nothing about the matter. The officer

crossed to Doctor Slammer, and Mr. Snodgrass went up to Mr. Winkle.

‘It’s all ready,’ said he, offering the pistol. ‘Give me your cloak.’

‘You have got the packet, my dear fellow,’ said poor Winkle.

‘All right,’ said Mr. Snodgrass. ‘Be steady, and wing him.’

It occurred to Mr. Winkle that this advice was very like that which

bystanders invariably give to the smallest boy in a street fight,

namely, ‘Go in, and win’--an admirable thing to recommend, if you only

know how to do it. He took off his cloak, however, in silence--it always

took a long time to undo that cloak--and accepted the pistol. The

seconds retired, the gentleman on the camp-stool did the same, and the

belligerents approached each other.

Mr. Winkle was always remarkable for extreme humanity. It is conjectured

that his unwillingness to hurt a fellow-creature intentionally was the

cause of his shutting his eyes when he arrived at the fatal spot; and

that the circumstance of his eyes being closed, prevented his observing

the very extraordinary and unaccountable demeanour of Doctor Slammer.

That gentleman started, stared, retreated, rubbed his eyes, stared

again, and, finally, shouted, ‘Stop, stop!’

‘What’s all this?’ said Doctor Slammer, as his friend and Mr. Snodgrass

came running up; ‘that’s not the man.’

‘Not the man!’ said Doctor Slammer’s second.

‘Not the man!’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Not the man!’ said the gentleman with the camp-stool in his hand.

‘Certainly not,’ replied the little doctor. ‘That’s not the person who

insulted me last night.’

‘Very extraordinary!’ exclaimed the officer.

‘Very,’ said the gentleman with the camp-stool. ‘The only question is,

whether the gentleman, being on the ground, must not be considered, as a

matter of form, to be the individual who insulted our friend, Doctor

Slammer, yesterday evening, whether he is really that individual or

not;’ and having delivered this suggestion, with a very sage and

mysterious air, the man with the camp-stool took a large pinch of snuff,

and looked profoundly round, with the air of an authority in such

matters.

Now Mr. Winkle had opened his eyes, and his ears too, when he heard his

adversary call out for a cessation of hostilities; and perceiving by

what he had afterwards said that there was, beyond all question, some

mistake in the matter, he at once foresaw the increase of reputation he

should inevitably acquire by concealing the real motive of his coming

out; he therefore stepped boldly forward, and said--

‘I am not the person. I know it.’

‘Then, that,’ said the man with the camp-stool, ‘is an affront to Doctor

Slammer, and a sufficient reason for proceeding immediately.’

‘Pray be quiet, Payne,’ said the doctor’s second. ‘Why did you not

communicate this fact to me this morning, Sir?’

‘To be sure--to be sure,’ said the man with the camp-stool indignantly.

‘I entreat you to be quiet, Payne,’ said the other. ‘May I repeat my

question, Sir?’

‘Because, Sir,’ replied Mr. Winkle, who had had time to deliberate upon

his answer, ‘because, Sir, you described an intoxicated and

ungentlemanly person as wearing a coat which I have the honour, not only

to wear but to have invented--the proposed uniform, Sir, of the Pickwick

Club in London. The honour of that uniform I feel bound to maintain, and

I therefore, without inquiry, accepted the challenge which you offered

me.’

‘My dear Sir,’ said the good-humoured little doctor advancing with

extended hand, ‘I honour your gallantry. Permit me to say, Sir, that I

highly admire your conduct, and extremely regret having caused you the

inconvenience of this meeting, to no purpose.’

‘I beg you won’t mention it, Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘I shall feel proud of your acquaintance, Sir,’ said the little doctor.

‘It will afford me the greatest pleasure to know you, sir,’ replied Mr.

Winkle. Thereupon the doctor and Mr. Winkle shook hands, and then Mr.

Winkle and Lieutenant Tappleton (the doctor’s second), and then Mr.

Winkle and the man with the camp-stool, and, finally, Mr. Winkle and Mr.

Snodgrass--the last-named gentleman in an excess of admiration at the

noble conduct of his heroic friend.

‘I think we may adjourn,’ said Lieutenant Tappleton.

‘Certainly,’ added the doctor.

‘Unless,’ interposed the man with the camp-stool, ‘unless Mr. Winkle

feels himself aggrieved by the challenge; in which case, I submit, he

has a right to satisfaction.’

Mr. Winkle, with great self-denial, expressed himself quite satisfied

already.

‘Or possibly,’ said the man with the camp-stool, ‘the gentleman’s second

may feel himself affronted with some observations which fell from me at

an early period of this meeting; if so, I shall be happy to give him

satisfaction immediately.’

Mr. Snodgrass hastily professed himself very much obliged with the

handsome offer of the gentleman who had spoken last, which he was only

induced to decline by his entire contentment with the whole proceedings.

The two seconds adjusted the cases, and the whole party left the ground

in a much more lively manner than they had proceeded to it.

‘Do you remain long here?’ inquired Doctor Slammer of Mr. Winkle, as

they walked on most amicably together.

‘I think we shall leave here the day after to-morrow,’ was the reply.

‘I trust I shall have the pleasure of seeing you and your friend at my

rooms, and of spending a pleasant evening with you, after this awkward

mistake,’ said the little doctor; ‘are you disengaged this evening?’

‘We have some friends here,’ replied Mr. Winkle, ‘and I should not like

to leave them to-night. Perhaps you and your friend will join us at the

Bull.’

‘With great pleasure,’ said the little doctor; ‘will ten o’clock be too

late to look in for half an hour?’

‘Oh dear, no,’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘I shall be most happy to introduce you

to my friends, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman.’

‘It will give me great pleasure, I am sure,’ replied Doctor Slammer,

little suspecting who Mr. Tupman was.

‘You will be sure to come?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Oh, certainly.’

By this time they had reached the road. Cordial farewells were

exchanged, and the party separated. Doctor Slammer and his friends

repaired to the barracks, and Mr. Winkle, accompanied by Mr. Snodgrass,

returned to their inn.

CHAPTER III. A NEW ACQUAINTANCE--THE STROLLER’S TALE--A DISAGREEABLE

INTERRUPTION, AND AN UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTER

Mr. Pickwick had felt some apprehensions in consequence of the unusual

absence of his two friends, which their mysterious behaviour during the

whole morning had by no means tended to diminish. It was, therefore,

with more than ordinary pleasure that he rose to greet them when they

again entered; and with more than ordinary interest that he inquired

what had occurred to detain them from his society. In reply to his

questions on this point, Mr. Snodgrass was about to offer an historical

account of the circumstances just now detailed, when he was suddenly

checked by observing that there were present, not only Mr. Tupman and

their stage-coach companion of the preceding day, but another stranger

of equally singular appearance. It was a careworn-looking man, whose

sallow face, and deeply-sunken eyes, were rendered still more striking

than Nature had made them, by the straight black hair which hung in

matted disorder half-way down his face. His eyes were almost unnaturally

bright and piercing; his cheek-bones were high and prominent; and his

jaws were so long and lank, that an observer would have supposed that he

was drawing the flesh of his face in, for a moment, by some contraction

of the muscles, if his half-opened mouth and immovable expression had

not announced that it was his ordinary appearance. Round his neck he

wore a green shawl, with the large ends straggling over his chest, and

making their appearance occasionally beneath the worn button-holes of

his old waistcoat. His upper garment was a long black surtout; and below

it he wore wide drab trousers, and large boots, running rapidly to seed.

It was on this uncouth-looking person that Mr. Winkle’s eye rested, and

it was towards him that Mr. Pickwick extended his hand when he said, ‘A

friend of our friend’s here. We discovered this morning that our friend

was connected with the theatre in this place, though he is not desirous

to have it generally known, and this gentleman is a member of the same

profession. He was about to favour us with a little anecdote connected

with it, when you entered.’

‘Lots of anecdote,’ said the green-coated stranger of the day before,

advancing to Mr. Winkle and speaking in a low and confidential tone.

‘Rum fellow--does the heavy business--no actor--strange man--all sorts

of miseries--Dismal Jemmy, we call him on the circuit.’ Mr. Winkle and

Mr. Snodgrass politely welcomed the gentleman, elegantly designated as

‘Dismal Jemmy’; and calling for brandy-and-water, in imitation of the

remainder of the company, seated themselves at the table.

‘Now sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘will you oblige us by proceeding with

what you were going to relate?’

The dismal individual took a dirty roll of paper from his pocket, and

turning to Mr. Snodgrass, who had just taken out his note-book, said in

a hollow voice, perfectly in keeping with his outward man--‘Are you the

poet?’

‘I--I do a little in that way,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass, rather taken

aback by the abruptness of the question.

‘Ah! poetry makes life what light and music do the stage--strip the one

of the false embellishments, and the other of its illusions, and what is

there real in either to live or care for?’

‘Very true, Sir,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass.

‘To be before the footlights,’ continued the dismal man, ‘is like

sitting at a grand court show, and admiring the silken dresses of the

gaudy throng; to be behind them is to be the people who make that

finery, uncared for and unknown, and left to sink or swim, to starve or

live, as fortune wills it.’

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Snodgrass: for the sunken eye of the dismal man

rested on him, and he felt it necessary to say something.

‘Go on, Jemmy,’ said the Spanish traveller, ‘like black-eyed Susan--all

in the Downs--no croaking--speak out--look lively.’

‘Will you make another glass before you begin, Sir?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

The dismal man took the hint, and having mixed a glass of brandy-and-

water, and slowly swallowed half of it, opened the roll of paper and

proceeded, partly to read, and partly to relate, the following incident,

which we find recorded on the Transactions of the Club as ‘The

Stroller’s Tale.’

THE STROLLER’S TALE

‘There is nothing of the marvellous in what I am going to relate,’ said

the dismal man; ‘there is nothing even uncommon in it. Want and sickness

are too common in many stations of life to deserve more notice than is

usually bestowed on the most ordinary vicissitudes of human nature. I

have thrown these few notes together, because the subject of them was

well known to me for many years. I traced his progress downwards, step

by step, until at last he reached that excess of destitution from which

he never rose again.

‘The man of whom I speak was a low pantomime actor; and, like many

people of his class, an habitual drunkard. In his better days, before he

had become enfeebled by dissipation and emaciated by disease, he had

been in the receipt of a good salary, which, if he had been careful and

prudent, he might have continued to receive for some years--not many;

because these men either die early, or by unnaturally taxing their

bodily energies, lose, prematurely, those physical powers on which alone

they can depend for subsistence. His besetting sin gained so fast upon

him, however, that it was found impossible to employ him in the

situations in which he really was useful to the theatre. The public-

house had a fascination for him which he could not resist. Neglected

disease and hopeless poverty were as certain to be his portion as death

itself, if he persevered in the same course; yet he did persevere, and

the result may be guessed. He could obtain no engagement, and he wanted

bread.

‘Everybody who is at all acquainted with theatrical matters knows what a

host of shabby, poverty-stricken men hang about the stage of a large

establishment--not regularly engaged actors, but ballet people,

procession men, tumblers, and so forth, who are taken on during the run

of a pantomime, or an Easter piece, and are then discharged, until the

production of some heavy spectacle occasions a new demand for their

services. To this mode of life the man was compelled to resort; and

taking the chair every night, at some low theatrical house, at once put

him in possession of a few more shillings weekly, and enabled him to

gratify his old propensity. Even this resource shortly failed him; his

irregularities were too great to admit of his earning the wretched

pittance he might thus have procured, and he was actually reduced to a

state bordering on starvation, only procuring a trifle occasionally by

borrowing it of some old companion, or by obtaining an appearance at one

or other of the commonest of the minor theatres; and when he did earn

anything it was spent in the old way.

‘About this time, and when he had been existing for upwards of a year no

one knew how, I had a short engagement at one of the theatres on the

Surrey side of the water, and here I saw this man, whom I had lost sight

of for some time; for I had been travelling in the provinces, and he had

been skulking in the lanes and alleys of London. I was dressed to leave

the house, and was crossing the stage on my way out, when he tapped me

on the shoulder. Never shall I forget the repulsive sight that met my

eye when I turned round. He was dressed for the pantomimes in all the

absurdity of a clown’s costume. The spectral figures in the Dance of

Death, the most frightful shapes that the ablest painter ever portrayed

on canvas, never presented an appearance half so ghastly. His bloated

body and shrunken legs--their deformity enhanced a hundredfold by the

fantastic dress--the glassy eyes, contrasting fearfully with the thick

white paint with which the face was besmeared; the grotesquely-

ornamented head, trembling with paralysis, and the long skinny hands,

rubbed with white chalk--all gave him a hideous and unnatural

appearance, of which no description could convey an adequate idea, and

which, to this day, I shudder to think of. His voice was hollow and

tremulous as he took me aside, and in broken words recounted a long

catalogue of sickness and privations, terminating as usual with an

urgent request for the loan of a trifling sum of money. I put a few

shillings in his hand, and as I turned away I heard the roar of laughter

which followed his first tumble on the stage.

‘A few nights afterwards, a boy put a dirty scrap of paper in my hand,

on which were scrawled a few words in pencil, intimating that the man

was dangerously ill, and begging me, after the performance, to see him

at his lodgings in some street--I forget the name of it now--at no great

distance from the theatre. I promised to comply, as soon as I could get

away; and after the curtain fell, sallied forth on my melancholy errand.

‘It was late, for I had been playing in the last piece; and, as it was a

benefit night, the performances had been protracted to an unusual

length. It was a dark, cold night, with a chill, damp wind, which blew

the rain heavily against the windows and house-fronts. Pools of water

had collected in the narrow and little-frequented streets, and as many

of the thinly-scattered oil-lamps had been blown out by the violence of

the wind, the walk was not only a comfortless, but most uncertain one. I

had fortunately taken the right course, however, and succeeded, after a

little difficulty, in finding the house to which I had been directed--a

coal-shed, with one storey above it, in the back room of which lay the

object of my search.

‘A wretched-looking woman, the man’s wife, met me on the stairs, and,

telling me that he had just fallen into a kind of doze, led me softly

in, and placed a chair for me at the bedside. The sick man was lying

with his face turned towards the wall; and as he took no heed of my

presence, I had leisure to observe the place in which I found myself.

‘He was lying on an old bedstead, which turned up during the day. The

tattered remains of a checked curtain were drawn round the bed’s head,

to exclude the wind, which, however, made its way into the comfortless

room through the numerous chinks in the door, and blew it to and fro

every instant. There was a low cinder fire in a rusty, unfixed grate;

and an old three-cornered stained table, with some medicine bottles, a

broken glass, and a few other domestic articles, was drawn out before

it. A little child was sleeping on a temporary bed which had been made

for it on the floor, and the woman sat on a chair by its side. There

were a couple of shelves, with a few plates and cups and saucers; and a

pair of stage shoes and a couple of foils hung beneath them. With the

exception of little heaps of rags and bundles which had been carelessly

thrown into the corners of the room, these were the only things in the

apartment.

‘I had had time to note these little particulars, and to mark the heavy

breathing and feverish startings of the sick man, before he was aware of

my presence. In the restless attempts to procure some easy resting-place

for his head, he tossed his hand out of the bed, and it fell on mine. He

started up, and stared eagerly in my face.

‘“Mr. Hutley, John,” said his wife; “Mr. Hutley, that you sent for to-

night, you know.”

‘“Ah!” said the invalid, passing his hand across his forehead; “Hutley--

Hutley--let me see.” He seemed endeavouring to collect his thoughts for

a few seconds, and then grasping me tightly by the wrist said, “Don’t

leave me--don’t leave me, old fellow. She’ll murder me; I know she

will.”

‘“Has he been long so?” said I, addressing his weeping wife.

‘“Since yesterday night,” she replied. “John, John, don’t you know me?”

‘“Don’t let her come near me,” said the man, with a shudder, as she

stooped over him. “Drive her away; I can’t bear her near me.” He stared

wildly at her, with a look of deadly apprehension, and then whispered in

my ear, “I beat her, Jem; I beat her yesterday, and many times before. I

have starved her and the boy too; and now I am weak and helpless, Jem,

she’ll murder me for it; I know she will. If you’d seen her cry, as I

have, you’d know it too. Keep her off.” He relaxed his grasp, and sank

back exhausted on the pillow.

‘I knew but too well what all this meant. If I could have entertained

any doubt of it, for an instant, one glance at the woman’s pale face and

wasted form would have sufficiently explained the real state of the

case. “You had better stand aside,” said I to the poor creature. “You

can do him no good. Perhaps he will be calmer, if he does not see you.”

She retired out of the man’s sight. He opened his eyes after a few

seconds, and looked anxiously round.

‘“Is she gone?” he eagerly inquired.

‘“Yes--yes,” said I; “she shall not hurt you.”

‘“I’ll tell you what, Jem,” said the man, in a low voice, “she does hurt

me. There’s something in her eyes wakes such a dreadful fear in my

heart, that it drives me mad. All last night, her large, staring eyes

and pale face were close to mine; wherever I turned, they turned; and

whenever I started up from my sleep, she was at the bedside looking at

me.” He drew me closer to him, as he said in a deep alarmed whisper,

“Jem, she must be an evil spirit--a devil! Hush! I know she is. If she

had been a woman she would have died long ago. No woman could have borne

what she has.”

‘I sickened at the thought of the long course of cruelty and neglect

which must have occurred to produce such an impression on such a man. I

could say nothing in reply; for who could offer hope, or consolation, to

the abject being before me?

‘I sat there for upwards of two hours, during which time he tossed

about, murmuring exclamations of pain or impatience, restlessly throwing

his arms here and there, and turning constantly from side to side. At

length he fell into that state of partial unconsciousness, in which the

mind wanders uneasily from scene to scene, and from place to place,

without the control of reason, but still without being able to divest

itself of an indescribable sense of present suffering. Finding from his

incoherent wanderings that this was the case, and knowing that in all

probability the fever would not grow immediately worse, I left him,

promising his miserable wife that I would repeat my visit next evening,

and, if necessary, sit up with the patient during the night.

‘I kept my promise. The last four-and-twenty hours had produced a

frightful alteration. The eyes, though deeply sunk and heavy, shone with

a lustre frightful to behold. The lips were parched, and cracked in many

places; the hard, dry skin glowed with a burning heat; and there was an

almost unearthly air of wild anxiety in the man’s face, indicating even

more strongly the ravages of the disease. The fever was at its height.

‘I took the seat I had occupied the night before, and there I sat for

hours, listening to sounds which must strike deep to the heart of the

most callous among human beings--the awful ravings of a dying man. From

what I had heard of the medical attendant’s opinion, I knew there was no

hope for him: I was sitting by his death-bed. I saw the wasted limbs--

which a few hours before had been distorted for the amusement of a

boisterous gallery, writhing under the tortures of a burning fever--I

heard the clown’s shrill laugh, blending with the low murmurings of the

dying man.

‘It is a touching thing to hear the mind reverting to the ordinary

occupations and pursuits of health, when the body lies before you weak

and helpless; but when those occupations are of a character the most

strongly opposed to anything we associate with grave and solemn ideas,

the impression produced is infinitely more powerful. The theatre and the

public-house were the chief themes of the wretched man’s wanderings. It

was evening, he fancied; he had a part to play that night; it was late,

and he must leave home instantly. Why did they hold him, and prevent his

going?--he should lose the money--he must go. No! they would not let

him. He hid his face in his burning hands, and feebly bemoaned his own

weakness, and the cruelty of his persecutors. A short pause, and he

shouted out a few doggerel rhymes--the last he had ever learned. He rose

in bed, drew up his withered limbs, and rolled about in uncouth

positions; he was acting--he was at the theatre. A minute’s silence, and

he murmured the burden of some roaring song. He had reached the old

house at last--how hot the room was. He had been ill, very ill, but he

was well now, and happy. Fill up his glass. Who was that, that dashed it

from his lips? It was the same persecutor that had followed him before.

He fell back upon his pillow and moaned aloud. A short period of

oblivion, and he was wandering through a tedious maze of low-arched

rooms--so low, sometimes, that he must creep upon his hands and knees to

make his way along; it was close and dark, and every way he turned, some

obstacle impeded his progress. There were insects, too, hideous crawling

things, with eyes that stared upon him, and filled the very air around,

glistening horribly amidst the thick darkness of the place. The walls

and ceiling were alive with reptiles--the vault expanded to an enormous

size--frightful figures flitted to and fro--and the faces of men he

knew, rendered hideous by gibing and mouthing, peered out from among

them; they were searing him with heated irons, and binding his head with

cords till the blood started; and he struggled madly for life.

‘At the close of one of these paroxysms, when I had with great

difficulty held him down in his bed, he sank into what appeared to be a

slumber. Overpowered with watching and exertion, I had closed my eyes

for a few minutes, when I felt a violent clutch on my shoulder. I awoke

instantly. He had raised himself up, so as to seat himself in bed--a

dreadful change had come over his face, but consciousness had returned,

for he evidently knew me. The child, who had been long since disturbed

by his ravings, rose from its little bed, and ran towards its father,

screaming with fright--the mother hastily caught it in her arms, lest he

should injure it in the violence of his insanity; but, terrified by the

alteration of his features, stood transfixed by the bedside. He grasped

my shoulder convulsively, and, striking his breast with the other hand,

made a desperate attempt to articulate. It was unavailing; he extended

his arm towards them, and made another violent effort. There was a

rattling noise in the throat--a glare of the eye--a short stifled groan-

-and he fell back--dead!’

It would afford us the highest gratification to be enabled to record Mr.

Pickwick’s opinion of the foregoing anecdote. We have little doubt that

we should have been enabled to present it to our readers, but for a most

unfortunate occurrence.

Mr. Pickwick had replaced on the table the glass which, during the last

few sentences of the tale, he had retained in his hand; and had just

made up his mind to speak--indeed, we have the authority of Mr.

Snodgrass’s note-book for stating, that he had actually opened his

mouth--when the waiter entered the room, and said--

‘Some gentlemen, Sir.’

It has been conjectured that Mr. Pickwick was on the point of delivering

some remarks which would have enlightened the world, if not the Thames,

when he was thus interrupted; for he gazed sternly on the waiter’s

countenance, and then looked round on the company generally, as if

seeking for information relative to the new-comers.

‘Oh!’ said Mr. Winkle, rising, ‘some friends of mine--show them in. Very

pleasant fellows,’ added Mr. Winkle, after the waiter had retired--

‘officers of the 97th, whose acquaintance I made rather oddly this

morning. You will like them very much.’

Mr. Pickwick’s equanimity was at once restored. The waiter returned, and

ushered three gentlemen into the room.

‘Lieutenant Tappleton,’ said Mr. Winkle, ‘Lieutenant Tappleton, Mr.

Pickwick--Doctor Payne, Mr. Pickwick--Mr. Snodgrass you have seen

before, my friend Mr. Tupman, Doctor Payne--Doctor Slammer, Mr.

Pickwick--Mr. Tupman, Doctor Slam--’

Here Mr. Winkle suddenly paused; for strong emotion was visible on the

countenance both of Mr. Tupman and the doctor.

‘I have met \_this\_ gentleman before,’ said the Doctor, with marked

emphasis.

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘And--and that person, too, if I am not mistaken,’ said the doctor,

bestowing a scrutinising glance on the green-coated stranger. ‘I think I

gave that person a very pressing invitation last night, which he thought

proper to decline.’ Saying which the doctor scowled magnanimously on the

stranger, and whispered his friend Lieutenant Tappleton.

‘You don’t say so,’ said that gentleman, at the conclusion of the

whisper.

‘I do, indeed,’ replied Doctor Slammer.

‘You are bound to kick him on the spot,’ murmured the owner of the camp-

stool, with great importance.

‘Do be quiet, Payne,’ interposed the lieutenant. ‘Will you allow me to

ask you, sir,’ he said, addressing Mr. Pickwick, who was considerably

mystified by this very unpolite by-play--‘will you allow me to ask you,

Sir, whether that person belongs to your party?’

‘No, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘he is a guest of ours.’

‘He is a member of your club, or I am mistaken?’ said the lieutenant

inquiringly.

‘Certainly not,’ responded Mr. Pickwick.

‘And never wears your club-button?’ said the lieutenant.

‘No--never!’ replied the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

Lieutenant Tappleton turned round to his friend Doctor Slammer, with a

scarcely perceptible shrug of the shoulder, as if implying some doubt of

the accuracy of his recollection. The little doctor looked wrathful, but

confounded; and Mr. Payne gazed with a ferocious aspect on the beaming

countenance of the unconscious Pickwick.

‘Sir,’ said the doctor, suddenly addressing Mr. Tupman, in a tone which

made that gentleman start as perceptibly as if a pin had been cunningly

inserted in the calf of his leg, ‘you were at the ball here last night!’

Mr. Tupman gasped a faint affirmative, looking very hard at Mr. Pickwick

all the while.

‘That person was your companion,’ said the doctor, pointing to the still

unmoved stranger.

Mr. Tupman admitted the fact.

‘Now, sir,’ said the doctor to the stranger, ‘I ask you once again, in

the presence of these gentlemen, whether you choose to give me your

card, and to receive the treatment of a gentleman; or whether you impose

upon me the necessity of personally chastising you on the spot?’

‘Stay, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I really cannot allow this matter to go

any further without some explanation. Tupman, recount the

circumstances.’

Mr. Tupman, thus solemnly adjured, stated the case in a few words;

touched slightly on the borrowing of the coat; expatiated largely on its

having been done ‘after dinner’; wound up with a little penitence on his

own account; and left the stranger to clear himself as best he could.

He was apparently about to proceed to do so, when Lieutenant Tappleton,

who had been eyeing him with great curiosity, said with considerable

scorn, ‘Haven’t I seen you at the theatre, Sir?’

‘Certainly,’ replied the unabashed stranger.

‘He is a strolling actor!’ said the lieutenant contemptuously, turning

to Doctor Slammer.--‘He acts in the piece that the officers of the 52nd

get up at the Rochester Theatre to-morrow night. You cannot proceed in

this affair, Slammer--impossible!’

‘Quite!’ said the dignified Payne.

‘Sorry to have placed you in this disagreeable situation,’ said

Lieutenant Tappleton, addressing Mr. Pickwick; ‘allow me to suggest,

that the best way of avoiding a recurrence of such scenes in future will

be to be more select in the choice of your companions. Good-evening,

Sir!’ and the lieutenant bounced out of the room.

‘And allow me to say, Sir,’ said the irascible Doctor Payne, ‘that if I

had been Tappleton, or if I had been Slammer, I would have pulled your

nose, Sir, and the nose of every man in this company. I would, sir--

every man. Payne is my name, sir--Doctor Payne of the 43rd. Good-

evening, Sir.’ Having concluded this speech, and uttered the last three

words in a loud key, he stalked majestically after his friend, closely

followed by Doctor Slammer, who said nothing, but contented himself by

withering the company with a look.

Rising rage and extreme bewilderment had swelled the noble breast of Mr.

Pickwick, almost to the bursting of his waistcoat, during the delivery

of the above defiance. He stood transfixed to the spot, gazing on

vacancy. The closing of the door recalled him to himself. He rushed

forward with fury in his looks, and fire in his eye. His hand was upon

the lock of the door; in another instant it would have been on the

throat of Doctor Payne of the 43rd, had not Mr. Snodgrass seized his

revered leader by the coat tail, and dragged him backwards.

‘Restrain him,’ cried Mr. Snodgrass; ‘Winkle, Tupman--he must not peril

his distinguished life in such a cause as this.’

‘Let me go,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hold him tight,’ shouted Mr. Snodgrass; and by the united efforts of

the whole company, Mr. Pickwick was forced into an arm-chair.

‘Leave him alone,’ said the green-coated stranger; ‘brandy-and-water--

jolly old gentleman--lots of pluck--swallow this--ah!--capital stuff.’

Having previously tested the virtues of a bumper, which had been mixed

by the dismal man, the stranger applied the glass to Mr. Pickwick’s

mouth; and the remainder of its contents rapidly disappeared.

There was a short pause; the brandy-and-water had done its work; the

amiable countenance of Mr. Pickwick was fast recovering its customary

expression.

‘They are not worth your notice,’ said the dismal man.

‘You are right, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘they are not. I am ashamed

to have been betrayed into this warmth of feeling. Draw your chair up to

the table, Sir.’

The dismal man readily complied; a circle was again formed round the

table, and harmony once more prevailed. Some lingering irritability

appeared to find a resting-place in Mr. Winkle’s bosom, occasioned

possibly by the temporary abstraction of his coat--though it is scarcely

reasonable to suppose that so slight a circumstance can have excited

even a passing feeling of anger in a Pickwickian’s breast. With this

exception, their good-humour was completely restored; and the evening

concluded with the conviviality with which it had begun.

CHAPTER IV. A FIELD DAY AND BIVOUAC--MORE NEW FRIENDS--AN INVITATION TO

THE COUNTRY

Many authors entertain, not only a foolish, but a really dishonest

objection to acknowledge the sources whence they derive much valuable

information. We have no such feeling. We are merely endeavouring to

discharge, in an upright manner, the responsible duties of our editorial

functions; and whatever ambition we might have felt under other

circumstances to lay claim to the authorship of these adventures, a

regard for truth forbids us to do more than claim the merit of their

judicious arrangement and impartial narration. The Pickwick papers are

our New River Head; and we may be compared to the New River Company. The

labours of others have raised for us an immense reservoir of important

facts. We merely lay them on, and communicate them, in a clear and

gentle stream, through the medium of these pages, to a world thirsting

for Pickwickian knowledge.

Acting in this spirit, and resolutely proceeding on our determination to

avow our obligations to the authorities we have consulted, we frankly

say, that to the note-book of Mr. Snodgrass are we indebted for the

particulars recorded in this and the succeeding chapter--particulars

which, now that we have disburdened our consciences, we shall proceed to

detail without further comment.

The whole population of Rochester and the adjoining towns rose from

their beds at an early hour of the following morning, in a state of the

utmost bustle and excitement. A grand review was to take place upon the

lines. The manoeuvres of half a dozen regiments were to be inspected by

the eagle eye of the commander-in-chief; temporary fortifications had

been erected, the citadel was to be attacked and taken, and a mine was

to be sprung.

Mr. Pickwick was, as our readers may have gathered from the slight

extract we gave from his description of Chatham, an enthusiastic admirer

of the army. Nothing could have been more delightful to him--nothing

could have harmonised so well with the peculiar feeling of each of his

companions--as this sight. Accordingly they were soon afoot, and walking

in the direction of the scene of action, towards which crowds of people

were already pouring from a variety of quarters.

The appearance of everything on the lines denoted that the approaching

ceremony was one of the utmost grandeur and importance. There were

sentries posted to keep the ground for the troops, and servants on the

batteries keeping places for the ladies, and sergeants running to and

fro, with vellum-covered books under their arms, and Colonel Bulder, in

full military uniform, on horseback, galloping first to one place and

then to another, and backing his horse among the people, and prancing,

and curvetting, and shouting in a most alarming manner, and making

himself very hoarse in the voice, and very red in the face, without any

assignable cause or reason whatever. Officers were running backwards and

forwards, first communicating with Colonel Bulder, and then ordering the

sergeants, and then running away altogether; and even the very privates

themselves looked from behind their glazed stocks with an air of

mysterious solemnity, which sufficiently bespoke the special nature of

the occasion.

Mr. Pickwick and his three companions stationed themselves in the front

of the crowd, and patiently awaited the commencement of the proceedings.

The throng was increasing every moment; and the efforts they were

compelled to make, to retain the position they had gained, sufficiently

occupied their attention during the two hours that ensued. At one time

there was a sudden pressure from behind, and then Mr. Pickwick was

jerked forward for several yards, with a degree of speed and elasticity

highly inconsistent with the general gravity of his demeanour; at

another moment there was a request to ‘keep back’ from the front, and

then the butt-end of a musket was either dropped upon Mr. Pickwick’s

toe, to remind him of the demand, or thrust into his chest, to insure

its being complied with. Then some facetious gentlemen on the left,

after pressing sideways in a body, and squeezing Mr. Snodgrass into the

very last extreme of human torture, would request to know ‘vere he vos a

shovin’ to’; and when Mr. Winkle had done expressing his excessive

indignation at witnessing this unprovoked assault, some person behind

would knock his hat over his eyes, and beg the favour of his putting his

head in his pocket. These, and other practical witticisms, coupled with

the unaccountable absence of Mr. Tupman (who had suddenly disappeared,

and was nowhere to be found), rendered their situation upon the whole

rather more uncomfortable than pleasing or desirable.

At length that low roar of many voices ran through the crowd which

usually announces the arrival of whatever they have been waiting for.

All eyes were turned in the direction of the sally-port. A few moments

of eager expectation, and colours were seen fluttering gaily in the air,

arms glistened brightly in the sun, column after column poured on to the

plain. The troops halted and formed; the word of command rang through

the line; there was a general clash of muskets as arms were presented;

and the commander-in-chief, attended by Colonel Bulder and numerous

officers, cantered to the front. The military bands struck up

altogether; the horses stood upon two legs each, cantered backwards, and

whisked their tails about in all directions; the dogs barked, the mob

screamed, the troops recovered, and nothing was to be seen on either

side, as far as the eye could reach, but a long perspective of red coats

and white trousers, fixed and motionless.

Mr. Pickwick had been so fully occupied in falling about, and

disentangling himself, miraculously, from between the legs of horses,

that he had not enjoyed sufficient leisure to observe the scene before

him, until it assumed the appearance we have just described. When he was

at last enabled to stand firmly on his legs, his gratification and

delight were unbounded.

‘Can anything be finer or more delightful?’ he inquired of Mr. Winkle.

‘Nothing,’ replied that gentleman, who had had a short man standing on

each of his feet for the quarter of an hour immediately preceding.

‘It is indeed a noble and a brilliant sight,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, in

whose bosom a blaze of poetry was rapidly bursting forth, ‘to see the

gallant defenders of their country drawn up in brilliant array before

its peaceful citizens; their faces beaming--not with warlike ferocity,

but with civilised gentleness; their eyes flashing--not with the rude

fire of rapine or revenge, but with the soft light of humanity and

intelligence.’

Mr. Pickwick fully entered into the spirit of this eulogium, but he

could not exactly re-echo its terms; for the soft light of intelligence

burned rather feebly in the eyes of the warriors, inasmuch as the

command ‘eyes front’ had been given, and all the spectator saw before

him was several thousand pair of optics, staring straight forward,

wholly divested of any expression whatever.

‘We are in a capital situation now,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking round

him. The crowd had gradually dispersed in their immediate vicinity, and

they were nearly alone.

‘Capital!’ echoed both Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle.

‘What are they doing now?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, adjusting his

spectacles.

‘I--I--rather think,’ said Mr. Winkle, changing colour--‘I rather think

they’re going to fire.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr. Pickwick hastily.

‘I--I--really think they are,’ urged Mr. Snodgrass, somewhat alarmed.

‘Impossible,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. He had hardly uttered the word, when

the whole half-dozen regiments levelled their muskets as if they had but

one common object, and that object the Pickwickians, and burst forth

with the most awful and tremendous discharge that ever shook the earth

to its centres, or an elderly gentleman off his.

It was in this trying situation, exposed to a galling fire of blank

cartridges, and harassed by the operations of the military, a fresh body

of whom had begun to fall in on the opposite side, that Mr. Pickwick

displayed that perfect coolness and self-possession, which are the

indispensable accompaniments of a great mind. He seized Mr. Winkle by

the arm, and placing himself between that gentleman and Mr. Snodgrass,

earnestly besought them to remember that beyond the possibility of being

rendered deaf by the noise, there was no immediate danger to be

apprehended from the firing.

‘But--but--suppose some of the men should happen to have ball cartridges

by mistake,’ remonstrated Mr. Winkle, pallid at the supposition he was

himself conjuring up. ‘I heard something whistle through the air now--so

sharp; close to my ear.’

‘We had better throw ourselves on our faces, hadn’t we?’ said Mr.

Snodgrass.

‘No, no--it’s over now,’ said Mr. Pickwick. His lip might quiver, and

his cheek might blanch, but no expression of fear or concern escaped the

lips of that immortal man.

Mr. Pickwick was right--the firing ceased; but he had scarcely time to

congratulate himself on the accuracy of his opinion, when a quick

movement was visible in the line; the hoarse shout of the word of

command ran along it, and before either of the party could form a guess

at the meaning of this new manoeuvre, the whole of the half-dozen

regiments, with fixed bayonets, charged at double-quick time down upon

the very spot on which Mr. Pickwick and his friends were stationed.

Man is but mortal; and there is a point beyond which human courage

cannot extend. Mr. Pickwick gazed through his spectacles for an instant

on the advancing mass, and then fairly turned his back and--we will not

say fled; firstly, because it is an ignoble term, and, secondly, because

Mr. Pickwick’s figure was by no means adapted for that mode of retreat--

he trotted away, at as quick a rate as his legs would convey him; so

quickly, indeed, that he did not perceive the awkwardness of his

situation, to the full extent, until too late.

The opposite troops, whose falling-in had perplexed Mr. Pickwick a few

seconds before, were drawn up to repel the mimic attack of the sham

besiegers of the citadel; and the consequence was that Mr. Pickwick and

his two companions found themselves suddenly inclosed between two lines

of great length, the one advancing at a rapid pace, and the other firmly

waiting the collision in hostile array.

‘Hoi!’ shouted the officers of the advancing line.

‘Get out of the way!’ cried the officers of the stationary one.

‘Where are we to go to?’ screamed the agitated Pickwickians.

‘Hoi--hoi--hoi!’ was the only reply. There was a moment of intense

bewilderment, a heavy tramp of footsteps, a violent concussion, a

smothered laugh; the half-dozen regiments were half a thousand yards

off, and the soles of Mr. Pickwick’s boots were elevated in air.

Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle had each performed a compulsory somerset

with remarkable agility, when the first object that met the eyes of the

latter as he sat on the ground, staunching with a yellow silk

handkerchief the stream of life which issued from his nose, was his

venerated leader at some distance off, running after his own hat, which

was gambolling playfully away in perspective.

There are very few moments in a man’s existence when he experiences so

much ludicrous distress, or meets with so little charitable

commiseration, as when he is in pursuit of his own hat. A vast deal of

coolness, and a peculiar degree of judgment, are requisite in catching a

hat. A man must not be precipitate, or he runs over it; he must not rush

into the opposite extreme, or he loses it altogether. The best way is to

keep gently up with the object of pursuit, to be wary and cautious, to

watch your opportunity well, get gradually before it, then make a rapid

dive, seize it by the crown, and stick it firmly on your head; smiling

pleasantly all the time, as if you thought it as good a joke as anybody

else.

There was a fine gentle wind, and Mr. Pickwick’s hat rolled sportively

before it. The wind puffed, and Mr. Pickwick puffed, and the hat rolled

over and over as merrily as a lively porpoise in a strong tide: and on

it might have rolled, far beyond Mr. Pickwick’s reach, had not its

course been providentially stopped, just as that gentleman was on the

point of resigning it to its fate.

Mr. Pickwick, we say, was completely exhausted, and about to give up the

chase, when the hat was blown with some violence against the wheel of a

carriage, which was drawn up in a line with half a dozen other vehicles

on the spot to which his steps had been directed. Mr. Pickwick,

perceiving his advantage, darted briskly forward, secured his property,

planted it on his head, and paused to take breath. He had not been

stationary half a minute, when he heard his own name eagerly pronounced

by a voice, which he at once recognised as Mr. Tupman’s, and, looking

upwards, he beheld a sight which filled him with surprise and pleasure.

In an open barouche, the horses of which had been taken out, the better

to accommodate it to the crowded place, stood a stout old gentleman, in

a blue coat and bright buttons, corduroy breeches and top-boots, two

young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a young gentleman apparently

enamoured of one of the young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a lady of

doubtful age, probably the aunt of the aforesaid, and Mr. Tupman, as

easy and unconcerned as if he had belonged to the family from the first

moments of his infancy. Fastened up behind the barouche was a hamper of

spacious dimensions--one of those hampers which always awakens in a

contemplative mind associations connected with cold fowls, tongues, and

bottles of wine--and on the box sat a fat and red-faced boy, in a state

of somnolency, whom no speculative observer could have regarded for an

instant without setting down as the official dispenser of the contents

of the before-mentioned hamper, when the proper time for their

consumption should arrive.

Mr. Pickwick had bestowed a hasty glance on these interesting objects,

when he was again greeted by his faithful disciple.

‘Pickwick--Pickwick,’ said Mr. Tupman; ‘come up here. Make haste.’

‘Come along, Sir. Pray, come up,’ said the stout gentleman. ‘Joe!--damn

that boy, he’s gone to sleep again.--Joe, let down the steps.’ The fat

boy rolled slowly off the box, let down the steps, and held the carriage

door invitingly open. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle came up at the

moment.

‘Room for you all, gentlemen,’ said the stout man. ‘Two inside, and one

out. Joe, make room for one of these gentlemen on the box. Now, Sir,

come along;’ and the stout gentleman extended his arm, and pulled first

Mr. Pickwick, and then Mr. Snodgrass, into the barouche by main force.

Mr. Winkle mounted to the box, the fat boy waddled to the same perch,

and fell fast asleep instantly.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said the stout man, ‘very glad to see you. Know you

very well, gentlemen, though you mayn’t remember me. I spent some

ev’nin’s at your club last winter--picked up my friend Mr. Tupman here

this morning, and very glad I was to see him. Well, Sir, and how are

you? You do look uncommon well, to be sure.’

Mr. Pickwick acknowledged the compliment, and cordially shook hands with

the stout gentleman in the top-boots.

‘Well, and how are you, sir?’ said the stout gentleman, addressing Mr.

Snodgrass with paternal anxiety. ‘Charming, eh? Well, that’s right--

that’s right. And how are you, sir (to Mr. Winkle)? Well, I am glad to

hear you say you are well; very glad I am, to be sure. My daughters,

gentlemen--my gals these are; and that’s my sister, Miss Rachael Wardle.

She’s a Miss, she is; and yet she ain’t a Miss--eh, Sir, eh?’ And the

stout gentleman playfully inserted his elbow between the ribs of Mr.

Pickwick, and laughed very heartily.

‘Lor, brother!’ said Miss Wardle, with a deprecating smile.

‘True, true,’ said the stout gentleman; ‘no one can deny it. Gentlemen,

I beg your pardon; this is my friend Mr. Trundle. And now you all know

each other, let’s be comfortable and happy, and see what’s going

forward; that’s what I say.’ So the stout gentleman put on his

spectacles, and Mr. Pickwick pulled out his glass, and everybody stood

up in the carriage, and looked over somebody else’s shoulder at the

evolutions of the military.

Astounding evolutions they were, one rank firing over the heads of

another rank, and then running away; and then the other rank firing over

the heads of another rank, and running away in their turn; and then

forming squares, with officers in the centre; and then descending the

trench on one side with scaling-ladders, and ascending it on the other

again by the same means; and knocking down barricades of baskets, and

behaving in the most gallant manner possible. Then there was such a

ramming down of the contents of enormous guns on the battery, with

instruments like magnified mops; such a preparation before they were let

off, and such an awful noise when they did go, that the air resounded

with the screams of ladies. The young Misses Wardle were so frightened,

that Mr. Trundle was actually obliged to hold one of them up in the

carriage, while Mr. Snodgrass supported the other; and Mr. Wardle’s

sister suffered under such a dreadful state of nervous alarm, that Mr.

Tupman found it indispensably necessary to put his arm round her waist,

to keep her up at all. Everybody was excited, except the fat boy, and he

slept as soundly as if the roaring of cannon were his ordinary lullaby.

‘Joe, Joe!’ said the stout gentleman, when the citadel was taken, and

the besiegers and besieged sat down to dinner. ‘Damn that boy, he’s gone

to sleep again. Be good enough to pinch him, sir--in the leg, if you

please; nothing else wakes him--thank you. Undo the hamper, Joe.’

The fat boy, who had been effectually roused by the compression of a

portion of his leg between the finger and thumb of Mr. Winkle, rolled

off the box once again, and proceeded to unpack the hamper with more

expedition than could have been expected from his previous inactivity.

‘Now we must sit close,’ said the stout gentleman. After a great many

jokes about squeezing the ladies’ sleeves, and a vast quantity of

blushing at sundry jocose proposals, that the ladies should sit in the

gentlemen’s laps, the whole party were stowed down in the barouche; and

the stout gentleman proceeded to hand the things from the fat boy (who

had mounted up behind for the purpose) into the carriage.

‘Now, Joe, knives and forks.’ The knives and forks were handed in, and

the ladies and gentlemen inside, and Mr. Winkle on the box, were each

furnished with those useful instruments.

‘Plates, Joe, plates.’ A similar process employed in the distribution of

the crockery.

‘Now, Joe, the fowls. Damn that boy; he’s gone to sleep again. Joe!

Joe!’ (Sundry taps on the head with a stick, and the fat boy, with some

difficulty, roused from his lethargy.) ‘Come, hand in the eatables.’

There was something in the sound of the last word which roused the

unctuous boy. He jumped up, and the leaden eyes which twinkled behind

his mountainous cheeks leered horribly upon the food as he unpacked it

from the basket.

‘Now make haste,’ said Mr. Wardle; for the fat boy was hanging fondly

over a capon, which he seemed wholly unable to part with. The boy sighed

deeply, and, bestowing an ardent gaze upon its plumpness, unwillingly

consigned it to his master.

‘That’s right--look sharp. Now the tongue--now the pigeon pie. Take care

of that veal and ham--mind the lobsters--take the salad out of the

cloth--give me the dressing.’ Such were the hurried orders which issued

from the lips of Mr. Wardle, as he handed in the different articles

described, and placed dishes in everybody’s hands, and on everybody’s

knees, in endless number.

‘Now ain’t this capital?’ inquired that jolly personage, when the work

of destruction had commenced.

‘Capital!’ said Mr. Winkle, who was carving a fowl on the box.

‘Glass of wine?’

‘With the greatest pleasure.’

‘You’d better have a bottle to yourself up there, hadn’t you?’

‘You’re very good.’

‘Joe!’

‘Yes, Sir.’ (He wasn’t asleep this time, having just succeeded in

abstracting a veal patty.)

‘Bottle of wine to the gentleman on the box. Glad to see you, Sir.’

‘Thank’ee.’ Mr. Winkle emptied his glass, and placed the bottle on the

coach-box, by his side.

‘Will you permit me to have the pleasure, Sir?’ said Mr. Trundle to Mr.

Winkle.

‘With great pleasure,’ replied Mr. Winkle to Mr. Trundle, and then the

two gentlemen took wine, after which they took a glass of wine round,

ladies and all.

‘How dear Emily is flirting with the strange gentleman,’ whispered the

spinster aunt, with true spinster-aunt-like envy, to her brother, Mr.

Wardle.

‘Oh! I don’t know,’ said the jolly old gentleman; ‘all very natural, I

dare say--nothing unusual. Mr. Pickwick, some wine, Sir?’ Mr. Pickwick,

who had been deeply investigating the interior of the pigeon-pie,

readily assented.

‘Emily, my dear,’ said the spinster aunt, with a patronising air, ‘don’t

talk so loud, love.’

‘Lor, aunt!’

‘Aunt and the little old gentleman want to have it all to themselves, I

think,’ whispered Miss Isabella Wardle to her sister Emily. The young

ladies laughed very heartily, and the old one tried to look amiable, but

couldn’t manage it.

‘Young girls have such spirits,’ said Miss Wardle to Mr. Tupman, with an

air of gentle commiseration, as if animal spirits were contraband, and

their possession without a permit a high crime and misdemeanour.

‘Oh, they have,’ replied Mr. Tupman, not exactly making the sort of

reply that was expected from him. ‘It’s quite delightful.’

‘Hem!’ said Miss Wardle, rather dubiously.

‘Will you permit me?’ said Mr. Tupman, in his blandest manner, touching

the enchanting Rachael’s wrist with one hand, and gently elevating the

bottle with the other. ‘Will you permit me?’

‘Oh, sir!’ Mr. Tupman looked most impressive; and Rachael expressed her

fear that more guns were going off, in which case, of course, she should

have required support again.

‘Do you think my dear nieces pretty?’ whispered their affectionate aunt

to Mr. Tupman.

‘I should, if their aunt wasn’t here,’ replied the ready Pickwickian,

with a passionate glance.

‘Oh, you naughty man--but really, if their complexions were a little

better, don’t you think they would be nice-looking girls--by

candlelight?’

‘Yes; I think they would,’ said Mr. Tupman, with an air of indifference.

‘Oh, you quiz--I know what you were going to say.’

‘What?’ inquired Mr. Tupman, who had not precisely made up his mind to

say anything at all.

‘You were going to say that Isabel stoops--I know you were--you men are

such observers. Well, so she does; it can’t be denied; and, certainly,

if there is one thing more than another that makes a girl look ugly it

is stooping. I often tell her that when she gets a little older she’ll

be quite frightful. Well, you are a quiz!’

Mr. Tupman had no objection to earning the reputation at so cheap a

rate: so he looked very knowing, and smiled mysteriously.

‘What a sarcastic smile,’ said the admiring Rachael; ‘I declare I’m

quite afraid of you.’

‘Afraid of me!’

‘Oh, you can’t disguise anything from me--I know what that smile means

very well.’

‘What?’ said Mr. Tupman, who had not the slightest notion himself.

‘You mean,’ said the amiable aunt, sinking her voice still lower--‘you

mean, that you don’t think Isabella’s stooping is as bad as Emily’s

boldness. Well, she is bold! You cannot think how wretched it makes me

sometimes--I’m sure I cry about it for hours together--my dear brother

is \_so\_ good, and so unsuspicious, that he never sees it; if he did, I’m

quite certain it would break his heart. I wish I could think it was only

manner--I hope it may be--’ (Here the affectionate relative heaved a

deep sigh, and shook her head despondingly).

‘I’m sure aunt’s talking about us,’ whispered Miss Emily Wardle to her

sister--‘I’m quite certain of it--she looks so malicious.’

‘Is she?’ replied Isabella.--‘Hem! aunt, dear!’

‘Yes, my dear love!’

‘I’m \_so\_ afraid you’ll catch cold, aunt--have a silk handkerchief to

tie round your dear old head--you really should take care of yourself--

consider your age!’

However well deserved this piece of retaliation might have been, it was

as vindictive a one as could well have been resorted to. There is no

guessing in what form of reply the aunt’s indignation would have vented

itself, had not Mr. Wardle unconsciously changed the subject, by calling

emphatically for Joe.

‘Damn that boy,’ said the old gentleman, ‘he’s gone to sleep again.’

‘Very extraordinary boy, that,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘does he always sleep

in this way?’

‘Sleep!’ said the old gentleman, ‘he’s always asleep. Goes on errands

fast asleep, and snores as he waits at table.’

‘How very odd!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah! odd indeed,’ returned the old gentleman; ‘I’m proud of that boy--

wouldn’t part with him on any account--he’s a natural curiosity! Here,

Joe--Joe--take these things away, and open another bottle--d’ye hear?’

The fat boy rose, opened his eyes, swallowed the huge piece of pie he

had been in the act of masticating when he last fell asleep, and slowly

obeyed his master’s orders--gloating languidly over the remains of the

feast, as he removed the plates, and deposited them in the hamper. The

fresh bottle was produced, and speedily emptied: the hamper was made

fast in its old place--the fat boy once more mounted the box--the

spectacles and pocket-glass were again adjusted--and the evolutions of

the military recommenced. There was a great fizzing and banging of guns,

and starting of ladies--and then a mine was sprung, to the gratification

of everybody--and when the mine had gone off, the military and the

company followed its example, and went off too.

‘Now, mind,’ said the old gentleman, as he shook hands with Mr. Pickwick

at the conclusion of a conversation which had been carried on at

intervals, during the conclusion of the proceedings, ‘we shall see you

all to-morrow.’

‘Most certainly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘You have got the address?’

‘Manor Farm, Dingley Dell,’ said Mr. Pickwick, consulting his pocket-

book.

‘That’s it,’ said the old gentleman. ‘I don’t let you off, mind, under a

week; and undertake that you shall see everything worth seeing. If

you’ve come down for a country life, come to me, and I’ll give you

plenty of it. Joe--damn that boy, he’s gone to sleep again--Joe, help

Tom put in the horses.’

The horses were put in--the driver mounted--the fat boy clambered up by

his side--farewells were exchanged--and the carriage rattled off. As the

Pickwickians turned round to take a last glimpse of it, the setting sun

cast a rich glow on the faces of their entertainers, and fell upon the

form of the fat boy. His head was sunk upon his bosom; and he slumbered

again.

CHAPTER V. A SHORT ONE--SHOWING, AMONG OTHER MATTERS, HOW Mr. PICKWICK

UNDERTOOK TO DRIVE, AND MR. WINKLE TO RIDE, AND HOW THEY BOTH DID IT

Bright and pleasant was the sky, balmy the air, and beautiful the

appearance of every object around, as Mr. Pickwick leaned over the

balustrades of Rochester Bridge, contemplating nature, and waiting for

breakfast. The scene was indeed one which might well have charmed a far

less reflective mind, than that to which it was presented.

On the left of the spectator lay the ruined wall, broken in many places,

and in some, overhanging the narrow beach below in rude and heavy

masses. Huge knots of seaweed hung upon the jagged and pointed stones,

trembling in every breath of wind; and the green ivy clung mournfully

round the dark and ruined battlements. Behind it rose the ancient

castle, its towers roofless, and its massive walls crumbling away, but

telling us proudly of its old might and strength, as when, seven hundred

years ago, it rang with the clash of arms, or resounded with the noise

of feasting and revelry. On either side, the banks of the Medway,

covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill, or

a distant church, stretched away as far as the eye could see, presenting

a rich and varied landscape, rendered more beautiful by the changing

shadows which passed swiftly across it as the thin and half-formed

clouds skimmed away in the light of the morning sun. The river,

reflecting the clear blue of the sky, glistened and sparkled as it

flowed noiselessly on; and the oars of the fishermen dipped into the

water with a clear and liquid sound, as their heavy but picturesque

boats glided slowly down the stream.

Mr. Pickwick was roused from the agreeable reverie into which he had

been led by the objects before him, by a deep sigh, and a touch on his

shoulder. He turned round: and the dismal man was at his side.

‘Contemplating the scene?’ inquired the dismal man.

‘I was,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘And congratulating yourself on being up so soon?’

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent.

‘Ah! people need to rise early, to see the sun in all his splendour, for

his brightness seldom lasts the day through. The morning of day and the

morning of life are but too much alike.’

‘You speak truly, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘How common the saying,’ continued the dismal man, ‘“The morning’s too

fine to last.” How well might it be applied to our everyday existence.

God! what would I forfeit to have the days of my childhood restored, or

to be able to forget them for ever!’

‘You have seen much trouble, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick compassionately.

‘I have,’ said the dismal man hurriedly; ‘I have. More than those who

see me now would believe possible.’ He paused for an instant, and then

said abruptly--

‘Did it ever strike you, on such a morning as this, that drowning would

be happiness and peace?’

‘God bless me, no!’ replied Mr. Pickwick, edging a little from the

balustrade, as the possibility of the dismal man’s tipping him over, by

way of experiment, occurred to him rather forcibly.

‘I have thought so, often,’ said the dismal man, without noticing the

action. ‘The calm, cool water seems to me to murmur an invitation to

repose and rest. A bound, a splash, a brief struggle; there is an eddy

for an instant, it gradually subsides into a gentle ripple; the waters

have closed above your head, and the world has closed upon your miseries

and misfortunes for ever.’ The sunken eye of the dismal man flashed

brightly as he spoke, but the momentary excitement quickly subsided; and

he turned calmly away, as he said--

‘There--enough of that. I wish to see you on another subject. You

invited me to read that paper, the night before last, and listened

attentively while I did so.’

‘I did,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘and I certainly thought--’

‘I asked for no opinion,’ said the dismal man, interrupting him, ‘and I

want none. You are travelling for amusement and instruction. Suppose I

forward you a curious manuscript--observe, not curious because wild or

improbable, but curious as a leaf from the romance of real life--would

you communicate it to the club, of which you have spoken so frequently?’

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘if you wished it; and it would be

entered on their transactions.’

‘You shall have it,’ replied the dismal man. ‘Your address;’ and, Mr.

Pickwick having communicated their probable route, the dismal man

carefully noted it down in a greasy pocket-book, and, resisting Mr.

Pickwick’s pressing invitation to breakfast, left that gentleman at his

inn, and walked slowly away.

Mr. Pickwick found that his three companions had risen, and were waiting

his arrival to commence breakfast, which was ready laid in tempting

display. They sat down to the meal; and broiled ham, eggs, tea, coffee

and sundries, began to disappear with a rapidity which at once bore

testimony to the excellence of the fare, and the appetites of its

consumers.

‘Now, about Manor Farm,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘How shall we go?’

‘We had better consult the waiter, perhaps,’ said Mr. Tupman; and the

waiter was summoned accordingly.

‘Dingley Dell, gentlemen--fifteen miles, gentlemen--cross road--post-

chaise, sir?’

‘Post-chaise won’t hold more than two,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘True, sir--beg your pardon, sir.--Very nice four-wheel chaise, sir--

seat for two behind--one in front for the gentleman that drives--oh! beg

your pardon, sir--that’ll only hold three.’

‘What’s to be done?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Perhaps one of the gentlemen would like to ride, sir?’ suggested the

waiter, looking towards Mr. Winkle; ‘very good saddle-horses, sir--any

of Mr. Wardle’s men coming to Rochester, bring ‘em back, Sir.’

‘The very thing,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Winkle, will you go on horseback?’

Now Mr. Winkle did entertain considerable misgivings in the very lowest

recesses of his own heart, relative to his equestrian skill; but, as he

would not have them even suspected, on any account, he at once replied

with great hardihood, ‘Certainly. I should enjoy it of all things.’

Mr. Winkle had rushed upon his fate; there was no resource.

‘Let them be at the door by eleven,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Very well, sir,’ replied the waiter.

The waiter retired; the breakfast concluded; and the travellers ascended

to their respective bedrooms, to prepare a change of clothing, to take

with them on their approaching expedition.

Mr. Pickwick had made his preliminary arrangements, and was looking over

the coffee-room blinds at the passengers in the street, when the waiter

entered, and announced that the chaise was ready--an announcement which

the vehicle itself confirmed, by forthwith appearing before the coffee-

room blinds aforesaid.

It was a curious little green box on four wheels, with a low place like

a wine-bin for two behind, and an elevated perch for one in front, drawn

by an immense brown horse, displaying great symmetry of bone. An hostler

stood near, holding by the bridle another immense horse--apparently a

near relative of the animal in the chaise--ready saddled for Mr. Winkle.

‘Bless my soul!’ said Mr. Pickwick, as they stood upon the pavement

while the coats were being put in. ‘Bless my soul! who’s to drive? I

never thought of that.’

‘Oh! you, of course,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘I!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not the slightest fear, Sir,’ interposed the hostler. ‘Warrant him

quiet, Sir; a hinfant in arms might drive him.’

‘He don’t shy, does he?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Shy, sir?-he wouldn’t shy if he was to meet a vagin-load of monkeys

with their tails burned off.’

The last recommendation was indisputable. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass

got into the bin; Mr. Pickwick ascended to his perch, and deposited his

feet on a floor-clothed shelf, erected beneath it for that purpose.

‘Now, shiny Villiam,’ said the hostler to the deputy hostler, ‘give the

gen’lm’n the ribbons.’

Shiny Villiam’--so called, probably, from his sleek hair and oily

countenance--placed the reins in Mr. Pickwick’s left hand; and the upper

hostler thrust a whip into his right.

‘Wo-o!’ cried Mr. Pickwick, as the tall quadruped evinced a decided

inclination to back into the coffee-room window.

‘Wo-o!’ echoed Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass, from the bin.

‘Only his playfulness, gen’lm’n,’ said the head hostler encouragingly;

‘jist kitch hold on him, Villiam.’ The deputy restrained the animal’s

impetuosity, and the principal ran to assist Mr. Winkle in mounting.

‘T’other side, sir, if you please.’

‘Blowed if the gen’lm’n worn’t a-gettin’ up on the wrong side,’

whispered a grinning post-boy to the inexpressibly gratified waiter.

Mr. Winkle, thus instructed, climbed into his saddle, with about as much

difficulty as he would have experienced in getting up the side of a

first-rate man-of-war.

‘All right?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, with an inward presentiment that it

was all wrong.

‘All right,’ replied Mr. Winkle faintly.

‘Let ‘em go,’ cried the hostler.--‘Hold him in, sir;’ and away went the

chaise, and the saddle-horse, with Mr. Pickwick on the box of the one,

and Mr. Winkle on the back of the other, to the delight and

gratification of the whole inn-yard.

‘What makes him go sideways?’ said Mr. Snodgrass in the bin, to Mr.

Winkle in the saddle.

‘I can’t imagine,’ replied Mr. Winkle. His horse was drifting up the

street in the most mysterious manner--side first, with his head towards

one side of the way, and his tail towards the other.

Mr. Pickwick had no leisure to observe either this or any other

particular, the whole of his faculties being concentrated in the

management of the animal attached to the chaise, who displayed various

peculiarities, highly interesting to a bystander, but by no means

equally amusing to any one seated behind him. Besides constantly jerking

his head up, in a very unpleasant and uncomfortable manner, and tugging

at the reins to an extent which rendered it a matter of great difficulty

for Mr. Pickwick to hold them, he had a singular propensity for darting

suddenly every now and then to the side of the road, then stopping

short, and then rushing forward for some minutes, at a speed which it

was wholly impossible to control.

‘What \_can\_ he mean by this?’ said Mr. Snodgrass, when the horse had

executed this manoeuvre for the twentieth time.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Tupman; ‘it looks very like shying, don’t

it?’ Mr. Snodgrass was about to reply, when he was interrupted by a

shout from Mr. Pickwick.

‘Woo!’ said that gentleman; ‘I have dropped my whip.’

‘Winkle,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, as the equestrian came trotting up on the

tall horse, with his hat over his ears, and shaking all over, as if he

would shake to pieces, with the violence of the exercise, ‘pick up the

whip, there’s a good fellow.’ Mr. Winkle pulled at the bridle of the

tall horse till he was black in the face; and having at length succeeded

in stopping him, dismounted, handed the whip to Mr. Pickwick, and

grasping the reins, prepared to remount.

Now whether the tall horse, in the natural playfulness of his

disposition, was desirous of having a little innocent recreation with

Mr. Winkle, or whether it occurred to him that he could perform the

journey as much to his own satisfaction without a rider as with one, are

points upon which, of course, we can arrive at no definite and distinct

conclusion. By whatever motives the animal was actuated, certain it is

that Mr. Winkle had no sooner touched the reins, than he slipped them

over his head, and darted backwards to their full length.

‘Poor fellow,’ said Mr. Winkle soothingly--‘poor fellow--good old

horse.’ The ‘poor fellow’ was proof against flattery; the more Mr.

Winkle tried to get nearer him, the more he sidled away; and,

notwithstanding all kinds of coaxing and wheedling, there were Mr.

Winkle and the horse going round and round each other for ten minutes,

at the end of which time each was at precisely the same distance from

the other as when they first commenced--an unsatisfactory sort of thing

under any circumstances, but particularly so in a lonely road, where no

assistance can be procured.

‘What am I to do?’ shouted Mr. Winkle, after the dodging had been

prolonged for a considerable time. ‘What am I to do? I can’t get on

him.’

‘You had better lead him till we come to a turnpike,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick from the chaise.

‘But he won’t come!’ roared Mr. Winkle. ‘Do come and hold him.’

Mr. Pickwick was the very personation of kindness and humanity: he threw

the reins on the horse’s back, and having descended from his seat,

carefully drew the chaise into the hedge, lest anything should come

along the road, and stepped back to the assistance of his distressed

companion, leaving Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the vehicle.

The horse no sooner beheld Mr. Pickwick advancing towards him with the

chaise whip in his hand, than he exchanged the rotary motion in which he

had previously indulged, for a retrograde movement of so very determined

a character, that it at once drew Mr. Winkle, who was still at the end

of the bridle, at a rather quicker rate than fast walking, in the

direction from which they had just come. Mr. Pickwick ran to his

assistance, but the faster Mr. Pickwick ran forward, the faster the

horse ran backward. There was a great scraping of feet, and kicking up

of the dust; and at last Mr. Winkle, his arms being nearly pulled out of

their sockets, fairly let go his hold. The horse paused, stared, shook

his head, turned round, and quietly trotted home to Rochester, leaving

Mr. Winkle and Mr. Pickwick gazing on each other with countenances of

blank dismay. A rattling noise at a little distance attracted their

attention. They looked up.

‘Bless my soul!’ exclaimed the agonised Mr. Pickwick; ‘there’s the other

horse running away!’

It was but too true. The animal was startled by the noise, and the reins

were on his back. The results may be guessed. He tore off with the four-

wheeled chaise behind him, and Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass in the four-

wheeled chaise. The heat was a short one. Mr. Tupman threw himself into

the hedge, Mr. Snodgrass followed his example, the horse dashed the

four--wheeled chaise against a wooden bridge, separated the wheels from

the body, and the bin from the perch; and finally stood stock still to

gaze upon the ruin he had made.

The first care of the two unspilt friends was to extricate their

unfortunate companions from their bed of quickset--a process which gave

them the unspeakable satisfaction of discovering that they had sustained

no injury, beyond sundry rents in their garments, and various

lacerations from the brambles. The next thing to be done was to

unharness the horse. This complicated process having been effected, the

party walked slowly forward, leading the horse among them, and

abandoning the chaise to its fate.

An hour’s walk brought the travellers to a little road-side public-

house, with two elm-trees, a horse trough, and a signpost, in front; one

or two deformed hay-ricks behind, a kitchen garden at the side, and

rotten sheds and mouldering outhouses jumbled in strange confusion all

about it. A red-headed man was working in the garden; and to him Mr.

Pickwick called lustily, ‘Hollo there!’

The red-headed man raised his body, shaded his eyes with his hand, and

stared, long and coolly, at Mr. Pickwick and his companions.

‘Hollo there!’ repeated Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hollo!’ was the red-headed man’s reply.

‘How far is it to Dingley Dell?’

‘Better er seven mile.’

‘Is it a good road?’

‘No, ‘tain’t.’ Having uttered this brief reply, and apparently satisfied

himself with another scrutiny, the red-headed man resumed his work. ‘We

want to put this horse up here,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I suppose we can,

can’t we?’

Want to put that ere horse up, do ee?’ repeated the red-headed man,

leaning on his spade.

‘Of course,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, who had by this time advanced, horse

in hand, to the garden rails.

‘Missus’--roared the man with the red head, emerging from the garden,

and looking very hard at the horse--‘missus!’

A tall, bony woman--straight all the way down--in a coarse, blue

pelisse, with the waist an inch or two below her arm-pits, responded to

the call.

‘Can we put this horse up here, my good woman?’ said Mr. Tupman,

advancing, and speaking in his most seductive tones. The woman looked

very hard at the whole party; and the red-headed man whispered something

in her ear.

‘No,’ replied the woman, after a little consideration, ‘I’m afeerd on

it.’

‘Afraid!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, ‘what’s the woman afraid of?’

‘It got us in trouble last time,’ said the woman, turning into the

house; ‘I woan’t have nothin’ to say to ‘un.’

‘Most extraordinary thing I have ever met with in my life,’ said the

astonished Mr. Pickwick.

‘I--I--really believe,’ whispered Mr. Winkle, as his friends gathered

round him, ‘that they think we have come by this horse in some dishonest

manner.’

‘What!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, in a storm of indignation. Mr. Winkle

modestly repeated his suggestion.

‘Hollo, you fellow,’ said the angry Mr. Pickwick, ‘do you think we stole

the horse?’

‘I’m sure ye did,’ replied the red-headed man, with a grin which

agitated his countenance from one auricular organ to the other. Saying

which he turned into the house and banged the door after him.

‘It’s like a dream,’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, ‘a hideous dream. The idea

of a man’s walking about all day with a dreadful horse that he can’t get

rid of!’ The depressed Pickwickians turned moodily away, with the tall

quadruped, for which they all felt the most unmitigated disgust,

following slowly at their heels.

It was late in the afternoon when the four friends and their four-footed

companion turned into the lane leading to Manor Farm; and even when they

were so near their place of destination, the pleasure they would

otherwise have experienced was materially damped as they reflected on

the singularity of their appearance, and the absurdity of their

situation. Torn clothes, lacerated faces, dusty shoes, exhausted looks,

and, above all, the horse. Oh, how Mr. Pickwick cursed that horse: he

had eyed the noble animal from time to time with looks expressive of

hatred and revenge; more than once he had calculated the probable amount

of the expense he would incur by cutting his throat; and now the

temptation to destroy him, or to cast him loose upon the world, rushed

upon his mind with tenfold force. He was roused from a meditation on

these dire imaginings by the sudden appearance of two figures at a turn

of the lane. It was Mr. Wardle, and his faithful attendant, the fat boy.

‘Why, where have you been?’ said the hospitable old gentleman; ‘I’ve

been waiting for you all day. Well, you \_do\_ look tired. What!

Scratches! Not hurt, I hope--eh? Well, I \_am\_ glad to hear that--very.

So you’ve been spilt, eh? Never mind. Common accident in these parts.

Joe--he’s asleep again!--Joe, take that horse from the gentlemen, and

lead it into the stable.’

The fat boy sauntered heavily behind them with the animal; and the old

gentleman, condoling with his guests in homely phrase on so much of the

day’s adventures as they thought proper to communicate, led the way to

the kitchen.

‘We’ll have you put to rights here,’ said the old gentleman, ‘and then

I’ll introduce you to the people in the parlour. Emma, bring out the

cherry brandy; now, Jane, a needle and thread here; towels and water,

Mary. Come, girls, bustle about.’

Three or four buxom girls speedily dispersed in search of the different

articles in requisition, while a couple of large-headed, circular-

visaged males rose from their seats in the chimney-corner (for although

it was a May evening their attachment to the wood fire appeared as

cordial as if it were Christmas), and dived into some obscure recesses,

from which they speedily produced a bottle of blacking, and some half-

dozen brushes.

‘Bustle!’ said the old gentleman again, but the admonition was quite

unnecessary, for one of the girls poured out the cherry brandy, and

another brought in the towels, and one of the men suddenly seizing Mr.

Pickwick by the leg, at imminent hazard of throwing him off his balance,

brushed away at his boot till his corns were red-hot; while the other

shampooed Mr. Winkle with a heavy clothes-brush, indulging, during the

operation, in that hissing sound which hostlers are wont to produce when

engaged in rubbing down a horse.

Mr. Snodgrass, having concluded his ablutions, took a survey of the

room, while standing with his back to the fire, sipping his cherry

brandy with heartfelt satisfaction. He describes it as a large

apartment, with a red brick floor and a capacious chimney; the ceiling

garnished with hams, sides of bacon, and ropes of onions. The walls were

decorated with several hunting-whips, two or three bridles, a saddle,

and an old rusty blunderbuss, with an inscription below it, intimating

that it was ‘Loaded’--as it had been, on the same authority, for half a

century at least. An old eight-day clock, of solemn and sedate

demeanour, ticked gravely in one corner; and a silver watch, of equal

antiquity, dangled from one of the many hooks which ornamented the

dresser.

‘Ready?’ said the old gentleman inquiringly, when his guests had been

washed, mended, brushed, and brandied.

‘Quite,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Come along, then;’ and the party having traversed several dark

passages, and being joined by Mr. Tupman, who had lingered behind to

snatch a kiss from Emma, for which he had been duly rewarded with sundry

pushings and scratchings, arrived at the parlour door.

‘Welcome,’ said their hospitable host, throwing it open and stepping

forward to announce them, ‘welcome, gentlemen, to Manor Farm.’

CHAPTER VI. AN OLD-FASHIONED CARD-PARTY--THE CLERGYMAN’S VERSES--THE

STORY OF THE CONVICT’S RETURN

Several guests who were assembled in the old parlour rose to greet Mr.

Pickwick and his friends upon their entrance; and during the performance

of the ceremony of introduction, with all due formalities, Mr. Pickwick

had leisure to observe the appearance, and speculate upon the characters

and pursuits, of the persons by whom he was surrounded--a habit in which

he, in common with many other great men, delighted to indulge.

A very old lady, in a lofty cap and faded silk gown--no less a personage

than Mr. Wardle’s mother--occupied the post of honour on the right-hand

corner of the chimney-piece; and various certificates of her having been

brought up in the way she should go when young, and of her not having

departed from it when old, ornamented the walls, in the form of samplers

of ancient date, worsted landscapes of equal antiquity, and crimson silk

tea-kettle holders of a more modern period. The aunt, the two young

ladies, and Mr. Wardle, each vying with the other in paying zealous and

unremitting attentions to the old lady, crowded round her easy-chair,

one holding her ear-trumpet, another an orange, and a third a smelling-

bottle, while a fourth was busily engaged in patting and punching the

pillows which were arranged for her support. On the opposite side sat a

bald-headed old gentleman, with a good-humoured, benevolent face--the

clergyman of Dingley Dell; and next him sat his wife, a stout, blooming

old lady, who looked as if she were well skilled, not only in the art

and mystery of manufacturing home-made cordials greatly to other

people’s satisfaction, but of tasting them occasionally very much to her

own. A little hard-headed, Ripstone pippin-faced man, was conversing

with a fat old gentleman in one corner; and two or three more old

gentlemen, and two or three more old ladies, sat bolt upright and

motionless on their chairs, staring very hard at Mr. Pickwick and his

fellow-voyagers.

‘Mr. Pickwick, mother,’ said Mr. Wardle, at the very top of his voice.

‘Ah!’ said the old lady, shaking her head; ‘I can’t hear you.’

‘Mr. Pickwick, grandma!’ screamed both the young ladies together.

‘Ah!’ exclaimed the old lady. ‘Well, it don’t much matter. He don’t care

for an old ‘ooman like me, I dare say.’

‘I assure you, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, grasping the old lady’s hand,

and speaking so loud that the exertion imparted a crimson hue to his

benevolent countenance--‘I assure you, ma’am, that nothing delights me

more than to see a lady of your time of life heading so fine a family,

and looking so young and well.’

‘Ah!’ said the old lady, after a short pause: ‘it’s all very fine, I

dare say; but I can’t hear him.’

‘Grandma’s rather put out now,’ said Miss Isabella Wardle, in a low

tone; ‘but she’ll talk to you presently.’

Mr. Pickwick nodded his readiness to humour the infirmities of age, and

entered into a general conversation with the other members of the

circle.

‘Delightful situation this,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Delightful!’ echoed Messrs. Snodgrass, Tupman, and Winkle.

‘Well, I think it is,’ said Mr. Wardle.

‘There ain’t a better spot o’ ground in all Kent, sir,’ said the hard-

headed man with the pippin--face; ‘there ain’t indeed, sir--I’m sure

there ain’t, Sir.’ The hard-headed man looked triumphantly round, as if

he had been very much contradicted by somebody, but had got the better

of him at last.

‘There ain’t a better spot o’ ground in all Kent,’ said the hard-headed

man again, after a pause.

‘’Cept Mullins’s Meadows,’ observed the fat man solemnly.

‘Mullins’s Meadows!’ ejaculated the other, with profound contempt.

‘Ah, Mullins’s Meadows,’ repeated the fat man.

‘Reg’lar good land that,’ interposed another fat man.

‘And so it is, sure-ly,’ said a third fat man.

‘Everybody knows that,’ said the corpulent host.

The hard-headed man looked dubiously round, but finding himself in a

minority, assumed a compassionate air and said no more.

‘What are they talking about?’ inquired the old lady of one of her

granddaughters, in a very audible voice; for, like many deaf people, she

never seemed to calculate on the possibility of other persons hearing

what she said herself.

‘About the land, grandma.’

‘What about the land?--Nothing the matter, is there?’

‘No, no. Mr. Miller was saying our land was better than Mullins’s

Meadows.’

‘How should he know anything about it?’ inquired the old lady

indignantly. ‘Miller’s a conceited coxcomb, and you may tell him I said

so.’ Saying which, the old lady, quite unconscious that she had spoken

above a whisper, drew herself up, and looked carving-knives at the hard-

headed delinquent.

‘Come, come,’ said the bustling host, with a natural anxiety to change

the conversation, ‘what say you to a rubber, Mr. Pickwick?’

‘I should like it of all things,’ replied that gentleman; ‘but pray

don’t make up one on my account.’

‘Oh, I assure you, mother’s very fond of a rubber,’ said Mr. Wardle;

‘ain’t you, mother?’

The old lady, who was much less deaf on this subject than on any other,

replied in the affirmative.

‘Joe, Joe!’ said the gentleman; ‘Joe--damn that--oh, here he is; put out

the card-tables.’

The lethargic youth contrived without any additional rousing to set out

two card-tables; the one for Pope Joan, and the other for whist. The

whist-players were Mr. Pickwick and the old lady, Mr. Miller and the fat

gentleman. The round game comprised the rest of the company.

The rubber was conducted with all that gravity of deportment and

sedateness of demeanour which befit the pursuit entitled ‘whist’--a

solemn observance, to which, as it appears to us, the title of ‘game’

has been very irreverently and ignominiously applied. The round-game

table, on the other hand, was so boisterously merry as materially to

interrupt the contemplations of Mr. Miller, who, not being quite so much

absorbed as he ought to have been, contrived to commit various high

crimes and misdemeanours, which excited the wrath of the fat gentleman

to a very great extent, and called forth the good-humour of the old lady

in a proportionate degree.

‘There!’ said the criminal Miller triumphantly, as he took up the odd

trick at the conclusion of a hand; ‘that could not have been played

better, I flatter myself; impossible to have made another trick!’

‘Miller ought to have trumped the diamond, oughtn’t he, Sir?’ said the

old lady.

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent.

‘Ought I, though?’ said the unfortunate, with a doubtful appeal to his

partner.

‘You ought, Sir,’ said the fat gentleman, in an awful voice.

‘Very sorry,’ said the crestfallen Miller.

‘Much use that,’ growled the fat gentleman.

‘Two by honours--makes us eight,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Another hand. ‘Can you one?’ inquired the old lady.

‘I can,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Double, single, and the rub.’

‘Never was such luck,’ said Mr. Miller.

‘Never was such cards,’ said the fat gentleman.

A solemn silence; Mr. Pickwick humorous, the old lady serious, the fat

gentleman captious, and Mr. Miller timorous.

‘Another double,’ said the old lady, triumphantly making a memorandum of

the circumstance, by placing one sixpence and a battered halfpenny under

the candlestick.

‘A double, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Quite aware of the fact, Sir,’ replied the fat gentleman sharply.

Another game, with a similar result, was followed by a revoke from the

unlucky Miller; on which the fat gentleman burst into a state of high

personal excitement which lasted until the conclusion of the game, when

he retired into a corner, and remained perfectly mute for one hour and

twenty-seven minutes; at the end of which time he emerged from his

retirement, and offered Mr. Pickwick a pinch of snuff with the air of a

man who had made up his mind to a Christian forgiveness of injuries

sustained. The old lady’s hearing decidedly improved and the unlucky

Miller felt as much out of his element as a dolphin in a sentry-box.

Meanwhile the round game proceeded right merrily. Isabella Wardle and

Mr. Trundle ‘went partners,’ and Emily Wardle and Mr. Snodgrass did the

same; and even Mr. Tupman and the spinster aunt established a joint-

stock company of fish and flattery. Old Mr. Wardle was in the very

height of his jollity; and he was so funny in his management of the

board, and the old ladies were so sharp after their winnings, that the

whole table was in a perpetual roar of merriment and laughter. There was

one old lady who always had about half a dozen cards to pay for, at

which everybody laughed, regularly every round; and when the old lady

looked cross at having to pay, they laughed louder than ever; on which

the old lady’s face gradually brightened up, till at last she laughed

louder than any of them, Then, when the spinster aunt got ‘matrimony,’

the young ladies laughed afresh, and the Spinster aunt seemed disposed

to be pettish; till, feeling Mr. Tupman squeezing her hand under the

table, she brightened up too, and looked rather knowing, as if matrimony

in reality were not quite so far off as some people thought for;

whereupon everybody laughed again, and especially old Mr. Wardle, who

enjoyed a joke as much as the youngest. As to Mr. Snodgrass, he did

nothing but whisper poetical sentiments into his partner’s ear, which

made one old gentleman facetiously sly, about partnerships at cards and

partnerships for life, and caused the aforesaid old gentleman to make

some remarks thereupon, accompanied with divers winks and chuckles,

which made the company very merry and the old gentleman’s wife

especially so. And Mr. Winkle came out with jokes which are very well

known in town, but are not all known in the country; and as everybody

laughed at them very heartily, and said they were very capital, Mr.

Winkle was in a state of great honour and glory. And the benevolent

clergyman looked pleasantly on; for the happy faces which surrounded the

table made the good old man feel happy too; and though the merriment was

rather boisterous, still it came from the heart and not from the lips;

and this is the right sort of merriment, after all.

The evening glided swiftly away, in these cheerful recreations; and when

the substantial though homely supper had been despatched, and the little

party formed a social circle round the fire, Mr. Pickwick thought he had

never felt so happy in his life, and at no time so much disposed to

enjoy, and make the most of, the passing moment.

‘Now this,’ said the hospitable host, who was sitting in great state

next the old lady’s arm-chair, with her hand fast clasped in his--‘this

is just what I like--the happiest moments of my life have been passed at

this old fireside; and I am so attached to it, that I keep up a blazing

fire here every evening, until it actually grows too hot to bear it.

Why, my poor old mother, here, used to sit before this fireplace upon

that little stool when she was a girl; didn’t you, mother?’

The tear which starts unbidden to the eye when the recollection of old

times and the happiness of many years ago is suddenly recalled, stole

down the old lady’s face as she shook her head with a melancholy smile.

‘You must excuse my talking about this old place, Mr. Pickwick,’ resumed

the host, after a short pause, ‘for I love it dearly, and know no other-

-the old houses and fields seem like living friends to me; and so does

our little church with the ivy, about which, by the bye, our excellent

friend there made a song when he first came amongst us. Mr. Snodgrass,

have you anything in your glass?’

‘Plenty, thank you,’ replied that gentleman, whose poetic curiosity had

been greatly excited by the last observation of his entertainer. ‘I beg

your pardon, but you were talking about the song of the Ivy.’

‘You must ask our friend opposite about that,’ said the host knowingly,

indicating the clergyman by a nod of his head.

‘May I say that I should like to hear you repeat it, sir?’ said Mr.

Snodgrass.

‘Why, really,’ replied the clergyman, ‘it’s a very slight affair; and

the only excuse I have for having ever perpetrated it is, that I was a

young man at the time. Such as it is, however, you shall hear it, if you

wish.’

A murmur of curiosity was of course the reply; and the old gentleman

proceeded to recite, with the aid of sundry promptings from his wife,

the lines in question. ‘I call them,’ said he,

THE IVY GREEN

Oh, a dainty plant is the Ivy green, That creepeth o’er ruins old! Of

right choice food are his meals, I ween, In his cell so lone and cold.

The wall must be crumbled, the stone decayed, To pleasure his dainty

whim; And the mouldering dust that years have made, Is a merry meal for

him. Creeping where no life is seen, A rare old plant is the Ivy green.

Fast he stealeth on, though he wears no wings, And a staunch old heart

has he. How closely he twineth, how tight he clings To his friend the

huge Oak Tree! And slily he traileth along the ground, And his leaves he

gently waves, As he joyously hugs and crawleth round The rich mould of

dead men’s graves. Creeping where grim death has been, A rare old plant

is the Ivy green.

Whole ages have fled and their works decayed, And nations have scattered

been; But the stout old Ivy shall never fade, From its hale and hearty

green. The brave old plant in its lonely days, Shall fatten upon the

past; For the stateliest building man can raise, Is the Ivy’s food at

last. Creeping on where time has been, A rare old plant is the Ivy

green.

While the old gentleman repeated these lines a second time, to enable

Mr. Snodgrass to note them down, Mr. Pickwick perused the lineaments of

his face with an expression of great interest. The old gentleman having

concluded his dictation, and Mr. Snodgrass having returned his note-book

to his pocket, Mr. Pickwick said--

‘Excuse me, sir, for making the remark on so short an acquaintance; but

a gentleman like yourself cannot fail, I should think, to have observed

many scenes and incidents worth recording, in the course of your

experience as a minister of the Gospel.’

‘I have witnessed some certainly,’ replied the old gentleman, ‘but the

incidents and characters have been of a homely and ordinary nature, my

sphere of action being so very limited.’

‘You did make some notes, I think, about John Edmunds, did you not?’

inquired Mr. Wardle, who appeared very desirous to draw his friend out,

for the edification of his new visitors.

The old gentleman slightly nodded his head in token of assent, and was

proceeding to change the subject, when Mr. Pickwick said--

‘I beg your pardon, sir, but pray, if I may venture to inquire, who was

John Edmunds?’

‘The very thing I was about to ask,’ said Mr. Snodgrass eagerly.

‘You are fairly in for it,’ said the jolly host. ‘You must satisfy the

curiosity of these gentlemen, sooner or later; so you had better take

advantage of this favourable opportunity, and do so at once.’

The old gentleman smiled good-humouredly as he drew his chair forward--

the remainder of the party drew their chairs closer together, especially

Mr. Tupman and the spinster aunt, who were possibly rather hard of

hearing; and the old lady’s ear-trumpet having been duly adjusted, and

Mr. Miller (who had fallen asleep during the recital of the verses)

roused from his slumbers by an admonitory pinch, administered beneath

the table by his ex-partner the solemn fat man, the old gentleman,

without further preface, commenced the following tale, to which we have

taken the liberty of prefixing the title of

THE CONVICT’S RETURN

‘When I first settled in this village,’ said the old gentleman, ‘which

is now just five-and-twenty years ago, the most notorious person among

my parishioners was a man of the name of Edmunds, who leased a small

farm near this spot. He was a morose, savage-hearted, bad man; idle and

dissolute in his habits; cruel and ferocious in his disposition. Beyond

the few lazy and reckless vagabonds with whom he sauntered away his time

in the fields, or sotted in the ale-house, he had not a single friend or

acquaintance; no one cared to speak to the man whom many feared, and

every one detested--and Edmunds was shunned by all.

‘This man had a wife and one son, who, when I first came here, was about

twelve years old. Of the acuteness of that woman’s sufferings, of the

gentle and enduring manner in which she bore them, of the agony of

solicitude with which she reared that boy, no one can form an adequate

conception. Heaven forgive me the supposition, if it be an uncharitable

one, but I do firmly and in my soul believe, that the man systematically

tried for many years to break her heart; but she bore it all for her

child’s sake, and, however strange it may seem to many, for his father’s

too; for brute as he was, and cruelly as he had treated her, she had

loved him once; and the recollection of what he had been to her,

awakened feelings of forbearance and meekness under suffering in her

bosom, to which all God’s creatures, but women, are strangers.

‘They were poor--they could not be otherwise when the man pursued such

courses; but the woman’s unceasing and unwearied exertions, early and

late, morning, noon, and night, kept them above actual want. These

exertions were but ill repaid. People who passed the spot in the

evening--sometimes at a late hour of the night--reported that they had

heard the moans and sobs of a woman in distress, and the sound of blows;

and more than once, when it was past midnight, the boy knocked softly at

the door of a neighbour’s house, whither he had been sent, to escape the

drunken fury of his unnatural father.

‘During the whole of this time, and when the poor creature often bore

about her marks of ill-usage and violence which she could not wholly

conceal, she was a constant attendant at our little church. Regularly

every Sunday, morning and afternoon, she occupied the same seat with the

boy at her side; and though they were both poorly dressed--much more so

than many of their neighbours who were in a lower station--they were

always neat and clean. Every one had a friendly nod and a kind word for

“poor Mrs. Edmunds”; and sometimes, when she stopped to exchange a few

words with a neighbour at the conclusion of the service in the little

row of elm-trees which leads to the church porch, or lingered behind to

gaze with a mother’s pride and fondness upon her healthy boy, as he

sported before her with some little companions, her careworn face would

lighten up with an expression of heartfelt gratitude; and she would

look, if not cheerful and happy, at least tranquil and contented.

‘Five or six years passed away; the boy had become a robust and well-

grown youth. The time that had strengthened the child’s slight frame and

knit his weak limbs into the strength of manhood had bowed his mother’s

form, and enfeebled her steps; but the arm that should have supported

her was no longer locked in hers; the face that should have cheered her,

no more looked upon her own. She occupied her old seat, but there was a

vacant one beside her. The Bible was kept as carefully as ever, the

places were found and folded down as they used to be: but there was no

one to read it with her; and the tears fell thick and fast upon the

book, and blotted the words from her eyes. Neighbours were as kind as

they were wont to be of old, but she shunned their greetings with

averted head. There was no lingering among the old elm-trees now--no

cheering anticipations of happiness yet in store. The desolate woman

drew her bonnet closer over her face, and walked hurriedly away.

‘Shall I tell you that the young man, who, looking back to the earliest

of his childhood’s days to which memory and consciousness extended, and

carrying his recollection down to that moment, could remember nothing

which was not in some way connected with a long series of voluntary

privations suffered by his mother for his sake, with ill-usage, and

insult, and violence, and all endured for him--shall I tell you, that

he, with a reckless disregard for her breaking heart, and a sullen,

wilful forgetfulness of all she had done and borne for him, had linked

himself with depraved and abandoned men, and was madly pursuing a

headlong career, which must bring death to him, and shame to her? Alas

for human nature! You have anticipated it long since.

‘The measure of the unhappy woman’s misery and misfortune was about to

be completed. Numerous offences had been committed in the neighbourhood;

the perpetrators remained undiscovered, and their boldness increased. A

robbery of a daring and aggravated nature occasioned a vigilance of

pursuit, and a strictness of search, they had not calculated on. Young

Edmunds was suspected, with three companions. He was apprehended--

committed--tried--condemned--to die.

‘The wild and piercing shriek from a woman’s voice, which resounded

through the court when the solemn sentence was pronounced, rings in my

ears at this moment. That cry struck a terror to the culprit’s heart,

which trial, condemnation--the approach of death itself, had failed to

awaken. The lips which had been compressed in dogged sullenness

throughout, quivered and parted involuntarily; the face turned ashy pale

as the cold perspiration broke forth from every pore; the sturdy limbs

of the felon trembled, and he staggered in the dock.

‘In the first transports of her mental anguish, the suffering mother

threw herself on her knees at my feet, and fervently sought the Almighty

Being who had hitherto supported her in all her troubles to release her

from a world of woe and misery, and to spare the life of her only child.

A burst of grief, and a violent struggle, such as I hope I may never

have to witness again, succeeded. I knew that her heart was breaking

from that hour; but I never once heard complaint or murmur escape her

lips.

‘It was a piteous spectacle to see that woman in the prison-yard from

day to day, eagerly and fervently attempting, by affection and entreaty,

to soften the hard heart of her obdurate son. It was in vain. He

remained moody, obstinate, and unmoved. Not even the unlooked-for

commutation of his sentence to transportation for fourteen years,

softened for an instant the sullen hardihood of his demeanour.

‘But the spirit of resignation and endurance that had so long upheld

her, was unable to contend against bodily weakness and infirmity. She

fell sick. She dragged her tottering limbs from the bed to visit her son

once more, but her strength failed her, and she sank powerless on the

ground.

‘And now the boasted coldness and indifference of the young man were

tested indeed; and the retribution that fell heavily upon him nearly

drove him mad. A day passed away and his mother was not there; another

flew by, and she came not near him; a third evening arrived, and yet he

had not seen her--, and in four-and-twenty hours he was to be separated

from her, perhaps for ever. Oh! how the long-forgotten thoughts of

former days rushed upon his mind, as he almost ran up and down the

narrow yard--as if intelligence would arrive the sooner for his

hurrying--and how bitterly a sense of his helplessness and desolation

rushed upon him, when he heard the truth! His mother, the only parent he

had ever known, lay ill--it might be, dying--within one mile of the

ground he stood on; were he free and unfettered, a few minutes would

place him by her side. He rushed to the gate, and grasping the iron

rails with the energy of desperation, shook it till it rang again, and

threw himself against the thick wall as if to force a passage through

the stone; but the strong building mocked his feeble efforts, and he

beat his hands together and wept like a child.

‘I bore the mother’s forgiveness and blessing to her son in prison; and

I carried the solemn assurance of repentance, and his fervent

supplication for pardon, to her sick-bed. I heard, with pity and

compassion, the repentant man devise a thousand little plans for her

comfort and support when he returned; but I knew that many months before

he could reach his place of destination, his mother would be no longer

of this world.

‘He was removed by night. A few weeks afterwards the poor woman’s soul

took its flight, I confidently hope, and solemnly believe, to a place of

eternal happiness and rest. I performed the burial service over her

remains. She lies in our little churchyard. There is no stone at her

grave’s head. Her sorrows were known to man; her virtues to God.

‘It had been arranged previously to the convict’s departure, that he

should write to his mother as soon as he could obtain permission, and

that the letter should be addressed to me. The father had positively

refused to see his son from the moment of his apprehension; and it was a

matter of indifference to him whether he lived or died. Many years

passed over without any intelligence of him; and when more than half his

term of transportation had expired, and I had received no letter, I

concluded him to be dead, as, indeed, I almost hoped he might be.

‘Edmunds, however, had been sent a considerable distance up the country

on his arrival at the settlement; and to this circumstance, perhaps, may

be attributed the fact, that though several letters were despatched,

none of them ever reached my hands. He remained in the same place during

the whole fourteen years. At the expiration of the term, steadily

adhering to his old resolution and the pledge he gave his mother, he

made his way back to England amidst innumerable difficulties, and

returned, on foot, to his native place.

‘On a fine Sunday evening, in the month of August, John Edmunds set foot

in the village he had left with shame and disgrace seventeen years

before. His nearest way lay through the churchyard. The man’s heart

swelled as he crossed the stile. The tall old elms, through whose

branches the declining sun cast here and there a rich ray of light upon

the shady part, awakened the associations of his earliest days. He

pictured himself as he was then, clinging to his mother’s hand, and

walking peacefully to church. He remembered how he used to look up into

her pale face; and how her eyes would sometimes fill with tears as she

gazed upon his features--tears which fell hot upon his forehead as she

stooped to kiss him, and made him weep too, although he little knew then

what bitter tears hers were. He thought how often he had run merrily

down that path with some childish playfellow, looking back, ever and

again, to catch his mother’s smile, or hear her gentle voice; and then a

veil seemed lifted from his memory, and words of kindness unrequited,

and warnings despised, and promises broken, thronged upon his

recollection till his heart failed him, and he could bear it no longer.

‘He entered the church. The evening service was concluded and the

congregation had dispersed, but it was not yet closed. His steps echoed

through the low building with a hollow sound, and he almost feared to be

alone, it was so still and quiet. He looked round him. Nothing was

changed. The place seemed smaller than it used to be; but there were the

old monuments on which he had gazed with childish awe a thousand times;

the little pulpit with its faded cushion; the Communion table before

which he had so often repeated the Commandments he had reverenced as a

child, and forgotten as a man. He approached the old seat; it looked

cold and desolate. The cushion had been removed, and the Bible was not

there. Perhaps his mother now occupied a poorer seat, or possibly she

had grown infirm and could not reach the church alone. He dared not

think of what he feared. A cold feeling crept over him, and he trembled

violently as he turned away. ‘An old man entered the porch just as he

reached it. Edmunds started back, for he knew him well; many a time he

had watched him digging graves in the churchyard. What would he say to

the returned convict?

‘The old man raised his eyes to the stranger’s face, bade him “good-

evening,” and walked slowly on. He had forgotten him.

‘He walked down the hill, and through the village. The weather was warm,

and the people were sitting at their doors, or strolling in their little

gardens as he passed, enjoying the serenity of the evening, and their

rest from labour. Many a look was turned towards him, and many a

doubtful glance he cast on either side to see whether any knew and

shunned him. There were strange faces in almost every house; in some he

recognised the burly form of some old schoolfellow--a boy when he last

saw him--surrounded by a troop of merry children; in others he saw,

seated in an easy-chair at a cottage door, a feeble and infirm old man,

whom he only remembered as a hale and hearty labourer; but they had all

forgotten him, and he passed on unknown.

‘The last soft light of the setting sun had fallen on the earth, casting

a rich glow on the yellow corn sheaves, and lengthening the shadows of

the orchard trees, as he stood before the old house--the home of his

infancy--to which his heart had yearned with an intensity of affection

not to be described, through long and weary years of captivity and

sorrow. The paling was low, though he well remembered the time that it

had seemed a high wall to him; and he looked over into the old garden.

There were more seeds and gayer flowers than there used to be, but there

were the old trees still--the very tree under which he had lain a

thousand times when tired of playing in the sun, and felt the soft, mild

sleep of happy boyhood steal gently upon him. There were voices within

the house. He listened, but they fell strangely upon his ear; he knew

them not. They were merry too; and he well knew that his poor old mother

could not be cheerful, and he away. The door opened, and a group of

little children bounded out, shouting and romping. The father, with a

little boy in his arms, appeared at the door, and they crowded round

him, clapping their tiny hands, and dragging him out, to join their

joyous sports. The convict thought on the many times he had shrunk from

his father’s sight in that very place. He remembered how often he had

buried his trembling head beneath the bedclothes, and heard the harsh

word, and the hard stripe, and his mother’s wailing; and though the man

sobbed aloud with agony of mind as he left the spot, his fist was

clenched, and his teeth were set, in a fierce and deadly passion.

‘And such was the return to which he had looked through the weary

perspective of many years, and for which he had undergone so much

suffering! No face of welcome, no look of forgiveness, no house to

receive, no hand to help him--and this too in the old village. What was

his loneliness in the wild, thick woods, where man was never seen, to

this!

‘He felt that in the distant land of his bondage and infamy, he had

thought of his native place as it was when he left it; and not as it

would be when he returned. The sad reality struck coldly at his heart,

and his spirit sank within him. He had not courage to make inquiries, or

to present himself to the only person who was likely to receive him with

kindness and compassion. He walked slowly on; and shunning the roadside

like a guilty man, turned into a meadow he well remembered; and covering

his face with his hands, threw himself upon the grass.

‘He had not observed that a man was lying on the bank beside him; his

garments rustled as he turned round to steal a look at the new-comer;

and Edmunds raised his head.

‘The man had moved into a sitting posture. His body was much bent, and

his face was wrinkled and yellow. His dress denoted him an inmate of the

workhouse: he had the appearance of being very old, but it looked more

the effect of dissipation or disease, than the length of years. He was

staring hard at the stranger, and though his eyes were lustreless and

heavy at first, they appeared to glow with an unnatural and alarmed

expression after they had been fixed upon him for a short time, until

they seemed to be starting from their sockets. Edmunds gradually raised

himself to his knees, and looked more and more earnestly on the old

man’s face. They gazed upon each other in silence.

‘The old man was ghastly pale. He shuddered and tottered to his feet.

Edmunds sprang to his. He stepped back a pace or two. Edmunds advanced.

‘“Let me hear you speak,” said the convict, in a thick, broken voice.

‘“Stand off!” cried the old man, with a dreadful oath. The convict drew

closer to him.

‘“Stand off!” shrieked the old man. Furious with terror, he raised his

stick, and struck Edmunds a heavy blow across the face.

‘“Father--devil!” murmured the convict between his set teeth. He rushed

wildly forward, and clenched the old man by the throat--but he was his

father; and his arm fell powerless by his side.

‘The old man uttered a loud yell which rang through the lonely fields

like the howl of an evil spirit. His face turned black, the gore rushed

from his mouth and nose, and dyed the grass a deep, dark red, as he

staggered and fell. He had ruptured a blood-vessel, and he was a dead

man before his son could raise him.

‘In that corner of the churchyard,’ said the old gentleman, after a

silence of a few moments, ‘in that corner of the churchyard of which I

have before spoken, there lies buried a man who was in my employment for

three years after this event, and who was truly contrite, penitent, and

humbled, if ever man was. No one save myself knew in that man’s lifetime

who he was, or whence he came--it was John Edmunds, the returned

convict.’

CHAPTER VII. HOW MR. WINKLE, INSTEAD OF SHOOTING AT THE PIGEON AND

KILLING THE CROW, SHOT AT THE CROW AND WOUNDED THE PIGEON; HOW THE

DINGLEY DELL CRICKET CLUB PLAYED ALL-MUGGLETON, AND HOW ALL-MUGGLETON

DINED AT THE DINGLEY DELL EXPENSE; WITH OTHER INTERESTING AND

INSTRUCTIVE MATTERS

The fatiguing adventures of the day or the somniferous influence of the

clergyman’s tale operated so strongly on the drowsy tendencies of Mr.

Pickwick, that in less than five minutes after he had been shown to his

comfortable bedroom he fell into a sound and dreamless sleep, from which

he was only awakened by the morning sun darting his bright beams

reproachfully into the apartment. Mr. Pickwick was no sluggard, and he

sprang like an ardent warrior from his tent-bedstead.

‘Pleasant, pleasant country,’ sighed the enthusiastic gentleman, as he

opened his lattice window. ‘Who could live to gaze from day to day on

bricks and slates who had once felt the influence of a scene like this?

Who could continue to exist where there are no cows but the cows on the

chimney-pots; nothing redolent of Pan but pan-tiles; no crop but stone

crop? Who could bear to drag out a life in such a spot? Who, I ask,

could endure it?’ and, having cross-examined solitude after the most

approved precedents, at considerable length, Mr. Pickwick thrust his

head out of the lattice and looked around him.

The rich, sweet smell of the hay-ricks rose to his chamber window; the

hundred perfumes of the little flower-garden beneath scented the air

around; the deep-green meadows shone in the morning dew that glistened

on every leaf as it trembled in the gentle air; and the birds sang as if

every sparkling drop were to them a fountain of inspiration. Mr.

Pickwick fell into an enchanting and delicious reverie.

‘Hollo!’ was the sound that roused him.

He looked to the right, but he saw nobody; his eyes wandered to the

left, and pierced the prospect; he stared into the sky, but he wasn’t

wanted there; and then he did what a common mind would have done at

once--looked into the garden, and there saw Mr. Wardle.

‘How are you?’ said the good-humoured individual, out of breath with his

own anticipations of pleasure.’Beautiful morning, ain’t it? Glad to see

you up so early. Make haste down, and come out. I’ll wait for you here.’

Mr. Pickwick needed no second invitation. Ten minutes sufficed for the

completion of his toilet, and at the expiration of that time he was by

the old gentleman’s side.

‘Hollo!’ said Mr. Pickwick in his turn, seeing that his companion was

armed with a gun, and that another lay ready on the grass; ‘what’s going

forward?’

‘Why, your friend and I,’ replied the host, ‘are going out rook-shooting

before breakfast. He’s a very good shot, ain’t he?’

‘I’ve heard him say he’s a capital one,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘but I

never saw him aim at anything.’

‘Well,’ said the host, ‘I wish he’d come. Joe--Joe!’

The fat boy, who under the exciting influence of the morning did not

appear to be more than three parts and a fraction asleep, emerged from

the house.

‘Go up, and call the gentleman, and tell him he’ll find me and Mr.

Pickwick in the rookery. Show the gentleman the way there; d’ye hear?’

The boy departed to execute his commission; and the host, carrying both

guns like a second Robinson Crusoe, led the way from the garden.

‘This is the place,’ said the old gentleman, pausing after a few minutes

walking, in an avenue of trees. The information was unnecessary; for the

incessant cawing of the unconscious rooks sufficiently indicated their

whereabouts.

The old gentleman laid one gun on the ground, and loaded the other.

‘Here they are,’ said Mr. Pickwick; and, as he spoke, the forms of Mr.

Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and Mr. Winkle appeared in the distance. The fat

boy, not being quite certain which gentleman he was directed to call,

had with peculiar sagacity, and to prevent the possibility of any

mistake, called them all.

‘Come along,’ shouted the old gentleman, addressing Mr. Winkle; ‘a keen

hand like you ought to have been up long ago, even to such poor work as

this.’

Mr. Winkle responded with a forced smile, and took up the spare gun with

an expression of countenance which a metaphysical rook, impressed with a

foreboding of his approaching death by violence, may be supposed to

assume. It might have been keenness, but it looked remarkably like

misery.

The old gentleman nodded; and two ragged boys who had been marshalled to

the spot under the direction of the infant Lambert, forthwith commenced

climbing up two of the trees.

‘What are these lads for?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick abruptly. He was rather

alarmed; for he was not quite certain but that the distress of the

agricultural interest, about which he had often heard a great deal,

might have compelled the small boys attached to the soil to earn a

precarious and hazardous subsistence by making marks of themselves for

inexperienced sportsmen.

‘Only to start the game,’ replied Mr. Wardle, laughing.

‘To what?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, in plain English, to frighten the rooks.’

‘Oh, is that all?’

‘You are satisfied?’

‘Quite.’

‘Very well. Shall I begin?’

‘If you please,’ said Mr. Winkle, glad of any respite.

‘Stand aside, then. Now for it.’

The boy shouted, and shook a branch with a nest on it. Half a dozen

young rooks in violent conversation, flew out to ask what the matter

was. The old gentleman fired by way of reply. Down fell one bird, and

off flew the others.

‘Take him up, Joe,’ said the old gentleman.

There was a smile upon the youth’s face as he advanced. Indistinct

visions of rook-pie floated through his imagination. He laughed as he

retired with the bird--it was a plump one.

‘Now, Mr. Winkle,’ said the host, reloading his own gun. ‘Fire away.’

Mr. Winkle advanced, and levelled his gun. Mr. Pickwick and his friends

cowered involuntarily to escape damage from the heavy fall of rooks,

which they felt quite certain would be occasioned by the devastating

barrel of their friend. There was a solemn pause--a shout--a flapping of

wings--a faint click.

‘Hollo!’ said the old gentleman.

‘Won’t it go?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Missed fire,’ said Mr. Winkle, who was very pale--probably from

disappointment.

‘Odd,’ said the old gentleman, taking the gun. ‘Never knew one of them

miss fire before. Why, I don’t see anything of the cap.’

Bless my soul!’ said Mr. Winkle, ‘I declare I forgot the cap!’

The slight omission was rectified. Mr. Pickwick crouched again. Mr.

Winkle stepped forward with an air of determination and resolution; and

Mr. Tupman looked out from behind a tree. The boy shouted; four birds

flew out. Mr. Winkle fired. There was a scream as of an individual--not

a rook--in corporal anguish. Mr. Tupman had saved the lives of

innumerable unoffending birds by receiving a portion of the charge in

his left arm.

To describe the confusion that ensued would be impossible. To tell how

Mr. Pickwick in the first transports of emotion called Mr. Winkle

‘Wretch!’ how Mr. Tupman lay prostrate on the ground; and how Mr. Winkle

knelt horror-stricken beside him; how Mr. Tupman called distractedly

upon some feminine Christian name, and then opened first one eye, and

then the other, and then fell back and shut them both--all this would be

as difficult to describe in detail, as it would be to depict the gradual

recovering of the unfortunate individual, the binding up of his arm with

pocket-handkerchiefs, and the conveying him back by slow degrees

supported by the arms of his anxious friends.

They drew near the house. The ladies were at the garden gate, waiting

for their arrival and their breakfast. The spinster aunt appeared; she

smiled, and beckoned them to walk quicker. ‘Twas evident she knew not of

the disaster. Poor thing! there are times when ignorance is bliss

indeed.

They approached nearer.

‘Why, what is the matter with the little old gentleman?’ said Isabella

Wardle. The spinster aunt heeded not the remark; she thought it applied

to Mr. Pickwick. In her eyes Tracy Tupman was a youth; she viewed his

years through a diminishing glass.

‘Don’t be frightened,’ called out the old host, fearful of alarming his

daughters. The little party had crowded so completely round Mr. Tupman,

that they could not yet clearly discern the nature of the accident.

‘Don’t be frightened,’ said the host.

‘What’s the matter?’ screamed the ladies.

‘Mr. Tupman has met with a little accident; that’s all.’

The spinster aunt uttered a piercing scream, burst into an hysteric

laugh, and fell backwards in the arms of her nieces.

‘Throw some cold water over her,’ said the old gentleman.

‘No, no,’ murmured the spinster aunt; ‘I am better now. Bella, Emily--a

surgeon! Is he wounded?--Is he dead?--Is he--Ha, ha, ha!’ Here the

spinster aunt burst into fit number two, of hysteric laughter

interspersed with screams.

‘Calm yourself,’ said Mr. Tupman, affected almost to tears by this

expression of sympathy with his sufferings. ‘Dear, dear madam, calm

yourself.’

‘It is his voice!’ exclaimed the spinster aunt; and strong symptoms of

fit number three developed themselves forthwith.

‘Do not agitate yourself, I entreat you, dearest madam,’ said Mr. Tupman

soothingly. ‘I am very little hurt, I assure you.’

‘Then you are not dead!’ ejaculated the hysterical lady. ‘Oh, say you

are not dead!’

‘Don’t be a fool, Rachael,’ interposed Mr. Wardle, rather more roughly

than was consistent with the poetic nature of the scene. ‘What the

devil’s the use of his saying he isn’t dead?’

‘No, no, I am not,’ said Mr. Tupman. ‘I require no assistance but yours.

Let me lean on your arm.’ He added, in a whisper, ‘Oh, Miss Rachael!’

The agitated female advanced, and offered her arm. They turned into the

breakfast parlour. Mr. Tracy Tupman gently pressed her hand to his lips,

and sank upon the sofa.

‘Are you faint?’ inquired the anxious Rachael.

‘No,’ said Mr. Tupman. ‘It is nothing. I shall be better presently.’ He

closed his eyes.

‘He sleeps,’ murmured the spinster aunt. (His organs of vision had been

closed nearly twenty seconds.) ‘Dear--dear--Mr. Tupman!’

Mr. Tupman jumped up--‘Oh, say those words again!’ he exclaimed.

The lady started. ‘Surely you did not hear them!’ she said bashfully.

‘Oh, yes, I did!’ replied Mr. Tupman; ‘repeat them. If you would have me

recover, repeat them.’

Hush!’ said the lady. ‘My brother.’ Mr. Tracy Tupman resumed his former

position; and Mr. Wardle, accompanied by a surgeon, entered the room.

The arm was examined, the wound dressed, and pronounced to be a very

slight one; and the minds of the company having been thus satisfied,

they proceeded to satisfy their appetites with countenances to which an

expression of cheerfulness was again restored. Mr. Pickwick alone was

silent and reserved. Doubt and distrust were exhibited in his

countenance. His confidence in Mr. Winkle had been shaken--greatly

shaken--by the proceedings of the morning.

‘Are you a cricketer?’ inquired Mr. Wardle of the marksman.

At any other time, Mr. Winkle would have replied in the affirmative. He

felt the delicacy of his situation, and modestly replied, ‘No.’

‘Are you, sir?’ inquired Mr. Snodgrass.

‘I was once upon a time,’ replied the host; ‘but I have given it up now.

I subscribe to the club here, but I don’t play.’

‘The grand match is played to-day, I believe,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It is,’ replied the host. ‘Of course you would like to see it.’

‘I, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘am delighted to view any sports which

may be safely indulged in, and in which the impotent effects of

unskilful people do not endanger human life.’ Mr. Pickwick paused, and

looked steadily on Mr. Winkle, who quailed beneath his leader’s

searching glance. The great man withdrew his eyes after a few minutes,

and added: ‘Shall we be justified in leaving our wounded friend to the

care of the ladies?’

‘You cannot leave me in better hands,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Quite impossible,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

It was therefore settled that Mr. Tupman should be left at home in

charge of the females; and that the remainder of the guests, under the

guidance of Mr. Wardle, should proceed to the spot where was to be held

that trial of skill, which had roused all Muggleton from its torpor, and

inoculated Dingley Dell with a fever of excitement.

As their walk, which was not above two miles long, lay through shady

lanes and sequestered footpaths, and as their conversation turned upon

the delightful scenery by which they were on every side surrounded, Mr.

Pickwick was almost inclined to regret the expedition they had used,

when he found himself in the main street of the town of Muggleton.

Everybody whose genius has a topographical bent knows perfectly well

that Muggleton is a corporate town, with a mayor, burgesses, and

freemen; and anybody who has consulted the addresses of the mayor to the

freemen, or the freemen to the mayor, or both to the corporation, or all

three to Parliament, will learn from thence what they ought to have

known before, that Muggleton is an ancient and loyal borough, mingling a

zealous advocacy of Christian principles with a devoted attachment to

commercial rights; in demonstration whereof, the mayor, corporation, and

other inhabitants, have presented at divers times, no fewer than one

thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of

negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with

the factory system at home; sixty-eight in favour of the sale of livings

in the Church, and eighty-six for abolishing Sunday trading in the

street.

Mr. Pickwick stood in the principal street of this illustrious town, and

gazed with an air of curiosity, not unmixed with interest, on the

objects around him. There was an open square for the market-place; and

in the centre of it, a large inn with a sign-post in front, displaying

an object very common in art, but rarely met with in nature--to wit, a

blue lion, with three bow legs in the air, balancing himself on the

extreme point of the centre claw of his fourth foot. There were, within

sight, an auctioneer’s and fire-agency office, a corn-factor’s, a linen-

draper’s, a saddler’s, a distiller’s, a grocer’s, and a shoe-shop--the

last-mentioned warehouse being also appropriated to the diffusion of

hats, bonnets, wearing apparel, cotton umbrellas, and useful knowledge.

There was a red brick house with a small paved courtyard in front, which

anybody might have known belonged to the attorney; and there was,

moreover, another red brick house with Venetian blinds, and a large

brass door-plate with a very legible announcement that it belonged to

the surgeon. A few boys were making their way to the cricket-field; and

two or three shopkeepers who were standing at their doors looked as if

they should like to be making their way to the same spot, as indeed to

all appearance they might have done, without losing any great amount of

custom thereby. Mr. Pickwick having paused to make these observations,

to be noted down at a more convenient period, hastened to rejoin his

friends, who had turned out of the main street, and were already within

sight of the field of battle.

The wickets were pitched, and so were a couple of marquees for the rest

and refreshment of the contending parties. The game had not yet

commenced. Two or three Dingley Dellers, and All-Muggletonians, were

amusing themselves with a majestic air by throwing the ball carelessly

from hand to hand; and several other gentlemen dressed like them, in

straw hats, flannel jackets, and white trousers--a costume in which they

looked very much like amateur stone-masons--were sprinkled about the

tents, towards one of which Mr. Wardle conducted the party.

Several dozen of ‘How-are-you’s?’ hailed the old gentleman’s arrival;

and a general raising of the straw hats, and bending forward of the

flannel jackets, followed his introduction of his guests as gentlemen

from London, who were extremely anxious to witness the proceedings of

the day, with which, he had no doubt, they would be greatly delighted.

‘You had better step into the marquee, I think, Sir,’ said one very

stout gentleman, whose body and legs looked like half a gigantic roll of

flannel, elevated on a couple of inflated pillow-cases.

‘You’ll find it much pleasanter, Sir,’ urged another stout gentleman,

who strongly resembled the other half of the roll of flannel aforesaid.

‘You’re very good,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘This way,’ said the first speaker; ‘they notch in here--it’s the best

place in the whole field;’ and the cricketer, panting on before,

preceded them to the tent.

‘Capital game--smart sport--fine exercise--very,’ were the words which

fell upon Mr. Pickwick’s ear as he entered the tent; and the first

object that met his eyes was his green-coated friend of the Rochester

coach, holding forth, to the no small delight and edification of a

select circle of the chosen of All-Muggleton. His dress was slightly

improved, and he wore boots; but there was no mistaking him.

The stranger recognised his friends immediately; and, darting forward

and seizing Mr. Pickwick by the hand, dragged him to a seat with his

usual impetuosity, talking all the while as if the whole of the

arrangements were under his especial patronage and direction.

‘This way--this way--capital fun--lots of beer--hogsheads; rounds of

beef--bullocks; mustard--cart-loads; glorious day--down with you--make

yourself at home--glad to see you--very.’

Mr. Pickwick sat down as he was bid, and Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass

also complied with the directions of their mysterious friend. Mr. Wardle

looked on in silent wonder.

‘Mr. Wardle--a friend of mine,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Friend of yours!--My dear sir, how are you?--Friend of my friend’s--

give me your hand, sir’--and the stranger grasped Mr. Wardle’s hand with

all the fervour of a close intimacy of many years, and then stepped back

a pace or two as if to take a full survey of his face and figure, and

then shook hands with him again, if possible, more warmly than before.

‘Well; and how came you here?’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile in which

benevolence struggled with surprise.

‘Come,’ replied the stranger--‘stopping at Crown--Crown at Muggleton--

met a party--flannel jackets--white trousers--anchovy sandwiches--

devilled kidney--splendid fellows--glorious.’

Mr. Pickwick was sufficiently versed in the stranger’s system of

stenography to infer from this rapid and disjointed communication that

he had, somehow or other, contracted an acquaintance with the All-

Muggletons, which he had converted, by a process peculiar to himself,

into that extent of good-fellowship on which a general invitation may be

easily founded. His curiosity was therefore satisfied, and putting on

his spectacles he prepared himself to watch the play which was just

commencing.

All-Muggleton had the first innings; and the interest became intense

when Mr. Dumkins and Mr. Podder, two of the most renowned members of

that most distinguished club, walked, bat in hand, to their respective

wickets. Mr. Luffey, the highest ornament of Dingley Dell, was pitched

to bowl against the redoubtable Dumkins, and Mr. Struggles was selected

to do the same kind office for the hitherto unconquered Podder. Several

players were stationed, to ‘look out,’ in different parts of the field,

and each fixed himself into the proper attitude by placing one hand on

each knee, and stooping very much as if he were ‘making a back’ for some

beginner at leap-frog. All the regular players do this sort of thing;--

indeed it is generally supposed that it is quite impossible to look out

properly in any other position.

The umpires were stationed behind the wickets; the scorers were prepared

to notch the runs; a breathless silence ensued. Mr. Luffey retired a few

paces behind the wicket of the passive Podder, and applied the ball to

his right eye for several seconds. Dumkins confidently awaited its

coming with his eyes fixed on the motions of Luffey.

‘Play!’ suddenly cried the bowler. The ball flew from his hand straight

and swift towards the centre stump of the wicket. The wary Dumkins was

on the alert: it fell upon the tip of the bat, and bounded far away over

the heads of the scouts, who had just stooped low enough to let it fly

over them.

‘Run--run--another.--Now, then throw her up--up with her--stop there--

another--no--yes--no--throw her up, throw her up!’--Such were the shouts

which followed the stroke; and at the conclusion of which All-Muggleton

had scored two. Nor was Podder behindhand in earning laurels wherewith

to garnish himself and Muggleton. He blocked the doubtful balls, missed

the bad ones, took the good ones, and sent them flying to all parts of

the field. The scouts were hot and tired; the bowlers were changed and

bowled till their arms ached; but Dumkins and Podder remained

unconquered. Did an elderly gentleman essay to stop the progress of the

ball, it rolled between his legs or slipped between his fingers. Did a

slim gentleman try to catch it, it struck him on the nose, and bounded

pleasantly off with redoubled violence, while the slim gentleman’s eyes

filled with water, and his form writhed with anguish. Was it thrown

straight up to the wicket, Dumkins had reached it before the ball. In

short, when Dumkins was caught out, and Podder stumped out, All-

Muggleton had notched some fifty-four, while the score of the Dingley

Dellers was as blank as their faces. The advantage was too great to be

recovered. In vain did the eager Luffey, and the enthusiastic Struggles,

do all that skill and experience could suggest, to regain the ground

Dingley Dell had lost in the contest--it was of no avail; and in an

early period of the winning game Dingley Dell gave in, and allowed the

superior prowess of All-Muggleton.

The stranger, meanwhile, had been eating, drinking, and talking, without

cessation. At every good stroke he expressed his satisfaction and

approval of the player in a most condescending and patronising manner,

which could not fail to have been highly gratifying to the party

concerned; while at every bad attempt at a catch, and every failure to

stop the ball, he launched his personal displeasure at the head of the

devoted individual in such denunciations as--‘Ah, ah!--stupid’--‘Now,

butter-fingers’--‘Muff’--‘Humbug’--and so forth--ejaculations which

seemed to establish him in the opinion of all around, as a most

excellent and undeniable judge of the whole art and mystery of the noble

game of cricket.

‘Capital game--well played--some strokes admirable,’ said the stranger,

as both sides crowded into the tent, at the conclusion of the game.

‘You have played it, sir?’ inquired Mr. Wardle, who had been much amused

by his loquacity.

‘Played it! Think I have--thousands of times--not here--West Indies--

exciting thing--hot work--very.’ ‘It must be rather a warm pursuit in

such a climate,’ observed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Warm!--red hot--scorching--glowing. Played a match once--single wicket-

-friend the colonel--Sir Thomas Blazo--who should get the greatest

number of runs.--Won the toss--first innings--seven o’clock A.M.--six

natives to look out--went in; kept in--heat intense--natives all

fainted--taken away--fresh half-dozen ordered--fainted also--Blazo

bowling--supported by two natives--couldn’t bowl me out--fainted too--

cleared away the colonel--wouldn’t give in--faithful attendant--Quanko

Samba--last man left--sun so hot, bat in blisters, ball scorched brown--

five hundred and seventy runs--rather exhausted--Quanko mustered up last

remaining strength--bowled me out--had a bath, and went out to dinner.’

‘And what became of what’s-his-name, Sir?’ inquired an old gentleman.

‘Blazo?’

‘No--the other gentleman.’

Quanko Samba?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Poor Quanko--never recovered it--bowled on, on my account--bowled off,

on his own--died, sir.’ Here the stranger buried his countenance in a

brown jug, but whether to hide his emotion or imbibe its contents, we

cannot distinctly affirm. We only know that he paused suddenly, drew a

long and deep breath, and looked anxiously on, as two of the principal

members of the Dingley Dell club approached Mr. Pickwick, and said--

‘We are about to partake of a plain dinner at the Blue Lion, Sir; we

hope you and your friends will join us.’

Of course,’ said Mr. Wardle, ‘among our friends we include Mr.--;’ and

he looked towards the stranger.

‘Jingle,’ said that versatile gentleman, taking the hint at once.

‘Jingle--Alfred Jingle, Esq., of No Hall, Nowhere.’

‘I shall be very happy, I am sure,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘So shall I,’ said Mr. Alfred Jingle, drawing one arm through Mr.

Pickwick’s, and another through Mr. Wardle’s, as he whispered

confidentially in the ear of the former gentleman:--

‘Devilish good dinner--cold, but capital--peeped into the room this

morning--fowls and pies, and all that sort of thing--pleasant fellows

these--well behaved, too--very.’

There being no further preliminaries to arrange, the company straggled

into the town in little knots of twos and threes; and within a quarter

of an hour were all seated in the great room of the Blue Lion Inn,

Muggleton--Mr. Dumkins acting as chairman, and Mr. Luffey officiating as

vice.

There was a vast deal of talking and rattling of knives and forks, and

plates; a great running about of three ponderous-headed waiters, and a

rapid disappearance of the substantial viands on the table; to each and

every of which item of confusion, the facetious Mr. Jingle lent the aid

of half-a-dozen ordinary men at least. When everybody had eaten as much

as possible, the cloth was removed, bottles, glasses, and dessert were

placed on the table; and the waiters withdrew to ‘clear away,’ or in

other words, to appropriate to their own private use and emolument

whatever remnants of the eatables and drinkables they could contrive to

lay their hands on.

Amidst the general hum of mirth and conversation that ensued, there was

a little man with a puffy Say-nothing-to-me,-or-I’ll-contradict-you sort

of countenance, who remained very quiet; occasionally looking round him

when the conversation slackened, as if he contemplated putting in

something very weighty; and now and then bursting into a short cough of

inexpressible grandeur. At length, during a moment of comparative

silence, the little man called out in a very loud, solemn voice,--

‘Mr. Luffey!’

Everybody was hushed into a profound stillness as the individual

addressed, replied--

‘Sir!’

‘I wish to address a few words to you, Sir, if you will entreat the

gentlemen to fill their glasses.’

Mr. Jingle uttered a patronising ‘Hear, hear,’ which was responded to by

the remainder of the company; and the glasses having been filled, the

vice-president assumed an air of wisdom in a state of profound

attention; and said--

‘Mr. Staple.’

‘Sir,’ said the little man, rising, ‘I wish to address what I have to

say to you and not to our worthy chairman, because our worthy chairman

is in some measure--I may say in a great degree--the subject of what I

have to say, or I may say to--to--’

‘State,’ suggested Mr. Jingle.

‘Yes, to state,’ said the little man, ‘I thank my honourable friend, if

he will allow me to call him so (four hears and one certainly from Mr.

Jingle), for the suggestion. Sir, I am a Deller--a Dingley Deller

(cheers). I cannot lay claim to the honour of forming an item in the

population of Muggleton; nor, Sir, I will frankly admit, do I covet that

honour: and I will tell you why, Sir (hear); to Muggleton I will readily

concede all these honours and distinctions to which it can fairly lay

claim--they are too numerous and too well known to require aid or

recapitulation from me. But, sir, while we remember that Muggleton has

given birth to a Dumkins and a Podder, let us never forget that Dingley

Dell can boast a Luffey and a Struggles. (Vociferous cheering.) Let me

not be considered as wishing to detract from the merits of the former

gentlemen. Sir, I envy them the luxury of their own feelings on this

occasion. (Cheers.) Every gentleman who hears me, is probably acquainted

with the reply made by an individual, who--to use an ordinary figure of

speech--“hung out” in a tub, to the emperor Alexander:--“if I were not

Diogenes,” said he, “I would be Alexander.” I can well imagine these

gentlemen to say, “If I were not Dumkins I would be Luffey; if I were

not Podder I would be Struggles.” (Enthusiasm.) But, gentlemen of

Muggleton, is it in cricket alone that your fellow-townsmen stand pre-

eminent? Have you never heard of Dumkins and determination? Have you

never been taught to associate Podder with property? (Great applause.)

Have you never, when struggling for your rights, your liberties, and

your privileges, been reduced, if only for an instant, to misgiving and

despair? And when you have been thus depressed, has not the name of

Dumkins laid afresh within your breast the fire which had just gone out;

and has not a word from that man lighted it again as brightly as if it

had never expired? (Great cheering.) Gentlemen, I beg to surround with a

rich halo of enthusiastic cheering the united names of “Dumkins and

Podder.”’

Here the little man ceased, and here the company commenced a raising of

voices, and thumping of tables, which lasted with little intermission

during the remainder of the evening. Other toasts were drunk. Mr. Luffey

and Mr. Struggles, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Jingle, were, each in his turn,

the subject of unqualified eulogium; and each in due course returned

thanks for the honour.

Enthusiastic as we are in the noble cause to which we have devoted

ourselves, we should have felt a sensation of pride which we cannot

express, and a consciousness of having done something to merit

immortality of which we are now deprived, could we have laid the

faintest outline on these addresses before our ardent readers. Mr.

Snodgrass, as usual, took a great mass of notes, which would no doubt

have afforded most useful and valuable information, had not the burning

eloquence of the words or the feverish influence of the wine made that

gentleman’s hand so extremely unsteady, as to render his writing nearly

unintelligible, and his style wholly so. By dint of patient

investigation, we have been enabled to trace some characters bearing a

faint resemblance to the names of the speakers; and we can only discern

an entry of a song (supposed to have been sung by Mr. Jingle), in which

the words ‘bowl’ ‘sparkling’ ‘ruby’ ‘bright’ and ‘wine’ are frequently

repeated at short intervals. We fancy, too, that we can discern at the

very end of the notes, some indistinct reference to ‘broiled bones’; and

then the words ‘cold’ ‘without’ occur: but as any hypothesis we could

found upon them must necessarily rest upon mere conjecture, we are not

disposed to indulge in any of the speculations to which they may give

rise.

We will therefore return to Mr. Tupman; merely adding that within some

few minutes before twelve o’clock that night, the convocation of

worthies of Dingley Dell and Muggleton were heard to sing, with great

feeling and emphasis, the beautiful and pathetic national air of

‘We won’t go home till morning, We won’t go home till morning, We won’t

go home till morning, Till daylight doth appear.’

CHAPTER VIII. STRONGLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE POSITION, THAT THE COURSE OF

TRUE LOVE IS NOT A RAILWAY

The quiet seclusion of Dingley Dell, the presence of so many of the

gentler sex, and the solicitude and anxiety they evinced in his behalf,

were all favourable to the growth and development of those softer

feelings which nature had implanted deep in the bosom of Mr. Tracy

Tupman, and which now appeared destined to centre in one lovely object.

The young ladies were pretty, their manners winning, their dispositions

unexceptionable; but there was a dignity in the air, a touch-me-not-

ishness in the walk, a majesty in the eye, of the spinster aunt, to

which, at their time of life, they could lay no claim, which

distinguished her from any female on whom Mr. Tupman had ever gazed.

That there was something kindred in their nature, something congenial in

their souls, something mysteriously sympathetic in their bosoms, was

evident. Her name was the first that rose to Mr. Tupman’s lips as he lay

wounded on the grass; and her hysteric laughter was the first sound that

fell upon his ear when he was supported to the house. But had her

agitation arisen from an amiable and feminine sensibility which would

have been equally irrepressible in any case; or had it been called forth

by a more ardent and passionate feeling, which he, of all men living,

could alone awaken? These were the doubts which racked his brain as he

lay extended on the sofa; these were the doubts which he determined

should be at once and for ever resolved.

It was evening. Isabella and Emily had strolled out with Mr. Trundle;

the deaf old lady had fallen asleep in her chair; the snoring of the fat

boy, penetrated in a low and monotonous sound from the distant kitchen;

the buxom servants were lounging at the side door, enjoying the

pleasantness of the hour, and the delights of a flirtation, on first

principles, with certain unwieldy animals attached to the farm; and

there sat the interesting pair, uncared for by all, caring for none, and

dreaming only of themselves; there they sat, in short, like a pair of

carefully-folded kid gloves--bound up in each other.

‘I have forgotten my flowers,’ said the spinster aunt.

‘Water them now,’ said Mr. Tupman, in accents of persuasion.

‘You will take cold in the evening air,’ urged the spinster aunt

affectionately.

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Tupman, rising; ‘it will do me good. Let me accompany

you.’

The lady paused to adjust the sling in which the left arm of the youth

was placed, and taking his right arm led him to the garden.

There was a bower at the farther end, with honeysuckle, jessamine, and

creeping plants--one of those sweet retreats which humane men erect for

the accommodation of spiders.

The spinster aunt took up a large watering-pot which lay in one corner,

and was about to leave the arbour. Mr. Tupman detained her, and drew her

to a seat beside him.

‘Miss Wardle!’ said he.

The spinster aunt trembled, till some pebbles which had accidentally

found their way into the large watering-pot shook like an infant’s

rattle.

‘Miss Wardle,’ said Mr. Tupman, ‘you are an angel.’

‘Mr. Tupman!’ exclaimed Rachael, blushing as red as the watering-pot

itself.

‘Nay,’ said the eloquent Pickwickian--‘I know it but too well.’

‘All women are angels, they say,’ murmured the lady playfully.

‘Then what can you be; or to what, without presumption, can I compare

you?’ replied Mr. Tupman. ‘Where was the woman ever seen who resembled

you? Where else could I hope to find so rare a combination of excellence

and beauty? Where else could I seek to--Oh!’ Here Mr. Tupman paused, and

pressed the hand which clasped the handle of the happy watering-pot.

The lady turned aside her head. ‘Men are such deceivers,’ she softly

whispered.

‘They are, they are,’ ejaculated Mr. Tupman; ‘but not all men. There

lives at least one being who can never change--one being who would be

content to devote his whole existence to your happiness--who lives but

in your eyes--who breathes but in your smiles--who bears the heavy

burden of life itself only for you.’

‘Could such an individual be found--’ said the lady.

‘But he \_can\_ be found,’ said the ardent Mr. Tupman, interposing. ‘He

\_is\_ found. He is here, Miss Wardle.’ And ere the lady was aware of his

intention, Mr. Tupman had sunk upon his knees at her feet.

‘Mr. Tupman, rise,’ said Rachael.

‘Never!’ was the valorous reply. ‘Oh, Rachael!’ He seized her passive

hand, and the watering-pot fell to the ground as he pressed it to his

lips.--‘Oh, Rachael! say you love me.’

‘Mr. Tupman,’ said the spinster aunt, with averted head, ‘I can hardly

speak the words; but--but--you are not wholly indifferent to me.’

Mr. Tupman no sooner heard this avowal, than he proceeded to do what his

enthusiastic emotions prompted, and what, for aught we know (for we are

but little acquainted with such matters), people so circumstanced always

do. He jumped up, and, throwing his arm round the neck of the spinster

aunt, imprinted upon her lips numerous kisses, which after a due show of

struggling and resistance, she received so passively, that there is no

telling how many more Mr. Tupman might have bestowed, if the lady had

not given a very unaffected start, and exclaimed in an affrighted tone--

‘Mr. Tupman, we are observed!--we are discovered!’

Mr. Tupman looked round. There was the fat boy, perfectly motionless,

with his large circular eyes staring into the arbour, but without the

slightest expression on his face that the most expert physiognomist

could have referred to astonishment, curiosity, or any other known

passion that agitates the human breast. Mr. Tupman gazed on the fat boy,

and the fat boy stared at him; and the longer Mr. Tupman observed the

utter vacancy of the fat boy’s countenance, the more convinced he became

that he either did not know, or did not understand, anything that had

been going forward. Under this impression, he said with great firmness--

‘What do you want here, Sir?’

‘Supper’s ready, sir,’ was the prompt reply.

‘Have you just come here, sir?’ inquired Mr. Tupman, with a piercing

look.

‘Just,’ replied the fat boy.

Mr. Tupman looked at him very hard again; but there was not a wink in

his eye, or a curve in his face.

Mr. Tupman took the arm of the spinster aunt, and walked towards the

house; the fat boy followed behind.

‘He knows nothing of what has happened,’ he whispered.

‘Nothing,’ said the spinster aunt.

There was a sound behind them, as of an imperfectly suppressed chuckle.

Mr. Tupman turned sharply round. No; it could not have been the fat boy;

there was not a gleam of mirth, or anything but feeding in his whole

visage.

‘He must have been fast asleep,’ whispered Mr. Tupman.

‘I have not the least doubt of it,’ replied the spinster aunt.

They both laughed heartily.

Mr. Tupman was wrong. The fat boy, for once, had not been fast asleep.

He was awake--wide awake--to what had been going forward.

The supper passed off without any attempt at a general conversation. The

old lady had gone to bed; Isabella Wardle devoted herself exclusively to

Mr. Trundle; the spinster’s attentions were reserved for Mr. Tupman; and

Emily’s thoughts appeared to be engrossed by some distant object--

possibly they were with the absent Snodgrass.

Eleven--twelve--one o’clock had struck, and the gentlemen had not

arrived. Consternation sat on every face. Could they have been waylaid

and robbed? Should they send men and lanterns in every direction by

which they could be supposed likely to have travelled home? or should

they--Hark! there they were. What could have made them so late? A

strange voice, too! To whom could it belong? They rushed into the

kitchen, whither the truants had repaired, and at once obtained rather

more than a glimmering of the real state of the case.

Mr. Pickwick, with his hands in his pockets and his hat cocked

completely over his left eye, was leaning against the dresser, shaking

his head from side to side, and producing a constant succession of the

blandest and most benevolent smiles without being moved thereunto by any

discernible cause or pretence whatsoever; old Mr. Wardle, with a highly-

inflamed countenance, was grasping the hand of a strange gentleman

muttering protestations of eternal friendship; Mr. Winkle, supporting

himself by the eight-day clock, was feebly invoking destruction upon the

head of any member of the family who should suggest the propriety of his

retiring for the night; and Mr. Snodgrass had sunk into a chair, with an

expression of the most abject and hopeless misery that the human mind

can imagine, portrayed in every lineament of his expressive face.

‘Is anything the matter?’ inquired the three ladies.

‘Nothing the matter,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘We--we’re--all right.--I

say, Wardle, we’re all right, ain’t we?’

‘I should think so,’ replied the jolly host.--‘My dears, here’s my

friend Mr. Jingle--Mr. Pickwick’s friend, Mr. Jingle, come ‘pon--little

visit.’

‘Is anything the matter with Mr. Snodgrass, Sir?’ inquired Emily, with

great anxiety.

‘Nothing the matter, ma’am,’ replied the stranger. ‘Cricket dinner--

glorious party--capital songs--old port--claret--good--very good--wine,

ma’am--wine.’

‘It wasn’t the wine,’ murmured Mr. Snodgrass, in a broken voice. ‘It was

the salmon.’ (Somehow or other, it never is the wine, in these cases.)

‘Hadn’t they better go to bed, ma’am?’ inquired Emma. ‘Two of the boys

will carry the gentlemen upstairs.’

‘I won’t go to bed,’ said Mr. Winkle firmly.

‘No living boy shall carry me,’ said Mr. Pickwick stoutly; and he went

on smiling as before.

‘Hurrah!’ gasped Mr. Winkle faintly.

‘Hurrah!’ echoed Mr. Pickwick, taking off his hat and dashing it on the

floor, and insanely casting his spectacles into the middle of the

kitchen. At this humorous feat he laughed outright.

‘Let’s--have--‘nother--bottle,’ cried Mr. Winkle, commencing in a very

loud key, and ending in a very faint one. His head dropped upon his

breast; and, muttering his invincible determination not to go to his

bed, and a sanguinary regret that he had not ‘done for old Tupman’ in

the morning, he fell fast asleep; in which condition he was borne to his

apartment by two young giants under the personal superintendence of the

fat boy, to whose protecting care Mr. Snodgrass shortly afterwards

confided his own person, Mr. Pickwick accepted the proffered arm of Mr.

Tupman and quietly disappeared, smiling more than ever; and Mr. Wardle,

after taking as affectionate a leave of the whole family as if he were

ordered for immediate execution, consigned to Mr. Trundle the honour of

conveying him upstairs, and retired, with a very futile attempt to look

impressively solemn and dignified.

‘What a shocking scene!’ said the spinster aunt.

‘Dis-gusting!’ ejaculated both the young ladies.

‘Dreadful--dreadful!’ said Jingle, looking very grave: he was about a

bottle and a half ahead of any of his companions. ‘Horrid spectacle--

very!’

‘What a nice man!’ whispered the spinster aunt to Mr. Tupman.

‘Good-looking, too!’ whispered Emily Wardle.

‘Oh, decidedly,’ observed the spinster aunt.

Mr. Tupman thought of the widow at Rochester, and his mind was troubled.

The succeeding half-hour’s conversation was not of a nature to calm his

perturbed spirit. The new visitor was very talkative, and the number of

his anecdotes was only to be exceeded by the extent of his politeness.

Mr. Tupman felt that as Jingle’s popularity increased, he (Tupman)

retired further into the shade. His laughter was forced--his merriment

feigned; and when at last he laid his aching temples between the sheets,

he thought, with horrid delight, on the satisfaction it would afford him

to have Jingle’s head at that moment between the feather bed and the

mattress.

The indefatigable stranger rose betimes next morning, and, although his

companions remained in bed overpowered with the dissipation of the

previous night, exerted himself most successfully to promote the

hilarity of the breakfast-table. So successful were his efforts, that

even the deaf old lady insisted on having one or two of his best jokes

retailed through the trumpet; and even she condescended to observe to

the spinster aunt, that ‘He’ (meaning Jingle) ‘was an impudent young

fellow:’ a sentiment in which all her relations then and there present

thoroughly coincided.

It was the old lady’s habit on the fine summer mornings to repair to the

arbour in which Mr. Tupman had already signalised himself, in form and

manner following: first, the fat boy fetched from a peg behind the old

lady’s bedroom door, a close black satin bonnet, a warm cotton shawl,

and a thick stick with a capacious handle; and the old lady, having put

on the bonnet and shawl at her leisure, would lean one hand on the stick

and the other on the fat boy’s shoulder, and walk leisurely to the

arbour, where the fat boy would leave her to enjoy the fresh air for the

space of half an hour; at the expiration of which time he would return

and reconduct her to the house.

The old lady was very precise and very particular; and as this ceremony

had been observed for three successive summers without the slightest

deviation from the accustomed form, she was not a little surprised on

this particular morning to see the fat boy, instead of leaving the

arbour, walk a few paces out of it, look carefully round him in every

direction, and return towards her with great stealth and an air of the

most profound mystery.

The old lady was timorous--most old ladies are--and her first impression

was that the bloated lad was about to do her some grievous bodily harm

with the view of possessing himself of her loose coin. She would have

cried for assistance, but age and infirmity had long ago deprived her of

the power of screaming; she, therefore, watched his motions with

feelings of intense horror which were in no degree diminished by his

coming close up to her, and shouting in her ear in an agitated, and as

it seemed to her, a threatening tone--

‘Missus!’

Now it so happened that Mr. Jingle was walking in the garden close to

the arbour at that moment. He too heard the shouts of ‘Missus,’ and

stopped to hear more. There were three reasons for his doing so. In the

first place, he was idle and curious; secondly, he was by no means

scrupulous; thirdly, and lastly, he was concealed from view by some

flowering shrubs. So there he stood, and there he listened.

‘Missus!’ shouted the fat boy.

‘Well, Joe,’ said the trembling old lady. ‘I’m sure I have been a good

mistress to you, Joe. You have invariably been treated very kindly. You

have never had too much to do; and you have always had enough to eat.’

This last was an appeal to the fat boy’s most sensitive feelings. He

seemed touched, as he replied emphatically--

‘I knows I has.’

‘Then what can you want to do now?’ said the old lady, gaining courage.

‘I wants to make your flesh creep,’ replied the boy.

This sounded like a very bloodthirsty mode of showing one’s gratitude;

and as the old lady did not precisely understand the process by which

such a result was to be attained, all her former horrors returned.

‘What do you think I see in this very arbour last night?’ inquired the

boy.

‘Bless us! What?’ exclaimed the old lady, alarmed at the solemn manner

of the corpulent youth.

‘The strange gentleman--him as had his arm hurt--a-kissin’ and huggin’--

‘

‘Who, Joe? None of the servants, I hope.’

Worser than that,’ roared the fat boy, in the old lady’s ear.

‘Not one of my grandda’aters?’

‘Worser than that.’

‘Worse than that, Joe!’ said the old lady, who had thought this the

extreme limit of human atrocity. ‘Who was it, Joe? I insist upon

knowing.’

The fat boy looked cautiously round, and having concluded his survey,

shouted in the old lady’s ear--

‘Miss Rachael.’

‘What!’ said the old lady, in a shrill tone. ‘Speak louder.’

‘Miss Rachael,’ roared the fat boy.

‘My da’ater!’

The train of nods which the fat boy gave by way of assent, communicated

a blanc-mange like motion to his fat cheeks.

‘And she suffered him!’ exclaimed the old lady. A grin stole over the

fat boy’s features as he said--

‘I see her a-kissin’ of him agin.’

If Mr. Jingle, from his place of concealment, could have beheld the

expression which the old lady’s face assumed at this communication, the

probability is that a sudden burst of laughter would have betrayed his

close vicinity to the summer-house. He listened attentively. Fragments

of angry sentences such as, ‘Without my permission!’--‘At her time of

life’--‘Miserable old ‘ooman like me’--‘Might have waited till I was

dead,’ and so forth, reached his ears; and then he heard the heels of

the fat boy’s boots crunching the gravel, as he retired and left the old

lady alone.

It was a remarkable coincidence perhaps, but it was nevertheless a fact,

that Mr. Jingle within five minutes of his arrival at Manor Farm on the

preceding night, had inwardly resolved to lay siege to the heart of the

spinster aunt, without delay. He had observation enough to see, that his

off-hand manner was by no means disagreeable to the fair object of his

attack; and he had more than a strong suspicion that she possessed that

most desirable of all requisites, a small independence. The imperative

necessity of ousting his rival by some means or other, flashed quickly

upon him, and he immediately resolved to adopt certain proceedings

tending to that end and object, without a moment’s delay. Fielding tells

us that man is fire, and woman tow, and the Prince of Darkness sets a

light to ‘em. Mr. Jingle knew that young men, to spinster aunts, are as

lighted gas to gunpowder, and he determined to essay the effect of an

explosion without loss of time.

Full of reflections upon this important decision, he crept from his

place of concealment, and, under cover of the shrubs before mentioned,

approached the house. Fortune seemed determined to favour his design.

Mr. Tupman and the rest of the gentlemen left the garden by the side

gate just as he obtained a view of it; and the young ladies, he knew,

had walked out alone, soon after breakfast. The coast was clear.

The breakfast-parlour door was partially open. He peeped in. The

spinster aunt was knitting. He coughed; she looked up and smiled.

Hesitation formed no part of Mr. Alfred Jingle’s character. He laid his

finger on his lips mysteriously, walked in, and closed the door.

‘Miss Wardle,’ said Mr. Jingle, with affected earnestness, ‘forgive

intrusion--short acquaintance--no time for ceremony--all discovered.’

‘Sir!’ said the spinster aunt, rather astonished by the unexpected

apparition and somewhat doubtful of Mr. Jingle’s sanity.

‘Hush!’ said Mr. Jingle, in a stage-whisper--‘Large boy--dumpling face--

round eyes--rascal!’ Here he shook his head expressively, and the

spinster aunt trembled with agitation.

‘I presume you allude to Joseph, Sir?’ said the lady, making an effort

to appear composed.

‘Yes, ma’am--damn that Joe!--treacherous dog, Joe--told the old lady--

old lady furious--wild--raving--arbour--Tupman--kissing and hugging--all

that sort of thing--eh, ma’am--eh?’

‘Mr. Jingle,’ said the spinster aunt, ‘if you come here, Sir, to insult

me--’

‘Not at all--by no means,’ replied the unabashed Mr. Jingle--‘overheard

the tale--came to warn you of your danger--tender my services--prevent

the hubbub. Never mind--think it an insult--leave the room’--and he

turned, as if to carry the threat into execution.

‘What \_shall\_ I do!’ said the poor spinster, bursting into tears. ‘My

brother will be furious.’

‘Of course he will,’ said Mr. Jingle pausing--‘outrageous.’

Oh, Mr. Jingle, what \_can\_ I say!’ exclaimed the spinster aunt, in

another flood of despair.

‘Say he dreamt it,’ replied Mr. Jingle coolly.

A ray of comfort darted across the mind of the spinster aunt at this

suggestion. Mr. Jingle perceived it, and followed up his advantage.

‘Pooh, pooh!--nothing more easy--blackguard boy--lovely woman--fat boy

horsewhipped--you believed--end of the matter--all comfortable.’

Whether the probability of escaping from the consequences of this ill-

timed discovery was delightful to the spinster’s feelings, or whether

the hearing herself described as a ‘lovely woman’ softened the asperity

of her grief, we know not. She blushed slightly, and cast a grateful

look on Mr. Jingle.

That insinuating gentleman sighed deeply, fixed his eyes on the spinster

aunt’s face for a couple of minutes, started melodramatically, and

suddenly withdrew them.

‘You seem unhappy, Mr. Jingle,’ said the lady, in a plaintive voice.

‘May I show my gratitude for your kind interference, by inquiring into

the cause, with a view, if possible, to its removal?’

‘Ha!’ exclaimed Mr. Jingle, with another start--‘removal! remove my

unhappiness, and your love bestowed upon a man who is insensible to the

blessing--who even now contemplates a design upon the affections of the

niece of the creature who--but no; he is my friend; I will not expose

his vices. Miss Wardle--farewell!’ At the conclusion of this address,

the most consecutive he was ever known to utter, Mr. Jingle applied to

his eyes the remnant of a handkerchief before noticed, and turned

towards the door.

‘Stay, Mr. Jingle!’ said the spinster aunt emphatically. ‘You have made

an allusion to Mr. Tupman--explain it.’

‘Never!’ exclaimed Jingle, with a professional (i.e., theatrical) air.

‘Never!’ and, by way of showing that he had no desire to be questioned

further, he drew a chair close to that of the spinster aunt and sat

down.

‘Mr. Jingle,’ said the aunt, ‘I entreat--I implore you, if there is any

dreadful mystery connected with Mr. Tupman, reveal it.’

‘Can I,’ said Mr. Jingle, fixing his eyes on the aunt’s face--‘can I

see--lovely creature--sacrificed at the shrine--heartless avarice!’ He

appeared to be struggling with various conflicting emotions for a few

seconds, and then said in a low voice-- ‘Tupman only wants your money.’

‘The wretch!’ exclaimed the spinster, with energetic indignation. (Mr.

Jingle’s doubts were resolved. She \_had\_ money.)

‘More than that,’ said Jingle--‘loves another.’

‘Another!’ ejaculated the spinster. ‘Who?’

Short girl--black eyes--niece Emily.’

There was a pause.

Now, if there was one individual in the whole world, of whom the

spinster aunt entertained a mortal and deep-rooted jealousy, it was this

identical niece. The colour rushed over her face and neck, and she

tossed her head in silence with an air of ineffable contempt. At last,

biting her thin lips, and bridling up, she said--

‘It can’t be. I won’t believe it.’

‘Watch ‘em,’ said Jingle.

‘I will,’ said the aunt.

‘Watch his looks.’

‘I will.’

‘His whispers.’

‘I will.’

‘He’ll sit next her at table.’

‘Let him.’

‘He’ll flatter her.’

‘Let him.’

‘He’ll pay her every possible attention.’

‘Let him.’

‘And he’ll cut you.’

‘Cut \_me\_!’ screamed the spinster aunt. ‘\_he\_ cut \_me\_; will he!’ and

she trembled with rage and disappointment.

‘You will convince yourself?’ said Jingle.

‘I will.’

‘You’ll show your spirit?’

‘I will.’

You’ll not have him afterwards?’

‘Never.’

‘You’ll take somebody else?’

Yes.’

‘You shall.’

Mr. Jingle fell on his knees, remained thereupon for five minutes

thereafter; and rose the accepted lover of the spinster aunt--

conditionally upon Mr. Tupman’s perjury being made clear and manifest.

The burden of proof lay with Mr. Alfred Jingle; and he produced his

evidence that very day at dinner. The spinster aunt could hardly believe

her eyes. Mr. Tracy Tupman was established at Emily’s side, ogling,

whispering, and smiling, in opposition to Mr. Snodgrass. Not a word, not

a look, not a glance, did he bestow upon his heart’s pride of the

evening before.

‘Damn that boy!’ thought old Mr. Wardle to himself.--He had heard the

story from his mother. ‘Damn that boy! He must have been asleep. It’s

all imagination.’

‘Traitor!’ thought the spinster aunt. ‘Dear Mr. Jingle was not deceiving

me. Ugh! how I hate the wretch!’

The following conversation may serve to explain to our readers this

apparently unaccountable alteration of deportment on the part of Mr.

Tracy Tupman.

The time was evening; the scene the garden. There were two figures

walking in a side path; one was rather short and stout; the other tall

and slim. They were Mr. Tupman and Mr. Jingle. The stout figure

commenced the dialogue.

‘How did I do it?’ he inquired.

‘Splendid--capital--couldn’t act better myself--you must repeat the part

to-morrow--every evening till further notice.’

‘Does Rachael still wish it?’

‘Of course--she don’t like it--but must be done--avert suspicion--afraid

of her brother--says there’s no help for it--only a few days more--when

old folks blinded--crown your happiness.’

‘Any message?’

‘Love--best love--kindest regards--unalterable affection. Can I say

anything for you?’

‘My dear fellow,’ replied the unsuspicious Mr. Tupman, fervently

grasping his ‘friend’s’ hand--‘carry my best love--say how hard I find

it to dissemble--say anything that’s kind: but add how sensible I am of

the necessity of the suggestion she made to me, through you, this

morning. Say I applaud her wisdom and admire her discretion.’

I will. Anything more?’

‘Nothing, only add how ardently I long for the time when I may call her

mine, and all dissimulation may be unnecessary.’

‘Certainly, certainly. Anything more?’

‘Oh, my friend!’ said poor Mr. Tupman, again grasping the hand of his

companion, ‘receive my warmest thanks for your disinterested kindness;

and forgive me if I have ever, even in thought, done you the injustice

of supposing that you could stand in my way. My dear friend, can I ever

repay you?’

‘Don’t talk of it,’ replied Mr. Jingle. He stopped short, as if suddenly

recollecting something, and said--‘By the bye--can’t spare ten pounds,

can you?--very particular purpose--pay you in three days.’

‘I dare say I can,’ replied Mr. Tupman, in the fulness of his heart.

‘Three days, you say?’

‘Only three days--all over then--no more difficulties.’ Mr. Tupman

counted the money into his companion’s hand, and he dropped it piece by

piece into his pocket, as they walked towards the house.

‘Be careful,’ said Mr. Jingle--‘not a look.’

‘Not a wink,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Not a syllable.’

‘Not a whisper.’

‘All your attentions to the niece--rather rude, than otherwise, to the

aunt--only way of deceiving the old ones.’

‘I’ll take care,’ said Mr. Tupman aloud.

‘And \_I’ll\_ take care,’ said Mr. Jingle internally; and they entered the

house.

The scene of that afternoon was repeated that evening, and on the three

afternoons and evenings next ensuing. On the fourth, the host was in

high spirits, for he had satisfied himself that there was no ground for

the charge against Mr. Tupman. So was Mr. Tupman, for Mr. Jingle had

told him that his affair would soon be brought to a crisis. So was Mr.

Pickwick, for he was seldom otherwise. So was not Mr. Snodgrass, for he

had grown jealous of Mr. Tupman. So was the old lady, for she had been

winning at whist. So were Mr. Jingle and Miss Wardle, for reasons of

sufficient importance in this eventful history to be narrated in another

chapter.

CHAPTER IX. A DISCOVERY AND A CHASE

The supper was ready laid, the chairs were drawn round the table,

bottles, jugs, and glasses were arranged upon the sideboard, and

everything betokened the approach of the most convivial period in the

whole four-and-twenty hours.

‘Where’s Rachael?’ said Mr. Wardle.

‘Ay, and Jingle?’ added Mr. Pickwick.

‘Dear me,’ said the host, ‘I wonder I haven’t missed him before. Why, I

don’t think I’ve heard his voice for two hours at least. Emily, my dear,

ring the bell.’

The bell was rung, and the fat boy appeared.

‘Where’s Miss Rachael?’ He couldn’t say.

‘Where’s Mr. Jingle, then?’ He didn’t know. Everybody looked surprised.

It was late--past eleven o’clock. Mr. Tupman laughed in his sleeve. They

were loitering somewhere, talking about him. Ha, ha! capital notion

that--funny.

‘Never mind,’ said Wardle, after a short pause. ‘They’ll turn up

presently, I dare say. I never wait supper for anybody.’

‘Excellent rule, that,’ said Mr. Pickwick--‘admirable.’

‘Pray, sit down,’ said the host.

‘Certainly’ said Mr. Pickwick; and down they sat.

There was a gigantic round of cold beef on the table, and Mr. Pickwick

was supplied with a plentiful portion of it. He had raised his fork to

his lips, and was on the very point of opening his mouth for the

reception of a piece of beef, when the hum of many voices suddenly arose

in the kitchen. He paused, and laid down his fork. Mr. Wardle paused

too, and insensibly released his hold of the carving-knife, which

remained inserted in the beef. He looked at Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick

looked at him.

Heavy footsteps were heard in the passage; the parlour door was suddenly

burst open; and the man who had cleaned Mr. Pickwick’s boots on his

first arrival, rushed into the room, followed by the fat boy and all the

domestics.

‘What the devil’s the meaning of this?’ exclaimed the host.

‘The kitchen chimney ain’t a-fire, is it, Emma?’ inquired the old lady.

‘Lor, grandma! No,’ screamed both the young ladies.

‘What’s the matter?’ roared the master of the house.

The man gasped for breath, and faintly ejaculated--

‘They ha’ gone, mas’r!--gone right clean off, Sir!’ (At this juncture

Mr. Tupman was observed to lay down his knife and fork, and to turn very

pale.)

‘Who’s gone?’ said Mr. Wardle fiercely.

‘Mus’r Jingle and Miss Rachael, in a po’-chay, from Blue Lion,

Muggleton. I was there; but I couldn’t stop ‘em; so I run off to tell

‘ee.’

‘I paid his expenses!’ said Mr. Tupman, jumping up frantically. ‘He’s

got ten pounds of mine!--stop him!--he’s swindled me!--I won’t bear it!-

-I’ll have justice, Pickwick!--I won’t stand it!’ and with sundry

incoherent exclamations of the like nature, the unhappy gentleman spun

round and round the apartment, in a transport of frenzy.

‘Lord preserve us!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, eyeing the extraordinary

gestures of his friend with terrified surprise. ‘He’s gone mad! What

shall we do?’

Do!’ said the stout old host, who regarded only the last words of the

sentence. ‘Put the horse in the gig! I’ll get a chaise at the Lion, and

follow ‘em instantly. Where?’--he exclaimed, as the man ran out to

execute the commission--‘where’s that villain, Joe?’

‘Here I am! but I hain’t a willin,’ replied a voice. It was the fat

boy’s.

‘Let me get at him, Pickwick,’ cried Wardle, as he rushed at the ill-

starred youth. ‘He was bribed by that scoundrel, Jingle, to put me on a

wrong scent, by telling a cock-and-bull story of my sister and your

friend Tupman!’ (Here Mr. Tupman sank into a chair.) ‘Let me get at

him!’

‘Don’t let him!’ screamed all the women, above whose exclamations the

blubbering of the fat boy was distinctly audible.

‘I won’t be held!’ cried the old man. ‘Mr. Winkle, take your hands off.

Mr. Pickwick, let me go, sir!’

It was a beautiful sight, in that moment of turmoil and confusion, to

behold the placid and philosophical expression of Mr. Pickwick’s face,

albeit somewhat flushed with exertion, as he stood with his arms firmly

clasped round the extensive waist of their corpulent host, thus

restraining the impetuosity of his passion, while the fat boy was

scratched, and pulled, and pushed from the room by all the females

congregated therein. He had no sooner released his hold, than the man

entered to announce that the gig was ready.

‘Don’t let him go alone!’ screamed the females. ‘He’ll kill somebody!’

‘I’ll go with him,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘You’re a good fellow, Pickwick,’ said the host, grasping his hand.

‘Emma, give Mr. Pickwick a shawl to tie round his neck--make haste. Look

after your grandmother, girls; she has fainted away. Now then, are you

ready?’

Mr. Pickwick’s mouth and chin having been hastily enveloped in a large

shawl, his hat having been put on his head, and his greatcoat thrown

over his arm, he replied in the affirmative.

They jumped into the gig. ‘Give her her head, Tom,’ cried the host; and

away they went, down the narrow lanes; jolting in and out of the cart-

ruts, and bumping up against the hedges on either side, as if they would

go to pieces every moment.

‘How much are they ahead?’ shouted Wardle, as they drove up to the door

of the Blue Lion, round which a little crowd had collected, late as it

was.

‘Not above three-quarters of an hour,’ was everybody’s reply.

‘Chaise-and-four directly!--out with ‘em! Put up the gig afterwards.’

‘Now, boys!’ cried the landlord--‘chaise-and-four out--make haste--look

alive there!’

Away ran the hostlers and the boys. The lanterns glimmered, as the men

ran to and fro; the horses’ hoofs clattered on the uneven paving of the

yard; the chaise rumbled as it was drawn out of the coach-house; and all

was noise and bustle.

‘Now then!--is that chaise coming out to-night?’ cried Wardle.

‘Coming down the yard now, Sir,’ replied the hostler.

Out came the chaise--in went the horses--on sprang the boys--in got the

travellers.

‘Mind--the seven-mile stage in less than half an hour!’ shouted Wardle.

‘Off with you!’

The boys applied whip and spur, the waiters shouted, the hostlers

cheered, and away they went, fast and furiously.

‘Pretty situation,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, when he had had a moment’s

time for reflection. ‘Pretty situation for the general chairman of the

Pickwick Club. Damp chaise--strange horses--fifteen miles an hour--and

twelve o’clock at night!’

For the first three or four miles, not a word was spoken by either of

the gentlemen, each being too much immersed in his own reflections to

address any observations to his companion. When they had gone over that

much ground, however, and the horses getting thoroughly warmed began to

do their work in really good style, Mr. Pickwick became too much

exhilarated with the rapidity of the motion, to remain any longer

perfectly mute.

‘We’re sure to catch them, I think,’ said he.

‘Hope so,’ replied his companion.

‘Fine night,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking up at the moon, which was

shining brightly.

‘So much the worse,’ returned Wardle; ‘for they’ll have had all the

advantage of the moonlight to get the start of us, and we shall lose it.

It will have gone down in another hour.’

‘It will be rather unpleasant going at this rate in the dark, won’t it?’

inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘I dare say it will,’ replied his friend dryly.

Mr. Pickwick’s temporary excitement began to sober down a little, as he

reflected upon the inconveniences and dangers of the expedition in which

he had so thoughtlessly embarked. He was roused by a loud shouting of

the post-boy on the leader.

‘Yo-yo-yo-yo-yoe!’ went the first boy.

‘Yo-yo-yo-yoe!’ went the second.

‘Yo-yo-yo-yoe!’ chimed in old Wardle himself, most lustily, with his

head and half his body out of the coach window.

‘Yo-yo-yo-yoe!’ shouted Mr. Pickwick, taking up the burden of the cry,

though he had not the slightest notion of its meaning or object. And

amidst the yo-yoing of the whole four, the chaise stopped.

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘There’s a gate here,’ replied old Wardle. ‘We shall hear something of

the fugitives.’

After a lapse of five minutes, consumed in incessant knocking and

shouting, an old man in his shirt and trousers emerged from the

turnpike-house, and opened the gate.

‘How long is it since a post-chaise went through here?’ inquired Mr.

Wardle.

‘How long?’

‘Ah!’

‘Why, I don’t rightly know. It worn’t a long time ago, nor it worn’t a

short time ago--just between the two, perhaps.’

‘Has any chaise been by at all?’

‘Oh, yes, there’s been a chay by.’

‘How long ago, my friend,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick; ‘an hour?’

‘Ah, I dare say it might be,’ replied the man.

‘Or two hours?’ inquired the post--boy on the wheeler.

‘Well, I shouldn’t wonder if it was,’ returned the old man doubtfully.

‘Drive on, boys,’ cried the testy old gentleman; ‘don’t waste any more

time with that old idiot!’

‘Idiot!’ exclaimed the old man with a grin, as he stood in the middle of

the road with the gate half-closed, watching the chaise which rapidly

diminished in the increasing distance. ‘No--not much o’ that either;

you’ve lost ten minutes here, and gone away as wise as you came, arter

all. If every man on the line as has a guinea give him, earns it half as

well, you won’t catch t’other chay this side Mich’lmas, old short-and-

fat.’ And with another prolonged grin, the old man closed the gate, re-

entered his house, and bolted the door after him.

Meanwhile the chaise proceeded, without any slackening of pace, towards

the conclusion of the stage. The moon, as Wardle had foretold, was

rapidly on the wane; large tiers of dark, heavy clouds, which had been

gradually overspreading the sky for some time past, now formed one black

mass overhead; and large drops of rain which pattered every now and then

against the windows of the chaise, seemed to warn the travellers of the

rapid approach of a stormy night. The wind, too, which was directly

against them, swept in furious gusts down the narrow road, and howled

dismally through the trees which skirted the pathway. Mr. Pickwick drew

his coat closer about him, coiled himself more snugly up into the corner

of the chaise, and fell into a sound sleep, from which he was only

awakened by the stopping of the vehicle, the sound of the hostler’s

bell, and a loud cry of ‘Horses on directly!’

But here another delay occurred. The boys were sleeping with such

mysterious soundness, that it took five minutes a-piece to wake them.

The hostler had somehow or other mislaid the key of the stable, and even

when that was found, two sleepy helpers put the wrong harness on the

wrong horses, and the whole process of harnessing had to be gone through

afresh. Had Mr. Pickwick been alone, these multiplied obstacles would

have completely put an end to the pursuit at once, but old Wardle was

not to be so easily daunted; and he laid about him with such hearty

good-will, cuffing this man, and pushing that; strapping a buckle here,

and taking in a link there, that the chaise was ready in a much shorter

time than could reasonably have been expected, under so many

difficulties.

They resumed their journey; and certainly the prospect before them was

by no means encouraging. The stage was fifteen miles long, the night was

dark, the wind high, and the rain pouring in torrents. It was impossible

to make any great way against such obstacles united; it was hard upon

one o’clock already; and nearly two hours were consumed in getting to

the end of the stage. Here, however, an object presented itself, which

rekindled their hopes, and reanimated their drooping spirits.

‘When did this chaise come in?’ cried old Wardle, leaping out of his own

vehicle, and pointing to one covered with wet mud, which was standing in

the yard.

‘Not a quarter of an hour ago, sir,’ replied the hostler, to whom the

question was addressed.

‘Lady and gentleman?’ inquired Wardle, almost breathless with

impatience.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Tall gentleman--dress-coat--long legs--thin body?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Elderly lady--thin face--rather skinny--eh?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘By heavens, it’s the couple, Pickwick,’ exclaimed the old gentleman.

‘Would have been here before,’ said the hostler, ‘but they broke a

trace.’

‘’Tis them!’ said Wardle, ‘it is, by Jove! Chaise-and-four instantly! We

shall catch them yet before they reach the next stage. A guinea a-piece,

boys-be alive there--bustle about--there’s good fellows.’

And with such admonitions as these, the old gentleman ran up and down

the yard, and bustled to and fro, in a state of excitement which

communicated itself to Mr. Pickwick also; and under the influence of

which, that gentleman got himself into complicated entanglements with

harness, and mixed up with horses and wheels of chaises, in the most

surprising manner, firmly believing that by so doing he was materially

forwarding the preparations for their resuming their journey.

‘Jump in--jump in!’ cried old Wardle, climbing into the chaise, pulling

up the steps, and slamming the door after him. ‘Come along! Make haste!’

And before Mr. Pickwick knew precisely what he was about, he felt

himself forced in at the other door, by one pull from the old gentleman

and one push from the hostler; and off they were again.

‘Ah! we are moving now,’ said the old gentleman exultingly. They were

indeed, as was sufficiently testified to Mr. Pickwick, by his constant

collision either with the hard wood-work of the chaise, or the body of

his companion.

‘Hold up!’ said the stout old Mr. Wardle, as Mr. Pickwick dived head

foremost into his capacious waistcoat.

‘I never did feel such a jolting in my life,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Never mind,’ replied his companion, ‘it will soon be over. Steady,

steady.’

Mr. Pickwick planted himself into his own corner, as firmly as he could;

and on whirled the chaise faster than ever.

They had travelled in this way about three miles, when Mr. Wardle, who

had been looking out of the Window for two or three minutes, suddenly

drew in his face, covered with splashes, and exclaimed in breathless

eagerness--

‘Here they are!’

Mr. Pickwick thrust his head out of his window. Yes: there was a chaise-

and-four, a short distance before them, dashing along at full gallop.

‘Go on, go on,’ almost shrieked the old gentleman. ‘Two guineas a-piece,

boys--don’t let ‘em gain on us--keep it up--keep it up.’

The horses in the first chaise started on at their utmost speed; and

those in Mr. Wardle’s galloped furiously behind them.

‘I see his head,’ exclaimed the choleric old man; ‘damme, I see his

head.’

‘So do I’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘that’s he.’

Mr. Pickwick was not mistaken. The countenance of Mr. Jingle, completely

coated with mud thrown up by the wheels, was plainly discernible at the

window of his chaise; and the motion of his arm, which was waving

violently towards the postillions, denoted that he was encouraging them

to increased exertion.

The interest was intense. Fields, trees, and hedges, seemed to rush past

them with the velocity of a whirlwind, so rapid was the pace at which

they tore along. They were close by the side of the first chaise.

Jingle’s voice could be plainly heard, even above the din of the wheels,

urging on the boys. Old Mr. Wardle foamed with rage and excitement. He

roared out scoundrels and villains by the dozen, clenched his fist and

shook it expressively at the object of his indignation; but Mr. Jingle

only answered with a contemptuous smile, and replied to his menaces by a

shout of triumph, as his horses, answering the increased application of

whip and spur, broke into a faster gallop, and left the pursuers behind.

Mr. Pickwick had just drawn in his head, and Mr. Wardle, exhausted with

shouting, had done the same, when a tremendous jolt threw them forward

against the front of the vehicle. There was a sudden bump--a loud crash-

-away rolled a wheel, and over went the chaise.

After a very few seconds of bewilderment and confusion, in which nothing

but the plunging of horses, and breaking of glass could be made out, Mr.

Pickwick felt himself violently pulled out from among the ruins of the

chaise; and as soon as he had gained his feet, extricated his head from

the skirts of his greatcoat, which materially impeded the usefulness of

his spectacles, the full disaster of the case met his view.

Old Mr. Wardle without a hat, and his clothes torn in several places,

stood by his side, and the fragments of the chaise lay scattered at

their feet. The post-boys, who had succeeded in cutting the traces, were

standing, disfigured with mud and disordered by hard riding, by the

horses’ heads. About a hundred yards in advance was the other chaise,

which had pulled up on hearing the crash. The postillions, each with a

broad grin convulsing his countenance, were viewing the adverse party

from their saddles, and Mr. Jingle was contemplating the wreck from the

coach window, with evident satisfaction. The day was just breaking, and

the whole scene was rendered perfectly visible by the grey light of the

morning.

‘Hollo!’ shouted the shameless Jingle, ‘anybody damaged?--elderly

gentlemen--no light weights--dangerous work--very.’

‘You’re a rascal,’ roared Wardle.

‘Ha! ha!’ replied Jingle; and then he added, with a knowing wink, and a

jerk of the thumb towards the interior of the chaise--‘I say--she’s very

well--desires her compliments--begs you won’t trouble yourself--love to

\_Tuppy\_--won’t you get up behind?--drive on, boys.’

The postillions resumed their proper attitudes, and away rattled the

chaise, Mr. Jingle fluttering in derision a white handkerchief from the

coach window.

Nothing in the whole adventure, not even the upset, had disturbed the

calm and equable current of Mr. Pickwick’s temper. The villainy,

however, which could first borrow money of his faithful follower, and

then abbreviate his name to ‘Tuppy,’ was more than he could patiently

bear. He drew his breath hard, and coloured up to the very tips of his

spectacles, as he said, slowly and emphatically--

‘If ever I meet that man again, I’ll--’

‘Yes, yes,’ interrupted Wardle, ‘that’s all very well; but while we

stand talking here, they’ll get their licence, and be married in

London.’

Mr. Pickwick paused, bottled up his vengeance, and corked it down. ‘How

far is it to the next stage?’ inquired Mr. Wardle, of one of the boys.

‘Six mile, ain’t it, Tom?’

‘Rayther better.’

‘Rayther better nor six mile, Sir.’

‘Can’t be helped,’ said Wardle, ‘we must walk it, Pickwick.’

‘No help for it,’ replied that truly great man.

So sending forward one of the boys on horseback, to procure a fresh

chaise and horses, and leaving the other behind to take care of the

broken one, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Wardle set manfully forward on the

walk, first tying their shawls round their necks, and slouching down

their hats to escape as much as possible from the deluge of rain, which

after a slight cessation had again begun to pour heavily down.

CHAPTER X. CLEARING UP ALL DOUBTS (IF ANY EXISTED) OF THE

DISINTERESTEDNESS OF MR. A. JINGLE’S CHARACTER

There are in London several old inns, once the headquarters of

celebrated coaches in the days when coaches performed their journeys in

a graver and more solemn manner than they do in these times; but which

have now degenerated into little more than the abiding and booking-

places of country wagons. The reader would look in vain for any of these

ancient hostelries, among the Golden Crosses and Bull and Mouths, which

rear their stately fronts in the improved streets of London. If he would

light upon any of these old places, he must direct his steps to the

obscurer quarters of the town, and there in some secluded nooks he will

find several, still standing with a kind of gloomy sturdiness, amidst

the modern innovations which surround them.

In the Borough especially, there still remain some half-dozen old inns,

which have preserved their external features unchanged, and which have

escaped alike the rage for public improvement and the encroachments of

private speculation. Great, rambling queer old places they are, with

galleries, and passages, and staircases, wide enough and antiquated

enough to furnish materials for a hundred ghost stories, supposing we

should ever be reduced to the lamentable necessity of inventing any, and

that the world should exist long enough to exhaust the innumerable

veracious legends connected with old London Bridge, and its adjacent

neighbourhood on the Surrey side.

It was in the yard of one of these inns--of no less celebrated a one

than the White Hart--that a man was busily employed in brushing the dirt

off a pair of boots, early on the morning succeeding the events narrated

in the last chapter. He was habited in a coarse, striped waistcoat, with

black calico sleeves, and blue glass buttons; drab breeches and

leggings. A bright red handkerchief was wound in a very loose and

unstudied style round his neck, and an old white hat was carelessly

thrown on one side of his head. There were two rows of boots before him,

one cleaned and the other dirty, and at every addition he made to the

clean row, he paused from his work, and contemplated its results with

evident satisfaction.

The yard presented none of that bustle and activity which are the usual

characteristics of a large coach inn. Three or four lumbering wagons,

each with a pile of goods beneath its ample canopy, about the height of

the second-floor window of an ordinary house, were stowed away beneath a

lofty roof which extended over one end of the yard; and another, which

was probably to commence its journey that morning, was drawn out into

the open space. A double tier of bedroom galleries, with old clumsy

balustrades, ran round two sides of the straggling area, and a double

row of bells to correspond, sheltered from the weather by a little

sloping roof, hung over the door leading to the bar and coffee-room. Two

or three gigs and chaise-carts were wheeled up under different little

sheds and pent-houses; and the occasional heavy tread of a cart-horse,

or rattling of a chain at the farther end of the yard, announced to

anybody who cared about the matter, that the stable lay in that

direction. When we add that a few boys in smock-frocks were lying asleep

on heavy packages, wool-packs, and other articles that were scattered

about on heaps of straw, we have described as fully as need be the

general appearance of the yard of the White Hart Inn, High Street,

Borough, on the particular morning in question.

A loud ringing of one of the bells was followed by the appearance of a

smart chambermaid in the upper sleeping gallery, who, after tapping at

one of the doors, and receiving a request from within, called over the

balustrades--

‘Sam!’

‘Hollo,’ replied the man with the white hat.

‘Number twenty-two wants his boots.’

‘Ask number twenty-two, vether he’ll have ‘em now, or vait till he gets

‘em,’ was the reply.

‘Come, don’t be a fool, Sam,’ said the girl coaxingly, ‘the gentleman

wants his boots directly.’

‘Well, you \_are\_ a nice young ‘ooman for a musical party, you are,’ said

the boot-cleaner. ‘Look at these here boots--eleven pair o’ boots; and

one shoe as belongs to number six, with the wooden leg. The eleven boots

is to be called at half-past eight and the shoe at nine. Who’s number

twenty-two, that’s to put all the others out? No, no; reg’lar rotation,

as Jack Ketch said, ven he tied the men up. Sorry to keep you a-waitin’,

Sir, but I’ll attend to you directly.’

Saying which, the man in the white hat set to work upon a top-boot with

increased assiduity.

There was another loud ring; and the bustling old landlady of the White

Hart made her appearance in the opposite gallery.

‘Sam,’ cried the landlady, ‘where’s that lazy, idle--why, Sam--oh, there

you are; why don’t you answer?’

‘Vouldn’t be gen-teel to answer, till you’d done talking,’ replied Sam

gruffly.

‘Here, clean these shoes for number seventeen directly, and take ‘em to

private sitting-room, number five, first floor.’

The landlady flung a pair of lady’s shoes into the yard, and bustled

away.

‘Number five,’ said Sam, as he picked up the shoes, and taking a piece

of chalk from his pocket, made a memorandum of their destination on the

soles--‘Lady’s shoes and private sittin’-room! I suppose she didn’t come

in the vagin.’

‘She came in early this morning,’ cried the girl, who was still leaning

over the railing of the gallery, ‘with a gentleman in a hackney-coach,

and it’s him as wants his boots, and you’d better do ‘em, that’s all

about it.’

‘Vy didn’t you say so before,’ said Sam, with great indignation,

singling out the boots in question from the heap before him. ‘For all I

know’d he was one o’ the regular threepennies. Private room! and a lady

too! If he’s anything of a gen’l’m’n, he’s vurth a shillin’ a day, let

alone the arrands.’

Stimulated by this inspiring reflection, Mr. Samuel brushed away with

such hearty good-will, that in a few minutes the boots and shoes, with a

polish which would have struck envy to the soul of the amiable Mr.

Warren (for they used Day & Martin at the White Hart), had arrived at

the door of number five.

‘Come in,’ said a man’s voice, in reply to Sam’s rap at the door. Sam

made his best bow, and stepped into the presence of a lady and gentleman

seated at breakfast. Having officiously deposited the gentleman’s boots

right and left at his feet, and the lady’s shoes right and left at hers,

he backed towards the door.

‘Boots,’ said the gentleman.

‘Sir,’ said Sam, closing the door, and keeping his hand on the knob of

the lock.

‘Do you know--what’s a-name--Doctors’ Commons?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘Where is it?’

‘Paul’s Churchyard, Sir; low archway on the carriage side, bookseller’s

at one corner, hotel on the other, and two porters in the middle as

touts for licences.’

‘Touts for licences!’ said the gentleman.

‘Touts for licences,’ replied Sam. ‘Two coves in vhite aprons--touches

their hats ven you walk in--“Licence, Sir, licence?” Queer sort, them,

and their mas’rs, too, sir--Old Bailey Proctors--and no mistake.’

‘What do they do?’ inquired the gentleman.

‘Do! You, Sir! That ain’t the worst on it, neither. They puts things

into old gen’l’m’n’s heads as they never dreamed of. My father, Sir, wos

a coachman. A widower he wos, and fat enough for anything--uncommon fat,

to be sure. His missus dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he

goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer and draw the blunt--very smart--

top boots on--nosegay in his button-hole--broad-brimmed tile--green

shawl--quite the gen’l’m’n. Goes through the archvay, thinking how he

should inwest the money--up comes the touter, touches his hat--“Licence,

Sir, licence?”--“What’s that?” says my father.--“Licence, Sir,” says

he.--“What licence?” says my father.--“Marriage licence,” says the

touter.--“Dash my veskit,” says my father, “I never thought o’ that.”--

“I think you wants one, Sir,” says the touter. My father pulls up, and

thinks a bit--“No,” says he, “damme, I’m too old, b’sides, I’m a many

sizes too large,” says he.--“Not a bit on it, Sir,” says the touter.--

“Think not?” says my father.--“I’m sure not,” says he; “we married a

gen’l’m’n twice your size, last Monday.”--“Did you, though?” said my

father.--“To be sure, we did,” says the touter, “you’re a babby to him--

this way, sir--this way!”--and sure enough my father walks arter him,

like a tame monkey behind a horgan, into a little back office, vere a

teller sat among dirty papers, and tin boxes, making believe he was

busy. “Pray take a seat, vile I makes out the affidavit, Sir,” says the

lawyer.--“Thank’ee, Sir,” says my father, and down he sat, and stared

with all his eyes, and his mouth vide open, at the names on the boxes.

“What’s your name, Sir,” says the lawyer.--“Tony Weller,” says my

father.--“Parish?” says the lawyer. “Belle Savage,” says my father; for

he stopped there wen he drove up, and he know’d nothing about parishes,

he didn’t.--“And what’s the lady’s name?” says the lawyer. My father was

struck all of a heap. “Blessed if I know,” says he.--“Not know!” says

the lawyer.--“No more nor you do,” says my father; “can’t I put that in

arterwards?”--“Impossible!” says the lawyer.--“Wery well,” says my

father, after he’d thought a moment, “put down Mrs. Clarke.”--“What

Clarke?” says the lawyer, dipping his pen in the ink.--“Susan Clarke,

Markis o’ Granby, Dorking,” says my father; “she’ll have me, if I ask. I

des-say--I never said nothing to her, but she’ll have me, I know.” The

licence was made out, and she \_did\_ have him, and what’s more she’s got

him now; and I never had any of the four hundred pound, worse luck. Beg

your pardon, sir,’ said Sam, when he had concluded, ‘but wen I gets on

this here grievance, I runs on like a new barrow with the wheel

greased.’ Having said which, and having paused for an instant to see

whether he was wanted for anything more, Sam left the room.

‘Half-past nine--just the time--off at once;’ said the gentleman, whom

we need hardly introduce as Mr. Jingle.

‘Time--for what?’ said the spinster aunt coquettishly.

‘Licence, dearest of angels--give notice at the church--call you mine,

to-morrow’--said Mr. Jingle, and he squeezed the spinster aunt’s hand.

‘The licence!’ said Rachael, blushing.

‘The licence,’ repeated Mr. Jingle--

‘In hurry, post-haste for a licence, In hurry, ding dong I come back.’

‘How you run on,’ said Rachael.

‘Run on--nothing to the hours, days, weeks, months, years, when we’re

united--run on--they’ll fly on--bolt--mizzle--steam-engine--thousand-

horse power--nothing to it.’

‘Can’t--can’t we be married before to-morrow morning?’ inquired Rachael.

‘Impossible--can’t be--notice at the church--leave the licence to-day--

ceremony come off to-morrow.’

I am so terrified, lest my brother should discover us!’ said Rachael.

‘Discover--nonsense--too much shaken by the break-down--besides--extreme

caution--gave up the post-chaise--walked on--took a hackney-coach--came

to the Borough--last place in the world that he’d look in--ha! ha!--

capital notion that--very.’

‘Don’t be long,’ said the spinster affectionately, as Mr. Jingle stuck

the pinched-up hat on his head.

‘Long away from you?--Cruel charmer,’ and Mr. Jingle skipped playfully

up to the spinster aunt, imprinted a chaste kiss upon her lips, and

danced out of the room.

‘Dear man!’ said the spinster, as the door closed after him.

‘Rum old girl,’ said Mr. Jingle, as he walked down the passage.

It is painful to reflect upon the perfidy of our species; and we will

not, therefore, pursue the thread of Mr. Jingle’s meditations, as he

wended his way to Doctors’ Commons. It will be sufficient for our

purpose to relate, that escaping the snares of the dragons in white

aprons, who guard the entrance to that enchanted region, he reached the

vicar-general’s office in safety and having procured a highly flattering

address on parchment, from the Archbishop of Canterbury, to his ‘trusty

and well-beloved Alfred Jingle and Rachael Wardle, greeting,’ he

carefully deposited the mystic document in his pocket, and retraced his

steps in triumph to the Borough.

He was yet on his way to the White Hart, when two plump gentleman and

one thin one entered the yard, and looked round in search of some

authorised person of whom they could make a few inquiries. Mr. Samuel

Weller happened to be at that moment engaged in burnishing a pair of

painted tops, the personal property of a farmer who was refreshing

himself with a slight lunch of two or three pounds of cold beef and a

pot or two of porter, after the fatigues of the Borough market; and to

him the thin gentleman straightway advanced.

‘My friend,’ said the thin gentleman.

‘You’re one o’ the adwice gratis order,’ thought Sam, ‘or you wouldn’t

be so wery fond o’ me all at once.’ But he only said--‘Well, Sir.’

‘My friend,’ said the thin gentleman, with a conciliatory hem--‘have you

got many people stopping here now? Pretty busy. Eh?’

Sam stole a look at the inquirer. He was a little high-dried man, with a

dark squeezed-up face, and small, restless, black eyes, that kept

winking and twinkling on each side of his little inquisitive nose, as if

they were playing a perpetual game of peep-bo with that feature. He was

dressed all in black, with boots as shiny as his eyes, a low white

neckcloth, and a clean shirt with a frill to it. A gold watch-chain, and

seals, depended from his fob. He carried his black kid gloves \_in\_ his

hands, and not ON them; and as he spoke, thrust his wrists beneath his

coat tails, with the air of a man who was in the habit of propounding

some regular posers.

‘Pretty busy, eh?’ said the little man.

‘Oh, wery well, Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘we shan’t be bankrupts, and we

shan’t make our fort’ns. We eats our biled mutton without capers, and

don’t care for horse-radish ven ve can get beef.’

‘Ah,’ said the little man, ‘you’re a wag, ain’t you?’

‘My eldest brother was troubled with that complaint,’ said Sam; ‘it may

be catching--I used to sleep with him.’

‘This is a curious old house of yours,’ said the little man, looking

round him.

‘If you’d sent word you was a-coming, we’d ha’ had it repaired;’ replied

the imperturbable Sam.

The little man seemed rather baffled by these several repulses, and a

short consultation took place between him and the two plump gentlemen.

At its conclusion, the little man took a pinch of snuff from an oblong

silver box, and was apparently on the point of renewing the

conversation, when one of the plump gentlemen, who in addition to a

benevolent countenance, possessed a pair of spectacles, and a pair of

black gaiters, interfered--

‘The fact of the matter is,’ said the benevolent gentleman, ‘that my

friend here (pointing to the other plump gentleman) will give you half a

guinea, if you’ll answer one or two--’

‘Now, my dear sir--my dear Sir,’ said the little man, ‘pray, allow me--

my dear Sir, the very first principle to be observed in these cases, is

this: if you place the matter in the hands of a professional man, you

must in no way interfere in the progress of the business; you must

repose implicit confidence in him. Really, Mr.--’ He turned to the other

plump gentleman, and said, ‘I forget your friend’s name.’

‘Pickwick,’ said Mr. Wardle, for it was no other than that jolly

personage.

‘Ah, Pickwick--really Mr. Pickwick, my dear Sir, excuse me--I shall be

happy to receive any private suggestions of yours, as AMICUS CURIAE, but

you must see the impropriety of your interfering with my conduct in this

case, with such an AD CAPTANDUM argument as the offer of half a guinea.

Really, my dear Sir, really;’ and the little man took an argumentative

pinch of snuff, and looked very profound.

‘My only wish, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘was to bring this very

unpleasant matter to as speedy a close as possible.’

‘Quite right--quite right,’ said the little man.

‘With which view,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, ‘I made use of the argument

which my experience of men has taught me is the most likely to succeed

in any case.’

‘Ay, ay,’ said the little man, ‘very good, very good, indeed; but you

should have suggested it to me. My dear sir, I’m quite certain you

cannot be ignorant of the extent of confidence which must be placed in

professional men. If any authority can be necessary on such a point, my

dear sir, let me refer you to the well-known case in Barnwell and--’

‘Never mind George Barnwell,’ interrupted Sam, who had remained a

wondering listener during this short colloquy; ‘everybody knows what

sort of a case his was, tho’ it’s always been my opinion, mind you, that

the young ‘ooman deserved scragging a precious sight more than he did.

Hows’ever, that’s neither here nor there. You want me to accept of half

a guinea. Wery well, I’m agreeable: I can’t say no fairer than that, can

I, sir?’ (Mr. Pickwick smiled.) Then the next question is, what the

devil do you want with me, as the man said, wen he see the ghost?’

‘We want to know--’ said Mr. Wardle.

‘Now, my dear sir--my dear sir,’ interposed the busy little man.

Mr. Wardle shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

‘We want to know,’ said the little man solemnly; ‘and we ask the

question of you, in order that we may not awaken apprehensions inside--

we want to know who you’ve got in this house at present?’

‘Who there is in the house!’ said Sam, in whose mind the inmates were

always represented by that particular article of their costume, which

came under his immediate superintendence. ‘There’s a vooden leg in

number six; there’s a pair of Hessians in thirteen; there’s two pair of

halves in the commercial; there’s these here painted tops in the

snuggery inside the bar; and five more tops in the coffee-room.’

‘Nothing more?’ said the little man.

‘Stop a bit,’ replied Sam, suddenly recollecting himself. ‘Yes; there’s

a pair of Vellingtons a good deal worn, and a pair o’ lady’s shoes, in

number five.’

‘What sort of shoes?’ hastily inquired Wardle, who, together with Mr.

Pickwick, had been lost in bewilderment at the singular catalogue of

visitors.

‘Country make,’ replied Sam.

‘Any maker’s name?’

‘Brown.’

‘Where of?’

‘Muggleton.

‘It is them,’ exclaimed Wardle. ‘By heavens, we’ve found them.’

‘Hush!’ said Sam. ‘The Vellingtons has gone to Doctors’ Commons.’

‘No,’ said the little man.

‘Yes, for a licence.’

‘We’re in time,’ exclaimed Wardle. ‘Show us the room; not a moment is to

be lost.’

‘Pray, my dear sir--pray,’ said the little man; ‘caution, caution.’ He

drew from his pocket a red silk purse, and looked very hard at Sam as he

drew out a sovereign.

Sam grinned expressively.

‘Show us into the room at once, without announcing us,’ said the little

man, ‘and it’s yours.’

Sam threw the painted tops into a corner, and led the way through a dark

passage, and up a wide staircase. He paused at the end of a second

passage, and held out his hand.

‘Here it is,’ whispered the attorney, as he deposited the money on the

hand of their guide.

The man stepped forward for a few paces, followed by the two friends and

their legal adviser. He stopped at a door.

‘Is this the room?’ murmured the little gentleman.

Sam nodded assent.

Old Wardle opened the door; and the whole three walked into the room

just as Mr. Jingle, who had that moment returned, had produced the

licence to the spinster aunt.

The spinster uttered a loud shriek, and throwing herself into a chair,

covered her face with her hands. Mr. Jingle crumpled up the licence, and

thrust it into his coat pocket. The unwelcome visitors advanced into the

middle of the room.

‘You--you are a nice rascal, arn’t you?’ exclaimed Wardle, breathless

with passion.

‘My dear Sir, my dear sir,’ said the little man, laying his hat on the

table, ‘pray, consider--pray. Defamation of character: action for

damages. Calm yourself, my dear sir, pray--’

‘How dare you drag my sister from my house?’ said the old man.

Ay--ay--very good,’ said the little gentleman, ‘you may ask that. How

dare you, sir?--eh, sir?’

‘Who the devil are you?’ inquired Mr. Jingle, in so fierce a tone, that

the little gentleman involuntarily fell back a step or two.

‘Who is he, you scoundrel,’ interposed Wardle. ‘He’s my lawyer, Mr.

Perker, of Gray’s Inn. Perker, I’ll have this fellow prosecuted--

indicted--I’ll--I’ll--I’ll ruin him. And you,’ continued Mr. Wardle,

turning abruptly round to his sister--‘you, Rachael, at a time of life

when you ought to know better, what do you mean by running away with a

vagabond, disgracing your family, and making yourself miserable? Get on

your bonnet and come back. Call a hackney-coach there, directly, and

bring this lady’s bill, d’ye hear--d’ye hear?’

Cert’nly, Sir,’ replied Sam, who had answered Wardle’s violent ringing

of the bell with a degree of celerity which must have appeared

marvellous to anybody who didn’t know that his eye had been applied to

the outside of the keyhole during the whole interview.

‘Get on your bonnet,’ repeated Wardle.

‘Do nothing of the kind,’ said Jingle. ‘Leave the room, Sir--no business

here--lady’s free to act as she pleases--more than one-and-twenty.’

‘More than one-and-twenty!’ ejaculated Wardle contemptuously. ‘More than

one-and-forty!’

‘I ain’t,’ said the spinster aunt, her indignation getting the better of

her determination to faint.

‘You are,’ replied Wardle; ‘you’re fifty if you’re an hour.’

Here the spinster aunt uttered a loud shriek, and became senseless.

‘A glass of water,’ said the humane Mr. Pickwick, summoning the

landlady.

‘A glass of water!’ said the passionate Wardle. ‘Bring a bucket, and

throw it all over her; it’ll do her good, and she richly deserves it.’

‘Ugh, you brute!’ ejaculated the kind-hearted landlady. ‘Poor dear.’ And

with sundry ejaculations of ‘Come now, there’s a dear--drink a little of

this--it’ll do you good--don’t give way so--there’s a love,’ etc. etc.,

the landlady, assisted by a chambermaid, proceeded to vinegar the

forehead, beat the hands, titillate the nose, and unlace the stays of

the spinster aunt, and to administer such other restoratives as are

usually applied by compassionate females to ladies who are endeavouring

to ferment themselves into hysterics.

‘Coach is ready, Sir,’ said Sam, appearing at the door.

‘Come along,’ cried Wardle. ‘I’ll carry her downstairs.’

At this proposition, the hysterics came on with redoubled violence.

The landlady was about to enter a very violent protest against this

proceeding, and had already given vent to an indignant inquiry whether

Mr. Wardle considered himself a lord of the creation, when Mr. Jingle

interposed--

‘Boots,’ said he, ‘get me an officer.’

‘Stay, stay,’ said little Mr. Perker. ‘Consider, Sir, consider.’

‘I’ll not consider,’ replied Jingle. ‘She’s her own mistress--see who

dares to take her away--unless she wishes it.’

‘I \_won’t\_ be taken away,’ murmured the spinster aunt. ‘I \_don’t\_ wish

it.’ (Here there was a frightful relapse.)

‘My dear Sir,’ said the little man, in a low tone, taking Mr. Wardle and

Mr. Pickwick apart--‘my dear Sir, we’re in a very awkward situation.

It’s a distressing case--very; I never knew one more so; but really, my

dear sir, really we have no power to control this lady’s actions. I

warned you before we came, my dear sir, that there was nothing to look

to but a compromise.’

There was a short pause.

‘What kind of compromise would you recommend?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, my dear Sir, our friend’s in an unpleasant position--very much so.

We must be content to suffer some pecuniary loss.’

‘I’ll suffer any, rather than submit to this disgrace, and let her, fool

as she is, be made miserable for life,’ said Wardle.

‘I rather think it can be done,’ said the bustling little man. ‘Mr.

Jingle, will you step with us into the next room for a moment?’

Mr. Jingle assented, and the quartette walked into an empty apartment.

‘Now, sir,’ said the little man, as he carefully closed the door, ‘is

there no way of accommodating this matter--step this way, sir, for a

moment--into this window, Sir, where we can be alone--there, sir, there,

pray sit down, sir. Now, my dear Sir, between you and I, we know very

well, my dear Sir, that you have run off with this lady for the sake of

her money. Don’t frown, Sir, don’t frown; I say, between you and I, \_we\_

know it. We are both men of the world, and WE know very well that our

friends here, are not--eh?’

Mr. Jingle’s face gradually relaxed; and something distantly resembling

a wink quivered for an instant in his left eye.

‘Very good, very good,’ said the little man, observing the impression he

had made. ‘Now, the fact is, that beyond a few hundreds, the lady has

little or nothing till the death of her mother--fine old lady, my dear

Sir.’

‘\_Old\_,’ said Mr. Jingle briefly but emphatically.

‘Why, yes,’ said the attorney, with a slight cough. ‘You are right, my

dear Sir, she is rather old. She comes of an old family though, my dear

Sir; old in every sense of the word. The founder of that family came

into Kent when Julius Caesar invaded Britain;--only one member of it,

since, who hasn’t lived to eighty-five, and he was beheaded by one of

the Henrys. The old lady is not seventy-three now, my dear Sir.’ The

little man paused, and took a pinch of snuff.

‘Well,’ cried Mr. Jingle.

‘Well, my dear sir--you don’t take snuff!--ah! so much the better--

expensive habit--well, my dear Sir, you’re a fine young man, man of the

world--able to push your fortune, if you had capital, eh?’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Jingle again.

‘Do you comprehend me?’

‘Not quite.’

‘Don’t you think--now, my dear Sir, I put it to you don’t you think--

that fifty pounds and liberty would be better than Miss Wardle and

expectation?’

‘Won’t do--not half enough!’ said Mr. Jingle, rising.

‘Nay, nay, my dear Sir,’ remonstrated the little attorney, seizing him

by the button. ‘Good round sum--a man like you could treble it in no

time--great deal to be done with fifty pounds, my dear Sir.’

‘More to be done with a hundred and fifty,’ replied Mr. Jingle coolly.

‘Well, my dear Sir, we won’t waste time in splitting straws,’ resumed

the little man, ‘say--say--seventy.’

Won’t do,’ said Mr. Jingle.

‘Don’t go away, my dear sir--pray don’t hurry,’ said the little man.

‘Eighty; come: I’ll write you a cheque at once.’

‘Won’t do,’ said Mr. Jingle.

‘Well, my dear Sir, well,’ said the little man, still detaining him;

‘just tell me what \_will\_ do.’

‘Expensive affair,’ said Mr. Jingle. ‘Money out of pocket--posting, nine

pounds; licence, three--that’s twelve--compensation, a hundred--hundred

and twelve--breach of honour--and loss of the lady--’

‘Yes, my dear Sir, yes,’ said the little man, with a knowing look,

‘never mind the last two items. That’s a hundred and twelve--say a

hundred--come.’

‘And twenty,’ said Mr. Jingle.

‘Come, come, I’ll write you a cheque,’ said the little man; and down he

sat at the table for that purpose.

‘I’ll make it payable the day after to-morrow,’ said the little man,

with a look towards Mr. Wardle; ‘and we can get the lady away,

meanwhile.’ Mr. Wardle sullenly nodded assent.

‘A hundred,’ said the little man.

‘And twenty,’ said Mr. Jingle.

‘My dear Sir,’ remonstrated the little man.

‘Give it him,’ interposed Mr. Wardle, ‘and let him go.’

The cheque was written by the little gentleman, and pocketed by Mr.

Jingle.

‘Now, leave this house instantly!’ said Wardle, starting up.

‘My dear Sir,’ urged the little man.

‘And mind,’ said Mr. Wardle, ‘that nothing should have induced me to

make this compromise--not even a regard for my family--if I had not

known that the moment you got any money in that pocket of yours, you’d

go to the devil faster, if possible, than you would without it--’

‘My dear sir,’ urged the little man again.

‘Be quiet, Perker,’ resumed Wardle. ‘Leave the room, Sir.’

‘Off directly,’ said the unabashed Jingle. ‘Bye bye, Pickwick.’

If any dispassionate spectator could have beheld the countenance of the

illustrious man, whose name forms the leading feature of the title of

this work, during the latter part of this conversation, he would have

been almost induced to wonder that the indignant fire which flashed from

his eyes did not melt the glasses of his spectacles--so majestic was his

wrath. His nostrils dilated, and his fists clenched involuntarily, as he

heard himself addressed by the villain. But he restrained himself again-

-he did not pulverise him.

‘Here,’ continued the hardened traitor, tossing the licence at Mr.

Pickwick’s feet; ‘get the name altered--take home the lady--do for

Tuppy.’

Mr. Pickwick was a philosopher, but philosophers are only men in armour,

after all. The shaft had reached him, penetrated through his

philosophical harness, to his very heart. In the frenzy of his rage, he

hurled the inkstand madly forward, and followed it up himself. But Mr.

Jingle had disappeared, and he found himself caught in the arms of Sam.

‘Hollo,’ said that eccentric functionary, ‘furniter’s cheap where you

come from, Sir. Self-acting ink, that ‘ere; it’s wrote your mark upon

the wall, old gen’l’m’n. Hold still, Sir; wot’s the use o’ runnin’ arter

a man as has made his lucky, and got to t’other end of the Borough by

this time?’

Mr. Pickwick’s mind, like those of all truly great men, was open to

conviction. He was a quick and powerful reasoner; and a moment’s

reflection sufficed to remind him of the impotency of his rage. It

subsided as quickly as it had been roused. He panted for breath, and

looked benignantly round upon his friends.

Shall we tell the lamentations that ensued when Miss Wardle found

herself deserted by the faithless Jingle? Shall we extract Mr.

Pickwick’s masterly description of that heartrending scene? His note-

book, blotted with the tears of sympathising humanity, lies open before

us; one word, and it is in the printer’s hands. But, no! we will be

resolute! We will not wring the public bosom, with the delineation of

such suffering!

Slowly and sadly did the two friends and the deserted lady return next

day in the Muggleton heavy coach. Dimly and darkly had the sombre

shadows of a summer’s night fallen upon all around, when they again

reached Dingley Dell, and stood within the entrance to Manor Farm.

CHAPTER XI. INVOLVING ANOTHER JOURNEY, AND AN ANTIQUARIAN DISCOVERY;

RECORDING MR. PICKWICK’S DETERMINATION TO BE PRESENT AT AN ELECTION; AND

CONTAINING A MANUSCRIPT OF THE OLD CLERGYMAN’S

A night of quiet and repose in the profound silence of Dingley Dell, and

an hour’s breathing of its fresh and fragrant air on the ensuing

morning, completely recovered Mr. Pickwick from the effects of his late

fatigue of body and anxiety of mind. That illustrious man had been

separated from his friends and followers for two whole days; and it was

with a degree of pleasure and delight, which no common imagination can

adequately conceive, that he stepped forward to greet Mr. Winkle and Mr.

Snodgrass, as he encountered those gentlemen on his return from his

early walk. The pleasure was mutual; for who could ever gaze on Mr.

Pickwick’s beaming face without experiencing the sensation? But still a

cloud seemed to hang over his companions which that great man could not

but be sensible of, and was wholly at a loss to account for. There was a

mysterious air about them both, as unusual as it was alarming.

‘And how,’ said Mr. Pickwick, when he had grasped his followers by the

hand, and exchanged warm salutations of welcome--‘how is Tupman?’

Mr. Winkle, to whom the question was more peculiarly addressed, made no

reply. He turned away his head, and appeared absorbed in melancholy

reflection.

‘Snodgrass,’ said Mr. Pickwick earnestly, ‘how is our friend--he is not

ill?’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass; and a tear trembled on his sentimental

eyelid, like a rain-drop on a window-frame--‘no; he is not ill.’

Mr. Pickwick stopped, and gazed on each of his friends in turn.

‘Winkle--Snodgrass,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘what does this mean? Where is

our friend? What has happened? Speak--I conjure, I entreat--nay, I

command you, speak.’

There was a solemnity--a dignity--in Mr. Pickwick’s manner, not to be

withstood.

‘He is gone,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Gone!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick. ‘Gone!’

‘Gone,’ repeated Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Where!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick.

‘We can only guess, from that communication,’ replied Mr. Snodgrass,

taking a letter from his pocket, and placing it in his friend’s hand.

‘Yesterday morning, when a letter was received from Mr. Wardle, stating

that you would be home with his sister at night, the melancholy which

had hung over our friend during the whole of the previous day, was

observed to increase. He shortly afterwards disappeared: he was missing

during the whole day, and in the evening this letter was brought by the

hostler from the Crown, at Muggleton. It had been left in his charge in

the morning, with a strict injunction that it should not be delivered

until night.’

Mr. Pickwick opened the epistle. It was in his friend’s hand-writing,

and these were its contents:--

‘MY DEAR PICKWICK,--\_You\_, my dear friend, are placed far beyond the

reach of many mortal frailties and weaknesses which ordinary people

cannot overcome. You do not know what it is, at one blow, to be deserted

by a lovely and fascinating creature, and to fall a victim to the

artifices of a villain, who had the grin of cunning beneath the mask of

friendship. I hope you never may.

‘Any letter addressed to me at the Leather Bottle, Cobham, Kent, will be

forwarded--supposing I still exist. I hasten from the sight of that

world, which has become odious to me. Should I hasten from it

altogether, pity--forgive me. Life, my dear Pickwick, has become

insupportable to me. The spirit which burns within us, is a porter’s

knot, on which to rest the heavy load of worldly cares and troubles; and

when that spirit fails us, the burden is too heavy to be borne. We sink

beneath it. You may tell Rachael--Ah, that name!--

‘TRACY TUPMAN.’

‘We must leave this place directly,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as he refolded

the note. ‘It would not have been decent for us to remain here, under

any circumstances, after what has happened; and now we are bound to

follow in search of our friend.’ And so saying, he led the way to the

house.

His intention was rapidly communicated. The entreaties to remain were

pressing, but Mr. Pickwick was inflexible. Business, he said, required

his immediate attendance.

The old clergyman was present.

‘You are not really going?’ said he, taking Mr. Pickwick aside.

Mr. Pickwick reiterated his former determination.

‘Then here,’ said the old gentleman, ‘is a little manuscript, which I

had hoped to have the pleasure of reading to you myself. I found it on

the death of a friend of mine--a medical man, engaged in our county

lunatic asylum--among a variety of papers, which I had the option of

destroying or preserving, as I thought proper. I can hardly believe that

the manuscript is genuine, though it certainly is not in my friend’s

hand. However, whether it be the genuine production of a maniac, or

founded upon the ravings of some unhappy being (which I think more

probable), read it, and judge for yourself.’

Mr. Pickwick received the manuscript, and parted from the benevolent old

gentleman with many expressions of good-will and esteem.

It was a more difficult task to take leave of the inmates of Manor Farm,

from whom they had received so much hospitality and kindness. Mr.

Pickwick kissed the young ladies--we were going to say, as if they were

his own daughters, only, as he might possibly have infused a little more

warmth into the salutation, the comparison would not be quite

appropriate--hugged the old lady with filial cordiality; and patted the

rosy cheeks of the female servants in a most patriarchal manner, as he

slipped into the hands of each some more substantial expression of his

approval. The exchange of cordialities with their fine old host and Mr.

Trundle was even more hearty and prolonged; and it was not until Mr.

Snodgrass had been several times called for, and at last emerged from a

dark passage followed soon after by Emily (whose bright eyes looked

unusually dim), that the three friends were enabled to tear themselves

from their friendly entertainers. Many a backward look they gave at the

farm, as they walked slowly away; and many a kiss did Mr. Snodgrass waft

in the air, in acknowledgment of something very like a lady’s

handkerchief, which was waved from one of the upper windows, until a

turn of the lane hid the old house from their sight.

At Muggleton they procured a conveyance to Rochester. By the time they

reached the last-named place, the violence of their grief had

sufficiently abated to admit of their making a very excellent early

dinner; and having procured the necessary information relative to the

road, the three friends set forward again in the afternoon to walk to

Cobham.

A delightful walk it was; for it was a pleasant afternoon in June, and

their way lay through a deep and shady wood, cooled by the light wind

which gently rustled the thick foliage, and enlivened by the songs of

the birds that perched upon the boughs. The ivy and the moss crept in

thick clusters over the old trees, and the soft green turf overspread

the ground like a silken mat. They emerged upon an open park, with an

ancient hall, displaying the quaint and picturesque architecture of

Elizabeth’s time. Long vistas of stately oaks and elm trees appeared on

every side; large herds of deer were cropping the fresh grass; and

occasionally a startled hare scoured along the ground, with the speed of

the shadows thrown by the light clouds which swept across a sunny

landscape like a passing breath of summer.

‘If this,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him--‘if this were the place

to which all who are troubled with our friend’s complaint came, I fancy

their old attachment to this world would very soon return.’

‘I think so too,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘And really,’ added Mr. Pickwick, after half an hour’s walking had

brought them to the village, ‘really, for a misanthrope’s choice, this

is one of the prettiest and most desirable places of residence I ever

met with.’

In this opinion also, both Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass expressed their

concurrence; and having been directed to the Leather Bottle, a clean and

commodious village ale-house, the three travellers entered, and at once

inquired for a gentleman of the name of Tupman.

‘Show the gentlemen into the parlour, Tom,’ said the landlady.

A stout country lad opened a door at the end of the passage, and the

three friends entered a long, low-roofed room, furnished with a large

number of high-backed leather-cushioned chairs, of fantastic shapes, and

embellished with a great variety of old portraits and roughly-coloured

prints of some antiquity. At the upper end of the room was a table, with

a white cloth upon it, well covered with a roast fowl, bacon, ale, and

et ceteras; and at the table sat Mr. Tupman, looking as unlike a man who

had taken his leave of the world, as possible.

On the entrance of his friends, that gentleman laid down his knife and

fork, and with a mournful air advanced to meet them.

‘I did not expect to see you here,’ he said, as he grasped Mr.

Pickwick’s hand. ‘It’s very kind.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Pickwick, sitting down, and wiping from his forehead the

perspiration which the walk had engendered. ‘Finish your dinner, and

walk out with me. I wish to speak to you alone.’

Mr. Tupman did as he was desired; and Mr. Pickwick having refreshed

himself with a copious draught of ale, waited his friend’s leisure. The

dinner was quickly despatched, and they walked out together.

For half an hour, their forms might have been seen pacing the churchyard

to and fro, while Mr. Pickwick was engaged in combating his companion’s

resolution. Any repetition of his arguments would be useless; for what

language could convey to them that energy and force which their great

originator’s manner communicated? Whether Mr. Tupman was already tired

of retirement, or whether he was wholly unable to resist the eloquent

appeal which was made to him, matters not, he did \_not \_ resist it at

last.

‘It mattered little to him,’ he said, ‘where he dragged out the

miserable remainder of his days; and since his friend laid so much

stress upon his humble companionship, he was willing to share his

adventures.’

Mr. Pickwick smiled; they shook hands, and walked back to rejoin their

companions.

It was at this moment that Mr. Pickwick made that immortal discovery,

which has been the pride and boast of his friends, and the envy of every

antiquarian in this or any other country. They had passed the door of

their inn, and walked a little way down the village, before they

recollected the precise spot in which it stood. As they turned back, Mr.

Pickwick’s eye fell upon a small broken stone, partially buried in the

ground, in front of a cottage door. He paused.

‘This is very strange,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘What is strange?’ inquired Mr. Tupman, staring eagerly at every object

near him, but the right one. ‘God bless me, what’s the matter?’

This last was an ejaculation of irrepressible astonishment, occasioned

by seeing Mr. Pickwick, in his enthusiasm for discovery, fall on his

knees before the little stone, and commence wiping the dust off it with

his pocket-handkerchief.

‘There is an inscription here,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Is it possible?’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘I can discern,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, rubbing away with all his

might, and gazing intently through his spectacles--‘I can discern a

cross, and a 13, and then a T. This is important,’ continued Mr.

Pickwick, starting up. ‘This is some very old inscription, existing

perhaps long before the ancient alms-houses in this place. It must not

be lost.’

He tapped at the cottage door. A labouring man opened it.

‘Do you know how this stone came here, my friend?’ inquired the

benevolent Mr. Pickwick.

‘No, I doan’t, Sir,’ replied the man civilly. ‘It was here long afore I

was born, or any on us.’

Mr. Pickwick glanced triumphantly at his companion.

‘You--you--are not particularly attached to it, I dare say,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, trembling with anxiety. ‘You wouldn’t mind selling it, now?’

‘Ah! but who’d buy it?’ inquired the man, with an expression of face

which he probably meant to be very cunning.

‘I’ll give you ten shillings for it, at once,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘if

you would take it up for me.’

The astonishment of the village may be easily imagined, when (the little

stone having been raised with one wrench of a spade) Mr. Pickwick, by

dint of great personal exertion, bore it with his own hands to the inn,

and after having carefully washed it, deposited it on the table.

The exultation and joy of the Pickwickians knew no bounds, when their

patience and assiduity, their washing and scraping, were crowned with

success. The stone was uneven and broken, and the letters were

straggling and irregular, but the following fragment of an inscription

was clearly to be deciphered:--

[cross] B I L S T U M P S H I S. M. ARK

Mr. Pickwick’s eyes sparkled with delight, as he sat and gloated over

the treasure he had discovered. He had attained one of the greatest

objects of his ambition. In a county known to abound in the remains of

the early ages; in a village in which there still existed some memorials

of the olden time, he--he, the chairman of the Pickwick Club--had

discovered a strange and curious inscription of unquestionable

antiquity, which had wholly escaped the observation of the many learned

men who had preceded him. He could hardly trust the evidence of his

senses.

‘This--this,’ said he, ‘determines me. We return to town to-morrow.’

‘To-morrow!’ exclaimed his admiring followers.

‘To-morrow,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘This treasure must be at once deposited

where it can be thoroughly investigated and properly understood. I have

another reason for this step. In a few days, an election is to take

place for the borough of Eatanswill, at which Mr. Perker, a gentleman

whom I lately met, is the agent of one of the candidates. We will

behold, and minutely examine, a scene so interesting to every

Englishman.’

‘We will,’ was the animated cry of three voices.

Mr. Pickwick looked round him. The attachment and fervour of his

followers lighted up a glow of enthusiasm within him. He was their

leader, and he felt it.

‘Let us celebrate this happy meeting with a convivial glass,’ said he.

This proposition, like the other, was received with unanimous applause.

Having himself deposited the important stone in a small deal box,

purchased from the landlady for the purpose, he placed himself in an

arm-chair, at the head of the table; and the evening was devoted to

festivity and conversation.

It was past eleven o’clock--a late hour for the little village of

Cobham--when Mr. Pickwick retired to the bedroom which had been prepared

for his reception. He threw open the lattice window, and setting his

light upon the table, fell into a train of meditation on the hurried

events of the two preceding days.

The hour and the place were both favourable to contemplation; Mr.

Pickwick was roused by the church clock striking twelve. The first

stroke of the hour sounded solemnly in his ear, but when the bell ceased

the stillness seemed insupportable--he almost felt as if he had lost a

companion. He was nervous and excited; and hastily undressing himself

and placing his light in the chimney, got into bed.

Every one has experienced that disagreeable state of mind, in which a

sensation of bodily weariness in vain contends against an inability to

sleep. It was Mr. Pickwick’s condition at this moment: he tossed first

on one side and then on the other; and perseveringly closed his eyes as

if to coax himself to slumber. It was of no use. Whether it was the

unwonted exertion he had undergone, or the heat, or the brandy-and-

water, or the strange bed--whatever it was, his thoughts kept reverting

very uncomfortably to the grim pictures downstairs, and the old stories

to which they had given rise in the course of the evening. After half an

hour’s tumbling about, he came to the unsatisfactory conclusion, that it

was of no use trying to sleep; so he got up and partially dressed

himself. Anything, he thought, was better than lying there fancying all

kinds of horrors. He looked out of the window--it was very dark. He

walked about the room--it was very lonely.

He had taken a few turns from the door to the window, and from the

window to the door, when the clergyman’s manuscript for the first time

entered his head. It was a good thought. If it failed to interest him,

it might send him to sleep. He took it from his coat pocket, and drawing

a small table towards his bedside, trimmed the light, put on his

spectacles, and composed himself to read. It was a strange handwriting,

and the paper was much soiled and blotted. The title gave him a sudden

start, too; and he could not avoid casting a wistful glance round the

room. Reflecting on the absurdity of giving way to such feelings,

however, he trimmed the light again, and read as follows:--

A MADMAN’S MANUSCRIPT

‘Yes!--a madman’s! How that word would have struck to my heart, many

years ago! How it would have roused the terror that used to come upon me

sometimes, sending the blood hissing and tingling through my veins, till

the cold dew of fear stood in large drops upon my skin, and my knees

knocked together with fright! I like it now though. It’s a fine name.

Show me the monarch whose angry frown was ever feared like the glare of

a madman’s eye--whose cord and axe were ever half so sure as a madman’s

gripe. Ho! ho! It’s a grand thing to be mad! to be peeped at like a wild

lion through the iron bars--to gnash one’s teeth and howl, through the

long still night, to the merry ring of a heavy chain and to roll and

twine among the straw, transported with such brave music. Hurrah for the

madhouse! Oh, it’s a rare place!

‘I remember days when I was afraid of being mad; when I used to start

from my sleep, and fall upon my knees, and pray to be spared from the

curse of my race; when I rushed from the sight of merriment or

happiness, to hide myself in some lonely place, and spend the weary

hours in watching the progress of the fever that was to consume my

brain. I knew that madness was mixed up with my very blood, and the

marrow of my bones! that one generation had passed away without the

pestilence appearing among them, and that I was the first in whom it

would revive. I knew it must be so: that so it always had been, and so

it ever would be: and when I cowered in some obscure corner of a crowded

room, and saw men whisper, and point, and turn their eyes towards me, I

knew they were telling each other of the doomed madman; and I slunk away

again to mope in solitude.

‘I did this for years; long, long years they were. The nights here are

long sometimes--very long; but they are nothing to the restless nights,

and dreadful dreams I had at that time. It makes me cold to remember

them. Large dusky forms with sly and jeering faces crouched in the

corners of the room, and bent over my bed at night, tempting me to

madness. They told me in low whispers, that the floor of the old house

in which my father died, was stained with his own blood, shed by his own

hand in raging madness. I drove my fingers into my ears, but they

screamed into my head till the room rang with it, that in one generation

before him the madness slumbered, but that his grandfather had lived for

years with his hands fettered to the ground, to prevent his tearing

himself to pieces. I knew they told the truth--I knew it well. I had

found it out years before, though they had tried to keep it from me. Ha!

ha! I was too cunning for them, madman as they thought me.

‘At last it came upon me, and I wondered how I could ever have feared

it. I could go into the world now, and laugh and shout with the best

among them. I knew I was mad, but they did not even suspect it. How I

used to hug myself with delight, when I thought of the fine trick I was

playing them after their old pointing and leering, when I was not mad,

but only dreading that I might one day become so! And how I used to

laugh for joy, when I was alone, and thought how well I kept my secret,

and how quickly my kind friends would have fallen from me, if they had

known the truth. I could have screamed with ecstasy when I dined alone

with some fine roaring fellow, to think how pale he would have turned,

and how fast he would have run, if he had known that the dear friend who

sat close to him, sharpening a bright, glittering knife, was a madman

with all the power, and half the will, to plunge it in his heart. Oh, it

was a merry life!

‘Riches became mine, wealth poured in upon me, and I rioted in pleasures

enhanced a thousandfold to me by the consciousness of my well-kept

secret. I inherited an estate. The law--the eagle-eyed law itself--had

been deceived, and had handed over disputed thousands to a madman’s

hands. Where was the wit of the sharp-sighted men of sound mind? Where

the dexterity of the lawyers, eager to discover a flaw? The madman’s

cunning had overreached them all.

‘I had money. How I was courted! I spent it profusely. How I was

praised! How those three proud, overbearing brothers humbled themselves

before me! The old, white-headed father, too--such deference--such

respect--such devoted friendship--he worshipped me! The old man had a

daughter, and the young men a sister; and all the five were poor. I was

rich; and when I married the girl, I saw a smile of triumph play upon

the faces of her needy relatives, as they thought of their well-planned

scheme, and their fine prize. It was for me to smile. To smile! To laugh

outright, and tear my hair, and roll upon the ground with shrieks of

merriment. They little thought they had married her to a madman.

‘Stay. If they had known it, would they have saved her? A sister’s

happiness against her husband’s gold. The lightest feather I blow into

the air, against the gay chain that ornaments my body!

‘In one thing I was deceived with all my cunning. If I had not been mad-

-for though we madmen are sharp-witted enough, we get bewildered

sometimes--I should have known that the girl would rather have been

placed, stiff and cold in a dull leaden coffin, than borne an envied

bride to my rich, glittering house. I should have known that her heart

was with the dark-eyed boy whose name I once heard her breathe in her

troubled sleep; and that she had been sacrificed to me, to relieve the

poverty of the old, white-headed man and the haughty brothers.

‘I don’t remember forms or faces now, but I know the girl was beautiful.

I know she was; for in the bright moonlight nights, when I start up from

my sleep, and all is quiet about me, I see, standing still and

motionless in one corner of this cell, a slight and wasted figure with

long black hair, which, streaming down her back, stirs with no earthly

wind, and eyes that fix their gaze on me, and never wink or close. Hush!

the blood chills at my heart as I write it down--that form is \_her’s\_;

the face is very pale, and the eyes are glassy bright; but I know them

well. That figure never moves; it never frowns and mouths as others do,

that fill this place sometimes; but it is much more dreadful to me, even

than the spirits that tempted me many years ago--it comes fresh from the

grave; and is so very death-like.

‘For nearly a year I saw that face grow paler; for nearly a year I saw

the tears steal down the mournful cheeks, and never knew the cause. I

found it out at last though. They could not keep it from me long. She

had never liked me; I had never thought she did: she despised my wealth,

and hated the splendour in which she lived; but I had not expected that.

She loved another. This I had never thought of. Strange feelings came

over me, and thoughts, forced upon me by some secret power, whirled

round and round my brain. I did not hate her, though I hated the boy she

still wept for. I pitied--yes, I pitied--the wretched life to which her

cold and selfish relations had doomed her. I knew that she could not

live long; but the thought that before her death she might give birth to

some ill-fated being, destined to hand down madness to its offspring,

determined me. I resolved to kill her.

‘For many weeks I thought of poison, and then of drowning, and then of

fire. A fine sight, the grand house in flames, and the madman’s wife

smouldering away to cinders. Think of the jest of a large reward, too,

and of some sane man swinging in the wind for a deed he never did, and

all through a madman’s cunning! I thought often of this, but I gave it

up at last. Oh! the pleasure of stropping the razor day after day,

feeling the sharp edge, and thinking of the gash one stroke of its thin,

bright edge would make!

‘At last the old spirits who had been with me so often before whispered

in my ear that the time was come, and thrust the open razor into my

hand. I grasped it firmly, rose softly from the bed, and leaned over my

sleeping wife. Her face was buried in her hands. I withdrew them softly,

and they fell listlessly on her bosom. She had been weeping; for the

traces of the tears were still wet upon her cheek. Her face was calm and

placid; and even as I looked upon it, a tranquil smile lighted up her

pale features. I laid my hand softly on her shoulder. She started--it

was only a passing dream. I leaned forward again. She screamed, and

woke.

‘One motion of my hand, and she would never again have uttered cry or

sound. But I was startled, and drew back. Her eyes were fixed on mine. I

knew not how it was, but they cowed and frightened me; and I quailed

beneath them. She rose from the bed, still gazing fixedly and steadily

on me. I trembled; the razor was in my hand, but I could not move. She

made towards the door. As she neared it, she turned, and withdrew her

eyes from my face. The spell was broken. I bounded forward, and clutched

her by the arm. Uttering shriek upon shriek, she sank upon the ground.

‘Now I could have killed her without a struggle; but the house was

alarmed. I heard the tread of footsteps on the stairs. I replaced the

razor in its usual drawer, unfastened the door, and called loudly for

assistance.

‘They came, and raised her, and placed her on the bed. She lay bereft of

animation for hours; and when life, look, and speech returned, her

senses had deserted her, and she raved wildly and furiously.

‘Doctors were called in--great men who rolled up to my door in easy

carriages, with fine horses and gaudy servants. They were at her bedside

for weeks. They had a great meeting and consulted together in low and

solemn voices in another room. One, the cleverest and most celebrated

among them, took me aside, and bidding me prepare for the worst, told

me--me, the madman!--that my wife was mad. He stood close beside me at

an open window, his eyes looking in my face, and his hand laid upon my

arm. With one effort, I could have hurled him into the street beneath.

It would have been rare sport to have done it; but my secret was at

stake, and I let him go. A few days after, they told me I must place her

under some restraint: I must provide a keeper for her. I! I went into

the open fields where none could hear me, and laughed till the air

resounded with my shouts!

‘She died next day. The white-headed old man followed her to the grave,

and the proud brothers dropped a tear over the insensible corpse of her

whose sufferings they had regarded in her lifetime with muscles of iron.

All this was food for my secret mirth, and I laughed behind the white

handkerchief which I held up to my face, as we rode home, till the tears

came into my eyes.

‘But though I had carried my object and killed her, I was restless and

disturbed, and I felt that before long my secret must be known. I could

not hide the wild mirth and joy which boiled within me, and made me when

I was alone, at home, jump up and beat my hands together, and dance

round and round, and roar aloud. When I went out, and saw the busy

crowds hurrying about the streets; or to the theatre, and heard the

sound of music, and beheld the people dancing, I felt such glee, that I

could have rushed among them, and torn them to pieces limb from limb,

and howled in transport. But I ground my teeth, and struck my feet upon

the floor, and drove my sharp nails into my hands. I kept it down; and

no one knew I was a madman yet.

‘I remember--though it’s one of the last things I can remember: for now

I mix up realities with my dreams, and having so much to do, and being

always hurried here, have no time to separate the two, from some strange

confusion in which they get involved--I remember how I let it out at

last. Ha! ha! I think I see their frightened looks now, and feel the

ease with which I flung them from me, and dashed my clenched fist into

their white faces, and then flew like the wind, and left them screaming

and shouting far behind. The strength of a giant comes upon me when I

think of it. There--see how this iron bar bends beneath my furious

wrench. I could snap it like a twig, only there are long galleries here

with many doors--I don’t think I could find my way along them; and even

if I could, I know there are iron gates below which they keep locked and

barred. They know what a clever madman I have been, and they are proud

to have me here, to show.

‘Let me see: yes, I had been out. It was late at night when I reached

home, and found the proudest of the three proud brothers waiting to see

me--urgent business he said: I recollect it well. I hated that man with

all a madman’s hate. Many and many a time had my fingers longed to tear

him. They told me he was there. I ran swiftly upstairs. He had a word to

say to me. I dismissed the servants. It was late, and we were alone

together--for the first time.

‘I kept my eyes carefully from him at first, for I knew what he little

thought--and I gloried in the knowledge--that the light of madness

gleamed from them like fire. We sat in silence for a few minutes. He

spoke at last. My recent dissipation, and strange remarks, made so soon

after his sister’s death, were an insult to her memory. Coupling

together many circumstances which had at first escaped his observation,

he thought I had not treated her well. He wished to know whether he was

right in inferring that I meant to cast a reproach upon her memory, and

a disrespect upon her family. It was due to the uniform he wore, to

demand this explanation.

‘This man had a commission in the army--a commission, purchased with my

money, and his sister’s misery! This was the man who had been foremost

in the plot to ensnare me, and grasp my wealth. This was the man who had

been the main instrument in forcing his sister to wed me; well knowing

that her heart was given to that puling boy. Due to his uniform! The

livery of his degradation! I turned my eyes upon him--I could not help

it--but I spoke not a word.

‘I saw the sudden change that came upon him beneath my gaze. He was a

bold man, but the colour faded from his face, and he drew back his

chair. I dragged mine nearer to him; and I laughed--I was very merry

then--I saw him shudder. I felt the madness rising within me. He was

afraid of me.

‘“You were very fond of your sister when she was alive,” I said.--

“Very.”

‘He looked uneasily round him, and I saw his hand grasp the back of his

chair; but he said nothing.

‘“You villain,” said I, “I found you out: I discovered your hellish

plots against me; I know her heart was fixed on some one else before you

compelled her to marry me. I know it--I know it.”

‘He jumped suddenly from his chair, brandished it aloft, and bid me

stand back--for I took care to be getting closer to him all the time I

spoke.

‘I screamed rather than talked, for I felt tumultuous passions eddying

through my veins, and the old spirits whispering and taunting me to tear

his heart out.

‘“Damn you,” said I, starting up, and rushing upon him; “I killed her. I

am a madman. Down with you. Blood, blood! I will have it!”

‘I turned aside with one blow the chair he hurled at me in his terror,

and closed with him; and with a heavy crash we rolled upon the floor

together.

‘It was a fine struggle that; for he was a tall, strong man, fighting

for his life; and I, a powerful madman, thirsting to destroy him. I knew

no strength could equal mine, and I was right. Right again, though a

madman! His struggles grew fainter. I knelt upon his chest, and clasped

his brawny throat firmly with both hands. His face grew purple; his eyes

were starting from his head, and with protruded tongue, he seemed to

mock me. I squeezed the tighter.

‘The door was suddenly burst open with a loud noise, and a crowd of

people rushed forward, crying aloud to each other to secure the madman.

‘My secret was out; and my only struggle now was for liberty and

freedom. I gained my feet before a hand was on me, threw myself among my

assailants, and cleared my way with my strong arm, as if I bore a

hatchet in my hand, and hewed them down before me. I gained the door,

dropped over the banisters, and in an instant was in the street.

‘Straight and swift I ran, and no one dared to stop me. I heard the

noise of the feet behind, and redoubled my speed. It grew fainter and

fainter in the distance, and at length died away altogether; but on I

bounded, through marsh and rivulet, over fence and wall, with a wild

shout which was taken up by the strange beings that flocked around me on

every side, and swelled the sound, till it pierced the air. I was borne

upon the arms of demons who swept along upon the wind, and bore down

bank and hedge before them, and spun me round and round with a rustle

and a speed that made my head swim, until at last they threw me from

them with a violent shock, and I fell heavily upon the earth. When I

woke I found myself here--here in this gray cell, where the sunlight

seldom comes, and the moon steals in, in rays which only serve to show

the dark shadows about me, and that silent figure in its old corner.

When I lie awake, I can sometimes hear strange shrieks and cries from

distant parts of this large place. What they are, I know not; but they

neither come from that pale form, nor does it regard them. For from the

first shades of dusk till the earliest light of morning, it still stands

motionless in the same place, listening to the music of my iron chain,

and watching my gambols on my straw bed.’

At the end of the manuscript was written, in another hand, this note:--

[The unhappy man whose ravings are recorded above, was a melancholy

instance of the baneful results of energies misdirected in early life,

and excesses prolonged until their consequences could never be repaired.

The thoughtless riot, dissipation, and debauchery of his younger days

produced fever and delirium. The first effects of the latter was the

strange delusion, founded upon a well-known medical theory, strongly

contended for by some, and as strongly contested by others, that an

hereditary madness existed in his family. This produced a settled gloom,

which in time developed a morbid insanity, and finally terminated in

raving madness. There is every reason to believe that the events he

detailed, though distorted in the description by his diseased

imagination, really happened. It is only matter of wonder to those who

were acquainted with the vices of his early career, that his passions,

when no longer controlled by reason, did not lead him to the commission

of still more frightful deeds.]

Mr. Pickwick’s candle was just expiring in the socket, as he concluded

the perusal of the old clergyman’s manuscript; and when the light went

suddenly out, without any previous flicker by way of warning, it

communicated a very considerable start to his excited frame. Hastily

throwing off such articles of clothing as he had put on when he rose

from his uneasy bed, and casting a fearful glance around, he once more

scrambled hastily between the sheets, and soon fell fast asleep.

The sun was shining brilliantly into his chamber, when he awoke, and the

morning was far advanced. The gloom which had oppressed him on the

previous night had disappeared with the dark shadows which shrouded the

landscape, and his thoughts and feelings were as light and gay as the

morning itself. After a hearty breakfast, the four gentlemen sallied

forth to walk to Gravesend, followed by a man bearing the stone in its

deal box. They reached the town about one o’clock (their luggage they

had directed to be forwarded to the city, from Rochester), and being

fortunate enough to secure places on the outside of a coach, arrived in

London in sound health and spirits, on that same afternoon.

The next three or four days were occupied with the preparations which

were necessary for their journey to the borough of Eatanswill. As any

references to that most important undertaking demands a separate

chapter, we may devote the few lines which remain at the close of this,

to narrate, with great brevity, the history of the antiquarian

discovery.

It appears from the Transactions of the Club, then, that Mr. Pickwick

lectured upon the discovery at a General Club Meeting, convened on the

night succeeding their return, and entered into a variety of ingenious

and erudite speculations on the meaning of the inscription. It also

appears that a skilful artist executed a faithful delineation of the

curiosity, which was engraven on stone, and presented to the Royal

Antiquarian Society, and other learned bodies: that heart-burnings and

jealousies without number were created by rival controversies which were

penned upon the subject; and that Mr. Pickwick himself wrote a pamphlet,

containing ninety-six pages of very small print, and twenty-seven

different readings of the inscription: that three old gentlemen cut off

their eldest sons with a shilling a-piece for presuming to doubt the

antiquity of the fragment; and that one enthusiastic individual cut

himself off prematurely, in despair at being unable to fathom its

meaning: that Mr. Pickwick was elected an honorary member of seventeen

native and foreign societies, for making the discovery: that none of the

seventeen could make anything of it; but that all the seventeen agreed

it was very extraordinary.

Mr. Blotton, indeed--and the name will be doomed to the undying contempt

of those who cultivate the mysterious and the sublime--Mr. Blotton, we

say, with the doubt and cavilling peculiar to vulgar minds, presumed to

state a view of the case, as degrading as ridiculous. Mr. Blotton, with

a mean desire to tarnish the lustre of the immortal name of Pickwick,

actually undertook a journey to Cobham in person, and on his return,

sarcastically observed in an oration at the club, that he had seen the

man from whom the stone was purchased; that the man presumed the stone

to be ancient, but solemnly denied the antiquity of the inscription--

inasmuch as he represented it to have been rudely carved by himself in

an idle mood, and to display letters intended to bear neither more or

less than the simple construction of--‘BILL STUMPS, HIS MARK’; and that

Mr. Stumps, being little in the habit of original composition, and more

accustomed to be guided by the sound of words than by the strict rules

of orthography, had omitted the concluding ‘L’ of his Christian name.

The Pickwick Club (as might have been expected from so enlightened an

institution) received this statement with the contempt it deserved,

expelled the presumptuous and ill-conditioned Blotton from the society,

and voted Mr. Pickwick a pair of gold spectacles, in token of their

confidence and approbation: in return for which, Mr. Pickwick caused a

portrait of himself to be painted, and hung up in the club room.

Mr. Blotton was ejected but not conquered. He also wrote a pamphlet,

addressed to the seventeen learned societies, native and foreign,

containing a repetition of the statement he had already made, and rather

more than half intimating his opinion that the seventeen learned

societies were so many ‘humbugs.’ Hereupon, the virtuous indignation of

the seventeen learned societies being roused, several fresh pamphlets

appeared; the foreign learned societies corresponded with the native

learned societies; the native learned societies translated the pamphlets

of the foreign learned societies into English; the foreign learned

societies translated the pamphlets of the native learned societies into

all sorts of languages; and thus commenced that celebrated scientific

discussion so well known to all men, as the Pickwick controversy.

But this base attempt to injure Mr. Pickwick recoiled upon the head of

its calumnious author. The seventeen learned societies unanimously voted

the presumptuous Blotton an ignorant meddler, and forthwith set to work

upon more treatises than ever. And to this day the stone remains, an

illegible monument of Mr. Pickwick’s greatness, and a lasting trophy to

the littleness of his enemies.

CHAPTER XII. DESCRIPTIVE OF A VERY IMPORTANT PROCEEDING ON THE PART OF

MR. PICKWICK; NO LESS AN EPOCH IN HIS LIFE, THAN IN THIS HISTORY

Mr. Pickwick’s apartments in Goswell Street, although on a limited

scale, were not only of a very neat and comfortable description, but

peculiarly adapted for the residence of a man of his genius and

observation. His sitting-room was the first-floor front, his bedroom the

second-floor front; and thus, whether he were sitting at his desk in his

parlour, or standing before the dressing-glass in his dormitory, he had

an equal opportunity of contemplating human nature in all the numerous

phases it exhibits, in that not more populous than popular thoroughfare.

His landlady, Mrs. Bardell--the relict and sole executrix of a deceased

custom-house officer--was a comely woman of bustling manners and

agreeable appearance, with a natural genius for cooking, improved by

study and long practice, into an exquisite talent. There were no

children, no servants, no fowls. The only other inmates of the house

were a large man and a small boy; the first a lodger, the second a

production of Mrs. Bardell’s. The large man was always home precisely at

ten o’clock at night, at which hour he regularly condensed himself into

the limits of a dwarfish French bedstead in the back parlour; and the

infantine sports and gymnastic exercises of Master Bardell were

exclusively confined to the neighbouring pavements and gutters.

Cleanliness and quiet reigned throughout the house; and in it Mr.

Pickwick’s will was law.

To any one acquainted with these points of the domestic economy of the

establishment, and conversant with the admirable regulation of Mr.

Pickwick’s mind, his appearance and behaviour on the morning previous to

that which had been fixed upon for the journey to Eatanswill would have

been most mysterious and unaccountable. He paced the room to and fro

with hurried steps, popped his head out of the window at intervals of

about three minutes each, constantly referred to his watch, and

exhibited many other manifestations of impatience very unusual with him.

It was evident that something of great importance was in contemplation,

but what that something was, not even Mrs. Bardell had been enabled to

discover.

‘Mrs. Bardell,’ said Mr. Pickwick, at last, as that amiable female

approached the termination of a prolonged dusting of the apartment.

‘Sir,’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘Your little boy is a very long time gone.’

‘Why it’s a good long way to the Borough, sir,’ remonstrated Mrs.

Bardell.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘very true; so it is.’ Mr. Pickwick relapsed

into silence, and Mrs. Bardell resumed her dusting.

‘Mrs. Bardell,’ said Mr. Pickwick, at the expiration of a few minutes.

‘Sir,’ said Mrs. Bardell again.

‘Do you think it a much greater expense to keep two people, than to keep

one?’

‘La, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell, colouring up to the very border

of her cap, as she fancied she observed a species of matrimonial twinkle

in the eyes of her lodger; ‘La, Mr. Pickwick, what a question!’

‘Well, but do you?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘That depends,’ said Mrs. Bardell, approaching the duster very near to

Mr. Pickwick’s elbow which was planted on the table. ‘That depends a

good deal upon the person, you know, Mr. Pickwick; and whether it’s a

saving and careful person, sir.’

‘That’s very true,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘but the person I have in my eye

(here he looked very hard at Mrs. Bardell) I think possesses these

qualities; and has, moreover, a considerable knowledge of the world, and

a great deal of sharpness, Mrs. Bardell, which may be of material use to

me.’

‘La, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell, the crimson rising to her cap-

border again.

‘I do,’ said Mr. Pickwick, growing energetic, as was his wont in

speaking of a subject which interested him--‘I do, indeed; and to tell

you the truth, Mrs. Bardell, I have made up my mind.’

‘Dear me, sir,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

‘You’ll think it very strange now,’ said the amiable Mr. Pickwick, with

a good-humoured glance at his companion, ‘that I never consulted you

about this matter, and never even mentioned it, till I sent your little

boy out this morning--eh?’

Mrs. Bardell could only reply by a look. She had long worshipped Mr.

Pickwick at a distance, but here she was, all at once, raised to a

pinnacle to which her wildest and most extravagant hopes had never dared

to aspire. Mr. Pickwick was going to propose--a deliberate plan, too--

sent her little boy to the Borough, to get him out of the way--how

thoughtful--how considerate!

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘what do you think?’

‘Oh, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Bardell, trembling with agitation, ‘you’re

very kind, sir.’

‘It’ll save you a good deal of trouble, won’t it?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, I never thought anything of the trouble, sir,’ replied Mrs.

Bardell; ‘and, of course, I should take more trouble to please you then,

than ever; but it is so kind of you, Mr. Pickwick, to have so much

consideration for my loneliness.’

‘Ah, to be sure,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I never thought of that. When I am

in town, you’ll always have somebody to sit with you. To be sure, so you

will.’

‘I am sure I ought to be a very happy woman,’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘And your little boy--’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Bless his heart!’ interposed Mrs. Bardell, with a maternal sob.

‘He, too, will have a companion,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick, ‘a lively one,

who’ll teach him, I’ll be bound, more tricks in a week than he would

ever learn in a year.’ And Mr. Pickwick smiled placidly.

‘Oh, you dear--’ said Mrs. Bardell.

Mr. Pickwick started.

‘Oh, you kind, good, playful dear,’ said Mrs. Bardell; and without more

ado, she rose from her chair, and flung her arms round Mr. Pickwick’s

neck, with a cataract of tears and a chorus of sobs.

‘Bless my soul,’ cried the astonished Mr. Pickwick; ‘Mrs. Bardell, my

good woman--dear me, what a situation--pray consider.--Mrs. Bardell,

don’t--if anybody should come--’

‘Oh, let them come,’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell frantically; ‘I’ll never

leave you--dear, kind, good soul;’ and, with these words, Mrs. Bardell

clung the tighter.

‘Mercy upon me,’ said Mr. Pickwick, struggling violently, ‘I hear

somebody coming up the stairs. Don’t, don’t, there’s a good creature,

don’t.’ But entreaty and remonstrance were alike unavailing; for Mrs.

Bardell had fainted in Mr. Pickwick’s arms; and before he could gain

time to deposit her on a chair, Master Bardell entered the room,

ushering in Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Pickwick was struck motionless and speechless. He stood with his

lovely burden in his arms, gazing vacantly on the countenances of his

friends, without the slightest attempt at recognition or explanation.

They, in their turn, stared at him; and Master Bardell, in his turn,

stared at everybody.

The astonishment of the Pickwickians was so absorbing, and the

perplexity of Mr. Pickwick was so extreme, that they might have remained

in exactly the same relative situations until the suspended animation of

the lady was restored, had it not been for a most beautiful and touching

expression of filial affection on the part of her youthful son. Clad in

a tight suit of corduroy, spangled with brass buttons of a very

considerable size, he at first stood at the door astounded and

uncertain; but by degrees, the impression that his mother must have

suffered some personal damage pervaded his partially developed mind, and

considering Mr. Pickwick as the aggressor, he set up an appalling and

semi-earthly kind of howling, and butting forward with his head,

commenced assailing that immortal gentleman about the back and legs,

with such blows and pinches as the strength of his arm, and the violence

of his excitement, allowed.

‘Take this little villain away,’ said the agonised Mr. Pickwick, ‘he’s

mad.’

‘What is the matter?’ said the three tongue-tied Pickwickians.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Pickwick pettishly. ‘Take away the boy.’

(Here Mr. Winkle carried the interesting boy, screaming and struggling,

to the farther end of the apartment.) ‘Now help me, lead this woman

downstairs.’

‘Oh, I am better now,’ said Mrs. Bardell faintly.

‘Let me lead you downstairs,’ said the ever-gallant Mr. Tupman.

‘Thank you, sir--thank you;’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell hysterically. And

downstairs she was led accordingly, accompanied by her affectionate son.

‘I cannot conceive,’ said Mr. Pickwick when his friend returned--‘I

cannot conceive what has been the matter with that woman. I had merely

announced to her my intention of keeping a man-servant, when she fell

into the extraordinary paroxysm in which you found her. Very

extraordinary thing.’

‘Very,’ said his three friends.

‘Placed me in such an extremely awkward situation,’ continued Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Very,’ was the reply of his followers, as they coughed slightly, and

looked dubiously at each other.

This behaviour was not lost upon Mr. Pickwick. He remarked their

incredulity. They evidently suspected him.

‘There is a man in the passage now,’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘It’s the man I spoke to you about,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I sent for him

to the Borough this morning. Have the goodness to call him up,

Snodgrass.’

Mr. Snodgrass did as he was desired; and Mr. Samuel Weller forthwith

presented himself.

‘Oh--you remember me, I suppose?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I should think so,’ replied Sam, with a patronising wink. ‘Queer start

that ‘ere, but he was one too many for you, warn’t he? Up to snuff and a

pinch or two over--eh?’

‘Never mind that matter now,’ said Mr. Pickwick hastily; ‘I want to

speak to you about something else. Sit down.’

‘Thank’ee, sir,’ said Sam. And down he sat without further bidding,

having previously deposited his old white hat on the landing outside the

door. ‘’Tain’t a wery good ‘un to look at,’ said Sam, ‘but it’s an

astonishin’ ‘un to wear; and afore the brim went, it was a wery handsome

tile. Hows’ever it’s lighter without it, that’s one thing, and every

hole lets in some air, that’s another--wentilation gossamer I calls it.’

On the delivery of this sentiment, Mr. Weller smiled agreeably upon the

assembled Pickwickians.

‘Now with regard to the matter on which I, with the concurrence of these

gentlemen, sent for you,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘That’s the pint, sir,’ interposed Sam; ‘out vith it, as the father said

to his child, when he swallowed a farden.’

‘We want to know, in the first place,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘whether you

have any reason to be discontented with your present situation.’

‘Afore I answers that ‘ere question, gen’l’m’n,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘I

should like to know, in the first place, whether you’re a-goin’ to

purwide me with a better?’

A sunbeam of placid benevolence played on Mr. Pickwick’s features as he

said, ‘I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.’

‘Have you, though?’ said Sam.

Mr. Pickwick nodded in the affirmative.

‘Wages?’ inquired Sam.

‘Twelve pounds a year,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Clothes?’

‘Two suits.’

‘Work?’

‘To attend upon me; and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.’

‘Take the bill down,’ said Sam emphatically. ‘I’m let to a single

gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.’

‘You accept the situation?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Cert’nly,’ replied Sam. ‘If the clothes fits me half as well as the

place, they’ll do.’

‘You can get a character of course?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ask the landlady o’ the White Hart about that, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘Can you come this evening?’

‘I’ll get into the clothes this minute, if they’re here,’ said Sam, with

great alacrity.

‘Call at eight this evening,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘and if the inquiries

are satisfactory, they shall be provided.’

With the single exception of one amiable indiscretion, in which an

assistant housemaid had equally participated, the history of Mr.

Weller’s conduct was so very blameless, that Mr. Pickwick felt fully

justified in closing the engagement that very evening. With the

promptness and energy which characterised not only the public

proceedings, but all the private actions of this extraordinary man, he

at once led his new attendant to one of those convenient emporiums where

gentlemen’s new and second-hand clothes are provided, and the

troublesome and inconvenient formality of measurement dispensed with;

and before night had closed in, Mr. Weller was furnished with a grey

coat with the P. C. button, a black hat with a cockade to it, a pink

striped waistcoat, light breeches and gaiters, and a variety of other

necessaries, too numerous to recapitulate.

‘Well,’ said that suddenly-transformed individual, as he took his seat

on the outside of the Eatanswill coach next morning; ‘I wonder whether

I’m meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a gamekeeper, or a seedsman. I

looks like a sort of compo of every one on ‘em. Never mind; there’s a

change of air, plenty to see, and little to do; and all this suits my

complaint uncommon; so long life to the Pickvicks, says I!’

CHAPTER XIII. SOME ACCOUNT OF EATANSWILL; OF THE STATE OF PARTIES

THEREIN; AND OF THE ELECTION OF A MEMBER TO SERVE IN PARLIAMENT FOR THAT

ANCIENT, LOYAL, AND PATRIOTIC BOROUGH

We will frankly acknowledge that, up to the period of our being first

immersed in the voluminous papers of the Pickwick Club, we had never

heard of Eatanswill; we will with equal candour admit that we have in

vain searched for proof of the actual existence of such a place at the

present day. Knowing the deep reliance to be placed on every note and

statement of Mr. Pickwick’s, and not presuming to set up our

recollection against the recorded declarations of that great man, we

have consulted every authority, bearing upon the subject, to which we

could possibly refer. We have traced every name in schedules A and B,

without meeting with that of Eatanswill; we have minutely examined every

corner of the pocket county maps issued for the benefit of society by

our distinguished publishers, and the same result has attended our

investigation. We are therefore led to believe that Mr. Pickwick, with

that anxious desire to abstain from giving offence to any, and with

those delicate feelings for which all who knew him well know he was so

eminently remarkable, purposely substituted a fictitious designation,

for the real name of the place in which his observations were made. We

are confirmed in this belief by a little circumstance, apparently slight

and trivial in itself, but when considered in this point of view, not

undeserving of notice. In Mr. Pickwick’s note-book, we can just trace an

entry of the fact, that the places of himself and followers were booked

by the Norwich coach; but this entry was afterwards lined through, as if

for the purpose of concealing even the direction in which the borough is

situated. We will not, therefore, hazard a guess upon the subject, but

will at once proceed with this history, content with the materials which

its characters have provided for us.

It appears, then, that the Eatanswill people, like the people of many

other small towns, considered themselves of the utmost and most mighty

importance, and that every man in Eatanswill, conscious of the weight

that attached to his example, felt himself bound to unite, heart and

soul, with one of the two great parties that divided the town--the Blues

and the Buffs. Now the Blues lost no opportunity of opposing the Buffs,

and the Buffs lost no opportunity of opposing the Blues; and the

consequence was, that whenever the Buffs and Blues met together at

public meeting, town-hall, fair, or market, disputes and high words

arose between them. With these dissensions it is almost superfluous to

say that everything in Eatanswill was made a party question. If the

Buffs proposed to new skylight the market-place, the Blues got up public

meetings, and denounced the proceeding; if the Blues proposed the

erection of an additional pump in the High Street, the Buffs rose as one

man and stood aghast at the enormity. There were Blue shops and Buff

shops, Blue inns and Buff inns--there was a Blue aisle and a Buff aisle

in the very church itself.

Of course it was essentially and indispensably necessary that each of

these powerful parties should have its chosen organ and representative:

and, accordingly, there were two newspapers in the town--the Eatanswill

\_Gazette\_ and the Eatanswill \_Independent\_; the former advocating Blue

principles, and the latter conducted on grounds decidedly Buff. Fine

newspapers they were. Such leading articles, and such spirited attacks!-

-’Our worthless contemporary, the \_Gazette\_’--‘That disgraceful and

dastardly journal, the \_Independent\_’--‘That false and scurrilous print,

the \_Independent\_’--‘That vile and slanderous calumniator, the

\_Gazette\_;’ these, and other spirit-stirring denunciations, were strewn

plentifully over the columns of each, in every number, and excited

feelings of the most intense delight and indignation in the bosoms of

the townspeople.

Mr. Pickwick, with his usual foresight and sagacity, had chosen a

peculiarly desirable moment for his visit to the borough. Never was such

a contest known. The Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, was the

Blue candidate; and Horatio Fizkin, Esq., of Fizkin Lodge, near

Eatanswill, had been prevailed upon by his friends to stand forward on

the Buff interest. The \_Gazette\_ warned the electors of Eatanswill that

the eyes not only of England, but of the whole civilised world, were

upon them; and the \_Independent\_ imperatively demanded to know, whether

the constituency of Eatanswill were the grand fellows they had always

taken them for, or base and servile tools, undeserving alike of the name

of Englishmen and the blessings of freedom. Never had such a commotion

agitated the town before.

It was late in the evening when Mr. Pickwick and his companions,

assisted by Sam, dismounted from the roof of the Eatanswill coach. Large

blue silk flags were flying from the windows of the Town Arms Inn, and

bills were posted in every sash, intimating, in gigantic letters, that

the Honourable Samuel Slumkey’s committee sat there daily. A crowd of

idlers were assembled in the road, looking at a hoarse man in the

balcony, who was apparently talking himself very red in the face in Mr.

Slumkey’s behalf; but the force and point of whose arguments were

somewhat impaired by the perpetual beating of four large drums which Mr.

Fizkin’s committee had stationed at the street corner. There was a busy

little man beside him, though, who took off his hat at intervals and

motioned to the people to cheer, which they regularly did, most

enthusiastically; and as the red-faced gentleman went on talking till he

was redder in the face than ever, it seemed to answer his purpose quite

as well as if anybody had heard him.

The Pickwickians had no sooner dismounted than they were surrounded by a

branch mob of the honest and independent, who forthwith set up three

deafening cheers, which being responded to by the main body (for it’s

not at all necessary for a crowd to know what they are cheering about),

swelled into a tremendous roar of triumph, which stopped even the red-

faced man in the balcony.

‘Hurrah!’ shouted the mob, in conclusion.

‘One cheer more,’ screamed the little fugleman in the balcony, and out

shouted the mob again, as if lungs were cast-iron, with steel works.

‘Slumkey for ever!’ roared the honest and independent.

‘Slumkey for ever!’ echoed Mr. Pickwick, taking off his hat.

‘No Fizkin!’ roared the crowd.

‘Certainly not!’ shouted Mr. Pickwick. ‘Hurrah!’ And then there was

another roaring, like that of a whole menagerie when the elephant has

rung the bell for the cold meat.

‘Who is Slumkey?’ whispered Mr. Tupman.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, in the same tone. ‘Hush. Don’t ask

any questions. It’s always best on these occasions to do what the mob

do.’

‘But suppose there are two mobs?’ suggested Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Shout with the largest,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

Volumes could not have said more.

They entered the house, the crowd opening right and left to let them

pass, and cheering vociferously. The first object of consideration was

to secure quarters for the night.

‘Can we have beds here?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, summoning the waiter.

‘Don’t know, Sir,’ replied the man; ‘afraid we’re full, sir--I’ll

inquire, Sir.’ Away he went for that purpose, and presently returned, to

ask whether the gentleman were ‘Blue.’

As neither Mr. Pickwick nor his companions took any vital interest in

the cause of either candidate, the question was rather a difficult one

to answer. In this dilemma Mr. Pickwick bethought himself of his new

friend, Mr. Perker.

‘Do you know a gentleman of the name of Perker?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Certainly, Sir; Honourable Mr. Samuel Slumkey’s agent.’

‘He is Blue, I think?’

‘Oh, yes, Sir.’

‘Then \_we\_ are Blue,’ said Mr. Pickwick; but observing that the man

looked rather doubtful at this accommodating announcement, he gave him

his card, and desired him to present it to Mr. Perker forthwith, if he

should happen to be in the house. The waiter retired; and reappearing

almost immediately with a request that Mr. Pickwick would follow him,

led the way to a large room on the first floor, where, seated at a long

table covered with books and papers, was Mr. Perker.

‘Ah--ah, my dear Sir,’ said the little man, advancing to meet him; ‘very

happy to see you, my dear Sir, very. Pray sit down. So you have carried

your intention into effect. You have come down here to see an election--

eh?’

Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.

‘Spirited contest, my dear sir,’ said the little man.

‘I’m delighted to hear it,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his hands. ‘I

like to see sturdy patriotism, on whatever side it is called forth--and

so it’s a spirited contest?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said the little man, ‘very much so indeed. We have opened all

the public-houses in the place, and left our adversary nothing but the

beer-shops--masterly stroke of policy that, my dear Sir, eh?’ The little

man smiled complacently, and took a large pinch of snuff.

‘And what are the probabilities as to the result of the contest?’

inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, doubtful, my dear Sir; rather doubtful as yet,’ replied the little

man. ‘Fizkin’s people have got three-and-thirty voters in the lock-up

coach-house at the White Hart.’

‘In the coach-house!’ said Mr. Pickwick, considerably astonished by this

second stroke of policy.

‘They keep ‘em locked up there till they want ‘em,’ resumed the little

man. ‘The effect of that is, you see, to prevent our getting at them;

and even if we could, it would be of no use, for they keep them very

drunk on purpose. Smart fellow Fizkin’s agent--very smart fellow

indeed.’

Mr. Pickwick stared, but said nothing.

‘We are pretty confident, though,’ said Mr. Perker, sinking his voice

almost to a whisper. ‘We had a little tea-party here, last night--five-

and-forty women, my dear sir--and gave every one of ‘em a green parasol

when she went away.’

‘A parasol!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Fact, my dear Sir, fact. Five-and-forty green parasols, at seven and

sixpence a-piece. All women like finery--extraordinary the effect of

those parasols. Secured all their husbands, and half their brothers--

beats stockings, and flannel, and all that sort of thing hollow. My

idea, my dear Sir, entirely. Hail, rain, or sunshine, you can’t walk

half a dozen yards up the street, without encountering half a dozen

green parasols.’

Here the little man indulged in a convulsion of mirth, which was only

checked by the entrance of a third party.

This was a tall, thin man, with a sandy-coloured head inclined to

baldness, and a face in which solemn importance was blended with a look

of unfathomable profundity. He was dressed in a long brown surtout, with

a black cloth waistcoat, and drab trousers. A double eyeglass dangled at

his waistcoat; and on his head he wore a very low-crowned hat with a

broad brim. The new-comer was introduced to Mr. Pickwick as Mr. Pott,

the editor of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_. After a few preliminary remarks,

Mr. Pott turned round to Mr. Pickwick, and said with solemnity--

‘This contest excites great interest in the metropolis, sir?’

‘I believe it does,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘To which I have reason to know,’ said Pott, looking towards Mr. Perker

for corroboration--‘to which I have reason to know that my article of

last Saturday in some degree contributed.’

‘Not the least doubt of it,’ said the little man.

‘The press is a mighty engine, sir,’ said Pott.

Mr. Pickwick yielded his fullest assent to the proposition.

‘But I trust, sir,’ said Pott, ‘that I have never abused the enormous

power I wield. I trust, sir, that I have never pointed the noble

instrument which is placed in my hands, against the sacred bosom of

private life, or the tender breast of individual reputation; I trust,

sir, that I have devoted my energies to--to endeavours--humble they may

be, humble I know they are--to instil those principles of--which--are--’

Here the editor of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, appearing to ramble, Mr.

Pickwick came to his relief, and said--

‘Certainly.’

‘And what, Sir,’ said Pott--‘what, Sir, let me ask you as an impartial

man, is the state of the public mind in London, with reference to my

contest with the \_Independent\_?’

‘Greatly excited, no doubt,’ interposed Mr. Perker, with a look of

slyness which was very likely accidental.

‘The contest,’ said Pott, ‘shall be prolonged so long as I have health

and strength, and that portion of talent with which I am gifted. From

that contest, Sir, although it may unsettle men’s minds and excite their

feelings, and render them incapable for the discharge of the everyday

duties of ordinary life; from that contest, sir, I will never shrink,

till I have set my heel upon the Eatanswill \_Independent\_. I wish the

people of London, and the people of this country to know, sir, that they

may rely upon me--that I will not desert them, that I am resolved to

stand by them, Sir, to the last.’

Your conduct is most noble, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick; and he grasped the

hand of the magnanimous Pott.

‘You are, sir, I perceive, a man of sense and talent,’ said Mr. Pott,

almost breathless with the vehemence of his patriotic declaration. ‘I am

most happy, sir, to make the acquaintance of such a man.’

‘And I,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘feel deeply honoured by this expression of

your opinion. Allow me, sir, to introduce you to my fellow-travellers,

the other corresponding members of the club I am proud to have founded.’

‘I shall be delighted,’ said Mr. Pott.

Mr. Pickwick withdrew, and returning with his friends, presented them in

due form to the editor of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_.

‘Now, my dear Pott,’ said little Mr. Perker, ‘the question is, what are

we to do with our friends here?’

‘We can stop in this house, I suppose,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not a spare bed in the house, my dear sir--not a single bed.’

‘Extremely awkward,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Very,’ said his fellow-voyagers.

‘I have an idea upon this subject,’ said Mr. Pott, ‘which I think may be

very successfully adopted. They have two beds at the Peacock, and I can

boldly say, on behalf of Mrs. Pott, that she will be delighted to

accommodate Mr. Pickwick and any one of his friends, if the other two

gentlemen and their servant do not object to shifting, as they best can,

at the Peacock.’

After repeated pressings on the part of Mr. Pott, and repeated

protestations on that of Mr. Pickwick that he could not think of

incommoding or troubling his amiable wife, it was decided that it was

the only feasible arrangement that could be made. So it \_was \_made; and

after dinner together at the Town Arms, the friends separated, Mr.

Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass repairing to the Peacock, and Mr. Pickwick and

Mr. Winkle proceeding to the mansion of Mr. Pott; it having been

previously arranged that they should all reassemble at the Town Arms in

the morning, and accompany the Honourable Samuel Slumkey’s procession to

the place of nomination.

Mr. Pott’s domestic circle was limited to himself and his wife. All men

whom mighty genius has raised to a proud eminence in the world, have

usually some little weakness which appears the more conspicuous from the

contrast it presents to their general character. If Mr. Pott had a

weakness, it was, perhaps, that he was rather too submissive to the

somewhat contemptuous control and sway of his wife. We do not feel

justified in laying any particular stress upon the fact, because on the

present occasion all Mrs. Pott’s most winning ways were brought into

requisition to receive the two gentlemen.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Pott, ‘Mr. Pickwick--Mr. Pickwick of London.’

Mrs. Pott received Mr. Pickwick’s paternal grasp of the hand with

enchanting sweetness; and Mr. Winkle, who had not been announced at all,

sidled and bowed, unnoticed, in an obscure corner.

‘P. my dear’--said Mrs. Pott.

‘My life,’ said Mr. Pott.

‘Pray introduce the other gentleman.’

‘I beg a thousand pardons,’ said Mr. Pott. ‘Permit me, Mrs. Pott, Mr.--’

‘Winkle,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Winkle,’ echoed Mr. Pott; and the ceremony of introduction was

complete.

‘We owe you many apologies, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘for disturbing

your domestic arrangements at so short a notice.’

‘I beg you won’t mention it, sir,’ replied the feminine Pott, with

vivacity. ‘It is a high treat to me, I assure you, to see any new faces;

living as I do, from day to day, and week to week, in this dull place,

and seeing nobody.’

‘Nobody, my dear!’ exclaimed Mr. Pott archly.

‘Nobody but you,’ retorted Mrs. Pott, with asperity.

‘You see, Mr. Pickwick,’ said the host in explanation of his wife’s

lament, ‘that we are in some measure cut off from many enjoyments and

pleasures of which we might otherwise partake. My public station, as

editor of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, the position which that paper holds

in the country, my constant immersion in the vortex of politics--’

‘P. my dear--’ interposed Mrs. Pott.

‘My life--’ said the editor.

‘I wish, my dear, you would endeavour to find some topic of conversation

in which these gentlemen might take some rational interest.’

‘But, my love,’ said Mr. Pott, with great humility, ‘Mr. Pickwick does

take an interest in it.’

‘It’s well for him if he can,’ said Mrs. Pott emphatically; ‘I am

wearied out of my life with your politics, and quarrels with the

\_Independent\_, and nonsense. I am quite astonished, P., at your making

such an exhibition of your absurdity.’

‘But, my dear--’ said Mr. Pott.

‘Oh, nonsense, don’t talk to me,’ said Mrs. Pott. ‘Do you play ecarte,

Sir?’

‘I shall be very happy to learn under your tuition,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘Well, then, draw that little table into this window, and let me get out

of hearing of those prosy politics.’

‘Jane,’ said Mr. Pott, to the servant who brought in candles, ‘go down

into the office, and bring me up the file of the \_Gazette\_ for eighteen

hundred and twenty-six. I’ll read you,’ added the editor, turning to Mr.

Pickwick--‘I’ll just read you a few of the leaders I wrote at that time

upon the Buff job of appointing a new tollman to the turnpike here; I

rather think they’ll amuse you.’

‘I should like to hear them very much indeed,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Up came the file, and down sat the editor, with Mr. Pickwick at his

side.

We have in vain pored over the leaves of Mr. Pickwick’s note-book, in

the hope of meeting with a general summary of these beautiful

compositions. We have every reason to believe that he was perfectly

enraptured with the vigour and freshness of the style; indeed Mr. Winkle

has recorded the fact that his eyes were closed, as if with excess of

pleasure, during the whole time of their perusal.

The announcement of supper put a stop both to the game of ecarte, and

the recapitulation of the beauties of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_. Mrs.

Pott was in the highest spirits and the most agreeable humour. Mr.

Winkle had already made considerable progress in her good opinion, and

she did not hesitate to inform him, confidentially, that Mr. Pickwick

was ‘a delightful old dear.’ These terms convey a familiarity of

expression, in which few of those who were intimately acquainted with

that colossal-minded man, would have presumed to indulge. We have

preserved them, nevertheless, as affording at once a touching and a

convincing proof of the estimation in which he was held by every class

of society, and the ease with which he made his way to their hearts and

feelings.

It was a late hour of the night--long after Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass

had fallen asleep in the inmost recesses of the Peacock--when the two

friends retired to rest. Slumber soon fell upon the senses of Mr.

Winkle, but his feelings had been excited, and his admiration roused;

and for many hours after sleep had rendered him insensible to earthly

objects, the face and figure of the agreeable Mrs. Pott presented

themselves again and again to his wandering imagination.

The noise and bustle which ushered in the morning were sufficient to

dispel from the mind of the most romantic visionary in existence, any

associations but those which were immediately connected with the

rapidly-approaching election. The beating of drums, the blowing of horns

and trumpets, the shouting of men, and tramping of horses, echoed and

re-echoed through the streets from the earliest dawn of day; and an

occasional fight between the light skirmishers of either party at once

enlivened the preparations, and agreeably diversified their character.

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as his valet appeared at his bedroom

door, just as he was concluding his toilet; ‘all alive to-day, I

suppose?’

‘Reg’lar game, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘our people’s a-collecting down

at the Town Arms, and they’re a-hollering themselves hoarse already.’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘do they seem devoted to their party, Sam?’

‘Never see such dewotion in my life, Sir.’

‘Energetic, eh?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Uncommon,’ replied Sam; ‘I never see men eat and drink so much afore. I

wonder they ain’t afeer’d o’ bustin’.’

‘That’s the mistaken kindness of the gentry here,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wery likely,’ replied Sam briefly.

‘Fine, fresh, hearty fellows they seem,’ said Mr. Pickwick, glancing

from the window.

‘Wery fresh,’ replied Sam; ‘me and the two waiters at the Peacock has

been a-pumpin’ over the independent woters as supped there last night.’

‘Pumping over independent voters!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes,’ said his attendant, ‘every man slept vere he fell down; we

dragged ‘em out, one by one, this mornin’, and put ‘em under the pump,

and they’re in reg’lar fine order now. Shillin’ a head the committee

paid for that ‘ere job.’

‘Can such things be!’ exclaimed the astonished Mr. Pickwick.

‘Lord bless your heart, sir,’ said Sam, ‘why where was you half

baptised?--that’s nothin’, that ain’t.’

‘Nothing?’said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Nothin’ at all, Sir,’ replied his attendant. ‘The night afore the last

day o’ the last election here, the opposite party bribed the barmaid at

the Town Arms, to hocus the brandy-and-water of fourteen unpolled

electors as was a-stoppin’ in the house.’

‘What do you mean by “hocussing” brandy-and-water?’ inquired Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Puttin’ laud’num in it,’ replied Sam. ‘Blessed if she didn’t send ‘em

all to sleep till twelve hours arter the election was over. They took

one man up to the booth, in a truck, fast asleep, by way of experiment,

but it was no go--they wouldn’t poll him; so they brought him back, and

put him to bed again.’

Strange practices, these,’ said Mr. Pickwick; half speaking to himself

and half addressing Sam.

‘Not half so strange as a miraculous circumstance as happened to my own

father, at an election time, in this wery place, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘What was that?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, he drove a coach down here once,’ said Sam; ‘’lection time came

on, and he was engaged by vun party to bring down woters from London.

Night afore he was going to drive up, committee on t’ other side sends

for him quietly, and away he goes vith the messenger, who shows him in;-

-large room--lots of gen’l’m’n--heaps of papers, pens and ink, and all

that ‘ere. “Ah, Mr. Weller,” says the gen’l’m’n in the chair, “glad to

see you, sir; how are you?”--“Wery well, thank ‘ee, Sir,” says my

father; “I hope you’re pretty middlin,” says he.--“Pretty well,

thank’ee, Sir,” says the gen’l’m’n; “sit down, Mr. Weller--pray sit

down, sir.” So my father sits down, and he and the gen’l’m’n looks wery

hard at each other. “You don’t remember me?” said the gen’l’m’n.--“Can’t

say I do,” says my father.--“Oh, I know you,” says the gen’l’m’n:

“know’d you when you was a boy,” says he.--“Well, I don’t remember you,”

says my father.--“That’s wery odd,” says the gen’l’m’n.”--“Wery,” says

my father.--“You must have a bad mem’ry, Mr. Weller,” says the

gen’l’m’n.--“Well, it is a wery bad ‘un,” says my father.--“I thought

so,” says the gen’l’m’n. So then they pours him out a glass of wine, and

gammons him about his driving, and gets him into a reg’lar good humour,

and at last shoves a twenty-pound note into his hand. “It’s a wery bad

road between this and London,” says the gen’l’m’n.--“Here and there it

is a heavy road,” says my father.--” ‘Specially near the canal, I

think,” says the gen’l’m’n.--“Nasty bit that ‘ere,” says my father.--

“Well, Mr. Weller,” says the gen’l’m’n, “you’re a wery good whip, and

can do what you like with your horses, we know. We’re all wery fond o’

you, Mr. Weller, so in case you should have an accident when you’re

bringing these here woters down, and should tip ‘em over into the canal

vithout hurtin’ of ‘em, this is for yourself,” says he.--“Gen’l’m’n,

you’re wery kind,” says my father, “and I’ll drink your health in

another glass of wine,” says he; vich he did, and then buttons up the

money, and bows himself out. You wouldn’t believe, sir,’ continued Sam,

with a look of inexpressible impudence at his master, ‘that on the wery

day as he came down with them woters, his coach \_was \_upset on that ‘ere

wery spot, and ev’ry man on ‘em was turned into the canal.’

‘And got out again?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick hastily.

‘Why,’ replied Sam very slowly, ‘I rather think one old gen’l’m’n was

missin’; I know his hat was found, but I ain’t quite certain whether his

head was in it or not. But what I look at is the hex-traordinary and

wonderful coincidence, that arter what that gen’l’m’n said, my father’s

coach should be upset in that wery place, and on that wery day!’

‘It is, no doubt, a very extraordinary circumstance indeed,’ said Mr.

Pickwick. ‘But brush my hat, Sam, for I hear Mr. Winkle calling me to

breakfast.’

With these words Mr. Pickwick descended to the parlour, where he found

breakfast laid, and the family already assembled. The meal was hastily

despatched; each of the gentlemen’s hats was decorated with an enormous

blue favour, made up by the fair hands of Mrs. Pott herself; and as Mr.

Winkle had undertaken to escort that lady to a house-top, in the

immediate vicinity of the hustings, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Pott repaired

alone to the Town Arms, from the back window of which, one of Mr.

Slumkey’s committee was addressing six small boys and one girl, whom he

dignified, at every second sentence, with the imposing title of ‘Men of

Eatanswill,’ whereat the six small boys aforesaid cheered prodigiously.

The stable-yard exhibited unequivocal symptoms of the glory and strength

of the Eatanswill Blues. There was a regular army of blue flags, some

with one handle, and some with two, exhibiting appropriate devices, in

golden characters four feet high, and stout in proportion. There was a

grand band of trumpets, bassoons, and drums, marshalled four abreast,

and earning their money, if ever men did, especially the drum-beaters,

who were very muscular. There were bodies of constables with blue

staves, twenty committee-men with blue scarfs, and a mob of voters with

blue cockades. There were electors on horseback and electors afoot.

There was an open carriage-and-four, for the Honourable Samuel Slumkey;

and there were four carriage-and-pair, for his friends and supporters;

and the flags were rustling, and the band was playing, and the

constables were swearing, and the twenty committee-men were squabbling,

and the mob were shouting, and the horses were backing, and the post-

boys perspiring; and everybody, and everything, then and there

assembled, was for the special use, behoof, honour, and renown, of the

Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, one of the candidates for

the representation of the borough of Eatanswill, in the Commons House of

Parliament of the United Kingdom.

Loud and long were the cheers, and mighty was the rustling of one of the

blue flags, with ‘Liberty of the Press’ inscribed thereon, when the

sandy head of Mr. Pott was discerned in one of the windows, by the mob

beneath; and tremendous was the enthusiasm when the Honourable Samuel

Slumkey himself, in top-boots, and a blue neckerchief, advanced and

seized the hand of the said Pott, and melodramatically testified by

gestures to the crowd, his ineffaceable obligations to the Eatanswill

\_Gazette\_.

‘Is everything ready?’ said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey to Mr. Perker.

‘Everything, my dear Sir,’ was the little man’s reply.

‘Nothing has been omitted, I hope?’ said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

‘Nothing has been left undone, my dear sir--nothing whatever. There are

twenty washed men at the street door for you to shake hands with; and

six children in arms that you’re to pat on the head, and inquire the age

of; be particular about the children, my dear sir--it has always a great

effect, that sort of thing.’

‘I’ll take care,’ said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

‘And, perhaps, my dear Sir,’ said the cautious little man, ‘perhaps if

you could--I don’t mean to say it’s indispensable--but if you could

manage to kiss one of ‘em, it would produce a very great impression on

the crowd.’

‘Wouldn’t it have as good an effect if the proposer or seconder did

that?’ said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey.

‘Why, I am afraid it wouldn’t,’ replied the agent; ‘if it were done by

yourself, my dear Sir, I think it would make you very popular.’

‘Very well,’ said the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, with a resigned air,

‘then it must be done. That’s all.’

‘Arrange the procession,’ cried the twenty committee-men.

Amidst the cheers of the assembled throng, the band, and the constables,

and the committee-men, and the voters, and the horsemen, and the

carriages, took their places--each of the two-horse vehicles being

closely packed with as many gentlemen as could manage to stand upright

in it; and that assigned to Mr. Perker, containing Mr. Pickwick, Mr.

Tupman, Mr. Snodgrass, and about half a dozen of the committee besides.

There was a moment of awful suspense as the procession waited for the

Honourable Samuel Slumkey to step into his carriage. Suddenly the crowd

set up a great cheering.

‘He has come out,’ said little Mr. Perker, greatly excited; the more so

as their position did not enable them to see what was going forward.

Another cheer, much louder.

‘He has shaken hands with the men,’ cried the little agent.

Another cheer, far more vehement.

‘He has patted the babies on the head,’ said Mr. Perker, trembling with

anxiety.

A roar of applause that rent the air.

‘He has kissed one of ‘em!’ exclaimed the delighted little man.

A second roar.

‘He has kissed another,’ gasped the excited manager.

A third roar.

‘He’s kissing ‘em all!’ screamed the enthusiastic little gentleman, and

hailed by the deafening shouts of the multitude, the procession moved

on.

How or by what means it became mixed up with the other procession, and

how it was ever extricated from the confusion consequent thereupon, is

more than we can undertake to describe, inasmuch as Mr. Pickwick’s hat

was knocked over his eyes, nose, and mouth, by one poke of a Buff flag-

staff, very early in the proceedings. He describes himself as being

surrounded on every side, when he could catch a glimpse of the scene, by

angry and ferocious countenances, by a vast cloud of dust, and by a

dense crowd of combatants. He represents himself as being forced from

the carriage by some unseen power, and being personally engaged in a

pugilistic encounter; but with whom, or how, or why, he is wholly unable

to state. He then felt himself forced up some wooden steps by the

persons from behind; and on removing his hat, found himself surrounded

by his friends, in the very front of the left hand side of the hustings.

The right was reserved for the Buff party, and the centre for the mayor

and his officers; one of whom--the fat crier of Eatanswill--was ringing

an enormous bell, by way of commanding silence, while Mr. Horatio

Fizkin, and the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, with their hands upon their

hearts, were bowing with the utmost affability to the troubled sea of

heads that inundated the open space in front; and from whence arose a

storm of groans, and shouts, and yells, and hootings, that would have

done honour to an earthquake.

‘There’s Winkle,’ said Mr. Tupman, pulling his friend by the sleeve.

‘Where!’ said Mr. Pickwick, putting on his spectacles, which he had

fortunately kept in his pocket hitherto.

‘There,’ said Mr. Tupman, ‘on the top of that house.’ And there, sure

enough, in the leaden gutter of a tiled roof, were Mr. Winkle and Mrs.

Pott, comfortably seated in a couple of chairs, waving their

handkerchiefs in token of recognition--a compliment which Mr. Pickwick

returned by kissing his hand to the lady.

The proceedings had not yet commenced; and as an inactive crowd is

generally disposed to be jocose, this very innocent action was

sufficient to awaken their facetiousness.

‘Oh, you wicked old rascal,’ cried one voice, ‘looking arter the girls,

are you?’

‘Oh, you wenerable sinner,’ cried another.

‘Putting on his spectacles to look at a married ‘ooman!’ said a third.

‘I see him a-winkin’ at her, with his wicked old eye,’ shouted a fourth.

‘Look arter your wife, Pott,’ bellowed a fifth--and then there was a

roar of laughter.

As these taunts were accompanied with invidious comparisons between Mr.

Pickwick and an aged ram, and several witticisms of the like nature; and

as they moreover rather tended to convey reflections upon the honour of

an innocent lady, Mr. Pickwick’s indignation was excessive; but as

silence was proclaimed at the moment, he contented himself by scorching

the mob with a look of pity for their misguided minds, at which they

laughed more boisterously than ever.

‘Silence!’ roared the mayor’s attendants.

‘Whiffin, proclaim silence,’ said the mayor, with an air of pomp

befitting his lofty station. In obedience to this command the crier

performed another concerto on the bell, whereupon a gentleman in the

crowd called out ‘Muffins’; which occasioned another laugh.

‘Gentlemen,’ said the mayor, at as loud a pitch as he could possibly

force his voice to--‘gentlemen. Brother electors of the borough of

Eatanswill. We are met here to-day for the purpose of choosing a

representative in the room of our late--’

Here the mayor was interrupted by a voice in the crowd.

‘Suc-cess to the mayor!’ cried the voice, ‘and may he never desert the

nail and sarspan business, as he got his money by.’

This allusion to the professional pursuits of the orator was received

with a storm of delight, which, with a bell-accompaniment, rendered the

remainder of his speech inaudible, with the exception of the concluding

sentence, in which he thanked the meeting for the patient attention with

which they heard him throughout--an expression of gratitude which

elicited another burst of mirth, of about a quarter of an hour’s

duration.

Next, a tall, thin gentleman, in a very stiff white neckerchief, after

being repeatedly desired by the crowd to ‘send a boy home, to ask

whether he hadn’t left his voice under the pillow,’ begged to nominate a

fit and proper person to represent them in Parliament. And when he said

it was Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, near Eatanswill, the

Fizkinites applauded, and the Slumkeyites groaned, so long, and so

loudly, that both he and the seconder might have sung comic songs in

lieu of speaking, without anybody’s being a bit the wiser.

The friends of Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, having had their innings, a

little choleric, pink-faced man stood forward to propose another fit and

proper person to represent the electors of Eatanswill in Parliament; and

very swimmingly the pink-faced gentleman would have got on, if he had

not been rather too choleric to entertain a sufficient perception of the

fun of the crowd. But after a very few sentences of figurative

eloquence, the pink-faced gentleman got from denouncing those who

interrupted him in the mob, to exchanging defiances with the gentlemen

on the hustings; whereupon arose an uproar which reduced him to the

necessity of expressing his feelings by serious pantomime, which he did,

and then left the stage to his seconder, who delivered a written speech

of half an hour’s length, and wouldn’t be stopped, because he had sent

it all to the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, and the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_ had

already printed it, every word.

Then Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, near Eatanswill,

presented himself for the purpose of addressing the electors; which he

no sooner did, than the band employed by the Honourable Samuel Slumkey,

commenced performing with a power to which their strength in the morning

was a trifle; in return for which, the Buff crowd belaboured the heads

and shoulders of the Blue crowd; on which the Blue crowd endeavoured to

dispossess themselves of their very unpleasant neighbours the Buff

crowd; and a scene of struggling, and pushing, and fighting, succeeded,

to which we can no more do justice than the mayor could, although he

issued imperative orders to twelve constables to seize the ringleaders,

who might amount in number to two hundred and fifty, or thereabouts. At

all these encounters, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, and his

friends, waxed fierce and furious; until at last Horatio Fizkin,

Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, begged to ask his opponent, the Honourable

Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall, whether that band played by his

consent; which question the Honourable Samuel Slumkey declining to

answer, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, shook his fist in the

countenance of the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall; upon

which the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, his blood being up, defied Horatio

Fizkin, Esquire, to mortal combat. At this violation of all known rules

and precedents of order, the mayor commanded another fantasia on the

bell, and declared that he would bring before himself, both Horatio

Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin Lodge, and the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of

Slumkey Hall, and bind them over to keep the peace. Upon this terrific

denunciation, the supporters of the two candidates interfered, and after

the friends of each party had quarrelled in pairs, for three-quarters of

an hour, Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, touched his hat to the Honourable

Samuel Slumkey; the Honourable Samuel Slumkey touched his to Horatio

Fizkin, Esquire; the band was stopped; the crowd were partially quieted;

and Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, was permitted to proceed.

The speeches of the two candidates, though differing in every other

respect, afforded a beautiful tribute to the merit and high worth of the

electors of Eatanswill. Both expressed their opinion that a more

independent, a more enlightened, a more public-spirited, a more noble-

minded, a more disinterested set of men than those who had promised to

vote for him, never existed on earth; each darkly hinted his suspicions

that the electors in the opposite interest had certain swinish and

besotted infirmities which rendered them unfit for the exercise of the

important duties they were called upon to discharge. Fizkin expressed

his readiness to do anything he was wanted: Slumkey, his determination

to do nothing that was asked of him. Both said that the trade, the

manufactures, the commerce, the prosperity of Eatanswill, would ever be

dearer to their hearts than any earthly object; and each had it in his

power to state, with the utmost confidence, that he was the man who

would eventually be returned.

There was a show of hands; the mayor decided in favour of the Honourable

Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall. Horatio Fizkin, Esquire, of Fizkin

Lodge, demanded a poll, and a poll was fixed accordingly. Then a vote of

thanks was moved to the mayor for his able conduct in the chair; and the

mayor, devoutly wishing that he had had a chair to display his able

conduct in (for he had been standing during the whole proceedings),

returned thanks. The processions reformed, the carriages rolled slowly

through the crowd, and its members screeched and shouted after them as

their feelings or caprice dictated.

During the whole time of the polling, the town was in a perpetual fever

of excitement. Everything was conducted on the most liberal and

delightful scale. Excisable articles were remarkably cheap at all the

public-houses; and spring vans paraded the streets for the accommodation

of voters who were seized with any temporary dizziness in the head--an

epidemic which prevailed among the electors, during the contest, to a

most alarming extent, and under the influence of which they might

frequently be seen lying on the pavements in a state of utter

insensibility. A small body of electors remained unpolled on the very

last day. They were calculating and reflecting persons, who had not yet

been convinced by the arguments of either party, although they had

frequent conferences with each. One hour before the close of the poll,

Mr. Perker solicited the honour of a private interview with these

intelligent, these noble, these patriotic men. It was granted. His

arguments were brief but satisfactory. They went in a body to the poll;

and when they returned, the Honourable Samuel Slumkey, of Slumkey Hall,

was returned also.

CHAPTER XIV. COMPRISING A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE COMPANY AT THE

PEACOCK ASSEMBLED; AND A TALE TOLD BY A BAGMAN

It is pleasant to turn from contemplating the strife and turmoil of

political existence, to the peaceful repose of private life. Although in

reality no great partisan of either side, Mr. Pickwick was sufficiently

fired with Mr. Pott’s enthusiasm, to apply his whole time and attention

to the proceedings, of which the last chapter affords a description

compiled from his own memoranda. Nor while he was thus occupied was Mr.

Winkle idle, his whole time being devoted to pleasant walks and short

country excursions with Mrs. Pott, who never failed, when such an

opportunity presented itself, to seek some relief from the tedious

monotony she so constantly complained of. The two gentlemen being thus

completely domesticated in the editor’s house, Mr. Tupman and Mr.

Snodgrass were in a great measure cast upon their own resources. Taking

but little interest in public affairs, they beguiled their time chiefly

with such amusements as the Peacock afforded, which were limited to a

bagatelle-board in the first floor, and a sequestered skittle-ground in

the back yard. In the science and nicety of both these recreations,

which are far more abstruse than ordinary men suppose, they were

gradually initiated by Mr. Weller, who possessed a perfect knowledge of

such pastimes. Thus, notwithstanding that they were in a great measure

deprived of the comfort and advantage of Mr. Pickwick’s society, they

were still enabled to beguile the time, and to prevent its hanging

heavily on their hands.

It was in the evening, however, that the Peacock presented attractions

which enabled the two friends to resist even the invitations of the

gifted, though prosy, Pott. It was in the evening that the ‘commercial

room’ was filled with a social circle, whose characters and manners it

was the delight of Mr. Tupman to observe; whose sayings and doings it

was the habit of Mr. Snodgrass to note down.

Most people know what sort of places commercial rooms usually are. That

of the Peacock differed in no material respect from the generality of

such apartments; that is to say, it was a large, bare-looking room, the

furniture of which had no doubt been better when it was newer, with a

spacious table in the centre, and a variety of smaller dittos in the

corners; an extensive assortment of variously shaped chairs, and an old

Turkey carpet, bearing about the same relative proportion to the size of

the room, as a lady’s pocket-handkerchief might to the floor of a watch-

box. The walls were garnished with one or two large maps; and several

weather-beaten rough greatcoats, with complicated capes, dangled from a

long row of pegs in one corner. The mantel-shelf was ornamented with a

wooden inkstand, containing one stump of a pen and half a wafer; a road-

book and directory; a county history minus the cover; and the mortal

remains of a trout in a glass coffin. The atmosphere was redolent of

tobacco-smoke, the fumes of which had communicated a rather dingy hue to

the whole room, and more especially to the dusty red curtains which

shaded the windows. On the sideboard a variety of miscellaneous articles

were huddled together, the most conspicuous of which were some very

cloudy fish-sauce cruets, a couple of driving-boxes, two or three whips,

and as many travelling shawls, a tray of knives and forks, and the

mustard.

Here it was that Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were seated on the evening

after the conclusion of the election, with several other temporary

inmates of the house, smoking and drinking.

‘Well, gents,’ said a stout, hale personage of about forty, with only

one eye--a very bright black eye, which twinkled with a roguish

expression of fun and good-humour, ‘our noble selves, gents. I always

propose that toast to the company, and drink Mary to myself. Eh, Mary!’

‘Get along with you, you wretch,’ said the hand-maiden, obviously not

ill-pleased with the compliment, however.

‘Don’t go away, Mary,’ said the black-eyed man.

‘Let me alone, imperence,’ said the young lady.

‘Never mind,’ said the one-eyed man, calling after the girl as she left

the room. ‘I’ll step out by and by, Mary. Keep your spirits up, dear.’

Here he went through the not very difficult process of winking upon the

company with his solitary eye, to the enthusiastic delight of an elderly

personage with a dirty face and a clay pipe.

‘Rum creeters is women,’ said the dirty-faced man, after a pause.

‘Ah! no mistake about that,’ said a very red-faced man, behind a cigar.

After this little bit of philosophy there was another pause.

‘There’s rummer things than women in this world though, mind you,’ said

the man with the black eye, slowly filling a large Dutch pipe, with a

most capacious bowl.

‘Are you married?’ inquired the dirty-faced man.

‘Can’t say I am.’

‘I thought not.’ Here the dirty-faced man fell into ecstasies of mirth

at his own retort, in which he was joined by a man of bland voice and

placid countenance, who always made it a point to agree with everybody.

‘Women, after all, gentlemen,’ said the enthusiastic Mr. Snodgrass, ‘are

the great props and comforts of our existence.’

‘So they are,’ said the placid gentleman.

‘When they’re in a good humour,’ interposed the dirty-faced man.

‘And that’s very true,’ said the placid one.

‘I repudiate that qualification,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, whose thoughts

were fast reverting to Emily Wardle. ‘I repudiate it with disdain--with

indignation. Show me the man who says anything against women, as women,

and I boldly declare he is not a man.’ And Mr. Snodgrass took his cigar

from his mouth, and struck the table violently with his clenched fist.

‘That’s good sound argument,’ said the placid man.

‘Containing a position which I deny,’ interrupted he of the dirty

countenance.

‘And there’s certainly a very great deal of truth in what you observe

too, Sir,’ said the placid gentleman.

‘Your health, Sir,’ said the bagman with the lonely eye, bestowing an

approving nod on Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Snodgrass acknowledged the compliment.

‘I always like to hear a good argument,’ continued the bagman, ‘a sharp

one, like this: it’s very improving; but this little argument about

women brought to my mind a story I have heard an old uncle of mine tell,

the recollection of which, just now, made me say there were rummer

things than women to be met with, sometimes.’

‘I should like to hear that same story,’ said the red-faced man with the

cigar.

‘Should you?’ was the only reply of the bagman, who continued to smoke

with great vehemence.

‘So should I,’ said Mr. Tupman, speaking for the first time. He was

always anxious to increase his stock of experience.

‘Should \_you\_? Well then, I’ll tell it. No, I won’t. I know you won’t

believe it,’ said the man with the roguish eye, making that organ look

more roguish than ever. ‘If you say it’s true, of course I shall,’ said

Mr. Tupman.

‘Well, upon that understanding I’ll tell you,’ replied the traveller.

‘Did you ever hear of the great commercial house of Bilson & Slum? But

it doesn’t matter though, whether you did or not, because they retired

from business long since. It’s eighty years ago, since the circumstance

happened to a traveller for that house, but he was a particular friend

of my uncle’s; and my uncle told the story to me. It’s a queer name; but

he used to call it

THE BAGMAN’S STORY

and he used to tell it, something in this way.

‘One winter’s evening, about five o’clock, just as it began to grow

dusk, a man in a gig might have been seen urging his tired horse along

the road which leads across Marlborough Downs, in the direction of

Bristol. I say he might have been seen, and I have no doubt he would

have been, if anybody but a blind man had happened to pass that way; but

the weather was so bad, and the night so cold and wet, that nothing was

out but the water, and so the traveller jogged along in the middle of

the road, lonesome and dreary enough. If any bagman of that day could

have caught sight of the little neck-or-nothing sort of gig, with a

clay-coloured body and red wheels, and the vixenish, ill tempered, fast-

going bay mare, that looked like a cross between a butcher’s horse and a

twopenny post-office pony, he would have known at once, that this

traveller could have been no other than Tom Smart, of the great house of

Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. However, as there was no bagman

to look on, nobody knew anything at all about the matter; and so Tom

Smart and his clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, and the vixenish

mare with the fast pace, went on together, keeping the secret among

them, and nobody was a bit the wiser.

‘There are many pleasanter places even in this dreary world, than

Marlborough Downs when it blows hard; and if you throw in beside, a

gloomy winter’s evening, a miry and sloppy road, and a pelting fall of

heavy rain, and try the effect, by way of experiment, in your own proper

person, you will experience the full force of this observation.

‘The wind blew--not up the road or down it, though that’s bad enough,

but sheer across it, sending the rain slanting down like the lines they

used to rule in the copy-books at school, to make the boys slope well.

For a moment it would die away, and the traveller would begin to delude

himself into the belief that, exhausted with its previous fury, it had

quietly laid itself down to rest, when, whoo! he could hear it growling

and whistling in the distance, and on it would come rushing over the

hill-tops, and sweeping along the plain, gathering sound and strength as

it drew nearer, until it dashed with a heavy gust against horse and man,

driving the sharp rain into their ears, and its cold damp breath into

their very bones; and past them it would scour, far, far away, with a

stunning roar, as if in ridicule of their weakness, and triumphant in

the consciousness of its own strength and power.

‘The bay mare splashed away, through the mud and water, with drooping

ears; now and then tossing her head as if to express her disgust at this

very ungentlemanly behaviour of the elements, but keeping a good pace

notwithstanding, until a gust of wind, more furious than any that had

yet assailed them, caused her to stop suddenly and plant her four feet

firmly against the ground, to prevent her being blown over. It’s a

special mercy that she did this, for if she \_had \_been blown over, the

vixenish mare was so light, and the gig was so light, and Tom Smart such

a light weight into the bargain, that they must infallibly have all gone

rolling over and over together, until they reached the confines of

earth, or until the wind fell; and in either case the probability is,

that neither the vixenish mare, nor the clay-coloured gig with the red

wheels, nor Tom Smart, would ever have been fit for service again.

‘“Well, damn my straps and whiskers,” says Tom Smart (Tom sometimes had

an unpleasant knack of swearing)--“damn my straps and whiskers,” says

Tom, “if this ain’t pleasant, blow me!”

‘You’ll very likely ask me why, as Tom Smart had been pretty well blown

already, he expressed this wish to be submitted to the same process

again. I can’t say--all I know is, that Tom Smart said so--or at least

he always told my uncle he said so, and it’s just the same thing.

“‘Blow me,” says Tom Smart; and the mare neighed as if she were

precisely of the same opinion.

“‘Cheer up, old girl,” said Tom, patting the bay mare on the neck with

the end of his whip. “It won’t do pushing on, such a night as this; the

first house we come to we’ll put up at, so the faster you go the sooner

it’s over. Soho, old girl--gently--gently.”

‘Whether the vixenish mare was sufficiently well acquainted with the

tones of Tom’s voice to comprehend his meaning, or whether she found it

colder standing still than moving on, of course I can’t say. But I can

say that Tom had no sooner finished speaking, than she pricked up her

ears, and started forward at a speed which made the clay-coloured gig

rattle until you would have supposed every one of the red spokes were

going to fly out on the turf of Marlborough Downs; and even Tom, whip as

he was, couldn’t stop or check her pace, until she drew up of her own

accord, before a roadside inn on the right-hand side of the way, about

half a quarter of a mile from the end of the Downs.

‘Tom cast a hasty glance at the upper part of the house as he threw the

reins to the hostler, and stuck the whip in the box. It was a strange

old place, built of a kind of shingle, inlaid, as it were, with cross-

beams, with gabled-topped windows projecting completely over the

pathway, and a low door with a dark porch, and a couple of steep steps

leading down into the house, instead of the modern fashion of half a

dozen shallow ones leading up to it. It was a comfortable-looking place

though, for there was a strong, cheerful light in the bar window, which

shed a bright ray across the road, and even lighted up the hedge on the

other side; and there was a red flickering light in the opposite window,

one moment but faintly discernible, and the next gleaming strongly

through the drawn curtains, which intimated that a rousing fire was

blazing within. Marking these little evidences with the eye of an

experienced traveller, Tom dismounted with as much agility as his half-

frozen limbs would permit, and entered the house.

‘In less than five minutes’ time, Tom was ensconced in the room opposite

the bar--the very room where he had imagined the fire blazing--before a

substantial, matter-of-fact, roaring fire, composed of something short

of a bushel of coals, and wood enough to make half a dozen decent

gooseberry bushes, piled half-way up the chimney, and roaring and

crackling with a sound that of itself would have warmed the heart of any

reasonable man. This was comfortable, but this was not all; for a

smartly-dressed girl, with a bright eye and a neat ankle, was laying a

very clean white cloth on the table; and as Tom sat with his slippered

feet on the fender, and his back to the open door, he saw a charming

prospect of the bar reflected in the glass over the chimney-piece, with

delightful rows of green bottles and gold labels, together with jars of

pickles and preserves, and cheeses and boiled hams, and rounds of beef,

arranged on shelves in the most tempting and delicious array. Well, this

was comfortable too; but even this was not all--for in the bar, seated

at tea at the nicest possible little table, drawn close up before the

brightest possible little fire, was a buxom widow of somewhere about

eight-and-forty or thereabouts, with a face as comfortable as the bar,

who was evidently the landlady of the house, and the supreme ruler over

all these agreeable possessions. There was only one drawback to the

beauty of the whole picture, and that was a tall man--a very tall man--

in a brown coat and bright basket buttons, and black whiskers and wavy

black hair, who was seated at tea with the widow, and who it required no

great penetration to discover was in a fair way of persuading her to be

a widow no longer, but to confer upon him the privilege of sitting down

in that bar, for and during the whole remainder of the term of his

natural life.

‘Tom Smart was by no means of an irritable or envious disposition, but

somehow or other the tall man with the brown coat and the bright basket

buttons did rouse what little gall he had in his composition, and did

make him feel extremely indignant, the more especially as he could now

and then observe, from his seat before the glass, certain little

affectionate familiarities passing between the tall man and the widow,

which sufficiently denoted that the tall man was as high in favour as he

was in size. Tom was fond of hot punch--I may venture to say he was

\_very\_ fond of hot punch--and after he had seen the vixenish mare well

fed and well littered down, and had eaten every bit of the nice little

hot dinner which the widow tossed up for him with her own hands, he just

ordered a tumbler of it by way of experiment. Now, if there was one

thing in the whole range of domestic art, which the widow could

manufacture better than another, it was this identical article; and the

first tumbler was adapted to Tom Smart’s taste with such peculiar

nicety, that he ordered a second with the least possible delay. Hot

punch is a pleasant thing, gentlemen--an extremely pleasant thing under

any circumstances--but in that snug old parlour, before the roaring

fire, with the wind blowing outside till every timber in the old house

creaked again, Tom Smart found it perfectly delightful. He ordered

another tumbler, and then another--I am not quite certain whether he

didn’t order another after that--but the more he drank of the hot punch,

the more he thought of the tall man.

‘“Confound his impudence!” said Tom to himself, “what business has he in

that snug bar? Such an ugly villain too!” said Tom. “If the widow had

any taste, she might surely pick up some better fellow than that.” Here

Tom’s eye wandered from the glass on the chimney-piece to the glass on

the table; and as he felt himself becoming gradually sentimental, he

emptied the fourth tumbler of punch and ordered a fifth.

‘Tom Smart, gentlemen, had always been very much attached to the public

line. It had been long his ambition to stand in a bar of his own, in a

green coat, knee-cords, and tops. He had a great notion of taking the

chair at convivial dinners, and he had often thought how well he could

preside in a room of his own in the talking way, and what a capital

example he could set to his customers in the drinking department. All

these things passed rapidly through Tom’s mind as he sat drinking the

hot punch by the roaring fire, and he felt very justly and properly

indignant that the tall man should be in a fair way of keeping such an

excellent house, while he, Tom Smart, was as far off from it as ever.

So, after deliberating over the two last tumblers, whether he hadn’t a

perfect right to pick a quarrel with the tall man for having contrived

to get into the good graces of the buxom widow, Tom Smart at last

arrived at the satisfactory conclusion that he was a very ill-used and

persecuted individual, and had better go to bed.

‘Up a wide and ancient staircase the smart girl preceded Tom, shading

the chamber candle with her hand, to protect it from the currents of air

which in such a rambling old place might have found plenty of room to

disport themselves in, without blowing the candle out, but which did

blow it out nevertheless--thus affording Tom’s enemies an opportunity of

asserting that it was he, and not the wind, who extinguished the candle,

and that while he pretended to be blowing it alight again, he was in

fact kissing the girl. Be this as it may, another light was obtained,

and Tom was conducted through a maze of rooms, and a labyrinth of

passages, to the apartment which had been prepared for his reception,

where the girl bade him good-night and left him alone.

‘It was a good large room with big closets, and a bed which might have

served for a whole boarding-school, to say nothing of a couple of oaken

presses that would have held the baggage of a small army; but what

struck Tom’s fancy most was a strange, grim-looking, high backed chair,

carved in the most fantastic manner, with a flowered damask cushion, and

the round knobs at the bottom of the legs carefully tied up in red

cloth, as if it had got the gout in its toes. Of any other queer chair,

Tom would only have thought it was a queer chair, and there would have

been an end of the matter; but there was something about this particular

chair, and yet he couldn’t tell what it was, so odd and so unlike any

other piece of furniture he had ever seen, that it seemed to fascinate

him. He sat down before the fire, and stared at the old chair for half

an hour.--Damn the chair, it was such a strange old thing, he couldn’t

take his eyes off it.

‘“Well,” said Tom, slowly undressing himself, and staring at the old

chair all the while, which stood with a mysterious aspect by the

bedside, “I never saw such a rum concern as that in my days. Very odd,”

said Tom, who had got rather sage with the hot punch--“very odd.” Tom

shook his head with an air of profound wisdom, and looked at the chair

again. He couldn’t make anything of it though, so he got into bed,

covered himself up warm, and fell asleep.

‘In about half an hour, Tom woke up with a start, from a confused dream

of tall men and tumblers of punch; and the first object that presented

itself to his waking imagination was the queer chair.

‘“I won’t look at it any more,” said Tom to himself, and he squeezed his

eyelids together, and tried to persuade himself he was going to sleep

again. No use; nothing but queer chairs danced before his eyes, kicking

up their legs, jumping over each other’s backs, and playing all kinds of

antics.

“‘I may as well see one real chair, as two or three complete sets of

false ones,” said Tom, bringing out his head from under the bedclothes.

There it was, plainly discernible by the light of the fire, looking as

provoking as ever.

‘Tom gazed at the chair; and, suddenly as he looked at it, a most

extraordinary change seemed to come over it. The carving of the back

gradually assumed the lineaments and expression of an old, shrivelled

human face; the damask cushion became an antique, flapped waistcoat; the

round knobs grew into a couple of feet, encased in red cloth slippers;

and the whole chair looked like a very ugly old man, of the previous

century, with his arms akimbo. Tom sat up in bed, and rubbed his eyes to

dispel the illusion. No. The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what

was more, he was winking at Tom Smart.

‘Tom was naturally a headlong, careless sort of dog, and he had had five

tumblers of hot punch into the bargain; so, although he was a little

startled at first, he began to grow rather indignant when he saw the old

gentleman winking and leering at him with such an impudent air. At

length he resolved that he wouldn’t stand it; and as the old face still

kept winking away as fast as ever, Tom said, in a very angry tone--

‘“What the devil are you winking at me for?”

‘“Because I like it, Tom Smart,” said the chair; or the old gentleman,

whichever you like to call him. He stopped winking though, when Tom

spoke, and began grinning like a superannuated monkey.

‘“How do you know my name, old nut-cracker face?” inquired Tom Smart,

rather staggered; though he pretended to carry it off so well.

‘“Come, come, Tom,” said the old gentleman, “that’s not the way to

address solid Spanish mahogany. Damme, you couldn’t treat me with less

respect if I was veneered.” When the old gentleman said this, he looked

so fierce that Tom began to grow frightened.

‘“I didn’t mean to treat you with any disrespect, Sir,” said Tom, in a

much humbler tone than he had spoken in at first.

‘“Well, well,” said the old fellow, “perhaps not--perhaps not. Tom--”

‘“Sir--”

‘“I know everything about you, Tom; everything. You’re very poor, Tom.”

‘“I certainly am,” said Tom Smart. “But how came you to know that?”

‘“Never mind that,” said the old gentleman; “you’re much too fond of

punch, Tom.”

‘Tom Smart was just on the point of protesting that he hadn’t tasted a

drop since his last birthday, but when his eye encountered that of the

old gentleman he looked so knowing that Tom blushed, and was silent.

‘“Tom,” said the old gentleman, “the widow’s a fine woman--remarkably

fine woman--eh, Tom?” Here the old fellow screwed up his eyes, cocked up

one of his wasted little legs, and looked altogether so unpleasantly

amorous, that Tom was quite disgusted with the levity of his behaviour--

at his time of life, too!

‘“I am her guardian, Tom,” said the old gentleman.

‘“Are you?” inquired Tom Smart.

‘“I knew her mother, Tom,” said the old fellow: “and her grandmother.

She was very fond of me--made me this waistcoat, Tom.”

‘“Did she?” said Tom Smart.

‘“And these shoes,” said the old fellow, lifting up one of the red cloth

mufflers; “but don’t mention it, Tom. I shouldn’t like to have it known

that she was so much attached to me. It might occasion some

unpleasantness in the family.” When the old rascal said this, he looked

so extremely impertinent, that, as Tom Smart afterwards declared, he

could have sat upon him without remorse.

‘“I have been a great favourite among the women in my time, Tom,” said

the profligate old debauchee; “hundreds of fine women have sat in my lap

for hours together. What do you think of that, you dog, eh!” The old

gentleman was proceeding to recount some other exploits of his youth,

when he was seized with such a violent fit of creaking that he was

unable to proceed.

‘“Just serves you right, old boy,” thought Tom Smart; but he didn’t say

anything.

‘“Ah!” said the old fellow, “I am a good deal troubled with this now. I

am getting old, Tom, and have lost nearly all my nails. I have had an

operation performed, too--a small piece let into my back--and I found it

a severe trial, Tom.”

‘“I dare say you did, Sir,” said Tom Smart.

‘“However,” said the old gentleman, “that’s not the point. Tom! I want

you to marry the widow.”

‘“Me, Sir!” said Tom.

‘“You,” said the old gentleman.

‘“Bless your reverend locks,” said Tom (he had a few scattered horse-

hairs left)--“bless your reverend locks, she wouldn’t have me.” And Tom

sighed involuntarily, as he thought of the bar.

‘“Wouldn’t she?” said the old gentleman firmly.

‘“No, no,” said Tom; “there’s somebody else in the wind. A tall man--a

confoundedly tall man--with black whiskers.”

‘“Tom,” said the old gentleman; “she will never have him.”

‘“Won’t she?” said Tom. “If you stood in the bar, old gentleman, you’d

tell another story.”

‘“Pooh, pooh,” said the old gentleman. “I know all about that.”

‘“About what?” said Tom.

‘“The kissing behind the door, and all that sort of thing, Tom,” said

the old gentleman. And here he gave another impudent look, which made

Tom very wroth, because as you all know, gentlemen, to hear an old

fellow, who ought to know better, talking about these things, is very

unpleasant--nothing more so.

‘“I know all about that, Tom,” said the old gentleman. “I have seen it

done very often in my time, Tom, between more people than I should like

to mention to you; but it never came to anything after all.”

‘“You must have seen some queer things,” said Tom, with an inquisitive

look.

‘“You may say that, Tom,” replied the old fellow, with a very

complicated wink. “I am the last of my family, Tom,” said the old

gentleman, with a melancholy sigh.

‘“Was it a large one?” inquired Tom Smart.

‘“There were twelve of us, Tom,” said the old gentleman; “fine,

straight-backed, handsome fellows as you’d wish to see. None of your

modern abortions--all with arms, and with a degree of polish, though I

say it that should not, which it would have done your heart good to

behold.”

‘“And what’s become of the others, Sir?” asked Tom Smart--

‘The old gentleman applied his elbow to his eye as he replied, “Gone,

Tom, gone. We had hard service, Tom, and they hadn’t all my

constitution. They got rheumatic about the legs and arms, and went into

kitchens and other hospitals; and one of ‘em, with long service and hard

usage, positively lost his senses--he got so crazy that he was obliged

to be burnt. Shocking thing that, Tom.”

‘“Dreadful!” said Tom Smart.

‘The old fellow paused for a few minutes, apparently struggling with his

feelings of emotion, and then said--

‘“However, Tom, I am wandering from the point. This tall man, Tom, is a

rascally adventurer. The moment he married the widow, he would sell off

all the furniture, and run away. What would be the consequence? She

would be deserted and reduced to ruin, and I should catch my death of

cold in some broker’s shop.”

‘“Yes, but--”

‘“Don’t interrupt me,” said the old gentleman. “Of you, Tom, I entertain

a very different opinion; for I well know that if you once settled

yourself in a public-house, you would never leave it, as long as there

was anything to drink within its walls.”

‘“I am very much obliged to you for your good opinion, Sir,” said Tom

Smart.

‘“Therefore,” resumed the old gentleman, in a dictatorial tone, “you

shall have her, and he shall not.”

‘“What is to prevent it?” said Tom Smart eagerly.

‘“This disclosure,” replied the old gentleman; “he is already married.”

‘“How can I prove it?” said Tom, starting half out of bed.

‘The old gentleman untucked his arm from his side, and having pointed to

one of the oaken presses, immediately replaced it, in its old position.

‘“He little thinks,” said the old gentleman, “that in the right-hand

pocket of a pair of trousers in that press, he has left a letter,

entreating him to return to his disconsolate wife, with six--mark me,

Tom--six babes, and all of them small ones.”

‘As the old gentleman solemnly uttered these words, his features grew

less and less distinct, and his figure more shadowy. A film came over

Tom Smart’s eyes. The old man seemed gradually blending into the chair,

the damask waistcoat to resolve into a cushion, the red slippers to

shrink into little red cloth bags. The light faded gently away, and Tom

Smart fell back on his pillow, and dropped asleep.

‘Morning aroused Tom from the lethargic slumber, into which he had

fallen on the disappearance of the old man. He sat up in bed, and for

some minutes vainly endeavoured to recall the events of the preceding

night. Suddenly they rushed upon him. He looked at the chair; it was a

fantastic and grim-looking piece of furniture, certainly, but it must

have been a remarkably ingenious and lively imagination, that could have

discovered any resemblance between it and an old man.

‘“How are you, old boy?” said Tom. He was bolder in the daylight--most

men are.

‘The chair remained motionless, and spoke not a word.

‘“Miserable morning,” said Tom. No. The chair would not be drawn into

conversation.

‘“Which press did you point to?--you can tell me that,” said Tom. Devil

a word, gentlemen, the chair would say.

‘“It’s not much trouble to open it, anyhow,” said Tom, getting out of

bed very deliberately. He walked up to one of the presses. The key was

in the lock; he turned it, and opened the door. There was a pair of

trousers there. He put his hand into the pocket, and drew forth the

identical letter the old gentleman had described!

‘“Queer sort of thing, this,” said Tom Smart, looking first at the chair

and then at the press, and then at the letter, and then at the chair

again. “Very queer,” said Tom. But, as there was nothing in either, to

lessen the queerness, he thought he might as well dress himself, and

settle the tall man’s business at once--just to put him out of his

misery.

‘Tom surveyed the rooms he passed through, on his way downstairs, with

the scrutinising eye of a landlord; thinking it not impossible, that

before long, they and their contents would be his property. The tall man

was standing in the snug little bar, with his hands behind him, quite at

home. He grinned vacantly at Tom. A casual observer might have supposed

he did it, only to show his white teeth; but Tom Smart thought that a

consciousness of triumph was passing through the place where the tall

man’s mind would have been, if he had had any. Tom laughed in his face;

and summoned the landlady.

‘“Good-morning ma’am,” said Tom Smart, closing the door of the little

parlour as the widow entered.

‘“Good-morning, Sir,” said the widow. “What will you take for breakfast,

sir?”

‘Tom was thinking how he should open the case, so he made no answer.

‘“There’s a very nice ham,” said the widow, “and a beautiful cold larded

fowl. Shall I send ‘em in, Sir?”

‘These words roused Tom from his reflections. His admiration of the

widow increased as she spoke. Thoughtful creature! Comfortable provider!

‘“Who is that gentleman in the bar, ma’am?” inquired Tom.

‘“His name is Jinkins, Sir,” said the widow, slightly blushing.

‘“He’s a tall man,” said Tom.

‘“He is a very fine man, Sir,” replied the widow, “and a very nice

gentleman.”

‘“Ah!” said Tom.

‘“Is there anything more you want, Sir?” inquired the widow, rather

puzzled by Tom’s manner.

‘“Why, yes,” said Tom. “My dear ma’am, will you have the kindness to sit

down for one moment?”

‘The widow looked much amazed, but she sat down, and Tom sat down too,

close beside her. I don’t know how it happened, gentlemen--indeed my

uncle used to tell me that Tom Smart said he didn’t know how it happened

either--but somehow or other the palm of Tom’s hand fell upon the back

of the widow’s hand, and remained there while he spoke.

‘“My dear ma’am,” said Tom Smart--he had always a great notion of

committing the amiable--“my dear ma’am, you deserve a very excellent

husband--you do indeed.”

‘“Lor, Sir!” said the widow--as well she might; Tom’s mode of commencing

the conversation being rather unusual, not to say startling; the fact of

his never having set eyes upon her before the previous night being taken

into consideration. “Lor, Sir!”

‘“I scorn to flatter, my dear ma’am,” said Tom Smart. “You deserve a

very admirable husband, and whoever he is, he’ll be a very lucky man.”

As Tom said this, his eye involuntarily wandered from the widow’s face

to the comfort around him.

‘The widow looked more puzzled than ever, and made an effort to rise.

Tom gently pressed her hand, as if to detain her, and she kept her seat.

Widows, gentlemen, are not usually timorous, as my uncle used to say.

‘“I am sure I am very much obliged to you, Sir, for your good opinion,”

said the buxom landlady, half laughing; “and if ever I marry again--”

’”\_If\_,” said Tom Smart, looking very shrewdly out of the right-hand

corner of his left eye. “\_If\_--”

“Well,” said the widow, laughing outright this time, “\_when \_I do, I

hope I shall have as good a husband as you describe.”

‘“Jinkins, to wit,” said Tom.

‘“Lor, sir!” exclaimed the widow.

‘“Oh, don’t tell me,” said Tom, “I know him.”

‘“I am sure nobody who knows him, knows anything bad of him,” said the

widow, bridling up at the mysterious air with which Tom had spoken.

‘“Hem!” said Tom Smart.

‘The widow began to think it was high time to cry, so she took out her

handkerchief, and inquired whether Tom wished to insult her, whether he

thought it like a gentleman to take away the character of another

gentleman behind his back, why, if he had got anything to say, he didn’t

say it to the man, like a man, instead of terrifying a poor weak woman

in that way; and so forth.

‘“I’ll say it to him fast enough,” said Tom, “only I want you to hear it

first.”

‘“What is it?” inquired the widow, looking intently in Tom’s

countenance.

‘“I’ll astonish you,” said Tom, putting his hand in his pocket.

‘“If it is, that he wants money,” said the widow, “I know that already,

and you needn’t trouble yourself.” ‘“Pooh, nonsense, that’s nothing,”

said Tom Smart, “I want money. ‘Tain’t that.”

‘“Oh, dear, what can it be?” exclaimed the poor widow.

‘“Don’t be frightened,” said Tom Smart. He slowly drew forth the letter,

and unfolded it. “You won’t scream?” said Tom doubtfully.

‘“No, no,” replied the widow; “let me see it.”

‘“You won’t go fainting away, or any of that nonsense?” said Tom.

‘“No, no,” returned the widow hastily.

‘“And don’t run out, and blow him up,” said Tom; “because I’ll do all

that for you. You had better not exert yourself.”

‘“Well, well,” said the widow, “let me see it.”

‘“I will,” replied Tom Smart; and, with these words, he placed the

letter in the widow’s hand.

‘Gentlemen, I have heard my uncle say, that Tom Smart said the widow’s

lamentations when she heard the disclosure would have pierced a heart of

stone. Tom was certainly very tender-hearted, but they pierced his, to

the very core. The widow rocked herself to and fro, and wrung her hands.

‘“Oh, the deception and villainy of the man!” said the widow.

‘“Frightful, my dear ma’am; but compose yourself,” said Tom Smart.

‘“Oh, I can’t compose myself,” shrieked the widow. “I shall never find

anyone else I can love so much!”

‘“Oh, yes you will, my dear soul,” said Tom Smart, letting fall a shower

of the largest-sized tears, in pity for the widow’s misfortunes. Tom

Smart, in the energy of his compassion, had put his arm round the

widow’s waist; and the widow, in a passion of grief, had clasped Tom’s

hand. She looked up in Tom’s face, and smiled through her tears. Tom

looked down in hers, and smiled through his.

‘I never could find out, gentlemen, whether Tom did or did not kiss the

widow at that particular moment. He used to tell my uncle he didn’t, but

I have my doubts about it. Between ourselves, gentlemen, I rather think

he did.

‘At all events, Tom kicked the very tall man out at the front door half

an hour later, and married the widow a month after. And he used to drive

about the country, with the clay-coloured gig with the red wheels, and

the vixenish mare with the fast pace, till he gave up business many

years afterwards, and went to France with his wife; and then the old

house was pulled down.’

‘Will you allow me to ask you,’ said the inquisitive old gentleman,

‘what became of the chair?’

‘Why,’ replied the one-eyed bagman, ‘it was observed to creak very much

on the day of the wedding; but Tom Smart couldn’t say for certain

whether it was with pleasure or bodily infirmity. He rather thought it

was the latter, though, for it never spoke afterwards.’

‘Everybody believed the story, didn’t they?’ said the dirty-faced man,

refilling his pipe.

‘Except Tom’s enemies,’ replied the bagman. ‘Some of ‘em said Tom

invented it altogether; and others said he was drunk and fancied it, and

got hold of the wrong trousers by mistake before he went to bed. But

nobody ever minded what \_they \_said.’

‘Tom Smart said it was all true?’

‘Every word.’

‘And your uncle?’

‘Every letter.’

‘They must have been very nice men, both of ‘em,’ said the dirty-faced

man.

‘Yes, they were,’ replied the bagman; ‘very nice men indeed!’

CHAPTER XV. IN WHICH IS GIVEN A FAITHFUL PORTRAITURE OF TWO

DISTINGUISHED PERSONS; AND AN ACCURATE DESCRIPTION OF A PUBLIC BREAKFAST

IN THEIR HOUSE AND GROUNDS: WHICH PUBLIC BREAKFAST LEADS TO THE

RECOGNITION OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE, AND THE COMMENCEMENT OF ANOTHER

CHAPTER

Mr. Pickwick’s conscience had been somewhat reproaching him for his

recent neglect of his friends at the Peacock; and he was just on the

point of walking forth in quest of them, on the third morning after the

election had terminated, when his faithful valet put into his hand a

card, on which was engraved the following inscription:--

Mrs. Leo Hunter THE DEN. EATANSWILL.

‘Person’s a-waitin’,’ said Sam, epigrammatically.

‘Does the person want me, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘He wants you partickler; and no one else ‘ll do, as the devil’s private

secretary said ven he fetched avay Doctor Faustus,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘\_He\_. Is it a gentleman?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘A wery good imitation o’ one, if it ain’t,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘But this is a lady’s card,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Given me by a gen’l’m’n, howsoever,’ replied Sam, ‘and he’s a-waitin’

in the drawing-room--said he’d rather wait all day, than not see you.’

Mr. Pickwick, on hearing this determination, descended to the drawing-

room, where sat a grave man, who started up on his entrance, and said,

with an air of profound respect:--

‘Mr. Pickwick, I presume?’

‘The same.’

‘Allow me, Sir, the honour of grasping your hand. Permit me, Sir, to

shake it,’ said the grave man.

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Pickwick. The stranger shook the extended hand,

and then continued--

‘We have heard of your fame, sir. The noise of your antiquarian

discussion has reached the ears of Mrs. Leo Hunter--my wife, sir; I am

Mr. Leo Hunter’--the stranger paused, as if he expected that Mr.

Pickwick would be overcome by the disclosure; but seeing that he

remained perfectly calm, proceeded--

‘My wife, sir--Mrs. Leo Hunter--is proud to number among her

acquaintance all those who have rendered themselves celebrated by their

works and talents. Permit me, sir, to place in a conspicuous part of the

list the name of Mr. Pickwick, and his brother-members of the club that

derives its name from him.’

‘I shall be extremely happy to make the acquaintance of such a lady,

sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘You \_shall \_make it, sir,’ said the grave man. ‘To-morrow morning, sir,

we give a public breakfast--a \_fete champetre\_--to a great number of

those who have rendered themselves celebrated by their works and

talents. Permit Mrs. Leo Hunter, Sir, to have the gratification of

seeing you at the Den.’

‘With great pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mrs. Leo Hunter has many of these breakfasts, Sir,’ resumed the new

acquaintance--‘“feasts of reason,” sir, “and flows of soul,” as somebody

who wrote a sonnet to Mrs. Leo Hunter on her breakfasts, feelingly and

originally observed.’

‘Was \_he\_ celebrated for his works and talents?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘He was Sir,’ replied the grave man, ‘all Mrs. Leo Hunter’s

acquaintances are; it is her ambition, sir, to have no other

acquaintance.’

‘It is a very noble ambition,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘When I inform Mrs. Leo Hunter, that that remark fell from your lips,

sir, she will indeed be proud,’ said the grave man. ‘You have a

gentleman in your train, who has produced some beautiful little poems, I

think, sir.’

‘My friend Mr. Snodgrass has a great taste for poetry,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick.

‘So has Mrs. Leo Hunter, Sir. She dotes on poetry, sir. She adores it; I

may say that her whole soul and mind are wound up, and entwined with it.

She has produced some delightful pieces, herself, sir. You may have met

with her “Ode to an Expiring Frog,” sir.’

‘I don’t think I have,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘You astonish me, Sir,’ said Mr. Leo Hunter. ‘It created an immense

sensation. It was signed with an “L” and eight stars, and appeared

originally in a lady’s magazine. It commenced--

‘“Can I view thee panting, lying On thy stomach, without sighing; Can I

unmoved see thee dying On a log Expiring frog!”’

‘Beautiful!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Fine,’ said Mr. Leo Hunter; ‘so simple.’

‘Very,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘The next verse is still more touching. Shall I repeat it?’

‘If you please,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It runs thus,’ said the grave man, still more gravely.

‘“Say, have fiends in shape of boys, With wild halloo, and brutal noise,

Hunted thee from marshy joys, With a dog, Expiring frog!”’

‘Finely expressed,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘All point, Sir,’ said Mr. Leo Hunter; ‘but you shall hear Mrs. Leo

Hunter repeat it. She can do justice to it, Sir. She will repeat it, in

character, Sir, to-morrow morning.’

‘In character!’

‘As Minerva. But I forgot--it’s a fancy-dress \_dejeune\_.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Pickwick, glancing at his own figure--‘I can’t

possibly--’

‘Can’t, sir; can’t!’ exclaimed Mr. Leo Hunter. ‘Solomon Lucas, the Jew

in the High Street, has thousands of fancy-dresses. Consider, Sir, how

many appropriate characters are open for your selection. Plato, Zeno,

Epicurus, Pythagoras--all founders of clubs.’

‘I know that,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but as I cannot put myself in

competition with those great men, I cannot presume to wear their

dresses.’

The grave man considered deeply, for a few seconds, and then said--

‘On reflection, Sir, I don’t know whether it would not afford Mrs. Leo

Hunter greater pleasure, if her guests saw a gentleman of your celebrity

in his own costume, rather than in an assumed one. I may venture to

promise an exception in your case, sir--yes, I am quite certain that, on

behalf of Mrs. Leo Hunter, I may venture to do so.’

‘In that case,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I shall have great pleasure in

coming.’

‘But I waste your time, Sir,’ said the grave man, as if suddenly

recollecting himself. ‘I know its value, sir. I will not detain you. I

may tell Mrs. Leo Hunter, then, that she may confidently expect you and

your distinguished friends? Good-morning, Sir, I am proud to have beheld

so eminent a personage--not a step sir; not a word.’ And without giving

Mr. Pickwick time to offer remonstrance or denial, Mr. Leo Hunter

stalked gravely away.

Mr. Pickwick took up his hat, and repaired to the Peacock, but Mr.

Winkle had conveyed the intelligence of the fancy-ball there, before

him.

‘Mrs. Pott’s going,’ were the first words with which he saluted his

leader.

‘Is she?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘As Apollo,’ replied Winkle. ‘Only Pott objects to the tunic.’

‘He is right. He is quite right,’ said Mr. Pickwick emphatically.

‘Yes; so she’s going to wear a white satin gown with gold spangles.’

‘They’ll hardly know what she’s meant for; will they?’ inquired Mr.

Snodgrass.

‘Of course they will,’ replied Mr. Winkle indignantly. ‘They’ll see her

lyre, won’t they?’

‘True; I forgot that,’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

‘I shall go as a bandit,’ interposed Mr. Tupman.

‘What!’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a sudden start.

‘As a bandit,’ repeated Mr. Tupman, mildly.

‘You don’t mean to say,’ said Mr. Pickwick, gazing with solemn sternness

at his friend--‘you don’t mean to say, Mr. Tupman, that it is your

intention to put yourself into a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch

tail?’

‘Such \_is\_ my intention, Sir,’ replied Mr. Tupman warmly. ‘And why not,

sir?’

‘Because, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, considerably excited--‘because you

are too old, Sir.’

‘Too old!’ exclaimed Mr. Tupman.

‘And if any further ground of objection be wanting,’ continued Mr.

Pickwick, ‘you are too fat, sir.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Tupman, his face suffused with a crimson glow, ‘this is

an insult.’

‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, in the same tone, ‘it is not half the

insult to you, that your appearance in my presence in a green velvet

jacket, with a two-inch tail, would be to me.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Tupman, ‘you’re a fellow.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘you’re another!’

Mr. Tupman advanced a step or two, and glared at Mr. Pickwick. Mr.

Pickwick returned the glare, concentrated into a focus by means of his

spectacles, and breathed a bold defiance. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle

looked on, petrified at beholding such a scene between two such men.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Tupman, after a short pause, speaking in a low, deep

voice, ‘you have called me old.’

‘I have,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘And fat.’

‘I reiterate the charge.’

‘And a fellow.’

‘So you are!’

There was a fearful pause.

‘My attachment to your person, sir,’ said Mr. Tupman, speaking in a

voice tremulous with emotion, and tucking up his wristbands meanwhile,

‘is great--very great--but upon that person, I must take summary

vengeance.’

‘Come on, Sir!’ replied Mr. Pickwick. Stimulated by the exciting nature

of the dialogue, the heroic man actually threw himself into a paralytic

attitude, confidently supposed by the two bystanders to have been

intended as a posture of defence.

‘What!’ exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, suddenly recovering the power of

speech, of which intense astonishment had previously bereft him, and

rushing between the two, at the imminent hazard of receiving an

application on the temple from each--‘what! Mr. Pickwick, with the eyes

of the world upon you! Mr. Tupman! who, in common with us all, derives a

lustre from his undying name! For shame, gentlemen; for shame.’

The unwonted lines which momentary passion had ruled in Mr. Pickwick’s

clear and open brow, gradually melted away, as his young friend spoke,

like the marks of a black-lead pencil beneath the softening influence of

india-rubber. His countenance had resumed its usual benign expression,

ere he concluded.

‘I have been hasty,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘very hasty. Tupman; your hand.’

The dark shadow passed from Mr. Tupman’s face, as he warmly grasped the

hand of his friend.

‘I have been hasty, too,’ said he.

‘No, no,’ interrupted Mr. Pickwick, ‘the fault was mine. You will wear

the green velvet jacket?’

‘No, no,’ replied Mr. Tupman.

‘To oblige me, you will,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well, well, I will,’ said Mr. Tupman.

It was accordingly settled that Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr.

Snodgrass, should all wear fancy-dresses. Thus Mr. Pickwick was led by

the very warmth of his own good feelings to give his consent to a

proceeding from which his better judgment would have recoiled--a more

striking illustration of his amiable character could hardly have been

conceived, even if the events recorded in these pages had been wholly

imaginary.

Mr. Leo Hunter had not exaggerated the resources of Mr. Solomon Lucas.

His wardrobe was extensive--very extensive--not strictly classical

perhaps, not quite new, nor did it contain any one garment made

precisely after the fashion of any age or time, but everything was more

or less spangled; and what can be prettier than spangles! It may be

objected that they are not adapted to the daylight, but everybody knows

that they would glitter if there were lamps; and nothing can be clearer

than that if people give fancy-balls in the day-time, and the dresses do

not show quite as well as they would by night, the fault lies solely

with the people who give the fancy-balls, and is in no wise chargeable

on the spangles. Such was the convincing reasoning of Mr. Solomon Lucas;

and influenced by such arguments did Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr.

Snodgrass engage to array themselves in costumes which his taste and

experience induced him to recommend as admirably suited to the occasion.

A carriage was hired from the Town Arms, for the accommodation of the

Pickwickians, and a chariot was ordered from the same repository, for

the purpose of conveying Mr. and Mrs. Pott to Mrs. Leo Hunter’s grounds,

which Mr. Pott, as a delicate acknowledgment of having received an

invitation, had already confidently predicted in the Eatanswill

\_Gazette\_ ‘would present a scene of varied and delicious enchantment--a

bewildering coruscation of beauty and talent--a lavish and prodigal

display of hospitality--above all, a degree of splendour softened by the

most exquisite taste; and adornment refined with perfect harmony and the

chastest good keeping--compared with which, the fabled gorgeousness of

Eastern fairyland itself would appear to be clothed in as many dark and

murky colours, as must be the mind of the splenetic and unmanly being

who could presume to taint with the venom of his envy, the preparations

made by the virtuous and highly distinguished lady at whose shrine this

humble tribute of admiration was offered.’ This last was a piece of

biting sarcasm against the \_Independent\_, who, in consequence of not

having been invited at all, had been, through four numbers, affecting to

sneer at the whole affair, in his very largest type, with all the

adjectives in capital letters.

The morning came: it was a pleasant sight to behold Mr. Tupman in full

brigand’s costume, with a very tight jacket, sitting like a pincushion

over his back and shoulders, the upper portion of his legs incased in

the velvet shorts, and the lower part thereof swathed in the complicated

bandages to which all brigands are peculiarly attached. It was pleasing

to see his open and ingenuous countenance, well mustachioed and corked,

looking out from an open shirt collar; and to contemplate the sugar-loaf

hat, decorated with ribbons of all colours, which he was compelled to

carry on his knee, inasmuch as no known conveyance with a top to it,

would admit of any man’s carrying it between his head and the roof.

Equally humorous and agreeable was the appearance of Mr. Snodgrass in

blue satin trunks and cloak, white silk tights and shoes, and Grecian

helmet, which everybody knows (and if they do not, Mr. Solomon Lucas

did) to have been the regular, authentic, everyday costume of a

troubadour, from the earliest ages down to the time of their final

disappearance from the face of the earth. All this was pleasant, but

this was as nothing compared with the shouting of the populace when the

carriage drew up, behind Mr. Pott’s chariot, which chariot itself drew

up at Mr. Pott’s door, which door itself opened, and displayed the great

Pott accoutred as a Russian officer of justice, with a tremendous knout

in his hand--tastefully typical of the stern and mighty power of the

Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, and the fearful lashings it bestowed on public

offenders.

‘Bravo!’ shouted Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass from the passage, when

they beheld the walking allegory.

‘Bravo!’ Mr. Pickwick was heard to exclaim, from the passage.

‘Hoo-roar Pott!’ shouted the populace. Amid these salutations, Mr. Pott,

smiling with that kind of bland dignity which sufficiently testified

that he felt his power, and knew how to exert it, got into the chariot.

Then there emerged from the house, Mrs. Pott, who would have looked very

like Apollo if she hadn’t had a gown on, conducted by Mr. Winkle, who,

in his light-red coat could not possibly have been mistaken for anything

but a sportsman, if he had not borne an equal resemblance to a general

postman. Last of all came Mr. Pickwick, whom the boys applauded as loud

as anybody, probably under the impression that his tights and gaiters

were some remnants of the dark ages; and then the two vehicles proceeded

towards Mrs. Leo Hunter’s; Mr. Weller (who was to assist in waiting)

being stationed on the box of that in which his master was seated.

Every one of the men, women, boys, girls, and babies, who were assembled

to see the visitors in their fancy-dresses, screamed with delight and

ecstasy, when Mr. Pickwick, with the brigand on one arm, and the

troubadour on the other, walked solemnly up the entrance. Never were

such shouts heard as those which greeted Mr. Tupman’s efforts to fix the

sugar-loaf hat on his head, by way of entering the garden in style.

The preparations were on the most delightful scale; fully realising the

prophetic Pott’s anticipations about the gorgeousness of Eastern

fairyland, and at once affording a sufficient contradiction to the

malignant statements of the reptile \_Independent\_. The grounds were more

than an acre and a quarter in extent, and they were filled with people!

Never was such a blaze of beauty, and fashion, and literature. There was

the young lady who ‘did’ the poetry in the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, in the

garb of a sultana, leaning upon the arm of the young gentleman who ‘did’

the review department, and who was appropriately habited in a field-

marshal’s uniform--the boots excepted. There were hosts of these

geniuses, and any reasonable person would have thought it honour enough

to meet them. But more than these, there were half a dozen lions from

London--authors, real authors, who had written whole books, and printed

them afterwards--and here you might see ‘em, walking about, like

ordinary men, smiling, and talking--aye, and talking pretty considerable

nonsense too, no doubt with the benign intention of rendering themselves

intelligible to the common people about them. Moreover, there was a band

of music in pasteboard caps; four something-ean singers in the costume

of their country, and a dozen hired waiters in the costume of \_their

\_country--and very dirty costume too. And above all, there was Mrs. Leo

Hunter in the character of Minerva, receiving the company, and

overflowing with pride and gratification at the notion of having called

such distinguished individuals together.

‘Mr. Pickwick, ma’am,’ said a servant, as that gentleman approached the

presiding goddess, with his hat in his hand, and the brigand and

troubadour on either arm.

‘What! Where!’ exclaimed Mrs. Leo Hunter, starting up, in an affected

rapture of surprise.

‘Here,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Is it possible that I have really the gratification of beholding Mr.

Pickwick himself!’ ejaculated Mrs. Leo Hunter.

‘No other, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, bowing very low. ‘Permit me to

introduce my friends--Mr. Tupman--Mr. Winkle--Mr. Snodgrass--to the

authoress of “The Expiring Frog.”’

Very few people but those who have tried it, know what a difficult

process it is to bow in green velvet smalls, and a tight jacket, and

high-crowned hat; or in blue satin trunks and white silks, or knee-cords

and top-boots that were never made for the wearer, and have been fixed

upon him without the remotest reference to the comparative dimensions of

himself and the suit. Never were such distortions as Mr. Tupman’s frame

underwent in his efforts to appear easy and graceful--never was such

ingenious posturing, as his fancy-dressed friends exhibited.

‘Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter, ‘I must make you promise not to

stir from my side the whole day. There are hundreds of people here, that

I must positively introduce you to.’

‘You are very kind, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘In the first place, here are my little girls; I had almost forgotten

them,’ said Minerva, carelessly pointing towards a couple of full-grown

young ladies, of whom one might be about twenty, and the other a year or

two older, and who were dressed in very juvenile costumes--whether to

make them look young, or their mamma younger, Mr. Pickwick does not

distinctly inform us.

‘They are very beautiful,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as the juveniles turned

away, after being presented.

‘They are very like their mamma, Sir,’ said Mr. Pott, majestically.

‘Oh, you naughty man,’ exclaimed Mrs. Leo Hunter, playfully tapping the

editor’s arm with her fan (Minerva with a fan!).

‘Why now, my dear Mrs. Hunter,’ said Mr. Pott, who was trumpeter in

ordinary at the Den, ‘you know that when your picture was in the

exhibition of the Royal Academy, last year, everybody inquired whether

it was intended for you, or your youngest daughter; for you were so much

alike that there was no telling the difference between you.’

‘Well, and if they did, why need you repeat it, before strangers?’ said

Mrs. Leo Hunter, bestowing another tap on the slumbering lion of the

Eatanswill \_Gazette\_.

‘Count, count,’ screamed Mrs. Leo Hunter to a well-whiskered individual

in a foreign uniform, who was passing by.

‘Ah! you want me?’ said the count, turning back.

‘I want to introduce two very clever people to each other,’ said Mrs.

Leo Hunter. ‘Mr. Pickwick, I have great pleasure in introducing you to

Count Smorltork.’ She added in a hurried whisper to Mr. Pickwick--‘The

famous foreigner--gathering materials for his great work on England--

hem!--Count Smorltork, Mr. Pickwick.’

Mr. Pickwick saluted the count with all the reverence due to so great a

man, and the count drew forth a set of tablets.

‘What you say, Mrs. Hunt?’ inquired the count, smiling graciously on the

gratified Mrs. Leo Hunter, ‘Pig Vig or Big Vig--what you call--lawyer--

eh? I see--that is it. Big Vig’--and the count was proceeding to enter

Mr. Pickwick in his tablets, as a gentleman of the long robe, who

derived his name from the profession to which he belonged, when Mrs. Leo

Hunter interposed.

‘No, no, count,’ said the lady, ‘Pick-wick.’

‘Ah, ah, I see,’ replied the count. ‘Peek--christian name; Weeks--

surname; good, ver good. Peek Weeks. How you do, Weeks?’

‘Quite well, I thank you,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, with all his usual

affability. ‘Have you been long in England?’

‘Long--ver long time--fortnight--more.’

‘Do you stay here long?’

‘One week.’

‘You will have enough to do,’ said Mr. Pickwick smiling, ‘to gather all

the materials you want in that time.’

‘Eh, they are gathered,’ said the count.

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘They are here,’ added the count, tapping his forehead significantly.

‘Large book at home--full of notes--music, picture, science, potry,

poltic; all tings.’

‘The word politics, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘comprises in itself, a

difficult study of no inconsiderable magnitude.’

‘Ah!’ said the count, drawing out the tablets again, ‘ver good--fine

words to begin a chapter. Chapter forty-seven. Poltics. The word poltic

surprises by himself--’ And down went Mr. Pickwick’s remark, in Count

Smorltork’s tablets, with such variations and additions as the count’s

exuberant fancy suggested, or his imperfect knowledge of the language

occasioned.

‘Count,’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter.

‘Mrs. Hunt,’ replied the count.

‘This is Mr. Snodgrass, a friend of Mr. Pickwick’s, and a poet.’

‘Stop,’ exclaimed the count, bringing out the tablets once more. ‘Head,

potry--chapter, literary friends--name, Snowgrass; ver good. Introduced

to Snowgrass--great poet, friend of Peek Weeks--by Mrs. Hunt, which

wrote other sweet poem--what is that name?--Fog--Perspiring Fog--ver

good--ver good indeed.’ And the count put up his tablets, and with

sundry bows and acknowledgments walked away, thoroughly satisfied that

he had made the most important and valuable additions to his stock of

information.

‘Wonderful man, Count Smorltork,’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter.

‘Sound philosopher,’ said Mr. Pott.

‘Clear-headed, strong-minded person,’ added Mr. Snodgrass.

A chorus of bystanders took up the shout of Count Smorltork’s praise,

shook their heads sagely, and unanimously cried, ‘Very!’

As the enthusiasm in Count Smorltork’s favour ran very high, his praises

might have been sung until the end of the festivities, if the four

something-ean singers had not ranged themselves in front of a small

apple-tree, to look picturesque, and commenced singing their national

songs, which appeared by no means difficult of execution, inasmuch as

the grand secret seemed to be, that three of the something-ean singers

should grunt, while the fourth howled. This interesting performance

having concluded amidst the loud plaudits of the whole company, a boy

forthwith proceeded to entangle himself with the rails of a chair, and

to jump over it, and crawl under it, and fall down with it, and do

everything but sit upon it, and then to make a cravat of his legs, and

tie them round his neck, and then to illustrate the ease with which a

human being can be made to look like a magnified toad--all which feats

yielded high delight and satisfaction to the assembled spectators. After

which, the voice of Mrs. Pott was heard to chirp faintly forth,

something which courtesy interpreted into a song, which was all very

classical, and strictly in character, because Apollo was himself a

composer, and composers can very seldom sing their own music or anybody

else’s, either. This was succeeded by Mrs. Leo Hunter’s recitation of

her far-famed ‘Ode to an Expiring Frog,’ which was encored once, and

would have been encored twice, if the major part of the guests, who

thought it was high time to get something to eat, had not said that it

was perfectly shameful to take advantage of Mrs. Hunter’s good nature.

So although Mrs. Leo Hunter professed her perfect willingness to recite

the ode again, her kind and considerate friends wouldn’t hear of it on

any account; and the refreshment room being thrown open, all the people

who had ever been there before, scrambled in with all possible despatch-

-Mrs. Leo Hunter’s usual course of proceedings being, to issue cards for

a hundred, and breakfast for fifty, or in other words to feed only the

very particular lions, and let the smaller animals take care of

themselves.

‘Where is Mr. Pott?’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter, as she placed the aforesaid

lions around her.

‘Here I am,’ said the editor, from the remotest end of the room; far

beyond all hope of food, unless something was done for him by the

hostess.

‘Won’t you come up here?’

‘Oh, pray don’t mind him,’ said Mrs. Pott, in the most obliging voice--

‘you give yourself a great deal of unnecessary trouble, Mrs. Hunter.

You’ll do very well there, won’t you--dear?’

‘Certainly--love,’ replied the unhappy Pott, with a grim smile. Alas for

the knout! The nervous arm that wielded it, with such a gigantic force

on public characters, was paralysed beneath the glance of the imperious

Mrs. Pott.

Mrs. Leo Hunter looked round her in triumph. Count Smorltork was busily

engaged in taking notes of the contents of the dishes; Mr. Tupman was

doing the honours of the lobster salad to several lionesses, with a

degree of grace which no brigand ever exhibited before; Mr. Snodgrass

having cut out the young gentleman who cut up the books for the

Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, was engaged in an impassioned argument with the

young lady who did the poetry; and Mr. Pickwick was making himself

universally agreeable. Nothing seemed wanting to render the select

circle complete, when Mr. Leo Hunter--whose department on these

occasions, was to stand about in doorways, and talk to the less

important people--suddenly called out--

‘My dear; here’s Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall.’

‘Oh dear,’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter, ‘how anxiously I have been expecting

him. Pray make room, to let Mr. Fitz-Marshall pass. Tell Mr. Fitz-

Marshall, my dear, to come up to me directly, to be scolded for coming

so late.’

‘Coming, my dear ma’am,’ cried a voice, ‘as quick as I can--crowds of

people--full room--hard work--very.’

Mr. Pickwick’s knife and fork fell from his hand. He stared across the

table at Mr. Tupman, who had dropped his knife and fork, and was looking

as if he were about to sink into the ground without further notice.

‘Ah!’ cried the voice, as its owner pushed his way among the last five-

and-twenty Turks, officers, cavaliers, and Charles the Seconds, that

remained between him and the table, ‘regular mangle--Baker’s patent--not

a crease in my coat, after all this squeezing--might have “got up my

linen” as I came along--ha! ha! not a bad idea, that--queer thing to

have it mangled when it’s upon one, though--trying process--very.’

With these broken words, a young man dressed as a naval officer made his

way up to the table, and presented to the astonished Pickwickians the

identical form and features of Mr. Alfred Jingle.

The offender had barely time to take Mrs. Leo Hunter’s proffered hand,

when his eyes encountered the indignant orbs of Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hollo!’ said Jingle. ‘Quite forgot--no directions to postillion--give

‘em at once--back in a minute.’

‘The servant, or Mr. Hunter will do it in a moment, Mr. Fitz-Marshall,’

said Mrs. Leo Hunter.

‘No, no--I’ll do it--shan’t be long--back in no time,’ replied Jingle.

With these words he disappeared among the crowd.

‘Will you allow me to ask you, ma’am,’ said the excited Mr. Pickwick,

rising from his seat, ‘who that young man is, and where he resides?’

‘He is a gentleman of fortune, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mrs. Leo Hunter, ‘to

whom I very much want to introduce you. The count will be delighted with

him.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Mr. Pickwick hastily. ‘His residence--’

‘Is at present at the Angel at Bury.’

‘At Bury?’

‘At Bury St. Edmunds, not many miles from here. But dear me, Mr.

Pickwick, you are not going to leave us; surely Mr. Pickwick you cannot

think of going so soon?’

But long before Mrs. Leo Hunter had finished speaking, Mr. Pickwick had

plunged through the throng, and reached the garden, whither he was

shortly afterwards joined by Mr. Tupman, who had followed his friend

closely.

‘It’s of no use,’ said Mr. Tupman. ‘He has gone.’

‘I know it,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘and I will follow him.’

‘Follow him! Where?’ inquired Mr. Tupman.

‘To the Angel at Bury,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, speaking very quickly.

‘How do we know whom he is deceiving there? He deceived a worthy man

once, and we were the innocent cause. He shall not do it again, if I can

help it; I’ll expose him! Sam! Where’s my servant?’

‘Here you are, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, emerging from a sequestered spot,

where he had been engaged in discussing a bottle of Madeira, which he

had abstracted from the breakfast-table an hour or two before. ‘Here’s

your servant, Sir. Proud o’ the title, as the living skellinton said,

ven they show’d him.’

‘Follow me instantly,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Tupman, if I stay at Bury,

you can join me there, when I write. Till then, good-bye!’

Remonstrances were useless. Mr. Pickwick was roused, and his mind was

made up. Mr. Tupman returned to his companions; and in another hour had

drowned all present recollection of Mr. Alfred Jingle, or Mr. Charles

Fitz-Marshall, in an exhilarating quadrille and a bottle of champagne.

By that time, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, perched on the outside of a

stage-coach, were every succeeding minute placing a less and less

distance between themselves and the good old town of Bury St. Edmunds.

CHAPTER XVI. TOO FULL OF ADVENTURE TO BE BRIEFLY DESCRIBED

There is no month in the whole year in which nature wears a more

beautiful appearance than in the month of August. Spring has many

beauties, and May is a fresh and blooming month, but the charms of this

time of year are enhanced by their contrast with the winter season.

August has no such advantage. It comes when we remember nothing but

clear skies, green fields, and sweet-smelling flowers--when the

recollection of snow, and ice, and bleak winds, has faded from our minds

as completely as they have disappeared from the earth--and yet what a

pleasant time it is! Orchards and cornfields ring with the hum of

labour; trees bend beneath the thick clusters of rich fruit which bow

their branches to the ground; and the corn, piled in graceful sheaves,

or waving in every light breath that sweeps above it, as if it wooed the

sickle, tinges the landscape with a golden hue. A mellow softness

appears to hang over the whole earth; the influence of the season seems

to extend itself to the very wagon, whose slow motion across the well-

reaped field is perceptible only to the eye, but strikes with no harsh

sound upon the ear.

As the coach rolls swiftly past the fields and orchards which skirt the

road, groups of women and children, piling the fruit in sieves, or

gathering the scattered ears of corn, pause for an instant from their

labour, and shading the sun-burned face with a still browner hand, gaze

upon the passengers with curious eyes, while some stout urchin, too

small to work, but too mischievous to be left at home, scrambles over

the side of the basket in which he has been deposited for security, and

kicks and screams with delight. The reaper stops in his work, and stands

with folded arms, looking at the vehicle as it whirls past; and the

rough cart-horses bestow a sleepy glance upon the smart coach team,

which says as plainly as a horse’s glance can, ‘It’s all very fine to

look at, but slow going, over a heavy field, is better than warm work

like that, upon a dusty road, after all.’ You cast a look behind you, as

you turn a corner of the road. The women and children have resumed their

labour; the reaper once more stoops to his work; the cart-horses have

moved on; and all are again in motion.

The influence of a scene like this, was not lost upon the well-regulated

mind of Mr. Pickwick. Intent upon the resolution he had formed, of

exposing the real character of the nefarious Jingle, in any quarter in

which he might be pursuing his fraudulent designs, he sat at first

taciturn and contemplative, brooding over the means by which his purpose

could be best attained. By degrees his attention grew more and more

attracted by the objects around him; and at last he derived as much

enjoyment from the ride, as if it had been undertaken for the

pleasantest reason in the world.

‘Delightful prospect, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Beats the chimbley-pots, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, touching his hat.

‘I suppose you have hardly seen anything but chimney-pots and bricks and

mortar all your life, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, smiling.

‘I worn’t always a boots, sir,’ said Mr. Weller, with a shake of the

head. ‘I wos a vaginer’s boy, once.’

‘When was that?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘When I wos first pitched neck and crop into the world, to play at leap-

frog with its troubles,’ replied Sam. ‘I wos a carrier’s boy at

startin’; then a vaginer’s, then a helper, then a boots. Now I’m a

gen’l’m’n’s servant. I shall be a gen’l’m’n myself one of these days,

perhaps, with a pipe in my mouth, and a summer-house in the back-garden.

Who knows? I shouldn’t be surprised for one.’

‘You are quite a philosopher, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It runs in the family, I b’lieve, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘My

father’s wery much in that line now. If my mother-in-law blows him up,

he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out,

and gets another. Then she screams wery loud, and falls into ‘sterics;

and he smokes wery comfortably till she comes to agin. That’s

philosophy, Sir, ain’t it?’

‘A very good substitute for it, at all events,’ replied Mr. Pickwick,

laughing. ‘It must have been of great service to you, in the course of

your rambling life, Sam.’

‘Service, sir,’ exclaimed Sam. ‘You may say that. Arter I run away from

the carrier, and afore I took up with the vaginer, I had unfurnished

lodgin’s for a fortnight.’

‘Unfurnished lodgings?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes--the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge. Fine sleeping-place--vithin ten

minutes’ walk of all the public offices--only if there is any objection

to it, it is that the sitivation’s rayther too airy. I see some queer

sights there.’

Ah, I suppose you did,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with an air of considerable

interest.

‘Sights, sir,’ resumed Mr. Weller, ‘as ‘ud penetrate your benevolent

heart, and come out on the other side. You don’t see the reg’lar

wagrants there; trust ‘em, they knows better than that. Young beggars,

male and female, as hasn’t made a rise in their profession, takes up

their quarters there sometimes; but it’s generally the worn-out,

starving, houseless creeturs as roll themselves in the dark corners o’

them lonesome places--poor creeturs as ain’t up to the twopenny rope.’

‘And pray, Sam, what is the twopenny rope?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘The twopenny rope, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘is just a cheap lodgin’

house, where the beds is twopence a night.’

‘What do they call a bed a rope for?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Bless your innocence, sir, that ain’t it,’ replied Sam. ‘Ven the lady

and gen’l’m’n as keeps the hot-el first begun business, they used to

make the beds on the floor; but this wouldn’t do at no price, ‘cos

instead o’ taking a moderate twopenn’orth o’ sleep, the lodgers used to

lie there half the day. So now they has two ropes, ‘bout six foot apart,

and three from the floor, which goes right down the room; and the beds

are made of slips of coarse sacking, stretched across ‘em.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘the adwantage o’ the plan’s hobvious. At six

o’clock every mornin’ they let’s go the ropes at one end, and down falls

the lodgers. Consequence is, that being thoroughly waked, they get up

wery quietly, and walk away!’

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said Sam, suddenly breaking off in his

loquacious discourse. ‘Is this Bury St. Edmunds?’

‘It is,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

The coach rattled through the well-paved streets of a handsome little

town, of thriving and cleanly appearance, and stopped before a large inn

situated in a wide open street, nearly facing the old abbey.

‘And this,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking up. ‘Is the Angel! We alight

here, Sam. But some caution is necessary. Order a private room, and do

not mention my name. You understand.’

‘Right as a trivet, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, with a wink of

intelligence; and having dragged Mr. Pickwick’s portmanteau from the

hind boot, into which it had been hastily thrown when they joined the

coach at Eatanswill, Mr. Weller disappeared on his errand. A private

room was speedily engaged; and into it Mr. Pickwick was ushered without

delay.

‘Now, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘the first thing to be done is to--’

Order dinner, Sir,’ interposed Mr. Weller. ‘It’s wery late, sir.’

‘Ah, so it is,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking at his watch. ‘You are right,

Sam.’

‘And if I might adwise, Sir,’ added Mr. Weller, ‘I’d just have a good

night’s rest arterwards, and not begin inquiring arter this here deep

‘un till the mornin’. There’s nothin’ so refreshen’ as sleep, sir, as

the servant girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful of laudanum.’

‘I think you are right, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘But I must first

ascertain that he is in the house, and not likely to go away.’

‘Leave that to me, Sir,’ said Sam. ‘Let me order you a snug little

dinner, and make my inquiries below while it’s a-getting ready; I could

worm ev’ry secret out O’ the boots’s heart, in five minutes, Sir.’

Do so,’ said Mr. Pickwick; and Mr. Weller at once retired.

In half an hour, Mr. Pickwick was seated at a very satisfactory dinner;

and in three-quarters Mr. Weller returned with the intelligence that Mr.

Charles Fitz-Marshall had ordered his private room to be retained for

him, until further notice. He was going to spend the evening at some

private house in the neighbourhood, had ordered the boots to sit up

until his return, and had taken his servant with him.

‘Now, sir,’ argued Mr. Weller, when he had concluded his report, ‘if I

can get a talk with this here servant in the mornin’, he’ll tell me all

his master’s concerns.’

‘How do you know that?’ interposed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Bless your heart, sir, servants always do,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Oh, ah, I forgot that,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Well.’

‘Then you can arrange what’s best to be done, sir, and we can act

accordingly.’

As it appeared that this was the best arrangement that could be made, it

was finally agreed upon. Mr. Weller, by his master’s permission, retired

to spend the evening in his own way; and was shortly afterwards elected,

by the unanimous voice of the assembled company, into the taproom chair,

in which honourable post he acquitted himself so much to the

satisfaction of the gentlemen-frequenters, that their roars of laughter

and approbation penetrated to Mr. Pickwick’s bedroom, and shortened the

term of his natural rest by at least three hours.

Early on the ensuing morning, Mr. Weller was dispelling all the feverish

remains of the previous evening’s conviviality, through the

instrumentality of a halfpenny shower-bath (having induced a young

gentleman attached to the stable department, by the offer of that coin,

to pump over his head and face, until he was perfectly restored), when

he was attracted by the appearance of a young fellow in mulberry-

coloured livery, who was sitting on a bench in the yard, reading what

appeared to be a hymn-book, with an air of deep abstraction, but who

occasionally stole a glance at the individual under the pump, as if he

took some interest in his proceedings, nevertheless.

‘You’re a rum ‘un to look at, you are!’ thought Mr. Weller, the first

time his eyes encountered the glance of the stranger in the mulberry

suit, who had a large, sallow, ugly face, very sunken eyes, and a

gigantic head, from which depended a quantity of lank black hair.

‘You’re a rum ‘un!’ thought Mr. Weller; and thinking this, he went on

washing himself, and thought no more about him.

Still the man kept glancing from his hymn-book to Sam, and from Sam to

his hymn-book, as if he wanted to open a conversation. So at last, Sam,

by way of giving him an opportunity, said with a familiar nod--

‘How are you, governor?’

‘I am happy to say, I am pretty well, Sir,’ said the man, speaking with

great deliberation, and closing the book. ‘I hope you are the same,

Sir?’

‘Why, if I felt less like a walking brandy-bottle I shouldn’t be quite

so staggery this mornin’,’ replied Sam. ‘Are you stoppin’ in this house,

old ‘un?’

The mulberry man replied in the affirmative.

‘How was it you worn’t one of us, last night?’ inquired Sam, scrubbing

his face with the towel. ‘You seem one of the jolly sort--looks as

conwivial as a live trout in a lime basket,’ added Mr. Weller, in an

undertone.

‘I was out last night with my master,’ replied the stranger.

‘What’s his name?’ inquired Mr. Weller, colouring up very red with

sudden excitement, and the friction of the towel combined.

‘Fitz-Marshall,’ said the mulberry man.

‘Give us your hand,’ said Mr. Weller, advancing; ‘I should like to know

you. I like your appearance, old fellow.’

‘Well, that is very strange,’ said the mulberry man, with great

simplicity of manner. ‘I like yours so much, that I wanted to speak to

you, from the very first moment I saw you under the pump.’

Did you though?’

‘Upon my word. Now, isn’t that curious?’

‘Wery sing’ler,’ said Sam, inwardly congratulating himself upon the

softness of the stranger. ‘What’s your name, my patriarch?’

‘Job.’

‘And a wery good name it is; only one I know that ain’t got a nickname

to it. What’s the other name?’

‘Trotter,’ said the stranger. ‘What is yours?’

Sam bore in mind his master’s caution, and replied--

‘My name’s Walker; my master’s name’s Wilkins. Will you take a drop o’

somethin’ this mornin’, Mr. Trotter?’

Mr. Trotter acquiesced in this agreeable proposal; and having deposited

his book in his coat pocket, accompanied Mr. Weller to the tap, where

they were soon occupied in discussing an exhilarating compound, formed

by mixing together, in a pewter vessel, certain quantities of British

Hollands and the fragrant essence of the clove.

‘And what sort of a place have you got?’ inquired Sam, as he filled his

companion’s glass, for the second time.

‘Bad,’ said Job, smacking his lips, ‘very bad.’

‘You don’t mean that?’ said Sam.

‘I do, indeed. Worse than that, my master’s going to be married.’

‘No.’

‘Yes; and worse than that, too, he’s going to run away with an immense

rich heiress, from boarding-school.’

‘What a dragon!’ said Sam, refilling his companion’s glass. ‘It’s some

boarding-school in this town, I suppose, ain’t it?’ Now, although this

question was put in the most careless tone imaginable, Mr. Job Trotter

plainly showed by gestures that he perceived his new friend’s anxiety to

draw forth an answer to it. He emptied his glass, looked mysteriously at

his companion, winked both of his small eyes, one after the other, and

finally made a motion with his arm, as if he were working an imaginary

pump-handle; thereby intimating that he (Mr. Trotter) considered himself

as undergoing the process of being pumped by Mr. Samuel Weller.

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Trotter, in conclusion, ‘that’s not to be told to

everybody. That is a secret--a great secret, Mr. Walker.’ As the

mulberry man said this, he turned his glass upside down, by way of

reminding his companion that he had nothing left wherewith to slake his

thirst. Sam observed the hint; and feeling the delicate manner in which

it was conveyed, ordered the pewter vessel to be refilled, whereat the

small eyes of the mulberry man glistened.

‘And so it’s a secret?’ said Sam.

‘I should rather suspect it was,’ said the mulberry man, sipping his

liquor, with a complacent face.

‘I suppose your mas’r’s wery rich?’ said Sam.

Mr. Trotter smiled, and holding his glass in his left hand, gave four

distinct slaps on the pockets of his mulberry indescribables with his

right, as if to intimate that his master might have done the same

without alarming anybody much by the chinking of coin.

‘Ah,’ said Sam, ‘that’s the game, is it?’

The mulberry man nodded significantly.

‘Well, and don’t you think, old feller,’ remonstrated Mr. Weller, ‘that

if you let your master take in this here young lady, you’re a precious

rascal?’

‘I know that,’ said Job Trotter, turning upon his companion a

countenance of deep contrition, and groaning slightly, ‘I know that, and

that’s what it is that preys upon my mind. But what am I to do?’

‘Do!’ said Sam; ‘di-wulge to the missis, and give up your master.’

‘Who’d believe me?’ replied Job Trotter. ‘The young lady’s considered

the very picture of innocence and discretion. She’d deny it, and so

would my master. Who’d believe me? I should lose my place, and get

indicted for a conspiracy, or some such thing; that’s all I should take

by my motion.’

‘There’s somethin’ in that,’ said Sam, ruminating; ‘there’s somethin’ in

that.’

‘If I knew any respectable gentleman who would take the matter up,’

continued Mr. Trotter. ‘I might have some hope of preventing the

elopement; but there’s the same difficulty, Mr. Walker, just the same. I

know no gentleman in this strange place; and ten to one if I did,

whether he would believe my story.’

‘Come this way,’ said Sam, suddenly jumping up, and grasping the

mulberry man by the arm. ‘My mas’r’s the man you want, I see.’ And after

a slight resistance on the part of Job Trotter, Sam led his newly-found

friend to the apartment of Mr. Pickwick, to whom he presented him,

together with a brief summary of the dialogue we have just repeated.

‘I am very sorry to betray my master, sir,’ said Job Trotter, applying

to his eyes a pink checked pocket-handkerchief about six inches square.

‘The feeling does you a great deal of honour,’ replied Mr. Pickwick;

‘but it is your duty, nevertheless.’

‘I know it is my duty, Sir,’ replied Job, with great emotion. ‘We should

all try to discharge our duty, Sir, and I humbly endeavour to discharge

mine, Sir; but it is a hard trial to betray a master, Sir, whose clothes

you wear, and whose bread you eat, even though he is a scoundrel, Sir.’

‘You are a very good fellow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, much affected; ‘an

honest fellow.’

‘Come, come,’ interposed Sam, who had witnessed Mr. Trotter’s tears with

considerable impatience, ‘blow this ‘ere water-cart bis’ness. It won’t

do no good, this won’t.’

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick reproachfully. ‘I am sorry to find that you

have so little respect for this young man’s feelings.’

‘His feelin’s is all wery well, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘and as

they’re so wery fine, and it’s a pity he should lose ‘em, I think he’d

better keep ‘em in his own buzzum, than let ‘em ewaporate in hot water,

‘specially as they do no good. Tears never yet wound up a clock, or

worked a steam ingin’. The next time you go out to a smoking party,

young fellow, fill your pipe with that ‘ere reflection; and for the

present just put that bit of pink gingham into your pocket. ‘Tain’t so

handsome that you need keep waving it about, as if you was a tight-rope

dancer.’

‘My man is in the right,’ said Mr. Pickwick, accosting Job, ‘although

his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally

incomprehensible.’

‘He is, sir, very right,’ said Mr. Trotter, ‘and I will give way no

longer.’

Very well,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Now, where is this boarding-school?’

‘It is a large, old, red brick house, just outside the town, Sir,’

replied Job Trotter.

‘And when,’ said Mr. Pickwick--‘when is this villainous design to be

carried into execution--when is this elopement to take place?’

‘To-night, Sir,’ replied Job.

‘To-night!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘This very night, sir,’ replied Job Trotter. ‘That is what alarms me so

much.’

‘Instant measures must be taken,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I will see the

lady who keeps the establishment immediately.’

‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ said Job, ‘but that course of proceeding will

never do.’

‘Why not?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘My master, sir, is a very artful man.’

‘I know he is,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘And he has so wound himself round the old lady’s heart, Sir,’ resumed

Job, ‘that she would believe nothing to his prejudice, if you went down

on your bare knees, and swore it; especially as you have no proof but

the word of a servant, who, for anything she knows (and my master would

be sure to say so), was discharged for some fault, and does this in

revenge.’

‘What had better be done, then?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Nothing but taking him in the very act of eloping, will convince the

old lady, sir,’ replied Job.

‘All them old cats \_will \_run their heads agin milestones,’ observed Mr.

Weller, in a parenthesis.

‘But this taking him in the very act of elopement, would be a very

difficult thing to accomplish, I fear,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I don’t know, sir,’ said Mr. Trotter, after a few moments’ reflection.

‘I think it might be very easily done.’

‘How?’ was Mr. Pickwick’s inquiry.

‘Why,’ replied Mr. Trotter, ‘my master and I, being in the confidence of

the two servants, will be secreted in the kitchen at ten o’clock. When

the family have retired to rest, we shall come out of the kitchen, and

the young lady out of her bedroom. A post-chaise will be waiting, and

away we go.’

‘Well?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were in waiting in the

garden behind, alone--’

‘Alone,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Why alone?’

‘I thought it very natural,’ replied Job, ‘that the old lady wouldn’t

like such an unpleasant discovery to be made before more persons than

can possibly be helped. The young lady, too, sir--consider her

feelings.’

‘You are very right,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘The consideration evinces your

delicacy of feeling. Go on; you are very right.’

‘Well, sir, I have been thinking that if you were waiting in the back

garden alone, and I was to let you in, at the door which opens into it,

from the end of the passage, at exactly half-past eleven o’clock, you

would be just in the very moment of time to assist me in frustrating the

designs of this bad man, by whom I have been unfortunately ensnared.’

Here Mr. Trotter sighed deeply.

‘Don’t distress yourself on that account,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘if he had

one grain of the delicacy of feeling which distinguishes you, humble as

your station is, I should have some hopes of him.’

Job Trotter bowed low; and in spite of Mr. Weller’s previous

remonstrance, the tears again rose to his eyes.

‘I never see such a feller,’ said Sam, ‘Blessed if I don’t think he’s

got a main in his head as is always turned on.’

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with great severity, ‘hold your tongue.’

‘Wery well, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘I don’t like this plan,’ said Mr. Pickwick, after deep meditation. ‘Why

cannot I communicate with the young lady’s friends?’

‘Because they live one hundred miles from here, sir,’ responded Job

Trotter.

‘That’s a clincher,’ said Mr. Weller, aside.

‘Then this garden,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick. ‘How am I to get into it?’

‘The wall is very low, sir, and your servant will give you a leg up.’

My servant will give me a leg up,’ repeated Mr. Pickwick mechanically.

‘You will be sure to be near this door that you speak of?’

‘You cannot mistake it, Sir; it’s the only one that opens into the

garden. Tap at it when you hear the clock strike, and I will open it

instantly.’

‘I don’t like the plan,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but as I see no other, and

as the happiness of this young lady’s whole life is at stake, I adopt

it. I shall be sure to be there.’

Thus, for the second time, did Mr. Pickwick’s innate good-feeling

involve him in an enterprise from which he would most willingly have

stood aloof.

‘What is the name of the house?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Westgate House, Sir. You turn a little to the right when you get to the

end of the town; it stands by itself, some little distance off the high

road, with the name on a brass plate on the gate.’

‘I know it,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I observed it once before, when I was

in this town. You may depend upon me.’

Mr. Trotter made another bow, and turned to depart, when Mr. Pickwick

thrust a guinea into his hand.

‘You’re a fine fellow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘and I admire your goodness

of heart. No thanks. Remember--eleven o’clock.’

‘There is no fear of my forgetting it, sir,’ replied Job Trotter. With

these words he left the room, followed by Sam.

‘I say,’ said the latter, ‘not a bad notion that ‘ere crying. I’d cry

like a rain-water spout in a shower on such good terms. How do you do

it?’

‘It comes from the heart, Mr. Walker,’ replied Job solemnly. ‘Good-

morning, sir.’

‘You’re a soft customer, you are; we’ve got it all out o’ you, anyhow,’

thought Mr. Weller, as Job walked away.

We cannot state the precise nature of the thoughts which passed through

Mr. Trotter’s mind, because we don’t know what they were.

The day wore on, evening came, and at a little before ten o’clock Sam

Weller reported that Mr. Jingle and Job had gone out together, that

their luggage was packed up, and that they had ordered a chaise. The

plot was evidently in execution, as Mr. Trotter had foretold.

Half-past ten o’clock arrived, and it was time for Mr. Pickwick to issue

forth on his delicate errand. Resisting Sam’s tender of his greatcoat,

in order that he might have no encumbrance in scaling the wall, he set

forth, followed by his attendant.

There was a bright moon, but it was behind the clouds. It was a fine dry

night, but it was most uncommonly dark. Paths, hedges, fields, houses,

and trees, were enveloped in one deep shade. The atmosphere was hot and

sultry, the summer lightning quivered faintly on the verge of the

horizon, and was the only sight that varied the dull gloom in which

everything was wrapped--sound there was none, except the distant barking

of some restless house-dog.

They found the house, read the brass plate, walked round the wall, and

stopped at that portion of it which divided them from the bottom of the

garden.

‘You will return to the inn, Sam, when you have assisted me over,’ said

Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wery well, Sir.’

‘And you will sit up, till I return.’

‘Cert’nly, Sir.’

‘Take hold of my leg; and, when I say “Over,” raise me gently.’

‘All right, sir.’

Having settled these preliminaries, Mr. Pickwick grasped the top of the

wall, and gave the word ‘Over,’ which was literally obeyed. Whether his

body partook in some degree of the elasticity of his mind, or whether

Mr. Weller’s notions of a gentle push were of a somewhat rougher

description than Mr. Pickwick’s, the immediate effect of his assistance

was to jerk that immortal gentleman completely over the wall on to the

bed beneath, where, after crushing three gooseberry-bushes and a rose-

tree, he finally alighted at full length.

‘You ha’n’t hurt yourself, I hope, Sir?’ said Sam, in a loud whisper, as

soon as he had recovered from the surprise consequent upon the

mysterious disappearance of his master.

‘I have not hurt \_myself\_, Sam, certainly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, from

the other side of the wall, ‘but I rather think that \_you \_have hurt

me.’

‘I hope not, Sir,’ said Sam.

‘Never mind,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rising, ‘it’s nothing but a few

scratches. Go away, or we shall be overheard.’

‘Good-bye, Sir.’

‘Good-bye.’

With stealthy steps Sam Weller departed, leaving Mr. Pickwick alone in

the garden.

Lights occasionally appeared in the different windows of the house, or

glanced from the staircases, as if the inmates were retiring to rest.

Not caring to go too near the door, until the appointed time, Mr.

Pickwick crouched into an angle of the wall, and awaited its arrival.

It was a situation which might well have depressed the spirits of many a

man. Mr. Pickwick, however, felt neither depression nor misgiving. He

knew that his purpose was in the main a good one, and he placed implicit

reliance on the high-minded Job. It was dull, certainly; not to say

dreary; but a contemplative man can always employ himself in meditation.

Mr. Pickwick had meditated himself into a doze, when he was roused by

the chimes of the neighbouring church ringing out the hour--half-past

eleven.

‘That’s the time,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, getting cautiously on his feet.

He looked up at the house. The lights had disappeared, and the shutters

were closed--all in bed, no doubt. He walked on tiptoe to the door, and

gave a gentle tap. Two or three minutes passing without any reply, he

gave another tap rather louder, and then another rather louder than

that.

At length the sound of feet was audible upon the stairs, and then the

light of a candle shone through the keyhole of the door. There was a

good deal of unchaining and unbolting, and the door was slowly opened.

Now the door opened outwards; and as the door opened wider and wider,

Mr. Pickwick receded behind it, more and more. What was his astonishment

when he just peeped out, by way of caution, to see that the person who

had opened it was--not Job Trotter, but a servant-girl with a candle in

her hand! Mr. Pickwick drew in his head again, with the swiftness

displayed by that admirable melodramatic performer, Punch, when he lies

in wait for the flat-headed comedian with the tin box of music.

‘It must have been the cat, Sarah,’ said the girl, addressing herself to

some one in the house. ‘Puss, puss, puss,--tit, tit, tit.’

But no animal being decoyed by these blandishments, the girl slowly

closed the door, and re-fastened it; leaving Mr. Pickwick drawn up

straight against the wall.

‘This is very curious,’ thought Mr. Pickwick. ‘They are sitting up

beyond their usual hour, I suppose. Extremely unfortunate, that they

should have chosen this night, of all others, for such a purpose--

exceedingly.’ And with these thoughts, Mr. Pickwick cautiously retired

to the angle of the wall in which he had been before ensconced; waiting

until such time as he might deem it safe to repeat the signal.

He had not been here five minutes, when a vivid flash of lightning was

followed by a loud peal of thunder that crashed and rolled away in the

distance with a terrific noise--then came another flash of lightning,

brighter than the other, and a second peal of thunder louder than the

first; and then down came the rain, with a force and fury that swept

everything before it.

Mr. Pickwick was perfectly aware that a tree is a very dangerous

neighbour in a thunderstorm. He had a tree on his right, a tree on his

left, a third before him, and a fourth behind. If he remained where he

was, he might fall the victim of an accident; if he showed himself in

the centre of the garden, he might be consigned to a constable. Once or

twice he tried to scale the wall, but having no other legs this time,

than those with which Nature had furnished him, the only effect of his

struggles was to inflict a variety of very unpleasant gratings on his

knees and shins, and to throw him into a state of the most profuse

perspiration.

‘What a dreadful situation,’ said Mr. Pickwick, pausing to wipe his brow

after this exercise. He looked up at the house--all was dark. They must

be gone to bed now. He would try the signal again.

He walked on tiptoe across the moist gravel, and tapped at the door. He

held his breath, and listened at the key-hole. No reply: very odd.

Another knock. He listened again. There was a low whispering inside, and

then a voice cried--

‘Who’s there?’

‘That’s not Job,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, hastily drawing himself straight

up against the wall again. ‘It’s a woman.’

He had scarcely had time to form this conclusion, when a window above

stairs was thrown up, and three or four female voices repeated the

query--‘Who’s there?’

Mr. Pickwick dared not move hand or foot. It was clear that the whole

establishment was roused. He made up his mind to remain where he was,

until the alarm had subsided; and then by a supernatural effort, to get

over the wall, or perish in the attempt.

Like all Mr. Pickwick’s determinations, this was the best that could be

made under the circumstances; but, unfortunately, it was founded upon

the assumption that they would not venture to open the door again. What

was his discomfiture, when he heard the chain and bolts withdrawn, and

saw the door slowly opening, wider and wider! He retreated into the

corner, step by step; but do what he would, the interposition of his own

person, prevented its being opened to its utmost width.

‘Who’s there?’ screamed a numerous chorus of treble voices from the

staircase inside, consisting of the spinster lady of the establishment,

three teachers, five female servants, and thirty boarders, all half-

dressed and in a forest of curl-papers.

Of course Mr. Pickwick didn’t say who was there: and then the burden of

the chorus changed into--‘Lor! I am so frightened.’

‘Cook,’ said the lady abbess, who took care to be on the top stair, the

very last of the group--‘cook, why don’t you go a little way into the

garden?’

Please, ma’am, I don’t like,’ responded the cook.

‘Lor, what a stupid thing that cook is!’ said the thirty boarders.

‘Cook,’ said the lady abbess, with great dignity; ‘don’t answer me, if

you please. I insist upon your looking into the garden immediately.’

Here the cook began to cry, and the housemaid said it was ‘a shame!’ for

which partisanship she received a month’s warning on the spot.

‘Do you hear, cook?’ said the lady abbess, stamping her foot

impatiently.

‘Don’t you hear your missis, cook?’ said the three teachers.

‘What an impudent thing that cook is!’ said the thirty boarders.

The unfortunate cook, thus strongly urged, advanced a step or two, and

holding her candle just where it prevented her from seeing at all,

declared there was nothing there, and it must have been the wind. The

door was just going to be closed in consequence, when an inquisitive

boarder, who had been peeping between the hinges, set up a fearful

screaming, which called back the cook and housemaid, and all the more

adventurous, in no time.

‘What is the matter with Miss Smithers?’ said the lady abbess, as the

aforesaid Miss Smithers proceeded to go into hysterics of four young

lady power.

‘Lor, Miss Smithers, dear,’ said the other nine-and-twenty boarders.

‘Oh, the man--the man--behind the door!’ screamed Miss Smithers.

The lady abbess no sooner heard this appalling cry, than she retreated

to her own bedroom, double-locked the door, and fainted away

comfortably. The boarders, and the teachers, and the servants, fell back

upon the stairs, and upon each other; and never was such a screaming,

and fainting, and struggling beheld. In the midst of the tumult, Mr.

Pickwick emerged from his concealment, and presented himself amongst

them.

‘Ladies--dear ladies,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh. he says we’re dear,’ cried the oldest and ugliest teacher. ‘Oh, the

wretch!’

‘Ladies,’ roared Mr. Pickwick, rendered desperate by the danger of his

situation. ‘Hear me. I am no robber. I want the lady of the house.’

‘Oh, what a ferocious monster!’ screamed another teacher. ‘He wants Miss

Tomkins.’

Here there was a general scream.

‘Ring the alarm bell, somebody!’ cried a dozen voices.

‘Don’t--don’t,’ shouted Mr. Pickwick. ‘Look at me. Do I look like a

robber! My dear ladies--you may bind me hand and leg, or lock me up in a

closet, if you like. Only hear what I have got to say--only hear me.’

‘How did you come in our garden?’ faltered the housemaid.

‘Call the lady of the house, and I’ll tell her everything,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, exerting his lungs to the utmost pitch. ‘Call her--only be

quiet, and call her, and you shall hear everything.’

It might have been Mr. Pickwick’s appearance, or it might have been his

manner, or it might have been the temptation--irresistible to a female

mind--of hearing something at present enveloped in mystery, that reduced

the more reasonable portion of the establishment (some four individuals)

to a state of comparative quiet. By them it was proposed, as a test of

Mr. Pickwick’s sincerity, that he should immediately submit to personal

restraint; and that gentleman having consented to hold a conference with

Miss Tomkins, from the interior of a closet in which the day boarders

hung their bonnets and sandwich-bags, he at once stepped into it, of his

own accord, and was securely locked in. This revived the others; and

Miss Tomkins having been brought to, and brought down, the conference

began.

‘What did you do in my garden, man?’ said Miss Tomkins, in a faint

voice.

‘I came to warn you that one of your young ladies was going to elope to-

night,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, from the interior of the closet.

‘Elope!’ exclaimed Miss Tomkins, the three teachers, the thirty

boarders, and the five servants. ‘Who with?’

Your friend, Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall.’

‘\_My\_ friend! I don’t know any such person.’

‘Well, Mr. Jingle, then.’

‘I never heard the name in my life.’

‘Then, I have been deceived, and deluded,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I have

been the victim of a conspiracy--a foul and base conspiracy. Send to the

Angel, my dear ma’am, if you don’t believe me. Send to the Angel for Mr.

Pickwick’s manservant, I implore you, ma’am.’

‘He must be respectable--he keeps a manservant,’ said Miss Tomkins to

the writing and ciphering governess.

‘It’s my opinion, Miss Tomkins,’ said the writing and ciphering

governess, ‘that his manservant keeps him, I think he’s a madman, Miss

Tomkins, and the other’s his keeper.’

‘I think you are very right, Miss Gwynn,’ responded Miss Tomkins. ‘Let

two of the servants repair to the Angel, and let the others remain here,

to protect us.’

So two of the servants were despatched to the Angel in search of Mr.

Samuel Weller; and the remaining three stopped behind to protect Miss

Tomkins, and the three teachers, and the thirty boarders. And Mr.

Pickwick sat down in the closet, beneath a grove of sandwich-bags, and

awaited the return of the messengers, with all the philosophy and

fortitude he could summon to his aid.

An hour and a half elapsed before they came back, and when they did

come, Mr. Pickwick recognised, in addition to the voice of Mr. Samuel

Weller, two other voices, the tones of which struck familiarly on his

ear; but whose they were, he could not for the life of him call to mind.

A very brief conversation ensued. The door was unlocked. Mr. Pickwick

stepped out of the closet, and found himself in the presence of the

whole establishment of Westgate House, Mr Samuel Weller, and--old

Wardle, and his destined son-in-law, Mr. Trundle!

‘My dear friend,’ said Mr. Pickwick, running forward and grasping

Wardle’s hand, ‘my dear friend, pray, for Heaven’s sake, explain to this

lady the unfortunate and dreadful situation in which I am placed. You

must have heard it from my servant; say, at all events, my dear fellow,

that I am neither a robber nor a madman.’

‘I have said so, my dear friend. I have said so already,’ replied Mr.

Wardle, shaking the right hand of his friend, while Mr. Trundle shook

the left.

‘And whoever says, or has said, he is,’ interposed Mr. Weller, stepping

forward, ‘says that which is not the truth, but so far from it, on the

contrary, quite the rewerse. And if there’s any number o’ men on these

here premises as has said so, I shall be wery happy to give ‘em all a

wery convincing proof o’ their being mistaken, in this here wery room,

if these wery respectable ladies ‘ll have the goodness to retire, and

order ‘em up, one at a time.’ Having delivered this defiance with great

volubility, Mr. Weller struck his open palm emphatically with his

clenched fist, and winked pleasantly on Miss Tomkins, the intensity of

whose horror at his supposing it within the bounds of possibility that

there could be any men on the premises of Westgate House Establishment

for Young Ladies, it is impossible to describe.

Mr. Pickwick’s explanation having already been partially made, was soon

concluded. But neither in the course of his walk home with his friends,

nor afterwards when seated before a blazing fire at the supper he so

much needed, could a single observation be drawn from him. He seemed

bewildered and amazed. Once, and only once, he turned round to Mr.

Wardle, and said--

‘How did you come here?’

‘Trundle and I came down here, for some good shooting on the first,’

replied Wardle. ‘We arrived to-night, and were astonished to hear from

your servant that you were here too. But I am glad you are,’ said the

old fellow, slapping him on the back--‘I am glad you are. We shall have

a jovial party on the first, and we’ll give Winkle another chance--eh,

old boy?’

Mr. Pickwick made no reply, he did not even ask after his friends at

Dingley Dell, and shortly afterwards retired for the night, desiring Sam

to fetch his candle when he rung.

The bell did ring in due course, and Mr. Weller presented himself.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking out from under the bed-clothes.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Weller.

Mr. Pickwick paused, and Mr. Weller snuffed the candle.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick again, as if with a desperate effort.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, once more.

‘Where is that Trotter?’

‘Job, sir?’

‘Yes.

‘Gone, sir.’

‘With his master, I suppose?’

‘Friend or master, or whatever he is, he’s gone with him,’ replied Mr.

Weller. ‘There’s a pair on ‘em, sir.’

‘Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you, with this

story, I suppose?’ said Mr. Pickwick, half choking.

‘Just that, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘It was all false, of course?’

‘All, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Reg’lar do, sir; artful dodge.’

‘I don’t think he’ll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam!’ said

Mr. Pickwick.

‘I don’t think he will, Sir.’

‘Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow,

‘I’ll inflict personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure

he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick.’

‘And venever I catches hold o’ that there melan-cholly chap with the

black hair,’ said Sam, ‘if I don’t bring some real water into his eyes,

for once in a way, my name ain’t Weller. Good-night, Sir!’

CHAPTER XVII. SHOWING THAT AN ATTACK OF RHEUMATISM, IN SOME CASES, ACTS

AS A QUICKENER TO INVENTIVE GENIUS

The constitution of Mr. Pickwick, though able to sustain a very

considerable amount of exertion and fatigue, was not proof against such

a combination of attacks as he had undergone on the memorable night,

recorded in the last chapter. The process of being washed in the night

air, and rough-dried in a closet, is as dangerous as it is peculiar. Mr.

Pickwick was laid up with an attack of rheumatism.

But although the bodily powers of the great man were thus impaired, his

mental energies retained their pristine vigour. His spirits were

elastic; his good-humour was restored. Even the vexation consequent upon

his recent adventure had vanished from his mind; and he could join in

the hearty laughter, which any allusion to it excited in Mr. Wardle,

without anger and without embarrassment. Nay, more. During the two days

Mr. Pickwick was confined to bed, Sam was his constant attendant. On the

first, he endeavoured to amuse his master by anecdote and conversation;

on the second, Mr. Pickwick demanded his writing-desk, and pen and ink,

and was deeply engaged during the whole day. On the third, being able to

sit up in his bedchamber, he despatched his valet with a message to Mr.

Wardle and Mr. Trundle, intimating that if they would take their wine

there, that evening, they would greatly oblige him. The invitation was

most willingly accepted; and when they were seated over their wine, Mr.

Pickwick, with sundry blushes, produced the following little tale, as

having been ‘edited’ by himself, during his recent indisposition, from

his notes of Mr. Weller’s unsophisticated recital.

THE PARISH CLERK A TALE OF TRUE LOVE

‘Once upon a time, in a very small country town, at a considerable

distance from London, there lived a little man named Nathaniel Pipkin,

who was the parish clerk of the little town, and lived in a little house

in the little High Street, within ten minutes’ walk from the little

church; and who was to be found every day, from nine till four, teaching

a little learning to the little boys. Nathaniel Pipkin was a harmless,

inoffensive, good-natured being, with a turned-up nose, and rather

turned-in legs, a cast in his eye, and a halt in his gait; and he

divided his time between the church and his school, verily believing

that there existed not, on the face of the earth, so clever a man as the

curate, so imposing an apartment as the vestry-room, or so well-ordered

a seminary as his own. Once, and only once, in his life, Nathaniel

Pipkin had seen a bishop--a real bishop, with his arms in lawn sleeves,

and his head in a wig. He had seen him walk, and heard him talk, at a

confirmation, on which momentous occasion Nathaniel Pipkin was so

overcome with reverence and awe, when the aforesaid bishop laid his hand

on his head, that he fainted right clean away, and was borne out of

church in the arms of the beadle.

‘This was a great event, a tremendous era, in Nathaniel Pipkin’s life,

and it was the only one that had ever occurred to ruffle the smooth

current of his quiet existence, when happening one fine afternoon, in a

fit of mental abstraction, to raise his eyes from the slate on which he

was devising some tremendous problem in compound addition for an

offending urchin to solve, they suddenly rested on the blooming

countenance of Maria Lobbs, the only daughter of old Lobbs, the great

saddler over the way. Now, the eyes of Mr. Pipkin had rested on the

pretty face of Maria Lobbs many a time and oft before, at church and

elsewhere; but the eyes of Maria Lobbs had never looked so bright, the

cheeks of Maria Lobbs had never looked so ruddy, as upon this particular

occasion. No wonder then, that Nathaniel Pipkin was unable to take his

eyes from the countenance of Miss Lobbs; no wonder that Miss Lobbs,

finding herself stared at by a young man, withdrew her head from the

window out of which she had been peeping, and shut the casement and

pulled down the blind; no wonder that Nathaniel Pipkin, immediately

thereafter, fell upon the young urchin who had previously offended, and

cuffed and knocked him about to his heart’s content. All this was very

natural, and there’s nothing at all to wonder at about it.

‘It \_is\_ matter of wonder, though, that anyone of Mr. Nathaniel Pipkin’s

retiring disposition, nervous temperament, and most particularly

diminutive income, should from this day forth, have dared to aspire to

the hand and heart of the only daughter of the fiery old Lobbs--of old

Lobbs, the great saddler, who could have bought up the whole village at

one stroke of his pen, and never felt the outlay--old Lobbs, who was

well known to have heaps of money, invested in the bank at the nearest

market town--who was reported to have countless and inexhaustible

treasures hoarded up in the little iron safe with the big keyhole, over

the chimney-piece in the back parlour--and who, it was well known, on

festive occasions garnished his board with a real silver teapot, cream-

ewer, and sugar-basin, which he was wont, in the pride of his heart, to

boast should be his daughter’s property when she found a man to her

mind. I repeat it, to be matter of profound astonishment and intense

wonder, that Nathaniel Pipkin should have had the temerity to cast his

eyes in this direction. But love is blind; and Nathaniel had a cast in

his eye; and perhaps these two circumstances, taken together, prevented

his seeing the matter in its proper light.

‘Now, if old Lobbs had entertained the most remote or distant idea of

the state of the affections of Nathaniel Pipkin, he would just have

razed the school-room to the ground, or exterminated its master from the

surface of the earth, or committed some other outrage and atrocity of an

equally ferocious and violent description; for he was a terrible old

fellow, was Lobbs, when his pride was injured, or his blood was up.

Swear! Such trains of oaths would come rolling and pealing over the way,

sometimes, when he was denouncing the idleness of the bony apprentice

with the thin legs, that Nathaniel Pipkin would shake in his shoes with

horror, and the hair of the pupils’ heads would stand on end with

fright.

‘Well! Day after day, when school was over, and the pupils gone, did

Nathaniel Pipkin sit himself down at the front window, and, while he

feigned to be reading a book, throw sidelong glances over the way in

search of the bright eyes of Maria Lobbs; and he hadn’t sat there many

days, before the bright eyes appeared at an upper window, apparently

deeply engaged in reading too. This was delightful, and gladdening to

the heart of Nathaniel Pipkin. It was something to sit there for hours

together, and look upon that pretty face when the eyes were cast down;

but when Maria Lobbs began to raise her eyes from her book, and dart

their rays in the direction of Nathaniel Pipkin, his delight and

admiration were perfectly boundless. At last, one day when he knew old

Lobbs was out, Nathaniel Pipkin had the temerity to kiss his hand to

Maria Lobbs; and Maria Lobbs, instead of shutting the window, and

pulling down the blind, kissed \_hers \_to him, and smiled. Upon which

Nathaniel Pipkin determined, that, come what might, he would develop the

state of his feelings, without further delay.

‘A prettier foot, a gayer heart, a more dimpled face, or a smarter form,

never bounded so lightly over the earth they graced, as did those of

Maria Lobbs, the old saddler’s daughter. There was a roguish twinkle in

her sparkling eyes, that would have made its way to far less susceptible

bosoms than that of Nathaniel Pipkin; and there was such a joyous sound

in her merry laugh, that the sternest misanthrope must have smiled to

hear it. Even old Lobbs himself, in the very height of his ferocity,

couldn’t resist the coaxing of his pretty daughter; and when she, and

her cousin Kate--an arch, impudent-looking, bewitching little person--

made a dead set upon the old man together, as, to say the truth, they

very often did, he could have refused them nothing, even had they asked

for a portion of the countless and inexhaustible treasures, which were

hidden from the light, in the iron safe.

‘Nathaniel Pipkin’s heart beat high within him, when he saw this

enticing little couple some hundred yards before him one summer’s

evening, in the very field in which he had many a time strolled about

till night-time, and pondered on the beauty of Maria Lobbs. But though

he had often thought then, how briskly he would walk up to Maria Lobbs

and tell her of his passion if he could only meet her, he felt, now that

she was unexpectedly before him, all the blood in his body mounting to

his face, manifestly to the great detriment of his legs, which, deprived

of their usual portion, trembled beneath him. When they stopped to

gather a hedge flower, or listen to a bird, Nathaniel Pipkin stopped

too, and pretended to be absorbed in meditation, as indeed he really

was; for he was thinking what on earth he should ever do, when they

turned back, as they inevitably must in time, and meet him face to face.

But though he was afraid to make up to them, he couldn’t bear to lose

sight of them; so when they walked faster he walked faster, when they

lingered he lingered, and when they stopped he stopped; and so they

might have gone on, until the darkness prevented them, if Kate had not

looked slyly back, and encouragingly beckoned Nathaniel to advance.

There was something in Kate’s manner that was not to be resisted, and so

Nathaniel Pipkin complied with the invitation; and after a great deal of

blushing on his part, and immoderate laughter on that of the wicked

little cousin, Nathaniel Pipkin went down on his knees on the dewy

grass, and declared his resolution to remain there for ever, unless he

were permitted to rise the accepted lover of Maria Lobbs. Upon this, the

merry laughter of Miss Lobbs rang through the calm evening air--without

seeming to disturb it, though; it had such a pleasant sound--and the

wicked little cousin laughed more immoderately than before, and

Nathaniel Pipkin blushed deeper than ever. At length, Maria Lobbs being

more strenuously urged by the love-worn little man, turned away her

head, and whispered her cousin to say, or at all events Kate did say,

that she felt much honoured by Mr. Pipkin’s addresses; that her hand and

heart were at her father’s disposal; but that nobody could be insensible

to Mr. Pipkin’s merits. As all this was said with much gravity, and as

Nathaniel Pipkin walked home with Maria Lobbs, and struggled for a kiss

at parting, he went to bed a happy man, and dreamed all night long, of

softening old Lobbs, opening the strong box, and marrying Maria.

The next day, Nathaniel Pipkin saw old Lobbs go out upon his old gray

pony, and after a great many signs at the window from the wicked little

cousin, the object and meaning of which he could by no means understand,

the bony apprentice with the thin legs came over to say that his master

wasn’t coming home all night, and that the ladies expected Mr. Pipkin to

tea, at six o’clock precisely. How the lessons were got through that

day, neither Nathaniel Pipkin nor his pupils knew any more than you do;

but they were got through somehow, and, after the boys had gone,

Nathaniel Pipkin took till full six o’clock to dress himself to his

satisfaction. Not that it took long to select the garments he should

wear, inasmuch as he had no choice about the matter; but the putting of

them on to the best advantage, and the touching of them up previously,

was a task of no inconsiderable difficulty or importance.

‘There was a very snug little party, consisting of Maria Lobbs and her

cousin Kate, and three or four romping, good-humoured, rosy-cheeked

girls. Nathaniel Pipkin had ocular demonstration of the fact, that the

rumours of old Lobbs’s treasures were not exaggerated. There were the

real solid silver teapot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, on the table, and

real silver spoons to stir the tea with, and real china cups to drink it

out of, and plates of the same, to hold the cakes and toast in. The only

eye-sore in the whole place was another cousin of Maria Lobbs’s, and a

brother of Kate, whom Maria Lobbs called “Henry,” and who seemed to keep

Maria Lobbs all to himself, up in one corner of the table. It’s a

delightful thing to see affection in families, but it may be carried

rather too far, and Nathaniel Pipkin could not help thinking that Maria

Lobbs must be very particularly fond of her relations, if she paid as

much attention to all of them as to this individual cousin. After tea,

too, when the wicked little cousin proposed a game at blind man’s buff,

it somehow or other happened that Nathaniel Pipkin was nearly always

blind, and whenever he laid his hand upon the male cousin, he was sure

to find that Maria Lobbs was not far off. And though the wicked little

cousin and the other girls pinched him, and pulled his hair, and pushed

chairs in his way, and all sorts of things, Maria Lobbs never seemed to

come near him at all; and once--once--Nathaniel Pipkin could have sworn

he heard the sound of a kiss, followed by a faint remonstrance from

Maria Lobbs, and a half-suppressed laugh from her female friends. All

this was odd--very odd--and there is no saying what Nathaniel Pipkin

might or might not have done, in consequence, if his thoughts had not

been suddenly directed into a new channel.

‘The circumstance which directed his thoughts into a new channel was a

loud knocking at the street door, and the person who made this loud

knocking at the street door was no other than old Lobbs himself, who had

unexpectedly returned, and was hammering away, like a coffin-maker; for

he wanted his supper. The alarming intelligence was no sooner

communicated by the bony apprentice with the thin legs, than the girls

tripped upstairs to Maria Lobbs’s bedroom, and the male cousin and

Nathaniel Pipkin were thrust into a couple of closets in the sitting-

room, for want of any better places of concealment; and when Maria Lobbs

and the wicked little cousin had stowed them away, and put the room to

rights, they opened the street door to old Lobbs, who had never left off

knocking since he first began.

‘Now it did unfortunately happen that old Lobbs being very hungry was

monstrous cross. Nathaniel Pipkin could hear him growling away like an

old mastiff with a sore throat; and whenever the unfortunate apprentice

with the thin legs came into the room, so surely did old Lobbs commence

swearing at him in a most Saracenic and ferocious manner, though

apparently with no other end or object than that of easing his bosom by

the discharge of a few superfluous oaths. At length some supper, which

had been warming up, was placed on the table, and then old Lobbs fell

to, in regular style; and having made clear work of it in no time,

kissed his daughter, and demanded his pipe.

‘Nature had placed Nathaniel Pipkin’s knees in very close juxtaposition,

but when he heard old Lobbs demand his pipe, they knocked together, as

if they were going to reduce each other to powder; for, depending from a

couple of hooks, in the very closet in which he stood, was a large,

brown-stemmed, silver-bowled pipe, which pipe he himself had seen in the

mouth of old Lobbs, regularly every afternoon and evening, for the last

five years. The two girls went downstairs for the pipe, and upstairs for

the pipe, and everywhere but where they knew the pipe was, and old Lobbs

stormed away meanwhile, in the most wonderful manner. At last he thought

of the closet, and walked up to it. It was of no use a little man like

Nathaniel Pipkin pulling the door inwards, when a great strong fellow

like old Lobbs was pulling it outwards. Old Lobbs gave it one tug, and

open it flew, disclosing Nathaniel Pipkin standing bolt upright inside,

and shaking with apprehension from head to foot. Bless us! what an

appalling look old Lobbs gave him, as he dragged him out by the collar,

and held him at arm’s length.

‘“Why, what the devil do you want here?” said old Lobbs, in a fearful

voice.

‘Nathaniel Pipkin could make no reply, so old Lobbs shook him backwards

and forwards, for two or three minutes, by way of arranging his ideas

for him.

‘“What do you want here?” roared Lobbs; “I suppose you have come after

my daughter, now!”

‘Old Lobbs merely said this as a sneer: for he did not believe that

mortal presumption could have carried Nathaniel Pipkin so far. What was

his indignation, when that poor man replied--

‘“Yes, I did, Mr. Lobbs, I did come after your daughter. I love her, Mr.

Lobbs.”

‘“Why, you snivelling, wry-faced, puny villain,” gasped old Lobbs,

paralysed by the atrocious confession; “what do you mean by that? Say

this to my face! Damme, I’ll throttle you!”

‘It is by no means improbable that old Lobbs would have carried his

threat into execution, in the excess of his rage, if his arm had not

been stayed by a very unexpected apparition: to wit, the male cousin,

who, stepping out of his closet, and walking up to old Lobbs, said--

‘“I cannot allow this harmless person, Sir, who has been asked here, in

some girlish frolic, to take upon himself, in a very noble manner, the

fault (if fault it is) which I am guilty of, and am ready to avow. I

love your daughter, sir; and I came here for the purpose of meeting

her.”

‘Old Lobbs opened his eyes very wide at this, but not wider than

Nathaniel Pipkin.

‘“You did?” said Lobbs, at last finding breath to speak.

‘“I did.”

‘“And I forbade you this house, long ago.”

‘“You did, or I should not have been here, clandestinely, to-night.”

‘I am sorry to record it of old Lobbs, but I think he would have struck

the cousin, if his pretty daughter, with her bright eyes swimming in

tears, had not clung to his arm.

‘“Don’t stop him, Maria,” said the young man; “if he has the will to

strike me, let him. I would not hurt a hair of his gray head, for the

riches of the world.”

‘The old man cast down his eyes at this reproof, and they met those of

his daughter. I have hinted once or twice before, that they were very

bright eyes, and, though they were tearful now, their influence was by

no means lessened. Old Lobbs turned his head away, as if to avoid being

persuaded by them, when, as fortune would have it, he encountered the

face of the wicked little cousin, who, half afraid for her brother, and

half laughing at Nathaniel Pipkin, presented as bewitching an expression

of countenance, with a touch of slyness in it, too, as any man, old or

young, need look upon. She drew her arm coaxingly through the old man’s,

and whispered something in his ear; and do what he would, old Lobbs

couldn’t help breaking out into a smile, while a tear stole down his

cheek at the same time.

‘Five minutes after this, the girls were brought down from the bedroom

with a great deal of giggling and modesty; and while the young people

were making themselves perfectly happy, old Lobbs got down the pipe, and

smoked it; and it was a remarkable circumstance about that particular

pipe of tobacco, that it was the most soothing and delightful one he

ever smoked.

‘Nathaniel Pipkin thought it best to keep his own counsel, and by so

doing gradually rose into high favour with old Lobbs, who taught him to

smoke in time; and they used to sit out in the garden on the fine

evenings, for many years afterwards, smoking and drinking in great

state. He soon recovered the effects of his attachment, for we find his

name in the parish register, as a witness to the marriage of Maria Lobbs

to her cousin; and it also appears, by reference to other documents,

that on the night of the wedding he was incarcerated in the village

cage, for having, in a state of extreme intoxication, committed sundry

excesses in the streets, in all of which he was aided and abetted by the

bony apprentice with the thin legs.’

CHAPTER XVIII. BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF TWO POINTS; FIRST, THE POWER OF

HYSTERICS, AND, SECONDLY, THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES

For two days after the \_dejeune \_at Mrs. Hunter’s, the Pickwickians

remained at Eatanswill, anxiously awaiting the arrival of some

intelligence from their revered leader. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass

were once again left to their own means of amusement; for Mr. Winkle, in

compliance with a most pressing invitation, continued to reside at Mr.

Pott’s house, and to devote his time to the companionship of his amiable

lady. Nor was the occasional society of Mr. Pott himself wanting to

complete their felicity. Deeply immersed in the intensity of his

speculations for the public weal and the destruction of the

\_Independent\_, it was not the habit of that great man to descend from

his mental pinnacle to the humble level of ordinary minds. On this

occasion, however, and as if expressly in compliment to any follower of

Mr. Pickwick’s, he unbent, relaxed, stepped down from his pedestal, and

walked upon the ground, benignly adapting his remarks to the

comprehension of the herd, and seeming in outward form, if not in

spirit, to be one of them.

Such having been the demeanour of this celebrated public character

towards Mr. Winkle, it will be readily imagined that considerable

surprise was depicted on the countenance of the latter gentleman, when,

as he was sitting alone in the breakfast-room, the door was hastily

thrown open, and as hastily closed, on the entrance of Mr. Pott, who,

stalking majestically towards him, and thrusting aside his proffered

hand, ground his teeth, as if to put a sharper edge on what he was about

to utter, and exclaimed, in a saw-like voice--

‘Serpent!’

‘Sir!’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle, starting from his chair.

‘Serpent, Sir,’ repeated Mr. Pott, raising his voice, and then suddenly

depressing it: ‘I said, serpent, sir--make the most of it.’

When you have parted with a man at two o’clock in the morning, on terms

of the utmost good-fellowship, and he meets you again, at half-past

nine, and greets you as a serpent, it is not unreasonable to conclude

that something of an unpleasant nature has occurred meanwhile. So Mr.

Winkle thought. He returned Mr. Pott’s gaze of stone, and in compliance

with that gentleman’s request, proceeded to make the most he could of

the ‘serpent.’ The most, however, was nothing at all; so, after a

profound silence of some minutes’ duration, he said,--

‘Serpent, Sir! Serpent, Mr. Pott! What can you mean, Sir?--this is

pleasantry.’

‘Pleasantry, sir!’ exclaimed Pott, with a motion of the hand, indicative

of a strong desire to hurl the Britannia metal teapot at the head of the

visitor. ‘Pleasantry, sir!--But--no, I will be calm; I will be calm,

Sir;’ in proof of his calmness, Mr. Pott flung himself into a chair, and

foamed at the mouth.

‘My dear sir,’ interposed Mr. Winkle.

‘\_DEAR \_Sir!’ replied Pott. ‘How dare you address me, as dear Sir, Sir?

How dare you look me in the face and do it, sir?’

‘Well, Sir, if you come to that,’ responded Mr. Winkle, ‘how dare you

look me in the face, and call me a serpent, sir?’

‘Because you are one,’ replied Mr. Pott.

‘Prove it, Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle warmly. ‘Prove it.’

A malignant scowl passed over the profound face of the editor, as he

drew from his pocket the \_Independent\_ of that morning; and laying his

finger on a particular paragraph, threw the journal across the table to

Mr. Winkle.

That gentleman took it up, and read as follows:--

‘Our obscure and filthy contemporary, in some disgusting observations on

the recent election for this borough, has presumed to violate the

hallowed sanctity of private life, and to refer in a manner not to be

misunderstood, to the personal affairs of our late candidate--aye, and

notwithstanding his base defeat, we will add, our future member, Mr.

Fizkin. What does our dastardly contemporary mean? What would the

ruffian say, if we, setting at naught, like him, the decencies of social

intercourse, were to raise the curtain which happily conceals \_His\_

private life from general ridicule, not to say from general execration?

What, if we were even to point out, and comment on, facts and

circumstances, which are publicly notorious, and beheld by every one but

our mole-eyed contemporary--what if we were to print the following

effusion, which we received while we were writing the commencement of

this article, from a talented fellow-townsman and correspondent?

‘“LINES TO A BRASS POT

‘“Oh Pott! if you’d known How false she’d have grown, When you heard the

marriage bells tinkle; You’d have done then, I vow, What you cannot help

now,

‘What,’ said Mr. Pott solemnly--‘what rhymes to “tinkle,” villain?’

‘What rhymes to tinkle?’ said Mrs. Pott, whose entrance at the moment

forestalled the reply. ‘What rhymes to tinkle? Why, Winkle, I should

conceive.’ Saying this, Mrs. Pott smiled sweetly on the disturbed

Pickwickian, and extended her hand towards him. The agitated young man

would have accepted it, in his confusion, had not Pott indignantly

interposed.

‘Back, ma’am--back!’ said the editor. ‘Take his hand before my very

face!’

‘Mr. P.!’ said his astonished lady.

‘Wretched woman, look here,’ exclaimed the husband. ‘Look here, ma’am--

“Lines to a Brass Pot.” “Brass Pot”; that’s me, ma’am. “False \_she’d\_

have grown”; that’s you, ma’am--you.’ With this ebullition of rage,

which was not unaccompanied with something like a tremble, at the

expression of his wife’s face, Mr. Pott dashed the current number of the

Eatanswill \_Independent\_ at her feet.

‘Upon my word, Sir,’ said the astonished Mrs. Pott, stooping to pick up

the paper. ‘Upon my word, Sir!’

Mr. Pott winced beneath the contemptuous gaze of his wife. He had made a

desperate struggle to screw up his courage, but it was fast coming

unscrewed again.

There appears nothing very tremendous in this little sentence, ‘Upon my

word, sir,’ when it comes to be read; but the tone of voice in which it

was delivered, and the look that accompanied it, both seeming to bear

reference to some revenge to be thereafter visited upon the head of

Pott, produced their effect upon him. The most unskilful observer could

have detected in his troubled countenance, a readiness to resign his

Wellington boots to any efficient substitute who would have consented to

stand in them at that moment.

Mrs. Pott read the paragraph, uttered a loud shriek, and threw herself

at full length on the hearth-rug, screaming, and tapping it with the

heels of her shoes, in a manner which could leave no doubt of the

propriety of her feelings on the occasion.

‘My dear,’ said the terrified Pott, ‘I didn’t say I believed it;--I--’

but the unfortunate man’s voice was drowned in the screaming of his

partner.

‘Mrs. Pott, let me entreat you, my dear ma’am, to compose yourself,’

said Mr. Winkle; but the shrieks and tappings were louder, and more

frequent than ever.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Pott, ‘I’m very sorry. If you won’t consider your

own health, consider me, my dear. We shall have a crowd round the

house.’ But the more strenuously Mr. Pott entreated, the more vehemently

the screams poured forth.

Very fortunately, however, attached to Mrs. Pott’s person was a

bodyguard of one, a young lady whose ostensible employment was to

preside over her toilet, but who rendered herself useful in a variety of

ways, and in none more so than in the particular department of

constantly aiding and abetting her mistress in every wish and

inclination opposed to the desires of the unhappy Pott. The screams

reached this young lady’s ears in due course, and brought her into the

room with a speed which threatened to derange, materially, the very

exquisite arrangement of her cap and ringlets.

‘Oh, my dear, dear mistress!’ exclaimed the bodyguard, kneeling

frantically by the side of the prostrate Mrs. Pott. ‘Oh, my dear

mistress, what is the matter?’

‘Your master--your brutal master,’ murmured the patient.

Pott was evidently giving way.

‘It’s a shame,’ said the bodyguard reproachfully. ‘I know he’ll be the

death on you, ma’am. Poor dear thing!’

He gave way more. The opposite party followed up the attack.

‘Oh, don’t leave me--don’t leave me, Goodwin,’ murmured Mrs. Pott,

clutching at the wrist of the said Goodwin with an hysteric jerk.

‘You’re the only person that’s kind to me, Goodwin.’

At this affecting appeal, Goodwin got up a little domestic tragedy of

her own, and shed tears copiously.

‘Never, ma’am--never,’ said Goodwin. ‘Oh, sir, you should be careful--

you should indeed; you don’t know what harm you may do missis; you’ll be

sorry for it one day, I know--I’ve always said so.’

The unlucky Pott looked timidly on, but said nothing.

‘Goodwin,’ said Mrs. Pott, in a soft voice.

‘Ma’am,’ said Goodwin.

‘If you only knew how I have loved that man--’

Don’t distress yourself by recollecting it, ma’am,’ said the bodyguard.

Pott looked very frightened. It was time to finish him.

‘And now,’ sobbed Mrs. Pott, ‘now, after all, to be treated in this way;

to be reproached and insulted in the presence of a third party, and that

party almost a stranger. But I will not submit to it! Goodwin,’

continued Mrs. Pott, raising herself in the arms of her attendant, ‘my

brother, the lieutenant, shall interfere. I’ll be separated, Goodwin!’

‘It would certainly serve him right, ma’am,’ said Goodwin.

Whatever thoughts the threat of a separation might have awakened in Mr.

Pott’s mind, he forbore to give utterance to them, and contented himself

by saying, with great humility:--

‘My dear, will you hear me?’

A fresh train of sobs was the only reply, as Mrs. Pott grew more

hysterical, requested to be informed why she was ever born, and required

sundry other pieces of information of a similar description.

‘My dear,’ remonstrated Mr. Pott, ‘do not give way to these sensitive

feelings. I never believed that the paragraph had any foundation, my

dear--impossible. I was only angry, my dear--I may say outrageous--with

the \_Independent\_ people for daring to insert it; that’s all.’ Mr. Pott

cast an imploring look at the innocent cause of the mischief, as if to

entreat him to say nothing about the serpent.

‘And what steps, sir, do you mean to take to obtain redress?’ inquired

Mr. Winkle, gaining courage as he saw Pott losing it.

‘Oh, Goodwin,’ observed Mrs. Pott, ‘does he mean to horsewhip the editor

of the \_Independent\_--does he, Goodwin?’

‘Hush, hush, ma’am; pray keep yourself quiet,’ replied the bodyguard. ‘I

dare say he will, if you wish it, ma’am.’

‘Certainly,’ said Pott, as his wife evinced decided symptoms of going

off again. ‘Of course I shall.’

‘When, Goodwin--when?’ said Mrs. Pott, still undecided about the going

off.

‘Immediately, of course,’ said Mr. Pott; ‘before the day is out.’

‘Oh, Goodwin,’ resumed Mrs. Pott, ‘it’s the only way of meeting the

slander, and setting me right with the world.’

‘Certainly, ma’am,’ replied Goodwin. ‘No man as is a man, ma’am, could

refuse to do it.’

So, as the hysterics were still hovering about, Mr. Pott said once more

that he would do it; but Mrs. Pott was so overcome at the bare idea of

having ever been suspected, that she was half a dozen times on the very

verge of a relapse, and most unquestionably would have gone off, had it

not been for the indefatigable efforts of the assiduous Goodwin, and

repeated entreaties for pardon from the conquered Pott; and finally,

when that unhappy individual had been frightened and snubbed down to his

proper level, Mrs. Pott recovered, and they went to breakfast.

‘You will not allow this base newspaper slander to shorten your stay

here, Mr. Winkle?’ said Mrs. Pott, smiling through the traces of her

tears.

‘I hope not,’ said Mr. Pott, actuated, as he spoke, by a wish that his

visitor would choke himself with the morsel of dry toast which he was

raising to his lips at the moment, and so terminate his stay

effectually.

‘I hope not.’

‘You are very good,’ said Mr. Winkle; ‘but a letter has been received

from Mr. Pickwick--so I learn by a note from Mr. Tupman, which was

brought up to my bedroom door, this morning--in which he requests us to

join him at Bury to-day; and we are to leave by the coach at noon.’

‘But you will come back?’ said Mrs. Pott.

‘Oh, certainly,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘You are quite sure?’ said Mrs. Pott, stealing a tender look at her

visitor.

‘Quite,’ responded Mr. Winkle.

The breakfast passed off in silence, for each of the party was brooding

over his, or her, own personal grievances. Mrs. Pott was regretting the

loss of a beau; Mr. Pott his rash pledge to horsewhip the \_Independent\_;

Mr. Winkle his having innocently placed himself in so awkward a

situation. Noon approached, and after many adieux and promises to

return, he tore himself away.

‘If he ever comes back, I’ll poison him,’ thought Mr. Pott, as he turned

into the little back office where he prepared his thunderbolts.

‘If I ever do come back, and mix myself up with these people again,’

thought Mr. Winkle, as he wended his way to the Peacock, ‘I shall

deserve to be horsewhipped myself--that’s all.’

His friends were ready, the coach was nearly so, and in half an hour

they were proceeding on their journey, along the road over which Mr.

Pickwick and Sam had so recently travelled, and of which, as we have

already said something, we do not feel called upon to extract Mr.

Snodgrass’s poetical and beautiful description.

Mr. Weller was standing at the door of the Angel, ready to receive them,

and by that gentleman they were ushered to the apartment of Mr.

Pickwick, where, to the no small surprise of Mr. Winkle and Mr.

Snodgrass, and the no small embarrassment of Mr. Tupman, they found old

Wardle and Trundle.

‘How are you?’ said the old man, grasping Mr. Tupman’s hand. ‘Don’t hang

back, or look sentimental about it; it can’t be helped, old fellow. For

her sake, I wish you’d had her; for your own, I’m very glad you have

not. A young fellow like you will do better one of these days, eh?’ With

this conclusion, Wardle slapped Mr. Tupman on the back, and laughed

heartily.

‘Well, and how are you, my fine fellows?’ said the old gentleman,

shaking hands with Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass at the same time. ‘I

have just been telling Pickwick that we must have you all down at

Christmas. We’re going to have a wedding--a real wedding this time.’

‘A wedding!’ exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, turning very pale.

‘Yes, a wedding. But don’t be frightened,’ said the good-humoured old

man; ‘it’s only Trundle there, and Bella.’

‘Oh, is that all?’ said Mr. Snodgrass, relieved from a painful doubt

which had fallen heavily on his breast. ‘Give you joy, Sir. How is Joe?’

‘Very well,’ replied the old gentleman. ‘Sleepy as ever.’

‘And your mother, and the clergyman, and all of ‘em?’

‘Quite well.’

‘Where,’ said Mr. Tupman, with an effort--‘where is--\_she\_, Sir?’ and he

turned away his head, and covered his eyes with his hand.

‘\_She\_!’ said the old gentleman, with a knowing shake of the head. ‘Do

you mean my single relative--eh?’

Mr. Tupman, by a nod, intimated that his question applied to the

disappointed Rachael.

‘Oh, she’s gone away,’ said the old gentleman. ‘She’s living at a

relation’s, far enough off. She couldn’t bear to see the girls, so I let

her go. But come! Here’s the dinner. You must be hungry after your ride.

I am, without any ride at all; so let us fall to.’

Ample justice was done to the meal; and when they were seated round the

table, after it had been disposed of, Mr. Pickwick, to the intense

horror and indignation of his followers, related the adventure he had

undergone, and the success which had attended the base artifices of the

diabolical Jingle.

‘And the attack of rheumatism which I caught in that garden,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, in conclusion, ‘renders me lame at this moment.’

‘I, too, have had something of an adventure,’ said Mr. Winkle, with a

smile; and, at the request of Mr. Pickwick, he detailed the malicious

libel of the Eatanswill \_Independent\_, and the consequent excitement of

their friend, the editor.

Mr. Pickwick’s brow darkened during the recital. His friends observed

it, and, when Mr. Winkle had concluded, maintained a profound silence.

Mr. Pickwick struck the table emphatically with his clenched fist, and

spoke as follows:--

‘Is it not a wonderful circumstance,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that we seem

destined to enter no man’s house without involving him in some degree of

trouble? Does it not, I ask, bespeak the indiscretion, or, worse than

that, the blackness of heart--that I should say so!--of my followers,

that, beneath whatever roof they locate, they disturb the peace of mind

and happiness of some confiding female? Is it not, I say--’

Mr. Pickwick would in all probability have gone on for some time, had

not the entrance of Sam, with a letter, caused him to break off in his

eloquent discourse. He passed his handkerchief across his forehead, took

off his spectacles, wiped them, and put them on again; and his voice had

recovered its wonted softness of tone when he said--

‘What have you there, Sam?’

‘Called at the post-office just now, and found this here letter, as has

laid there for two days,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘It’s sealed vith a vafer,

and directed in round hand.’

‘I don’t know this hand,’ said Mr. Pickwick, opening the letter. ‘Mercy

on us! what’s this? It must be a jest; it--it--can’t be true.’

‘What’s the matter?’ was the general inquiry.

‘Nobody dead, is there?’ said Wardle, alarmed at the horror in Mr.

Pickwick’s countenance.

Mr. Pickwick made no reply, but, pushing the letter across the table,

and desiring Mr. Tupman to read it aloud, fell back in his chair with a

look of vacant astonishment quite alarming to behold.

Mr. Tupman, with a trembling voice, read the letter, of which the

following is a copy:--

Freeman’s Court, Cornhill, August 28th, 1827.

Bardell against Pickwick.

Sir,

Having been instructed by Mrs. Martha Bardell to commence an action

against you for a breach of promise of marriage, for which the plaintiff

lays her damages at fifteen hundred pounds, we beg to inform you that a

writ has been issued against you in this suit in the Court of Common

Pleas; and request to know, by return of post, the name of your attorney

in London, who will accept service thereof.

We are, Sir, Your obedient servants, Dodson & Fogg.

Mr. Samuel Pickwick.

There was something so impressive in the mute astonishment with which

each man regarded his neighbour, and every man regarded Mr. Pickwick,

that all seemed afraid to speak. The silence was at length broken by Mr.

Tupman.

‘Dodson and Fogg,’ he repeated mechanically.

‘Bardell and Pickwick,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, musing.

‘Peace of mind and happiness of confiding females,’ murmured Mr. Winkle,

with an air of abstraction.

‘It’s a conspiracy,’ said Mr. Pickwick, at length recovering the power

of speech; ‘a base conspiracy between these two grasping attorneys,

Dodson and Fogg. Mrs. Bardell would never do it;--she hasn’t the heart

to do it;--she hasn’t the case to do it. Ridiculous--ridiculous.’

Of her heart,’ said Wardle, with a smile, ‘you should certainly be the

best judge. I don’t wish to discourage you, but I should certainly say

that, of her case, Dodson and Fogg are far better judges than any of us

can be.’

‘It’s a vile attempt to extort money,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I hope it is,’ said Wardle, with a short, dry cough.

‘Who ever heard me address her in any way but that in which a lodger

would address his landlady?’ continued Mr. Pickwick, with great

vehemence. ‘Who ever saw me with her? Not even my friends here--’

‘Except on one occasion,’ said Mr. Tupman.

Mr. Pickwick changed colour.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Wardle. ‘Well, that’s important. There was nothing

suspicious then, I suppose?’

Mr. Tupman glanced timidly at his leader. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘there was

nothing suspicious; but--I don’t know how it happened, mind--she

certainly was reclining in his arms.’

‘Gracious powers!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, as the recollection of the

scene in question struck forcibly upon him; ‘what a dreadful instance of

the force of circumstances! So she was--so she was.’

‘And our friend was soothing her anguish,’ said Mr. Winkle, rather

maliciously.

‘So I was,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I don’t deny it. So I was.’

‘Hollo!’ said Wardle; ‘for a case in which there’s nothing suspicious,

this looks rather queer--eh, Pickwick? Ah, sly dog--sly dog!’ and he

laughed till the glasses on the sideboard rang again.

‘What a dreadful conjunction of appearances!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick,

resting his chin upon his hands. ‘Winkle--Tupman--I beg your pardon for

the observations I made just now. We are all the victims of

circumstances, and I the greatest.’ With this apology Mr. Pickwick

buried his head in his hands, and ruminated; while Wardle measured out a

regular circle of nods and winks, addressed to the other members of the

company.

‘I’ll have it explained, though,’ said Mr. Pickwick, raising his head

and hammering the table. ‘I’ll see this Dodson and Fogg! I’ll go to

London to-morrow.’

‘Not to-morrow,’ said Wardle; ‘you’re too lame.’

‘Well, then, next day.’

‘Next day is the first of September, and you’re pledged to ride out with

us, as far as Sir Geoffrey Manning’s grounds at all events, and to meet

us at lunch, if you don’t take the field.’

‘Well, then, the day after,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘Thursday.--Sam!’

‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Take two places outside to London, on Thursday morning, for yourself

and me.’

‘Wery well, Sir.’

Mr. Weller left the room, and departed slowly on his errand, with his

hands in his pocket and his eyes fixed on the ground.

‘Rum feller, the hemperor,’ said Mr. Weller, as he walked slowly up the

street. ‘Think o’ his makin’ up to that ‘ere Mrs. Bardell--vith a little

boy, too! Always the vay vith these here old ‘uns howsoever, as is such

steady goers to look at. I didn’t think he’d ha’ done it, though--I

didn’t think he’d ha’ done it!’ Moralising in this strain, Mr. Samuel

Weller bent his steps towards the booking-office.

CHAPTER XIX. A PLEASANT DAY WITH AN UNPLEASANT TERMINATION

The birds, who, happily for their own peace of mind and personal

comfort, were in blissful ignorance of the preparations which had been

making to astonish them, on the first of September, hailed it, no doubt,

as one of the pleasantest mornings they had seen that season. Many a

young partridge who strutted complacently among the stubble, with all

the finicking coxcombry of youth, and many an older one who watched his

levity out of his little round eye, with the contemptuous air of a bird

of wisdom and experience, alike unconscious of their approaching doom,

basked in the fresh morning air with lively and blithesome feelings, and

a few hours afterwards were laid low upon the earth. But we grow

affecting: let us proceed.

In plain commonplace matter-of-fact, then, it was a fine morning--so

fine that you would scarcely have believed that the few months of an

English summer had yet flown by. Hedges, fields, and trees, hill and

moorland, presented to the eye their ever-varying shades of deep rich

green; scarce a leaf had fallen, scarce a sprinkle of yellow mingled

with the hues of summer, warned you that autumn had begun. The sky was

cloudless; the sun shone out bright and warm; the songs of birds, the

hum of myriads of summer insects, filled the air; and the cottage

gardens, crowded with flowers of every rich and beautiful tint,

sparkled, in the heavy dew, like beds of glittering jewels. Everything

bore the stamp of summer, and none of its beautiful colour had yet faded

from the die.

Such was the morning, when an open carriage, in which were three

Pickwickians (Mr. Snodgrass having preferred to remain at home), Mr.

Wardle, and Mr. Trundle, with Sam Weller on the box beside the driver,

pulled up by a gate at the roadside, before which stood a tall, raw-

boned gamekeeper, and a half-booted, leather-legginged boy, each bearing

a bag of capacious dimensions, and accompanied by a brace of pointers.

‘I say,’ whispered Mr. Winkle to Wardle, as the man let down the steps,

‘they don’t suppose we’re going to kill game enough to fill those bags,

do they?’

‘Fill them!’ exclaimed old Wardle. ‘Bless you, yes! You shall fill one,

and I the other; and when we’ve done with them, the pockets of our

shooting-jackets will hold as much more.’

Mr. Winkle dismounted without saying anything in reply to this

observation; but he thought within himself, that if the party remained

in the open air, till he had filled one of the bags, they stood a

considerable chance of catching colds in their heads.

‘Hi, Juno, lass-hi, old girl; down, Daph, down,’ said Wardle, caressing

the dogs. ‘Sir Geoffrey still in Scotland, of course, Martin?’

The tall gamekeeper replied in the affirmative, and looked with some

surprise from Mr. Winkle, who was holding his gun as if he wished his

coat pocket to save him the trouble of pulling the trigger, to Mr.

Tupman, who was holding his as if he was afraid of it--as there is no

earthly reason to doubt he really was.

‘My friends are not much in the way of this sort of thing yet, Martin,’

said Wardle, noticing the look. ‘Live and learn, you know. They’ll be

good shots one of these days. I beg my friend Winkle’s pardon, though;

he has had some practice.’

Mr. Winkle smiled feebly over his blue neckerchief in acknowledgment of

the compliment, and got himself so mysteriously entangled with his gun,

in his modest confusion, that if the piece had been loaded, he must

inevitably have shot himself dead upon the spot.

‘You mustn’t handle your piece in that ‘ere way, when you come to have

the charge in it, Sir,’ said the tall gamekeeper gruffly; ‘or I’m damned

if you won’t make cold meat of some on us.’

Mr. Winkle, thus admonished, abruptly altered his position, and in so

doing, contrived to bring the barrel into pretty smart contact with Mr.

Weller’s head.

‘Hollo!’ said Sam, picking up his hat, which had been knocked off, and

rubbing his temple. ‘Hollo, sir! if you comes it this vay, you’ll fill

one o’ them bags, and something to spare, at one fire.’

Here the leather-legginged boy laughed very heartily, and then tried to

look as if it was somebody else, whereat Mr. Winkle frowned

majestically.

‘Where did you tell the boy to meet us with the snack, Martin?’ inquired

Wardle.

‘Side of One-tree Hill, at twelve o’clock, Sir.’

‘That’s not Sir Geoffrey’s land, is it?’

‘No, Sir; but it’s close by it. It’s Captain Boldwig’s land; but

there’ll be nobody to interrupt us, and there’s a fine bit of turf

there.’

‘Very well,’ said old Wardle. ‘Now the sooner we’re off the better. Will

you join us at twelve, then, Pickwick?’

Mr. Pickwick was particularly desirous to view the sport, the more

especially as he was rather anxious in respect of Mr. Winkle’s life and

limbs. On so inviting a morning, too, it was very tantalising to turn

back, and leave his friends to enjoy themselves. It was, therefore, with

a very rueful air that he replied--

‘Why, I suppose I must.’

‘Ain’t the gentleman a shot, Sir?’ inquired the long gamekeeper.

‘No,’ replied Wardle; ‘and he’s lame besides.’

‘I should very much like to go,’ said Mr. Pickwick--‘very much.’

There was a short pause of commiseration.

‘There’s a barrow t’other side the hedge,’ said the boy. ‘If the

gentleman’s servant would wheel along the paths, he could keep nigh us,

and we could lift it over the stiles, and that.’

‘The wery thing,’ said Mr. Weller, who was a party interested, inasmuch

as he ardently longed to see the sport. ‘The wery thing. Well said,

Smallcheek; I’ll have it out in a minute.’

But here a difficulty arose. The long gamekeeper resolutely protested

against the introduction into a shooting party, of a gentleman in a

barrow, as a gross violation of all established rules and precedents.

It was a great objection, but not an insurmountable one. The gamekeeper

having been coaxed and feed, and having, moreover, eased his mind by

‘punching’ the head of the inventive youth who had first suggested the

use of the machine, Mr. Pickwick was placed in it, and off the party

set; Wardle and the long gamekeeper leading the way, and Mr. Pickwick in

the barrow, propelled by Sam, bringing up the rear.

‘Stop, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, when they had got half across the first

field.

‘What’s the matter now?’ said Wardle.

‘I won’t suffer this barrow to be moved another step,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, resolutely, ‘unless Winkle carries that gun of his in a

different manner.’

‘How \_am\_ I to carry it?’ said the wretched Winkle.

‘Carry it with the muzzle to the ground,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘It’s so unsportsmanlike,’ reasoned Winkle.

‘I don’t care whether it’s unsportsmanlike or not,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick; ‘I am not going to be shot in a wheel-barrow, for the sake of

appearances, to please anybody.’

‘I know the gentleman’ll put that ‘ere charge into somebody afore he’s

done,’ growled the long man.

‘Well, well--I don’t mind,’ said poor Winkle, turning his gun-stock

uppermost--‘there.’

‘Anythin’ for a quiet life,’ said Mr. Weller; and on they went again.

‘Stop!’ said Mr. Pickwick, after they had gone a few yards farther.

‘What now?’ said Wardle.

‘That gun of Tupman’s is not safe: I know it isn’t,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Eh? What! not safe?’ said Mr. Tupman, in a tone of great alarm.

‘Not as you are carrying it,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I am very sorry to

make any further objection, but I cannot consent to go on, unless you

carry it as Winkle does his.’

‘I think you had better, sir,’ said the long gamekeeper, ‘or you’re

quite as likely to lodge the charge in yourself as in anything else.’

Mr. Tupman, with the most obliging haste, placed his piece in the

position required, and the party moved on again; the two amateurs

marching with reversed arms, like a couple of privates at a royal

funeral.

The dogs suddenly came to a dead stop, and the party advancing

stealthily a single pace, stopped too.

‘What’s the matter with the dogs’ legs?’ whispered Mr. Winkle. ‘How

queer they’re standing.’

‘Hush, can’t you?’ replied Wardle softly. ‘Don’t you see, they’re making

a point?’

‘Making a point!’ said Mr. Winkle, staring about him, as if he expected

to discover some particular beauty in the landscape, which the sagacious

animals were calling special attention to. ‘Making a point! What are

they pointing at?’

‘Keep your eyes open,’ said Wardle, not heeding the question in the

excitement of the moment. ‘Now then.’

There was a sharp whirring noise, that made Mr. Winkle start back as if

he had been shot himself. Bang, bang, went a couple of guns--the smoke

swept quickly away over the field, and curled into the air.

‘Where are they!’ said Mr. Winkle, in a state of the highest excitement,

turning round and round in all directions. ‘Where are they? Tell me when

to fire. Where are they--where are they?’

‘Where are they!’ said Wardle, taking up a brace of birds which the dogs

had deposited at his feet. ‘Why, here they are.’

‘No, no; I mean the others,’ said the bewildered Winkle.

‘Far enough off, by this time,’ replied Wardle, coolly reloading his

gun.

‘We shall very likely be up with another covey in five minutes,’ said

the long gamekeeper. ‘If the gentleman begins to fire now, perhaps he’ll

just get the shot out of the barrel by the time they rise.’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ roared Mr. Weller.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, compassionating his follower’s confusion and

embarrassment.

‘Sir.’

‘Don’t laugh.’

‘Certainly not, Sir.’ So, by way of indemnification, Mr. Weller

contorted his features from behind the wheel-barrow, for the exclusive

amusement of the boy with the leggings, who thereupon burst into a

boisterous laugh, and was summarily cuffed by the long gamekeeper, who

wanted a pretext for turning round, to hide his own merriment.

‘Bravo, old fellow!’ said Wardle to Mr. Tupman; ‘you fired that time, at

all events.’

‘Oh, yes,’ replied Mr. Tupman, with conscious pride. ‘I let it off.’

‘Well done. You’ll hit something next time, if you look sharp. Very

easy, ain’t it?’

‘Yes, it’s very easy,’ said Mr. Tupman. ‘How it hurts one’s shoulder,

though. It nearly knocked me backwards. I had no idea these small

firearms kicked so.’

‘Ah,’ said the old gentleman, smiling, ‘you’ll get used to it in time.

Now then--all ready--all right with the barrow there?’

‘All right, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Come along, then.’

‘Hold hard, Sir,’ said Sam, raising the barrow.

‘Aye, aye,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; and on they went, as briskly as need

be.

‘Keep that barrow back now,’ cried Wardle, when it had been hoisted over

a stile into another field, and Mr. Pickwick had been deposited in it

once more.

‘All right, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, pausing.

‘Now, Winkle,’ said the old gentleman, ‘follow me softly, and don’t be

too late this time.’

‘Never fear,’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘Are they pointing?’

‘No, no; not now. Quietly now, quietly.’ On they crept, and very quietly

they would have advanced, if Mr. Winkle, in the performance of some very

intricate evolutions with his gun, had not accidentally fired, at the

most critical moment, over the boy’s head, exactly in the very spot

where the tall man’s brain would have been, had he been there instead.

‘Why, what on earth did you do that for?’ said old Wardle, as the birds

flew unharmed away.

‘I never saw such a gun in my life,’ replied poor Mr. Winkle, looking at

the lock, as if that would do any good. ‘It goes off of its own accord.

It \_will \_do it.’

‘Will do it!’ echoed Wardle, with something of irritation in his manner.

‘I wish it would kill something of its own accord.’

‘It’ll do that afore long, Sir,’ observed the tall man, in a low,

prophetic voice.

‘What do you mean by that observation, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Winkle,

angrily.

‘Never mind, Sir, never mind,’ replied the long gamekeeper; ‘I’ve no

family myself, sir; and this here boy’s mother will get something

handsome from Sir Geoffrey, if he’s killed on his land. Load again, Sir,

load again.’

‘Take away his gun,’ cried Mr. Pickwick from the barrow, horror-stricken

at the long man’s dark insinuations. ‘Take away his gun, do you hear,

somebody?’

Nobody, however, volunteered to obey the command; and Mr. Winkle, after

darting a rebellious glance at Mr. Pickwick, reloaded his gun, and

proceeded onwards with the rest.

We are bound, on the authority of Mr. Pickwick, to state, that Mr.

Tupman’s mode of proceeding evinced far more of prudence and

deliberation, than that adopted by Mr. Winkle. Still, this by no means

detracts from the great authority of the latter gentleman, on all

matters connected with the field; because, as Mr. Pickwick beautifully

observes, it has somehow or other happened, from time immemorial, that

many of the best and ablest philosophers, who have been perfect lights

of science in matters of theory, have been wholly unable to reduce them

to practice.

Mr. Tupman’s process, like many of our most sublime discoveries, was

extremely simple. With the quickness and penetration of a man of genius,

he had at once observed that the two great points to be attained were--

first, to discharge his piece without injury to himself, and, secondly,

to do so, without danger to the bystanders--obviously, the best thing to

do, after surmounting the difficulty of firing at all, was to shut his

eyes firmly, and fire into the air.

On one occasion, after performing this feat, Mr. Tupman, on opening his

eyes, beheld a plump partridge in the act of falling, wounded, to the

ground. He was on the point of congratulating Mr. Wardle on his

invariable success, when that gentleman advanced towards him, and

grasped him warmly by the hand.

‘Tupman,’ said the old gentleman, ‘you singled out that particular

bird?’

‘No,’ said Mr. Tupman--‘no.’

‘You did,’ said Wardle. ‘I saw you do it--I observed you pick him out--I

noticed you, as you raised your piece to take aim; and I will say this,

that the best shot in existence could not have done it more beautifully.

You are an older hand at this than I thought you, Tupman; you have been

out before.’

It was in vain for Mr. Tupman to protest, with a smile of self-denial,

that he never had. The very smile was taken as evidence to the contrary;

and from that time forth his reputation was established. It is not the

only reputation that has been acquired as easily, nor are such fortunate

circumstances confined to partridge-shooting.

Meanwhile, Mr. Winkle flashed, and blazed, and smoked away, without

producing any material results worthy of being noted down; sometimes

expending his charge in mid-air, and at others sending it skimming along

so near the surface of the ground as to place the lives of the two dogs

on a rather uncertain and precarious tenure. As a display of fancy-

shooting, it was extremely varied and curious; as an exhibition of

firing with any precise object, it was, upon the whole, perhaps a

failure. It is an established axiom, that ‘every bullet has its billet.’

If it apply in an equal degree to shot, those of Mr. Winkle were

unfortunate foundlings, deprived of their natural rights, cast loose

upon the world, and billeted nowhere.

‘Well,’ said Wardle, walking up to the side of the barrow, and wiping

the streams of perspiration from his jolly red face; ‘smoking day, isn’t

it?’

‘It is, indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. The sun is tremendously hot, even

to me. I don’t know how you must feel it.’

‘Why,’ said the old gentleman, ‘pretty hot. It’s past twelve, though.

You see that green hill there?’

‘Certainly.’

‘That’s the place where we are to lunch; and, by Jove, there’s the boy

with the basket, punctual as clockwork!’

‘So he is,’ said Mr. Pickwick, brightening up. ‘Good boy, that. I’ll

give him a shilling, presently. Now, then, Sam, wheel away.’

‘Hold on, sir,’ said Mr. Weller, invigorated with the prospect of

refreshments. ‘Out of the vay, young leathers. If you walley my precious

life don’t upset me, as the gen’l’m’n said to the driver when they was

a-carryin’ him to Tyburn.’ And quickening his pace to a sharp run, Mr.

Weller wheeled his master nimbly to the green hill, shot him dexterously

out by the very side of the basket, and proceeded to unpack it with the

utmost despatch.

‘Weal pie,’ said Mr. Weller, soliloquising, as he arranged the eatables

on the grass. ‘Wery good thing is weal pie, when you know the lady as

made it, and is quite sure it ain’t kittens; and arter all though,

where’s the odds, when they’re so like weal that the wery piemen

themselves don’t know the difference?’

‘Don’t they, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not they, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, touching his hat. ‘I lodged in the

same house vith a pieman once, sir, and a wery nice man he was--reg’lar

clever chap, too--make pies out o’ anything, he could. “What a number o’

cats you keep, Mr. Brooks,” says I, when I’d got intimate with him.

“Ah,” says he, “I do--a good many,” says he, “You must be wery fond o’

cats,” says I. “Other people is,” says he, a-winkin’ at me; “they ain’t

in season till the winter though,” says he. “Not in season!” says I.

“No,” says he, “fruits is in, cats is out.” “Why, what do you mean?”

says I. “Mean!” says he. “That I’ll never be a party to the combination

o’ the butchers, to keep up the price o’ meat,” says he. “Mr. Weller,”

says he, a-squeezing my hand wery hard, and vispering in my ear--“don’t

mention this here agin--but it’s the seasonin’ as does it. They’re all

made o’ them noble animals,” says he, a-pointin’ to a wery nice little

tabby kitten, “and I seasons ‘em for beefsteak, weal or kidney, ‘cording

to the demand. And more than that,” says he, “I can make a weal a beef-

steak, or a beef-steak a kidney, or any one on ‘em a mutton, at a

minute’s notice, just as the market changes, and appetites wary!”’

‘He must have been a very ingenious young man, that, Sam,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, with a slight shudder.

‘Just was, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, continuing his occupation of

emptying the basket, ‘and the pies was beautiful. Tongue--, well that’s

a wery good thing when it ain’t a woman’s. Bread--knuckle o’ ham,

reg’lar picter--cold beef in slices, wery good. What’s in them stone

jars, young touch-and-go?’

‘Beer in this one,’ replied the boy, taking from his shoulder a couple

of large stone bottles, fastened together by a leathern strap--‘cold

punch in t’other.’

‘And a wery good notion of a lunch it is, take it altogether,’ said Mr.

Weller, surveying his arrangement of the repast with great satisfaction.

‘Now, gen’l’m’n, “fall on,” as the English said to the French when they

fixed bagginets.’

It needed no second invitation to induce the party to yield full justice

to the meal; and as little pressing did it require to induce Mr. Weller,

the long gamekeeper, and the two boys, to station themselves on the

grass, at a little distance, and do good execution upon a decent

proportion of the viands. An old oak afforded a pleasant shelter to the

group, and a rich prospect of arable and meadow land, intersected with

luxuriant hedges, and richly ornamented with wood, lay spread out before

them.

‘This is delightful--thoroughly delightful!’ said Mr. Pickwick; the skin

of whose expressive countenance was rapidly peeling off, with exposure

to the sun.

‘So it is--so it is, old fellow,’ replied Wardle. ‘Come; a glass of

punch!’

‘With great pleasure,’ said Mr. Pickwick; the satisfaction of whose

countenance, after drinking it, bore testimony to the sincerity of the

reply.

‘Good,’ said Mr. Pickwick, smacking his lips. ‘Very good. I’ll take

another. Cool; very cool. Come, gentlemen,’ continued Mr. Pickwick,

still retaining his hold upon the jar, ‘a toast. Our friends at Dingley

Dell.’

The toast was drunk with loud acclamations.

‘I’ll tell you what I shall do, to get up my shooting again,’ said Mr.

Winkle, who was eating bread and ham with a pocket-knife. ‘I’ll put a

stuffed partridge on the top of a post, and practise at it, beginning at

a short distance, and lengthening it by degrees. I understand it’s

capital practice.’

‘I know a gen’l’man, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘as did that, and begun at

two yards; but he never tried it on agin; for he blowed the bird right

clean away at the first fire, and nobody ever seed a feather on him

arterwards.’

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Have the goodness to reserve your anecdotes till they are called for.’

‘Cert’nly, sir.’

Here Mr. Weller winked the eye which was not concealed by the beer-can

he was raising to his lips, with such exquisite facetiousness, that the

two boys went into spontaneous convulsions, and even the long man

condescended to smile.

‘Well, that certainly is most capital cold punch,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

looking earnestly at the stone bottle; ‘and the day is extremely warm,

and--Tupman, my dear friend, a glass of punch?’

‘With the greatest delight,’ replied Mr. Tupman; and having drank that

glass, Mr. Pickwick took another, just to see whether there was any

orange peel in the punch, because orange peel always disagreed with him;

and finding that there was not, Mr. Pickwick took another glass to the

health of their absent friend, and then felt himself imperatively called

upon to propose another in honour of the punch-compounder, unknown.

This constant succession of glasses produced considerable effect upon

Mr. Pickwick; his countenance beamed with the most sunny smiles,

laughter played around his lips, and good-humoured merriment twinkled in

his eye. Yielding by degrees to the influence of the exciting liquid,

rendered more so by the heat, Mr. Pickwick expressed a strong desire to

recollect a song which he had heard in his infancy, and the attempt

proving abortive, sought to stimulate his memory with more glasses of

punch, which appeared to have quite a contrary effect; for, from

forgetting the words of the song, he began to forget how to articulate

any words at all; and finally, after rising to his legs to address the

company in an eloquent speech, he fell into the barrow, and fast asleep,

simultaneously.

The basket having been repacked, and it being found perfectly impossible

to awaken Mr. Pickwick from his torpor, some discussion took place

whether it would be better for Mr. Weller to wheel his master back

again, or to leave him where he was, until they should all be ready to

return. The latter course was at length decided on; and as the further

expedition was not to exceed an hour’s duration, and as Mr. Weller

begged very hard to be one of the party, it was determined to leave Mr.

Pickwick asleep in the barrow, and to call for him on their return. So

away they went, leaving Mr. Pickwick snoring most comfortably in the

shade.

That Mr. Pickwick would have continued to snore in the shade until his

friends came back, or, in default thereof, until the shades of evening

had fallen on the landscape, there appears no reasonable cause to doubt;

always supposing that he had been suffered to remain there in peace. But

he was \_not \_suffered to remain there in peace. And this was what

prevented him.

Captain Boldwig was a little fierce man in a stiff black neckerchief and

blue surtout, who, when he did condescend to walk about his property,

did it in company with a thick rattan stick with a brass ferrule, and a

gardener and sub-gardener with meek faces, to whom (the gardeners, not

the stick) Captain Boldwig gave his orders with all due grandeur and

ferocity; for Captain Boldwig’s wife’s sister had married a marquis, and

the captain’s house was a villa, and his land ‘grounds,’ and it was all

very high, and mighty, and great.

Mr. Pickwick had not been asleep half an hour when little Captain

Boldwig, followed by the two gardeners, came striding along as fast as

his size and importance would let him; and when he came near the oak

tree, Captain Boldwig paused and drew a long breath, and looked at the

prospect as if he thought the prospect ought to be highly gratified at

having him to take notice of it; and then he struck the ground

emphatically with his stick, and summoned the head-gardener.

‘Hunt,’ said Captain Boldwig.

‘Yes, Sir,’ said the gardener.

‘Roll this place to-morrow morning--do you hear, Hunt?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘And take care that you keep this place in good order--do you hear,

Hunt?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘And remind me to have a board done about trespassers, and spring guns,

and all that sort of thing, to keep the common people out. Do you hear,

Hunt; do you hear?’

‘I’ll not forget it, Sir.’

‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ said the other man, advancing, with his hand

to his hat.

‘Well, Wilkins, what’s the matter with you?’ said Captain Boldwig.

‘I beg your pardon, sir--but I think there have been trespassers here

to-day.’

‘Ha!’ said the captain, scowling around him.

‘Yes, sir--they have been dining here, I think, sir.’

‘Why, damn their audacity, so they have,’ said Captain Boldwig, as the

crumbs and fragments that were strewn upon the grass met his eye. ‘They

have actually been devouring their food here. I wish I had the vagabonds

here!’ said the captain, clenching the thick stick.

‘I wish I had the vagabonds here,’ said the captain wrathfully.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said Wilkins, ‘but--’

‘But what? Eh?’ roared the captain; and following the timid glance of

Wilkins, his eyes encountered the wheel-barrow and Mr. Pickwick.

‘Who are you, you rascal?’ said the captain, administering several pokes

to Mr. Pickwick’s body with the thick stick. ‘What’s your name?’

‘Cold punch,’ murmured Mr. Pickwick, as he sank to sleep again.

‘What?’ demanded Captain Boldwig.

No reply.

‘What did he say his name was?’ asked the captain.

‘Punch, I think, sir,’ replied Wilkins.

‘That’s his impudence--that’s his confounded impudence,’ said Captain

Boldwig. ‘He’s only feigning to be asleep now,’ said the captain, in a

high passion. ‘He’s drunk; he’s a drunken plebeian. Wheel him away,

Wilkins, wheel him away directly.’

Where shall I wheel him to, sir?’ inquired Wilkins, with great timidity.

‘Wheel him to the devil,’ replied Captain Boldwig.

‘Very well, sir,’ said Wilkins.

‘Stay,’ said the captain.

Wilkins stopped accordingly.

‘Wheel him,’ said the captain--‘wheel him to the pound; and let us see

whether he calls himself Punch when he comes to himself. He shall not

bully me--he shall not bully me. Wheel him away.’

Away Mr. Pickwick was wheeled in compliance with this imperious mandate;

and the great Captain Boldwig, swelling with indignation, proceeded on

his walk.

Inexpressible was the astonishment of the little party when they

returned, to find that Mr. Pickwick had disappeared, and taken the

wheel-barrow with him. It was the most mysterious and unaccountable

thing that was ever heard of. For a lame man to have got upon his legs

without any previous notice, and walked off, would have been most

extraordinary; but when it came to his wheeling a heavy barrow before

him, by way of amusement, it grew positively miraculous. They searched

every nook and corner round, together and separately; they shouted,

whistled, laughed, called--and all with the same result. Mr. Pickwick

was not to be found. After some hours of fruitless search, they arrived

at the unwelcome conclusion that they must go home without him.

Meanwhile Mr. Pickwick had been wheeled to the Pound, and safely

deposited therein, fast asleep in the wheel-barrow, to the immeasurable

delight and satisfaction not only of all the boys in the village, but

three-fourths of the whole population, who had gathered round, in

expectation of his waking. If their most intense gratification had been

awakened by seeing him wheeled in, how many hundredfold was their joy

increased when, after a few indistinct cries of ‘Sam!’ he sat up in the

barrow, and gazed with indescribable astonishment on the faces before

him.

A general shout was of course the signal of his having woke up; and his

involuntary inquiry of ‘What’s the matter?’ occasioned another, louder

than the first, if possible.

‘Here’s a game!’ roared the populace.

‘Where am I?’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘In the pound,’ replied the mob.

‘How came I here? What was I doing? Where was I brought from?’

Boldwig! Captain Boldwig!’ was the only reply.

‘Let me out,’ cried Mr. Pickwick. ‘Where’s my servant? Where are my

friends?’

‘You ain’t got no friends. Hurrah!’ Then there came a turnip, then a

potato, and then an egg; with a few other little tokens of the playful

disposition of the many-headed.

How long this scene might have lasted, or how much Mr. Pickwick might

have suffered, no one can tell, had not a carriage, which was driving

swiftly by, suddenly pulled up, from whence there descended old Wardle

and Sam Weller, the former of whom, in far less time than it takes to

write it, if not to read it, had made his way to Mr. Pickwick’s side,

and placed him in the vehicle, just as the latter had concluded the

third and last round of a single combat with the town-beadle.

‘Run to the justice’s!’ cried a dozen voices.

‘Ah, run avay,’ said Mr. Weller, jumping up on the box. ‘Give my

compliments--Mr. Veller’s compliments--to the justice, and tell him I’ve

spiled his beadle, and that, if he’ll swear in a new ‘un, I’ll come back

again to-morrow and spile him. Drive on, old feller.’

‘I’ll give directions for the commencement of an action for false

imprisonment against this Captain Boldwig, directly I get to London,’

said Mr. Pickwick, as soon as the carriage turned out of the town.

‘We were trespassing, it seems,’ said Wardle.

‘I don’t care,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I’ll bring the action.’

‘No, you won’t,’ said Wardle.

‘I will, by--’ But as there was a humorous expression in Wardle’s face,

Mr. Pickwick checked himself, and said, ‘Why not?’

‘Because,’ said old Wardle, half-bursting with laughter, ‘because they

might turn on some of us, and say we had taken too much cold punch.’

Do what he would, a smile would come into Mr. Pickwick’s face; the smile

extended into a laugh; the laugh into a roar; the roar became general.

So, to keep up their good-humour, they stopped at the first roadside

tavern they came to, and ordered a glass of brandy-and-water all round,

with a magnum of extra strength for Mr. Samuel Weller.

CHAPTER XX. SHOWING HOW DODSON AND FOGG WERE MEN OF BUSINESS, AND THEIR

CLERKS MEN OF PLEASURE; AND HOW AN AFFECTING INTERVIEW TOOK PLACE

BETWEEN MR. WELLER AND HIS LONG-LOST PARENT; SHOWING ALSO WHAT CHOICE

SPIRITS ASSEMBLED AT THE MAGPIE AND STUMP, AND WHAT A CAPITAL CHAPTER

THE NEXT ONE WILL BE

In the ground-floor front of a dingy house, at the very farthest end of

Freeman’s Court, Cornhill, sat the four clerks of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg,

two of his Majesty’s attorneys of the courts of King’s Bench and Common

Pleas at Westminster, and solicitors of the High Court of Chancery--the

aforesaid clerks catching as favourable glimpses of heaven’s light and

heaven’s sun, in the course of their daily labours, as a man might hope

to do, were he placed at the bottom of a reasonably deep well; and

without the opportunity of perceiving the stars in the day-time, which

the latter secluded situation affords.

The clerks’ office of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg was a dark, mouldy, earthy-

smelling room, with a high wainscotted partition to screen the clerks

from the vulgar gaze, a couple of old wooden chairs, a very loud-ticking

clock, an almanac, an umbrella-stand, a row of hat-pegs, and a few

shelves, on which were deposited several ticketed bundles of dirty

papers, some old deal boxes with paper labels, and sundry decayed stone

ink bottles of various shapes and sizes. There was a glass door leading

into the passage which formed the entrance to the court, and on the

outer side of this glass door, Mr. Pickwick, closely followed by Sam

Weller, presented himself on the Friday morning succeeding the

occurrence of which a faithful narration is given in the last chapter.

‘Come in, can’t you!’ cried a voice from behind the partition, in reply

to Mr. Pickwick’s gentle tap at the door. And Mr. Pickwick and Sam

entered accordingly.

‘Mr. Dodson or Mr. Fogg at home, sir?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, gently,

advancing, hat in hand, towards the partition.

‘Mr. Dodson ain’t at home, and Mr. Fogg’s particularly engaged,’ replied

the voice; and at the same time the head to which the voice belonged,

with a pen behind its ear, looked over the partition, and at Mr.

Pickwick.

It was a ragged head, the sandy hair of which, scrupulously parted on

one side, and flattened down with pomatum, was twisted into little semi-

circular tails round a flat face ornamented with a pair of small eyes,

and garnished with a very dirty shirt collar, and a rusty black stock.

‘Mr. Dodson ain’t at home, and Mr. Fogg’s particularly engaged,’ said

the man to whom the head belonged.

‘When will Mr. Dodson be back, sir?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Can’t say.’

‘Will it be long before Mr. Fogg is disengaged, Sir?’

‘Don’t know.’

Here the man proceeded to mend his pen with great deliberation, while

another clerk, who was mixing a Seidlitz powder, under cover of the lid

of his desk, laughed approvingly.

‘I think I’ll wait,’ said Mr. Pickwick. There was no reply; so Mr.

Pickwick sat down unbidden, and listened to the loud ticking of the

clock and the murmured conversation of the clerks.

‘That was a game, wasn’t it?’ said one of the gentlemen, in a brown coat

and brass buttons, inky drabs, and bluchers, at the conclusion of some

inaudible relation of his previous evening’s adventures.

‘Devilish good--devilish good,’ said the Seidlitz-powder man.

‘Tom Cummins was in the chair,’ said the man with the brown coat. ‘It

was half-past four when I got to Somers Town, and then I was so uncommon

lushy, that I couldn’t find the place where the latch-key went in, and

was obliged to knock up the old ‘ooman. I say, I wonder what old Fogg

‘ud say, if he knew it. I should get the sack, I s’pose--eh?’

At this humorous notion, all the clerks laughed in concert.

‘There was such a game with Fogg here, this mornin’,’ said the man in

the brown coat, ‘while Jack was upstairs sorting the papers, and you two

were gone to the stamp-office. Fogg was down here, opening the letters

when that chap as we issued the writ against at Camberwell, you know,

came in--what’s his name again?’

‘Ramsey,’ said the clerk who had spoken to Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah, Ramsey--a precious seedy-looking customer. “Well, sir,” says old

Fogg, looking at him very fierce--you know his way--“well, Sir, have you

come to settle?” “Yes, I have, sir,” said Ramsey, putting his hand in

his pocket, and bringing out the money, “the debt’s two pound ten, and

the costs three pound five, and here it is, Sir;” and he sighed like

bricks, as he lugged out the money, done up in a bit of blotting-paper.

Old Fogg looked first at the money, and then at him, and then he coughed

in his rum way, so that I knew something was coming. “You don’t know

there’s a declaration filed, which increases the costs materially, I

suppose,” said Fogg. “You don’t say that, sir,” said Ramsey, starting

back; “the time was only out last night, Sir.” “I do say it, though,”

said Fogg, “my clerk’s just gone to file it. Hasn’t Mr. Jackson gone to

file that declaration in Bullman and Ramsey, Mr. Wicks?” Of course I

said yes, and then Fogg coughed again, and looked at Ramsey. “My God!”

said Ramsey; “and here have I nearly driven myself mad, scraping this

money together, and all to no purpose.” “None at all,” said Fogg coolly;

“so you had better go back and scrape some more together, and bring it

here in time.” “I can’t get it, by God!” said Ramsey, striking the desk

with his fist. “Don’t bully me, sir,” said Fogg, getting into a passion

on purpose. “I am not bullying you, sir,” said Ramsey. “You are,” said

Fogg; “get out, sir; get out of this office, Sir, and come back, Sir,

when you know how to behave yourself.” Well, Ramsey tried to speak, but

Fogg wouldn’t let him, so he put the money in his pocket, and sneaked

out. The door was scarcely shut, when old Fogg turned round to me, with

a sweet smile on his face, and drew the declaration out of his coat

pocket. “Here, Wicks,” says Fogg, “take a cab, and go down to the Temple

as quick as you can, and file that. The costs are quite safe, for he’s a

steady man with a large family, at a salary of five-and-twenty shillings

a week, and if he gives us a warrant of attorney, as he must in the end,

I know his employers will see it paid; so we may as well get all we can

get out of him, Mr. Wicks; it’s a Christian act to do it, Mr. Wicks, for

with his large family and small income, he’ll be all the better for a

good lesson against getting into debt--won’t he, Mr. Wicks, won’t he?”--

and he smiled so good-naturedly as he went away, that it was delightful

to see him. He is a capital man of business,’ said Wicks, in a tone of

the deepest admiration, ‘capital, isn’t he?’

The other three cordially subscribed to this opinion, and the anecdote

afforded the most unlimited satisfaction.

‘Nice men these here, Sir,’ whispered Mr. Weller to his master; ‘wery

nice notion of fun they has, Sir.’

Mr. Pickwick nodded assent, and coughed to attract the attention of the

young gentlemen behind the partition, who, having now relaxed their

minds by a little conversation among themselves, condescended to take

some notice of the stranger.

‘I wonder whether Fogg’s disengaged now?’ said Jackson.

‘I’ll see,’ said Wicks, dismounting leisurely from his stool. ‘What name

shall I tell Mr. Fogg?’

‘Pickwick,’ replied the illustrious subject of these memoirs.

Mr. Jackson departed upstairs on his errand, and immediately returned

with a message that Mr. Fogg would see Mr. Pickwick in five minutes; and

having delivered it, returned again to his desk.

‘What did he say his name was?’ whispered Wicks.

‘Pickwick,’ replied Jackson; ‘it’s the defendant in Bardell and

Pickwick.’

A sudden scraping of feet, mingled with the sound of suppressed

laughter, was heard from behind the partition.

‘They’re a-twiggin’ of you, Sir,’ whispered Mr. Weller.

‘Twigging of me, Sam!’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘what do you mean by

twigging me?’

Mr. Weller replied by pointing with his thumb over his shoulder, and Mr.

Pickwick, on looking up, became sensible of the pleasing fact, that all

the four clerks, with countenances expressive of the utmost amusement,

and with their heads thrust over the wooden screen, were minutely

inspecting the figure and general appearance of the supposed trifler

with female hearts, and disturber of female happiness. On his looking

up, the row of heads suddenly disappeared, and the sound of pens

travelling at a furious rate over paper, immediately succeeded.

A sudden ring at the bell which hung in the office, summoned Mr. Jackson

to the apartment of Fogg, from whence he came back to say that he (Fogg)

was ready to see Mr. Pickwick if he would step upstairs.

Upstairs Mr. Pickwick did step accordingly, leaving Sam Weller below.

The room door of the one-pair back, bore inscribed in legible characters

the imposing words, ‘Mr. Fogg’; and, having tapped thereat, and been

desired to come in, Jackson ushered Mr. Pickwick into the presence.

‘Is Mr. Dodson in?’ inquired Mr. Fogg.

‘Just come in, Sir,’ replied Jackson.

‘Ask him to step here.’

‘Yes, sir.’ Exit Jackson.

‘Take a seat, sir,’ said Fogg; ‘there is the paper, sir; my partner will

be here directly, and we can converse about this matter, sir.’

Mr. Pickwick took a seat and the paper, but, instead of reading the

latter, peeped over the top of it, and took a survey of the man of

business, who was an elderly, pimply-faced, vegetable-diet sort of man,

in a black coat, dark mixture trousers, and small black gaiters; a kind

of being who seemed to be an essential part of the desk at which he was

writing, and to have as much thought or feeling.

After a few minutes’ silence, Mr. Dodson, a plump, portly, stern-looking

man, with a loud voice, appeared; and the conversation commenced.

‘This is Mr. Pickwick,’ said Fogg.

‘Ah! You are the defendant, Sir, in Bardell and Pickwick?’ said Dodson.

‘I am, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well, sir,’ said Dodson, ‘and what do you propose?’

‘Ah!’ said Fogg, thrusting his hands into his trousers’ pockets, and

throwing himself back in his chair, ‘what do you propose, Mr Pickwick?’

‘Hush, Fogg,’ said Dodson, ‘let me hear what Mr. Pickwick has to say.’

‘I came, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pickwick, gazing placidly on the two

partners, ‘I came here, gentlemen, to express the surprise with which I

received your letter of the other day, and to inquire what grounds of

action you can have against me.’

‘Grounds of--’ Fogg had ejaculated this much, when he was stopped by

Dodson.

‘Mr. Fogg,’ said Dodson, ‘I am going to speak.’

I beg your pardon, Mr. Dodson,’ said Fogg.

‘For the grounds of action, sir,’ continued Dodson, with moral elevation

in his air, ‘you will consult your own conscience and your own feelings.

We, Sir, we, are guided entirely by the statement of our client. That

statement, Sir, may be true, or it may be false; it may be credible, or

it may be incredible; but, if it be true, and if it be credible, I do

not hesitate to say, Sir, that our grounds of action, Sir, are strong,

and not to be shaken. You may be an unfortunate man, Sir, or you may be

a designing one; but if I were called upon, as a juryman upon my oath,

Sir, to express an opinion of your conduct, Sir, I do not hesitate to

assert that I should have but one opinion about it.’ Here Dodson drew

himself up, with an air of offended virtue, and looked at Fogg, who

thrust his hands farther in his pockets, and nodding his head sagely,

said, in a tone of the fullest concurrence, ‘Most certainly.’

‘Well, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with considerable pain depicted in his

countenance, ‘you will permit me to assure you that I am a most

unfortunate man, so far as this case is concerned.’

‘I hope you are, Sir,’ replied Dodson; ‘I trust you may be, Sir. If you

are really innocent of what is laid to your charge, you are more

unfortunate than I had believed any man could possibly be. What do you

say, Mr. Fogg?’

‘I say precisely what you say,’ replied Fogg, with a smile of

incredulity.

‘The writ, Sir, which commences the action,’ continued Dodson, ‘was

issued regularly. Mr. Fogg, where is the \_Praecipe \_book?’

‘Here it is,’ said Fogg, handing over a square book, with a parchment

cover.

‘Here is the entry,’ resumed Dodson. ‘“Middlesex, Capias MARTHA BARDELL,

WIDOW, v. SAMUEL PICKWICK. Damages £1500. Dodson & Fogg for the

plaintiff, Aug. 28, 1827.” All regular, Sir; perfectly.’ Dodson coughed

and looked at Fogg, who said ‘Perfectly,’ also. And then they both

looked at Mr. Pickwick.

‘I am to understand, then,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that it really is your

intention to proceed with this action?’

‘Understand, sir!--that you certainly may,’ replied Dodson, with

something as near a smile as his importance would allow.

‘And that the damages are actually laid at fifteen hundred pounds?’ said

Mr. Pickwick.

‘To which understanding you may add my assurance, that if we could have

prevailed upon our client, they would have been laid at treble the

amount, sir,’ replied Dodson.

‘I believe Mrs. Bardell specially said, however,’ observed Fogg,

glancing at Dodson, ‘that she would not compromise for a farthing less.’

‘Unquestionably,’ replied Dodson sternly. For the action was only just

begun; and it wouldn’t have done to let Mr. Pickwick compromise it then,

even if he had been so disposed.

‘As you offer no terms, sir,’ said Dodson, displaying a slip of

parchment in his right hand, and affectionately pressing a paper copy of

it, on Mr. Pickwick with his left, ‘I had better serve you with a copy

of this writ, sir. Here is the original, sir.’

‘Very well, gentlemen, very well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rising in person

and wrath at the same time; ‘you shall hear from my solicitor,

gentlemen.’

‘We shall be very happy to do so,’ said Fogg, rubbing his hands.

‘Very,’ said Dodson, opening the door.

‘And before I go, gentlemen,’ said the excited Mr. Pickwick, turning

round on the landing, ‘permit me to say, that of all the disgraceful and

rascally proceedings--’

‘Stay, sir, stay,’ interposed Dodson, with great politeness. ‘Mr.

Jackson! Mr. Wicks!’

‘Sir,’ said the two clerks, appearing at the bottom of the stairs.

‘I merely want you to hear what this gentleman says,’ replied Dodson.

‘Pray, go on, sir--disgraceful and rascally proceedings, I think you

said?’

‘I did,’ said Mr. Pickwick, thoroughly roused. ‘I said, Sir, that of all

the disgraceful and rascally proceedings that ever were attempted, this

is the most so. I repeat it, sir.’

‘You hear that, Mr. Wicks,’ said Dodson.

‘You won’t forget these expressions, Mr. Jackson?’ said Fogg.

‘Perhaps you would like to call us swindlers, sir,’ said Dodson. ‘Pray

do, Sir, if you feel disposed; now pray do, Sir.’

‘I do,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘You \_are \_swindlers.’

‘Very good,’ said Dodson. ‘You can hear down there, I hope, Mr. Wicks?’

‘Oh, yes, Sir,’ said Wicks.

‘You had better come up a step or two higher, if you can’t,’ added Mr.

Fogg. ‘Go on, Sir; do go on. You had better call us thieves, Sir; or

perhaps You would like to assault one of \_us\_. Pray do it, Sir, if you

would; we will not make the smallest resistance. Pray do it, Sir.’

As Fogg put himself very temptingly within the reach of Mr. Pickwick’s

clenched fist, there is little doubt that that gentleman would have

complied with his earnest entreaty, but for the interposition of Sam,

who, hearing the dispute, emerged from the office, mounted the stairs,

and seized his master by the arm.

‘You just come away,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Battledore and shuttlecock’s a

wery good game, vhen you ain’t the shuttlecock and two lawyers the

battledores, in which case it gets too excitin’ to be pleasant. Come

avay, Sir. If you want to ease your mind by blowing up somebody, come

out into the court and blow up me; but it’s rayther too expensive work

to be carried on here.’

And without the slightest ceremony, Mr. Weller hauled his master down

the stairs, and down the court, and having safely deposited him in

Cornhill, fell behind, prepared to follow whithersoever he should lead.

Mr. Pickwick walked on abstractedly, crossed opposite the Mansion House,

and bent his steps up Cheapside. Sam began to wonder where they were

going, when his master turned round, and said--

‘Sam, I will go immediately to Mr. Perker’s.’

‘That’s just exactly the wery place vere you ought to have gone last

night, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘I think it is, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I \_know \_it is,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Well, well, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘we will go there at once; but

first, as I have been rather ruffled, I should like a glass of brandy-

and-water warm, Sam. Where can I have it, Sam?’

Mr. Weller’s knowledge of London was extensive and peculiar. He replied,

without the slightest consideration--

‘Second court on the right hand side--last house but vun on the same

side the vay--take the box as stands in the first fireplace, ‘cos there

ain’t no leg in the middle o’ the table, which all the others has, and

it’s wery inconvenient.’

Mr. Pickwick observed his valet’s directions implicitly, and bidding Sam

follow him, entered the tavern he had pointed out, where the hot brandy-

and-water was speedily placed before him; while Mr. Weller, seated at a

respectful distance, though at the same table with his master, was

accommodated with a pint of porter.

The room was one of a very homely description, and was apparently under

the especial patronage of stage-coachmen; for several gentleman, who had

all the appearance of belonging to that learned profession, were

drinking and smoking in the different boxes. Among the number was one

stout, red-faced, elderly man, in particular, seated in an opposite box,

who attracted Mr. Pickwick’s attention. The stout man was smoking with

great vehemence, but between every half-dozen puffs, he took his pipe

from his mouth, and looked first at Mr. Weller and then at Mr. Pickwick.

Then, he would bury in a quart pot, as much of his countenance as the

dimensions of the quart pot admitted of its receiving, and take another

look at Sam and Mr. Pickwick. Then he would take another half-dozen

puffs with an air of profound meditation and look at them again. At last

the stout man, putting up his legs on the seat, and leaning his back

against the wall, began to puff at his pipe without leaving off at all,

and to stare through the smoke at the new-comers, as if he had made up

his mind to see the most he could of them.

At first the evolutions of the stout man had escaped Mr. Weller’s

observation, but by degrees, as he saw Mr. Pickwick’s eyes every now and

then turning towards him, he began to gaze in the same direction, at the

same time shading his eyes with his hand, as if he partially recognised

the object before him, and wished to make quite sure of its identity.

His doubts were speedily dispelled, however; for the stout man having

blown a thick cloud from his pipe, a hoarse voice, like some strange

effort of ventriloquism, emerged from beneath the capacious shawls which

muffled his throat and chest, and slowly uttered these sounds--‘Wy,

Sammy!’

‘Who’s that, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, I wouldn’t ha’ believed it, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, with

astonished eyes. ‘It’s the old ‘un.’

‘Old one,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘What old one?’

‘My father, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘How are you, my ancient?’ And

with this beautiful ebullition of filial affection, Mr. Weller made room

on the seat beside him, for the stout man, who advanced pipe in mouth

and pot in hand, to greet him.

‘Wy, Sammy,’ said the father, ‘I ha’n’t seen you, for two year and

better.’

‘Nor more you have, old codger,’ replied the son. ‘How’s mother-in-law?’

‘Wy, I’ll tell you what, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, senior, with much

solemnity in his manner; ‘there never was a nicer woman as a widder,

than that ‘ere second wentur o’ mine--a sweet creetur she was, Sammy;

all I can say on her now, is, that as she was such an uncommon pleasant

widder, it’s a great pity she ever changed her condition. She don’t act

as a vife, Sammy.’

Don’t she, though?’ inquired Mr. Weller, junior.

The elder Mr. Weller shook his head, as he replied with a sigh, ‘I’ve

done it once too often, Sammy; I’ve done it once too often. Take example

by your father, my boy, and be wery careful o’ widders all your life,

‘specially if they’ve kept a public-house, Sammy.’ Having delivered this

parental advice with great pathos, Mr. Weller, senior, refilled his pipe

from a tin box he carried in his pocket; and, lighting his fresh pipe

from the ashes of the old One, commenced smoking at a great rate.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ he said, renewing the subject, and addressing

Mr. Pickwick, after a considerable pause, ‘nothin’ personal, I hope,

sir; I hope you ha’n’t got a widder, sir.’

‘Not I,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, laughing; and while Mr. Pickwick laughed,

Sam Weller informed his parent in a whisper, of the relation in which he

stood towards that gentleman.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ said Mr. Weller, senior, taking off his hat, ‘I

hope you’ve no fault to find with Sammy, Sir?’

‘None whatever,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wery glad to hear it, sir,’ replied the old man; ‘I took a good deal o’

pains with his eddication, sir; let him run in the streets when he was

wery young, and shift for hisself. It’s the only way to make a boy

sharp, sir.’

‘Rather a dangerous process, I should imagine,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with

a smile.

‘And not a wery sure one, neither,’ added Mr. Weller; ‘I got reg’larly

done the other day.’

‘No!’ said his father.

‘I did,’ said the son; and he proceeded to relate, in as few words as

possible, how he had fallen a ready dupe to the stratagems of Job

Trotter.

Mr. Weller, senior, listened to the tale with the most profound

attention, and, at its termination, said--

‘Worn’t one o’ these chaps slim and tall, with long hair, and the gift

o’ the gab wery gallopin’?’

Mr. Pickwick did not quite understand the last item of description, but,

comprehending the first, said ‘Yes,’ at a venture.

‘T’ other’s a black-haired chap in mulberry livery, with a wery large

head?’

‘Yes, yes, he is,’ said Mr. Pickwick and Sam, with great earnestness.

‘Then I know where they are, and that’s all about it,’ said Mr. Weller;

‘they’re at Ipswich, safe enough, them two.’

‘No!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Fact,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘and I’ll tell you how I know it. I work an

Ipswich coach now and then for a friend o’ mine. I worked down the wery

day arter the night as you caught the rheumatic, and at the Black Boy at

Chelmsford--the wery place they’d come to--I took ‘em up, right through

to Ipswich, where the man-servant--him in the mulberries--told me they

was a-goin’ to put up for a long time.’

‘I’ll follow him,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘we may as well see Ipswich as any

other place. I’ll follow him.’

‘You’re quite certain it was them, governor?’ inquired Mr. Weller,

junior.

‘Quite, Sammy, quite,’ replied his father, ‘for their appearance is wery

sing’ler; besides that ‘ere, I wondered to see the gen’l’m’n so

formiliar with his servant; and, more than that, as they sat in the

front, right behind the box, I heerd ‘em laughing and saying how they’d

done old Fireworks.’

‘Old who?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Old Fireworks, Sir; by which, I’ve no doubt, they meant you, Sir.’

There is nothing positively vile or atrocious in the appellation of ‘old

Fireworks,’ but still it is by no means a respectful or flattering

designation. The recollection of all the wrongs he had sustained at

Jingle’s hands, had crowded on Mr. Pickwick’s mind, the moment Mr.

Weller began to speak; it wanted but a feather to turn the scale, and

‘old Fireworks’ did it.

‘I’ll follow him,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with an emphatic blow on the

table.

‘I shall work down to Ipswich the day arter to-morrow, Sir,’ said Mr.

Weller the elder, ‘from the Bull in Whitechapel; and if you really mean

to go, you’d better go with me.’

‘So we had,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘very true; I can write to Bury, and

tell them to meet me at Ipswich. We will go with you. But don’t hurry

away, Mr. Weller; won’t you take anything?’

‘You’re wery good, Sir,’ replied Mr. W., stopping short;--‘perhaps a

small glass of brandy to drink your health, and success to Sammy, Sir,

wouldn’t be amiss.’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘A glass of brandy here!’ The brandy was brought; and Mr. Weller, after

pulling his hair to Mr. Pickwick, and nodding to Sam, jerked it down his

capacious throat as if it had been a small thimbleful.

‘Well done, father,’ said Sam, ‘take care, old fellow, or you’ll have a

touch of your old complaint, the gout.’

‘I’ve found a sov’rin’ cure for that, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, setting

down the glass.

‘A sovereign cure for the gout,’ said Mr. Pickwick, hastily producing

his note-book--‘what is it?’

‘The gout, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘the gout is a complaint as arises

from too much ease and comfort. If ever you’re attacked with the gout,

sir, jist you marry a widder as has got a good loud woice, with a decent

notion of usin’ it, and you’ll never have the gout agin. It’s a capital

prescription, sir. I takes it reg’lar, and I can warrant it to drive

away any illness as is caused by too much jollity.’ Having imparted this

valuable secret, Mr. Weller drained his glass once more, produced a

laboured wink, sighed deeply, and slowly retired.

‘Well, what do you think of what your father says, Sam?’ inquired Mr.

Pickwick, with a smile.

‘Think, Sir!’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘why, I think he’s the wictim o’

connubiality, as Blue Beard’s domestic chaplain said, vith a tear of

pity, ven he buried him.’

There was no replying to this very apposite conclusion, and, therefore,

Mr. Pickwick, after settling the reckoning, resumed his walk to Gray’s

Inn. By the time he reached its secluded groves, however, eight o’clock

had struck, and the unbroken stream of gentlemen in muddy high-lows,

soiled white hats, and rusty apparel, who were pouring towards the

different avenues of egress, warned him that the majority of the offices

had closed for that day.

After climbing two pairs of steep and dirty stairs, he found his

anticipations were realised. Mr. Perker’s ‘outer door’ was closed; and

the dead silence which followed Mr. Weller’s repeated kicks thereat,

announced that the officials had retired from business for the night.

‘This is pleasant, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I shouldn’t lose an hour in

seeing him; I shall not be able to get one wink of sleep to-night, I

know, unless I have the satisfaction of reflecting that I have confided

this matter to a professional man.’

‘Here’s an old ‘ooman comin’ upstairs, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘p’raps

she knows where we can find somebody. Hollo, old lady, vere’s Mr.

Perker’s people?’

‘Mr. Perker’s people,’ said a thin, miserable-looking old woman,

stopping to recover breath after the ascent of the staircase--‘Mr.

Perker’s people’s gone, and I’m a-goin’ to do the office out.’

Are you Mr. Perker’s servant?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘I am Mr. Perker’s laundress,’ replied the woman.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Pickwick, half aside to Sam, ‘it’s a curious

circumstance, Sam, that they call the old women in these inns,

laundresses. I wonder what’s that for?’

‘’Cos they has a mortal awersion to washing anythin’, I suppose, Sir,’

replied Mr. Weller.

‘I shouldn’t wonder,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking at the old woman, whose

appearance, as well as the condition of the office, which she had by

this time opened, indicated a rooted antipathy to the application of

soap and water; ‘do you know where I can find Mr. Perker, my good

woman?’

‘No, I don’t,’ replied the old woman gruffly; ‘he’s out o’ town now.’

‘That’s unfortunate,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘where’s his clerk? Do you

know?’

‘Yes, I know where he is, but he won’t thank me for telling you,’

replied the laundress.

‘I have very particular business with him,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Won’t it do in the morning?’ said the woman.

‘Not so well,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well,’ said the old woman, ‘if it was anything very particular, I was

to say where he was, so I suppose there’s no harm in telling. If you

just go to the Magpie and Stump, and ask at the bar for Mr. Lowten,

they’ll show you in to him, and he’s Mr. Perker’s clerk.’

With this direction, and having been furthermore informed that the

hostelry in question was situated in a court, happy in the double

advantage of being in the vicinity of Clare Market, and closely

approximating to the back of New Inn, Mr. Pickwick and Sam descended the

rickety staircase in safety, and issued forth in quest of the Magpie and

Stump.

This favoured tavern, sacred to the evening orgies of Mr. Lowten and his

companions, was what ordinary people would designate a public-house.

That the landlord was a man of money-making turn was sufficiently

testified by the fact of a small bulkhead beneath the tap-room window,

in size and shape not unlike a sedan-chair, being underlet to a mender

of shoes: and that he was a being of a philanthropic mind was evident

from the protection he afforded to a pieman, who vended his delicacies

without fear of interruption, on the very door-step. In the lower

windows, which were decorated with curtains of a saffron hue, dangled

two or three printed cards, bearing reference to Devonshire cider and

Dantzic spruce, while a large blackboard, announcing in white letters to

an enlightened public, that there were 500,000 barrels of double stout

in the cellars of the establishment, left the mind in a state of not

unpleasing doubt and uncertainty as to the precise direction in the

bowels of the earth, in which this mighty cavern might be supposed to

extend. When we add that the weather-beaten signboard bore the half-

obliterated semblance of a magpie intently eyeing a crooked streak of

brown paint, which the neighbours had been taught from infancy to

consider as the ‘stump,’ we have said all that need be said of the

exterior of the edifice.

On Mr. Pickwick’s presenting himself at the bar, an elderly female

emerged from behind the screen therein, and presented herself before

him.

‘Is Mr. Lowten here, ma’am?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes, he is, Sir,’ replied the landlady. ‘Here, Charley, show the

gentleman in to Mr. Lowten.’

‘The gen’l’m’n can’t go in just now,’ said a shambling pot-boy, with a

red head, ‘cos’ Mr. Lowten’s a-singin’ a comic song, and he’ll put him

out. He’ll be done directly, Sir.’

The red-headed pot-boy had scarcely finished speaking, when a most

unanimous hammering of tables, and jingling of glasses, announced that

the song had that instant terminated; and Mr. Pickwick, after desiring

Sam to solace himself in the tap, suffered himself to be conducted into

the presence of Mr. Lowten.

At the announcement of ‘A gentleman to speak to you, Sir,’ a puffy-faced

young man, who filled the chair at the head of the table, looked with

some surprise in the direction from whence the voice proceeded; and the

surprise seemed to be by no means diminished, when his eyes rested on an

individual whom he had never seen before.

‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘and I am very sorry to

disturb the other gentlemen, too, but I come on very particular

business; and if you will suffer me to detain you at this end of the

room for five minutes, I shall be very much obliged to you.’

The puffy-faced young man rose, and drawing a chair close to Mr.

Pickwick in an obscure corner of the room, listened attentively to his

tale of woe.

‘Ah,’ he said, when Mr. Pickwick had concluded, ‘Dodson and Fogg--sharp

practice theirs--capital men of business, Dodson and Fogg, sir.’

Mr. Pickwick admitted the sharp practice of Dodson and Fogg, and Lowten

resumed.

‘Perker ain’t in town, and he won’t be, neither, before the end of next

week; but if you want the action defended, and will leave the copy with

me, I can do all that’s needful till he comes back.’

‘That’s exactly what I came here for,’ said Mr. Pickwick, handing over

the document. ‘If anything particular occurs, you can write to me at the

post-office, Ipswich.’

‘That’s all right,’ replied Mr. Perker’s clerk; and then seeing Mr.

Pickwick’s eye wandering curiously towards the table, he added, ‘will

you join us, for half an hour or so? We are capital company here to-

night. There’s Samkin and Green’s managing-clerk, and Smithers and

Price’s chancery, and Pimkin and Thomas’s out o’ doors--sings a capital

song, he does--and Jack Bamber, and ever so many more. You’re come out

of the country, I suppose. Would you like to join us?’

Mr. Pickwick could not resist so tempting an opportunity of studying

human nature. He suffered himself to be led to the table, where, after

having been introduced to the company in due form, he was accommodated

with a seat near the chairman and called for a glass of his favourite

beverage.

A profound silence, quite contrary to Mr. Pickwick’s expectation,

succeeded.

‘You don’t find this sort of thing disagreeable, I hope, sir?’ said his

right hand neighbour, a gentleman in a checked shirt and Mosaic studs,

with a cigar in his mouth.

‘Not in the least,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘I like it very much, although

I am no smoker myself.’

‘I should be very sorry to say I wasn’t,’ interposed another gentleman

on the opposite side of the table. ‘It’s board and lodgings to me, is

smoke.’

Mr. Pickwick glanced at the speaker, and thought that if it were washing

too, it would be all the better.

Here there was another pause. Mr. Pickwick was a stranger, and his

coming had evidently cast a damp upon the party.

‘Mr. Grundy’s going to oblige the company with a song,’ said the

chairman.

‘No, he ain’t,’ said Mr. Grundy.

‘Why not?’ said the chairman.

‘Because he can’t,’ said Mr. Grundy.

‘You had better say he won’t,’ replied the chairman.

‘Well, then, he won’t,’ retorted Mr. Grundy. Mr. Grundy’s positive

refusal to gratify the company occasioned another silence.

‘Won’t anybody enliven us?’ said the chairman, despondingly.

‘Why don’t you enliven us yourself, Mr. Chairman?’ said a young man with

a whisker, a squint, and an open shirt collar (dirty), from the bottom

of the table.

‘Hear! hear!’ said the smoking gentleman, in the Mosaic jewellery.

‘Because I only know one song, and I have sung it already, and it’s a

fine of “glasses round” to sing the same song twice in a night,’ replied

the chairman.

This was an unanswerable reply, and silence prevailed again.

‘I have been to-night, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pickwick, hoping to start a

subject which all the company could take a part in discussing, ‘I have

been to-night, in a place which you all know very well, doubtless, but

which I have not been in for some years, and know very little of; I mean

Gray’s Inn, gentlemen. Curious little nooks in a great place, like

London, these old inns are.’

‘By Jove!’ said the chairman, whispering across the table to Mr.

Pickwick, ‘you have hit upon something that one of us, at least, would

talk upon for ever. You’ll draw old Jack Bamber out; he was never heard

to talk about anything else but the inns, and he has lived alone in them

till he’s half crazy.’

The individual to whom Lowten alluded, was a little, yellow, high-

shouldered man, whose countenance, from his habit of stooping forward

when silent, Mr. Pickwick had not observed before. He wondered, though,

when the old man raised his shrivelled face, and bent his gray eye upon

him, with a keen inquiring look, that such remarkable features could

have escaped his attention for a moment. There was a fixed grim smile

perpetually on his countenance; he leaned his chin on a long, skinny

hand, with nails of extraordinary length; and as he inclined his head to

one side, and looked keenly out from beneath his ragged gray eyebrows,

there was a strange, wild slyness in his leer, quite repulsive to

behold.

This was the figure that now started forward, and burst into an animated

torrent of words. As this chapter has been a long one, however, and as

the old man was a remarkable personage, it will be more respectful to

him, and more convenient to us, to let him speak for himself in a fresh

one.

CHAPTER XXI. IN WHICH THE OLD MAN LAUNCHES FORTH INTO HIS FAVOURITE

THEME, AND RELATES A STORY ABOUT A QUEER CLIENT

‘Aha!’ said the old man, a brief description of whose manner and

appearance concluded the last chapter, ‘aha! who was talking about the

inns?’

‘I was, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick--‘I was observing what singular old

places they are.’

‘\_You\_!’ said the old man contemptuously. ‘What do \_you \_know of the

time when young men shut themselves up in those lonely rooms, and read

and read, hour after hour, and night after night, till their reason

wandered beneath their midnight studies; till their mental powers were

exhausted; till morning’s light brought no freshness or health to them;

and they sank beneath the unnatural devotion of their youthful energies

to their dry old books? Coming down to a later time, and a very

different day, what do \_you\_ know of the gradual sinking beneath

consumption, or the quick wasting of fever--the grand results of “life”

and dissipation--which men have undergone in these same rooms? How many

vain pleaders for mercy, do you think, have turned away heart-sick from

the lawyer’s office, to find a resting-place in the Thames, or a refuge

in the jail? They are no ordinary houses, those. There is not a panel in

the old wainscotting, but what, if it were endowed with the powers of

speech and memory, could start from the wall, and tell its tale of

horror--the romance of life, Sir, the romance of life! Common-place as

they may seem now, I tell you they are strange old places, and I would

rather hear many a legend with a terrific-sounding name, than the true

history of one old set of chambers.’

There was something so odd in the old man’s sudden energy, and the

subject which had called it forth, that Mr. Pickwick was prepared with

no observation in reply; and the old man checking his impetuosity, and

resuming the leer, which had disappeared during his previous excitement,

said--

‘Look at them in another light--their most common-place and least

romantic. What fine places of slow torture they are! Think of the needy

man who has spent his all, beggared himself, and pinched his friends, to

enter the profession, which is destined never to yield him a morsel of

bread. The waiting--the hope--the disappointment--the fear--the misery--

the poverty--the blight on his hopes, and end to his career--the suicide

perhaps, or the shabby, slipshod drunkard. Am I not right about them?’

And the old man rubbed his hands, and leered as if in delight at having

found another point of view in which to place his favourite subject.

Mr. Pickwick eyed the old man with great curiosity, and the remainder of

the company smiled, and looked on in silence.

‘Talk of your German universities,’ said the little old man. ‘Pooh,

pooh! there’s romance enough at home without going half a mile for it;

only people never think of it.’

‘I never thought of the romance of this particular subject before,

certainly,’ said Mr. Pickwick, laughing.

‘To be sure you didn’t,’ said the little old man; ‘of course not. As a

friend of mine used to say to me, “What is there in chambers in

particular?” “Queer old places,” said I. “Not at all,” said he.

“Lonely,” said I. “Not a bit of it,” said he. He died one morning of

apoplexy, as he was going to open his outer door. Fell with his head in

his own letter-box, and there he lay for eighteen months. Everybody

thought he’d gone out of town.’

‘And how was he found out at last?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘The benchers determined to have his door broken open, as he hadn’t paid

any rent for two years. So they did. Forced the lock; and a very dusty

skeleton in a blue coat, black knee-shorts, and silks, fell forward in

the arms of the porter who opened the door. Queer, that. Rather,

perhaps; rather, eh?’ The little old man put his head more on one side,

and rubbed his hands with unspeakable glee.

‘I know another case,’ said the little old man, when his chuckles had in

some degree subsided. ‘It occurred in Clifford’s Inn. Tenant of a top

set--bad character--shut himself up in his bedroom closet, and took a

dose of arsenic. The steward thought he had run away: opened the door,

and put a bill up. Another man came, took the chambers, furnished them,

and went to live there. Somehow or other he couldn’t sleep--always

restless and uncomfortable. “Odd,” says he. “I’ll make the other room my

bedchamber, and this my sitting-room.” He made the change, and slept

very well at night, but suddenly found that, somehow, he couldn’t read

in the evening: he got nervous and uncomfortable, and used to be always

snuffing his candles and staring about him. “I can’t make this out,”

said he, when he came home from the play one night, and was drinking a

glass of cold grog, with his back to the wall, in order that he mightn’t

be able to fancy there was any one behind him--“I can’t make it out,”

said he; and just then his eyes rested on the little closet that had

been always locked up, and a shudder ran through his whole frame from

top to toe. “I have felt this strange feeling before,” said he, “I

cannot help thinking there’s something wrong about that closet.” He made

a strong effort, plucked up his courage, shivered the lock with a blow

or two of the poker, opened the door, and there, sure enough, standing

bolt upright in the corner, was the last tenant, with a little bottle

clasped firmly in his hand, and his face--well!’ As the little old man

concluded, he looked round on the attentive faces of his wondering

auditory with a smile of grim delight.

‘What strange things these are you tell us of, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

minutely scanning the old man’s countenance, by the aid of his glasses.

‘Strange!’ said the little old man. ‘Nonsense; you think them strange,

because you know nothing about it. They are funny, but not uncommon.’

‘Funny!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick involuntarily.

‘Yes, funny, are they not?’ replied the little old man, with a

diabolical leer; and then, without pausing for an answer, he continued--

‘I knew another man--let me see--forty years ago now--who took an old,

damp, rotten set of chambers, in one of the most ancient inns, that had

been shut up and empty for years and years before. There were lots of

old women’s stories about the place, and it certainly was very far from

being a cheerful one; but he was poor, and the rooms were cheap, and

that would have been quite a sufficient reason for him, if they had been

ten times worse than they really were. He was obliged to take some

mouldering fixtures that were on the place, and, among the rest, was a

great lumbering wooden press for papers, with large glass doors, and a

green curtain inside; a pretty useless thing for him, for he had no

papers to put in it; and as to his clothes, he carried them about with

him, and that wasn’t very hard work, either. Well, he had moved in all

his furniture--it wasn’t quite a truck-full--and had sprinkled it about

the room, so as to make the four chairs look as much like a dozen as

possible, and was sitting down before the fire at night, drinking the

first glass of two gallons of whisky he had ordered on credit, wondering

whether it would ever be paid for, and if so, in how many years’ time,

when his eyes encountered the glass doors of the wooden press. “Ah,”

says he, “if I hadn’t been obliged to take that ugly article at the old

broker’s valuation, I might have got something comfortable for the

money. I’ll tell you what it is, old fellow,” he said, speaking aloud to

the press, having nothing else to speak to, “if it wouldn’t cost more to

break up your old carcass, than it would ever be worth afterward, I’d

have a fire out of you in less than no time.” He had hardly spoken the

words, when a sound resembling a faint groan, appeared to issue from the

interior of the case. It startled him at first, but thinking, on a

moment’s reflection, that it must be some young fellow in the next

chamber, who had been dining out, he put his feet on the fender, and

raised the poker to stir the fire. At that moment, the sound was

repeated; and one of the glass doors slowly opening, disclosed a pale

and emaciated figure in soiled and worn apparel, standing erect in the

press. The figure was tall and thin, and the countenance expressive of

care and anxiety; but there was something in the hue of the skin, and

gaunt and unearthly appearance of the whole form, which no being of this

world was ever seen to wear. “Who are you?” said the new tenant, turning

very pale; poising the poker in his hand, however, and taking a very

decent aim at the countenance of the figure. “Who are you?” “Don’t throw

that poker at me,” replied the form; “if you hurled it with ever so sure

an aim, it would pass through me, without resistance, and expend its

force on the wood behind. I am a spirit.” “And pray, what do you want

here?” faltered the tenant. “In this room,” replied the apparition, “my

worldly ruin was worked, and I and my children beggared. In this press,

the papers in a long, long suit, which accumulated for years, were

deposited. In this room, when I had died of grief, and long-deferred

hope, two wily harpies divided the wealth for which I had contested

during a wretched existence, and of which, at last, not one farthing was

left for my unhappy descendants. I terrified them from the spot, and

since that day have prowled by night--the only period at which I can

revisit the earth--about the scenes of my long-protracted misery. This

apartment is mine: leave it to me.” “If you insist upon making your

appearance here,” said the tenant, who had had time to collect his

presence of mind during this prosy statement of the ghost’s, “I shall

give up possession with the greatest pleasure; but I should like to ask

you one question, if you will allow me.” “Say on,” said the apparition

sternly. “Well,” said the tenant, “I don’t apply the observation

personally to you, because it is equally applicable to most of the

ghosts I ever heard of; but it does appear to me somewhat inconsistent,

that when you have an opportunity of visiting the fairest spots of

earth--for I suppose space is nothing to you--you should always return

exactly to the very places where you have been most miserable.” “Egad,

that’s very true; I never thought of that before,” said the ghost. “You

see, Sir,” pursued the tenant, “this is a very uncomfortable room. From

the appearance of that press, I should be disposed to say that it is not

wholly free from bugs; and I really think you might find much more

comfortable quarters: to say nothing of the climate of London, which is

extremely disagreeable.” “You are very right, Sir,” said the ghost

politely, “it never struck me till now; I’ll try change of air

directly”--and, in fact, he began to vanish as he spoke; his legs,

indeed, had quite disappeared. “And if, Sir,” said the tenant, calling

after him, “if you \_would \_have the goodness to suggest to the other

ladies and gentlemen who are now engaged in haunting old empty houses,

that they might be much more comfortable elsewhere, you will confer a

very great benefit on society.” “I will,” replied the ghost; “we must be

dull fellows--very dull fellows, indeed; I can’t imagine how we can have

been so stupid.” With these words, the spirit disappeared; and what is

rather remarkable,’ added the old man, with a shrewd look round the

table, ‘he never came back again.’

‘That ain’t bad, if it’s true,’ said the man in the Mosaic studs,

lighting a fresh cigar.

‘\_If\_!’ exclaimed the old man, with a look of excessive contempt. ‘I

suppose,’ he added, turning to Lowten, ‘he’ll say next, that my story

about the queer client we had, when I was in an attorney’s office, is

not true either--I shouldn’t wonder.’

‘I shan’t venture to say anything at all about it, seeing that I never

heard the story,’ observed the owner of the Mosaic decorations.

‘I wish you would repeat it, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah, do,’ said Lowten, ‘nobody has heard it but me, and I have nearly

forgotten it.’

The old man looked round the table, and leered more horribly than ever,

as if in triumph, at the attention which was depicted in every face.

Then rubbing his chin with his hand, and looking up to the ceiling as if

to recall the circumstances to his memory, he began as follows:--

THE OLD MAN’S TALE ABOUT THE QUEER CLIENT

‘It matters little,’ said the old man, ‘where, or how, I picked up this

brief history. If I were to relate it in the order in which it reached

me, I should commence in the middle, and when I had arrived at the

conclusion, go back for a beginning. It is enough for me to say that

some of its circumstances passed before my own eyes; for the remainder I

know them to have happened, and there are some persons yet living, who

will remember them but too well.

‘In the Borough High Street, near St. George’s Church, and on the same

side of the way, stands, as most people know, the smallest of our

debtors’ prisons, the Marshalsea. Although in later times it has been a

very different place from the sink of filth and dirt it once was, even

its improved condition holds out but little temptation to the

extravagant, or consolation to the improvident. The condemned felon has

as good a yard for air and exercise in Newgate, as the insolvent debtor

in the Marshalsea Prison. [Better. But this is past, in a better age,

and the prison exists no longer.]

‘It may be my fancy, or it may be that I cannot separate the place from

the old recollections associated with it, but this part of London I

cannot bear. The street is broad, the shops are spacious, the noise of

passing vehicles, the footsteps of a perpetual stream of people--all the

busy sounds of traffic, resound in it from morn to midnight; but the

streets around are mean and close; poverty and debauchery lie festering

in the crowded alleys; want and misfortune are pent up in the narrow

prison; an air of gloom and dreariness seems, in my eyes at least, to

hang about the scene, and to impart to it a squalid and sickly hue.

‘Many eyes, that have long since been closed in the grave, have looked

round upon that scene lightly enough, when entering the gate of the old

Marshalsea Prison for the first time; for despair seldom comes with the

first severe shock of misfortune. A man has confidence in untried

friends, he remembers the many offers of service so freely made by his

boon companions when he wanted them not; he has hope--the hope of happy

inexperience--and however he may bend beneath the first shock, it

springs up in his bosom, and flourishes there for a brief space, until

it droops beneath the blight of disappointment and neglect. How soon

have those same eyes, deeply sunken in the head, glared from faces

wasted with famine, and sallow from confinement, in days when it was no

figure of speech to say that debtors rotted in prison, with no hope of

release, and no prospect of liberty! The atrocity in its full extent no

longer exists, but there is enough of it left to give rise to

occurrences that make the heart bleed.

‘Twenty years ago, that pavement was worn with the footsteps of a mother

and child, who, day by day, so surely as the morning came, presented

themselves at the prison gate; often after a night of restless misery

and anxious thoughts, were they there, a full hour too soon, and then

the young mother turning meekly away, would lead the child to the old

bridge, and raising him in her arms to show him the glistening water,

tinted with the light of the morning’s sun, and stirring with all the

bustling preparations for business and pleasure that the river presented

at that early hour, endeavour to interest his thoughts in the objects

before him. But she would quickly set him down, and hiding her face in

her shawl, give vent to the tears that blinded her; for no expression of

interest or amusement lighted up his thin and sickly face. His

recollections were few enough, but they were all of one kind--all

connected with the poverty and misery of his parents. Hour after hour

had he sat on his mother’s knee, and with childish sympathy watched the

tears that stole down her face, and then crept quietly away into some

dark corner, and sobbed himself to sleep. The hard realities of the

world, with many of its worst privations--hunger and thirst, and cold

and want--had all come home to him, from the first dawnings of reason;

and though the form of childhood was there, its light heart, its merry

laugh, and sparkling eyes were wanting.

‘The father and mother looked on upon this, and upon each other, with

thoughts of agony they dared not breathe in words. The healthy, strong-

made man, who could have borne almost any fatigue of active exertion,

was wasting beneath the close confinement and unhealthy atmosphere of a

crowded prison. The slight and delicate woman was sinking beneath the

combined effects of bodily and mental illness. The child’s young heart

was breaking.

‘Winter came, and with it weeks of cold and heavy rain. The poor girl

had removed to a wretched apartment close to the spot of her husband’s

imprisonment; and though the change had been rendered necessary by their

increasing poverty, she was happier now, for she was nearer him. For two

months, she and her little companion watched the opening of the gate as

usual. One day she failed to come, for the first time. Another morning

arrived, and she came alone. The child was dead.

‘They little know, who coldly talk of the poor man’s bereavements, as a

happy release from pain to the departed, and a merciful relief from

expense to the survivor--they little know, I say, what the agony of

those bereavements is. A silent look of affection and regard when all

other eyes are turned coldly away--the consciousness that we possess the

sympathy and affection of one being when all others have deserted us--is

a hold, a stay, a comfort, in the deepest affliction, which no wealth

could purchase, or power bestow. The child had sat at his parents’ feet

for hours together, with his little hands patiently folded in each

other, and his thin wan face raised towards them. They had seen him pine

away, from day to day; and though his brief existence had been a joyless

one, and he was now removed to that peace and rest which, child as he

was, he had never known in this world, they were his parents, and his

loss sank deep into their souls.

‘It was plain to those who looked upon the mother’s altered face, that

death must soon close the scene of her adversity and trial. Her

husband’s fellow-prisoners shrank from obtruding on his grief and

misery, and left to himself alone, the small room he had previously

occupied in common with two companions. She shared it with him; and

lingering on without pain, but without hope, her life ebbed slowly away.

‘She had fainted one evening in her husband’s arms, and he had borne her

to the open window, to revive her with the air, when the light of the

moon falling full upon her face, showed him a change upon her features,

which made him stagger beneath her weight, like a helpless infant.

‘“Set me down, George,” she said faintly. He did so, and seating himself

beside her, covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

‘“It is very hard to leave you, George,” she said; “but it is God’s

will, and you must bear it for my sake. Oh! how I thank Him for having

taken our boy! He is happy, and in heaven now. What would he have done

here, without his mother!”

‘“You shall not die, Mary, you shall not die;” said the husband,

starting up. He paced hurriedly to and fro, striking his head with his

clenched fists; then reseating himself beside her, and supporting her in

his arms, added more calmly, “Rouse yourself, my dear girl. Pray, pray

do. You will revive yet.”

‘“Never again, George; never again,” said the dying woman. “Let them lay

me by my poor boy now, but promise me, that if ever you leave this

dreadful place, and should grow rich, you will have us removed to some

quiet country churchyard, a long, long way off--very far from here--

where we can rest in peace. Dear George, promise me you will.”

‘“I do, I do,” said the man, throwing himself passionately on his knees

before her. “Speak to me, Mary, another word; one look--but one!”

‘He ceased to speak: for the arm that clasped his neck grew stiff and

heavy. A deep sigh escaped from the wasted form before him; the lips

moved, and a smile played upon the face; but the lips were pallid, and

the smile faded into a rigid and ghastly stare. He was alone in the

world.

‘That night, in the silence and desolation of his miserable room, the

wretched man knelt down by the dead body of his wife, and called on God

to witness a terrible oath, that from that hour, he devoted himself to

revenge her death and that of his child; that thenceforth to the last

moment of his life, his whole energies should be directed to this one

object; that his revenge should be protracted and terrible; that his

hatred should be undying and inextinguishable; and should hunt its

object through the world.

‘The deepest despair, and passion scarcely human, had made such fierce

ravages on his face and form, in that one night, that his companions in

misfortune shrank affrighted from him as he passed by. His eyes were

bloodshot and heavy, his face a deadly white, and his body bent as if

with age. He had bitten his under lip nearly through in the violence of

his mental suffering, and the blood which had flowed from the wound had

trickled down his chin, and stained his shirt and neckerchief. No tear,

or sound of complaint escaped him; but the unsettled look, and

disordered haste with which he paced up and down the yard, denoted the

fever which was burning within.

‘It was necessary that his wife’s body should be removed from the

prison, without delay. He received the communication with perfect

calmness, and acquiesced in its propriety. Nearly all the inmates of the

prison had assembled to witness its removal; they fell back on either

side when the widower appeared; he walked hurriedly forward, and

stationed himself, alone, in a little railed area close to the lodge

gate, from whence the crowd, with an instinctive feeling of delicacy,

had retired. The rude coffin was borne slowly forward on men’s

shoulders. A dead silence pervaded the throng, broken only by the

audible lamentations of the women, and the shuffling steps of the

bearers on the stone pavement. They reached the spot where the bereaved

husband stood: and stopped. He laid his hand upon the coffin, and

mechanically adjusting the pall with which it was covered, motioned them

onward. The turnkeys in the prison lobby took off their hats as it

passed through, and in another moment the heavy gate closed behind it.

He looked vacantly upon the crowd, and fell heavily to the ground.

‘Although for many weeks after this, he was watched, night and day, in

the wildest ravings of fever, neither the consciousness of his loss, nor

the recollection of the vow he had made, ever left him for a moment.

Scenes changed before his eyes, place succeeded place, and event

followed event, in all the hurry of delirium; but they were all

connected in some way with the great object of his mind. He was sailing

over a boundless expanse of sea, with a blood-red sky above, and the

angry waters, lashed into fury beneath, boiling and eddying up, on every

side. There was another vessel before them, toiling and labouring in the

howling storm; her canvas fluttering in ribbons from the mast, and her

deck thronged with figures who were lashed to the sides, over which huge

waves every instant burst, sweeping away some devoted creatures into the

foaming sea. Onward they bore, amidst the roaring mass of water, with a

speed and force which nothing could resist; and striking the stem of the

foremost vessel, crushed her beneath their keel. From the huge whirlpool

which the sinking wreck occasioned, arose a shriek so loud and shrill--

the death-cry of a hundred drowning creatures, blended into one fierce

yell--that it rung far above the war-cry of the elements, and echoed,

and re-echoed till it seemed to pierce air, sky, and ocean. But what was

that--that old gray head that rose above the water’s surface, and with

looks of agony, and screams for aid, buffeted with the waves! One look,

and he had sprung from the vessel’s side, and with vigorous strokes was

swimming towards it. He reached it; he was close upon it. They were \_his

\_features. The old man saw him coming, and vainly strove to elude his

grasp. But he clasped him tight, and dragged him beneath the water.

Down, down with him, fifty fathoms down; his struggles grew fainter and

fainter, until they wholly ceased. He was dead; he had killed him, and

had kept his oath.

‘He was traversing the scorching sands of a mighty desert, barefoot and

alone. The sand choked and blinded him; its fine thin grains entered the

very pores of his skin, and irritated him almost to madness. Gigantic

masses of the same material, carried forward by the wind, and shone

through by the burning sun, stalked in the distance like pillars of

living fire. The bones of men, who had perished in the dreary waste, lay

scattered at his feet; a fearful light fell on everything around; so far

as the eye could reach, nothing but objects of dread and horror

presented themselves. Vainly striving to utter a cry of terror, with his

tongue cleaving to his mouth, he rushed madly forward. Armed with

supernatural strength, he waded through the sand, until, exhausted with

fatigue and thirst, he fell senseless on the earth. What fragrant

coolness revived him; what gushing sound was that? Water! It was indeed

a well; and the clear fresh stream was running at his feet. He drank

deeply of it, and throwing his aching limbs upon the bank, sank into a

delicious trance. The sound of approaching footsteps roused him. An old

gray-headed man tottered forward to slake his burning thirst. It was

\_he\_ again! He wound his arms round the old man’s body, and held him

back. He struggled, and shrieked for water--for but one drop of water to

save his life! But he held the old man firmly, and watched his agonies

with greedy eyes; and when his lifeless head fell forward on his bosom,

he rolled the corpse from him with his feet.

‘When the fever left him, and consciousness returned, he awoke to find

himself rich and free, to hear that the parent who would have let him

die in jail--\_would\_! who \_had \_let those who were far dearer to him

than his own existence die of want, and sickness of heart that medicine

cannot cure--had been found dead in his bed of down. He had had all the

heart to leave his son a beggar, but proud even of his health and

strength, had put off the act till it was too late, and now might gnash

his teeth in the other world, at the thought of the wealth his

remissness had left him. He awoke to this, and he awoke to more. To

recollect the purpose for which he lived, and to remember that his enemy

was his wife’s own father--the man who had cast him into prison, and

who, when his daughter and her child sued at his feet for mercy, had

spurned them from his door. Oh, how he cursed the weakness that

prevented him from being up, and active, in his scheme of vengeance!

‘He caused himself to be carried from the scene of his loss and misery,

and conveyed to a quiet residence on the sea-coast; not in the hope of

recovering his peace of mind or happiness, for both were fled for ever;

but to restore his prostrate energies, and meditate on his darling

object. And here, some evil spirit cast in his way the opportunity for

his first, most horrible revenge.

‘It was summer-time; and wrapped in his gloomy thoughts, he would issue

from his solitary lodgings early in the evening, and wandering along a

narrow path beneath the cliffs, to a wild and lonely spot that had

struck his fancy in his ramblings, seat himself on some fallen fragment

of the rock, and burying his face in his hands, remain there for hours--

sometimes until night had completely closed in, and the long shadows of

the frowning cliffs above his head cast a thick, black darkness on every

object near him.

‘He was seated here, one calm evening, in his old position, now and then

raising his head to watch the flight of a sea-gull, or carry his eye

along the glorious crimson path, which, commencing in the middle of the

ocean, seemed to lead to its very verge where the sun was setting, when

the profound stillness of the spot was broken by a loud cry for help; he

listened, doubtful of his having heard aright, when the cry was repeated

with even greater vehemence than before, and, starting to his feet, he

hastened in the direction whence it proceeded.

‘The tale told itself at once: some scattered garments lay on the beach;

a human head was just visible above the waves at a little distance from

the shore; and an old man, wringing his hands in agony, was running to

and fro, shrieking for assistance. The invalid, whose strength was now

sufficiently restored, threw off his coat, and rushed towards the sea,

with the intention of plunging in, and dragging the drowning man ashore.

‘“Hasten here, Sir, in God’s name; help, help, sir, for the love of

Heaven. He is my son, Sir, my only son!” said the old man frantically,

as he advanced to meet him. “My only son, Sir, and he is dying before

his father’s eyes!”

‘At the first word the old man uttered, the stranger checked himself in

his career, and, folding his arms, stood perfectly motionless.

‘“Great God!” exclaimed the old man, recoiling, “Heyling!”

‘The stranger smiled, and was silent.

‘“Heyling!” said the old man wildly; “my boy, Heyling, my dear boy,

look, look!” Gasping for breath, the miserable father pointed to the

spot where the young man was struggling for life.

‘“Hark!” said the old man. “He cries once more. He is alive yet.

Heyling, save him, save him!”

‘The stranger smiled again, and remained immovable as a statue.

‘“I have wronged you,” shrieked the old man, falling on his knees, and

clasping his hands together. “Be revenged; take my all, my life; cast me

into the water at your feet, and, if human nature can repress a

struggle, I will die, without stirring hand or foot. Do it, Heyling, do

it, but save my boy; he is so young, Heyling, so young to die!”

‘“Listen,” said the stranger, grasping the old man fiercely by the

wrist; “I will have life for life, and here is \_one\_. \_My\_ child died,

before his father’s eyes, a far more agonising and painful death than

that young slanderer of his sister’s worth is meeting while I speak. You

laughed--laughed in your daughter’s face, where death had already set

his hand--at our sufferings, then. What think you of them now! See

there, see there!”

‘As the stranger spoke, he pointed to the sea. A faint cry died away

upon its surface; the last powerful struggle of the dying man agitated

the rippling waves for a few seconds; and the spot where he had gone

down into his early grave, was undistinguishable from the surrounding

water.

‘Three years had elapsed, when a gentleman alighted from a private

carriage at the door of a London attorney, then well known as a man of

no great nicety in his professional dealings, and requested a private

interview on business of importance. Although evidently not past the

prime of life, his face was pale, haggard, and dejected; and it did not

require the acute perception of the man of business, to discern at a

glance, that disease or suffering had done more to work a change in his

appearance, than the mere hand of time could have accomplished in twice

the period of his whole life.

‘“I wish you to undertake some legal business for me,” said the

stranger.

‘The attorney bowed obsequiously, and glanced at a large packet which

the gentleman carried in his hand. His visitor observed the look, and

proceeded.

‘“It is no common business,” said he; “nor have these papers reached my

hands without long trouble and great expense.”

‘The attorney cast a still more anxious look at the packet; and his

visitor, untying the string that bound it, disclosed a quantity of

promissory notes, with copies of deeds, and other documents.

‘“Upon these papers,” said the client, “the man whose name they bear,

has raised, as you will see, large sums of money, for years past. There

was a tacit understanding between him and the men into whose hands they

originally went--and from whom I have by degrees purchased the whole,

for treble and quadruple their nominal value--that these loans should be

from time to time renewed, until a given period had elapsed. Such an

understanding is nowhere expressed. He has sustained many losses of

late; and these obligations accumulating upon him at once, would crush

him to the earth.”

‘“The whole amount is many thousands of pounds,” said the attorney,

looking over the papers.

‘“It is,” said the client.

‘“What are we to do?” inquired the man of business.

‘“Do!” replied the client, with sudden vehemence. “Put every engine of

the law in force, every trick that ingenuity can devise and rascality

execute; fair means and foul; the open oppression of the law, aided by

all the craft of its most ingenious practitioners. I would have him die

a harassing and lingering death. Ruin him, seize and sell his lands and

goods, drive him from house and home, and drag him forth a beggar in his

old age, to die in a common jail.”

‘“But the costs, my dear Sir, the costs of all this,” reasoned the

attorney, when he had recovered from his momentary surprise. “If the

defendant be a man of straw, who is to pay the costs, Sir?”

‘“Name any sum,” said the stranger, his hand trembling so violently with

excitement, that he could scarcely hold the pen he seized as he spoke--

“any sum, and it is yours. Don’t be afraid to name it, man. I shall not

think it dear, if you gain my object.”

‘The attorney named a large sum, at hazard, as the advance he should

require to secure himself against the possibility of loss; but more with

the view of ascertaining how far his client was really disposed to go,

than with any idea that he would comply with the demand. The stranger

wrote a cheque upon his banker, for the whole amount, and left him.

‘The draft was duly honoured, and the attorney, finding that his strange

client might be safely relied upon, commenced his work in earnest. For

more than two years afterwards, Mr. Heyling would sit whole days

together, in the office, poring over the papers as they accumulated, and

reading again and again, his eyes gleaming with joy, the letters of

remonstrance, the prayers for a little delay, the representations of the

certain ruin in which the opposite party must be involved, which poured

in, as suit after suit, and process after process, was commenced. To all

applications for a brief indulgence, there was but one reply--the money

must be paid. Land, house, furniture, each in its turn, was taken under

some one of the numerous executions which were issued; and the old man

himself would have been immured in prison had he not escaped the

vigilance of the officers, and fled.

‘The implacable animosity of Heyling, so far from being satiated by the

success of his persecution, increased a hundredfold with the ruin he

inflicted. On being informed of the old man’s flight, his fury was

unbounded. He gnashed his teeth with rage, tore the hair from his head,

and assailed with horrid imprecations the men who had been intrusted

with the writ. He was only restored to comparative calmness by repeated

assurances of the certainty of discovering the fugitive. Agents were

sent in quest of him, in all directions; every stratagem that could be

invented was resorted to, for the purpose of discovering his place of

retreat; but it was all in vain. Half a year had passed over, and he was

still undiscovered.

‘At length late one night, Heyling, of whom nothing had been seen for

many weeks before, appeared at his attorney’s private residence, and

sent up word that a gentleman wished to see him instantly. Before the

attorney, who had recognised his voice from above stairs, could order

the servant to admit him, he had rushed up the staircase, and entered

the drawing-room pale and breathless. Having closed the door, to prevent

being overheard, he sank into a chair, and said, in a low voice--

‘“Hush! I have found him at last.”

‘“No!” said the attorney. “Well done, my dear sir, well done.”

‘“He lies concealed in a wretched lodging in Camden Town,” said Heyling.

“Perhaps it is as well we \_did \_lose sight of him, for he has been

living alone there, in the most abject misery, all the time, and he is

poor--very poor.”

‘“Very good,” said the attorney. “You will have the caption made to-

morrow, of course?”

‘“Yes,” replied Heyling. “Stay! No! The next day. You are surprised at

my wishing to postpone it,” he added, with a ghastly smile; “but I had

forgotten. The next day is an anniversary in his life: let it be done

then.”

‘“Very good,” said the attorney. “Will you write down instructions for

the officer?”

‘“No; let him meet me here, at eight in the evening, and I will

accompany him myself.”

‘They met on the appointed night, and, hiring a hackney-coach, directed

the driver to stop at that corner of the old Pancras Road, at which

stands the parish workhouse. By the time they alighted there, it was

quite dark; and, proceeding by the dead wall in front of the Veterinary

Hospital, they entered a small by-street, which is, or was at that time,

called Little College Street, and which, whatever it may be now, was in

those days a desolate place enough, surrounded by little else than

fields and ditches.

‘Having drawn the travelling-cap he had on half over his face, and

muffled himself in his cloak, Heyling stopped before the meanest-looking

house in the street, and knocked gently at the door. It was at once

opened by a woman, who dropped a curtsey of recognition, and Heyling,

whispering the officer to remain below, crept gently upstairs, and,

opening the door of the front room, entered at once.

‘The object of his search and his unrelenting animosity, now a decrepit

old man, was seated at a bare deal table, on which stood a miserable

candle. He started on the entrance of the stranger, and rose feebly to

his feet.

‘“What now, what now?” said the old man. “What fresh misery is this?

What do you want here?”

‘“A word with \_you\_,” replied Heyling. As he spoke, he seated himself at

the other end of the table, and, throwing off his cloak and cap,

disclosed his features.

‘The old man seemed instantly deprived of speech. He fell backward in

his chair, and, clasping his hands together, gazed on the apparition

with a mingled look of abhorrence and fear.

‘“This day six years,” said Heyling, “I claimed the life you owed me for

my child’s. Beside the lifeless form of your daughter, old man, I swore

to live a life of revenge. I have never swerved from my purpose for a

moment’s space; but if I had, one thought of her uncomplaining,

suffering look, as she drooped away, or of the starving face of our

innocent child, would have nerved me to my task. My first act of

requital you well remember: this is my last.”

‘The old man shivered, and his hands dropped powerless by his side.

‘“I leave England to-morrow,” said Heyling, after a moment’s pause. “To-

night I consign you to the living death to which you devoted her--a

hopeless prison--”

‘He raised his eyes to the old man’s countenance, and paused. He lifted

the light to his face, set it gently down, and left the apartment.

‘“You had better see to the old man,” he said to the woman, as he opened

the door, and motioned the officer to follow him into the street. “I

think he is ill.” The woman closed the door, ran hastily upstairs, and

found him lifeless.

‘Beneath a plain gravestone, in one of the most peaceful and secluded

churchyards in Kent, where wild flowers mingle with the grass, and the

soft landscape around forms the fairest spot in the garden of England,

lie the bones of the young mother and her gentle child. But the ashes of

the father do not mingle with theirs; nor, from that night forward, did

the attorney ever gain the remotest clue to the subsequent history of

his queer client.’

As the old man concluded his tale, he advanced to a peg in one corner,

and taking down his hat and coat, put them on with great deliberation;

and, without saying another word, walked slowly away. As the gentleman

with the Mosaic studs had fallen asleep, and the major part of the

company were deeply occupied in the humorous process of dropping melted

tallow-grease into his brandy-and-water, Mr. Pickwick departed

unnoticed, and having settled his own score, and that of Mr. Weller,

issued forth, in company with that gentleman, from beneath the portal of

the Magpie and Stump.

CHAPTER XXII. MR. PICKWICK JOURNEYS TO IPSWICH AND MEETS WITH A ROMANTIC

ADVENTURE WITH A MIDDLE-AGED LADY IN YELLOW CURL-PAPERS

That ‘ere your governor’s luggage, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller of his

affectionate son, as he entered the yard of the Bull Inn, Whitechapel,

with a travelling-bag and a small portmanteau.

‘You might ha’ made a worser guess than that, old feller,’ replied Mr.

Weller the younger, setting down his burden in the yard, and sitting

himself down upon it afterwards. ‘The governor hisself’ll be down here

presently.’

‘He’s a-cabbin’ it, I suppose?’ said the father.

‘Yes, he’s a havin’ two mile o’ danger at eight-pence,’ responded the

son. ‘How’s mother-in-law this mornin’?’

‘Queer, Sammy, queer,’ replied the elder Mr. Weller, with impressive

gravity. ‘She’s been gettin’ rayther in the Methodistical order lately,

Sammy; and she is uncommon pious, to be sure. She’s too good a creetur

for me, Sammy. I feel I don’t deserve her.’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Samuel. ‘that’s wery self-denyin’ o’ you.’

‘Wery,’ replied his parent, with a sigh. ‘She’s got hold o’ some

inwention for grown-up people being born again, Sammy--the new birth, I

think they calls it. I should wery much like to see that system in

haction, Sammy. I should wery much like to see your mother-in-law born

again. Wouldn’t I put her out to nurse!’

‘What do you think them women does t’other day,’ continued Mr. Weller,

after a short pause, during which he had significantly struck the side

of his nose with his forefinger some half-dozen times. ‘What do you

think they does, t’other day, Sammy?’

‘Don’t know,’ replied Sam, ‘what?’

‘Goes and gets up a grand tea drinkin’ for a feller they calls their

shepherd,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘I was a-standing starin’ in at the pictur

shop down at our place, when I sees a little bill about it; “tickets

half-a-crown. All applications to be made to the committee. Secretary,

Mrs. Weller”; and when I got home there was the committee a-sittin’ in

our back parlour. Fourteen women; I wish you could ha’ heard ‘em, Sammy.

There they was, a-passin’ resolutions, and wotin’ supplies, and all

sorts o’ games. Well, what with your mother-in-law a-worrying me to go,

and what with my looking for’ard to seein’ some queer starts if I did, I

put my name down for a ticket; at six o’clock on the Friday evenin’ I

dresses myself out wery smart, and off I goes with the old ‘ooman, and

up we walks into a fust-floor where there was tea-things for thirty, and

a whole lot o’ women as begins whisperin’ to one another, and lookin’ at

me, as if they’d never seen a rayther stout gen’l’m’n of eight-and-fifty

afore. By and by, there comes a great bustle downstairs, and a lanky

chap with a red nose and a white neckcloth rushes up, and sings out,

“Here’s the shepherd a-coming to wisit his faithful flock;” and in comes

a fat chap in black, vith a great white face, a-smilin’ avay like

clockwork. Such goin’s on, Sammy! “The kiss of peace,” says the

shepherd; and then he kissed the women all round, and ven he’d done, the

man vith the red nose began. I was just a-thinkin’ whether I hadn’t

better begin too--‘specially as there was a wery nice lady a-sittin’

next me--ven in comes the tea, and your mother-in-law, as had been

makin’ the kettle bile downstairs. At it they went, tooth and nail. Such

a precious loud hymn, Sammy, while the tea was a brewing; such a grace,

such eatin’ and drinkin’! I wish you could ha’ seen the shepherd walkin’

into the ham and muffins. I never see such a chap to eat and drink--

never. The red-nosed man warn’t by no means the sort of person you’d

like to grub by contract, but he was nothin’ to the shepherd. Well;

arter the tea was over, they sang another hymn, and then the shepherd

began to preach: and wery well he did it, considerin’ how heavy them

muffins must have lied on his chest. Presently he pulls up, all of a

sudden, and hollers out, “Where is the sinner; where is the mis’rable

sinner?” Upon which, all the women looked at me, and began to groan as

if they was a-dying. I thought it was rather sing’ler, but howsoever, I

says nothing. Presently he pulls up again, and lookin’ wery hard at me,

says, “Where is the sinner; where is the mis’rable sinner?” and all the

women groans again, ten times louder than afore. I got rather savage at

this, so I takes a step or two for’ard and says, “My friend,” says I,

“did you apply that ‘ere obserwation to me?” ‘Stead of beggin’ my pardon

as any gen’l’m’n would ha’ done, he got more abusive than ever:--called

me a wessel, Sammy--a wessel of wrath--and all sorts o’ names. So my

blood being reg’larly up, I first gave him two or three for himself, and

then two or three more to hand over to the man with the red nose, and

walked off. I wish you could ha’ heard how the women screamed, Sammy,

ven they picked up the shepherd from underneath the table--Hollo! here’s

the governor, the size of life.’

As Mr. Weller spoke, Mr. Pickwick dismounted from a cab, and entered the

yard.

‘Fine mornin’, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, senior.

‘Beautiful indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Beautiful indeed,’ echoes a red-haired man with an inquisitive nose and

green spectacles, who had unpacked himself from a cab at the same moment

as Mr. Pickwick. ‘Going to Ipswich, Sir?’

‘I am,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Extraordinary coincidence. So am I.’

Mr. Pickwick bowed.

‘Going outside?’ said the red-haired man.

Mr. Pickwick bowed again.

‘Bless my soul, how remarkable--I am going outside, too,’ said the red-

haired man; ‘we are positively going together.’ And the red-haired man,

who was an important-looking, sharp-nosed, mysterious-spoken personage,

with a bird-like habit of giving his head a jerk every time he said

anything, smiled as if he had made one of the strangest discoveries that

ever fell to the lot of human wisdom.

‘I am happy in the prospect of your company, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah,’ said the new-comer, ‘it’s a good thing for both of us, isn’t it?

Company, you see--company--is--is--it’s a very different thing from

solitude--ain’t it?’

‘There’s no denying that ‘ere,’ said Mr. Weller, joining in the

conversation, with an affable smile. ‘That’s what I call a self-evident

proposition, as the dog’s-meat man said, when the housemaid told him he

warn’t a gentleman.’

‘Ah,’ said the red-haired man, surveying Mr. Weller from head to foot

with a supercilious look. ‘Friend of yours, sir?’

‘Not exactly a friend,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, in a low tone. ‘The fact

is, he is my servant, but I allow him to take a good many liberties;

for, between ourselves, I flatter myself he is an original, and I am

rather proud of him.’

‘Ah,’ said the red-haired man, ‘that, you see, is a matter of taste. I

am not fond of anything original; I don’t like it; don’t see the

necessity for it. What’s your name, sir?’

‘Here is my card, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, much amused by the

abruptness of the question, and the singular manner of the stranger.

‘Ah,’ said the red-haired man, placing the card in his pocket-book,

‘Pickwick; very good. I like to know a man’s name, it saves so much

trouble. That’s my card, sir. Magnus, you will perceive, sir--Magnus is

my name. It’s rather a good name, I think, sir.’

‘A very good name, indeed,’ said Mr. Pickwick, wholly unable to repress

a smile.

‘Yes, I think it is,’ resumed Mr. Magnus. ‘There’s a good name before

it, too, you will observe. Permit me, sir--if you hold the card a little

slanting, this way, you catch the light upon the up-stroke. There--Peter

Magnus--sounds well, I think, sir.’

‘Very,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Curious circumstance about those initials, sir,’ said Mr. Magnus. ‘You

will observe--P.M.--post meridian. In hasty notes to intimate

acquaintance, I sometimes sign myself “Afternoon.” It amuses my friends

very much, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘It is calculated to afford them the highest gratification, I should

conceive,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rather envying the ease with which Mr.

Magnus’s friends were entertained.

‘Now, gen’l’m’n,’ said the hostler, ‘coach is ready, if you please.’

‘Is all my luggage in?’ inquired Mr. Magnus.

‘All right, sir.’

‘Is the red bag in?’

‘All right, Sir.’

‘And the striped bag?’

‘Fore boot, Sir.’

‘And the brown-paper parcel?’

‘Under the seat, Sir.’

‘And the leather hat-box?’

‘They’re all in, Sir.’

‘Now, will you get up?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Excuse me,’ replied Magnus, standing on the wheel. ‘Excuse me, Mr.

Pickwick. I cannot consent to get up, in this state of uncertainty. I am

quite satisfied from that man’s manner, that the leather hat-box is not

in.’

The solemn protestations of the hostler being wholly unavailing, the

leather hat-box was obliged to be raked up from the lowest depth of the

boot, to satisfy him that it had been safely packed; and after he had

been assured on this head, he felt a solemn presentiment, first, that

the red bag was mislaid, and next that the striped bag had been stolen,

and then that the brown-paper parcel ‘had come untied.’ At length when

he had received ocular demonstration of the groundless nature of each

and every of these suspicions, he consented to climb up to the roof of

the coach, observing that now he had taken everything off his mind, he

felt quite comfortable and happy.

‘You’re given to nervousness, ain’t you, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller,

senior, eyeing the stranger askance, as he mounted to his place.

‘Yes; I always am rather about these little matters,’ said the stranger,

‘but I am all right now--quite right.’

‘Well, that’s a blessin’, said Mr. Weller. ‘Sammy, help your master up

to the box; t’other leg, Sir, that’s it; give us your hand, Sir. Up with

you. You was a lighter weight when you was a boy, sir.’

True enough, that, Mr. Weller,’ said the breathless Mr. Pickwick good-

humouredly, as he took his seat on the box beside him.

‘Jump up in front, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Now Villam, run ‘em out.

Take care o’ the archvay, gen’l’m’n. “Heads,” as the pieman says.

That’ll do, Villam. Let ‘em alone.’ And away went the coach up

Whitechapel, to the admiration of the whole population of that pretty

densely populated quarter.

‘Not a wery nice neighbourhood, this, Sir,’ said Sam, with a touch of

the hat, which always preceded his entering into conversation with his

master.

‘It is not indeed, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the crowded and

filthy street through which they were passing.

‘It’s a wery remarkable circumstance, Sir,’ said Sam, ‘that poverty and

oysters always seem to go together.’

‘I don’t understand you, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘What I mean, sir,’ said Sam, ‘is, that the poorer a place is, the

greater call there seems to be for oysters. Look here, sir; here’s a

oyster-stall to every half-dozen houses. The street’s lined vith ‘em.

Blessed if I don’t think that ven a man’s wery poor, he rushes out of

his lodgings, and eats oysters in reg’lar desperation.’

‘To be sure he does,’ said Mr. Weller, senior; ‘and it’s just the same

vith pickled salmon!’

‘Those are two very remarkable facts, which never occurred to me

before,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘The very first place we stop at, I’ll make

a note of them.’

By this time they had reached the turnpike at Mile End; a profound

silence prevailed until they had got two or three miles farther on, when

Mr. Weller, senior, turning suddenly to Mr. Pickwick, said--

‘Wery queer life is a pike-keeper’s, sir.’

‘A what?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘A pike-keeper.’

‘What do you mean by a pike-keeper?’ inquired Mr. Peter Magnus.

‘The old ‘un means a turnpike-keeper, gen’l’m’n,’ observed Mr. Samuel

Weller, in explanation.

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I see. Yes; very curious life. Very

uncomfortable.’

‘They’re all on ‘em men as has met vith some disappointment in life,’

said Mr. Weller, senior.

‘Ay, ay,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes. Consequence of vich, they retires from the world, and shuts

themselves up in pikes; partly with the view of being solitary, and

partly to rewenge themselves on mankind by takin’ tolls.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I never knew that before.’

‘Fact, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller; ‘if they was gen’l’m’n, you’d call ‘em

misanthropes, but as it is, they only takes to pike-keepin’.’

With such conversation, possessing the inestimable charm of blending

amusement with instruction, did Mr. Weller beguile the tediousness of

the journey, during the greater part of the day. Topics of conversation

were never wanting, for even when any pause occurred in Mr. Weller’s

loquacity, it was abundantly supplied by the desire evinced by Mr.

Magnus to make himself acquainted with the whole of the personal history

of his fellow-travellers, and his loudly-expressed anxiety at every

stage, respecting the safety and well-being of the two bags, the leather

hat-box, and the brown-paper parcel.

In the main street of Ipswich, on the left-hand side of the way, a short

distance after you have passed through the open space fronting the Town

Hall, stands an inn known far and wide by the appellation of the Great

White Horse, rendered the more conspicuous by a stone statue of some

rampacious animal with flowing mane and tail, distantly resembling an

insane cart-horse, which is elevated above the principal door. The Great

White Horse is famous in the neighbourhood, in the same degree as a

prize ox, or a county-paper-chronicled turnip, or unwieldy pig--for its

enormous size. Never was such labyrinths of uncarpeted passages, such

clusters of mouldy, ill-lighted rooms, such huge numbers of small dens

for eating or sleeping in, beneath any one roof, as are collected

together between the four walls of the Great White Horse at Ipswich.

It was at the door of this overgrown tavern that the London coach

stopped, at the same hour every evening; and it was from this same

London coach that Mr. Pickwick, Sam Weller, and Mr. Peter Magnus

dismounted, on the particular evening to which this chapter of our

history bears reference.

‘Do you stop here, sir?’ inquired Mr. Peter Magnus, when the striped

bag, and the red bag, and the brown-paper parcel, and the leather hat-

box, had all been deposited in the passage. ‘Do you stop here, sir?’

‘I do,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Magnus, ‘I never knew anything like these

extraordinary coincidences. Why, I stop here too. I hope we dine

together?’

‘With pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘I am not quite certain whether I

have any friends here or not, though. Is there any gentleman of the name

of Tupman here, waiter?’

A corpulent man, with a fortnight’s napkin under his arm, and coeval

stockings on his legs, slowly desisted from his occupation of staring

down the street, on this question being put to him by Mr. Pickwick; and,

after minutely inspecting that gentleman’s appearance, from the crown of

his hat to the lowest button of his gaiters, replied emphatically--

‘No!’

‘Nor any gentleman of the name of Snodgrass?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘No!’

‘Nor Winkle?’

‘No!’

‘My friends have not arrived to-day, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘We will

dine alone, then. Show us a private room, waiter.’

On this request being preferred, the corpulent man condescended to order

the boots to bring in the gentlemen’s luggage; and preceding them down a

long, dark passage, ushered them into a large, badly-furnished

apartment, with a dirty grate, in which a small fire was making a

wretched attempt to be cheerful, but was fast sinking beneath the

dispiriting influence of the place. After the lapse of an hour, a bit of

fish and a steak was served up to the travellers, and when the dinner

was cleared away, Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Peter Magnus drew their chairs up

to the fire, and having ordered a bottle of the worst possible port

wine, at the highest possible price, for the good of the house, drank

brandy-and-water for their own.

Mr. Peter Magnus was naturally of a very communicative disposition, and

the brandy-and-water operated with wonderful effect in warming into life

the deepest hidden secrets of his bosom. After sundry accounts of

himself, his family, his connections, his friends, his jokes, his

business, and his brothers (most talkative men have a great deal to say

about their brothers), Mr. Peter Magnus took a view of Mr. Pickwick

through his coloured spectacles for several minutes, and then said, with

an air of modesty--

‘And what do you think--what \_do\_ you think, Mr. Pickwick--I have come

down here for?’

‘Upon my word,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘it is wholly impossible for me to

guess; on business, perhaps.’

‘Partly right, Sir,’ replied Mr. Peter Magnus, ‘but partly wrong at the

same time; try again, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘Really,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I must throw myself on your mercy, to tell

me or not, as you may think best; for I should never guess, if I were to

try all night.’

‘Why, then, he-he-he!’ said Mr. Peter Magnus, with a bashful titter,

‘what should you think, Mr. Pickwick, if I had come down here to make a

proposal, Sir, eh? He, he, he!’

‘Think! That you are very likely to succeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, with

one of his beaming smiles.

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Magnus. ‘But do you really think so, Mr. Pickwick? Do

you, though?’

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No; but you’re joking, though.’

‘I am not, indeed.’

‘Why, then,’ said Mr. Magnus, ‘to let you into a little secret, I think

so too. I don’t mind telling you, Mr. Pickwick, although I’m dreadful

jealous by nature--horrid--that the lady is in this house.’ Here Mr.

Magnus took off his spectacles, on purpose to wink, and then put them on

again.

‘That’s what you were running out of the room for, before dinner, then,

so often,’ said Mr. Pickwick archly.

‘Hush! Yes, you’re right, that was it; not such a fool as to see her,

though.’

‘No!’

‘No; wouldn’t do, you know, after having just come off a journey. Wait

till to-morrow, sir; double the chance then. Mr. Pickwick, Sir, there is

a suit of clothes in that bag, and a hat in that box, which, I expect,

in the effect they will produce, will be invaluable to me, sir.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes; you must have observed my anxiety about them to-day. I do not

believe that such another suit of clothes, and such a hat, could be

bought for money, Mr. Pickwick.’

Mr. Pickwick congratulated the fortunate owner of the irresistible

garments on their acquisition; and Mr. Peter Magnus remained a few

moments apparently absorbed in contemplation.

‘She’s a fine creature,’ said Mr. Magnus.

‘Is she?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Very,’ said Mr. Magnus. ‘Very. She lives about twenty miles from here,

Mr. Pickwick. I heard she would be here to-night and all to-morrow

forenoon, and came down to seize the opportunity. I think an inn is a

good sort of a place to propose to a single woman in, Mr. Pickwick. She

is more likely to feel the loneliness of her situation in travelling,

perhaps, than she would be at home. What do you think, Mr. Pickwick?’

‘I think it is very probable,’ replied that gentleman.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus, ‘but I am

naturally rather curious; what may you have come down here for?’

‘On a far less pleasant errand, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, the colour

mounting to his face at the recollection. ‘I have come down here, Sir,

to expose the treachery and falsehood of an individual, upon whose truth

and honour I placed implicit reliance.’

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus, ‘that’s very unpleasant. It is a lady,

I presume? Eh? ah! Sly, Mr. Pickwick, sly. Well, Mr. Pickwick, sir, I

wouldn’t probe your feelings for the world. Painful subjects, these,

sir, very painful. Don’t mind me, Mr. Pickwick, if you wish to give vent

to your feelings. I know what it is to be jilted, Sir; I have endured

that sort of thing three or four times.’

‘I am much obliged to you, for your condolence on what you presume to be

my melancholy case,’ said Mr. Pickwick, winding up his watch, and laying

it on the table, ‘but--’

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus, ‘not a word more; it’s a painful

subject. I see, I see. What’s the time, Mr. Pickwick?’

Past twelve.’

‘Dear me, it’s time to go to bed. It will never do, sitting here. I

shall be pale to-morrow, Mr. Pickwick.’

At the bare notion of such a calamity, Mr. Peter Magnus rang the bell

for the chambermaid; and the striped bag, the red bag, the leathern hat-

box, and the brown-paper parcel, having been conveyed to his bedroom, he

retired in company with a japanned candlestick, to one side of the

house, while Mr. Pickwick, and another japanned candlestick, were

conducted through a multitude of tortuous windings, to another.

‘This is your room, sir,’ said the chambermaid.

‘Very well,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, looking round him. It was a tolerably

large double-bedded room, with a fire; upon the whole, a more

comfortable-looking apartment than Mr. Pickwick’s short experience of

the accommodations of the Great White Horse had led him to expect.

‘Nobody sleeps in the other bed, of course,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, no, Sir.’

‘Very good. Tell my servant to bring me up some hot water at half-past

eight in the morning, and that I shall not want him any more to-night.’

‘Yes, Sir,’ and bidding Mr. Pickwick good-night, the chambermaid

retired, and left him alone.

Mr. Pickwick sat himself down in a chair before the fire, and fell into

a train of rambling meditations. First he thought of his friends, and

wondered when they would join him; then his mind reverted to Mrs. Martha

Bardell; and from that lady it wandered, by a natural process, to the

dingy counting-house of Dodson & Fogg. From Dodson & Fogg’s it flew off

at a tangent, to the very centre of the history of the queer client; and

then it came back to the Great White Horse at Ipswich, with sufficient

clearness to convince Mr. Pickwick that he was falling asleep. So he

roused himself, and began to undress, when he recollected he had left

his watch on the table downstairs.

Now this watch was a special favourite with Mr. Pickwick, having been

carried about, beneath the shadow of his waistcoat, for a greater number

of years than we feel called upon to state at present. The possibility

of going to sleep, unless it were ticking gently beneath his pillow, or

in the watch-pocket over his head, had never entered Mr. Pickwick’s

brain. So as it was pretty late now, and he was unwilling to ring his

bell at that hour of the night, he slipped on his coat, of which he had

just divested himself, and taking the japanned candlestick in his hand,

walked quietly downstairs.

The more stairs Mr. Pickwick went down, the more stairs there seemed to

be to descend, and again and again, when Mr. Pickwick got into some

narrow passage, and began to congratulate himself on having gained the

ground-floor, did another flight of stairs appear before his astonished

eyes. At last he reached a stone hall, which he remembered to have seen

when he entered the house. Passage after passage did he explore; room

after room did he peep into; at length, as he was on the point of giving

up the search in despair, he opened the door of the identical room in

which he had spent the evening, and beheld his missing property on the

table.

Mr. Pickwick seized the watch in triumph, and proceeded to retrace his

steps to his bedchamber. If his progress downward had been attended with

difficulties and uncertainty, his journey back was infinitely more

perplexing. Rows of doors, garnished with boots of every shape, make,

and size, branched off in every possible direction. A dozen times did he

softly turn the handle of some bedroom door which resembled his own,

when a gruff cry from within of ‘Who the devil’s that?’ or ‘What do you

want here?’ caused him to steal away, on tiptoe, with a perfectly

marvellous celerity. He was reduced to the verge of despair, when an

open door attracted his attention. He peeped in. Right at last! There

were the two beds, whose situation he perfectly remembered, and the fire

still burning. His candle, not a long one when he first received it, had

flickered away in the drafts of air through which he had passed and sank

into the socket as he closed the door after him. ‘No matter,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, ‘I can undress myself just as well by the light of the fire.’

The bedsteads stood one on each side of the door; and on the inner side

of each was a little path, terminating in a rush-bottomed chair, just

wide enough to admit of a person’s getting into or out of bed, on that

side, if he or she thought proper. Having carefully drawn the curtains

of his bed on the outside, Mr. Pickwick sat down on the rush-bottomed

chair, and leisurely divested himself of his shoes and gaiters. He then

took off and folded up his coat, waistcoat, and neckcloth, and slowly

drawing on his tasselled nightcap, secured it firmly on his head, by

tying beneath his chin the strings which he always had attached to that

article of dress. It was at this moment that the absurdity of his recent

bewilderment struck upon his mind. Throwing himself back in the rush-

bottomed chair, Mr. Pickwick laughed to himself so heartily, that it

would have been quite delightful to any man of well-constituted mind to

have watched the smiles that expanded his amiable features as they shone

forth from beneath the nightcap.

‘It is the best idea,’ said Mr. Pickwick to himself, smiling till he

almost cracked the nightcap strings--‘it is the best idea, my losing

myself in this place, and wandering about these staircases, that I ever

heard of. Droll, droll, very droll.’ Here Mr. Pickwick smiled again, a

broader smile than before, and was about to continue the process of

undressing, in the best possible humour, when he was suddenly stopped by

a most unexpected interruption: to wit, the entrance into the room of

some person with a candle, who, after locking the door, advanced to the

dressing-table, and set down the light upon it.

The smile that played on Mr. Pickwick’s features was instantaneously

lost in a look of the most unbounded and wonder-stricken surprise. The

person, whoever it was, had come in so suddenly and with so little

noise, that Mr. Pickwick had had no time to call out, or oppose their

entrance. Who could it be? A robber? Some evil-minded person who had

seen him come upstairs with a handsome watch in his hand, perhaps. What

was he to do?

The only way in which Mr. Pickwick could catch a glimpse of his

mysterious visitor with the least danger of being seen himself, was by

creeping on to the bed, and peeping out from between the curtains on the

opposite side. To this manoeuvre he accordingly resorted. Keeping the

curtains carefully closed with his hand, so that nothing more of him

could be seen than his face and nightcap, and putting on his spectacles,

he mustered up courage and looked out.

Mr. Pickwick almost fainted with horror and dismay. Standing before the

dressing-glass was a middle-aged lady, in yellow curl-papers, busily

engaged in brushing what ladies call their ‘back-hair.’ However the

unconscious middle-aged lady came into that room, it was quite clear

that she contemplated remaining there for the night; for she had brought

a rushlight and shade with her, which, with praiseworthy precaution

against fire, she had stationed in a basin on the floor, where it was

glimmering away, like a gigantic lighthouse in a particularly small

piece of water.

‘Bless my soul!’ thought Mr. Pickwick, ‘what a dreadful thing!’

‘Hem!’ said the lady; and in went Mr. Pickwick’s head with automaton-

like rapidity.

‘I never met with anything so awful as this,’ thought poor Mr. Pickwick,

the cold perspiration starting in drops upon his nightcap. ‘Never. This

is fearful.’

It was quite impossible to resist the urgent desire to see what was

going forward. So out went Mr. Pickwick’s head again. The prospect was

worse than before. The middle-aged lady had finished arranging her hair;

had carefully enveloped it in a muslin nightcap with a small plaited

border; and was gazing pensively on the fire.

‘This matter is growing alarming,’ reasoned Mr. Pickwick with himself.

‘I can’t allow things to go on in this way. By the self-possession of

that lady, it is clear to me that I must have come into the wrong room.

If I call out she’ll alarm the house; but if I remain here the

consequences will be still more frightful.’

Mr. Pickwick, it is quite unnecessary to say, was one of the most modest

and delicate-minded of mortals. The very idea of exhibiting his nightcap

to a lady overpowered him, but he had tied those confounded strings in a

knot, and, do what he would, he couldn’t get it off. The disclosure must

be made. There was only one other way of doing it. He shrunk behind the

curtains, and called out very loudly--

‘Ha-hum!’

That the lady started at this unexpected sound was evident, by her

falling up against the rushlight shade; that she persuaded herself it

must have been the effect of imagination was equally clear, for when Mr.

Pickwick, under the impression that she had fainted away stone-dead with

fright, ventured to peep out again, she was gazing pensively on the fire

as before.

‘Most extraordinary female this,’ thought Mr. Pickwick, popping in

again. ‘Ha-hum!’

These last sounds, so like those in which, as legends inform us, the

ferocious giant Blunderbore was in the habit of expressing his opinion

that it was time to lay the cloth, were too distinctly audible to be

again mistaken for the workings of fancy.

‘Gracious Heaven!’ said the middle-aged lady, ‘what’s that?’

‘It’s--it’s--only a gentleman, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, from behind

the curtains.

‘A gentleman!’ said the lady, with a terrific scream.

‘It’s all over!’ thought Mr. Pickwick.

‘A strange man!’ shrieked the lady. Another instant and the house would

be alarmed. Her garments rustled as she rushed towards the door.

‘Ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, thrusting out his head in the extremity of

his desperation, ‘ma’am!’

Now, although Mr. Pickwick was not actuated by any definite object in

putting out his head, it was instantaneously productive of a good

effect. The lady, as we have already stated, was near the door. She must

pass it, to reach the staircase, and she would most undoubtedly have

done so by this time, had not the sudden apparition of Mr. Pickwick’s

nightcap driven her back into the remotest corner of the apartment,

where she stood staring wildly at Mr. Pickwick, while Mr. Pickwick in

his turn stared wildly at her.

‘Wretch,’ said the lady, covering her eyes with her hands, ‘what do you

want here?’

‘Nothing, ma’am; nothing whatever, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick earnestly.

‘Nothing!’ said the lady, looking up.

‘Nothing, ma’am, upon my honour,’ said Mr. Pickwick, nodding his head so

energetically, that the tassel of his nightcap danced again. ‘I am

almost ready to sink, ma’am, beneath the confusion of addressing a lady

in my nightcap (here the lady hastily snatched off hers), but I can’t

get it off, ma’am (here Mr. Pickwick gave it a tremendous tug, in proof

of the statement). It is evident to me, ma’am, now, that I have mistaken

this bedroom for my own. I had not been here five minutes, ma’am, when

you suddenly entered it.’

‘If this improbable story be really true, Sir,’ said the lady, sobbing

violently, ‘you will leave it instantly.’

‘I will, ma’am, with the greatest pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Instantly, sir,’ said the lady.

‘Certainly, ma’am,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick, very quickly. ‘Certainly,

ma’am. I--I--am very sorry, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, making his

appearance at the bottom of the bed, ‘to have been the innocent occasion

of this alarm and emotion; deeply sorry, ma’am.’

The lady pointed to the door. One excellent quality of Mr. Pickwick’s

character was beautifully displayed at this moment, under the most

trying circumstances. Although he had hastily put on his hat over his

nightcap, after the manner of the old patrol; although he carried his

shoes and gaiters in his hand, and his coat and waistcoat over his arm;

nothing could subdue his native politeness.

‘I am exceedingly sorry, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, bowing very low.

‘If you are, Sir, you will at once leave the room,’ said the lady.

‘Immediately, ma’am; this instant, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, opening

the door, and dropping both his shoes with a crash in so doing.

‘I trust, ma’am,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick, gathering up his shoes, and

turning round to bow again--‘I trust, ma’am, that my unblemished

character, and the devoted respect I entertain for your sex, will plead

as some slight excuse for this--’ But before Mr. Pickwick could conclude

the sentence, the lady had thrust him into the passage, and locked and

bolted the door behind him.

Whatever grounds of self-congratulation Mr. Pickwick might have for

having escaped so quietly from his late awkward situation, his present

position was by no means enviable. He was alone, in an open passage, in

a strange house in the middle of the night, half dressed; it was not to

be supposed that he could find his way in perfect darkness to a room

which he had been wholly unable to discover with a light, and if he made

the slightest noise in his fruitless attempts to do so, he stood every

chance of being shot at, and perhaps killed, by some wakeful traveller.

He had no resource but to remain where he was until daylight appeared.

So after groping his way a few paces down the passage, and, to his

infinite alarm, stumbling over several pairs of boots in so doing, Mr.

Pickwick crouched into a little recess in the wall, to wait for morning,

as philosophically as he might.

He was not destined, however, to undergo this additional trial of

patience; for he had not been long ensconced in his present concealment

when, to his unspeakable horror, a man, bearing a light, appeared at the

end of the passage. His horror was suddenly converted into joy, however,

when he recognised the form of his faithful attendant. It was indeed Mr.

Samuel Weller, who after sitting up thus late, in conversation with the

boots, who was sitting up for the mail, was now about to retire to rest.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly appearing before him, ‘where’s my

bedroom?’

Mr. Weller stared at his master with the most emphatic surprise; and it

was not until the question had been repeated three several times, that

he turned round, and led the way to the long-sought apartment.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as he got into bed, ‘I have made one of the

most extraordinary mistakes to-night, that ever were heard of.’

‘Wery likely, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller drily.

‘But of this I am determined, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘that if I were

to stop in this house for six months, I would never trust myself about

it, alone, again.’

‘That’s the wery prudentest resolution as you could come to, Sir,’

replied Mr. Weller. ‘You rayther want somebody to look arter you, Sir,

when your judgment goes out a wisitin’.’

‘What do you mean by that, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick. He raised himself in

bed, and extended his hand, as if he were about to say something more;

but suddenly checking himself, turned round, and bade his valet ‘Good-

night.’

‘Good-night, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. He paused when he got outside the

door--shook his head--walked on--stopped--snuffed the candle--shook his

head again--and finally proceeded slowly to his chamber, apparently

buried in the profoundest meditation.

CHAPTER XXIII. IN WHICH MR. SAMUEL WELLER BEGINS TO DEVOTE HIS ENERGIES

TO THE RETURN MATCH BETWEEN HIMSELF AND MR. TROTTER

In a small room in the vicinity of the stableyard, betimes in the

morning, which was ushered in by Mr. Pickwick’s adventure with the

middle--aged lady in the yellow curl-papers, sat Mr. Weller, senior,

preparing himself for his journey to London. He was sitting in an

excellent attitude for having his portrait taken; and here it is.

It is very possible that at some earlier period of his career, Mr.

Weller’s profile might have presented a bold and determined outline. His

face, however, had expanded under the influence of good living, and a

disposition remarkable for resignation; and its bold, fleshy curves had

so far extended beyond the limits originally assigned them, that unless

you took a full view of his countenance in front, it was difficult to

distinguish more than the extreme tip of a very rubicund nose. His chin,

from the same cause, had acquired the grave and imposing form which is

generally described by prefixing the word ‘double’ to that expressive

feature; and his complexion exhibited that peculiarly mottled

combination of colours which is only to be seen in gentlemen of his

profession, and in underdone roast beef. Round his neck he wore a

crimson travelling-shawl, which merged into his chin by such

imperceptible gradations, that it was difficult to distinguish the folds

of the one, from the folds of the other. Over this, he mounted a long

waistcoat of a broad pink-striped pattern, and over that again, a wide-

skirted green coat, ornamented with large brass buttons, whereof the two

which garnished the waist, were so far apart, that no man had ever

beheld them both at the same time. His hair, which was short, sleek, and

black, was just visible beneath the capacious brim of a low-crowned

brown hat. His legs were encased in knee-cord breeches, and painted top-

boots; and a copper watch-chain, terminating in one seal, and a key of

the same material, dangled loosely from his capacious waistband.

We have said that Mr. Weller was engaged in preparing for his journey to

London--he was taking sustenance, in fact. On the table before him,

stood a pot of ale, a cold round of beef, and a very respectable-looking

loaf, to each of which he distributed his favours in turn, with the most

rigid impartiality. He had just cut a mighty slice from the latter, when

the footsteps of somebody entering the room, caused him to raise his

head; and he beheld his son.

‘Mornin’, Sammy!’ said the father.

The son walked up to the pot of ale, and nodding significantly to his

parent, took a long draught by way of reply.

‘Wery good power o’ suction, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller the elder, looking

into the pot, when his first-born had set it down half empty. ‘You’d ha’

made an uncommon fine oyster, Sammy, if you’d been born in that station

o’ life.’

‘Yes, I des-say, I should ha’ managed to pick up a respectable livin’,’

replied Sam applying himself to the cold beef, with considerable vigour.

‘I’m wery sorry, Sammy,’ said the elder Mr. Weller, shaking up the ale,

by describing small circles with the pot, preparatory to drinking. ‘I’m

wery sorry, Sammy, to hear from your lips, as you let yourself be

gammoned by that ‘ere mulberry man. I always thought, up to three days

ago, that the names of Veller and gammon could never come into contract,

Sammy, never.’

‘Always exceptin’ the case of a widder, of course,’ said Sam.

‘Widders, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, slightly changing colour. ‘Widders

are ‘ceptions to ev’ry rule. I have heerd how many ordinary women one

widder’s equal to in pint o’ comin’ over you. I think it’s five-and-

twenty, but I don’t rightly know vether it ain’t more.’

‘Well; that’s pretty well,’ said Sam.

‘Besides,’ continued Mr. Weller, not noticing the interruption, ‘that’s

a wery different thing. You know what the counsel said, Sammy, as

defended the gen’l’m’n as beat his wife with the poker, venever he got

jolly. “And arter all, my Lord,” says he, “it’s a amiable weakness.” So

I says respectin’ widders, Sammy, and so you’ll say, ven you gets as old

as me.’

‘I ought to ha’ know’d better, I know,’ said Sam.

‘Ought to ha’ know’d better!’ repeated Mr. Weller, striking the table

with his fist. ‘Ought to ha’ know’d better! why, I know a young ‘un as

hasn’t had half nor quarter your eddication--as hasn’t slept about the

markets, no, not six months--who’d ha’ scorned to be let in, in such a

vay; scorned it, Sammy.’ In the excitement of feeling produced by this

agonising reflection, Mr. Weller rang the bell, and ordered an

additional pint of ale.

‘Well, it’s no use talking about it now,’ said Sam. ‘It’s over, and

can’t be helped, and that’s one consolation, as they always says in

Turkey, ven they cuts the wrong man’s head off. It’s my innings now,

gov’nor, and as soon as I catches hold o’ this ‘ere Trotter, I’ll have a

good ‘un.’

‘I hope you will, Sammy. I hope you will,’ returned Mr. Weller. ‘Here’s

your health, Sammy, and may you speedily vipe off the disgrace as you’ve

inflicted on the family name.’ In honour of this toast Mr. Weller

imbibed at a draught, at least two-thirds of a newly-arrived pint, and

handed it over to his son, to dispose of the remainder, which he

instantaneously did.

‘And now, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, consulting a large double-faced

silver watch that hung at the end of the copper chain. ‘Now it’s time I

was up at the office to get my vay-bill and see the coach loaded; for

coaches, Sammy, is like guns--they requires to be loaded with wery great

care, afore they go off.’

At this parental and professional joke, Mr. Weller, junior, smiled a

filial smile. His revered parent continued in a solemn tone--

‘I’m a-goin’ to leave you, Samivel, my boy, and there’s no telling ven I

shall see you again. Your mother-in-law may ha’ been too much for me, or

a thousand things may have happened by the time you next hears any news

o’ the celebrated Mr. Veller o’ the Bell Savage. The family name depends

wery much upon you, Samivel, and I hope you’ll do wot’s right by it.

Upon all little pints o’ breedin’, I know I may trust you as vell as if

it was my own self. So I’ve only this here one little bit of adwice to

give you. If ever you gets to up’ards o’ fifty, and feels disposed to go

a-marryin’ anybody--no matter who--jist you shut yourself up in your own

room, if you’ve got one, and pison yourself off hand. Hangin’s wulgar,

so don’t you have nothin’ to say to that. Pison yourself, Samivel, my

boy, pison yourself, and you’ll be glad on it arterwards.’ With these

affecting words, Mr. Weller looked steadfastly on his son, and turning

slowly upon his heel, disappeared from his sight.

In the contemplative mood which these words had awakened, Mr. Samuel

Weller walked forth from the Great White Horse when his father had left

him; and bending his steps towards St. Clement’s Church, endeavoured to

dissipate his melancholy, by strolling among its ancient precincts. He

had loitered about, for some time, when he found himself in a retired

spot--a kind of courtyard of venerable appearance--which he discovered

had no other outlet than the turning by which he had entered. He was

about retracing his steps, when he was suddenly transfixed to the spot

by a sudden appearance; and the mode and manner of this appearance, we

now proceed to relate.

Mr. Samuel Weller had been staring up at the old brick houses now and

then, in his deep abstraction, bestowing a wink upon some healthy-

looking servant girl as she drew up a blind, or threw open a bedroom

window, when the green gate of a garden at the bottom of the yard

opened, and a man having emerged therefrom, closed the green gate very

carefully after him, and walked briskly towards the very spot where Mr.

Weller was standing.

Now, taking this, as an isolated fact, unaccompanied by any attendant

circumstances, there was nothing very extraordinary in it; because in

many parts of the world men do come out of gardens, close green gates

after them, and even walk briskly away, without attracting any

particular share of public observation. It is clear, therefore, that

there must have been something in the man, or in his manner, or both, to

attract Mr. Weller’s particular notice. Whether there was, or not, we

must leave the reader to determine, when we have faithfully recorded the

behaviour of the individual in question.

When the man had shut the green gate after him, he walked, as we have

said twice already, with a brisk pace up the courtyard; but he no sooner

caught sight of Mr. Weller than he faltered, and stopped, as if

uncertain, for the moment, what course to adopt. As the green gate was

closed behind him, and there was no other outlet but the one in front,

however, he was not long in perceiving that he must pass Mr. Samuel

Weller to get away. He therefore resumed his brisk pace, and advanced,

staring straight before him. The most extraordinary thing about the man

was, that he was contorting his face into the most fearful and

astonishing grimaces that ever were beheld. Nature’s handiwork never was

disguised with such extraordinary artificial carving, as the man had

overlaid his countenance with in one moment.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Weller to himself, as the man approached. ‘This is wery

odd. I could ha’ swore it was him.’

Up came the man, and his face became more frightfully distorted than

ever, as he drew nearer.

‘I could take my oath to that ‘ere black hair and mulberry suit,’ said

Mr. Weller; ‘only I never see such a face as that afore.’

As Mr. Weller said this, the man’s features assumed an unearthly twinge,

perfectly hideous. He was obliged to pass very near Sam, however, and

the scrutinising glance of that gentleman enabled him to detect, under

all these appalling twists of feature, something too like the small eyes

of Mr. Job Trotter to be easily mistaken.

‘Hollo, you Sir!’ shouted Sam fiercely.

The stranger stopped.

‘Hollo!’ repeated Sam, still more gruffly.

The man with the horrible face looked, with the greatest surprise, up

the court, and down the court, and in at the windows of the houses--

everywhere but at Sam Weller--and took another step forward, when he was

brought to again by another shout.

‘Hollo, you sir!’ said Sam, for the third time.

There was no pretending to mistake where the voice came from now, so the

stranger, having no other resource, at last looked Sam Weller full in

the face.

‘It won’t do, Job Trotter,’ said Sam. ‘Come! None o’ that ‘ere nonsense.

You ain’t so wery ‘andsome that you can afford to throw avay many o’

your good looks. Bring them ‘ere eyes o’ yourn back into their proper

places, or I’ll knock ‘em out of your head. D’ye hear?’

As Mr. Weller appeared fully disposed to act up to the spirit of this

address, Mr. Trotter gradually allowed his face to resume its natural

expression; and then giving a start of joy, exclaimed, ‘What do I see?

Mr. Walker!’

‘Ah,’ replied Sam. ‘You’re wery glad to see me, ain’t you?’

‘Glad!’ exclaimed Job Trotter; ‘Oh, Mr. Walker, if you had but known how

I have looked forward to this meeting! It is too much, Mr. Walker; I

cannot bear it, indeed I cannot.’ And with these words, Mr. Trotter

burst into a regular inundation of tears, and, flinging his arms around

those of Mr. Weller, embraced him closely, in an ecstasy of joy.

‘Get off!’ cried Sam, indignant at this process, and vainly endeavouring

to extricate himself from the grasp of his enthusiastic acquaintance.

‘Get off, I tell you. What are you crying over me for, you portable

engine?’

‘Because I am so glad to see you,’ replied Job Trotter, gradually

releasing Mr. Weller, as the first symptoms of his pugnacity

disappeared. ‘Oh, Mr. Walker, this is too much.’

‘Too much!’ echoed Sam, ‘I think it is too much--rayther! Now, what have

you got to say to me, eh?’

Mr. Trotter made no reply; for the little pink pocket-handkerchief was

in full force.

‘What have you got to say to me, afore I knock your head off?’ repeated

Mr. Weller, in a threatening manner.

‘Eh!’ said Mr. Trotter, with a look of virtuous surprise.

‘What have you got to say to me?’

‘I, Mr. Walker!’

‘Don’t call me Valker; my name’s Veller; you know that vell enough. What

have you got to say to me?’

‘Bless you, Mr. Walker--Weller, I mean--a great many things, if you will

come away somewhere, where we can talk comfortably. If you knew how I

have looked for you, Mr. Weller--’

‘Wery hard, indeed, I s’pose?’ said Sam drily.

‘Very, very, Sir,’ replied Mr. Trotter, without moving a muscle of his

face. ‘But shake hands, Mr. Weller.’

Sam eyed his companion for a few seconds, and then, as if actuated by a

sudden impulse, complied with his request.

‘How,’ said Job Trotter, as they walked away, ‘how is your dear, good

master? Oh, he is a worthy gentleman, Mr. Weller! I hope he didn’t catch

cold, that dreadful night, Sir.’

There was a momentary look of deep slyness in Job Trotter’s eye, as he

said this, which ran a thrill through Mr. Weller’s clenched fist, as he

burned with a desire to make a demonstration on his ribs. Sam

constrained himself, however, and replied that his master was extremely

well.

‘Oh, I am so glad,’ replied Mr. Trotter; ‘is he here?’

‘Is yourn?’ asked Sam, by way of reply.

‘Oh, yes, he is here, and I grieve to say, Mr. Weller, he is going on

worse than ever.’

‘Ah, ah!’ said Sam.

‘Oh, shocking--terrible!’

‘At a boarding-school?’ said Sam.

‘No, not at a boarding-school,’ replied Job Trotter, with the same sly

look which Sam had noticed before; ‘not at a boarding-school.’

‘At the house with the green gate?’ said Sam, eyeing his companion

closely.

‘No, no--oh, not there,’ replied Job, with a quickness very unusual to

him, ‘not there.’

‘What was you a-doin’ there?’ asked Sam, with a sharp glance. ‘Got

inside the gate by accident, perhaps?’

‘Why, Mr. Weller,’ replied Job, ‘I don’t mind telling you my little

secrets, because, you know, we took such a fancy for each other when we

first met. You recollect how pleasant we were that morning?’

‘Oh, yes,’ said Sam, impatiently. ‘I remember. Well?’

‘Well,’ replied Job, speaking with great precision, and in the low tone

of a man who communicates an important secret; ‘in that house with the

green gate, Mr. Weller, they keep a good many servants.’

‘So I should think, from the look on it,’ interposed Sam.

‘Yes,’ continued Mr. Trotter, ‘and one of them is a cook, who has saved

up a little money, Mr. Weller, and is desirous, if she can establish

herself in life, to open a little shop in the chandlery way, you see.’

Yes.’

‘Yes, Mr. Weller. Well, Sir, I met her at a chapel that I go to; a very

neat little chapel in this town, Mr. Weller, where they sing the number

four collection of hymns, which I generally carry about with me, in a

little book, which you may perhaps have seen in my hand--and I got a

little intimate with her, Mr. Weller, and from that, an acquaintance

sprung up between us, and I may venture to say, Mr. Weller, that I am to

be the chandler.’

‘Ah, and a wery amiable chandler you’ll make,’ replied Sam, eyeing Job

with a side look of intense dislike.

‘The great advantage of this, Mr. Weller,’ continued Job, his eyes

filling with tears as he spoke, ‘will be, that I shall be able to leave

my present disgraceful service with that bad man, and to devote myself

to a better and more virtuous life; more like the way in which I was

brought up, Mr. Weller.’

‘You must ha’ been wery nicely brought up,’ said Sam.

‘Oh, very, Mr. Weller, very,’ replied Job. At the recollection of the

purity of his youthful days, Mr. Trotter pulled forth the pink

handkerchief, and wept copiously.

‘You must ha’ been an uncommon nice boy, to go to school vith,’ said

Sam.

‘I was, sir,’ replied Job, heaving a deep sigh; ‘I was the idol of the

place.’

‘Ah,’ said Sam, ‘I don’t wonder at it. What a comfort you must ha’ been

to your blessed mother.’

At these words, Mr. Job Trotter inserted an end of the pink handkerchief

into the corner of each eye, one after the other, and began to weep

copiously.

‘Wot’s the matter with the man,’ said Sam, indignantly. ‘Chelsea water-

works is nothin’ to you. What are you melting vith now? The

consciousness o’ willainy?’

‘I cannot keep my feelings down, Mr. Weller,’ said Job, after a short

pause. ‘To think that my master should have suspected the conversation I

had with yours, and so dragged me away in a post-chaise, and after

persuading the sweet young lady to say she knew nothing of him, and

bribing the school-mistress to do the same, deserted her for a better

speculation! Oh! Mr. Weller, it makes me shudder.’

‘Oh, that was the vay, was it?’ said Mr. Weller.

‘To be sure it was,’ replied Job.

‘Vell,’ said Sam, as they had now arrived near the hotel, ‘I vant to

have a little bit o’ talk with you, Job; so if you’re not partickler

engaged, I should like to see you at the Great White Horse to-night,

somewheres about eight o’clock.’

‘I shall be sure to come,’ said Job.

‘Yes, you’d better,’ replied Sam, with a very meaning look, ‘or else I

shall perhaps be askin’ arter you, at the other side of the green gate,

and then I might cut you out, you know.’

‘I shall be sure to be with you, sir,’ said Mr. Trotter; and wringing

Sam’s hand with the utmost fervour, he walked away.

‘Take care, Job Trotter, take care,’ said Sam, looking after him, ‘or I

shall be one too many for you this time. I shall, indeed.’ Having

uttered this soliloquy, and looked after Job till he was to be seen no

more, Mr. Weller made the best of his way to his master’s bedroom.

‘It’s all in training, Sir,’ said Sam.

‘What’s in training, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘I’ve found ‘em out, Sir,’ said Sam.

‘Found out who?’

‘That ‘ere queer customer, and the melan-cholly chap with the black

hair.’

‘Impossible, Sam!’ said Mr. Pickwick, with the greatest energy. ‘Where

are they, Sam: where are they?’

‘Hush, hush!’ replied Mr. Weller; and as he assisted Mr. Pickwick to

dress, he detailed the plan of action on which he proposed to enter.

‘But when is this to be done, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘All in good time, Sir,’ replied Sam.

Whether it was done in good time, or not, will be seen hereafter.

CHAPTER XXIV. WHEREIN MR. PETER MAGNUS GROWS JEALOUS, AND THE MIDDLE-

AGED LADY APPREHENSIVE, WHICH BRINGS THE PICKWICKIANS WITHIN THE GRASP

OF THE LAW

When Mr. Pickwick descended to the room in which he and Mr. Peter Magnus

had spent the preceding evening, he found that gentleman with the major

part of the contents of the two bags, the leathern hat-box, and the

brown-paper parcel, displaying to all possible advantage on his person,

while he himself was pacing up and down the room in a state of the

utmost excitement and agitation.

‘Good-morning, Sir,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus. ‘What do you think of this,

Sir?’

‘Very effective indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the garments of

Mr. Peter Magnus with a good-natured smile.

‘Yes, I think it’ll do,’ said Mr. Magnus. ‘Mr. Pickwick, Sir, I have

sent up my card.’

‘Have you?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘And the waiter brought back word, that she would see me at eleven--at

eleven, Sir; it only wants a quarter now.’

‘Very near the time,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes, it is rather near,’ replied Mr. Magnus, ‘rather too near to be

pleasant--eh! Mr. Pickwick, sir?’

‘Confidence is a great thing in these cases,’ observed Mr. Pickwick.

‘I believe it is, Sir,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus. ‘I am very confident,

Sir. Really, Mr. Pickwick, I do not see why a man should feel any fear

in such a case as this, sir. What is it, Sir? There’s nothing to be

ashamed of; it’s a matter of mutual accommodation, nothing more. Husband

on one side, wife on the other. That’s my view of the matter, Mr.

Pickwick.’

‘It is a very philosophical one,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘But breakfast

is waiting, Mr. Magnus. Come.’

Down they sat to breakfast, but it was evident, notwithstanding the

boasting of Mr. Peter Magnus, that he laboured under a very considerable

degree of nervousness, of which loss of appetite, a propensity to upset

the tea-things, a spectral attempt at drollery, and an irresistible

inclination to look at the clock, every other second, were among the

principal symptoms.

‘He-he-he,’ tittered Mr. Magnus, affecting cheerfulness, and gasping

with agitation. ‘It only wants two minutes, Mr. Pickwick. Am I pale,

Sir?’

‘Not very,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

There was a brief pause.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick; but have you ever done this sort of

thing in your time?’ said Mr. Magnus.

‘You mean proposing?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes.’

‘Never,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with great energy, ‘never.’

‘You have no idea, then, how it’s best to begin?’ said Mr. Magnus.

‘Why,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I may have formed some ideas upon the

subject, but, as I have never submitted them to the test of experience,

I should be sorry if you were induced to regulate your proceedings by

them.’

‘I should feel very much obliged to you, for any advice, Sir,’ said Mr.

Magnus, taking another look at the clock, the hand of which was verging

on the five minutes past.

‘Well, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with the profound solemnity with which

that great man could, when he pleased, render his remarks so deeply

impressive. ‘I should commence, sir, with a tribute to the lady’s beauty

and excellent qualities; from them, Sir, I should diverge to my own

unworthiness.’

‘Very good,’ said Mr. Magnus.

‘Unworthiness for \_her \_only, mind, sir,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick; ‘for to

show that I was not wholly unworthy, sir, I should take a brief review

of my past life, and present condition. I should argue, by analogy, that

to anybody else, I must be a very desirable object. I should then

expatiate on the warmth of my love, and the depth of my devotion.

Perhaps I might then be tempted to seize her hand.’

‘Yes, I see,’ said Mr. Magnus; ‘that would be a very great point.’

‘I should then, Sir,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, growing warmer as the

subject presented itself in more glowing colours before him--‘I should

then, Sir, come to the plain and simple question, “Will you have me?” I

think I am justified in assuming that upon this, she would turn away her

head.’

‘You think that may be taken for granted?’ said Mr. Magnus; ‘because, if

she did not do that at the right place, it would be embarrassing.’

‘I think she would,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Upon this, sir, I should

squeeze her hand, and I think--I think, Mr. Magnus--that after I had

done that, supposing there was no refusal, I should gently draw away the

handkerchief, which my slight knowledge of human nature leads me to

suppose the lady would be applying to her eyes at the moment, and steal

a respectful kiss. I think I should kiss her, Mr. Magnus; and at this

particular point, I am decidedly of opinion that if the lady were going

to take me at all, she would murmur into my ears a bashful acceptance.’

Mr. Magnus started; gazed on Mr. Pickwick’s intelligent face, for a

short time in silence; and then (the dial pointing to the ten minutes

past) shook him warmly by the hand, and rushed desperately from the

room.

Mr. Pickwick had taken a few strides to and fro; and the small hand of

the clock following the latter part of his example, had arrived at the

figure which indicates the half-hour, when the door suddenly opened. He

turned round to meet Mr. Peter Magnus, and encountered, in his stead,

the joyous face of Mr. Tupman, the serene countenance of Mr. Winkle, and

the intellectual lineaments of Mr. Snodgrass.

As Mr. Pickwick greeted them, Mr. Peter Magnus tripped into the room.

‘My friends, the gentleman I was speaking of--Mr. Magnus,’ said Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Your servant, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Magnus, evidently in a high state of

excitement; ‘Mr. Pickwick, allow me to speak to you one moment, sir.’

As he said this, Mr. Magnus harnessed his forefinger to Mr. Pickwick’s

buttonhole, and, drawing him to a window recess, said--

‘Congratulate me, Mr. Pickwick; I followed your advice to the very

letter.’

‘And it was all correct, was it?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘It was, Sir. Could not possibly have been better,’ replied Mr. Magnus.

‘Mr. Pickwick, she is mine.’

‘I congratulate you, with all my heart,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, warmly

shaking his new friend by the hand.

‘You must see her. Sir,’ said Mr. Magnus; ‘this way, if you please.

Excuse us for one instant, gentlemen.’ Hurrying on in this way, Mr.

Peter Magnus drew Mr. Pickwick from the room. He paused at the next door

in the passage, and tapped gently thereat.

‘Come in,’ said a female voice. And in they went.

‘Miss Witherfield,’ said Mr. Magnus, ‘allow me to introduce my very

particular friend, Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick, I beg to make you known

to Miss Witherfield.’

The lady was at the upper end of the room. As Mr. Pickwick bowed, he

took his spectacles from his waistcoat pocket, and put them on; a

process which he had no sooner gone through, than, uttering an

exclamation of surprise, Mr. Pickwick retreated several paces, and the

lady, with a half-suppressed scream, hid her face in her hands, and

dropped into a chair; whereupon Mr. Peter Magnus was stricken motionless

on the spot, and gazed from one to the other, with a countenance

expressive of the extremities of horror and surprise.

This certainly was, to all appearance, very unaccountable behaviour; but

the fact is, that Mr. Pickwick no sooner put on his spectacles, than he

at once recognised in the future Mrs. Magnus the lady into whose room he

had so unwarrantably intruded on the previous night; and the spectacles

had no sooner crossed Mr. Pickwick’s nose, than the lady at once

identified the countenance which she had seen surrounded by all the

horrors of a nightcap. So the lady screamed, and Mr. Pickwick started.

‘Mr. Pickwick!’ exclaimed Mr. Magnus, lost in astonishment, ‘what is the

meaning of this, Sir? What is the meaning of it, Sir?’ added Mr. Magnus,

in a threatening, and a louder tone.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, somewhat indignant at the very sudden manner

in which Mr. Peter Magnus had conjugated himself into the imperative

mood, ‘I decline answering that question.’

‘You decline it, Sir?’ said Mr. Magnus.

‘I do, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘I object to say anything which may

compromise that lady, or awaken unpleasant recollections in her breast,

without her consent and permission.’

‘Miss Witherfield,’ said Mr. Peter Magnus, ‘do you know this person?’

‘Know him!’ repeated the middle-aged lady, hesitating.

‘Yes, know him, ma’am; I said know him,’ replied Mr. Magnus, with

ferocity.

‘I have seen him,’ replied the middle-aged lady.

‘Where?’ inquired Mr. Magnus, ‘where?’

‘That,’ said the middle-aged lady, rising from her seat, and averting

her head--‘that I would not reveal for worlds.’

‘I understand you, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘and respect your

delicacy; it shall never be revealed by \_me\_ depend upon it.’

‘Upon my word, ma’am,’ said Mr. Magnus, ‘considering the situation in

which I am placed with regard to yourself, you carry this matter off

with tolerable coolness--tolerable coolness, ma’am.’

‘Cruel Mr. Magnus!’ said the middle-aged lady; here she wept very

copiously indeed.

‘Address your observations to me, sir,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick; ‘I

alone am to blame, if anybody be.’

‘Oh! you alone are to blame, are you, sir?’ said Mr. Magnus; ‘I--I--see

through this, sir. You repent of your determination now, do you?’

‘My determination!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Your determination, Sir. Oh! don’t stare at me, Sir,’ said Mr. Magnus;

‘I recollect your words last night, Sir. You came down here, sir, to

expose the treachery and falsehood of an individual on whose truth and

honour you had placed implicit reliance--eh?’ Here Mr. Peter Magnus

indulged in a prolonged sneer; and taking off his green spectacles--

which he probably found superfluous in his fit of jealousy--rolled his

little eyes about, in a manner frightful to behold.

‘Eh?’ said Mr. Magnus; and then he repeated the sneer with increased

effect. ‘But you shall answer it, Sir.’

‘Answer what?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Never mind, sir,’ replied Mr. Magnus, striding up and down the room.

‘Never mind.’

There must be something very comprehensive in this phrase of ‘Never

mind,’ for we do not recollect to have ever witnessed a quarrel in the

street, at a theatre, public room, or elsewhere, in which it has not

been the standard reply to all belligerent inquiries. ‘Do you call

yourself a gentleman, sir?’--‘Never mind, sir.’

Did I offer to say anything to the young woman, sir?’--‘Never mind,

sir.’

Do you want your head knocked up against that wall, sir?’--‘Never mind,

sir.’ It is observable, too, that there would appear to be some hidden

taunt in this universal ‘Never mind,’ which rouses more indignation in

the bosom of the individual addressed, than the most lavish abuse could

possibly awaken.

We do not mean to assert that the application of this brevity to

himself, struck exactly that indignation to Mr. Pickwick’s soul, which

it would infallibly have roused in a vulgar breast. We merely record the

fact that Mr. Pickwick opened the room door, and abruptly called out,

‘Tupman, come here!’

Mr. Tupman immediately presented himself, with a look of very

considerable surprise.

‘Tupman,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘a secret of some delicacy, in which that

lady is concerned, is the cause of a difference which has just arisen

between this gentleman and myself. When I assure him, in your presence,

that it has no relation to himself, and is not in any way connected with

his affairs, I need hardly beg you to take notice that if he continue to

dispute it, he expresses a doubt of my veracity, which I shall consider

extremely insulting.’ As Mr. Pickwick said this, he looked encyclopedias

at Mr. Peter Magnus.

Mr. Pickwick’s upright and honourable bearing, coupled with that force

and energy of speech which so eminently distinguished him, would have

carried conviction to any reasonable mind; but, unfortunately, at that

particular moment, the mind of Mr. Peter Magnus was in anything but

reasonable order. Consequently, instead of receiving Mr. Pickwick’s

explanation as he ought to have done, he forthwith proceeded to work

himself into a red-hot, scorching, consuming passion, and to talk about

what was due to his own feelings, and all that sort of thing; adding

force to his declamation by striding to and fro, and pulling his hair--

amusements which he would vary occasionally, by shaking his fist in Mr.

Pickwick’s philanthropic countenance.

Mr. Pickwick, in his turn, conscious of his own innocence and rectitude,

and irritated by having unfortunately involved the middle-aged lady in

such an unpleasant affair, was not so quietly disposed as was his wont.

The consequence was, that words ran high, and voices higher; and at

length Mr. Magnus told Mr. Pickwick he should hear from him; to which

Mr. Pickwick replied, with laudable politeness, that the sooner he heard

from him the better; whereupon the middle-aged lady rushed in terror

from the room, out of which Mr. Tupman dragged Mr. Pickwick, leaving Mr.

Peter Magnus to himself and meditation.

If the middle-aged lady had mingled much with the busy world, or had

profited at all by the manners and customs of those who make the laws

and set the fashions, she would have known that this sort of ferocity is

the most harmless thing in nature; but as she had lived for the most

part in the country, and never read the parliamentary debates, she was

little versed in these particular refinements of civilised life.

Accordingly, when she had gained her bedchamber, bolted herself in, and

began to meditate on the scene she had just witnessed, the most terrific

pictures of slaughter and destruction presented themselves to her

imagination; among which, a full-length portrait of Mr. Peter Magnus

borne home by four men, with the embellishment of a whole barrelful of

bullets in his left side, was among the very least. The more the middle-

aged lady meditated, the more terrified she became; and at length she

determined to repair to the house of the principal magistrate of the

town, and request him to secure the persons of Mr. Pickwick and Mr.

Tupman without delay.

To this decision the middle-aged lady was impelled by a variety of

considerations, the chief of which was the incontestable proof it would

afford of her devotion to Mr. Peter Magnus, and her anxiety for his

safety. She was too well acquainted with his jealous temperament to

venture the slightest allusion to the real cause of her agitation on

beholding Mr. Pickwick; and she trusted to her own influence and power

of persuasion with the little man, to quell his boisterous jealousy,

supposing that Mr. Pickwick were removed, and no fresh quarrel could

arise. Filled with these reflections, the middle-aged lady arrayed

herself in her bonnet and shawl, and repaired to the mayor’s dwelling

straightway.

Now George Nupkins, Esquire, the principal magistrate aforesaid, was as

grand a personage as the fastest walker would find out, between sunrise

and sunset, on the twenty-first of June, which being, according to the

almanacs, the longest day in the whole year, would naturally afford him

the longest period for his search. On this particular morning, Mr.

Nupkins was in a state of the utmost excitement and irritation, for

there had been a rebellion in the town; all the day-scholars at the

largest day-school had conspired to break the windows of an obnoxious

apple-seller, and had hooted the beadle and pelted the constabulary--an

elderly gentleman in top-boots, who had been called out to repress the

tumult, and who had been a peace-officer, man and boy, for half a

century at least. And Mr. Nupkins was sitting in his easy-chair,

frowning with majesty, and boiling with rage, when a lady was announced

on pressing, private, and particular business. Mr. Nupkins looked calmly

terrible, and commanded that the lady should be shown in; which command,

like all the mandates of emperors, and magistrates, and other great

potentates of the earth, was forthwith obeyed; and Miss Witherfield,

interestingly agitated, was ushered in accordingly.

‘Muzzle!’ said the magistrate.

Muzzle was an undersized footman, with a long body and short legs.

‘Muzzle!’

Yes, your Worship.’

‘Place a chair, and leave the room.’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Now, ma’am, will you state your business?’ said the magistrate.

‘It is of a very painful kind, Sir,’ said Miss Witherfield.

‘Very likely, ma’am,’ said the magistrate. ‘Compose your feelings,

ma’am.’ Here Mr. Nupkins looked benignant. ‘And then tell me what legal

business brings you here, ma’am.’ Here the magistrate triumphed over the

man; and he looked stern again.

‘It is very distressing to me, Sir, to give this information,’ said Miss

Witherfield, ‘but I fear a duel is going to be fought here.’

‘Here, ma’am?’ said the magistrate. ‘Where, ma’am?’

‘In Ipswich.’

In Ipswich, ma’am! A duel in Ipswich!’ said the magistrate, perfectly

aghast at the notion. ‘Impossible, ma’am; nothing of the kind can be

contemplated in this town, I am persuaded. Bless my soul, ma’am, are you

aware of the activity of our local magistracy? Do you happen to have

heard, ma’am, that I rushed into a prize-ring on the fourth of May last,

attended by only sixty special constables; and, at the hazard of falling

a sacrifice to the angry passions of an infuriated multitude, prohibited

a pugilistic contest between the Middlesex Dumpling and the Suffolk

Bantam? A duel in Ipswich, ma’am? I don’t think--I do not think,’ said

the magistrate, reasoning with himself, ‘that any two men can have had

the hardihood to plan such a breach of the peace, in this town.’

‘My information is, unfortunately, but too correct,’ said the middle-

aged lady; ‘I was present at the quarrel.’

‘It’s a most extraordinary thing,’ said the astounded magistrate.

‘Muzzle!’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Send Mr. Jinks here, directly! Instantly.’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

Muzzle retired; and a pale, sharp-nosed, half-fed, shabbily-clad clerk,

of middle age, entered the room.

‘Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate. ‘Mr. Jinks.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Jinks.

‘This lady, Mr. Jinks, has come here, to give information of an intended

duel in this town.’

Mr. Jinks, not knowing exactly what to do, smiled a dependent’s smile.

‘What are you laughing at, Mr. Jinks?’ said the magistrate.

Mr. Jinks looked serious instantly.

‘Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate, ‘you’re a fool.’

Mr. Jinks looked humbly at the great man, and bit the top of his pen.

‘You may see something very comical in this information, Sir--but I can

tell you this, Mr. Jinks, that you have very little to laugh at,’ said

the magistrate.

The hungry-looking Jinks sighed, as if he were quite aware of the fact

of his having very little indeed to be merry about; and, being ordered

to take the lady’s information, shambled to a seat, and proceeded to

write it down.

‘This man, Pickwick, is the principal, I understand?’ said the

magistrate, when the statement was finished.

‘He is,’ said the middle-aged lady.

‘And the other rioter--what’s his name, Mr. Jinks?’

‘Tupman, Sir.’

Tupman is the second?’

‘Yes.’

‘The other principal, you say, has absconded, ma’am?’

‘Yes,’ replied Miss Witherfield, with a short cough.

‘Very well,’ said the magistrate. ‘These are two cut-throats from

London, who have come down here to destroy his Majesty’s population,

thinking that at this distance from the capital, the arm of the law is

weak and paralysed. They shall be made an example of. Draw up the

warrants, Mr. Jinks. Muzzle!’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Is Grummer downstairs?’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Send him up.’

The obsequious Muzzle retired, and presently returned, introducing the

elderly gentleman in the top-boots, who was chiefly remarkable for a

bottle-nose, a hoarse voice, a snuff-coloured surtout, and a wandering

eye.

‘Grummer,’ said the magistrate.

‘Your Wash-up.’

‘Is the town quiet now?’

‘Pretty well, your Wash-up,’ replied Grummer. ‘Pop’lar feeling has in a

measure subsided, consekens o’ the boys having dispersed to cricket.’

‘Nothing but vigorous measures will do in these times, Grummer,’ said

the magistrate, in a determined manner. ‘If the authority of the king’s

officers is set at naught, we must have the riot act read. If the civil

power cannot protect these windows, Grummer, the military must protect

the civil power, and the windows too. I believe that is a maxim of the

constitution, Mr. Jinks?’

Certainly, sir,’ said Jinks.

‘Very good,’ said the magistrate, signing the warrants. ‘Grummer, you

will bring these persons before me, this afternoon. You will find them

at the Great White Horse. You recollect the case of the Middlesex

Dumpling and the Suffolk Bantam, Grummer?’

Mr. Grummer intimated, by a retrospective shake of the head, that he

should never forget it--as indeed it was not likely he would, so long as

it continued to be cited daily.

‘This is even more unconstitutional,’ said the magistrate; ‘this is even

a greater breach of the peace, and a grosser infringement of his

Majesty’s prerogative. I believe duelling is one of his Majesty’s most

undoubted prerogatives, Mr. Jinks?’

‘Expressly stipulated in Magna Charta, sir,’ said Mr. Jinks.

‘One of the brightest jewels in the British crown, wrung from his

Majesty by the barons, I believe, Mr. Jinks?’ said the magistrate.

‘Just so, Sir,’ replied Mr. Jinks.

‘Very well,’ said the magistrate, drawing himself up proudly, ‘it shall

not be violated in this portion of his dominions. Grummer, procure

assistance, and execute these warrants with as little delay as possible.

Muzzle!’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Show the lady out.’

Miss Witherfield retired, deeply impressed with the magistrate’s

learning and research; Mr. Nupkins retired to lunch; Mr. Jinks retired

within himself--that being the only retirement he had, except the sofa-

bedstead in the small parlour which was occupied by his landlady’s

family in the daytime--and Mr. Grummer retired, to wipe out, by his mode

of discharging his present commission, the insult which had been

fastened upon himself, and the other representative of his Majesty--the

beadle--in the course of the morning.

While these resolute and determined preparations for the conservation of

the king’s peace were pending, Mr. Pickwick and his friends, wholly

unconscious of the mighty events in progress, had sat quietly down to

dinner; and very talkative and companionable they all were. Mr. Pickwick

was in the very act of relating his adventure of the preceding night, to

the great amusement of his followers, Mr. Tupman especially, when the

door opened, and a somewhat forbidding countenance peeped into the room.

The eyes in the forbidding countenance looked very earnestly at Mr.

Pickwick, for several seconds, and were to all appearance satisfied with

their investigation; for the body to which the forbidding countenance

belonged, slowly brought itself into the apartment, and presented the

form of an elderly individual in top-boots--not to keep the reader any

longer in suspense, in short, the eyes were the wandering eyes of Mr.

Grummer, and the body was the body of the same gentleman.

Mr. Grummer’s mode of proceeding was professional, but peculiar. His

first act was to bolt the door on the inside; his second, to polish his

head and countenance very carefully with a cotton handkerchief; his

third, to place his hat, with the cotton handkerchief in it, on the

nearest chair; and his fourth, to produce from the breast-pocket of his

coat a short truncheon, surmounted by a brazen crown, with which he

beckoned to Mr. Pickwick with a grave and ghost-like air.

Mr. Snodgrass was the first to break the astonished silence. He looked

steadily at Mr. Grummer for a brief space, and then said emphatically,

‘This is a private room, Sir. A private room.’

Mr. Grummer shook his head, and replied, ‘No room’s private to his

Majesty when the street door’s once passed. That’s law. Some people

maintains that an Englishman’s house is his castle. That’s gammon.’

The Pickwickians gazed on each other with wondering eyes.

‘Which is Mr. Tupman?’ inquired Mr. Grummer. He had an intuitive

perception of Mr. Pickwick; he knew him at once.

‘My name’s Tupman,’ said that gentleman.

‘My name’s Law,’ said Mr. Grummer.

‘What?’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘Law,’ replied Mr. Grummer--‘Law, civil power, and exekative; them’s my

titles; here’s my authority. Blank Tupman, blank Pickwick--against the

peace of our sufferin’ lord the king--stattit in the case made and

purwided--and all regular. I apprehend you Pickwick! Tupman--the

aforesaid.’

‘What do you mean by this insolence?’ said Mr. Tupman, starting up;

‘leave the room!’

‘Hollo,’ said Mr. Grummer, retreating very expeditiously to the door,

and opening it an inch or two, ‘Dubbley.’

‘Well,’ said a deep voice from the passage.

‘Come for’ard, Dubbley.’

At the word of command, a dirty-faced man, something over six feet high,

and stout in proportion, squeezed himself through the half-open door

(making his face very red in the process), and entered the room.

‘Is the other specials outside, Dubbley?’ inquired Mr. Grummer.

Mr. Dubbley, who was a man of few words, nodded assent.

‘Order in the diwision under your charge, Dubbley,’ said Mr. Grummer.

Mr. Dubbley did as he was desired; and half a dozen men, each with a

short truncheon and a brass crown, flocked into the room. Mr. Grummer

pocketed his staff, and looked at Mr. Dubbley; Mr. Dubbley pocketed his

staff and looked at the division; the division pocketed their staves and

looked at Messrs. Tupman and Pickwick.

Mr. Pickwick and his followers rose as one man.

‘What is the meaning of this atrocious intrusion upon my privacy?’ said

Mr. Pickwick.

‘Who dares apprehend me?’ said Mr. Tupman.

‘What do you want here, scoundrels?’ said Mr. Snodgrass.

Mr. Winkle said nothing, but he fixed his eyes on Grummer, and bestowed

a look upon him, which, if he had had any feeling, must have pierced his

brain. As it was, however, it had no visible effect on him whatever.

When the executive perceived that Mr. Pickwick and his friends were

disposed to resist the authority of the law, they very significantly

turned up their coat sleeves, as if knocking them down in the first

instance, and taking them up afterwards, were a mere professional act

which had only to be thought of to be done, as a matter of course. This

demonstration was not lost upon Mr. Pickwick. He conferred a few moments

with Mr. Tupman apart, and then signified his readiness to proceed to

the mayor’s residence, merely begging the parties then and there

assembled, to take notice, that it was his firm intention to resent this

monstrous invasion of his privileges as an Englishman, the instant he

was at liberty; whereat the parties then and there assembled laughed

very heartily, with the single exception of Mr. Grummer, who seemed to

consider that any slight cast upon the divine right of magistrates was a

species of blasphemy not to be tolerated.

But when Mr. Pickwick had signified his readiness to bow to the laws of

his country, and just when the waiters, and hostlers, and chambermaids,

and post-boys, who had anticipated a delightful commotion from his

threatened obstinacy, began to turn away, disappointed and disgusted, a

difficulty arose which had not been foreseen. With every sentiment of

veneration for the constituted authorities, Mr. Pickwick resolutely

protested against making his appearance in the public streets,

surrounded and guarded by the officers of justice, like a common

criminal. Mr. Grummer, in the then disturbed state of public feeling

(for it was half-holiday, and the boys had not yet gone home), as

resolutely protested against walking on the opposite side of the way,

and taking Mr. Pickwick’s parole that he would go straight to the

magistrate’s; and both Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman as strenuously

objected to the expense of a post-coach, which was the only respectable

conveyance that could be obtained. The dispute ran high, and the dilemma

lasted long; and just as the executive were on the point of overcoming

Mr. Pickwick’s objection to walking to the magistrate’s, by the trite

expedient of carrying him thither, it was recollected that there stood

in the inn yard, an old sedan-chair, which, having been originally built

for a gouty gentleman with funded property, would hold Mr. Pickwick and

Mr. Tupman, at least as conveniently as a modern post-chaise. The chair

was hired, and brought into the hall; Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman

squeezed themselves inside, and pulled down the blinds; a couple of

chairmen were speedily found; and the procession started in grand order.

The specials surrounded the body of the vehicle; Mr. Grummer and Mr.

Dubbley marched triumphantly in front; Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle

walked arm-in-arm behind; and the unsoaped of Ipswich brought up the

rear.

The shopkeepers of the town, although they had a very indistinct notion

of the nature of the offence, could not but be much edified and

gratified by this spectacle. Here was the strong arm of the law, coming

down with twenty gold-beater force, upon two offenders from the

metropolis itself; the mighty engine was directed by their own

magistrate, and worked by their own officers; and both the criminals, by

their united efforts, were securely shut up, in the narrow compass of

one sedan-chair. Many were the expressions of approval and admiration

which greeted Mr. Grummer, as he headed the cavalcade, staff in hand;

loud and long were the shouts raised by the unsoaped; and amidst these

united testimonials of public approbation, the procession moved slowly

and majestically along.

Mr. Weller, habited in his morning jacket, with the black calico

sleeves, was returning in a rather desponding state from an unsuccessful

survey of the mysterious house with the green gate, when, raising his

eyes, he beheld a crowd pouring down the street, surrounding an object

which had very much the appearance of a sedan-chair. Willing to divert

his thoughts from the failure of his enterprise, he stepped aside to see

the crowd pass; and finding that they were cheering away, very much to

their own satisfaction, forthwith began (by way of raising his spirits)

to cheer too, with all his might and main.

Mr. Grummer passed, and Mr. Dubbley passed, and the sedan passed, and

the bodyguard of specials passed, and Sam was still responding to the

enthusiastic cheers of the mob, and waving his hat about as if he were

in the very last extreme of the wildest joy (though, of course, he had

not the faintest idea of the matter in hand), when he was suddenly

stopped by the unexpected appearance of Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass.

‘What’s the row, gen’l’m’n? ’cried Sam. ‘Who have they got in this here

watch-box in mournin’?’

Both gentlemen replied together, but their words were lost in the

tumult.

‘Who is it?’ cried Sam again.

Once more was a joint reply returned; and, though the words were

inaudible, Sam saw by the motion of the two pairs of lips that they had

uttered the magic word ‘Pickwick.’

This was enough. In another minute Mr. Weller had made his way through

the crowd, stopped the chairmen, and confronted the portly Grummer.

‘Hollo, old gen’l’m’n!’ said Sam. ‘Who have you got in this here

conweyance?’

‘Stand back,’ said Mr. Grummer, whose dignity, like the dignity of a

great many other men, had been wondrously augmented by a little

popularity.

‘Knock him down, if he don’t,’ said Mr. Dubbley.

‘I’m wery much obliged to you, old gen’l’m’n,’ replied Sam, ‘for

consulting my conwenience, and I’m still more obliged to the other

gen’l’m’n, who looks as if he’d just escaped from a giant’s carrywan,

for his wery ‘andsome suggestion; but I should prefer your givin’ me a

answer to my question, if it’s all the same to you.--How are you, Sir?’

This last observation was addressed with a patronising air to Mr.

Pickwick, who was peeping through the front window.

Mr. Grummer, perfectly speechless with indignation, dragged the

truncheon with the brass crown from its particular pocket, and

flourished it before Sam’s eyes.

‘Ah,’ said Sam, ‘it’s wery pretty, ‘specially the crown, which is

uncommon like the real one.’

‘Stand back!’ said the outraged Mr. Grummer. By way of adding force to

the command, he thrust the brass emblem of royalty into Sam’s neckcloth

with one hand, and seized Sam’s collar with the other--a compliment

which Mr. Weller returned by knocking him down out of hand, having

previously with the utmost consideration, knocked down a chairman for

him to lie upon.

Whether Mr. Winkle was seized with a temporary attack of that species of

insanity which originates in a sense of injury, or animated by this

display of Mr. Weller’s valour, is uncertain; but certain it is, that he

no sooner saw Mr. Grummer fall than he made a terrific onslaught on a

small boy who stood next him; whereupon Mr. Snodgrass, in a truly

Christian spirit, and in order that he might take no one unawares,

announced in a very loud tone that he was going to begin, and proceeded

to take off his coat with the utmost deliberation. He was immediately

surrounded and secured; and it is but common justice both to him and Mr.

Winkle to say, that they did not make the slightest attempt to rescue

either themselves or Mr. Weller; who, after a most vigorous resistance,

was overpowered by numbers and taken prisoner. The procession then

reformed; the chairmen resumed their stations; and the march was re-

commenced.

Mr. Pickwick’s indignation during the whole of this proceeding was

beyond all bounds. He could just see Sam upsetting the specials, and

flying about in every direction; and that was all he could see, for the

sedan doors wouldn’t open, and the blinds wouldn’t pull up. At length,

with the assistance of Mr. Tupman, he managed to push open the roof; and

mounting on the seat, and steadying himself as well as he could, by

placing his hand on that gentleman’s shoulder, Mr. Pickwick proceeded to

address the multitude; to dwell upon the unjustifiable manner in which

he had been treated; and to call upon them to take notice that his

servant had been first assaulted. In this order they reached the

magistrate’s house; the chairmen trotting, the prisoners following, Mr.

Pickwick oratorising, and the crowd shouting.

CHAPTER XXV. SHOWING, AMONG A VARIETY OF PLEASANT MATTERS, HOW MAJESTIC

AND IMPARTIAL MR. NUPKINS WAS; AND HOW MR. WELLER RETURNED MR. JOB

TROTTER’S SHUTTLECOCK AS HEAVILY AS IT CAME--WITH ANOTHER MATTER, WHICH

WILL BE FOUND IN ITS PLACE

Violent was Mr. Weller’s indignation as he was borne along; numerous

were the allusions to the personal appearance and demeanour of Mr.

Grummer and his companion; and valorous were the defiances to any six of

the gentlemen present, in which he vented his dissatisfaction. Mr.

Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle listened with gloomy respect to the torrent of

eloquence which their leader poured forth from the sedan-chair, and the

rapid course of which not all Mr. Tupman’s earnest entreaties to have

the lid of the vehicle closed, were able to check for an instant. But

Mr. Weller’s anger quickly gave way to curiosity when the procession

turned down the identical courtyard in which he had met with the runaway

Job Trotter; and curiosity was exchanged for a feeling of the most

gleeful astonishment, when the all-important Mr. Grummer, commanding the

sedan-bearers to halt, advanced with dignified and portentous steps to

the very green gate from which Job Trotter had emerged, and gave a

mighty pull at the bell-handle which hung at the side thereof. The ring

was answered by a very smart and pretty-faced servant-girl, who, after

holding up her hands in astonishment at the rebellious appearance of the

prisoners, and the impassioned language of Mr. Pickwick, summoned Mr.

Muzzle. Mr. Muzzle opened one half of the carriage gate, to admit the

sedan, the captured ones, and the specials; and immediately slammed it

in the faces of the mob, who, indignant at being excluded, and anxious

to see what followed, relieved their feelings by kicking at the gate and

ringing the bell, for an hour or two afterwards. In this amusement they

all took part by turns, except three or four fortunate individuals, who,

having discovered a grating in the gate, which commanded a view of

nothing, stared through it with the indefatigable perseverance with

which people will flatten their noses against the front windows of a

chemist’s shop, when a drunken man, who has been run over by a dog-cart

in the street, is undergoing a surgical inspection in the back-parlour.

At the foot of a flight of steps, leading to the house door, which was

guarded on either side by an American aloe in a green tub, the sedan-

chair stopped. Mr. Pickwick and his friends were conducted into the

hall, whence, having been previously announced by Muzzle, and ordered in

by Mr. Nupkins, they were ushered into the worshipful presence of that

public-spirited officer.

The scene was an impressive one, well calculated to strike terror to the

hearts of culprits, and to impress them with an adequate idea of the

stern majesty of the law. In front of a big book-case, in a big chair,

behind a big table, and before a big volume, sat Mr. Nupkins, looking a

full size larger than any one of them, big as they were. The table was

adorned with piles of papers; and above the farther end of it, appeared

the head and shoulders of Mr. Jinks, who was busily engaged in looking

as busy as possible. The party having all entered, Muzzle carefully

closed the door, and placed himself behind his master’s chair to await

his orders. Mr. Nupkins threw himself back with thrilling solemnity, and

scrutinised the faces of his unwilling visitors.

‘Now, Grummer, who is that person?’ said Mr. Nupkins, pointing to Mr.

Pickwick, who, as the spokesman of his friends, stood hat in hand,

bowing with the utmost politeness and respect.

‘This here’s Pickvick, your Wash-up,’ said Grummer.

‘Come, none o’ that ‘ere, old Strike-a-light,’ interposed Mr. Weller,

elbowing himself into the front rank. ‘Beg your pardon, sir, but this

here officer o’ yourn in the gambooge tops, ‘ull never earn a decent

livin’ as a master o’ the ceremonies any vere. This here, sir’ continued

Mr. Weller, thrusting Grummer aside, and addressing the magistrate with

pleasant familiarity, ‘this here is S. Pickvick, Esquire; this here’s

Mr. Tupman; that ‘ere’s Mr. Snodgrass; and farder on, next him on the

t’other side, Mr. Winkle--all wery nice gen’l’m’n, Sir, as you’ll be

wery happy to have the acquaintance on; so the sooner you commits these

here officers o’ yourn to the tread-mill for a month or two, the sooner

we shall begin to be on a pleasant understanding. Business first,

pleasure arterwards, as King Richard the Third said when he stabbed the

t’other king in the Tower, afore he smothered the babbies.’

At the conclusion of this address, Mr. Weller brushed his hat with his

right elbow, and nodded benignly to Jinks, who had heard him throughout

with unspeakable awe.

‘Who is this man, Grummer?’ said the magistrate.

‘Wery desp’rate ch’racter, your Wash-up,’ replied Grummer. ‘He attempted

to rescue the prisoners, and assaulted the officers; so we took him into

custody, and brought him here.’

‘You did quite right,’ replied the magistrate. ‘He is evidently a

desperate ruffian.’

‘He is my servant, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick angrily.

‘Oh! he is your servant, is he?’ said Mr. Nupkins. ‘A conspiracy to

defeat the ends of justice, and murder its officers. Pickwick’s servant.

Put that down, Mr. Jinks.’

Mr. Jinks did so.

‘What’s your name, fellow?’ thundered Mr. Nupkins.

‘Veller,’ replied Sam.

‘A very good name for the Newgate Calendar,’ said Mr. Nupkins.

This was a joke; so Jinks, Grummer, Dubbley, all the specials, and

Muzzle, went into fits of laughter of five minutes’ duration.

‘Put down his name, Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate.

‘Two L’s, old feller,’ said Sam.

Here an unfortunate special laughed again, whereupon the magistrate

threatened to commit him instantly. It is a dangerous thing to laugh at

the wrong man, in these cases.

‘Where do you live?’ said the magistrate.

‘Vere ever I can,’ replied Sam.

‘Put down that, Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate, who was fast rising

into a rage.

‘Score it under,’ said Sam.

‘He is a vagabond, Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate. ‘He is a vagabond on

his own statement,--is he not, Mr. Jinks?’

‘Certainly, Sir.’

‘Then I’ll commit him--I’ll commit him as such,’ said Mr. Nupkins.

‘This is a wery impartial country for justice, ‘said Sam.’ There ain’t a

magistrate goin’ as don’t commit himself twice as he commits other

people.’

At this sally another special laughed, and then tried to look so

supernaturally solemn, that the magistrate detected him immediately.

‘Grummer,’ said Mr. Nupkins, reddening with passion, ‘how dare you

select such an inefficient and disreputable person for a special

constable, as that man? How dare you do it, Sir?’

‘I am very sorry, your Wash-up,’ stammered Grummer.

‘Very sorry!’ said the furious magistrate. ‘You shall repent of this

neglect of duty, Mr. Grummer; you shall be made an example of. Take that

fellow’s staff away. He’s drunk. You’re drunk, fellow.’

‘I am not drunk, your Worship,’ said the man.

‘You \_are \_drunk,’ returned the magistrate. ‘How dare you say you are

not drunk, Sir, when I say you are? Doesn’t he smell of spirits,

Grummer?’

‘Horrid, your Wash-up,’ replied Grummer, who had a vague impression that

there was a smell of rum somewhere.

‘I knew he did,’ said Mr. Nupkins. ‘I saw he was drunk when he first

came into the room, by his excited eye. Did you observe his excited eye,

Mr. Jinks?’

‘Certainly, Sir.’

‘I haven’t touched a drop of spirits this morning,’ said the man, who

was as sober a fellow as need be.

‘How dare you tell me a falsehood?’ said Mr. Nupkins. ‘Isn’t he drunk at

this moment, Mr. Jinks?’

‘Certainly, Sir,’ replied Jinks.

‘Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate, ‘I shall commit that man for contempt.

Make out his committal, Mr. Jinks.’

And committed the special would have been, only Jinks, who was the

magistrate’s adviser (having had a legal education of three years in a

country attorney’s office), whispered the magistrate that he thought it

wouldn’t do; so the magistrate made a speech, and said, that in

consideration of the special’s family, he would merely reprimand and

discharge him. Accordingly, the special was abused, vehemently, for a

quarter of an hour, and sent about his business; and Grummer, Dubbley,

Muzzle, and all the other specials, murmured their admiration of the

magnanimity of Mr. Nupkins.

‘Now, Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate, ‘swear Grummer.’

Grummer was sworn directly; but as Grummer wandered, and Mr. Nupkins’s

dinner was nearly ready, Mr. Nupkins cut the matter short, by putting

leading questions to Grummer, which Grummer answered as nearly in the

affirmative as he could. So the examination went off, all very smooth

and comfortable, and two assaults were proved against Mr. Weller, and a

threat against Mr. Winkle, and a push against Mr. Snodgrass. When all

this was done to the magistrate’s satisfaction, the magistrate and Mr.

Jinks consulted in whispers.

The consultation having lasted about ten minutes, Mr. Jinks retired to

his end of the table; and the magistrate, with a preparatory cough, drew

himself up in his chair, and was proceeding to commence his address,

when Mr. Pickwick interposed.

‘I beg your pardon, sir, for interrupting you,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but

before you proceed to express, and act upon, any opinion you may have

formed on the statements which have been made here, I must claim my

right to be heard so far as I am personally concerned.’

‘Hold your tongue, Sir,’ said the magistrate peremptorily.

‘I must submit to you, Sir--’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hold your tongue, sir,’ interposed the magistrate, ‘or I shall order an

officer to remove you.’

‘You may order your officers to do whatever you please, Sir,’ said Mr.

Pickwick; ‘and I have no doubt, from the specimen I have had of the

subordination preserved amongst them, that whatever you order, they will

execute, Sir; but I shall take the liberty, Sir, of claiming my right to

be heard, until I am removed by force.’

‘Pickvick and principle!’ exclaimed Mr. Weller, in a very audible voice.

‘Sam, be quiet,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Dumb as a drum vith a hole in it, Sir,’ replied Sam.

Mr. Nupkins looked at Mr. Pickwick with a gaze of intense astonishment,

at his displaying such unwonted temerity; and was apparently about to

return a very angry reply, when Mr. Jinks pulled him by the sleeve, and

whispered something in his ear. To this, the magistrate returned a half-

audible answer, and then the whispering was renewed. Jinks was evidently

remonstrating.

At length the magistrate, gulping down, with a very bad grace, his

disinclination to hear anything more, turned to Mr. Pickwick, and said

sharply, ‘What do you want to say?’

‘First,’ said Mr. Pickwick, sending a look through his spectacles, under

which even Nupkins quailed, ‘first, I wish to know what I and my friend

have been brought here for?’

‘Must I tell him?’ whispered the magistrate to Jinks.

‘I think you had better, sir,’ whispered Jinks to the magistrate.

‘An information has been sworn before me,’ said the magistrate, ‘that it

is apprehended you are going to fight a duel, and that the other man,

Tupman, is your aider and abettor in it. Therefore--eh, Mr. Jinks?’

‘Certainly, sir.’

‘Therefore, I call upon you both, to--I think that’s the course, Mr.

Jinks?’

‘Certainly, Sir.’

‘To--to--what, Mr. Jinks?’ said the magistrate pettishly.

‘To find bail, sir.’

‘Yes. Therefore, I call upon you both--as I was about to say when I was

interrupted by my clerk--to find bail.’

Good bail,’ whispered Mr. Jinks.

‘I shall require good bail,’ said the magistrate.

‘Town’s-people,’ whispered Jinks.

‘They must be townspeople,’ said the magistrate.

‘Fifty pounds each,’ whispered Jinks, ‘and householders, of course.’

‘I shall require two sureties of fifty pounds each,’ said the magistrate

aloud, with great dignity, ‘and they must be householders, of course.’

‘But bless my heart, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, who, together with Mr.

Tupman, was all amazement and indignation; ‘we are perfect strangers in

this town. I have as little knowledge of any householders here, as I

have intention of fighting a duel with anybody.’

‘I dare say,’ replied the magistrate, ‘I dare say--don’t you, Mr.

Jinks?’

‘Certainly, Sir.’

‘Have you anything more to say?’ inquired the magistrate.

Mr. Pickwick had a great deal more to say, which he would no doubt have

said, very little to his own advantage, or the magistrate’s

satisfaction, if he had not, the moment he ceased speaking, been pulled

by the sleeve by Mr. Weller, with whom he was immediately engaged in so

earnest a conversation, that he suffered the magistrate’s inquiry to

pass wholly unnoticed. Mr. Nupkins was not the man to ask a question of

the kind twice over; and so, with another preparatory cough, he

proceeded, amidst the reverential and admiring silence of the

constables, to pronounce his decision.

He should fine Weller two pounds for the first assault, and three pounds

for the second. He should fine Winkle two pounds, and Snodgrass one

pound, besides requiring them to enter into their own recognisances to

keep the peace towards all his Majesty’s subjects, and especially

towards his liege servant, Daniel Grummer. Pickwick and Tupman he had

already held to bail.

Immediately on the magistrate ceasing to speak, Mr. Pickwick, with a

smile mantling on his again good-humoured countenance, stepped forward,

and said--

‘I beg the magistrate’s pardon, but may I request a few minutes’ private

conversation with him, on a matter of deep importance to himself?’

‘What?’ said the magistrate. Mr. Pickwick repeated his request.

‘This is a most extraordinary request,’ said the magistrate. ‘A private

interview?’

‘A private interview,’ replied Mr. Pickwick firmly; ‘only, as a part of

the information which I wish to communicate is derived from my servant,

I should wish him to be present.’

The magistrate looked at Mr. Jinks; Mr. Jinks looked at the magistrate;

the officers looked at each other in amazement. Mr. Nupkins turned

suddenly pale. Could the man Weller, in a moment of remorse, have

divulged some secret conspiracy for his assassination? It was a dreadful

thought. He was a public man; and he turned paler, as he thought of

Julius Caesar and Mr. Perceval.

The magistrate looked at Mr. Pickwick again, and beckoned Mr. Jinks.

‘What do you think of this request, Mr. Jinks?’ murmured Mr. Nupkins.

Mr. Jinks, who didn’t exactly know what to think of it, and was afraid

he might offend, smiled feebly, after a dubious fashion, and, screwing

up the corners of his mouth, shook his head slowly from side to side.

‘Mr. Jinks,’ said the magistrate gravely, ‘you are an ass.’

At this little expression of opinion, Mr. Jinks smiled again--rather

more feebly than before--and edged himself, by degrees, back into his

own corner.

Mr. Nupkins debated the matter within himself for a few seconds, and

then, rising from his chair, and requesting Mr. Pickwick and Sam to

follow him, led the way into a small room which opened into the justice-

parlour. Desiring Mr. Pickwick to walk to the upper end of the little

apartment, and holding his hand upon the half-closed door, that he might

be able to effect an immediate escape, in case there was the least

tendency to a display of hostilities, Mr. Nupkins expressed his

readiness to hear the communication, whatever it might be.

‘I will come to the point at once, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘it affects

yourself and your credit materially. I have every reason to believe,

Sir, that you are harbouring in your house a gross impostor!’

‘Two,’ interrupted Sam. ‘Mulberry agin all natur, for tears and

willainny!’

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘if I am to render myself intelligible to this

gentleman, I must beg you to control your feelings.’

‘Wery sorry, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘but when I think o’ that ‘ere

Job, I can’t help opening the walve a inch or two.’

‘In one word, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘is my servant right in

suspecting that a certain Captain Fitz-Marshall is in the habit of

visiting here? Because,’ added Mr. Pickwick, as he saw that Mr. Nupkins

was about to offer a very indignant interruption, ‘because if he be, I

know that person to be a--’

‘Hush, hush,’ said Mr. Nupkins, closing the door. ‘Know him to be what,

Sir?’

‘An unprincipled adventurer--a dishonourable character--a man who preys

upon society, and makes easily-deceived people his dupes, Sir; his

absurd, his foolish, his wretched dupes, Sir,’ said the excited Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Nupkins, turning very red, and altering his whole

manner directly. ‘Dear me, Mr.--’

‘Pickvick,’ said Sam.

‘Pickwick,’ said the magistrate, ‘dear me, Mr. Pickwick--pray take a

seat--you cannot mean this? Captain Fitz-Marshall!’

‘Don’t call him a cap’en,’ said Sam, ‘nor Fitz-Marshall neither; he

ain’t neither one nor t’other. He’s a strolling actor, he is, and his

name’s Jingle; and if ever there was a wolf in a mulberry suit, that

‘ere Job Trotter’s him.’

‘It is very true, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, replying to the magistrate’s

look of amazement; ‘my only business in this town, is to expose the

person of whom we now speak.’

Mr. Pickwick proceeded to pour into the horror-stricken ear of Mr.

Nupkins, an abridged account of all Mr. Jingle’s atrocities. He related

how he had first met him; how he had eloped with Miss Wardle; how he had

cheerfully resigned the lady for a pecuniary consideration; how he had

entrapped himself into a lady’s boarding-school at midnight; and how he

(Mr. Pickwick) now felt it his duty to expose his assumption of his

present name and rank.

As the narrative proceeded, all the warm blood in the body of Mr.

Nupkins tingled up into the very tips of his ears. He had picked up the

captain at a neighbouring race-course. Charmed with his long list of

aristocratic acquaintance, his extensive travel, and his fashionable

demeanour, Mrs. Nupkins and Miss Nupkins had exhibited Captain Fitz-

Marshall, and quoted Captain Fitz-Marshall, and hurled Captain Fitz-

Marshall at the devoted heads of their select circle of acquaintance,

until their bosom friends, Mrs. Porkenham and the Misses Porkenhams, and

Mr. Sidney Porkenham, were ready to burst with jealousy and despair. And

now, to hear, after all, that he was a needy adventurer, a strolling

player, and if not a swindler, something so very like it, that it was

hard to tell the difference! Heavens! what would the Porkenhams say!

What would be the triumph of Mr. Sidney Porkenham when he found that his

addresses had been slighted for such a rival! How should he, Nupkins,

meet the eye of old Porkenham at the next quarter-sessions! And what a

handle would it be for the opposition magisterial party if the story got

abroad!

‘But after all,’ said Mr. Nupkins, brightening for a moment, after a

long pause; ‘after all, this is a mere statement. Captain Fitz-Marshall

is a man of very engaging manners, and, I dare say, has many enemies.

What proof have you of the truth of these representations?’

‘Confront me with him,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that is all I ask, and all I

require. Confront him with me and my friends here; you will want no

further proof.’

‘Why,’ said Mr. Nupkins, ‘that might be very easily done, for he will be

here to-night, and then there would be no occasion to make the matter

public, just--just--for the young man’s own sake, you know. I--I--should

like to consult Mrs. Nupkins on the propriety of the step, in the first

instance, though. At all events, Mr. Pickwick, we must despatch this

legal business before we can do anything else. Pray step back into the

next room.’

Into the next room they went.

‘Grummer,’ said the magistrate, in an awful voice.

‘Your Wash-up,’ replied Grummer, with the smile of a favourite.

‘Come, come, Sir,’ said the magistrate sternly, ‘don’t let me see any of

this levity here. It is very unbecoming, and I can assure you that you

have very little to smile at. Was the account you gave me just now

strictly true? Now be careful, sir!’

Your Wash-up,’ stammered Grummer, ‘I-’

‘Oh, you are confused, are you?’ said the magistrate. ‘Mr. Jinks, you

observe this confusion?’

‘Certainly, Sir,’ replied Jinks.

‘Now,’ said the magistrate, ‘repeat your statement, Grummer, and again I

warn you to be careful. Mr. Jinks, take his words down.’

The unfortunate Grummer proceeded to re-state his complaint, but, what

between Mr. Jinks’s taking down his words, and the magistrate’s taking

them up, his natural tendency to rambling, and his extreme confusion, he

managed to get involved, in something under three minutes, in such a

mass of entanglement and contradiction, that Mr. Nupkins at once

declared he didn’t believe him. So the fines were remitted, and Mr.

Jinks found a couple of bail in no time. And all these solemn

proceedings having been satisfactorily concluded, Mr. Grummer was

ignominiously ordered out--an awful instance of the instability of human

greatness, and the uncertain tenure of great men’s favour.

Mrs. Nupkins was a majestic female in a pink gauze turban and a light

brown wig. Miss Nupkins possessed all her mamma’s haughtiness without

the turban, and all her ill-nature without the wig; and whenever the

exercise of these two amiable qualities involved mother and daughter in

some unpleasant dilemma, as they not infrequently did, they both

concurred in laying the blame on the shoulders of Mr. Nupkins.

Accordingly, when Mr. Nupkins sought Mrs. Nupkins, and detailed the

communication which had been made by Mr. Pickwick, Mrs. Nupkins suddenly

recollected that she had always expected something of the kind; that she

had always said it would be so; that her advice was never taken; that

she really did not know what Mr. Nupkins supposed she was; and so forth.

‘The idea!’ said Miss Nupkins, forcing a tear of very scanty proportions

into the corner of each eye; ‘the idea of my being made such a fool of!’

‘Ah! you may thank your papa, my dear,’ said Mrs. Nupkins; ‘how I have

implored and begged that man to inquire into the captain’s family

connections; how I have urged and entreated him to take some decisive

step! I am quite certain nobody would believe it--quite.’

‘But, my dear,’ said Mr. Nupkins.

‘Don’t talk to me, you aggravating thing, don’t!’ said Mrs. Nupkins.

‘My love,’ said Mr. Nupkins, ‘you professed yourself very fond of

Captain Fitz-Marshall. You have constantly asked him here, my dear, and

you have lost no opportunity of introducing him elsewhere.’

‘Didn’t I say so, Henrietta?’ cried Mrs. Nupkins, appealing to her

daughter with the air of a much-injured female. ‘Didn’t I say that your

papa would turn round and lay all this at my door? Didn’t I say so?’

Here Mrs. Nupkins sobbed.

‘Oh, pa!’ remonstrated Miss Nupkins. And here she sobbed too.

‘Isn’t it too much, when he has brought all this disgrace and ridicule

upon us, to taunt me with being the cause of it?’ exclaimed Mrs.

Nupkins.

‘How can we ever show ourselves in society!’ said Miss Nupkins.

‘How can we face the Porkenhams?’ cried Mrs. Nupkins.

‘Or the Griggs!’ cried Miss Nupkins.

‘Or the Slummintowkens!’ cried Mrs. Nupkins. ‘But what does your papa

care! What is it to \_him\_!’ At this dreadful reflection, Mrs. Nupkins

wept mental anguish, and Miss Nupkins followed on the same side.

Mrs. Nupkins’s tears continued to gush forth, with great velocity, until

she had gained a little time to think the matter over; when she decided,

in her own mind, that the best thing to do would be to ask Mr. Pickwick

and his friends to remain until the captain’s arrival, and then to give

Mr. Pickwick the opportunity he sought. If it appeared that he had

spoken truly, the captain could be turned out of the house without

noising the matter abroad, and they could easily account to the

Porkenhams for his disappearance, by saying that he had been appointed,

through the Court influence of his family, to the governor-generalship

of Sierra Leone, of Saugur Point, or any other of those salubrious

climates which enchant Europeans so much, that when they once get there,

they can hardly ever prevail upon themselves to come back again.

When Mrs. Nupkins dried up her tears, Miss Nupkins dried up hers, and

Mr. Nupkins was very glad to settle the matter as Mrs. Nupkins had

proposed. So Mr. Pickwick and his friends, having washed off all marks

of their late encounter, were introduced to the ladies, and soon

afterwards to their dinner; and Mr. Weller, whom the magistrate, with

his peculiar sagacity, had discovered in half an hour to be one of the

finest fellows alive, was consigned to the care and guardianship of Mr.

Muzzle, who was specially enjoined to take him below, and make much of

him.

‘How de do, sir?’ said Mr. Muzzle, as he conducted Mr. Weller down the

kitchen stairs.

‘Why, no considerable change has taken place in the state of my system,

since I see you cocked up behind your governor’s chair in the parlour, a

little vile ago,’ replied Sam.

‘You will excuse my not taking more notice of you then,’ said Mr.

Muzzle. ‘You see, master hadn’t introduced us, then. Lord, how fond he

is of you, Mr. Weller, to be sure!’

‘Ah!’ said Sam, ‘what a pleasant chap he is!’

‘Ain’t he?’ replied Mr. Muzzle.

‘So much humour,’ said Sam.

‘And such a man to speak,’ said Mr. Muzzle. ‘How his ideas flow, don’t

they?’

‘Wonderful,’ replied Sam; ‘they comes a-pouring out, knocking each

other’s heads so fast, that they seems to stun one another; you hardly

know what he’s arter, do you?’

That’s the great merit of his style of speaking,’ rejoined Mr. Muzzle.

‘Take care of the last step, Mr. Weller. Would you like to wash your

hands, sir, before we join the ladies? Here’s a sink, with the water

laid on, Sir, and a clean jack towel behind the door.’

‘Ah! perhaps I may as well have a rinse,’ replied Mr. Weller, applying

plenty of yellow soap to the towel, and rubbing away till his face shone

again. ‘How many ladies are there?’

‘Only two in our kitchen,’ said Mr. Muzzle; ‘cook and ‘ouse-maid. We

keep a boy to do the dirty work, and a gal besides, but they dine in the

wash’us.’

‘Oh, they dines in the wash’us, do they?’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Yes,’ replied Mr. Muzzle, ‘we tried ‘em at our table when they first

come, but we couldn’t keep ‘em. The gal’s manners is dreadful vulgar;

and the boy breathes so very hard while he’s eating, that we found it

impossible to sit at table with him.’

‘Young grampus!’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Oh, dreadful,’ rejoined Mr. Muzzle; ‘but that is the worst of country

service, Mr. Weller; the juniors is always so very savage. This way,

sir, if you please, this way.’

Preceding Mr. Weller, with the utmost politeness, Mr. Muzzle conducted

him into the kitchen.

‘Mary,’ said Mr. Muzzle to the pretty servant-girl, ‘this is Mr. Weller;

a gentleman as master has sent down, to be made as comfortable as

possible.’

‘And your master’s a knowin’ hand, and has just sent me to the right

place,’ said Mr. Weller, with a glance of admiration at Mary. ‘If I wos

master o’ this here house, I should alvays find the materials for

comfort vere Mary wos.’

Lor, Mr. Weller!’ said Mary blushing.

‘Well, I never!’ ejaculated the cook.

‘Bless me, cook, I forgot you,’ said Mr. Muzzle. ‘Mr. Weller, let me

introduce you.’

‘How are you, ma’am?’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Wery glad to see you, indeed,

and hope our acquaintance may be a long ‘un, as the gen’l’m’n said to

the fi’ pun’ note.’

When this ceremony of introduction had been gone through, the cook and

Mary retired into the back kitchen to titter, for ten minutes; then

returning, all giggles and blushes, they sat down to dinner.

Mr. Weller’s easy manners and conversational powers had such

irresistible influence with his new friends, that before the dinner was

half over, they were on a footing of perfect intimacy, and in possession

of a full account of the delinquency of Job Trotter.

‘I never could a-bear that Job,’ said Mary.

‘No more you never ought to, my dear,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Why not?’ inquired Mary.

‘’Cos ugliness and svindlin’ never ought to be formiliar with elegance

and wirtew,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Ought they, Mr. Muzzle?’

‘Not by no means,’ replied that gentleman.

Here Mary laughed, and said the cook had made her; and the cook laughed,

and said she hadn’t.

‘I ha’n’t got a glass,’ said Mary.

‘Drink with me, my dear,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Put your lips to this here

tumbler, and then I can kiss you by deputy.’

‘For shame, Mr. Weller!’ said Mary.

‘What’s a shame, my dear?’

‘Talkin’ in that way.’

‘Nonsense; it ain’t no harm. It’s natur; ain’t it, cook?’

‘Don’t ask me, imperence,’ replied the cook, in a high state of delight;

and hereupon the cook and Mary laughed again, till what between the

beer, and the cold meat, and the laughter combined, the latter young

lady was brought to the verge of choking--an alarming crisis from which

she was only recovered by sundry pats on the back, and other necessary

attentions, most delicately administered by Mr. Samuel Weller.

In the midst of all this jollity and conviviality, a loud ring was heard

at the garden gate, to which the young gentleman who took his meals in

the wash-house, immediately responded. Mr. Weller was in the height of

his attentions to the pretty house-maid; Mr. Muzzle was busy doing the

honours of the table; and the cook had just paused to laugh, in the very

act of raising a huge morsel to her lips; when the kitchen door opened,

and in walked Mr. Job Trotter.

We have said in walked Mr. Job Trotter, but the statement is not

distinguished by our usual scrupulous adherence to fact. The door opened

and Mr. Trotter appeared. He would have walked in, and was in the very

act of doing so, indeed, when catching sight of Mr. Weller, he

involuntarily shrank back a pace or two, and stood gazing on the

unexpected scene before him, perfectly motionless with amazement and

terror.

‘Here he is!’ said Sam, rising with great glee. ‘Why we were that wery

moment a-speaking o’ you. How are you? Where have you been? Come in.’

Laying his hand on the mulberry collar of the unresisting Job, Mr.

Weller dragged him into the kitchen; and, locking the door, handed the

key to Mr. Muzzle, who very coolly buttoned it up in a side pocket.

‘Well, here’s a game!’ cried Sam. ‘Only think o’ my master havin’ the

pleasure o’ meeting yourn upstairs, and me havin’ the joy o’ meetin’ you

down here. How are you gettin’ on, and how is the chandlery bis’ness

likely to do? Well, I am so glad to see you. How happy you look. It’s

quite a treat to see you; ain’t it, Mr. Muzzle?’

‘Quite,’ said Mr. Muzzle.

‘So cheerful he is!’ said Sam.

‘In such good spirits!’ said Muzzle.

‘And so glad to see us--that makes it so much more comfortable,’ said

Sam. ‘Sit down; sit down.’

Mr. Trotter suffered himself to be forced into a chair by the fireside.

He cast his small eyes, first on Mr. Weller, and then on Mr. Muzzle, but

said nothing.

‘Well, now,’ said Sam, ‘afore these here ladies, I should jest like to

ask you, as a sort of curiosity, whether you don’t consider yourself as

nice and well-behaved a young gen’l’m’n, as ever used a pink check

pocket-handkerchief, and the number four collection?’

‘And as was ever a-going to be married to a cook,’ said that lady

indignantly. ‘The willin!’

‘And leave off his evil ways, and set up in the chandlery line

arterwards,’ said the housemaid.

‘Now, I’ll tell you what it is, young man,’ said Mr. Muzzle solemnly,

enraged at the last two allusions, ‘this here lady (pointing to the

cook) keeps company with me; and when you presume, Sir, to talk of

keeping chandlers’ shops with her, you injure me in one of the most

delicatest points in which one man can injure another. Do you understand

that, Sir?’

Here Mr. Muzzle, who had a great notion of his eloquence, in which he

imitated his master, paused for a reply.

But Mr. Trotter made no reply. So Mr. Muzzle proceeded in a solemn

manner--

‘It’s very probable, sir, that you won’t be wanted upstairs for several

minutes, Sir, because \_my\_ master is at this moment particularly engaged

in settling the hash of \_your \_master, Sir; and therefore you’ll have

leisure, Sir, for a little private talk with me, Sir. Do you understand

that, Sir?’

Mr. Muzzle again paused for a reply; and again Mr. Trotter disappointed

him.

‘Well, then,’ said Mr. Muzzle, ‘I’m very sorry to have to explain myself

before ladies, but the urgency of the case will be my excuse. The back

kitchen’s empty, Sir. If you will step in there, Sir, Mr. Weller will

see fair, and we can have mutual satisfaction till the bell rings.

Follow me, Sir!’

As Mr. Muzzle uttered these words, he took a step or two towards the

door; and, by way of saving time, began to pull off his coat as he

walked along.

Now, the cook no sooner heard the concluding words of this desperate

challenge, and saw Mr. Muzzle about to put it into execution, than she

uttered a loud and piercing shriek; and rushing on Mr. Job Trotter, who

rose from his chair on the instant, tore and buffeted his large flat

face, with an energy peculiar to excited females, and twining her hands

in his long black hair, tore therefrom about enough to make five or six

dozen of the very largest-sized mourning-rings. Having accomplished this

feat with all the ardour which her devoted love for Mr. Muzzle inspired,

she staggered back; and being a lady of very excitable and delicate

feelings, she instantly fell under the dresser, and fainted away.

At this moment, the bell rang.

‘That’s for you, Job Trotter,’ said Sam; and before Mr. Trotter could

offer remonstrance or reply--even before he had time to stanch the

wounds inflicted by the insensible lady--Sam seized one arm and Mr.

Muzzle the other, and one pulling before, and the other pushing behind,

they conveyed him upstairs, and into the parlour.

It was an impressive tableau. Alfred Jingle, Esquire, alias Captain

Fitz-Marshall, was standing near the door with his hat in his hand, and

a smile on his face, wholly unmoved by his very unpleasant situation.

Confronting him, stood Mr. Pickwick, who had evidently been inculcating

some high moral lesson; for his left hand was beneath his coat tail, and

his right extended in air, as was his wont when delivering himself of an

impressive address. At a little distance, stood Mr. Tupman with

indignant countenance, carefully held back by his two younger friends;

at the farther end of the room were Mr. Nupkins, Mrs. Nupkins, and Miss

Nupkins, gloomily grand and savagely vexed.

‘What prevents me,’ said Mr. Nupkins, with magisterial dignity, as Job

was brought in--‘what prevents me from detaining these men as rogues and

impostors? It is a foolish mercy. What prevents me?’

‘Pride, old fellow, pride,’ replied Jingle, quite at his ease. ‘Wouldn’t

do--no go--caught a captain, eh?--ha! ha! very good--husband for

daughter--biter bit--make it public--not for worlds--look stupid--very!’

‘Wretch,’ said Mr. Nupkins, ‘we scorn your base insinuations.’

‘I always hated him,’ added Henrietta.

‘Oh, of course,’ said Jingle. ‘Tall young man--old lover--Sidney

Porkenham--rich--fine fellow--not so rich as captain, though, eh?--turn

him away--off with him--anything for captain--nothing like captain

anywhere--all the girls--raving mad--eh, Job, eh?’

Here Mr. Jingle laughed very heartily; and Job, rubbing his hands with

delight, uttered the first sound he had given vent to since he entered

the house--a low, noiseless chuckle, which seemed to intimate that he

enjoyed his laugh too much, to let any of it escape in sound.

‘Mr. Nupkins,’ said the elder lady,’ this is not a fit conversation for

the servants to overhear. Let these wretches be removed.’

‘Certainly, my dear,’ Said Mr. Nupkins. ‘Muzzle!’

‘Your Worship.’

‘Open the front door.’

‘Yes, your Worship.’

‘Leave the house!’ said Mr. Nupkins, waving his hand emphatically.

Jingle smiled, and moved towards the door.

‘Stay!’ said Mr. Pickwick. Jingle stopped.

‘I might,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘have taken a much greater revenge for the

treatment I have experienced at your hands, and that of your

hypocritical friend there.’

Job Trotter bowed with great politeness, and laid his hand upon his

heart.

‘I say,’ said Mr. Pickwick, growing gradually angry, ‘that I might have

taken a greater revenge, but I content myself with exposing you, which I

consider a duty I owe to society. This is a leniency, Sir, which I hope

you will remember.’

When Mr. Pickwick arrived at this point, Job Trotter, with facetious

gravity, applied his hand to his ear, as if desirous not to lose a

syllable he uttered.

‘And I have only to add, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, now thoroughly angry,

‘that I consider you a rascal, and a--a--ruffian--and--and worse than

any man I ever saw, or heard of, except that pious and sanctified

vagabond in the mulberry livery.’

‘Ha! ha!’ said Jingle, ‘good fellow, Pickwick--fine heart--stout old

boy--but must \_not \_be passionate--bad thing, very--bye, bye--see you

again some day--keep up your spirits--now, Job--trot!’

With these words, Mr. Jingle stuck on his hat in his old fashion, and

strode out of the room. Job Trotter paused, looked round, smiled and

then with a bow of mock solemnity to Mr. Pickwick, and a wink to Mr.

Weller, the audacious slyness of which baffles all description, followed

the footsteps of his hopeful master.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as Mr. Weller was following.

‘Sir.’

Stay here.’

Mr. Weller seemed uncertain.

‘Stay here,’ repeated Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mayn’t I polish that ‘ere Job off, in the front garden?’ said Mr.

Weller.

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mayn’t I kick him out o’ the gate, Sir?’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Not on any account,’ replied his master.

For the first time since his engagement, Mr. Weller looked, for a

moment, discontented and unhappy. But his countenance immediately

cleared up; for the wily Mr. Muzzle, by concealing himself behind the

street door, and rushing violently out, at the right instant, contrived

with great dexterity to overturn both Mr. Jingle and his attendant, down

the flight of steps, into the American aloe tubs that stood beneath.

‘Having discharged my duty, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick to Mr. Nupkins, ‘I

will, with my friends, bid you farewell. While we thank you for such

hospitality as we have received, permit me to assure you, in our joint

names, that we should not have accepted it, or have consented to

extricate ourselves in this way, from our previous dilemma, had we not

been impelled by a strong sense of duty. We return to London to-morrow.

Your secret is safe with us.’

Having thus entered his protest against their treatment of the morning,

Mr. Pickwick bowed low to the ladies, and notwithstanding the

solicitations of the family, left the room with his friends.

‘Get your hat, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It’s below stairs, Sir,’ said Sam, and he ran down after it.

Now, there was nobody in the kitchen, but the pretty housemaid; and as

Sam’s hat was mislaid, he had to look for it, and the pretty housemaid

lighted him. They had to look all over the place for the hat. The pretty

housemaid, in her anxiety to find it, went down on her knees, and turned

over all the things that were heaped together in a little corner by the

door. It was an awkward corner. You couldn’t get at it without shutting

the door first.

‘Here it is,’ said the pretty housemaid. ‘This is it, ain’t it?’

‘Let me look,’ said Sam.

The pretty housemaid had stood the candle on the floor; and, as it gave

a very dim light, Sam was obliged to go down on \_his \_knees before he

could see whether it really was his own hat or not. It was a remarkably

small corner, and so--it was nobody’s fault but the man’s who built the

house--Sam and the pretty housemaid were necessarily very close

together.

‘Yes, this is it,’ said Sam. ‘Good-bye!’

‘Good-bye!’ said the pretty housemaid.

‘Good-bye!’ said Sam; and as he said it, he dropped the hat that had

cost so much trouble in looking for.

‘How awkward you are,’ said the pretty housemaid. ‘You’ll lose it again,

if you don’t take care.’

So just to prevent his losing it again, she put it on for him.

Whether it was that the pretty housemaid’s face looked prettier still,

when it was raised towards Sam’s, or whether it was the accidental

consequence of their being so near to each other, is matter of

uncertainty to this day; but Sam kissed her.

‘You don’t mean to say you did that on purpose,’ said the pretty

housemaid, blushing.

‘No, I didn’t then,’ said Sam; ‘but I will now.’

So he kissed her again.

‘Sam!’ said Mr. Pickwick, calling over the banisters.

‘Coming, Sir,’ replied Sam, running upstairs.

‘How long you have been!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘There was something behind the door, Sir, which perwented our getting

it open, for ever so long, Sir,’ replied Sam.

And this was the first passage of Mr. Weller’s first love.

CHAPTER XXVI. WHICH CONTAINS A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF THE PROGRESS OF THE

ACTION OF BARDELL AGAINST PICKWICK

Having accomplished the main end and object of his journey, by the

exposure of Jingle, Mr. Pickwick resolved on immediately returning to

London, with the view of becoming acquainted with the proceedings which

had been taken against him, in the meantime, by Messrs. Dodson and Fogg.

Acting upon this resolution with all the energy and decision of his

character, he mounted to the back seat of the first coach which left

Ipswich on the morning after the memorable occurrences detailed at

length in the two preceding chapters; and accompanied by his three

friends, and Mr. Samuel Weller, arrived in the metropolis, in perfect

health and safety, the same evening.

Here the friends, for a short time, separated. Messrs. Tupman, Winkle,

and Snodgrass repaired to their several homes to make such preparations

as might be requisite for their forthcoming visit to Dingley Dell; and

Mr. Pickwick and Sam took up their present abode in very good, old-

fashioned, and comfortable quarters, to wit, the George and Vulture

Tavern and Hotel, George Yard, Lombard Street.

Mr. Pickwick had dined, finished his second pint of particular port,

pulled his silk handkerchief over his head, put his feet on the fender,

and thrown himself back in an easy-chair, when the entrance of Mr.

Weller with his carpet-bag, aroused him from his tranquil meditation.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘I have just been thinking, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that having left a

good many things at Mrs. Bardell’s, in Goswell Street, I ought to

arrange for taking them away, before I leave town again.’

‘Wery good, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘I could send them to Mr. Tupman’s, for the present, Sam,’ continued Mr.

Pickwick, ‘but before we take them away, it is necessary that they

should be looked up, and put together. I wish you would step up to

Goswell Street, Sam, and arrange about it.’

‘At once, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘At once,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘And stay, Sam,’ added Mr. Pickwick,

pulling out his purse, ‘there is some rent to pay. The quarter is not

due till Christmas, but you may pay it, and have done with it. A month’s

notice terminates my tenancy. Here it is, written out. Give it, and tell

Mrs. Bardell she may put a bill up, as soon as she likes.’

‘Wery good, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘anythin’ more, sir?’

‘Nothing more, Sam.’

Mr. Weller stepped slowly to the door, as if he expected something more;

slowly opened it, slowly stepped out, and had slowly closed it within a

couple of inches, when Mr. Pickwick called out--

‘Sam.’

‘Yes, sir,’ said Mr. Weller, stepping quickly back, and closing the door

behind him.

‘I have no objection, Sam, to your endeavouring to ascertain how Mrs.

Bardell herself seems disposed towards me, and whether it is really

probable that this vile and groundless action is to be carried to

extremity. I say I do not object to you doing this, if you wish it,

Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam gave a short nod of intelligence, and left the room. Mr. Pickwick

drew the silk handkerchief once more over his head, And composed himself

for a nap. Mr. Weller promptly walked forth, to execute his commission.

It was nearly nine o’clock when he reached Goswell Street. A couple of

candles were burning in the little front parlour, and a couple of caps

were reflected on the window-blind. Mrs. Bardell had got company.

Mr. Weller knocked at the door, and after a pretty long interval--

occupied by the party without, in whistling a tune, and by the party

within, in persuading a refractory flat candle to allow itself to be

lighted--a pair of small boots pattered over the floor-cloth, and Master

Bardell presented himself.

‘Well, young townskip,’ said Sam, ‘how’s mother?’

‘She’s pretty well,’ replied Master Bardell, ‘so am I.’

‘Well, that’s a mercy,’ said Sam; ‘tell her I want to speak to her, will

you, my hinfant fernomenon?’

Master Bardell, thus adjured, placed the refractory flat candle on the

bottom stair, and vanished into the front parlour with his message.

The two caps, reflected on the window-blind, were the respective head-

dresses of a couple of Mrs. Bardell’s most particular acquaintance, who

had just stepped in, to have a quiet cup of tea, and a little warm

supper of a couple of sets of pettitoes and some toasted cheese. The

cheese was simmering and browning away, most delightfully, in a little

Dutch oven before the fire; the pettitoes were getting on deliciously in

a little tin saucepan on the hob; and Mrs. Bardell and her two friends

were getting on very well, also, in a little quiet conversation about

and concerning all their particular friends and acquaintance; when

Master Bardell came back from answering the door, and delivered the

message intrusted to him by Mr. Samuel Weller.

‘Mr. Pickwick’s servant!’ said Mrs. Bardell, turning pale.

‘Bless my soul!’ said Mrs. Cluppins.

‘Well, I raly would not ha’ believed it, unless I had ha’ happened to

ha’ been here!’ said Mrs. Sanders.

Mrs. Cluppins was a little, brisk, busy-looking woman; Mrs. Sanders was

a big, fat, heavy-faced personage; and the two were the company.

Mrs. Bardell felt it proper to be agitated; and as none of the three

exactly knew whether under existing circumstances, any communication,

otherwise than through Dodson & Fogg, ought to be held with Mr.

Pickwick’s servant, they were all rather taken by surprise. In this

state of indecision, obviously the first thing to be done, was to thump

the boy for finding Mr. Weller at the door. So his mother thumped him,

and he cried melodiously.

‘Hold your noise--do--you naughty creetur!’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘Yes; don’t worrit your poor mother,’ said Mrs. Sanders.

‘She’s quite enough to worrit her, as it is, without you, Tommy,’ said

Mrs. Cluppins, with sympathising resignation.

‘Ah! worse luck, poor lamb!’ said Mrs. Sanders.

At all which moral reflections, Master Bardell howled the louder.

‘Now, what shall I do?’ said Mrs. Bardell to Mrs. Cluppins.

‘I think you ought to see him,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins. ‘But on no

account without a witness.’

‘I think two witnesses would be more lawful,’ said Mrs. Sanders, who,

like the other friend, was bursting with curiosity.

‘Perhaps he’d better come in here,’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘To be sure,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins, eagerly catching at the idea; ‘walk

in, young man; and shut the street door first, please.’

Mr. Weller immediately took the hint; and presenting himself in the

parlour, explained his business to Mrs. Bardell thus--

‘Wery sorry to ‘casion any personal inconwenience, ma’am, as the

housebreaker said to the old lady when he put her on the fire; but as me

and my governor ‘s only jest come to town, and is jest going away agin,

it can’t be helped, you see.’

‘Of course, the young man can’t help the faults of his master,’ said

Mrs. Cluppins, much struck by Mr. Weller’s appearance and conversation.

‘Certainly not,’ chimed in Mrs. Sanders, who, from certain wistful

glances at the little tin saucepan, seemed to be engaged in a mental

calculation of the probable extent of the pettitoes, in the event of

Sam’s being asked to stop to supper.

‘So all I’ve come about, is jest this here,’ said Sam, disregarding the

interruption; ‘first, to give my governor’s notice--there it is.

Secondly, to pay the rent--here it is. Thirdly, to say as all his things

is to be put together, and give to anybody as we sends for ‘em.

Fourthly, that you may let the place as soon as you like--and that’s

all.’

‘Whatever has happened,’ said Mrs. Bardell, ‘I always have said, and

always will say, that in every respect but one, Mr. Pickwick has always

behaved himself like a perfect gentleman. His money always as good as

the bank--always.’

As Mrs. Bardell said this, she applied her handkerchief to her eyes, and

went out of the room to get the receipt.

Sam well knew that he had only to remain quiet, and the women were sure

to talk; so he looked alternately at the tin saucepan, the toasted

cheese, the wall, and the ceiling, in profound silence.

‘Poor dear!’ said Mrs. Cluppins.

‘Ah, poor thing!’ replied Mrs. Sanders.

Sam said nothing. He saw they were coming to the subject.

‘I raly cannot contain myself,’ said Mrs. Cluppins, ‘when I think of

such perjury. I don’t wish to say anything to make you uncomfortable,

young man, but your master’s an old brute, and I wish I had him here to

tell him so.’

I wish you had,’ said Sam.

‘To see how dreadful she takes on, going moping about, and taking no

pleasure in nothing, except when her friends comes in, out of charity,

to sit with her, and make her comfortable,’ resumed Mrs. Cluppins,

glancing at the tin saucepan and the Dutch oven, ‘it’s shocking!’

‘Barbareous,’ said Mrs. Sanders.

‘And your master, young man! A gentleman with money, as could never feel

the expense of a wife, no more than nothing,’ continued Mrs. Cluppins,

with great volubility; ‘why there ain’t the faintest shade of an excuse

for his behaviour! Why don’t he marry her?’

‘Ah,’ said Sam, ‘to be sure; that’s the question.’

‘Question, indeed,’ retorted Mrs. Cluppins, ‘she’d question him, if

she’d my spirit. Hows’ever, there is law for us women, mis’rable

creeturs as they’d make us, if they could; and that your master will

find out, young man, to his cost, afore he’s six months older.’

At this consolatory reflection, Mrs. Cluppins bridled up, and smiled at

Mrs. Sanders, who smiled back again.

‘The action’s going on, and no mistake,’ thought Sam, as Mrs. Bardell

re-entered with the receipt.

‘Here’s the receipt, Mr. Weller,’ said Mrs. Bardell, ‘and here’s the

change, and I hope you’ll take a little drop of something to keep the

cold out, if it’s only for old acquaintance’ sake, Mr. Weller.’

Sam saw the advantage he should gain, and at once acquiesced; whereupon

Mrs. Bardell produced, from a small closet, a black bottle and a wine-

glass; and so great was her abstraction, in her deep mental affliction,

that, after filling Mr. Weller’s glass, she brought out three more wine-

glasses, and filled them too.

‘Lauk, Mrs. Bardell,’ said Mrs. Cluppins, ‘see what you’ve been and

done!’

‘Well, that is a good one!’ ejaculated Mrs. Sanders.

‘Ah, my poor head!’ said Mrs. Bardell, with a faint smile.

Sam understood all this, of course, so he said at once, that he never

could drink before supper, unless a lady drank with him. A great deal of

laughter ensued, and Mrs. Sanders volunteered to humour him, so she took

a slight sip out of her glass. Then Sam said it must go all round, so

they all took a slight sip. Then little Mrs. Cluppins proposed as a

toast, ‘Success to Bardell agin Pickwick’; and then the ladies emptied

their glasses in honour of the sentiment, and got very talkative

directly.

‘I suppose you’ve heard what’s going forward, Mr. Weller?’ said Mrs.

Bardell.

‘I’ve heerd somethin’ on it,’ replied Sam.

‘It’s a terrible thing to be dragged before the public, in that way, Mr.

Weller,’ said Mrs. Bardell; ‘but I see now, that it’s the only thing I

ought to do, and my lawyers, Mr. Dodson and Fogg, tell me that, with the

evidence as we shall call, we must succeed. I don’t know what I should

do, Mr. Weller, if I didn’t.’

The mere idea of Mrs. Bardell’s failing in her action, affected Mrs.

Sanders so deeply, that she was under the necessity of refilling and re-

emptying her glass immediately; feeling, as she said afterwards, that if

she hadn’t had the presence of mind to do so, she must have dropped.

‘Ven is it expected to come on?’ inquired Sam.

‘Either in February or March,’ replied Mrs. Bardell.

‘What a number of witnesses there’ll be, won’t there?’ said Mrs.

Cluppins.

‘Ah! won’t there!’ replied Mrs. Sanders.

‘And won’t Mr. Dodson and Fogg be wild if the plaintiff shouldn’t get

it?’ added Mrs. Cluppins, ‘when they do it all on speculation!’

‘Ah! won’t they!’ said Mrs. Sanders.

‘But the plaintiff must get it,’ resumed Mrs. Cluppins.

‘I hope so,’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘Oh, there can’t be any doubt about it,’ rejoined Mrs. Sanders.

‘Vell,’ said Sam, rising and setting down his glass, ‘all I can say is,

that I vish you \_may \_get it.’

‘Thank’ee, Mr. Weller,’ said Mrs. Bardell fervently.

‘And of them Dodson and Foggs, as does these sort o’ things on spec,’

continued Mr. Weller, ‘as vell as for the other kind and gen’rous people

o’ the same purfession, as sets people by the ears, free gratis for

nothin’, and sets their clerks to work to find out little disputes among

their neighbours and acquaintances as vants settlin’ by means of

lawsuits--all I can say o’ them is, that I vish they had the reward I’d

give ‘em.’

‘Ah, I wish they had the reward that every kind and generous heart would

be inclined to bestow upon them!’ said the gratified Mrs. Bardell.

‘Amen to that,’ replied Sam, ‘and a fat and happy liven’ they’d get out

of it! Wish you good-night, ladies.’

To the great relief of Mrs. Sanders, Sam was allowed to depart without

any reference, on the part of the hostess, to the pettitoes and toasted

cheese; to which the ladies, with such juvenile assistance as Master

Bardell could afford, soon afterwards rendered the amplest justice--

indeed they wholly vanished before their strenuous exertions.

Mr. Weller wended his way back to the George and Vulture, and faithfully

recounted to his master, such indications of the sharp practice of

Dodson & Fogg, as he had contrived to pick up in his visit to Mrs.

Bardell’s. An interview with Mr. Perker, next day, more than confirmed

Mr. Weller’s statement; and Mr. Pickwick was fain to prepare for his

Christmas visit to Dingley Dell, with the pleasant anticipation that

some two or three months afterwards, an action brought against him for

damages sustained by reason of a breach of promise of marriage, would be

publicly tried in the Court of Common Pleas; the plaintiff having all

the advantages derivable, not only from the force of circumstances, but

from the sharp practice of Dodson & Fogg to boot.

CHAPTER XXVII. SAMUEL WELLER MAKES A PILGRIMAGE TO DORKING, AND BEHOLDS

HIS MOTHER-IN-LAW

There still remaining an interval of two days before the time agreed

upon for the departure of the Pickwickians to Dingley Dell, Mr. Weller

sat himself down in a back room at the George and Vulture, after eating

an early dinner, to muse on the best way of disposing of his time. It

was a remarkably fine day; and he had not turned the matter over in his

mind ten minutes, when he was suddenly stricken filial and affectionate;

and it occurred to him so strongly that he ought to go down and see his

father, and pay his duty to his mother-in-law, that he was lost in

astonishment at his own remissness in never thinking of this moral

obligation before. Anxious to atone for his past neglect without another

hour’s delay, he straightway walked upstairs to Mr. Pickwick, and

requested leave of absence for this laudable purpose.

‘Certainly, Sam, certainly,’ said Mr. Pickwick, his eyes glistening with

delight at this manifestation of filial feeling on the part of his

attendant; ‘certainly, Sam.’

Mr. Weller made a grateful bow.

‘I am very glad to see that you have so high a sense of your duties as a

son, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I always had, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘That’s a very gratifying reflection, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick

approvingly.

‘Wery, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘if ever I wanted anythin’ o’ my

father, I always asked for it in a wery ‘spectful and obligin’ manner.

If he didn’t give it me, I took it, for fear I should be led to do

anythin’ wrong, through not havin’ it. I saved him a world o’ trouble

this vay, Sir.’

‘That’s not precisely what I meant, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, shaking his

head, with a slight smile.

‘All good feelin’, sir--the wery best intentions, as the gen’l’m’n said

ven he run away from his wife ‘cos she seemed unhappy with him,’ replied

Mr. Weller.

‘You may go, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Thank’ee, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; and having made his best bow, and

put on his best clothes, Sam planted himself on the top of the Arundel

coach, and journeyed on to Dorking.

The Marquis of Granby, in Mrs. Weller’s time, was quite a model of a

roadside public-house of the better class--just large enough to be

convenient, and small enough to be snug. On the opposite side of the

road was a large sign-board on a high post, representing the head and

shoulders of a gentleman with an apoplectic countenance, in a red coat

with deep blue facings, and a touch of the same blue over his three-

cornered hat, for a sky. Over that again were a pair of flags; beneath

the last button of his coat were a couple of cannon; and the whole

formed an expressive and undoubted likeness of the Marquis of Granby of

glorious memory. The bar window displayed a choice collection of

geranium plants, and a well-dusted row of spirit phials. The open

shutters bore a variety of golden inscriptions, eulogistic of good beds

and neat wines; and the choice group of countrymen and hostlers lounging

about the stable door and horse-trough, afforded presumptive proof of

the excellent quality of the ale and spirits which were sold within. Sam

Weller paused, when he dismounted from the coach, to note all these

little indications of a thriving business, with the eye of an

experienced traveller; and having done so, stepped in at once, highly

satisfied with everything he had observed.

‘Now, then!’ said a shrill female voice the instant Sam thrust his head

in at the door, ‘what do you want, young man?’

Sam looked round in the direction whence the voice proceeded. It came

from a rather stout lady of comfortable appearance, who was seated

beside the fireplace in the bar, blowing the fire to make the kettle

boil for tea. She was not alone; for on the other side of the fireplace,

sitting bolt upright in a high-backed chair, was a man in threadbare

black clothes, with a back almost as long and stiff as that of the chair

itself, who caught Sam’s most particular and especial attention at once.

He was a prim-faced, red-nosed man, with a long, thin countenance, and a

semi-rattlesnake sort of eye--rather sharp, but decidedly bad. He wore

very short trousers, and black cotton stockings, which, like the rest of

his apparel, were particularly rusty. His looks were starched, but his

white neckerchief was not, and its long limp ends straggled over his

closely-buttoned waistcoat in a very uncouth and unpicturesque fashion.

A pair of old, worn, beaver gloves, a broad-brimmed hat, and a faded

green umbrella, with plenty of whalebone sticking through the bottom, as

if to counterbalance the want of a handle at the top, lay on a chair

beside him; and, being disposed in a very tidy and careful manner,

seemed to imply that the red-nosed man, whoever he was, had no intention

of going away in a hurry.

To do the red-nosed man justice, he would have been very far from wise

if he had entertained any such intention; for, to judge from all

appearances, he must have been possessed of a most desirable circle of

acquaintance, if he could have reasonably expected to be more

comfortable anywhere else. The fire was blazing brightly under the

influence of the bellows, and the kettle was singing gaily under the

influence of both. A small tray of tea-things was arranged on the table;

a plate of hot buttered toast was gently simmering before the fire; and

the red-nosed man himself was busily engaged in converting a large slice

of bread into the same agreeable edible, through the instrumentality of

a long brass toasting-fork. Beside him stood a glass of reeking hot

pine-apple rum-and-water, with a slice of lemon in it; and every time

the red-nosed man stopped to bring the round of toast to his eye, with

the view of ascertaining how it got on, he imbibed a drop or two of the

hot pine-apple rum-and-water, and smiled upon the rather stout lady, as

she blew the fire.

Sam was so lost in the contemplation of this comfortable scene, that he

suffered the first inquiry of the rather stout lady to pass unheeded. It

was not until it had been twice repeated, each time in a shriller tone,

that he became conscious of the impropriety of his behaviour.

‘Governor in?’ inquired Sam, in reply to the question.

‘No, he isn’t,’ replied Mrs. Weller; for the rather stout lady was no

other than the quondam relict and sole executrix of the dead-and-gone

Mr. Clarke; ‘no, he isn’t, and I don’t expect him, either.’

‘I suppose he’s drivin’ up to-day?’ said Sam.

‘He may be, or he may not,’ replied Mrs. Weller, buttering the round of

toast which the red-nosed man had just finished. ‘I don’t know, and,

what’s more, I don’t care.--Ask a blessin’, Mr. Stiggins.’

The red-nosed man did as he was desired, and instantly commenced on the

toast with fierce voracity.

The appearance of the red-nosed man had induced Sam, at first sight, to

more than half suspect that he was the deputy-shepherd of whom his

estimable parent had spoken. The moment he saw him eat, all doubt on the

subject was removed, and he perceived at once that if he purposed to

take up his temporary quarters where he was, he must make his footing

good without delay. He therefore commenced proceedings by putting his

arm over the half-door of the bar, coolly unbolting it, and leisurely

walking in.

‘Mother-in-law,’ said Sam, ‘how are you?’

‘Why, I do believe he is a Weller!’ said Mrs. W., raising her eyes to

Sam’s face, with no very gratified expression of countenance.

‘I rayther think he is,’ said the imperturbable Sam; ‘and I hope this

here reverend gen’l’m’n ‘ll excuse me saying that I wish I was \_the

\_Weller as owns you, mother-in-law.’

This was a double-barrelled compliment. It implied that Mrs. Weller was

a most agreeable female, and also that Mr. Stiggins had a clerical

appearance. It made a visible impression at once; and Sam followed up

his advantage by kissing his mother-in-law.

‘Get along with you!’ said Mrs. Weller, pushing him away.

‘For shame, young man!’ said the gentleman with the red nose.

‘No offence, sir, no offence,’ replied Sam; ‘you’re wery right, though;

it ain’t the right sort o’ thing, ven mothers-in-law is young and good-

looking, is it, Sir?’

‘It’s all vanity,’ said Mr. Stiggins.

‘Ah, so it is,’ said Mrs. Weller, setting her cap to rights.

Sam thought it was, too, but he held his peace.

The deputy-shepherd seemed by no means best pleased with Sam’s arrival;

and when the first effervescence of the compliment had subsided, even

Mrs. Weller looked as if she could have spared him without the smallest

inconvenience. However, there he was; and as he couldn’t be decently

turned out, they all three sat down to tea.

‘And how’s father?’ said Sam.

At this inquiry, Mrs. Weller raised her hands, and turned up her eyes,

as if the subject were too painful to be alluded to.

Mr. Stiggins groaned.

‘What’s the matter with that ‘ere gen’l’m’n?’ inquired Sam.

‘He’s shocked at the way your father goes on in,’ replied Mrs. Weller.

‘Oh, he is, is he?’ said Sam.

‘And with too good reason,’ added Mrs. Weller gravely.

Mr. Stiggins took up a fresh piece of toast, and groaned heavily.

‘He is a dreadful reprobate,’ said Mrs. Weller.

‘A man of wrath!’ exclaimed Mr. Stiggins. He took a large semi-circular

bite out of the toast, and groaned again.

Sam felt very strongly disposed to give the reverend Mr. Stiggins

something to groan for, but he repressed his inclination, and merely

asked, ‘What’s the old ‘un up to now?’

‘Up to, indeed!’ said Mrs. Weller, ‘Oh, he has a hard heart. Night after

night does this excellent man--don’t frown, Mr. Stiggins; I \_will \_say

you \_are \_an excellent man--come and sit here, for hours together, and

it has not the least effect upon him.’

Well, that is odd,’ said Sam; ‘it ‘ud have a wery considerable effect

upon me, if I wos in his place; I know that.’

‘The fact is, my young friend,’ said Mr. Stiggins solemnly, ‘he has an

obderrate bosom. Oh, my young friend, who else could have resisted the

pleading of sixteen of our fairest sisters, and withstood their

exhortations to subscribe to our noble society for providing the infant

negroes in the West Indies with flannel waistcoats and moral pocket-

handkerchiefs?’

‘What’s a moral pocket-ankercher?’ said Sam; ‘I never see one o’ them

articles o’ furniter.’

‘Those which combine amusement With instruction, my young friend,’

replied Mr. Stiggins, ‘blending select tales with wood-cuts.’

‘Oh, I know,’ said Sam; ‘them as hangs up in the linen-drapers’ shops,

with beggars’ petitions and all that ‘ere upon ‘em?’

Mr. Stiggins began a third round of toast, and nodded assent.

‘And he wouldn’t be persuaded by the ladies, wouldn’t he?’ said Sam.

‘Sat and smoked his pipe, and said the infant negroes were--what did he

say the infant negroes were?’ said Mrs. Weller.

‘Little humbugs,’ replied Mr. Stiggins, deeply affected.

‘Said the infant negroes were little humbugs,’ repeated Mrs. Weller. And

they both groaned at the atrocious conduct of the elder Mr. Weller.

A great many more iniquities of a similar nature might have been

disclosed, only the toast being all eaten, the tea having got very weak,

and Sam holding out no indications of meaning to go, Mr. Stiggins

suddenly recollected that he had a most pressing appointment with the

shepherd, and took himself off accordingly.

The tea-things had been scarcely put away, and the hearth swept up, when

the London coach deposited Mr. Weller, senior, at the door; his legs

deposited him in the bar; and his eyes showed him his son.

‘What, Sammy!’ exclaimed the father.

‘What, old Nobs!’ ejaculated the son. And they shook hands heartily.

‘Wery glad to see you, Sammy,’ said the elder Mr. Weller, ‘though how

you’ve managed to get over your mother-in-law, is a mystery to me. I

only vish you’d write me out the receipt, that’s all.’

‘Hush!’ said Sam, ‘she’s at home, old feller.’

She ain’t vithin hearin’,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘she always goes and

blows up, downstairs, for a couple of hours arter tea; so we’ll just

give ourselves a damp, Sammy.’

Saying this, Mr. Weller mixed two glasses of spirits-and-water, and

produced a couple of pipes. The father and son sitting down opposite

each other; Sam on one side of the fire, in the high-backed chair, and

Mr. Weller, senior, on the other, in an easy ditto, they proceeded to

enjoy themselves with all due gravity.

‘Anybody been here, Sammy?’ asked Mr. Weller, senior, dryly, after a

long silence.

Sam nodded an expressive assent.

‘Red-nosed chap?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

Sam nodded again.

‘Amiable man that ‘ere, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, smoking violently.

‘Seems so,’ observed Sam.

‘Good hand at accounts,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Is he?’ said Sam.

‘Borrows eighteenpence on Monday, and comes on Tuesday for a shillin’ to

make it up half-a-crown; calls again on Vensday for another half-crown

to make it five shillin’s; and goes on, doubling, till he gets it up to

a five pund note in no time, like them sums in the ‘rithmetic book ‘bout

the nails in the horse’s shoes, Sammy.’

Sam intimated by a nod that he recollected the problem alluded to by his

parent.

‘So you vouldn’t subscribe to the flannel veskits?’ said Sam, after

another interval of smoking.

‘Cert’nly not,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘what’s the good o’ flannel veskits

to the young niggers abroad? But I’ll tell you what it is, Sammy,’ said

Mr. Weller, lowering his voice, and bending across the fireplace; ‘I’d

come down wery handsome towards strait veskits for some people at home.’

As Mr. Weller said this, he slowly recovered his former position, and

winked at his first-born, in a profound manner.

‘It cert’nly seems a queer start to send out pocket-’ankerchers to

people as don’t know the use on ‘em,’ observed Sam.

‘They’re alvays a-doin’ some gammon of that sort, Sammy,’ replied his

father. ‘T’other Sunday I wos walkin’ up the road, wen who should I see,

a-standin’ at a chapel door, with a blue soup-plate in her hand, but

your mother-in-law! I werily believe there was change for a couple o’

suv’rins in it, then, Sammy, all in ha’pence; and as the people come

out, they rattled the pennies in it, till you’d ha’ thought that no

mortal plate as ever was baked, could ha’ stood the wear and tear. What

d’ye think it was all for?’

‘For another tea-drinkin’, perhaps,’ said Sam.

‘Not a bit on it,’ replied the father; ‘for the shepherd’s water-rate,

Sammy.’

‘The shepherd’s water-rate!’ said Sam.

‘Ay,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘there was three quarters owin’, and the

shepherd hadn’t paid a farden, not he--perhaps it might be on account

that the water warn’t o’ much use to him, for it’s wery little o’ that

tap he drinks, Sammy, wery; he knows a trick worth a good half-dozen of

that, he does. Hows’ever, it warn’t paid, and so they cuts the water

off. Down goes the shepherd to chapel, gives out as he’s a persecuted

saint, and says he hopes the heart of the turncock as cut the water off,

‘ll be softened, and turned in the right vay, but he rayther thinks he’s

booked for somethin’ uncomfortable. Upon this, the women calls a

meetin’, sings a hymn, wotes your mother-in-law into the chair,

wolunteers a collection next Sunday, and hands it all over to the

shepherd. And if he ain’t got enough out on ‘em, Sammy, to make him free

of the water company for life,’ said Mr. Weller, in conclusion, ‘I’m one

Dutchman, and you’re another, and that’s all about it.’

Mr. Weller smoked for some minutes in silence, and then resumed--

‘The worst o’ these here shepherds is, my boy, that they reg’larly turns

the heads of all the young ladies, about here. Lord bless their little

hearts, they thinks it’s all right, and don’t know no better; but

they’re the wictims o’ gammon, Samivel, they’re the wictims o’ gammon.’

‘I s’pose they are,’ said Sam.

‘Nothin’ else,’ said Mr. Weller, shaking his head gravely; ‘and wot

aggrawates me, Samivel, is to see ‘em a-wastin’ all their time and

labour in making clothes for copper-coloured people as don’t want ‘em,

and taking no notice of flesh-coloured Christians as do. If I’d my vay,

Samivel, I’d just stick some o’ these here lazy shepherds behind a heavy

wheelbarrow, and run ‘em up and down a fourteen-inch-wide plank all day.

That ‘ud shake the nonsense out of ‘em, if anythin’ vould.’

Mr. Weller, having delivered this gentle recipe with strong emphasis,

eked out by a variety of nods and contortions of the eye, emptied his

glass at a draught, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe, with native

dignity.

He was engaged in this operation, when a shrill voice was heard in the

passage.

‘Here’s your dear relation, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller; and Mrs. W. hurried

into the room.

‘Oh, you’ve come back, have you!’ said Mrs. Weller.

‘Yes, my dear,’ replied Mr. Weller, filling a fresh pipe.

‘Has Mr. Stiggins been back?’ said Mrs. Weller.

‘No, my dear, he hasn’t,’ replied Mr. Weller, lighting the pipe by the

ingenious process of holding to the bowl thereof, between the tongs, a

red-hot coal from the adjacent fire; and what’s more, my dear, I shall

manage to surwive it, if he don’t come back at all.’

‘Ugh, you wretch!’ said Mrs. Weller.

‘Thank’ee, my love,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Come, come, father,’ said Sam, ‘none o’ these little lovin’s afore

strangers. Here’s the reverend gen’l’m’n a-comin’ in now.’

At this announcement, Mrs. Weller hastily wiped off the tears which she

had just begun to force on; and Mr. W. drew his chair sullenly into the

chimney-corner.

Mr. Stiggins was easily prevailed on to take another glass of the hot

pine-apple rum-and-water, and a second, and a third, and then to refresh

himself with a slight supper, previous to beginning again. He sat on the

same side as Mr. Weller, senior; and every time he could contrive to do

so, unseen by his wife, that gentleman indicated to his son the hidden

emotions of his bosom, by shaking his fist over the deputy-shepherd’s

head; a process which afforded his son the most unmingled delight and

satisfaction, the more especially as Mr. Stiggins went on, quietly

drinking the hot pine-apple rum-and-water, wholly unconscious of what

was going forward.

The major part of the conversation was confined to Mrs. Weller and the

reverend Mr. Stiggins; and the topics principally descanted on, were the

virtues of the shepherd, the worthiness of his flock, and the high

crimes and misdemeanours of everybody beside--dissertations which the

elder Mr. Weller occasionally interrupted by half-suppressed references

to a gentleman of the name of Walker, and other running commentaries of

the same kind.

At length Mr. Stiggins, with several most indubitable symptoms of having

quite as much pine-apple rum-and-water about him as he could comfortably

accommodate, took his hat, and his leave; and Sam was, immediately

afterwards, shown to bed by his father. The respectable old gentleman

wrung his hand fervently, and seemed disposed to address some

observation to his son; but on Mrs. Weller advancing towards him, he

appeared to relinquish that intention, and abruptly bade him good-night.

Sam was up betimes next day, and having partaken of a hasty breakfast,

prepared to return to London. He had scarcely set foot without the

house, when his father stood before him.

‘Goin’, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Off at once,’ replied Sam.

‘I vish you could muffle that ‘ere Stiggins, and take him vith you,’

said Mr. Weller.

‘I am ashamed on you!’ said Sam reproachfully; ‘what do you let him show

his red nose in the Markis o’ Granby at all, for?’

Mr. Weller the elder fixed on his son an earnest look, and replied,

‘’Cause I’m a married man, Samivel, ‘cause I’m a married man. Ven you’re

a married man, Samivel, you’ll understand a good many things as you

don’t understand now; but vether it’s worth while goin’ through so much,

to learn so little, as the charity-boy said ven he got to the end of the

alphabet, is a matter o’ taste. I rayther think it isn’t.’

Well,’ said Sam, ‘good-bye.’

‘Tar, tar, Sammy,’ replied his father.

‘I’ve only got to say this here,’ said Sam, stopping short, ‘that if I

was the properiator o’ the Markis o’ Granby, and that ‘ere Stiggins came

and made toast in my bar, I’d--’

‘What?’ interposed Mr. Weller, with great anxiety. ‘What?’

‘Pison his rum-and-water,’ said Sam.

‘No!’ said Mr. Weller, shaking his son eagerly by the hand, ‘would you

raly, Sammy-would you, though?’

‘I would,’ said Sam. ‘I wouldn’t be too hard upon him at first. I’d drop

him in the water-butt, and put the lid on; and if I found he was

insensible to kindness, I’d try the other persvasion.’

The elder Mr. Weller bestowed a look of deep, unspeakable admiration on

his son, and, having once more grasped his hand, walked slowly away,

revolving in his mind the numerous reflections to which his advice had

given rise.

Sam looked after him, until he turned a corner of the road; and then set

forward on his walk to London. He meditated at first, on the probable

consequences of his own advice, and the likelihood of his father’s

adopting it. He dismissed the subject from his mind, however, with the

consolatory reflection that time alone would show; and this is the

reflection we would impress upon the reader.

CHAPTER XXVIII. A GOOD-HUMOURED CHRISTMAS CHAPTER, CONTAINING AN ACCOUNT

OF A WEDDING, AND SOME OTHER SPORTS BESIDE: WHICH ALTHOUGH IN THEIR WAY,

EVEN AS GOOD CUSTOMS AS MARRIAGE ITSELF, ARE NOT QUITE SO RELIGIOUSLY

KEPT UP, IN THESE DEGENERATE TIMES

As brisk as bees, if not altogether as light as fairies, did the four

Pickwickians assemble on the morning of the twenty-second day of

December, in the year of grace in which these, their faithfully-recorded

adventures, were undertaken and accomplished. Christmas was close at

hand, in all his bluff and hearty honesty; it was the season of

hospitality, merriment, and open-heartedness; the old year was

preparing, like an ancient philosopher, to call his friends around him,

and amidst the sound of feasting and revelry to pass gently and calmly

away. Gay and merry was the time; and right gay and merry were at least

four of the numerous hearts that were gladdened by its coming.

And numerous indeed are the hearts to which Christmas brings a brief

season of happiness and enjoyment. How many families, whose members have

been dispersed and scattered far and wide, in the restless struggles of

life, are then reunited, and meet once again in that happy state of

companionship and mutual goodwill, which is a source of such pure and

unalloyed delight; and one so incompatible with the cares and sorrows of

the world, that the religious belief of the most civilised nations, and

the rude traditions of the roughest savages, alike number it among the

first joys of a future condition of existence, provided for the blessed

and happy! How many old recollections, and how many dormant sympathies,

does Christmas time awaken!

We write these words now, many miles distant from the spot at which,

year after year, we met on that day, a merry and joyous circle. Many of

the hearts that throbbed so gaily then, have ceased to beat; many of the

looks that shone so brightly then, have ceased to glow; the hands we

grasped, have grown cold; the eyes we sought, have hid their lustre in

the grave; and yet the old house, the room, the merry voices and smiling

faces, the jest, the laugh, the most minute and trivial circumstances

connected with those happy meetings, crowd upon our mind at each

recurrence of the season, as if the last assemblage had been but

yesterday! Happy, happy Christmas, that can win us back to the delusions

of our childish days; that can recall to the old man the pleasures of

his youth; that can transport the sailor and the traveller, thousands of

miles away, back to his own fireside and his quiet home!

But we are so taken up and occupied with the good qualities of this

saint Christmas, that we are keeping Mr. Pickwick and his friends

waiting in the cold on the outside of the Muggleton coach, which they

have just attained, well wrapped up in great-coats, shawls, and

comforters. The portmanteaus and carpet-bags have been stowed away, and

Mr. Weller and the guard are endeavouring to insinuate into the fore-

boot a huge cod-fish several sizes too large for it--which is snugly

packed up, in a long brown basket, with a layer of straw over the top,

and which has been left to the last, in order that he may repose in

safety on the half-dozen barrels of real native oysters, all the

property of Mr. Pickwick, which have been arranged in regular order at

the bottom of the receptacle. The interest displayed in Mr. Pickwick’s

countenance is most intense, as Mr. Weller and the guard try to squeeze

the cod-fish into the boot, first head first, and then tail first, and

then top upward, and then bottom upward, and then side-ways, and then

long-ways, all of which artifices the implacable cod-fish sturdily

resists, until the guard accidentally hits him in the very middle of the

basket, whereupon he suddenly disappears into the boot, and with him,

the head and shoulders of the guard himself, who, not calculating upon

so sudden a cessation of the passive resistance of the cod-fish,

experiences a very unexpected shock, to the unsmotherable delight of all

the porters and bystanders. Upon this, Mr. Pickwick smiles with great

good-humour, and drawing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket, begs the

guard, as he picks himself out of the boot, to drink his health in a

glass of hot brandy-and-water; at which the guard smiles too, and

Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, all smile in company. The guard

and Mr. Weller disappear for five minutes, most probably to get the hot

brandy-and-water, for they smell very strongly of it, when they return,

the coachman mounts to the box, Mr. Weller jumps up behind, the

Pickwickians pull their coats round their legs and their shawls over

their noses, the helpers pull the horse-cloths off, the coachman shouts

out a cheery ‘All right,’ and away they go.

They have rumbled through the streets, and jolted over the stones, and

at length reach the wide and open country. The wheels skim over the hard

and frosty ground; and the horses, bursting into a canter at a smart

crack of the whip, step along the road as if the load behind them--

coach, passengers, cod-fish, oyster-barrels, and all--were but a feather

at their heels. They have descended a gentle slope, and enter upon a

level, as compact and dry as a solid block of marble, two miles long.

Another crack of the whip, and on they speed, at a smart gallop, the

horses tossing their heads and rattling the harness, as if in

exhilaration at the rapidity of the motion; while the coachman, holding

whip and reins in one hand, takes off his hat with the other, and

resting it on his knees, pulls out his handkerchief, and wipes his

forehead, partly because he has a habit of doing it, and partly because

it’s as well to show the passengers how cool he is, and what an easy

thing it is to drive four-in-hand, when you have had as much practice as

he has. Having done this very leisurely (otherwise the effect would be

materially impaired), he replaces his handkerchief, pulls on his hat,

adjusts his gloves, squares his elbows, cracks the whip again, and on

they speed, more merrily than before.

A few small houses, scattered on either side of the road, betoken the

entrance to some town or village. The lively notes of the guard’s key-

bugle vibrate in the clear cold air, and wake up the old gentleman

inside, who, carefully letting down the window-sash half-way, and

standing sentry over the air, takes a short peep out, and then carefully

pulling it up again, informs the other inside that they’re going to

change directly; on which the other inside wakes himself up, and

determines to postpone his next nap until after the stoppage. Again the

bugle sounds lustily forth, and rouses the cottager’s wife and children,

who peep out at the house door, and watch the coach till it turns the

corner, when they once more crouch round the blazing fire, and throw on

another log of wood against father comes home; while father himself, a

full mile off, has just exchanged a friendly nod with the coachman, and

turned round to take a good long stare at the vehicle as it whirls away.

And now the bugle plays a lively air as the coach rattles through the

ill-paved streets of a country town; and the coachman, undoing the

buckle which keeps his ribands together, prepares to throw them off the

moment he stops. Mr. Pickwick emerges from his coat collar, and looks

about him with great curiosity; perceiving which, the coachman informs

Mr. Pickwick of the name of the town, and tells him it was market-day

yesterday, both of which pieces of information Mr. Pickwick retails to

his fellow-passengers; whereupon they emerge from their coat collars

too, and look about them also. Mr. Winkle, who sits at the extreme edge,

with one leg dangling in the air, is nearly precipitated into the

street, as the coach twists round the sharp corner by the cheesemonger’s

shop, and turns into the market-place; and before Mr. Snodgrass, who

sits next to him, has recovered from his alarm, they pull up at the inn

yard where the fresh horses, with cloths on, are already waiting. The

coachman throws down the reins and gets down himself, and the other

outside passengers drop down also; except those who have no great

confidence in their ability to get up again; and they remain where they

are, and stamp their feet against the coach to warm them--looking, with

longing eyes and red noses, at the bright fire in the inn bar, and the

sprigs of holly with red berries which ornament the window.

But the guard has delivered at the corn-dealer’s shop, the brown paper

packet he took out of the little pouch which hangs over his shoulder by

a leathern strap; and has seen the horses carefully put to; and has

thrown on the pavement the saddle which was brought from London on the

coach roof; and has assisted in the conference between the coachman and

the hostler about the gray mare that hurt her off fore-leg last Tuesday;

and he and Mr. Weller are all right behind, and the coachman is all

right in front, and the old gentleman inside, who has kept the window

down full two inches all this time, has pulled it up again, and the

cloths are off, and they are all ready for starting, except the ‘two

stout gentlemen,’ whom the coachman inquires after with some impatience.

Hereupon the coachman, and the guard, and Sam Weller, and Mr. Winkle,

and Mr. Snodgrass, and all the hostlers, and every one of the idlers,

who are more in number than all the others put together, shout for the

missing gentlemen as loud as they can bawl. A distant response is heard

from the yard, and Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Tupman come running down it,

quite out of breath, for they have been having a glass of ale a-piece,

and Mr. Pickwick’s fingers are so cold that he has been full five

minutes before he could find the sixpence to pay for it. The coachman

shouts an admonitory ‘Now then, gen’l’m’n,’ the guard re-echoes it; the

old gentleman inside thinks it a very extraordinary thing that people

\_will \_get down when they know there isn’t time for it; Mr. Pickwick

struggles up on one side, Mr. Tupman on the other; Mr. Winkle cries ‘All

right’; and off they start. Shawls are pulled up, coat collars are

readjusted, the pavement ceases, the houses disappear; and they are once

again dashing along the open road, with the fresh clear air blowing in

their faces, and gladdening their very hearts within them.

Such was the progress of Mr. Pickwick and his friends by the Muggleton

Telegraph, on their way to Dingley Dell; and at three o’clock that

afternoon they all stood high and dry, safe and sound, hale and hearty,

upon the steps of the Blue Lion, having taken on the road quite enough

of ale and brandy, to enable them to bid defiance to the frost that was

binding up the earth in its iron fetters, and weaving its beautiful

network upon the trees and hedges. Mr. Pickwick was busily engaged in

counting the barrels of oysters and superintending the disinterment of

the cod-fish, when he felt himself gently pulled by the skirts of the

coat. Looking round, he discovered that the individual who resorted to

this mode of catching his attention was no other than Mr. Wardle’s

favourite page, better known to the readers of this unvarnished history,

by the distinguishing appellation of the fat boy.

‘Aha!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Aha!’ said the fat boy.

As he said it, he glanced from the cod-fish to the oyster-barrels, and

chuckled joyously. He was fatter than ever.

‘Well, you look rosy enough, my young friend,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I’ve been asleep, right in front of the taproom fire,’ replied the fat

boy, who had heated himself to the colour of a new chimney-pot, in the

course of an hour’s nap. ‘Master sent me over with the chay-cart, to

carry your luggage up to the house. He’d ha’ sent some saddle-horses,

but he thought you’d rather walk, being a cold day.’

‘Yes, yes,’ said Mr. Pickwick hastily, for he remembered how they had

travelled over nearly the same ground on a previous occasion. ‘Yes, we

would rather walk. Here, Sam!’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Help Mr. Wardle’s servant to put the packages into the cart, and then

ride on with him. We will walk forward at once.’

Having given this direction, and settled with the coachman, Mr. Pickwick

and his three friends struck into the footpath across the fields, and

walked briskly away, leaving Mr. Weller and the fat boy confronted

together for the first time. Sam looked at the fat boy with great

astonishment, but without saying a word; and began to stow the luggage

rapidly away in the cart, while the fat boy stood quietly by, and seemed

to think it a very interesting sort of thing to see Mr. Weller working

by himself.

‘There,’ said Sam, throwing in the last carpet-bag, ‘there they are!’

‘Yes,’ said the fat boy, in a very satisfied tone, ‘there they are.’

‘Vell, young twenty stun,’ said Sam, ‘you’re a nice specimen of a prize

boy, you are!’

Thank’ee,’ said the fat boy.

‘You ain’t got nothin’ on your mind as makes you fret yourself, have

you?’ inquired Sam.

‘Not as I knows on,’ replied the fat boy.

‘I should rayther ha’ thought, to look at you, that you was a-labourin’

under an unrequited attachment to some young ‘ooman,’ said Sam.

The fat boy shook his head.

‘Vell,’ said Sam, ‘I am glad to hear it. Do you ever drink anythin’?’

‘I likes eating better,’ replied the boy.

‘Ah,’ said Sam, ‘I should ha’ s’posed that; but what I mean is, should

you like a drop of anythin’ as’d warm you? but I s’pose you never was

cold, with all them elastic fixtures, was you?’

‘Sometimes,’ replied the boy; ‘and I likes a drop of something, when

it’s good.’

‘Oh, you do, do you?’ said Sam, ‘come this way, then!’

The Blue Lion tap was soon gained, and the fat boy swallowed a glass of

liquor without so much as winking--a feat which considerably advanced

him in Mr. Weller’s good opinion. Mr. Weller having transacted a similar

piece of business on his own account, they got into the cart.

‘Can you drive?’ said the fat boy.

‘I should rayther think so,’ replied Sam.

‘There, then,’ said the fat boy, putting the reins in his hand, and

pointing up a lane, ‘it’s as straight as you can go; you can’t miss it.’

With these words, the fat boy laid himself affectionately down by the

side of the cod-fish, and, placing an oyster-barrel under his head for a

pillow, fell asleep instantaneously.

‘Well,’ said Sam, ‘of all the cool boys ever I set my eyes on, this here

young gen’l’m’n is the coolest. Come, wake up, young dropsy!’

But as young dropsy evinced no symptoms of returning animation, Sam

Weller sat himself down in front of the cart, and starting the old horse

with a jerk of the rein, jogged steadily on, towards the Manor Farm.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pickwick and his friends having walked their blood into

active circulation, proceeded cheerfully on. The paths were hard; the

grass was crisp and frosty; the air had a fine, dry, bracing coldness;

and the rapid approach of the gray twilight (slate-coloured is a better

term in frosty weather) made them look forward with pleasant

anticipation to the comforts which awaited them at their hospitable

entertainer’s. It was the sort of afternoon that might induce a couple

of elderly gentlemen, in a lonely field, to take off their greatcoats

and play at leap-frog in pure lightness of heart and gaiety; and we

firmly believe that had Mr. Tupman at that moment proffered ‘a back,’

Mr. Pickwick would have accepted his offer with the utmost avidity.

However, Mr. Tupman did not volunteer any such accommodation, and the

friends walked on, conversing merrily. As they turned into a lane they

had to cross, the sound of many voices burst upon their ears; and before

they had even had time to form a guess to whom they belonged, they

walked into the very centre of the party who were expecting their

arrival--a fact which was first notified to the Pickwickians, by the

loud ‘Hurrah,’ which burst from old Wardle’s lips, when they appeared in

sight.

First, there was Wardle himself, looking, if that were possible, more

jolly than ever; then there were Bella and her faithful Trundle; and,

lastly, there were Emily and some eight or ten young ladies, who had all

come down to the wedding, which was to take place next day, and who were

in as happy and important a state as young ladies usually are, on such

momentous occasions; and they were, one and all, startling the fields

and lanes, far and wide, with their frolic and laughter.

The ceremony of introduction, under such circumstances, was very soon

performed, or we should rather say that the introduction was soon over,

without any ceremony at all. In two minutes thereafter, Mr. Pickwick was

joking with the young ladies who wouldn’t come over the stile while he

looked--or who, having pretty feet and unexceptionable ankles, preferred

standing on the top rail for five minutes or so, declaring that they

were too frightened to move--with as much ease and absence of reserve or

constraint, as if he had known them for life. It is worthy of remark,

too, that Mr. Snodgrass offered Emily far more assistance than the

absolute terrors of the stile (although it was full three feet high, and

had only a couple of stepping-stones) would seem to require; while one

black-eyed young lady in a very nice little pair of boots with fur round

the top, was observed to scream very loudly, when Mr. Winkle offered to

help her over.

All this was very snug and pleasant. And when the difficulties of the

stile were at last surmounted, and they once more entered on the open

field, old Wardle informed Mr. Pickwick how they had all been down in a

body to inspect the furniture and fittings-up of the house, which the

young couple were to tenant, after the Christmas holidays; at which

communication Bella and Trundle both coloured up, as red as the fat boy

after the taproom fire; and the young lady with the black eyes and the

fur round the boots, whispered something in Emily’s ear, and then

glanced archly at Mr. Snodgrass; to which Emily responded that she was a

foolish girl, but turned very red, notwithstanding; and Mr. Snodgrass,

who was as modest as all great geniuses usually are, felt the crimson

rising to the crown of his head, and devoutly wished, in the inmost

recesses of his own heart, that the young lady aforesaid, with her black

eyes, and her archness, and her boots with the fur round the top, were

all comfortably deposited in the adjacent county.

But if they were social and happy outside the house, what was the warmth

and cordiality of their reception when they reached the farm! The very

servants grinned with pleasure at sight of Mr. Pickwick; and Emma

bestowed a half-demure, half-impudent, and all-pretty look of

recognition, on Mr. Tupman, which was enough to make the statue of

Bonaparte in the passage, unfold his arms, and clasp her within them.

The old lady was seated with customary state in the front parlour, but

she was rather cross, and, by consequence, most particularly deaf. She

never went out herself, and like a great many other old ladies of the

same stamp, she was apt to consider it an act of domestic treason, if

anybody else took the liberty of doing what she couldn’t. So, bless her

old soul, she sat as upright as she could, in her great chair, and

looked as fierce as might be--and that was benevolent after all.

‘Mother,’ said Wardle, ‘Mr. Pickwick. You recollect him?’

‘Never mind,’ replied the old lady, with great dignity. ‘Don’t trouble

Mr. Pickwick about an old creetur like me. Nobody cares about me now,

and it’s very nat’ral they shouldn’t.’ Here the old lady tossed her

head, and smoothed down her lavender-coloured silk dress with trembling

hands.

‘Come, come, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I can’t let you cut an old

friend in this way. I have come down expressly to have a long talk, and

another rubber with you; and we’ll show these boys and girls how to

dance a minuet, before they’re eight-and-forty hours older.’

The old lady was rapidly giving way, but she did not like to do it all

at once; so she only said, ‘Ah! I can’t hear him!’

‘Nonsense, mother,’ said Wardle. ‘Come, come, don’t be cross, there’s a

good soul. Recollect Bella; come, you must keep her spirits up, poor

girl.’

The good old lady heard this, for her lip quivered as her son said it.

But age has its little infirmities of temper, and she was not quite

brought round yet. So, she smoothed down the lavender-coloured dress

again, and turning to Mr. Pickwick said, ‘Ah, Mr. Pickwick, young people

was very different, when I was a girl.’

‘No doubt of that, ma’am,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘and that’s the reason why

I would make much of the few that have any traces of the old stock’--and

saying this, Mr. Pickwick gently pulled Bella towards him, and bestowing

a kiss upon her forehead, bade her sit down on the little stool at her

grandmother’s feet. Whether the expression of her countenance, as it was

raised towards the old lady’s face, called up a thought of old times, or

whether the old lady was touched by Mr. Pickwick’s affectionate good-

nature, or whatever was the cause, she was fairly melted; so she threw

herself on her granddaughter’s neck, and all the little ill-humour

evaporated in a gush of silent tears.

A happy party they were, that night. Sedate and solemn were the score of

rubbers in which Mr. Pickwick and the old lady played together;

uproarious was the mirth of the round table. Long after the ladies had

retired, did the hot elder wine, well qualified with brandy and spice,

go round, and round, and round again; and sound was the sleep and

pleasant were the dreams that followed. It is a remarkable fact that

those of Mr. Snodgrass bore constant reference to Emily Wardle; and that

the principal figure in Mr. Winkle’s visions was a young lady with black

eyes, and arch smile, and a pair of remarkably nice boots with fur round

the tops.

Mr. Pickwick was awakened early in the morning, by a hum of voices and a

pattering of feet, sufficient to rouse even the fat boy from his heavy

slumbers. He sat up in bed and listened. The female servants and female

visitors were running constantly to and fro; and there were such

multitudinous demands for hot water, such repeated outcries for needles

and thread, and so many half-suppressed entreaties of ‘Oh, do come and

tie me, there’s a dear!’ that Mr. Pickwick in his innocence began to

imagine that something dreadful must have occurred--when he grew more

awake, and remembered the wedding. The occasion being an important one,

he dressed himself with peculiar care, and descended to the breakfast-

room.

There were all the female servants in a bran new uniform of pink muslin

gowns with white bows in their caps, running about the house in a state

of excitement and agitation which it would be impossible to describe.

The old lady was dressed out in a brocaded gown, which had not seen the

light for twenty years, saving and excepting such truant rays as had

stolen through the chinks in the box in which it had been laid by,

during the whole time. Mr. Trundle was in high feather and spirits, but

a little nervous withal. The hearty old landlord was trying to look very

cheerful and unconcerned, but failing signally in the attempt. All the

girls were in tears and white muslin, except a select two or three, who

were being honoured with a private view of the bride and bridesmaids,

upstairs. All the Pickwickians were in most blooming array; and there

was a terrific roaring on the grass in front of the house, occasioned by

all the men, boys, and hobbledehoys attached to the farm, each of whom

had got a white bow in his button-hole, and all of whom were cheering

with might and main; being incited thereto, and stimulated therein by

the precept and example of Mr. Samuel Weller, who had managed to become

mighty popular already, and was as much at home as if he had been born

on the land.

A wedding is a licensed subject to joke upon, but there really is no

great joke in the matter after all;--we speak merely of the ceremony,

and beg it to be distinctly understood that we indulge in no hidden

sarcasm upon a married life. Mixed up with the pleasure and joy of the

occasion, are the many regrets at quitting home, the tears of parting

between parent and child, the consciousness of leaving the dearest and

kindest friends of the happiest portion of human life, to encounter its

cares and troubles with others still untried and little known--natural

feelings which we would not render this chapter mournful by describing,

and which we should be still more unwilling to be supposed to ridicule.

Let us briefly say, then, that the ceremony was performed by the old

clergyman, in the parish church of Dingley Dell, and that Mr. Pickwick’s

name is attached to the register, still preserved in the vestry thereof;

that the young lady with the black eyes signed her name in a very

unsteady and tremulous manner; that Emily’s signature, as the other

bridesmaid, is nearly illegible; that it all went off in very admirable

style; that the young ladies generally thought it far less shocking than

they had expected; and that although the owner of the black eyes and the

arch smile informed Mr. Wardle that she was sure she could never submit

to anything so dreadful, we have the very best reasons for thinking she

was mistaken. To all this, we may add, that Mr. Pickwick was the first

who saluted the bride, and that in so doing he threw over her neck a

rich gold watch and chain, which no mortal eyes but the jeweller’s had

ever beheld before. Then, the old church bell rang as gaily as it could,

and they all returned to breakfast.

‘Vere does the mince-pies go, young opium-eater?’ said Mr. Weller to the

fat boy, as he assisted in laying out such articles of consumption as

had not been duly arranged on the previous night.

The fat boy pointed to the destination of the pies.

‘Wery good,’ said Sam, ‘stick a bit o’ Christmas in ‘em. T’other dish

opposite. There; now we look compact and comfortable, as the father said

ven he cut his little boy’s head off, to cure him o’ squintin’.’

As Mr. Weller made the comparison, he fell back a step or two, to give

full effect to it, and surveyed the preparations with the utmost

satisfaction.

‘Wardle,’ said Mr. Pickwick, almost as soon as they were all seated, ‘a

glass of wine in honour of this happy occasion!’

‘I shall be delighted, my boy,’ said Wardle. ‘Joe--damn that boy, he’s

gone to sleep.’

No, I ain’t, sir,’ replied the fat boy, starting up from a remote

corner, where, like the patron saint of fat boys--the immortal Horner--

he had been devouring a Christmas pie, though not with the coolness and

deliberation which characterised that young gentleman’s proceedings.

‘Fill Mr. Pickwick’s glass.’

‘Yes, sir.’

The fat boy filled Mr. Pickwick’s glass, and then retired behind his

master’s chair, from whence he watched the play of the knives and forks,

and the progress of the choice morsels from the dishes to the mouths of

the company, with a kind of dark and gloomy joy that was most

impressive.

‘God bless you, old fellow!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Same to you, my boy,’ replied Wardle; and they pledged each other,

heartily.

‘Mrs. Wardle,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘we old folks must have a glass of

wine together, in honour of this joyful event.’

The old lady was in a state of great grandeur just then, for she was

sitting at the top of the table in the brocaded gown, with her newly-

married granddaughter on one side, and Mr. Pickwick on the other, to do

the carving. Mr. Pickwick had not spoken in a very loud tone, but she

understood him at once, and drank off a full glass of wine to his long

life and happiness; after which the worthy old soul launched forth into

a minute and particular account of her own wedding, with a dissertation

on the fashion of wearing high-heeled shoes, and some particulars

concerning the life and adventures of the beautiful Lady Tollimglower,

deceased; at all of which the old lady herself laughed very heartily

indeed, and so did the young ladies too, for they were wondering among

themselves what on earth grandma was talking about. When they laughed,

the old lady laughed ten times more heartily, and said that these always

had been considered capital stories, which caused them all to laugh

again, and put the old lady into the very best of humours. Then the cake

was cut, and passed through the ring; the young ladies saved pieces to

put under their pillows to dream of their future husbands on; and a

great deal of blushing and merriment was thereby occasioned.

‘Mr. Miller,’ said Mr. Pickwick to his old acquaintance, the hard-headed

gentleman, ‘a glass of wine?’

‘With great satisfaction, Mr. Pickwick,’ replied the hard-headed

gentleman solemnly.

‘You’ll take me in?’ said the benevolent old clergyman.

‘And me,’ interposed his wife.

‘And me, and me,’ said a couple of poor relations at the bottom of the

table, who had eaten and drunk very heartily, and laughed at everything.

Mr. Pickwick expressed his heartfelt delight at every additional

suggestion; and his eyes beamed with hilarity and cheerfulness.

‘Ladies and gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly rising.

‘Hear, hear! Hear, hear! Hear, hear!’ cried Mr. Weller, in the

excitement of his feelings.

‘Call in all the servants,’ cried old Wardle, interposing to prevent the

public rebuke which Mr. Weller would otherwise most indubitably have

received from his master. ‘Give them a glass of wine each to drink the

toast in. Now, Pickwick.’

Amidst the silence of the company, the whispering of the women-servants,

and the awkward embarrassment of the men, Mr. Pickwick proceeded--

‘Ladies and gentlemen--no, I won’t say ladies and gentlemen, I’ll call

you my friends, my dear friends, if the ladies will allow me to take so

great a liberty--’

Here Mr. Pickwick was interrupted by immense applause from the ladies,

echoed by the gentlemen, during which the owner of the eyes was

distinctly heard to state that she could kiss that dear Mr. Pickwick.

Whereupon Mr. Winkle gallantly inquired if it couldn’t be done by

deputy: to which the young lady with the black eyes replied ‘Go away,’

and accompanied the request with a look which said as plainly as a look

could do, ‘if you can.’

‘My dear friends,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick, ‘I am going to propose the

health of the bride and bridegroom--God bless ‘em (cheers and tears). My

young friend, Trundle, I believe to be a very excellent and manly

fellow; and his wife I know to be a very amiable and lovely girl, well

qualified to transfer to another sphere of action the happiness which

for twenty years she has diffused around her, in her father’s house.

(Here, the fat boy burst forth into stentorian blubberings, and was led

forth by the coat collar, by Mr. Weller.) I wish,’ added Mr. Pickwick--

‘I wish I was young enough to be her sister’s husband (cheers), but,

failing that, I am happy to be old enough to be her father; for, being

so, I shall not be suspected of any latent designs when I say, that I

admire, esteem, and love them both (cheers and sobs). The bride’s

father, our good friend there, is a noble person, and I am proud to know

him (great uproar). He is a kind, excellent, independent-spirited, fine-

hearted, hospitable, liberal man (enthusiastic shouts from the poor

relations, at all the adjectives; and especially at the two last). That

his daughter may enjoy all the happiness, even he can desire; and that

he may derive from the contemplation of her felicity all the

gratification of heart and peace of mind which he so well deserves, is,

I am persuaded, our united wish. So, let us drink their healths, and

wish them prolonged life, and every blessing!’

Mr. Pickwick concluded amidst a whirlwind of applause; and once more

were the lungs of the supernumeraries, under Mr. Weller’s command,

brought into active and efficient operation. Mr. Wardle proposed Mr.

Pickwick; Mr. Pickwick proposed the old lady. Mr. Snodgrass proposed Mr.

Wardle; Mr. Wardle proposed Mr. Snodgrass. One of the poor relations

proposed Mr. Tupman, and the other poor relation proposed Mr. Winkle;

all was happiness and festivity, until the mysterious disappearance of

both the poor relations beneath the table, warned the party that it was

time to adjourn.

At dinner they met again, after a five-and-twenty mile walk, undertaken

by the males at Wardle’s recommendation, to get rid of the effects of

the wine at breakfast. The poor relations had kept in bed all day, with

the view of attaining the same happy consummation, but, as they had been

unsuccessful, they stopped there. Mr. Weller kept the domestics in a

state of perpetual hilarity; and the fat boy divided his time into small

alternate allotments of eating and sleeping.

The dinner was as hearty an affair as the breakfast, and was quite as

noisy, without the tears. Then came the dessert and some more toasts.

Then came the tea and coffee; and then, the ball.

The best sitting-room at Manor Farm was a good, long, dark-panelled room

with a high chimney-piece, and a capacious chimney, up which you could

have driven one of the new patent cabs, wheels and all. At the upper end

of the room, seated in a shady bower of holly and evergreens were the

two best fiddlers, and the only harp, in all Muggleton. In all sorts of

recesses, and on all kinds of brackets, stood massive old silver

candlesticks with four branches each. The carpet was up, the candles

burned bright, the fire blazed and crackled on the hearth, and merry

voices and light-hearted laughter rang through the room. If any of the

old English yeomen had turned into fairies when they died, it was just

the place in which they would have held their revels.

If anything could have added to the interest of this agreeable scene, it

would have been the remarkable fact of Mr. Pickwick’s appearing without

his gaiters, for the first time within the memory of his oldest friends.

‘You mean to dance?’ said Wardle.

‘Of course I do,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Don’t you see I am dressed for

the purpose?’ Mr. Pickwick called attention to his speckled silk

stockings, and smartly tied pumps.

‘\_You \_in silk stockings!’ exclaimed Mr. Tupman jocosely.

‘And why not, sir--why not?’ said Mr. Pickwick, turning warmly upon him.

‘Oh, of course there is no reason why you shouldn’t wear them,’

responded Mr. Tupman.

‘I imagine not, sir--I imagine not,’ said Mr. Pickwick, in a very

peremptory tone.

Mr. Tupman had contemplated a laugh, but he found it was a serious

matter; so he looked grave, and said they were a pretty pattern.

‘I hope they are,’ said Mr. Pickwick, fixing his eyes upon his friend.

‘You see nothing extraordinary in the stockings, \_as\_ stockings, I

trust, Sir?’

‘Certainly not. Oh, certainly not,’ replied Mr. Tupman. He walked away;

and Mr. Pickwick’s countenance resumed its customary benign expression.

‘We are all ready, I believe,’ said Mr. Pickwick, who was stationed with

the old lady at the top of the dance, and had already made four false

starts, in his excessive anxiety to commence.

‘Then begin at once,’ said Wardle. ‘Now!’

Up struck the two fiddles and the one harp, and off went Mr. Pickwick

into hands across, when there was a general clapping of hands, and a cry

of ‘Stop, stop!’

‘What’s the matter?’ said Mr. Pickwick, who was only brought to, by the

fiddles and harp desisting, and could have been stopped by no other

earthly power, if the house had been on fire.

‘Where’s Arabella Allen?’ cried a dozen voices.

‘And Winkle?’ added Mr. Tupman.

‘Here we are!’ exclaimed that gentleman, emerging with his pretty

companion from the corner; as he did so, it would have been hard to tell

which was the redder in the face, he or the young lady with the black

eyes.

‘What an extraordinary thing it is, Winkle,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rather

pettishly, ‘that you couldn’t have taken your place before.’

‘Not at all extraordinary,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a very expressive smile, as his eyes

rested on Arabella, ‘well, I don’t know that it \_was \_extraordinary,

either, after all.’

However, there was no time to think more about the matter, for the

fiddles and harp began in real earnest. Away went Mr. Pickwick--hands

across--down the middle to the very end of the room, and half-way up the

chimney, back again to the door--poussette everywhere--loud stamp on the

ground--ready for the next couple--off again--all the figure over once

more--another stamp to beat out the time--next couple, and the next, and

the next again--never was such going; at last, after they had reached

the bottom of the dance, and full fourteen couple after the old lady had

retired in an exhausted state, and the clergyman’s wife had been

substituted in her stead, did that gentleman, when there was no demand

whatever on his exertions, keep perpetually dancing in his place, to

keep time to the music, smiling on his partner all the while with a

blandness of demeanour which baffles all description.

Long before Mr. Pickwick was weary of dancing, the newly-married couple

had retired from the scene. There was a glorious supper downstairs,

notwithstanding, and a good long sitting after it; and when Mr. Pickwick

awoke, late the next morning, he had a confused recollection of having,

severally and confidentially, invited somewhere about five-and-forty

people to dine with him at the George and Vulture, the very first time

they came to London; which Mr. Pickwick rightly considered a pretty

certain indication of his having taken something besides exercise, on

the previous night.

‘And so your family has games in the kitchen to-night, my dear, has

they?’ inquired Sam of Emma.

‘Yes, Mr. Weller,’ replied Emma; ‘we always have on Christmas Eve.

Master wouldn’t neglect to keep it up on any account.’

‘Your master’s a wery pretty notion of keeping anythin’ up, my dear,’

said Mr. Weller; ‘I never see such a sensible sort of man as he is, or

such a reg’lar gen’l’m’n.’

Oh, that he is!’ said the fat boy, joining in the conversation; ‘don’t

he breed nice pork!’ The fat youth gave a semi-cannibalic leer at Mr.

Weller, as he thought of the roast legs and gravy.

‘Oh, you’ve woke up, at last, have you?’ said Sam.

The fat boy nodded.

‘I’ll tell you what it is, young boa-constructer,’ said Mr. Weller

impressively; ‘if you don’t sleep a little less, and exercise a little

more, wen you comes to be a man you’ll lay yourself open to the same

sort of personal inconwenience as was inflicted on the old gen’l’m’n as

wore the pigtail.’

‘What did they do to him?’ inquired the fat boy, in a faltering voice.

‘I’m a-going to tell you,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘he was one o’ the

largest patterns as was ever turned out--reg’lar fat man, as hadn’t

caught a glimpse of his own shoes for five-and-forty year.’

‘Lor!’ exclaimed Emma.

‘No, that he hadn’t, my dear,’ said Mr. Weller; ‘and if you’d put an

exact model of his own legs on the dinin’-table afore him, he wouldn’t

ha’ known ‘em. Well, he always walks to his office with a wery handsome

gold watch-chain hanging out, about a foot and a quarter, and a gold

watch in his fob pocket as was worth--I’m afraid to say how much, but as

much as a watch can be--a large, heavy, round manufacter, as stout for a

watch, as he was for a man, and with a big face in proportion. “You’d

better not carry that ‘ere watch,” says the old gen’l’m’n’s friends,

“you’ll be robbed on it,” says they. “Shall I?” says he. “Yes, you

will,” says they. “Well,” says he, “I should like to see the thief as

could get this here watch out, for I’m blessed if I ever can, it’s such

a tight fit,” says he, “and wenever I vants to know what’s o’clock, I’m

obliged to stare into the bakers’ shops,” he says. Well, then he laughs

as hearty as if he was a-goin’ to pieces, and out he walks agin with his

powdered head and pigtail, and rolls down the Strand with the chain

hangin’ out furder than ever, and the great round watch almost bustin’

through his gray kersey smalls. There warn’t a pickpocket in all London

as didn’t take a pull at that chain, but the chain ‘ud never break, and

the watch ‘ud never come out, so they soon got tired of dragging such a

heavy old gen’l’m’n along the pavement, and he’d go home and laugh till

the pigtail wibrated like the penderlum of a Dutch clock. At last, one

day the old gen’l’m’n was a-rollin’ along, and he sees a pickpocket as

he know’d by sight, a-coming up, arm in arm with a little boy with a

wery large head. “Here’s a game,” says the old gen’l’m’n to himself,

“they’re a-goin’ to have another try, but it won’t do!” So he begins a-

chucklin’ wery hearty, wen, all of a sudden, the little boy leaves hold

of the pickpocket’s arm, and rushes head foremost straight into the old

gen’l’m’n’s stomach, and for a moment doubles him right up with the

pain. “Murder!” says the old gen’l’m’n. “All right, Sir,” says the

pickpocket, a-wisperin’ in his ear. And wen he come straight agin, the

watch and chain was gone, and what’s worse than that, the old

gen’l’m’n’s digestion was all wrong ever afterwards, to the wery last

day of his life; so just you look about you, young feller, and take care

you don’t get too fat.’

As Mr. Weller concluded this moral tale, with which the fat boy appeared

much affected, they all three repaired to the large kitchen, in which

the family were by this time assembled, according to annual custom on

Christmas Eve, observed by old Wardle’s forefathers from time

immemorial.

From the centre of the ceiling of this kitchen, old Wardle had just

suspended, with his own hands, a huge branch of mistletoe, and this same

branch of mistletoe instantaneously gave rise to a scene of general and

most delightful struggling and confusion; in the midst of which, Mr.

Pickwick, with a gallantry that would have done honour to a descendant

of Lady Tollimglower herself, took the old lady by the hand, led her

beneath the mystic branch, and saluted her in all courtesy and decorum.

The old lady submitted to this piece of practical politeness with all

the dignity which befitted so important and serious a solemnity, but the

younger ladies, not being so thoroughly imbued with a superstitious

veneration for the custom, or imagining that the value of a salute is

very much enhanced if it cost a little trouble to obtain it, screamed

and struggled, and ran into corners, and threatened and remonstrated,

and did everything but leave the room, until some of the less

adventurous gentlemen were on the point of desisting, when they all at

once found it useless to resist any longer, and submitted to be kissed

with a good grace. Mr. Winkle kissed the young lady with the black eyes,

and Mr. Snodgrass kissed Emily; and Mr. Weller, not being particular

about the form of being under the mistletoe, kissed Emma and the other

female servants, just as he caught them. As to the poor relations, they

kissed everybody, not even excepting the plainer portions of the young

lady visitors, who, in their excessive confusion, ran right under the

mistletoe, as soon as it was hung up, without knowing it! Wardle stood

with his back to the fire, surveying the whole scene, with the utmost

satisfaction; and the fat boy took the opportunity of appropriating to

his own use, and summarily devouring, a particularly fine mince-pie,

that had been carefully put by, for somebody else.

Now, the screaming had subsided, and faces were in a glow, and curls in

a tangle, and Mr. Pickwick, after kissing the old lady as before

mentioned, was standing under the mistletoe, looking with a very pleased

countenance on all that was passing around him, when the young lady with

the black eyes, after a little whispering with the other young ladies,

made a sudden dart forward, and, putting her arm round Mr. Pickwick’s

neck, saluted him affectionately on the left cheek; and before Mr.

Pickwick distinctly knew what was the matter, he was surrounded by the

whole body, and kissed by every one of them.

It was a pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick in the centre of the group,

now pulled this way, and then that, and first kissed on the chin, and

then on the nose, and then on the spectacles, and to hear the peals of

laughter which were raised on every side; but it was a still more

pleasant thing to see Mr. Pickwick, blinded shortly afterwards with a

silk handkerchief, falling up against the wall, and scrambling into

corners, and going through all the mysteries of blind-man’s buff, with

the utmost relish for the game, until at last he caught one of the poor

relations, and then had to evade the blind-man himself, which he did

with a nimbleness and agility that elicited the admiration and applause

of all beholders. The poor relations caught the people who they thought

would like it, and, when the game flagged, got caught themselves. When

they all tired of blind-man’s buff, there was a great game at snap-

dragon, and when fingers enough were burned with that, and all the

raisins were gone, they sat down by the huge fire of blazing logs to a

substantial supper, and a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than

an ordinary wash-house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and

bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly

irresistible.

‘This,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking round him, ‘this is, indeed,

comfort.’ ‘Our invariable custom,’ replied Mr. Wardle. ‘Everybody sits

down with us on Christmas Eve, as you see them now--servants and all;

and here we wait, until the clock strikes twelve, to usher Christmas in,

and beguile the time with forfeits and old stories. Trundle, my boy,

rake up the fire.’

Up flew the bright sparks in myriads as the logs were stirred. The deep

red blaze sent forth a rich glow, that penetrated into the farthest

corner of the room, and cast its cheerful tint on every face.

‘Come,’ said Wardle, ‘a song--a Christmas song! I’ll give you one, in

default of a better.’

‘Bravo!’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Fill up,’ cried Wardle. ‘It will be two hours, good, before you see the

bottom of the bowl through the deep rich colour of the wassail; fill up

all round, and now for the song.’

Thus saying, the merry old gentleman, in a good, round, sturdy voice,

commenced without more ado--

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

‘I care not for Spring; on his fickle wing Let the blossoms and buds be

borne; He woos them amain with his treacherous rain, And he scatters

them ere the morn. An inconstant elf, he knows not himself, Nor his own

changing mind an hour, He’ll smile in your face, and, with wry grimace,

He’ll wither your youngest flower.

‘Let the Summer sun to his bright home run, He shall never be sought by

me; When he’s dimmed by a cloud I can laugh aloud And care not how sulky

he be! For his darling child is the madness wild That sports in fierce

fever’s train; And when love is too strong, it don’t last long, As many

have found to their pain.

‘A mild harvest night, by the tranquil light Of the modest and gentle

moon, Has a far sweeter sheen for me, I ween, Than the broad and

unblushing noon. But every leaf awakens my grief, As it lieth beneath

the tree; So let Autumn air be never so fair, It by no means agrees with

me.

‘But my song I troll out, for \_Christmas \_Stout, The hearty, the true,

and the bold; A bumper I drain, and with might and main Give three

cheers for this Christmas old! We’ll usher him in with a merry din That

shall gladden his joyous heart, And we’ll keep him up, while there’s

bite or sup, And in fellowship good, we’ll part. ‘In his fine honest

pride, he scorns to hide One jot of his hard-weather scars; They’re no

disgrace, for there’s much the same trace On the cheeks of our bravest

tars. Then again I sing till the roof doth ring And it echoes from wall

to wall--To the stout old wight, fair welcome to-night, As the King of

the Seasons all!’

This song was tumultuously applauded--for friends and dependents make a

capital audience--and the poor relations, especially, were in perfect

ecstasies of rapture. Again was the fire replenished, and again went the

wassail round.

‘How it snows!’ said one of the men, in a low tone.

‘Snows, does it?’ said Wardle.

‘Rough, cold night, Sir,’ replied the man; ‘and there’s a wind got up,

that drifts it across the fields, in a thick white cloud.’

‘What does Jem say?’ inquired the old lady. ‘There ain’t anything the

matter, is there?’

‘No, no, mother,’ replied Wardle; ‘he says there’s a snowdrift, and a

wind that’s piercing cold. I should know that, by the way it rumbles in

the chimney.’

‘Ah!’ said the old lady, ‘there was just such a wind, and just such a

fall of snow, a good many years back, I recollect--just five years

before your poor father died. It was a Christmas Eve, too; and I

remember that on that very night he told us the story about the goblins

that carried away old Gabriel Grub.’

‘The story about what?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, nothing, nothing,’ replied Wardle. ‘About an old sexton, that the

good people down here suppose to have been carried away by goblins.’

‘Suppose!’ ejaculated the old lady. ‘Is there anybody hardy enough to

disbelieve it? Suppose! Haven’t you heard ever since you were a child,

that he \_was \_carried away by the goblins, and don’t you know he was?’

‘Very well, mother, he was, if you like,’ said Wardle laughing. ‘He

\_was\_ carried away by goblins, Pickwick; and there’s an end of the

matter.’

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘not an end of it, I assure you; for I must

hear how, and why, and all about it.’

Wardle smiled, as every head was bent forward to hear, and filling out

the wassail with no stinted hand, nodded a health to Mr. Pickwick, and

began as follows--

But bless our editorial heart, what a long chapter we have been betrayed

into! We had quite forgotten all such petty restrictions as chapters, we

solemnly declare. So here goes, to give the goblin a fair start in a new

one. A clear stage and no favour for the goblins, ladies and gentlemen,

if you please.

CHAPTER XXIX. THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

‘In an old abbey town, down in this part of the country, a long, long

while ago--so long, that the story must be a true one, because our

great-grandfathers implicitly believed it--there officiated as sexton

and grave-digger in the churchyard, one Gabriel Grub. It by no means

follows that because a man is a sexton, and constantly surrounded by the

emblems of mortality, therefore he should be a morose and melancholy

man; your undertakers are the merriest fellows in the world; and I once

had the honour of being on intimate terms with a mute, who in private

life, and off duty, was as comical and jocose a little fellow as ever

chirped out a devil-may-care song, without a hitch in his memory, or

drained off a good stiff glass without stopping for breath. But

notwithstanding these precedents to the contrary, Gabriel Grub was an

ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow--a morose and lonely man,

who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle which

fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket--and who eyed each merry

face, as it passed him by, with such a deep scowl of malice and ill-

humour, as it was difficult to meet without feeling something the worse

for.

‘A little before twilight, one Christmas Eve, Gabriel shouldered his

spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself towards the old

churchyard; for he had got a grave to finish by next morning, and,

feeling very low, he thought it might raise his spirits, perhaps, if he

went on with his work at once. As he went his way, up the ancient

street, he saw the cheerful light of the blazing fires gleam through the

old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts of those

who were assembled around them; he marked the bustling preparations for

next day’s cheer, and smelled the numerous savoury odours consequent

thereupon, as they steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All

this was gall and wormwood to the heart of Gabriel Grub; and when groups

of children bounded out of the houses, tripped across the road, and were

met, before they could knock at the opposite door, by half a dozen

curly-headed little rascals who crowded round them as they flocked

upstairs to spend the evening in their Christmas games, Gabriel smiled

grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he

thought of measles, scarlet fever, thrush, whooping-cough, and a good

many other sources of consolation besides.

‘In this happy frame of mind, Gabriel strode along, returning a short,

sullen growl to the good-humoured greetings of such of his neighbours as

now and then passed him, until he turned into the dark lane which led to

the churchyard. Now, Gabriel had been looking forward to reaching the

dark lane, because it was, generally speaking, a nice, gloomy, mournful

place, into which the townspeople did not much care to go, except in

broad daylight, and when the sun was shining; consequently, he was not a

little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song

about a merry Christmas, in this very sanctuary which had been called

Coffin Lane ever since the days of the old abbey, and the time of the

shaven-headed monks. As Gabriel walked on, and the voice drew nearer, he

found it proceeded from a small boy, who was hurrying along, to join one

of the little parties in the old street, and who, partly to keep himself

company, and partly to prepare himself for the occasion, was shouting

out the song at the highest pitch of his lungs. So Gabriel waited until

the boy came up, and then dodged him into a corner, and rapped him over

the head with his lantern five or six times, just to teach him to

modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away with his hand to his

head, singing quite a different sort of tune, Gabriel Grub chuckled very

heartily to himself, and entered the churchyard, locking the gate behind

him.

‘He took off his coat, set down his lantern, and getting into the

unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so with right good-will.

But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no very easy

matter to break it up, and shovel it out; and although there was a moon,

it was a very young one, and shed little light upon the grave, which was

in the shadow of the church. At any other time, these obstacles would

have made Gabriel Grub very moody and miserable, but he was so well

pleased with having stopped the small boy’s singing, that he took little

heed of the scanty progress he had made, and looked down into the grave,

when he had finished work for the night, with grim satisfaction,

murmuring as he gathered up his things--

Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one, A few feet of cold

earth, when life is done; A stone at the head, a stone at the feet, A

rich, juicy meal for the worms to eat; Rank grass overhead, and damp

clay around, Brave lodgings for one, these, in holy ground!

‘“Ho! ho!” laughed Gabriel Grub, as he sat himself down on a flat

tombstone which was a favourite resting-place of his, and drew forth his

wicker bottle. “A coffin at Christmas! A Christmas box! Ho! ho! ho!”

‘“Ho! ho! ho!” repeated a voice which sounded close behind him.

‘Gabriel paused, in some alarm, in the act of raising the wicker bottle

to his lips, and looked round. The bottom of the oldest grave about him

was not more still and quiet than the churchyard in the pale moonlight.

The cold hoar frost glistened on the tombstones, and sparkled like rows

of gems, among the stone carvings of the old church. The snow lay hard

and crisp upon the ground; and spread over the thickly-strewn mounds of

earth, so white and smooth a cover that it seemed as if corpses lay

there, hidden only by their winding sheets. Not the faintest rustle

broke the profound tranquillity of the solemn scene. Sound itself

appeared to be frozen up, all was so cold and still.

‘“It was the echoes,” said Gabriel Grub, raising the bottle to his lips

again.

‘“It was \_not\_,” said a deep voice.

‘Gabriel started up, and stood rooted to the spot with astonishment and

terror; for his eyes rested on a form that made his blood run cold.

‘Seated on an upright tombstone, close to him, was a strange, unearthly

figure, whom Gabriel felt at once, was no being of this world. His long,

fantastic legs which might have reached the ground, were cocked up, and

crossed after a quaint, fantastic fashion; his sinewy arms were bare;

and his hands rested on his knees. On his short, round body, he wore a

close covering, ornamented with small slashes; a short cloak dangled at

his back; the collar was cut into curious peaks, which served the goblin

in lieu of ruff or neckerchief; and his shoes curled up at his toes into

long points. On his head, he wore a broad-brimmed sugar-loaf hat,

garnished with a single feather. The hat was covered with the white

frost; and the goblin looked as if he had sat on the same tombstone very

comfortably, for two or three hundred years. He was sitting perfectly

still; his tongue was put out, as if in derision; and he was grinning at

Gabriel Grub with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

‘“It was \_not \_the echoes,” said the goblin.

‘Gabriel Grub was paralysed, and could make no reply.

‘“What do you do here on Christmas Eve?” said the goblin sternly.

‘“I came to dig a grave, Sir,” stammered Gabriel Grub.

‘“What man wanders among graves and churchyards on such a night as

this?” cried the goblin.

‘“Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!” screamed a wild chorus of voices that

seemed to fill the churchyard. Gabriel looked fearfully round--nothing

was to be seen.

‘“What have you got in that bottle?” said the goblin.

‘“Hollands, sir,” replied the sexton, trembling more than ever; for he

had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought that perhaps his

questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

‘“Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard, on such a night as

this?” said the goblin.

‘“Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!” exclaimed the wild voices again.

‘The goblin leered maliciously at the terrified sexton, and then raising

his voice, exclaimed--

‘“And who, then, is our fair and lawful prize?”

‘To this inquiry the invisible chorus replied, in a strain that sounded

like the voices of many choristers singing to the mighty swell of the

old church organ--a strain that seemed borne to the sexton’s ears upon a

wild wind, and to die away as it passed onward; but the burden of the

reply was still the same, “Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!”

‘The goblin grinned a broader grin than before, as he said, “Well,

Gabriel, what do you say to this?”

‘The sexton gasped for breath.

‘“What do you think of this, Gabriel?” said the goblin, kicking up his

feet in the air on either side of the tombstone, and looking at the

turned-up points with as much complacency as if he had been

contemplating the most fashionable pair of Wellingtons in all Bond

Street.

‘“It’s--it’s--very curious, Sir,” replied the sexton, half dead with

fright; “very curious, and very pretty, but I think I’ll go back and

finish my work, Sir, if you please.”

‘“Work!” said the goblin, “what work?”

‘“The grave, Sir; making the grave,” stammered the sexton.

‘“Oh, the grave, eh?” said the goblin; “who makes graves at a time when

all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?”

‘Again the mysterious voices replied, “Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!”

‘“I am afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,” said the goblin, thrusting

his tongue farther into his cheek than ever--and a most astonishing

tongue it was--“I’m afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,” said the

goblin.

‘“Under favour, Sir,” replied the horror-stricken sexton, “I don’t think

they can, Sir; they don’t know me, Sir; I don’t think the gentlemen have

ever seen me, Sir.”

‘“Oh, yes, they have,” replied the goblin; “we know the man with the

sulky face and grim scowl, that came down the street to-night, throwing

his evil looks at the children, and grasping his burying-spade the

tighter. We know the man who struck the boy in the envious malice of his

heart, because the boy could be merry, and he could not. We know him, we

know him.”

‘Here, the goblin gave a loud, shrill laugh, which the echoes returned

twentyfold; and throwing his legs up in the air, stood upon his head, or

rather upon the very point of his sugar-loaf hat, on the narrow edge of

the tombstone, whence he threw a Somerset with extraordinary agility,

right to the sexton’s feet, at which he planted himself in the attitude

in which tailors generally sit upon the shop-board.

‘“I--I--am afraid I must leave you, Sir,” said the sexton, making an

effort to move.

‘“Leave us!” said the goblin, “Gabriel Grub going to leave us. Ho! ho!

ho!”

‘As the goblin laughed, the sexton observed, for one instant, a

brilliant illumination within the windows of the church, as if the whole

building were lighted up; it disappeared, the organ pealed forth a

lively air, and whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart of the

first one, poured into the churchyard, and began playing at leap-frog

with the tombstones, never stopping for an instant to take breath, but

“overing” the highest among them, one after the other, with the most

marvellous dexterity. The first goblin was a most astonishing leaper,

and none of the others could come near him; even in the extremity of his

terror the sexton could not help observing, that while his friends were

content to leap over the common-sized gravestones, the first one took

the family vaults, iron railings and all, with as much ease as if they

had been so many street-posts.

‘At last the game reached to a most exciting pitch; the organ played

quicker and quicker, and the goblins leaped faster and faster, coiling

themselves up, rolling head over heels upon the ground, and bounding

over the tombstones like footballs. The sexton’s brain whirled round

with the rapidity of the motion he beheld, and his legs reeled beneath

him, as the spirits flew before his eyes; when the goblin king, suddenly

darting towards him, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him

through the earth.

‘When Gabriel Grub had had time to fetch his breath, which the rapidity

of his descent had for the moment taken away, he found himself in what

appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of

goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat,

was stationed his friend of the churchyard; and close behind him stood

Gabriel Grub himself, without power of motion.

‘“Cold to-night,” said the king of the goblins, “very cold. A glass of

something warm here!”

‘At this command, half a dozen officious goblins, with a perpetual smile

upon their faces, whom Gabriel Grub imagined to be courtiers, on that

account, hastily disappeared, and presently returned with a goblet of

liquid fire, which they presented to the king.

‘“Ah!” cried the goblin, whose cheeks and throat were transparent, as he

tossed down the flame, “this warms one, indeed! Bring a bumper of the

same, for Mr. Grub.”

‘It was in vain for the unfortunate sexton to protest that he was not in

the habit of taking anything warm at night; one of the goblins held him

while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat; the whole

assembly screeched with laughter, as he coughed and choked, and wiped

away the tears which gushed plentifully from his eyes, after swallowing

the burning draught.

‘“And now,” said the king, fantastically poking the taper corner of his

sugar-loaf hat into the sexton’s eye, and thereby occasioning him the

most exquisite pain; “and now, show the man of misery and gloom, a few

of the pictures from our own great storehouse!”

‘As the goblin said this, a thick cloud which obscured the remoter end

of the cavern rolled gradually away, and disclosed, apparently at a

great distance, a small and scantily furnished, but neat and clean

apartment. A crowd of little children were gathered round a bright fire,

clinging to their mother’s gown, and gambolling around her chair. The

mother occasionally rose, and drew aside the window-curtain, as if to

look for some expected object; a frugal meal was ready spread upon the

table; and an elbow chair was placed near the fire. A knock was heard at

the door; the mother opened it, and the children crowded round her, and

clapped their hands for joy, as their father entered. He was wet and

weary, and shook the snow from his garments, as the children crowded

round him, and seizing his cloak, hat, stick, and gloves, with busy

zeal, ran with them from the room. Then, as he sat down to his meal

before the fire, the children climbed about his knee, and the mother sat

by his side, and all seemed happiness and comfort.

‘But a change came upon the view, almost imperceptibly. The scene was

altered to a small bedroom, where the fairest and youngest child lay

dying; the roses had fled from his cheek, and the light from his eye;

and even as the sexton looked upon him with an interest he had never

felt or known before, he died. His young brothers and sisters crowded

round his little bed, and seized his tiny hand, so cold and heavy; but

they shrank back from its touch, and looked with awe on his infant face;

for calm and tranquil as it was, and sleeping in rest and peace as the

beautiful child seemed to be, they saw that he was dead, and they knew

that he was an angel looking down upon, and blessing them, from a bright

and happy Heaven.

‘Again the light cloud passed across the picture, and again the subject

changed. The father and mother were old and helpless now, and the number

of those about them was diminished more than half; but content and

cheerfulness sat on every face, and beamed in every eye, as they crowded

round the fireside, and told and listened to old stories of earlier and

bygone days. Slowly and peacefully, the father sank into the grave, and,

soon after, the sharer of all his cares and troubles followed him to a

place of rest. The few who yet survived them, kneeled by their tomb, and

watered the green turf which covered it with their tears; then rose, and

turned away, sadly and mournfully, but not with bitter cries, or

despairing lamentations, for they knew that they should one day meet

again; and once more they mixed with the busy world, and their content

and cheerfulness were restored. The cloud settled upon the picture, and

concealed it from the sexton’s view.

‘“What do you think of \_that\_?” said the goblin, turning his large face

towards Gabriel Grub.

‘Gabriel murmured out something about its being very pretty, and looked

somewhat ashamed, as the goblin bent his fiery eyes upon him.

‘“You a miserable man!” said the goblin, in a tone of excessive

contempt. “You!” He appeared disposed to add more, but indignation

choked his utterance, so he lifted up one of his very pliable legs, and,

flourishing it above his head a little, to insure his aim, administered

a good sound kick to Gabriel Grub; immediately after which, all the

goblins in waiting crowded round the wretched sexton, and kicked him

without mercy, according to the established and invariable custom of

courtiers upon earth, who kick whom royalty kicks, and hug whom royalty

hugs.

‘“Show him some more!” said the king of the goblins.

‘At these words, the cloud was dispelled, and a rich and beautiful

landscape was disclosed to view--there is just such another, to this

day, within half a mile of the old abbey town. The sun shone from out

the clear blue sky, the water sparkled beneath his rays, and the trees

looked greener, and the flowers more gay, beneath its cheering

influence. The water rippled on with a pleasant sound, the trees rustled

in the light wind that murmured among their leaves, the birds sang upon

the boughs, and the lark carolled on high her welcome to the morning.

Yes, it was morning; the bright, balmy morning of summer; the minutest

leaf, the smallest blade of grass, was instinct with life. The ant crept

forth to her daily toil, the butterfly fluttered and basked in the warm

rays of the sun; myriads of insects spread their transparent wings, and

revelled in their brief but happy existence. Man walked forth, elated

with the scene; and all was brightness and splendour.

’”\_You \_a miserable man!” said the king of the goblins, in a more

contemptuous tone than before. And again the king of the goblins gave

his leg a flourish; again it descended on the shoulders of the sexton;

and again the attendant goblins imitated the example of their chief.

‘Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to

Gabriel Grub, who, although his shoulders smarted with pain from the

frequent applications of the goblins’ feet thereunto, looked on with an

interest that nothing could diminish. He saw that men who worked hard,

and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and

happy; and that to the most ignorant, the sweet face of Nature was a

never-failing source of cheerfulness and joy. He saw those who had been

delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations,

and superior to suffering, that would have crushed many of a rougher

grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of

happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and

most fragile of all God’s creatures, were the oftenest superior to

sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they

bore, in their own hearts, an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and

devotion. Above all, he saw that men like himself, who snarled at the

mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair

surface of the earth; and setting all the good of the world against the

evil, he came to the conclusion that it was a very decent and

respectable sort of world after all. No sooner had he formed it, than

the cloud which had closed over the last picture, seemed to settle on

his senses, and lull him to repose. One by one, the goblins faded from

his sight; and, as the last one disappeared, he sank to sleep.

‘The day had broken when Gabriel Grub awoke, and found himself lying at

full length on the flat gravestone in the churchyard, with the wicker

bottle lying empty by his side, and his coat, spade, and lantern, all

well whitened by the last night’s frost, scattered on the ground. The

stone on which he had first seen the goblin seated, stood bolt upright

before him, and the grave at which he had worked, the night before, was

not far off. At first, he began to doubt the reality of his adventures,

but the acute pain in his shoulders when he attempted to rise, assured

him that the kicking of the goblins was certainly not ideal. He was

staggered again, by observing no traces of footsteps in the snow on

which the goblins had played at leap-frog with the gravestones, but he

speedily accounted for this circumstance when he remembered that, being

spirits, they would leave no visible impression behind them. So, Gabriel

Grub got on his feet as well as he could, for the pain in his back; and,

brushing the frost off his coat, put it on, and turned his face towards

the town.

‘But he was an altered man, and he could not bear the thought of

returning to a place where his repentance would be scoffed at, and his

reformation disbelieved. He hesitated for a few moments; and then turned

away to wander where he might, and seek his bread elsewhere.

‘The lantern, the spade, and the wicker bottle were found, that day, in

the churchyard. There were a great many speculations about the sexton’s

fate, at first, but it was speedily determined that he had been carried

away by the goblins; and there were not wanting some very credible

witnesses who had distinctly seen him whisked through the air on the

back of a chestnut horse blind of one eye, with the hind-quarters of a

lion, and the tail of a bear. At length all this was devoutly believed;

and the new sexton used to exhibit to the curious, for a trifling

emolument, a good-sized piece of the church weathercock which had been

accidentally kicked off by the aforesaid horse in his aerial flight, and

picked up by himself in the churchyard, a year or two afterwards.

‘Unfortunately, these stories were somewhat disturbed by the unlooked-

for reappearance of Gabriel Grub himself, some ten years afterwards, a

ragged, contented, rheumatic old man. He told his story to the

clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in course of time it began to be

received as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to

this very day. The believers in the weathercock tale, having misplaced

their confidence once, were not easily prevailed upon to part with it

again, so they looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders,

touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub

having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat

tombstone; and they affected to explain what he supposed he had

witnessed in the goblin’s cavern, by saying that he had seen the world,

and grown wiser. But this opinion, which was by no means a popular one

at any time, gradually died off; and be the matter how it may, as

Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this

story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one--and that is,

that if a man turn sulky and drink by himself at Christmas time, he may

make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it: let the spirits be

never so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as

those which Gabriel Grub saw in the goblin’s cavern.’

CHAPTER XXX. HOW THE PICKWICKIANS MADE AND CULTIVATED THE ACQUAINTANCE

OF A COUPLE OF NICE YOUNG MEN BELONGING TO ONE OF THE LIBERAL

PROFESSIONS; HOW THEY DISPORTED THEMSELVES ON THE ICE; AND HOW THEIR

VISIT CAME TO A CONCLUSION

Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as that favoured servitor entered his

bed-chamber, with his warm water, on the morning of Christmas Day,

‘still frosty?’

‘Water in the wash-hand basin’s a mask o’ ice, Sir,’ responded Sam.

‘Severe weather, Sam,’ observed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar bear said to

himself, ven he was practising his skating,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘I shall be down in a quarter of an hour, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

untying his nightcap.

‘Wery good, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘There’s a couple o’ sawbones

downstairs.’

‘A couple of what!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, sitting up in bed.

‘A couple o’ sawbones,’ said Sam.

‘What’s a sawbones?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, not quite certain whether it

was a live animal, or something to eat.

‘What! Don’t you know what a sawbones is, sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller. ‘I

thought everybody know’d as a sawbones was a surgeon.’

‘Oh, a surgeon, eh?’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

‘Just that, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘These here ones as is below, though,

ain’t reg’lar thoroughbred sawbones; they’re only in trainin’.’

In other words they’re medical students, I suppose?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam Weller nodded assent.

‘I am glad of it,’ said Mr. Pickwick, casting his nightcap energetically

on the counterpane. ‘They are fine fellows--very fine fellows; with

judgments matured by observation and reflection; and tastes refined by

reading and study. I am very glad of it.’

‘They’re a-smokin’ cigars by the kitchen fire,’ said Sam.

‘Ah!’ observed Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his hands, ‘overflowing with kindly

feelings and animal spirits. Just what I like to see.’

And one on ‘em,’ said Sam, not noticing his master’s interruption, ‘one

on ‘em’s got his legs on the table, and is a-drinking brandy neat, vile

the t’other one--him in the barnacles--has got a barrel o’ oysters

atween his knees, which he’s a-openin’ like steam, and as fast as he

eats ‘em, he takes a aim vith the shells at young dropsy, who’s a

sittin’ down fast asleep, in the chimbley corner.’

‘Eccentricities of genius, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘You may retire.’

Sam did retire accordingly. Mr. Pickwick at the expiration of the

quarter of an hour, went down to breakfast.

‘Here he is at last!’ said old Mr. Wardle. ‘Pickwick, this is Miss

Allen’s brother, Mr. Benjamin Allen. Ben we call him, and so may you, if

you like. This gentleman is his very particular friend, Mr.--’

‘Mr. Bob Sawyer,’ interposed Mr. Benjamin Allen; whereupon Mr. Bob

Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen laughed in concert.

Mr. Pickwick bowed to Bob Sawyer, and Bob Sawyer bowed to Mr. Pickwick.

Bob and his very particular friend then applied themselves most

assiduously to the eatables before them; and Mr. Pickwick had an

opportunity of glancing at them both.

Mr. Benjamin Allen was a coarse, stout, thick-set young man, with black

hair cut rather short, and a white face cut rather long. He was

embellished with spectacles, and wore a white neckerchief. Below his

single-breasted black surtout, which was buttoned up to his chin,

appeared the usual number of pepper-and-salt coloured legs, terminating

in a pair of imperfectly polished boots. Although his coat was short in

the sleeves, it disclosed no vestige of a linen wristband; and although

there was quite enough of his face to admit of the encroachment of a

shirt collar, it was not graced by the smallest approach to that

appendage. He presented, altogether, rather a mildewy appearance, and

emitted a fragrant odour of full-flavoured Cubas.

Mr. Bob Sawyer, who was habited in a coarse, blue coat, which, without

being either a greatcoat or a surtout, partook of the nature and

qualities of both, had about him that sort of slovenly smartness, and

swaggering gait, which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the

streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by

their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally

facetious description. He wore a pair of plaid trousers, and a large,

rough, double-breasted waistcoat; out of doors, he carried a thick stick

with a big top. He eschewed gloves, and looked, upon the whole,

something like a dissipated Robinson Crusoe.

Such were the two worthies to whom Mr. Pickwick was introduced, as he

took his seat at the breakfast-table on Christmas morning.

‘Splendid morning, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Bob Sawyer slightly nodded his assent to the proposition, and asked

Mr. Benjamin Allen for the mustard.

‘Have you come far this morning, gentlemen?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Blue Lion at Muggleton,’ briefly responded Mr. Allen.

‘You should have joined us last night,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘So we should,’ replied Bob Sawyer, ‘but the brandy was too good to

leave in a hurry; wasn’t it, Ben?’

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen; ‘and the cigars were not bad, or

the pork-chops either; were they, Bob?’

‘Decidedly not,’ said Bob. The particular friends resumed their attack

upon the breakfast, more freely than before, as if the recollection of

last night’s supper had imparted a new relish to the meal.

‘Peg away, Bob,’ said Mr. Allen, to his companion, encouragingly.

‘So I do,’ replied Bob Sawyer. And so, to do him justice, he did.

‘Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer,

looking round the table.

Mr. Pickwick slightly shuddered.

‘By the bye, Bob,’ said Mr. Allen, ‘have you finished that leg yet?’

‘Nearly,’ replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke.

‘It’s a very muscular one for a child’s.’

Is it?’ inquired Mr. Allen carelessly.

‘Very,’ said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

‘I’ve put my name down for an arm at our place,’ said Mr. Allen. ‘We’re

clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can’t get

hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you’d take it.’

‘No,’ replied ‘Bob Sawyer; ‘can’t afford expensive luxuries.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Allen.

‘Can’t, indeed,’ rejoined Bob Sawyer, ‘I wouldn’t mind a brain, but I

couldn’t stand a whole head.’

Hush, hush, gentlemen, pray,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I hear the ladies.’

As Mr. Pickwick spoke, the ladies, gallantly escorted by Messrs.

Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, returned from an early walk.

‘Why, Ben!’ said Arabella, in a tone which expressed more surprise than

pleasure at the sight of her brother.

‘Come to take you home to-morrow,’ replied Benjamin.

Mr. Winkle turned pale.

‘Don’t you see Bob Sawyer, Arabella?’ inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen,

somewhat reproachfully. Arabella gracefully held out her hand, in

acknowledgment of Bob Sawyer’s presence. A thrill of hatred struck to

Mr. Winkle’s heart, as Bob Sawyer inflicted on the proffered hand a

perceptible squeeze.

‘Ben, dear!’ said Arabella, blushing; ‘have--have--you been introduced

to Mr. Winkle?’

‘I have not been, but I shall be very happy to be, Arabella,’ replied

her brother gravely. Here Mr. Allen bowed grimly to Mr. Winkle, while

Mr. Winkle and Mr. Bob Sawyer glanced mutual distrust out of the corners

of their eyes.

The arrival of the two new visitors, and the consequent check upon Mr.

Winkle and the young lady with the fur round her boots, would in all

probability have proved a very unpleasant interruption to the hilarity

of the party, had not the cheerfulness of Mr. Pickwick, and the good

humour of the host, been exerted to the very utmost for the common weal.

Mr. Winkle gradually insinuated himself into the good graces of Mr.

Benjamin Allen, and even joined in a friendly conversation with Mr. Bob

Sawyer; who, enlivened with the brandy, and the breakfast, and the

talking, gradually ripened into a state of extreme facetiousness, and

related with much glee an agreeable anecdote, about the removal of a

tumour on some gentleman’s head, which he illustrated by means of an

oyster-knife and a half-quartern loaf, to the great edification of the

assembled company. Then the whole train went to church, where Mr.

Benjamin Allen fell fast asleep; while Mr. Bob Sawyer abstracted his

thoughts from worldly matters, by the ingenious process of carving his

name on the seat of the pew, in corpulent letters of four inches long.

‘Now,’ said Wardle, after a substantial lunch, with the agreeable items

of strong beer and cherry-brandy, had been done ample justice to, ‘what

say you to an hour on the ice? We shall have plenty of time.’

‘Capital!’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Prime!’ ejaculated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘You skate, of course, Winkle?’ said Wardle.

‘Ye-yes; oh, yes,’ replied Mr. Winkle. ‘I--I--am \_rather \_out of

practice.’

‘Oh, \_do\_ skate, Mr. Winkle,’ said Arabella. ‘I like to see it so much.’

‘Oh, it is \_so\_ graceful,’ said another young lady.

A third young lady said it was elegant, and a fourth expressed her

opinion that it was ‘swan-like.’

‘I should be very happy, I’m sure,’ said Mr. Winkle, reddening; ‘but I

have no skates.’

This objection was at once overruled. Trundle had a couple of pair, and

the fat boy announced that there were half a dozen more downstairs;

whereat Mr. Winkle expressed exquisite delight, and looked exquisitely

uncomfortable.

Old Wardle led the way to a pretty large sheet of ice; and the fat boy

and Mr. Weller, having shovelled and swept away the snow which had

fallen on it during the night, Mr. Bob Sawyer adjusted his skates with a

dexterity which to Mr. Winkle was perfectly marvellous, and described

circles with his left leg, and cut figures of eight, and inscribed upon

the ice, without once stopping for breath, a great many other pleasant

and astonishing devices, to the excessive satisfaction of Mr. Pickwick,

Mr. Tupman, and the ladies; which reached a pitch of positive

enthusiasm, when old Wardle and Benjamin Allen, assisted by the

aforesaid Bob Sawyer, performed some mystic evolutions, which they

called a reel.

All this time, Mr. Winkle, with his face and hands blue with the cold,

had been forcing a gimlet into the sole of his feet, and putting his

skates on, with the points behind, and getting the straps into a very

complicated and entangled state, with the assistance of Mr. Snodgrass,

who knew rather less about skates than a Hindoo. At length, however,

with the assistance of Mr. Weller, the unfortunate skates were firmly

screwed and buckled on, and Mr. Winkle was raised to his feet.

‘Now, then, Sir,’ said Sam, in an encouraging tone; ‘off vith you, and

show ‘em how to do it.’

‘Stop, Sam, stop!’ said Mr. Winkle, trembling violently, and clutching

hold of Sam’s arms with the grasp of a drowning man. ‘How slippery it

is, Sam!’

‘Not an uncommon thing upon ice, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Hold up,

Sir!’

This last observation of Mr. Weller’s bore reference to a demonstration

Mr. Winkle made at the instant, of a frantic desire to throw his feet in

the air, and dash the back of his head on the ice.

‘These--these--are very awkward skates; ain’t they, Sam?’ inquired Mr.

Winkle, staggering.

‘I’m afeerd there’s a orkard gen’l’m’n in ‘em, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘Now, Winkle,’ cried Mr. Pickwick, quite unconscious that there was

anything the matter. ‘Come; the ladies are all anxiety.’

‘Yes, yes,’ replied Mr. Winkle, with a ghastly smile. ‘I’m coming.’

‘Just a-goin’ to begin,’ said Sam, endeavouring to disengage himself.

‘Now, Sir, start off!’

‘Stop an instant, Sam,’ gasped Mr. Winkle, clinging most affectionately

to Mr. Weller. ‘I find I’ve got a couple of coats at home that I don’t

want, Sam. You may have them, Sam.’

‘Thank’ee, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Never mind touching your hat, Sam,’ said Mr. Winkle hastily. ‘You

needn’t take your hand away to do that. I meant to have given you five

shillings this morning for a Christmas box, Sam. I’ll give it you this

afternoon, Sam.’

‘You’re wery good, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Just hold me at first, Sam; will you?’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘There--that’s

right. I shall soon get in the way of it, Sam. Not too fast, Sam; not

too fast.’

Mr. Winkle, stooping forward, with his body half doubled up, was being

assisted over the ice by Mr. Weller, in a very singular and un-swan-like

manner, when Mr. Pickwick most innocently shouted from the opposite

bank--

‘Sam!’

‘Sir?’

‘Here. I want you.’

‘Let go, Sir,’ said Sam. ‘Don’t you hear the governor a-callin’? Let go,

sir.’

With a violent effort, Mr. Weller disengaged himself from the grasp of

the agonised Pickwickian, and, in so doing, administered a considerable

impetus to the unhappy Mr. Winkle. With an accuracy which no degree of

dexterity or practice could have insured, that unfortunate gentleman

bore swiftly down into the centre of the reel, at the very moment when

Mr. Bob Sawyer was performing a flourish of unparalleled beauty. Mr.

Winkle struck wildly against him, and with a loud crash they both fell

heavily down. Mr. Pickwick ran to the spot. Bob Sawyer had risen to his

feet, but Mr. Winkle was far too wise to do anything of the kind, in

skates. He was seated on the ice, making spasmodic efforts to smile; but

anguish was depicted on every lineament of his countenance.

‘Are you hurt?’ inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen, with great anxiety.

‘Not much,’ said Mr. Winkle, rubbing his back very hard.

‘I wish you’d let me bleed you,’ said Mr. Benjamin, with great

eagerness.

‘No, thank you,’ replied Mr. Winkle hurriedly.

‘I really think you had better,’ said Allen.

‘Thank you,’ replied Mr. Winkle; ‘I’d rather not.’

‘What do \_you \_think, Mr. Pickwick?’ inquired Bob Sawyer.

Mr. Pickwick was excited and indignant. He beckoned to Mr. Weller, and

said in a stern voice, ‘Take his skates off.’

‘No; but really I had scarcely begun,’ remonstrated Mr. Winkle.

‘Take his skates off,’ repeated Mr. Pickwick firmly.

The command was not to be resisted. Mr. Winkle allowed Sam to obey it,

in silence.

‘Lift him up,’ said Mr. Pickwick. Sam assisted him to rise.

Mr. Pickwick retired a few paces apart from the bystanders; and,

beckoning his friend to approach, fixed a searching look upon him, and

uttered in a low, but distinct and emphatic tone, these remarkable

words--

‘You’re a humbug, sir.’

A what?’ said Mr. Winkle, starting.

‘A humbug, Sir. I will speak plainer, if you wish it. An impostor, sir.’

With those words, Mr. Pickwick turned slowly on his heel, and rejoined

his friends.

While Mr. Pickwick was delivering himself of the sentiment just

recorded, Mr. Weller and the fat boy, having by their joint endeavours

cut out a slide, were exercising themselves thereupon, in a very

masterly and brilliant manner. Sam Weller, in particular, was displaying

that beautiful feat of fancy-sliding which is currently denominated

‘knocking at the cobbler’s door,’ and which is achieved by skimming over

the ice on one foot, and occasionally giving a postman’s knock upon it

with the other. It was a good long slide, and there was something in the

motion which Mr. Pickwick, who was very cold with standing still, could

not help envying.

‘It looks a nice warm exercise that, doesn’t it?’ he inquired of Wardle,

when that gentleman was thoroughly out of breath, by reason of the

indefatigable manner in which he had converted his legs into a pair of

compasses, and drawn complicated problems on the ice.

‘Ah, it does, indeed,’ replied Wardle. ‘Do you slide?’

‘I used to do so, on the gutters, when I was a boy,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Try it now,’ said Wardle.

‘Oh, do, please, Mr. Pickwick!’ cried all the ladies.

‘I should be very happy to afford you any amusement,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick, ‘but I haven’t done such a thing these thirty years.’

‘Pooh! pooh! Nonsense!’ said Wardle, dragging off his skates with the

impetuosity which characterised all his proceedings. ‘Here; I’ll keep

you company; come along!’ And away went the good-tempered old fellow

down the slide, with a rapidity which came very close upon Mr. Weller,

and beat the fat boy all to nothing.

Mr. Pickwick paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in

his hat; took two or three short runs, baulked himself as often, and at

last took another run, and went slowly and gravely down the slide, with

his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts

of all the spectators.

‘Keep the pot a-bilin’, Sir!’ said Sam; and down went Wardle again, and

then Mr. Pickwick, and then Sam, and then Mr. Winkle, and then Mr. Bob

Sawyer, and then the fat boy, and then Mr. Snodgrass, following closely

upon each other’s heels, and running after each other with as much

eagerness as if their future prospects in life depended on their

expedition.

It was the most intensely interesting thing, to observe the manner in

which Mr. Pickwick performed his share in the ceremony; to watch the

torture of anxiety with which he viewed the person behind, gaining upon

him at the imminent hazard of tripping him up; to see him gradually

expend the painful force he had put on at first, and turn slowly round

on the slide, with his face towards the point from which he had started;

to contemplate the playful smile which mantled on his face when he had

accomplished the distance, and the eagerness with which he turned round

when he had done so, and ran after his predecessor, his black gaiters

tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness

and gladness through his spectacles. And when he was knocked down (which

happened upon the average every third round), it was the most

invigorating sight that can possibly be imagined, to behold him gather

up his hat, gloves, and handkerchief, with a glowing countenance, and

resume his station in the rank, with an ardour and enthusiasm that

nothing Could abate.

The sport was at its height, the sliding was at the quickest, the

laughter was at the loudest, when a sharp smart crack was heard. There

was a quick rush towards the bank, a wild scream from the ladies, and a

shout from Mr. Tupman. A large mass of ice disappeared; the water

bubbled up over it; Mr. Pickwick’s hat, gloves, and handkerchief were

floating on the surface; and this was all of Mr. Pickwick that anybody

could see.

Dismay and anguish were depicted on every countenance; the males turned

pale, and the females fainted; Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle grasped each

other by the hand, and gazed at the spot where their leader had gone

down, with frenzied eagerness; while Mr. Tupman, by way of rendering the

promptest assistance, and at the same time conveying to any persons who

might be within hearing, the clearest possible notion of the

catastrophe, ran off across the country at his utmost speed, screaming

‘Fire!’ with all his might.

It was at this moment, when old Wardle and Sam Weller were approaching

the hole with cautious steps, and Mr. Benjamin Allen was holding a

hurried consultation with Mr. Bob Sawyer on the advisability of bleeding

the company generally, as an improving little bit of professional

practice--it was at this very moment, that a face, head, and shoulders,

emerged from beneath the water, and disclosed the features and

spectacles of Mr. Pickwick.

‘Keep yourself up for an instant--for only one instant!’ bawled Mr.

Snodgrass.

‘Yes, do; let me implore you--for my sake!’ roared Mr. Winkle, deeply

affected. The adjuration was rather unnecessary; the probability being,

that if Mr. Pickwick had declined to keep himself up for anybody else’s

sake, it would have occurred to him that he might as well do so, for his

own.

‘Do you feel the bottom there, old fellow?’ said Wardle.

‘Yes, certainly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, wringing the water from his head

and face, and gasping for breath. ‘I fell upon my back. I couldn’t get

on my feet at first.’

The clay upon so much of Mr. Pickwick’s coat as was yet visible, bore

testimony to the accuracy of this statement; and as the fears of the

spectators were still further relieved by the fat boy’s suddenly

recollecting that the water was nowhere more than five feet deep,

prodigies of valour were performed to get him out. After a vast quantity

of splashing, and cracking, and struggling, Mr. Pickwick was at length

fairly extricated from his unpleasant position, and once more stood on

dry land.

‘Oh, he’ll catch his death of cold,’ said Emily.

‘Dear old thing!’ said Arabella. ‘Let me wrap this shawl round you, Mr.

Pickwick.’

‘Ah, that’s the best thing you can do,’ said Wardle; ‘and when you’ve

got it on, run home as fast as your legs can carry you, and jump into

bed directly.’

A dozen shawls were offered on the instant. Three or four of the

thickest having been selected, Mr. Pickwick was wrapped up, and started

off, under the guidance of Mr. Weller; presenting the singular

phenomenon of an elderly gentleman, dripping wet, and without a hat,

with his arms bound down to his sides, skimming over the ground, without

any clearly-defined purpose, at the rate of six good English miles an

hour.

But Mr. Pickwick cared not for appearances in such an extreme case, and

urged on by Sam Weller, he kept at the very top of his speed until he

reached the door of Manor Farm, where Mr. Tupman had arrived some five

minutes before, and had frightened the old lady into palpitations of the

heart by impressing her with the unalterable conviction that the kitchen

chimney was on fire--a calamity which always presented itself in glowing

colours to the old lady’s mind, when anybody about her evinced the

smallest agitation.

Mr. Pickwick paused not an instant until he was snug in bed. Sam Weller

lighted a blazing fire in the room, and took up his dinner; a bowl of

punch was carried up afterwards, and a grand carouse held in honour of

his safety. Old Wardle would not hear of his rising, so they made the

bed the chair, and Mr. Pickwick presided. A second and a third bowl were

ordered in; and when Mr. Pickwick awoke next morning, there was not a

symptom of rheumatism about him; which proves, as Mr. Bob Sawyer very

justly observed, that there is nothing like hot punch in such cases; and

that if ever hot punch did fail to act as a preventive, it was merely

because the patient fell into the vulgar error of not taking enough of

it.

The jovial party broke up next morning. Breakings-up are capital things

in our school-days, but in after life they are painful enough. Death,

self-interest, and fortune’s changes, are every day breaking up many a

happy group, and scattering them far and wide; and the boys and girls

never come back again. We do not mean to say that it was exactly the

case in this particular instance; all we wish to inform the reader is,

that the different members of the party dispersed to their several

homes; that Mr. Pickwick and his friends once more took their seats on

the top of the Muggleton coach; and that Arabella Allen repaired to her

place of destination, wherever it might have been--we dare say Mr.

Winkle knew, but we confess we don’t--under the care and guardianship of

her brother Benjamin, and his most intimate and particular friend, Mr.

Bob Sawyer.

Before they separated, however, that gentleman and Mr. Benjamin Allen

drew Mr. Pickwick aside with an air of some mystery; and Mr. Bob Sawyer,

thrusting his forefinger between two of Mr. Pickwick’s ribs, and thereby

displaying his native drollery, and his knowledge of the anatomy of the

human frame, at one and the same time, inquired--

‘I say, old boy, where do you hang out?’ Mr. Pickwick replied that he

was at present suspended at the George and Vulture.

‘I wish you’d come and see me,’ said Bob Sawyer.

‘Nothing would give me greater pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘There’s my lodgings,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer, producing a card. ‘Lant

Street, Borough; it’s near Guy’s, and handy for me, you know. Little

distance after you’ve passed St. George’s Church--turns out of the High

Street on the right hand side the way.’

‘I shall find it,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Come on Thursday fortnight, and bring the other chaps with you,’ said

Mr. Bob Sawyer; ‘I’m going to have a few medical fellows that night.’

Mr. Pickwick expressed the pleasure it would afford him to meet the

medical fellows; and after Mr. Bob Sawyer had informed him that he meant

to be very cosy, and that his friend Ben was to be one of the party,

they shook hands and separated.

We feel that in this place we lay ourself open to the inquiry whether

Mr. Winkle was whispering, during this brief conversation, to Arabella

Allen; and if so, what he said; and furthermore, whether Mr. Snodgrass

was conversing apart with Emily Wardle; and if so, what \_he\_ said. To

this, we reply, that whatever they might have said to the ladies, they

said nothing at all to Mr. Pickwick or Mr. Tupman for eight-and-twenty

miles, and that they sighed very often, refused ale and brandy, and

looked gloomy. If our observant lady readers can deduce any satisfactory

inferences from these facts, we beg them by all means to do so.

CHAPTER XXXI. WHICH IS ALL ABOUT THE LAW, AND SUNDRY GREAT AUTHORITIES

LEARNED THEREIN

Scattered about, in various holes and corners of the Temple, are certain

dark and dirty chambers, in and out of which, all the morning in

vacation, and half the evening too in term time, there may be seen

constantly hurrying with bundles of papers under their arms, and

protruding from their pockets, an almost uninterrupted succession of

lawyers’ clerks. There are several grades of lawyers’ clerks. There is

the articled clerk, who has paid a premium, and is an attorney in

perspective, who runs a tailor’s bill, receives invitations to parties,

knows a family in Gower Street, and another in Tavistock Square; who

goes out of town every long vacation to see his father, who keeps live

horses innumerable; and who is, in short, the very aristocrat of clerks.

There is the salaried clerk--out of door, or in door, as the case may

be--who devotes the major part of his thirty shillings a week to his

Personal pleasure and adornments, repairs half-price to the Adelphi

Theatre at least three times a week, dissipates majestically at the

cider cellars afterwards, and is a dirty caricature of the fashion which

expired six months ago. There is the middle-aged copying clerk, with a

large family, who is always shabby, and often drunk. And there are the

office lads in their first surtouts, who feel a befitting contempt for

boys at day-schools, club as they go home at night, for saveloys and

porter, and think there’s nothing like ‘life.’ There are varieties of

the genus, too numerous to recapitulate, but however numerous they may

be, they are all to be seen, at certain regulated business hours,

hurrying to and from the places we have just mentioned.

These sequestered nooks are the public offices of the legal profession,

where writs are issued, judgments signed, declarations filed, and

numerous other ingenious machines put in motion for the torture and

torment of His Majesty’s liege subjects, and the comfort and emolument

of the practitioners of the law. They are, for the most part, low-

roofed, mouldy rooms, where innumerable rolls of parchment, which have

been perspiring in secret for the last century, send forth an agreeable

odour, which is mingled by day with the scent of the dry-rot, and by

night with the various exhalations which arise from damp cloaks,

festering umbrellas, and the coarsest tallow candles.

About half-past seven o’clock in the evening, some ten days or a

fortnight after Mr. Pickwick and his friends returned to London, there

hurried into one of these offices, an individual in a brown coat and

brass buttons, whose long hair was scrupulously twisted round the rim of

his napless hat, and whose soiled drab trousers were so tightly strapped

over his Blucher boots, that his knees threatened every moment to start

from their concealment. He produced from his coat pockets a long and

narrow strip of parchment, on which the presiding functionary impressed

an illegible black stamp. He then drew forth four scraps of paper, of

similar dimensions, each containing a printed copy of the strip of

parchment with blanks for a name; and having filled up the blanks, put

all the five documents in his pocket, and hurried away.

The man in the brown coat, with the cabalistic documents in his pocket,

was no other than our old acquaintance Mr. Jackson, of the house of

Dodson & Fogg, Freeman’s Court, Cornhill. Instead of returning to the

office whence he came, however, he bent his steps direct to Sun Court,

and walking straight into the George and Vulture, demanded to know

whether one Mr. Pickwick was within.

‘Call Mr. Pickwick’s servant, Tom,’ said the barmaid of the George and

Vulture.

‘Don’t trouble yourself,’ said Mr. Jackson. ‘I’ve come on business. If

you’ll show me Mr. Pickwick’s room I’ll step up myself.’

‘What name, Sir?’ said the waiter.

‘Jackson,’ replied the clerk.

The waiter stepped upstairs to announce Mr. Jackson; but Mr. Jackson

saved him the trouble by following close at his heels, and walking into

the apartment before he could articulate a syllable.

Mr. Pickwick had, that day, invited his three friends to dinner; they

were all seated round the fire, drinking their wine, when Mr. Jackson

presented himself, as above described.

‘How de do, sir?’ said Mr. Jackson, nodding to Mr. Pickwick.

That gentleman bowed, and looked somewhat surprised, for the physiognomy

of Mr. Jackson dwelt not in his recollection.

‘I have called from Dodson and Fogg’s,’ said Mr. Jackson, in an

explanatory tone.

Mr. Pickwick roused at the name. ‘I refer you to my attorney, Sir; Mr.

Perker, of Gray’s Inn,’ said he. ‘Waiter, show this gentleman out.’

‘Beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Jackson, deliberately depositing

his hat on the floor, and drawing from his pocket the strip of

parchment. ‘But personal service, by clerk or agent, in these cases, you

know, Mr. Pickwick--nothing like caution, sir, in all legal forms--eh?’

Here Mr. Jackson cast his eye on the parchment; and, resting his hands

on the table, and looking round with a winning and persuasive smile,

said, ‘Now, come; don’t let’s have no words about such a little matter

as this. Which of you gentlemen’s name’s Snodgrass?’

At this inquiry, Mr. Snodgrass gave such a very undisguised and palpable

start, that no further reply was needed.

‘Ah! I thought so,’ said Mr. Jackson, more affably than before. ‘I’ve a

little something to trouble you with, Sir.’

‘Me!’ exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass.

‘It’s only a subpoena in Bardell and Pickwick on behalf of the

plaintiff,’ replied Jackson, singling out one of the slips of paper, and

producing a shilling from his waistcoat pocket. ‘It’ll come on, in the

settens after Term: fourteenth of Febooary, we expect; we’ve marked it a

special jury cause, and it’s only ten down the paper. That’s yours, Mr.

Snodgrass.’ As Jackson said this, he presented the parchment before the

eyes of Mr. Snodgrass, and slipped the paper and the shilling into his

hand.

Mr. Tupman had witnessed this process in silent astonishment, when

Jackson, turning sharply upon him, said--

‘I think I ain’t mistaken when I say your name’s Tupman, am I?’

Mr. Tupman looked at Mr. Pickwick; but, perceiving no encouragement in

that gentleman’s widely-opened eyes to deny his name, said--

‘Yes, my name is Tupman, Sir.’

‘And that other gentleman’s Mr. Winkle, I think?’ said Jackson. Mr.

Winkle faltered out a reply in the affirmative; and both gentlemen were

forthwith invested with a slip of paper, and a shilling each, by the

dexterous Mr. Jackson.

‘Now,’ said Jackson, ‘I’m afraid you’ll think me rather troublesome, but

I want somebody else, if it ain’t inconvenient. I have Samuel Weller’s

name here, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘Send my servant here, waiter,’ said Mr. Pickwick. The waiter retired,

considerably astonished, and Mr. Pickwick motioned Jackson to a seat.

There was a painful pause, which was at length broken by the innocent

defendant.

‘I suppose, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, his indignation rising while he

spoke--‘I suppose, Sir, that it is the intention of your employers to

seek to criminate me upon the testimony of my own friends?’

Mr. Jackson struck his forefinger several times against the left side of

his nose, to intimate that he was not there to disclose the secrets of

the prison house, and playfully rejoined--

‘Not knowin’, can’t say.’

‘For what other reason, Sir,’ pursued Mr. Pickwick, ‘are these subpoenas

served upon them, if not for this?’

‘Very good plant, Mr. Pickwick,’ replied Jackson, slowly shaking his

head. ‘But it won’t do. No harm in trying, but there’s little to be got

out of me.’

Here Mr. Jackson smiled once more upon the company, and, applying his

left thumb to the tip of his nose, worked a visionary coffee-mill with

his right hand, thereby performing a very graceful piece of pantomime

(then much in vogue, but now, unhappily, almost obsolete) which was

familiarly denominated ‘taking a grinder.’

‘No, no, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Jackson, in conclusion; ‘Perker’s people

must guess what we’ve served these subpoenas for. If they can’t, they

must wait till the action comes on, and then they’ll find out.’

Mr. Pickwick bestowed a look of excessive disgust on his unwelcome

visitor, and would probably have hurled some tremendous anathema at the

heads of Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, had not Sam’s entrance at the instant

interrupted him.

‘Samuel Weller?’ said Mr. Jackson, inquiringly.

‘Vun o’ the truest things as you’ve said for many a long year,’ replied

Sam, in a most composed manner.

‘Here’s a subpoena for you, Mr. Weller,’ said Jackson.

‘What’s that in English?’ inquired Sam.

‘Here’s the original,’ said Jackson, declining the required explanation.

‘Which?’ said Sam.

‘This,’ replied Jackson, shaking the parchment.

‘Oh, that’s the ‘rig’nal, is it?’ said Sam. ‘Well, I’m wery glad I’ve

seen the ‘rig’nal, ‘cos it’s a gratifyin’ sort o’ thing, and eases vun’s

mind so much.’

‘And here’s the shilling,’ said Jackson. ‘It’s from Dodson and Fogg’s.’

‘And it’s uncommon handsome o’ Dodson and Fogg, as knows so little of

me, to come down vith a present,’ said Sam. ‘I feel it as a wery high

compliment, sir; it’s a wery honorable thing to them, as they knows how

to reward merit werever they meets it. Besides which, it’s affectin’ to

one’s feelin’s.’

As Mr. Weller said this, he inflicted a little friction on his right

eyelid, with the sleeve of his coat, after the most approved manner of

actors when they are in domestic pathetics.

Mr. Jackson seemed rather puzzled by Sam’s proceedings; but, as he had

served the subpoenas, and had nothing more to say, he made a feint of

putting on the one glove which he usually carried in his hand, for the

sake of appearances; and returned to the office to report progress.

Mr. Pickwick slept little that night; his memory had received a very

disagreeable refresher on the subject of Mrs. Bardell’s action. He

breakfasted betimes next morning, and, desiring Sam to accompany him,

set forth towards Gray’s Inn Square.

‘Sam!’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking round, when they got to the end of

Cheapside.

‘Sir?’ said Sam, stepping up to his master.

‘Which way?’

Up Newgate Street.’

Mr. Pickwick did not turn round immediately, but looked vacantly in

Sam’s face for a few seconds, and heaved a deep sigh.

‘What’s the matter, sir?’ inquired Sam.

‘This action, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘is expected to come on, on the

fourteenth of next month.’

Remarkable coincidence that ‘ere, sir,’ replied Sam.

‘Why remarkable, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Walentine’s day, sir,’ responded Sam; ‘reg’lar good day for a breach o’

promise trial.’

Mr. Weller’s smile awakened no gleam of mirth in his master’s

countenance. Mr. Pickwick turned abruptly round, and led the way in

silence.

They had walked some distance, Mr. Pickwick trotting on before, plunged

in profound meditation, and Sam following behind, with a countenance

expressive of the most enviable and easy defiance of everything and

everybody, when the latter, who was always especially anxious to impart

to his master any exclusive information he possessed, quickened his pace

until he was close at Mr. Pickwick’s heels; and, pointing up at a house

they were passing, said--

‘Wery nice pork-shop that ‘ere, sir.’

‘Yes, it seems so,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Celebrated sassage factory,’ said Sam.

‘Is it?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Is it!’ reiterated Sam, with some indignation; ‘I should rayther think

it was. Why, sir, bless your innocent eyebrows, that’s where the

mysterious disappearance of a ‘spectable tradesman took place four years

ago.’

‘You don’t mean to say he was burked, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking

hastily round.

‘No, I don’t indeed, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘I wish I did; far worse

than that. He was the master o’ that ‘ere shop, sir, and the inwentor o’

the patent-never-leavin’-off sassage steam-ingin, as ‘ud swaller up a

pavin’ stone if you put it too near, and grind it into sassages as easy

as if it was a tender young babby. Wery proud o’ that machine he was, as

it was nat’ral he should be, and he’d stand down in the celler a-lookin’

at it wen it was in full play, till he got quite melancholy with joy. A

wery happy man he’d ha’ been, Sir, in the procession o’ that ‘ere ingin

and two more lovely hinfants besides, if it hadn’t been for his wife,

who was a most owdacious wixin. She was always a-follerin’ him about,

and dinnin’ in his ears, till at last he couldn’t stand it no longer.

“I’ll tell you what it is, my dear,” he says one day; “if you persewere

in this here sort of amusement,” he says, “I’m blessed if I don’t go

away to ‘Merriker; and that’s all about it.” “You’re a idle willin,”

says she, “and I wish the ‘Merrikins joy of their bargain.” Arter which

she keeps on abusin’ of him for half an hour, and then runs into the

little parlour behind the shop, sets to a-screamin’, says he’ll be the

death on her, and falls in a fit, which lasts for three good hours--one

o’ them fits wich is all screamin’ and kickin’. Well, next mornin’, the

husband was missin’. He hadn’t taken nothin’ from the till--hadn’t even

put on his greatcoat--so it was quite clear he warn’t gone to ‘Merriker.

Didn’t come back next day; didn’t come back next week; missis had bills

printed, sayin’ that, if he’d come back, he should be forgiven

everythin’ (which was very liberal, seein’ that he hadn’t done nothin’

at all); the canals was dragged, and for two months arterwards, wenever

a body turned up, it was carried, as a reg’lar thing, straight off to

the sassage shop. Hows’ever, none on ‘em answered; so they gave out that

he’d run away, and she kep’ on the bis’ness. One Saturday night, a

little, thin, old gen’l’m’n comes into the shop in a great passion and

says, “Are you the missis o’ this here shop?” “Yes, I am,” says she.

“Well, ma’am,” says he, “then I’ve just looked in to say that me and my

family ain’t a-goin’ to be choked for nothin’; and more than that,

ma’am,” he says, “you’ll allow me to observe that as you don’t use the

primest parts of the meat in the manafacter o’ sassages, I’d think you’d

find beef come nearly as cheap as buttons.” “As buttons, Sir!” says she.

“Buttons, ma’am,” says the little, old gentleman, unfolding a bit of

paper, and showin’ twenty or thirty halves o’ buttons. “Nice seasonin’

for sassages, is trousers’ buttons, ma’am.” “They’re my husband’s

buttons!” says the widder beginnin’ to faint, “What!” screams the little

old gen’l’m’n, turnin’ wery pale. “I see it all,” says the widder; “in a

fit of temporary insanity he rashly converted hisself into sassages!”

And so he had, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, looking steadily into Mr.

Pickwick’s horror-stricken countenance, ‘or else he’d been draw’d into

the ingin; but however that might ha’ been, the little, old gen’l’m’n,

who had been remarkably partial to sassages all his life, rushed out o’

the shop in a wild state, and was never heerd on arterwards!’

The relation of this affecting incident of private life brought master

and man to Mr. Perker’s chambers. Lowten, holding the door half open,

was in conversation with a rustily-clad, miserable-looking man, in boots

without toes and gloves without fingers. There were traces of privation

and suffering--almost of despair--in his lank and care-worn countenance;

he felt his poverty, for he shrank to the dark side of the staircase as

Mr. Pickwick approached.

‘It’s very unfortunate,’ said the stranger, with a sigh.

‘Very,’ said Lowten, scribbling his name on the doorpost with his pen,

and rubbing it out again with the feather. ‘Will you leave a message for

him?’

‘When do you think he’ll be back?’ inquired the stranger.

‘Quite uncertain,’ replied Lowten, winking at Mr. Pickwick, as the

stranger cast his eyes towards the ground.

‘You don’t think it would be of any use my waiting for him?’ said the

stranger, looking wistfully into the office.

‘Oh, no, I’m sure it wouldn’t,’ replied the clerk, moving a little more

into the centre of the doorway. ‘He’s certain not to be back this week,

and it’s a chance whether he will be next; for when Perker once gets out

of town, he’s never in a hurry to come back again.’

‘Out of town!’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘dear me, how unfortunate!’

‘Don’t go away, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Lowten, ‘I’ve got a letter for you.’

The stranger, seeming to hesitate, once more looked towards the ground,

and the clerk winked slyly at Mr. Pickwick, as if to intimate that some

exquisite piece of humour was going forward, though what it was Mr.

Pickwick could not for the life of him divine.

‘Step in, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Lowten. ‘Well, will you leave a message,

Mr. Watty, or will you call again?’

‘Ask him to be so kind as to leave out word what has been done in my

business,’ said the man; ‘for God’s sake don’t neglect it, Mr. Lowten.’

‘No, no; I won’t forget it,’ replied the clerk. ‘Walk in, Mr. Pickwick.

Good-morning, Mr. Watty; it’s a fine day for walking, isn’t it?’ Seeing

that the stranger still lingered, he beckoned Sam Weller to follow his

master in, and shut the door in his face.

‘There never was such a pestering bankrupt as that since the world

began, I do believe!’ said Lowten, throwing down his pen with the air of

an injured man. ‘His affairs haven’t been in Chancery quite four years

yet, and I’m d----d if he don’t come worrying here twice a week. Step

this way, Mr. Pickwick. Perker \_is\_ in, and he’ll see you, I know.

Devilish cold,’ he added pettishly, ‘standing at that door, wasting

one’s time with such seedy vagabonds!’ Having very vehemently stirred a

particularly large fire with a particularly small poker, the clerk led

the way to his principal’s private room, and announced Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah, my dear Sir,’ said little Mr. Perker, bustling up from his chair.

‘Well, my dear sir, and what’s the news about your matter, eh? Anything

more about our friends in Freeman’s Court? They’ve not been sleeping, I

know that. Ah, they’re very smart fellows; very smart, indeed.’

As the little man concluded, he took an emphatic pinch of snuff, as a

tribute to the smartness of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg.

‘They are great scoundrels,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Aye, aye,’ said the little man; ‘that’s a matter of opinion, you know,

and we won’t dispute about terms; because of course you can’t be

expected to view these subjects with a professional eye. Well, we’ve

done everything that’s necessary. I have retained Serjeant Snubbin.’

‘Is he a good man?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Good man!’ replied Perker; ‘bless your heart and soul, my dear Sir,

Serjeant Snubbin is at the very top of his profession. Gets treble the

business of any man in court--engaged in every case. You needn’t mention

it abroad; but we say--we of the profession--that Serjeant Snubbin leads

the court by the nose.’

The little man took another pinch of snuff as he made this

communication, and nodded mysteriously to Mr. Pickwick.

‘They have subpoenaed my three friends,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah! of course they would,’ replied Perker. ‘Important witnesses; saw

you in a delicate situation.’

‘But she fainted of her own accord,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘She threw

herself into my arms.’

‘Very likely, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker; ‘very likely and very

natural. Nothing more so, my dear Sir, nothing. But who’s to prove it?’

‘They have subpoenaed my servant, too,’ said Mr. Pickwick, quitting the

other point; for there Mr. Perker’s question had somewhat staggered him.

‘Sam?’ said Perker.

Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.

‘Of course, my dear Sir; of course. I knew they would. I could have told

you that, a month ago. You know, my dear Sir, if you \_will \_take the

management of your affairs into your own hands after entrusting them to

your solicitor, you must also take the consequences.’ Here Mr. Perker

drew himself up with conscious dignity, and brushed some stray grains of

snuff from his shirt frill.

‘And what do they want him to prove?’ asked Mr. Pickwick, after two or

three minutes’ silence.

‘That you sent him up to the plaintiff ‘s to make some offer of a

compromise, I suppose,’ replied Perker. ‘It don’t matter much, though; I

don’t think many counsel could get a great deal out of \_him\_.’

‘I don’t think they could,’ said Mr. Pickwick, smiling, despite his

vexation, at the idea of Sam’s appearance as a witness. ‘What course do

we pursue?’

‘We have only one to adopt, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker; ‘cross-examine

the witnesses; trust to Snubbin’s eloquence; throw dust in the eyes of

the judge; throw ourselves on the jury.’

‘And suppose the verdict is against me?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Perker smiled, took a very long pinch of snuff, stirred the fire,

shrugged his shoulders, and remained expressively silent.

‘You mean that in that case I must pay the damages?’ said Mr. Pickwick,

who had watched this telegraphic answer with considerable sternness.

Perker gave the fire another very unnecessary poke, and said, ‘I am

afraid so.’

‘Then I beg to announce to you my unalterable determination to pay no

damages whatever,’ said Mr. Pickwick, most emphatically. ‘None, Perker.

Not a pound, not a penny of my money, shall find its way into the

pockets of Dodson and Fogg. That is my deliberate and irrevocable

determination.’ Mr. Pickwick gave a heavy blow on the table before him,

in confirmation of the irrevocability of his intention.

‘Very well, my dear Sir, very well,’ said Perker. ‘You know best, of

course.’

‘Of course,’ replied Mr. Pickwick hastily. ‘Where does Serjeant Snubbin

live?’

In Lincoln’s Inn Old Square,’ replied Perker.

‘I should like to see him,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘See Serjeant Snubbin, my dear Sir!’ rejoined Perker, in utter

amazement. ‘Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir, impossible. See Serjeant Snubbin!

Bless you, my dear Sir, such a thing was never heard of, without a

consultation fee being previously paid, and a consultation fixed. It

couldn’t be done, my dear Sir; it couldn’t be done.’

Mr. Pickwick, however, had made up his mind not only that it could be

done, but that it should be done; and the consequence was, that within

ten minutes after he had received the assurance that the thing was

impossible, he was conducted by his solicitor into the outer office of

the great Serjeant Snubbin himself.

It was an uncarpeted room of tolerable dimensions, with a large writing-

table drawn up near the fire, the baize top of which had long since lost

all claim to its original hue of green, and had gradually grown gray

with dust and age, except where all traces of its natural colour were

obliterated by ink-stains. Upon the table were numerous little bundles

of papers tied with red tape; and behind it, sat an elderly clerk, whose

sleek appearance and heavy gold watch-chain presented imposing

indications of the extensive and lucrative practice of Mr. Serjeant

Snubbin.

‘Is the Serjeant in his room, Mr. Mallard?’ inquired Perker, offering

his box with all imaginable courtesy.

‘Yes, he is,’ was the reply, ‘but he’s very busy. Look here; not an

opinion given yet, on any one of these cases; and an expedition fee paid

with all of ‘em.’ The clerk smiled as he said this, and inhaled the

pinch of snuff with a zest which seemed to be compounded of a fondness

for snuff and a relish for fees.

‘Something like practice that,’ said Perker.

‘Yes,’ said the barrister’s clerk, producing his own box, and offering

it with the greatest cordiality; ‘and the best of it is, that as nobody

alive except myself can read the serjeant’s writing, they are obliged to

wait for the opinions, when he has given them, till I have copied ‘em,

ha-ha-ha!’

‘Which makes good for we know who, besides the serjeant, and draws a

little more out of the clients, eh?’ said Perker; ‘Ha, ha, ha!’ At this

the serjeant’s clerk laughed again--not a noisy boisterous laugh, but a

silent, internal chuckle, which Mr. Pickwick disliked to hear. When a

man bleeds inwardly, it is a dangerous thing for himself; but when he

laughs inwardly, it bodes no good to other people.

‘You haven’t made me out that little list of the fees that I’m in your

debt, have you?’ said Perker.

‘No, I have not,’ replied the clerk.

‘I wish you would,’ said Perker. ‘Let me have them, and I’ll send you a

cheque. But I suppose you’re too busy pocketing the ready money, to

think of the debtors, eh? ha, ha, ha!’ This sally seemed to tickle the

clerk amazingly, and he once more enjoyed a little quiet laugh to

himself.

‘But, Mr. Mallard, my dear friend,’ said Perker, suddenly recovering his

gravity, and drawing the great man’s great man into a Corner, by the

lappel of his coat; ‘you must persuade the Serjeant to see me, and my

client here.’

‘Come, come,’ said the clerk, ‘that’s not bad either. See the Serjeant!

come, that’s too absurd.’ Notwithstanding the absurdity of the proposal,

however, the clerk allowed himself to be gently drawn beyond the hearing

of Mr. Pickwick; and after a short conversation conducted in whispers,

walked softly down a little dark passage, and disappeared into the legal

luminary’s sanctum, whence he shortly returned on tiptoe, and informed

Mr. Perker and Mr. Pickwick that the Serjeant had been prevailed upon,

in violation of all established rules and customs, to admit them at

once.

Mr. Serjeant Snubbins was a lantern-faced, sallow-complexioned man, of

about five-and-forty, or--as the novels say--he might be fifty. He had

that dull-looking, boiled eye which is often to be seen in the heads of

people who have applied themselves during many years to a weary and

laborious course of study; and which would have been sufficient, without

the additional eyeglass which dangled from a broad black riband round

his neck, to warn a stranger that he was very near-sighted. His hair was

thin and weak, which was partly attributable to his having never devoted

much time to its arrangement, and partly to his having worn for five-

and-twenty years the forensic wig which hung on a block beside him. The

marks of hairpowder on his coat-collar, and the ill-washed and worse

tied white neckerchief round his throat, showed that he had not found

leisure since he left the court to make any alteration in his dress;

while the slovenly style of the remainder of his costume warranted the

inference that his personal appearance would not have been very much

improved if he had. Books of practice, heaps of papers, and opened

letters, were scattered over the table, without any attempt at order or

arrangement; the furniture of the room was old and rickety; the doors of

the book-case were rotting in their hinges; the dust flew out from the

carpet in little clouds at every step; the blinds were yellow with age

and dirt; the state of everything in the room showed, with a clearness

not to be mistaken, that Mr. Serjeant Snubbin was far too much occupied

with his professional pursuits to take any great heed or regard of his

personal comforts.

The Serjeant was writing when his clients entered; he bowed abstractedly

when Mr. Pickwick was introduced by his solicitor; and then, motioning

them to a seat, put his pen carefully in the inkstand, nursed his left

leg, and waited to be spoken to.

‘Mr. Pickwick is the defendant in Bardell and Pickwick, Serjeant

Snubbin,’ said Perker.

‘I am retained in that, am I?’ said the Serjeant.

‘You are, Sir,’ replied Perker.

The Serjeant nodded his head, and waited for something else.

‘Mr. Pickwick was anxious to call upon you, Serjeant Snubbin,’ said

Perker, ‘to state to you, before you entered upon the case, that he

denies there being any ground or pretence whatever for the action

against him; and that unless he came into court with clean hands, and

without the most conscientious conviction that he was right in resisting

the plaintiff’s demand, he would not be there at all. I believe I state

your views correctly; do I not, my dear Sir?’ said the little man,

turning to Mr. Pickwick.

‘Quite so,’ replied that gentleman.

Mr. Serjeant Snubbin unfolded his glasses, raised them to his eyes; and,

after looking at Mr. Pickwick for a few seconds with great curiosity,

turned to Mr. Perker, and said, smiling slightly as he spoke--

‘Has Mr. Pickwick a strong case?’

The attorney shrugged his shoulders.

‘Do you propose calling witnesses?’

‘No.’

The smile on the Serjeant’s countenance became more defined; he rocked

his leg with increased violence; and, throwing himself back in his easy-

chair, coughed dubiously.

These tokens of the Serjeant’s presentiments on the subject, slight as

they were, were not lost on Mr. Pickwick. He settled the spectacles,

through which he had attentively regarded such demonstrations of the

barrister’s feelings as he had permitted himself to exhibit, more firmly

on his nose; and said with great energy, and in utter disregard of all

Mr. Perker’s admonitory winkings and frownings--

‘My wishing to wait upon you, for such a purpose as this, Sir, appears,

I have no doubt, to a gentleman who sees so much of these matters as you

must necessarily do, a very extraordinary circumstance.’

The Serjeant tried to look gravely at the fire, but the smile came back

again.

‘Gentlemen of your profession, Sir,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, ‘see the

worst side of human nature. All its disputes, all its ill-will and bad

blood, rise up before you. You know from your experience of juries (I

mean no disparagement to you, or them) how much depends upon effect; and

you are apt to attribute to others, a desire to use, for purposes of

deception and self-interest, the very instruments which you, in pure

honesty and honour of purpose, and with a laudable desire to do your

utmost for your client, know the temper and worth of so well, from

constantly employing them yourselves. I really believe that to this

circumstance may be attributed the vulgar but very general notion of

your being, as a body, suspicious, distrustful, and over-cautious.

Conscious as I am, sir, of the disadvantage of making such a declaration

to you, under such circumstances, I have come here, because I wish you

distinctly to understand, as my friend Mr. Perker has said, that I am

innocent of the falsehood laid to my charge; and although I am very well

aware of the inestimable value of your assistance, Sir, I must beg to

add, that unless you sincerely believe this, I would rather be deprived

of the aid of your talents than have the advantage of them.’

Long before the close of this address, which we are bound to say was of

a very prosy character for Mr. Pickwick, the Serjeant had relapsed into

a state of abstraction. After some minutes, however, during which he had

reassumed his pen, he appeared to be again aware of the presence of his

clients; raising his head from the paper, he said, rather snappishly--

‘Who is with me in this case?’

‘Mr. Phunky, Serjeant Snubbin,’ replied the attorney.

‘Phunky--Phunky,’ said the Serjeant, ‘I never heard the name before. He

must be a very young man.’

‘Yes, he is a very young man,’ replied the attorney. ‘He was only called

the other day. Let me see--he has not been at the Bar eight years yet.’

‘Ah, I thought not,’ said the Serjeant, in that sort of pitying tone in

which ordinary folks would speak of a very helpless little child. ‘Mr.

Mallard, send round to Mr.--Mr.--’

Phunky’s--Holborn Court, Gray’s Inn,’ interposed Perker. (Holborn Court,

by the bye, is South Square now.)--‘Mr. Phunky, and say I should be glad

if he’d step here, a moment.’

Mr. Mallard departed to execute his commission; and Serjeant Snubbin

relapsed into abstraction until Mr. Phunky himself was introduced.

Although an infant barrister, he was a full-grown man. He had a very

nervous manner, and a painful hesitation in his speech; it did not

appear to be a natural defect, but seemed rather the result of timidity,

arising from the consciousness of being ‘kept down’ by want of means, or

interest, or connection, or impudence, as the case might be. He was

overawed by the Serjeant, and profoundly courteous to the attorney.

‘I have not had the pleasure of seeing you before, Mr. Phunky,’ said

Serjeant Snubbin, with haughty condescension.

Mr. Phunky bowed. He \_had \_had the pleasure of seeing the Serjeant, and

of envying him too, with all a poor man’s envy, for eight years and a

quarter.

‘You are with me in this case, I understand?’ said the Serjeant.

If Mr. Phunky had been a rich man, he would have instantly sent for his

clerk to remind him; if he had been a wise one, he would have applied

his forefinger to his forehead, and endeavoured to recollect, whether,

in the multiplicity of his engagements, he had undertaken this one or

not; but as he was neither rich nor wise (in this sense, at all events)

he turned red, and bowed.

‘Have you read the papers, Mr. Phunky?’ inquired the Serjeant.

Here again, Mr. Phunky should have professed to have forgotten all about

the merits of the case; but as he had read such papers as had been laid

before him in the course of the action, and had thought of nothing else,

waking or sleeping, throughout the two months during which he had been

retained as Mr. Serjeant Snubbin’s junior, he turned a deeper red and

bowed again.

‘This is Mr. Pickwick,’ said the Serjeant, waving his pen in the

direction in which that gentleman was standing.

Mr. Phunky bowed to Mr. Pickwick, with a reverence which a first client

must ever awaken; and again inclined his head towards his leader.

‘Perhaps you will take Mr. Pickwick away,’ said the Serjeant, ‘and--and-

-and--hear anything Mr. Pickwick may wish to communicate. We shall have

a consultation, of course.’ With that hint that he had been interrupted

quite long enough, Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, who had been gradually growing

more and more abstracted, applied his glass to his eyes for an instant,

bowed slightly round, and was once more deeply immersed in the case

before him, which arose out of an interminable lawsuit, originating in

the act of an individual, deceased a century or so ago, who had stopped

up a pathway leading from some place which nobody ever came from, to

some other place which nobody ever went to.

Mr. Phunky would not hear of passing through any door until Mr. Pickwick

and his solicitor had passed through before him, so it was some time

before they got into the Square; and when they did reach it, they walked

up and down, and held a long conference, the result of which was, that

it was a very difficult matter to say how the verdict would go; that

nobody could presume to calculate on the issue of an action; that it was

very lucky they had prevented the other party from getting Serjeant

Snubbin; and other topics of doubt and consolation, common in such a

position of affairs.

Mr. Weller was then roused by his master from a sweet sleep of an hour’s

duration; and, bidding adieu to Lowten, they returned to the city.

CHAPTER XXXII. DESCRIBES, FAR MORE FULLY THAN THE COURT NEWSMAN EVER

DID, A BACHELOR’S PARTY, GIVEN BY MR. BOB SAWYER AT HIS LODGINGS IN THE

BOROUGH

There is a repose about Lant Street, in the Borough, which sheds a

gentle melancholy upon the soul. There are always a good many houses to

let in the street: it is a by-street too, and its dulness is soothing. A

house in Lant Street would not come within the denomination of a first-

rate residence, in the strict acceptation of the term; but it is a most

desirable spot nevertheless. If a man wished to abstract himself from

the world--to remove himself from within the reach of temptation--to

place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of

the window--we should recommend him by all means go to Lant Street.

In this happy retreat are colonised a few clear-starchers, a sprinkling

of journeymen bookbinders, one or two prison agents for the Insolvent

Court, several small housekeepers who are employed in the Docks, a

handful of mantua-makers, and a seasoning of jobbing tailors. The

majority of the inhabitants either direct their energies to the letting

of furnished apartments, or devote themselves to the healthful and

invigorating pursuit of mangling. The chief features in the still life

of the street are green shutters, lodging-bills, brass door-plates, and

bell-handles; the principal specimens of animated nature, the pot-boy,

the muffin youth, and the baked-potato man. The population is migratory,

usually disappearing on the verge of quarter-day, and generally by

night. His Majesty’s revenues are seldom collected in this happy valley;

the rents are dubious; and the water communication is very frequently

cut off.

Mr. Bob Sawyer embellished one side of the fire, in his first-floor

front, early on the evening for which he had invited Mr. Pickwick, and

Mr. Ben Allen the other. The preparations for the reception of visitors

appeared to be completed. The umbrellas in the passage had been heaped

into the little corner outside the back-parlour door; the bonnet and

shawl of the landlady’s servant had been removed from the bannisters;

there were not more than two pairs of pattens on the street-door mat;

and a kitchen candle, with a very long snuff, burned cheerfully on the

ledge of the staircase window. Mr. Bob Sawyer had himself purchased the

spirits at a wine vaults in High Street, and had returned home preceding

the bearer thereof, to preclude the possibility of their delivery at the

wrong house. The punch was ready-made in a red pan in the bedroom; a

little table, covered with a green baize cloth, had been borrowed from

the parlour, to play at cards on; and the glasses of the establishment,

together with those which had been borrowed for the occasion from the

public-house, were all drawn up in a tray, which was deposited on the

landing outside the door.

Notwithstanding the highly satisfactory nature of all these

arrangements, there was a cloud on the countenance of Mr. Bob Sawyer, as

he sat by the fireside. There was a sympathising expression, too, in the

features of Mr. Ben Allen, as he gazed intently on the coals, and a tone

of melancholy in his voice, as he said, after a long silence--

‘Well, it is unlucky she should have taken it in her head to turn sour,

just on this occasion. She might at least have waited till to-morrow.’

‘That’s her malevolence--that’s her malevolence,’ returned Mr. Bob

Sawyer vehemently. ‘She says that if I can afford to give a party I

ought to be able to pay her confounded “little bill.”’

How long has it been running?’ inquired Mr. Ben Allen. A bill, by the

bye, is the most extraordinary locomotive engine that the genius of man

ever produced. It would keep on running during the longest lifetime,

without ever once stopping of its own accord.

‘Only a quarter, and a month or so,’ replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

Ben Allen coughed hopelessly, and directed a searching look between the

two top bars of the stove.

‘It’ll be a deuced unpleasant thing if she takes it into her head to let

out, when those fellows are here, won’t it?’ said Mr. Ben Allen at

length.

‘Horrible,’ replied Bob Sawyer, ‘horrible.’

A low tap was heard at the room door. Mr. Bob Sawyer looked expressively

at his friend, and bade the tapper come in; whereupon a dirty, slipshod

girl in black cotton stockings, who might have passed for the neglected

daughter of a superannuated dustman in very reduced circumstances,

thrust in her head, and said--

‘Please, Mister Sawyer, Missis Raddle wants to speak to you.’

Before Mr. Bob Sawyer could return any answer, the girl suddenly

disappeared with a jerk, as if somebody had given her a violent pull

behind; this mysterious exit was no sooner accomplished, than there was

another tap at the door--a smart, pointed tap, which seemed to say,

‘Here I am, and in I’m coming.’

Mr. Bob Sawyer glanced at his friend with a look of abject apprehension,

and once more cried, ‘Come in.’

The permission was not at all necessary, for, before Mr. Bob Sawyer had

uttered the words, a little, fierce woman bounced into the room, all in

a tremble with passion, and pale with rage.

‘Now, Mr. Sawyer,’ said the little, fierce woman, trying to appear very

calm, ‘if you’ll have the kindness to settle that little bill of mine

I’ll thank you, because I’ve got my rent to pay this afternoon, and my

landlord’s a-waiting below now.’ Here the little woman rubbed her hands,

and looked steadily over Mr. Bob Sawyer’s head, at the wall behind him.

‘I am very sorry to put you to any inconvenience, Mrs. Raddle,’ said Bob

Sawyer deferentially, ‘but--’

‘Oh, it isn’t any inconvenience,’ replied the little woman, with a

shrill titter. ‘I didn’t want it particular before to-day; leastways, as

it has to go to my landlord directly, it was as well for you to keep it

as me. You promised me this afternoon, Mr. Sawyer, and every gentleman

as has ever lived here, has kept his word, Sir, as of course anybody as

calls himself a gentleman does.’ Mrs. Raddle tossed her head, bit her

lips, rubbed her hands harder, and looked at the wall more steadily than

ever. It was plain to see, as Mr. Bob Sawyer remarked in a style of

Eastern allegory on a subsequent occasion, that she was ‘getting the

steam up.’

‘I am very sorry, Mrs. Raddle,’ said Bob Sawyer, with all imaginable

humility, ‘but the fact is, that I have been disappointed in the City

to-day.’--Extraordinary place that City. An astonishing number of men

always \_are \_getting disappointed there.

‘Well, Mr. Sawyer,’ said Mrs. Raddle, planting herself firmly on a

purple cauliflower in the Kidderminster carpet, ‘and what’s that to me,

Sir?’

‘I--I--have no doubt, Mrs. Raddle,’ said Bob Sawyer, blinking this last

question, ‘that before the middle of next week we shall be able to set

ourselves quite square, and go on, on a better system, afterwards.’

This was all Mrs. Raddle wanted. She had bustled up to the apartment of

the unlucky Bob Sawyer, so bent upon going into a passion, that, in all

probability, payment would have rather disappointed her than otherwise.

She was in excellent order for a little relaxation of the kind, having

just exchanged a few introductory compliments with Mr. R. in the front

kitchen.

‘Do you suppose, Mr. Sawyer,’ said Mrs. Raddle, elevating her voice for

the information of the neighbours--‘do you suppose that I’m a-going day

after day to let a fellar occupy my lodgings as never thinks of paying

his rent, nor even the very money laid out for the fresh butter and lump

sugar that’s bought for his breakfast, and the very milk that’s took in,

at the street door? Do you suppose a hard-working and industrious woman

as has lived in this street for twenty year (ten year over the way, and

nine year and three-quarters in this very house) has nothing else to do

but to work herself to death after a parcel of lazy idle fellars, that

are always smoking and drinking, and lounging, when they ought to be

glad to turn their hands to anything that would help ‘em to pay their

bills? Do you--’

‘My good soul,’ interposed Mr. Benjamin Allen soothingly.

‘Have the goodness to keep your observashuns to yourself, Sir, I beg,’

said Mrs. Raddle, suddenly arresting the rapid torrent of her speech,

and addressing the third party with impressive slowness and solemnity.

‘I am not aweer, Sir, that you have any right to address your

conversation to me. I don’t think I let these apartments to you, Sir.’

‘No, you certainly did not,’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Very good, Sir,’ responded Mrs. Raddle, with lofty politeness. ‘Then

p’raps, Sir, you’ll confine yourself to breaking the arms and legs of

the poor people in the hospitals, and keep yourself \_to\_ yourself, Sir,

or there may be some persons here as will make you, Sir.’

‘But you are such an unreasonable woman,’ remonstrated Mr. Benjamin

Allen.

‘I beg your parding, young man,’ said Mrs. Raddle, in a cold

perspiration of anger. ‘But will you have the goodness just to call me

that again, sir?’

‘I didn’t make use of the word in any invidious sense, ma’am,’ replied

Mr. Benjamin Allen, growing somewhat uneasy on his own account.

‘I beg your parding, young man,’ demanded Mrs. Raddle, in a louder and

more imperative tone. ‘But who do you call a woman? Did you make that

remark to me, sir?’

‘Why, bless my heart!’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Did you apply that name to me, I ask of you, sir?’ interrupted Mrs.

Raddle, with intense fierceness, throwing the door wide open.

‘Why, of course I did,’ replied Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Yes, of course you did,’ said Mrs. Raddle, backing gradually to the

door, and raising her voice to its loudest pitch, for the special behoof

of Mr. Raddle in the kitchen. ‘Yes, of course you did! And everybody

knows that they may safely insult me in my own ‘ouse while my husband

sits sleeping downstairs, and taking no more notice than if I was a dog

in the streets. He ought to be ashamed of himself (here Mrs. Raddle

sobbed) to allow his wife to be treated in this way by a parcel of young

cutters and carvers of live people’s bodies, that disgraces the lodgings

(another sob), and leaving her exposed to all manner of abuse; a base,

faint-hearted, timorous wretch, that’s afraid to come upstairs, and face

the ruffinly creatures--that’s afraid--that’s afraid to come!’ Mrs.

Raddle paused to listen whether the repetition of the taunt had roused

her better half; and finding that it had not been successful, proceeded

to descend the stairs with sobs innumerable; when there came a loud

double knock at the street door; whereupon she burst into an hysterical

fit of weeping, accompanied with dismal moans, which was prolonged until

the knock had been repeated six times, when, in an uncontrollable burst

of mental agony, she threw down all the umbrellas, and disappeared into

the back parlour, closing the door after her with an awful crash.

‘Does Mr. Sawyer live here?’ said Mr. Pickwick, when the door was

opened.

‘Yes,’ said the girl, ‘first floor. It’s the door straight afore you,

when you gets to the top of the stairs.’ Having given this instruction,

the handmaid, who had been brought up among the aboriginal inhabitants

of Southwark, disappeared, with the candle in her hand, down the kitchen

stairs, perfectly satisfied that she had done everything that could

possibly be required of her under the circumstances.

Mr. Snodgrass, who entered last, secured the street door, after several

ineffectual efforts, by putting up the chain; and the friends stumbled

upstairs, where they were received by Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been

afraid to go down, lest he should be waylaid by Mrs. Raddle.

‘How are you?’ said the discomfited student. ‘Glad to see you--take care

of the glasses.’ This caution was addressed to Mr. Pickwick, who had put

his hat in the tray.

‘Dear me,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I beg your pardon.’

‘Don’t mention it, don’t mention it,’ said Bob Sawyer. ‘I’m rather

confined for room here, but you must put up with all that, when you come

to see a young bachelor. Walk in. You’ve seen this gentleman before, I

think?’ Mr. Pickwick shook hands with Mr. Benjamin Allen, and his

friends followed his example. They had scarcely taken their seats when

there was another double knock.

‘I hope that’s Jack Hopkins!’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer. ‘Hush. Yes, it is.

Come up, Jack; come up.’

A heavy footstep was heard upon the stairs, and Jack Hopkins presented

himself. He wore a black velvet waistcoat, with thunder-and-lightning

buttons; and a blue striped shirt, with a white false collar.

‘You’re late, Jack?’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Been detained at Bartholomew’s,’ replied Hopkins.

‘Anything new?’

‘No, nothing particular. Rather a good accident brought into the

casualty ward.’

‘What was that, sir?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Only a man fallen out of a four pair of stairs’ window; but it’s a very

fair case indeed.’

‘Do you mean that the patient is in a fair way to recover?’ inquired Mr.

Pickwick.

‘No,’ replied Mr. Hopkins carelessly. ‘No, I should rather say he

wouldn’t. There must be a splendid operation, though, to-morrow--

magnificent sight if Slasher does it.’

‘You consider Mr. Slasher a good operator?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Best alive,’ replied Hopkins. ‘Took a boy’s leg out of the socket last

week--boy ate five apples and a gingerbread cake--exactly two minutes

after it was all over, boy said he wouldn’t lie there to be made game

of, and he’d tell his mother if they didn’t begin.’

‘Dear me!’ said Mr. Pickwick, astonished.

‘Pooh! That’s nothing, that ain’t,’ said Jack Hopkins. ‘Is it, Bob?’

‘Nothing at all,’ replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘By the bye, Bob,’ said Hopkins, with a scarcely perceptible glance at

Mr. Pickwick’s attentive face, ‘we had a curious accident last night. A

child was brought in, who had swallowed a necklace.’

‘Swallowed what, Sir?’ interrupted Mr. Pickwick.

‘A necklace,’ replied Jack Hopkins. ‘Not all at once, you know, that

would be too much--you couldn’t swallow that, if the child did--eh, Mr.

Pickwick? ha, ha!’ Mr. Hopkins appeared highly gratified with his own

pleasantry, and continued--‘No, the way was this. Child’s parents were

poor people who lived in a court. Child’s eldest sister bought a

necklace--common necklace, made of large black wooden beads. Child being

fond of toys, cribbed the necklace, hid it, played with it, cut the

string, and swallowed a bead. Child thought it capital fun, went back

next day, and swallowed another bead.’

‘Bless my heart,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘what a dreadful thing! I beg your

pardon, Sir. Go on.’

‘Next day, child swallowed two beads; the day after that, he treated

himself to three, and so on, till in a week’s time he had got through

the necklace--five-and-twenty beads in all. The sister, who was an

industrious girl, and seldom treated herself to a bit of finery, cried

her eyes out, at the loss of the necklace; looked high and low for it;

but, I needn’t say, didn’t find it. A few days afterwards, the family

were at dinner--baked shoulder of mutton, and potatoes under it--the

child, who wasn’t hungry, was playing about the room, when suddenly

there was heard a devil of a noise, like a small hailstorm. “Don’t do

that, my boy,” said the father. “I ain’t a-doin’ nothing,” said the

child. “Well, don’t do it again,” said the father. There was a short

silence, and then the noise began again, worse than ever. “If you don’t

mind what I say, my boy,” said the father, “you’ll find yourself in bed,

in something less than a pig’s whisper.” He gave the child a shake to

make him obedient, and such a rattling ensued as nobody ever heard

before. “Why, damme, it’s \_in\_ the child!” said the father, “he’s got

the croup in the wrong place!” “No, I haven’t, father,” said the child,

beginning to cry, “it’s the necklace; I swallowed it, father.”--The

father caught the child up, and ran with him to the hospital; the beads

in the boy’s stomach rattling all the way with the jolting; and the

people looking up in the air, and down in the cellars, to see where the

unusual sound came from. He’s in the hospital now,’ said Jack Hopkins,

‘and he makes such a devil of a noise when he walks about, that they’re

obliged to muffle him in a watchman’s coat, for fear he should wake the

patients.’

‘That’s the most extraordinary case I ever heard of,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

with an emphatic blow on the table.

‘Oh, that’s nothing,’ said Jack Hopkins. ‘Is it, Bob?’

‘Certainly not,’ replied Bob Sawyer.

‘Very singular things occur in our profession, I can assure you, Sir,’

said Hopkins.

‘So I should be disposed to imagine,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

Another knock at the door announced a large-headed young man in a black

wig, who brought with him a scorbutic youth in a long stock. The next

comer was a gentleman in a shirt emblazoned with pink anchors, who was

closely followed by a pale youth with a plated watchguard. The arrival

of a prim personage in clean linen and cloth boots rendered the party

complete. The little table with the green baize cover was wheeled out;

the first instalment of punch was brought in, in a white jug; and the

succeeding three hours were devoted to \_Vingt-et-un\_ at sixpence a

dozen, which was only once interrupted by a slight dispute between the

scorbutic youth and the gentleman with the pink anchors; in the course

of which, the scorbutic youth intimated a burning desire to pull the

nose of the gentleman with the emblems of hope; in reply to which, that

individual expressed his decided unwillingness to accept of any ‘sauce’

on gratuitous terms, either from the irascible young gentleman with the

scorbutic countenance, or any other person who was ornamented with a

head.

When the last ‘natural’ had been declared, and the profit and loss

account of fish and sixpences adjusted, to the satisfaction of all

parties, Mr. Bob Sawyer rang for supper, and the visitors squeezed

themselves into corners while it was getting ready.

It was not so easily got ready as some people may imagine. First of all,

it was necessary to awaken the girl, who had fallen asleep with her face

on the kitchen table; this took a little time, and, even when she did

answer the bell, another quarter of an hour was consumed in fruitless

endeavours to impart to her a faint and distant glimmering of reason.

The man to whom the order for the oysters had been sent, had not been

told to open them; it is a very difficult thing to open an oyster with a

limp knife and a two-pronged fork; and very little was done in this way.

Very little of the beef was done either; and the ham (which was also

from the German-sausage shop round the corner) was in a similar

predicament. However, there was plenty of porter in a tin can; and the

cheese went a great way, for it was very strong. So upon the whole,

perhaps, the supper was quite as good as such matters usually are.

After supper, another jug of punch was put upon the table, together with

a paper of cigars, and a couple of bottles of spirits. Then there was an

awful pause; and this awful pause was occasioned by a very common

occurrence in this sort of place, but a very embarrassing one

notwithstanding.

The fact is, the girl was washing the glasses. The establishment boasted

four: we do not record the circumstance as at all derogatory to Mrs.

Raddle, for there never was a lodging-house yet, that was not short of

glasses. The landlady’s glasses were little, thin, blown-glass tumblers,

and those which had been borrowed from the public-house were great,

dropsical, bloated articles, each supported on a huge gouty leg. This

would have been in itself sufficient to have possessed the company with

the real state of affairs; but the young woman of all work had prevented

the possibility of any misconception arising in the mind of any

gentleman upon the subject, by forcibly dragging every man’s glass away,

long before he had finished his beer, and audibly stating, despite the

winks and interruptions of Mr. Bob Sawyer, that it was to be conveyed

downstairs, and washed forthwith.

It is a very ill wind that blows nobody any good. The prim man in the

cloth boots, who had been unsuccessfully attempting to make a joke

during the whole time the round game lasted, saw his opportunity, and

availed himself of it. The instant the glasses disappeared, he commenced

a long story about a great public character, whose name he had

forgotten, making a particularly happy reply to another eminent and

illustrious individual whom he had never been able to identify. He

enlarged at some length and with great minuteness upon divers collateral

circumstances, distantly connected with the anecdote in hand, but for

the life of him he couldn’t recollect at that precise moment what the

anecdote was, although he had been in the habit of telling the story

with great applause for the last ten years.

‘Dear me,’ said the prim man in the cloth boots, ‘it is a very

extraordinary circumstance.’

‘I am sorry you have forgotten it,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer, glancing

eagerly at the door, as he thought he heard the noise of glasses

jingling; ‘very sorry.’

‘So am I,’ responded the prim man, ‘because I know it would have

afforded so much amusement. Never mind; I dare say I shall manage to

recollect it, in the course of half an hour or so.’

The prim man arrived at this point just as the glasses came back, when

Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been absorbed in attention during the whole

time, said he should very much like to hear the end of it, for, so far

as it went, it was, without exception, the very best story he had ever

heard.

The sight of the tumblers restored Bob Sawyer to a degree of equanimity

which he had not possessed since his interview with his landlady. His

face brightened up, and he began to feel quite convivial.

‘Now, Betsy,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer, with great suavity, and dispersing,

at the same time, the tumultuous little mob of glasses the girl had

collected in the centre of the table--‘now, Betsy, the warm water; be

brisk, there’s a good girl.’

‘You can’t have no warm water,’ replied Betsy.

‘No warm water!’ exclaimed Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘No,’ said the girl, with a shake of the head which expressed a more

decided negative than the most copious language could have conveyed.

‘Missis Raddle said you warn’t to have none.’

The surprise depicted on the countenances of his guests imparted new

courage to the host.

‘Bring up the warm water instantly--instantly!’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer,

with desperate sternness.

‘No. I can’t,’ replied the girl; ‘Missis Raddle raked out the kitchen

fire afore she went to bed, and locked up the kittle.’

‘Oh, never mind; never mind. Pray don’t disturb yourself about such a

trifle,’ said Mr. Pickwick, observing the conflict of Bob Sawyer’s

passions, as depicted in his countenance, ‘cold water will do very

well.’

‘Oh, admirably,’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘My landlady is subject to some slight attacks of mental derangement,’

remarked Bob Sawyer, with a ghastly smile; ‘I fear I must give her

warning.’

‘No, don’t,’ said Ben Allen.

‘I fear I must,’ said Bob, with heroic firmness. ‘I’ll pay her what I

owe her, and give her warning to-morrow morning.’ Poor fellow! how

devoutly he wished he could!

Mr. Bob Sawyer’s heart-sickening attempts to rally under this last blow,

communicated a dispiriting influence to the company, the greater part of

whom, with the view of raising their spirits, attached themselves with

extra cordiality to the cold brandy-and-water, the first perceptible

effects of which were displayed in a renewal of hostilities between the

scorbutic youth and the gentleman in the shirt. The belligerents vented

their feelings of mutual contempt, for some time, in a variety of

frownings and snortings, until at last the scorbutic youth felt it

necessary to come to a more explicit understanding on the matter; when

the following clear understanding took place.

‘Sawyer,’ said the scorbutic youth, in a loud voice.

‘Well, Noddy,’ replied Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘I should be very sorry, Sawyer,’ said Mr. Noddy, ‘to create any

unpleasantness at any friend’s table, and much less at yours, Sawyer--

very; but I must take this opportunity of informing Mr. Gunter that he

is no gentleman.’

‘And I should be very sorry, Sawyer, to create any disturbance in the

street in which you reside,’ said Mr. Gunter, ‘but I’m afraid I shall be

under the necessity of alarming the neighbours by throwing the person

who has just spoken, out o’ window.’

‘What do you mean by that, sir?’ inquired Mr. Noddy.

‘What I say, Sir,’ replied Mr. Gunter.

‘I should like to see you do it, Sir,’ said Mr. Noddy.

‘You shall \_feel \_me do it in half a minute, Sir,’ replied Mr. Gunter.

‘I request that you’ll favour me with your card, Sir,’ said Mr. Noddy.

‘I’ll do nothing of the kind, Sir,’ replied Mr. Gunter.

‘Why not, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Noddy.

‘Because you’ll stick it up over your chimney-piece, and delude your

visitors into the false belief that a gentleman has been to see you,

Sir,’ replied Mr. Gunter.

‘Sir, a friend of mine shall wait on you in the morning,’ said Mr.

Noddy.

‘Sir, I’m very much obliged to you for the caution, and I’ll leave

particular directions with the servant to lock up the spoons,’ replied

Mr. Gunter.

At this point the remainder of the guests interposed, and remonstrated

with both parties on the impropriety of their conduct; on which Mr.

Noddy begged to state that his father was quite as respectable as Mr.

Gunter’s father; to which Mr. Gunter replied that his father was to the

full as respectable as Mr. Noddy’s father, and that his father’s son was

as good a man as Mr. Noddy, any day in the week. As this announcement

seemed the prelude to a recommencement of the dispute, there was another

interference on the part of the company; and a vast quantity of talking

and clamouring ensued, in the course of which Mr. Noddy gradually

allowed his feelings to overpower him, and professed that he had ever

entertained a devoted personal attachment towards Mr. Gunter. To this

Mr. Gunter replied that, upon the whole, he rather preferred Mr. Noddy

to his own brother; on hearing which admission, Mr. Noddy magnanimously

rose from his seat, and proffered his hand to Mr. Gunter. Mr. Gunter

grasped it with affecting fervour; and everybody said that the whole

dispute had been conducted in a manner which was highly honourable to

both parties concerned.

‘Now,’ said Jack Hopkins, ‘just to set us going again, Bob, I don’t mind

singing a song.’ And Hopkins, incited thereto by tumultuous applause,

plunged himself at once into ‘The King, God bless him,’ which he sang as

loud as he could, to a novel air, compounded of the ‘Bay of Biscay,’ and

‘A Frog he would.’ The chorus was the essence of the song; and, as each

gentleman sang it to the tune he knew best, the effect was very striking

indeed.

It was at the end of the chorus to the first verse, that Mr. Pickwick

held up his hand in a listening attitude, and said, as soon as silence

was restored--

‘Hush! I beg your pardon. I thought I heard somebody calling from

upstairs.’

A profound silence immediately ensued; and Mr. Bob Sawyer was observed

to turn pale.

‘I think I hear it now,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Have the goodness to open

the door.’

The door was no sooner opened than all doubt on the subject was removed.

‘Mr. Sawyer! Mr. Sawyer!’ screamed a voice from the two-pair landing.

‘It’s my landlady,’ said Bob Sawyer, looking round him with great

dismay. ‘Yes, Mrs. Raddle.’

‘What do you mean by this, Mr. Sawyer?’ replied the voice, with great

shrillness and rapidity of utterance. ‘Ain’t it enough to be swindled

out of one’s rent, and money lent out of pocket besides, and abused and

insulted by your friends that dares to call themselves men, without

having the house turned out of the window, and noise enough made to

bring the fire-engines here, at two o’clock in the morning?--Turn them

wretches away.’

‘You ought to be ashamed of yourselves,’ said the voice of Mr. Raddle,

which appeared to proceed from beneath some distant bed-clothes.

‘Ashamed of themselves!’ said Mrs. Raddle. ‘Why don’t you go down and

knock ‘em every one downstairs? You would if you was a man.’

I should if I was a dozen men, my dear,’ replied Mr. Raddle pacifically,

‘but they have the advantage of me in numbers, my dear.’

‘Ugh, you coward!’ replied Mrs. Raddle, with supreme contempt. ‘\_Do\_ you

mean to turn them wretches out, or not, Mr. Sawyer?’

‘They’re going, Mrs. Raddle, they’re going,’ said the miserable Bob. ‘I

am afraid you’d better go,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer to his friends. ‘I

thought you were making too much noise.’

‘It’s a very unfortunate thing,’ said the prim man. ‘Just as we were

getting so comfortable too!’ The prim man was just beginning to have a

dawning recollection of the story he had forgotten.

‘It’s hardly to be borne,’ said the prim man, looking round. ‘Hardly to

be borne, is it?’

‘Not to be endured,’ replied Jack Hopkins; ‘let’s have the other verse,

Bob. Come, here goes!’

‘No, no, Jack, don’t,’ interposed Bob Sawyer; ‘it’s a capital song, but

I am afraid we had better not have the other verse. They are very

violent people, the people of the house.’

‘Shall I step upstairs, and pitch into the landlord?’ inquired Hopkins,

‘or keep on ringing the bell, or go and groan on the staircase? You may

command me, Bob.’

‘I am very much indebted to you for your friendship and good-nature,

Hopkins,’ said the wretched Mr. Bob Sawyer, ‘but I think the best plan

to avoid any further dispute is for us to break up at once.’

‘Now, Mr. Sawyer,’ screamed the shrill voice of Mrs. Raddle, ‘are them

brutes going?’

‘They’re only looking for their hats, Mrs. Raddle,’ said Bob; ‘they are

going directly.’

‘Going!’ said Mrs. Raddle, thrusting her nightcap over the banisters

just as Mr. Pickwick, followed by Mr. Tupman, emerged from the sitting-

room. ‘Going! what did they ever come for?’

‘My dear ma’am,’ remonstrated Mr. Pickwick, looking up.

‘Get along with you, old wretch!’ replied Mrs. Raddle, hastily

withdrawing the nightcap. ‘Old enough to be his grandfather, you willin!

You’re worse than any of ‘em.’

Mr. Pickwick found it in vain to protest his innocence, so hurried

downstairs into the street, whither he was closely followed by Mr.

Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. Mr. Ben Allen, who was dismally

depressed with spirits and agitation, accompanied them as far as London

Bridge, and in the course of the walk confided to Mr. Winkle, as an

especially eligible person to intrust the secret to, that he was

resolved to cut the throat of any gentleman, except Mr. Bob Sawyer, who

should aspire to the affections of his sister Arabella. Having expressed

his determination to perform this painful duty of a brother with proper

firmness, he burst into tears, knocked his hat over his eyes, and,

making the best of his way back, knocked double knocks at the door of

the Borough Market office, and took short naps on the steps alternately,

until daybreak, under the firm impression that he lived there, and had

forgotten the key.

The visitors having all departed, in compliance with the rather pressing

request of Mrs. Raddle, the luckless Mr. Bob Sawyer was left alone, to

meditate on the probable events of to-morrow, and the pleasures of the

evening.

CHAPTER XXXIII. MR. WELLER THE ELDER DELIVERS SOME CRITICAL SENTIMENTS

RESPECTING LITERARY COMPOSITION; AND, ASSISTED BY HIS SON SAMUEL, PAYS A

SMALL INSTALMENT OF RETALIATION TO THE ACCOUNT OF THE REVEREND GENTLEMAN

WITH THE RED NOSE

The morning of the thirteenth of February, which the readers of this

authentic narrative know, as well as we do, to have been the day

immediately preceding that which was appointed for the trial of Mrs.

Bardell’s action, was a busy time for Mr. Samuel Weller, who was

perpetually engaged in travelling from the George and Vulture to Mr.

Perker’s chambers and back again, from and between the hours of nine

o’clock in the morning and two in the afternoon, both inclusive. Not

that there was anything whatever to be done, for the consultation had

taken place, and the course of proceeding to be adopted, had been

finally determined on; but Mr. Pickwick being in a most extreme state of

excitement, persevered in constantly sending small notes to his

attorney, merely containing the inquiry, ‘Dear Perker. Is all going on

well?’ to which Mr. Perker invariably forwarded the reply, ‘Dear

Pickwick. As well as possible’; the fact being, as we have already

hinted, that there was nothing whatever to go on, either well or ill,

until the sitting of the court on the following morning.

But people who go voluntarily to law, or are taken forcibly there, for

the first time, may be allowed to labour under some temporary irritation

and anxiety; and Sam, with a due allowance for the frailties of human

nature, obeyed all his master’s behests with that imperturbable good-

humour and unruffable composure which formed one of his most striking

and amiable characteristics.

Sam had solaced himself with a most agreeable little dinner, and was

waiting at the bar for the glass of warm mixture in which Mr. Pickwick

had requested him to drown the fatigues of his morning’s walks, when a

young boy of about three feet high, or thereabouts, in a hairy cap and

fustian overalls, whose garb bespoke a laudable ambition to attain in

time the elevation of an hostler, entered the passage of the George and

Vulture, and looked first up the stairs, and then along the passage, and

then into the bar, as if in search of somebody to whom he bore a

commission; whereupon the barmaid, conceiving it not improbable that the

said commission might be directed to the tea or table spoons of the

establishment, accosted the boy with--

‘Now, young man, what do you want?’

‘Is there anybody here, named Sam?’ inquired the youth, in a loud voice

of treble quality.

‘What’s the t’other name?’ said Sam Weller, looking round.

‘How should I know?’ briskly replied the young gentleman below the hairy

cap.

‘You’re a sharp boy, you are,’ said Mr. Weller; ‘only I wouldn’t show

that wery fine edge too much, if I was you, in case anybody took it off.

What do you mean by comin’ to a hot-el, and asking arter Sam, vith as

much politeness as a vild Indian?’

‘’Cos an old gen’l’m’n told me to,’ replied the boy.

‘What old gen’l’m’n?’ inquired Sam, with deep disdain.

‘Him as drives a Ipswich coach, and uses our parlour,’ rejoined the boy.

‘He told me yesterday mornin’ to come to the George and Wultur this

arternoon, and ask for Sam.’

‘It’s my father, my dear,’ said Mr. Weller, turning with an explanatory

air to the young lady in the bar; ‘blessed if I think he hardly knows

wot my other name is. Well, young brockiley sprout, wot then?’

‘Why then,’ said the boy, ‘you was to come to him at six o’clock to our

‘ouse, ‘cos he wants to see you--Blue Boar, Leaden’all Markit. Shall I

say you’re comin’?’

‘You may wenture on that ‘ere statement, Sir,’ replied Sam. And thus

empowered, the young gentleman walked away, awakening all the echoes in

George Yard as he did so, with several chaste and extremely correct

imitations of a drover’s whistle, delivered in a tone of peculiar

richness and volume.

Mr. Weller having obtained leave of absence from Mr. Pickwick, who, in

his then state of excitement and worry, was by no means displeased at

being left alone, set forth, long before the appointed hour, and having

plenty of time at his disposal, sauntered down as far as the Mansion

House, where he paused and contemplated, with a face of great calmness

and philosophy, the numerous cads and drivers of short stages who

assemble near that famous place of resort, to the great terror and

confusion of the old-lady population of these realms. Having loitered

here, for half an hour or so, Mr. Weller turned, and began wending his

way towards Leadenhall Market, through a variety of by-streets and

courts. As he was sauntering away his spare time, and stopped to look at

almost every object that met his gaze, it is by no means surprising that

Mr. Weller should have paused before a small stationer’s and print-

seller’s window; but without further explanation it does appear

surprising that his eyes should have no sooner rested on certain

pictures which were exposed for sale therein, than he gave a sudden

start, smote his right leg with great vehemence, and exclaimed, with

energy, ‘if it hadn’t been for this, I should ha’ forgot all about it,

till it was too late!’

The particular picture on which Sam Weller’s eyes were fixed, as he said

this, was a highly-coloured representation of a couple of human hearts

skewered together with an arrow, cooking before a cheerful fire, while a

male and female cannibal in modern attire, the gentleman being clad in a

blue coat and white trousers, and the lady in a deep red pelisse with a

parasol of the same, were approaching the meal with hungry eyes, up a

serpentine gravel path leading thereunto. A decidedly indelicate young

gentleman, in a pair of wings and nothing else, was depicted as

superintending the cooking; a representation of the spire of the church

in Langham Place, London, appeared in the distance; and the whole formed

a ‘valentine,’ of which, as a written inscription in the window

testified, there was a large assortment within, which the shopkeeper

pledged himself to dispose of, to his countrymen generally, at the

reduced rate of one-and-sixpence each.

‘I should ha’ forgot it; I should certainly ha’ forgot it!’ said Sam; so

saying, he at once stepped into the stationer’s shop, and requested to

be served with a sheet of the best gilt-edged letter-paper, and a hard-

nibbed pen which could be warranted not to splutter. These articles

having been promptly supplied, he walked on direct towards Leadenhall

Market at a good round pace, very different from his recent lingering

one. Looking round him, he there beheld a signboard on which the

painter’s art had delineated something remotely resembling a cerulean

elephant with an aquiline nose in lieu of trunk. Rightly conjecturing

that this was the Blue Boar himself, he stepped into the house, and

inquired concerning his parent.

‘He won’t be here this three-quarters of an hour or more,’ said the

young lady who superintended the domestic arrangements of the Blue Boar.

‘Wery good, my dear,’ replied Sam. ‘Let me have nine-penn’oth o’ brandy-

and-water luke, and the inkstand, will you, miss?’

The brandy-and-water luke, and the inkstand, having been carried into

the little parlour, and the young lady having carefully flattened down

the coals to prevent their blazing, and carried away the poker to

preclude the possibility of the fire being stirred, without the full

privity and concurrence of the Blue Boar being first had and obtained,

Sam Weller sat himself down in a box near the stove, and pulled out the

sheet of gilt-edged letter-paper, and the hard-nibbed pen. Then looking

carefully at the pen to see that there were no hairs in it, and dusting

down the table, so that there might be no crumbs of bread under the

paper, Sam tucked up the cuffs of his coat, squared his elbows, and

composed himself to write.

To ladies and gentlemen who are not in the habit of devoting themselves

practically to the science of penmanship, writing a letter is no very

easy task; it being always considered necessary in such cases for the

writer to recline his head on his left arm, so as to place his eyes as

nearly as possible on a level with the paper, and, while glancing

sideways at the letters he is constructing, to form with his tongue

imaginary characters to correspond. These motions, although

unquestionably of the greatest assistance to original composition,

retard in some degree the progress of the writer; and Sam had

unconsciously been a full hour and a half writing words in small text,

smearing out wrong letters with his little finger, and putting in new

ones which required going over very often to render them visible through

the old blots, when he was roused by the opening of the door and the

entrance of his parent.

‘Vell, Sammy,’ said the father.

‘Vell, my Prooshan Blue,’ responded the son, laying down his pen.

‘What’s the last bulletin about mother-in-law?’

‘Mrs. Veller passed a very good night, but is uncommon perwerse, and

unpleasant this mornin’. Signed upon oath, Tony Veller, Esquire. That’s

the last vun as was issued, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, untying his

shawl.

‘No better yet?’ inquired Sam.

‘All the symptoms aggerawated,’ replied Mr. Weller, shaking his head.

‘But wot’s that, you’re a-doin’ of? Pursuit of knowledge under

difficulties, Sammy?’

‘I’ve done now,’ said Sam, with slight embarrassment; ‘I’ve been a-

writin’.’

‘So I see,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Not to any young ‘ooman, I hope,

Sammy?’

‘Why, it’s no use a-sayin’ it ain’t,’ replied Sam; ‘it’s a walentine.’

‘A what!’ exclaimed Mr. Weller, apparently horror-stricken by the word.

‘A walentine,’ replied Sam.

‘Samivel, Samivel,’ said Mr. Weller, in reproachful accents, ‘I didn’t

think you’d ha’ done it. Arter the warnin’ you’ve had o’ your father’s

wicious propensities; arter all I’ve said to you upon this here wery

subject; arter actiwally seein’ and bein’ in the company o’ your own

mother-in-law, vich I should ha’ thought wos a moral lesson as no man

could never ha’ forgotten to his dyin’ day! I didn’t think you’d ha’

done it, Sammy, I didn’t think you’d ha’ done it!’ These reflections

were too much for the good old man. He raised Sam’s tumbler to his lips

and drank off its contents.

‘Wot’s the matter now?’ said Sam.

‘Nev’r mind, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘it’ll be a wery agonisin’

trial to me at my time of life, but I’m pretty tough, that’s vun

consolation, as the wery old turkey remarked wen the farmer said he wos

afeerd he should be obliged to kill him for the London market.’

‘Wot’ll be a trial?’ inquired Sam.

‘To see you married, Sammy--to see you a dilluded wictim, and thinkin’

in your innocence that it’s all wery capital,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘It’s

a dreadful trial to a father’s feelin’s, that ‘ere, Sammy--’

‘Nonsense,’ said Sam. ‘I ain’t a-goin’ to get married, don’t you fret

yourself about that; I know you’re a judge of these things. Order in

your pipe and I’ll read you the letter. There!’

We cannot distinctly say whether it was the prospect of the pipe, or the

consolatory reflection that a fatal disposition to get married ran in

the family, and couldn’t be helped, which calmed Mr. Weller’s feelings,

and caused his grief to subside. We should be rather disposed to say

that the result was attained by combining the two sources of

consolation, for he repeated the second in a low tone, very frequently;

ringing the bell meanwhile, to order in the first. He then divested

himself of his upper coat; and lighting the pipe and placing himself in

front of the fire with his back towards it, so that he could feel its

full heat, and recline against the mantel-piece at the same time, turned

towards Sam, and, with a countenance greatly mollified by the softening

influence of tobacco, requested him to ‘fire away.’

Sam dipped his pen into the ink to be ready for any corrections, and

began with a very theatrical air--

‘“Lovely--“’

‘Stop,’ said Mr. Weller, ringing the bell. ‘A double glass o’ the

inwariable, my dear.’

‘Very well, Sir,’ replied the girl; who with great quickness appeared,

vanished, returned, and disappeared.

‘They seem to know your ways here,’ observed Sam.

‘Yes,’ replied his father, ‘I’ve been here before, in my time. Go on,

Sammy.’

‘“Lovely creetur,”’ repeated Sam.

‘’Tain’t in poetry, is it?’ interposed his father.

‘No, no,’ replied Sam.

‘Wery glad to hear it,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Poetry’s unnat’ral; no man

ever talked poetry ‘cept a beadle on boxin’-day, or Warren’s blackin’,

or Rowland’s oil, or some of them low fellows; never you let yourself

down to talk poetry, my boy. Begin agin, Sammy.’

Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with critical solemnity, and Sam once more

commenced, and read as follows:

‘“Lovely creetur I feel myself a damned--“’

That ain’t proper,’ said Mr. Weller, taking his pipe from his mouth.

‘No; it ain’t “damned,”’ observed Sam, holding the letter up to the

light, ‘it’s “shamed,” there’s a blot there--“I feel myself ashamed.”’

‘Wery good,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Go on.’

‘Feel myself ashamed, and completely cir--’ I forget what this here word

is,’ said Sam, scratching his head with the pen, in vain attempts to

remember.

‘Why don’t you look at it, then?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘So I am a-lookin’ at it,’ replied Sam, ‘but there’s another blot.

Here’s a “c,” and a “i,” and a “d.”’

‘Circumwented, p’raps,’ suggested Mr. Weller.

‘No, it ain’t that,’ said Sam, ‘“circumscribed”; that’s it.’

‘That ain’t as good a word as “circumwented,” Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller

gravely.

‘Think not?’ said Sam.

‘Nothin’ like it,’ replied his father.

‘But don’t you think it means more?’ inquired Sam.

‘Vell p’raps it’s a more tenderer word,’ said Mr. Weller, after a few

moments’ reflection. ‘Go on, Sammy.’

‘“Feel myself ashamed and completely circumscribed in a-dressin’ of you,

for you are a nice gal and nothin’ but it.”’

‘That’s a wery pretty sentiment,’ said the elder Mr. Weller, removing

his pipe to make way for the remark.

‘Yes, I think it is rayther good,’ observed Sam, highly flattered.

‘Wot I like in that ‘ere style of writin’,’ said the elder Mr. Weller,

‘is, that there ain’t no callin’ names in it--no Wenuses, nor nothin’ o’

that kind. Wot’s the good o’ callin’ a young ‘ooman a Wenus or a angel,

Sammy?’

‘Ah! what, indeed?’ replied Sam.

‘You might jist as well call her a griffin, or a unicorn, or a king’s

arms at once, which is wery well known to be a collection o’ fabulous

animals,’ added Mr. Weller.

‘Just as well,’ replied Sam.

‘Drive on, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller.

Sam complied with the request, and proceeded as follows; his father

continuing to smoke, with a mixed expression of wisdom and complacency,

which was particularly edifying.

‘“Afore I see you, I thought all women was alike.”’

‘So they are,’ observed the elder Mr. Weller parenthetically.

‘“But now,”’ continued Sam, ‘“now I find what a reg’lar soft-headed,

inkred’lous turnip I must ha’ been; for there ain’t nobody like you,

though I like you better than nothin’ at all.” I thought it best to make

that rayther strong,’ said Sam, looking up.

Mr. Weller nodded approvingly, and Sam resumed.

‘“So I take the privilidge of the day, Mary, my dear--as the gen’l’m’n

in difficulties did, ven he valked out of a Sunday--to tell you that the

first and only time I see you, your likeness was took on my hart in much

quicker time and brighter colours than ever a likeness was took by the

profeel macheen (wich p’raps you may have heerd on Mary my dear) altho

it \_does \_finish a portrait and put the frame and glass on complete,

with a hook at the end to hang it up by, and all in two minutes and a

quarter.”’

‘I am afeerd that werges on the poetical, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller

dubiously.

‘No, it don’t,’ replied Sam, reading on very quickly, to avoid

contesting the point--

‘“Except of me Mary my dear as your walentine and think over what I’ve

said.--My dear Mary I will now conclude.” That’s all,’ said Sam.

‘That’s rather a Sudden pull-up, ain’t it, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Not a bit on it,’ said Sam; ‘she’ll vish there wos more, and that’s the

great art o’ letter-writin’.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘there’s somethin’ in that; and I wish your

mother-in-law ‘ud only conduct her conwersation on the same gen-teel

principle. Ain’t you a-goin’ to sign it?’

‘That’s the difficulty,’ said Sam; ‘I don’t know what to sign it.’

‘Sign it--“Veller”,’ said the oldest surviving proprietor of that name.

‘Won’t do,’ said Sam. ‘Never sign a walentine with your own name.’

‘Sign it “Pickwick,” then,’ said Mr. Weller; ‘it’s a wery good name, and

a easy one to spell.’

The wery thing,’ said Sam. ‘I \_could \_end with a werse; what do you

think?’

‘I don’t like it, Sam,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. ‘I never know’d a

respectable coachman as wrote poetry, ‘cept one, as made an affectin’

copy o’ werses the night afore he was hung for a highway robbery; and he

wos only a Cambervell man, so even that’s no rule.’

But Sam was not to be dissuaded from the poetical idea that had occurred

to him, so he signed the letter--

‘Your love-sick Pickwick.’

And having folded it, in a very intricate manner, squeezed a downhill

direction in one corner: ‘To Mary, Housemaid, at Mr. Nupkins’s, Mayor’s,

Ipswich, Suffolk’; and put it into his pocket, wafered, and ready for

the general post. This important business having been transacted, Mr.

Weller the elder proceeded to open that, on which he had summoned his

son.

‘The first matter relates to your governor, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘He’s a-goin’ to be tried to-morrow, ain’t he?’

‘The trial’s a-comin’ on,’ replied Sam.

‘Vell,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘Now I s’pose he’ll want to call some witnesses

to speak to his character, or p’rhaps to prove a alleybi. I’ve been a-

turnin’ the bis’ness over in my mind, and he may make his-self easy,

Sammy. I’ve got some friends as’ll do either for him, but my adwice ‘ud

be this here--never mind the character, and stick to the alleybi.

Nothing like a alleybi, Sammy, nothing.’ Mr. Weller looked very profound

as he delivered this legal opinion; and burying his nose in his tumbler,

winked over the top thereof, at his astonished son.

‘Why, what do you mean?’ said Sam; ‘you don’t think he’s a-goin’ to be

tried at the Old Bailey, do you?’

‘That ain’t no part of the present consideration, Sammy,’ replied Mr.

Weller. ‘Verever he’s a-goin’ to be tried, my boy, a alleybi’s the thing

to get him off. Ve got Tom Vildspark off that ‘ere manslaughter, with a

alleybi, ven all the big vigs to a man said as nothing couldn’t save

him. And my ‘pinion is, Sammy, that if your governor don’t prove a

alleybi, he’ll be what the Italians call reg’larly flummoxed, and that’s

all about it.’

As the elder Mr. Weller entertained a firm and unalterable conviction

that the Old Bailey was the supreme court of judicature in this country,

and that its rules and forms of proceeding regulated and controlled the

practice of all other courts of justice whatsoever, he totally

disregarded the assurances and arguments of his son, tending to show

that the alibi was inadmissible; and vehemently protested that Mr.

Pickwick was being ‘wictimised.’ Finding that it was of no use to

discuss the matter further, Sam changed the subject, and inquired what

the second topic was, on which his revered parent wished to consult him.

‘That’s a pint o’ domestic policy, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘This here

Stiggins--’

‘Red-nosed man?’ inquired Sam.

‘The wery same,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘This here red-nosed man, Sammy,

wisits your mother-in-law vith a kindness and constancy I never see

equalled. He’s sitch a friend o’ the family, Sammy, that wen he’s avay

from us, he can’t be comfortable unless he has somethin’ to remember us

by.’

‘And I’d give him somethin’ as ‘ud turpentine and beeswax his memory for

the next ten years or so, if I wos you,’ interposed Sam.

‘Stop a minute,’ said Mr. Weller; ‘I wos a-going to say, he always

brings now, a flat bottle as holds about a pint and a half, and fills it

vith the pine-apple rum afore he goes avay.’

‘And empties it afore he comes back, I s’pose?’ said Sam.

‘Clean!’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘never leaves nothin’ in it but the cork

and the smell; trust him for that, Sammy. Now, these here fellows, my

boy, are a-goin’ to-night to get up the monthly meetin’ o’ the Brick

Lane Branch o’ the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance

Association. Your mother-in-law wos a-goin’, Sammy, but she’s got the

rheumatics, and can’t; and I, Sammy--I’ve got the two tickets as wos

sent her.’ Mr. Weller communicated this secret with great glee, and

winked so indefatigably after doing so, that Sam began to think he must

have got the \_Tic Doloureux\_ in his right eyelid.

‘Well?’ said that young gentleman.

‘Well,’ continued his progenitor, looking round him very cautiously,

‘you and I’ll go, punctiwal to the time. The deputy-shepherd won’t,

Sammy; the deputy-shepherd won’t.’ Here Mr. Weller was seized with a

paroxysm of chuckles, which gradually terminated in as near an approach

to a choke as an elderly gentleman can, with safety, sustain.

‘Well, I never see sitch an old ghost in all my born days,’ exclaimed

Sam, rubbing the old gentleman’s back, hard enough to set him on fire

with the friction. ‘What are you a-laughin’ at, corpilence?’

‘Hush! Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, looking round him with increased

caution, and speaking in a whisper. ‘Two friends o’ mine, as works the

Oxford Road, and is up to all kinds o’ games, has got the deputy-

shepherd safe in tow, Sammy; and ven he does come to the Ebenezer

Junction (vich he’s sure to do: for they’ll see him to the door, and

shove him in, if necessary), he’ll be as far gone in rum-and-water, as

ever he wos at the Markis o’ Granby, Dorkin’, and that’s not sayin’ a

little neither.’ And with this, Mr. Weller once more laughed

immoderately, and once more relapsed into a state of partial

suffocation, in consequence.

Nothing could have been more in accordance with Sam Weller’s feelings

than the projected exposure of the real propensities and qualities of

the red-nosed man; and it being very near the appointed hour of meeting,

the father and son took their way at once to Brick Lane, Sam not

forgetting to drop his letter into a general post-office as they walked

along.

The monthly meetings of the Brick Lane Branch of the United Grand

Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association were held in a large room,

pleasantly and airily situated at the top of a safe and commodious

ladder. The president was the straight-walking Mr. Anthony Humm, a

converted fireman, now a schoolmaster, and occasionally an itinerant

preacher; and the secretary was Mr. Jonas Mudge, chandler’s shopkeeper,

an enthusiastic and disinterested vessel, who sold tea to the members.

Previous to the commencement of business, the ladies sat upon forms, and

drank tea, till such time as they considered it expedient to leave off;

and a large wooden money-box was conspicuously placed upon the green

baize cloth of the business-table, behind which the secretary stood, and

acknowledged, with a gracious smile, every addition to the rich vein of

copper which lay concealed within.

On this particular occasion the women drank tea to a most alarming

extent; greatly to the horror of Mr. Weller, senior, who, utterly

regardless of all Sam’s admonitory nudgings, stared about him in every

direction with the most undisguised astonishment.

‘Sammy,’ whispered Mr. Weller, ‘if some o’ these here people don’t want

tappin’ to-morrow mornin’, I ain’t your father, and that’s wot it is.

Why, this here old lady next me is a-drowndin’ herself in tea.’

Be quiet, can’t you?’ murmured Sam.

‘Sam,’ whispered Mr. Weller, a moment afterwards, in a tone of deep

agitation, ‘mark my vords, my boy. If that ‘ere secretary fellow keeps

on for only five minutes more, he’ll blow hisself up with toast and

water.’

‘Well, let him, if he likes,’ replied Sam; ‘it ain’t no bis’ness o’

yourn.’

‘If this here lasts much longer, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, in the same

low voice, ‘I shall feel it my duty, as a human bein’, to rise and

address the cheer. There’s a young ‘ooman on the next form but two, as

has drunk nine breakfast cups and a half; and she’s a-swellin’ wisibly

before my wery eyes.’

There is little doubt that Mr. Weller would have carried his benevolent

intention into immediate execution, if a great noise, occasioned by

putting up the cups and saucers, had not very fortunately announced that

the tea-drinking was over. The crockery having been removed, the table

with the green baize cover was carried out into the centre of the room,

and the business of the evening was commenced by a little emphatic man,

with a bald head and drab shorts, who suddenly rushed up the ladder, at

the imminent peril of snapping the two little legs incased in the drab

shorts, and said--

‘Ladies and gentlemen, I move our excellent brother, Mr. Anthony Humm,

into the chair.’

The ladies waved a choice selection of pocket-handkerchiefs at this

proposition; and the impetuous little man literally moved Mr. Humm into

the chair, by taking him by the shoulders and thrusting him into a

mahogany-frame which had once represented that article of furniture. The

waving of handkerchiefs was renewed; and Mr. Humm, who was a sleek,

white-faced man, in a perpetual perspiration, bowed meekly, to the great

admiration of the females, and formally took his seat. Silence was then

proclaimed by the little man in the drab shorts, and Mr. Humm rose and

said--That, with the permission of his Brick Lane Branch brothers and

sisters, then and there present, the secretary would read the report of

the Brick Lane Branch committee; a proposition which was again received

with a demonstration of pocket-handkerchiefs.

The secretary having sneezed in a very impressive manner, and the cough

which always seizes an assembly, when anything particular is going to be

done, having been duly performed, the following document was read:

‘REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE BRICK LANE BRANCH OF THE UNITED GRAND

JUNCTION EBENEZER TEMPERANCE ASSOCIATION

‘Your committee have pursued their grateful labours during the past

month, and have the unspeakable pleasure of reporting the following

additional cases of converts to Temperance.

‘H. Walker, tailor, wife, and two children. When in better

circumstances, owns to having been in the constant habit of drinking ale

and beer; says he is not certain whether he did not twice a week, for

twenty years, taste “dog’s nose,” which your committee find upon

inquiry, to be compounded of warm porter, moist sugar, gin, and nutmeg

(a groan, and ‘So it is!’ from an elderly female). Is now out of work

and penniless; thinks it must be the porter (cheers) or the loss of the

use of his right hand; is not certain which, but thinks it very likely

that, if he had drunk nothing but water all his life, his fellow-workman

would never have stuck a rusty needle in him, and thereby occasioned his

accident (tremendous cheering). Has nothing but cold water to drink, and

never feels thirsty (great applause).

‘Betsy Martin, widow, one child, and one eye. Goes out charing and

washing, by the day; never had more than one eye, but knows her mother

drank bottled stout, and shouldn’t wonder if that caused it (immense

cheering). Thinks it not impossible that if she had always abstained

from spirits she might have had two eyes by this time (tremendous

applause). Used, at every place she went to, to have eighteen-pence a

day, a pint of porter, and a glass of spirits; but since she became a

member of the Brick Lane Branch, has always demanded three-and-sixpence

(the announcement of this most interesting fact was received with

deafening enthusiasm).

‘Henry Beller was for many years toast-master at various corporation

dinners, during which time he drank a great deal of foreign wine; may

sometimes have carried a bottle or two home with him; is not quite

certain of that, but is sure if he did, that he drank the contents.

Feels very low and melancholy, is very feverish, and has a constant

thirst upon him; thinks it must be the wine he used to drink (cheers).

Is out of employ now; and never touches a drop of foreign wine by any

chance (tremendous plaudits).

‘Thomas Burton is purveyor of cat’s meat to the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs,

and several members of the Common Council (the announcement of this

gentleman’s name was received with breathless interest). Has a wooden

leg; finds a wooden leg expensive, going over the stones; used to wear

second-hand wooden legs, and drink a glass of hot gin-and-water

regularly every night--sometimes two (deep sighs). Found the second-hand

wooden legs split and rot very quickly; is firmly persuaded that their

constitution was undermined by the gin-and-water (prolonged cheering).

Buys new wooden legs now, and drinks nothing but water and weak tea. The

new legs last twice as long as the others used to do, and he attributes

this solely to his temperate habits (triumphant cheers).’

Anthony Humm now moved that the assembly do regale itself with a song.

With a view to their rational and moral enjoyment, Brother Mordlin had

adapted the beautiful words of ‘Who hasn’t heard of a Jolly Young

Waterman?’ to the tune of the Old Hundredth, which he would request them

to join him in singing (great applause). He might take that opportunity

of expressing his firm persuasion that the late Mr. Dibdin, seeing the

errors of his former life, had written that song to show the advantages

of abstinence. It was a temperance song (whirlwinds of cheers). The

neatness of the young man’s attire, the dexterity of his feathering, the

enviable state of mind which enabled him in the beautiful words of the

poet, to

‘Row along, thinking of nothing at all,’

all combined to prove that he must have been a water-drinker (cheers).

Oh, what a state of virtuous jollity! (rapturous cheering). And what was

the young man’s reward? Let all young men present mark this:

‘The maidens all flocked to his boat so readily.’

(Loud cheers, in which the ladies joined.) What a bright example! The

sisterhood, the maidens, flocking round the young waterman, and urging

him along the stream of duty and of temperance. But, was it the maidens

of humble life only, who soothed, consoled, and supported him? No!

‘He was always first oars with the fine city ladies.’

(Immense cheering.) The soft sex to a man--he begged pardon, to a

female--rallied round the young waterman, and turned with disgust from

the drinker of spirits (cheers). The Brick Lane Branch brothers were

watermen (cheers and laughter). That room was their boat; that audience

were the maidens; and he (Mr. Anthony Humm), however unworthily, was

‘first oars’ (unbounded applause).

‘Wot does he mean by the soft sex, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller, in a

whisper.

‘The womin,’ said Sam, in the same tone.

‘He ain’t far out there, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘they \_must \_be a

soft sex--a wery soft sex, indeed--if they let themselves be gammoned by

such fellers as him.’

Any further observations from the indignant old gentleman were cut short

by the announcement of the song, which Mr. Anthony Humm gave out two

lines at a time, for the information of such of his hearers as were

unacquainted with the legend. While it was being sung, the little man

with the drab shorts disappeared; he returned immediately on its

conclusion, and whispered Mr. Anthony Humm, with a face of the deepest

importance.

‘My friends,’ said Mr. Humm, holding up his hand in a deprecatory

manner, to bespeak the silence of such of the stout old ladies as were

yet a line or two behind; ‘my friends, a delegate from the Dorking

Branch of our society, Brother Stiggins, attends below.’

Out came the pocket-handkerchiefs again, in greater force than ever; for

Mr. Stiggins was excessively popular among the female constituency of

Brick Lane.

‘He may approach, I think,’ said Mr. Humm, looking round him, with a fat

smile. ‘Brother Tadger, let him come forth and greet us.’

The little man in the drab shorts who answered to the name of Brother

Tadger, bustled down the ladder with great speed, and was immediately

afterwards heard tumbling up with the Reverend Mr. Stiggins.

‘He’s a-comin’, Sammy,’ whispered Mr. Weller, purple in the countenance

with suppressed laughter.

‘Don’t say nothin’ to me,’ replied Sam, ‘for I can’t bear it. He’s close

to the door. I hear him a-knockin’ his head again the lath and plaster

now.’

As Sam Weller spoke, the little door flew open, and Brother Tadger

appeared, closely followed by the Reverend Mr. Stiggins, who no sooner

entered, than there was a great clapping of hands, and stamping of feet,

and flourishing of handkerchiefs; to all of which manifestations of

delight, Brother Stiggins returned no other acknowledgment than staring

with a wild eye, and a fixed smile, at the extreme top of the wick of

the candle on the table, swaying his body to and fro, meanwhile, in a

very unsteady and uncertain manner.

‘Are you unwell, Brother Stiggins?’ whispered Mr. Anthony Humm.

‘I am all right, Sir,’ replied Mr. Stiggins, in a tone in which ferocity

was blended with an extreme thickness of utterance; ‘I am all right,

Sir.’

‘Oh, very well,’ rejoined Mr. Anthony Humm, retreating a few paces.

‘I believe no man here has ventured to say that I am not all right,

Sir?’ said Mr. Stiggins.

‘Oh, certainly not,’ said Mr. Humm.

‘I should advise him not to, Sir; I should advise him not,’ said Mr.

Stiggins.

By this time the audience were perfectly silent, and waited with some

anxiety for the resumption of business.

‘Will you address the meeting, brother?’ said Mr. Humm, with a smile of

invitation.

‘No, sir,’ rejoined Mr. Stiggins; ‘No, sir. I will not, sir.’

The meeting looked at each other with raised eyelids; and a murmur of

astonishment ran through the room.

‘It’s my opinion, sir,’ said Mr. Stiggins, unbuttoning his coat, and

speaking very loudly--‘it’s my opinion, sir, that this meeting is drunk,

sir. Brother Tadger, sir!’ said Mr. Stiggins, suddenly increasing in

ferocity, and turning sharp round on the little man in the drab shorts,

‘\_you \_are drunk, sir!’ With this, Mr. Stiggins, entertaining a

praiseworthy desire to promote the sobriety of the meeting, and to

exclude therefrom all improper characters, hit Brother Tadger on the

summit of the nose with such unerring aim, that the drab shorts

disappeared like a flash of lightning. Brother Tadger had been knocked,

head first, down the ladder.

Upon this, the women set up a loud and dismal screaming; and rushing in

small parties before their favourite brothers, flung their arms around

them to preserve them from danger. An instance of affection, which had

nearly proved fatal to Humm, who, being extremely popular, was all but

suffocated, by the crowd of female devotees that hung about his neck,

and heaped caresses upon him. The greater part of the lights were

quickly put out, and nothing but noise and confusion resounded on all

sides.

‘Now, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, taking off his greatcoat with much

deliberation, ‘just you step out, and fetch in a watchman.’

‘And wot are you a-goin’ to do, the while?’ inquired Sam.

‘Never you mind me, Sammy,’ replied the old gentleman; ‘I shall ockipy

myself in havin’ a small settlement with that ‘ere Stiggins.’ Before Sam

could interfere to prevent it, his heroic parent had penetrated into a

remote corner of the room, and attacked the Reverend Mr. Stiggins with

manual dexterity.

‘Come off!’ said Sam.

‘Come on!’ cried Mr. Weller; and without further invitation he gave the

Reverend Mr. Stiggins a preliminary tap on the head, and began dancing

round him in a buoyant and cork-like manner, which in a gentleman at his

time of life was a perfect marvel to behold.

Finding all remonstrances unavailing, Sam pulled his hat firmly on,

threw his father’s coat over his arm, and taking the old man round the

waist, forcibly dragged him down the ladder, and into the street; never

releasing his hold, or permitting him to stop, until they reached the

corner. As they gained it, they could hear the shouts of the populace,

who were witnessing the removal of the Reverend Mr. Stiggins to strong

lodgings for the night, and could hear the noise occasioned by the

dispersion in various directions of the members of the Brick Lane Branch

of the United Grand Junction Ebenezer Temperance Association.

CHAPTER XXXIV. IS WHOLLY DEVOTED TO A FULL AND FAITHFUL REPORT OF THE

MEMORABLE TRIAL OF BARDELL AGAINST PICKWICK

I wonder what the foreman of the jury, whoever he’ll be, has got for

breakfast,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, by way of keeping up a conversation on

the eventful morning of the fourteenth of February.

‘Ah!’ said Perker, ‘I hope he’s got a good one.’

Why so?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Highly important--very important, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker. ‘A

good, contented, well-breakfasted juryman is a capital thing to get hold

of. Discontented or hungry jurymen, my dear sir, always find for the

plaintiff.’

‘Bless my heart,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking very blank, ‘what do they

do that for?’

‘Why, I don’t know,’ replied the little man coolly; ‘saves time, I

suppose. If it’s near dinner-time, the foreman takes out his watch when

the jury has retired, and says, “Dear me, gentlemen, ten minutes to

five, I declare! I dine at five, gentlemen.” “So do I,” says everybody

else, except two men who ought to have dined at three and seem more than

half disposed to stand out in consequence. The foreman smiles, and puts

up his watch:--“Well, gentlemen, what do we say, plaintiff or defendant,

gentlemen? I rather think, so far as I am concerned, gentlemen,--I say,

I rather think--but don’t let that influence you--I \_rather\_ think the

plaintiff’s the man.” Upon this, two or three other men are sure to say

that they think so too--as of course they do; and then they get on very

unanimously and comfortably. Ten minutes past nine!’ said the little

man, looking at his watch. ‘Time we were off, my dear sir; breach of

promise trial-court is generally full in such cases. You had better ring

for a coach, my dear sir, or we shall be rather late.’

Mr. Pickwick immediately rang the bell, and a coach having been

procured, the four Pickwickians and Mr. Perker ensconced themselves

therein, and drove to Guildhall; Sam Weller, Mr. Lowten, and the blue

bag, following in a cab.

‘Lowten,’ said Perker, when they reached the outer hall of the court,

‘put Mr. Pickwick’s friends in the students’ box; Mr. Pickwick himself

had better sit by me. This way, my dear sir, this way.’ Taking Mr.

Pickwick by the coat sleeve, the little man led him to the low seat just

beneath the desks of the King’s Counsel, which is constructed for the

convenience of attorneys, who from that spot can whisper into the ear of

the leading counsel in the case, any instructions that may be necessary

during the progress of the trial. The occupants of this seat are

invisible to the great body of spectators, inasmuch as they sit on a

much lower level than either the barristers or the audience, whose seats

are raised above the floor. Of course they have their backs to both, and

their faces towards the judge.

‘That’s the witness-box, I suppose?’ said Mr. Pickwick, pointing to a

kind of pulpit, with a brass rail, on his left hand.

‘That’s the witness-box, my dear sir,’ replied Perker, disinterring a

quantity of papers from the blue bag, which Lowten had just deposited at

his feet.

‘And that,’ said Mr. Pickwick, pointing to a couple of enclosed seats on

his right, ‘that’s where the jurymen sit, is it not?’

‘The identical place, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker, tapping the lid of

his snuff-box.

Mr. Pickwick stood up in a state of great agitation, and took a glance

at the court. There were already a pretty large sprinkling of spectators

in the gallery, and a numerous muster of gentlemen in wigs, in the

barristers’ seats, who presented, as a body, all that pleasing and

extensive variety of nose and whisker for which the Bar of England is so

justly celebrated. Such of the gentlemen as had a brief to carry,

carried it in as conspicuous a manner as possible, and occasionally

scratched their noses therewith, to impress the fact more strongly on

the observation of the spectators. Other gentlemen, who had no briefs to

show, carried under their arms goodly octavos, with a red label behind,

and that under-done-pie-crust-coloured cover, which is technically known

as ‘law calf.’ Others, who had neither briefs nor books, thrust their

hands into their pockets, and looked as wise as they conveniently could;

others, again, moved here and there with great restlessness and

earnestness of manner, content to awaken thereby the admiration and

astonishment of the uninitiated strangers. The whole, to the great

wonderment of Mr. Pickwick, were divided into little groups, who were

chatting and discussing the news of the day in the most unfeeling manner

possible--just as if no trial at all were coming on.

A bow from Mr. Phunky, as he entered, and took his seat behind the row

appropriated to the King’s Counsel, attracted Mr. Pickwick’s attention;

and he had scarcely returned it, when Mr. Serjeant Snubbin appeared,

followed by Mr. Mallard, who half hid the Serjeant behind a large

crimson bag, which he placed on his table, and, after shaking hands with

Perker, withdrew. Then there entered two or three more Serjeants; and

among them, one with a fat body and a red face, who nodded in a friendly

manner to Mr. Serjeant Snubbin, and said it was a fine morning.

‘Who’s that red-faced man, who said it was a fine morning, and nodded to

our counsel?’ whispered Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz,’ replied Perker. ‘He’s opposed to us; he leads on

the other side. That gentleman behind him is Mr. Skimpin, his junior.’

Mr. Pickwick was on the point of inquiring, with great abhorrence of the

man’s cold-blooded villainy, how Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, who was counsel

for the opposite party, dared to presume to tell Mr. Serjeant Snubbin,

who was counsel for him, that it was a fine morning, when he was

interrupted by a general rising of the barristers, and a loud cry of

‘Silence!’ from the officers of the court. Looking round, he found that

this was caused by the entrance of the judge.

Mr. Justice Stareleigh (who sat in the absence of the Chief Justice,

occasioned by indisposition) was a most particularly short man, and so

fat, that he seemed all face and waistcoat. He rolled in, upon two

little turned legs, and having bobbed gravely to the Bar, who bobbed

gravely to him, put his little legs underneath his table, and his little

three-cornered hat upon it; and when Mr. Justice Stareleigh had done

this, all you could see of him was two queer little eyes, one broad pink

face, and somewhere about half of a big and very comical-looking wig.

The judge had no sooner taken his seat, than the officer on the floor of

the court called out ‘Silence!’ in a commanding tone, upon which another

officer in the gallery cried ‘Silence!’ in an angry manner, whereupon

three or four more ushers shouted ‘Silence!’ in a voice of indignant

remonstrance. This being done, a gentleman in black, who sat below the

judge, proceeded to call over the names of the jury; and after a great

deal of bawling, it was discovered that only ten special jurymen were

present. Upon this, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz prayed a \_tales\_; the gentleman

in black then proceeded to press into the special jury, two of the

common jurymen; and a greengrocer and a chemist were caught directly.

‘Answer to your names, gentlemen, that you may be sworn,’ said the

gentleman in black. ‘Richard Upwitch.’

‘Here,’ said the greengrocer.

‘Thomas Groffin.’

‘Here,’ said the chemist.

‘Take the book, gentlemen. You shall well and truly try--’

‘I beg this court’s pardon,’ said the chemist, who was a tall, thin,

yellow-visaged man, ‘but I hope this court will excuse my attendance.’

‘On what grounds, Sir?’ said Mr. Justice Stareleigh.

‘I have no assistant, my Lord,’ said the chemist.

‘I can’t help that, Sir,’ replied Mr. Justice Stareleigh. ‘You should

hire one.’

‘I can’t afford it, my Lord,’ rejoined the chemist.

‘Then you ought to be able to afford it, Sir,’ said the judge,

reddening; for Mr. Justice Stareleigh’s temper bordered on the

irritable, and brooked not contradiction.

‘I know I \_ought \_to do, if I got on as well as I deserved; but I don’t,

my Lord,’ answered the chemist.

‘Swear the gentleman,’ said the judge peremptorily.

The officer had got no further than the ‘You shall well and truly try,’

when he was again interrupted by the chemist.

‘I am to be sworn, my Lord, am I?’ said the chemist.

‘Certainly, sir,’ replied the testy little judge.

‘Very well, my Lord,’ replied the chemist, in a resigned manner. ‘Then

there’ll be murder before this trial’s over; that’s all. Swear me, if

you please, Sir;’ and sworn the chemist was, before the judge could find

words to utter.

‘I merely wanted to observe, my Lord,’ said the chemist, taking his seat

with great deliberation, ‘that I’ve left nobody but an errand-boy in my

shop. He is a very nice boy, my Lord, but he is not acquainted with

drugs; and I know that the prevailing impression on his mind is, that

Epsom salts means oxalic acid; and syrup of senna, laudanum. That’s all,

my Lord.’ With this, the tall chemist composed himself into a

comfortable attitude, and, assuming a pleasant expression of

countenance, appeared to have prepared himself for the worst.

Mr. Pickwick was regarding the chemist with feelings of the deepest

horror, when a slight sensation was perceptible in the body of the

court; and immediately afterwards Mrs. Bardell, supported by Mrs.

Cluppins, was led in, and placed, in a drooping state, at the other end

of the seat on which Mr. Pickwick sat. An extra-sized umbrella was then

handed in by Mr. Dodson, and a pair of pattens by Mr. Fogg, each of whom

had prepared a most sympathising and melancholy face for the occasion.

Mrs. Sanders then appeared, leading in Master Bardell. At sight of her

child, Mrs. Bardell started; suddenly recollecting herself, she kissed

him in a frantic manner; then relapsing into a state of hysterical

imbecility, the good lady requested to be informed where she was. In

reply to this, Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders turned their heads away

and wept, while Messrs. Dodson and Fogg entreated the plaintiff to

compose herself. Serjeant Buzfuz rubbed his eyes very hard with a large

white handkerchief, and gave an appealing look towards the jury, while

the judge was visibly affected, and several of the beholders tried to

cough down their emotion.

‘Very good notion that indeed,’ whispered Perker to Mr. Pickwick.

‘Capital fellows those Dodson and Fogg; excellent ideas of effect, my

dear Sir, excellent.’

As Perker spoke, Mrs. Bardell began to recover by slow degrees, while

Mrs. Cluppins, after a careful survey of Master Bardell’s buttons and

the button-holes to which they severally belonged, placed him on the

floor of the court in front of his mother--a commanding position in

which he could not fail to awaken the full commiseration and sympathy of

both judge and jury. This was not done without considerable opposition,

and many tears, on the part of the young gentleman himself, who had

certain inward misgivings that the placing him within the full glare of

the judge’s eye was only a formal prelude to his being immediately

ordered away for instant execution, or for transportation beyond the

seas, during the whole term of his natural life, at the very least.

‘Bardell and Pickwick,’ cried the gentleman in black, calling on the

case, which stood first on the list.

‘I am for the plaintiff, my Lord,’ said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz.

‘Who is with you, Brother Buzfuz?’ said the judge. Mr. Skimpin bowed, to

intimate that he was.

‘I appear for the defendant, my Lord,’ said Mr. Serjeant Snubbin.

‘Anybody with you, Brother Snubbin?’ inquired the court.

‘Mr. Phunky, my Lord,’ replied Serjeant Snubbin.

‘Serjeant Buzfuz and Mr. Skimpin for the plaintiff,’ said the judge,

writing down the names in his note-book, and reading as he wrote; ‘for

the defendant, Serjeant Snubbin and Mr. Monkey.’

‘Beg your Lordship’s pardon, Phunky.’

‘Oh, very good,’ said the judge; ‘I never had the pleasure of hearing

the gentleman’s name before.’ Here Mr. Phunky bowed and smiled, and the

judge bowed and smiled too, and then Mr. Phunky, blushing into the very

whites of his eyes, tried to look as if he didn’t know that everybody

was gazing at him, a thing which no man ever succeeded in doing yet, or

in all reasonable probability, ever will.

‘Go on,’ said the judge.

The ushers again called silence, and Mr. Skimpin proceeded to ‘open the

case’; and the case appeared to have very little inside it when he had

opened it, for he kept such particulars as he knew, completely to

himself, and sat down, after a lapse of three minutes, leaving the jury

in precisely the same advanced stage of wisdom as they were in before.

Serjeant Buzfuz then rose with all the majesty and dignity which the

grave nature of the proceedings demanded, and having whispered to

Dodson, and conferred briefly with Fogg, pulled his gown over his

shoulders, settled his wig, and addressed the jury.

Serjeant Buzfuz began by saying, that never, in the whole course of his

professional experience--never, from the very first moment of his

applying himself to the study and practice of the law--had he approached

a case with feelings of such deep emotion, or with such a heavy sense of

the responsibility imposed upon him--a responsibility, he would say,

which he could never have supported, were he not buoyed up and sustained

by a conviction so strong, that it amounted to positive certainty that

the cause of truth and justice, or, in other words, the cause of his

much-injured and most oppressed client, must prevail with the high-

minded and intelligent dozen of men whom he now saw in that box before

him.

Counsel usually begin in this way, because it puts the jury on the very

best terms with themselves, and makes them think what sharp fellows they

must be. A visible effect was produced immediately, several jurymen

beginning to take voluminous notes with the utmost eagerness.

‘You have heard from my learned friend, gentlemen,’ continued Serjeant

Buzfuz, well knowing that, from the learned friend alluded to, the

gentlemen of the jury had heard just nothing at all--‘you have heard

from my learned friend, gentlemen, that this is an action for a breach

of promise of marriage, in which the damages are laid at £1,500. But you

have not heard from my learned friend, inasmuch as it did not come

within my learned friend’s province to tell you, what are the facts and

circumstances of the case. Those facts and circumstances, gentlemen, you

shall hear detailed by me, and proved by the unimpeachable female whom I

will place in that box before you.’

Here, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, with a tremendous emphasis on the word ‘box,’

smote his table with a mighty sound, and glanced at Dodson and Fogg, who

nodded admiration of the Serjeant, and indignant defiance of the

defendant.

‘The plaintiff, gentlemen,’ continued Serjeant Buzfuz, in a soft and

melancholy voice, ‘the plaintiff is a widow; yes, gentlemen, a widow.

The late Mr. Bardell, after enjoying, for many years, the esteem and

confidence of his sovereign, as one of the guardians of his royal

revenues, glided almost imperceptibly from the world, to seek elsewhere

for that repose and peace which a custom-house can never afford.’

At this pathetic description of the decease of Mr. Bardell, who had been

knocked on the head with a quart-pot in a public-house cellar, the

learned serjeant’s voice faltered, and he proceeded, with emotion--

‘Some time before his death, he had stamped his likeness upon a little

boy. With this little boy, the only pledge of her departed exciseman,

Mrs. Bardell shrank from the world, and courted the retirement and

tranquillity of Goswell Street; and here she placed in her front parlour

window a written placard, bearing this inscription--“Apartments

furnished for a single gentleman. Inquire within.”’ Here Serjeant Buzfuz

paused, while several gentlemen of the jury took a note of the document.

‘There is no date to that, is there?’ inquired a juror.

‘There is no date, gentlemen,’ replied Serjeant Buzfuz; ‘but I am

instructed to say that it was put in the plaintiff’s parlour window just

this time three years. I entreat the attention of the jury to the

wording of this document--“Apartments furnished for a single gentleman”!

Mrs. Bardell’s opinions of the opposite sex, gentlemen, were derived

from a long contemplation of the inestimable qualities of her lost

husband. She had no fear, she had no distrust, she had no suspicion; all

was confidence and reliance. “Mr. Bardell,” said the widow--“Mr. Bardell

was a man of honour, Mr. Bardell was a man of his word, Mr. Bardell was

no deceiver, Mr. Bardell was once a single gentleman himself; to single

gentlemen I look for protection, for assistance, for comfort, and for

consolation; in single gentlemen I shall perpetually see something to

remind me of what Mr. Bardell was when he first won my young and untried

affections; to a single gentleman, then, shall my lodgings be let.”

Actuated by this beautiful and touching impulse (among the best impulses

of our imperfect nature, gentlemen), the lonely and desolate widow dried

her tears, furnished her first floor, caught her innocent boy to her

maternal bosom, and put the bill up in her parlour window. Did it remain

there long? No. The serpent was on the watch, the train was laid, the

mine was preparing, the sapper and miner was at work. Before the bill

had been in the parlour window three days--three days, gentlemen--a

being, erect upon two legs, and bearing all the outward semblance of a

man, and not of a monster, knocked at the door of Mrs. Bardell’s house.

He inquired within--he took the lodgings; and on the very next day he

entered into possession of them. This man was Pickwick--Pickwick, the

defendant.’

Serjeant Buzfuz, who had proceeded with such volubility that his face

was perfectly crimson, here paused for breath. The silence awoke Mr.

Justice Stareleigh, who immediately wrote down something with a pen

without any ink in it, and looked unusually profound, to impress the

jury with the belief that he always thought most deeply with his eyes

shut. Serjeant Buzfuz proceeded--

‘Of this man Pickwick I will say little; the subject presents but few

attractions; and I, gentlemen, am not the man, nor are you, gentlemen,

the men, to delight in the contemplation of revolting heartlessness, and

of systematic villainy.’

Here Mr. Pickwick, who had been writhing in silence for some time, gave

a violent start, as if some vague idea of assaulting Serjeant Buzfuz, in

the august presence of justice and law, suggested itself to his mind. An

admonitory gesture from Perker restrained him, and he listened to the

learned gentleman’s continuation with a look of indignation, which

contrasted forcibly with the admiring faces of Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs.

Sanders.

‘I say systematic villainy, gentlemen,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, looking

through Mr. Pickwick, and talking \_at\_ him; ‘and when I say systematic

villainy, let me tell the defendant Pickwick, if he be in court, as I am

informed he is, that it would have been more decent in him, more

becoming, in better judgment, and in better taste, if he had stopped

away. Let me tell him, gentlemen, that any gestures of dissent or

disapprobation in which he may indulge in this court will not go down

with you; that you will know how to value and how to appreciate them;

and let me tell him further, as my Lord will tell you, gentlemen, that a

counsel, in the discharge of his duty to his client, is neither to be

intimidated nor bullied, nor put down; and that any attempt to do either

the one or the other, or the first, or the last, will recoil on the head

of the attempter, be he plaintiff or be he defendant, be his name

Pickwick, or Noakes, or Stoakes, or Stiles, or Brown, or Thompson.’

This little divergence from the subject in hand, had, of course, the

intended effect of turning all eyes to Mr. Pickwick. Serjeant Buzfuz,

having partially recovered from the state of moral elevation into which

he had lashed himself, resumed--

‘I shall show you, gentlemen, that for two years, Pickwick continued to

reside constantly, and without interruption or intermission, at Mrs.

Bardell’s house. I shall show you that Mrs. Bardell, during the whole of

that time, waited on him, attended to his comforts, cooked his meals,

looked out his linen for the washerwoman when it went abroad, darned,

aired, and prepared it for wear, when it came home, and, in short,

enjoyed his fullest trust and confidence. I shall show you that, on many

occasions, he gave halfpence, and on some occasions even sixpences, to

her little boy; and I shall prove to you, by a witness whose testimony

it will be impossible for my learned friend to weaken or controvert,

that on one occasion he patted the boy on the head, and, after inquiring

whether he had won any “\_alley tors\_” or “\_commoneys\_” lately (both of

which I understand to be a particular species of marbles much prized by

the youth of this town), made use of this remarkable expression, “How

should you like to have another father?” I shall prove to you,

gentlemen, that about a year ago, Pickwick suddenly began to absent

himself from home, during long intervals, as if with the intention of

gradually breaking off from my client; but I shall show you also, that

his resolution was not at that time sufficiently strong, or that his

better feelings conquered, if better feelings he has, or that the charms

and accomplishments of my client prevailed against his unmanly

intentions, by proving to you, that on one occasion, when he returned

from the country, he distinctly and in terms, offered her marriage:

previously, however, taking special care that there would be no witness

to their solemn contract; and I am in a situation to prove to you, on

the testimony of three of his own friends--most unwilling witnesses,

gentlemen--most unwilling witnesses--that on that morning he was

discovered by them holding the plaintiff in his arms, and soothing her

agitation by his caresses and endearments.’

A visible impression was produced upon the auditors by this part of the

learned Serjeant’s address. Drawing forth two very small scraps of

paper, he proceeded--

‘And now, gentlemen, but one word more. Two letters have passed between

these parties, letters which are admitted to be in the handwriting of

the defendant, and which speak volumes, indeed. The letters, too,

bespeak the character of the man. They are not open, fervent, eloquent

epistles, breathing nothing but the language of affectionate attachment.

They are covert, sly, underhanded communications, but, fortunately, far

more conclusive than if couched in the most glowing language and the

most poetic imagery--letters that must be viewed with a cautious and

suspicious eye--letters that were evidently intended at the time, by

Pickwick, to mislead and delude any third parties into whose hands they

might fall. Let me read the first: “Garraways, twelve o’clock. Dear Mrs.

B.--Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, \_Pickwick\_.” Gentlemen, what does

this mean? Chops and tomato sauce. Yours, Pickwick! Chops! Gracious

heavens! and tomato sauce! Gentlemen, is the happiness of a sensitive

and confiding female to be trifled away, by such shallow artifices as

these? The next has no date whatever, which is in itself suspicious.

“Dear Mrs. B., I shall not be at home till to-morrow. Slow coach.” And

then follows this very remarkable expression. “Don’t trouble yourself

about the warming-pan.” The warming-pan! Why, gentlemen, who \_does

\_trouble himself about a warming-pan? When was the peace of mind of man

or woman broken or disturbed by a warming-pan, which is in itself a

harmless, a useful, and I will add, gentlemen, a comforting article of

domestic furniture? Why is Mrs. Bardell so earnestly entreated not to

agitate herself about this warming-pan, unless (as is no doubt the case)

it is a mere cover for hidden fire--a mere substitute for some endearing

word or promise, agreeably to a preconcerted system of correspondence,

artfully contrived by Pickwick with a view to his contemplated

desertion, and which I am not in a condition to explain? And what does

this allusion to the slow coach mean? For aught I know, it may be a

reference to Pickwick himself, who has most unquestionably been a

criminally slow coach during the whole of this transaction, but whose

speed will now be very unexpectedly accelerated, and whose wheels,

gentlemen, as he will find to his cost, will very soon be greased by

you!’

Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz paused in this place, to see whether the jury smiled

at his joke; but as nobody took it but the greengrocer, whose

sensitiveness on the subject was very probably occasioned by his having

subjected a chaise-cart to the process in question on that identical

morning, the learned Serjeant considered it advisable to undergo a

slight relapse into the dismals before he concluded.

‘But enough of this, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz, ‘it is

difficult to smile with an aching heart; it is ill jesting when our

deepest sympathies are awakened. My client’s hopes and prospects are

ruined, and it is no figure of speech to say that her occupation is gone

indeed. The bill is down--but there is no tenant. Eligible single

gentlemen pass and repass--but there is no invitation for to inquire

within or without. All is gloom and silence in the house; even the voice

of the child is hushed; his infant sports are disregarded when his

mother weeps; his “alley tors” and his “commoneys” are alike neglected;

he forgets the long familiar cry of “knuckle down,” and at tip-cheese,

or odd and even, his hand is out. But Pickwick, gentlemen, Pickwick, the

ruthless destroyer of this domestic oasis in the desert of Goswell

Street--Pickwick who has choked up the well, and thrown ashes on the

sward--Pickwick, who comes before you to-day with his heartless tomato

sauce and warming-pans--Pickwick still rears his head with unblushing

effrontery, and gazes without a sigh on the ruin he has made. Damages,

gentlemen--heavy damages is the only punishment with which you can visit

him; the only recompense you can award to my client. And for those

damages she now appeals to an enlightened, a high-minded, a right-

feeling, a conscientious, a dispassionate, a sympathising, a

contemplative jury of her civilised countrymen.’ With this beautiful

peroration, Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz sat down, and Mr. Justice Stareleigh

woke up.

‘Call Elizabeth Cluppins,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, rising a minute

afterwards, with renewed vigour.

The nearest usher called for Elizabeth Tuppins; another one, at a little

distance off, demanded Elizabeth Jupkins; and a third rushed in a

breathless state into King Street, and screamed for Elizabeth Muffins

till he was hoarse.

Meanwhile Mrs. Cluppins, with the combined assistance of Mrs. Bardell,

Mrs. Sanders, Mr. Dodson, and Mr. Fogg, was hoisted into the witness-

box; and when she was safely perched on the top step, Mrs. Bardell stood

on the bottom one, with the pocket-handkerchief and pattens in one hand,

and a glass bottle that might hold about a quarter of a pint of

smelling-salts in the other, ready for any emergency. Mrs. Sanders,

whose eyes were intently fixed on the judge’s face, planted herself

close by, with the large umbrella, keeping her right thumb pressed on

the spring with an earnest countenance, as if she were fully prepared to

put it up at a moment’s notice.

‘Mrs. Cluppins,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, ‘pray compose yourself, ma’am.’

Of course, directly Mrs. Cluppins was desired to compose herself, she

sobbed with increased vehemence, and gave divers alarming manifestations

of an approaching fainting fit, or, as she afterwards said, of her

feelings being too many for her.

‘Do you recollect, Mrs. Cluppins,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, after a few

unimportant questions--‘do you recollect being in Mrs. Bardell’s back

one pair of stairs, on one particular morning in July last, when she was

dusting Pickwick’s apartment?’

‘Yes, my Lord and jury, I do,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins.

‘Mr. Pickwick’s sitting-room was the first-floor front, I believe?’

‘Yes, it were, Sir,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins.

‘What were you doing in the back room, ma’am?’ inquired the little

judge.

‘My Lord and jury,’ said Mrs. Cluppins, with interesting agitation, ‘I

will not deceive you.’

‘You had better not, ma’am,’ said the little judge.

‘I was there,’ resumed Mrs. Cluppins, ‘unbeknown to Mrs. Bardell; I had

been out with a little basket, gentlemen, to buy three pound of red

kidney pertaties, which was three pound tuppence ha’penny, when I see

Mrs. Bardell’s street door on the jar.’

‘On the what?’ exclaimed the little judge.

‘Partly open, my Lord,’ said Serjeant Snubbin.

‘She said on the jar,’ said the little judge, with a cunning look.

‘It’s all the same, my Lord,’ said Serjeant Snubbin. The little judge

looked doubtful, and said he’d make a note of it. Mrs. Cluppins then

resumed--

‘I walked in, gentlemen, just to say good-mornin’, and went, in a

permiscuous manner, upstairs, and into the back room. Gentlemen, there

was the sound of voices in the front room, and--’

‘And you listened, I believe, Mrs. Cluppins?’ said Serjeant Buzfuz.

‘Beggin’ your pardon, Sir,’ replied Mrs. Cluppins, in a majestic manner,

‘I would scorn the haction. The voices was very loud, Sir, and forced

themselves upon my ear.’

‘Well, Mrs. Cluppins, you were not listening, but you heard the voices.

Was one of those voices Pickwick’s?’

‘Yes, it were, Sir.’ And Mrs. Cluppins, after distinctly stating that

Mr. Pickwick addressed himself to Mrs. Bardell, repeated by slow

degrees, and by dint of many questions, the conversation with which our

readers are already acquainted.

The jury looked suspicious, and Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz smiled as he sat

down. They looked positively awful when Serjeant Snubbin intimated that

he should not cross-examine the witness, for Mr. Pickwick wished it to

be distinctly stated that it was due to her to say, that her account was

in substance correct.

Mrs. Cluppins having once broken the ice, thought it a favourable

opportunity for entering into a short dissertation on her own domestic

affairs; so she straightway proceeded to inform the court that she was

the mother of eight children at that present speaking, and that she

entertained confident expectations of presenting Mr. Cluppins with a

ninth, somewhere about that day six months. At this interesting point,

the little judge interposed most irascibly; and the effect of the

interposition was, that both the worthy lady and Mrs. Sanders were

politely taken out of court, under the escort of Mr. Jackson, without

further parley.

‘Nathaniel Winkle!’ said Mr. Skimpin.

‘Here!’ replied a feeble voice. Mr. Winkle entered the witness-box, and

having been duly sworn, bowed to the judge with considerable deference.

‘Don’t look at me, Sir,’ said the judge sharply, in acknowledgment of

the salute; ‘look at the jury.’

Mr. Winkle obeyed the mandate, and looked at the place where he thought

it most probable the jury might be; for seeing anything in his then

state of intellectual complication was wholly out of the question.

Mr. Winkle was then examined by Mr. Skimpin, who, being a promising

young man of two or three-and-forty, was of course anxious to confuse a

witness who was notoriously predisposed in favour of the other side, as

much as he could.

‘Now, Sir,’ said Mr. Skimpin, ‘have the goodness to let his Lordship

know what your name is, will you?’ and Mr. Skimpin inclined his head on

one side to listen with great sharpness to the answer, and glanced at

the jury meanwhile, as if to imply that he rather expected Mr. Winkle’s

natural taste for perjury would induce him to give some name which did

not belong to him.

‘Winkle,’ replied the witness.

‘What’s your Christian name, Sir?’ angrily inquired the little judge.

‘Nathaniel, Sir.’

‘Daniel--any other name?’

‘Nathaniel, sir--my Lord, I mean.’

‘Nathaniel Daniel, or Daniel Nathaniel?’

‘No, my Lord, only Nathaniel--not Daniel at all.’

‘What did you tell me it was Daniel for, then, sir?’ inquired the judge.

‘I didn’t, my Lord,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘You did, Sir,’ replied the judge, with a severe frown. ‘How could I

have got Daniel on my notes, unless you told me so, Sir?’

This argument was, of course, unanswerable.

‘Mr. Winkle has rather a short memory, my Lord,’ interposed Mr. Skimpin,

with another glance at the jury. ‘We shall find means to refresh it

before we have quite done with him, I dare say.’

‘You had better be careful, Sir,’ said the little judge, with a sinister

look at the witness.

Poor Mr. Winkle bowed, and endeavoured to feign an easiness of manner,

which, in his then state of confusion, gave him rather the air of a

disconcerted pickpocket.

‘Now, Mr. Winkle,’ said Mr. Skimpin, ‘attend to me, if you please, Sir;

and let me recommend you, for your own sake, to bear in mind his

Lordship’s injunctions to be careful. I believe you are a particular

friend of Mr. Pickwick, the defendant, are you not?’

‘I have known Mr. Pickwick now, as well as I recollect at this moment,

nearly--’

‘Pray, Mr. Winkle, do not evade the question. Are you, or are you not, a

particular friend of the defendant’s?’

‘I was just about to say, that--’

‘Will you, or will you not, answer my question, Sir?’

If you don’t answer the question, you’ll be committed, Sir,’ interposed

the little judge, looking over his note-book.

‘Come, Sir,’ said Mr. Skimpin, ‘yes or no, if you please.’

‘Yes, I am,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘Yes, you are. And why couldn’t you say that at once, Sir? Perhaps you

know the plaintiff too? Eh, Mr. Winkle?’

‘I don’t know her; I’ve seen her.’

‘Oh, you don’t know her, but you’ve seen her? Now, have the goodness to

tell the gentlemen of the jury what you mean by that, Mr. Winkle.’

‘I mean that I am not intimate with her, but I have seen her when I went

to call on Mr. Pickwick, in Goswell Street.’

‘How often have you seen her, Sir?’

‘How often?’

‘Yes, Mr. Winkle, how often? I’ll repeat the question for you a dozen

times, if you require it, Sir.’ And the learned gentleman, with a firm

and steady frown, placed his hands on his hips, and smiled suspiciously

to the jury.

On this question there arose the edifying brow-beating, customary on

such points. First of all, Mr. Winkle said it was quite impossible for

him to say how many times he had seen Mrs. Bardell. Then he was asked if

he had seen her twenty times, to which he replied, ‘Certainly--more than

that.’ Then he was asked whether he hadn’t seen her a hundred times--

whether he couldn’t swear that he had seen her more than fifty times--

whether he didn’t know that he had seen her at least seventy-five times,

and so forth; the satisfactory conclusion which was arrived at, at last,

being, that he had better take care of himself, and mind what he was

about. The witness having been by these means reduced to the requisite

ebb of nervous perplexity, the examination was continued as follows--

‘Pray, Mr. Winkle, do you remember calling on the defendant Pickwick at

these apartments in the plaintiff’s house in Goswell Street, on one

particular morning, in the month of July last?’

‘Yes, I do.’

‘Were you accompanied on that occasion by a friend of the name of

Tupman, and another by the name of Snodgrass?’

‘Yes, I was.’

‘Are they here?’

Yes, they are,’ replied Mr. Winkle, looking very earnestly towards the

spot where his friends were stationed.

‘Pray attend to me, Mr. Winkle, and never mind your friends,’ said Mr.

Skimpin, with another expressive look at the jury. ‘They must tell their

stories without any previous consultation with you, if none has yet

taken place (another look at the jury). Now, Sir, tell the gentlemen of

the jury what you saw on entering the defendant’s room, on this

particular morning. Come; out with it, Sir; we must have it, sooner or

later.’

‘The defendant, Mr. Pickwick, was holding the plaintiff in his arms,

with his hands clasping her waist,’ replied Mr. Winkle with natural

hesitation, ‘and the plaintiff appeared to have fainted away.’

‘Did you hear the defendant say anything?’

‘I heard him call Mrs. Bardell a good creature, and I heard him ask her

to compose herself, for what a situation it was, if anybody should come,

or words to that effect.’

‘Now, Mr. Winkle, I have only one more question to ask you, and I beg

you to bear in mind his Lordship’s caution. Will you undertake to swear

that Pickwick, the defendant, did not say on the occasion in question--

“My dear Mrs. Bardell, you’re a good creature; compose yourself to this

situation, for to this situation you must come,” or words to that

effect?’

‘I--I didn’t understand him so, certainly,’ said Mr. Winkle, astounded

on this ingenious dove-tailing of the few words he had heard. ‘I was on

the staircase, and couldn’t hear distinctly; the impression on my mind

is--’

‘The gentlemen of the jury want none of the impressions on your mind,

Mr. Winkle, which I fear would be of little service to honest,

straightforward men,’ interposed Mr. Skimpin. ‘You were on the

staircase, and didn’t distinctly hear; but you will not swear that

Pickwick did not make use of the expressions I have quoted? Do I

understand that?’

‘No, I will not,’ replied Mr. Winkle; and down sat Mr. Skimpin with a

triumphant countenance.

Mr. Pickwick’s case had not gone off in so particularly happy a manner,

up to this point, that it could very well afford to have any additional

suspicion cast upon it. But as it could afford to be placed in a rather

better light, if possible, Mr. Phunky rose for the purpose of getting

something important out of Mr. Winkle in cross-examination. Whether he

did get anything important out of him, will immediately appear.

‘I believe, Mr. Winkle,’ said Mr. Phunky, ‘that Mr. Pickwick is not a

young man?’

‘Oh, no,’ replied Mr. Winkle; ‘old enough to be my father.’

‘You have told my learned friend that you have known Mr. Pickwick a long

time. Had you ever any reason to suppose or believe that he was about to

be married?’

‘Oh, no; certainly not;’ replied Mr. Winkle with so much eagerness, that

Mr. Phunky ought to have got him out of the box with all possible

dispatch. Lawyers hold that there are two kinds of particularly bad

witnesses--a reluctant witness, and a too-willing witness; it was Mr.

Winkle’s fate to figure in both characters.

‘I will even go further than this, Mr. Winkle,’ continued Mr. Phunky, in

a most smooth and complacent manner. ‘Did you ever see anything in Mr.

Pickwick’s manner and conduct towards the opposite sex, to induce you to

believe that he ever contemplated matrimony of late years, in any case?’

‘Oh, no; certainly not,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘Has his behaviour, when females have been in the case, always been that

of a man, who, having attained a pretty advanced period of life, content

with his own occupations and amusements, treats them only as a father

might his daughters?’

‘Not the least doubt of it,’ replied Mr. Winkle, in the fulness of his

heart. ‘That is--yes--oh, yes--certainly.’

‘You have never known anything in his behaviour towards Mrs. Bardell, or

any other female, in the least degree suspicious?’ said Mr. Phunky,

preparing to sit down; for Serjeant Snubbin was winking at him.

‘N-n-no,’ replied Mr. Winkle, ‘except on one trifling occasion, which, I

have no doubt, might be easily explained.’

Now, if the unfortunate Mr. Phunky had sat down when Serjeant Snubbin

had winked at him, or if Serjeant Buzfuz had stopped this irregular

cross-examination at the outset (which he knew better than to do;

observing Mr. Winkle’s anxiety, and well knowing it would, in all

probability, lead to something serviceable to him), this unfortunate

admission would not have been elicited. The moment the words fell from

Mr. Winkle’s lips, Mr. Phunky sat down, and Serjeant Snubbin rather

hastily told him he might leave the box, which Mr. Winkle prepared to do

with great readiness, when Serjeant Buzfuz stopped him.

‘Stay, Mr. Winkle, stay!’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, ‘will your Lordship have

the goodness to ask him, what this one instance of suspicious behaviour

towards females on the part of this gentleman, who is old enough to be

his father, was?’

‘You hear what the learned counsel says, Sir,’ observed the judge,

turning to the miserable and agonised Mr. Winkle. ‘Describe the occasion

to which you refer.’

‘My Lord,’ said Mr. Winkle, trembling with anxiety, ‘I--I’d rather not.’

‘Perhaps so,’ said the little judge; ‘but you must.’

Amid the profound silence of the whole court, Mr. Winkle faltered out,

that the trifling circumstance of suspicion was Mr. Pickwick’s being

found in a lady’s sleeping-apartment at midnight; which had terminated,

he believed, in the breaking off of the projected marriage of the lady

in question, and had led, he knew, to the whole party being forcibly

carried before George Nupkins, Esq., magistrate and justice of the

peace, for the borough of Ipswich!

‘You may leave the box, Sir,’ said Serjeant Snubbin. Mr. Winkle did

leave the box, and rushed with delirious haste to the George and

Vulture, where he was discovered some hours after, by the waiter,

groaning in a hollow and dismal manner, with his head buried beneath the

sofa cushions.

Tracy Tupman, and Augustus Snodgrass, were severally called into the

box; both corroborated the testimony of their unhappy friend; and each

was driven to the verge of desperation by excessive badgering.

Susannah Sanders was then called, and examined by Serjeant Buzfuz, and

cross-examined by Serjeant Snubbin. Had always said and believed that

Pickwick would marry Mrs. Bardell; knew that Mrs. Bardell’s being

engaged to Pickwick was the current topic of conversation in the

neighbourhood, after the fainting in July; had been told it herself by

Mrs. Mudberry which kept a mangle, and Mrs. Bunkin which clear-starched,

but did not see either Mrs. Mudberry or Mrs. Bunkin in court. Had heard

Pickwick ask the little boy how he should like to have another father.

Did not know that Mrs. Bardell was at that time keeping company with the

baker, but did know that the baker was then a single man and is now

married. Couldn’t swear that Mrs. Bardell was not very fond of the

baker, but should think that the baker was not very fond of Mrs.

Bardell, or he wouldn’t have married somebody else. Thought Mrs. Bardell

fainted away on the morning in July, because Pickwick asked her to name

the day: knew that she (witness) fainted away stone dead when Mr.

Sanders asked her to name the day, and believed that everybody as called

herself a lady would do the same, under similar circumstances. Heard

Pickwick ask the boy the question about the marbles, but upon her oath

did not know the difference between an ‘alley tor’ and a ‘commoney.’

By the \_court\_.--During the period of her keeping company with Mr.

Sanders, had received love letters, like other ladies. In the course of

their correspondence Mr. Sanders had often called her a ‘duck,’ but

never ‘chops,’ nor yet ‘tomato sauce.’ He was particularly fond of

ducks. Perhaps if he had been as fond of chops and tomato sauce, he

might have called her that, as a term of affection.

Serjeant Buzfuz now rose with more importance than he had yet exhibited,

if that were possible, and vociferated; ‘Call Samuel Weller.’

It was quite unnecessary to call Samuel Weller; for Samuel Weller

stepped briskly into the box the instant his name was pronounced; and

placing his hat on the floor, and his arms on the rail, took a bird’s-

eye view of the Bar, and a comprehensive survey of the Bench, with a

remarkably cheerful and lively aspect.

‘What’s your name, sir?’ inquired the judge.

‘Sam Weller, my Lord,’ replied that gentleman.

‘Do you spell it with a “V” or a “W”?’ inquired the judge.

‘That depends upon the taste and fancy of the speller, my Lord,’ replied

Sam; ‘I never had occasion to spell it more than once or twice in my

life, but I spells it with a “V.”’

Here a voice in the gallery exclaimed aloud, ‘Quite right too, Samivel,

quite right. Put it down a “we,” my Lord, put it down a “we.”’

Who is that, who dares address the court?’ said the little judge,

looking up. ‘Usher.’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

‘Bring that person here instantly.’

‘Yes, my Lord.’

But as the usher didn’t find the person, he didn’t bring him; and, after

a great commotion, all the people who had got up to look for the

culprit, sat down again. The little judge turned to the witness as soon

as his indignation would allow him to speak, and said--

‘Do you know who that was, sir?’

‘I rayther suspect it was my father, my lord,’ replied Sam.

‘Do you see him here now?’ said the judge.

‘No, I don’t, my Lord,’ replied Sam, staring right up into the lantern

at the roof of the court.

‘If you could have pointed him out, I would have committed him

instantly,’ said the judge. Sam bowed his acknowledgments and turned,

with unimpaired cheerfulness of countenance, towards Serjeant Buzfuz.

‘Now, Mr. Weller,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz.

‘Now, sir,’ replied Sam.

‘I believe you are in the service of Mr. Pickwick, the defendant in this

case? Speak up, if you please, Mr. Weller.’

‘I mean to speak up, Sir,’ replied Sam; ‘I am in the service o’ that

‘ere gen’l’man, and a wery good service it is.’

‘Little to do, and plenty to get, I suppose?’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, with

jocularity.

‘Oh, quite enough to get, Sir, as the soldier said ven they ordered him

three hundred and fifty lashes,’ replied Sam.

‘You must not tell us what the soldier, or any other man, said, Sir,’

interposed the judge; ‘it’s not evidence.’

‘Wery good, my Lord,’ replied Sam.

‘Do you recollect anything particular happening on the morning when you

were first engaged by the defendant; eh, Mr. Weller?’ said Serjeant

Buzfuz.

‘Yes, I do, sir,’ replied Sam.

‘Have the goodness to tell the jury what it was.’

‘I had a reg’lar new fit out o’ clothes that mornin’, gen’l’men of the

jury,’ said Sam, ‘and that was a wery partickler and uncommon

circumstance vith me in those days.’

Hereupon there was a general laugh; and the little judge, looking with

an angry countenance over his desk, said, ‘You had better be careful,

Sir.’

‘So Mr. Pickwick said at the time, my Lord,’ replied Sam; ‘and I was

wery careful o’ that ‘ere suit o’ clothes; wery careful indeed, my

Lord.’

The judge looked sternly at Sam for full two minutes, but Sam’s features

were so perfectly calm and serene that the judge said nothing, and

motioned Serjeant Buzfuz to proceed.

‘Do you mean to tell me, Mr. Weller,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, folding his

arms emphatically, and turning half-round to the jury, as if in mute

assurance that he would bother the witness yet--‘do you mean to tell me,

Mr. Weller, that you saw nothing of this fainting on the part of the

plaintiff in the arms of the defendant, which you have heard described

by the witnesses?’

Certainly not,’ replied Sam; ‘I was in the passage till they called me

up, and then the old lady was not there.’

‘Now, attend, Mr. Weller,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, dipping a large pen

into the inkstand before him, for the purpose of frightening Sam with a

show of taking down his answer. ‘You were in the passage, and yet saw

nothing of what was going forward. Have you a pair of eyes, Mr. Weller?’

‘Yes, I have a pair of eyes,’ replied Sam, ‘and that’s just it. If they

wos a pair o’ patent double million magnifyin’ gas microscopes of hextra

power, p’raps I might be able to see through a flight o’ stairs and a

deal door; but bein’ only eyes, you see, my wision ‘s limited.’

At this answer, which was delivered without the slightest appearance of

irritation, and with the most complete simplicity and equanimity of

manner, the spectators tittered, the little judge smiled, and Serjeant

Buzfuz looked particularly foolish. After a short consultation with

Dodson & Fogg, the learned Serjeant again turned towards Sam, and said,

with a painful effort to conceal his vexation, ‘Now, Mr. Weller, I’ll

ask you a question on another point, if you please.’

‘If you please, Sir,’ rejoined Sam, with the utmost good-humour.

‘Do you remember going up to Mrs. Bardell’s house, one night in November

last?’

Oh, yes, wery well.’

‘Oh, you do remember that, Mr. Weller,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, recovering

his spirits; ‘I thought we should get at something at last.’

‘I rayther thought that, too, sir,’ replied Sam; and at this the

spectators tittered again.

‘Well; I suppose you went up to have a little talk about this trial--eh,

Mr. Weller?’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, looking knowingly at the jury.

‘I went up to pay the rent; but we did get a-talkin’ about the trial,’

replied Sam.

‘Oh, you did get a-talking about the trial,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz,

brightening up with the anticipation of some important discovery. ‘Now,

what passed about the trial; will you have the goodness to tell us, Mr.

Weller’?’

‘Vith all the pleasure in life, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘Arter a few

unimportant obserwations from the two wirtuous females as has been

examined here to-day, the ladies gets into a very great state o’

admiration at the honourable conduct of Mr. Dodson and Fogg--them two

gen’l’men as is settin’ near you now.’ This, of course, drew general

attention to Dodson & Fogg, who looked as virtuous as possible.

‘The attorneys for the plaintiff,’ said Mr. Serjeant Buzfuz. ‘Well! They

spoke in high praise of the honourable conduct of Messrs. Dodson and

Fogg, the attorneys for the plaintiff, did they?’

‘Yes,’ said Sam, ‘they said what a wery gen’rous thing it was o’ them to

have taken up the case on spec, and to charge nothing at all for costs,

unless they got ‘em out of Mr. Pickwick.’

At this very unexpected reply, the spectators tittered again, and Dodson

& Fogg, turning very red, leaned over to Serjeant Buzfuz, and in a

hurried manner whispered something in his ear.

‘You are quite right,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz aloud, with affected

composure. ‘It’s perfectly useless, my Lord, attempting to get at any

evidence through the impenetrable stupidity of this witness. I will not

trouble the court by asking him any more questions. Stand down, sir.’

‘Would any other gen’l’man like to ask me anythin’?’ inquired Sam,

taking up his hat, and looking round most deliberately.

‘Not I, Mr. Weller, thank you,’ said Serjeant Snubbin, laughing.

‘You may go down, sir,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, waving his hand

impatiently. Sam went down accordingly, after doing Messrs. Dodson &

Fogg’s case as much harm as he conveniently could, and saying just as

little respecting Mr. Pickwick as might be, which was precisely the

object he had had in view all along.

‘I have no objection to admit, my Lord,’ said Serjeant Snubbin, ‘if it

will save the examination of another witness, that Mr. Pickwick has

retired from business, and is a gentleman of considerable independent

property.’

‘Very well,’ said Serjeant Buzfuz, putting in the two letters to be

read, ‘then that’s my case, my Lord.’

Serjeant Snubbin then addressed the jury on behalf of the defendant; and

a very long and a very emphatic address he delivered, in which he

bestowed the highest possible eulogiums on the conduct and character of

Mr. Pickwick; but inasmuch as our readers are far better able to form a

correct estimate of that gentleman’s merits and deserts, than Serjeant

Snubbin could possibly be, we do not feel called upon to enter at any

length into the learned gentleman’s observations. He attempted to show

that the letters which had been exhibited, merely related to Mr.

Pickwick’s dinner, or to the preparations for receiving him in his

apartments on his return from some country excursion. It is sufficient

to add in general terms, that he did the best he could for Mr. Pickwick;

and the best, as everybody knows, on the infallible authority of the old

adage, could do no more.

Mr. Justice Stareleigh summed up, in the old-established and most

approved form. He read as much of his notes to the jury as he could

decipher on so short a notice, and made running-comments on the evidence

as he went along. If Mrs. Bardell were right, it was perfectly clear

that Mr. Pickwick was wrong, and if they thought the evidence of Mrs.

Cluppins worthy of credence they would believe it, and, if they didn’t,

why, they wouldn’t. If they were satisfied that a breach of promise of

marriage had been committed they would find for the plaintiff with such

damages as they thought proper; and if, on the other hand, it appeared

to them that no promise of marriage had ever been given, they would find

for the defendant with no damages at all. The jury then retired to their

private room to talk the matter over, and the judge retired to \_his

\_private room, to refresh himself with a mutton chop and a glass of

sherry.

An anxious quarter of a hour elapsed; the jury came back; the judge was

fetched in. Mr. Pickwick put on his spectacles, and gazed at the foreman

with an agitated countenance and a quickly-beating heart.

‘Gentlemen,’ said the individual in black, ‘are you all agreed upon your

verdict?’

‘We are,’ replied the foreman.

‘Do you find for the plaintiff, gentlemen, or for the defendant?’

For the plaintiff.’

‘With what damages, gentlemen?’

‘Seven hundred and fifty pounds.’

Mr. Pickwick took off his spectacles, carefully wiped the glasses,

folded them into their case, and put them in his pocket; then, having

drawn on his gloves with great nicety, and stared at the foreman all the

while, he mechanically followed Mr. Perker and the blue bag out of

court.

They stopped in a side room while Perker paid the court fees; and here,

Mr. Pickwick was joined by his friends. Here, too, he encountered

Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, rubbing their hands with every token of outward

satisfaction.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well, Sir,’ said Dodson, for self and partner.

‘You imagine you’ll get your costs, don’t you, gentlemen?’ said Mr.

Pickwick.

Fogg said they thought it rather probable. Dodson smiled, and said

they’d try.

‘You may try, and try, and try again, Messrs. Dodson and Fogg,’ said Mr.

Pickwick vehemently, ‘but not one farthing of costs or damages do you

ever get from me, if I spend the rest of my existence in a debtor’s

prison.’

‘Ha! ha!’ laughed Dodson. ‘You’ll think better of that, before next

term, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘He, he, he! We’ll soon see about that, Mr. Pickwick,’ grinned Fogg.

Speechless with indignation, Mr. Pickwick allowed himself to be led by

his solicitor and friends to the door, and there assisted into a

hackney-coach, which had been fetched for the purpose, by the ever-

watchful Sam Weller.

Sam had put up the steps, and was preparing to jump upon the box, when

he felt himself gently touched on the shoulder; and, looking round, his

father stood before him. The old gentleman’s countenance wore a mournful

expression, as he shook his head gravely, and said, in warning accents--

‘I know’d what ‘ud come o’ this here mode o’ doin’ bisness. Oh, Sammy,

Sammy, vy worn’t there a alleybi!’

CHAPTER XXXV. IN WHICH MR. PICKWICK THINKS HE HAD BETTER GO TO BATH; AND

GOES ACCORDINGLY

But surely, my dear sir,’ said little Perker, as he stood in Mr.

Pickwick’s apartment on the morning after the trial, ‘surely you don’t

really mean--really and seriously now, and irritation apart--that you

won’t pay these costs and damages?’

‘Not one halfpenny,’ said Mr. Pickwick firmly; ‘not one halfpenny.’

‘Hooroar for the principle, as the money-lender said ven he vouldn’t

renew the bill,’ observed Mr. Weller, who was clearing away the

breakfast-things.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘have the goodness to step downstairs.’

‘Cert’nly, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller; and acting on Mr. Pickwick’s gentle

hint, Sam retired.

‘No, Perker,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with great seriousness of manner, ‘my

friends here have endeavoured to dissuade me from this determination,

but without avail. I shall employ myself as usual, until the opposite

party have the power of issuing a legal process of execution against me;

and if they are vile enough to avail themselves of it, and to arrest my

person, I shall yield myself up with perfect cheerfulness and content of

heart. When can they do this?’

‘They can issue execution, my dear Sir, for the amount of the damages

and taxed costs, next term,’ replied Perker, ‘just two months hence, my

dear sir.’

‘Very good,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Until that time, my dear fellow, let me

hear no more of the matter. And now,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, looking

round on his friends with a good-humoured smile, and a sparkle in the

eye which no spectacles could dim or conceal, ‘the only question is,

Where shall we go next?’

Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were too much affected by their friend’s

heroism to offer any reply. Mr. Winkle had not yet sufficiently

recovered the recollection of his evidence at the trial, to make any

observation on any subject, so Mr. Pickwick paused in vain.

‘Well,’ said that gentleman, ‘if you leave me to suggest our

destination, I say Bath. I think none of us have ever been there.’

Nobody had; and as the proposition was warmly seconded by Perker, who

considered it extremely probable that if Mr. Pickwick saw a little

change and gaiety he would be inclined to think better of his

determination, and worse of a debtor’s prison, it was carried

unanimously; and Sam was at once despatched to the White Horse Cellar,

to take five places by the half-past seven o’clock coach, next morning.

There were just two places to be had inside, and just three to be had

out; so Sam Weller booked for them all, and having exchanged a few

compliments with the booking-office clerk on the subject of a pewter

half-crown which was tendered him as a portion of his ‘change,’ walked

back to the George and Vulture, where he was pretty busily employed

until bed-time in reducing clothes and linen into the smallest possible

compass, and exerting his mechanical genius in constructing a variety of

ingenious devices for keeping the lids on boxes which had neither locks

nor hinges.

The next was a very unpropitious morning for a journey--muggy, damp, and

drizzly. The horses in the stages that were going out, and had come

through the city, were smoking so, that the outside passengers were

invisible. The newspaper-sellers looked moist, and smelled mouldy; the

wet ran off the hats of the orange-vendors as they thrust their heads

into the coach windows, and diluted the insides in a refreshing manner.

The Jews with the fifty-bladed penknives shut them up in despair; the

men with the pocket-books made pocket-books of them. Watch-guards and

toasting-forks were alike at a discount, and pencil-cases and sponges

were a drug in the market.

Leaving Sam Weller to rescue the luggage from the seven or eight porters

who flung themselves savagely upon it, the moment the coach stopped, and

finding that they were about twenty minutes too early, Mr. Pickwick and

his friends went for shelter into the travellers’ room--the last

resource of human dejection.

The travellers’ room at the White Horse Cellar is of course

uncomfortable; it would be no travellers’ room if it were not. It is the

right-hand parlour, into which an aspiring kitchen fireplace appears to

have walked, accompanied by a rebellious poker, tongs, and shovel. It is

divided into boxes, for the solitary confinement of travellers, and is

furnished with a clock, a looking-glass, and a live waiter, which latter

article is kept in a small kennel for washing glasses, in a corner of

the apartment.

One of these boxes was occupied, on this particular occasion, by a

stern-eyed man of about five-and-forty, who had a bald and glossy

forehead, with a good deal of black hair at the sides and back of his

head, and large black whiskers. He was buttoned up to the chin in a

brown coat; and had a large sealskin travelling-cap, and a greatcoat and

cloak, lying on the seat beside him. He looked up from his breakfast as

Mr. Pickwick entered, with a fierce and peremptory air, which was very

dignified; and, having scrutinised that gentleman and his companions to

his entire satisfaction, hummed a tune, in a manner which seemed to say

that he rather suspected somebody wanted to take advantage of him, but

it wouldn’t do.

‘Waiter,’ said the gentleman with the whiskers.

‘Sir?’ replied a man with a dirty complexion, and a towel of the same,

emerging from the kennel before mentioned.

‘Some more toast.’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Buttered toast, mind,’ said the gentleman fiercely.

‘Directly, sir,’ replied the waiter.

The gentleman with the whiskers hummed a tune in the same manner as

before, and pending the arrival of the toast, advanced to the front of

the fire, and, taking his coat tails under his arms, looked at his boots

and ruminated.

‘I wonder whereabouts in Bath this coach puts up,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

mildly addressing Mr. Winkle.

‘Hum--eh--what’s that?’ said the strange man.

‘I made an observation to my friend, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, always

ready to enter into conversation. ‘I wondered at what house the Bath

coach put up. Perhaps you can inform me.’

Are you going to Bath?’ said the strange man.

‘I am, sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘And those other gentlemen?’

‘They are going also,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not inside--I’ll be damned if you’re going inside,’ said the strange

man.

‘Not all of us,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No, not all of you,’ said the strange man emphatically. ‘I’ve taken two

places. If they try to squeeze six people into an infernal box that only

holds four, I’ll take a post-chaise and bring an action. I’ve paid my

fare. It won’t do; I told the clerk when I took my places that it

wouldn’t do. I know these things have been done. I know they are done

every day; but I never was done, and I never will be. Those who know me

best, best know it; crush me!’ Here the fierce gentleman rang the bell

with great violence, and told the waiter he’d better bring the toast in

five seconds, or he’d know the reason why.

‘My good sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘you will allow me to observe that

this is a very unnecessary display of excitement. I have only taken

places inside for two.’

‘I am glad to hear it,’ said the fierce man. ‘I withdraw my expressions.

I tender an apology. There’s my card. Give me your acquaintance.’

‘With great pleasure, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘We are to be fellow-

travellers, and I hope we shall find each other’s society mutually

agreeable.’

‘I hope we shall,’ said the fierce gentleman. ‘I know we shall. I like

your looks; they please me. Gentlemen, your hands and names. Know me.’

Of course, an interchange of friendly salutations followed this gracious

speech; and the fierce gentleman immediately proceeded to inform the

friends, in the same short, abrupt, jerking sentences, that his name was

Dowler; that he was going to Bath on pleasure; that he was formerly in

the army; that he had now set up in business as a gentleman; that he

lived upon the profits; and that the individual for whom the second

place was taken, was a personage no less illustrious than Mrs. Dowler,

his lady wife.

‘She’s a fine woman,’ said Mr. Dowler. ‘I am proud of her. I have

reason.’

‘I hope I shall have the pleasure of judging,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a

smile.

‘You shall,’ replied Dowler. ‘She shall know you. She shall esteem you.

I courted her under singular circumstances. I won her through a rash

vow. Thus. I saw her; I loved her; I proposed; she refused me.--“You

love another?”--“Spare my blushes.”--“I know him.”--“You do.”--“Very

good; if he remains here, I’ll skin him.”’

‘Lord bless me!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick involuntarily.

‘Did you skin the gentleman, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Winkle, with a very pale

face.

‘I wrote him a note, I said it was a painful thing. And so it was.’

‘Certainly,’ interposed Mr. Winkle.

‘I said I had pledged my word as a gentleman to skin him. My character

was at stake. I had no alternative. As an officer in His Majesty’s

service, I was bound to skin him. I regretted the necessity, but it must

be done. He was open to conviction. He saw that the rules of the service

were imperative. He fled. I married her. Here’s the coach. That’s her

head.’

As Mr. Dowler concluded, he pointed to a stage which had just driven up,

from the open window of which a rather pretty face in a bright blue

bonnet was looking among the crowd on the pavement, most probably for

the rash man himself. Mr. Dowler paid his bill, and hurried out with his

travelling cap, coat, and cloak; and Mr. Pickwick and his friends

followed to secure their places.

Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass had seated themselves at the back part of

the coach; Mr. Winkle had got inside; and Mr. Pickwick was preparing to

follow him, when Sam Weller came up to his master, and whispering in his

ear, begged to speak to him, with an air of the deepest mystery.

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘what’s the matter now?’

‘Here’s rayther a rum go, sir,’ replied Sam.

‘What?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘This here, Sir,’ rejoined Sam. ‘I’m wery much afeerd, sir, that the

properiator o’ this here coach is a playin’ some imperence vith us.’

‘How is that, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘aren’t the names down on the

way-bill?’

‘The names is not only down on the vay-bill, Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘but

they’ve painted vun on ‘em up, on the door o’ the coach.’ As Sam spoke,

he pointed to that part of the coach door on which the proprietor’s name

usually appears; and there, sure enough, in gilt letters of a goodly

size, was the magic name of \_Pickwick\_!

‘Dear me,’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, quite staggered by the coincidence;

‘what a very extraordinary thing!’

‘Yes, but that ain’t all,’ said Sam, again directing his master’s

attention to the coach door; ‘not content vith writin’ up “Pick-wick,”

they puts “Moses” afore it, vich I call addin’ insult to injury, as the

parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made

him talk the English langwidge arterwards.’

‘It’s odd enough, certainly, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but if we stand

talking here, we shall lose our places.’

‘Wot, ain’t nothin’ to be done in consequence, sir?’ exclaimed Sam,

perfectly aghast at the coolness with which Mr. Pickwick prepared to

ensconce himself inside.

‘Done!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘What should be done?’

Ain’t nobody to be whopped for takin’ this here liberty, sir?’ said Mr.

Weller, who had expected that at least he would have been commissioned

to challenge the guard and the coachman to a pugilistic encounter on the

spot.

‘Certainly not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick eagerly; ‘not on any account. Jump

up to your seat directly.’

‘I am wery much afeered,’ muttered Sam to himself, as he turned away,

‘that somethin’ queer’s come over the governor, or he’d never ha’ stood

this so quiet. I hope that ‘ere trial hasn’t broke his spirit, but it

looks bad, wery bad.’ Mr. Weller shook his head gravely; and it is

worthy of remark, as an illustration of the manner in which he took this

circumstance to heart, that he did not speak another word until the

coach reached the Kensington turnpike. Which was so long a time for him

to remain taciturn, that the fact may be considered wholly

unprecedented.

Nothing worthy of special mention occurred during the journey. Mr.

Dowler related a variety of anecdotes, all illustrative of his own

personal prowess and desperation, and appealed to Mrs. Dowler in

corroboration thereof; when Mrs. Dowler invariably brought in, in the

form of an appendix, some remarkable fact or circumstance which Mr.

Dowler had forgotten, or had perhaps through modesty, omitted; for the

addenda in every instance went to show that Mr. Dowler was even a more

wonderful fellow than he made himself out to be. Mr. Pickwick and Mr.

Winkle listened with great admiration, and at intervals conversed with

Mrs. Dowler, who was a very agreeable and fascinating person. So, what

between Mr. Dowler’s stories, and Mrs. Dowler’s charms, and Mr.

Pickwick’s good-humour, and Mr. Winkle’s good listening, the insides

contrived to be very companionable all the way.

The outsides did as outsides always do. They were very cheerful and

talkative at the beginning of every stage, and very dismal and sleepy in

the middle, and very bright and wakeful again towards the end. There was

one young gentleman in an India-rubber cloak, who smoked cigars all day;

and there was another young gentleman in a parody upon a greatcoat, who

lighted a good many, and feeling obviously unsettled after the second

whiff, threw them away when he thought nobody was looking at him. There

was a third young man on the box who wished to be learned in cattle; and

an old one behind, who was familiar with farming. There was a constant

succession of Christian names in smock-frocks and white coats, who were

invited to have a ‘lift’ by the guard, and who knew every horse and

hostler on the road and off it; and there was a dinner which would have

been cheap at half-a-crown a mouth, if any moderate number of mouths

could have eaten it in the time. And at seven o’clock P.M. Mr. Pickwick

and his friends, and Mr. Dowler and his wife, respectively retired to

their private sitting-rooms at the White Hart Hotel, opposite the Great

Pump Room, Bath, where the waiters, from their costume, might be

mistaken for Westminster boys, only they destroy the illusion by

behaving themselves much better.

Breakfast had scarcely been cleared away on the succeeding morning, when

a waiter brought in Mr. Dowler’s card, with a request to be allowed

permission to introduce a friend. Mr. Dowler at once followed up the

delivery of the card, by bringing himself and the friend also.

The friend was a charming young man of not much more than fifty, dressed

in a very bright blue coat with resplendent buttons, black trousers, and

the thinnest possible pair of highly-polished boots. A gold eye-glass

was suspended from his neck by a short, broad, black ribbon; a gold

snuff-box was lightly clasped in his left hand; gold rings innumerable

glittered on his fingers; and a large diamond pin set in gold glistened

in his shirt frill. He had a gold watch, and a gold curb chain with

large gold seals; and he carried a pliant ebony cane with a gold top.

His linen was of the very whitest, finest, and stiffest; his wig of the

glossiest, blackest, and curliest. His snuff was princes’ mixture; his

scent \_bouquet du roi\_. His features were contracted into a perpetual

smile; and his teeth were in such perfect order that it was difficult at

a small distance to tell the real from the false.

‘Mr. Pickwick,’ said Mr. Dowler; ‘my friend, Angelo Cyrus Bantam,

Esquire, M.C.; Bantam; Mr. Pickwick. Know each other.’

‘Welcome to Ba--ath, Sir. This is indeed an acquisition. Most welcome to

Ba--ath, sir. It is long--very long, Mr. Pickwick, since you drank the

waters. It appears an age, Mr. Pickwick. Re-markable!’

Such were the expressions with which Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, M.C.,

took Mr. Pickwick’s hand; retaining it in his, meantime, and shrugging

up his shoulders with a constant succession of bows, as if he really

could not make up his mind to the trial of letting it go again.

‘It is a very long time since I drank the waters, certainly,’ replied

Mr. Pickwick; ‘for, to the best of my knowledge, I was never here

before.’

‘Never in Ba--ath, Mr. Pickwick!’ exclaimed the Grand Master, letting

the hand fall in astonishment. ‘Never in Ba--ath! He! he! Mr. Pickwick,

you are a wag. Not bad, not bad. Good, good. He! he! he! Re-markable!’

‘To my shame, I must say that I am perfectly serious,’ rejoined Mr.

Pickwick. ‘I really never was here before.’

‘Oh, I see,’ exclaimed the Grand Master, looking extremely pleased;

‘yes, yes--good, good--better and better. You are the gentleman of whom

we have heard. Yes; we know you, Mr. Pickwick; we know you.’

‘The reports of the trial in those confounded papers,’ thought Mr.

Pickwick. ‘They have heard all about me.’

You are the gentleman residing on Clapham Green,’ resumed Bantam, ‘who

lost the use of his limbs from imprudently taking cold after port wine;

who could not be moved in consequence of acute suffering, and who had

the water from the king’s bath bottled at one hundred and three degrees,

and sent by wagon to his bedroom in town, where he bathed, sneezed, and

the same day recovered. Very remarkable!’

Mr. Pickwick acknowledged the compliment which the supposition implied,

but had the self-denial to repudiate it, notwithstanding; and taking

advantage of a moment’s silence on the part of the M.C., begged to

introduce his friends, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass. An

introduction which overwhelmed the M.C. with delight and honour.

‘Bantam,’ said Mr. Dowler, ‘Mr. Pickwick and his friends are strangers.

They must put their names down. Where’s the book?’

‘The register of the distinguished visitors in Ba--ath will be at the

Pump Room this morning at two o’clock,’ replied the M.C. ‘Will you guide

our friends to that splendid building, and enable me to procure their

autographs?’

‘I will,’ rejoined Dowler. ‘This is a long call. It’s time to go. I

shall be here again in an hour. Come.’

‘This is a ball-night,’ said the M.C., again taking Mr. Pickwick’s hand,

as he rose to go. ‘The ball-nights in Ba--ath are moments snatched from

paradise; rendered bewitching by music, beauty, elegance, fashion,

etiquette, and--and--above all, by the absence of tradespeople, who are

quite inconsistent with paradise, and who have an amalgamation of

themselves at the Guildhall every fortnight, which is, to say the least,

remarkable. Good-bye, good-bye!’ and protesting all the way downstairs

that he was most satisfied, and most delighted, and most overpowered,

and most flattered, Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, M.C., stepped into a

very elegant chariot that waited at the door, and rattled off.

At the appointed hour, Mr. Pickwick and his friends, escorted by Dowler,

repaired to the Assembly Rooms, and wrote their names down in the book--

an instance of condescension at which Angelo Bantam was even more

overpowered than before. Tickets of admission to that evening’s assembly

were to have been prepared for the whole party, but as they were not

ready, Mr. Pickwick undertook, despite all the protestations to the

contrary of Angelo Bantam, to send Sam for them at four o’clock in the

afternoon, to the M.C.’s house in Queen Square. Having taken a short

walk through the city, and arrived at the unanimous conclusion that Park

Street was very much like the perpendicular streets a man sees in a

dream, which he cannot get up for the life of him, they returned to the

White Hart, and despatched Sam on the errand to which his master had

pledged him.

Sam Weller put on his hat in a very easy and graceful manner, and,

thrusting his hands in his waistcoat pockets, walked with great

deliberation to Queen Square, whistling as he went along, several of the

most popular airs of the day, as arranged with entirely new movements

for that noble instrument the organ, either mouth or barrel. Arriving at

the number in Queen Square to which he had been directed, he left off

whistling and gave a cheerful knock, which was instantaneously answered

by a powdered-headed footman in gorgeous livery, and of symmetrical

stature.

‘Is this here Mr. Bantam’s, old feller?’ inquired Sam Weller, nothing

abashed by the blaze of splendour which burst upon his sight in the

person of the powdered-headed footman with the gorgeous livery.

‘Why, young man?’ was the haughty inquiry of the powdered-headed

footman.

‘’Cos if it is, jist you step in to him with that ‘ere card, and say Mr.

Veller’s a-waitin’, will you?’ said Sam. And saying it, he very coolly

walked into the hall, and sat down.

The powdered-headed footman slammed the door very hard, and scowled very

grandly; but both the slam and the scowl were lost upon Sam, who was

regarding a mahogany umbrella-stand with every outward token of critical

approval.

Apparently his master’s reception of the card had impressed the

powdered-headed footman in Sam’s favour, for when he came back from

delivering it, he smiled in a friendly manner, and said that the answer

would be ready directly.

‘Wery good,’ said Sam. ‘Tell the old gen’l’m’n not to put himself in a

perspiration. No hurry, six-foot. I’ve had my dinner.’

‘You dine early, sir,’ said the powdered-headed footman.

‘I find I gets on better at supper when I does,’ replied Sam.

‘Have you been long in Bath, sir?’ inquired the powdered-headed footman.

‘I have not had the pleasure of hearing of you before.’

‘I haven’t created any wery surprisin’ sensation here, as yet,’ rejoined

Sam, ‘for me and the other fash’nables only come last night.’

‘Nice place, Sir,’ said the powdered-headed footman.

‘Seems so,’ observed Sam.

‘Pleasant society, sir,’ remarked the powdered-headed footman. ‘Very

agreeable servants, sir.’

‘I should think they wos,’ replied Sam. ‘Affable, unaffected, say-

nothin’-to-nobody sorts o’ fellers.’

‘Oh, very much so, indeed, sir,’ said the powdered-headed footman,

taking Sam’s remarks as a high compliment. ‘Very much so indeed. Do you

do anything in this way, Sir?’ inquired the tall footman, producing a

small snuff-box with a fox’s head on the top of it.

‘Not without sneezing,’ replied Sam.

‘Why, it \_is\_ difficult, sir, I confess,’ said the tall footman. ‘It may

be done by degrees, Sir. Coffee is the best practice. I carried coffee,

Sir, for a long time. It looks very like rappee, sir.’

Here, a sharp peal at the bell reduced the powdered-headed footman to

the ignominious necessity of putting the fox’s head in his pocket, and

hastening with a humble countenance to Mr. Bantam’s ‘study.’ By the bye,

who ever knew a man who never read or wrote either, who hadn’t got some

small back parlour which he \_would \_call a study!

‘There is the answer, sir,’ said the powdered-headed footman. ‘I’m

afraid you’ll find it inconveniently large.’

‘Don’t mention it,’ said Sam, taking a letter with a small enclosure.

‘It’s just possible as exhausted natur’ may manage to surwive it.’

‘I hope we shall meet again, Sir,’ said the powdered-headed footman,

rubbing his hands, and following Sam out to the door-step.

‘You are wery obligin’, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘Now, don’t allow yourself to

be fatigued beyond your powers; there’s a amiable bein’. Consider what

you owe to society, and don’t let yourself be injured by too much work.

For the sake o’ your feller-creeturs, keep yourself as quiet as you can;

only think what a loss you would be!’ With these pathetic words, Sam

Weller departed.

‘A very singular young man that,’ said the powdered-headed footman,

looking after Mr. Weller, with a countenance which clearly showed he

could make nothing of him.

Sam said nothing at all. He winked, shook his head, smiled, winked

again; and, with an expression of countenance which seemed to denote

that he was greatly amused with something or other, walked merrily away.

At precisely twenty minutes before eight o’clock that night, Angelo

Cyrus Bantam, Esq., the Master of the Ceremonies, emerged from his

chariot at the door of the Assembly Rooms in the same wig, the same

teeth, the same eye-glass, the same watch and seals, the same rings, the

same shirt-pin, and the same cane. The only observable alterations in

his appearance were, that he wore a brighter blue coat, with a white

silk lining, black tights, black silk stockings, and pumps, and a white

waistcoat, and was, if possible, just a thought more scented.

Thus attired, the Master of the Ceremonies, in strict discharge of the

important duties of his all-important office, planted himself in the

room to receive the company.

Bath being full, the company, and the sixpences for tea, poured in, in

shoals. In the ballroom, the long card-room, the octagonal card-room,

the staircases, and the passages, the hum of many voices, and the sound

of many feet, were perfectly bewildering. Dresses rustled, feathers

waved, lights shone, and jewels sparkled. There was the music--not of

the quadrille band, for it had not yet commenced; but the music of soft,

tiny footsteps, with now and then a clear, merry laugh--low and gentle,

but very pleasant to hear in a female voice, whether in Bath or

elsewhere. Brilliant eyes, lighted up with pleasurable expectation,

gleamed from every side; and, look where you would, some exquisite form

glided gracefully through the throng, and was no sooner lost, than it

was replaced by another as dainty and bewitching.

In the tea-room, and hovering round the card-tables, were a vast number

of queer old ladies, and decrepit old gentlemen, discussing all the

small talk and scandal of the day, with a relish and gusto which

sufficiently bespoke the intensity of the pleasure they derived from the

occupation. Mingled with these groups, were three or four match-making

mammas, appearing to be wholly absorbed by the conversation in which

they were taking part, but failing not from time to time to cast an

anxious sidelong glance upon their daughters, who, remembering the

maternal injunction to make the best use of their youth, had already

commenced incipient flirtations in the mislaying scarves, putting on

gloves, setting down cups, and so forth; slight matters apparently, but

which may be turned to surprisingly good account by expert

practitioners.

Lounging near the doors, and in remote corners, were various knots of

silly young men, displaying various varieties of puppyism and stupidity;

amusing all sensible people near them with their folly and conceit; and

happily thinking themselves the objects of general admiration--a wise

and merciful dispensation which no good man will quarrel with.

And lastly, seated on some of the back benches, where they had already

taken up their positions for the evening, were divers unmarried ladies

past their grand climacteric, who, not dancing because there were no

partners for them, and not playing cards lest they should be set down as

irretrievably single, were in the favourable situation of being able to

abuse everybody without reflecting on themselves. In short, they could

abuse everybody, because everybody was there. It was a scene of gaiety,

glitter, and show; of richly-dressed people, handsome mirrors, chalked

floors, girandoles and wax-candles; and in all parts of the scene,

gliding from spot to spot in silent softness, bowing obsequiously to

this party, nodding familiarly to that, and smiling complacently on all,

was the sprucely-attired person of Angelo Cyrus Bantam, Esquire, the

Master of the Ceremonies.

‘Stop in the tea-room. Take your sixpenn’orth. Then lay on hot water,

and call it tea. Drink it,’ said Mr. Dowler, in a loud voice, directing

Mr. Pickwick, who advanced at the head of the little party, with Mrs.

Dowler on his arm. Into the tea-room Mr. Pickwick turned; and catching

sight of him, Mr. Bantam corkscrewed his way through the crowd and

welcomed him with ecstasy.

‘My dear Sir, I am highly honoured. Ba--ath is favoured. Mrs. Dowler,

you embellish the rooms. I congratulate you on your feathers. Re-

markable!’

‘Anybody here?’ inquired Dowler suspiciously.

‘Anybody! The \_elite \_of Ba--ath. Mr. Pickwick, do you see the old lady

in the gauze turban?’

‘The fat old lady?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick innocently.

‘Hush, my dear sir--nobody’s fat or old in Ba--ath. That’s the Dowager

Lady Snuphanuph.’

‘Is it, indeed?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No less a person, I assure you,’ said the Master of the Ceremonies.

‘Hush. Draw a little nearer, Mr. Pickwick. You see the splendidly-

dressed young man coming this way?’

‘The one with the long hair, and the particularly small forehead?’

inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘The same. The richest young man in Ba--ath at this moment. Young Lord

Mutanhed.’

‘You don’t say so?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes. You’ll hear his voice in a moment, Mr. Pickwick. He’ll speak to

me. The other gentleman with him, in the red under-waistcoat and dark

moustache, is the Honourable Mr. Crushton, his bosom friend. How do you

do, my Lord?’

‘Veway hot, Bantam,’ said his Lordship.

‘It \_is\_ very warm, my Lord,’ replied the M.C.

‘Confounded,’ assented the Honourable Mr. Crushton.

‘Have you seen his Lordship’s mail-cart, Bantam?’ inquired the

Honourable Mr. Crushton, after a short pause, during which young Lord

Mutanhed had been endeavouring to stare Mr. Pickwick out of countenance,

and Mr. Crushton had been reflecting what subject his Lordship could

talk about best.

‘Dear me, no,’ replied the M.C. ‘A mail-cart! What an excellent idea.

Re-markable!’

‘Gwacious heavens!’ said his Lordship, ‘I thought evewebody had seen the

new mail-cart; it’s the neatest, pwettiest, gwacefullest thing that ever

wan upon wheels. Painted wed, with a cweam piebald.’

‘With a real box for the letters, and all complete,’ said the Honourable

Mr. Crushton.

‘And a little seat in fwont, with an iwon wail, for the dwiver,’ added

his Lordship. ‘I dwove it over to Bwistol the other morning, in a

cwimson coat, with two servants widing a quarter of a mile behind; and

confound me if the people didn’t wush out of their cottages, and awest

my pwogwess, to know if I wasn’t the post. Glorwious--glorwious!’

At this anecdote his Lordship laughed very heartily, as did the

listeners, of course. Then, drawing his arm through that of the

obsequious Mr. Crushton, Lord Mutanhed walked away.

‘Delightful young man, his Lordship,’ said the Master of the Ceremonies.

‘So I should think,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick drily.

The dancing having commenced, the necessary introductions having been

made, and all preliminaries arranged, Angelo Bantam rejoined Mr.

Pickwick, and led him into the card-room.

Just at the very moment of their entrance, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph

and two other ladies of an ancient and whist-like appearance, were

hovering over an unoccupied card-table; and they no sooner set eyes upon

Mr. Pickwick under the convoy of Angelo Bantam, than they exchanged

glances with each other, seeing that he was precisely the very person

they wanted, to make up the rubber.

‘My dear Bantam,’ said the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph coaxingly, ‘find us

some nice creature to make up this table; there’s a good soul.’ Mr.

Pickwick happened to be looking another way at the moment, so her

Ladyship nodded her head towards him, and frowned expressively.

‘My friend Mr. Pickwick, my Lady, will be most happy, I am sure,

remarkably so,’ said the M.C., taking the hint. ‘Mr. Pickwick, Lady

Snuphanuph--Mrs. Colonel Wugsby--Miss Bolo.’

Mr. Pickwick bowed to each of the ladies, and, finding escape

impossible, cut. Mr. Pickwick and Miss Bolo against Lady Snuphanuph and

Mrs. Colonel Wugsby.

As the trump card was turned up, at the commencement of the second deal,

two young ladies hurried into the room, and took their stations on

either side of Mrs. Colonel Wugsby’s chair, where they waited patiently

until the hand was over.

‘Now, Jane,’ said Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, turning to one of the girls,

‘what is it?’

I came to ask, ma, whether I might dance with the youngest Mr. Crawley,’

whispered the prettier and younger of the two.

‘Good God, Jane, how can you think of such things?’ replied the mamma

indignantly. ‘Haven’t you repeatedly heard that his father has eight

hundred a year, which dies with him? I am ashamed of you. Not on any

account.’

‘Ma,’ whispered the other, who was much older than her sister, and very

insipid and artificial, ‘Lord Mutanhed has been introduced to me. I said

I thought I wasn’t engaged, ma.’

‘You’re a sweet pet, my love,’ replied Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, tapping her

daughter’s cheek with her fan, ‘and are always to be trusted. He’s

immensely rich, my dear. Bless you!’ With these words Mrs. Colonel

Wugsby kissed her eldest daughter most affectionately, and frowning in a

warning manner upon the other, sorted her cards.

Poor Mr. Pickwick! he had never played with three thorough-paced female

card-players before. They were so desperately sharp, that they quite

frightened him. If he played a wrong card, Miss Bolo looked a small

armoury of daggers; if he stopped to consider which was the right one,

Lady Snuphanuph would throw herself back in her chair, and smile with a

mingled glance of impatience and pity to Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, at which

Mrs. Colonel Wugsby would shrug up her shoulders, and cough, as much as

to say she wondered whether he ever would begin. Then, at the end of

every hand, Miss Bolo would inquire with a dismal countenance and

reproachful sigh, why Mr. Pickwick had not returned that diamond, or led

the club, or roughed the spade, or finessed the heart, or led through

the honour, or brought out the ace, or played up to the king, or some

such thing; and in reply to all these grave charges, Mr. Pickwick would

be wholly unable to plead any justification whatever, having by this

time forgotten all about the game. People came and looked on, too, which

made Mr. Pickwick nervous. Besides all this, there was a great deal of

distracting conversation near the table, between Angelo Bantam and the

two Misses Matinter, who, being single and singular, paid great court to

the Master of the Ceremonies, in the hope of getting a stray partner now

and then. All these things, combined with the noises and interruptions

of constant comings in and goings out, made Mr. Pickwick play rather

badly; the cards were against him, also; and when they left off at ten

minutes past eleven, Miss Bolo rose from the table considerably

agitated, and went straight home, in a flood of tears and a sedan-chair.

Being joined by his friends, who one and all protested that they had

scarcely ever spent a more pleasant evening, Mr. Pickwick accompanied

them to the White Hart, and having soothed his feelings with something

hot, went to bed, and to sleep, almost simultaneously.

CHAPTER XXXVI. THE CHIEF FEATURES OF WHICH WILL BE FOUND TO BE AN

AUTHENTIC VERSION OF THE LEGEND OF PRINCE BLADUD, AND A MOST

EXTRAORDINARY CALAMITY THAT BEFELL MR. WINKLE

As Mr. Pickwick contemplated a stay of at least two months in Bath, he

deemed it advisable to take private lodgings for himself and friends for

that period; and as a favourable opportunity offered for their securing,

on moderate terms, the upper portion of a house in the Royal Crescent,

which was larger than they required, Mr. and Mrs. Dowler offered to

relieve them of a bedroom and sitting-room. This proposition was at once

accepted, and in three days’ time they were all located in their new

abode, when Mr. Pickwick began to drink the waters with the utmost

assiduity. Mr. Pickwick took them systematically. He drank a quarter of

a pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter

of a pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill; and, after every

fresh quarter of a pint, Mr. Pickwick declared, in the most solemn and

emphatic terms, that he felt a great deal better; whereat his friends

were very much delighted, though they had not been previously aware that

there was anything the matter with him.

The Great Pump Room is a spacious saloon, ornamented with Corinthian

pillars, and a music-gallery, and a Tompion clock, and a statue of Nash,

and a golden inscription, to which all the water-drinkers should attend,

for it appeals to them in the cause of a deserving charity. There is a

large bar with a marble vase, out of which the pumper gets the water;

and there are a number of yellow-looking tumblers, out of which the

company get it; and it is a most edifying and satisfactory sight to

behold the perseverance and gravity with which they swallow it. There

are baths near at hand, in which a part of the company wash themselves;

and a band plays afterwards, to congratulate the remainder on their

having done so. There is another pump room, into which infirm ladies and

gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and

chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular

number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them; and

there is a third, into which the quiet people go, for it is less noisy

than either. There is an immensity of promenading, on crutches and off,

with sticks and without, and a great deal of conversation, and

liveliness, and pleasantry.

Every morning, the regular water-drinkers, Mr. Pickwick among the

number, met each other in the pump room, took their quarter of a pint,

and walked constitutionally. At the afternoon’s promenade, Lord

Mutanhed, and the Honourable Mr. Crushton, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph,

Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, and all the great people, and all the morning

water-drinkers, met in grand assemblage. After this, they walked out, or

drove out, or were pushed out in bath-chairs, and met one another again.

After this, the gentlemen went to the reading-rooms, and met divisions

of the mass. After this, they went home. If it were theatre-night,

perhaps they met at the theatre; if it were assembly-night, they met at

the rooms; and if it were neither, they met the next day. A very

pleasant routine, with perhaps a slight tinge of sameness.

Mr. Pickwick was sitting up by himself, after a day spent in this

manner, making entries in his journal, his friends having retired to

bed, when he was roused by a gentle tap at the room door.

‘Beg your pardon, Sir,’ said Mrs. Craddock, the landlady, peeping in;

‘but did you want anything more, sir?’

‘Nothing more, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘My young girl is gone to bed, Sir,’ said Mrs. Craddock; ‘and Mr. Dowler

is good enough to say that he’ll sit up for Mrs. Dowler, as the party

isn’t expected to be over till late; so I was thinking that if you

wanted nothing more, Mr. Pickwick, I would go to bed.’

‘By all means, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wish you good-night, Sir,’ said Mrs. Craddock.

‘Good-night, ma’am,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

Mrs. Craddock closed the door, and Mr. Pickwick resumed his writing.

In half an hour’s time the entries were concluded. Mr. Pickwick

carefully rubbed the last page on the blotting-paper, shut up the book,

wiped his pen on the bottom of the inside of his coat tail, and opened

the drawer of the inkstand to put it carefully away. There were a couple

of sheets of writing-paper, pretty closely written over, in the inkstand

drawer, and they were folded so, that the title, which was in a good

round hand, was fully disclosed to him. Seeing from this, that it was no

private document; and as it seemed to relate to Bath, and was very

short: Mr. Pick-wick unfolded it, lighted his bedroom candle that it

might burn up well by the time he finished; and drawing his chair nearer

the fire, read as follows--

THE TRUE LEGEND OF PRINCE BLADUD

‘Less than two hundred years ago, on one of the public baths in this

city, there appeared an inscription in honour of its mighty founder, the

renowned Prince Bladud. That inscription is now erased.

‘For many hundred years before that time, there had been handed down,

from age to age, an old legend, that the illustrious prince being

afflicted with leprosy, on his return from reaping a rich harvest of

knowledge in Athens, shunned the court of his royal father, and

consorted moodily with husbandman and pigs. Among the herd (so said the

legend) was a pig of grave and solemn countenance, with whom the prince

had a fellow-feeling--for he too was wise--a pig of thoughtful and

reserved demeanour; an animal superior to his fellows, whose grunt was

terrible, and whose bite was sharp. The young prince sighed deeply as he

looked upon the countenance of the majestic swine; he thought of his

royal father, and his eyes were bedewed with tears.

‘This sagacious pig was fond of bathing in rich, moist mud. Not in

summer, as common pigs do now, to cool themselves, and did even in those

distant ages (which is a proof that the light of civilisation had

already begun to dawn, though feebly), but in the cold, sharp days of

winter. His coat was ever so sleek, and his complexion so clear, that

the prince resolved to essay the purifying qualities of the same water

that his friend resorted to. He made the trial. Beneath that black mud,

bubbled the hot springs of Bath. He washed, and was cured. Hastening to

his father’s court, he paid his best respects, and returning quickly

hither, founded this city and its famous baths.

‘He sought the pig with all the ardour of their early friendship--but,

alas! the waters had been his death. He had imprudently taken a bath at

too high a temperature, and the natural philosopher was no more! He was

succeeded by Pliny, who also fell a victim to his thirst for knowledge.

‘This was the legend. Listen to the true one.

‘A great many centuries since, there flourished, in great state, the

famous and renowned Lud Hudibras, king of Britain. He was a mighty

monarch. The earth shook when he walked--he was so very stout. His

people basked in the light of his countenance--it was so red and

glowing. He was, indeed, every inch a king. And there were a good many

inches of him, too, for although he was not very tall, he was a

remarkable size round, and the inches that he wanted in height, he made

up in circumference. If any degenerate monarch of modern times could be

in any way compared with him, I should say the venerable King Cole would

be that illustrious potentate.

‘This good king had a queen, who eighteen years before, had had a son,

who was called Bladud. He was sent to a preparatory seminary in his

father’s dominions until he was ten years old, and was then despatched,

in charge of a trusty messenger, to a finishing school at Athens; and as

there was no extra charge for remaining during the holidays, and no

notice required previous to the removal of a pupil, there he remained

for eight long years, at the expiration of which time, the king his

father sent the lord chamberlain over, to settle the bill, and to bring

him home; which, the lord chamberlain doing, was received with shouts,

and pensioned immediately.

‘When King Lud saw the prince his son, and found he had grown up such a

fine young man, he perceived what a grand thing it would be to have him

married without delay, so that his children might be the means of

perpetuating the glorious race of Lud, down to the very latest ages of

the world. With this view, he sent a special embassy, composed of great

noblemen who had nothing particular to do, and wanted lucrative

employment, to a neighbouring king, and demanded his fair daughter in

marriage for his son; stating at the same time that he was anxious to be

on the most affectionate terms with his brother and friend, but that if

they couldn’t agree in arranging this marriage, he should be under the

unpleasant necessity of invading his kingdom and putting his eyes out.

To this, the other king (who was the weaker of the two) replied that he

was very much obliged to his friend and brother for all his goodness and

magnanimity, and that his daughter was quite ready to be married,

whenever Prince Bladud liked to come and fetch her.

‘This answer no sooner reached Britain, than the whole nation was

transported with joy. Nothing was heard, on all sides, but the sounds of

feasting and revelry--except the chinking of money as it was paid in by

the people to the collector of the royal treasures, to defray the

expenses of the happy ceremony. It was upon this occasion that King Lud,

seated on the top of his throne in full council, rose, in the exuberance

of his feelings, and commanded the lord chief justice to order in the

richest wines and the court minstrels--an act of graciousness which has

been, through the ignorance of traditionary historians, attributed to

King Cole, in those celebrated lines in which his Majesty is represented

as

Calling for his pipe, and calling for his pot, And calling for his

fiddlers three.

Which is an obvious injustice to the memory of King Lud, and a dishonest

exaltation of the virtues of King Cole.

‘But, in the midst of all this festivity and rejoicing, there was one

individual present, who tasted not when the sparkling wines were poured

forth, and who danced not, when the minstrels played. This was no other

than Prince Bladud himself, in honour of whose happiness a whole people

were, at that very moment, straining alike their throats and purse-

strings. The truth was, that the prince, forgetting the undoubted right

of the minister for foreign affairs to fall in love on his behalf, had,

contrary to every precedent of policy and diplomacy, already fallen in

love on his own account, and privately contracted himself unto the fair

daughter of a noble Athenian.

‘Here we have a striking example of one of the manifold advantages of

civilisation and refinement. If the prince had lived in later days, he

might at once have married the object of his father’s choice, and then

set himself seriously to work, to relieve himself of the burden which

rested heavily upon him. He might have endeavoured to break her heart by

a systematic course of insult and neglect; or, if the spirit of her sex,

and a proud consciousness of her many wrongs had upheld her under this

ill-treatment, he might have sought to take her life, and so get rid of

her effectually. But neither mode of relief suggested itself to Prince

Bladud; so he solicited a private audience, and told his father.

‘It is an old prerogative of kings to govern everything but their

passions. King Lud flew into a frightful rage, tossed his crown up to

the ceiling, and caught it again--for in those days kings kept their

crowns on their heads, and not in the Tower--stamped the ground, rapped

his forehead, wondered why his own flesh and blood rebelled against him,

and, finally, calling in his guards, ordered the prince away to instant

Confinement in a lofty turret; a course of treatment which the kings of

old very generally pursued towards their sons, when their matrimonial

inclinations did not happen to point to the same quarter as their own.

‘When Prince Bladud had been shut up in the lofty turret for the greater

part of a year, with no better prospect before his bodily eyes than a

stone wall, or before his mental vision than prolonged imprisonment, he

naturally began to ruminate on a plan of escape, which, after months of

preparation, he managed to accomplish; considerately leaving his dinner-

knife in the heart of his jailer, lest the poor fellow (who had a

family) should be considered privy to his flight, and punished

accordingly by the infuriated king.

‘The monarch was frantic at the loss of his son. He knew not on whom to

vent his grief and wrath, until fortunately bethinking himself of the

lord chamberlain who had brought him home, he struck off his pension and

his head together.

‘Meanwhile, the young prince, effectually disguised, wandered on foot

through his father’s dominions, cheered and supported in all his

hardships by sweet thoughts of the Athenian maid, who was the innocent

cause of his weary trials. One day he stopped to rest in a country

village; and seeing that there were gay dances going forward on the

green, and gay faces passing to and fro, ventured to inquire of a

reveller who stood near him, the reason for this rejoicing.

‘“Know you not, O stranger,” was the reply, “of the recent proclamation

of our gracious king?”

‘“Proclamation! No. What proclamation?” rejoined the prince--for he had

travelled along the by and little-frequented ways, and knew nothing of

what had passed upon the public roads, such as they were.

‘“Why,” replied the peasant, “the foreign lady that our prince wished to

wed, is married to a foreign noble of her own country, and the king

proclaims the fact, and a great public festival besides; for now, of

course, Prince Bladud will come back and marry the lady his father

chose, who they say is as beautiful as the noonday sun. Your health,

sir. God save the king!”

‘The prince remained to hear no more. He fled from the spot, and plunged

into the thickest recesses of a neighbouring wood. On, on, he wandered,

night and day; beneath the blazing sun, and the cold pale moon; through

the dry heat of noon, and the damp cold of night; in the gray light of

morn, and the red glare of eve. So heedless was he of time or object,

that being bound for Athens, he wandered as far out of his way as Bath.

‘There was no city where Bath stands, then. There was no vestige of

human habitation, or sign of man’s resort, to bear the name; but there

was the same noble country, the same broad expanse of hill and dale, the

same beautiful channel stealing on, far away, the same lofty mountains

which, like the troubles of life, viewed at a distance, and partially

obscured by the bright mist of its morning, lose their ruggedness and

asperity, and seem all ease and softness. Moved by the gentle beauty of

the scene, the prince sank upon the green turf, and bathed his swollen

feet in his tears.

‘“Oh!” said the unhappy Bladud, clasping his hands, and mournfully

raising his eyes towards the sky, “would that my wanderings might end

here! Would that these grateful tears with which I now mourn hope

misplaced, and love despised, might flow in peace for ever!”

‘The wish was heard. It was in the time of the heathen deities, who used

occasionally to take people at their words, with a promptness, in some

cases, extremely awkward. The ground opened beneath the prince’s feet;

he sank into the chasm; and instantaneously it closed upon his head for

ever, save where his hot tears welled up through the earth, and where

they have continued to gush forth ever since.

‘It is observable that, to this day, large numbers of elderly ladies and

gentlemen who have been disappointed in procuring partners, and almost

as many young ones who are anxious to obtain them, repair annually to

Bath to drink the waters, from which they derive much strength and

comfort. This is most complimentary to the virtue of Prince Bladud’s

tears, and strongly corroborative of the veracity of this legend.’

Mr. Pickwick yawned several times when he had arrived at the end of this

little manuscript, carefully refolded, and replaced it in the inkstand

drawer, and then, with a countenance expressive of the utmost weariness,

lighted his chamber candle, and went upstairs to bed.

He stopped at Mr. Dowler’s door, according to custom, and knocked to say

good-night.

‘Ah!’ said Dowler, ‘going to bed? I wish I was. Dismal night. Windy;

isn’t it?’

‘Very,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Good-night.’

‘Good-night.’

Mr. Pickwick went to his bedchamber, and Mr. Dowler resumed his seat

before the fire, in fulfilment of his rash promise to sit up till his

wife came home.

There are few things more worrying than sitting up for somebody,

especially if that somebody be at a party. You cannot help thinking how

quickly the time passes with them, which drags so heavily with you; and

the more you think of this, the more your hopes of their speedy arrival

decline. Clocks tick so loud, too, when you are sitting up alone, and

you seem as if you had an under-garment of cobwebs on. First, something

tickles your right knee, and then the same sensation irritates your

left. You have no sooner changed your position, than it comes again in

the arms; when you have fidgeted your limbs into all sorts of queer

shapes, you have a sudden relapse in the nose, which you rub as if to

rub it off--as there is no doubt you would, if you could. Eyes, too, are

mere personal inconveniences; and the wick of one candle gets an inch

and a half long, while you are snuffing the other. These, and various

other little nervous annoyances, render sitting up for a length of time

after everybody else has gone to bed, anything but a cheerful amusement.

This was just Mr. Dowler’s opinion, as he sat before the fire, and felt

honestly indignant with all the inhuman people at the party who were

keeping him up. He was not put into better humour either, by the

reflection that he had taken it into his head, early in the evening, to

think he had got an ache there, and so stopped at home. At length, after

several droppings asleep, and fallings forward towards the bars, and

catchings backward soon enough to prevent being branded in the face, Mr.

Dowler made up his mind that he would throw himself on the bed in the

back room and think--not sleep, of course.

‘I’m a heavy sleeper,’ said Mr. Dowler, as he flung himself on the bed.

‘I must keep awake. I suppose I shall hear a knock here. Yes. I thought

so. I can hear the watchman. There he goes. Fainter now, though. A

little fainter. He’s turning the corner. Ah!’ When Mr. Dowler arrived at

this point, he turned the corner at which he had been long hesitating,

and fell fast asleep.

Just as the clock struck three, there was blown into the crescent a

sedan-chair with Mrs. Dowler inside, borne by one short, fat chairman,

and one long, thin one, who had had much ado to keep their bodies

perpendicular: to say nothing of the chair. But on that high ground, and

in the crescent, which the wind swept round and round as if it were

going to tear the paving stones up, its fury was tremendous. They were

very glad to set the chair down, and give a good round loud double-knock

at the street door.

They waited some time, but nobody came.

‘Servants is in the arms o’ Porpus, I think,’ said the short chairman,

warming his hands at the attendant link-boy’s torch.

‘I wish he’d give ‘em a squeeze and wake ‘em,’ observed the long one.

‘Knock again, will you, if you please,’ cried Mrs. Dowler from the

chair. ‘Knock two or three times, if you please.’

The short man was quite willing to get the job over, as soon as

possible; so he stood on the step, and gave four or five most startling

double-knocks, of eight or ten knocks a-piece, while the long man went

into the road, and looked up at the windows for a light.

Nobody came. It was all as silent and dark as ever.

‘Dear me!’ said Mrs. Dowler. ‘You must knock again, if you please.’

There ain’t a bell, is there, ma’am?’ said the short chairman.

‘Yes, there is,’ interposed the link-boy, ‘I’ve been a-ringing at it

ever so long.’

‘It’s only a handle,’ said Mrs. Dowler, ‘the wire’s broken.’

‘I wish the servants’ heads wos,’ growled the long man.

‘I must trouble you to knock again, if you please,’ said Mrs. Dowler,

with the utmost politeness.

The short man did knock again several times, without producing the

smallest effect. The tall man, growing very impatient, then relieved

him, and kept on perpetually knocking double-knocks of two loud knocks

each, like an insane postman.

At length Mr. Winkle began to dream that he was at a club, and that the

members being very refractory, the chairman was obliged to hammer the

table a good deal to preserve order; then he had a confused notion of an

auction room where there were no bidders, and the auctioneer was buying

everything in; and ultimately he began to think it just within the

bounds of possibility that somebody might be knocking at the street

door. To make quite certain, however, he remained quiet in bed for ten

minutes or so, and listened; and when he had counted two or three-and-

thirty knocks, he felt quite satisfied, and gave himself a great deal of

credit for being so wakeful.

‘Rap rap-rap rap-rap rap-ra, ra, ra, ra, ra, rap!’ went the knocker.

Mr. Winkle jumped out of bed, wondering very much what could possibly be

the matter, and hastily putting on his stockings and slippers, folded

his dressing-gown round him, lighted a flat candle from the rush-light

that was burning in the fireplace, and hurried downstairs.

‘Here’s somebody comin’ at last, ma’am,’ said the short chairman.

‘I wish I wos behind him vith a bradawl,’ muttered the long one.

‘Who’s there?’ cried Mr. Winkle, undoing the chain.

‘Don’t stop to ask questions, cast-iron head,’ replied the long man,

with great disgust, taking it for granted that the inquirer was a

footman; ‘but open the door.’

‘Come, look sharp, timber eyelids,’ added the other encouragingly.

Mr. Winkle, being half asleep, obeyed the command mechanically, opened

the door a little, and peeped out. The first thing he saw, was the red

glare of the link-boy’s torch. Startled by the sudden fear that the

house might be on fire, he hastily threw the door wide open, and holding

the candle above his head, stared eagerly before him, not quite certain

whether what he saw was a sedan-chair or a fire-engine. At this instant

there came a violent gust of wind; the light was blown out; Mr. Winkle

felt himself irresistibly impelled on to the steps; and the door blew

to, with a loud crash.

‘Well, young man, now you \_have \_done it!’ said the short chairman.

Mr. Winkle, catching sight of a lady’s face at the window of the sedan,

turned hastily round, plied the knocker with all his might and main, and

called frantically upon the chairman to take the chair away again.

‘Take it away, take it away,’ cried Mr. Winkle. ‘Here’s somebody coming

out of another house; put me into the chair. Hide me! Do something with

me!’

All this time he was shivering with cold; and every time he raised his

hand to the knocker, the wind took the dressing-gown in a most

unpleasant manner.

‘The people are coming down the crescent now. There are ladies with ‘em;

cover me up with something. Stand before me!’ roared Mr. Winkle. But the

chairmen were too much exhausted with laughing to afford him the

slightest assistance, and the ladies were every moment approaching

nearer and nearer.

Mr. Winkle gave a last hopeless knock; the ladies were only a few doors

off. He threw away the extinguished candle, which, all this time he had

held above his head, and fairly bolted into the sedan-chair where Mrs.

Dowler was.

Now, Mrs. Craddock had heard the knocking and the voices at last; and,

only waiting to put something smarter on her head than her nightcap, ran

down into the front drawing-room to make sure that it was the right

party. Throwing up the window-sash as Mr. Winkle was rushing into the

chair, she no sooner caught sight of what was going forward below, than

she raised a vehement and dismal shriek, and implored Mr. Dowler to get

up directly, for his wife was running away with another gentleman.

Upon this, Mr. Dowler bounced off the bed as abruptly as an India-rubber

ball, and rushing into the front room, arrived at one window just as Mr.

Pickwick threw up the other, when the first object that met the gaze of

both, was Mr. Winkle bolting into the sedan-chair.

‘Watchman,’ shouted Dowler furiously, ‘stop him--hold him--keep him

tight--shut him in, till I come down. I’ll cut his throat--give me a

knife--from ear to ear, Mrs. Craddock--I will!’ And breaking from the

shrieking landlady, and from Mr. Pickwick, the indignant husband seized

a small supper-knife, and tore into the street.

But Mr. Winkle didn’t wait for him. He no sooner heard the horrible

threat of the valorous Dowler, than he bounced out of the sedan, quite

as quickly as he had bounced in, and throwing off his slippers into the

road, took to his heels and tore round the crescent, hotly pursued by

Dowler and the watchman. He kept ahead; the door was open as he came

round the second time; he rushed in, slammed it in Dowler’s face,

mounted to his bedroom, locked the door, piled a wash-hand-stand, chest

of drawers, and a table against it, and packed up a few necessaries

ready for flight with the first ray of morning.

Dowler came up to the outside of the door; avowed, through the keyhole,

his steadfast determination of cutting Mr. Winkle’s throat next day;

and, after a great confusion of voices in the drawing-room, amidst which

that of Mr. Pickwick was distinctly heard endeavouring to make peace,

the inmates dispersed to their several bed-chambers, and all was quiet

once more.

It is not unlikely that the inquiry may be made, where Mr. Weller was,

all this time? We will state where he was, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XXXVII. HONOURABLY ACCOUNTS FOR MR. WELLER’S ABSENCE, BY

DESCRIBING A SOIREE TO WHICH HE WAS INVITED AND WENT; ALSO RELATES HOW

HE WAS ENTRUSTED BY MR. PICKWICK WITH A PRIVATE MISSION OF DELICACY AND

IMPORTANCE

Mr. Weller,’ said Mrs. Craddock, upon the morning of this very eventful

day, ‘here’s a letter for you.’

‘Wery odd that,’ said Sam; ‘I’m afeerd there must be somethin’ the

matter, for I don’t recollect any gen’l’m’n in my circle of acquaintance

as is capable o’ writin’ one.’

‘Perhaps something uncommon has taken place,’ observed Mrs. Craddock.

‘It must be somethin’ wery uncommon indeed, as could perduce a letter

out o’ any friend o’ mine,’ replied Sam, shaking his head dubiously;

‘nothin’ less than a nat’ral conwulsion, as the young gen’l’m’n observed

ven he wos took with fits. It can’t be from the gov’ner,’ said Sam,

looking at the direction. ‘He always prints, I know, ‘cos he learnt

writin’ from the large bills in the booking-offices. It’s a wery strange

thing now, where this here letter can ha’ come from.’

As Sam said this, he did what a great many people do when they are

uncertain about the writer of a note--looked at the seal, and then at

the front, and then at the back, and then at the sides, and then at the

superscription; and, as a last resource, thought perhaps he might as

well look at the inside, and try to find out from that.

‘It’s wrote on gilt-edged paper,’ said Sam, as he unfolded it, ‘and

sealed in bronze vax vith the top of a door key. Now for it.’ And, with

a very grave face, Mr. Weller slowly read as follows--

‘A select company of the Bath footmen presents their compliments to Mr.

Weller, and requests the pleasure of his company this evening, to a

friendly swarry, consisting of a boiled leg of mutton with the usual

trimmings. The swarry to be on table at half-past nine o’clock

punctually.’

This was inclosed in another note, which ran thus--

‘Mr. John Smauker, the gentleman who had the pleasure of meeting Mr.

Weller at the house of their mutual acquaintance, Mr. Bantam, a few days

since, begs to inclose Mr. Weller the herewith invitation. If Mr. Weller

will call on Mr. John Smauker at nine o’clock, Mr. John Smauker will

have the pleasure of introducing Mr. Weller.

(Signed) ‘\_John Smauker\_.’

The envelope was directed to blank Weller, Esq., at Mr. Pickwick’s; and

in a parenthesis, in the left hand corner, were the words ‘airy bell,’

as an instruction to the bearer.

‘Vell,’ said Sam, ‘this is comin’ it rayther powerful, this is. I never

heerd a biled leg o’ mutton called a swarry afore. I wonder wot they’d

call a roast one.’

However, without waiting to debate the point, Sam at once betook himself

into the presence of Mr. Pickwick, and requested leave of absence for

that evening, which was readily granted. With this permission and the

street-door key, Sam Weller issued forth a little before the appointed

time, and strolled leisurely towards Queen Square, which he no sooner

gained than he had the satisfaction of beholding Mr. John Smauker

leaning his powdered head against a lamp-post at a short distance off,

smoking a cigar through an amber tube.

‘How do you do, Mr. Weller?’ said Mr. John Smauker, raising his hat

gracefully with one hand, while he gently waved the other in a

condescending manner. ‘How do you do, Sir?’

‘Why, reasonably conwalessent,’ replied Sam. ‘How do \_you \_find

yourself, my dear feller?’

‘Only so so,’ said Mr. John Smauker.

‘Ah, you’ve been a-workin’ too hard,’ observed Sam. ‘I was fearful you

would; it won’t do, you know; you must not give way to that ‘ere

uncompromisin’ spirit o’ yourn.’

‘It’s not so much that, Mr. Weller,’ replied Mr. John Smauker, ‘as bad

wine; I’m afraid I’ve been dissipating.’

‘Oh! that’s it, is it?’ said Sam; ‘that’s a wery bad complaint, that.’

‘And yet the temptation, you see, Mr. Weller,’ observed Mr. John

Smauker.

‘Ah, to be sure,’ said Sam.

‘Plunged into the very vortex of society, you know, Mr. Weller,’ said

Mr. John Smauker, with a sigh.

‘Dreadful, indeed!’ rejoined Sam.

‘But it’s always the way,’ said Mr. John Smauker; ‘if your destiny leads

you into public life, and public station, you must expect to be

subjected to temptations which other people is free from, Mr. Weller.’

‘Precisely what my uncle said, ven he vent into the public line,’

remarked Sam, ‘and wery right the old gen’l’m’n wos, for he drank

hisself to death in somethin’ less than a quarter.’

Mr. John Smauker looked deeply indignant at any parallel being drawn

between himself and the deceased gentleman in question; but, as Sam’s

face was in the most immovable state of calmness, he thought better of

it, and looked affable again.

‘Perhaps we had better be walking,’ said Mr. Smauker, consulting a

copper timepiece which dwelt at the bottom of a deep watch-pocket, and

was raised to the surface by means of a black string, with a copper key

at the other end.

‘P’raps we had,’ replied Sam, ‘or they’ll overdo the swarry, and that’ll

spile it.’

‘Have you drank the waters, Mr. Weller?’ inquired his companion, as they

walked towards High Street.

‘Once,’ replied Sam.

‘What did you think of ‘em, Sir?’

‘I thought they was particklery unpleasant,’ replied Sam.

‘Ah,’ said Mr. John Smauker, ‘you disliked the killibeate taste,

perhaps?’

‘I don’t know much about that ‘ere,’ said Sam. ‘I thought they’d a wery

strong flavour o’ warm flat irons.’

‘That \_is\_ the killibeate, Mr. Weller,’ observed Mr. John Smauker

contemptuously.

‘Well, if it is, it’s a wery inexpressive word, that’s all,’ said Sam.

‘It may be, but I ain’t much in the chimical line myself, so I can’t

say.’ And here, to the great horror of Mr. John Smauker, Sam Weller

began to whistle.

‘I beg your pardon, Mr. Weller,’ said Mr. John Smauker, agonised at the

exceeding ungenteel sound, ‘will you take my arm?’

‘Thank’ee, you’re wery good, but I won’t deprive you of it,’ replied

Sam. ‘I’ve rayther a way o’ putting my hands in my pockets, if it’s all

the same to you.’ As Sam said this, he suited the action to the word,

and whistled far louder than before.

‘This way,’ said his new friend, apparently much relieved as they turned

down a by-street; ‘we shall soon be there.’

‘Shall we?’ said Sam, quite unmoved by the announcement of his close

vicinity to the select footmen of Bath.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. John Smauker. ‘Don’t be alarmed, Mr. Weller.’

‘Oh, no,’ said Sam.

‘You’ll see some very handsome uniforms, Mr. Weller,’ continued Mr. John

Smauker; ‘and perhaps you’ll find some of the gentlemen rather high at

first, you know, but they’ll soon come round.’

‘That’s wery kind on ‘em,’ replied Sam.

‘And you know,’ resumed Mr. John Smauker, with an air of sublime

protection--‘you know, as you’re a stranger, perhaps, they’ll be rather

hard upon you at first.’

‘They won’t be wery cruel, though, will they?’ inquired Sam.

‘No, no,’ replied Mr. John Smauker, pulling forth the fox’s head, and

taking a gentlemanly pinch. ‘There are some funny dogs among us, and

they will have their joke, you know; but you mustn’t mind ‘em, you

mustn’t mind ‘em.’

‘I’ll try and bear up agin such a reg’lar knock down o’ talent,’ replied

Sam.

‘That’s right,’ said Mr. John Smauker, putting forth his fox’s head, and

elevating his own; ‘I’ll stand by you.’

By this time they had reached a small greengrocer’s shop, which Mr. John

Smauker entered, followed by Sam, who, the moment he got behind him,

relapsed into a series of the very broadest and most unmitigated grins,

and manifested other demonstrations of being in a highly enviable state

of inward merriment.

Crossing the greengrocer’s shop, and putting their hats on the stairs in

the little passage behind it, they walked into a small parlour; and here

the full splendour of the scene burst upon Mr. Weller’s view.

A couple of tables were put together in the middle of the parlour,

covered with three or four cloths of different ages and dates of

washing, arranged to look as much like one as the circumstances of the

case would allow. Upon these were laid knives and forks for six or eight

people. Some of the knife handles were green, others red, and a few

yellow; and as all the forks were black, the combination of colours was

exceedingly striking. Plates for a corresponding number of guests were

warming behind the fender; and the guests themselves were warming before

it: the chief and most important of whom appeared to be a stoutish

gentleman in a bright crimson coat with long tails, vividly red

breeches, and a cocked hat, who was standing with his back to the fire,

and had apparently just entered, for besides retaining his cocked hat on

his head, he carried in his hand a high stick, such as gentlemen of his

profession usually elevate in a sloping position over the roofs of

carriages.

‘Smauker, my lad, your fin,’ said the gentleman with the cocked hat.

Mr. Smauker dovetailed the top joint of his right-hand little finger

into that of the gentleman with the cocked hat, and said he was charmed

to see him looking so well.

‘Well, they tell me I am looking pretty blooming,’ said the man with the

cocked hat, ‘and it’s a wonder, too. I’ve been following our old woman

about, two hours a day, for the last fortnight; and if a constant

contemplation of the manner in which she hooks-and-eyes that infernal

lavender-coloured old gown of hers behind, isn’t enough to throw anybody

into a low state of despondency for life, stop my quarter’s salary.’

At this, the assembled selections laughed very heartily; and one

gentleman in a yellow waistcoat, with a coach-trimming border, whispered

a neighbour in green-foil smalls, that Tuckle was in spirits to-night.

‘By the bye,’ said Mr. Tuckle, ‘Smauker, my boy, you--’ The remainder of

the sentence was forwarded into Mr. John Smauker’s ear, by whisper.

‘Oh, dear me, I quite forgot,’ said Mr. John Smauker. ‘Gentlemen, my

friend Mr. Weller.’

‘Sorry to keep the fire off you, Weller,’ said Mr. Tuckle, with a

familiar nod. ‘Hope you’re not cold, Weller.’

‘Not by no means, Blazes,’ replied Sam. ‘It ‘ud be a wery chilly subject

as felt cold wen you stood opposite. You’d save coals if they put you

behind the fender in the waitin’-room at a public office, you would.’

As this retort appeared to convey rather a personal allusion to Mr.

Tuckle’s crimson livery, that gentleman looked majestic for a few

seconds, but gradually edging away from the fire, broke into a forced

smile, and said it wasn’t bad.

‘Wery much obliged for your good opinion, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘We shall

get on by degrees, I des-say. We’ll try a better one by and bye.’

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a

gentleman in orange-coloured plush, accompanied by another selection in

purple cloth, with a great extent of stocking. The new-comers having

been welcomed by the old ones, Mr. Tuckle put the question that supper

be ordered in, which was carried unanimously.

The greengrocer and his wife then arranged upon the table a boiled leg

of mutton, hot, with caper sauce, turnips, and potatoes. Mr. Tuckle took

the chair, and was supported at the other end of the board by the

gentleman in orange plush. The greengrocer put on a pair of wash-leather

gloves to hand the plates with, and stationed himself behind Mr.

Tuckle’s chair.

‘Harris,’ said Mr. Tuckle, in a commanding tone.

‘Sir,’ said the greengrocer.

‘Have you got your gloves on?’

Yes, Sir.’

‘Then take the kiver off.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

The greengrocer did as he was told, with a show of great humility, and

obsequiously handed Mr. Tuckle the carving-knife; in doing which, he

accidentally gaped.

‘What do you mean by that, Sir?’ said Mr. Tuckle, with great asperity.

‘I beg your pardon, Sir,’ replied the crestfallen greengrocer, ‘I didn’t

mean to do it, Sir; I was up very late last night, Sir.’

‘I tell you what my opinion of you is, Harris,’ said Mr. Tuckle, with a

most impressive air, ‘you’re a wulgar beast.’

‘I hope, gentlemen,’ said Harris, ‘that you won’t be severe with me,

gentlemen. I am very much obliged to you indeed, gentlemen, for your

patronage, and also for your recommendations, gentlemen, whenever

additional assistance in waiting is required. I hope, gentlemen, I give

satisfaction.’

‘No, you don’t, Sir,’ said Mr. Tuckle. ‘Very far from it, Sir.’

‘We consider you an inattentive reskel,’ said the gentleman in the

orange plush.

‘And a low thief,’ added the gentleman in the green-foil smalls.

‘And an unreclaimable blaygaird,’ added the gentleman in purple.

The poor greengrocer bowed very humbly while these little epithets were

bestowed upon him, in the true spirit of the very smallest tyranny; and

when everybody had said something to show his superiority, Mr. Tuckle

proceeded to carve the leg of mutton, and to help the company.

This important business of the evening had hardly commenced, when the

door was thrown briskly open, and another gentleman in a light-blue

suit, and leaden buttons, made his appearance.

‘Against the rules,’ said Mr. Tuckle. ‘Too late, too late.’

‘No, no; positively I couldn’t help it,’ said the gentleman in blue. ‘I

appeal to the company. An affair of gallantry now, an appointment at the

theayter.’

‘Oh, that indeed,’ said the gentleman in the orange plush.

‘Yes; raly now, honour bright,’ said the man in blue. ‘I made a promese

to fetch our youngest daughter at half-past ten, and she is such an

uncauminly fine gal, that I raly hadn’t the ‘art to disappint her. No

offence to the present company, Sir, but a petticut, sir--a petticut,

Sir, is irrevokeable.’

‘I begin to suspect there’s something in that quarter,’ said Tuckle, as

the new-comer took his seat next Sam, ‘I’ve remarked, once or twice,

that she leans very heavy on your shoulder when she gets in and out of

the carriage.’

‘Oh, raly, raly, Tuckle, you shouldn’t,’ said the man in blue. ‘It’s not

fair. I may have said to one or two friends that she wos a very divine

creechure, and had refused one or two offers without any hobvus cause,

but--no, no, no, indeed, Tuckle--before strangers, too--it’s not right--

you shouldn’t. Delicacy, my dear friend, delicacy!’ And the man in blue,

pulling up his neckerchief, and adjusting his coat cuffs, nodded and

frowned as if there were more behind, which he could say if he liked,

but was bound in honour to suppress.

The man in blue being a light-haired, stiff-necked, free and easy sort

of footman, with a swaggering air and pert face, had attracted Mr.

Weller’s special attention at first, but when he began to come out in

this way, Sam felt more than ever disposed to cultivate his

acquaintance; so he launched himself into the conversation at once, with

characteristic independence.

‘Your health, Sir,’ said Sam. ‘I like your conversation much. I think

it’s wery pretty.’

At this the man in blue smiled, as if it were a compliment he was well

used to; but looked approvingly on Sam at the same time, and said he

hoped he should be better acquainted with him, for without any flattery

at all he seemed to have the makings of a very nice fellow about him,

and to be just the man after his own heart.

‘You’re wery good, sir,’ said Sam. ‘What a lucky feller you are!’

‘How do you mean?’ inquired the gentleman in blue.

‘That ‘ere young lady,’ replied Sam. ‘She knows wot’s wot, she does. Ah!

I see.’ Mr. Weller closed one eye, and shook his head from side to side,

in a manner which was highly gratifying to the personal vanity of the

gentleman in blue.

‘I’m afraid you’re a cunning fellow, Mr. Weller,’ said that individual.

‘No, no,’ said Sam. ‘I leave all that ‘ere to you. It’s a great deal

more in your way than mine, as the gen’l’m’n on the right side o’ the

garden vall said to the man on the wrong un, ven the mad bull vos a-

comin’ up the lane.’

‘Well, well, Mr. Weller,’ said the gentleman in blue, ‘I think she has

remarked my air and manner, Mr. Weller.’

‘I should think she couldn’t wery well be off o’ that,’ said Sam.

‘Have you any little thing of that kind in hand, sir?’ inquired the

favoured gentleman in blue, drawing a toothpick from his waistcoat

pocket.

‘Not exactly,’ said Sam. ‘There’s no daughters at my place, else o’

course I should ha’ made up to vun on ‘em. As it is, I don’t think I can

do with anythin’ under a female markis. I might keep up with a young

‘ooman o’ large property as hadn’t a title, if she made wery fierce love

to me. Not else.’

‘Of course not, Mr. Weller,’ said the gentleman in blue, ‘one can’t be

troubled, you know; and \_we\_ know, Mr. Weller--we, who are men of the

world--that a good uniform must work its way with the women, sooner or

later. In fact, that’s the only thing, between you and me, that makes

the service worth entering into.’

‘Just so,’ said Sam. ‘That’s it, o’ course.’

When this confidential dialogue had gone thus far, glasses were placed

round, and every gentleman ordered what he liked best, before the

public-house shut up. The gentleman in blue, and the man in orange, who

were the chief exquisites of the party, ordered ‘cold shrub and water,’

but with the others, gin-and-water, sweet, appeared to be the favourite

beverage. Sam called the greengrocer a ‘desp’rate willin,’ and ordered a

large bowl of punch--two circumstances which seemed to raise him very

much in the opinion of the selections.

‘Gentlemen,’ said the man in blue, with an air of the most consummate

dandyism, ‘I’ll give you the ladies; come.’

‘Hear, hear!’ said Sam. ‘The young mississes.’

Here there was a loud cry of ‘Order,’ and Mr. John Smauker, as the

gentleman who had introduced Mr. Weller into that company, begged to

inform him that the word he had just made use of, was unparliamentary.

‘Which word was that ‘ere, Sir?’ inquired Sam.

‘Mississes, Sir,’ replied Mr. John Smauker, with an alarming frown. ‘We

don’t recognise such distinctions here.’

‘Oh, wery good,’ said Sam; ‘then I’ll amend the obserwation and call ‘em

the dear creeturs, if Blazes vill allow me.’

Some doubt appeared to exist in the mind of the gentleman in the green-

foil smalls, whether the chairman could be legally appealed to, as

‘Blazes,’ but as the company seemed more disposed to stand upon their

own rights than his, the question was not raised. The man with the

cocked hat breathed short, and looked long at Sam, but apparently

thought it as well to say nothing, in case he should get the worst of

it. After a short silence, a gentleman in an embroidered coat reaching

down to his heels, and a waistcoat of the same which kept one half of

his legs warm, stirred his gin-and-water with great energy, and putting

himself upon his feet, all at once by a violent effort, said he was

desirous of offering a few remarks to the company, whereupon the person

in the cocked hat had no doubt that the company would be very happy to

hear any remarks that the man in the long coat might wish to offer.

‘I feel a great delicacy, gentlemen, in coming for’ard,’ said the man in

the long coat, ‘having the misforchune to be a coachman, and being only

admitted as a honorary member of these agreeable swarrys, but I do feel

myself bound, gentlemen--drove into a corner, if I may use the

expression--to make known an afflicting circumstance which has come to

my knowledge; which has happened I may say within the soap of my

everyday contemplation. Gentlemen, our friend Mr. Whiffers (everybody

looked at the individual in orange), our friend Mr. Whiffers has

resigned.’

Universal astonishment fell upon the hearers. Each gentleman looked in

his neighbour’s face, and then transferred his glance to the upstanding

coachman.

‘You may well be sapparised, gentlemen,’ said the coachman. ‘I will not

wenchure to state the reasons of this irrepairabel loss to the service,

but I will beg Mr. Whiffers to state them himself, for the improvement

and imitation of his admiring friends.’

The suggestion being loudly approved of, Mr. Whiffers explained. He said

he certainly could have wished to have continued to hold the appointment

he had just resigned. The uniform was extremely rich and expensive, the

females of the family was most agreeable, and the duties of the

situation was not, he was bound to say, too heavy; the principal service

that was required of him, being, that he should look out of the hall

window as much as possible, in company with another gentleman, who had

also resigned. He could have wished to have spared that company the

painful and disgusting detail on which he was about to enter, but as the

explanation had been demanded of him, he had no alternative but to

state, boldly and distinctly, that he had been required to eat cold

meat.

It is impossible to conceive the disgust which this avowal awakened in

the bosoms of the hearers. Loud cries of ‘Shame,’ mingled with groans

and hisses, prevailed for a quarter of an hour.

Mr. Whiffers then added that he feared a portion of this outrage might

be traced to his own forbearing and accommodating disposition. He had a

distinct recollection of having once consented to eat salt butter, and

he had, moreover, on an occasion of sudden sickness in the house, so far

forgotten himself as to carry a coal-scuttle up to the second floor. He

trusted he had not lowered himself in the good opinion of his friends by

this frank confession of his faults; and he hoped the promptness with

which he had resented the last unmanly outrage on his feelings, to which

he had referred, would reinstate him in their good opinion, if he had.

Mr. Whiffers’s address was responded to, with a shout of admiration, and

the health of the interesting martyr was drunk in a most enthusiastic

manner; for this, the martyr returned thanks, and proposed their

visitor, Mr. Weller--a gentleman whom he had not the pleasure of an

intimate acquaintance with, but who was the friend of Mr. John Smauker,

which was a sufficient letter of recommendation to any society of

gentlemen whatever, or wherever. On this account, he should have been

disposed to have given Mr. Weller’s health with all the honours, if his

friends had been drinking wine; but as they were taking spirits by way

of a change, and as it might be inconvenient to empty a tumbler at every

toast, he should propose that the honours be understood.

At the conclusion of this speech, everybody took a sip in honour of Sam;

and Sam having ladled out, and drunk, two full glasses of punch in

honour of himself, returned thanks in a neat speech.

‘Wery much obliged to you, old fellers,’ said Sam, ladling away at the

punch in the most unembarrassed manner possible, ‘for this here

compliment; which, comin’ from sich a quarter, is wery overvelmin’. I’ve

heered a good deal on you as a body, but I will say, that I never

thought you was sich uncommon nice men as I find you air. I only hope

you’ll take care o’ yourselves, and not compromise nothin’ o’ your

dignity, which is a wery charmin’ thing to see, when one’s out a-

walkin’, and has always made me wery happy to look at, ever since I was

a boy about half as high as the brass-headed stick o’ my wery

respectable friend, Blazes, there. As to the wictim of oppression in the

suit o’ brimstone, all I can say of him, is, that I hope he’ll get jist

as good a berth as he deserves; in vitch case it’s wery little cold

swarry as ever he’ll be troubled with agin.’

Here Sam sat down with a pleasant smile, and his speech having been

vociferously applauded, the company broke up.

‘Wy, you don’t mean to say you’re a-goin’ old feller?’ said Sam Weller

to his friend, Mr. John Smauker.

‘I must, indeed,’ said Mr. Smauker; ‘I promised Bantam.’

‘Oh, wery well,’ said Sam; ‘that’s another thing. P’raps he’d resign if

you disappinted him. You ain’t a-goin’, Blazes?’

‘Yes, I am,’ said the man with the cocked hat.

‘Wot, and leave three-quarters of a bowl of punch behind you!’ said Sam;

‘nonsense, set down agin.’

Mr. Tuckle was not proof against this invitation. He laid aside the

cocked hat and stick which he had just taken up, and said he would have

one glass, for good fellowship’s sake.

As the gentleman in blue went home the same way as Mr. Tuckle, he was

prevailed upon to stop too. When the punch was about half gone, Sam

ordered in some oysters from the green-grocer’s shop; and the effect of

both was so extremely exhilarating, that Mr. Tuckle, dressed out with

the cocked hat and stick, danced the frog hornpipe among the shells on

the table, while the gentleman in blue played an accompaniment upon an

ingenious musical instrument formed of a hair-comb upon a curl-paper. At

last, when the punch was all gone, and the night nearly so, they sallied

forth to see each other home. Mr. Tuckle no sooner got into the open

air, than he was seized with a sudden desire to lie on the curbstone;

Sam thought it would be a pity to contradict him, and so let him have

his own way. As the cocked hat would have been spoiled if left there,

Sam very considerately flattened it down on the head of the gentleman in

blue, and putting the big stick in his hand, propped him up against his

own street-door, rang the bell, and walked quietly home.

At a much earlier hour next morning than his usual time of rising, Mr.

Pickwick walked downstairs completely dressed, and rang the bell.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, when Mr. Weller appeared in reply to the

summons, ‘shut the door.’

Mr. Weller did so.

‘There was an unfortunate occurrence here, last night, Sam,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, ‘which gave Mr. Winkle some cause to apprehend violence from

Mr. Dowler.’

‘So I’ve heerd from the old lady downstairs, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘And I’m sorry to say, Sam,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, with a most

perplexed countenance, ‘that in dread of this violence, Mr. Winkle has

gone away.’

‘Gone avay!’ said Sam.

‘Left the house early this morning, without the slightest previous

communication with me,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘And is gone, I know not

where.’

‘He should ha’ stopped and fought it out, Sir,’ replied Sam

contemptuously. ‘It wouldn’t take much to settle that ‘ere Dowler, Sir.’

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I may have my doubts of his great

bravery and determination also. But however that may be, Mr. Winkle is

gone. He must be found, Sam. Found and brought back to me.’

And s’pose he won’t come back, Sir?’ said Sam.

‘He must be made, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Who’s to do it, Sir?’ inquired Sam, with a smile.

‘You,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wery good, Sir.’

With these words Mr. Weller left the room, and immediately afterwards

was heard to shut the street door. In two hours’ time he returned with

so much coolness as if he had been despatched on the most ordinary

message possible, and brought the information that an individual, in

every respect answering Mr. Winkle’s description, had gone over to

Bristol that morning, by the branch coach from the Royal Hotel.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, grasping his hand, ‘you’re a capital fellow;

an invaluable fellow. You must follow him, Sam.’

‘Cert’nly, Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘The instant you discover him, write to me immediately, Sam,’ said Mr.

Pickwick. ‘If he attempts to run away from you, knock him down, or lock

him up. You have my full authority, Sam.’

‘I’ll be wery careful, sir,’ rejoined Sam.

‘You’ll tell him,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that I am highly excited, highly

displeased, and naturally indignant, at the very extraordinary course he

has thought proper to pursue.’

‘I will, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘You’ll tell him,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that if he does not come back to

this very house, with you, he will come back with me, for I will come

and fetch him.’

‘I’ll mention that ‘ere, Sir,’ rejoined Sam.

‘You think you can find him, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking earnestly

in his face.

‘Oh, I’ll find him if he’s anyvere,’ rejoined Sam, with great

confidence.

‘Very well,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Then the sooner you go the better.’

With these instructions, Mr. Pickwick placed a sum of money in the hands

of his faithful servitor, and ordered him to start for Bristol

immediately, in pursuit of the fugitive.

Sam put a few necessaries in a carpet-bag, and was ready for starting.

He stopped when he had got to the end of the passage, and walking

quietly back, thrust his head in at the parlour door.

‘Sir,’ whispered Sam.

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I fully understands my instructions, do I, Sir?’ inquired Sam.

‘I hope so,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It’s reg’larly understood about the knockin’ down, is it, Sir?’

inquired Sam.

‘Perfectly,’ replied Pickwick. ‘Thoroughly. Do what you think necessary.

You have my orders.’

Sam gave a nod of intelligence, and withdrawing his head from the door,

set forth on his pilgrimage with a light heart.

CHAPTER XXXVIII. HOW MR. WINKLE, WHEN HE STEPPED OUT OF THE FRYING-PAN,

WALKED GENTLY AND COMFORTABLY INTO THE FIRE

The ill-starred gentleman who had been the unfortunate cause of the

unusual noise and disturbance which alarmed the inhabitants of the Royal

Crescent in manner and form already described, after passing a night of

great confusion and anxiety, left the roof beneath which his friends

still slumbered, bound he knew not whither. The excellent and

considerate feelings which prompted Mr. Winkle to take this step can

never be too highly appreciated or too warmly extolled. ‘If,’ reasoned

Mr. Winkle with himself--‘if this Dowler attempts (as I have no doubt he

will) to carry into execution his threat of personal violence against

myself, it will be incumbent on me to call him out. He has a wife; that

wife is attached to, and dependent on him. Heavens! If I should kill him

in the blindness of my wrath, what would be my feelings ever

afterwards!’ This painful consideration operated so powerfully on the

feelings of the humane young man, as to cause his knees to knock

together, and his countenance to exhibit alarming manifestations of

inward emotion. Impelled by such reflections, he grasped his carpet-bag,

and creeping stealthily downstairs, shut the detestable street door with

as little noise as possible, and walked off. Bending his steps towards

the Royal Hotel, he found a coach on the point of starting for Bristol,

and, thinking Bristol as good a place for his purpose as any other he

could go to, he mounted the box, and reached his place of destination in

such time as the pair of horses, who went the whole stage and back

again, twice a day or more, could be reasonably supposed to arrive

there.

He took up his quarters at the Bush, and designing to postpone any

communication by letter with Mr. Pickwick until it was probable that Mr.

Dowler’s wrath might have in some degree evaporated, walked forth to

view the city, which struck him as being a shade more dirty than any

place he had ever seen. Having inspected the docks and shipping, and

viewed the cathedral, he inquired his way to Clifton, and being directed

thither, took the route which was pointed out to him. But as the

pavements of Bristol are not the widest or cleanest upon earth, so its

streets are not altogether the straightest or least intricate; and Mr.

Winkle, being greatly puzzled by their manifold windings and twistings,

looked about him for a decent shop in which he could apply afresh for

counsel and instruction.

His eye fell upon a newly-painted tenement which had been recently

converted into something between a shop and a private house, and which a

red lamp, projecting over the fanlight of the street door, would have

sufficiently announced as the residence of a medical practitioner, even

if the word ‘Surgery’ had not been inscribed in golden characters on a

wainscot ground, above the window of what, in times bygone, had been the

front parlour. Thinking this an eligible place wherein to make his

inquiries, Mr. Winkle stepped into the little shop where the gilt-

labelled drawers and bottles were; and finding nobody there, knocked

with a half-crown on the counter, to attract the attention of anybody

who might happen to be in the back parlour, which he judged to be the

innermost and peculiar sanctum of the establishment, from the repetition

of the word surgery on the door--painted in white letters this time, by

way of taking off the monotony.

At the first knock, a sound, as of persons fencing with fire-irons,

which had until now been very audible, suddenly ceased; at the second, a

studious-looking young gentleman in green spectacles, with a very large

book in his hand, glided quietly into the shop, and stepping behind the

counter, requested to know the visitor’s pleasure.

‘I am sorry to trouble you, Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle, ‘but will you have

the goodness to direct me to--’

‘Ha! ha! ha!’ roared the studious young gentleman, throwing the large

book up into the air, and catching it with great dexterity at the very

moment when it threatened to smash to atoms all the bottles on the

counter. ‘Here’s a start!’

There was, without doubt; for Mr. Winkle was so very much astonished at

the extraordinary behaviour of the medical gentleman, that he

involuntarily retreated towards the door, and looked very much disturbed

at his strange reception.

‘What, don’t you know me?’ said the medical gentleman.

Mr. Winkle murmured, in reply, that he had not that pleasure.

‘Why, then,’ said the medical gentleman, ‘there are hopes for me yet; I

may attend half the old women in Bristol, if I’ve decent luck. Get out,

you mouldy old villain, get out!’ With this adjuration, which was

addressed to the large book, the medical gentleman kicked the volume

with remarkable agility to the farther end of the shop, and, pulling off

his green spectacles, grinned the identical grin of Robert Sawyer,

Esquire, formerly of Guy’s Hospital in the Borough, with a private

residence in Lant Street.

‘You don’t mean to say you weren’t down upon me?’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer,

shaking Mr. Winkle’s hand with friendly warmth.

‘Upon my word I was not,’ replied Mr. Winkle, returning his pressure.

‘I wonder you didn’t see the name,’ said Bob Sawyer, calling his

friend’s attention to the outer door, on which, in the same white paint,

were traced the words ‘Sawyer, late Nockemorf.’

‘It never caught my eye,’ returned Mr. Winkle.

‘Lord, if I had known who you were, I should have rushed out, and caught

you in my arms,’ said Bob Sawyer; ‘but upon my life, I thought you were

the King’s-taxes.’

‘No!’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘I did, indeed,’ responded Bob Sawyer, ‘and I was just going to say that

I wasn’t at home, but if you’d leave a message I’d be sure to give it to

myself; for he don’t know me; no more does the Lighting and Paving. I

think the Church-rates guesses who I am, and I know the Water-works

does, because I drew a tooth of his when I first came down here. But

come in, come in!’ Chattering in this way, Mr. Bob Sawyer pushed Mr.

Winkle into the back room, where, amusing himself by boring little

circular caverns in the chimney-piece with a red-hot poker, sat no less

a person than Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘This is indeed a pleasure I did not expect.

What a very nice place you have here!’

‘Pretty well, pretty well,’ replied Bob Sawyer. ‘I \_passed\_, soon after

that precious party, and my friends came down with the needful for this

business; so I put on a black suit of clothes, and a pair of spectacles,

and came here to look as solemn as I could.’

‘And a very snug little business you have, no doubt?’ said Mr. Winkle

knowingly.

‘Very,’ replied Bob Sawyer. ‘So snug, that at the end of a few years you

might put all the profits in a wine-glass, and cover ‘em over with a

gooseberry leaf.’

You cannot surely mean that?’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘The stock itself--’

Dummies, my dear boy,’ said Bob Sawyer; ‘half the drawers have nothing

in ‘em, and the other half don’t open.’

‘Nonsense!’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Fact--honour!’ returned Bob Sawyer, stepping out into the shop, and

demonstrating the veracity of the assertion by divers hard pulls at the

little gilt knobs on the counterfeit drawers. ‘Hardly anything real in

the shop but the leeches, and \_they \_are second-hand.’

‘I shouldn’t have thought it!’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle, much surprised.

‘I hope not,’ replied Bob Sawyer, ‘else where’s the use of appearances,

eh? But what will you take? Do as we do? That’s right. Ben, my fine

fellow, put your hand into the cupboard, and bring out the patent

digester.’

Mr. Benjamin Allen smiled his readiness, and produced from the closet at

his elbow a black bottle half full of brandy.

‘You don’t take water, of course?’ said Bob Sawyer.

‘Thank you,’ replied Mr. Winkle. ‘It’s rather early. I should like to

qualify it, if you have no objection.’

‘None in the least, if you can reconcile it to your conscience,’ replied

Bob Sawyer, tossing off, as he spoke, a glass of the liquor with great

relish. ‘Ben, the pipkin!’

Mr. Benjamin Allen drew forth, from the same hiding-place, a small brass

pipkin, which Bob Sawyer observed he prided himself upon, particularly

because it looked so business-like. The water in the professional pipkin

having been made to boil, in course of time, by various little

shovelfuls of coal, which Mr. Bob Sawyer took out of a practicable

window-seat, labelled ‘Soda Water,’ Mr. Winkle adulterated his brandy;

and the conversation was becoming general, when it was interrupted by

the entrance into the shop of a boy, in a sober gray livery and a gold-

laced hat, with a small covered basket under his arm, whom Mr. Bob

Sawyer immediately hailed with, ‘Tom, you vagabond, come here.’

The boy presented himself accordingly.

‘You’ve been stopping to “over” all the posts in Bristol, you idle young

scamp!’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘No, sir, I haven’t,’ replied the boy.

‘You had better not!’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer, with a threatening aspect.

‘Who do you suppose will ever employ a professional man, when they see

his boy playing at marbles in the gutter, or flying the garter in the

horse-road? Have you no feeling for your profession, you groveller? Did

you leave all the medicine?’

Yes, Sir.’

‘The powders for the child, at the large house with the new family, and

the pills to be taken four times a day at the ill-tempered old

gentleman’s with the gouty leg?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then shut the door, and mind the shop.’

‘Come,’ said Mr. Winkle, as the boy retired, ‘things are not quite so

bad as you would have me believe, either. There is \_some \_medicine to be

sent out.’

Mr. Bob Sawyer peeped into the shop to see that no stranger was within

hearing, and leaning forward to Mr. Winkle, said, in a low tone--

‘He leaves it all at the wrong houses.’

Mr. Winkle looked perplexed, and Bob Sawyer and his friend laughed.

‘Don’t you see?’ said Bob. ‘He goes up to a house, rings the area bell,

pokes a packet of medicine without a direction into the servant’s hand,

and walks off. Servant takes it into the dining-parlour; master opens

it, and reads the label: “Draught to be taken at bedtime--pills as

before--lotion as usual--the powder. From Sawyer’s, late Nockemorf’s.

Physicians’ prescriptions carefully prepared,” and all the rest of it.

Shows it to his wife--she reads the label; it goes down to the servants-

-\_they\_ read the label. Next day, boy calls: “Very sorry--his mistake--

immense business--great many parcels to deliver--Mr. Sawyer’s

compliments--late Nockemorf.” The name gets known, and that’s the thing,

my boy, in the medical way. Bless your heart, old fellow, it’s better

than all the advertising in the world. We have got one four-ounce bottle

that’s been to half the houses in Bristol, and hasn’t done yet.’

‘Dear me, I see,’ observed Mr. Winkle; ‘what an excellent plan!’

‘Oh, Ben and I have hit upon a dozen such,’ replied Bob Sawyer, with

great glee. ‘The lamplighter has eighteenpence a week to pull the night-

bell for ten minutes every time he comes round; and my boy always rushes

into the church just before the psalms, when the people have got nothing

to do but look about ‘em, and calls me out, with horror and dismay

depicted on his countenance. “Bless my soul,” everybody says, “somebody

taken suddenly ill! Sawyer, late Nockemorf, sent for. What a business

that young man has!”’

At the termination of this disclosure of some of the mysteries of

medicine, Mr. Bob Sawyer and his friend, Ben Allen, threw themselves

back in their respective chairs, and laughed boisterously. When they had

enjoyed the joke to their heart’s content, the discourse changed to

topics in which Mr. Winkle was more immediately interested.

We think we have hinted elsewhere, that Mr. Benjamin Allen had a way of

becoming sentimental after brandy. The case is not a peculiar one, as we

ourself can testify, having, on a few occasions, had to deal with

patients who have been afflicted in a similar manner. At this precise

period of his existence, Mr. Benjamin Allen had perhaps a greater

predisposition to maudlinism than he had ever known before; the cause of

which malady was briefly this. He had been staying nearly three weeks

with Mr. Bob Sawyer; Mr. Bob Sawyer was not remarkable for temperance,

nor was Mr. Benjamin Allen for the ownership of a very strong head; the

consequence was that, during the whole space of time just mentioned, Mr.

Benjamin Allen had been wavering between intoxication partial, and

intoxication complete.

‘My dear friend,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, taking advantage of Mr. Bob

Sawyer’s temporary absence behind the counter, whither he had retired to

dispense some of the second-hand leeches, previously referred to; ‘my

dear friend, I am very miserable.’

Mr. Winkle professed his heartfelt regret to hear it, and begged to know

whether he could do anything to alleviate the sorrows of the suffering

student.

‘Nothing, my dear boy, nothing,’ said Ben. ‘You recollect Arabella,

Winkle? My sister Arabella--a little girl, Winkle, with black eyes--when

we were down at Wardle’s? I don’t know whether you happened to notice

her--a nice little girl, Winkle. Perhaps my features may recall her

countenance to your recollection?’

Mr. Winkle required nothing to recall the charming Arabella to his mind;

and it was rather fortunate he did not, for the features of her brother

Benjamin would unquestionably have proved but an indifferent refresher

to his memory. He answered, with as much calmness as he could assume,

that he perfectly remembered the young lady referred to, and sincerely

trusted she was in good health.

‘Our friend Bob is a delightful fellow, Winkle,’ was the only reply of

Mr. Ben Allen.

‘Very,’ said Mr. Winkle, not much relishing this close connection of the

two names.

‘I designed ‘em for each other; they were made for each other, sent into

the world for each other, born for each other, Winkle,’ said Mr. Ben

Allen, setting down his glass with emphasis. ‘There’s a special destiny

in the matter, my dear sir; there’s only five years’ difference between

‘em, and both their birthdays are in August.’

Mr. Winkle was too anxious to hear what was to follow to express much

wonderment at this extraordinary coincidence, marvellous as it was; so

Mr. Ben Allen, after a tear or two, went on to say that, notwithstanding

all his esteem and respect and veneration for his friend, Arabella had

unaccountably and undutifully evinced the most determined antipathy to

his person.

‘And I think,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, in conclusion. ‘I think there’s a

prior attachment.’

‘Have you any idea who the object of it might be?’ asked Mr. Winkle,

with great trepidation.

Mr. Ben Allen seized the poker, flourished it in a warlike manner above

his head, inflicted a savage blow on an imaginary skull, and wound up by

saying, in a very expressive manner, that he only wished he could guess;

that was all.

‘I’d show him what I thought of him,’ said Mr. Ben Allen. And round went

the poker again, more fiercely than before.

All this was, of course, very soothing to the feelings of Mr. Winkle,

who remained silent for a few minutes; but at length mustered up

resolution to inquire whether Miss Allen was in Kent.

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, laying aside the poker, and looking very

cunning; ‘I didn’t think Wardle’s exactly the place for a headstrong

girl; so, as I am her natural protector and guardian, our parents being

dead, I have brought her down into this part of the country to spend a

few months at an old aunt’s, in a nice, dull, close place. I think that

will cure her, my boy. If it doesn’t, I’ll take her abroad for a little

while, and see what that’ll do.’

‘Oh, the aunt’s is in Bristol, is it?’ faltered Mr. Winkle.

‘No, no, not in Bristol,’ replied Mr. Ben Allen, jerking his thumb over

his right shoulder; ‘over that way--down there. But, hush, here’s Bob.

Not a word, my dear friend, not a word.’

Short as this conversation was, it roused in Mr. Winkle the highest

degree of excitement and anxiety. The suspected prior attachment rankled

in his heart. Could he be the object of it? Could it be for him that the

fair Arabella had looked scornfully on the sprightly Bob Sawyer, or had

he a successful rival? He determined to see her, cost what it might; but

here an insurmountable objection presented itself, for whether the

explanatory ‘over that way,’ and ‘down there,’ of Mr. Ben Allen, meant

three miles off, or thirty, or three hundred, he could in no wise guess.

But he had no opportunity of pondering over his love just then, for Bob

Sawyer’s return was the immediate precursor of the arrival of a meat-pie

from the baker’s, of which that gentleman insisted on his staying to

partake. The cloth was laid by an occasional charwoman, who officiated

in the capacity of Mr. Bob Sawyer’s housekeeper; and a third knife and

fork having been borrowed from the mother of the boy in the gray livery

(for Mr. Sawyer’s domestic arrangements were as yet conducted on a

limited scale), they sat down to dinner; the beer being served up, as

Mr. Sawyer remarked, ‘in its native pewter.’

After dinner, Mr. Bob Sawyer ordered in the largest mortar in the shop,

and proceeded to brew a reeking jorum of rum-punch therein, stirring up

and amalgamating the materials with a pestle in a very creditable and

apothecary-like manner. Mr. Sawyer, being a bachelor, had only one

tumbler in the house, which was assigned to Mr. Winkle as a compliment

to the visitor, Mr. Ben Allen being accommodated with a funnel with a

cork in the narrow end, and Bob Sawyer contented himself with one of

those wide-lipped crystal vessels inscribed with a variety of cabalistic

characters, in which chemists are wont to measure out their liquid drugs

in compounding prescriptions. These preliminaries adjusted, the punch

was tasted, and pronounced excellent; and it having been arranged that

Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen should be considered at liberty to fill twice

to Mr. Winkle’s once, they started fair, with great satisfaction and

good-fellowship.

There was no singing, because Mr. Bob Sawyer said it wouldn’t look

professional; but to make amends for this deprivation there was so much

talking and laughing that it might have been heard, and very likely was,

at the end of the street. Which conversation materially lightened the

hours and improved the mind of Mr. Bob Sawyer’s boy, who, instead of

devoting the evening to his ordinary occupation of writing his name on

the counter, and rubbing it out again, peeped through the glass door,

and thus listened and looked on at the same time.

The mirth of Mr. Bob Sawyer was rapidly ripening into the furious, Mr.

Ben Allen was fast relapsing into the sentimental, and the punch had

well-nigh disappeared altogether, when the boy hastily running in,

announced that a young woman had just come over, to say that Sawyer late

Nockemorf was wanted directly, a couple of streets off. This broke up

the party. Mr. Bob Sawyer, understanding the message, after some twenty

repetitions, tied a wet cloth round his head to sober himself, and,

having partially succeeded, put on his green spectacles and issued

forth. Resisting all entreaties to stay till he came back, and finding

it quite impossible to engage Mr. Ben Allen in any intelligible

conversation on the subject nearest his heart, or indeed on any other,

Mr. Winkle took his departure, and returned to the Bush.

The anxiety of his mind, and the numerous meditations which Arabella had

awakened, prevented his share of the mortar of punch producing that

effect upon him which it would have had under other circumstances. So,

after taking a glass of soda-water and brandy at the bar, he turned into

the coffee-room, dispirited rather than elevated by the occurrences of

the evening.

Sitting in front of the fire, with his back towards him, was a tallish

gentleman in a greatcoat: the only other occupant of the room. It was

rather a cool evening for the season of the year, and the gentleman drew

his chair aside to afford the new-comer a sight of the fire. What were

Mr. Winkle’s feelings when, in doing so, he disclosed to view the face

and figure of the vindictive and sanguinary Dowler!

Mr. Winkle’s first impulse was to give a violent pull at the nearest

bell-handle, but that unfortunately happened to be immediately behind

Mr. Dowler’s head. He had made one step towards it, before he checked

himself. As he did so, Mr. Dowler very hastily drew back.

‘Mr. Winkle, Sir. Be calm. Don’t strike me. I won’t bear it. A blow!

Never!’ said Mr. Dowler, looking meeker than Mr. Winkle had expected in

a gentleman of his ferocity.

‘A blow, Sir?’ stammered Mr. Winkle.

‘A blow, Sir,’ replied Dowler. ‘Compose your feelings. Sit down. Hear

me.’

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle, trembling from head to foot, ‘before I consent

to sit down beside, or opposite you, without the presence of a waiter, I

must be secured by some further understanding. You used a threat against

me last night, Sir, a dreadful threat, Sir.’ Here Mr. Winkle turned very

pale indeed, and stopped short.

‘I did,’ said Dowler, with a countenance almost as white as Mr.

Winkle’s. ‘Circumstances were suspicious. They have been explained. I

respect your bravery. Your feeling is upright. Conscious innocence.

There’s my hand. Grasp it.’

‘Really, Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle, hesitating whether to give his hand or

not, and almost fearing that it was demanded in order that he might be

taken at an advantage, ‘really, Sir, I--’

‘I know what you mean,’ interposed Dowler. ‘You feel aggrieved. Very

natural. So should I. I was wrong. I beg your pardon. Be friendly.

Forgive me.’ With this, Dowler fairly forced his hand upon Mr. Winkle,

and shaking it with the utmost vehemence, declared he was a fellow of

extreme spirit, and he had a higher opinion of him than ever.

‘Now,’ said Dowler, ‘sit down. Relate it all. How did you find me? When

did you follow? Be frank. Tell me.’

‘It’s quite accidental,’ replied Mr. Winkle, greatly perplexed by the

curious and unexpected nature of the interview. ‘Quite.’

‘Glad of it,’ said Dowler. ‘I woke this morning. I had forgotten my

threat. I laughed at the accident. I felt friendly. I said so.’

‘To whom?’ inquired Mr. Winkle.

‘To Mrs. Dowler. “You made a vow,” said she. “I did,” said I. “It was a

rash one,” said she. “It was,” said I. “I’ll apologise. Where is he?”’

‘Who?’ inquired Mr. Winkle.

‘You,’ replied Dowler. ‘I went downstairs. You were not to be found.

Pickwick looked gloomy. Shook his head. Hoped no violence would be

committed. I saw it all. You felt yourself insulted. You had gone, for a

friend perhaps. Possibly for pistols. “High spirit,” said I. “I admire

him.”’

Mr. Winkle coughed, and beginning to see how the land lay, assumed a

look of importance.

‘I left a note for you,’ resumed Dowler. ‘I said I was sorry. So I was.

Pressing business called me here. You were not satisfied. You followed.

You required a verbal explanation. You were right. It’s all over now. My

business is finished. I go back to-morrow. Join me.’

As Dowler progressed in his explanation, Mr. Winkle’s countenance grew

more and more dignified. The mysterious nature of the commencement of

their conversation was explained; Mr. Dowler had as great an objection

to duelling as himself; in short, this blustering and awful personage

was one of the most egregious cowards in existence, and interpreting Mr.

Winkle’s absence through the medium of his own fears, had taken the same

step as himself, and prudently retired until all excitement of feeling

should have subsided.

As the real state of the case dawned upon Mr. Winkle’s mind, he looked

very terrible, and said he was perfectly satisfied; but at the same

time, said so with an air that left Mr. Dowler no alternative but to

infer that if he had not been, something most horrible and destructive

must inevitably have occurred. Mr. Dowler appeared to be impressed with

a becoming sense of Mr. Winkle’s magnanimity and condescension; and the

two belligerents parted for the night, with many protestations of

eternal friendship.

About half-past twelve o’clock, when Mr. Winkle had been revelling some

twenty minutes in the full luxury of his first sleep, he was suddenly

awakened by a loud knocking at his chamber door, which, being repeated

with increased vehemence, caused him to start up in bed, and inquire who

was there, and what the matter was.

‘Please, Sir, here’s a young man which says he must see you directly,’

responded the voice of the chambermaid.

‘A young man!’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle.

‘No mistake about that ‘ere, Sir,’ replied another voice through the

keyhole; ‘and if that wery same interestin’ young creetur ain’t let in

vithout delay, it’s wery possible as his legs vill enter afore his

countenance.’ The young man gave a gentle kick at one of the lower

panels of the door, after he had given utterance to this hint, as if to

add force and point to the remark.

‘Is that you, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Winkle, springing out of bed.

‘Quite unpossible to identify any gen’l’m’n vith any degree o’ mental

satisfaction, vithout lookin’ at him, Sir,’ replied the voice

dogmatically.

Mr. Winkle, not much doubting who the young man was, unlocked the door;

which he had no sooner done than Mr. Samuel Weller entered with great

precipitation, and carefully relocking it on the inside, deliberately

put the key in his waistcoat pocket; and, after surveying Mr. Winkle

from head to foot, said--

‘You’re a wery humorous young gen’l’m’n, you air, Sir!’

‘What do you mean by this conduct, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Winkle

indignantly. ‘Get out, sir, this instant. What do you mean, Sir?’

‘What do I mean,’ retorted Sam; ‘come, Sir, this is rayther too rich, as

the young lady said when she remonstrated with the pastry-cook, arter

he’d sold her a pork pie as had got nothin’ but fat inside. What do I

mean! Well, that ain’t a bad ‘un, that ain’t.’

‘Unlock that door, and leave this room immediately, Sir,’ said Mr.

Winkle.

‘I shall leave this here room, sir, just precisely at the wery same

moment as you leaves it,’ responded Sam, speaking in a forcible manner,

and seating himself with perfect gravity. ‘If I find it necessary to

carry you away, pick-a-back, o’ course I shall leave it the least bit o’

time possible afore you; but allow me to express a hope as you won’t

reduce me to extremities; in saying wich, I merely quote wot the

nobleman said to the fractious pennywinkle, ven he vouldn’t come out of

his shell by means of a pin, and he conseqvently began to be afeered

that he should be obliged to crack him in the parlour door.’ At the end

of this address, which was unusually lengthy for him, Mr. Weller planted

his hands on his knees, and looked full in Mr. Winkle’s face, with an

expression of countenance which showed that he had not the remotest

intention of being trifled with.

‘You’re a amiably-disposed young man, Sir, I don’t think,’ resumed Mr.

Weller, in a tone of moral reproof, ‘to go inwolving our precious

governor in all sorts o’ fanteegs, wen he’s made up his mind to go

through everythink for principle. You’re far worse nor Dodson, Sir; and

as for Fogg, I consider him a born angel to you!’ Mr. Weller having

accompanied this last sentiment with an emphatic slap on each knee,

folded his arms with a look of great disgust, and threw himself back in

his chair, as if awaiting the criminal’s defence.

‘My good fellow,’ said Mr. Winkle, extending his hand--his teeth

chattering all the time he spoke, for he had been standing, during the

whole of Mr. Weller’s lecture, in his night-gear--‘my good fellow, I

respect your attachment to my excellent friend, and I am very sorry

indeed to have added to his causes for disquiet. There, Sam, there!’

‘Well,’ said Sam, rather sulkily, but giving the proffered hand a

respectful shake at the same time--‘well, so you ought to be, and I am

very glad to find you air; for, if I can help it, I won’t have him put

upon by nobody, and that’s all about it.’

‘Certainly not, Sam,’ said Mr. Winkle. ‘There! Now go to bed, Sam, and

we’ll talk further about this in the morning.’

‘I’m wery sorry,’ said Sam, ‘but I can’t go to bed.’

‘Not go to bed!’ repeated Mr. Winkle.

‘No,’ said Sam, shaking his head. ‘Can’t be done.’

‘You don’t mean to say you’re going back to-night, Sam?’ urged Mr.

Winkle, greatly surprised.

‘Not unless you particklerly wish it,’ replied Sam; ‘but I mustn’t leave

this here room. The governor’s orders wos peremptory.’

‘Nonsense, Sam,’ said Mr. Winkle, ‘I must stop here two or three days;

and more than that, Sam, you must stop here too, to assist me in gaining

an interview with a young lady--Miss Allen, Sam; you remember her--whom

I must and will see before I leave Bristol.’

But in reply to each of these positions, Sam shook his head with great

firmness, and energetically replied, ‘It can’t be done.’

After a great deal of argument and representation on the part of Mr.

Winkle, however, and a full disclosure of what had passed in the

interview with Dowler, Sam began to waver; and at length a compromise

was effected, of which the following were the main and principal

conditions:--

That Sam should retire, and leave Mr. Winkle in the undisturbed

possession of his apartment, on the condition that he had permission to

lock the door on the outside, and carry off the key; provided always,

that in the event of an alarm of fire, or other dangerous contingency,

the door should be instantly unlocked. That a letter should be written

to Mr. Pickwick early next morning, and forwarded per Dowler, requesting

his consent to Sam and Mr. Winkle’s remaining at Bristol, for the

purpose and with the object already assigned, and begging an answer by

the next coach--, if favourable, the aforesaid parties to remain

accordingly, and if not, to return to Bath immediately on the receipt

thereof. And, lastly, that Mr. Winkle should be understood as distinctly

pledging himself not to resort to the window, fireplace, or other

surreptitious mode of escape in the meanwhile. These stipulations having

been concluded, Sam locked the door and departed.

He had nearly got downstairs, when he stopped, and drew the key from his

pocket.

‘I quite forgot about the knockin’ down,’ said Sam, half turning back.

‘The governor distinctly said it was to be done. Amazin’ stupid o’ me,

that ‘ere! Never mind,’ said Sam, brightening up, ‘it’s easily done to-

morrow, anyvays.’

Apparently much consoled by this reflection, Mr. Weller once more

deposited the key in his pocket, and descending the remainder of the

stairs without any fresh visitations of conscience, was soon, in common

with the other inmates of the house, buried in profound repose.

CHAPTER XXXIX. MR. SAMUEL WELLER, BEING INTRUSTED WITH A MISSION OF

LOVE, PROCEEDS TO EXECUTE IT; WITH WHAT SUCCESS WILL HEREINAFTER APPEAR

During the whole of next day, Sam kept Mr. Winkle steadily in sight,

fully determined not to take his eyes off him for one instant, until he

should receive express instructions from the fountain-head. However

disagreeable Sam’s very close watch and great vigilance were to Mr.

Winkle, he thought it better to bear with them, than, by any act of

violent opposition, to hazard being carried away by force, which Mr.

Weller more than once strongly hinted was the line of conduct that a

strict sense of duty prompted him to pursue. There is little reason to

doubt that Sam would very speedily have quieted his scruples, by bearing

Mr. Winkle back to Bath, bound hand and foot, had not Mr. Pickwick’s

prompt attention to the note, which Dowler had undertaken to deliver,

forestalled any such proceeding. In short, at eight o’clock in the

evening, Mr. Pickwick himself walked into the coffee-room of the Bush

Tavern, and told Sam with a smile, to his very great relief, that he had

done quite right, and it was unnecessary for him to mount guard any

longer.

‘I thought it better to come myself,’ said Mr. Pickwick, addressing Mr.

Winkle, as Sam disencumbered him of his great-coat and travelling-shawl,

‘to ascertain, before I gave my consent to Sam’s employment in this

matter, that you are quite in earnest and serious, with respect to this

young lady.’

‘Serious, from my heart--from my soul!’ returned Mr. Winkle, with great

energy.

‘Remember,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with beaming eyes, ‘we met her at our

excellent and hospitable friend’s, Winkle. It would be an ill return to

tamper lightly, and without due consideration, with this young lady’s

affections. I’ll not allow that, sir. I’ll not allow it.’

‘I have no such intention, indeed,’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle warmly. ‘I have

considered the matter well, for a long time, and I feel that my

happiness is bound up in her.’

‘That’s wot we call tying it up in a small parcel, sir,’ interposed Mr.

Weller, with an agreeable smile.

Mr. Winkle looked somewhat stern at this interruption, and Mr. Pickwick

angrily requested his attendant not to jest with one of the best

feelings of our nature; to which Sam replied, ‘That he wouldn’t, if he

was aware on it; but there were so many on ‘em, that he hardly know’d

which was the best ones wen he heerd ‘em mentioned.’

Mr. Winkle then recounted what had passed between himself and Mr. Ben

Allen, relative to Arabella; stated that his object was to gain an

interview with the young lady, and make a formal disclosure of his

passion; and declared his conviction, founded on certain dark hints and

mutterings of the aforesaid Ben, that, wherever she was at present

immured, it was somewhere near the Downs. And this was his whole stock

of knowledge or suspicion on the subject.

With this very slight clue to guide him, it was determined that Mr.

Weller should start next morning on an expedition of discovery; it was

also arranged that Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle, who were less confident

of their powers, should parade the town meanwhile, and accidentally drop

in upon Mr. Bob Sawyer in the course of the day, in the hope of seeing

or hearing something of the young lady’s whereabouts.

Accordingly, next morning, Sam Weller issued forth upon his quest, in no

way daunted by the very discouraging prospect before him; and away he

walked, up one street and down another--we were going to say, up one

hill and down another, only it’s all uphill at Clifton--without meeting

with anything or anybody that tended to throw the faintest light on the

matter in hand. Many were the colloquies into which Sam entered with

grooms who were airing horses on roads, and nursemaids who were airing

children in lanes; but nothing could Sam elicit from either the first-

mentioned or the last, which bore the slightest reference to the object

of his artfully-prosecuted inquiries. There were a great many young

ladies in a great many houses, the greater part whereof were shrewdly

suspected by the male and female domestics to be deeply attached to

somebody, or perfectly ready to become so, if opportunity afforded. But

as none among these young ladies was Miss Arabella Allen, the

information left Sam at exactly the old point of wisdom at which he had

stood before.

Sam struggled across the Downs against a good high wind, wondering

whether it was always necessary to hold your hat on with both hands in

that part of the country, and came to a shady by-place, about which were

sprinkled several little villas of quiet and secluded appearance.

Outside a stable door at the bottom of a long back lane without a

thoroughfare, a groom in undress was idling about, apparently persuading

himself that he was doing something with a spade and a wheel-barrow. We

may remark, in this place, that we have scarcely ever seen a groom near

a stable, in his lazy moments, who has not been, to a greater or less

extent, the victim of this singular delusion.

Sam thought he might as well talk to this groom as to any one else,

especially as he was very tired with walking, and there was a good large

stone just opposite the wheel-barrow; so he strolled down the lane, and,

seating himself on the stone, opened a conversation with the ease and

freedom for which he was remarkable.

‘Mornin’, old friend,’ said Sam.

‘Arternoon, you mean,’ replied the groom, casting a surly look at Sam.

‘You’re wery right, old friend,’ said Sam; ‘I \_do\_ mean arternoon. How

are you?’

‘Why, I don’t find myself much the better for seeing of you,’ replied

the ill-tempered groom.

‘That’s wery odd--that is,’ said Sam, ‘for you look so uncommon

cheerful, and seem altogether so lively, that it does vun’s heart good

to see you.’

The surly groom looked surlier still at this, but not sufficiently so to

produce any effect upon Sam, who immediately inquired, with a

countenance of great anxiety, whether his master’s name was not Walker.

‘No, it ain’t,’ said the groom.

‘Nor Brown, I s’pose?’ said Sam.

‘No, it ain’t.’

‘Nor Vilson?’

‘No; nor that either,’ said the groom.

‘Vell,’ replied Sam, ‘then I’m mistaken, and he hasn’t got the honour o’

my acquaintance, which I thought he had. Don’t wait here out o’

compliment to me,’ said Sam, as the groom wheeled in the barrow, and

prepared to shut the gate. ‘Ease afore ceremony, old boy; I’ll excuse

you.’

‘I’d knock your head off for half-a-crown,’ said the surly groom,

bolting one half of the gate.

‘Couldn’t afford to have it done on those terms,’ rejoined Sam. ‘It ‘ud

be worth a life’s board wages at least, to you, and ‘ud be cheap at

that. Make my compliments indoors. Tell ‘em not to vait dinner for me,

and say they needn’t mind puttin’ any by, for it’ll be cold afore I come

in.’

In reply to this, the groom waxing very wroth, muttered a desire to

damage somebody’s person; but disappeared without carrying it into

execution, slamming the door angrily after him, and wholly unheeding

Sam’s affectionate request, that he would leave him a lock of his hair

before he went.

Sam continued to sit on the large stone, meditating upon what was best

to be done, and revolving in his mind a plan for knocking at all the

doors within five miles of Bristol, taking them at a hundred and fifty

or two hundred a day, and endeavouring to find Miss Arabella by that

expedient, when accident all of a sudden threw in his way what he might

have sat there for a twelvemonth and yet not found without it.

Into the lane where he sat, there opened three or four garden gates,

belonging to as many houses, which though detached from each other, were

only separated by their gardens. As these were large and long, and well

planted with trees, the houses were not only at some distance off, but

the greater part of them were nearly concealed from view. Sam was

sitting with his eyes fixed upon the dust-heap outside the next gate to

that by which the groom had disappeared, profoundly turning over in his

mind the difficulties of his present undertaking, when the gate opened,

and a female servant came out into the lane to shake some bedside

carpets.

Sam was so very busy with his own thoughts, that it is probable he would

have taken no more notice of the young woman than just raising his head

and remarking that she had a very neat and pretty figure, if his

feelings of gallantry had not been most strongly roused by observing

that she had no one to help her, and that the carpets seemed too heavy

for her single strength. Mr. Weller was a gentleman of great gallantry

in his own way, and he no sooner remarked this circumstance than he

hastily rose from the large stone, and advanced towards her.

‘My dear,’ said Sam, sliding up with an air of great respect, ‘you’ll

spile that wery pretty figure out o’ all perportion if you shake them

carpets by yourself. Let me help you.’

The young lady, who had been coyly affecting not to know that a

gentleman was so near, turned round as Sam spoke--no doubt (indeed she

said so, afterwards) to decline this offer from a perfect stranger--when

instead of speaking, she started back, and uttered a half-suppressed

scream. Sam was scarcely less staggered, for in the countenance of the

well-shaped female servant, he beheld the very features of his

valentine, the pretty housemaid from Mr. Nupkins’s.

‘Wy, Mary, my dear!’ said Sam.

‘Lauk, Mr. Weller,’ said Mary, ‘how you do frighten one!’

Sam made no verbal answer to this complaint, nor can we precisely say

what reply he did make. We merely know that after a short pause Mary

said, ‘Lor, do adun, Mr. Weller!’ and that his hat had fallen off a few

moments before--from both of which tokens we should be disposed to infer

that one kiss, or more, had passed between the parties.

‘Why, how did you come here?’ said Mary, when the conversation to which

this interruption had been offered, was resumed.

‘O’ course I came to look arter you, my darlin’,’ replied Mr. Weller;

for once permitting his passion to get the better of his veracity.

‘And how did you know I was here?’ inquired Mary. ‘Who could have told

you that I took another service at Ipswich, and that they afterwards

moved all the way here? Who \_could \_have told you that, Mr. Weller?’

‘Ah, to be sure,’ said Sam, with a cunning look, ‘that’s the pint. Who

could ha’ told me?’

‘It wasn’t Mr. Muzzle, was it?’ inquired Mary.

‘Oh, no.’ replied Sam, with a solemn shake of the head, ‘it warn’t him.’

‘It must have been the cook,’ said Mary.

‘O’ course it must,’ said Sam.

‘Well, I never heard the like of that!’ exclaimed Mary.

‘No more did I,’ said Sam. ‘But Mary, my dear’--here Sam’s manner grew

extremely affectionate--‘Mary, my dear, I’ve got another affair in hand

as is wery pressin’. There’s one o’ my governor’s friends--Mr. Winkle,

you remember him?’

‘Him in the green coat?’ said Mary. ‘Oh, yes, I remember him.’

‘Well,’ said Sam, ‘he’s in a horrid state o’ love; reg’larly comfoozled,

and done over vith it.’

‘Lor!’ interposed Mary.

‘Yes,’ said Sam; ‘but that’s nothin’ if we could find out the young

‘ooman;’ and here Sam, with many digressions upon the personal beauty of

Mary, and the unspeakable tortures he had experienced since he last saw

her, gave a faithful account of Mr. Winkle’s present predicament.

‘Well,’ said Mary, ‘I never did!’

‘O’ course not,’ said Sam, ‘and nobody never did, nor never vill

neither; and here am I a-walkin’ about like the wandering Jew--a

sportin’ character you have perhaps heerd on Mary, my dear, as vos

alvays doin’ a match agin’ time, and never vent to sleep--looking arter

this here Miss Arabella Allen.’

‘Miss who?’ said Mary, in great astonishment.

‘Miss Arabella Allen,’ said Sam.

‘Goodness gracious!’ said Mary, pointing to the garden door which the

sulky groom had locked after him. ‘Why, it’s that very house; she’s been

living there these six weeks. Their upper house-maid, which is lady’s-

maid too, told me all about it over the wash-house palin’s before the

family was out of bed, one mornin’.’

‘Wot, the wery next door to you?’ said Sam.

‘The very next,’ replied Mary.

Mr. Weller was so deeply overcome on receiving this intelligence that he

found it absolutely necessary to cling to his fair informant for

support; and divers little love passages had passed between them, before

he was sufficiently collected to return to the subject.

‘Vell,’ said Sam at length, ‘if this don’t beat cock-fightin’ nothin’

never vill, as the lord mayor said, ven the chief secretary o’ state

proposed his missis’s health arter dinner. That wery next house! Wy,

I’ve got a message to her as I’ve been a-trying all day to deliver.’

‘Ah,’ said Mary, ‘but you can’t deliver it now, because she only walks

in the garden in the evening, and then only for a very little time; she

never goes out, without the old lady.’

Sam ruminated for a few moments, and finally hit upon the following plan

of operations; that he should return just at dusk--the time at which

Arabella invariably took her walk--and, being admitted by Mary into the

garden of the house to which she belonged, would contrive to scramble up

the wall, beneath the overhanging boughs of a large pear-tree, which

would effectually screen him from observation; would there deliver his

message, and arrange, if possible, an interview on behalf of Mr. Winkle

for the ensuing evening at the same hour. Having made this arrangement

with great despatch, he assisted Mary in the long-deferred occupation of

shaking the carpets.

It is not half as innocent a thing as it looks, that shaking little

pieces of carpet--at least, there may be no great harm in the shaking,

but the folding is a very insidious process. So long as the shaking

lasts, and the two parties are kept the carpet’s length apart, it is as

innocent an amusement as can well be devised; but when the folding

begins, and the distance between them gets gradually lessened from one

half its former length to a quarter, and then to an eighth, and then to

a sixteenth, and then to a thirty-second, if the carpet be long enough,

it becomes dangerous. We do not know, to a nicety, how many pieces of

carpet were folded in this instance, but we can venture to state that as

many pieces as there were, so many times did Sam kiss the pretty

housemaid.

Mr. Weller regaled himself with moderation at the nearest tavern until

it was nearly dusk, and then returned to the lane without the

thoroughfare. Having been admitted into the garden by Mary, and having

received from that lady sundry admonitions concerning the safety of his

limbs and neck, Sam mounted into the pear-tree, to wait until Arabella

should come into sight.

He waited so long without this anxiously-expected event occurring, that

he began to think it was not going to take place at all, when he heard

light footsteps upon the gravel, and immediately afterwards beheld

Arabella walking pensively down the garden. As soon as she came nearly

below the tree, Sam began, by way of gently indicating his presence, to

make sundry diabolical noises similar to those which would probably be

natural to a person of middle age who had been afflicted with a

combination of inflammatory sore throat, croup, and whooping-cough, from

his earliest infancy.

Upon this, the young lady cast a hurried glance towards the spot whence

the dreadful sounds proceeded; and her previous alarm being not at all

diminished when she saw a man among the branches, she would most

certainly have decamped, and alarmed the house, had not fear fortunately

deprived her of the power of moving, and caused her to sink down on a

garden seat, which happened by good luck to be near at hand.

‘She’s a-goin’ off,’ soliloquised Sam in great perplexity. ‘Wot a thing

it is, as these here young creeturs will go a-faintin’ avay just ven

they oughtn’t to. Here, young ‘ooman, Miss Sawbones, Mrs. Vinkle,

don’t!’

Whether it was the magic of Mr. Winkle’s name, or the coolness of the

open air, or some recollection of Mr. Weller’s voice, that revived

Arabella, matters not. She raised her head and languidly inquired,

‘Who’s that, and what do you want?’

‘Hush,’ said Sam, swinging himself on to the wall, and crouching there

in as small a compass as he could reduce himself to, ‘only me, miss,

only me.’

‘Mr. Pickwick’s servant!’ said Arabella earnestly.

‘The wery same, miss,’ replied Sam. ‘Here’s Mr. Vinkle reg’larly sewed

up vith desperation, miss.’

‘Ah!’ said Arabella, drawing nearer the wall.

‘Ah, indeed,’ said Sam. ‘Ve thought ve should ha’ been obliged to

strait-veskit him last night; he’s been a-ravin’ all day; and he says if

he can’t see you afore to-morrow night’s over, he vishes he may be

somethin’ unpleasanted if he don’t drownd hisself.’

‘Oh, no, no, Mr. Weller!’ said Arabella, clasping her hands.

‘That’s wot he says, miss,’ replied Sam coolly. ‘He’s a man of his word,

and it’s my opinion he’ll do it, miss. He’s heerd all about you from the

sawbones in barnacles.’

‘From my brother!’ said Arabella, having some faint recognition of Sam’s

description.

‘I don’t rightly know which is your brother, miss,’ replied Sam. ‘Is it

the dirtiest vun o’ the two?’

‘Yes, yes, Mr. Weller,’ returned Arabella, ‘go on. Make haste, pray.’

‘Well, miss,’ said Sam, ‘he’s heerd all about it from him; and it’s the

gov’nor’s opinion that if you don’t see him wery quick, the sawbones as

we’ve been a-speakin’ on, ‘ull get as much extra lead in his head as’ll

rayther damage the dewelopment o’ the orgins if they ever put it in

spirits artervards.’

‘Oh, what can I do to prevent these dreadful quarrels!’ exclaimed

Arabella.

‘It’s the suspicion of a priory ‘tachment as is the cause of it all,’

replied Sam. ‘You’d better see him, miss.’

‘But how?--where?’ cried Arabella. ‘I dare not leave the house alone. My

brother is so unkind, so unreasonable! I know how strange my talking

thus to you may appear, Mr. Weller, but I am very, very unhappy--’ and

here poor Arabella wept so bitterly that Sam grew chivalrous.

‘It may seem wery strange talkin’ to me about these here affairs, miss,’

said Sam, with great vehemence; ‘but all I can say is, that I’m not only

ready but villin’ to do anythin’ as’ll make matters agreeable; and if

chuckin’ either o’ them sawboneses out o’ winder ‘ull do it, I’m the

man.’ As Sam Weller said this, he tucked up his wristbands, at the

imminent hazard of falling off the wall in so doing, to intimate his

readiness to set to work immediately.

Flattering as these professions of good feeling were, Arabella

resolutely declined (most unaccountably, as Sam thought) to avail

herself of them. For some time she strenuously refused to grant Mr.

Winkle the interview Sam had so pathetically requested; but at length,

when the conversation threatened to be interrupted by the unwelcome

arrival of a third party, she hurriedly gave him to understand, with

many professions of gratitude, that it was barely possible she might be

in the garden an hour later, next evening. Sam understood this perfectly

well; and Arabella, bestowing upon him one of her sweetest smiles,

tripped gracefully away, leaving Mr. Weller in a state of very great

admiration of her charms, both personal and mental.

Having descended in safety from the wall, and not forgotten to devote a

few moments to his own particular business in the same department, Mr.

Weller then made the best of his way back to the Bush, where his

prolonged absence had occasioned much speculation and some alarm.

‘We must be careful,’ said Mr. Pickwick, after listening attentively to

Sam’s tale, ‘not for our sakes, but for that of the young lady. We must

be very cautious.’

‘\_We\_!’ said Mr. Winkle, with marked emphasis.

Mr. Pickwick’s momentary look of indignation at the tone of this remark,

subsided into his characteristic expression of benevolence, as he

replied--

‘\_We\_, Sir! I shall accompany you.’

‘You!’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘I,’ replied Mr. Pickwick mildly. ‘In affording you this interview, the

young lady has taken a natural, perhaps, but still a very imprudent

step. If I am present at the meeting--a mutual friend, who is old enough

to be the father of both parties--the voice of calumny can never be

raised against her hereafter.’

Mr. Pickwick’s eyes lightened with honest exultation at his own

foresight, as he spoke thus. Mr. Winkle was touched by this little trait

of his delicate respect for the young \_protegee \_of his friend, and took

his hand with a feeling of regard, akin to veneration.

‘You \_SHALL \_ go,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘I will,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Sam, have my greatcoat and shawl ready,

and order a conveyance to be at the door to-morrow evening, rather

earlier than is absolutely necessary, in order that we may be in good

time.’

Mr. Weller touched his hat, as an earnest of his obedience, and withdrew

to make all needful preparations for the expedition.

The coach was punctual to the time appointed; and Mr. Weller, after duly

installing Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Winkle inside, took his seat on the box

by the driver. They alighted, as had been agreed on, about a quarter of

a mile from the place of rendezvous, and desiring the coachman to await

their return, proceeded the remaining distance on foot.

It was at this stage of the undertaking that Mr. Pickwick, with many

smiles and various other indications of great self-satisfaction,

produced from one of his coat pockets a dark lantern, with which he had

specially provided himself for the occasion, and the great mechanical

beauty of which he proceeded to explain to Mr. Winkle, as they walked

along, to the no small surprise of the few stragglers they met.

‘I should have been the better for something of this kind, in my last

garden expedition, at night; eh, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking good-

humouredly round at his follower, who was trudging behind.

‘Wery nice things, if they’re managed properly, Sir,’ replied Mr.

Weller; ‘but wen you don’t want to be seen, I think they’re more useful

arter the candle’s gone out, than wen it’s alight.’

Mr. Pickwick appeared struck by Sam’s remarks, for he put the lantern

into his pocket again, and they walked on in silence.

‘Down here, Sir,’ said Sam. ‘Let me lead the way. This is the lane,

Sir.’

Down the lane they went, and dark enough it was. Mr. Pickwick brought

out the lantern, once or twice, as they groped their way along, and

threw a very brilliant little tunnel of light before them, about a foot

in diameter. It was very pretty to look at, but seemed to have the

effect of rendering surrounding objects rather darker than before.

At length they arrived at the large stone. Here Sam recommended his

master and Mr. Winkle to seat themselves, while he reconnoitred, and

ascertained whether Mary was yet in waiting.

After an absence of five or ten minutes, Sam returned to say that the

gate was opened, and all quiet. Following him with stealthy tread, Mr.

Pickwick and Mr. Winkle soon found themselves in the garden. Here

everybody said, ‘Hush!’ a good many times; and that being done, no one

seemed to have any very distinct apprehension of what was to be done

next.

‘Is Miss Allen in the garden yet, Mary?’ inquired Mr. Winkle, much

agitated.

‘I don’t know, sir,’ replied the pretty housemaid. ‘The best thing to be

done, sir, will be for Mr. Weller to give you a hoist up into the tree,

and perhaps Mr. Pickwick will have the goodness to see that nobody comes

up the lane, while I watch at the other end of the garden. Goodness

gracious, what’s that?’

‘That ‘ere blessed lantern ‘ull be the death on us all,’ exclaimed Sam

peevishly. ‘Take care wot you’re a-doin’ on, sir; you’re a-sendin’ a

blaze o’ light, right into the back parlour winder.’

‘Dear me!’ said Mr. Pickwick, turning hastily aside, ‘I didn’t mean to

do that.’

‘Now, it’s in the next house, sir,’ remonstrated Sam.

‘Bless my heart!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, turning round again.

‘Now, it’s in the stable, and they’ll think the place is afire,’ said

Sam. ‘Shut it up, sir, can’t you?’

‘It’s the most extraordinary lantern I ever met with, in all my life!’

exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, greatly bewildered by the effects he had so

unintentionally produced. ‘I never saw such a powerful reflector.’

‘It’ll be vun too powerful for us, if you keep blazin’ avay in that

manner, sir,’ replied Sam, as Mr. Pickwick, after various unsuccessful

efforts, managed to close the slide. ‘There’s the young lady’s

footsteps. Now, Mr. Winkle, sir, up vith you.’

‘Stop, stop!’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I must speak to her first. Help me up,

Sam.’

‘Gently, Sir,’ said Sam, planting his head against the wall, and making

a platform of his back. ‘Step atop o’ that ‘ere flower-pot, Sir. Now

then, up vith you.’

‘I’m afraid I shall hurt you, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Never mind me, Sir,’ replied Sam. ‘Lend him a hand, Mr. Winkle, sir.

Steady, sir, steady! That’s the time o’ day!’

As Sam spoke, Mr. Pickwick, by exertions almost supernatural in a

gentleman of his years and weight, contrived to get upon Sam’s back; and

Sam gently raising himself up, and Mr. Pickwick holding on fast by the

top of the wall, while Mr. Winkle clasped him tight by the legs, they

contrived by these means to bring his spectacles just above the level of

the coping.

‘My dear,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking over the wall, and catching sight

of Arabella, on the other side, ‘don’t be frightened, my dear, it’s only

me.’ ‘Oh, pray go away, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Arabella. ‘Tell them all to

go away. I am so dreadfully frightened. Dear, dear Mr. Pickwick, don’t

stop there. You’ll fall down and kill yourself, I know you will.’

‘Now, pray don’t alarm yourself, my dear,’ said Mr. Pickwick soothingly.

‘There is not the least cause for fear, I assure you. Stand firm, Sam,’

said Mr. Pickwick, looking down.

‘All right, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Don’t be longer than you can

conweniently help, sir. You’re rayther heavy.’

‘Only another moment, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘I merely wished you to know, my dear, that I should not have allowed my

young friend to see you in this clandestine way, if the situation in

which you are placed had left him any alternative; and, lest the

impropriety of this step should cause you any uneasiness, my love, it

may be a satisfaction to you, to know that I am present. That’s all, my

dear.’

‘Indeed, Mr. Pickwick, I am very much obliged to you for your kindness

and consideration,’ replied Arabella, drying her tears with her

handkerchief. She would probably have said much more, had not Mr.

Pickwick’s head disappeared with great swiftness, in consequence of a

false step on Sam’s shoulder which brought him suddenly to the ground.

He was up again in an instant however; and bidding Mr. Winkle make haste

and get the interview over, ran out into the lane to keep watch, with

all the courage and ardour of youth. Mr. Winkle himself, inspired by the

occasion, was on the wall in a moment, merely pausing to request Sam to

be careful of his master.

‘I’ll take care on him, sir,’ replied Sam. ‘Leave him to me.’

‘Where is he? What’s he doing, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Winkle.

‘Bless his old gaiters,’ rejoined Sam, looking out at the garden door.

‘He’s a-keepin’ guard in the lane vith that ‘ere dark lantern, like a

amiable Guy Fawkes! I never see such a fine creetur in my days. Blessed

if I don’t think his heart must ha’ been born five-and-twenty year arter

his body, at least!’

Mr. Winkle stayed not to hear the encomium upon his friend. He had

dropped from the wall; thrown himself at Arabella’s feet; and by this

time was pleading the sincerity of his passion with an eloquence worthy

even of Mr. Pickwick himself.

While these things were going on in the open air, an elderly gentleman

of scientific attainments was seated in his library, two or three houses

off, writing a philosophical treatise, and ever and anon moistening his

clay and his labours with a glass of claret from a venerable-looking

bottle which stood by his side. In the agonies of composition, the

elderly gentleman looked sometimes at the carpet, sometimes at the

ceiling, and sometimes at the wall; and when neither carpet, ceiling,

nor wall afforded the requisite degree of inspiration, he looked out of

the window.

In one of these pauses of invention, the scientific gentleman was gazing

abstractedly on the thick darkness outside, when he was very much

surprised by observing a most brilliant light glide through the air, at

a short distance above the ground, and almost instantaneously vanish.

After a short time the phenomenon was repeated, not once or twice, but

several times; at last the scientific gentleman, laying down his pen,

began to consider to what natural causes these appearances were to be

assigned.

They were not meteors; they were too low. They were not glow-worms; they

were too high. They were not will-o’-the-wisps; they were not fireflies;

they were not fireworks. What could they be? Some extraordinary and

wonderful phenomenon of nature, which no philosopher had ever seen

before; something which it had been reserved for him alone to discover,

and which he should immortalise his name by chronicling for the benefit

of posterity. Full of this idea, the scientific gentleman seized his pen

again, and committed to paper sundry notes of these unparalleled

appearances, with the date, day, hour, minute, and precise second at

which they were visible: all of which were to form the data of a

voluminous treatise of great research and deep learning, which should

astonish all the atmospherical wiseacres that ever drew breath in any

part of the civilised globe.

He threw himself back in his easy-chair, wrapped in contemplations of

his future greatness. The mysterious light appeared more brilliantly

than before, dancing, to all appearance, up and down the lane, crossing

from side to side, and moving in an orbit as eccentric as comets

themselves.

The scientific gentleman was a bachelor. He had no wife to call in and

astonish, so he rang the bell for his servant.

‘Pruffle,’ said the scientific gentleman, ‘there is something very

extraordinary in the air to-night? Did you see that?’ said the

scientific gentleman, pointing out of the window, as the light again

became visible.

‘Yes, I did, Sir.’

‘What do you think of it, Pruffle?’

‘Think of it, Sir?’

‘Yes. You have been bred up in this country. What should you say was the

cause for those lights, now?’

The scientific gentleman smilingly anticipated Pruffle’s reply that he

could assign no cause for them at all. Pruffle meditated.

‘I should say it was thieves, Sir,’ said Pruffle at length.

‘You’re a fool, and may go downstairs,’ said the scientific gentleman.

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Pruffle. And down he went.

But the scientific gentleman could not rest under the idea of the

ingenious treatise he had projected being lost to the world, which must

inevitably be the case if the speculation of the ingenious Mr. Pruffle

were not stifled in its birth. He put on his hat and walked quickly down

the garden, determined to investigate the matter to the very bottom.

Now, shortly before the scientific gentleman walked out into the garden,

Mr. Pickwick had run down the lane as fast as he could, to convey a

false alarm that somebody was coming that way; occasionally drawing back

the slide of the dark lantern to keep himself from the ditch. The alarm

was no sooner given, than Mr. Winkle scrambled back over the wall, and

Arabella ran into the house; the garden gate was shut, and the three

adventurers were making the best of their way down the lane, when they

were startled by the scientific gentleman unlocking his garden gate.

‘Hold hard,’ whispered Sam, who was, of course, the first of the party.

‘Show a light for just vun second, Sir.’

Mr. Pickwick did as he was desired, and Sam, seeing a man’s head peeping

out very cautiously within half a yard of his own, gave it a gentle tap

with his clenched fist, which knocked it, with a hollow sound, against

the gate. Having performed this feat with great suddenness and

dexterity, Mr. Weller caught Mr. Pickwick up on his back, and followed

Mr. Winkle down the lane at a pace which, considering the burden he

carried, was perfectly astonishing.

‘Have you got your vind back agin, Sir,’ inquired Sam, when they had

reached the end.

‘Quite. Quite, now,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Then come along, Sir,’ said Sam, setting his master on his feet again.

‘Come betveen us, sir. Not half a mile to run. Think you’re vinnin’ a

cup, sir. Now for it.’

Thus encouraged, Mr. Pickwick made the very best use of his legs. It may

be confidently stated that a pair of black gaiters never got over the

ground in better style than did those of Mr. Pickwick on this memorable

occasion.

The coach was waiting, the horses were fresh, the roads were good, and

the driver was willing. The whole party arrived in safety at the Bush

before Mr. Pickwick had recovered his breath.

‘In with you at once, sir,’ said Sam, as he helped his master out.

‘Don’t stop a second in the street, arter that ‘ere exercise. Beg your

pardon, sir,’ continued Sam, touching his hat as Mr. Winkle descended,

‘hope there warn’t a priory ‘tachment, sir?’

Mr. Winkle grasped his humble friend by the hand, and whispered in his

ear, ‘It’s all right, Sam; quite right.’ Upon which Mr. Weller struck

three distinct blows upon his nose in token of intelligence, smiled,

winked, and proceeded to put the steps up, with a countenance expressive

of lively satisfaction.

As to the scientific gentleman, he demonstrated, in a masterly treatise,

that these wonderful lights were the effect of electricity; and clearly

proved the same by detailing how a flash of fire danced before his eyes

when he put his head out of the gate, and how he received a shock which

stunned him for a quarter of an hour afterwards; which demonstration

delighted all the scientific associations beyond measure, and caused him

to be considered a light of science ever afterwards.

CHAPTER XL. INTRODUCES MR. PICKWICK TO A NEW AND NOT UNINTERESTING SCENE

IN THE GREAT DRAMA OF LIFE

The remainder of the period which Mr. Pickwick had assigned as the

duration of the stay at Bath passed over without the occurrence of

anything material. Trinity term commenced. On the expiration of its

first week, Mr. Pickwick and his friends returned to London; and the

former gentleman, attended of course by Sam, straightway repaired to his

old quarters at the George and Vulture.

On the third morning after their arrival, just as all the clocks in the

city were striking nine individually, and somewhere about nine hundred

and ninety-nine collectively, Sam was taking the air in George Yard,

when a queer sort of fresh-painted vehicle drove up, out of which there

jumped with great agility, throwing the reins to a stout man who sat

beside him, a queer sort of gentleman, who seemed made for the vehicle,

and the vehicle for him.

The vehicle was not exactly a gig, neither was it a stanhope. It was not

what is currently denominated a dog-cart, neither was it a taxed cart,

nor a chaise-cart, nor a guillotined cabriolet; and yet it had something

of the character of each and every of these machines. It was painted a

bright yellow, with the shafts and wheels picked out in black; and the

driver sat in the orthodox sporting style, on cushions piled about two

feet above the rail. The horse was a bay, a well-looking animal enough;

but with something of a flash and dog-fighting air about him,

nevertheless, which accorded both with the vehicle and his master.

The master himself was a man of about forty, with black hair, and

carefully combed whiskers. He was dressed in a particularly gorgeous

manner, with plenty of articles of jewellery about him--all about three

sizes larger than those which are usually worn by gentlemen--and a rough

greatcoat to crown the whole. Into one pocket of this greatcoat, he

thrust his left hand the moment he dismounted, while from the other he

drew forth, with his right, a very bright and glaring silk handkerchief,

with which he whisked a speck or two of dust from his boots, and then,

crumpling it in his hand, swaggered up the court.

It had not escaped Sam’s attention that, when this person dismounted, a

shabby-looking man in a brown greatcoat shorn of divers buttons, who had

been previously slinking about, on the opposite side of the way, crossed

over, and remained stationary close by. Having something more than a

suspicion of the object of the gentleman’s visit, Sam preceded him to

the George and Vulture, and, turning sharp round, planted himself in the

centre of the doorway.

‘Now, my fine fellow!’ said the man in the rough coat, in an imperious

tone, attempting at the same time to push his way past.

‘Now, Sir, wot’s the matter?’ replied Sam, returning the push with

compound interest.

‘Come, none of this, my man; this won’t do with me,’ said the owner of

the rough coat, raising his voice, and turning white. ‘Here, Smouch!’

‘Well, wot’s amiss here?’ growled the man in the brown coat, who had

been gradually sneaking up the court during this short dialogue.

‘Only some insolence of this young man’s,’ said the principal, giving

Sam another push.

‘Come, none o’ this gammon,’ growled Smouch, giving him another, and a

harder one.

This last push had the effect which it was intended by the experienced

Mr. Smouch to produce; for while Sam, anxious to return the compliment,

was grinding that gentleman’s body against the door-post, the principal

crept past, and made his way to the bar, whither Sam, after bandying a

few epithetical remarks with Mr. Smouch, followed at once.

‘Good-morning, my dear,’ said the principal, addressing the young lady

at the bar, with Botany Bay ease, and New South Wales gentility; ‘which

is Mr. Pickwick’s room, my dear?’

‘Show him up,’ said the barmaid to a waiter, without deigning another

look at the exquisite, in reply to his inquiry.

The waiter led the way upstairs as he was desired, and the man in the

rough coat followed, with Sam behind him, who, in his progress up the

staircase, indulged in sundry gestures indicative of supreme contempt

and defiance, to the unspeakable gratification of the servants and other

lookers-on. Mr. Smouch, who was troubled with a hoarse cough, remained

below, and expectorated in the passage.

Mr. Pickwick was fast asleep in bed, when his early visitor, followed by

Sam, entered the room. The noise they made, in so doing, awoke him.

‘Shaving-water, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, from within the curtains.

‘Shave you directly, Mr. Pickwick,’ said the visitor, drawing one of

them back from the bed’s head. ‘I’ve got an execution against you, at

the suit of Bardell.--Here’s the warrant.--Common Pleas.--Here’s my

card. I suppose you’ll come over to my house.’ Giving Mr. Pickwick a

friendly tap on the shoulder, the sheriff’s officer (for such he was)

threw his card on the counterpane, and pulled a gold toothpick from his

waistcoat pocket.

‘Namby’s the name,’ said the sheriff’s deputy, as Mr. Pickwick took his

spectacles from under the pillow, and put them on, to read the card.

‘Namby, Bell Alley, Coleman Street.’

At this point, Sam Weller, who had had his eyes fixed hitherto on Mr.

Namby’s shining beaver, interfered.

‘Are you a Quaker?’ said Sam.

‘I’ll let you know I am, before I’ve done with you,’ replied the

indignant officer. ‘I’ll teach you manners, my fine fellow, one of these

fine mornings.’

‘Thank’ee,’ said Sam. ‘I’ll do the same to you. Take your hat off.’ With

this, Mr. Weller, in the most dexterous manner, knocked Mr. Namby’s hat

to the other side of the room, with such violence, that he had very

nearly caused him to swallow the gold toothpick into the bargain.

‘Observe this, Mr. Pickwick,’ said the disconcerted officer, gasping for

breath. ‘I’ve been assaulted in the execution of my dooty by your

servant in your chamber. I’m in bodily fear. I call you to witness

this.’

‘Don’t witness nothin’, Sir,’ interposed Sam. ‘Shut your eyes up tight,

Sir. I’d pitch him out o’ winder, only he couldn’t fall far enough,

‘cause o’ the leads outside.’

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, in an angry voice, as his attendant made

various demonstrations of hostilities, ‘if you say another word, or

offer the slightest interference with this person, I discharge you that

instant.’

‘But, Sir!’ said Sam.

‘Hold your tongue,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick. ‘Take that hat up again.’

But this Sam flatly and positively refused to do; and, after he had been

severely reprimanded by his master, the officer, being in a hurry,

condescended to pick it up himself, venting a great variety of threats

against Sam meanwhile, which that gentleman received with perfect

composure, merely observing that if Mr. Namby would have the goodness to

put his hat on again, he would knock it into the latter end of next

week. Mr. Namby, perhaps thinking that such a process might be

productive of inconvenience to himself, declined to offer the

temptation, and, soon after, called up Smouch. Having informed him that

the capture was made, and that he was to wait for the prisoner until he

should have finished dressing, Namby then swaggered out, and drove away.

Smouch, requesting Mr. Pickwick in a surly manner ‘to be as alive as he

could, for it was a busy time,’ drew up a chair by the door and sat

there, until he had finished dressing. Sam was then despatched for a

hackney-coach, and in it the triumvirate proceeded to Coleman Street. It

was fortunate the distance was short; for Mr. Smouch, besides possessing

no very enchanting conversational powers, was rendered a decidedly

unpleasant companion in a limited space, by the physical weakness to

which we have elsewhere adverted.

The coach having turned into a very narrow and dark street, stopped

before a house with iron bars to all the windows; the door-posts of

which were graced by the name and title of ‘Namby, Officer to the

Sheriffs of London’; the inner gate having been opened by a gentleman

who might have passed for a neglected twin-brother of Mr. Smouch, and

who was endowed with a large key for the purpose, Mr. Pickwick was shown

into the ‘coffee-room.’

This coffee-room was a front parlour, the principal features of which

were fresh sand and stale tobacco smoke. Mr. Pickwick bowed to the three

persons who were seated in it when he entered; and having despatched Sam

for Perker, withdrew into an obscure corner, and looked thence with some

curiosity upon his new companions.

One of these was a mere boy of nineteen or twenty, who, though it was

yet barely ten o’clock, was drinking gin-and-water, and smoking a cigar-

-amusements to which, judging from his inflamed countenance, he had

devoted himself pretty constantly for the last year or two of his life.

Opposite him, engaged in stirring the fire with the toe of his right

boot, was a coarse, vulgar young man of about thirty, with a sallow face

and harsh voice; evidently possessed of that knowledge of the world, and

captivating freedom of manner, which is to be acquired in public-house

parlours, and at low billiard tables. The third tenant of the apartment

was a middle-aged man in a very old suit of black, who looked pale and

haggard, and paced up and down the room incessantly; stopping, now and

then, to look with great anxiety out of the window as if he expected

somebody, and then resuming his walk.

‘You’d better have the loan of my razor this morning, Mr. Ayresleigh,’

said the man who was stirring the fire, tipping the wink to his friend

the boy.

‘Thank you, no, I shan’t want it; I expect I shall be out, in the course

of an hour or so,’ replied the other in a hurried manner. Then, walking

again up to the window, and once more returning disappointed, he sighed

deeply, and left the room; upon which the other two burst into a loud

laugh.

‘Well, I never saw such a game as that,’ said the gentleman who had

offered the razor, whose name appeared to be Price. ‘Never!’ Mr. Price

confirmed the assertion with an oath, and then laughed again, when of

course the boy (who thought his companion one of the most dashing

fellows alive) laughed also.

‘You’d hardly think, would you now,’ said Price, turning towards Mr.

Pickwick, ‘that that chap’s been here a week yesterday, and never once

shaved himself yet, because he feels so certain he’s going out in half

an hour’s time, thinks he may as well put it off till he gets home?’

‘Poor man!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Are his chances of getting out of his

difficulties really so great?’

‘Chances be d----d,’ replied Price; ‘he hasn’t half the ghost of one. I

wouldn’t give \_that \_for his chance of walking about the streets this

time ten years.’ With this, Mr. Price snapped his fingers

contemptuously, and rang the bell.

‘Give me a sheet of paper, Crookey,’ said Mr. Price to the attendant,

who in dress and general appearance looked something between a bankrupt

glazier, and a drover in a state of insolvency; ‘and a glass of brandy-

and-water, Crookey, d’ye hear? I’m going to write to my father, and I

must have a stimulant, or I shan’t be able to pitch it strong enough

into the old boy.’ At this facetious speech, the young boy, it is almost

needless to say, was fairly convulsed.

‘That’s right,’ said Mr. Price. ‘Never say die. All fun, ain’t it?’

‘Prime!’ said the young gentleman.

‘You’ve got some spirit about you, you have,’ said Price. ‘You’ve seen

something of life.’

‘I rather think I have!’ replied the boy. He had looked at it through

the dirty panes of glass in a bar door.

Mr. Pickwick, feeling not a little disgusted with this dialogue, as well

as with the air and manner of the two beings by whom it had been carried

on, was about to inquire whether he could not be accommodated with a

private sitting-room, when two or three strangers of genteel appearance

entered, at sight of whom the boy threw his cigar into the fire, and

whispering to Mr. Price that they had come to ‘make it all right’ for

him, joined them at a table in the farther end of the room.

It would appear, however, that matters were not going to be made all

right quite so speedily as the young gentleman anticipated; for a very

long conversation ensued, of which Mr. Pickwick could not avoid hearing

certain angry fragments regarding dissolute conduct, and repeated

forgiveness. At last, there were very distinct allusions made by the

oldest gentleman of the party to one Whitecross Street, at which the

young gentleman, notwithstanding his primeness and his spirit, and his

knowledge of life into the bargain, reclined his head upon the table,

and howled dismally.

Very much satisfied with this sudden bringing down of the youth’s

valour, and this effectual lowering of his tone, Mr. Pickwick rang the

bell, and was shown, at his own request, into a private room furnished

with a carpet, table, chairs, sideboard and sofa, and ornamented with a

looking-glass, and various old prints. Here he had the advantage of

hearing Mrs. Namby’s performance on a square piano overhead, while the

breakfast was getting ready; when it came, Mr. Perker came too.

‘Aha, my dear sir,’ said the little man, ‘nailed at last, eh? Come,

come, I’m not sorry for it either, because now you’ll see the absurdity

of this conduct. I’ve noted down the amount of the taxed costs and

damages for which the ca-sa was issued, and we had better settle at once

and lose no time. Namby is come home by this time, I dare say. What say

you, my dear sir? Shall I draw a cheque, or will you?’ The little man

rubbed his hands with affected cheerfulness as he said this, but

glancing at Mr. Pickwick’s countenance, could not forbear at the same

time casting a desponding look towards Sam Weller.

‘Perker,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘let me hear no more of this, I beg. I see

no advantage in staying here, so I shall go to prison to-night.’

‘You can’t go to Whitecross Street, my dear Sir,’ said Perker.

‘Impossible! There are sixty beds in a ward; and the bolt’s on, sixteen

hours out of the four-and-twenty.’

‘I would rather go to some other place of confinement if I can,’ said

Mr. Pickwick. ‘If not, I must make the best I can of that.’

‘You can go to the Fleet, my dear Sir, if you’re determined to go

somewhere,’ said Perker.

‘That’ll do,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I’ll go there directly I have finished

my breakfast.’

‘Stop, stop, my dear Sir; not the least occasion for being in such a

violent hurry to get into a place that most other men are as eager to

get out of,’ said the good-natured little attorney. ‘We must have a

habeas-corpus. There’ll be no judge at chambers till four o’clock this

afternoon. You must wait till then.’

‘Very good,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with unmoved patience. ‘Then we will

have a chop here, at two. See about it, Sam, and tell them to be

punctual.’

Mr. Pickwick remaining firm, despite all the remonstrances and arguments

of Perker, the chops appeared and disappeared in due course; he was then

put into another hackney coach, and carried off to Chancery Lane, after

waiting half an hour or so for Mr. Namby, who had a select dinner-party

and could on no account be disturbed before.

There were two judges in attendance at Serjeant’s Inn--one King’s Bench,

and one Common Pleas--and a great deal of business appeared to be

transacting before them, if the number of lawyer’s clerks who were

hurrying in and out with bundles of papers, afforded any test. When they

reached the low archway which forms the entrance to the inn, Perker was

detained a few moments parlaying with the coachman about the fare and

the change; and Mr. Pickwick, stepping to one side to be out of the way

of the stream of people that were pouring in and out, looked about him

with some curiosity.

The people that attracted his attention most, were three or four men of

shabby-genteel appearance, who touched their hats to many of the

attorneys who passed, and seemed to have some business there, the nature

of which Mr. Pickwick could not divine. They were curious-looking

fellows. One was a slim and rather lame man in rusty black, and a white

neckerchief; another was a stout, burly person, dressed in the same

apparel, with a great reddish-black cloth round his neck; a third was a

little weazen, drunken-looking body, with a pimply face. They were

loitering about, with their hands behind them, and now and then with an

anxious countenance whispered something in the ear of some of the

gentlemen with papers, as they hurried by. Mr. Pickwick remembered to

have very often observed them lounging under the archway when he had

been walking past; and his curiosity was quite excited to know to what

branch of the profession these dingy-looking loungers could possibly

belong.

He was about to propound the question to Namby, who kept close beside

him, sucking a large gold ring on his little finger, when Perker bustled

up, and observing that there was no time to lose, led the way into the

inn. As Mr. Pickwick followed, the lame man stepped up to him, and

civilly touching his hat, held out a written card, which Mr. Pickwick,

not wishing to hurt the man’s feelings by refusing, courteously accepted

and deposited in his waistcoat pocket.

‘Now,’ said Perker, turning round before he entered one of the offices,

to see that his companions were close behind him. ‘In here, my dear sir.

Hallo, what do you want?’

This last question was addressed to the lame man, who, unobserved by Mr.

Pickwick, made one of the party. In reply to it, the lame man touched

his hat again, with all imaginable politeness, and motioned towards Mr.

Pickwick.

‘No, no,’ said Perker, with a smile. ‘We don’t want you, my dear friend,

we don’t want you.’

‘I beg your pardon, sir,’ said the lame man. ‘The gentleman took my

card. I hope you will employ me, sir. The gentleman nodded to me. I’ll

be judged by the gentleman himself. You nodded to me, sir?’

‘Pooh, pooh, nonsense. You didn’t nod to anybody, Pickwick? A mistake, a

mistake,’ said Perker.

‘The gentleman handed me his card,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, producing it

from his waistcoat pocket. ‘I accepted it, as the gentleman seemed to

wish it--in fact I had some curiosity to look at it when I should be at

leisure. I--’

The little attorney burst into a loud laugh, and returning the card to

the lame man, informing him it was all a mistake, whispered to Mr.

Pickwick as the man turned away in dudgeon, that he was only a bail.

‘A what!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘A bail,’ replied Perker.

‘A bail!’

Yes, my dear sir--half a dozen of ‘em here. Bail you to any amount, and

only charge half a crown. Curious trade, isn’t it?’ said Perker,

regaling himself with a pinch of snuff.

‘What! Am I to understand that these men earn a livelihood by waiting

about here, to perjure themselves before the judges of the land, at the

rate of half a crown a crime?’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, quite aghast at

the disclosure.

‘Why, I don’t exactly know about perjury, my dear sir,’ replied the

little gentleman. ‘Harsh word, my dear sir, very harsh word indeed. It’s

a legal fiction, my dear sir, nothing more.’ Saying which, the attorney

shrugged his shoulders, smiled, took a second pinch of snuff, and led

the way into the office of the judge’s clerk.

This was a room of specially dirty appearance, with a very low ceiling

and old panelled walls; and so badly lighted, that although it was broad

day outside, great tallow candles were burning on the desks. At one end,

was a door leading to the judge’s private apartment, round which were

congregated a crowd of attorneys and managing clerks, who were called

in, in the order in which their respective appointments stood upon the

file. Every time this door was opened to let a party out, the next party

made a violent rush to get in; and, as in addition to the numerous

dialogues which passed between the gentlemen who were waiting to see the

judge, a variety of personal squabbles ensued between the greater part

of those who had seen him, there was as much noise as could well be

raised in an apartment of such confined dimensions.

Nor were the conversations of these gentlemen the only sounds that broke

upon the ear. Standing on a box behind a wooden bar at another end of

the room was a clerk in spectacles who was ‘taking the affidavits’;

large batches of which were, from time to time, carried into the private

room by another clerk for the judge’s signature. There were a large

number of attorneys’ clerks to be sworn, and it being a moral

impossibility to swear them all at once, the struggles of these

gentlemen to reach the clerk in spectacles, were like those of a crowd

to get in at the pit door of a theatre when Gracious Majesty honours it

with its presence. Another functionary, from time to time, exercised his

lungs in calling over the names of those who had been sworn, for the

purpose of restoring to them their affidavits after they had been signed

by the judge, which gave rise to a few more scuffles; and all these

things going on at the same time, occasioned as much bustle as the most

active and excitable person could desire to behold. There were yet

another class of persons--those who were waiting to attend summonses

their employers had taken out, which it was optional to the attorney on

the opposite side to attend or not--and whose business it was, from time

to time, to cry out the opposite attorney’s name; to make certain that

he was not in attendance without their knowledge.

For example. Leaning against the wall, close beside the seat Mr.

Pickwick had taken, was an office-lad of fourteen, with a tenor voice;

near him a common-law clerk with a bass one.

A clerk hurried in with a bundle of papers, and stared about him.

‘Sniggle and Blink,’ cried the tenor.

‘Porkin and Snob,’ growled the bass.

‘Stumpy and Deacon,’ said the new-comer.

Nobody answered; the next man who came in, was bailed by the whole

three; and he in his turn shouted for another firm; and then somebody

else roared in a loud voice for another; and so forth.

All this time, the man in the spectacles was hard at work, swearing the

clerks; the oath being invariably administered, without any effort at

punctuation, and usually in the following terms:--

‘Take the book in your right hand this is your name and hand-writing you

swear that the contents of this your affidavit are true so help you God

a shilling you must get change I haven’t got it.’

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I suppose they are getting the \_Habeas-

corpus\_ ready?’

‘Yes,’ said Sam, ‘and I vish they’d bring out the have-his-carcase. It’s

wery unpleasant keepin’ us vaitin’ here. I’d ha’ got half a dozen have-

his-carcases ready, pack’d up and all, by this time.’

What sort of cumbrous and unmanageable machine, Sam Weller imagined a

habeas-corpus to be, does not appear; for Perker, at that moment, walked

up and took Mr. Pickwick away.

The usual forms having been gone through, the body of Samuel Pickwick

was soon afterwards confided to the custody of the tipstaff, to be by

him taken to the warden of the Fleet Prison, and there detained until

the amount of the damages and costs in the action of Bardell against

Pickwick was fully paid and satisfied.

‘And that,’ said Mr. Pickwick, laughing, ‘will be a very long time. Sam,

call another hackney-coach. Perker, my dear friend, good-bye.’

‘I shall go with you, and see you safe there,’ said Perker.

‘Indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘I would rather go without any other

attendant than Sam. As soon as I get settled, I will write and let you

know, and I shall expect you immediately. Until then, good-bye.’

As Mr. Pickwick said this, he got into the coach which had by this time

arrived, followed by the tipstaff. Sam having stationed himself on the

box, it rolled away.

‘A most extraordinary man that!’ said Perker, as he stopped to pull on

his gloves.

‘What a bankrupt he’d make, Sir,’ observed Mr. Lowten, who was standing

near. ‘How he would bother the commissioners! He’d set ‘em at defiance

if they talked of committing him, Sir.’

The attorney did not appear very much delighted with his clerk’s

professional estimate of Mr. Pickwick’s character, for he walked away

without deigning any reply.

The hackney-coach jolted along Fleet Street, as hackney-coaches usually

do. The horses ‘went better’, the driver said, when they had anything

before them (they must have gone at a most extraordinary pace when there

was nothing), and so the vehicle kept behind a cart; when the cart

stopped, it stopped; and when the cart went on again, it did the same.

Mr. Pickwick sat opposite the tipstaff; and the tipstaff sat with his

hat between his knees, whistling a tune, and looking out of the coach

window.

Time performs wonders. By the powerful old gentleman’s aid, even a

hackney-coach gets over half a mile of ground. They stopped at length,

and Mr. Pickwick alighted at the gate of the Fleet.

The tipstaff, just looking over his shoulder to see that his charge was

following close at his heels, preceded Mr. Pickwick into the prison;

turning to the left, after they had entered, they passed through an open

door into a lobby, from which a heavy gate, opposite to that by which

they had entered, and which was guarded by a stout turnkey with the key

in his hand, led at once into the interior of the prison.

Here they stopped, while the tipstaff delivered his papers; and here Mr.

Pickwick was apprised that he would remain, until he had undergone the

ceremony, known to the initiated as ‘sitting for your portrait.’

‘Sitting for my portrait?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Having your likeness taken, sir,’ replied the stout turnkey.

‘We’re capital hands at likenesses here. Take ‘em in no time, and always

exact. Walk in, sir, and make yourself at home.’

Mr. Pickwick complied with the invitation, and sat himself down; when

Mr. Weller, who stationed himself at the back of the chair, whispered

that the sitting was merely another term for undergoing an inspection by

the different turnkeys, in order that they might know prisoners from

visitors.

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘then I wish the artists would come.

This is rather a public place.’

‘They von’t be long, Sir, I des-say,’ replied Sam. ‘There’s a Dutch

clock, sir.’

‘So I see,’ observed Mr. Pickwick.

‘And a bird-cage, sir,’ says Sam. ‘Veels vithin veels, a prison in a

prison. Ain’t it, Sir?’

As Mr. Weller made this philosophical remark, Mr. Pickwick was aware

that his sitting had commenced. The stout turnkey having been relieved

from the lock, sat down, and looked at him carelessly, from time to

time, while a long thin man who had relieved him, thrust his hands

beneath his coat tails, and planting himself opposite, took a good long

view of him. A third rather surly-looking gentleman, who had apparently

been disturbed at his tea, for he was disposing of the last remnant of a

crust and butter when he came in, stationed himself close to Mr.

Pickwick; and, resting his hands on his hips, inspected him narrowly;

while two others mixed with the group, and studied his features with

most intent and thoughtful faces. Mr. Pickwick winced a good deal under

the operation, and appeared to sit very uneasily in his chair; but he

made no remark to anybody while it was being performed, not even to Sam,

who reclined upon the back of the chair, reflecting, partly on the

situation of his master, and partly on the great satisfaction it would

have afforded him to make a fierce assault upon all the turnkeys there

assembled, one after the other, if it were lawful and peaceable so to

do.

At length the likeness was completed, and Mr. Pickwick was informed that

he might now proceed into the prison.

‘Where am I to sleep to-night?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Why, I don’t rightly know about to-night,’ replied the stout turnkey.

‘You’ll be chummed on somebody to-morrow, and then you’ll be all snug

and comfortable. The first night’s generally rather unsettled, but

you’ll be set all squares to-morrow.’

After some discussion, it was discovered that one of the turnkeys had a

bed to let, which Mr. Pickwick could have for that night. He gladly

agreed to hire it.

‘If you’ll come with me, I’ll show it you at once,’ said the man. ‘It

ain’t a large ‘un; but it’s an out-and-outer to sleep in. This way,

sir.’

They passed through the inner gate, and descended a short flight of

steps. The key was turned after them; and Mr. Pickwick found himself,

for the first time in his life, within the walls of a debtors’ prison.

CHAPTER XLI. WHAT BEFELL MR. PICKWICK WHEN HE GOT INTO THE FLEET; WHAT

PRISONERS HE SAW THERE, AND HOW HE PASSED THE NIGHT

Mr. Tom Roker, the gentleman who had accompanied Mr. Pickwick into the

prison, turned sharp round to the right when he got to the bottom of the

little flight of steps, and led the way, through an iron gate which

stood open, and up another short flight of steps, into a long narrow

gallery, dirty and low, paved with stone, and very dimly lighted by a

window at each remote end.

‘This,’ said the gentleman, thrusting his hands into his pockets, and

looking carelessly over his shoulder to Mr. Pickwick--‘this here is the

hall flight.’

‘Oh,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, looking down a dark and filthy staircase,

which appeared to lead to a range of damp and gloomy stone vaults,

beneath the ground, ‘and those, I suppose, are the little cellars where

the prisoners keep their small quantities of coals. Unpleasant places to

have to go down to; but very convenient, I dare say.’

‘Yes, I shouldn’t wonder if they was convenient,’ replied the gentleman,

‘seeing that a few people live there, pretty snug. That’s the Fair, that

is.’

‘My friend,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘you don’t really mean to say that human

beings live down in those wretched dungeons?’

‘Don’t I?’ replied Mr. Roker, with indignant astonishment; ‘why

shouldn’t I?’

‘Live!--live down there!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Live down there! Yes, and die down there, too, very often!’ replied Mr.

Roker; ‘and what of that? Who’s got to say anything agin it? Live down

there! Yes, and a wery good place it is to live in, ain’t it?’

As Roker turned somewhat fiercely upon Mr. Pickwick in saying this, and

moreover muttered in an excited fashion certain unpleasant invocations

concerning his own eyes, limbs, and circulating fluids, the latter

gentleman deemed it advisable to pursue the discourse no further. Mr.

Roker then proceeded to mount another staircase, as dirty as that which

led to the place which has just been the subject of discussion, in which

ascent he was closely followed by Mr. Pickwick and Sam.

‘There,’ said Mr. Roker, pausing for breath when they reached another

gallery of the same dimensions as the one below, ‘this is the coffee-

room flight; the one above’s the third, and the one above that’s the

top; and the room where you’re a-going to sleep to-night is the warden’s

room, and it’s this way--come on.’ Having said all this in a breath, Mr.

Roker mounted another flight of stairs with Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller

following at his heels.

These staircases received light from sundry windows placed at some

little distance above the floor, and looking into a gravelled area

bounded by a high brick wall, with iron \_chevaux-de-frise\_ at the top.

This area, it appeared from Mr. Roker’s statement, was the racket-

ground; and it further appeared, on the testimony of the same gentleman,

that there was a smaller area in that portion of the prison which was

nearest Farringdon Street, denominated and called ‘the Painted Ground,’

from the fact of its walls having once displayed the semblance of

various men-of-war in full sail, and other artistical effects achieved

in bygone times by some imprisoned draughtsman in his leisure hours.

Having communicated this piece of information, apparently more for the

purpose of discharging his bosom of an important fact, than with any

specific view of enlightening Mr. Pickwick, the guide, having at length

reached another gallery, led the way into a small passage at the extreme

end, opened a door, and disclosed an apartment of an appearance by no

means inviting, containing eight or nine iron bedsteads.

‘There,’ said Mr. Roker, holding the door open, and looking triumphantly

round at Mr. Pickwick, ‘there’s a room!’

Mr. Pickwick’s face, however, betokened such a very trifling portion of

satisfaction at the appearance of his lodging, that Mr. Roker looked,

for a reciprocity of feeling, into the countenance of Samuel Weller,

who, until now, had observed a dignified silence.

‘There’s a room, young man,’ observed Mr. Roker.

‘I see it,’ replied Sam, with a placid nod of the head.

‘You wouldn’t think to find such a room as this in the Farringdon Hotel,

would you?’ said Mr. Roker, with a complacent smile.

To this Mr. Weller replied with an easy and unstudied closing of one

eye; which might be considered to mean, either that he would have

thought it, or that he would not have thought it, or that he had never

thought anything at all about it, as the observer’s imagination

suggested. Having executed this feat, and reopened his eye, Mr. Weller

proceeded to inquire which was the individual bedstead that Mr. Roker

had so flatteringly described as an out-and-outer to sleep in.

‘That’s it,’ replied Mr. Roker, pointing to a very rusty one in a

corner. ‘It would make any one go to sleep, that bedstead would, whether

they wanted to or not.’

‘I should think,’ said Sam, eyeing the piece of furniture in question

with a look of excessive disgust--‘I should think poppies was nothing to

it.’

‘Nothing at all,’ said Mr. Roker.

‘And I s’pose,’ said Sam, with a sidelong glance at his master, as if to

see whether there were any symptoms of his determination being shaken by

what passed, ‘I s’pose the other gen’l’men as sleeps here \_are

\_gen’l’men.’

‘Nothing but it,’ said Mr. Roker. ‘One of ‘em takes his twelve pints of

ale a day, and never leaves off smoking even at his meals.’

‘He must be a first-rater,’ said Sam.

‘A1,’ replied Mr. Roker.

Nothing daunted, even by this intelligence, Mr. Pickwick smilingly

announced his determination to test the powers of the narcotic bedstead

for that night; and Mr. Roker, after informing him that he could retire

to rest at whatever hour he thought proper, without any further notice

or formality, walked off, leaving him standing with Sam in the gallery.

It was getting dark; that is to say, a few gas jets were kindled in this

place which was never light, by way of compliment to the evening, which

had set in outside. As it was rather warm, some of the tenants of the

numerous little rooms which opened into the gallery on either hand, had

set their doors ajar. Mr. Pickwick peeped into them as he passed along,

with great curiosity and interest. Here, four or five great hulking

fellows, just visible through a cloud of tobacco smoke, were engaged in

noisy and riotous conversation over half-emptied pots of beer, or

playing at all-fours with a very greasy pack of cards. In the adjoining

room, some solitary tenant might be seen poring, by the light of a

feeble tallow candle, over a bundle of soiled and tattered papers,

yellow with dust and dropping to pieces from age, writing, for the

hundredth time, some lengthened statement of his grievances, for the

perusal of some great man whose eyes it would never reach, or whose

heart it would never touch. In a third, a man, with his wife and a whole

crowd of children, might be seen making up a scanty bed on the ground,

or upon a few chairs, for the younger ones to pass the night in. And in

a fourth, and a fifth, and a sixth, and a seventh, the noise, and the

beer, and the tobacco smoke, and the cards, all came over again in

greater force than before.

In the galleries themselves, and more especially on the stair-cases,

there lingered a great number of people, who came there, some because

their rooms were empty and lonesome, others because their rooms were

full and hot; the greater part because they were restless and

uncomfortable, and not possessed of the secret of exactly knowing what

to do with themselves. There were many classes of people here, from the

labouring man in his fustian jacket, to the broken-down spendthrift in

his shawl dressing-gown, most appropriately out at elbows; but there was

the same air about them all--a kind of listless, jail-bird, careless

swagger, a vagabondish who’s-afraid sort of bearing, which is wholly

indescribable in words, but which any man can understand in one moment

if he wish, by setting foot in the nearest debtors’ prison, and looking

at the very first group of people he sees there, with the same interest

as Mr. Pickwick did.

‘It strikes me, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, leaning over the iron rail at

the stair-head, ‘it strikes me, Sam, that imprisonment for debt is

scarcely any punishment at all.’

‘Think not, sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘You see how these fellows drink, and smoke, and roar,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick. ‘It’s quite impossible that they can mind it much.’

‘Ah, that’s just the wery thing, Sir,’ rejoined Sam, ‘they don’t mind

it; it’s a reg’lar holiday to them--all porter and skittles. It’s the

t’other vuns as gets done over vith this sort o’ thing; them down-

hearted fellers as can’t svig avay at the beer, nor play at skittles

neither; them as vould pay if they could, and gets low by being boxed

up. I’ll tell you wot it is, sir; them as is always a-idlin’ in public-

houses it don’t damage at all, and them as is alvays a-workin’ wen they

can, it damages too much. “It’s unekal,” as my father used to say wen

his grog worn’t made half-and-half: “it’s unekal, and that’s the fault

on it.”’

‘I think you’re right, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, after a few moments’

reflection, ‘quite right.’

‘P’raps, now and then, there’s some honest people as likes it,’ observed

Mr. Weller, in a ruminative tone, ‘but I never heerd o’ one as I can

call to mind, ‘cept the little dirty-faced man in the brown coat; and

that was force of habit.’

‘And who was he?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wy, that’s just the wery point as nobody never know’d,’ replied Sam.

‘But what did he do?’

‘Wy, he did wot many men as has been much better know’d has done in

their time, Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘he run a match agin the constable, and

vun it.’

‘In other words, I suppose,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘he got into debt.’

‘Just that, Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘and in course o’ time he come here in

consekens. It warn’t much--execution for nine pound nothin’, multiplied

by five for costs; but hows’ever here he stopped for seventeen year. If

he got any wrinkles in his face, they were stopped up vith the dirt, for

both the dirty face and the brown coat wos just the same at the end o’

that time as they wos at the beginnin’. He wos a wery peaceful,

inoffendin’ little creetur, and wos alvays a-bustlin’ about for

somebody, or playin’ rackets and never vinnin’; till at last the

turnkeys they got quite fond on him, and he wos in the lodge ev’ry

night, a-chattering vith ‘em, and tellin’ stories, and all that ‘ere.

Vun night he wos in there as usual, along vith a wery old friend of his,

as wos on the lock, ven he says all of a sudden, “I ain’t seen the

market outside, Bill,” he says (Fleet Market wos there at that time)--“I

ain’t seen the market outside, Bill,” he says, “for seventeen year.” “I

know you ain’t,” says the turnkey, smoking his pipe. “I should like to

see it for a minit, Bill,” he says. “Wery probable,” says the turnkey,

smoking his pipe wery fierce, and making believe he warn’t up to wot the

little man wanted. “Bill,” says the little man, more abrupt than afore,

“I’ve got the fancy in my head. Let me see the public streets once more

afore I die; and if I ain’t struck with apoplexy, I’ll be back in five

minits by the clock.” “And wot ‘ud become o’ me if you \_wos \_struck with

apoplexy?” said the turnkey. “Wy,” says the little creetur, “whoever

found me, ‘ud bring me home, for I’ve got my card in my pocket, Bill,”

he says, “No. 20, Coffee-room Flight”: and that wos true, sure enough,

for wen he wanted to make the acquaintance of any new-comer, he used to

pull out a little limp card vith them words on it and nothin’ else; in

consideration of vich, he vos alvays called Number Tventy. The turnkey

takes a fixed look at him, and at last he says in a solemn manner,

“Tventy,” he says, “I’ll trust you; you Won’t get your old friend into

trouble.” “No, my boy; I hope I’ve somethin’ better behind here,” says

the little man; and as he said it he hit his little vesket wery hard,

and then a tear started out o’ each eye, which wos wery extraordinary,

for it wos supposed as water never touched his face. He shook the

turnkey by the hand; out he vent--’

‘And never came back again,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wrong for vunce, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘for back he come, two

minits afore the time, a-bilin’ with rage, sayin’ how he’d been nearly

run over by a hackney-coach that he warn’t used to it; and he was blowed

if he wouldn’t write to the lord mayor. They got him pacified at last;

and for five years arter that, he never even so much as peeped out o’

the lodge gate.’

‘At the expiration of that time he died, I suppose,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No, he didn’t, Sir,’ replied Sam. ‘He got a curiosity to go and taste

the beer at a new public-house over the way, and it wos such a wery nice

parlour, that he took it into his head to go there every night, which he

did for a long time, always comin’ back reg’lar about a quarter of an

hour afore the gate shut, which was all wery snug and comfortable. At

last he began to get so precious jolly, that he used to forget how the

time vent, or care nothin’ at all about it, and he went on gettin’ later

and later, till vun night his old friend wos just a-shuttin’ the gate--

had turned the key in fact--wen he come up. “Hold hard, Bill,” he says.

“Wot, ain’t you come home yet, Tventy?” says the turnkey, “I thought you

wos in, long ago.” “No, I wasn’t,” says the little man, with a smile.

“Well, then, I’ll tell you wot it is, my friend,” says the turnkey,

openin’ the gate wery slow and sulky, “it’s my ‘pinion as you’ve got

into bad company o’ late, which I’m wery sorry to see. Now, I don’t wish

to do nothing harsh,” he says, “but if you can’t confine yourself to

steady circles, and find your vay back at reg’lar hours, as sure as

you’re a-standin’ there, I’ll shut you out altogether!” The little man

was seized vith a wiolent fit o’ tremblin’, and never vent outside the

prison walls artervards!’

As Sam concluded, Mr. Pickwick slowly retraced his steps downstairs.

After a few thoughtful turns in the Painted Ground, which, as it was now

dark, was nearly deserted, he intimated to Mr. Weller that he thought it

high time for him to withdraw for the night; requesting him to seek a

bed in some adjacent public-house, and return early in the morning, to

make arrangements for the removal of his master’s wardrobe from the

George and Vulture. This request Mr. Samuel Weller prepared to obey,

with as good a grace as he could assume, but with a very considerable

show of reluctance nevertheless. He even went so far as to essay sundry

ineffectual hints regarding the expediency of stretching himself on the

gravel for that night; but finding Mr. Pickwick obstinately deaf to any

such suggestions, finally withdrew.

There is no disguising the fact that Mr. Pickwick felt very low-spirited

and uncomfortable--not for lack of society, for the prison was very

full, and a bottle of wine would at once have purchased the utmost good-

fellowship of a few choice spirits, without any more formal ceremony of

introduction; but he was alone in the coarse, vulgar crowd, and felt the

depression of spirits and sinking of heart, naturally consequent on the

reflection that he was cooped and caged up, without a prospect of

liberation. As to the idea of releasing himself by ministering to the

sharpness of Dodson & Fogg, it never for an instant entered his

thoughts.

In this frame of mind he turned again into the coffee-room gallery, and

walked slowly to and fro. The place was intolerably dirty, and the smell

of tobacco smoke perfectly suffocating. There was a perpetual slamming

and banging of doors as the people went in and out; and the noise of

their voices and footsteps echoed and re-echoed through the passages

constantly. A young woman, with a child in her arms, who seemed scarcely

able to crawl, from emaciation and misery, was walking up and down the

passage in conversation with her husband, who had no other place to see

her in. As they passed Mr. Pickwick, he could hear the female sob

bitterly; and once she burst into such a passion of grief, that she was

compelled to lean against the wall for support, while the man took the

child in his arms, and tried to soothe her.

Mr. Pickwick’s heart was really too full to bear it, and he went

upstairs to bed.

Now, although the warder’s room was a very uncomfortable one (being, in

every point of decoration and convenience, several hundred degrees

inferior to the common infirmary of a county jail), it had at present

the merit of being wholly deserted save by Mr. Pickwick himself. So, he

sat down at the foot of his little iron bedstead, and began to wonder

how much a year the warder made out of the dirty room. Having satisfied

himself, by mathematical calculation, that the apartment was about equal

in annual value to the freehold of a small street in the suburbs of

London, he took to wondering what possible temptation could have induced

a dingy-looking fly that was crawling over his pantaloons, to come into

a close prison, when he had the choice of so many airy situations--a

course of meditation which led him to the irresistible conclusion that

the insect was insane. After settling this point, he began to be

conscious that he was getting sleepy; whereupon he took his nightcap out

of the pocket in which he had had the precaution to stow it in the

morning, and, leisurely undressing himself, got into bed and fell

asleep.

‘Bravo! Heel over toe--cut and shuffle--pay away at it, Zephyr! I’m

smothered if the opera house isn’t your proper hemisphere. Keep it up!

Hooray!’ These expressions, delivered in a most boisterous tone, and

accompanied with loud peals of laughter, roused Mr. Pickwick from one of

those sound slumbers which, lasting in reality some half-hour, seem to

the sleeper to have been protracted for three weeks or a month.

The voice had no sooner ceased than the room was shaken with such

violence that the windows rattled in their frames, and the bedsteads

trembled again. Mr. Pickwick started up, and remained for some minutes

fixed in mute astonishment at the scene before him.

On the floor of the room, a man in a broad-skirted green coat, with

corduroy knee-smalls and gray cotton stockings, was performing the most

popular steps of a hornpipe, with a slang and burlesque caricature of

grace and lightness, which, combined with the very appropriate character

of his costume, was inexpressibly absurd. Another man, evidently very

drunk, who had probably been tumbled into bed by his companions, was

sitting up between the sheets, warbling as much as he could recollect of

a comic song, with the most intensely sentimental feeling and

expression; while a third, seated on one of the bedsteads, was

applauding both performers with the air of a profound connoisseur, and

encouraging them by such ebullitions of feeling as had already roused

Mr. Pickwick from his sleep.

This last man was an admirable specimen of a class of gentry which never

can be seen in full perfection but in such places--they may be met with,

in an imperfect state, occasionally about stable-yards and Public-

houses; but they never attain their full bloom except in these hot-beds,

which would almost seem to be considerately provided by the legislature

for the sole purpose of rearing them.

He was a tall fellow, with an olive complexion, long dark hair, and very

thick bushy whiskers meeting under his chin. He wore no neckerchief, as

he had been playing rackets all day, and his open shirt collar displayed

their full luxuriance. On his head he wore one of the common

eighteenpenny French skull-caps, with a gaudy tassel dangling therefrom,

very happily in keeping with a common fustian coat. His legs, which,

being long, were afflicted with weakness, graced a pair of Oxford-

mixture trousers, made to show the full symmetry of those limbs. Being

somewhat negligently braced, however, and, moreover, but imperfectly

buttoned, they fell in a series of not the most graceful folds over a

pair of shoes sufficiently down at heel to display a pair of very soiled

white stockings. There was a rakish, vagabond smartness, and a kind of

boastful rascality, about the whole man, that was worth a mine of gold.

This figure was the first to perceive that Mr. Pickwick was looking on;

upon which he winked to the Zephyr, and entreated him, with mock

gravity, not to wake the gentleman.

‘Why, bless the gentleman’s honest heart and soul!’ said the Zephyr,

turning round and affecting the extremity of surprise; ‘the gentleman is

awake. Hem, Shakespeare! How do you do, Sir? How is Mary and Sarah, sir?

and the dear old lady at home, Sir? Will you have the kindness to put my

compliments into the first little parcel you’re sending that way, sir,

and say that I would have sent ‘em before, only I was afraid they might

be broken in the wagon, sir?’

‘Don’t overwhelm the gentlemen with ordinary civilities when you see

he’s anxious to have something to drink,’ said the gentleman with the

whiskers, with a jocose air. ‘Why don’t you ask the gentleman what he’ll

take?’

‘Dear me, I quite forgot,’ replied the other. ‘What will you take, sir?

Will you take port wine, sir, or sherry wine, sir? I can recommend the

ale, sir; or perhaps you’d like to taste the porter, sir? Allow me to

have the felicity of hanging up your nightcap, Sir.’

With this, the speaker snatched that article of dress from Mr.

Pickwick’s head, and fixed it in a twinkling on that of the drunken man,

who, firmly impressed with the belief that he was delighting a numerous

assembly, continued to hammer away at the comic song in the most

melancholy strains imaginable.

Taking a man’s nightcap from his brow by violent means, and adjusting it

on the head of an unknown gentleman, of dirty exterior, however

ingenious a witticism in itself, is unquestionably one of those which

come under the denomination of practical jokes. Viewing the matter

precisely in this light, Mr. Pickwick, without the slightest intimation

of his purpose, sprang vigorously out of bed, struck the Zephyr so smart

a blow in the chest as to deprive him of a considerable portion of the

commodity which sometimes bears his name, and then, recapturing his

nightcap, boldly placed himself in an attitude of defence.

‘Now,’ said Mr. Pickwick, gasping no less from excitement than from the

expenditure of so much energy, ‘come on--both of you--both of you!’ With

this liberal invitation the worthy gentleman communicated a revolving

motion to his clenched fists, by way of appalling his antagonists with a

display of science.

It might have been Mr. Pickwick’s very unexpected gallantry, or it might

have been the complicated manner in which he had got himself out of bed,

and fallen all in a mass upon the hornpipe man, that touched his

adversaries. Touched they were; for, instead of then and there making an

attempt to commit man-slaughter, as Mr. Pickwick implicitly believed

they would have done, they paused, stared at each other a short time,

and finally laughed outright.

‘Well, you’re a trump, and I like you all the better for it,’ said the

Zephyr. ‘Now jump into bed again, or you’ll catch the rheumatics. No

malice, I hope?’ said the man, extending a hand the size of the yellow

clump of fingers which sometimes swings over a glover’s door.

‘Certainly not,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with great alacrity; for, now that

the excitement was over, he began to feel rather cool about the legs.

‘Allow me the H-onour,’ said the gentleman with the whiskers, presenting

his dexter hand, and aspirating the h.

‘With much pleasure, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick; and having executed a very

long and solemn shake, he got into bed again.

‘My name is Smangle, sir,’ said the man with the whiskers.

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mine is Mivins,’ said the man in the stockings.

‘I am delighted to hear it, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hem,’ coughed Mr. Smangle.

‘Did you speak, sir?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No, I did not, sir,’ said Mr. Smangle.

All this was very genteel and pleasant; and, to make matters still more

comfortable, Mr. Smangle assured Mr. Pickwick a great many more times

that he entertained a very high respect for the feelings of a gentleman;

which sentiment, indeed, did him infinite credit, as he could be in no

wise supposed to understand them.

‘Are you going through the court, sir?’ inquired Mr. Smangle.

‘Through the what?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Through the court--Portugal Street--the Court for Relief of--you know.’

‘Oh, no,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘No, I am not.’

‘Going out, perhaps?’ suggested Mr. Mivins.

‘I fear not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘I refuse to pay some damages, and

am here in consequence.’

‘Ah,’ said Mr. Smangle, ‘paper has been my ruin.’

‘A stationer, I presume, Sir?’ said Mr. Pickwick innocently.

‘Stationer! No, no; confound and curse me! Not so low as that. No trade.

When I say paper, I mean bills.’

‘Oh, you use the word in that sense. I see,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Damme! A gentleman must expect reverses,’ said Smangle. ‘What of that?

Here am I in the Fleet Prison. Well; good. What then? I’m none the worse

for that, am I?’

‘Not a bit,’ replied Mr. Mivins. And he was quite right; for, so far

from Mr. Smangle being any the worse for it, he was something the

better, inasmuch as to qualify himself for the place, he had attained

gratuitous possession of certain articles of jewellery, which, long

before that, had found their way to the pawnbroker’s.

‘Well; but come,’ said Mr. Smangle; ‘this is dry work. Let’s rinse our

mouths with a drop of burnt sherry; the last-comer shall stand it,

Mivins shall fetch it, and I’ll help to drink it. That’s a fair and

gentlemanlike division of labour, anyhow. Curse me!’

Unwilling to hazard another quarrel, Mr. Pickwick gladly assented to the

proposition, and consigned the money to Mr. Mivins, who, as it was

nearly eleven o’clock, lost no time in repairing to the coffee-room on

his errand.

‘I say,’ whispered Smangle, the moment his friend had left the room;

‘what did you give him?’

‘Half a sovereign,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘He’s a devilish pleasant gentlemanly dog,’ said Mr. Smangle;--‘infernal

pleasant. I don’t know anybody more so; but--’ Here Mr. Smangle stopped

short, and shook his head dubiously.

‘You don’t think there is any probability of his appropriating the money

to his own use?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, no! Mind, I don’t say that; I expressly say that he’s a devilish

gentlemanly fellow,’ said Mr. Smangle. ‘But I think, perhaps, if

somebody went down, just to see that he didn’t dip his beak into the jug

by accident, or make some confounded mistake in losing the money as he

came upstairs, it would be as well. Here, you sir, just run downstairs,

and look after that gentleman, will you?’

This request was addressed to a little timid-looking, nervous man, whose

appearance bespoke great poverty, and who had been crouching on his

bedstead all this while, apparently stupefied by the novelty of his

situation.

‘You know where the coffee-room is,’ said Smangle; ‘just run down, and

tell that gentleman you’ve come to help him up with the jug. Or--stop--

I’ll tell you what--I’ll tell you how we’ll do him,’ said Smangle, with

a cunning look.

‘How?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Send down word that he’s to spend the change in cigars. Capital

thought. Run and tell him that; d’ye hear? They shan’t be wasted,’

continued Smangle, turning to Mr. Pickwick. ‘\_I’ll\_ smoke ‘em.’

This manoeuvring was so exceedingly ingenious and, withal, performed

with such immovable composure and coolness, that Mr. Pickwick would have

had no wish to disturb it, even if he had had the power. In a short time

Mr. Mivins returned, bearing the sherry, which Mr. Smangle dispensed in

two little cracked mugs; considerately remarking, with reference to

himself, that a gentleman must not be particular under such

circumstances, and that, for his part, he was not too proud to drink out

of the jug. In which, to show his sincerity, he forthwith pledged the

company in a draught which half emptied it.

An excellent understanding having been by these means promoted, Mr.

Smangle proceeded to entertain his hearers with a relation of divers

romantic adventures in which he had been from time to time engaged,

involving various interesting anecdotes of a thoroughbred horse, and a

magnificent Jewess, both of surpassing beauty, and much coveted by the

nobility and gentry of these kingdoms.

Long before these elegant extracts from the biography of a gentleman

were concluded, Mr. Mivins had betaken himself to bed, and had set in

snoring for the night, leaving the timid stranger and Mr. Pickwick to

the full benefit of Mr. Smangle’s experiences.

Nor were the two last-named gentlemen as much edified as they might have

been by the moving passages narrated. Mr. Pickwick had been in a state

of slumber for some time, when he had a faint perception of the drunken

man bursting out afresh with the comic song, and receiving from Mr.

Smangle a gentle intimation, through the medium of the water-jug, that

his audience was not musically disposed. Mr. Pickwick then once again

dropped off to sleep, with a confused consciousness that Mr. Smangle was

still engaged in relating a long story, the chief point of which

appeared to be that, on some occasion particularly stated and set forth,

he had ‘done’ a bill and a gentleman at the same time.

CHAPTER XLII. ILLUSTRATIVE, LIKE THE PRECEDING ONE, OF THE OLD PROVERB,

THAT ADVERSITY BRINGS A MAN ACQUAINTED WITH STRANGE BEDFELLOWS--

LIKEWISE CONTAINING MR. PICKWICK’S EXTRAORDINARY AND STARTLING

ANNOUNCEMENT TO MR. SAMUEL WELLER

When Mr. Pickwick opened his eyes next morning, the first object upon

which they rested was Samuel Weller, seated upon a small black

portmanteau, intently regarding, apparently in a condition of profound

abstraction, the stately figure of the dashing Mr. Smangle; while Mr.

Smangle himself, who was already partially dressed, was seated on his

bedstead, occupied in the desperately hopeless attempt of staring Mr.

Weller out of countenance. We say desperately hopeless, because Sam,

with a comprehensive gaze which took in Mr. Smangle’s cap, feet, head,

face, legs, and whiskers, all at the same time, continued to look

steadily on, with every demonstration of lively satisfaction, but with

no more regard to Mr. Smangle’s personal sentiments on the subject than

he would have displayed had he been inspecting a wooden statue, or a

straw-embowelled Guy Fawkes.

‘Well; will you know me again?’ said Mr. Smangle, with a frown.

‘I’d svear to you anyveres, Sir,’ replied Sam cheerfully.

‘Don’t be impertinent to a gentleman, Sir,’ said Mr. Smangle.

‘Not on no account,’ replied Sam. ‘If you’ll tell me wen he wakes, I’ll

be upon the wery best extra-super behaviour!’ This observation, having a

remote tendency to imply that Mr. Smangle was no gentleman, kindled his

ire.

‘Mivins!’ said Mr. Smangle, with a passionate air.

‘What’s the office?’ replied that gentleman from his couch.

‘Who the devil is this fellow?’

‘’Gad,’ said Mr. Mivins, looking lazily out from under the bed-clothes,

‘I ought to ask \_you \_that. Hasn’t he any business here?’

‘No,’ replied Mr. Smangle.

‘Then knock him downstairs, and tell him not to presume to get up till I

come and kick him,’ rejoined Mr. Mivins; with this prompt advice that

excellent gentleman again betook himself to slumber.

The conversation exhibiting these unequivocal symptoms of verging on the

personal, Mr. Pickwick deemed it a fit point at which to interpose.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Sir,’ rejoined that gentleman.

‘Has anything new occurred since last night?’

‘Nothin’ partickler, sir,’ replied Sam, glancing at Mr. Smangle’s

whiskers; ‘the late prewailance of a close and confined atmosphere has

been rayther favourable to the growth of veeds, of an alarmin’ and

sangvinary natur; but vith that ‘ere exception things is quiet enough.’

‘I shall get up,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘give me some clean things.’

Whatever hostile intentions Mr. Smangle might have entertained, his

thoughts were speedily diverted by the unpacking of the portmanteau; the

contents of which appeared to impress him at once with a most favourable

opinion, not only of Mr. Pickwick, but of Sam also, who, he took an

early opportunity of declaring in a tone of voice loud enough for that

eccentric personage to overhear, was a regular thoroughbred original,

and consequently the very man after his own heart. As to Mr. Pickwick,

the affection he conceived for him knew no limits.

‘Now is there anything I can do for you, my dear Sir?’ said Smangle.

‘Nothing that I am aware of, I am obliged to you,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘No linen that you want sent to the washerwoman’s? I know a delightful

washerwoman outside, that comes for my things twice a week; and, by

Jove!--how devilish lucky!--this is the day she calls. Shall I put any

of those little things up with mine? Don’t say anything about the

trouble. Confound and curse it! if one gentleman under a cloud is not to

put himself a little out of the way to assist another gentleman in the

same condition, what’s human nature?’

Thus spake Mr. Smangle, edging himself meanwhile as near as possible to

the portmanteau, and beaming forth looks of the most fervent and

disinterested friendship.

‘There’s nothing you want to give out for the man to brush, my dear

creature, is there?’ resumed Smangle.

‘Nothin’ whatever, my fine feller,’ rejoined Sam, taking the reply into

his own mouth. ‘P’raps if vun of us wos to brush, without troubling the

man, it ‘ud be more agreeable for all parties, as the schoolmaster said

when the young gentleman objected to being flogged by the butler.’

‘And there’s nothing I can send in my little box to the washer-woman’s,

is there?’ said Smangle, turning from Sam to Mr. Pickwick, with an air

of some discomfiture.

‘Nothin’ whatever, Sir,’ retorted Sam; ‘I’m afeered the little box must

be chock full o’ your own as it is.’

This speech was accompanied with such a very expressive look at that

particular portion of Mr. Smangle’s attire, by the appearance of which

the skill of laundresses in getting up gentlemen’s linen is generally

tested, that he was fain to turn upon his heel, and, for the present at

any rate, to give up all design on Mr. Pickwick’s purse and wardrobe. He

accordingly retired in dudgeon to the racket-ground, where he made a

light and whole-some breakfast on a couple of the cigars which had been

purchased on the previous night.

Mr. Mivins, who was no smoker, and whose account for small articles of

chandlery had also reached down to the bottom of the slate, and been

‘carried over’ to the other side, remained in bed, and, in his own

words, ‘took it out in sleep.’

After breakfasting in a small closet attached to the coffee-room, which

bore the imposing title of the Snuggery, the temporary inmate of which,

in consideration of a small additional charge, had the unspeakable

advantage of overhearing all the conversation in the coffee-room

aforesaid; and, after despatching Mr. Weller on some necessary errands,

Mr. Pickwick repaired to the lodge, to consult Mr. Roker concerning his

future accommodation.

‘Accommodation, eh?’ said that gentleman, consulting a large book.

‘Plenty of that, Mr. Pickwick. Your chummage ticket will be on twenty-

seven, in the third.’

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘My what, did you say?’

‘Your chummage ticket,’ replied Mr. Roker; ‘you’re up to that?’

‘Not quite,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

‘Why,’ said Mr. Roker, ‘it’s as plain as Salisbury. You’ll have a

chummage ticket upon twenty-seven in the third, and them as is in the

room will be your chums.’

‘Are there many of them?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick dubiously.

‘Three,’ replied Mr. Roker.

Mr. Pickwick coughed.

‘One of ‘em’s a parson,’ said Mr. Roker, filling up a little piece of

paper as he spoke; ‘another’s a butcher.’

‘Eh?’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘A butcher,’ repeated Mr. Roker, giving the nib of his pen a tap on the

desk to cure it of a disinclination to mark. ‘What a thorough-paced goer

he used to be sure-ly! You remember Tom Martin, Neddy?’ said Roker,

appealing to another man in the lodge, who was paring the mud off his

shoes with a five-and-twenty-bladed pocket-knife.

‘I should think so,’ replied the party addressed, with a strong emphasis

on the personal pronoun.

‘Bless my dear eyes!’ said Mr. Roker, shaking his head slowly from side

to side, and gazing abstractedly out of the grated windows before him,

as if he were fondly recalling some peaceful scene of his early youth;

‘it seems but yesterday that he whopped the coal-heaver down Fox-under-

the-Hill by the wharf there. I think I can see him now, a-coming up the

Strand between the two street-keepers, a little sobered by the bruising,

with a patch o’ winegar and brown paper over his right eyelid, and that

‘ere lovely bulldog, as pinned the little boy arterwards, a-following at

his heels. What a rum thing time is, ain’t it, Neddy?’

The gentleman to whom these observations were addressed, who appeared of

a taciturn and thoughtful cast, merely echoed the inquiry; Mr. Roker,

shaking off the poetical and gloomy train of thought into which he had

been betrayed, descended to the common business of life, and resumed his

pen.

‘Do you know what the third gentlemen is?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, not

very much gratified by this description of his future associates.

‘What is that Simpson, Neddy?’ said Mr. Roker, turning to his companion.

‘What Simpson?’ said Neddy.

‘Why, him in twenty-seven in the third, that this gentleman’s going to

be chummed on.’

‘Oh, him!’ replied Neddy; ‘he’s nothing exactly. He \_was \_a horse

chaunter: he’s a leg now.’

‘Ah, so I thought,’ rejoined Mr. Roker, closing the book, and placing

the small piece of paper in Mr. Pickwick’s hands. ‘That’s the ticket,

sir.’

Very much perplexed by this summary disposition of this person, Mr.

Pickwick walked back into the prison, revolving in his mind what he had

better do. Convinced, however, that before he took any other steps it

would be advisable to see, and hold personal converse with, the three

gentlemen with whom it was proposed to quarter him, he made the best of

his way to the third flight.

After groping about in the gallery for some time, attempting in the dim

light to decipher the numbers on the different doors, he at length

appealed to a pot-boy, who happened to be pursuing his morning

occupation of gleaning for pewter.

‘Which is twenty-seven, my good fellow?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Five doors farther on,’ replied the pot-boy. ‘There’s the likeness of a

man being hung, and smoking the while, chalked outside the door.’

Guided by this direction, Mr. Pickwick proceeded slowly along the

gallery until he encountered the ‘portrait of a gentleman,’ above

described, upon whose countenance he tapped, with the knuckle of his

forefinger--gently at first, and then audibly. After repeating this

process several times without effect, he ventured to open the door and

peep in.

There was only one man in the room, and he was leaning out of window as

far as he could without overbalancing himself, endeavouring, with great

perseverance, to spit upon the crown of the hat of a personal friend on

the parade below. As neither speaking, coughing, sneezing, knocking, nor

any other ordinary mode of attracting attention, made this person aware

of the presence of a visitor, Mr. Pickwick, after some delay, stepped up

to the window, and pulled him gently by the coat tail. The individual

brought in his head and shoulders with great swiftness, and surveying

Mr. Pickwick from head to foot, demanded in a surly tone what the--

something beginning with a capital H--he wanted.

‘I believe,’ said Mr. Pickwick, consulting his ticket--‘I believe this

is twenty-seven in the third?’

‘Well?’ replied the gentleman.

‘I have come here in consequence of receiving this bit of paper,’

rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

‘Hand it over,’ said the gentleman.

Mr. Pickwick complied.

‘I think Roker might have chummed you somewhere else,’ said Mr. Simpson

(for it was the leg), after a very discontented sort of a pause.

Mr. Pickwick thought so also; but, under all the circumstances, he

considered it a matter of sound policy to be silent.

Mr. Simpson mused for a few moments after this, and then, thrusting his

head out of the window, gave a shrill whistle, and pronounced some word

aloud, several times. What the word was, Mr. Pickwick could not

distinguish; but he rather inferred that it must be some nickname which

distinguished Mr. Martin, from the fact of a great number of gentlemen

on the ground below, immediately proceeding to cry ‘Butcher!’ in

imitation of the tone in which that useful class of society are wont,

diurnally, to make their presence known at area railings.

Subsequent occurrences confirmed the accuracy of Mr. Pickwick’s

impression; for, in a few seconds, a gentleman, prematurely broad for

his years, clothed in a professional blue jean frock and top-boots with

circular toes, entered the room nearly out of breath, closely followed

by another gentleman in very shabby black, and a sealskin cap. The

latter gentleman, who fastened his coat all the way up to his chin by

means of a pin and a button alternately, had a very coarse red face, and

looked like a drunken chaplain; which, indeed, he was.

These two gentlemen having by turns perused Mr. Pickwick’s billet, the

one expressed his opinion that it was ‘a rig,’ and the other his

conviction that it was ‘a go.’ Having recorded their feelings in these

very intelligible terms, they looked at Mr. Pickwick and each other in

awkward silence.

‘It’s an aggravating thing, just as we got the beds so snug,’ said the

chaplain, looking at three dirty mattresses, each rolled up in a

blanket; which occupied one corner of the room during the day, and

formed a kind of slab, on which were placed an old cracked basin, ewer,

and soap-dish, of common yellow earthenware, with a blue flower--‘very

aggravating.’

Mr. Martin expressed the same opinion in rather stronger terms; Mr.

Simpson, after having let a variety of expletive adjectives loose upon

society without any substantive to accompany them, tucked up his

sleeves, and began to wash the greens for dinner.

While this was going on, Mr. Pickwick had been eyeing the room, which

was filthily dirty, and smelt intolerably close. There was no vestige of

either carpet, curtain, or blind. There was not even a closet in it.

Unquestionably there were but few things to put away, if there had been

one; but, however few in number, or small in individual amount, still,

remnants of loaves and pieces of cheese, and damp towels, and scrags of

meat, and articles of wearing apparel, and mutilated crockery, and

bellows without nozzles, and toasting-forks without prongs, do present

somewhat of an uncomfortable appearance when they are scattered about

the floor of a small apartment, which is the common sitting and sleeping

room of three idle men.

‘I suppose this can be managed somehow,’ said the butcher, after a

pretty long silence. ‘What will you take to go out?’

I beg your pardon,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘What did you say? I hardly

understand you.’

‘What will you take to be paid out?’ said the butcher. ‘The regular

chummage is two-and-six. Will you take three bob?’

‘And a bender,’ suggested the clerical gentleman.

‘Well, I don’t mind that; it’s only twopence a piece more,’ said Mr.

Martin. ‘What do you say, now? We’ll pay you out for three-and-sixpence

a week. Come!’

‘And stand a gallon of beer down,’ chimed in Mr. Simpson. ‘There!’

‘And drink it on the spot,’ said the chaplain. ‘Now!’

‘I really am so wholly ignorant of the rules of this place,’ returned

Mr. Pickwick, ‘that I do not yet comprehend you. Can I live anywhere

else? I thought I could not.’

At this inquiry Mr. Martin looked, with a countenance of excessive

surprise, at his two friends, and then each gentleman pointed with his

right thumb over his left shoulder. This action imperfectly described in

words by the very feeble term of ‘over the left,’ when performed by any

number of ladies or gentlemen who are accustomed to act in unison, has a

very graceful and airy effect; its expression is one of light and

playful sarcasm.

‘\_Can \_you!’ repeated Mr. Martin, with a smile of pity.

‘Well, if I knew as little of life as that, I’d eat my hat and swallow

the buckle whole,’ said the clerical gentleman.

‘So would I,’ added the sporting one solemnly.

After this introductory preface, the three chums informed Mr. Pickwick,

in a breath, that money was, in the Fleet, just what money was out of

it; that it would instantly procure him almost anything he desired; and

that, supposing he had it, and had no objection to spend it, if he only

signified his wish to have a room to himself, he might take possession

of one, furnished and fitted to boot, in half an hour’s time.

With this the parties separated, very much to their common satisfaction;

Mr. Pickwick once more retracing his steps to the lodge, and the three

companions adjourning to the coffee-room, there to spend the five

shillings which the clerical gentleman had, with admirable prudence and

foresight, borrowed of him for the purpose.

‘I knowed it!’ said Mr. Roker, with a chuckle, when Mr. Pickwick stated

the object with which he had returned. ‘Didn’t I say so, Neddy?’

The philosophical owner of the universal penknife growled an

affirmative.

‘I knowed you’d want a room for yourself, bless you!’ said Mr. Roker.

‘Let me see. You’ll want some furniture. You’ll hire that of me, I

suppose? That’s the reg’lar thing.’

‘With great pleasure,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘There’s a capital room up in the coffee-room flight, that belongs to a

Chancery prisoner,’ said Mr. Roker. ‘It’ll stand you in a pound a week.

I suppose you don’t mind that?’

‘Not at all,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Just step there with me,’ said Roker, taking up his hat with great

alacrity; ‘the matter’s settled in five minutes. Lord! why didn’t you

say at first that you was willing to come down handsome?’

The matter was soon arranged, as the turnkey had foretold. The Chancery

prisoner had been there long enough to have lost his friends, fortune,

home, and happiness, and to have acquired the right of having a room to

himself. As he laboured, however, under the inconvenience of often

wanting a morsel of bread, he eagerly listened to Mr. Pickwick’s

proposal to rent the apartment, and readily covenanted and agreed to

yield him up the sole and undisturbed possession thereof, in

consideration of the weekly payment of twenty shillings; from which fund

he furthermore contracted to pay out any person or persons that might be

chummed upon it.

As they struck the bargain, Mr. Pickwick surveyed him with a painful

interest. He was a tall, gaunt, cadaverous man, in an old greatcoat and

slippers, with sunken cheeks, and a restless, eager eye. His lips were

bloodless, and his bones sharp and thin. God help him! the iron teeth of

confinement and privation had been slowly filing him down for twenty

years.

‘And where will you live meanwhile, Sir?’ said Mr. Pickwick, as he laid

the amount of the first week’s rent, in advance, on the tottering table.

The man gathered up the money with a trembling hand, and replied that he

didn’t know yet; he must go and see where he could move his bed to.

‘I am afraid, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, laying his hand gently and

compassionately on his arm--‘I am afraid you will have to live in some

noisy, crowded place. Now, pray, consider this room your own when you

want quiet, or when any of your friends come to see you.’

‘Friends!’ interposed the man, in a voice which rattled in his throat.

‘if I lay dead at the bottom of the deepest mine in the world; tight

screwed down and soldered in my coffin; rotting in the dark and filthy

ditch that drags its slime along, beneath the foundations of this

prison; I could not be more forgotten or unheeded than I am here. I am a

dead man; dead to society, without the pity they bestow on those whose

souls have passed to judgment. Friends to see me! My God! I have sunk,

from the prime of life into old age, in this place, and there is not one

to raise his hand above my bed when I lie dead upon it, and say, “It is

a blessing he is gone!”’

The excitement, which had cast an unwonted light over the man’s face,

while he spoke, subsided as he concluded; and pressing his withered

hands together in a hasty and disordered manner, he shuffled from the

room.

‘Rides rather rusty,’ said Mr. Roker, with a smile. ‘Ah! they’re like

the elephants. They feel it now and then, and it makes ‘em wild!’

Having made this deeply-sympathising remark, Mr. Roker entered upon his

arrangements with such expedition, that in a short time the room was

furnished with a carpet, six chairs, a table, a sofa bedstead, a tea-

kettle, and various small articles, on hire, at the very reasonable rate

of seven-and-twenty shillings and sixpence per week.

‘Now, is there anything more we can do for you?’ inquired Mr. Roker,

looking round with great satisfaction, and gaily chinking the first

week’s hire in his closed fist.

‘Why, yes,’ said Mr. Pickwick, who had been musing deeply for some time.

‘Are there any people here who run on errands, and so forth?’

‘Outside, do you mean?’ inquired Mr. Roker.

‘Yes. I mean who are able to go outside. Not prisoners.’

‘Yes, there is,’ said Roker. ‘There’s an unfortunate devil, who has got

a friend on the poor side, that’s glad to do anything of that sort. He’s

been running odd jobs, and that, for the last two months. Shall I send

him?’

‘If you please,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick. ‘Stay; no. The poor side, you

say? I should like to see it. I’ll go to him myself.’

The poor side of a debtor’s prison is, as its name imports, that in

which the most miserable and abject class of debtors are confined. A

prisoner having declared upon the poor side, pays neither rent nor

chummage. His fees, upon entering and leaving the jail, are reduced in

amount, and he becomes entitled to a share of some small quantities of

food: to provide which, a few charitable persons have, from time to

time, left trifling legacies in their wills. Most of our readers will

remember, that, until within a very few years past, there was a kind of

iron cage in the wall of the Fleet Prison, within which was posted some

man of hungry looks, who, from time to time, rattled a money-box, and

exclaimed in a mournful voice, ‘Pray, remember the poor debtors; pray

remember the poor debtors.’ The receipts of this box, when there were

any, were divided among the poor prisoners; and the men on the poor side

relieved each other in this degrading office.

Although this custom has been abolished, and the cage is now boarded up,

the miserable and destitute condition of these unhappy persons remains

the same. We no longer suffer them to appeal at the prison gates to the

charity and compassion of the passersby; but we still leave unblotted

the leaves of our statute book, for the reverence and admiration of

succeeding ages, the just and wholesome law which declares that the

sturdy felon shall be fed and clothed, and that the penniless debtor

shall be left to die of starvation and nakedness. This is no fiction.

Not a week passes over our head, but, in every one of our prisons for

debt, some of these men must inevitably expire in the slow agonies of

want, if they were not relieved by their fellow-prisoners.

Turning these things in his mind, as he mounted the narrow staircase at

the foot of which Roker had left him, Mr. Pickwick gradually worked

himself to the boiling-over point; and so excited was he with his

reflections on this subject, that he had burst into the room to which he

had been directed, before he had any distinct recollection, either of

the place in which he was, or of the object of his visit.

The general aspect of the room recalled him to himself at once; but he

had no sooner cast his eye on the figure of a man who was brooding over

the dusty fire, than, letting his hat fall on the floor, he stood

perfectly fixed and immovable with astonishment.

Yes; in tattered garments, and without a coat; his common calico shirt,

yellow and in rags; his hair hanging over his face; his features changed

with suffering, and pinched with famine--there sat Mr. Alfred Jingle;

his head resting on his hands, his eyes fixed upon the fire, and his

whole appearance denoting misery and dejection!

Near him, leaning listlessly against the wall, stood a strong-built

countryman, flicking with a worn-out hunting-whip the top-boot that

adorned his right foot; his left being thrust into an old slipper.

Horses, dogs, and drink had brought him there, pell-mell. There was a

rusty spur on the solitary boot, which he occasionally jerked into the

empty air, at the same time giving the boot a smart blow, and muttering

some of the sounds by which a sportsman encourages his horse. He was

riding, in imagination, some desperate steeplechase at that moment. Poor

wretch! He never rode a match on the swiftest animal in his costly stud,

with half the speed at which he had torn along the course that ended in

the Fleet.

On the opposite side of the room an old man was seated on a small wooden

box, with his eyes riveted on the floor, and his face settled into an

expression of the deepest and most hopeless despair. A young girl--his

little grand-daughter--was hanging about him, endeavouring, with a

thousand childish devices, to engage his attention; but the old man

neither saw nor heard her. The voice that had been music to him, and the

eyes that had been light, fell coldly on his senses. His limbs were

shaking with disease, and the palsy had fastened on his mind.

There were two or three other men in the room, congregated in a little

knot, and noiselessly talking among themselves. There was a lean and

haggard woman, too--a prisoner’s wife--who was watering, with great

solicitude, the wretched stump of a dried-up, withered plant, which, it

was plain to see, could never send forth a green leaf again--too true an

emblem, perhaps, of the office she had come there to discharge.

Such were the objects which presented themselves to Mr. Pickwick’s view,

as he looked round him in amazement. The noise of some one stumbling

hastily into the room, roused him. Turning his eyes towards the door,

they encountered the new-comer; and in him, through his rags and dirt,

he recognised the familiar features of Mr. Job Trotter.

‘Mr. Pickwick!’ exclaimed Job aloud.

‘Eh?’ said Jingle, starting from his seat.

‘Mr ----! So it is--queer place--strange things--serves me right--very.’

Mr. Jingle thrust his hands into the place where his trousers pockets

used to be, and, dropping his chin upon his breast, sank back into his

chair.

Mr. Pickwick was affected; the two men looked so very miserable. The

sharp, involuntary glance Jingle had cast at a small piece of raw loin

of mutton, which Job had brought in with him, said more of their reduced

state than two hours’ explanation could have done. Mr. Pickwick looked

mildly at Jingle, and said--

‘I should like to speak to you in private. Will you step out for an

instant?’

‘Certainly,’ said Jingle, rising hastily. ‘Can’t step far--no danger of

overwalking yourself here--spike park--grounds pretty--romantic, but not

extensive--open for public inspection--family always in town--

housekeeper desperately careful--very.’

‘You have forgotten your coat,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as they walked out to

the staircase, and closed the door after them.

‘Eh?’ said Jingle. ‘Spout--dear relation--uncle Tom--couldn’t help it--

must eat, you know. Wants of nature--and all that.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Gone, my dear sir--last coat--can’t help it. Lived on a pair of boots,

whole fortnight. Silk umbrella--ivory handle--week--fact--honour--ask

Job--knows it.’

‘Lived for three weeks upon a pair of boots, and a silk umbrella with an

ivory handle!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who had only heard of such things

in shipwrecks or read of them in Constable’s Miscellany.

‘True,’ said Jingle, nodding his head. ‘Pawnbroker’s shop--duplicates

here--small sums--mere nothing--all rascals.’

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Pickwick, much relieved by this explanation; ‘I

understand you. You have pawned your wardrobe.’

‘Everything--Job’s too--all shirts gone--never mind--saves washing.

Nothing soon--lie in bed--starve--die--inquest--little bone-house--poor

prisoner--common necessaries--hush it up--gentlemen of the jury--

warden’s tradesmen--keep it snug--natural death--coroner’s order--

workhouse funeral--serve him right--all over--drop the curtain.’

Jingle delivered this singular summary of his prospects in life, with

his accustomed volubility, and with various twitches of the countenance

to counterfeit smiles. Mr. Pickwick easily perceived that his

recklessness was assumed, and looking him full, but not unkindly, in the

face, saw that his eyes were moist with tears.

‘Good fellow,’ said Jingle, pressing his hand, and turning his head

away. ‘Ungrateful dog--boyish to cry--can’t help it--bad fever--weak--

ill--hungry. Deserved it all--but suffered much--very.’ Wholly unable to

keep up appearances any longer, and perhaps rendered worse by the effort

he had made, the dejected stroller sat down on the stairs, and, covering

his face with his hands, sobbed like a child.

‘Come, come,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with considerable emotion, ‘we will see

what can be done, when I know all about the matter. Here, Job; where is

that fellow?’

‘Here, sir,’ replied Job, presenting himself on the staircase. We have

described him, by the bye, as having deeply-sunken eyes, in the best of

times. In his present state of want and distress, he looked as if those

features had gone out of town altogether.

‘Here, sir,’ cried Job.

‘Come here, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, trying to look stern, with four

large tears running down his waistcoat. ‘Take that, sir.’

Take what? In the ordinary acceptation of such language, it should have

been a blow. As the world runs, it ought to have been a sound, hearty

cuff; for Mr. Pickwick had been duped, deceived, and wronged by the

destitute outcast who was now wholly in his power. Must we tell the

truth? It was something from Mr. Pickwick’s waistcoat pocket, which

chinked as it was given into Job’s hand, and the giving of which,

somehow or other imparted a sparkle to the eye, and a swelling to the

heart, of our excellent old friend, as he hurried away.

Sam had returned when Mr. Pickwick reached his own room, and was

inspecting the arrangements that had been made for his comfort, with a

kind of grim satisfaction which was very pleasant to look upon. Having a

decided objection to his master’s being there at all, Mr. Weller

appeared to consider it a high moral duty not to appear too much pleased

with anything that was done, said, suggested, or proposed.

‘Well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Well, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Pretty comfortable now, eh, Sam?’

‘Pretty vell, sir,’ responded Sam, looking round him in a disparaging

manner.

‘Have you seen Mr. Tupman and our other friends?’

‘Yes, I \_have \_seen ‘em, sir, and they’re a-comin’ to-morrow, and wos

wery much surprised to hear they warn’t to come to-day,’ replied Sam.

‘You have brought the things I wanted?’

Mr. Weller in reply pointed to various packages which he had arranged,

as neatly as he could, in a corner of the room.

‘Very well, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, after a little hesitation; ‘listen

to what I am going to say, Sam.’

‘Cert’nly, Sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller; ‘fire away, Sir.’

‘I have felt from the first, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with much

solemnity, ‘that this is not the place to bring a young man to.’

‘Nor an old ‘un neither, Sir,’ observed Mr. Weller.

‘You’re quite right, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but old men may come here

through their own heedlessness and unsuspicion, and young men may be

brought here by the selfishness of those they serve. It is better for

those young men, in every point of view, that they should not remain

here. Do you understand me, Sam?’

‘Vy no, Sir, I do \_not\_,’ replied Mr. Weller doggedly.

‘Try, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Vell, sir,’ rejoined Sam, after a short pause, ‘I think I see your

drift; and if I do see your drift, it’s my ‘pinion that you’re a-comin’

it a great deal too strong, as the mail-coachman said to the snowstorm,

ven it overtook him.’

‘I see you comprehend me, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Independently of my

wish that you should not be idling about a place like this, for years to

come, I feel that for a debtor in the Fleet to be attended by his

manservant is a monstrous absurdity. Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘for a

time you must leave me.’

‘Oh, for a time, eh, sir?’ rejoined Mr. Weller rather sarcastically.

‘Yes, for the time that I remain here,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Your wages I

shall continue to pay. Any one of my three friends will be happy to take

you, were it only out of respect to me. And if I ever do leave this

place, Sam,’ added Mr. Pickwick, with assumed cheerfulness--‘if I do, I

pledge you my word that you shall return to me instantly.’

‘Now I’ll tell you wot it is, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, in a grave and

solemn voice. ‘This here sort o’ thing won’t do at all, so don’t let’s

hear no more about it.’

I am serious, and resolved, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘You air, air you, sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller firmly. ‘Wery good, Sir;

then so am I.’

Thus speaking, Mr. Weller fixed his hat on his head with great

precision, and abruptly left the room.

‘Sam!’ cried Mr. Pickwick, calling after him, ‘Sam! Here!’

But the long gallery ceased to re-echo the sound of footsteps. Sam

Weller was gone.

CHAPTER XLIII. SHOWING HOW MR. SAMUEL WELLER GOT INTO DIFFICULTIES

In a lofty room, ill-lighted and worse ventilated, situated in Portugal

Street, Lincoln’s Inn Fields, there sit nearly the whole year round,

one, two, three, or four gentlemen in wigs, as the case may be, with

little writing-desks before them, constructed after the fashion of those

used by the judges of the land, barring the French polish. There is a

box of barristers on their right hand; there is an enclosure of

insolvent debtors on their left; and there is an inclined plane of most

especially dirty faces in their front. These gentlemen are the

Commissioners of the Insolvent Court, and the place in which they sit,

is the Insolvent Court itself.

It is, and has been, time out of mind, the remarkable fate of this court

to be, somehow or other, held and understood, by the general consent of

all the destitute shabby-genteel people in London, as their common

resort, and place of daily refuge. It is always full. The steams of beer

and spirits perpetually ascend to the ceiling, and, being condensed by

the heat, roll down the walls like rain; there are more old suits of

clothes in it at one time, than will be offered for sale in all

Houndsditch in a twelvemonth; more unwashed skins and grizzly beards

than all the pumps and shaving-shops between Tyburn and Whitechapel

could render decent, between sunrise and sunset.

It must not be supposed that any of these people have the least shadow

of business in, or the remotest connection with, the place they so

indefatigably attend. If they had, it would be no matter of surprise,

and the singularity of the thing would cease. Some of them sleep during

the greater part of the sitting; others carry small portable dinners

wrapped in pocket-handkerchiefs or sticking out of their worn-out

pockets, and munch and listen with equal relish; but no one among them

was ever known to have the slightest personal interest in any case that

was ever brought forward. Whatever they do, there they sit from the

first moment to the last. When it is heavy, rainy weather, they all come

in, wet through; and at such times the vapours of the court are like

those of a fungus-pit.

A casual visitor might suppose this place to be a temple dedicated to

the Genius of Seediness. There is not a messenger or process-server

attached to it, who wears a coat that was made for him; not a tolerably

fresh, or wholesome-looking man in the whole establishment, except a

little white-headed apple-faced tipstaff, and even he, like an ill-

conditioned cherry preserved in brandy, seems to have artificially dried

and withered up into a state of preservation to which he can lay no

natural claim. The very barristers’ wigs are ill-powdered, and their

curls lack crispness.

But the attorneys, who sit at a large bare table below the

commissioners, are, after all, the greatest curiosities. The

professional establishment of the more opulent of these gentlemen,

consists of a blue bag and a boy; generally a youth of the Jewish

persuasion. They have no fixed offices, their legal business being

transacted in the parlours of public-houses, or the yards of prisons,

whither they repair in crowds, and canvass for customers after the

manner of omnibus cads. They are of a greasy and mildewed appearance;

and if they can be said to have any vices at all, perhaps drinking and

cheating are the most conspicuous among them. Their residences are

usually on the outskirts of ‘the Rules,’ chiefly lying within a circle

of one mile from the obelisk in St. George’s Fields. Their looks are not

prepossessing, and their manners are peculiar.

Mr. Solomon Pell, one of this learned body, was a fat, flabby, pale man,

in a surtout which looked green one minute, and brown the next, with a

velvet collar of the same chameleon tints. His forehead was narrow, his

face wide, his head large, and his nose all on one side, as if Nature,

indignant with the propensities she observed in him in his birth, had

given it an angry tweak which it had never recovered. Being short-necked

and asthmatic, however, he respired principally through this feature;

so, perhaps, what it wanted in ornament, it made up in usefulness.

‘I’m sure to bring him through it,’ said Mr. Pell.

‘Are you, though?’ replied the person to whom the assurance was pledged.

‘Certain sure,’ replied Pell; ‘but if he’d gone to any irregular

practitioner, mind you, I wouldn’t have answered for the consequences.’

‘Ah!’ said the other, with open mouth.

‘No, that I wouldn’t,’ said Mr. Pell; and he pursed up his lips,

frowned, and shook his head mysteriously.

Now, the place where this discourse occurred was the public-house just

opposite to the Insolvent Court; and the person with whom it was held

was no other than the elder Mr. Weller, who had come there, to comfort

and console a friend, whose petition to be discharged under the act, was

to be that day heard, and whose attorney he was at that moment

consulting.

‘And vere is George?’ inquired the old gentleman.

Mr. Pell jerked his head in the direction of a back parlour, whither Mr.

Weller at once repairing, was immediately greeted in the warmest and

most flattering manner by some half-dozen of his professional brethren,

in token of their gratification at his arrival. The insolvent gentleman,

who had contracted a speculative but imprudent passion for horsing long

stages, which had led to his present embarrassments, looked extremely

well, and was soothing the excitement of his feelings with shrimps and

porter.

The salutation between Mr. Weller and his friends was strictly confined

to the freemasonry of the craft; consisting of a jerking round of the

right wrist, and a tossing of the little finger into the air at the same

time. We once knew two famous coachmen (they are dead now, poor fellows)

who were twins, and between whom an unaffected and devoted attachment

existed. They passed each other on the Dover road, every day, for

twenty-four years, never exchanging any other greeting than this; and

yet, when one died, the other pined away, and soon afterwards followed

him!

‘Vell, George,’ said Mr. Weller senior, taking off his upper coat, and

seating himself with his accustomed gravity. ‘How is it? All right

behind, and full inside?’

‘All right, old feller,’ replied the embarrassed gentleman.

‘Is the gray mare made over to anybody?’ inquired Mr. Weller anxiously.

George nodded in the affirmative.

‘Vell, that’s all right,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Coach taken care on, also?’

‘Con-signed in a safe quarter,’ replied George, wringing the heads off

half a dozen shrimps, and swallowing them without any more ado.

‘Wery good, wery good,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Alvays see to the drag ven you

go downhill. Is the vay-bill all clear and straight for’erd?’

‘The schedule, sir,’ said Pell, guessing at Mr. Weller’s meaning, ‘the

schedule is as plain and satisfactory as pen and ink can make it.’

Mr. Weller nodded in a manner which bespoke his inward approval of these

arrangements; and then, turning to Mr. Pell, said, pointing to his

friend George--

‘Ven do you take his cloths off?’

‘Why,’ replied Mr. Pell, ‘he stands third on the opposed list, and I

should think it would be his turn in about half an hour. I told my clerk

to come over and tell us when there was a chance.’

Mr. Weller surveyed the attorney from head to foot with great

admiration, and said emphatically--

‘And what’ll you take, sir?’

‘Why, really,’ replied Mr. Pell, ‘you’re very--. Upon my word and

honour, I’m not in the habit of--. It’s so very early in the morning,

that, actually, I am almost--. Well, you may bring me threepenn’orth of

rum, my dear.’

The officiating damsel, who had anticipated the order before it was

given, set the glass of spirits before Pell, and retired.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pell, looking round upon the company, ‘success to

your friend! I don’t like to boast, gentlemen; it’s not my way; but I

can’t help saying, that, if your friend hadn’t been fortunate enough to

fall into hands that--But I won’t say what I was going to say.

Gentlemen, my service to you.’ Having emptied the glass in a twinkling,

Mr. Pell smacked his lips, and looked complacently round on the

assembled coachmen, who evidently regarded him as a species of divinity.

‘Let me see,’ said the legal authority. ‘What was I a-saying,

gentlemen?’

‘I think you was remarkin’ as you wouldn’t have no objection to another

o’ the same, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, with grave facetiousness.

‘Ha, ha!’ laughed Mr. Pell. ‘Not bad, not bad. A professional man, too!

At this time of the morning, it would be rather too good a--Well, I

don’t know, my dear--you may do that again, if you please. Hem!’

This last sound was a solemn and dignified cough, in which Mr. Pell,

observing an indecent tendency to mirth in some of his auditors,

considered it due to himself to indulge.

‘The late Lord Chancellor, gentlemen, was very fond of me,’ said Mr.

Pell.

‘And wery creditable in him, too,’ interposed Mr. Weller.

‘Hear, hear,’ assented Mr. Pell’s client. ‘Why shouldn’t he be?

‘Ah! Why, indeed!’ said a very red-faced man, who had said nothing yet,

and who looked extremely unlikely to say anything more. ‘Why shouldn’t

he?’

A murmur of assent ran through the company.

‘I remember, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pell, ‘dining with him on one

occasion; there was only us two, but everything as splendid as if twenty

people had been expected--the great seal on a dumb-waiter at his right

hand, and a man in a bag-wig and suit of armour guarding the mace with a

drawn sword and silk stockings--which is perpetually done, gentlemen,

night and day; when he said, “Pell,” he said, “no false delicacy, Pell.

You’re a man of talent; you can get anybody through the Insolvent Court,

Pell; and your country should be proud of you.” Those were his very

words. “My Lord,” I said, “you flatter me.”--“Pell,” he said, “if I do,

I’m damned.”’

‘Did he say that?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘He did,’ replied Pell.

‘Vell, then,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘I say Parliament ought to ha’ took it

up; and if he’d been a poor man, they would ha’ done it.’

‘But, my dear friend,’ argued Mr. Pell, ‘it was in confidence.’

‘In what?’ said Mr. Weller.

‘In confidence.’

‘Oh! wery good,’ replied Mr. Weller, after a little reflection. ‘If he

damned hisself in confidence, o’ course that was another thing.’

‘Of course it was,’ said Mr. Pell. ‘The distinction’s obvious, you will

perceive.’

‘Alters the case entirely,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘Go on, Sir.’

No, I will not go on, Sir,’ said Mr. Pell, in a low and serious tone.

‘You have reminded me, Sir, that this conversation was private--private

and confidential, gentlemen. Gentlemen, I am a professional man. It may

be that I am a good deal looked up to, in my profession--it may be that

I am not. Most people know. I say nothing. Observations have already

been made, in this room, injurious to the reputation of my noble friend.

You will excuse me, gentlemen; I was imprudent. I feel that I have no

right to mention this matter without his concurrence. Thank you, Sir;

thank you.’ Thus delivering himself, Mr. Pell thrust his hands into his

pockets, and, frowning grimly around, rattled three halfpence with

terrible determination.

This virtuous resolution had scarcely been formed, when the boy and the

blue bag, who were inseparable companions, rushed violently into the

room, and said (at least the boy did, for the blue bag took no part in

the announcement) that the case was coming on directly. The intelligence

was no sooner received than the whole party hurried across the street,

and began to fight their way into court--a preparatory ceremony, which

has been calculated to occupy, in ordinary cases, from twenty-five

minutes to thirty.

Mr. Weller, being stout, cast himself at once into the crowd, with the

desperate hope of ultimately turning up in some place which would suit

him. His success was not quite equal to his expectations; for having

neglected to take his hat off, it was knocked over his eyes by some

unseen person, upon whose toes he had alighted with considerable force.

Apparently this individual regretted his impetuosity immediately

afterwards, for, muttering an indistinct exclamation of surprise, he

dragged the old man out into the hall, and, after a violent struggle,

released his head and face.

‘Samivel!’ exclaimed Mr. Weller, when he was thus enabled to behold his

rescuer.

Sam nodded.

‘You’re a dutiful and affectionate little boy, you are, ain’t you,’ said

Mr. Weller, ‘to come a-bonnetin’ your father in his old age?’

‘How should I know who you wos?’ responded the son. ‘Do you s’pose I wos

to tell you by the weight o’ your foot?’

‘Vell, that’s wery true, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, mollified at once;

‘but wot are you a-doin’ on here? Your gov’nor can’t do no good here,

Sammy. They won’t pass that werdick, they won’t pass it, Sammy.’ And Mr.

Weller shook his head with legal solemnity.

‘Wot a perwerse old file it is!’ exclaimed Sam, ‘always a-goin’ on about

werdicks and alleybis and that. Who said anything about the werdick?’

Mr. Weller made no reply, but once more shook his head most learnedly.

‘Leave off rattlin’ that ‘ere nob o’ yourn, if you don’t want it to come

off the springs altogether,’ said Sam impatiently, ‘and behave

reasonable. I vent all the vay down to the Markis o’ Granby, arter you,

last night.’

‘Did you see the Marchioness o’ Granby, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller,

with a sigh.

‘Yes, I did,’ replied Sam.

‘How wos the dear creetur a-lookin’?’

‘Wery queer,’ said Sam. ‘I think she’s a-injurin’ herself gradivally

vith too much o’ that ‘ere pine-apple rum, and other strong medicines of

the same natur.’

‘You don’t mean that, Sammy?’ said the senior earnestly.

‘I do, indeed,’ replied the junior.

Mr. Weller seized his son’s hand, clasped it, and let it fall. There was

an expression on his countenance in doing so--not of dismay or

apprehension, but partaking more of the sweet and gentle character of

hope. A gleam of resignation, and even of cheerfulness, passed over his

face too, as he slowly said, ‘I ain’t quite certain, Sammy; I wouldn’t

like to say I wos altogether positive, in case of any subsekent

disappointment, but I rayther think, my boy, I rayther think, that the

shepherd’s got the liver complaint!’

‘Does he look bad?’ inquired Sam.

‘He’s uncommon pale,’ replied his father, ‘’cept about the nose, which

is redder than ever. His appetite is wery so-so, but he imbibes

wonderful.’

Some thoughts of the rum appeared to obtrude themselves on Mr. Weller’s

mind, as he said this; for he looked gloomy and thoughtful; but he very

shortly recovered, as was testified by a perfect alphabet of winks, in

which he was only wont to indulge when particularly pleased.

‘Vell, now,’ said Sam, ‘about my affair. Just open them ears o’ yourn,

and don’t say nothin’ till I’ve done.’ With this preface, Sam related,

as succinctly as he could, the last memorable conversation he had had

with Mr. Pickwick.

‘Stop there by himself, poor creetur!’ exclaimed the elder Mr. Weller,

‘without nobody to take his part! It can’t be done, Samivel, it can’t be

done.’

‘O’ course it can’t,’ asserted Sam: ‘I know’d that, afore I came.’

Why, they’ll eat him up alive, Sammy,’ exclaimed Mr. Weller.

Sam nodded his concurrence in the opinion.

‘He goes in rayther raw, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller metaphorically, ‘and

he’ll come out, done so ex-ceedin’ brown, that his most formiliar

friends won’t know him. Roast pigeon’s nothin’ to it, Sammy.’

Again Sam Weller nodded.

‘It oughtn’t to be, Samivel,’ said Mr. Weller gravely.

‘It mustn’t be,’ said Sam.

‘Cert’nly not,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Vell now,’ said Sam, ‘you’ve been a-prophecyin’ away, wery fine, like a

red-faced Nixon, as the sixpenny books gives picters on.’

‘Who wos he, Sammy?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Never mind who he was,’ retorted Sam; ‘he warn’t a coachman; that’s

enough for you.’

I know’d a ostler o’ that name,’ said Mr. Weller, musing.

‘It warn’t him,’ said Sam. ‘This here gen’l’m’n was a prophet.’

‘Wot’s a prophet?’ inquired Mr. Weller, looking sternly on his son.

‘Wy, a man as tells what’s a-goin’ to happen,’ replied Sam.

‘I wish I’d know’d him, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘P’raps he might ha’

throw’d a small light on that ‘ere liver complaint as we wos a-speakin’

on, just now. Hows’ever, if he’s dead, and ain’t left the bisness to

nobody, there’s an end on it. Go on, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, with a

sigh.

‘Well,’ said Sam, ‘you’ve been a-prophecyin’ avay about wot’ll happen to

the gov’ner if he’s left alone. Don’t you see any way o’ takin’ care on

him?’

‘No, I don’t, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, with a reflective visage.

‘No vay at all?’ inquired Sam.

‘No vay,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘unless’--and a gleam of intelligence lighted

up his countenance as he sank his voice to a whisper, and applied his

mouth to the ear of his offspring--‘unless it is getting him out in a

turn-up bedstead, unbeknown to the turnkeys, Sammy, or dressin’ him up

like a old ‘ooman vith a green wail.’

Sam Weller received both of these suggestions with unexpected contempt,

and again propounded his question.

‘No,’ said the old gentleman; ‘if he von’t let you stop there, I see no

vay at all. It’s no thoroughfare, Sammy, no thoroughfare.’

‘Well, then, I’ll tell you wot it is,’ said Sam, ‘I’ll trouble you for

the loan of five-and-twenty pound.’

‘Wot good’ll that do?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Never mind,’ replied Sam. ‘P’raps you may ask for it five minits

arterwards; p’raps I may say I von’t pay, and cut up rough. You von’t

think o’ arrestin’ your own son for the money, and sendin’ him off to

the Fleet, will you, you unnat’ral wagabone?’

At this reply of Sam’s, the father and son exchanged a complete code of

telegraph nods and gestures, after which, the elder Mr. Weller sat

himself down on a stone step and laughed till he was purple.

‘Wot a old image it is!’ exclaimed Sam, indignant at this loss of time.

‘What are you a-settin’ down there for, con-wertin’ your face into a

street-door knocker, wen there’s so much to be done. Where’s the money?’

‘In the boot, Sammy, in the boot,’ replied Mr. Weller, composing his

features. ‘Hold my hat, Sammy.’

Having divested himself of this encumbrance, Mr. Weller gave his body a

sudden wrench to one side, and by a dexterous twist, contrived to get

his right hand into a most capacious pocket, from whence, after a great

deal of panting and exertion, he extricated a pocket-book of the large

octavo size, fastened by a huge leathern strap. From this ledger he drew

forth a couple of whiplashes, three or four buckles, a little sample-bag

of corn, and, finally, a small roll of very dirty bank-notes, from which

he selected the required amount, which he handed over to Sam.

‘And now, Sammy,’ said the old gentleman, when the whip-lashes, and the

buckles, and the samples, had been all put back, and the book once more

deposited at the bottom of the same pocket, ‘now, Sammy, I know a

gen’l’m’n here, as’ll do the rest o’ the bisness for us, in no time--a

limb o’ the law, Sammy, as has got brains like the frogs, dispersed all

over his body, and reachin’ to the wery tips of his fingers; a friend of

the Lord Chancellorship’s, Sammy, who’d only have to tell him what he

wanted, and he’d lock you up for life, if that wos all.’

‘I say,’ said Sam, ‘none o’ that.’

‘None o’ wot?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Wy, none o’ them unconstitootional ways o’ doin’ it,’ retorted Sam.

‘The have-his-carcass, next to the perpetual motion, is vun of the

blessedest things as wos ever made. I’ve read that ‘ere in the

newspapers wery of’en.’

‘Well, wot’s that got to do vith it?’ inquired Mr. Weller.

‘Just this here,’ said Sam, ‘that I’ll patronise the inwention, and go

in, that vay. No visperin’s to the Chancellorship--I don’t like the

notion. It mayn’t be altogether safe, vith reference to gettin’ out

agin.’

Deferring to his son’s feeling upon this point, Mr. Weller at once

sought the erudite Solomon Pell, and acquainted him with his desire to

issue a writ, instantly, for the \_sum \_of twenty-five pounds, and costs

of process; to be executed without delay upon the body of one Samuel

Weller; the charges thereby incurred, to be paid in advance to Solomon

Pell.

The attorney was in high glee, for the embarrassed coach-horser was

ordered to be discharged forthwith. He highly approved of Sam’s

attachment to his master; declared that it strongly reminded him of his

own feelings of devotion to his friend, the Chancellor; and at once led

the elder Mr. Weller down to the Temple, to swear the affidavit of debt,

which the boy, with the assistance of the blue bag, had drawn up on the

spot.

Meanwhile, Sam, having been formally introduced to the whitewashed

gentleman and his friends, as the offspring of Mr. Weller, of the Belle

Savage, was treated with marked distinction, and invited to regale

himself with them in honour of the occasion--an invitation which he was

by no means backward in accepting.

The mirth of gentlemen of this class is of a grave and quiet character,

usually; but the present instance was one of peculiar festivity, and

they relaxed in proportion. After some rather tumultuous toasting of the

Chief Commissioner and Mr. Solomon Pell, who had that day displayed such

transcendent abilities, a mottled-faced gentleman in a blue shawl

proposed that somebody should sing a song. The obvious suggestion was,

that the mottled-faced gentleman, being anxious for a song, should sing

it himself; but this the mottled-faced gentleman sturdily, and somewhat

offensively, declined to do. Upon which, as is not unusual in such

cases, a rather angry colloquy ensued.

‘Gentlemen,’ said the coach-horser, ‘rather than disturb the harmony of

this delightful occasion, perhaps Mr. Samuel Weller will oblige the

company.’

‘Raly, gentlemen,’ said Sam, ‘I’m not wery much in the habit o’ singin’

without the instrument; but anythin’ for a quiet life, as the man said

wen he took the sitivation at the lighthouse.’

With this prelude, Mr. Samuel Weller burst at once into the following

wild and beautiful legend, which, under the impression that it is not

generally known, we take the liberty of quoting. We would beg to call

particular attention to the monosyllable at the end of the second and

fourth lines, which not only enables the singer to take breath at those

points, but greatly assists the metre.

ROMANCE

I

Bold Turpin vunce, on Hounslow Heath, His bold mare Bess bestrode--er;

Ven there he see’d the Bishop’s coach A-coming along the road--er. So he

gallops close to the ‘orse’s legs, And he claps his head vithin; And the

Bishop says, ‘Sure as eggs is eggs, This here’s the bold Turpin!’

CHORUS

And the Bishop says, ‘Sure as eggs is eggs, This here’s the bold

Turpin!’

II

Says Turpin, ‘You shall eat your words, With a sarse of leaden bul--

let;’ So he puts a pistol to his mouth, And he fires it down his gul--

let. The coachman he not likin’ the job, Set off at full gal-lop, But

Dick put a couple of balls in his nob, And perwailed on him to stop.

CHORUS (sarcastically)

But Dick put a couple of balls in his nob, And perwailed on him to stop.

‘I maintain that that ‘ere song’s personal to the cloth,’ said the

mottled-faced gentleman, interrupting it at this point. ‘I demand the

name o’ that coachman.’

‘Nobody know’d,’ replied Sam. ‘He hadn’t got his card in his pocket.’

‘I object to the introduction o’ politics,’ said the mottled-faced

gentleman. ‘I submit that, in the present company, that ‘ere song’s

political; and, wot’s much the same, that it ain’t true. I say that that

coachman did not run away; but that he died game--game as pheasants; and

I won’t hear nothin’ said to the contrairey.’

As the mottled-faced gentleman spoke with great energy and

determination, and as the opinions of the company seemed divided on the

subject, it threatened to give rise to fresh altercation, when Mr.

Weller and Mr. Pell most opportunely arrived.

‘All right, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘The officer will be here at four o’clock,’ said Mr. Pell. ‘I suppose

you won’t run away meanwhile, eh? Ha! ha!’

‘P’raps my cruel pa ‘ull relent afore then,’ replied Sam, with a broad

grin.

‘Not I,’ said the elder Mr. Weller.

‘Do,’ said Sam.

‘Not on no account,’ replied the inexorable creditor.

‘I’ll give bills for the amount, at sixpence a month,’ said Sam.

‘I won’t take ‘em,’ said Mr. Weller.

‘Ha, ha, ha! very good, very good,’ said Mr. Solomon Pell, who was

making out his little bill of costs; ‘a very amusing incident indeed!

Benjamin, copy that.’ And Mr. Pell smiled again, as he called Mr.

Weller’s attention to the amount.

‘Thank you, thank you,’ said the professional gentleman, taking up

another of the greasy notes as Mr. Weller took it from the pocket-book.

‘Three ten and one ten is five. Much obliged to you, Mr. Weller. Your

son is a most deserving young man, very much so indeed, Sir. It’s a very

pleasant trait in a young man’s character, very much so,’ added Mr.

Pell, smiling smoothly round, as he buttoned up the money.

‘Wot a game it is!’ said the elder Mr. Weller, with a chuckle. ‘A

reg’lar prodigy son!’

‘Prodigal--prodigal son, Sir,’ suggested Mr. Pell, mildly.

‘Never mind, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, with dignity. ‘I know wot’s o’clock,

Sir. Wen I don’t, I’ll ask you, Sir.’

By the time the officer arrived, Sam had made himself so extremely

popular, that the congregated gentlemen determined to see him to prison

in a body. So off they set; the plaintiff and defendant walking arm in

arm, the officer in front, and eight stout coachmen bringing up the

rear. At Serjeant’s Inn Coffee-house the whole party halted to refresh,

and, the legal arrangements being completed, the procession moved on

again.

Some little commotion was occasioned in Fleet Street, by the pleasantry

of the eight gentlemen in the flank, who persevered in walking four

abreast; it was also found necessary to leave the mottled-faced

gentleman behind, to fight a ticket-porter, it being arranged that his

friends should call for him as they came back. Nothing but these little

incidents occurred on the way. When they reached the gate of the Fleet,

the cavalcade, taking the time from the plaintiff, gave three tremendous

cheers for the defendant, and, after having shaken hands all round, left

him.

Sam, having been formally delivered into the warder’s custody, to the

intense astonishment of Roker, and to the evident emotion of even the

phlegmatic Neddy, passed at once into the prison, walked straight to his

master’s room, and knocked at the door.

‘Come in,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam appeared, pulled off his hat, and smiled.

‘Ah, Sam, my good lad!’ said Mr. Pickwick, evidently delighted to see

his humble friend again; ‘I had no intention of hurting your feelings

yesterday, my faithful fellow, by what I said. Put down your hat, Sam,

and let me explain my meaning, a little more at length.’

‘Won’t presently do, sir?’ inquired Sam.

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but why not now?’

‘I’d rayther not now, sir,’ rejoined Sam.

‘Why?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘’Cause--’ said Sam, hesitating.

‘Because of what?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, alarmed at his follower’s

manner. ‘Speak out, Sam.’

‘’Cause,’ rejoined Sam--‘’cause I’ve got a little bisness as I want to

do.’

‘What business?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, surprised at Sam’s confused

manner.

‘Nothin’ partickler, Sir,’ replied Sam.

‘Oh, if it’s nothing particular,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile, ‘you

can speak with me first.’

‘I think I’d better see arter it at once,’ said Sam, still hesitating.

Mr. Pickwick looked amazed, but said nothing.

‘The fact is--’ said Sam, stopping short.

‘Well!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Speak out, Sam.’

‘Why, the fact is,’ said Sam, with a desperate effort, ‘perhaps I’d

better see arter my bed afore I do anythin’ else.’

‘\_Your bed!\_’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, in astonishment.

‘Yes, my bed, Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘I’m a prisoner. I was arrested this

here wery arternoon for debt.’

‘You arrested for debt!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, sinking into a chair.

‘Yes, for debt, Sir,’ replied Sam. ‘And the man as puts me in, ‘ull

never let me out till you go yourself.’

‘Bless my heart and soul!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick. ‘What do you mean?’

‘Wot I say, Sir,’ rejoined Sam. ‘If it’s forty years to come, I shall be

a prisoner, and I’m very glad on it; and if it had been Newgate, it

would ha’ been just the same. Now the murder’s out, and, damme, there’s

an end on it!’

With these words, which he repeated with great emphasis and violence,

Sam Weller dashed his hat upon the ground, in a most unusual state of

excitement; and then, folding his arms, looked firmly and fixedly in his

master’s face.

CHAPTER LXIV. TREATS OF DIVERS LITTLE MATTERS WHICH OCCURRED IN THE

FLEET, AND OF MR. WINKLE’S MYSTERIOUS BEHAVIOUR; AND SHOWS HOW THE POOR

CHANCERY PRISONER OBTAINED HIS RELEASE AT LAST

Mr. Pickwick felt a great deal too much touched by the warmth of Sam’s

attachment, to be able to exhibit any manifestation of anger or

displeasure at the precipitate course he had adopted, in voluntarily

consigning himself to a debtor’s prison for an indefinite period. The

only point on which he persevered in demanding an explanation, was, the

name of Sam’s detaining creditor; but this Mr. Weller as perseveringly

withheld.

‘It ain’t o’ no use, sir,’ said Sam, again and again; ‘he’s a malicious,

bad-disposed, vorldly-minded, spiteful, windictive creetur, with a hard

heart as there ain’t no soft’nin’, as the wirtuous clergyman remarked of

the old gen’l’m’n with the dropsy, ven he said, that upon the whole he

thought he’d rayther leave his property to his vife than build a chapel

vith it.’

‘But consider, Sam,’ Mr. Pickwick remonstrated, ‘the sum is so small

that it can very easily be paid; and having made up my mind that you

shall stop with me, you should recollect how much more useful you would

be, if you could go outside the walls.’

Wery much obliged to you, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller gravely; ‘but I’d

rayther not.’

‘Rather not do what, Sam?’

‘Wy, I’d rayther not let myself down to ask a favour o’ this here

unremorseful enemy.’

‘But it is no favour asking him to take his money, Sam,’ reasoned Mr.

Pickwick.

‘Beg your pardon, sir,’ rejoined Sam, ‘but it ‘ud be a wery great favour

to pay it, and he don’t deserve none; that’s where it is, sir.’

Here Mr. Pickwick, rubbing his nose with an air of some vexation, Mr.

Weller thought it prudent to change the theme of the discourse.

‘I takes my determination on principle, Sir,’ remarked Sam, ‘and you

takes yours on the same ground; wich puts me in mind o’ the man as

killed his-self on principle, wich o’ course you’ve heerd on, Sir.’ Mr.

Weller paused when he arrived at this point, and cast a comical look at

his master out of the corners of his eyes.

‘There is no “of course” in the case, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, gradually

breaking into a smile, in spite of the uneasiness which Sam’s obstinacy

had given him. ‘The fame of the gentleman in question, never reached my

ears.’

‘No, sir!’ exclaimed Mr. Weller. ‘You astonish me, Sir; he wos a clerk

in a gov’ment office, sir.’

‘Was he?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes, he wos, Sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller; ‘and a wery pleasant gen’l’m’n

too--one o’ the precise and tidy sort, as puts their feet in little

India-rubber fire-buckets wen it’s wet weather, and never has no other

bosom friends but hare-skins; he saved up his money on principle, wore a

clean shirt ev’ry day on principle; never spoke to none of his relations

on principle, ‘fear they shou’d want to borrow money of him; and wos

altogether, in fact, an uncommon agreeable character. He had his hair

cut on principle vunce a fortnight, and contracted for his clothes on

the economic principle--three suits a year, and send back the old uns.

Being a wery reg’lar gen’l’m’n, he din’d ev’ry day at the same place,

where it was one-and-nine to cut off the joint, and a wery good one-and-

nine’s worth he used to cut, as the landlord often said, with the tears

a-tricklin’ down his face, let alone the way he used to poke the fire in

the vinter time, which wos a dead loss o’ four-pence ha’penny a day, to

say nothin’ at all o’ the aggrawation o’ seein’ him do it. So uncommon

grand with it too! “\_Post \_arter the next gen’l’m’n,” he sings out ev’ry

day ven he comes in. “See arter the TIMES, Thomas; let me look at the

MORNIN’ HERALD, when it’s out o’ hand; don’t forget to bespeak the

CHRONICLE; and just bring the ‘TIZER, vill you:” and then he’d set vith

his eyes fixed on the clock, and rush out, just a quarter of a minit

‘fore the time to waylay the boy as wos a-comin’ in with the evenin’

paper, which he’d read with sich intense interest and persewerance as

worked the other customers up to the wery confines o’ desperation and

insanity, ‘specially one i-rascible old gen’l’m’n as the vaiter wos

always obliged to keep a sharp eye on, at sich times, fear he should be

tempted to commit some rash act with the carving-knife. Vell, Sir, here

he’d stop, occupyin’ the best place for three hours, and never takin’

nothin’ arter his dinner, but sleep, and then he’d go away to a coffee-

house a few streets off, and have a small pot o’ coffee and four

crumpets, arter wich he’d walk home to Kensington and go to bed. One

night he wos took very ill; sends for a doctor; doctor comes in a green

fly, with a kind o’ Robinson Crusoe set o’ steps, as he could let down

wen he got out, and pull up arter him wen he got in, to perwent the

necessity o’ the coachman’s gettin’ down, and thereby undeceivin’ the

public by lettin’ ‘em see that it wos only a livery coat as he’d got on,

and not the trousers to match. “Wot’s the matter?” says the doctor.

“Wery ill,” says the patient. “Wot have you been a-eatin’ on?” says the

doctor. “Roast weal,” says the patient. “Wot’s the last thing you

dewoured?” says the doctor. “Crumpets,” says the patient. “That’s it!”

says the doctor. “I’ll send you a box of pills directly, and don’t you

never take no more of ‘em,” he says. “No more o’ wot?” says the patient-

-“pills?” “No; crumpets,” says the doctor. “Wy?” says the patient,

starting up in bed; “I’ve eat four crumpets, ev’ry night for fifteen

year, on principle.” “Well, then, you’d better leave ‘em off, on

principle,” says the doctor. “Crumpets is \_not \_wholesome, Sir,” says

the doctor, wery fierce. “But they’re so cheap,” says the patient,

comin’ down a little, “and so wery fillin’ at the price.” “They’d be

dear to you, at any price; dear if you wos paid to eat ‘em,” says the

doctor. “Four crumpets a night,” he says, “vill do your business in six

months!” The patient looks him full in the face, and turns it over in

his mind for a long time, and at last he says, “Are you sure o’ that

‘ere, Sir?” “I’ll stake my professional reputation on it,” says the

doctor. “How many crumpets, at a sittin’, do you think ‘ud kill me off

at once?” says the patient. “I don’t know,” says the doctor. “Do you

think half-a-crown’s wurth ‘ud do it?” says the patient. “I think it

might,” says the doctor. “Three shillins’ wurth ‘ud be sure to do it, I

s’pose?” says the patient. “Certainly,” says the doctor. “Wery good,”

says the patient; “good-night.” Next mornin’ he gets up, has a fire lit,

orders in three shillins’ wurth o’ crumpets, toasts ‘em all, eats ‘em

all, and blows his brains out.’

‘What did he do that for?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick abruptly; for he was

considerably startled by this tragical termination of the narrative.

‘Wot did he do it for, Sir?’ reiterated Sam. ‘Wy, in support of his

great principle that crumpets wos wholesome, and to show that he

wouldn’t be put out of his way for nobody!’

With such like shiftings and changings of the discourse, did Mr. Weller

meet his master’s questioning on the night of his taking up his

residence in the Fleet. Finding all gentle remonstrance useless, Mr.

Pickwick at length yielded a reluctant consent to his taking lodgings by

the week, of a bald-headed cobbler, who rented a small slip room in one

of the upper galleries. To this humble apartment Mr. Weller moved a

mattress and bedding, which he hired of Mr. Roker; and, by the time he

lay down upon it at night, was as much at home as if he had been bred in

the prison, and his whole family had vegetated therein for three

generations.

‘Do you always smoke arter you goes to bed, old cock?’ inquired Mr.

Weller of his landlord, when they had both retired for the night.

‘Yes, I does, young bantam,’ replied the cobbler.

‘Will you allow me to in-quire wy you make up your bed under that ‘ere

deal table?’ said Sam.

‘’Cause I was always used to a four-poster afore I came here, and I find

the legs of the table answer just as well,’ replied the cobbler.

‘You’re a character, sir,’ said Sam.

‘I haven’t got anything of the kind belonging to me,’ rejoined the

cobbler, shaking his head; ‘and if you want to meet with a good one, I’m

afraid you’ll find some difficulty in suiting yourself at this register

office.’

The above short dialogue took place as Mr. Weller lay extended on his

mattress at one end of the room, and the cobbler on his, at the other;

the apartment being illumined by the light of a rush-candle, and the

cobbler’s pipe, which was glowing below the table, like a red-hot coal.

The conversation, brief as it was, predisposed Mr. Weller strongly in

his landlord’s favour; and, raising himself on his elbow, he took a more

lengthened survey of his appearance than he had yet had either time or

inclination to make.

He was a sallow man--all cobblers are; and had a strong bristly beard--

all cobblers have. His face was a queer, good-tempered, crooked-featured

piece of workmanship, ornamented with a couple of eyes that must have

worn a very joyous expression at one time, for they sparkled yet. The

man was sixty, by years, and Heaven knows how old by imprisonment, so

that his having any look approaching to mirth or contentment, was

singular enough. He was a little man, and, being half doubled up as he

lay in bed, looked about as long as he ought to have been without his

legs. He had a great red pipe in his mouth, and was smoking, and staring

at the rush-light, in a state of enviable placidity.

‘Have you been here long?’ inquired Sam, breaking the silence which had

lasted for some time.

‘Twelve year,’ replied the cobbler, biting the end of his pipe as he

spoke.

‘Contempt?’ inquired Sam.

The cobbler nodded.

‘Well, then,’ said Sam, with some sternness, ‘wot do you persevere in

bein’ obstinit for, vastin’ your precious life away, in this here

magnified pound? Wy don’t you give in, and tell the Chancellorship that

you’re wery sorry for makin’ his court contemptible, and you won’t do so

no more?’

The cobbler put his pipe in the corner of his mouth, while he smiled,

and then brought it back to its old place again; but said nothing.

‘Wy don’t you?’ said Sam, urging his question strenuously.

‘Ah,’ said the cobbler, ‘you don’t quite understand these matters. What

do you suppose ruined me, now?’

‘Wy,’ said Sam, trimming the rush-light, ‘I s’pose the beginnin’ wos,

that you got into debt, eh?’

‘Never owed a farden,’ said the cobbler; ‘try again.’

‘Well, perhaps,’ said Sam, ‘you bought houses, wich is delicate English

for goin’ mad; or took to buildin’, wich is a medical term for bein’

incurable.’

The cobbler shook his head and said, ‘Try again.’

‘You didn’t go to law, I hope?’ said Sam suspiciously.

‘Never in my life,’ replied the cobbler. ‘The fact is, I was ruined by

having money left me.’

‘Come, come,’ said Sam, ‘that von’t do. I wish some rich enemy ‘ud try

to vork my destruction in that ‘ere vay. I’d let him.’

‘Oh, I dare say you don’t believe it,’ said the cobbler, quietly smoking

his pipe. ‘I wouldn’t if I was you; but it’s true for all that.’

‘How wos it?’ inquired Sam, half induced to believe the fact already, by

the look the cobbler gave him.

‘Just this,’ replied the cobbler; ‘an old gentleman that I worked for,

down in the country, and a humble relation of whose I married--she’s

dead, God bless her, and thank Him for it!--was seized with a fit and

went off.’

‘Where?’ inquired Sam, who was growing sleepy after the numerous events

of the day.

‘How should I know where he went?’ said the cobbler, speaking through

his nose in an intense enjoyment of his pipe. ‘He went off dead.’

‘Oh, that indeed,’ said Sam. ‘Well?’

‘Well,’ said the cobbler, ‘he left five thousand pound behind him.’

‘And wery gen-teel in him so to do,’ said Sam.

‘One of which,’ continued the cobbler, ‘he left to me, ‘cause I married

his relation, you see.’

‘Wery good,’ murmured Sam.

‘And being surrounded by a great number of nieces and nevys, as was

always quarrelling and fighting among themselves for the property, he

makes me his executor, and leaves the rest to me in trust, to divide it

among ‘em as the will prowided.’

‘Wot do you mean by leavin’ it on trust?’ inquired Sam, waking up a

little. ‘If it ain’t ready-money, were’s the use on it?’

‘It’s a law term, that’s all,’ said the cobbler.

‘I don’t think that,’ said Sam, shaking his head. ‘There’s wery little

trust at that shop. Hows’ever, go on.’

Well,’ said the cobbler, ‘when I was going to take out a probate of the

will, the nieces and nevys, who was desperately disappointed at not

getting all the money, enters a caveat against it.’

What’s that?’ inquired Sam.

‘A legal instrument, which is as much as to say, it’s no go,’ replied

the cobbler.

‘I see,’ said Sam, ‘a sort of brother-in-law o’ the have-his-carcass.

Well.’

‘But,’ continued the cobbler, ‘finding that they couldn’t agree among

themselves, and consequently couldn’t get up a case against the will,

they withdrew the caveat, and I paid all the legacies. I’d hardly done

it, when one nevy brings an action to set the will aside. The case comes

on, some months afterwards, afore a deaf old gentleman, in a back room

somewhere down by Paul’s Churchyard; and arter four counsels had taken a

day a-piece to bother him regularly, he takes a week or two to consider,

and read the evidence in six volumes, and then gives his judgment that

how the testator was not quite right in his head, and I must pay all the

money back again, and all the costs. I appealed; the case come on before

three or four very sleepy gentlemen, who had heard it all before in the

other court, where they’re lawyers without work; the only difference

being, that, there, they’re called doctors, and in the other place

delegates, if you understand that; and they very dutifully confirmed the

decision of the old gentleman below. After that, we went into Chancery,

where we are still, and where I shall always be. My lawyers have had all

my thousand pound long ago; and what between the estate, as they call

it, and the costs, I’m here for ten thousand, and shall stop here, till

I die, mending shoes. Some gentlemen have talked of bringing it before

Parliament, and I dare say would have done it, only they hadn’t time to

come to me, and I hadn’t power to go to them, and they got tired of my

long letters, and dropped the business. And this is God’s truth, without

one word of suppression or exaggeration, as fifty people, both in this

place and out of it, very well know.’

The cobbler paused to ascertain what effect his story had produced on

Sam; but finding that he had dropped asleep, knocked the ashes out of

his pipe, sighed, put it down, drew the bed-clothes over his head, and

went to sleep, too.

Mr. Pickwick was sitting at breakfast, alone, next morning (Sam being

busily engaged in the cobbler’s room, polishing his master’s shoes and

brushing the black gaiters) when there came a knock at the door, which,

before Mr. Pickwick could cry ‘Come in!’ was followed by the appearance

of a head of hair and a cotton-velvet cap, both of which articles of

dress he had no difficulty in recognising as the personal property of

Mr. Smangle.

‘How are you?’ said that worthy, accompanying the inquiry with a score

or two of nods; ‘I say--do you expect anybody this morning? Three men--

devilish gentlemanly fellows--have been asking after you downstairs, and

knocking at every door on the hall flight; for which they’ve been most

infernally blown up by the collegians that had the trouble of opening

‘em.’

‘Dear me! How very foolish of them,’ said Mr. Pickwick, rising. ‘Yes; I

have no doubt they are some friends whom I rather expected to see,

yesterday.’

‘Friends of yours!’ exclaimed Smangle, seizing Mr. Pickwick by the hand.

‘Say no more. Curse me, they’re friends of mine from this minute, and

friends of Mivins’s, too. Infernal pleasant, gentlemanly dog, Mivins,

isn’t he?’ said Smangle, with great feeling.

‘I know so little of the gentleman,’ said Mr. Pickwick, hesitating,

‘that I--’

‘I know you do,’ interrupted Smangle, clasping Mr. Pickwick by the

shoulder. ‘You shall know him better. You’ll be delighted with him. That

man, Sir,’ said Smangle, with a solemn countenance, ‘has comic powers

that would do honour to Drury Lane Theatre.’

‘Has he indeed?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Ah, by Jove he has!’ replied Smangle. ‘Hear him come the four cats in

the wheel-barrow--four distinct cats, sir, I pledge you my honour. Now

you know that’s infernal clever! Damme, you can’t help liking a man,

when you see these traits about him. He’s only one fault--that little

failing I mentioned to you, you know.’

As Mr. Smangle shook his head in a confidential and sympathising manner

at this juncture, Mr. Pickwick felt that he was expected to say

something, so he said, ‘Ah!’ and looked restlessly at the door.

‘Ah!’ echoed Mr. Smangle, with a long-drawn sigh. ‘He’s delightful

company, that man is, sir. I don’t know better company anywhere; but he

has that one drawback. If the ghost of his grandfather, Sir, was to rise

before him this minute, he’d ask him for the loan of his acceptance on

an eightpenny stamp.’

Dear me!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes,’ added Mr. Smangle; ‘and if he’d the power of raising him again,

he would, in two months and three days from this time, to renew the

bill!’

‘Those are very remarkable traits,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but I’m afraid

that while we are talking here, my friends may be in a state of great

perplexity at not finding me.’

‘I’ll show ‘em the way,’ said Smangle, making for the door. ‘Good-day. I

won’t disturb you while they’re here, you know. By the bye--’

As Smangle pronounced the last three words, he stopped suddenly,

reclosed the door which he had opened, and, walking softly back to Mr.

Pickwick, stepped close up to him on tiptoe, and said, in a very soft

whisper--

‘You couldn’t make it convenient to lend me half-a-crown till the latter

end of next week, could you?’

Mr. Pickwick could scarcely forbear smiling, but managing to preserve

his gravity, he drew forth the coin, and placed it in Mr. Smangle’s

palm; upon which, that gentleman, with many nods and winks, implying

profound mystery, disappeared in quest of the three strangers, with whom

he presently returned; and having coughed thrice, and nodded as many

times, as an assurance to Mr. Pickwick that he would not forget to pay,

he shook hands all round, in an engaging manner, and at length took

himself off.

‘My dear friends,’ said Mr. Pickwick, shaking hands alternately with Mr.

Tupman, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass, who were the three visitors in

question, ‘I am delighted to see you.’

The triumvirate were much affected. Mr. Tupman shook his head

deploringly, Mr. Snodgrass drew forth his handkerchief, with undisguised

emotion; and Mr. Winkle retired to the window, and sniffed aloud.

‘Mornin’, gen’l’m’n,’ said Sam, entering at the moment with the shoes

and gaiters. ‘Avay vith melincholly, as the little boy said ven his

schoolmissus died. Velcome to the college, gen’l’m’n.’

‘This foolish fellow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, tapping Sam on the head as he

knelt down to button up his master’s gaiters--‘this foolish fellow has

got himself arrested, in order to be near me.’

‘What!’ exclaimed the three friends.

‘Yes, gen’l’m’n,’ said Sam, ‘I’m a--stand steady, sir, if you please--

I’m a prisoner, gen’l’m’n. Con-fined, as the lady said.’

‘A prisoner!’ exclaimed Mr. Winkle, with unaccountable vehemence.

‘Hollo, sir!’ responded Sam, looking up. ‘Wot’s the matter, Sir?’

‘I had hoped, Sam, that--Nothing, nothing,’ said Mr. Winkle

precipitately.

There was something so very abrupt and unsettled in Mr. Winkle’s manner,

that Mr. Pickwick involuntarily looked at his two friends for an

explanation.

‘We don’t know,’ said Mr. Tupman, answering this mute appeal aloud. ‘He

has been much excited for two days past, and his whole demeanour very

unlike what it usually is. We feared there must be something the matter,

but he resolutely denies it.’

‘No, no,’ said Mr. Winkle, colouring beneath Mr. Pickwick’s gaze; ‘there

is really nothing. I assure you there is nothing, my dear sir. It will

be necessary for me to leave town, for a short time, on private

business, and I had hoped to have prevailed upon you to allow Sam to

accompany me.’

Mr. Pickwick looked more astonished than before.

‘I think,’ faltered Mr. Winkle, ‘that Sam would have had no objection to

do so; but, of course, his being a prisoner here, renders it impossible.

So I must go alone.’

As Mr. Winkle said these words, Mr. Pickwick felt, with some

astonishment, that Sam’s fingers were trembling at the gaiters, as if he

were rather surprised or startled. Sam looked up at Mr. Winkle, too,

when he had finished speaking; and though the glance they exchanged was

instantaneous, they seemed to understand each other.

‘Do you know anything of this, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick sharply.

‘No, I don’t, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, beginning to button with

extraordinary assiduity.

‘Are you sure, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wy, sir,’ responded Mr. Weller; ‘I’m sure so far, that I’ve never heerd

anythin’ on the subject afore this moment. If I makes any guess about

it,’ added Sam, looking at Mr. Winkle, ‘I haven’t got any right to say

what it is, ‘fear it should be a wrong ‘un.’

‘I have no right to make any further inquiry into the private affairs of

a friend, however intimate a friend,’ said Mr. Pickwick, after a short

silence; ‘at present let me merely say, that I do not understand this at

all. There. We have had quite enough of the subject.’

Thus expressing himself, Mr. Pickwick led the conversation to different

topics, and Mr. Winkle gradually appeared more at ease, though still

very far from being completely so. They had all so much to converse

about, that the morning very quickly passed away; and when, at three

o’clock, Mr. Weller produced upon the little dining-table, a roast leg

of mutton and an enormous meat-pie, with sundry dishes of vegetables,

and pots of porter, which stood upon the chairs or the sofa bedstead, or

where they could, everybody felt disposed to do justice to the meal,

notwithstanding that the meat had been purchased, and dressed, and the

pie made, and baked, at the prison cookery hard by.

To these succeeded a bottle or two of very good wine, for which a

messenger was despatched by Mr. Pickwick to the Horn Coffee-house, in

Doctors’ Commons. The bottle or two, indeed, might be more properly

described as a bottle or six, for by the time it was drunk, and tea

over, the bell began to ring for strangers to withdraw.

But, if Mr. Winkle’s behaviour had been unaccountable in the morning, it

became perfectly unearthly and solemn when, under the influence of his

feelings, and his share of the bottle or six, he prepared to take leave

of his friend. He lingered behind, until Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass

had disappeared, and then fervently clenched Mr. Pickwick’s hand, with

an expression of face in which deep and mighty resolve was fearfully

blended with the very concentrated essence of gloom.

‘Good-night, my dear Sir!’ said Mr. Winkle between his set teeth.

‘Bless you, my dear fellow!’ replied the warm-hearted Mr. Pickwick, as

he returned the pressure of his young friend’s hand.

‘Now then!’ cried Mr. Tupman from the gallery.

‘Yes, yes, directly,’ replied Mr. Winkle. ‘Good-night!’

‘Good-night,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

There was another good-night, and another, and half a dozen more after

that, and still Mr. Winkle had fast hold of his friend’s hand, and was

looking into his face with the same strange expression.

‘Is anything the matter?’ said Mr. Pickwick at last, when his arm was

quite sore with shaking.

‘Nothing,’ said Mr. Winkle.

‘Well then, good-night,’ said Mr. Pickwick, attempting to disengage his

hand.

‘My friend, my benefactor, my honoured companion,’ murmured Mr. Winkle,

catching at his wrist. ‘Do not judge me harshly; do not, when you hear

that, driven to extremity by hopeless obstacles, I--’

‘Now then,’ said Mr. Tupman, reappearing at the door. ‘Are you coming,

or are we to be locked in?’

‘Yes, yes, I am ready,’ replied Mr. Winkle. And with a violent effort he

tore himself away.

As Mr. Pickwick was gazing down the passage after them in silent

astonishment, Sam Weller appeared at the stair-head, and whispered for

one moment in Mr. Winkle’s ear.

‘Oh, certainly, depend upon me,’ said that gentleman aloud.

‘Thank’ee, sir. You won’t forget, sir?’ said Sam.

‘Of course not,’ replied Mr. Winkle.

‘Wish you luck, Sir,’ said Sam, touching his hat. ‘I should very much

liked to ha’ joined you, Sir; but the gov’nor, o’ course, is paramount.’

‘It is very much to your credit that you remain here,’ said Mr. Winkle.

With these words they disappeared down the stairs.

‘Very extraordinary,’ said Mr. Pickwick, going back into his room, and

seating himself at the table in a musing attitude. ‘What can that young

man be going to do?’

He had sat ruminating about the matter for some time, when the voice of

Roker, the turnkey, demanded whether he might come in.

‘By all means,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I’ve brought you a softer pillow, Sir,’ said Mr. Roker, ‘instead of the

temporary one you had last night.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Will you take a glass of wine?’

‘You’re wery good, Sir,’ replied Mr. Roker, accepting the proffered

glass. ‘Yours, sir.’

‘Thank you,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘I’m sorry to say that your landlord’s wery bad to-night, Sir,’ said

Roker, setting down the glass, and inspecting the lining of his hat

preparatory to putting it on again.

‘What! The Chancery prisoner!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘He won’t be a Chancery prisoner wery long, Sir,’ replied Roker, turning

his hat round, so as to get the maker’s name right side upwards, as he

looked into it.

‘You make my blood run cold,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘What do you mean?’

‘He’s been consumptive for a long time past,’ said Mr. Roker, ‘and he’s

taken wery bad in the breath to-night. The doctor said, six months ago,

that nothing but change of air could save him.’

‘Great Heaven!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick; ‘has this man been slowly

murdered by the law for six months?’

‘I don’t know about that,’ replied Roker, weighing the hat by the brim

in both hands. ‘I suppose he’d have been took the same, wherever he was.

He went into the infirmary, this morning; the doctor says his strength

is to be kept up as much as possible; and the warden’s sent him wine and

broth and that, from his own house. It’s not the warden’s fault, you

know, sir.’

‘Of course not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick hastily.

‘I’m afraid, however,’ said Roker, shaking his head, ‘that it’s all up

with him. I offered Neddy two six-penn’orths to one upon it just now,

but he wouldn’t take it, and quite right. Thank’ee, Sir. Good-night,

sir.’

‘Stay,’ said Mr. Pickwick earnestly. ‘Where is this infirmary?’

‘Just over where you slept, sir,’ replied Roker. ‘I’ll show you, if you

like to come.’ Mr. Pickwick snatched up his hat without speaking, and

followed at once.

The turnkey led the way in silence; and gently raising the latch of the

room door, motioned Mr. Pickwick to enter. It was a large, bare,

desolate room, with a number of stump bedsteads made of iron, on one of

which lay stretched the shadow of a man--wan, pale, and ghastly. His

breathing was hard and thick, and he moaned painfully as it came and

went. At the bedside sat a short old man in a cobbler’s apron, who, by

the aid of a pair of horn spectacles, was reading from the Bible aloud.

It was the fortunate legatee.

The sick man laid his hand upon his attendant’s arm, and motioned him to

stop. He closed the book, and laid it on the bed.

‘Open the window,’ said the sick man.

He did so. The noise of carriages and carts, the rattle of wheels, the

cries of men and boys, all the busy sounds of a mighty multitude

instinct with life and occupation, blended into one deep murmur, floated

into the room. Above the hoarse loud hum, arose, from time to time, a

boisterous laugh; or a scrap of some jingling song, shouted forth, by

one of the giddy crowd, would strike upon the ear, for an instant, and

then be lost amidst the roar of voices and the tramp of footsteps; the

breaking of the billows of the restless sea of life, that rolled heavily

on, without. These are melancholy sounds to a quiet listener at any

time; but how melancholy to the watcher by the bed of death!

‘There is no air here,’ said the man faintly. ‘The place pollutes it. It

was fresh round about, when I walked there, years ago; but it grows hot

and heavy in passing these walls. I cannot breathe it.’

‘We have breathed it together, for a long time,’ said the old man.

‘Come, come.’

There was a short silence, during which the two spectators approached

the bed. The sick man drew a hand of his old fellow-prisoner towards

him, and pressing it affectionately between both his own, retained it in

his grasp.

‘I hope,’ he gasped after a while, so faintly that they bent their ears

close over the bed to catch the half-formed sounds his pale lips gave

vent to--‘I hope my merciful Judge will bear in mind my heavy punishment

on earth. Twenty years, my friend, twenty years in this hideous grave!

My heart broke when my child died, and I could not even kiss him in his

little coffin. My loneliness since then, in all this noise and riot, has

been very dreadful. May God forgive me! He has seen my solitary,

lingering death.’

He folded his hands, and murmuring something more they could not hear,

fell into a sleep--only a sleep at first, for they saw him smile.

They whispered together for a little time, and the turnkey, stooping

over the pillow, drew hastily back. ‘He has got his discharge, by G--!’

said the man.

He had. But he had grown so like death in life, that they knew not when

he died.

CHAPTER XLIV. DESCRIPTIVE OF AN AFFECTING INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. SAMUEL

WELLER AND A FAMILY PARTY. MR. PICKWICK MAKES A TOUR OF THE DIMINUTIVE

WORLD HE INHABITS, AND RESOLVES TO MIX WITH IT, IN FUTURE, AS LITTLE AS

POSSIBLE

A few mornings after his incarceration, Mr. Samuel Weller, having

arranged his master’s room with all possible care, and seen him

comfortably seated over his books and papers, withdrew to employ himself

for an hour or two to come, as he best could. It was a fine morning, and

it occurred to Sam that a pint of porter in the open air would lighten

his next quarter of an hour or so, as well as any little amusement in

which he could indulge.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he betook himself to the tap. Having

purchased the beer, and obtained, moreover, the day-but-one-before-

yesterday’s paper, he repaired to the skittle-ground, and seating

himself on a bench, proceeded to enjoy himself in a very sedate and

methodical manner.

First of all, he took a refreshing draught of the beer, and then he

looked up at a window, and bestowed a platonic wink on a young lady who

was peeling potatoes thereat. Then he opened the paper, and folded it so

as to get the police reports outwards; and this being a vexatious and

difficult thing to do, when there is any wind stirring, he took another

draught of the beer when he had accomplished it. Then, he read two lines

of the paper, and stopped short to look at a couple of men who were

finishing a game at rackets, which, being concluded, he cried out ‘wery

good,’ in an approving manner, and looked round upon the spectators, to

ascertain whether their sentiments coincided with his own. This involved

the necessity of looking up at the windows also; and as the young lady

was still there, it was an act of common politeness to wink again, and

to drink to her good health in dumb show, in another draught of the

beer, which Sam did; and having frowned hideously upon a small boy who

had noted this latter proceeding with open eyes, he threw one leg over

the other, and, holding the newspaper in both hands, began to read in

real earnest.

He had hardly composed himself into the needful state of abstraction,

when he thought he heard his own name proclaimed in some distant

passage. Nor was he mistaken, for it quickly passed from mouth to mouth,

and in a few seconds the air teemed with shouts of ‘Weller!’

Here!’ roared Sam, in a stentorian voice. ‘Wot’s the matter? Who wants

him? Has an express come to say that his country house is afire?’

‘Somebody wants you in the hall,’ said a man who was standing by.

‘Just mind that ‘ere paper and the pot, old feller, will you?’ said Sam.

‘I’m a-comin’. Blessed, if they was a-callin’ me to the bar, they

couldn’t make more noise about it!’

Accompanying these words with a gentle rap on the head of the young

gentleman before noticed, who, unconscious of his close vicinity to the

person in request, was screaming ‘Weller!’ with all his might, Sam

hastened across the ground, and ran up the steps into the hall. Here,

the first object that met his eyes was his beloved father sitting on a

bottom stair, with his hat in his hand, shouting out ‘Weller!’ in his

very loudest tone, at half-minute intervals.

‘Wot are you a-roarin’ at?’ said Sam impetuously, when the old gentleman

had discharged himself of another shout; ‘making yourself so precious

hot that you looks like a aggrawated glass-blower. Wot’s the matter?’

‘Aha!’ replied the old gentleman, ‘I began to be afeerd that you’d gone

for a walk round the Regency Park, Sammy.’

‘Come,’ said Sam, ‘none o’ them taunts agin the wictim o’ avarice, and

come off that ‘ere step. Wot are you a-settin’ down there for? I don’t

live there.’

‘I’ve got such a game for you, Sammy,’ said the elder Mr. Weller,

rising.

‘Stop a minit,’ said Sam, ‘you’re all vite behind.’

‘That’s right, Sammy, rub it off,’ said Mr. Weller, as his son dusted

him. ‘It might look personal here, if a man walked about with vitevash

on his clothes, eh, Sammy?’

As Mr. Weller exhibited in this place unequivocal symptoms of an

approaching fit of chuckling, Sam interposed to stop it.

‘Keep quiet, do,’ said Sam, ‘there never vos such a old picter-card

born. Wot are you bustin’ vith, now?’

‘Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, wiping his forehead, ‘I’m afeerd that vun o’

these days I shall laugh myself into a appleplexy, my boy.’

‘Vell, then, wot do you do it for?’ said Sam. ‘Now, then, wot have you

got to say?’

‘Who do you think’s come here with me, Samivel?’ said Mr. Weller,

drawing back a pace or two, pursing up his mouth, and extending his

eyebrows.

‘Pell?’ said Sam.

Mr. Weller shook his head, and his red cheeks expanded with the laughter

that was endeavouring to find a vent.

‘Mottled-faced man, p’raps?’ asked Sam.

Again Mr. Weller shook his head.

‘Who then?’asked Sam.

‘Your mother-in-law,’ said Mr. Weller; and it was lucky he did say it,

or his cheeks must inevitably have cracked, from their most unnatural

distension.

‘Your mother-in-law, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘and the red-nosed man, my

boy; and the red-nosed man. Ho! ho! ho!’

With this, Mr. Weller launched into convulsions of laughter, while Sam

regarded him with a broad grin gradually over-spreading his whole

countenance.

‘They’ve come to have a little serious talk with you, Samivel,’ said Mr.

Weller, wiping his eyes. ‘Don’t let out nothin’ about the unnat’ral

creditor, Sammy.’

‘Wot, don’t they know who it is?’ inquired Sam.

‘Not a bit on it,’ replied his father.

‘Vere are they?’ said Sam, reciprocating all the old gentleman’s grins.

‘In the snuggery,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. ‘Catch the red-nosed man a-goin’

anyvere but vere the liquors is; not he, Samivel, not he. Ve’d a wery

pleasant ride along the road from the Markis this mornin’, Sammy,’ said

Mr. Weller, when he felt himself equal to the task of speaking in an

articulate manner. ‘I drove the old piebald in that ‘ere little chay-

cart as belonged to your mother-in-law’s first wenter, into vich a harm-

cheer wos lifted for the shepherd; and I’m blessed,’ said Mr. Weller,

with a look of deep scorn--‘I’m blessed if they didn’t bring a portable

flight o’ steps out into the road a-front o’ our door for him, to get up

by.’

‘You don’t mean that?’ said Sam.

‘I do mean that, Sammy,’ replied his father, ‘and I vish you could ha’

seen how tight he held on by the sides wen he did get up, as if he wos

afeerd o’ being precipitayted down full six foot, and dashed into a

million hatoms. He tumbled in at last, however, and avay ve vent; and I

rayther think--I say I rayther think, Samivel--that he found his-self a

little jolted ven ve turned the corners.’

‘Wot, I s’pose you happened to drive up agin a post or two?’ said Sam.

‘I’m afeerd,’ replied Mr. Weller, in a rapture of winks--‘I’m afeerd I

took vun or two on ‘em, Sammy; he wos a-flyin’ out o’ the arm-cheer all

the way.’

Here the old gentleman shook his head from side to side, and was seized

with a hoarse internal rumbling, accompanied with a violent swelling of

the countenance, and a sudden increase in the breadth of all his

features; symptoms which alarmed his son not a little.

‘Don’t be frightened, Sammy, don’t be frightened,’ said the old

gentleman, when by dint of much struggling, and various convulsive

stamps upon the ground, he had recovered his voice. ‘It’s only a kind o’

quiet laugh as I’m a-tryin’ to come, Sammy.’

‘Well, if that’s wot it is,’ said Sam, ‘you’d better not try to come it

agin. You’ll find it rayther a dangerous inwention.’

‘Don’t you like it, Sammy?’ inquired the old gentleman.

‘Not at all,’ replied Sam.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Weller, with the tears still running down his cheeks,

‘it ‘ud ha’ been a wery great accommodation to me if I could ha’ done

it, and ‘ud ha’ saved a good many vords atween your mother-in-law and

me, sometimes; but I’m afeerd you’re right, Sammy, it’s too much in the

appleplexy line--a deal too much, Samivel.’

This conversation brought them to the door of the snuggery, into which

Sam--pausing for an instant to look over his shoulder, and cast a sly

leer at his respected progenitor, who was still giggling behind--at once

led the way.

‘Mother-in-law,’ said Sam, politely saluting the lady, ‘wery much

obliged to you for this here wisit.--Shepherd, how air you?’

‘Oh, Samuel!’ said Mrs. Weller. ‘This is dreadful.’

‘Not a bit on it, mum,’ replied Sam.--‘Is it, shepherd?’

Mr. Stiggins raised his hands, and turned up his eyes, until the whites-

-or rather the yellows--were alone visible; but made no reply in words.

‘Is this here gen’l’m’n troubled with any painful complaint?’ said Sam,

looking to his mother-in-law for explanation.

‘The good man is grieved to see you here, Samuel,’ replied Mrs. Weller.

‘Oh, that’s it, is it?’ said Sam. ‘I was afeerd, from his manner, that

he might ha’ forgotten to take pepper vith that ‘ere last cowcumber he

eat. Set down, Sir, ve make no extra charge for settin’ down, as the

king remarked wen he blowed up his ministers.’

‘Young man,’ said Mr. Stiggins ostentatiously, ‘I fear you are not

softened by imprisonment.’

‘Beg your pardon, Sir,’ replied Sam; ‘wot wos you graciously pleased to

hobserve?’

‘I apprehend, young man, that your nature is no softer for this

chastening,’ said Mr. Stiggins, in a loud voice.

‘Sir,’ replied Sam, ‘you’re wery kind to say so. I hope my natur is \_NOT

\_ a soft vun, Sir. Wery much obliged to you for your good opinion, Sir.’

At this point of the conversation, a sound, indecorously approaching to

a laugh, was heard to proceed from the chair in which the elder Mr.

Weller was seated; upon which Mrs. Weller, on a hasty consideration of

all the circumstances of the case, considered it her bounden duty to

become gradually hysterical.

‘Weller,’ said Mrs. W. (the old gentleman was seated in a corner);

‘Weller! Come forth.’

‘Wery much obleeged to you, my dear,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘but I’m quite

comfortable vere I am.’

Upon this, Mrs. Weller burst into tears.

‘Wot’s gone wrong, mum?’ said Sam.

‘Oh, Samuel!’ replied Mrs. Weller, ‘your father makes me wretched. Will

nothing do him good?’

‘Do you hear this here?’ said Sam. ‘Lady vants to know vether nothin’

‘ull do you good.’

‘Wery much indebted to Mrs. Weller for her po-lite inquiries, Sammy,’

replied the old gentleman. ‘I think a pipe vould benefit me a good deal.

Could I be accommodated, Sammy?’

Here Mrs. Weller let fall some more tears, and Mr. Stiggins groaned.

‘Hollo! Here’s this unfortunate gen’l’m’n took ill agin,’ said Sam,

looking round. ‘Vere do you feel it now, sir?’

‘In the same place, young man,’ rejoined Mr. Stiggins, ‘in the same

place.’

‘Vere may that be, Sir?’ inquired Sam, with great outward simplicity.

‘In the buzzim, young man,’ replied Mr. Stiggins, placing his umbrella

on his waistcoat.

At this affecting reply, Mrs. Weller, being wholly unable to suppress

her feelings, sobbed aloud, and stated her conviction that the red-nosed

man was a saint; whereupon Mr. Weller, senior, ventured to suggest, in

an undertone, that he must be the representative of the united parishes

of St. Simon Without and St. Walker Within.

‘I’m afeered, mum,’ said Sam, ‘that this here gen’l’m’n, with the twist

in his countenance, feels rather thirsty, with the melancholy spectacle

afore him. Is it the case, mum?’

The worthy lady looked at Mr. Stiggins for a reply; that gentleman, with

many rollings of the eye, clenched his throat with his right hand, and

mimicked the act of swallowing, to intimate that he was athirst.

‘I am afraid, Samuel, that his feelings have made him so indeed,’ said

Mrs. Weller mournfully.

‘Wot’s your usual tap, sir?’ replied Sam.

‘Oh, my dear young friend,’ replied Mr. Stiggins, ‘all taps is

vanities!’

‘Too true, too true, indeed,’ said Mrs. Weller, murmuring a groan, and

shaking her head assentingly.

‘Well,’ said Sam, ‘I des-say they may be, sir; but wich is your

partickler wanity? Wich wanity do you like the flavour on best, sir?’

‘Oh, my dear young friend,’ replied Mr. Stiggins, ‘I despise them all.

If,’ said Mr. Stiggins--‘if there is any one of them less odious than

another, it is the liquor called rum. Warm, my dear young friend, with

three lumps of sugar to the tumbler.’

‘Wery sorry to say, sir,’ said Sam, ‘that they don’t allow that

particular wanity to be sold in this here establishment.’

‘Oh, the hardness of heart of these inveterate men!’ ejaculated Mr.

Stiggins. ‘Oh, the accursed cruelty of these inhuman persecutors!’

With these words, Mr. Stiggins again cast up his eyes, and rapped his

breast with his umbrella; and it is but justice to the reverend

gentleman to say, that his indignation appeared very real and unfeigned

indeed.

After Mrs. Weller and the red-nosed gentleman had commented on this

inhuman usage in a very forcible manner, and had vented a variety of

pious and holy execrations against its authors, the latter recommended a

bottle of port wine, warmed with a little water, spice, and sugar, as

being grateful to the stomach, and savouring less of vanity than many

other compounds. It was accordingly ordered to be prepared, and pending

its preparation the red-nosed man and Mrs. Weller looked at the elder W.

and groaned.

‘Well, Sammy,’ said the gentleman, ‘I hope you’ll find your spirits rose

by this here lively wisit. Wery cheerful and improvin’ conwersation,

ain’t it, Sammy?’

‘You’re a reprobate,’ replied Sam; ‘and I desire you won’t address no

more o’ them ungraceful remarks to me.’

So far from being edified by this very proper reply, the elder Mr.

Weller at once relapsed into a broad grin; and this inexorable conduct

causing the lady and Mr. Stiggins to close their eyes, and rock

themselves to and fro on their chairs, in a troubled manner, he

furthermore indulged in several acts of pantomime, indicative of a

desire to pummel and wring the nose of the aforesaid Stiggins, the

performance of which, appeared to afford him great mental relief. The

old gentleman very narrowly escaped detection in one instance; for Mr.

Stiggins happening to give a start on the arrival of the negus, brought

his head in smart contact with the clenched fist with which Mr. Weller

had been describing imaginary fireworks in the air, within two inches of

his ear, for some minutes.

‘Wot are you a-reachin’ out, your hand for the tumbler in that ‘ere

sawage way for?’ said Sam, with great promptitude. ‘Don’t you see you’ve

hit the gen’l’m’n?’

‘I didn’t go to do it, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, in some degree abashed

by the very unexpected occurrence of the incident.

‘Try an in’ard application, sir,’ said Sam, as the red-nosed gentleman

rubbed his head with a rueful visage. ‘Wot do you think o’ that, for a

go o’ wanity, warm, Sir?’

Mr. Stiggins made no verbal answer, but his manner was expressive. He

tasted the contents of the glass which Sam had placed in his hand, put

his umbrella on the floor, and tasted it again, passing his hand

placidly across his stomach twice or thrice; he then drank the whole at

a breath, and smacking his lips, held out the tumbler for more.

Nor was Mrs. Weller behind-hand in doing justice to the composition. The

good lady began by protesting that she couldn’t touch a drop--then took

a small drop--then a large drop--then a great many drops; and her

feelings being of the nature of those substances which are powerfully

affected by the application of strong waters, she dropped a tear with

every drop of negus, and so got on, melting the feelings down, until at

length she had arrived at a very pathetic and decent pitch of misery.

The elder Mr. Weller observed these signs and tokens with many

manifestations of disgust, and when, after a second jug of the same, Mr.

Stiggins began to sigh in a dismal manner, he plainly evinced his

disapprobation of the whole proceedings, by sundry incoherent ramblings

of speech, among which frequent angry repetitions of the word ‘gammon’

were alone distinguishable to the ear.

‘I’ll tell you wot it is, Samivel, my boy,’ whispered the old gentleman

into his son’s ear, after a long and steadfast contemplation of his lady

and Mr. Stiggins; ‘I think there must be somethin’ wrong in your mother-

in-law’s inside, as vell as in that o’ the red-nosed man.’

‘Wot do you mean?’ said Sam.

‘I mean this here, Sammy,’ replied the old gentleman, ‘that wot they

drink, don’t seem no nourishment to ‘em; it all turns to warm water, and

comes a-pourin’ out o’ their eyes. ‘Pend upon it, Sammy, it’s a

constitootional infirmity.’

Mr. Weller delivered this scientific opinion with many confirmatory

frowns and nods; which, Mrs. Weller remarking, and concluding that they

bore some disparaging reference either to herself or to Mr. Stiggins, or

to both, was on the point of becoming infinitely worse, when Mr.

Stiggins, getting on his legs as well as he could, proceeded to deliver

an edifying discourse for the benefit of the company, but more

especially of Mr. Samuel, whom he adjured in moving terms to be upon his

guard in that sink of iniquity into which he was cast; to abstain from

all hypocrisy and pride of heart; and to take in all things exact

pattern and copy by him (Stiggins), in which case he might calculate on

arriving, sooner or later at the comfortable conclusion, that, like him,

he was a most estimable and blameless character, and that all his

acquaintances and friends were hopelessly abandoned and profligate

wretches. Which consideration, he said, could not but afford him the

liveliest satisfaction.

He furthermore conjured him to avoid, above all things, the vice of

intoxication, which he likened unto the filthy habits of swine, and to

those poisonous and baleful drugs which being chewed in the mouth, are

said to filch away the memory. At this point of his discourse, the

reverend and red-nosed gentleman became singularly incoherent, and

staggering to and fro in the excitement of his eloquence, was fain to

catch at the back of a chair to preserve his perpendicular.

Mr. Stiggins did not desire his hearers to be upon their guard against

those false prophets and wretched mockers of religion, who, without

sense to expound its first doctrines, or hearts to feel its first

principles, are more dangerous members of society than the common

criminal; imposing, as they necessarily do, upon the weakest and worst

informed, casting scorn and contempt on what should be held most sacred,

and bringing into partial disrepute large bodies of virtuous and well-

conducted persons of many excellent sects and persuasions. But as he

leaned over the back of the chair for a considerable time, and closing

one eye, winked a good deal with the other, it is presumed that he

thought all this, but kept it to himself.

During the delivery of the oration, Mrs. Weller sobbed and wept at the

end of the paragraphs; while Sam, sitting cross-legged on a chair and

resting his arms on the top rail, regarded the speaker with great

suavity and blandness of demeanour; occasionally bestowing a look of

recognition on the old gentleman, who was delighted at the beginning,

and went to sleep about half-way.

‘Brayvo; wery pretty!’ said Sam, when the red-nosed man having finished,

pulled his worn gloves on, thereby thrusting his fingers through the

broken tops till the knuckles were disclosed to view. ‘Wery pretty.’

‘I hope it may do you good, Samuel,’ said Mrs. Weller solemnly.

‘I think it vill, mum,’ replied Sam.

‘I wish I could hope that it would do your father good,’ said Mrs.

Weller.

‘Thank’ee, my dear,’ said Mr. Weller, senior. ‘How do you find yourself

arter it, my love?’

‘Scoffer!’ exclaimed Mrs. Weller.

‘Benighted man!’ said the Reverend Mr. Stiggins.

‘If I don’t get no better light than that ‘ere moonshine o’ yourn, my

worthy creetur,’ said the elder Mr. Weller, ‘it’s wery likely as I shall

continey to be a night coach till I’m took off the road altogether. Now,

Mrs. We, if the piebald stands at livery much longer, he’ll stand at

nothin’ as we go back, and p’raps that ‘ere harm-cheer ‘ull be tipped

over into some hedge or another, with the shepherd in it.’

At this supposition, the Reverend Mr. Stiggins, in evident

consternation, gathered up his hat and umbrella, and proposed an

immediate departure, to which Mrs. Weller assented. Sam walked with them

to the lodge gate, and took a dutiful leave.

‘A-do, Samivel,’ said the old gentleman.

‘Wot’s a-do?’ inquired Sammy.

‘Well, good-bye, then,’ said the old gentleman.

‘Oh, that’s wot you’re aimin’ at, is it?’ said Sam. ‘Good-bye!’

‘Sammy,’ whispered Mr. Weller, looking cautiously round; ‘my duty to

your gov’nor, and tell him if he thinks better o’ this here bis’ness, to

com-moonicate vith me. Me and a cab’net-maker has dewised a plan for

gettin’ him out. A pianner, Samivel--a pianner!’ said Mr. Weller,

striking his son on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling

back a step or two.

‘Wot do you mean?’ said Sam.

‘A pianner-forty, Samivel,’ rejoined Mr. Weller, in a still more

mysterious manner, ‘as he can have on hire; vun as von’t play, Sammy.’

‘And wot ‘ud be the good o’ that?’ said Sam.

‘Let him send to my friend, the cabinet-maker, to fetch it back, Sammy,’

replied Mr. Weller. ‘Are you avake, now?’

‘No,’ rejoined Sam.

‘There ain’t no vurks in it,’ whispered his father. ‘It ‘ull hold him

easy, vith his hat and shoes on, and breathe through the legs, vich his

holler. Have a passage ready taken for ‘Merriker. The ‘Merrikin gov’ment

will never give him up, ven vunce they find as he’s got money to spend,

Sammy. Let the gov’nor stop there, till Mrs. Bardell’s dead, or Mr.

Dodson and Fogg’s hung (wich last ewent I think is the most likely to

happen first, Sammy), and then let him come back and write a book about

the ‘Merrikins as’ll pay all his expenses and more, if he blows ‘em up

enough.’

Mr. Weller delivered this hurried abstract of his plot with great

vehemence of whisper; and then, as if fearful of weakening the effect of

the tremendous communication by any further dialogue, he gave the

coachman’s salute, and vanished.

Sam had scarcely recovered his usual composure of countenance, which had

been greatly disturbed by the secret communication of his respected

relative, when Mr. Pickwick accosted him.

‘Sam,’ said that gentleman.

‘Sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘I am going for a walk round the prison, and I wish you to attend me. I

see a prisoner we know coming this way, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

smiling.

‘Wich, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller; ‘the gen’l’m’n vith the head o’ hair,

or the interestin’ captive in the stockin’s?’

‘Neither,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick. ‘He is an older friend of yours, Sam.’

‘O’ mine, Sir?’ exclaimed Mr. Weller.

‘You recollect the gentleman very well, I dare say, Sam,’ replied Mr.

Pickwick, ‘or else you are more unmindful of your old acquaintances than

I think you are. Hush! not a word, Sam; not a syllable. Here he is.’

As Mr. Pickwick spoke, Jingle walked up. He looked less miserable than

before, being clad in a half-worn suit of clothes, which, with Mr.

Pickwick’s assistance, had been released from the pawnbroker’s. He wore

clean linen too, and had had his hair cut. He was very pale and thin,

however; and as he crept slowly up, leaning on a stick, it was easy to

see that he had suffered severely from illness and want, and was still

very weak. He took off his hat as Mr. Pickwick saluted him, and seemed

much humbled and abashed at the sight of Sam Weller.

Following close at his heels, came Mr. Job Trotter, in the catalogue of

whose vices, want of faith and attachment to his companion could at all

events find no place. He was still ragged and squalid, but his face was

not quite so hollow as on his first meeting with Mr. Pickwick, a few

days before. As he took off his hat to our benevolent old friend, he

murmured some broken expressions of gratitude, and muttered something

about having been saved from starving.

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, impatiently interrupting him, ‘you can

follow with Sam. I want to speak to you, Mr. Jingle. Can you walk

without his arm?’

‘Certainly, sir--all ready--not too fast--legs shaky--head queer--round

and round--earthquaky sort of feeling--very.’

‘Here, give me your arm,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘No, no,’ replied Jingle; ‘won’t indeed--rather not.’

‘Nonsense,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘lean upon me, I desire, Sir.’

Seeing that he was confused and agitated, and uncertain what to do, Mr.

Pickwick cut the matter short by drawing the invalided stroller’s arm

through his, and leading him away, without saying another word about it.

During the whole of this time the countenance of Mr. Samuel Weller had

exhibited an expression of the most overwhelming and absorbing

astonishment that the imagination can portray. After looking from Job to

Jingle, and from Jingle to Job in profound silence, he softly ejaculated

the words, ‘Well, I \_am\_ damn’d!’ which he repeated at least a score of

times; after which exertion, he appeared wholly bereft of speech, and

again cast his eyes, first upon the one and then upon the other, in mute

perplexity and bewilderment.

‘Now, Sam!’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking back.

‘I’m a-comin’, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller, mechanically following his

master; and still he lifted not his eyes from Mr. Job Trotter, who

walked at his side in silence.

Job kept his eyes fixed on the ground for some time. Sam, with his glued

to Job’s countenance, ran up against the people who were walking about,

and fell over little children, and stumbled against steps and railings,

without appearing at all sensible of it, until Job, looking stealthily

up, said--

‘How do you do, Mr. Weller?’

‘It \_is\_ him!’ exclaimed Sam; and having established Job’s identity

beyond all doubt, he smote his leg, and vented his feelings in a long,

shrill whistle.

‘Things has altered with me, sir,’ said Job.

‘I should think they had,’ exclaimed Mr. Weller, surveying his

companion’s rags with undisguised wonder. ‘This is rayther a change for

the worse, Mr. Trotter, as the gen’l’m’n said, wen he got two doubtful

shillin’s and sixpenn’orth o’ pocket-pieces for a good half-crown.’

‘It is indeed,’ replied Job, shaking his head. ‘There is no deception

now, Mr. Weller. Tears,’ said Job, with a look of momentary slyness--

‘tears are not the only proofs of distress, nor the best ones.’

‘No, they ain’t,’ replied Sam expressively.

‘They may be put on, Mr. Weller,’ said Job.

‘I know they may,’ said Sam; ‘some people, indeed, has ‘em always ready

laid on, and can pull out the plug wenever they likes.’

‘Yes,’ replied Job; ‘but these sort of things are not so easily

counterfeited, Mr. Weller, and it is a more painful process to get them

up.’ As he spoke, he pointed to his sallow, sunken cheeks, and, drawing

up his coat sleeve, disclosed an arm which looked as if the bone could

be broken at a touch, so sharp and brittle did it appear, beneath its

thin covering of flesh.

‘Wot have you been a-doin’ to yourself?’ said Sam, recoiling.

‘Nothing,’ replied Job.

‘Nothin’!’ echoed Sam.

‘I have been doin’ nothing for many weeks past,’ said Job; and eating

and drinking almost as little.’

Sam took one comprehensive glance at Mr. Trotter’s thin face and

wretched apparel; and then, seizing him by the arm, commenced dragging

him away with great violence.

‘Where are you going, Mr. Weller?’ said Job, vainly struggling in the

powerful grasp of his old enemy.

‘Come on,’ said Sam; ‘come on!’ He deigned no further explanation till

they reached the tap, and then called for a pot of porter, which was

speedily produced.

‘Now,’ said Sam, ‘drink that up, ev’ry drop on it, and then turn the pot

upside down, to let me see as you’ve took the medicine.’

‘But, my dear Mr. Weller,’ remonstrated Job.

‘Down vith it!’ said Sam peremptorily.

Thus admonished, Mr. Trotter raised the pot to his lips, and, by gentle

and almost imperceptible degrees, tilted it into the air. He paused

once, and only once, to draw a long breath, but without raising his face

from the vessel, which, in a few moments thereafter, he held out at

arm’s length, bottom upward. Nothing fell upon the ground but a few

particles of froth, which slowly detached themselves from the rim, and

trickled lazily down.

‘Well done!’ said Sam. ‘How do you find yourself arter it?’

‘Better, Sir. I think I am better,’ responded Job.

‘O’ course you air,’ said Sam argumentatively. ‘It’s like puttin’ gas in

a balloon. I can see with the naked eye that you gets stouter under the

operation. Wot do you say to another o’ the same dimensions?’

‘I would rather not, I am much obliged to you, Sir,’ replied Job--‘much

rather not.’

‘Vell, then, wot do you say to some wittles?’ inquired Sam.

‘Thanks to your worthy governor, Sir,’ said Mr. Trotter, ‘we have half a

leg of mutton, baked, at a quarter before three, with the potatoes under

it to save boiling.’

‘Wot! Has \_he\_ been a-purwidin’ for you?’ asked Sam emphatically.

‘He has, Sir,’ replied Job. ‘More than that, Mr. Weller; my master being

very ill, he got us a room--we were in a kennel before--and paid for it,

Sir; and come to look at us, at night, when nobody should know. Mr.

Weller,’ said Job, with real tears in his eyes, for once, ‘I could serve

that gentleman till I fell down dead at his feet.’

‘I say!’ said Sam, ‘I’ll trouble you, my friend! None o’ that!’

Job Trotter looked amazed.

‘None o’ that, I say, young feller,’ repeated Sam firmly. ‘No man serves

him but me. And now we’re upon it, I’ll let you into another secret

besides that,’ said Sam, as he paid for the beer. ‘I never heerd, mind

you, or read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights

and gaiters--not even in spectacles, as I remember, though that may ha’

been done for anythin’ I know to the contrairey--but mark my vords, Job

Trotter, he’s a reg’lar thoroughbred angel for all that; and let me see

the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun.’ With this

defiance, Mr. Weller buttoned up his change in a side pocket, and, with

many confirmatory nods and gestures by the way, proceeded in search of

the subject of discourse.

They found Mr. Pickwick, in company with Jingle, talking very earnestly,

and not bestowing a look on the groups who were congregated on the

racket-ground; they were very motley groups too, and worth the looking

at, if it were only in idle curiosity.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as Sam and his companion drew nigh, ‘you will

see how your health becomes, and think about it meanwhile. Make the

statement out for me when you feel yourself equal to the task, and I

will discuss the subject with you when I have considered it. Now, go to

your room. You are tired, and not strong enough to be out long.’

Mr. Alfred Jingle, without one spark of his old animation--with nothing

even of the dismal gaiety which he had assumed when Mr. Pickwick first

stumbled on him in his misery--bowed low without speaking, and,

motioning to Job not to follow him just yet, crept slowly away.

‘Curious scene this, is it not, Sam?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking good-

humouredly round.

‘Wery much so, Sir,’ replied Sam. ‘Wonders ‘ull never cease,’ added Sam,

speaking to himself. ‘I’m wery much mistaken if that ‘ere Jingle worn’t

a-doin somethin’ in the water-cart way!’

The area formed by the wall in that part of the Fleet in which Mr.

Pickwick stood was just wide enough to make a good racket-court; one

side being formed, of course, by the wall itself, and the other by that

portion of the prison which looked (or rather would have looked, but for

the wall) towards St. Paul’s Cathedral. Sauntering or sitting about, in

every possible attitude of listless idleness, were a great number of

debtors, the major part of whom were waiting in prison until their day

of ‘going up’ before the Insolvent Court should arrive; while others had

been remanded for various terms, which they were idling away as they

best could. Some were shabby, some were smart, many dirty, a few clean;

but there they all lounged, and loitered, and slunk about with as little

spirit or purpose as the beasts in a menagerie.

Lolling from the windows which commanded a view of this promenade were a

number of persons, some in noisy conversation with their acquaintance

below, others playing at ball with some adventurous throwers outside,

others looking on at the racket-players, or watching the boys as they

cried the game. Dirty, slipshod women passed and repassed, on their way

to the cooking-house in one corner of the yard; children screamed, and

fought, and played together, in another; the tumbling of the skittles,

and the shouts of the players, mingled perpetually with these and a

hundred other sounds; and all was noise and tumult--save in a little

miserable shed a few yards off, where lay, all quiet and ghastly, the

body of the Chancery prisoner who had died the night before, awaiting

the mockery of an inquest. The body! It is the lawyer’s term for the

restless, whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and

griefs, that make up the living man. The law had his body; and there it

lay, clothed in grave-clothes, an awful witness to its tender mercy.

‘Would you like to see a whistling-shop, Sir?’ inquired Job Trotter.

‘What do you mean?’ was Mr. Pickwick’s counter inquiry.

‘A vistlin’ shop, Sir,’ interposed Mr. Weller.

‘What is that, Sam?--A bird-fancier’s?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Bless your heart, no, Sir,’ replied Job; ‘a whistling-shop, Sir, is

where they sell spirits.’ Mr. Job Trotter briefly explained here, that

all persons, being prohibited under heavy penalties from conveying

spirits into debtors’ prisons, and such commodities being highly prized

by the ladies and gentlemen confined therein, it had occurred to some

speculative turnkey to connive, for certain lucrative considerations, at

two or three prisoners retailing the favourite article of gin, for their

own profit and advantage.

‘This plan, you see, Sir, has been gradually introduced into all the

prisons for debt,’ said Mr. Trotter.

‘And it has this wery great advantage,’ said Sam, ‘that the turnkeys

takes wery good care to seize hold o’ ev’rybody but them as pays ‘em,

that attempts the willainy, and wen it gets in the papers they’re

applauded for their wigilance; so it cuts two ways--frightens other

people from the trade, and elewates their own characters.’

‘Exactly so, Mr. Weller,’ observed Job.

‘Well, but are these rooms never searched to ascertain whether any

spirits are concealed in them?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Cert’nly they are, Sir,’ replied Sam; ‘but the turnkeys knows

beforehand, and gives the word to the wistlers, and you may wistle for

it wen you go to look.’

By this time, Job had tapped at a door, which was opened by a gentleman

with an uncombed head, who bolted it after them when they had walked in,

and grinned; upon which Job grinned, and Sam also; whereupon Mr.

Pickwick, thinking it might be expected of him, kept on smiling to the

end of the interview.

The gentleman with the uncombed head appeared quite satisfied with this

mute announcement of their business, and, producing a flat stone bottle,

which might hold about a couple of quarts, from beneath his bedstead,

filled out three glasses of gin, which Job Trotter and Sam disposed of

in a most workmanlike manner.

‘Any more?’ said the whistling gentleman.

‘No more,’ replied Job Trotter.

Mr. Pickwick paid, the door was unbolted, and out they came; the

uncombed gentleman bestowing a friendly nod upon Mr. Roker, who happened

to be passing at the moment.

From this spot, Mr. Pickwick wandered along all the galleries, up and

down all the staircases, and once again round the whole area of the

yard. The great body of the prison population appeared to be Mivins, and

Smangle, and the parson, and the butcher, and the leg, over and over,

and over again. There were the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise,

the same general characteristics, in every corner; in the best and the

worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the

people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an

uneasy dream.

‘I have seen enough,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as he threw himself into a

chair in his little apartment. ‘My head aches with these scenes, and my

heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room.’

And Mr. Pickwick steadfastly adhered to this determination. For three

long months he remained shut up, all day; only stealing out at night to

breathe the air, when the greater part of his fellow-prisoners were in

bed or carousing in their rooms. His health was beginning to suffer from

the closeness of the confinement, but neither the often-repeated

entreaties of Perker and his friends, nor the still more frequently-

repeated warnings and admonitions of Mr. Samuel Weller, could induce him

to alter one jot of his inflexible resolution.

CHAPTER XLVI. RECORDS A TOUCHING ACT OF DELICATE FEELING, NOT UNMIXED

WITH PLEASANTRY, ACHIEVED AND PERFORMED BY Messrs. DODSON AND FOGG

It was within a week of the close of the month of July, that a hackney

cabriolet, number unrecorded, was seen to proceed at a rapid pace up

Goswell Street; three people were squeezed into it besides the driver,

who sat in his own particular little dickey at the side; over the apron

were hung two shawls, belonging to two small vixenish-looking ladies

under the apron; between whom, compressed into a very small compass, was

stowed away, a gentleman of heavy and subdued demeanour, who, whenever

he ventured to make an observation, was snapped up short by one of the

vixenish ladies before-mentioned. Lastly, the two vixenish ladies and

the heavy gentleman were giving the driver contradictory directions, all

tending to the one point, that he should stop at Mrs. Bardell’s door;

which the heavy gentleman, in direct opposition to, and defiance of, the

vixenish ladies, contended was a green door and not a yellow one.

‘Stop at the house with a green door, driver,’ said the heavy gentleman.

‘Oh! You perwerse creetur!’ exclaimed one of the vixenish ladies. ‘Drive

to the ‘ouse with the yellow door, cabmin.’

Upon this the cabman, who in a sudden effort to pull up at the house

with the green door, had pulled the horse up so high that he nearly

pulled him backward into the cabriolet, let the animal’s fore-legs down

to the ground again, and paused.

‘Now vere am I to pull up?’ inquired the driver. ‘Settle it among

yourselves. All I ask is, vere?’

Here the contest was renewed with increased violence; and the horse

being troubled with a fly on his nose, the cabman humanely employed his

leisure in lashing him about on the head, on the counter-irritation

principle.

‘Most wotes carries the day!’ said one of the vixenish ladies at length.

‘The ‘ouse with the yellow door, cabman.’

But after the cabriolet had dashed up, in splendid style, to the house

with the yellow door, ‘making,’ as one of the vixenish ladies

triumphantly said, ‘acterrally more noise than if one had come in one’s

own carriage,’ and after the driver had dismounted to assist the ladies

in getting out, the small round head of Master Thomas Bardell was thrust

out of the one-pair window of a house with a red door, a few numbers

off.

‘Aggrawatin’ thing!’ said the vixenish lady last-mentioned, darting a

withering glance at the heavy gentleman.

‘My dear, it’s not my fault,’ said the gentleman.

‘Don’t talk to me, you creetur, don’t,’ retorted the lady. ‘The house

with the red door, cabmin. Oh! If ever a woman was troubled with a

ruffinly creetur, that takes a pride and a pleasure in disgracing his

wife on every possible occasion afore strangers, I am that woman!’

‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Raddle,’ said the other little

woman, who was no other than Mrs. Cluppins.

‘What have I been a-doing of?’ asked Mr. Raddle.

‘Don’t talk to me, don’t, you brute, for fear I should be perwoked to

forgit my sect and strike you!’ said Mrs. Raddle.

While this dialogue was going on, the driver was most ignominiously

leading the horse, by the bridle, up to the house with the red door,

which Master Bardell had already opened. Here was a mean and low way of

arriving at a friend’s house! No dashing up, with all the fire and fury

of the animal; no jumping down of the driver; no loud knocking at the

door; no opening of the apron with a crash at the very last moment, for

fear of the ladies sitting in a draught; and then the man handing the

shawls out, afterwards, as if he were a private coachman! The whole edge

of the thing had been taken off--it was flatter than walking.

‘Well, Tommy,’ said Mrs. Cluppins, ‘how’s your poor dear mother?’

‘Oh, she’s very well,’ replied Master Bardell. ‘She’s in the front

parlour, all ready. I’m ready too, I am.’ Here Master Bardell put his

hands in his pockets, and jumped off and on the bottom step of the door.

‘Is anybody else a-goin’, Tommy?’ said Mrs. Cluppins, arranging her

pelerine.

‘Mrs. Sanders is going, she is,’ replied Tommy; ‘I’m going too, I am.’

‘Drat the boy,’ said little Mrs. Cluppins. ‘He thinks of nobody but

himself. Here, Tommy, dear.’

‘Well,’ said Master Bardell.

‘Who else is a-goin’, lovey?’ said Mrs. Cluppins, in an insinuating

manner.

‘Oh! Mrs. Rogers is a-goin’,’ replied Master Bardell, opening his eyes

very wide as he delivered the intelligence.

‘What? The lady as has taken the lodgings!’ ejaculated Mrs. Cluppins.

Master Bardell put his hands deeper down into his pockets, and nodded

exactly thirty-five times, to imply that it was the lady-lodger, and no

other.

‘Bless us!’ said Mrs. Cluppins. ‘It’s quite a party!’

‘Ah, if you knew what was in the cupboard, you’d say so,’ replied Master

Bardell.

‘What is there, Tommy?’ said Mrs. Cluppins coaxingly. ‘You’ll tell \_me\_,

Tommy, I know.’

No, I won’t,’ replied Master Bardell, shaking his head, and applying

himself to the bottom step again.

‘Drat the child!’ muttered Mrs. Cluppins. ‘What a prowokin’ little

wretch it is! Come, Tommy, tell your dear Cluppy.’

‘Mother said I wasn’t to,’ rejoined Master Bardell, ‘I’m a-goin’ to have

some, I am.’ Cheered by this prospect, the precocious boy applied

himself to his infantile treadmill, with increased vigour.

The above examination of a child of tender years took place while Mr.

and Mrs. Raddle and the cab-driver were having an altercation concerning

the fare, which, terminating at this point in favour of the cabman, Mrs.

Raddle came up tottering.

‘Lauk, Mary Ann! what’s the matter?’ said Mrs. Cluppins.

‘It’s put me all over in such a tremble, Betsy,’ replied Mrs. Raddle.

‘Raddle ain’t like a man; he leaves everythink to me.’

This was scarcely fair upon the unfortunate Mr. Raddle, who had been

thrust aside by his good lady in the commencement of the dispute, and

peremptorily commanded to hold his tongue. He had no opportunity of

defending himself, however, for Mrs. Raddle gave unequivocal signs of

fainting; which, being perceived from the parlour window, Mrs. Bardell,

Mrs. Sanders, the lodger, and the lodger’s servant, darted precipitately

out, and conveyed her into the house, all talking at the same time, and

giving utterance to various expressions of pity and condolence, as if

she were one of the most suffering mortals on earth. Being conveyed into

the front parlour, she was there deposited on a sofa; and the lady from

the first floor running up to the first floor, returned with a bottle of

sal-volatile, which, holding Mrs. Raddle tight round the neck, she

applied in all womanly kindness and pity to her nose, until that lady

with many plunges and struggles was fain to declare herself decidedly

better.

‘Ah, poor thing!’ said Mrs. Rogers, ‘I know what her feelin’s is, too

well.’

Ah, poor thing! so do I,’ said Mrs. Sanders; and then all the ladies

moaned in unison, and said they knew what it was, and they pitied her

from their hearts, they did. Even the lodger’s little servant, who was

thirteen years old and three feet high, murmured her sympathy.

‘But what’s been the matter?’ said Mrs. Bardell.

‘Ah, what has decomposed you, ma’am?’ inquired Mrs. Rogers.

‘I have been a good deal flurried,’ replied Mrs. Raddle, in a

reproachful manner. Thereupon the ladies cast indignant glances at Mr.

Raddle.

‘Why, the fact is,’ said that unhappy gentleman, stepping forward, ‘when

we alighted at this door, a dispute arose with the driver of the

cabrioily--’ A loud scream from his wife, at the mention of this word,

rendered all further explanation inaudible.

‘You’d better leave us to bring her round, Raddle,’ said Mrs. Cluppins.

‘She’ll never get better as long as you’re here.’

All the ladies concurred in this opinion; so Mr. Raddle was pushed out

of the room, and requested to give himself an airing in the back yard.

Which he did for about a quarter of an hour, when Mrs. Bardell announced

to him with a solemn face that he might come in now, but that he must be

very careful how he behaved towards his wife. She knew he didn’t mean to

be unkind; but Mary Ann was very far from strong, and, if he didn’t take

care, he might lose her when he least expected it, which would be a very

dreadful reflection for him afterwards; and so on. All this, Mr. Raddle

heard with great submission, and presently returned to the parlour in a

most lamb-like manner.

‘Why, Mrs. Rogers, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Bardell, ‘you’ve never been

introduced, I declare! Mr. Raddle, ma’am; Mrs. Cluppins, ma’am; Mrs.

Raddle, ma’am.’

‘Which is Mrs. Cluppins’s sister,’ suggested Mrs. Sanders.

‘Oh, indeed!’ said Mrs. Rogers graciously; for she was the lodger, and

her servant was in waiting, so she was more gracious than intimate, in

right of her position. ‘Oh, indeed!’

Mrs. Raddle smiled sweetly, Mr. Raddle bowed, and Mrs. Cluppins said,

‘she was sure she was very happy to have an opportunity of being known

to a lady which she had heerd so much in favour of, as Mrs. Rogers.’ A

compliment which the last-named lady acknowledged with graceful

condescension.

‘Well, Mr. Raddle,’ said Mrs. Bardell; ‘I’m sure you ought to feel very

much honoured at you and Tommy being the only gentlemen to escort so

many ladies all the way to the Spaniards, at Hampstead. Don’t you think

he ought, Mrs. Rogers, ma’am?’

Oh, certainly, ma’am,’ replied Mrs. Rogers; after whom all the other

ladies responded, ‘Oh, certainly.’

‘Of course I feel it, ma’am,’ said Mr. Raddle, rubbing his hands, and

evincing a slight tendency to brighten up a little. ‘Indeed, to tell you

the truth, I said, as we was a-coming along in the cabrioily--’

At the recapitulation of the word which awakened so many painful

recollections, Mrs. Raddle applied her handkerchief to her eyes again,

and uttered a half-suppressed scream; so that Mrs. Bardell frowned upon

Mr. Raddle, to intimate that he had better not say anything more, and

desired Mrs. Rogers’s servant, with an air, to ‘put the wine on.’

This was the signal for displaying the hidden treasures of the closet,

which comprised sundry plates of oranges and biscuits, and a bottle of

old crusted port--that at one-and-nine--with another of the celebrated

East India sherry at fourteen-pence, which were all produced in honour

of the lodger, and afforded unlimited satisfaction to everybody. After

great consternation had been excited in the mind of Mrs. Cluppins, by an

attempt on the part of Tommy to recount how he had been cross-examined

regarding the cupboard then in action (which was fortunately nipped in

the bud by his imbibing half a glass of the old crusted ‘the wrong way,’

and thereby endangering his life for some seconds), the party walked

forth in quest of a Hampstead stage. This was soon found, and in a

couple of hours they all arrived safely in the Spaniards Tea-gardens,

where the luckless Mr. Raddle’s very first act nearly occasioned his

good lady a relapse; it being neither more nor less than to order tea

for seven, whereas (as the ladies one and all remarked), what could have

been easier than for Tommy to have drank out of anybody’s cup--or

everybody’s, if that was all--when the waiter wasn’t looking, which

would have saved one head of tea, and the tea just as good!

However, there was no help for it, and the tea-tray came, with seven

cups and saucers, and bread-and-butter on the same scale. Mrs. Bardell

was unanimously voted into the chair, and Mrs. Rogers being stationed on

her right hand, and Mrs. Raddle on her left, the meal proceeded with

great merriment and success.

‘How sweet the country is, to be sure!’ sighed Mrs. Rogers; ‘I almost

wish I lived in it always.’

‘Oh, you wouldn’t like that, ma’am,’ replied Mrs. Bardell, rather

hastily; for it was not at all advisable, with reference to the

lodgings, to encourage such notions; ‘you wouldn’t like it, ma’am.’

‘Oh! I should think you was a deal too lively and sought after, to be

content with the country, ma’am,’ said little Mrs. Cluppins.

‘Perhaps I am, ma’am. Perhaps I am,’ sighed the first-floor lodger.

‘For lone people as have got nobody to care for them, or take care of

them, or as have been hurt in their mind, or that kind of thing,’

observed Mr. Raddle, plucking up a little cheerfulness, and looking

round, ‘the country is all very well. The country for a wounded spirit,

they say.’

Now, of all things in the world that the unfortunate man could have

said, any would have been preferable to this. Of course Mrs. Bardell

burst into tears, and requested to be led from the table instantly; upon

which the affectionate child began to cry too, most dismally.

‘Would anybody believe, ma’am,’ exclaimed Mrs. Raddle, turning fiercely

to the first-floor lodger, ‘that a woman could be married to such a

unmanly creetur, which can tamper with a woman’s feelings as he does,

every hour in the day, ma’am?’

‘My dear,’ remonstrated Mr. Raddle, ‘I didn’t mean anything, my dear.’

‘You didn’t mean!’ repeated Mrs. Raddle, with great scorn and contempt.

‘Go away. I can’t bear the sight on you, you brute.’

‘You must not flurry yourself, Mary Ann,’ interposed Mrs. Cluppins. ‘You

really must consider yourself, my dear, which you never do. Now go away,

Raddle, there’s a good soul, or you’ll only aggravate her.’

‘You had better take your tea by yourself, Sir, indeed,’ said Mrs.

Rogers, again applying the smelling-bottle.

Mrs. Sanders, who, according to custom, was very busy with the bread-

and-butter, expressed the same opinion, and Mr. Raddle quietly retired.

After this, there was a great hoisting up of Master Bardell, who was

rather a large size for hugging, into his mother’s arms, in which

operation he got his boots in the tea-board, and occasioned some

confusion among the cups and saucers. But that description of fainting

fits, which is contagious among ladies, seldom lasts long; so when he

had been well kissed, and a little cried over, Mrs. Bardell recovered,

set him down again, wondering how she could have been so foolish, and

poured out some more tea.

It was at this moment, that the sound of approaching wheels was heard,

and that the ladies, looking up, saw a hackney-coach stop at the garden

gate.

‘More company!’ said Mrs. Sanders.

‘It’s a gentleman,’ said Mrs. Raddle.

‘Well, if it ain’t Mr. Jackson, the young man from Dodson and Fogg’s!’

cried Mrs. Bardell. ‘Why, gracious! Surely Mr. Pickwick can’t have paid

the damages.’

‘Or hoffered marriage!’ said Mrs. Cluppins.

‘Dear me, how slow the gentleman is,’ exclaimed Mrs. Rogers. ‘Why

doesn’t he make haste!’

As the lady spoke these words, Mr. Jackson turned from the coach where

he had been addressing some observations to a shabby man in black

leggings, who had just emerged from the vehicle with a thick ash stick

in his hand, and made his way to the place where the ladies were seated;

winding his hair round the brim of his hat, as he came along.

‘Is anything the matter? Has anything taken place, Mr. Jackson?’ said

Mrs. Bardell eagerly.

‘Nothing whatever, ma’am,’ replied Mr. Jackson. ‘How de do, ladies? I

have to ask pardon, ladies, for intruding--but the law, ladies--the

law.’ With this apology Mr. Jackson smiled, made a comprehensive bow,

and gave his hair another wind. Mrs. Rogers whispered Mrs. Raddle that

he was really an elegant young man.

‘I called in Goswell Street,’ resumed Mr. Jackson, ‘and hearing that you

were here, from the slavey, took a coach and came on. Our people want

you down in the city directly, Mrs. Bardell.’

‘Lor!’ ejaculated that lady, starting at the sudden nature of the

communication.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Jackson, biting his lip. ‘It’s very important and

pressing business, which can’t be postponed on any account. Indeed,

Dodson expressly said so to me, and so did Fogg. I’ve kept the coach on

purpose for you to go back in.’

‘How very strange!’ exclaimed Mrs. Bardell.

The ladies agreed that it \_was \_ very strange, but were unanimously of

opinion that it must be very important, or Dodson & Fogg would never

have sent; and further, that the business being urgent, she ought to

repair to Dodson & Fogg’s without any delay.

There was a certain degree of pride and importance about being wanted by

one’s lawyers in such a monstrous hurry, that was by no means

displeasing to Mrs. Bardell, especially as it might be reasonably

supposed to enhance her consequence in the eyes of the first-floor

lodger. She simpered a little, affected extreme vexation and hesitation,

and at last arrived at the conclusion that she supposed she must go.

‘But won’t you refresh yourself after your walk, Mr. Jackson?’ said Mrs.

Bardell persuasively.

‘Why, really there ain’t much time to lose,’ replied Jackson; ‘and I’ve

got a friend here,’ he continued, looking towards the man with the ash

stick.

‘Oh, ask your friend to come here, Sir,’ said Mrs. Bardell. ‘Pray ask

your friend here, Sir.’

‘Why, thank’ee, I’d rather not,’ said Mr. Jackson, with some

embarrassment of manner. ‘He’s not much used to ladies’ society, and it

makes him bashful. If you’ll order the waiter to deliver him anything

short, he won’t drink it off at once, won’t he!--only try him!’ Mr.

Jackson’s fingers wandered playfully round his nose at this portion of

his discourse, to warn his hearers that he was speaking ironically.

The waiter was at once despatched to the bashful gentleman, and the

bashful gentleman took something; Mr. Jackson also took something, and

the ladies took something, for hospitality’s sake. Mr. Jackson then said

he was afraid it was time to go; upon which, Mrs. Sanders, Mrs.

Cluppins, and Tommy (who it was arranged should accompany Mrs. Bardell,

leaving the others to Mr. Raddle’s protection), got into the coach.

‘Isaac,’ said Jackson, as Mrs. Bardell prepared to get in, looking up at

the man with the ash stick, who was seated on the box, smoking a cigar.

‘Well?’

‘This is Mrs. Bardell.’

‘Oh, I know’d that long ago,’ said the man.

Mrs. Bardell got in, Mr. Jackson got in after her, and away they drove.

Mrs. Bardell could not help ruminating on what Mr. Jackson’s friend had

said. Shrewd creatures, those lawyers. Lord bless us, how they find

people out!

‘Sad thing about these costs of our people’s, ain’t it,’ said Jackson,

when Mrs. Cluppins and Mrs. Sanders had fallen asleep; ‘your bill of

costs, I mean.’

‘I’m very sorry they can’t get them,’ replied Mrs. Bardell. ‘But if you

law gentlemen do these things on speculation, why you must get a loss

now and then, you know.’

‘You gave them a \_cognovit \_for the amount of your costs, after the

trial, I’m told!’ said Jackson.

‘Yes. Just as a matter of form,’ replied Mrs. Bardell.

‘Certainly,’ replied Jackson drily. ‘Quite a matter of form. Quite.’

On they drove, and Mrs. Bardell fell asleep. She was awakened, after

some time, by the stopping of the coach.

‘Bless us!’ said the lady. ‘Are we at Freeman’s Court?’

‘We’re not going quite so far,’ replied Jackson. ‘Have the goodness to

step out.’

Mrs. Bardell, not yet thoroughly awake, complied. It was a curious

place: a large wall, with a gate in the middle, and a gas-light burning

inside.

‘Now, ladies,’ cried the man with the ash stick, looking into the coach,

and shaking Mrs. Sanders to wake her, ‘Come!’ Rousing her friend, Mrs.

Sanders alighted. Mrs. Bardell, leaning on Jackson’s arm, and leading

Tommy by the hand, had already entered the porch. They followed.

The room they turned into was even more odd-looking than the porch. Such

a number of men standing about! And they stared so!

‘What place is this?’ inquired Mrs. Bardell, pausing.

‘Only one of our public offices,’ replied Jackson, hurrying her through

a door, and looking round to see that the other women were following.

‘Look sharp, Isaac!’

‘Safe and sound,’ replied the man with the ash stick. The door swung

heavily after them, and they descended a small flight of steps.

‘Here we are at last. All right and tight, Mrs. Bardell!’ said Jackson,

looking exultingly round.

‘What do you mean?’ said Mrs. Bardell, with a palpitating heart.

‘Just this,’ replied Jackson, drawing her a little on one side; ‘don’t

be frightened, Mrs. Bardell. There never was a more delicate man than

Dodson, ma’am, or a more humane man than Fogg. It was their duty in the

way of business, to take you in execution for them costs; but they were

anxious to spare your feelings as much as they could. What a comfort it

must be, to you, to think how it’s been done! This is the Fleet, ma’am.

Wish you good-night, Mrs. Bardell. Good-night, Tommy!’

As Jackson hurried away in company with the man with the ash stick

another man, with a key in his hand, who had been looking on, led the

bewildered female to a second short flight of steps leading to a

doorway. Mrs. Bardell screamed violently; Tommy roared; Mrs. Cluppins

shrunk within herself; and Mrs. Sanders made off, without more ado. For

there stood the injured Mr. Pickwick, taking his nightly allowance of

air; and beside him leant Samuel Weller, who, seeing Mrs. Bardell, took

his hat off with mock reverence, while his master turned indignantly on

his heel.

‘Don’t bother the woman,’ said the turnkey to Weller; ‘she’s just come

in.’

‘A prisoner!’ said Sam, quickly replacing his hat. ‘Who’s the

plaintives? What for? Speak up, old feller.’

‘Dodson and Fogg,’ replied the man; ‘execution on \_cognovit \_for costs.’

‘Here, Job, Job!’ shouted Sam, dashing into the passage. ‘Run to Mr.

Perker’s, Job. I want him directly. I see some good in this. Here’s a

game. Hooray! vere’s the gov’nor?’

But there was no reply to these inquiries, for Job had started furiously

off, the instant he received his commission, and Mrs. Bardell had

fainted in real downright earnest.

CHAPTER XLVII. IS CHIEFLY DEVOTED TO MATTERS OF BUSINESS, AND THE

TEMPORAL ADVANTAGE OF DODSON AND FOGG--MR. WINKLE REAPPEARS UNDER

EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES--MR. PICKWICK’S BENEVOLENCE PROVES STRONGER

THAN HIS OBSTINACY

Job Trotter, abating nothing of his speed, ran up Holborn, sometimes in

the middle of the road, sometimes on the pavement, sometimes in the

gutter, as the chances of getting along varied with the press of men,

women, children, and coaches, in each division of the thoroughfare, and,

regardless of all obstacles stopped not for an instant until he reached

the gate of Gray’s Inn. Notwithstanding all the expedition he had used,

however, the gate had been closed a good half-hour when he reached it,

and by the time he had discovered Mr. Perker’s laundress, who lived with

a married daughter, who had bestowed her hand upon a non-resident

waiter, who occupied the one-pair of some number in some street closely

adjoining to some brewery somewhere behind Gray’s Inn Lane, it was

within fifteen minutes of closing the prison for the night. Mr. Lowten

had still to be ferreted out from the back parlour of the Magpie and

Stump; and Job had scarcely accomplished this object, and communicated

Sam Weller’s message, when the clock struck ten.

‘There,’ said Lowten, ‘it’s too late now. You can’t get in to-night;

you’ve got the key of the street, my friend.’

‘Never mind me,’ replied Job. ‘I can sleep anywhere. But won’t it be

better to see Mr. Perker to-night, so that we may be there, the first

thing in the morning?’

‘Why,’ responded Lowten, after a little consideration, ‘if it was in

anybody else’s case, Perker wouldn’t be best pleased at my going up to

his house; but as it’s Mr. Pickwick’s, I think I may venture to take a

cab and charge it to the office.’ Deciding on this line of conduct, Mr.

Lowten took up his hat, and begging the assembled company to appoint a

deputy-chairman during his temporary absence, led the way to the nearest

coach-stand. Summoning the cab of most promising appearance, he directed

the driver to repair to Montague Place, Russell Square.

Mr. Perker had had a dinner-party that day, as was testified by the

appearance of lights in the drawing-room windows, the sound of an

improved grand piano, and an improvable cabinet voice issuing therefrom,

and a rather overpowering smell of meat which pervaded the steps and

entry. In fact, a couple of very good country agencies happening to come

up to town, at the same time, an agreeable little party had been got

together to meet them, comprising Mr. Snicks, the Life Office Secretary,

Mr. Prosee, the eminent counsel, three solicitors, one commissioner of

bankrupts, a special pleader from the Temple, a small-eyed peremptory

young gentleman, his pupil, who had written a lively book about the law

of demises, with a vast quantity of marginal notes and references; and

several other eminent and distinguished personages. From this society,

little Mr. Perker detached himself, on his clerk being announced in a

whisper; and repairing to the dining-room, there found Mr. Lowten and

Job Trotter looking very dim and shadowy by the light of a kitchen

candle, which the gentleman who condescended to appear in plush shorts

and cottons for a quarterly stipend, had, with a becoming contempt for

the clerk and all things appertaining to ‘the office,’ placed upon the

table.

‘Now, Lowten,’ said little Mr. Perker, shutting the door, ‘what’s the

matter? No important letter come in a parcel, is there?’

‘No, Sir,’ replied Lowten. ‘This is a messenger from Mr. Pickwick, Sir.’

‘From Pickwick, eh?’ said the little man, turning quickly to Job. ‘Well,

what is it?’

‘Dodson and Fogg have taken Mrs. Bardell in execution for her costs,

Sir,’ said Job.

‘No!’ exclaimed Perker, putting his hands in his pockets, and reclining

against the sideboard.

‘Yes,’ said Job. ‘It seems they got a cognovit out of her, for the

amount of ‘em, directly after the trial.’

‘By Jove!’ said Perker, taking both hands out of his pockets, and

striking the knuckles of his right against the palm of his left,

emphatically, ‘those are the cleverest scamps I ever had anything to do

with!’

‘The sharpest practitioners I ever knew, Sir,’ observed Lowten.

‘Sharp!’ echoed Perker. ‘There’s no knowing where to have them.’

‘Very true, Sir, there is not,’ replied Lowten; and then, both master

and man pondered for a few seconds, with animated countenances, as if

they were reflecting upon one of the most beautiful and ingenious

discoveries that the intellect of man had ever made. When they had in

some measure recovered from their trance of admiration, Job Trotter

discharged himself of the rest of his commission. Perker nodded his head

thoughtfully, and pulled out his watch.

‘At ten precisely, I will be there,’ said the little man. ‘Sam is quite

right. Tell him so. Will you take a glass of wine, Lowten?’

No, thank you, Sir.’

‘You mean yes, I think,’ said the little man, turning to the sideboard

for a decanter and glasses.

As Lowten \_did \_mean yes, he said no more on the subject, but inquired

of Job, in an audible whisper, whether the portrait of Perker, which

hung opposite the fireplace, wasn’t a wonderful likeness, to which Job

of course replied that it was. The wine being by this time poured out,

Lowten drank to Mrs. Perker and the children, and Job to Perker. The

gentleman in the plush shorts and cottons considering it no part of his

duty to show the people from the office out, consistently declined to

answer the bell, and they showed themselves out. The attorney betook

himself to his drawing-room, the clerk to the Magpie and Stump, and Job

to Covent Garden Market to spend the night in a vegetable basket.

Punctually at the appointed hour next morning, the good-humoured little

attorney tapped at Mr. Pickwick’s door, which was opened with great

alacrity by Sam Weller.

‘Mr. Perker, sir,’ said Sam, announcing the visitor to Mr. Pickwick, who

was sitting at the window in a thoughtful attitude. ‘Wery glad you’ve

looked in accidentally, Sir. I rather think the gov’nor wants to have a

word and a half with you, Sir.’

Perker bestowed a look of intelligence on Sam, intimating that he

understood he was not to say he had been sent for; and beckoning him to

approach, whispered briefly in his ear.

‘You don’t mean that ‘ere, Sir?’ said Sam, starting back in excessive

surprise.

Perker nodded and smiled.

Mr. Samuel Weller looked at the little lawyer, then at Mr. Pickwick,

then at the ceiling, then at Perker again; grinned, laughed outright,

and finally, catching up his hat from the carpet, without further

explanation, disappeared.

‘What does this mean?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, looking at Perker with

astonishment. ‘What has put Sam into this extraordinary state?’

‘Oh, nothing, nothing,’ replied Perker. ‘Come, my dear Sir, draw up your

chair to the table. I have a good deal to say to you.’

‘What papers are those?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, as the little man

deposited on the table a small bundle of documents tied with red tape.

‘The papers in Bardell and Pickwick,’ replied Perker, undoing the knot

with his teeth.

Mr. Pickwick grated the legs of his chair against the ground; and

throwing himself into it, folded his hands and looked sternly--if Mr.

Pickwick ever could look sternly--at his legal friend.

‘You don’t like to hear the name of the cause?’ said the little man,

still busying himself with the knot.

‘No, I do not indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Sorry for that,’ resumed Perker, ‘because it will form the subject of

our conversation.’

‘I would rather that the subject should be never mentioned between us,

Perker,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick hastily.

‘Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir,’ said the little man, untying the bundle, and

glancing eagerly at Mr. Pickwick out of the corners of his eyes. ‘It

must be mentioned. I have come here on purpose. Now, are you ready to

hear what I have to say, my dear Sir? No hurry; if you are not, I can

wait. I have this morning’s paper here. Your time shall be mine. There!’

Hereupon, the little man threw one leg over the other, and made a show

of beginning to read with great composure and application.

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a sigh, but softening into a smile

at the same time. ‘Say what you have to say; it’s the old story, I

suppose?’

‘With a difference, my dear Sir; with a difference,’ rejoined Perker,

deliberately folding up the paper and putting it into his pocket again.

‘Mrs. Bardell, the plaintiff in the action, is within these walls, Sir.’

‘I know it,’ was Mr. Pickwick’s reply.

‘Very good,’ retorted Perker. ‘And you know how she comes here, I

suppose; I mean on what grounds, and at whose suit?’

‘Yes; at least I have heard Sam’s account of the matter,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, with affected carelessness.

‘Sam’s account of the matter,’ replied Perker, ‘is, I will venture to

say, a perfectly correct one. Well now, my dear Sir, the first question

I have to ask, is, whether this woman is to remain here?’

‘To remain here!’ echoed Mr. Pickwick.

‘To remain here, my dear Sir,’ rejoined Perker, leaning back in his

chair and looking steadily at his client.

‘How can you ask me?’ said that gentleman. ‘It rests with Dodson and

Fogg; you know that very well.’

‘I know nothing of the kind,’ retorted Perker firmly. ‘It does \_not

\_rest with Dodson and Fogg; you know the men, my dear Sir, as well as I

do. It rests solely, wholly, and entirely with you.’

‘With me!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, rising nervously from his chair, and

reseating himself directly afterwards.

The little man gave a double-knock on the lid of his snuff-box, opened

it, took a great pinch, shut it up again, and repeated the words, ‘With

you.’

‘I say, my dear Sir,’ resumed the little man, who seemed to gather

confidence from the snuff--‘I say, that her speedy liberation or

perpetual imprisonment rests with you, and with you alone. Hear me out,

my dear Sir, if you please, and do not be so very energetic, for it will

only put you into a perspiration and do no good whatever. I say,’

continued Perker, checking off each position on a different finger, as

he laid it down--‘I say that nobody but you can rescue her from this den

of wretchedness; and that you can only do that, by paying the costs of

this suit--both of plaintive and defendant--into the hands of these

Freeman Court sharks. Now pray be quiet, my dear sir.’

Mr. Pickwick, whose face had been undergoing most surprising changes

during this speech, and was evidently on the verge of a strong burst of

indignation, calmed his wrath as well as he could. Perker, strengthening

his argumentative powers with another pinch of snuff, proceeded--

‘I have seen the woman, this morning. By paying the costs, you can

obtain a full release and discharge from the damages; and further--this

I know is a far greater object of consideration with you, my dear sir--a

voluntary statement, under her hand, in the form of a letter to me, that

this business was, from the very first, fomented, and encouraged, and

brought about, by these men, Dodson and Fogg; that she deeply regrets

ever having been the instrument of annoyance or injury to you; and that

she entreats me to intercede with you, and implore your pardon.’

‘If I pay her costs for her,’ said Mr. Pickwick indignantly. ‘A valuable

document, indeed!’

‘No “if” in the case, my dear Sir,’ said Perker triumphantly. ‘There is

the very letter I speak of. Brought to my office by another woman at

nine o’clock this morning, before I had set foot in this place, or held

any communication with Mrs. Bardell, upon my honour.’ Selecting the

letter from the bundle, the little lawyer laid it at Mr. Pickwick’s

elbow, and took snuff for two consecutive minutes, without winking.

‘Is this all you have to say to me?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick mildly.

‘Not quite,’ replied Perker. ‘I cannot undertake to say, at this moment,

whether the wording of the cognovit, the nature of the ostensible

consideration, and the proof we can get together about the whole conduct

of the suit, will be sufficient to justify an indictment for conspiracy.

I fear not, my dear Sir; they are too clever for that, I doubt. I do

mean to say, however, that the whole facts, taken together, will be

sufficient to justify you, in the minds of all reasonable men. And now,

my dear Sir, I put it to you. This one hundred and fifty pounds, or

whatever it may be--take it in round numbers--is nothing to you. A jury

had decided against you; well, their verdict is wrong, but still they

decided as they thought right, and it \_is\_ against you. You have now an

opportunity, on easy terms, of placing yourself in a much higher

position than you ever could, by remaining here; which would only be

imputed, by people who didn’t know you, to sheer dogged, wrongheaded,

brutal obstinacy; nothing else, my dear Sir, believe me. Can you

hesitate to avail yourself of it, when it restores you to your friends,

your old pursuits, your health and amusements; when it liberates your

faithful and attached servant, whom you otherwise doom to imprisonment

for the whole of your life; and above all, when it enables you to take

the very magnanimous revenge--which I know, my dear sir, is one after

your own heart--of releasing this woman from a scene of misery and

debauchery, to which no man should ever be consigned, if I had my will,

but the infliction of which on any woman, is even more frightful and

barbarous. Now I ask you, my dear sir, not only as your legal adviser,

but as your very true friend, will you let slip the occasion of

attaining all these objects, and doing all this good, for the paltry

consideration of a few pounds finding their way into the pockets of a

couple of rascals, to whom it makes no manner of difference, except that

the more they gain, the more they’ll seek, and so the sooner be led into

some piece of knavery that must end in a crash? I have put these

considerations to you, my dear Sir, very feebly and imperfectly, but I

ask you to think of them. Turn them over in your mind as long as you

please. I wait here most patiently for your answer.’

Before Mr. Pickwick could reply, before Mr. Perker had taken one

twentieth part of the snuff with which so unusually long an address

imperatively required to be followed up, there was a low murmuring of

voices outside, and then a hesitating knock at the door.

‘Dear, dear,’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who had been evidently roused by

his friend’s appeal; ‘what an annoyance that door is! Who is that?’

‘Me, Sir,’ replied Sam Weller, putting in his head.

‘I can’t speak to you just now, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I am engaged

at this moment, Sam.’

‘Beg your pardon, Sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. ‘But here’s a lady here,

Sir, as says she’s somethin’ wery partickler to disclose.’

‘I can’t see any lady,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, whose mind was filled with

visions of Mrs. Bardell.

‘I wouldn’t make too sure o’ that, Sir,’ urged Mr. Weller, shaking his

head. ‘If you know’d who was near, sir, I rayther think you’d change

your note; as the hawk remarked to himself vith a cheerful laugh, ven he

heerd the robin-redbreast a-singin’ round the corner.’

‘Who is it?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Will you see her, Sir?’ asked Mr. Weller, holding the door in his hand

as if he had some curious live animal on the other side.

‘I suppose I must,’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking at Perker.

‘Well then, all in to begin!’ cried Sam. ‘Sound the gong, draw up the

curtain, and enter the two conspiraytors.’

As Sam Weller spoke, he threw the door open, and there rushed

tumultuously into the room, Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, leading after him by

the hand, the identical young lady who at Dingley Dell had worn the

boots with the fur round the tops, and who, now a very pleasing compound

of blushes and confusion, and lilac silk, and a smart bonnet, and a rich

lace veil, looked prettier than ever.

‘Miss Arabella Allen!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, rising from his chair.

‘No,’ replied Mr. Winkle, dropping on his knees. ‘Mrs. Winkle. Pardon,

my dear friend, pardon!’

Mr. Pickwick could scarcely believe the evidence of his senses, and

perhaps would not have done so, but for the corroborative testimony

afforded by the smiling countenance of Perker, and the bodily presence,

in the background, of Sam and the pretty housemaid; who appeared to

contemplate the proceedings with the liveliest satisfaction.

‘Oh, Mr. Pickwick!’ said Arabella, in a low voice, as if alarmed at the

silence. ‘Can you forgive my imprudence?’

Mr. Pickwick returned no verbal response to this appeal; but he took off

his spectacles in great haste, and seizing both the young lady’s hands

in his, kissed her a great number of times--perhaps a greater number

than was absolutely necessary--and then, still retaining one of her

hands, told Mr. Winkle he was an audacious young dog, and bade him get

up. This, Mr. Winkle, who had been for some seconds scratching his nose

with the brim of his hat, in a penitent manner, did; whereupon Mr.

Pickwick slapped him on the back several times, and then shook hands

heartily with Perker, who, not to be behind-hand in the compliments of

the occasion, saluted both the bride and the pretty housemaid with right

good-will, and, having wrung Mr. Winkle’s hand most cordially, wound up

his demonstrations of joy by taking snuff enough to set any half-dozen

men with ordinarily-constructed noses, a-sneezing for life.

‘Why, my dear girl,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘how has all this come about?

Come! Sit down, and let me hear it all. How well she looks, doesn’t she,

Perker?’ added Mr. Pickwick, surveying Arabella’s face with a look of as

much pride and exultation, as if she had been his daughter.

‘Delightful, my dear Sir,’ replied the little man. ‘If I were not a

married man myself, I should be disposed to envy you, you dog.’ Thus

expressing himself, the little lawyer gave Mr. Winkle a poke in the

chest, which that gentleman reciprocated; after which they both laughed

very loudly, but not so loudly as Mr. Samuel Weller, who had just

relieved his feelings by kissing the pretty housemaid under cover of the

cupboard door.

‘I can never be grateful enough to you, Sam, I am sure,’ said Arabella,

with the sweetest smile imaginable. ‘I shall not forget your exertions

in the garden at Clifton.’

‘Don’t say nothin’ wotever about it, ma’am,’ replied Sam. ‘I only

assisted natur, ma’am; as the doctor said to the boy’s mother, after

he’d bled him to death.’

‘Mary, my dear, sit down,’ said Mr. Pickwick, cutting short these

compliments. ‘Now then; how long have you been married, eh?’

Arabella looked bashfully at her lord and master, who replied, ‘Only

three days.’

‘Only three days, eh?’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Why, what have you been doing

these three months?’

‘Ah, to be sure!’ interposed Perker; ‘come, account for this idleness.

You see Mr. Pickwick’s only astonishment is, that it wasn’t all over,

months ago.’

‘Why the fact is,’ replied Mr. Winkle, looking at his blushing young

wife, ‘that I could not persuade Bella to run away, for a long time. And

when I had persuaded her, it was a long time more before we could find

an opportunity. Mary had to give a month’s warning, too, before she

could leave her place next door, and we couldn’t possibly have done it

without her assistance.’

Upon my word,’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, who by this time had resumed his

spectacles, and was looking from Arabella to Winkle, and from Winkle to

Arabella, with as much delight depicted in his countenance as

warmheartedness and kindly feeling can communicate to the human face--

‘upon my word! you seem to have been very systematic in your

proceedings. And is your brother acquainted with all this, my dear?’

‘Oh, no, no,’ replied Arabella, changing colour. ‘Dear Mr. Pickwick, he

must only know it from you--from your lips alone. He is so violent, so

prejudiced, and has been so--so anxious in behalf of his friend, Mr.

Sawyer,’ added Arabella, looking down, ‘that I fear the consequences

dreadfully.’

‘Ah, to be sure,’ said Perker gravely. ‘You must take this matter in

hand for them, my dear sir. These young men will respect you, when they

would listen to nobody else. You must prevent mischief, my dear Sir. Hot

blood, hot blood.’ And the little man took a warning pinch, and shook

his head doubtfully.

‘You forget, my love,’ said Mr. Pickwick gently, ‘you forget that I am a

prisoner.’

‘No, indeed I do not, my dear Sir,’ replied Arabella. ‘I never have

forgotten it. I have never ceased to think how great your sufferings

must have been in this shocking place. But I hoped that what no

consideration for yourself would induce you to do, a regard to our

happiness might. If my brother hears of this, first, from you, I feel

certain we shall be reconciled. He is my only relation in the world, Mr.

Pickwick, and unless you plead for me, I fear I have lost even him. I

have done wrong, very, very wrong, I know.’ Here poor Arabella hid her

face in her handkerchief, and wept bitterly.

Mr. Pickwick’s nature was a good deal worked upon, by these same tears;

but when Mrs. Winkle, drying her eyes, took to coaxing and entreating in

the sweetest tones of a very sweet voice, he became particularly

restless, and evidently undecided how to act, as was evinced by sundry

nervous rubbings of his spectacle-glasses, nose, tights, head, and

gaiters.

Taking advantage of these symptoms of indecision, Mr. Perker (to whom,

it appeared, the young couple had driven straight that morning) urged

with legal point and shrewdness that Mr. Winkle, senior, was still

unacquainted with the important rise in life’s flight of steps which his

son had taken; that the future expectations of the said son depended

entirely upon the said Winkle, senior, continuing to regard him with

undiminished feelings of affection and attachment, which it was very

unlikely he would, if this great event were long kept a secret from him;

that Mr. Pickwick, repairing to Bristol to seek Mr. Allen, might, with

equal reason, repair to Birmingham to seek Mr. Winkle, senior; lastly,

that Mr. Winkle, senior, had good right and title to consider Mr.

Pickwick as in some degree the guardian and adviser of his son, and that

it consequently behoved that gentleman, and was indeed due to his

personal character, to acquaint the aforesaid Winkle, senior,

personally, and by word of mouth, with the whole circumstances of the

case, and with the share he had taken in the transaction.

Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass arrived, most opportunely, in this stage of

the pleadings, and as it was necessary to explain to them all that had

occurred, together with the various reasons pro and con, the whole of

the arguments were gone over again, after which everybody urged every

argument in his own way, and at his own length. And, at last, Mr.

Pickwick, fairly argued and remonstrated out of all his resolutions, and

being in imminent danger of being argued and remonstrated out of his

wits, caught Arabella in his arms, and declaring that she was a very

amiable creature, and that he didn’t know how it was, but he had always

been very fond of her from the first, said he could never find it in his

heart to stand in the way of young people’s happiness, and they might do

with him as they pleased.

Mr. Weller’s first act, on hearing this concession, was to despatch Job

Trotter to the illustrious Mr. Pell, with an authority to deliver to the

bearer the formal discharge which his prudent parent had had the

foresight to leave in the hands of that learned gentleman, in case it

should be, at any time, required on an emergency; his next proceeding

was, to invest his whole stock of ready-money in the purchase of five-

and-twenty gallons of mild porter, which he himself dispensed on the

racket-ground to everybody who would partake of it; this done, he

hurra’d in divers parts of the building until he lost his voice, and

then quietly relapsed into his usual collected and philosophical

condition.

At three o’clock that afternoon, Mr. Pickwick took a last look at his

little room, and made his way, as well as he could, through the throng

of debtors who pressed eagerly forward to shake him by the hand, until

he reached the lodge steps. He turned here, to look about him, and his

eye lightened as he did so. In all the crowd of wan, emaciated faces, he

saw not one which was not happier for his sympathy and charity.

‘Perker,’ said Mr. Pickwick, beckoning one young man towards him, ‘this

is Mr. Jingle, whom I spoke to you about.’

‘Very good, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker, looking hard at Jingle. ‘You

will see me again, young man, to-morrow. I hope you may live to remember

and feel deeply, what I shall have to communicate, Sir.’

Jingle bowed respectfully, trembled very much as he took Mr. Pickwick’s

proffered hand, and withdrew.

‘Job you know, I think?’ said Mr. Pickwick, presenting that gentleman.

‘I know the rascal,’ replied Perker good-humouredly. ‘See after your

friend, and be in the way to-morrow at one. Do you hear? Now, is there

anything more?’

‘Nothing,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick. ‘You have delivered the little parcel

I gave you for your old landlord, Sam?’

‘I have, Sir,’ replied Sam. ‘He bust out a-cryin’, Sir, and said you wos

wery gen’rous and thoughtful, and he only wished you could have him

innockilated for a gallopin’ consumption, for his old friend as had

lived here so long wos dead, and he’d noweres to look for another.’

Poor fellow, poor fellow!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘God bless you, my

friends!’

As Mr. Pickwick uttered this adieu, the crowd raised a loud shout. Many

among them were pressing forward to shake him by the hand again, when he

drew his arm through Perker’s, and hurried from the prison, far more sad

and melancholy, for the moment, than when he had first entered it. Alas!

how many sad and unhappy beings had he left behind!

A happy evening was that for at least one party in the George and

Vulture; and light and cheerful were two of the hearts that emerged from

its hospitable door next morning. The owners thereof were Mr. Pickwick

and Sam Weller, the former of whom was speedily deposited inside a

comfortable post-coach, with a little dickey behind, in which the latter

mounted with great agility.

‘Sir,’ called out Mr. Weller to his master.

‘Well, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, thrusting his head out of the window.

‘I wish them horses had been three months and better in the Fleet, Sir.’

‘Why, Sam?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wy, Sir,’ exclaimed Mr. Weller, rubbing his hands, ‘how they would go

if they had been!’

CHAPTER XLVIII. RELATES HOW MR. PICKWICK, WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF SAMUEL

WELLER, ESSAYED TO SOFTEN THE HEART OF MR. BENJAMIN ALLEN, AND TO

MOLLIFY THE WRATH OF MR. ROBERT SAWYER

Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer sat together in the little surgery

behind the shop, discussing minced veal and future prospects, when the

discourse, not unnaturally, turned upon the practice acquired by Bob the

aforesaid, and his present chances of deriving a competent independence

from the honourable profession to which he had devoted himself.

‘Which, I think,’ observed Mr. Bob Sawyer, pursuing the thread of the

subject--‘which, I think, Ben, are rather dubious.’

‘What’s rather dubious?’ inquired Mr. Ben Allen, at the same time

sharpening his intellect with a draught of beer. ‘What’s dubious?’

‘Why, the chances,’ responded Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘I forgot,’ said Mr. Ben Allen. ‘The beer has reminded me that I forgot,

Bob--yes; they \_are \_dubious.’

‘It’s wonderful how the poor people patronise me,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer

reflectively. ‘They knock me up, at all hours of the night; they take

medicine to an extent which I should have conceived impossible; they put

on blisters and leeches with a perseverance worthy of a better cause;

they make additions to their families, in a manner which is quite awful.

Six of those last-named little promissory notes, all due on the same

day, Ben, and all intrusted to me!’

‘It’s very gratifying, isn’t it?’ said Mr. Ben Allen, holding his plate

for some more minced veal.

‘Oh, very,’ replied Bob; ‘only not quite so much so as the confidence of

patients with a shilling or two to spare would be. This business was

capitally described in the advertisement, Ben. It is a practice, a very

extensive practice--and that’s all.’

‘Bob,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, laying down his knife and fork, and fixing

his eyes on the visage of his friend, ‘Bob, I’ll tell you what it is.’

‘What is it?’ inquired Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘You must make yourself, with as little delay as possible, master of

Arabella’s one thousand pounds.’

‘Three per cent. consolidated bank annuities, now standing in her name

in the book or books of the governor and company of the Bank of

England,’ added Bob Sawyer, in legal phraseology.

‘Exactly so,’ said Ben. ‘She has it when she comes of age, or marries.

She wants a year of coming of age, and if you plucked up a spirit she

needn’t want a month of being married.’

‘She’s a very charming and delightful creature,’ quoth Mr. Robert

Sawyer, in reply; ‘and has only one fault that I know of, Ben. It

happens, unfortunately, that that single blemish is a want of taste. She

don’t like me.’

‘It’s my opinion that she don’t know what she does like,’ said Mr. Ben

Allen contemptuously.

‘Perhaps not,’ remarked Mr. Bob Sawyer. ‘But it’s my opinion that she

does know what she doesn’t like, and that’s of more importance.’

‘I wish,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, setting his teeth together, and speaking

more like a savage warrior who fed on raw wolf’s flesh which he carved

with his fingers, than a peaceable young gentleman who ate minced veal

with a knife and fork--‘I wish I knew whether any rascal really has been

tampering with her, and attempting to engage her affections. I think I

should assassinate him, Bob.’

‘I’d put a bullet in him, if I found him out,’ said Mr. Sawyer, stopping

in the course of a long draught of beer, and looking malignantly out of

the porter pot. ‘If that didn’t do his business, I’d extract it

afterwards, and kill him that way.’

Mr. Benjamin Allen gazed abstractedly on his friend for some minutes in

silence, and then said--

‘You have never proposed to her, point-blank, Bob?’

‘No. Because I saw it would be of no use,’ replied Mr. Robert Sawyer.

‘You shall do it, before you are twenty-four hours older,’ retorted Ben,

with desperate calmness. ‘She shall have you, or I’ll know the reason

why. I’ll exert my authority.’

‘Well,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer, ‘we shall see.’

‘We shall see, my friend,’ replied Mr. Ben Allen fiercely. He paused for

a few seconds, and added in a voice broken by emotion, ‘You have loved

her from a child, my friend. You loved her when we were boys at school

together, and, even then, she was wayward and slighted your young

feelings. Do you recollect, with all the eagerness of a child’s love,

one day pressing upon her acceptance, two small caraway-seed biscuits

and one sweet apple, neatly folded into a circular parcel with the leaf

of a copy-book?’

‘I do,’ replied Bob Sawyer.

‘She slighted that, I think?’ said Ben Allen.

‘She did,’ rejoined Bob. ‘She said I had kept the parcel so long in the

pockets of my corduroys, that the apple was unpleasantly warm.’

‘I remember,’ said Mr. Allen gloomily. ‘Upon which we ate it ourselves,

in alternate bites.’

Bob Sawyer intimated his recollection of the circumstance last alluded

to, by a melancholy frown; and the two friends remained for some time

absorbed, each in his own meditations.

While these observations were being exchanged between Mr. Bob Sawyer and

Mr. Benjamin Allen; and while the boy in the gray livery, marvelling at

the unwonted prolongation of the dinner, cast an anxious look, from time

to time, towards the glass door, distracted by inward misgivings

regarding the amount of minced veal which would be ultimately reserved

for his individual cravings; there rolled soberly on through the streets

of Bristol, a private fly, painted of a sad green colour, drawn by a

chubby sort of brown horse, and driven by a surly-looking man with his

legs dressed like the legs of a groom, and his body attired in the coat

of a coachman. Such appearances are common to many vehicles belonging

to, and maintained by, old ladies of economic habits; and in this

vehicle sat an old lady who was its mistress and proprietor.

‘Martin!’ said the old lady, calling to the surly man, out of the front

window.

‘Well?’ said the surly man, touching his hat to the old lady.

‘Mr. Sawyer’s,’ said the old lady.

‘I was going there,’ said the surly man.

The old lady nodded the satisfaction which this proof of the surly man’s

foresight imparted to her feelings; and the surly man giving a smart

lash to the chubby horse, they all repaired to Mr. Bob Sawyer’s

together.

‘Martin!’ said the old lady, when the fly stopped at the door of Mr.

Robert Sawyer, late Nockemorf.

‘Well?’ said Martin.

‘Ask the lad to step out, and mind the horse.’

‘I’m going to mind the horse myself,’ said Martin, laying his whip on

the roof of the fly.

‘I can’t permit it, on any account,’ said the old lady; ‘your testimony

will be very important, and I must take you into the house with me. You

must not stir from my side during the whole interview. Do you hear?’

‘I hear,’ replied Martin.

‘Well; what are you stopping for?’

‘Nothing,’ replied Martin. So saying, the surly man leisurely descended

from the wheel, on which he had been poising himself on the tops of the

toes of his right foot, and having summoned the boy in the gray livery,

opened the coach door, flung down the steps, and thrusting in a hand

enveloped in a dark wash-leather glove, pulled out the old lady with as

much unconcern in his manner as if she were a bandbox.

‘Dear me!’ exclaimed the old lady. ‘I am so flurried, now I have got

here, Martin, that I’m all in a tremble.’

Mr. Martin coughed behind the dark wash-leather gloves, but expressed no

sympathy; so the old lady, composing herself, trotted up Mr. Bob

Sawyer’s steps, and Mr. Martin followed. Immediately on the old lady’s

entering the shop, Mr. Benjamin Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been

putting the spirits-and-water out of sight, and upsetting nauseous drugs

to take off the smell of the tobacco smoke, issued hastily forth in a

transport of pleasure and affection.

‘My dear aunt,’ exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen, ‘how kind of you to look in

upon us! Mr. Sawyer, aunt; my friend Mr. Bob Sawyer whom I have spoken

to you about, regarding--you know, aunt.’ And here Mr. Ben Allen, who

was not at the moment extraordinarily sober, added the word ‘Arabella,’

in what was meant to be a whisper, but which was an especially audible

and distinct tone of speech which nobody could avoid hearing, if anybody

were so disposed.

‘My dear Benjamin,’ said the old lady, struggling with a great shortness

of breath, and trembling from head to foot, ‘don’t be alarmed, my dear,

but I think I had better speak to Mr. Sawyer, alone, for a moment. Only

for one moment.’

‘Bob,’ said Mr. Allen, ‘will you take my aunt into the surgery?’

‘Certainly,’ responded Bob, in a most professional voice. ‘Step this

way, my dear ma’am. Don’t be frightened, ma’am. We shall be able to set

you to rights in a very short time, I have no doubt, ma’am. Here, my

dear ma’am. Now then!’ With this, Mr. Bob Sawyer having handed the old

lady to a chair, shut the door, drew another chair close to her, and

waited to hear detailed the symptoms of some disorder from which he saw

in perspective a long train of profits and advantages.

The first thing the old lady did, was to shake her head a great many

times, and began to cry.

‘Nervous,’ said Bob Sawyer complacently. ‘Camphor-julep and water three

times a day, and composing draught at night.’

‘I don’t know how to begin, Mr. Sawyer,’ said the old lady. ‘It is so

very painful and distressing.’

‘You need not begin, ma’am,’ rejoined Mr. Bob Sawyer. ‘I can anticipate

all you would say. The head is in fault.’

‘I should be very sorry to think it was the heart,’ said the old lady,

with a slight groan.

‘Not the slightest danger of that, ma’am,’ replied Bob Sawyer. ‘The

stomach is the primary cause.’

‘Mr. Sawyer!’ exclaimed the old lady, starting.

‘Not the least doubt of it, ma’am,’ rejoined Bob, looking wondrous wise.

‘Medicine, in time, my dear ma’am, would have prevented it all.’

‘Mr. Sawyer,’ said the old lady, more flurried than before, ‘this

conduct is either great impertinence to one in my situation, Sir, or it

arises from your not understanding the object of my visit. If it had

been in the power of medicine, or any foresight I could have used, to

prevent what has occurred, I should certainly have done so. I had better

see my nephew at once,’ said the old lady, twirling her reticule

indignantly, and rising as she spoke.

‘Stop a moment, ma’am,’ said Bob Sawyer; ‘I’m afraid I have not

understood you. What \_is\_ the matter, ma’am?’

‘My niece, Mr. Sawyer,’ said the old lady: ‘your friend’s sister.’

‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Bob, all impatience; for the old lady, although much

agitated, spoke with the most tantalising deliberation, as old ladies

often do. ‘Yes, ma’am.’

‘Left my home, Mr. Sawyer, three days ago, on a pretended visit to my

sister, another aunt of hers, who keeps the large boarding-school, just

beyond the third mile-stone, where there is a very large laburnum-tree

and an oak gate,’ said the old lady, stopping in this place to dry her

eyes.

‘Oh, devil take the laburnum-tree, ma’am!’ said Bob, quite forgetting

his professional dignity in his anxiety. ‘Get on a little faster; put a

little more steam on, ma’am, pray.’

‘This morning,’ said the old lady slowly--‘this morning, she--’

‘She came back, ma’am, I suppose,’ said Bob, with great animation. ‘Did

she come back?’

‘No, she did not; she wrote,’ replied the old lady.

‘What did she say?’ inquired Bob eagerly.

‘She said, Mr. Sawyer,’ replied the old lady--‘and it is this I want to

prepare Benjamin’s mind for, gently and by degrees; she said that she

was--I have got the letter in my pocket, Mr. Sawyer, but my glasses are

in the carriage, and I should only waste your time if I attempted to

point out the passage to you, without them; she said, in short, Mr.

Sawyer, that she was married.’

What!’ said, or rather shouted, Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘Married,’ repeated the old lady.

Mr. Bob Sawyer stopped to hear no more; but darting from the surgery

into the outer shop, cried in a stentorian voice, ‘Ben, my boy, she’s

bolted!’

Mr. Ben Allen, who had been slumbering behind the counter, with his head

half a foot or so below his knees, no sooner heard this appalling

communication, than he made a precipitate rush at Mr. Martin, and,

twisting his hand in the neck-cloth of that taciturn servitor, expressed

an obliging intention of choking him where he stood. This intention,

with a promptitude often the effect of desperation, he at once commenced

carrying into execution, with much vigour and surgical skill.

Mr. Martin, who was a man of few words and possessed but little power of

eloquence or persuasion, submitted to this operation with a very calm

and agreeable expression of countenance, for some seconds; finding,

however, that it threatened speedily to lead to a result which would

place it beyond his power to claim any wages, board or otherwise, in all

time to come, he muttered an inarticulate remonstrance and felled Mr.

Benjamin Allen to the ground. As that gentleman had his hands entangled

in his cravat, he had no alternative but to follow him to the floor.

There they both lay struggling, when the shop door opened, and the party

was increased by the arrival of two most unexpected visitors, to wit,

Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Samuel Weller.

The impression at once produced on Mr. Weller’s mind by what he saw,

was, that Mr. Martin was hired by the establishment of Sawyer, late

Nockemorf, to take strong medicine, or to go into fits and be

experimentalised upon, or to swallow poison now and then with the view

of testing the efficacy of some new antidotes, or to do something or

other to promote the great science of medicine, and gratify the ardent

spirit of inquiry burning in the bosoms of its two young professors. So,

without presuming to interfere, Sam stood perfectly still, and looked

on, as if he were mightily interested in the result of the then pending

experiment. Not so, Mr. Pickwick. He at once threw himself on the

astonished combatants, with his accustomed energy, and loudly called

upon the bystanders to interpose.

This roused Mr. Bob Sawyer, who had been hitherto quite paralysed by the

frenzy of his companion. With that gentleman’s assistance, Mr. Pickwick

raised Ben Allen to his feet. Mr. Martin finding himself alone on the

floor, got up, and looked about him.

‘Mr. Allen,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘what is the matter, Sir?’

‘Never mind, Sir!’ replied Mr. Allen, with haughty defiance.

‘What is it?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, looking at Bob Sawyer. ‘Is he

unwell?’

Before Bob could reply, Mr. Ben Allen seized Mr. Pickwick by the hand,

and murmured, in sorrowful accents, ‘My sister, my dear Sir; my sister.’

‘Oh, is that all!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘We shall easily arrange that

matter, I hope. Your sister is safe and well, and I am here, my dear

Sir, to--’

‘Sorry to do anythin’ as may cause an interruption to such wery pleasant

proceedin’s, as the king said wen he dissolved the parliament,’

interposed Mr. Weller, who had been peeping through the glass door; ‘but

there’s another experiment here, sir. Here’s a wenerable old lady a--

lyin’ on the carpet waitin’ for dissection, or galwinism, or some other

rewivin’ and scientific inwention.’

‘I forgot,’ exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen. ‘It is my aunt.’

‘Dear me!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Poor lady! Gently Sam, gently.’

‘Strange sitivation for one o’ the family,’ observed Sam Weller,

hoisting the aunt into a chair. ‘Now depitty sawbones, bring out the

wollatilly!’

The latter observation was addressed to the boy in gray, who, having

handed over the fly to the care of the street-keeper, had come back to

see what all the noise was about. Between the boy in gray, and Mr. Bob

Sawyer, and Mr. Benjamin Allen (who having frightened his aunt into a

fainting fit, was affectionately solicitous for her recovery) the old

lady was at length restored to consciousness; then Mr. Ben Allen,

turning with a puzzled countenance to Mr. Pickwick, asked him what he

was about to say, when he had been so alarmingly interrupted.

‘We are all friends here, I presume?’ said Mr. Pickwick, clearing his

voice, and looking towards the man of few words with the surly

countenance, who drove the fly with the chubby horse.

This reminded Mr. Bob Sawyer that the boy in gray was looking on, with

eyes wide open, and greedy ears. The incipient chemist having been

lifted up by his coat collar, and dropped outside the door, Bob Sawyer

assured Mr. Pickwick that he might speak without reserve.

‘Your sister, my dear Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, turning to Benjamin

Allen, ‘is in London; well and happy.’

‘Her happiness is no object to me, sir,’ said Benjamin Allen, with a

flourish of the hand.

‘Her husband \_is\_ an object to \_me\_, Sir,’ said Bob Sawyer. ‘He shall be

an object to me, sir, at twelve paces, and a pretty object I’ll make of

him, sir--a mean-spirited scoundrel!’ This, as it stood, was a very

pretty denunciation, and magnanimous withal; but Mr. Bob Sawyer rather

weakened its effect, by winding up with some general observations

concerning the punching of heads and knocking out of eyes, which were

commonplace by comparison.

‘Stay, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘before you apply those epithets to the

gentleman in question, consider, dispassionately, the extent of his

fault, and above all remember that he is a friend of mine.’

‘What!’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer. ‘His name!’ cried Ben Allen. ‘His name!’

‘Mr. Nathaniel Winkle,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Benjamin Allen deliberately crushed his spectacles beneath the heel

of his boot, and having picked up the pieces, and put them into three

separate pockets, folded his arms, bit his lips, and looked in a

threatening manner at the bland features of Mr. Pickwick.

‘Then it’s you, is it, Sir, who have encouraged and brought about this

match?’ inquired Mr. Benjamin Allen at length.

‘And it’s this gentleman’s servant, I suppose,’ interrupted the old

lady, ‘who has been skulking about my house, and endeavouring to entrap

my servants to conspire against their mistress.--Martin!’

‘Well?’ said the surly man, coming forward.

‘Is that the young man you saw in the lane, whom you told me about, this

morning?’

Mr. Martin, who, as it has already appeared, was a man of few words,

looked at Sam Weller, nodded his head, and growled forth, ‘That’s the

man.’ Mr. Weller, who was never proud, gave a smile of friendly

recognition as his eyes encountered those of the surly groom, and

admitted in courteous terms, that he had ‘knowed him afore.’

‘And this is the faithful creature,’ exclaimed Mr. Ben Allen, ‘whom I

had nearly suffocated!--Mr. Pickwick, how dare you allow your fellow to

be employed in the abduction of my sister? I demand that you explain

this matter, sir.’

‘Explain it, sir!’ cried Bob Sawyer fiercely.

‘It’s a conspiracy,’ said Ben Allen.

‘A regular plant,’ added Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘A disgraceful imposition,’ observed the old lady.

‘Nothing but a do,’ remarked Martin.

‘Pray hear me,’ urged Mr. Pickwick, as Mr. Ben Allen fell into a chair

that patients were bled in, and gave way to his pocket-handkerchief. ‘I

have rendered no assistance in this matter, beyond being present at one

interview between the young people which I could not prevent, and from

which I conceived my presence would remove any slight colouring of

impropriety that it might otherwise have had; this is the whole share I

have had in the transaction, and I had no suspicion that an immediate

marriage was even contemplated. Though, mind,’ added Mr. Pickwick,

hastily checking himself--‘mind, I do not say I should have prevented

it, if I had known that it was intended.’

‘You hear that, all of you; you hear that?’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen.

‘I hope they do,’ mildly observed Mr. Pickwick, looking round, ‘and,’

added that gentleman, his colour mounting as he spoke, ‘I hope they hear

this, Sir, also. That from what has been stated to me, sir, I assert

that you were by no means justified in attempting to force your sister’s

inclinations as you did, and that you should rather have endeavoured by

your kindness and forbearance to have supplied the place of other nearer

relations whom she had never known, from a child. As regards my young

friend, I must beg to add, that in every point of worldly advantage he

is, at least, on an equal footing with yourself, if not on a much better

one, and that unless I hear this question discussed with becoming temper

and moderation, I decline hearing any more said upon the subject.’

‘I wish to make a wery few remarks in addition to wot has been put

for’ard by the honourable gen’l’m’n as has jist give over,’ said Mr.

Weller, stepping forth, ‘wich is this here: a indiwidual in company has

called me a feller.’

‘That has nothing whatever to do with the matter, Sam,’ interposed Mr.

Pickwick. ‘Pray hold your tongue.’

‘I ain’t a-goin’ to say nothin’ on that ‘ere pint, sir,’ replied Sam,

‘but merely this here. P’raps that gen’l’m’n may think as there wos a

priory ‘tachment; but there worn’t nothin’ o’ the sort, for the young

lady said in the wery beginnin’ o’ the keepin’ company, that she

couldn’t abide him. Nobody’s cut him out, and it ‘ud ha’ been jist the

wery same for him if the young lady had never seen Mr. Vinkle. That’s

what I wished to say, sir, and I hope I’ve now made that ‘ere

gen’l’m’n’s mind easy.

A short pause followed these consolatory remarks of Mr. Weller. Then Mr.

Ben Allen rising from his chair, protested that he would never see

Arabella’s face again; while Mr. Bob Sawyer, despite Sam’s flattering

assurance, vowed dreadful vengeance on the happy bridegroom.

But, just when matters were at their height, and threatening to remain

so, Mr. Pickwick found a powerful assistant in the old lady, who,

evidently much struck by the mode in which he had advocated her niece’s

cause, ventured to approach Mr. Benjamin Allen with a few comforting

reflections, of which the chief were, that after all, perhaps, it was

well it was no worse; the least said the soonest mended, and upon her

word she did not know that it was so very bad after all; what was over

couldn’t be begun, and what couldn’t be cured must be endured; with

various other assurances of the like novel and strengthening

description. To all of these, Mr. Benjamin Allen replied that he meant

no disrespect to his aunt, or anybody there, but if it were all the same

to them, and they would allow him to have his own way, he would rather

have the pleasure of hating his sister till death, and after it.

At length, when this determination had been announced half a hundred

times, the old lady suddenly bridling up and looking very majestic,

wished to know what she had done that no respect was to be paid to her

years or station, and that she should be obliged to beg and pray, in

that way, of her own nephew, whom she remembered about five-and-twenty

years before he was born, and whom she had known, personally, when he

hadn’t a tooth in his head; to say nothing of her presence on the first

occasion of his having his hair cut, and assistance at numerous other

times and ceremonies during his babyhood, of sufficient importance to

found a claim upon his affection, obedience, and sympathies, for ever.

While the good lady was bestowing this objurgation on Mr. Ben Allen, Bob

Sawyer and Mr. Pickwick had retired in close conversation to the inner

room, where Mr. Sawyer was observed to apply himself several times to

the mouth of a black bottle, under the influence of which, his features

gradually assumed a cheerful and even jovial expression. And at last he

emerged from the room, bottle in hand, and, remarking that he was very

sorry to say he had been making a fool of himself, begged to propose the

health and happiness of Mr. and Mrs. Winkle, whose felicity, so far from

envying, he would be the first to congratulate them upon. Hearing this,

Mr. Ben Allen suddenly arose from his chair, and, seizing the black

bottle, drank the toast so heartily, that, the liquor being strong, he

became nearly as black in the face as the bottle. Finally, the black

bottle went round till it was empty, and there was so much shaking of

hands and interchanging of compliments, that even the metal-visaged Mr.

Martin condescended to smile.

‘And now,’ said Bob Sawyer, rubbing his hands, ‘we’ll have a jolly

night.’

‘I am sorry,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that I must return to my inn. I have

not been accustomed to fatigue lately, and my journey has tired me

exceedingly.’

‘You’ll take some tea, Mr. Pickwick?’ said the old lady, with

irresistible sweetness.

‘Thank you, I would rather not,’ replied that gentleman. The truth is,

that the old lady’s evidently increasing admiration was Mr. Pickwick’s

principal inducement for going away. He thought of Mrs. Bardell; and

every glance of the old lady’s eyes threw him into a cold perspiration.

As Mr. Pickwick could by no means be prevailed upon to stay, it was

arranged at once, on his own proposition, that Mr. Benjamin Allen should

accompany him on his journey to the elder Mr. Winkle’s, and that the

coach should be at the door, at nine o’clock next morning. He then took

his leave, and, followed by Samuel Weller, repaired to the Bush. It is

worthy of remark, that Mr. Martin’s face was horribly convulsed as he

shook hands with Sam at parting, and that he gave vent to a smile and an

oath simultaneously; from which tokens it has been inferred by those who

were best acquainted with that gentleman’s peculiarities, that he

expressed himself much pleased with Mr. Weller’s society, and requested

the honour of his further acquaintance.

‘Shall I order a private room, Sir?’ inquired Sam, when they reached the

Bush.

‘Why, no, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘as I dined in the coffee-room,

and shall go to bed soon, it is hardly worth while. See who there is in

the travellers’ room, Sam.’

Mr. Weller departed on his errand, and presently returned to say that

there was only a gentleman with one eye; and that he and the landlord

were drinking a bowl of bishop together.

‘I will join them,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘He’s a queer customer, the vun-eyed vun, sir,’ observed Mr. Weller, as

he led the way. ‘He’s a-gammonin’ that ‘ere landlord, he is, sir, till

he don’t rightly know wether he’s a-standing on the soles of his boots

or the crown of his hat.’

The individual to whom this observation referred, was sitting at the

upper end of the room when Mr. Pickwick entered, and was smoking a large

Dutch pipe, with his eye intently fixed on the round face of the

landlord; a jolly-looking old personage, to whom he had recently been

relating some tale of wonder, as was testified by sundry disjointed

exclamations of, ‘Well, I wouldn’t have believed it! The strangest thing

I ever heard! Couldn’t have supposed it possible!’ and other expressions

of astonishment which burst spontaneously from his lips, as he returned

the fixed gaze of the one-eyed man.

‘Servant, sir,’ said the one-eyed man to Mr. Pickwick. ‘Fine night,

sir.’

‘Very much so indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, as the waiter placed a

small decanter of brandy, and some hot water before him.

While Mr. Pickwick was mixing his brandy-and-water, the one-eyed man

looked round at him earnestly, from time to time, and at length said--

‘I think I’ve seen you before.’

‘I don’t recollect you,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick.

‘I dare say not,’ said the one-eyed man. ‘You didn’t know me, but I knew

two friends of yours that were stopping at the Peacock at Eatanswill, at

the time of the election.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes,’ rejoined the one-eyed man. ‘I mentioned a little circumstance to

them about a friend of mine of the name of Tom Smart. Perhaps you’ve

heard them speak of it.’

‘Often,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick, smiling. ‘He was your uncle, I think?’

‘No, no; only a friend of my uncle’s,’ replied the one-eyed man.

‘He was a wonderful man, that uncle of yours, though,’ remarked the

landlord shaking his head.

‘Well, I think he was; I think I may say he was,’ answered the one-eyed

man. ‘I could tell you a story about that same uncle, gentlemen, that

would rather surprise you.’

‘Could you?’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Let us hear it, by all means.’

The one-eyed bagman ladled out a glass of negus from the bowl, and drank

it; smoked a long whiff out of the Dutch pipe; and then, calling to Sam

Weller who was lingering near the door, that he needn’t go away unless

he wanted to, because the story was no secret, fixed his eye upon the

landlord’s, and proceeded, in the words of the next chapter.

CHAPTER XLIX. CONTAINING THE STORY OF THE BAGMAN’S UNCLE

My uncle, gentlemen,’ said the bagman, ‘was one of the merriest,

pleasantest, cleverest fellows, that ever lived. I wish you had known

him, gentlemen. On second thoughts, gentlemen, I don’t wish you had

known him, for if you had, you would have been all, by this time, in the

ordinary course of nature, if not dead, at all events so near it, as to

have taken to stopping at home and giving up company, which would have

deprived me of the inestimable pleasure of addressing you at this

moment. Gentlemen, I wish your fathers and mothers had known my uncle.

They would have been amazingly fond of him, especially your respectable

mothers; I know they would. If any two of his numerous virtues

predominated over the many that adorned his character, I should say they

were his mixed punch and his after-supper song. Excuse my dwelling on

these melancholy recollections of departed worth; you won’t see a man

like my uncle every day in the week.

‘I have always considered it a great point in my uncle’s character,

gentlemen, that he was the intimate friend and companion of Tom Smart,

of the great house of Bilson and Slum, Cateaton Street, City. My uncle

collected for Tiggin and Welps, but for a long time he went pretty near

the same journey as Tom; and the very first night they met, my uncle

took a fancy for Tom, and Tom took a fancy for my uncle. They made a bet

of a new hat before they had known each other half an hour, who should

brew the best quart of punch and drink it the quickest. My uncle was

judged to have won the making, but Tom Smart beat him in the drinking by

about half a salt-spoonful. They took another quart apiece to drink each

other’s health in, and were staunch friends ever afterwards. There’s a

destiny in these things, gentlemen; we can’t help it.

‘In personal appearance, my uncle was a trifle shorter than the middle

size; he was a thought stouter too, than the ordinary run of people, and

perhaps his face might be a shade redder. He had the jolliest face you

ever saw, gentleman: something like Punch, with a handsome nose and

chin; his eyes were always twinkling and sparkling with good-humour; and

a smile--not one of your unmeaning wooden grins, but a real, merry,

hearty, good-tempered smile--was perpetually on his countenance. He was

pitched out of his gig once, and knocked, head first, against a

milestone. There he lay, stunned, and so cut about the face with some

gravel which had been heaped up alongside it, that, to use my uncle’s

own strong expression, if his mother could have revisited the earth, she

wouldn’t have known him. Indeed, when I come to think of the matter,

gentlemen, I feel pretty sure she wouldn’t, for she died when my uncle

was two years and seven months old, and I think it’s very likely that,

even without the gravel, his top-boots would have puzzled the good lady

not a little; to say nothing of his jolly red face. However, there he

lay, and I have heard my uncle say, many a time, that the man said who

picked him up that he was smiling as merrily as if he had tumbled out

for a treat, and that after they had bled him, the first faint

glimmerings of returning animation, were his jumping up in bed, bursting

out into a loud laugh, kissing the young woman who held the basin, and

demanding a mutton chop and a pickled walnut. He was very fond of

pickled walnuts, gentlemen. He said he always found that, taken without

vinegar, they relished the beer.

‘My uncle’s great journey was in the fall of the leaf, at which time he

collected debts, and took orders, in the north; going from London to

Edinburgh, from Edinburgh to Glasgow, from Glasgow back to Edinburgh,

and thence to London by the smack. You are to understand that his second

visit to Edinburgh was for his own pleasure. He used to go back for a

week, just to look up his old friends; and what with breakfasting with

this one, lunching with that, dining with the third, and supping with

another, a pretty tight week he used to make of it. I don’t know whether

any of you, gentlemen, ever partook of a real substantial hospitable

Scotch breakfast, and then went out to a slight lunch of a bushel of

oysters, a dozen or so of bottled ale, and a noggin or two of whiskey to

close up with. If you ever did, you will agree with me that it requires

a pretty strong head to go out to dinner and supper afterwards.

‘But bless your hearts and eyebrows, all this sort of thing was nothing

to my uncle! He was so well seasoned, that it was mere child’s play. I

have heard him say that he could see the Dundee people out, any day, and

walk home afterwards without staggering; and yet the Dundee people have

as strong heads and as strong punch, gentlemen, as you are likely to

meet with, between the poles. I have heard of a Glasgow man and a Dundee

man drinking against each other for fifteen hours at a sitting. They

were both suffocated, as nearly as could be ascertained, at the same

moment, but with this trifling exception, gentlemen, they were not a bit

the worse for it.

‘One night, within four-and-twenty hours of the time when he had settled

to take shipping for London, my uncle supped at the house of a very old

friend of his, a Bailie Mac something and four syllables after it, who

lived in the old town of Edinburgh. There were the bailie’s wife, and

the bailie’s three daughters, and the bailie’s grown-up son, and three

or four stout, bushy eye-browed, canny, old Scotch fellows, that the

bailie had got together to do honour to my uncle, and help to make

merry. It was a glorious supper. There was kippered salmon, and Finnan

haddocks, and a lamb’s head, and a haggis--a celebrated Scotch dish,

gentlemen, which my uncle used to say always looked to him, when it came

to table, very much like a Cupid’s stomach--and a great many other

things besides, that I forget the names of, but very good things,

notwithstanding. The lassies were pretty and agreeable; the bailie’s

wife was one of the best creatures that ever lived; and my uncle was in

thoroughly good cue. The consequence of which was, that the young ladies

tittered and giggled, and the old lady laughed out loud, and the bailie

and the other old fellows roared till they were red in the face, the

whole mortal time. I don’t quite recollect how many tumblers of whiskey-

toddy each man drank after supper; but this I know, that about one

o’clock in the morning, the bailie’s grown-up son became insensible

while attempting the first verse of “Willie brewed a peck o’ maut”; and

he having been, for half an hour before, the only other man visible

above the mahogany, it occurred to my uncle that it was almost time to

think about going, especially as drinking had set in at seven o’clock,

in order that he might get home at a decent hour. But, thinking it might

not be quite polite to go just then, my uncle voted himself into the

chair, mixed another glass, rose to propose his own health, addressed

himself in a neat and complimentary speech, and drank the toast with

great enthusiasm. Still nobody woke; so my uncle took a little drop

more--neat this time, to prevent the toddy from disagreeing with him--

and, laying violent hands on his hat, sallied forth into the street.

‘It was a wild, gusty night when my uncle closed the bailie’s door, and

settling his hat firmly on his head to prevent the wind from taking it,

thrust his hands into his pockets, and looking upward, took a short

survey of the state of the weather. The clouds were drifting over the

moon at their giddiest speed; at one time wholly obscuring her; at

another, suffering her to burst forth in full splendour and shed her

light on all the objects around; anon, driving over her again, with

increased velocity, and shrouding everything in darkness. “Really, this

won’t do,” said my uncle, addressing himself to the weather, as if he

felt himself personally offended. “This is not at all the kind of thing

for my voyage. It will not do at any price,” said my uncle, very

impressively. Having repeated this, several times, he recovered his

balance with some difficulty--for he was rather giddy with looking up

into the sky so long--and walked merrily on.

‘The bailie’s house was in the Canongate, and my uncle was going to the

other end of Leith Walk, rather better than a mile’s journey. On either

side of him, there shot up against the dark sky, tall, gaunt, straggling

houses, with time-stained fronts, and windows that seemed to have shared

the lot of eyes in mortals, and to have grown dim and sunken with age.

Six, seven, eight storey high, were the houses; storey piled upon

storey, as children build with cards--throwing their dark shadows over

the roughly paved road, and making the dark night darker. A few oil

lamps were scattered at long distances, but they only served to mark the

dirty entrance to some narrow close, or to show where a common stair

communicated, by steep and intricate windings, with the various flats

above. Glancing at all these things with the air of a man who had seen

them too often before, to think them worthy of much notice now, my uncle

walked up the middle of the street, with a thumb in each waistcoat

pocket, indulging from time to time in various snatches of song, chanted

forth with such good-will and spirit, that the quiet honest folk started

from their first sleep and lay trembling in bed till the sound died away

in the distance; when, satisfying themselves that it was only some

drunken ne’er-do-weel finding his way home, they covered themselves up

warm and fell asleep again.

‘I am particular in describing how my uncle walked up the middle of the

street, with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, gentlemen, because, as

he often used to say (and with great reason too) there is nothing at all

extraordinary in this story, unless you distinctly understand at the

beginning, that he was not by any means of a marvellous or romantic

turn.

‘Gentlemen, my uncle walked on with his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets,

taking the middle of the street to himself, and singing, now a verse of

a love song, and then a verse of a drinking one, and when he was tired

of both, whistling melodiously, until he reached the North Bridge,

which, at this point, connects the old and new towns of Edinburgh. Here

he stopped for a minute, to look at the strange, irregular clusters of

lights piled one above the other, and twinkling afar off so high, that

they looked like stars, gleaming from the castle walls on the one side

and the Calton Hill on the other, as if they illuminated veritable

castles in the air; while the old picturesque town slept heavily on, in

gloom and darkness below: its palace and chapel of Holyrood, guarded day

and night, as a friend of my uncle’s used to say, by old Arthur’s Seat,

towering, surly and dark, like some gruff genius, over the ancient city

he has watched so long. I say, gentlemen, my uncle stopped here, for a

minute, to look about him; and then, paying a compliment to the weather,

which had a little cleared up, though the moon was sinking, walked on

again, as royally as before; keeping the middle of the road with great

dignity, and looking as if he would very much like to meet with somebody

who would dispute possession of it with him. There was nobody at all

disposed to contest the point, as it happened; and so, on he went, with

his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, like a lamb.

‘When my uncle reached the end of Leith Walk, he had to cross a pretty

large piece of waste ground which separated him from a short street

which he had to turn down to go direct to his lodging. Now, in this

piece of waste ground, there was, at that time, an enclosure belonging

to some wheelwright who contracted with the Post Office for the purchase

of old, worn-out mail coaches; and my uncle, being very fond of coaches,

old, young, or middle-aged, all at once took it into his head to step

out of his road for no other purpose than to peep between the palings at

these mails--about a dozen of which he remembered to have seen, crowded

together in a very forlorn and dismantled state, inside. My uncle was a

very enthusiastic, emphatic sort of person, gentlemen; so, finding that

he could not obtain a good peep between the palings he got over them,

and sitting himself quietly down on an old axle-tree, began to

contemplate the mail coaches with a deal of gravity.

‘There might be a dozen of them, or there might be more--my uncle was

never quite certain on this point, and being a man of very scrupulous

veracity about numbers, didn’t like to say--but there they stood, all

huddled together in the most desolate condition imaginable. The doors

had been torn from their hinges and removed; the linings had been

stripped off, only a shred hanging here and there by a rusty nail; the

lamps were gone, the poles had long since vanished, the ironwork was

rusty, the paint was worn away; the wind whistled through the chinks in

the bare woodwork; and the rain, which had collected on the roofs, fell,

drop by drop, into the insides with a hollow and melancholy sound. They

were the decaying skeletons of departed mails, and in that lonely place,

at that time of night, they looked chill and dismal.

‘My uncle rested his head upon his hands, and thought of the busy,

bustling people who had rattled about, years before, in the old coaches,

and were now as silent and changed; he thought of the numbers of people

to whom one of these crazy, mouldering vehicles had borne, night after

night, for many years, and through all weathers, the anxiously expected

intelligence, the eagerly looked-for remittance, the promised assurance

of health and safety, the sudden announcement of sickness and death. The

merchant, the lover, the wife, the widow, the mother, the school-boy,

the very child who tottered to the door at the postman’s knock--how had

they all looked forward to the arrival of the old coach. And where were

they all now?

‘Gentlemen, my uncle used to \_say \_that he thought all this at the time,

but I rather suspect he learned it out of some book afterwards, for he

distinctly stated that he fell into a kind of doze, as he sat on the old

axle-tree looking at the decayed mail coaches, and that he was suddenly

awakened by some deep church bell striking two. Now, my uncle was never

a fast thinker, and if he had thought all these things, I am quite

certain it would have taken him till full half-past two o’clock at the

very least. I am, therefore, decidedly of opinion, gentlemen, that my

uncle fell into a kind of doze, without having thought about anything at

all.

‘Be this as it may, a church bell struck two. My uncle woke, rubbed his

eyes, and jumped up in astonishment.

‘In one instant, after the clock struck two, the whole of this deserted

and quiet spot had become a scene of most extraordinary life and

animation. The mail coach doors were on their hinges, the lining was

replaced, the ironwork was as good as new, the paint was restored, the

lamps were alight; cushions and greatcoats were on every coach-box,

porters were thrusting parcels into every boot, guards were stowing away

letter-bags, hostlers were dashing pails of water against the renovated

wheels; numbers of men were pushing about, fixing poles into every

coach; passengers arrived, portmanteaus were handed up, horses were put

to; in short, it was perfectly clear that every mail there, was to be

off directly. Gentlemen, my uncle opened his eyes so wide at all this,

that, to the very last moment of his life, he used to wonder how it fell

out that he had ever been able to shut ‘em again.

‘“Now then!” said a voice, as my uncle felt a hand on his shoulder,

“you’re booked for one inside. You’d better get in.”

‘“I booked!” said my uncle, turning round.

‘“Yes, certainly.”

‘My uncle, gentlemen, could say nothing, he was so very much astonished.

The queerest thing of all was that although there was such a crowd of

persons, and although fresh faces were pouring in, every moment, there

was no telling where they came from. They seemed to start up, in some

strange manner, from the ground, or the air, and disappear in the same

way. When a porter had put his luggage in the coach, and received his

fare, he turned round and was gone; and before my uncle had well begun

to wonder what had become of him, half a dozen fresh ones started up,

and staggered along under the weight of parcels, which seemed big enough

to crush them. The passengers were all dressed so oddly too! Large,

broad-skirted laced coats, with great cuffs and no collars; and wigs,

gentlemen--great formal wigs with a tie behind. My uncle could make

nothing of it.

‘“Now, are you going to get in?” said the person who had addressed my

uncle before. He was dressed as a mail guard, with a wig on his head and

most enormous cuffs to his coat, and had a lantern in one hand, and a

huge blunderbuss in the other, which he was going to stow away in his

little arm-chest. “\_are \_you going to get in, Jack Martin?” said the

guard, holding the lantern to my uncle’s face.

‘“Hollo!” said my uncle, falling back a step or two. “That’s familiar!”

‘“It’s so on the way-bill,” said the guard.

‘“Isn’t there a ‘Mister’ before it?” said my uncle. For he felt,

gentlemen, that for a guard he didn’t know, to call him Jack Martin, was

a liberty which the Post Office wouldn’t have sanctioned if they had

known it.

‘“No, there is not,” rejoined the guard coolly.

‘“Is the fare paid?” inquired my uncle.

‘“Of course it is,” rejoined the guard.

‘“It is, is it?” said my uncle. “Then here goes! Which coach?”

‘“This,” said the guard, pointing to an old-fashioned Edinburgh and

London mail, which had the steps down and the door open. “Stop! Here are

the other passengers. Let them get in first.”

‘As the guard spoke, there all at once appeared, right in front of my

uncle, a young gentleman in a powdered wig, and a sky-blue coat trimmed

with silver, made very full and broad in the skirts, which were lined

with buckram. Tiggin and Welps were in the printed calico and waistcoat

piece line, gentlemen, so my uncle knew all the materials at once. He

wore knee breeches, and a kind of leggings rolled up over his silk

stockings, and shoes with buckles; he had ruffles at his wrists, a

three-cornered hat on his head, and a long taper sword by his side. The

flaps of his waist-coat came half-way down his thighs, and the ends of

his cravat reached to his waist. He stalked gravely to the coach door,

pulled off his hat, and held it above his head at arm’s length, cocking

his little finger in the air at the same time, as some affected people

do, when they take a cup of tea. Then he drew his feet together, and

made a low, grave bow, and then put out his left hand. My uncle was just

going to step forward, and shake it heartily, when he perceived that

these attentions were directed, not towards him, but to a young lady who

just then appeared at the foot of the steps, attired in an old-fashioned

green velvet dress with a long waist and stomacher. She had no bonnet on

her head, gentlemen, which was muffled in a black silk hood, but she

looked round for an instant as she prepared to get into the coach, and

such a beautiful face as she disclosed, my uncle had never seen--not

even in a picture. She got into the coach, holding up her dress with one

hand; and as my uncle always said with a round oath, when he told the

story, he wouldn’t have believed it possible that legs and feet could

have been brought to such a state of perfection unless he had seen them

with his own eyes.

‘But, in this one glimpse of the beautiful face, my uncle saw that the

young lady cast an imploring look upon him, and that she appeared

terrified and distressed. He noticed, too, that the young fellow in the

powdered wig, notwithstanding his show of gallantry, which was all very

fine and grand, clasped her tight by the wrist when she got in, and

followed himself immediately afterwards. An uncommonly ill-looking

fellow, in a close brown wig, and a plum-coloured suit, wearing a very

large sword, and boots up to his hips, belonged to the party; and when

he sat himself down next to the young lady, who shrank into a corner at

his approach, my uncle was confirmed in his original impression that

something dark and mysterious was going forward, or, as he always said

himself, that “there was a screw loose somewhere.” It’s quite surprising

how quickly he made up his mind to help the lady at any peril, if she

needed any help.

‘“Death and lightning!” exclaimed the young gentleman, laying his hand

upon his sword as my uncle entered the coach.

‘“Blood and thunder!” roared the other gentleman. With this, he whipped

his sword out, and made a lunge at my uncle without further ceremony. My

uncle had no weapon about him, but with great dexterity he snatched the

ill-looking gentleman’s three-cornered hat from his head, and, receiving

the point of his sword right through the crown, squeezed the sides

together, and held it tight.

‘“Pink him behind!” cried the ill-looking gentleman to his companion, as

he struggled to regain his sword.

‘“He had better not,” cried my uncle, displaying the heel of one of his

shoes, in a threatening manner. “I’ll kick his brains out, if he has

any--, or fracture his skull if he hasn’t.” Exerting all his strength,

at this moment, my uncle wrenched the ill-looking man’s sword from his

grasp, and flung it clean out of the coach window, upon which the

younger gentleman vociferated, “Death and lightning!” again, and laid

his hand upon the hilt of his sword, in a very fierce manner, but didn’t

draw it. Perhaps, gentlemen, as my uncle used to say with a smile,

perhaps he was afraid of alarming the lady.

‘“Now, gentlemen,” said my uncle, taking his seat deliberately, “I don’t

want to have any death, with or without lightning, in a lady’s presence,

and we have had quite blood and thundering enough for one journey; so,

if you please, we’ll sit in our places like quiet insides. Here, guard,

pick up that gentleman’s carving-knife.”

‘As quickly as my uncle said the words, the guard appeared at the coach

window, with the gentleman’s sword in his hand. He held up his lantern,

and looked earnestly in my uncle’s face, as he handed it in, when, by

its light, my uncle saw, to his great surprise, that an immense crowd of

mail-coach guards swarmed round the window, every one of whom had his

eyes earnestly fixed upon him too. He had never seen such a sea of white

faces, red bodies, and earnest eyes, in all his born days.

‘“This is the strangest sort of thing I ever had anything to do with,”

thought my uncle; “allow me to return you your hat, sir.”

‘The ill-looking gentleman received his three-cornered hat in silence,

looked at the hole in the middle with an inquiring air, and finally

stuck it on the top of his wig with a solemnity the effect of which was

a trifle impaired by his sneezing violently at the moment, and jerking

it off again.

‘“All right!” cried the guard with the lantern, mounting into his little

seat behind. Away they went. My uncle peeped out of the coach window as

they emerged from the yard, and observed that the other mails, with

coachmen, guards, horses, and passengers, complete, were driving round

and round in circles, at a slow trot of about five miles an hour. My

uncle burned with indignation, gentlemen. As a commercial man, he felt

that the mail-bags were not to be trifled with, and he resolved to

memorialise the Post Office on the subject, the very instant he reached

London.

‘At present, however, his thoughts were occupied with the young lady who

sat in the farthest corner of the coach, with her face muffled closely

in her hood; the gentleman with the sky-blue coat sitting opposite to

her; the other man in the plum-coloured suit, by her side; and both

watching her intently. If she so much as rustled the folds of her hood,

he could hear the ill-looking man clap his hand upon his sword, and

could tell by the other’s breathing (it was so dark he couldn’t see his

face) that he was looking as big as if he were going to devour her at a

mouthful. This roused my uncle more and more, and he resolved, come what

might, to see the end of it. He had a great admiration for bright eyes,

and sweet faces, and pretty legs and feet; in short, he was fond of the

whole sex. It runs in our family, gentleman--so am I.

‘Many were the devices which my uncle practised, to attract the lady’s

attention, or at all events, to engage the mysterious gentlemen in

conversation. They were all in vain; the gentlemen wouldn’t talk, and

the lady didn’t dare. He thrust his head out of the coach window at

intervals, and bawled out to know why they didn’t go faster. But he

called till he was hoarse; nobody paid the least attention to him. He

leaned back in the coach, and thought of the beautiful face, and the

feet and legs. This answered better; it whiled away the time, and kept

him from wondering where he was going, and how it was that he found

himself in such an odd situation. Not that this would have worried him

much, anyway--he was a mighty free and easy, roving, devil-may-care sort

of person, was my uncle, gentlemen.

‘All of a sudden the coach stopped. “Hollo!” said my uncle, “what’s in

the wind now?”

‘“Alight here,” said the guard, letting down the steps.

‘“Here!” cried my uncle.

‘“Here,” rejoined the guard.

‘“I’ll do nothing of the sort,” said my uncle.

‘“Very well, then stop where you are,” said the guard.

‘“I will,” said my uncle.

‘“Do,” said the guard.

‘The passengers had regarded this colloquy with great attention, and,

finding that my uncle was determined not to alight, the younger man

squeezed past him, to hand the lady out. At this moment, the ill-looking

man was inspecting the hole in the crown of his three-cornered hat. As

the young lady brushed past, she dropped one of her gloves into my

uncle’s hand, and softly whispered, with her lips so close to his face

that he felt her warm breath on his nose, the single word “Help!”

Gentlemen, my uncle leaped out of the coach at once, with such violence

that it rocked on the springs again.

‘“Oh! you’ve thought better of it, have you?” said the guard, when he

saw my uncle standing on the ground.

‘My uncle looked at the guard for a few seconds, in some doubt whether

it wouldn’t be better to wrench his blunderbuss from him, fire it in the

face of the man with the big sword, knock the rest of the company over

the head with the stock, snatch up the young lady, and go off in the

smoke. On second thoughts, however, he abandoned this plan, as being a

shade too melodramatic in the execution, and followed the two mysterious

men, who, keeping the lady between them, were now entering an old house

in front of which the coach had stopped. They turned into the passage,

and my uncle followed.

‘Of all the ruinous and desolate places my uncle had ever beheld, this

was the most so. It looked as if it had once been a large house of

entertainment; but the roof had fallen in, in many places, and the

stairs were steep, rugged, and broken. There was a huge fireplace in the

room into which they walked, and the chimney was blackened with smoke;

but no warm blaze lighted it up now. The white feathery dust of burned

wood was still strewed over the hearth, but the stove was cold, and all

was dark and gloomy.

‘“Well,” said my uncle, as he looked about him, “a mail travelling at

the rate of six miles and a half an hour, and stopping for an indefinite

time at such a hole as this, is rather an irregular sort of proceeding,

I fancy. This shall be made known. I’ll write to the papers.”

‘My uncle said this in a pretty loud voice, and in an open, unreserved

sort of manner, with the view of engaging the two strangers in

conversation if he could. But, neither of them took any more notice of

him than whispering to each other, and scowling at him as they did so.

The lady was at the farther end of the room, and once she ventured to

wave her hand, as if beseeching my uncle’s assistance.

‘At length the two strangers advanced a little, and the conversation

began in earnest.

‘“You don’t know this is a private room, I suppose, fellow?” said the

gentleman in sky-blue.

‘“No, I do not, fellow,” rejoined my uncle. “Only, if this is a private

room specially ordered for the occasion, I should think the public room

must be a \_very \_comfortable one;” with this, my uncle sat himself down

in a high-backed chair, and took such an accurate measure of the

gentleman, with his eyes, that Tiggin and Welps could have supplied him

with printed calico for a suit, and not an inch too much or too little,

from that estimate alone.

‘“Quit this room,” said both men together, grasping their swords.

‘“Eh?” said my uncle, not at all appearing to comprehend their meaning.

‘“Quit the room, or you are a dead man,” said the ill-looking fellow

with the large sword, drawing it at the same time and flourishing it in

the air.

‘“Down with him!” cried the gentleman in sky-blue, drawing his sword

also, and falling back two or three yards. “Down with him!” The lady

gave a loud scream.

‘Now, my uncle was always remarkable for great boldness, and great

presence of mind. All the time that he had appeared so indifferent to

what was going on, he had been looking slily about for some missile or

weapon of defence, and at the very instant when the swords were drawn,

he espied, standing in the chimney-corner, an old basket-hilted rapier

in a rusty scabbard. At one bound, my uncle caught it in his hand, drew

it, flourished it gallantly above his head, called aloud to the lady to

keep out of the way, hurled the chair at the man in sky-blue, and the

scabbard at the man in plum-colour, and taking advantage of the

confusion, fell upon them both, pell-mell.

‘Gentlemen, there is an old story--none the worse for being true--

regarding a fine young Irish gentleman, who being asked if he could play

the fiddle, replied he had no doubt he could, but he couldn’t exactly

say, for certain, because he had never tried. This is not inapplicable

to my uncle and his fencing. He had never had a sword in his hand

before, except once when he played Richard the Third at a private

theatre, upon which occasion it was arranged with Richmond that he was

to be run through, from behind, without showing fight at all. But here

he was, cutting and slashing with two experienced swordsman, thrusting,

and guarding, and poking, and slicing, and acquitting himself in the

most manful and dexterous manner possible, although up to that time he

had never been aware that he had the least notion of the science. It

only shows how true the old saying is, that a man never knows what he

can do till he tries, gentlemen.

‘The noise of the combat was terrific; each of the three combatants

swearing like troopers, and their swords clashing with as much noise as

if all the knives and steels in Newport market were rattling together,

at the same time. When it was at its very height, the lady (to encourage

my uncle most probably) withdrew her hood entirely from her face, and

disclosed a countenance of such dazzling beauty, that he would have

fought against fifty men, to win one smile from it and die. He had done

wonders before, but now he began to powder away like a raving mad giant.

‘At this very moment, the gentleman in sky-blue turning round, and

seeing the young lady with her face uncovered, vented an exclamation of

rage and jealousy, and, turning his weapon against her beautiful bosom,

pointed a thrust at her heart, which caused my uncle to utter a cry of

apprehension that made the building ring. The lady stepped lightly

aside, and snatching the young man’s sword from his hand, before he had

recovered his balance, drove him to the wall, and running it through

him, and the panelling, up to the very hilt, pinned him there, hard and

fast. It was a splendid example. My uncle, with a loud shout of triumph,

and a strength that was irresistible, made his adversary retreat in the

same direction, and plunging the old rapier into the very centre of a

large red flower in the pattern of his waistcoat, nailed him beside his

friend; there they both stood, gentlemen, jerking their arms and legs

about in agony, like the toy-shop figures that are moved by a piece of

pack-thread. My uncle always said, afterwards, that this was one of the

surest means he knew of, for disposing of an enemy; but it was liable to

one objection on the ground of expense, inasmuch as it involved the loss

of a sword for every man disabled.

‘“The mail, the mail!” cried the lady, running up to my uncle and

throwing her beautiful arms round his neck; “we may yet escape.”

‘“May!” cried my uncle; “why, my dear, there’s nobody else to kill, is

there?” My uncle was rather disappointed, gentlemen, for he thought a

little quiet bit of love-making would be agreeable after the

slaughtering, if it were only to change the subject.

‘“We have not an instant to lose here,” said the young lady. “He

(pointing to the young gentleman in sky-blue) is the only son of the

powerful Marquess of Filletoville.”

‘“Well then, my dear, I’m afraid he’ll never come to the title,” said my

uncle, looking coolly at the young gentleman as he stood fixed up

against the wall, in the cockchafer fashion that I have described. “You

have cut off the entail, my love.”

‘“I have been torn from my home and my friends by these villains,” said

the young lady, her features glowing with indignation. “That wretch

would have married me by violence in another hour.”

‘“Confound his impudence!” said my uncle, bestowing a very contemptuous

look on the dying heir of Filletoville.

‘“As you may guess from what you have seen,” said the young lady, “the

party were prepared to murder me if I appealed to any one for

assistance. If their accomplices find us here, we are lost. Two minutes

hence may be too late. The mail!” With these words, overpowered by her

feelings, and the exertion of sticking the young Marquess of

Filletoville, she sank into my uncle’s arms. My uncle caught her up, and

bore her to the house door. There stood the mail, with four long-tailed,

flowing-maned, black horses, ready harnessed; but no coachman, no guard,

no hostler even, at the horses’ heads.

‘Gentlemen, I hope I do no injustice to my uncle’s memory, when I

express my opinion, that although he was a bachelor, he had held some

ladies in his arms before this time; I believe, indeed, that he had

rather a habit of kissing barmaids; and I know, that in one or two

instances, he had been seen by credible witnesses, to hug a landlady in

a very perceptible manner. I mention the circumstance, to show what a

very uncommon sort of person this beautiful young lady must have been,

to have affected my uncle in the way she did; he used to say, that as

her long dark hair trailed over his arm, and her beautiful dark eyes

fixed themselves upon his face when she recovered, he felt so strange

and nervous that his legs trembled beneath him. But who can look in a

sweet, soft pair of dark eyes, without feeling queer? I can’t,

gentlemen. I am afraid to look at some eyes I know, and that’s the truth

of it.

‘“You will never leave me,” murmured the young lady.

‘“Never,” said my uncle. And he meant it too.

‘“My dear preserver!” exclaimed the young lady. “My dear, kind, brave

preserver!”

‘“Don’t,” said my uncle, interrupting her.

‘“‘Why?” inquired the young lady.

‘“Because your mouth looks so beautiful when you speak,” rejoined my

uncle, “that I’m afraid I shall be rude enough to kiss it.”

‘The young lady put up her hand as if to caution my uncle not to do so,

and said--No, she didn’t say anything--she smiled. When you are looking

at a pair of the most delicious lips in the world, and see them gently

break into a roguish smile--if you are very near them, and nobody else

by--you cannot better testify your admiration of their beautiful form

and colour than by kissing them at once. My uncle did so, and I honour

him for it.

‘“Hark!” cried the young lady, starting. “The noise of wheels, and

horses!”

‘“So it is,” said my uncle, listening. He had a good ear for wheels, and

the trampling of hoofs; but there appeared to be so many horses and

carriages rattling towards them, from a distance, that it was impossible

to form a guess at their number. The sound was like that of fifty

brakes, with six blood cattle in each.

‘“We are pursued!” cried the young lady, clasping her hands. “We are

pursued. I have no hope but in you!”

‘There was such an expression of terror in her beautiful face, that my

uncle made up his mind at once. He lifted her into the coach, told her

not to be frightened, pressed his lips to hers once more, and then

advising her to draw up the window to keep the cold air out, mounted to

the box.

‘“Stay, love,” cried the young lady.

‘“What’s the matter?” said my uncle, from the coach-box.

‘“I want to speak to you,” said the young lady; “only a word. Only one

word, dearest.”

‘“Must I get down?” inquired my uncle. The lady made no answer, but she

smiled again. Such a smile, gentlemen! It beat the other one, all to

nothing. My uncle descended from his perch in a twinkling.

‘“What is it, my dear?” said my uncle, looking in at the coach window.

The lady happened to bend forward at the same time, and my uncle thought

she looked more beautiful than she had done yet. He was very close to

her just then, gentlemen, so he really ought to know.

‘“What is it, my dear?” said my uncle.

‘“Will you never love any one but me--never marry any one beside?” said

the young lady.

‘My uncle swore a great oath that he never would marry anybody else, and

the young lady drew in her head, and pulled up the window. He jumped

upon the box, squared his elbows, adjusted the ribands, seized the whip

which lay on the roof, gave one flick to the off leader, and away went

the four long-tailed, flowing-maned black horses, at fifteen good

English miles an hour, with the old mail-coach behind them. Whew! How

they tore along!

‘The noise behind grew louder. The faster the old mail went, the faster

came the pursuers--men, horses, dogs, were leagued in the pursuit. The

noise was frightful, but, above all, rose the voice of the young lady,

urging my uncle on, and shrieking, “Faster! Faster!”

‘They whirled past the dark trees, as feathers would be swept before a

hurricane. Houses, gates, churches, haystacks, objects of every kind

they shot by, with a velocity and noise like roaring waters suddenly let

loose. But still the noise of pursuit grew louder, and still my uncle

could hear the young lady wildly screaming, “Faster! Faster!”

‘My uncle plied whip and rein, and the horses flew onward till they were

white with foam; and yet the noise behind increased; and yet the young

lady cried, “Faster! Faster!” My uncle gave a loud stamp on the boot in

the energy of the moment, and--found that it was gray morning, and he

was sitting in the wheelwright’s yard, on the box of an old Edinburgh

mail, shivering with the cold and wet and stamping his feet to warm

them! He got down, and looked eagerly inside for the beautiful young

lady. Alas! There was neither door nor seat to the coach. It was a mere

shell.

‘Of course, my uncle knew very well that there was some mystery in the

matter, and that everything had passed exactly as he used to relate it.

He remained staunch to the great oath he had sworn to the beautiful

young lady, refusing several eligible landladies on her account, and

dying a bachelor at last. He always said what a curious thing it was

that he should have found out, by such a mere accident as his clambering

over the palings, that the ghosts of mail-coaches and horses, guards,

coachmen, and passengers, were in the habit of making journeys regularly

every night. He used to add, that he believed he was the only living

person who had ever been taken as a passenger on one of these

excursions. And I think he was right, gentlemen--at least I never heard

of any other.’

‘I wonder what these ghosts of mail-coaches carry in their bags,’ said

the landlord, who had listened to the whole story with profound

attention.

‘The dead letters, of course,’ said the bagman.

‘Oh, ah! To be sure,’ rejoined the landlord. ‘I never thought of that.’

CHAPTER L. HOW MR. PICKWICK SPED UPON HIS MISSION, AND HOW HE WAS

REINFORCED IN THE OUTSET BY A MOST UNEXPECTED AUXILIARY

The horses were put to, punctually at a quarter before nine next

morning, and Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller having each taken his seat, the

one inside and the other out, the postillion was duly directed to repair

in the first instance to Mr. Bob Sawyer’s house, for the purpose of

taking up Mr. Benjamin Allen.

It was with feelings of no small astonishment, when the carriage drew up

before the door with the red lamp, and the very legible inscription of

‘Sawyer, late Nockemorf,’ that Mr. Pickwick saw, on popping his head out

of the coach window, the boy in the gray livery very busily employed in

putting up the shutters--the which, being an unusual and an

unbusinesslike proceeding at that hour of the morning, at once suggested

to his mind two inferences: the one, that some good friend and patient

of Mr. Bob Sawyer’s was dead; the other, that Mr. Bob Sawyer himself was

bankrupt.

‘What is the matter?’ said Mr. Pickwick to the boy.

‘Nothing’s the matter, Sir,’ replied the boy, expanding his mouth to the

whole breadth of his countenance.

‘All right, all right!’ cried Bob Sawyer, suddenly appearing at the

door, with a small leathern knapsack, limp and dirty, in one hand, and a

rough coat and shawl thrown over the other arm. ‘I’m going, old fellow.’

‘You!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes,’ replied Bob Sawyer, ‘and a regular expedition we’ll make of it.

Here, Sam! Look out!’ Thus briefly bespeaking Mr. Weller’s attention,

Mr. Bob Sawyer jerked the leathern knapsack into the dickey, where it

was immediately stowed away, under the seat, by Sam, who regarded the

proceeding with great admiration. This done, Mr. Bob Sawyer, with the

assistance of the boy, forcibly worked himself into the rough coat,

which was a few sizes too small for him, and then advancing to the coach

window, thrust in his head, and laughed boisterously.

‘What a start it is, isn’t it?’ cried Bob, wiping the tears out of his

eyes, with one of the cuffs of the rough coat.

‘My dear Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with some embarrassment, ‘I had no

idea of your accompanying us.’

‘No, that’s just the very thing,’ replied Bob, seizing Mr. Pickwick by

the lappel of his coat. ‘That’s the joke.’

‘Oh, that’s the joke, is it?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Of course,’ replied Bob. ‘It’s the whole point of the thing, you know--

that, and leaving the business to take care of itself, as it seems to

have made up its mind not to take care of me.’ With this explanation of

the phenomenon of the shutters, Mr. Bob Sawyer pointed to the shop, and

relapsed into an ecstasy of mirth.

‘Bless me, you are surely not mad enough to think of leaving your

patients without anybody to attend them!’ remonstrated Mr. Pickwick in a

very serious tone.

‘Why not?’ asked Bob, in reply. ‘I shall save by it, you know. None of

them ever pay. Besides,’ said Bob, lowering his voice to a confidential

whisper, ‘they will be all the better for it; for, being nearly out of

drugs, and not able to increase my account just now, I should have been

obliged to give them calomel all round, and it would have been certain

to have disagreed with some of them. So it’s all for the best.’

There was a philosophy and a strength of reasoning about this reply,

which Mr. Pickwick was not prepared for. He paused a few moments, and

added, less firmly than before--

‘But this chaise, my young friend, will only hold two; and I am pledged

to Mr. Allen.’

‘Don’t think of me for a minute,’ replied Bob. ‘I’ve arranged it all;

Sam and I will share the dickey between us. Look here. This little bill

is to be wafered on the shop door: “Sawyer, late Nockemorf. Inquire of

Mrs. Cripps over the way.” Mrs. Cripps is my boy’s mother. “Mr. Sawyer’s

very sorry,” says Mrs. Cripps, “couldn’t help it--fetched away early

this morning to a consultation of the very first surgeons in the

country--couldn’t do without him--would have him at any price--

tremendous operation.” The fact is,’ said Bob, in conclusion, ‘it’ll do

me more good than otherwise, I expect. If it gets into one of the local

papers, it will be the making of me. Here’s Ben; now then, jump in!’

With these hurried words, Mr. Bob Sawyer pushed the postboy on one side,

jerked his friend into the vehicle, slammed the door, put up the steps,

wafered the bill on the street door, locked it, put the key in his

pocket, jumped into the dickey, gave the word for starting, and did the

whole with such extraordinary precipitation, that before Mr. Pickwick

had well begun to consider whether Mr. Bob Sawyer ought to go or not,

they were rolling away, with Mr. Bob Sawyer thoroughly established as

part and parcel of the equipage.

So long as their progress was confined to the streets of Bristol, the

facetious Bob kept his professional green spectacles on, and conducted

himself with becoming steadiness and gravity of demeanour; merely giving

utterance to divers verbal witticisms for the exclusive behoof and

entertainment of Mr. Samuel Weller. But when they emerged on the open

road, he threw off his green spectacles and his gravity together, and

performed a great variety of practical jokes, which were calculated to

attract the attention of the passersby, and to render the carriage and

those it contained objects of more than ordinary curiosity; the least

conspicuous among these feats being a most vociferous imitation of a

key-bugle, and the ostentatious display of a crimson silk pocket-

handkerchief attached to a walking-stick, which was occasionally waved

in the air with various gestures indicative of supremacy and defiance.

‘I wonder,’ said Mr. Pickwick, stopping in the midst of a most sedate

conversation with Ben Allen, bearing reference to the numerous good

qualities of Mr. Winkle and his sister--‘I wonder what all the people we

pass, can see in us to make them stare so.’

‘It’s a neat turn-out,’ replied Ben Allen, with something of pride in

his tone. ‘They’re not used to see this sort of thing, every day, I dare

say.’

‘Possibly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘It may be so. Perhaps it is.’

Mr. Pickwick might very probably have reasoned himself into the belief

that it really was, had he not, just then happening to look out of the

coach window, observed that the looks of the passengers betokened

anything but respectful astonishment, and that various telegraphic

communications appeared to be passing between them and some persons

outside the vehicle, whereupon it occurred to him that these

demonstrations might be, in some remote degree, referable to the

humorous deportment of Mr. Robert Sawyer.

‘I hope,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘that our volatile friend is committing no

absurdities in that dickey behind.’

‘Oh dear, no,’ replied Ben Allen. ‘Except when he’s elevated, Bob’s the

quietest creature breathing.’

Here a prolonged imitation of a key-bugle broke upon the ear, succeeded

by cheers and screams, all of which evidently proceeded from the throat

and lungs of the quietest creature breathing, or in plainer designation,

of Mr. Bob Sawyer himself.

Mr. Pickwick and Mr. Ben Allen looked expressively at each other, and

the former gentleman taking off his hat, and leaning out of the coach

window until nearly the whole of his waistcoat was outside it, was at

length enabled to catch a glimpse of his facetious friend.

Mr. Bob Sawyer was seated, not in the dickey, but on the roof of the

chaise, with his legs as far asunder as they would conveniently go,

wearing Mr. Samuel Weller’s hat on one side of his head, and bearing, in

one hand, a most enormous sandwich, while, in the other, he supported a

goodly-sized case-bottle, to both of which he applied himself with

intense relish, varying the monotony of the occupation by an occasional

howl, or the interchange of some lively badinage with any passing

stranger. The crimson flag was carefully tied in an erect position to

the rail of the dickey; and Mr. Samuel Weller, decorated with Bob

Sawyer’s hat, was seated in the centre thereof, discussing a twin

sandwich, with an animated countenance, the expression of which

betokened his entire and perfect approval of the whole arrangement.

This was enough to irritate a gentleman with Mr. Pickwick’s sense of

propriety, but it was not the whole extent of the aggravation, for a

stage-coach full, inside and out, was meeting them at the moment, and

the astonishment of the passengers was very palpably evinced. The

congratulations of an Irish family, too, who were keeping up with the

chaise, and begging all the time, were of rather a boisterous

description, especially those of its male head, who appeared to consider

the display as part and parcel of some political or other procession of

triumph.

‘Mr. Sawyer!’ cried Mr. Pickwick, in a state of great excitement, ‘Mr.

Sawyer, Sir!’

‘Hollo!’ responded that gentleman, looking over the side of the chaise

with all the coolness in life.

‘Are you mad, sir?’ demanded Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not a bit of it,’ replied Bob; ‘only cheerful.’

‘Cheerful, sir!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick. ‘Take down that scandalous red

handkerchief, I beg. I insist, Sir. Sam, take it down.’

Before Sam could interpose, Mr. Bob Sawyer gracefully struck his

colours, and having put them in his pocket, nodded in a courteous manner

to Mr. Pickwick, wiped the mouth of the case-bottle, and applied it to

his own, thereby informing him, without any unnecessary waste of words,

that he devoted that draught to wishing him all manner of happiness and

prosperity. Having done this, Bob replaced the cork with great care, and

looking benignantly down on Mr. Pickwick, took a large bite out of the

sandwich, and smiled.

‘Come,’ said Mr. Pickwick, whose momentary anger was not quite proof

against Bob’s immovable self-possession, ‘pray let us have no more of

this absurdity.’

‘No, no,’ replied Bob, once more exchanging hats with Mr. Weller; ‘I

didn’t mean to do it, only I got so enlivened with the ride that I

couldn’t help it.’

‘Think of the look of the thing,’ expostulated Mr. Pickwick; ‘have some

regard to appearances.’

‘Oh, certainly,’ said Bob, ‘it’s not the sort of thing at all. All over,

governor.’

Satisfied with this assurance, Mr. Pickwick once more drew his head into

the chaise and pulled up the glass; but he had scarcely resumed the

conversation which Mr. Bob Sawyer had interrupted, when he was somewhat

startled by the apparition of a small dark body, of an oblong form, on

the outside of the window, which gave sundry taps against it, as if

impatient of admission.

‘What’s this?’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘It looks like a case-bottle;’ remarked Ben Allen, eyeing the object in

question through his spectacles with some interest; ‘I rather think it

belongs to Bob.’

The impression was perfectly accurate; for Mr. Bob Sawyer, having

attached the case-bottle to the end of the walking-stick, was battering

the window with it, in token of his wish, that his friends inside would

partake of its contents, in all good-fellowship and harmony.

‘What’s to be done?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking at the bottle. ‘This

proceeding is more absurd than the other.’

‘I think it would be best to take it in,’ replied Mr. Ben Allen; ‘it

would serve him right to take it in and keep it, wouldn’t it?’

‘It would,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘shall I?’

‘I think it the most proper course we could possibly adopt,’ replied

Ben.

This advice quite coinciding with his own opinion, Mr. Pickwick gently

let down the window and disengaged the bottle from the stick; upon which

the latter was drawn up, and Mr. Bob Sawyer was heard to laugh heartily.

‘What a merry dog it is!’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking round at his

companion, with the bottle in his hand.

‘He is,’ said Mr. Allen.

‘You cannot possibly be angry with him,’ remarked Mr. Pickwick.

‘Quite out of the question,’ observed Benjamin Allen.

During this short interchange of sentiments, Mr. Pickwick had, in an

abstracted mood, uncorked the bottle.

‘What is it?’ inquired Ben Allen carelessly.

‘I don’t know,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, with equal carelessness. ‘It

smells, I think, like milk-punch.’

Oh, indeed?’ said Ben.

‘I \_think \_so,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick, very properly guarding himself

against the possibility of stating an untruth; ‘mind, I could not

undertake to say certainly, without tasting it.’

‘You had better do so,’ said Ben; ‘we may as well know what it is.’

‘Do you think so?’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Well; if you are curious to

know, of course I have no objection.’

Ever willing to sacrifice his own feelings to the wishes of his friend,

Mr. Pickwick at once took a pretty long taste.

‘What is it?’ inquired Ben Allen, interrupting him with some impatience.

‘Curious,’ said Mr. Pickwick, smacking his lips, ‘I hardly know, now.

Oh, yes!’ said Mr. Pickwick, after a second taste. ‘It \_is\_ punch.’

Mr. Ben Allen looked at Mr. Pickwick; Mr. Pickwick looked at Mr. Ben

Allen; Mr. Ben Allen smiled; Mr. Pickwick did not.

‘It would serve him right,’ said the last-named gentleman, with some

severity--‘it would serve him right to drink it every drop.’

‘The very thing that occurred to me,’ said Ben Allen.

‘Is it, indeed?’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick. ‘Then here’s his health!’ With

these words, that excellent person took a most energetic pull at the

bottle, and handed it to Ben Allen, who was not slow to imitate his

example. The smiles became mutual, and the milk-punch was gradually and

cheerfully disposed of.

‘After all,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as he drained the last drop, ‘his pranks

are really very amusing; very entertaining indeed.’

‘You may say that,’ rejoined Mr. Ben Allen. In proof of Bob Sawyer’s

being one of the funniest fellows alive, he proceeded to entertain Mr.

Pickwick with a long and circumstantial account how that gentleman once

drank himself into a fever and got his head shaved; the relation of

which pleasant and agreeable history was only stopped by the stoppage of

the chaise at the Bell at Berkeley Heath, to change horses.

‘I say! We’re going to dine here, aren’t we?’ said Bob, looking in at

the window.

‘Dine!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Why, we have only come nineteen miles, and

have eighty-seven and a half to go.’

‘Just the reason why we should take something to enable us to bear up

against the fatigue,’ remonstrated Mr. Bob Sawyer.

‘Oh, it’s quite impossible to dine at half-past eleven o’clock in the

day,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, looking at his watch.

‘So it is,’ rejoined Bob, ‘lunch is the very thing. Hollo, you sir!

Lunch for three, directly; and keep the horses back for a quarter of an

hour. Tell them to put everything they have cold, on the table, and some

bottled ale, and let us taste your very best Madeira.’ Issuing these

orders with monstrous importance and bustle, Mr. Bob Sawyer at once

hurried into the house to superintend the arrangements; in less than

five minutes he returned and declared them to be excellent.

The quality of the lunch fully justified the eulogium which Bob had

pronounced, and very great justice was done to it, not only by that

gentleman, but Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Pickwick also. Under the auspices

of the three, the bottled ale and the Madeira were promptly disposed of;

and when (the horses being once more put to) they resumed their seats,

with the case-bottle full of the best substitute for milk-punch that

could be procured on so short a notice, the key-bugle sounded, and the

red flag waved, without the slightest opposition on Mr. Pickwick’s part.

At the Hop Pole at Tewkesbury, they stopped to dine; upon which occasion

there was more bottled ale, with some more Madeira, and some port

besides; and here the case-bottle was replenished for the fourth time.

Under the influence of these combined stimulants, Mr. Pickwick and Mr.

Ben Allen fell fast asleep for thirty miles, while Bob and Mr. Weller

sang duets in the dickey.

It was quite dark when Mr. Pickwick roused himself sufficiently to look

out of the window. The straggling cottages by the road-side, the dingy

hue of every object visible, the murky atmosphere, the paths of cinders

and brick-dust, the deep-red glow of furnace fires in the distance, the

volumes of dense smoke issuing heavily forth from high toppling

chimneys, blackening and obscuring everything around; the glare of

distant lights, the ponderous wagons which toiled along the road, laden

with clashing rods of iron, or piled with heavy goods--all betokened

their rapid approach to the great working town of Birmingham.

As they rattled through the narrow thoroughfares leading to the heart of

the turmoil, the sights and sounds of earnest occupation struck more

forcibly on the senses. The streets were thronged with working people.

The hum of labour resounded from every house; lights gleamed from the

long casement windows in the attic storeys, and the whirl of wheels and

noise of machinery shook the trembling walls. The fires, whose lurid,

sullen light had been visible for miles, blazed fiercely up, in the

great works and factories of the town. The din of hammers, the rushing

of steam, and the dead heavy clanking of engines, was the harsh music

which arose from every quarter.

The postboy was driving briskly through the open streets, and past the

handsome and well-lighted shops that intervene between the outskirts of

the town and the Old Royal Hotel, before Mr. Pickwick had begun to

consider the very difficult and delicate nature of the commission which

had carried him thither.

The delicate nature of this commission, and the difficulty of executing

it in a satisfactory manner, were by no means lessened by the voluntary

companionship of Mr. Bob Sawyer. Truth to tell, Mr. Pickwick felt that

his presence on the occasion, however considerate and gratifying, was by

no means an honour he would willingly have sought; in fact, he would

cheerfully have given a reasonable sum of money to have had Mr. Bob

Sawyer removed to any place at not less than fifty miles’ distance,

without delay.

Mr. Pickwick had never held any personal communication with Mr. Winkle,

senior, although he had once or twice corresponded with him by letter,

and returned satisfactory answers to his inquiries concerning the moral

character and behaviour of his son; he felt nervously sensible that to

wait upon him, for the first time, attended by Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen,

both slightly fuddled, was not the most ingenious and likely means that

could have been hit upon to prepossess him in his favour.

‘However,’ said Mr. Pickwick, endeavouring to reassure himself, ‘I must

do the best I can. I must see him to-night, for I faithfully promised to

do so. If they persist in accompanying me, I must make the interview as

brief as possible, and be content that, for their own sakes, they will

not expose themselves.’

As he comforted himself with these reflections, the chaise stopped at

the door of the Old Royal. Ben Allen having been partially awakened from

a stupendous sleep, and dragged out by the collar by Mr. Samuel Weller,

Mr. Pickwick was enabled to alight. They were shown to a comfortable

apartment, and Mr. Pickwick at once propounded a question to the waiter

concerning the whereabout of Mr. Winkle’s residence.

‘Close by, Sir,’ said the waiter, ‘not above five hundred yards, Sir.

Mr. Winkle is a wharfinger, Sir, at the canal, sir. Private residence is

not--oh dear, no, sir, not five hundred yards, sir.’ Here the waiter

blew a candle out, and made a feint of lighting it again, in order to

afford Mr. Pickwick an opportunity of asking any further questions, if

he felt so disposed.

‘Take anything now, Sir?’ said the waiter, lighting the candle in

desperation at Mr. Pickwick’s silence. ‘Tea or coffee, Sir? Dinner,

sir?’

‘Nothing now.’

‘Very good, sir. Like to order supper, Sir?’

‘Not just now.’

‘Very good, Sir.’ Here, he walked slowly to the door, and then stopping

short, turned round and said, with great suavity--

‘Shall I send the chambermaid, gentlemen?’

‘You may if you please,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘If \_you \_please, sir.’

‘And bring some soda-water,’ said Bob Sawyer.

‘Soda-water, Sir! Yes, Sir.’ With his mind apparently relieved from an

overwhelming weight, by having at last got an order for something, the

waiter imperceptibly melted away. Waiters never walk or run. They have a

peculiar and mysterious power of skimming out of rooms, which other

mortals possess not.

Some slight symptoms of vitality having been awakened in Mr. Ben Allen

by the soda-water, he suffered himself to be prevailed upon to wash his

face and hands, and to submit to be brushed by Sam. Mr. Pickwick and Bob

Sawyer having also repaired the disorder which the journey had made in

their apparel, the three started forth, arm in arm, to Mr. Winkle’s; Bob

Sawyer impregnating the atmosphere with tobacco smoke as he walked

along.

About a quarter of a mile off, in a quiet, substantial-looking street,

stood an old red brick house with three steps before the door, and a

brass plate upon it, bearing, in fat Roman capitals, the words, ‘Mr.

Winkle.’ The steps were very white, and the bricks were very red, and

the house was very clean; and here stood Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Benjamin

Allen, and Mr. Bob Sawyer, as the clock struck ten.

A smart servant-girl answered the knock, and started on beholding the

three strangers.

‘Is Mr. Winkle at home, my dear?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘He is just going to supper, Sir,’ replied the girl.

‘Give him that card if you please,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick. ‘Say I am

sorry to trouble him at so late an hour; but I am anxious to see him to-

night, and have only just arrived.’

The girl looked timidly at Mr. Bob Sawyer, who was expressing his

admiration of her personal charms by a variety of wonderful grimaces;

and casting an eye at the hats and greatcoats which hung in the passage,

called another girl to mind the door while she went upstairs. The

sentinel was speedily relieved; for the girl returned immediately, and

begging pardon of the gentlemen for leaving them in the street, ushered

them into a floor-clothed back parlour, half office and half dressing

room, in which the principal useful and ornamental articles of furniture

were a desk, a wash-hand stand and shaving-glass, a boot-rack and boot-

jack, a high stool, four chairs, a table, and an old eight-day clock.

Over the mantelpiece were the sunken doors of an iron safe, while a

couple of hanging shelves for books, an almanac, and several files of

dusty papers, decorated the walls.

‘Very sorry to leave you standing at the door, Sir,’ said the girl,

lighting a lamp, and addressing Mr. Pickwick with a winning smile, ‘but

you was quite strangers to me; and we have such a many trampers that

only come to see what they can lay their hands on, that really--’

‘There is not the least occasion for any apology, my dear,’ said Mr.

Pickwick good-humouredly.

‘Not the slightest, my love,’ said Bob Sawyer, playfully stretching

forth his arms, and skipping from side to side, as if to prevent the

young lady’s leaving the room.

The young lady was not at all softened by these allurements, for she at

once expressed her opinion, that Mr. Bob Sawyer was an ‘odous creetur;’

and, on his becoming rather more pressing in his attentions, imprinted

her fair fingers upon his face, and bounced out of the room with many

expressions of aversion and contempt.

Deprived of the young lady’s society, Mr. Bob Sawyer proceeded to divert

himself by peeping into the desk, looking into all the table drawers,

feigning to pick the lock of the iron safe, turning the almanac with its

face to the wall, trying on the boots of Mr. Winkle, senior, over his

own, and making several other humorous experiments upon the furniture,

all of which afforded Mr. Pickwick unspeakable horror and agony, and

yielded Mr. Bob Sawyer proportionate delight.

At length the door opened, and a little old gentleman in a snuff-

coloured suit, with a head and face the precise counterpart of those

belonging to Mr. Winkle, junior, excepting that he was rather bald,

trotted into the room with Mr. Pickwick’s card in one hand, and a silver

candlestick in the other.

‘Mr. Pickwick, sir, how do you do?’ said Winkle the elder, putting down

the candlestick and proffering his hand. ‘Hope I see you well, sir. Glad

to see you. Be seated, Mr. Pickwick, I beg, Sir. This gentleman is--’

‘My friend, Mr. Sawyer,’ interposed Mr. Pickwick, ‘your son’s friend.’

‘Oh,’ said Mr. Winkle the elder, looking rather grimly at Bob. ‘I hope

you are well, sir.’

‘Right as a trivet, sir,’ replied Bob Sawyer.

‘This other gentleman,’ cried Mr. Pickwick, ‘is, as you will see when

you have read the letter with which I am intrusted, a very near

relative, or I should rather say a very particular friend of your son’s.

His name is Allen.’

‘\_That \_gentleman?’ inquired Mr. Winkle, pointing with the card towards

Ben Allen, who had fallen asleep in an attitude which left nothing of

him visible but his spine and his coat collar.

Mr. Pickwick was on the point of replying to the question, and reciting

Mr. Benjamin Allen’s name and honourable distinctions at full length,

when the sprightly Mr. Bob Sawyer, with a view of rousing his friend to

a sense of his situation, inflicted a startling pinch upon the fleshly

part of his arm, which caused him to jump up with a shriek. Suddenly

aware that he was in the presence of a stranger, Mr. Ben Allen advanced

and, shaking Mr. Winkle most affectionately by both hands for about five

minutes, murmured, in some half-intelligible fragments of sentences, the

great delight he felt in seeing him, and a hospitable inquiry whether he

felt disposed to take anything after his walk, or would prefer waiting

‘till dinner-time;’ which done, he sat down and gazed about him with a

petrified stare, as if he had not the remotest idea where he was, which

indeed he had not.

All this was most embarrassing to Mr. Pickwick, the more especially as

Mr. Winkle, senior, evinced palpable astonishment at the eccentric--not

to say extraordinary--behaviour of his two companions. To bring the

matter to an issue at once, he drew a letter from his pocket, and

presenting it to Mr. Winkle, senior, said--

‘This letter, Sir, is from your son. You will see, by its contents, that

on your favourable and fatherly consideration of it, depend his future

happiness and welfare. Will you oblige me by giving it the calmest and

coolest perusal, and by discussing the subject afterwards with me, in

the tone and spirit in which alone it ought to be discussed? You may

judge of the importance of your decision to your son, and his intense

anxiety upon the subject, by my waiting upon you, without any previous

warning, at so late an hour; and,’ added Mr. Pickwick, glancing slightly

at his two companions--‘and under such unfavourable circumstances.’

With this prelude, Mr. Pickwick placed four closely-written sides of

extra superfine wire-wove penitence in the hands of the astounded Mr.

Winkle, senior. Then reseating himself in his chair, he watched his

looks and manner: anxiously, it is true, but with the open front of a

gentleman who feels he has taken no part which he need excuse or

palliate.

The old wharfinger turned the letter over, looked at the front, back,

and sides, made a microscopic examination of the fat little boy on the

seal, raised his eyes to Mr. Pickwick’s face, and then, seating himself

on the high stool, and drawing the lamp closer to him, broke the wax,

unfolded the epistle, and lifting it to the light, prepared to read.

Just at this moment, Mr. Bob Sawyer, whose wit had lain dormant for some

minutes, placed his hands on his knees, and made a face after the

portraits of the late Mr. Grimaldi, as clown. It so happened that Mr.

Winkle, senior, instead of being deeply engaged in reading the letter,

as Mr. Bob Sawyer thought, chanced to be looking over the top of it at

no less a person than Mr. Bob Sawyer himself; rightly conjecturing that

the face aforesaid was made in ridicule and derision of his own person,

he fixed his eyes on Bob with such expressive sternness, that the late

Mr. Grimaldi’s lineaments gradually resolved themselves into a very fine

expression of humility and confusion.

‘Did you speak, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Winkle, senior, after an awful

silence.

‘No, sir,’ replied Bob, With no remains of the clown about him, save and

except the extreme redness of his cheeks.

‘You are sure you did not, sir?’ said Mr. Winkle, senior.

‘Oh dear, yes, sir, quite,’ replied Bob.

‘I thought you did, Sir,’ replied the old gentleman, with indignant

emphasis. ‘Perhaps you \_looked \_at me, sir?’

‘Oh, no! sir, not at all,’ replied Bob, with extreme civility.

‘I am very glad to hear it, sir,’ said Mr. Winkle, senior. Having

frowned upon the abashed Bob with great magnificence, the old gentleman

again brought the letter to the light, and began to read it seriously.

Mr. Pickwick eyed him intently as he turned from the bottom line of the

first page to the top line of the second, and from the bottom of the

second to the top of the third, and from the bottom of the third to the

top of the fourth; but not the slightest alteration of countenance

afforded a clue to the feelings with which he received the announcement

of his son’s marriage, which Mr. Pickwick knew was in the very first

half-dozen lines.

He read the letter to the last word, folded it again with all the

carefulness and precision of a man of business, and, just when Mr.

Pickwick expected some great outbreak of feeling, dipped a pen in the

ink-stand, and said, as quietly as if he were speaking on the most

ordinary counting-house topic--

‘What is Nathaniel’s address, Mr. Pickwick?’

‘The George and Vulture, at present,’ replied that gentleman.

‘George and Vulture. Where is that?’

‘George Yard, Lombard Street.’

‘In the city?’

‘Yes.’

The old gentleman methodically indorsed the address on the back of the

letter; and then, placing it in the desk, which he locked, said, as he

got off the stool and put the bunch of keys in his pocket--

‘I suppose there is nothing else which need detain us, Mr. Pickwick?’

‘Nothing else, my dear Sir!’ observed that warm-hearted person in

indignant amazement. ‘Nothing else! Have you no opinion to express on

this momentous event in our young friend’s life? No assurance to convey

to him, through me, of the continuance of your affection and protection?

Nothing to say which will cheer and sustain him, and the anxious girl

who looks to him for comfort and support? My dear Sir, consider.’

‘I will consider,’ replied the old gentleman. ‘I have nothing to say

just now. I am a man of business, Mr. Pickwick. I never commit myself

hastily in any affair, and from what I see of this, I by no means like

the appearance of it. A thousand pounds is not much, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘You’re very right, Sir,’ interposed Ben Allen, just awake enough to

know that he had spent his thousand pounds without the smallest

difficulty. ‘You’re an intelligent man. Bob, he’s a very knowing fellow

this.’

‘I am very happy to find that you do me the justice to make the

admission, sir,’ said Mr. Winkle, senior, looking contemptuously at Ben

Allen, who was shaking his head profoundly. ‘The fact is, Mr. Pickwick,

that when I gave my son a roving license for a year or so, to see

something of men and manners (which he has done under your auspices), so

that he might not enter life a mere boarding-school milk-sop to be

gulled by everybody, I never bargained for this. He knows that very

well, so if I withdraw my countenance from him on this account, he has

no call to be surprised. He shall hear from me, Mr. Pickwick. Good-

night, sir.--Margaret, open the door.’

All this time, Bob Sawyer had been nudging Mr. Ben Allen to say

something on the right side; Ben accordingly now burst, without the

slightest preliminary notice, into a brief but impassioned piece of

eloquence.

‘Sir,’ said Mr. Ben Allen, staring at the old gentleman, out of a pair

of very dim and languid eyes, and working his right arm vehemently up

and down, ‘you--you ought to be ashamed of yourself.’

‘As the lady’s brother, of course you are an excellent judge of the

question,’ retorted Mr. Winkle, senior. ‘There; that’s enough. Pray say

no more, Mr. Pickwick. Good-night, gentlemen!’

With these words the old gentleman took up the candle-stick and opening

the room door, politely motioned towards the passage.

‘You will regret this, Sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick, setting his teeth close

together to keep down his choler; for he felt how important the effect

might prove to his young friend.

‘I am at present of a different opinion,’ calmly replied Mr. Winkle,

senior. ‘Once again, gentlemen, I wish you a good-night.’

Mr. Pickwick walked with angry strides into the street. Mr. Bob Sawyer,

completely quelled by the decision of the old gentleman’s manner, took

the same course. Mr. Ben Allen’s hat rolled down the steps immediately

afterwards, and Mr. Ben Allen’s body followed it directly. The whole

party went silent and supperless to bed; and Mr. Pickwick thought, just

before he fell asleep, that if he had known Mr. Winkle, senior, had been

quite so much of a man of business, it was extremely probable he might

never have waited upon him, on such an errand.

CHAPTER LI. IN WHICH MR. PICKWICK ENCOUNTERS AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE--TO

WHICH FORTUNATE CIRCUMSTANCE THE READER IS MAINLY INDEBTED FOR MATTER OF

THRILLING INTEREST HEREIN SET DOWN, CONCERNING TWO GREAT PUBLIC MEN OF

MIGHT AND POWER

The morning which broke upon Mr. Pickwick’s sight at eight o’clock, was

not at all calculated to elevate his spirits, or to lessen the

depression which the unlooked-for result of his embassy inspired. The

sky was dark and gloomy, the air was damp and raw, the streets were wet

and sloppy. The smoke hung sluggishly above the chimney-tops as if it

lacked the courage to rise, and the rain came slowly and doggedly down,

as if it had not even the spirit to pour. A game-cock in the stableyard,

deprived of every spark of his accustomed animation, balanced himself

dismally on one leg in a corner; a donkey, moping with drooping head

under the narrow roof of an outhouse, appeared from his meditative and

miserable countenance to be contemplating suicide. In the street,

umbrellas were the only things to be seen, and the clicking of pattens

and splashing of rain-drops were the only sounds to be heard.

The breakfast was interrupted by very little conversation; even Mr. Bob

Sawyer felt the influence of the weather, and the previous day’s

excitement. In his own expressive language he was ‘floored.’ So was Mr.

Ben Allen. So was Mr. Pickwick.

In protracted expectation of the weather clearing up, the last evening

paper from London was read and re-read with an intensity of interest

only known in cases of extreme destitution; every inch of the carpet was

walked over with similar perseverance; the windows were looked out of,

often enough to justify the imposition of an additional duty upon them;

all kinds of topics of conversation were started, and failed; and at

length Mr. Pickwick, when noon had arrived, without a change for the

better, rang the bell resolutely, and ordered out the chaise.

Although the roads were miry, and the drizzling rain came down harder

than it had done yet, and although the mud and wet splashed in at the

open windows of the carriage to such an extent that the discomfort was

almost as great to the pair of insides as to the pair of outsides, still

there was something in the motion, and the sense of being up and doing,

which was so infinitely superior to being pent in a dull room, looking

at the dull rain dripping into a dull street, that they all agreed, on

starting, that the change was a great improvement, and wondered how they

could possibly have delayed making it as long as they had done.

When they stopped to change at Coventry, the steam ascended from the

horses in such clouds as wholly to obscure the hostler, whose voice was

however heard to declare from the mist, that he expected the first gold

medal from the Humane Society on their next distribution of rewards, for

taking the postboy’s hat off; the water descending from the brim of

which, the invisible gentleman declared, must have drowned him (the

postboy), but for his great presence of mind in tearing it promptly from

his head, and drying the gasping man’s countenance with a wisp of straw.

‘This is pleasant,’ said Bob Sawyer, turning up his coat collar, and

pulling the shawl over his mouth to concentrate the fumes of a glass of

brandy just swallowed.

‘Wery,’ replied Sam composedly.

‘You don’t seem to mind it,’ observed Bob.

‘Vy, I don’t exactly see no good my mindin’ on it ‘ud do, sir,’ replied

Sam.

‘That’s an unanswerable reason, anyhow,’ said Bob.

‘Yes, sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. ‘Wotever is, is right, as the young

nobleman sweetly remarked wen they put him down in the pension list ‘cos

his mother’s uncle’s vife’s grandfather vunce lit the king’s pipe vith a

portable tinder-box.’

Not a bad notion that, Sam,’ said Mr. Bob Sawyer approvingly.

‘Just wot the young nobleman said ev’ry quarter-day arterwards for the

rest of his life,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘Wos you ever called in,’ inquired Sam, glancing at the driver, after a

short silence, and lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper--‘wos you

ever called in, when you wos ‘prentice to a sawbones, to wisit a

postboy.’

‘I don’t remember that I ever was,’ replied Bob Sawyer.

‘You never see a postboy in that ‘ere hospital as you \_walked \_(as they

says o’ the ghosts), did you?’ demanded Sam.

‘No,’ replied Bob Sawyer. ‘I don’t think I ever did.’

‘Never know’d a churchyard were there wos a postboy’s tombstone, or see

a dead postboy, did you?’ inquired Sam, pursuing his catechism.

‘No,’ rejoined Bob, ‘I never did.’

‘No!’ rejoined Sam triumphantly. ‘Nor never vill; and there’s another

thing that no man never see, and that’s a dead donkey. No man never see

a dead donkey ‘cept the gen’l’m’n in the black silk smalls as know’d the

young ‘ooman as kep’ a goat; and that wos a French donkey, so wery

likely he warn’t wun o’ the reg’lar breed.’

‘Well, what has that got to do with the postboys?’ asked Bob Sawyer.

‘This here,’ replied Sam. ‘Without goin’ so far as to as-sert, as some

wery sensible people do, that postboys and donkeys is both immortal, wot

I say is this: that wenever they feels theirselves gettin’ stiff and

past their work, they just rides off together, wun postboy to a pair in

the usual way; wot becomes on ‘em nobody knows, but it’s wery probable

as they starts avay to take their pleasure in some other vorld, for

there ain’t a man alive as ever see either a donkey or a postboy a-

takin’ his pleasure in this!’

Expatiating upon this learned and remarkable theory, and citing many

curious statistical and other facts in its support, Sam Weller beguiled

the time until they reached Dunchurch, where a dry postboy and fresh

horses were procured; the next stage was Daventry, and the next

Towcester; and at the end of each stage it rained harder than it had

done at the beginning.

‘I say,’ remonstrated Bob Sawyer, looking in at the coach window, as

they pulled up before the door of the Saracen’s Head, Towcester, ‘this

won’t do, you know.’

‘Bless me!’ said Mr. Pickwick, just awakening from a nap, ‘I’m afraid

you’re wet.’

‘Oh, you are, are you?’ returned Bob. ‘Yes, I am, a little that way,

Uncomfortably damp, perhaps.’

Bob did look dampish, inasmuch as the rain was streaming from his neck,

elbows, cuffs, skirts, and knees; and his whole apparel shone so with

the wet, that it might have been mistaken for a full suit of prepared

oilskin.

‘I \_am\_ rather wet,’ said Bob, giving himself a shake and casting a

little hydraulic shower around, like a Newfoundland dog just emerged

from the water.

‘I think it’s quite impossible to go on to-night,’ interposed Ben.

‘Out of the question, sir,’ remarked Sam Weller, coming to assist in the

conference; ‘it’s a cruelty to animals, sir, to ask ‘em to do it.

There’s beds here, sir,’ said Sam, addressing his master, ‘everything

clean and comfortable. Wery good little dinner, sir, they can get ready

in half an hour--pair of fowls, sir, and a weal cutlet; French beans,

‘taturs, tart, and tidiness. You’d better stop vere you are, sir, if I

might recommend. Take adwice, sir, as the doctor said.’

The host of the Saracen’s Head opportunely appeared at this moment, to

confirm Mr. Weller’s statement relative to the accommodations of the

establishment, and to back his entreaties with a variety of dismal

conjectures regarding the state of the roads, the doubt of fresh horses

being to be had at the next stage, the dead certainty of its raining all

night, the equally mortal certainty of its clearing up in the morning,

and other topics of inducement familiar to innkeepers.

‘Well,’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘but I must send a letter to London by some

conveyance, so that it may be delivered the very first thing in the

morning, or I must go forwards at all hazards.’

The landlord smiled his delight. Nothing could be easier than for the

gentleman to inclose a letter in a sheet of brown paper, and send it on,

either by the mail or the night coach from Birmingham. If the gentleman

were particularly anxious to have it left as soon as possible, he might

write outside, ‘To be delivered immediately,’ which was sure to be

attended to; or ‘Pay the bearer half-a-crown extra for instant

delivery,’ which was surer still.

‘Very well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘then we will stop here.’

‘Lights in the Sun, John; make up the fire; the gentlemen are wet!’

cried the landlord. ‘This way, gentlemen; don’t trouble yourselves about

the postboy now, sir. I’ll send him to you when you ring for him, sir.

Now, John, the candles.’

The candles were brought, the fire was stirred up, and a fresh log of

wood thrown on. In ten minutes’ time, a waiter was laying the cloth for

dinner, the curtains were drawn, the fire was blazing brightly, and

everything looked (as everything always does, in all decent English

inns) as if the travellers had been expected, and their comforts

prepared, for days beforehand.

Mr. Pickwick sat down at a side table, and hastily indited a note to Mr.

Winkle, merely informing him that he was detained by stress of weather,

but would certainly be in London next day; until when he deferred any

account of his proceedings. This note was hastily made into a parcel,

and despatched to the bar per Mr. Samuel Weller.

Sam left it with the landlady, and was returning to pull his master’s

boots off, after drying himself by the kitchen fire, when glancing

casually through a half-opened door, he was arrested by the sight of a

gentleman with a sandy head who had a large bundle of newspapers lying

on the table before him, and was perusing the leading article of one

with a settled sneer which curled up his nose and all other features

into a majestic expression of haughty contempt.

‘Hollo!’ said Sam, ‘I ought to know that ‘ere head and them features;

the eyeglass, too, and the broad-brimmed tile! Eatansvill to vit, or I’m

a Roman.’

Sam was taken with a troublesome cough, at once, for the purpose of

attracting the gentleman’s attention; the gentleman starting at the

sound, raised his head and his eyeglass, and disclosed to view the

profound and thoughtful features of Mr. Pott, of the Eatanswill

\_Gazette\_.

‘Beggin’ your pardon, sir,’ said Sam, advancing with a bow, ‘my master’s

here, Mr. Pott.’

‘Hush! hush!’ cried Pott, drawing Sam into the room, and closing the

door, with a countenance of mysterious dread and apprehension.

‘Wot’s the matter, Sir?’ inquired Sam, looking vacantly about him.

‘Not a whisper of my name,’ replied Pott; ‘this is a buff neighbourhood.

If the excited and irritable populace knew I was here, I should be torn

to pieces.’

‘No! Vould you, sir?’ inquired Sam.

‘I should be the victim of their fury,’ replied Pott. ‘Now young man,

what of your master?’

‘He’s a-stopping here to-night on his vay to town, with a couple of

friends,’ replied Sam.

‘Is Mr. Winkle one of them?’ inquired Pott, with a slight frown.

‘No, Sir. Mr. Vinkle stops at home now,’ rejoined Sam. ‘He’s married.’

‘Married!’ exclaimed Pott, with frightful vehemence. He stopped, smiled

darkly, and added, in a low, vindictive tone, ‘It serves him right!’

Having given vent to this cruel ebullition of deadly malice and cold-

blooded triumph over a fallen enemy, Mr. Pott inquired whether Mr.

Pickwick’s friends were ‘blue?’ Receiving a most satisfactory answer in

the affirmative from Sam, who knew as much about the matter as Pott

himself, he consented to accompany him to Mr. Pickwick’s room, where a

hearty welcome awaited him, and an agreement to club their dinners

together was at once made and ratified.

‘And how are matters going on in Eatanswill?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick,

when Pott had taken a seat near the fire, and the whole party had got

their wet boots off, and dry slippers on. ‘Is the \_Independent\_ still in

being?’

‘The \_Independent\_, sir,’ replied Pott, ‘is still dragging on a wretched

and lingering career. Abhorred and despised by even the few who are

cognisant of its miserable and disgraceful existence, stifled by the

very filth it so profusely scatters, rendered deaf and blind by the

exhalations of its own slime, the obscene journal, happily unconscious

of its degraded state, is rapidly sinking beneath that treacherous mud

which, while it seems to give it a firm standing with the low and

debased classes of society, is nevertheless rising above its detested

head, and will speedily engulf it for ever.’

Having delivered this manifesto (which formed a portion of his last

week’s leader) with vehement articulation, the editor paused to take

breath, and looked majestically at Bob Sawyer.

‘You are a young man, sir,’ said Pott.

Mr. Bob Sawyer nodded.

‘So are you, sir,’ said Pott, addressing Mr. Ben Allen.

Ben admitted the soft impeachment.

‘And are both deeply imbued with those blue principles, which, so long

as I live, I have pledged myself to the people of these kingdoms to

support and to maintain?’ suggested Pott.

‘Why, I don’t exactly know about that,’ replied Bob Sawyer. ‘I am--’

‘Not buff, Mr. Pickwick,’ interrupted Pott, drawing back his chair,

‘your friend is not buff, sir?’

‘No, no,’ rejoined Bob, ‘I’m a kind of plaid at present; a compound of

all sorts of colours.’

‘A waverer,’ said Pott solemnly, ‘a waverer. I should like to show you a

series of eight articles, Sir, that have appeared in the Eatanswill

\_Gazette\_. I think I may venture to say that you would not be long in

establishing your opinions on a firm and solid blue basis, sir.’

I dare say I should turn very blue, long before I got to the end of

them,’ responded Bob.

Mr. Pott looked dubiously at Bob Sawyer for some seconds, and, turning

to Mr. Pickwick, said--

‘You have seen the literary articles which have appeared at intervals in

the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_ in the course of the last three months, and

which have excited such general--I may say such universal--attention and

admiration?’

‘Why,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, slightly embarrassed by the question, ‘the

fact is, I have been so much engaged in other ways, that I really have

not had an opportunity of perusing them.’

‘You should do so, Sir,’ said Pott, with a severe countenance.

‘I will,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘They appeared in the form of a copious review of a work on Chinese

metaphysics, Sir,’ said Pott.

‘Oh,’ observed Mr. Pickwick; ‘from your pen, I hope?’

‘From the pen of my critic, Sir,’ rejoined Pott, with dignity.

‘An abstruse subject, I should conceive,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Very, Sir,’ responded Pott, looking intensely sage. ‘He \_crammed \_for

it, to use a technical but expressive term; he read up for the subject,

at my desire, in the “Encyclopaedia Britannica.”’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘I was not aware that that valuable work

contained any information respecting Chinese metaphysics.’

‘He read, Sir,’ rejoined Pott, laying his hand on Mr. Pickwick’s knee,

and looking round with a smile of intellectual superiority--‘he read for

metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and

combined his information, Sir!’

Mr. Pott’s features assumed so much additional grandeur at the

recollection of the power and research displayed in the learned

effusions in question, that some minutes elapsed before Mr. Pickwick

felt emboldened to renew the conversation; at length, as the editor’s

countenance gradually relaxed into its customary expression of moral

supremacy, he ventured to resume the discourse by asking--

‘Is it fair to inquire what great object has brought you so far from

home?’

‘That object which actuates and animates me in all my gigantic labours,

Sir,’ replied Pott, with a calm smile: ‘my country’s good.’

I supposed it was some public mission,’ observed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes, Sir,’ resumed Pott, ‘it is.’ Here, bending towards Mr. Pickwick,

he whispered in a deep, hollow voice, ‘A Buff ball, Sir, will take place

in Birmingham to-morrow evening.’

‘God bless me!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes, Sir, and supper,’ added Pott.

‘You don’t say so!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick.

Pott nodded portentously.

Now, although Mr. Pickwick feigned to stand aghast at this disclosure,

he was so little versed in local politics that he was unable to form an

adequate comprehension of the importance of the dire conspiracy it

referred to; observing which, Mr. Pott, drawing forth the last number of

the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, and referring to the same, delivered himself

of the following paragraph:--

HOLE-AND-CORNER BUFFERY.

‘A reptile contemporary has recently sweltered forth his black venom in

the vain and hopeless attempt of sullying the fair name of our

distinguished and excellent representative, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey--

that Slumkey whom we, long before he gained his present noble and

exalted position, predicted would one day be, as he now is, at once his

country’s brightest honour, and her proudest boast: alike her bold

defender and her honest pride--our reptile contemporary, we say, has

made himself merry, at the expense of a superbly embossed plated coal-

scuttle, which has been presented to that glorious man by his enraptured

constituents, and towards the purchase of which, the nameless wretch

insinuates, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey himself contributed, through a

confidential friend of his butler’s, more than three-fourths of the

whole sum subscribed. Why, does not the crawling creature see, that even

if this be the fact, the Honourable Mr. Slumkey only appears in a still

more amiable and radiant light than before, if that be possible? Does

not even his obtuseness perceive that this amiable and touching desire

to carry out the wishes of the constituent body, must for ever endear

him to the hearts and souls of such of his fellow townsmen as are not

worse than swine; or, in other words, who are not as debased as our

contemporary himself? But such is the wretched trickery of hole-and-

corner Buffery! These are not its only artifices. Treason is abroad. We

boldly state, now that we are goaded to the disclosure, and we throw

ourselves on the country and its constables for protection--we boldly

state that secret preparations are at this moment in progress for a Buff

ball; which is to be held in a Buff town, in the very heart and centre

of a Buff population; which is to be conducted by a Buff master of the

ceremonies; which is to be attended by four ultra Buff members of

Parliament, and the admission to which, is to be by Buff tickets! Does

our fiendish contemporary wince? Let him writhe, in impotent malice, as

we pen the words, \_We will be there\_.’

‘There, Sir,’ said Pott, folding up the paper quite exhausted, ‘that is

the state of the case!’

The landlord and waiter entering at the moment with dinner, caused Mr.

Pott to lay his finger on his lips, in token that he considered his life

in Mr. Pickwick’s hands, and depended on his secrecy. Messrs. Bob Sawyer

and Benjamin Allen, who had irreverently fallen asleep during the

reading of the quotation from the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_, and the

discussion which followed it, were roused by the mere whispering of the

talismanic word ‘Dinner’ in their ears; and to dinner they went with

good digestion waiting on appetite, and health on both, and a waiter on

all three.

In the course of the dinner and the sitting which succeeded it, Mr. Pott

descending, for a few moments, to domestic topics, informed Mr. Pickwick

that the air of Eatanswill not agreeing with his lady, she was then

engaged in making a tour of different fashionable watering-places with a

view to the recovery of her wonted health and spirits; this was a

delicate veiling of the fact that Mrs. Pott, acting upon her often-

repeated threat of separation, had, in virtue of an arrangement

negotiated by her brother, the lieutenant, and concluded by Mr. Pott,

permanently retired with the faithful bodyguard upon one moiety or half

part of the annual income and profits arising from the editorship and

sale of the Eatanswill \_Gazette\_.

While the great Mr. Pott was dwelling upon this and other matters,

enlivening the conversation from time to time with various extracts from

his own lucubrations, a stern stranger, calling from the window of a

stage-coach, outward bound, which halted at the inn to deliver packages,

requested to know whether if he stopped short on his journey and

remained there for the night, he could be furnished with the necessary

accommodation of a bed and bedstead.

‘Certainly, sir,’ replied the landlord.

‘I can, can I?’ inquired the stranger, who seemed habitually suspicious

in look and manner.

‘No doubt of it, Sir,’ replied the landlord.

‘Good,’ said the stranger. ‘Coachman, I get down here. Guard, my carpet-

bag!’

Bidding the other passengers good-night, in a rather snappish manner,

the stranger alighted. He was a shortish gentleman, with very stiff

black hair cut in the porcupine or blacking-brush style, and standing

stiff and straight all over his head; his aspect was pompous and

threatening; his manner was peremptory; his eyes were sharp and

restless; and his whole bearing bespoke a feeling of great confidence in

himself, and a consciousness of immeasurable superiority over all other

people.

This gentleman was shown into the room originally assigned to the

patriotic Mr. Pott; and the waiter remarked, in dumb astonishment at the

singular coincidence, that he had no sooner lighted the candles than the

gentleman, diving into his hat, drew forth a newspaper, and began to

read it with the very same expression of indignant scorn, which, upon

the majestic features of Pott, had paralysed his energies an hour

before. The man observed too, that, whereas Mr. Pott’s scorn had been

roused by a newspaper headed the Eatanswill \_Independent\_, this

gentleman’s withering contempt was awakened by a newspaper entitled the

Eatanswill \_Gazette\_.

‘Send the landlord,’ said the stranger.

‘Yes, sir,’ rejoined the waiter.

The landlord was sent, and came.

‘Are you the landlord?’ inquired the gentleman.

‘I am sir,’ replied the landlord.

‘Do you know me?’ demanded the gentleman.

‘I have not had that pleasure, Sir,’ rejoined the landlord.

‘My name is Slurk,’ said the gentleman.

The landlord slightly inclined his head.

‘Slurk, sir,’ repeated the gentleman haughtily. ‘Do you know me now,

man?’

The landlord scratched his head, looked at the ceiling, and at the

stranger, and smiled feebly.

‘Do you know me, man?’ inquired the stranger angrily.

The landlord made a strong effort, and at length replied, ‘Well, Sir, I

do \_not\_ know you.’

‘Great Heaven!’ said the stranger, dashing his clenched fist upon the

table. ‘And this is popularity!’

The landlord took a step or two towards the door; the stranger fixing

his eyes upon him, resumed.

‘This,’ said the stranger--‘this is gratitude for years of labour and

study in behalf of the masses. I alight wet and weary; no enthusiastic

crowds press forward to greet their champion; the church bells are

silent; the very name elicits no responsive feeling in their torpid

bosoms. It is enough,’ said the agitated Mr. Slurk, pacing to and fro,

‘to curdle the ink in one’s pen, and induce one to abandon their cause

for ever.’

‘Did you say brandy-and-water, Sir?’ said the landlord, venturing a

hint.

‘Rum,’ said Mr. Slurk, turning fiercely upon him. ‘Have you got a fire

anywhere?’

‘We can light one directly, Sir,’ said the landlord.

‘Which will throw out no heat until it is bed-time,’ interrupted Mr.

Slurk. ‘Is there anybody in the kitchen?’

Not a soul. There was a beautiful fire. Everybody had gone, and the

house door was closed for the night.

‘I will drink my rum-and-water,’ said Mr. Slurk, ‘by the kitchen fire.’

So, gathering up his hat and newspaper, he stalked solemnly behind the

landlord to that humble apartment, and throwing himself on a settle by

the fireside, resumed his countenance of scorn, and began to read and

drink in silent dignity.

Now, some demon of discord, flying over the Saracen’s Head at that

moment, on casting down his eyes in mere idle curiosity, happened to

behold Slurk established comfortably by the kitchen fire, and Pott

slightly elevated with wine in another room; upon which the malicious

demon, darting down into the last-mentioned apartment with inconceivable

rapidity, passed at once into the head of Mr. Bob Sawyer, and prompted

him for his (the demon’s) own evil purpose to speak as follows:--

‘I say, we’ve let the fire out. It’s uncommonly cold after the rain,

isn’t it?’

‘It really is,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, shivering.

‘It wouldn’t be a bad notion to have a cigar by the kitchen fire, would

it?’ said Bob Sawyer, still prompted by the demon aforesaid.

‘It would be particularly comfortable, I think,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mr. Pott, what do you say?’

Mr. Pott yielded a ready assent; and all four travellers, each with his

glass in his hand, at once betook themselves to the kitchen, with Sam

Weller heading the procession to show them the way.

The stranger was still reading; he looked up and started. Mr. Pott

started.

‘What’s the matter?’ whispered Mr. Pickwick.

‘That reptile!’ replied Pott.

‘What reptile?’ said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him for fear he should

tread on some overgrown black beetle, or dropsical spider.

‘That reptile,’ whispered Pott, catching Mr. Pickwick by the arm, and

pointing towards the stranger. ‘That reptile Slurk, of the

\_Independent\_!’

‘Perhaps we had better retire,’ whispered Mr. Pickwick.

‘Never, Sir,’ rejoined Pott, pot-valiant in a double sense--‘never.’

With these words, Mr. Pott took up his position on an opposite settle,

and selecting one from a little bundle of newspapers, began to read

against his enemy.

Mr. Pott, of course read the \_Independent\_, and Mr. Slurk, of course,

read the \_Gazette\_; and each gentleman audibly expressed his contempt at

the other’s compositions by bitter laughs and sarcastic sniffs; whence

they proceeded to more open expressions of opinion, such as ‘absurd,’

‘wretched,’ ‘atrocity,’ ‘humbug,’ ‘knavery’, ‘dirt,’ ‘filth,’ ‘slime,’

‘ditch-water,’ and other critical remarks of the like nature.

Both Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Ben Allen had beheld these symptoms of

rivalry and hatred, with a degree of delight which imparted great

additional relish to the cigars at which they were puffing most

vigorously. The moment they began to flag, the mischievous Mr. Bob

Sawyer, addressing Slurk with great politeness, said--

‘Will you allow me to look at your paper, Sir, when you have quite done

with it?’

‘You will find very little to repay you for your trouble in this

contemptible \_thing\_, sir,’ replied Slurk, bestowing a Satanic frown on

Pott.

‘You shall have this presently,’ said Pott, looking up, pale with rage,

and quivering in his speech, from the same cause. ‘Ha! ha! you will be

amused with this \_fellow’s\_ audacity.’

Terrible emphasis was laid upon ‘thing’ and ‘fellow’; and the faces of

both editors began to glow with defiance.

‘The ribaldry of this miserable man is despicably disgusting,’ said

Pott, pretending to address Bob Sawyer, and scowling upon Slurk.

Here, Mr. Slurk laughed very heartily, and folding up the paper so as to

get at a fresh column conveniently, said, that the blockhead really

amused him.

‘What an impudent blunderer this fellow is,’ said Pott, turning from

pink to crimson.

‘Did you ever read any of this man’s foolery, Sir?’ inquired Slurk of

Bob Sawyer.

‘Never,’ replied Bob; ‘is it very bad?’

‘Oh, shocking! shocking!’ rejoined Slurk.

‘Really! Dear me, this is too atrocious!’ exclaimed Pott, at this

juncture; still feigning to be absorbed in his reading.

‘If you can wade through a few sentences of malice, meanness, falsehood,

perjury, treachery, and cant,’ said Slurk, handing the paper to Bob,

‘you will, perhaps, be somewhat repaid by a laugh at the style of this

ungrammatical twaddler.’

‘What’s that you said, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Pott, looking up, trembling

all over with passion.

‘What’s that to you, sir?’ replied Slurk.

‘Ungrammatical twaddler, was it, sir?’ said Pott.

‘Yes, sir, it was,’ replied Slurk; ‘and \_blue bore\_, Sir, if you like

that better; ha! ha!’

Mr. Pott retorted not a word at this jocose insult, but deliberately

folded up his copy of the \_Independent\_, flattened it carefully down,

crushed it beneath his boot, spat upon it with great ceremony, and flung

it into the fire.

‘There, sir,’ said Pott, retreating from the stove, ‘and that’s the way

I would serve the viper who produces it, if I were not, fortunately for

him, restrained by the laws of my country.’

‘Serve him so, sir!’ cried Slurk, starting up. ‘Those laws shall never

be appealed to by him, sir, in such a case. Serve him so, sir!’

‘Hear! hear!’ said Bob Sawyer.

‘Nothing can be fairer,’ observed Mr. Ben Allen.

‘Serve him so, sir!’ reiterated Slurk, in a loud voice.

Mr. Pott darted a look of contempt, which might have withered an anchor.

‘Serve him so, sir!’ reiterated Slurk, in a louder voice than before.

‘I will not, sir,’ rejoined Pott.

‘Oh, you won’t, won’t you, sir?’ said Mr. Slurk, in a taunting manner;

‘you hear this, gentlemen! He won’t; not that he’s afraid--, oh, no! he

\_won’t\_. Ha! ha!’

‘I consider you, sir,’ said Mr. Pott, moved by this sarcasm, ‘I consider

you a viper. I look upon you, sir, as a man who has placed himself

beyond the pale of society, by his most audacious, disgraceful, and

abominable public conduct. I view you, sir, personally and politically,

in no other light than as a most unparalleled and unmitigated viper.’

The indignant Independent did not wait to hear the end of this personal

denunciation; for, catching up his carpet-bag, which was well stuffed

with movables, he swung it in the air as Pott turned away, and, letting

it fall with a circular sweep on his head, just at that particular angle

of the bag where a good thick hairbrush happened to be packed, caused a

sharp crash to be heard throughout the kitchen, and brought him at once

to the ground.

‘Gentlemen,’ cried Mr. Pickwick, as Pott started up and seized the fire-

shovel--‘gentlemen! Consider, for Heaven’s sake--help--Sam--here--pray,

gentlemen--interfere, somebody.’

Uttering these incoherent exclamations, Mr. Pickwick rushed between the

infuriated combatants just in time to receive the carpet-bag on one side

of his body, and the fire-shovel on the other. Whether the

representatives of the public feeling of Eatanswill were blinded by

animosity, or (being both acute reasoners) saw the advantage of having a

third party between them to bear all the blows, certain it is that they

paid not the slightest attention to Mr. Pickwick, but defying each other

with great spirit, plied the carpet-bag and the fire-shovel most

fearlessly. Mr. Pickwick would unquestionably have suffered severely for

his humane interference, if Mr. Weller, attracted by his master’s cries,

had not rushed in at the moment, and, snatching up a meal-sack,

effectually stopped the conflict by drawing it over the head and

shoulders of the mighty Pott, and clasping him tight round the

shoulders.

‘Take away that ‘ere bag from the t’other madman,’ said Sam to Ben Allen

and Bob Sawyer, who had done nothing but dodge round the group, each

with a tortoise-shell lancet in his hand, ready to bleed the first man

stunned. ‘Give it up, you wretched little creetur, or I’ll smother you

in it.’

Awed by these threats, and quite out of breath, the \_Independent\_

suffered himself to be disarmed; and Mr. Weller, removing the

extinguisher from Pott, set him free with a caution.

‘You take yourselves off to bed quietly,’ said Sam, ‘or I’ll put you

both in it, and let you fight it out vith the mouth tied, as I vould a

dozen sich, if they played these games. And you have the goodness to

come this here way, sir, if you please.’

Thus addressing his master, Sam took him by the arm, and led him off,

while the rival editors were severally removed to their beds by the

landlord, under the inspection of Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen;

breathing, as they went away, many sanguinary threats, and making vague

appointments for mortal combat next day. When they came to think it

over, however, it occurred to them that they could do it much better in

print, so they recommenced deadly hostilities without delay; and all

Eatanswill rung with their boldness--on paper.

They had taken themselves off in separate coaches, early next morning,

before the other travellers were stirring; and the weather having now

cleared up, the chaise companions once more turned their faces to

London.

CHAPTER LII. INVOLVING A SERIOUS CHANGE IN THE WELLER FAMILY, AND THE

UNTIMELY DOWNFALL OF MR. STIGGINS

Considering it a matter of delicacy to abstain from introducing either

Bob Sawyer or Ben Allen to the young couple, until they were fully

prepared to expect them, and wishing to spare Arabella’s feelings as

much as possible, Mr. Pickwick proposed that he and Sam should alight in

the neighbourhood of the George and Vulture, and that the two young men

should for the present take up their quarters elsewhere. To this they

very readily agreed, and the proposition was accordingly acted upon; Mr.

Ben Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer betaking themselves to a sequestered pot-

shop on the remotest confines of the Borough, behind the bar door of

which their names had in other days very often appeared at the head of

long and complex calculations worked in white chalk.

‘Dear me, Mr. Weller,’ said the pretty housemaid, meeting Sam at the

door.

‘Dear \_me\_ I vish it vos, my dear,’ replied Sam, dropping behind, to let

his master get out of hearing. ‘Wot a sweet-lookin’ creetur you are,

Mary!’

‘Lor’, Mr. Weller, what nonsense you do talk!’ said Mary. ‘Oh! don’t,

Mr. Weller.’

‘Don’t what, my dear?’ said Sam.

‘Why, that,’ replied the pretty housemaid. ‘Lor, do get along with you.’

Thus admonishing him, the pretty housemaid pushed Sam against the wall,

declaring that he had tumbled her cap, and put her hair quite out of

curl.

‘And prevented what I was going to say, besides,’ added Mary. ‘There’s a

letter been waiting here for you four days; you hadn’t gone away, half

an hour, when it came; and more than that, it’s got “immediate,” on the

outside.’

‘Vere is it, my love?’ inquired Sam.

‘I took care of it, for you, or I dare say it would have been lost long

before this,’ replied Mary. ‘There, take it; it’s more than you

deserve.’

With these words, after many pretty little coquettish doubts and fears,

and wishes that she might not have lost it, Mary produced the letter

from behind the nicest little muslin tucker possible, and handed it to

Sam, who thereupon kissed it with much gallantry and devotion.

‘My goodness me!’ said Mary, adjusting the tucker, and feigning

unconsciousness, ‘you seem to have grown very fond of it all at once.’

To this Mr. Weller only replied by a wink, the intense meaning of which

no description could convey the faintest idea of; and, sitting himself

down beside Mary on a window-seat, opened the letter and glanced at the

contents.

‘Hollo!’ exclaimed Sam, ‘wot’s all this?’

‘Nothing the matter, I hope?’ said Mary, peeping over his shoulder.

‘Bless them eyes o’ yourn!’ said Sam, looking up.

‘Never mind my eyes; you had much better read your letter,’ said the

pretty housemaid; and as she said so, she made the eyes twinkle with

such slyness and beauty that they were perfectly irresistible.

Sam refreshed himself with a kiss, and read as follows:--

‘MARKIS GRAN ‘By DORKEN ‘Wensdy.

‘My DEAR SAMMLE,

‘I am wery sorry to have the pleasure of being a Bear of ill news your

Mother in law cort cold consekens of imprudently settin too long on the

damp grass in the rain a hearin of a shepherd who warnt able to leave

off till late at night owen to his having vound his-self up vith brandy

and vater and not being able to stop his-self till he got a little sober

which took a many hours to do the doctor says that if she’d svallo’d

varm brandy and vater artervards insted of afore she mightn’t have been

no vus her veels wos immedetly greased and everythink done to set her

agoin as could be inwented your father had hopes as she vould have

vorked round as usual but just as she wos a turnen the corner my boy she

took the wrong road and vent down hill vith a welocity you never see and

notvithstandin that the drag wos put on drectly by the medikel man it

wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes

afore six o’clock yesterday evenin havin done the jouney wery much under

the reglar time vich praps was partly owen to her haven taken in wery

little luggage by the vay your father says that if you vill come and see

me Sammy he vill take it as a wery great favor for I am wery lonely

Samivel N. B. he \_vill \_have it spelt that vay vich I say ant right and

as there is sich a many things to settle he is sure your guvner wont

object of course he vill not Sammy for I knows him better so he sends

his dooty in which I join and am Samivel infernally yours

‘TONY VELLER.’

‘Wot a incomprehensible letter,’ said Sam; ‘who’s to know wot it means,

vith all this he-ing and I-ing! It ain’t my father’s writin’, ‘cept this

here signater in print letters; that’s his.’

‘Perhaps he got somebody to write it for him, and signed it himself

afterwards,’ said the pretty housemaid.

‘Stop a minit,’ replied Sam, running over the letter again, and pausing

here and there, to reflect, as he did so. ‘You’ve hit it. The gen’l’m’n

as wrote it wos a-tellin’ all about the misfortun’ in a proper vay, and

then my father comes a-lookin’ over him, and complicates the whole

concern by puttin’ his oar in. That’s just the wery sort o’ thing he’d

do. You’re right, Mary, my dear.’

Having satisfied himself on this point, Sam read the letter all over,

once more, and, appearing to form a clear notion of its contents for the

first time, ejaculated thoughtfully, as he folded it up--

‘And so the poor creetur’s dead! I’m sorry for it. She warn’t a bad-

disposed ‘ooman, if them shepherds had let her alone. I’m wery sorry for

it.’

Mr. Weller uttered these words in so serious a manner, that the pretty

housemaid cast down her eyes and looked very grave.

‘Hows’ever,’ said Sam, putting the letter in his pocket with a gentle

sigh, ‘it wos to be--and wos, as the old lady said arter she’d married

the footman. Can’t be helped now, can it, Mary?’

Mary shook her head, and sighed too.

‘I must apply to the hemperor for leave of absence,’ said Sam.

Mary sighed again--the letter was so very affecting.

‘Good-bye!’ said Sam.

‘Good-bye,’ rejoined the pretty housemaid, turning her head away.

‘Well, shake hands, won’t you?’ said Sam.

The pretty housemaid put out a hand which, although it was a

housemaid’s, was a very small one, and rose to go.

‘I shan’t be wery long avay,’ said Sam.

‘You’re always away,’ said Mary, giving her head the slightest possible

toss in the air. ‘You no sooner come, Mr. Weller, than you go again.’

Mr. Weller drew the household beauty closer to him, and entered upon a

whispering conversation, which had not proceeded far, when she turned

her face round and condescended to look at him again. When they parted,

it was somehow or other indispensably necessary for her to go to her

room, and arrange the cap and curls before she could think of presenting

herself to her mistress; which preparatory ceremony she went off to

perform, bestowing many nods and smiles on Sam over the banisters as she

tripped upstairs.

‘I shan’t be avay more than a day, or two, Sir, at the furthest,’ said

Sam, when he had communicated to Mr. Pickwick the intelligence of his

father’s loss.

‘As long as may be necessary, Sam,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘you have my

full permission to remain.’

Sam bowed.

‘You will tell your father, Sam, that if I can be of any assistance to

him in his present situation, I shall be most willing and ready to lend

him any aid in my power,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Thank’ee, sir,’ rejoined Sam. ‘I’ll mention it, sir.’

And with some expressions of mutual good-will and interest, master and

man separated.

It was just seven o’clock when Samuel Weller, alighting from the box of

a stage-coach which passed through Dorking, stood within a few hundred

yards of the Marquis of Granby. It was a cold, dull evening; the little

street looked dreary and dismal; and the mahogany countenance of the

noble and gallant marquis seemed to wear a more sad and melancholy

expression than it was wont to do, as it swung to and fro, creaking

mournfully in the wind. The blinds were pulled down, and the shutters

partly closed; of the knot of loungers that usually collected about the

door, not one was to be seen; the place was silent and desolate.

Seeing nobody of whom he could ask any preliminary questions, Sam walked

softly in, and glancing round, he quickly recognised his parent in the

distance.

The widower was seated at a small round table in the little room behind

the bar, smoking a pipe, with his eyes intently fixed upon the fire. The

funeral had evidently taken place that day, for attached to his hat,

which he still retained on his head, was a hatband measuring about a

yard and a half in length, which hung over the top rail of the chair and

streamed negligently down. Mr. Weller was in a very abstracted and

contemplative mood. Notwithstanding that Sam called him by name several

times, he still continued to smoke with the same fixed and quiet

countenance, and was only roused ultimately by his son’s placing the

palm of his hand on his shoulder.

‘Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘you’re welcome.’

‘I’ve been a-callin’ to you half a dozen times,’ said Sam, hanging his

hat on a peg, ‘but you didn’t hear me.’

‘No, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, again looking thoughtfully at the fire.

‘I was in a referee, Sammy.’

‘Wot about?’ inquired Sam, drawing his chair up to the fire.

‘In a referee, Sammy,’ replied the elder Mr. Weller, ‘regarding \_her\_,

Samivel.’ Here Mr. Weller jerked his head in the direction of Dorking

churchyard, in mute explanation that his words referred to the late Mrs.

Weller.

‘I wos a-thinkin’, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, eyeing his son, with great

earnestness, over his pipe, as if to assure him that however

extraordinary and incredible the declaration might appear, it was

nevertheless calmly and deliberately uttered. ‘I wos a-thinkin’, Sammy,

that upon the whole I wos wery sorry she wos gone.’

‘Vell, and so you ought to be,’ replied Sam.

Mr. Weller nodded his acquiescence in the sentiment, and again fastening

his eyes on the fire, shrouded himself in a cloud, and mused deeply.

‘Those wos wery sensible observations as she made, Sammy,’ said Mr.

Weller, driving the smoke away with his hand, after a long silence.

‘Wot observations?’ inquired Sam.

‘Them as she made, arter she was took ill,’ replied the old gentleman.

‘Wot was they?’

‘Somethin’ to this here effect. “Veller,” she says, “I’m afeered I’ve

not done by you quite wot I ought to have done; you’re a wery kind-

hearted man, and I might ha’ made your home more comfortabler. I begin

to see now,” she says, “ven it’s too late, that if a married ‘ooman

vishes to be religious, she should begin vith dischargin’ her dooties at

home, and makin’ them as is about her cheerful and happy, and that vile

she goes to church, or chapel, or wot not, at all proper times, she

should be wery careful not to con-wert this sort o’ thing into a excuse

for idleness or self-indulgence. I have done this,” she says, “and I’ve

vasted time and substance on them as has done it more than me; but I

hope ven I’m gone, Veller, that you’ll think on me as I wos afore I

know’d them people, and as I raly wos by natur.” ‘“Susan,” says I--I wos

took up wery short by this, Samivel; I von’t deny it, my boy--“Susan,” I

says, “you’ve been a wery good vife to me, altogether; don’t say nothin’

at all about it; keep a good heart, my dear; and you’ll live to see me

punch that ‘ere Stiggins’s head yet.” She smiled at this, Samivel,’ said

the old gentleman, stifling a sigh with his pipe, ‘but she died arter

all!’

‘Vell,’ said Sam, venturing to offer a little homely consolation, after

the lapse of three or four minutes, consumed by the old gentleman in

slowly shaking his head from side to side, and solemnly smoking, ‘vell,

gov’nor, ve must all come to it, one day or another.’

‘So we must, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller the elder.

‘There’s a Providence in it all,’ said Sam.

‘O’ course there is,’ replied his father, with a nod of grave approval.

‘Wot ‘ud become of the undertakers vithout it, Sammy?’

Lost in the immense field of conjecture opened by this reflection, the

elder Mr. Weller laid his pipe on the table, and stirred the fire with a

meditative visage.

While the old gentleman was thus engaged, a very buxom-looking cook,

dressed in mourning, who had been bustling about, in the bar, glided

into the room, and bestowing many smirks of recognition upon Sam,

silently stationed herself at the back of his father’s chair, and

announced her presence by a slight cough, the which, being disregarded,

was followed by a louder one.

‘Hollo!’ said the elder Mr. Weller, dropping the poker as he looked

round, and hastily drew his chair away. ‘Wot’s the matter now?’

‘Have a cup of tea, there’s a good soul,’ replied the buxom female

coaxingly.

‘I von’t,’ replied Mr. Weller, in a somewhat boisterous manner. ‘I’ll

see you--’ Mr. Weller hastily checked himself, and added in a low tone,

‘furder fust.’

‘Oh, dear, dear! How adwersity does change people!’ said the lady,

looking upwards.

‘It’s the only thing ‘twixt this and the doctor as shall change my

condition,’ muttered Mr. Weller.

‘I really never saw a man so cross,’ said the buxom female.

‘Never mind. It’s all for my own good; vich is the reflection vith vich

the penitent school-boy comforted his feelin’s ven they flogged him,’

rejoined the old gentleman.

The buxom female shook her head with a compassionate and sympathising

air; and, appealing to Sam, inquired whether his father really ought not

to make an effort to keep up, and not give way to that lowness of

spirits.

‘You see, Mr. Samuel,’ said the buxom female, ‘as I was telling him

yesterday, he will feel lonely, he can’t expect but what he should, sir,

but he should keep up a good heart, because, dear me, I’m sure we all

pity his loss, and are ready to do anything for him; and there’s no

situation in life so bad, Mr. Samuel, that it can’t be mended. Which is

what a very worthy person said to me when my husband died.’ Here the

speaker, putting her hand before her mouth, coughed again, and looked

affectionately at the elder Mr. Weller.

‘As I don’t rekvire any o’ your conversation just now, mum, vill you

have the goodness to re-tire?’ inquired Mr. Weller, in a grave and

steady voice.

‘Well, Mr. Weller,’ said the buxom female, ‘I’m sure I only spoke to you

out of kindness.’

‘Wery likely, mum,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Samivel, show the lady out, and

shut the door after her.’

This hint was not lost upon the buxom female; for she at once left the

room, and slammed the door behind her, upon which Mr. Weller, senior,

falling back in his chair in a violent perspiration, said--

‘Sammy, if I wos to stop here alone vun week--only vun week, my boy--

that ‘ere ‘ooman ‘ud marry me by force and wiolence afore it was over.’

‘Wot! is she so wery fond on you?’ inquired Sam.

‘Fond!’ replied his father. ‘I can’t keep her avay from me. If I was

locked up in a fireproof chest vith a patent Brahmin, she’d find means

to get at me, Sammy.’

‘Wot a thing it is to be so sought arter!’ observed Sam, smiling.

‘I don’t take no pride out on it, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, poking the

fire vehemently, ‘it’s a horrid sitiwation. I’m actiwally drove out o’

house and home by it. The breath was scarcely out o’ your poor mother-

in-law’s body, ven vun old ‘ooman sends me a pot o’ jam, and another a

pot o’ jelly, and another brews a blessed large jug o’ camomile-tea,

vich she brings in vith her own hands.’ Mr. Weller paused with an aspect

of intense disgust, and looking round, added in a whisper, ‘They wos all

widders, Sammy, all on ‘em, ‘cept the camomile-tea vun, as wos a single

young lady o’ fifty-three.’

Sam gave a comical look in reply, and the old gentleman having broken an

obstinate lump of coal, with a countenance expressive of as much

earnestness and malice as if it had been the head of one of the widows

last-mentioned, said:

‘In short, Sammy, I feel that I ain’t safe anyveres but on the box.’

‘How are you safer there than anyveres else?’ interrupted Sam.

‘’Cos a coachman’s a privileged indiwidual,’ replied Mr. Weller, looking

fixedly at his son. ‘’Cos a coachman may do vithout suspicion wot other

men may not; ‘cos a coachman may be on the wery amicablest terms with

eighty mile o’ females, and yet nobody think that he ever means to marry

any vun among ‘em. And wot other man can say the same, Sammy?’

‘Vell, there’s somethin’ in that,’ said Sam.

‘If your gov’nor had been a coachman,’ reasoned Mr. Weller, ‘do you

s’pose as that ‘ere jury ‘ud ever ha’ conwicted him, s’posin’ it

possible as the matter could ha’ gone to that extremity? They dustn’t

ha’ done it.’

‘Wy not?’ said Sam, rather disparagingly.

‘Wy not!’ rejoined Mr. Weller; ‘’cos it ‘ud ha’ gone agin their

consciences. A reg’lar coachman’s a sort o’ con-nectin’ link betwixt

singleness and matrimony, and every practicable man knows it.’

‘Wot! You mean, they’re gen’ral favorites, and nobody takes adwantage on

‘em, p’raps?’ said Sam.

His father nodded.

‘How it ever come to that ‘ere pass,’ resumed the parent Weller, ‘I

can’t say. Wy it is that long-stage coachmen possess such insiniwations,

and is alvays looked up to--a-dored I may say--by ev’ry young ‘ooman in

ev’ry town he vurks through, I don’t know. I only know that so it is.

It’s a regulation of natur--a dispensary, as your poor mother-in-law

used to say.’

‘A dispensation,’ said Sam, correcting the old gentleman.

‘Wery good, Samivel, a dispensation if you like it better,’ returned Mr.

Weller; ‘I call it a dispensary, and it’s always writ up so, at the

places vere they gives you physic for nothin’ in your own bottles;

that’s all.’

With these words, Mr. Weller refilled and relighted his pipe, and once

more summoning up a meditative expression of countenance, continued as

follows--

‘Therefore, my boy, as I do not see the adwisability o’ stoppin here to

be married vether I vant to or not, and as at the same time I do not

vish to separate myself from them interestin’ members o’ society

altogether, I have come to the determination o’ driving the Safety, and

puttin’ up vunce more at the Bell Savage, vich is my nat’ral born

element, Sammy.’

‘And wot’s to become o’ the bis’ness?’ inquired Sam.

‘The bis’ness, Samivel,’ replied the old gentleman, ‘good-vill, stock,

and fixters, vill be sold by private contract; and out o’ the money, two

hundred pound, agreeable to a rekvest o’ your mother-in-law’s to me, a

little afore she died, vill be invested in your name in--What do you

call them things agin?’

‘Wot things?’ inquired Sam.

‘Them things as is always a-goin’ up and down, in the city.’

‘Omnibuses?’ suggested Sam.

‘Nonsense,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Them things as is alvays a-

fluctooatin’, and gettin’ theirselves inwolved somehow or another vith

the national debt, and the chequers bill; and all that.’

‘Oh! the funds,’ said Sam.

‘Ah!’ rejoined Mr. Weller, ‘the funs; two hundred pounds o’ the money is

to be inwested for you, Samivel, in the funs; four and a half per cent.

reduced counsels, Sammy.’

‘Wery kind o’ the old lady to think o’ me,’ said Sam, ‘and I’m wery much

obliged to her.’

‘The rest will be inwested in my name,’ continued the elder Mr. Weller;

‘and wen I’m took off the road, it’ll come to you, so take care you

don’t spend it all at vunst, my boy, and mind that no widder gets a

inklin’ o’ your fortun’, or you’re done.’

Having delivered this warning, Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with a more

serene countenance; the disclosure of these matters appearing to have

eased his mind considerably.

‘Somebody’s a-tappin’ at the door,’ said Sam.

‘Let ‘em tap,’ replied his father, with dignity.

Sam acted upon the direction. There was another tap, and another, and

then a long row of taps; upon which Sam inquired why the tapper was not

admitted.

‘Hush,’ whispered Mr. Weller, with apprehensive looks, ‘don’t take no

notice on ‘em, Sammy, it’s vun o’ the widders, p’raps.’

No notice being taken of the taps, the unseen visitor, after a short

lapse, ventured to open the door and peep in. It was no female head that

was thrust in at the partially-opened door, but the long black locks and

red face of Mr. Stiggins. Mr. Weller’s pipe fell from his hands.

The reverend gentleman gradually opened the door by almost imperceptible

degrees, until the aperture was just wide enough to admit of the passage

of his lank body, when he glided into the room and closed it after him,

with great care and gentleness. Turning towards Sam, and raising his

hands and eyes in token of the unspeakable sorrow with which he regarded

the calamity that had befallen the family, he carried the high-backed

chair to his old corner by the fire, and, seating himself on the very

edge, drew forth a brown pocket-handkerchief, and applied the same to

his optics.

While this was going forward, the elder Mr. Weller sat back in his

chair, with his eyes wide open, his hands planted on his knees, and his

whole countenance expressive of absorbing and overwhelming astonishment.

Sam sat opposite him in perfect silence, waiting, with eager curiosity,

for the termination of the scene.

Mr. Stiggins kept the brown pocket-handkerchief before his eyes for some

minutes, moaning decently meanwhile, and then, mastering his feelings by

a strong effort, put it in his pocket and buttoned it up. After this, he

stirred the fire; after that, he rubbed his hands and looked at Sam.

‘Oh, my young friend,’ said Mr. Stiggins, breaking the silence, in a

very low voice, ‘here’s a sorrowful affliction!’

Sam nodded very slightly.

‘For the man of wrath, too!’ added Mr. Stiggins; ‘it makes a vessel’s

heart bleed!’

Mr. Weller was overheard by his son to murmur something relative to

making a vessel’s nose bleed; but Mr. Stiggins heard him not.

‘Do you know, young man,’ whispered Mr. Stiggins, drawing his chair

closer to Sam, ‘whether she has left Emanuel anything?’

‘Who’s he?’ inquired Sam.

‘The chapel,’ replied Mr. Stiggins; ‘our chapel; our fold, Mr. Samuel.’

‘She hasn’t left the fold nothin’, nor the shepherd nothin’, nor the

animals nothin’,’ said Sam decisively; ‘nor the dogs neither.’

Mr. Stiggins looked slily at Sam; glanced at the old gentleman, who was

sitting with his eyes closed, as if asleep; and drawing his chair still

nearer, said--

‘Nothing for \_me\_, Mr. Samuel?’

Sam shook his head.

‘I think there’s something,’ said Stiggins, turning as pale as he could

turn. ‘Consider, Mr. Samuel; no little token?’

‘Not so much as the vorth o’ that ‘ere old umberella o’ yourn,’ replied

Sam.

‘Perhaps,’ said Mr. Stiggins hesitatingly, after a few moments’ deep

thought, ‘perhaps she recommended me to the care of the man of wrath,

Mr. Samuel?’

‘I think that’s wery likely, from what he said,’ rejoined Sam; ‘he wos

a-speakin’ about you, jist now.’

‘Was he, though?’ exclaimed Stiggins, brightening up. ‘Ah! He’s changed,

I dare say. We might live very comfortably together now, Mr. Samuel, eh?

I could take care of his property when you are away--good care, you

see.’

Heaving a long-drawn sigh, Mr. Stiggins paused for a response. Sam

nodded, and Mr. Weller the elder gave vent to an extraordinary sound,

which, being neither a groan, nor a grunt, nor a gasp, nor a growl,

seemed to partake in some degree of the character of all four.

Mr. Stiggins, encouraged by this sound, which he understood to betoken

remorse or repentance, looked about him, rubbed his hands, wept, smiled,

wept again, and then, walking softly across the room to a well-

remembered shelf in one corner, took down a tumbler, and with great

deliberation put four lumps of sugar in it. Having got thus far, he

looked about him again, and sighed grievously; with that, he walked

softly into the bar, and presently returning with the tumbler half full

of pine-apple rum, advanced to the kettle which was singing gaily on the

hob, mixed his grog, stirred it, sipped it, sat down, and taking a long

and hearty pull at the rum-and-water, stopped for breath.

The elder Mr. Weller, who still continued to make various strange and

uncouth attempts to appear asleep, offered not a single word during

these proceedings; but when Stiggins stopped for breath, he darted upon

him, and snatching the tumbler from his hand, threw the remainder of the

rum-and-water in his face, and the glass itself into the grate. Then,

seizing the reverend gentleman firmly by the collar, he suddenly fell to

kicking him most furiously, accompanying every application of his top-

boot to Mr. Stiggins’s person, with sundry violent and incoherent

anathemas upon his limbs, eyes, and body.

‘Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘put my hat on tight for me.’

Sam dutifully adjusted the hat with the long hatband more firmly on his

father’s head, and the old gentleman, resuming his kicking with greater

agility than before, tumbled with Mr. Stiggins through the bar, and

through the passage, out at the front door, and so into the street--the

kicking continuing the whole way, and increasing in vehemence, rather

than diminishing, every time the top-boot was lifted.

It was a beautiful and exhilarating sight to see the red-nosed man

writhing in Mr. Weller’s grasp, and his whole frame quivering with

anguish as kick followed kick in rapid succession; it was a still more

exciting spectacle to behold Mr. Weller, after a powerful struggle,

immersing Mr. Stiggins’s head in a horse-trough full of water, and

holding it there, until he was half suffocated.

‘There!’ said Mr. Weller, throwing all his energy into one most

complicated kick, as he at length permitted Mr. Stiggins to withdraw his

head from the trough, ‘send any vun o’ them lazy shepherds here, and

I’ll pound him to a jelly first, and drownd him artervards! Sammy, help

me in, and fill me a small glass of brandy. I’m out o’ breath, my boy.’

CHAPTER LIII. COMPRISING THE FINAL EXIT OF MR. JINGLE AND JOB TROTTER,

WITH A GREAT MORNING OF BUSINESS IN GRAY’S INN SQUARE--CONCLUDING WITH A

DOUBLE KNOCK AT MR. PERKER’S DOOR

When Arabella, after some gentle preparation and many assurances that

there was not the least occasion for being low-spirited, was at length

made acquainted by Mr. Pickwick with the unsatisfactory result of his

visit to Birmingham, she burst into tears, and sobbing aloud, lamented

in moving terms that she should have been the unhappy cause of any

estrangement between a father and his son.

‘My dear girl,’ said Mr. Pickwick kindly, ‘it is no fault of yours. It

was impossible to foresee that the old gentleman would be so strongly

prepossessed against his son’s marriage, you know. I am sure,’ added Mr.

Pickwick, glancing at her pretty face, ‘he can have very little idea of

the pleasure he denies himself.’

‘Oh, my dear Mr. Pickwick,’ said Arabella, ‘what shall we do, if he

continues to be angry with us?’

‘Why, wait patiently, my dear, until he thinks better of it,’ replied

Mr. Pickwick cheerfully.

‘But, dear Mr. Pickwick, what is to become of Nathaniel if his father

withdraws his assistance?’ urged Arabella.

‘In that case, my love,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick, ‘I will venture to

prophesy that he will find some other friend who will not be backward in

helping him to start in the world.’

The significance of this reply was not so well disguised by Mr. Pickwick

but that Arabella understood it. So, throwing her arms round his neck,

and kissing him affectionately, she sobbed louder than before.

‘Come, come,’ said Mr. Pickwick taking her hand, ‘we will wait here a

few days longer, and see whether he writes or takes any other notice of

your husband’s communication. If not, I have thought of half a dozen

plans, any one of which would make you happy at once. There, my dear,

there!’

With these words, Mr. Pickwick gently pressed Arabella’s hand, and bade

her dry her eyes, and not distress her husband. Upon which, Arabella,

who was one of the best little creatures alive, put her handkerchief in

her reticule, and by the time Mr. Winkle joined them, exhibited in full

lustre the same beaming smiles and sparkling eyes that had originally

captivated him.

‘This is a distressing predicament for these young people,’ thought Mr.

Pickwick, as he dressed himself next morning. ‘I’ll walk up to Perker’s,

and consult him about the matter.’

As Mr. Pickwick was further prompted to betake himself to Gray’s Inn

Square by an anxious desire to come to a pecuniary settlement with the

kind-hearted little attorney without further delay, he made a hurried

breakfast, and executed his intention so speedily, that ten o’clock had

not struck when he reached Gray’s Inn.

It still wanted ten minutes to the hour when he had ascended the

staircase on which Perker’s chambers were. The clerks had not arrived

yet, and he beguiled the time by looking out of the staircase window.

The healthy light of a fine October morning made even the dingy old

houses brighten up a little; some of the dusty windows actually looking

almost cheerful as the sun’s rays gleamed upon them. Clerk after clerk

hastened into the square by one or other of the entrances, and looking

up at the Hall clock, accelerated or decreased his rate of walking

according to the time at which his office hours nominally commenced; the

half-past nine o’clock people suddenly becoming very brisk, and the ten

o’clock gentlemen falling into a pace of most aristocratic slowness. The

clock struck ten, and clerks poured in faster than ever, each one in a

greater perspiration than his predecessor. The noise of unlocking and

opening doors echoed and re-echoed on every side; heads appeared as if

by magic in every window; the porters took up their stations for the

day; the slipshod laundresses hurried off; the postman ran from house to

house; and the whole legal hive was in a bustle.

‘You’re early, Mr. Pickwick,’ said a voice behind him.

‘Ah, Mr. Lowten,’ replied that gentleman, looking round, and recognising

his old acquaintance.

‘Precious warm walking, isn’t it?’ said Lowten, drawing a Bramah key

from his pocket, with a small plug therein, to keep the dust out.

‘You appear to feel it so,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick, smiling at the clerk,

who was literally red-hot.

‘I’ve come along, rather, I can tell you,’ replied Lowten. ‘It went the

half hour as I came through the Polygon. I’m here before him, though, so

I don’t mind.’

Comforting himself with this reflection, Mr. Lowten extracted the plug

from the door-key; having opened the door, replugged and repocketed his

Bramah, and picked up the letters which the postman had dropped through

the box, he ushered Mr. Pickwick into the office. Here, in the twinkling

of an eye, he divested himself of his coat, put on a threadbare garment,

which he took out of a desk, hung up his hat, pulled forth a few sheets

of cartridge and blotting-paper in alternate layers, and, sticking a pen

behind his ear, rubbed his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

‘There, you see, Mr. Pickwick,’ he said, ‘now I’m complete. I’ve got my

office coat on, and my pad out, and let him come as soon as he likes.

You haven’t got a pinch of snuff about you, have you?’

‘No, I have not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘I’m sorry for it,’ said Lowten. ‘Never mind. I’ll run out presently,

and get a bottle of soda. Don’t I look rather queer about the eyes, Mr.

Pickwick?’

The individual appealed to, surveyed Mr. Lowten’s eyes from a distance,

and expressed his opinion that no unusual queerness was perceptible in

those features.

‘I’m glad of it,’ said Lowten. ‘We were keeping it up pretty tolerably

at the Stump last night, and I’m rather out of sorts this morning.

Perker’s been about that business of yours, by the bye.’

‘What business?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick. ‘Mrs. Bardell’s costs?’

‘No, I don’t mean that,’ replied Mr. Lowten. ‘About getting that

customer that we paid the ten shillings in the pound to the bill-

discounter for, on your account--to get him out of the Fleet, you know--

about getting him to Demerara.’

‘Oh, Mr. Jingle,’ said Mr. Pickwick hastily. ‘Yes. Well?’

‘Well, it’s all arranged,’ said Lowten, mending his pen. ‘The agent at

Liverpool said he had been obliged to you many times when you were in

business, and he would be glad to take him on your recommendation.’

‘That’s well,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I am delighted to hear it.’

‘But I say,’ resumed Lowten, scraping the back of the pen preparatory to

making a fresh split, ‘what a soft chap that other is!’

‘Which other?’

‘Why, that servant, or friend, or whatever he is; you know, Trotter.’

‘Ah!’ said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile. ‘I always thought him the

reverse.’

‘Well, and so did I, from what little I saw of him,’ replied Lowten, ‘it

only shows how one may be deceived. What do you think of his going to

Demerara, too?’

‘What! And giving up what was offered him here!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

‘Treating Perker’s offer of eighteen bob a week, and a rise if he

behaved himself, like dirt,’ replied Lowten. ‘He said he must go along

with the other one, and so they persuaded Perker to write again, and

they’ve got him something on the same estate; not near so good, Perker

says, as a convict would get in New South Wales, if he appeared at his

trial in a new suit of clothes.’

‘Foolish fellow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, with glistening eyes. ‘Foolish

fellow.’

‘Oh, it’s worse than foolish; it’s downright sneaking, you know,’

replied Lowten, nibbing the pen with a contemptuous face. ‘He says that

he’s the only friend he ever had, and he’s attached to him, and all

that. Friendship’s a very good thing in its way--we are all very

friendly and comfortable at the Stump, for instance, over our grog,

where every man pays for himself; but damn hurting yourself for anybody

else, you know! No man should have more than two attachments--the first,

to number one, and the second to the ladies; that’s what I say--ha! ha!’

Mr. Lowten concluded with a loud laugh, half in jocularity, and half in

derision, which was prematurely cut short by the sound of Perker’s

footsteps on the stairs, at the first approach of which, he vaulted on

his stool with an agility most remarkable, and wrote intensely.

The greeting between Mr. Pickwick and his professional adviser was warm

and cordial; the client was scarcely ensconced in the attorney’s arm-

chair, however, when a knock was heard at the door, and a voice inquired

whether Mr. Perker was within.

‘Hark!’ said Perker, ‘that’s one of our vagabond friends--Jingle

himself, my dear Sir. Will you see him?’

‘What do you think?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, hesitating.

‘Yes, I think you had better. Here, you Sir, what’s your name, walk in,

will you?’

In compliance with this unceremonious invitation, Jingle and Job walked

into the room, but, seeing Mr. Pickwick, stopped short in some

confusion.

‘Well,’ said Perker, ‘don’t you know that gentleman?’

‘Good reason to,’ replied Mr. Jingle, stepping forward. ‘Mr. Pickwick--

deepest obligations--life preserver--made a man of me--you shall never

repent it, Sir.’

‘I am happy to hear you say so,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘You look much

better.’

‘Thanks to you, sir--great change--Majesty’s Fleet--unwholesome place--

very,’ said Jingle, shaking his head. He was decently and cleanly

dressed, and so was Job, who stood bolt upright behind him, staring at

Mr. Pickwick with a visage of iron.

‘When do they go to Liverpool?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick, half aside to

Perker.

‘This evening, Sir, at seven o’clock,’ said Job, taking one step

forward. ‘By the heavy coach from the city, Sir.’

‘Are your places taken?’

‘They are, sir,’ replied Job.

‘You have fully made up your mind to go?’

‘I have sir,’ answered Job.

‘With regard to such an outfit as was indispensable for Jingle,’ said

Perker, addressing Mr. Pickwick aloud. ‘I have taken upon myself to make

an arrangement for the deduction of a small sum from his quarterly

salary, which, being made only for one year, and regularly remitted,

will provide for that expense. I entirely disapprove of your doing

anything for him, my dear sir, which is not dependent on his own

exertions and good conduct.’

‘Certainly,’ interposed Jingle, with great firmness. ‘Clear head--man of

the world--quite right--perfectly.’

‘By compounding with his creditor, releasing his clothes from the

pawnbroker’s, relieving him in prison, and paying for his passage,’

continued Perker, without noticing Jingle’s observation, ‘you have

already lost upwards of fifty pounds.’

‘Not lost,’ said Jingle hastily, ‘Pay it all--stick to business--cash

up--every farthing. Yellow fever, perhaps--can’t help that--if not--’

Here Mr. Jingle paused, and striking the crown of his hat with great

violence, passed his hand over his eyes, and sat down.

‘He means to say,’ said Job, advancing a few paces, ‘that if he is not

carried off by the fever, he will pay the money back again. If he lives,

he will, Mr. Pickwick. I will see it done. I know he will, Sir,’ said

Job, with energy. ‘I could undertake to swear it.’

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, who had been bestowing a score or two

of frowns upon Perker, to stop his summary of benefits conferred, which

the little attorney obstinately disregarded, ‘you must be careful not to

play any more desperate cricket matches, Mr. Jingle, or to renew your

acquaintance with Sir Thomas Blazo, and I have little doubt of your

preserving your health.’

Mr. Jingle smiled at this sally, but looked rather foolish

notwithstanding; so Mr. Pickwick changed the subject by saying--

‘You don’t happen to know, do you, what has become of another friend of

yours--a more humble one, whom I saw at Rochester?’

‘Dismal Jemmy?’ inquired Jingle.

‘Yes.’

Jingle shook his head.

‘Clever rascal--queer fellow, hoaxing genius--Job’s brother.’

‘Job’s brother!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick. ‘Well, now I look at him

closely, there \_is\_ a likeness.’

‘We were always considered like each other, Sir,’ said Job, with a

cunning look just lurking in the corners of his eyes, ‘only I was really

of a serious nature, and he never was. He emigrated to America, Sir, in

consequence of being too much sought after here, to be comfortable; and

has never been heard of since.’

‘That accounts for my not having received the “page from the romance of

real life,” which he promised me one morning when he appeared to be

contemplating suicide on Rochester Bridge, I suppose,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, smiling. ‘I need not inquire whether his dismal behaviour was

natural or assumed.’

‘He could assume anything, Sir,’ said Job. ‘You may consider yourself

very fortunate in having escaped him so easily. On intimate terms he

would have been even a more dangerous acquaintance than--’ Job looked at

Jingle, hesitated, and finally added, ‘than--than-myself even.’

‘A hopeful family yours, Mr. Trotter,’ said Perker, sealing a letter

which he had just finished writing.

‘Yes, Sir,’ replied Job. ‘Very much so.’

‘Well,’ said the little man, laughing, ‘I hope you are going to disgrace

it. Deliver this letter to the agent when you reach Liverpool, and let

me advise you, gentlemen, not to be too knowing in the West Indies. If

you throw away this chance, you will both richly deserve to be hanged,

as I sincerely trust you will be. And now you had better leave Mr.

Pickwick and me alone, for we have other matters to talk over, and time

is precious.’ As Perker said this, he looked towards the door, with an

evident desire to render the leave-taking as brief as possible.

It was brief enough on Mr. Jingle’s part. He thanked the little attorney

in a few hurried words for the kindness and promptitude with which he

had rendered his assistance, and, turning to his benefactor, stood for a

few seconds as if irresolute what to say or how to act. Job Trotter

relieved his perplexity; for, with a humble and grateful bow to Mr.

Pickwick, he took his friend gently by the arm, and led him away.

‘A worthy couple!’ said Perker, as the door closed behind them.

‘I hope they may become so,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘What do you think?

Is there any chance of their permanent reformation?’

Perker shrugged his shoulders doubtfully, but observing Mr. Pickwick’s

anxious and disappointed look, rejoined--

‘Of course there is a chance. I hope it may prove a good one. They are

unquestionably penitent now; but then, you know, they have the

recollection of very recent suffering fresh upon them. What they may

become, when that fades away, is a problem that neither you nor I can

solve. However, my dear Sir,’ added Perker, laying his hand on Mr.

Pickwick’s shoulder, ‘your object is equally honourable, whatever the

result is. Whether that species of benevolence which is so very cautious

and long-sighted that it is seldom exercised at all, lest its owner

should be imposed upon, and so wounded in his self-love, be real charity

or a worldly counterfeit, I leave to wiser heads than mine to determine.

But if those two fellows were to commit a burglary to-morrow, my opinion

of this action would be equally high.’

With these remarks, which were delivered in a much more animated and

earnest manner than is usual in legal gentlemen, Perker drew his chair

to his desk, and listened to Mr. Pickwick’s recital of old Mr. Winkle’s

obstinacy.

‘Give him a week,’ said Perker, nodding his head prophetically.

‘Do you think he will come round?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘I think he will,’ rejoined Perker. ‘If not, we must try the young

lady’s persuasion; and that is what anybody but you would have done at

first.’

Mr. Perker was taking a pinch of snuff with various grotesque

contractions of countenance, eulogistic of the persuasive powers

appertaining unto young ladies, when the murmur of inquiry and answer

was heard in the outer office, and Lowten tapped at the door.

‘Come in!’ cried the little man.

The clerk came in, and shut the door after him, with great mystery.

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired Perker.

‘You’re wanted, Sir.’

‘Who wants me?’

Lowten looked at Mr. Pickwick, and coughed.

‘Who wants me? Can’t you speak, Mr. Lowten?’

‘Why, sir,’ replied Lowten, ‘it’s Dodson; and Fogg is with him.’

‘Bless my life!’ said the little man, looking at his watch, ‘I appointed

them to be here at half-past eleven, to settle that matter of yours,

Pickwick. I gave them an undertaking on which they sent down your

discharge; it’s very awkward, my dear Sir; what will you do? Would you

like to step into the next room?’

The next room being the identical room in which Messrs. Dodson & Fogg

were, Mr. Pickwick replied that he would remain where he was: the more

especially as Messrs. Dodson & Fogg ought to be ashamed to look him in

the face, instead of his being ashamed to see them. Which latter

circumstance he begged Mr. Perker to note, with a glowing countenance

and many marks of indignation.

‘Very well, my dear Sir, very well,’ replied Perker, ‘I can only say

that if you expect either Dodson or Fogg to exhibit any symptom of shame

or confusion at having to look you, or anybody else, in the face, you

are the most sanguine man in your expectations that I ever met with.

Show them in, Mr. Lowten.’

Mr. Lowten disappeared with a grin, and immediately returned ushering in

the firm, in due form of precedence--Dodson first, and Fogg afterwards.

‘You have seen Mr. Pickwick, I believe?’ said Perker to Dodson,

inclining his pen in the direction where that gentleman was seated.

‘How do you do, Mr. Pickwick?’ said Dodson, in a loud voice.

‘Dear me,’ cried Fogg, ‘how do you do, Mr. Pickwick? I hope you are

well, Sir. I thought I knew the face,’ said Fogg, drawing up a chair,

and looking round him with a smile.

Mr. Pickwick bent his head very slightly, in answer to these

salutations, and, seeing Fogg pull a bundle of papers from his coat

pocket, rose and walked to the window.

‘There’s no occasion for Mr. Pickwick to move, Mr. Perker,’ said Fogg,

untying the red tape which encircled the little bundle, and smiling

again more sweetly than before. ‘Mr. Pickwick is pretty well acquainted

with these proceedings. There are no secrets between us, I think. He!

he! he!’

‘Not many, I think,’ said Dodson. ‘Ha! ha! ha!’ Then both the partners

laughed together--pleasantly and cheerfully, as men who are going to

receive money often do.

‘We shall make Mr. Pickwick pay for peeping,’ said Fogg, with

considerable native humour, as he unfolded his papers. ‘The amount of

the taxed costs is one hundred and thirty-three, six, four, Mr. Perker.’

There was a great comparing of papers, and turning over of leaves, by

Fogg and Perker, after this statement of profit and loss. Meanwhile,

Dodson said, in an affable manner, to Mr. Pickwick--

‘I don’t think you are looking quite so stout as when I had the pleasure

of seeing you last, Mr. Pickwick.’

‘Possibly not, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, who had been flashing forth

looks of fierce indignation, without producing the smallest effect on

either of the sharp practitioners; ‘I believe I am not, Sir. I have been

persecuted and annoyed by scoundrels of late, Sir.’

Perker coughed violently, and asked Mr. Pickwick whether he wouldn’t

like to look at the morning paper. To which inquiry Mr. Pickwick

returned a most decided negative.

‘True,’ said Dodson, ‘I dare say you have been annoyed in the Fleet;

there are some odd gentry there. Whereabouts were your apartments, Mr.

Pickwick?’

‘My one room,’ replied that much-injured gentleman, ‘was on the coffee-

room flight.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ said Dodson. ‘I believe that is a very pleasant part of

the establishment.’

‘Very,’ replied Mr. Pickwick drily.

There was a coolness about all this, which, to a gentleman of an

excitable temperament, had, under the circumstances, rather an

exasperating tendency. Mr. Pickwick restrained his wrath by gigantic

efforts; but when Perker wrote a cheque for the whole amount, and Fogg

deposited it in a small pocket-book, with a triumphant smile playing

over his pimply features, which communicated itself likewise to the

stern countenance of Dodson, he felt the blood in his cheeks tingling

with indignation.

‘Now, Mr. Dodson,’ said Fogg, putting up the pocket-book and drawing on

his gloves, ‘I am at your service.’

‘Very good,’ said Dodson, rising; ‘I am quite ready.’

‘I am very happy,’ said Fogg, softened by the cheque, ‘to have had the

pleasure of making Mr. Pickwick’s acquaintance. I hope you don’t think

quite so ill of us, Mr. Pickwick, as when we first had the pleasure of

seeing you.’

‘I hope not,’ said Dodson, with the high tone of calumniated virtue.

‘Mr. Pickwick now knows us better, I trust; whatever your opinion of

gentlemen of our profession may be, I beg to assure you, sir, that I

bear no ill-will or vindictive feeling towards you for the sentiments

you thought proper to express in our office in Freeman’s Court,

Cornhill, on the occasion to which my partner has referred.’

‘Oh, no, no; nor I,’ said Fogg, in a most forgiving manner.

‘Our conduct, Sir,’ said Dodson, ‘will speak for itself, and justify

itself, I hope, upon every occasion. We have been in the profession some

years, Mr. Pickwick, and have been honoured with the confidence of many

excellent clients. I wish you good-morning, Sir.’

‘Good-morning, Mr. Pickwick,’ said Fogg. So saying, he put his umbrella

under his arm, drew off his right glove, and extended the hand of

reconciliation to that most indignant gentleman; who, thereupon, thrust

his hands beneath his coat tails, and eyed the attorney with looks of

scornful amazement.

‘Lowten!’ cried Perker, at this moment. ‘Open the door.’

‘Wait one instant,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘Perker, I \_will \_speak.’

‘My dear Sir, pray let the matter rest where it is,’ said the little

attorney, who had been in a state of nervous apprehension during the

whole interview; ‘Mr. Pickwick, I beg--’

‘I will not be put down, Sir,’ replied Mr. Pickwick hastily. ‘Mr.

Dodson, you have addressed some remarks to me.’

Dodson turned round, bent his head meekly, and smiled.

‘Some remarks to me,’ repeated Mr. Pickwick, almost breathless; ‘and

your partner has tendered me his hand, and you have both assumed a tone

of forgiveness and high-mindedness, which is an extent of impudence that

I was not prepared for, even in you.’

‘What, sir!’ exclaimed Dodson.

‘What, sir!’ reiterated Fogg.

‘Do you know that I have been the victim of your plots and

conspiracies?’ continued Mr. Pickwick. ‘Do you know that I am the man

whom you have been imprisoning and robbing? Do you know that you were

the attorneys for the plaintiff, in Bardell and Pickwick?’

‘Yes, sir, we do know it,’ replied Dodson.

‘Of course we know it, Sir,’ rejoined Fogg, slapping his pocket--perhaps

by accident.

‘I see that you recollect it with satisfaction,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

attempting to call up a sneer for the first time in his life, and

failing most signally in so doing. ‘Although I have long been anxious to

tell you, in plain terms, what my opinion of you is, I should have let

even this opportunity pass, in deference to my friend Perker’s wishes,

but for the unwarrantable tone you have assumed, and your insolent

familiarity. I say insolent familiarity, sir,’ said Mr. Pickwick,

turning upon Fogg with a fierceness of gesture which caused that person

to retreat towards the door with great expedition.

‘Take care, Sir,’ said Dodson, who, though he was the biggest man of the

party, had prudently entrenched himself behind Fogg, and was speaking

over his head with a very pale face. ‘Let him assault you, Mr. Fogg;

don’t return it on any account.’

‘No, no, I won’t return it,’ said Fogg, falling back a little more as he

spoke; to the evident relief of his partner, who by these means was

gradually getting into the outer office.

‘You are,’ continued Mr. Pickwick, resuming the thread of his discourse-

-’you are a well-matched pair of mean, rascally, pettifogging robbers.’

‘Well,’ interposed Perker, ‘is that all?’

‘It is all summed up in that,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick; ‘they are mean,

rascally, pettifogging robbers.’

‘There!’ said Perker, in a most conciliatory tone. ‘My dear sirs, he has

said all he has to say. Now pray go. Lowten, is that door open?’

Mr. Lowten, with a distant giggle, replied in the affirmative.

‘There, there--good-morning--good-morning--now pray, my dear sirs--Mr.

Lowten, the door!’ cried the little man, pushing Dodson & Fogg, nothing

loath, out of the office; ‘this way, my dear sirs--now pray don’t

prolong this--Dear me--Mr. Lowten--the door, sir--why don’t you attend?’

‘If there’s law in England, sir,’ said Dodson, looking towards Mr.

Pickwick, as he put on his hat, ‘you shall smart for this.’

‘You are a couple of mean--’

‘Remember, sir, you pay dearly for this,’ said Fogg.

‘--Rascally, pettifogging robbers!’ continued Mr. Pickwick, taking not

the least notice of the threats that were addressed to him.

‘Robbers!’ cried Mr. Pickwick, running to the stair-head, as the two

attorneys descended.

‘Robbers!’ shouted Mr. Pickwick, breaking from Lowten and Perker, and

thrusting his head out of the staircase window.

When Mr. Pickwick drew in his head again, his countenance was smiling

and placid; and, walking quietly back into the office, he declared that

he had now removed a great weight from his mind, and that he felt

perfectly comfortable and happy.

Perker said nothing at all until he had emptied his snuff-box, and sent

Lowten out to fill it, when he was seized with a fit of laughing, which

lasted five minutes; at the expiration of which time he said that he

supposed he ought to be very angry, but he couldn’t think of the

business seriously yet--when he could, he would be.

‘Well, now,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘let me have a settlement with you.’

Of the same kind as the last?’ inquired Perker, with another laugh.

‘Not exactly,’ rejoined Mr. Pickwick, drawing out his pocket-book, and

shaking the little man heartily by the hand, ‘I only mean a pecuniary

settlement. You have done me many acts of kindness that I can never

repay, and have no wish to repay, for I prefer continuing the

obligation.’

With this preface, the two friends dived into some very complicated

accounts and vouchers, which, having been duly displayed and gone

through by Perker, were at once discharged by Mr. Pickwick with many

professions of esteem and friendship.

They had no sooner arrived at this point, than a most violent and

startling knocking was heard at the door; it was not an ordinary double-

knock, but a constant and uninterrupted succession of the loudest single

raps, as if the knocker were endowed with the perpetual motion, or the

person outside had forgotten to leave off.

‘Dear me, what’s that?’ exclaimed Perker, starting.

‘I think it is a knock at the door,’ said Mr. Pickwick, as if there

could be the smallest doubt of the fact.

The knocker made a more energetic reply than words could have yielded,

for it continued to hammer with surprising force and noise, without a

moment’s cessation.

‘Dear me!’ said Perker, ringing his bell, ‘we shall alarm the inn. Mr.

Lowten, don’t you hear a knock?’

‘I’ll answer the door in one moment, Sir,’ replied the clerk.

The knocker appeared to hear the response, and to assert that it was

quite impossible he could wait so long. It made a stupendous uproar.

‘It’s quite dreadful,’ said Mr. Pickwick, stopping his ears.

‘Make haste, Mr. Lowten,’ Perker called out; ‘we shall have the panels

beaten in.’

Mr. Lowten, who was washing his hands in a dark closet, hurried to the

door, and turning the handle, beheld the appearance which is described

in the next chapter.

CHAPTER LIV. CONTAINING SOME PARTICULARS RELATIVE TO THE DOUBLE KNOCK,

AND OTHER MATTERS: AMONG WHICH CERTAIN INTERESTING DISCLOSURES RELATIVE

TO MR. SNODGRASS AND A YOUNG LADY ARE BY NO MEANS IRRELEVANT TO THIS

HISTORY

The object that presented itself to the eyes of the astonished clerk,

was a boy--a wonderfully fat boy--habited as a serving lad, standing

upright on the mat, with his eyes closed as if in sleep. He had never

seen such a fat boy, in or out of a travelling caravan; and this,

coupled with the calmness and repose of his appearance, so very

different from what was reasonably to have been expected of the

inflicter of such knocks, smote him with wonder.

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired the clerk.

The extraordinary boy replied not a word; but he nodded once, and

seemed, to the clerk’s imagination, to snore feebly.

‘Where do you come from?’ inquired the clerk.

The boy made no sign. He breathed heavily, but in all other respects was

motionless.

The clerk repeated the question thrice, and receiving no answer,

prepared to shut the door, when the boy suddenly opened his eyes, winked

several times, sneezed once, and raised his hand as if to repeat the

knocking. Finding the door open, he stared about him with astonishment,

and at length fixed his eyes on Mr. Lowten’s face.

‘What the devil do you knock in that way for?’ inquired the clerk

angrily.

‘Which way?’ said the boy, in a slow and sleepy voice.

‘Why, like forty hackney-coachmen,’ replied the clerk.

‘Because master said, I wasn’t to leave off knocking till they opened

the door, for fear I should go to sleep,’ said the boy.

‘Well,’ said the clerk, ‘what message have you brought?’

‘He’s downstairs,’ rejoined the boy.

‘Who?’

‘Master. He wants to know whether you’re at home.’

Mr. Lowten bethought himself, at this juncture, of looking out of the

window. Seeing an open carriage with a hearty old gentleman in it,

looking up very anxiously, he ventured to beckon him; on which, the old

gentleman jumped out directly.

‘That’s your master in the carriage, I suppose?’ said Lowten.

The boy nodded.

All further inquiries were superseded by the appearance of old Wardle,

who, running upstairs and just recognising Lowten, passed at once into

Mr. Perker’s room.

‘Pickwick!’ said the old gentleman. ‘Your hand, my boy! Why have I never

heard until the day before yesterday of your suffering yourself to be

cooped up in jail? And why did you let him do it, Perker?’

‘I couldn’t help it, my dear Sir,’ replied Perker, with a smile and a

pinch of snuff; ‘you know how obstinate he is?’

‘Of course I do; of course I do,’ replied the old gentleman. ‘I am

heartily glad to see him, notwithstanding. I will not lose sight of him

again, in a hurry.’

With these words, Wardle shook Mr. Pickwick’s hand once more, and,

having done the same by Perker, threw himself into an arm-chair, his

jolly red face shining again with smiles and health.

‘Well!’ said Wardle. ‘Here are pretty goings on--a pinch of your snuff,

Perker, my boy--never were such times, eh?’

‘What do you mean?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Mean!’ replied Wardle. ‘Why, I think the girls are all running mad;

that’s no news, you’ll say? Perhaps it’s not; but it’s true, for all

that.’

‘You have not come up to London, of all places in the world, to tell us

that, my dear Sir, have you?’ inquired Perker.

‘No, not altogether,’ replied Wardle; ‘though it was the main cause of

my coming. How’s Arabella?’

‘Very well,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘and will be delighted to see you, I

am sure.’

‘Black-eyed little jilt!’ replied Wardle. ‘I had a great idea of

marrying her myself, one of these odd days. But I am glad of it too,

very glad.’

‘How did the intelligence reach you?’ asked Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, it came to my girls, of course,’ replied Wardle. ‘Arabella wrote,

the day before yesterday, to say she had made a stolen match without her

husband’s father’s consent, and so you had gone down to get it when his

refusing it couldn’t prevent the match, and all the rest of it. I

thought it a very good time to say something serious to my girls; so I

said what a dreadful thing it was that children should marry without

their parents’ consent, and so forth; but, bless your hearts, I couldn’t

make the least impression upon them. They thought it such a much more

dreadful thing that there should have been a wedding without

bridesmaids, that I might as well have preached to Joe himself.’

Here the old gentleman stopped to laugh; and having done so to his

heart’s content, presently resumed--

‘But this is not the best of it, it seems. This is only half the love-

making and plotting that have been going forward. We have been walking

on mines for the last six months, and they’re sprung at last.’

‘What do you mean?’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, turning pale; ‘no other

secret marriage, I hope?’

‘No, no,’ replied old Wardle; ‘not so bad as that; no.’

‘What then?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick; ‘am I interested in it?’

‘Shall I answer that question, Perker?’ said Wardle.

‘If you don’t commit yourself by doing so, my dear Sir.’

‘Well then, you are,’ said Wardle.

‘How?’ asked Mr. Pickwick anxiously. ‘In what way?’

‘Really,’ replied Wardle, ‘you’re such a fiery sort of a young fellow

that I am almost afraid to tell you; but, however, if Perker will sit

between us to prevent mischief, I’ll venture.’

Having closed the room door, and fortified himself with another

application to Perker’s snuff-box, the old gentleman proceeded with his

great disclosure in these words--

‘The fact is, that my daughter Bella--Bella, who married young Trundle,

you know.’

‘Yes, yes, we know,’ said Mr. Pickwick impatiently.

‘Don’t alarm me at the very beginning. My daughter Bella--Emily having

gone to bed with a headache after she had read Arabella’s letter to me--

sat herself down by my side the other evening, and began to talk over

this marriage affair. “Well, pa,” she says, “what do you think of it?”

“Why, my dear,” I said, “I suppose it’s all very well; I hope it’s for

the best.” I answered in this way because I was sitting before the fire

at the time, drinking my grog rather thoughtfully, and I knew my

throwing in an undecided word now and then, would induce her to continue

talking. Both my girls are pictures of their dear mother, and as I grow

old I like to sit with only them by me; for their voices and looks carry

me back to the happiest period of my life, and make me, for the moment,

as young as I used to be then, though not quite so light-hearted. “It’s

quite a marriage of affection, pa,” said Bella, after a short silence.

“Yes, my dear,” said I, “but such marriages do not always turn out the

happiest.”’

‘I question that, mind!’ interposed Mr. Pickwick warmly.

‘Very good,’ responded Wardle, ‘question anything you like when it’s

your turn to speak, but don’t interrupt me.’

‘I beg your pardon,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Granted,’ replied Wardle. ‘“I am sorry to hear you express your opinion

against marriages of affection, pa,” said Bella, colouring a little. “I

was wrong; I ought not to have said so, my dear, either,” said I,

patting her cheek as kindly as a rough old fellow like me could pat it,

“for your mother’s was one, and so was yours.” “It’s not that I meant,

pa,” said Bella. “The fact is, pa, I wanted to speak to you about

Emily.”’

Mr. Pickwick started.

‘What’s the matter now?’ inquired Wardle, stopping in his narrative.

‘Nothing,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Pray go on.’

‘I never could spin out a story,’ said Wardle abruptly. ‘It must come

out, sooner or later, and it’ll save us all a great deal of time if it

comes at once. The long and the short of it is, then, that Bella at last

mustered up courage to tell me that Emily was very unhappy; that she and

your young friend Snodgrass had been in constant correspondence and

communication ever since last Christmas; that she had very dutifully

made up her mind to run away with him, in laudable imitation of her old

friend and school-fellow; but that having some compunctions of

conscience on the subject, inasmuch as I had always been rather kindly

disposed to both of them, they had thought it better in the first

instance to pay me the compliment of asking whether I would have any

objection to their being married in the usual matter-of-fact manner.

There now, Mr. Pickwick, if you can make it convenient to reduce your

eyes to their usual size again, and to let me hear what you think we

ought to do, I shall feel rather obliged to you!’

The testy manner in which the hearty old gentleman uttered this last

sentence was not wholly unwarranted; for Mr. Pickwick’s face had settled

down into an expression of blank amazement and perplexity, quite curious

to behold.

‘Snodgrass!--since last Christmas!’ were the first broken words that

issued from the lips of the confounded gentleman.

‘Since last Christmas,’ replied Wardle; ‘that’s plain enough, and very

bad spectacles we must have worn, not to have discovered it before.’

‘I don’t understand it,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ruminating; ‘I cannot really

understand it.’

‘It’s easy enough to understand it,’ replied the choleric old gentleman.

‘If you had been a younger man, you would have been in the secret long

ago; and besides,’ added Wardle, after a moment’s hesitation, ‘the truth

is, that, knowing nothing of this matter, I have rather pressed Emily

for four or five months past, to receive favourably (if she could; I

would never attempt to force a girl’s inclinations) the addresses of a

young gentleman down in our neighbourhood. I have no doubt that, girl-

like, to enhance her own value and increase the ardour of Mr. Snodgrass,

she has represented this matter in very glowing colours, and that they

have both arrived at the conclusion that they are a terribly-persecuted

pair of unfortunates, and have no resource but clandestine matrimony, or

charcoal. Now the question is, what’s to be done?’

‘What have \_you \_done?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘\_I!\_’

‘I mean what did you do when your married daughter told you this?’

‘Oh, I made a fool of myself of course,’ rejoined Wardle.

‘Just so,’ interposed Perker, who had accompanied this dialogue with

sundry twitchings of his watch-chain, vindictive rubbings of his nose,

and other symptoms of impatience. ‘That’s very natural; but how?’

‘I went into a great passion and frightened my mother into a fit,’ said

Wardle.

‘That was judicious,’ remarked Perker; ‘and what else?’

‘I fretted and fumed all next day, and raised a great disturbance,’

rejoined the old gentleman. ‘At last I got tired of rendering myself

unpleasant and making everybody miserable; so I hired a carriage at

Muggleton, and, putting my own horses in it, came up to town, under

pretence of bringing Emily to see Arabella.’

‘Miss Wardle is with you, then?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘To be sure she is,’ replied Wardle. ‘She is at Osborne’s Hotel in the

Adelphi at this moment, unless your enterprising friend has run away

with her since I came out this morning.’

‘You are reconciled then?’ said Perker.

‘Not a bit of it,’ answered Wardle; ‘she has been crying and moping ever

since, except last night, between tea and supper, when she made a great

parade of writing a letter that I pretended to take no notice of.’

‘You want my advice in this matter, I suppose?’ said Perker, looking

from the musing face of Mr. Pickwick to the eager countenance of Wardle,

and taking several consecutive pinches of his favourite stimulant.

‘I suppose so,’ said Wardle, looking at Mr. Pickwick.

‘Certainly,’ replied that gentleman.

‘Well then,’ said Perker, rising and pushing his chair back, ‘my advice

is, that you both walk away together, or ride away, or get away by some

means or other, for I’m tired of you, and just talk this matter over

between you. If you have not settled it by the next time I see you, I’ll

tell you what to do.’

‘This is satisfactory,’ said Wardle, hardly knowing whether to smile or

be offended.

‘Pooh, pooh, my dear Sir,’ returned Perker. ‘I know you both a great

deal better than you know yourselves. You have settled it already, to

all intents and purposes.’

Thus expressing himself, the little gentleman poked his snuff-box first

into the chest of Mr. Pickwick, and then into the waistcoat of Mr.

Wardle, upon which they all three laughed, especially the two last-named

gentlemen, who at once shook hands again, without any obvious or

particular reason.

‘You dine with me to-day,’ said Wardle to Perker, as he showed them out.

‘Can’t promise, my dear Sir, can’t promise,’ replied Perker. ‘I’ll look

in, in the evening, at all events.’

‘I shall expect you at five,’ said Wardle. ‘Now, Joe!’ And Joe having

been at length awakened, the two friends departed in Mr. Wardle’s

carriage, which in common humanity had a dickey behind for the fat boy,

who, if there had been a footboard instead, would have rolled off and

killed himself in his very first nap.

Driving to the George and Vulture, they found that Arabella and her maid

had sent for a hackney-coach immediately on the receipt of a short note

from Emily announcing her arrival in town, and had proceeded straight to

the Adelphi. As Wardle had business to transact in the city, they sent

the carriage and the fat boy to his hotel, with the information that he

and Mr. Pickwick would return together to dinner at five o’clock.

Charged with this message, the fat boy returned, slumbering as peaceably

in his dickey, over the stones, as if it had been a down bed on watch

springs. By some extraordinary miracle he awoke of his own accord, when

the coach stopped, and giving himself a good shake to stir up his

faculties, went upstairs to execute his commission.

Now, whether the shake had jumbled the fat boy’s faculties together,

instead of arranging them in proper order, or had roused such a quantity

of new ideas within him as to render him oblivious of ordinary forms and

ceremonies, or (which is also possible) had proved unsuccessful in

preventing his falling asleep as he ascended the stairs, it is an

undoubted fact that he walked into the sitting-room without previously

knocking at the door; and so beheld a gentleman with his arms clasping

his young mistress’s waist, sitting very lovingly by her side on a sofa,

while Arabella and her pretty handmaid feigned to be absorbed in looking

out of a window at the other end of the room. At the sight of this

phenomenon, the fat boy uttered an interjection, the ladies a scream,

and the gentleman an oath, almost simultaneously.

‘Wretched creature, what do you want here?’ said the gentleman, who it

is needless to say was Mr. Snodgrass.

To this the fat boy, considerably terrified, briefly responded,

‘Missis.’

‘What do you want me for,’ inquired Emily, turning her head aside, ‘you

stupid creature?’

‘Master and Mr. Pickwick is a-going to dine here at five,’ replied the

fat boy.

‘Leave the room!’ said Mr. Snodgrass, glaring upon the bewildered youth.

‘No, no, no,’ added Emily hastily. ‘Bella, dear, advise me.’

Upon this, Emily and Mr. Snodgrass, and Arabella and Mary, crowded into

a corner, and conversed earnestly in whispers for some minutes, during

which the fat boy dozed.

‘Joe,’ said Arabella, at length, looking round with a most bewitching

smile, ‘how do you do, Joe?’

‘Joe,’ said Emily, ‘you’re a very good boy; I won’t forget you, Joe.’

‘Joe,’ said Mr. Snodgrass, advancing to the astonished youth, and

seizing his hand, ‘I didn’t know you before. There’s five shillings for

you, Joe!”

‘I’ll owe you five, Joe,’ said Arabella, ‘for old acquaintance sake, you

know;’ and another most captivating smile was bestowed upon the

corpulent intruder.

The fat boy’s perception being slow, he looked rather puzzled at first

to account for this sudden prepossession in his favour, and stared about

him in a very alarming manner. At length his broad face began to show

symptoms of a grin of proportionately broad dimensions; and then,

thrusting half-a-crown into each of his pockets, and a hand and wrist

after it, he burst into a horse laugh: being for the first and only time

in his existence.

‘He understands us, I see,’ said Arabella.

‘He had better have something to eat, immediately,’ remarked Emily.

The fat boy almost laughed again when he heard this suggestion. Mary,

after a little more whispering, tripped forth from the group and said--

‘I am going to dine with you to-day, sir, if you have no objection.’

‘This way,’ said the fat boy eagerly. ‘There is such a jolly meat-pie!’

With these words, the fat boy led the way downstairs; his pretty

companion captivating all the waiters and angering all the chambermaids

as she followed him to the eating-room.

There was the meat-pie of which the youth had spoken so feelingly, and

there were, moreover, a steak, and a dish of potatoes, and a pot of

porter.

‘Sit down,’ said the fat boy. ‘Oh, my eye, how prime! I am \_so\_ hungry.’

Having apostrophised his eye, in a species of rapture, five or six

times, the youth took the head of the little table, and Mary seated

herself at the bottom.

‘Will you have some of this?’ said the fat boy, plunging into the pie up

to the very ferules of the knife and fork.

‘A little, if you please,’ replied Mary.

The fat boy assisted Mary to a little, and himself to a great deal, and

was just going to begin eating when he suddenly laid down his knife and

fork, leaned forward in his chair, and letting his hands, with the knife

and fork in them, fall on his knees, said, very slowly--

‘I say! How nice you look!’

This was said in an admiring manner, and was, so far, gratifying; but

still there was enough of the cannibal in the young gentleman’s eyes to

render the compliment a double one.

‘Dear me, Joseph,’ said Mary, affecting to blush, ‘what do you mean?’

The fat boy, gradually recovering his former position, replied with a

heavy sigh, and, remaining thoughtful for a few moments, drank a long

draught of the porter. Having achieved this feat, he sighed again, and

applied himself assiduously to the pie.

‘What a nice young lady Miss Emily is!’ said Mary, after a long silence.

The fat boy had by this time finished the pie. He fixed his eyes on

Mary, and replied--

‘I knows a nicerer.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mary.

‘Yes, indeed!’ replied the fat boy, with unwonted vivacity.

‘What’s her name?’ inquired Mary.

‘What’s yours?’

‘Mary.’

‘So’s hers,’ said the fat boy. ‘You’re her.’ The boy grinned to add

point to the compliment, and put his eyes into something between a

squint and a cast, which there is reason to believe he intended for an

ogle.

‘You mustn’t talk to me in that way,’ said Mary; ‘you don’t mean it.’

‘Don’t I, though?’ replied the fat boy. ‘I say?’

‘Well?’

‘Are you going to come here regular?’

‘No,’ rejoined Mary, shaking her head, ‘I’m going away again to-night.

Why?’

‘Oh,’ said the fat boy, in a tone of strong feeling; ‘how we should have

enjoyed ourselves at meals, if you had been!’

‘I might come here sometimes, perhaps, to see you,’ said Mary, plaiting

the table-cloth in assumed coyness, ‘if you would do me a favour.’

The fat boy looked from the pie-dish to the steak, as if he thought a

favour must be in a manner connected with something to eat; and then

took out one of the half-crowns and glanced at it nervously.

‘Don’t you understand me?’ said Mary, looking slily in his fat face.

Again he looked at the half-crown, and said faintly, ‘No.’

‘The ladies want you not to say anything to the old gentleman about the

young gentleman having been upstairs; and I want you too.’

‘Is that all?’ said the fat boy, evidently very much relieved, as he

pocketed the half-crown again. ‘Of course I ain’t a-going to.’

‘You see,’ said Mary, ‘Mr. Snodgrass is very fond of Miss Emily, and

Miss Emily’s very fond of him, and if you were to tell about it, the old

gentleman would carry you all away miles into the country, where you’d

see nobody.’

‘No, no, I won’t tell,’ said the fat boy stoutly.

‘That’s a dear,’ said Mary. ‘Now it’s time I went upstairs, and got my

lady ready for dinner.’

‘Don’t go yet,’ urged the fat boy.

‘I must,’ replied Mary. ‘Good-bye, for the present.’

The fat boy, with elephantine playfulness, stretched out his arms to

ravish a kiss; but as it required no great agility to elude him, his

fair enslaver had vanished before he closed them again; upon which the

apathetic youth ate a pound or so of steak with a sentimental

countenance, and fell fast asleep.

There was so much to say upstairs, and there were so many plans to

concert for elopement and matrimony in the event of old Wardle

continuing to be cruel, that it wanted only half an hour of dinner when

Mr. Snodgrass took his final adieu. The ladies ran to Emily’s bedroom to

dress, and the lover, taking up his hat, walked out of the room. He had

scarcely got outside the door, when he heard Wardle’s voice talking

loudly, and looking over the banisters beheld him, followed by some

other gentlemen, coming straight upstairs. Knowing nothing of the house,

Mr. Snodgrass in his confusion stepped hastily back into the room he had

just quitted, and passing thence into an inner apartment (Mr. Wardle’s

bedchamber), closed the door softly, just as the persons he had caught a

glimpse of entered the sitting-room. These were Mr. Wardle, Mr.

Pickwick, Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, and Mr. Benjamin Allen, whom he had no

difficulty in recognising by their voices.

‘Very lucky I had the presence of mind to avoid them,’ thought Mr.

Snodgrass with a smile, and walking on tiptoe to another door near the

bedside; ‘this opens into the same passage, and I can walk quietly and

comfortably away.’

There was only one obstacle to his walking quietly and comfortably away,

which was that the door was locked and the key gone.

‘Let us have some of your best wine to-day, waiter,’ said old Wardle,

rubbing his hands.

‘You shall have some of the very best, sir,’ replied the waiter.

‘Let the ladies know we have come in.’

‘Yes, Sir.’

Devoutly and ardently did Mr. Snodgrass wish that the ladies could know

he had come in. He ventured once to whisper, ‘Waiter!’ through the

keyhole, but the probability of the wrong waiter coming to his relief,

flashed upon his mind, together with a sense of the strong resemblance

between his own situation and that in which another gentleman had been

recently found in a neighbouring hotel (an account of whose misfortunes

had appeared under the head of ‘Police’ in that morning’s paper), he sat

himself on a portmanteau, and trembled violently.

‘We won’t wait a minute for Perker,’ said Wardle, looking at his watch;

‘he is always exact. He will be here, in time, if he means to come; and

if he does not, it’s of no use waiting. Ha! Arabella!’

‘My sister!’ exclaimed Mr. Benjamin Allen, folding her in a most

romantic embrace.

‘Oh, Ben, dear, how you do smell of tobacco,’ said Arabella, rather

overcome by this mark of affection.

‘Do I?’ said Mr. Benjamin Allen. ‘Do I, Bella? Well, perhaps I do.’

Perhaps he did, having just left a pleasant little smoking-party of

twelve medical students, in a small back parlour with a large fire.

‘But I am delighted to see you,’ said Mr. Ben Allen. ‘Bless you, Bella!’

‘There,’ said Arabella, bending forward to kiss her brother; ‘don’t take

hold of me again, Ben, dear, because you tumble me so.’

At this point of the reconciliation, Mr. Ben Allen allowed his feelings

and the cigars and porter to overcome him, and looked round upon the

beholders with damp spectacles.

‘Is nothing to be said to me?’ cried Wardle, with open arms.

‘A great deal,’ whispered Arabella, as she received the old gentleman’s

hearty caress and congratulation. ‘You are a hard-hearted, unfeeling,

cruel monster.’

‘You are a little rebel,’ replied Wardle, in the same tone, ‘and I am

afraid I shall be obliged to forbid you the house. People like you, who

get married in spite of everybody, ought not to be let loose on society.

But come!’ added the old gentleman aloud, ‘here’s the dinner; you shall

sit by me. Joe; why, damn the boy, he’s awake!’

To the great distress of his master, the fat boy was indeed in a state

of remarkable vigilance, his eyes being wide open, and looking as if

they intended to remain so. There was an alacrity in his manner, too,

which was equally unaccountable; every time his eyes met those of Emily

or Arabella, he smirked and grinned; once, Wardle could have sworn, he

saw him wink.

This alteration in the fat boy’s demeanour originated in his increased

sense of his own importance, and the dignity he acquired from having

been taken into the confidence of the young ladies; and the smirks, and

grins, and winks were so many condescending assurances that they might

depend upon his fidelity. As these tokens were rather calculated to

awaken suspicion than allay it, and were somewhat embarrassing besides,

they were occasionally answered by a frown or shake of the head from

Arabella, which the fat boy, considering as hints to be on his guard,

expressed his perfect understanding of, by smirking, grinning, and

winking, with redoubled assiduity.

‘Joe,’ said Mr. Wardle, after an unsuccessful search in all his pockets,

‘is my snuff-box on the sofa?’

‘No, sir,’ replied the fat boy.

‘Oh, I recollect; I left it on my dressing-table this morning,’ said

Wardle. ‘Run into the next room and fetch it.’

The fat boy went into the next room; and, having been absent about a

minute, returned with the snuff-box, and the palest face that ever a fat

boy wore.

‘What’s the matter with the boy?’ exclaimed Wardle.

‘Nothen’s the matter with me,’ replied Joe nervously.

‘Have you been seeing any spirits?’ inquired the old gentleman.

‘Or taking any?’ added Ben Allen.

‘I think you’re right,’ whispered Wardle across the table. ‘He is

intoxicated, I’m sure.’

Ben Allen replied that he thought he was; and, as that gentleman had

seen a vast deal of the disease in question, Wardle was confirmed in an

impression which had been hovering about his mind for half an hour, and

at once arrived at the conclusion that the fat boy was drunk.

‘Just keep your eye upon him for a few minutes,’ murmured Wardle. ‘We

shall soon find out whether he is or not.’

The unfortunate youth had only interchanged a dozen words with Mr.

Snodgrass, that gentleman having implored him to make a private appeal

to some friend to release him, and then pushed him out with the snuff-

box, lest his prolonged absence should lead to a discovery. He ruminated

a little with a most disturbed expression of face, and left the room in

search of Mary.

But Mary had gone home after dressing her mistress, and the fat boy came

back again more disturbed than before.

Wardle and Mr. Ben Allen exchanged glances.

‘Joe!’ said Wardle.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘What did you go away for?’

The fat boy looked hopelessly in the face of everybody at table, and

stammered out that he didn’t know.

‘Oh,’ said Wardle, ‘you don’t know, eh? Take this cheese to Mr.

Pickwick.’

Now, Mr. Pickwick being in the very best health and spirits, had been

making himself perfectly delightful all dinner-time, and was at this

moment engaged in an energetic conversation with Emily and Mr. Winkle;

bowing his head, courteously, in the emphasis of his discourse, gently

waving his left hand to lend force to his observations, and all glowing

with placid smiles. He took a piece of cheese from the plate, and was on

the point of turning round to renew the conversation, when the fat boy,

stooping so as to bring his head on a level with that of Mr. Pickwick,

pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, and made the most horrible and

hideous face that was ever seen out of a Christmas pantomime.

‘Dear me!’ said Mr. Pickwick, starting, ‘what a very--Eh?’ He stopped,

for the fat boy had drawn himself up, and was, or pretended to be, fast

asleep.

‘What’s the matter?’ inquired Wardle.

‘This is such an extremely singular lad!’ replied Mr. Pickwick, looking

uneasily at the boy. ‘It seems an odd thing to say, but upon my word I

am afraid that, at times, he is a little deranged.’

‘Oh! Mr. Pickwick, pray don’t say so,’ cried Emily and Arabella, both at

once.

‘I am not certain, of course,’ said Mr. Pickwick, amidst profound

silence and looks of general dismay; ‘but his manner to me this moment

really was very alarming. Oh!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, suddenly jumping

up with a short scream. ‘I beg your pardon, ladies, but at that moment

he ran some sharp instrument into my leg. Really, he is not safe.’

‘He’s drunk,’ roared old Wardle passionately. ‘Ring the bell! Call the

waiters! He’s drunk.’

‘I ain’t,’ said the fat boy, falling on his knees as his master seized

him by the collar. ‘I ain’t drunk.’

‘Then you’re mad; that’s worse. Call the waiters,’ said the old

gentleman.

‘I ain’t mad; I’m sensible,’ rejoined the fat boy, beginning to cry.

‘Then, what the devil did you run sharp instruments into Mr. Pickwick’s

legs for?’ inquired Wardle angrily.

‘He wouldn’t look at me,’ replied the boy. ‘I wanted to speak to him.’

‘What did you want to say?’ asked half a dozen voices at once.

The fat boy gasped, looked at the bedroom door, gasped again, and wiped

two tears away with the knuckle of each of his forefingers.

‘What did you want to say?’ demanded Wardle, shaking him.

‘Stop!’ said Mr. Pickwick; ‘allow me. What did you wish to communicate

to me, my poor boy?’

‘I want to whisper to you,’ replied the fat boy.

‘You want to bite his ear off, I suppose,’ said Wardle. ‘Don’t come near

him; he’s vicious; ring the bell, and let him be taken downstairs.’

Just as Mr. Winkle caught the bell-rope in his hand, it was arrested by

a general expression of astonishment; the captive lover, his face

burning with confusion, suddenly walked in from the bedroom, and made a

comprehensive bow to the company.

‘Hollo!’ cried Wardle, releasing the fat boy’s collar, and staggering

back. ‘What’s this?’

‘I have been concealed in the next room, sir, since you returned,’

explained Mr. Snodgrass.

‘Emily, my girl,’ said Wardle reproachfully, ‘I detest meanness and

deceit; this is unjustifiable and indelicate in the highest degree. I

don’t deserve this at your hands, Emily, indeed!’

‘Dear papa,’ said Emily, ‘Arabella knows--everybody here knows--Joe

knows--that I was no party to this concealment. Augustus, for Heaven’s

sake, explain it!’

Mr. Snodgrass, who had only waited for a hearing, at once recounted how

he had been placed in his then distressing predicament; how the fear of

giving rise to domestic dissensions had alone prompted him to avoid Mr.

Wardle on his entrance; how he merely meant to depart by another door,

but, finding it locked, had been compelled to stay against his will. It

was a painful situation to be placed in; but he now regretted it the

less, inasmuch as it afforded him an opportunity of acknowledging,

before their mutual friends, that he loved Mr. Wardle’s daughter deeply

and sincerely; that he was proud to avow that the feeling was mutual;

and that if thousands of miles were placed between them, or oceans

rolled their waters, he could never for an instant forget those happy

days, when first--et cetera, et cetera.

Having delivered himself to this effect, Mr. Snodgrass bowed again,

looked into the crown of his hat, and stepped towards the door.

‘Stop!’ shouted Wardle. ‘Why, in the name of all that’s--’

‘Inflammable,’ mildly suggested Mr. Pickwick, who thought something

worse was coming.

‘Well--that’s inflammable,’ said Wardle, adopting the substitute;

‘couldn’t you say all this to me in the first instance?’

‘Or confide in me?’ added Mr. Pickwick.

‘Dear, dear,’ said Arabella, taking up the defence, ‘what is the use of

asking all that now, especially when you know you had set your covetous

old heart on a richer son-in-law, and are so wild and fierce besides,

that everybody is afraid of you, except me? Shake hands with him, and

order him some dinner, for goodness gracious’ sake, for he looks half

starved; and pray have your wine up at once, for you’ll not be tolerable

until you have taken two bottles at least.’

The worthy old gentleman pulled Arabella’s ear, kissed her without the

smallest scruple, kissed his daughter also with great affection, and

shook Mr. Snodgrass warmly by the hand.

‘She is right on one point at all events,’ said the old gentleman

cheerfully. ‘Ring for the wine!’

The wine came, and Perker came upstairs at the same moment. Mr.

Snodgrass had dinner at a side table, and, when he had despatched it,

drew his chair next Emily, without the smallest opposition on the old

gentleman’s part.

The evening was excellent. Little Mr. Perker came out wonderfully, told

various comic stories, and sang a serious song which was almost as funny

as the anecdotes. Arabella was very charming, Mr. Wardle very jovial,

Mr. Pickwick very harmonious, Mr. Ben Allen very uproarious, the lovers

very silent, Mr. Winkle very talkative, and all of them very happy.

CHAPTER LV. MR. SOLOMON PELL, ASSISTED BY A SELECT COMMITTEE OF

COACHMEN, ARRANGES THE AFFAIRS OF THE ELDER MR. WELLER

Samivel,’ said Mr. Weller, accosting his son on the morning after the

funeral, ‘I’ve found it, Sammy. I thought it wos there.’

‘Thought wot wos there?’ inquired Sam.

‘Your mother-in-law’s vill, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘In wirtue o’

vich, them arrangements is to be made as I told you on, last night,

respectin’ the funs.’

‘Wot, didn’t she tell you were it wos?’ inquired Sam.

‘Not a bit on it, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘We wos a adjestin’ our

little differences, and I wos a-cheerin’ her spirits and bearin’ her up,

so that I forgot to ask anythin’ about it. I don’t know as I should ha’

done it, indeed, if I had remembered it,’ added Mr. Weller, ‘for it’s a

rum sort o’ thing, Sammy, to go a-hankerin’ arter anybody’s property,

ven you’re assistin’ ‘em in illness. It’s like helping an outside

passenger up, ven he’s been pitched off a coach, and puttin’ your hand

in his pocket, vile you ask him, vith a sigh, how he finds his-self,

Sammy.’

With this figurative illustration of his meaning, Mr. Weller unclasped

his pocket-book, and drew forth a dirty sheet of letter-paper, on which

were inscribed various characters crowded together in remarkable

confusion.

‘This here is the dockyment, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller. ‘I found it in the

little black tea-pot, on the top shelf o’ the bar closet. She used to

keep bank-notes there, ‘fore she vos married, Samivel. I’ve seen her

take the lid off, to pay a bill, many and many a time. Poor creetur, she

might ha’ filled all the tea-pots in the house vith vills, and not have

inconwenienced herself neither, for she took wery little of anythin’ in

that vay lately, ‘cept on the temperance nights, ven they just laid a

foundation o’ tea to put the spirits atop on!’

‘What does it say?’ inquired Sam.

‘Jist vot I told you, my boy,’ rejoined his parent. ‘Two hundred pound

vurth o’ reduced counsels to my son-in-law, Samivel, and all the rest o’

my property, of ev’ry kind and description votsoever, to my husband, Mr.

Tony Veller, who I appint as my sole eggzekiter.’

‘That’s all, is it?’ said Sam.

‘That’s all,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘And I s’pose as it’s all right and

satisfactory to you and me as is the only parties interested, ve may as

vell put this bit o’ paper into the fire.’

‘Wot are you a-doin’ on, you lunatic?’ said Sam, snatching the paper

away, as his parent, in all innocence, stirred the fire preparatory to

suiting the action to the word. ‘You’re a nice eggzekiter, you are.’

‘Vy not?’ inquired Mr. Weller, looking sternly round, with the poker in

his hand.

‘Vy not?’ exclaimed Sam. ‘’Cos it must be proved, and probated, and

swore to, and all manner o’ formalities.’

‘You don’t mean that?’ said Mr. Weller, laying down the poker.

Sam buttoned the will carefully in a side pocket; intimating by a look,

meanwhile, that he did mean it, and very seriously too.

‘Then I’ll tell you wot it is,’ said Mr. Weller, after a short

meditation, ‘this is a case for that ‘ere confidential pal o’ the

Chancellorship’s. Pell must look into this, Sammy. He’s the man for a

difficult question at law. Ve’ll have this here brought afore the

Solvent Court, directly, Samivel.’

‘I never did see such a addle-headed old creetur!’ exclaimed Sam

irritably; ‘Old Baileys, and Solvent Courts, and alleybis, and ev’ry

species o’ gammon alvays a-runnin’ through his brain. You’d better get

your out o’ door clothes on, and come to town about this bisness, than

stand a-preachin’ there about wot you don’t understand nothin’ on.’

‘Wery good, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, ‘I’m quite agreeable to anythin’

as vill hexpedite business, Sammy. But mind this here, my boy, nobody

but Pell--nobody but Pell as a legal adwiser.’

‘I don’t want anybody else,’ replied Sam. ‘Now, are you a-comin’?’

‘Vait a minit, Sammy,’ replied Mr. Weller, who, having tied his shawl

with the aid of a small glass that hung in the window, was now, by dint

of the most wonderful exertions, struggling into his upper garments.

‘Vait a minit’ Sammy; ven you grow as old as your father, you von’t get

into your veskit quite as easy as you do now, my boy.’

‘If I couldn’t get into it easier than that, I’m blessed if I’d vear vun

at all,’ rejoined his son.

‘You think so now,’ said Mr. Weller, with the gravity of age, ‘but

you’ll find that as you get vider, you’ll get viser. Vidth and visdom,

Sammy, alvays grows together.’

As Mr. Weller delivered this infallible maxim--the result of many years’

personal experience and observation--he contrived, by a dexterous twist

of his body, to get the bottom button of his coat to perform its office.

Having paused a few seconds to recover breath, he brushed his hat with

his elbow, and declared himself ready.

‘As four heads is better than two, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, as they

drove along the London Road in the chaise-cart, ‘and as all this here

property is a wery great temptation to a legal gen’l’m’n, ve’ll take a

couple o’ friends o’ mine vith us, as’ll be wery soon down upon him if

he comes anythin’ irreg’lar; two o’ them as saw you to the Fleet that

day. They’re the wery best judges,’ added Mr. Weller, in a half-whisper-

-’the wery best judges of a horse, you ever know’d.’

‘And of a lawyer too?’ inquired Sam.

‘The man as can form a ackerate judgment of a animal, can form a

ackerate judgment of anythin’,’ replied his father, so dogmatically,

that Sam did not attempt to controvert the position.

In pursuance of this notable resolution, the services of the mottled-

faced gentleman and of two other very fat coachmen--selected by Mr.

Weller, probably, with a view to their width and consequent wisdom--were

put into requisition; and this assistance having been secured, the party

proceeded to the public-house in Portugal Street, whence a messenger was

despatched to the Insolvent Court over the way, requiring Mr. Solomon

Pell’s immediate attendance.

The messenger fortunately found Mr. Solomon Pell in court, regaling

himself, business being rather slack, with a cold collation of an

Abernethy biscuit and a saveloy. The message was no sooner whispered in

his ear than he thrust them in his pocket among various professional

documents, and hurried over the way with such alacrity that he reached

the parlour before the messenger had even emancipated himself from the

court.

‘Gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pell, touching his hat, ‘my service to you all. I

don’t say it to flatter you, gentlemen, but there are not five other men

in the world, that I’d have come out of that court for, to-day.’

‘So busy, eh?’ said Sam.

‘Busy!’ replied Pell; ‘I’m completely sewn up, as my friend the late

Lord Chancellor many a time used to say to me, gentlemen, when he came

out from hearing appeals in the House of Lords. Poor fellow; he was very

susceptible to fatigue; he used to feel those appeals uncommonly. I

actually thought more than once that he’d have sunk under ‘em; I did,

indeed.’

Here Mr. Pell shook his head and paused; on which, the elder Mr. Weller,

nudging his neighbour, as begging him to mark the attorney’s high

connections, asked whether the duties in question produced any permanent

ill effects on the constitution of his noble friend.

‘I don’t think he ever quite recovered them,’ replied Pell; ‘in fact I’m

sure he never did. “Pell,” he used to say to me many a time, “how the

blazes you can stand the head-work you do, is a mystery to me.”--“Well,”

I used to answer, “I hardly know how I do it, upon my life.”--“Pell,”

he’d add, sighing, and looking at me with a little envy--friendly envy,

you know, gentlemen, mere friendly envy; I never minded it--“Pell,

you’re a wonder; a wonder.” Ah! you’d have liked him very much if you

had known him, gentlemen. Bring me three-penn’orth of rum, my dear.’

Addressing this latter remark to the waitress, in a tone of subdued

grief, Mr. Pell sighed, looked at his shoes and the ceiling; and, the

rum having by that time arrived, drank it up.

‘However,’ said Pell, drawing a chair to the table, ‘a professional man

has no right to think of his private friendships when his legal

assistance is wanted. By the bye, gentlemen, since I saw you here

before, we have had to weep over a very melancholy occurrence.’

Mr. Pell drew out a pocket-handkerchief, when he came to the word weep,

but he made no further use of it than to wipe away a slight tinge of rum

which hung upon his upper lip.

‘I saw it in the ADVERTISER, Mr. Weller,’ continued Pell. ‘Bless my

soul, not more than fifty-two! Dear me--only think.’

These indications of a musing spirit were addressed to the mottled-faced

man, whose eyes Mr. Pell had accidentally caught; on which, the mottled-

faced man, whose apprehension of matters in general was of a foggy

nature, moved uneasily in his seat, and opined that, indeed, so far as

that went, there was no saying how things was brought about; which

observation, involving one of those subtle propositions which it is

difficult to encounter in argument, was controverted by nobody.

‘I have heard it remarked that she was a very fine woman, Mr. Weller,’

said Pell, in a sympathising manner.

‘Yes, sir, she wos,’ replied the elder Mr. Weller, not much relishing

this mode of discussing the subject, and yet thinking that the attorney,

from his long intimacy with the late Lord Chancellor, must know best on

all matters of polite breeding. ‘She wos a wery fine ‘ooman, sir, ven I

first know’d her. She wos a widder, sir, at that time.’

‘Now, it’s curious,’ said Pell, looking round with a sorrowful smile;

‘Mrs. Pell was a widow.’

‘That’s very extraordinary,’ said the mottled-faced man.

‘Well, it is a curious coincidence,’ said Pell.

‘Not at all,’ gruffly remarked the elder Mr. Weller. ‘More widders is

married than single wimin.’

‘Very good, very good,’ said Pell, ‘you’re quite right, Mr. Weller. Mrs.

Pell was a very elegant and accomplished woman; her manners were the

theme of universal admiration in our neighbourhood. I was proud to see

that woman dance; there was something so firm and dignified, and yet

natural, in her motion. Her cutting, gentlemen, was simplicity itself.

Ah! well, well! Excuse my asking the question, Mr. Samuel,’ continued

the attorney in a lower voice, ‘was your mother-in-law tall?’

‘Not wery,’ replied Sam.

‘Mrs. Pell was a tall figure,’ said Pell, ‘a splendid woman, with a

noble shape, and a nose, gentlemen, formed to command and be majestic.

She was very much attached to me--very much--highly connected, too. Her

mother’s brother, gentlemen, failed for eight hundred pounds, as a law

stationer.’

‘Vell,’ said Mr. Weller, who had grown rather restless during this

discussion, ‘vith regard to bis’ness.’

The word was music to Pell’s ears. He had been revolving in his mind

whether any business was to be transacted, or whether he had been merely

invited to partake of a glass of brandy-and-water, or a bowl of punch,

or any similar professional compliment, and now the doubt was set at

rest without his appearing at all eager for its solution. His eyes

glistened as he laid his hat on the table, and said--

‘What is the business upon which--um? Either of these gentlemen wish to

go through the court? We require an arrest; a friendly arrest will do,

you know; we are all friends here, I suppose?’

‘Give me the dockyment, Sammy,’ said Mr. Weller, taking the will from

his son, who appeared to enjoy the interview amazingly. ‘Wot we rekvire,

sir, is a probe o’ this here.’

‘Probate, my dear Sir, probate,’ said Pell.

‘Well, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller sharply, ‘probe and probe it, is wery

much the same; if you don’t understand wot I mean, sir, I des-say I can

find them as does.’

‘No offence, I hope, Mr. Weller,’ said Pell meekly. ‘You are the

executor, I see,’ he added, casting his eyes over the paper.

‘I am, sir,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘These other gentlemen, I presume, are legatees, are they?’ inquired

Pell, with a congratulatory smile.

‘Sammy is a leg-at-ease,’ replied Mr. Weller; ‘these other gen’l’m’n is

friends o’ mine, just come to see fair; a kind of umpires.’

‘Oh!’ said Pell, ‘very good. I have no objections, I’m sure. I shall

want a matter of five pound of you before I begin, ha! ha! ha!’

It being decided by the committee that the five pound might be advanced,

Mr. Weller produced that sum; after which, a long consultation about

nothing particular took place, in the course whereof Mr. Pell

demonstrated to the perfect satisfaction of the gentlemen who saw fair,

that unless the management of the business had been intrusted to him, it

must all have gone wrong, for reasons not clearly made out, but no doubt

sufficient. This important point being despatched, Mr. Pell refreshed

himself with three chops, and liquids both malt and spirituous, at the

expense of the estate; and then they all went away to Doctors’ Commons.

The next day there was another visit to Doctors’ Commons, and a great

to-do with an attesting hostler, who, being inebriated, declined

swearing anything but profane oaths, to the great scandal of a proctor

and surrogate. Next week, there were more visits to Doctors’ Commons,

and there was a visit to the Legacy Duty Office besides, and there were

treaties entered into, for the disposal of the lease and business, and

ratifications of the same, and inventories to be made out, and lunches

to be taken, and dinners to be eaten, and so many profitable things to

be done, and such a mass of papers accumulated that Mr. Solomon Pell,

and the boy, and the blue bag to boot, all got so stout that scarcely

anybody would have known them for the same man, boy, and bag, that had

loitered about Portugal Street, a few days before.

At length all these weighty matters being arranged, a day was fixed for

selling out and transferring the stock, and of waiting with that view

upon Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, stock-broker, of somewhere near the bank,

who had been recommended by Mr. Solomon Pell for the purpose.

It was a kind of festive occasion, and the parties were attired

accordingly. Mr. Weller’s tops were newly cleaned, and his dress was

arranged with peculiar care; the mottled-faced gentleman wore at his

button-hole a full-sized dahlia with several leaves; and the coats of

his two friends were adorned with nosegays of laurel and other

evergreens. All three were habited in strict holiday costume; that is to

say, they were wrapped up to the chins, and wore as many clothes as

possible, which is, and has been, a stage-coachman’s idea of full dress

ever since stage-coaches were invented.

Mr. Pell was waiting at the usual place of meeting at the appointed

time; even he wore a pair of gloves and a clean shirt, much frayed at

the collar and wristbands by frequent washings.

‘A quarter to two,’ said Pell, looking at the parlour clock. ‘If we are

with Mr. Flasher at a quarter past, we shall just hit the best time.’

‘What should you say to a drop o’ beer, gen’l’m’n?’ suggested the

mottled-faced man.

‘And a little bit o’ cold beef,’ said the second coachman.

‘Or a oyster,’ added the third, who was a hoarse gentleman, supported by

very round legs.

‘Hear, hear!’ said Pell; ‘to congratulate Mr. Weller, on his coming into

possession of his property, eh? Ha! ha!’

‘I’m quite agreeable, gen’l’m’n,’ answered Mr. Weller. ‘Sammy, pull the

bell.’

Sammy complied; and the porter, cold beef, and oysters being promptly

produced, the lunch was done ample justice to. Where everybody took so

active a part, it is almost invidious to make a distinction; but if one

individual evinced greater powers than another, it was the coachman with

the hoarse voice, who took an imperial pint of vinegar with his oysters,

without betraying the least emotion.

‘Mr. Pell, Sir,’ said the elder Mr. Weller, stirring a glass of brandy-

and-water, of which one was placed before every gentleman when the

oyster shells were removed--‘Mr. Pell, Sir, it wos my intention to have

proposed the funs on this occasion, but Samivel has vispered to me--’

Here Mr. Samuel Weller, who had silently eaten his oysters with tranquil

smiles, cried, ‘Hear!’ in a very loud voice.

‘--Has vispered to me,’ resumed his father, ‘that it vould be better to

dewote the liquor to vishin’ you success and prosperity, and thankin’

you for the manner in which you’ve brought this here business through.

Here’s your health, sir.’

‘Hold hard there,’ interposed the mottled-faced gentleman, with sudden

energy; ‘your eyes on me, gen’l’m’n!’

Saying this, the mottled-faced gentleman rose, as did the other

gentlemen. The mottled-faced gentleman reviewed the company, and slowly

lifted his hand, upon which every man (including him of the mottled

countenance) drew a long breath, and lifted his tumbler to his lips. In

one instant, the mottled-faced gentleman depressed his hand again, and

every glass was set down empty. It is impossible to describe the

thrilling effect produced by this striking ceremony. At once dignified,

solemn, and impressive, it combined every element of grandeur.

‘Well, gentlemen,’ said Mr. Pell, ‘all I can say is, that such marks of

confidence must be very gratifying to a professional man. I don’t wish

to say anything that might appear egotistical, gentlemen, but I’m very

glad, for your own sakes, that you came to me; that’s all. If you had

gone to any low member of the profession, it’s my firm conviction, and I

assure you of it as a fact, that you would have found yourselves in

Queer Street before this. I could have wished my noble friend had been

alive to have seen my management of this case. I don’t say it out of

pride, but I think--However, gentlemen, I won’t trouble you with that.

I’m generally to be found here, gentlemen, but if I’m not here, or over

the way, that’s my address. You’ll find my terms very cheap and

reasonable, and no man attends more to his clients than I do, and I hope

I know a little of my profession besides. If you have any opportunity of

recommending me to any of your friends, gentlemen, I shall be very much

obliged to you, and so will they too, when they come to know me. Your

healths, gentlemen.’

With this expression of his feelings, Mr. Solomon Pell laid three small

written cards before Mr. Weller’s friends, and, looking at the clock

again, feared it was time to be walking. Upon this hint Mr. Weller

settled the bill, and, issuing forth, the executor, legatee, attorney,

and umpires, directed their steps towards the city.

The office of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, of the Stock Exchange, was in a

first floor up a court behind the Bank of England; the house of Wilkins

Flasher, Esquire, was at Brixton, Surrey; the horse and stanhope of

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, were at an adjacent livery stable; the groom

of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was on his way to the West End to deliver

some game; the clerk of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, had gone to his

dinner; and so Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, himself, cried, ‘Come in,’ when

Mr. Pell and his companions knocked at the counting-house door.

‘Good-morning, Sir,’ said Pell, bowing obsequiously. ‘We want to make a

little transfer, if you please.’

‘Oh, just come in, will you?’ said Mr. Flasher. ‘Sit down a minute; I’ll

attend to you directly.’

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Pell, ‘there’s no hurry. Take a chair, Mr.

Weller.’

Mr. Weller took a chair, and Sam took a box, and the umpires took what

they could get, and looked at the almanac and one or two papers which

were wafered against the wall, with as much open-eyed reverence as if

they had been the finest efforts of the old masters.

‘Well, I’ll bet you half a dozen of claret on it; come!’ said Wilkins

Flasher, Esquire, resuming the conversation to which Mr. Pell’s entrance

had caused a momentary interruption.

This was addressed to a very smart young gentleman who wore his hat on

his right whisker, and was lounging over the desk, killing flies with a

ruler. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was balancing himself on two legs of an

office stool, spearing a wafer-box with a penknife, which he dropped

every now and then with great dexterity into the very centre of a small

red wafer that was stuck outside. Both gentlemen had very open

waistcoats and very rolling collars, and very small boots, and very big

rings, and very little watches, and very large guard-chains, and

symmetrical inexpressibles, and scented pocket-handkerchiefs.

‘I never bet half a dozen!’ said the other gentleman. ‘I’ll take a

dozen.’

‘Done, Simmery, done!’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

‘P. P., mind,’ observed the other.

‘Of course,’ replied Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire,

entered it in a little book, with a gold pencil-case, and the other

gentleman entered it also, in another little book with another gold

pencil-case.

‘I see there’s a notice up this morning about Boffer,’ observed Mr.

Simmery. ‘Poor devil, he’s expelled the house!’

‘I’ll bet you ten guineas to five, he cuts his throat,’ said Wilkins

Flasher, Esquire.

‘Done,’ replied Mr. Simmery.

‘Stop! I bar,’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, thoughtfully. ‘Perhaps he

may hang himself.’

‘Very good,’ rejoined Mr. Simmery, pulling out the gold pencil-case

again. ‘I’ve no objection to take you that way. Say, makes away with

himself.’

‘Kills himself, in fact,’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

‘Just so,’ replied Mr. Simmery, putting it down. ‘“Flasher--ten guineas

to five, Boffer kills himself.” Within what time shall we say?’

‘A fortnight?’ suggested Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

‘Con-found it, no,’ rejoined Mr. Simmery, stopping for an instant to

smash a fly with the ruler. ‘Say a week.’

‘Split the difference,’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. ‘Make it ten

days.’

‘Well; ten days,’ rejoined Mr. Simmery.

So it was entered down on the little books that Boffer was to kill

himself within ten days, or Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was to hand over

to Frank Simmery, Esquire, the sum of ten guineas; and that if Boffer

did kill himself within that time, Frank Simmery, Esquire, would pay to

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, five guineas, instead.

‘I’m very sorry he has failed,’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. ‘Capital

dinners he gave.’

‘Fine port he had too,’ remarked Mr. Simmery. ‘We are going to send our

butler to the sale to-morrow, to pick up some of that sixty-four.’

‘The devil you are!’ said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. ‘My man’s going too.

Five guineas my man outbids your man.’

‘Done.’

Another entry was made in the little books, with the gold pencil-cases;

and Mr. Simmery, having by this time killed all the flies and taken all

the bets, strolled away to the Stock Exchange to see what was going

forward.

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, now condescended to receive Mr. Solomon Pell’s

instructions, and having filled up some printed forms, requested the

party to follow him to the bank, which they did: Mr. Weller and his

three friends staring at all they beheld in unbounded astonishment, and

Sam encountering everything with a coolness which nothing could disturb.

Crossing a courtyard which was all noise and bustle, and passing a

couple of porters who seemed dressed to match the red fire engine which

was wheeled away into a corner, they passed into an office where their

business was to be transacted, and where Pell and Mr. Flasher left them

standing for a few moments, while they went upstairs into the Will

Office.

‘Wot place is this here?’ whispered the mottled-faced gentleman to the

elder Mr. Weller.

‘Counsel’s Office,’ replied the executor in a whisper.

‘Wot are them gen’l’men a-settin’ behind the counters?’ asked the hoarse

coachman.

‘Reduced counsels, I s’pose,’ replied Mr. Weller. ‘Ain’t they the

reduced counsels, Samivel?’

‘Wy, you don’t suppose the reduced counsels is alive, do you?’ inquired

Sam, with some disdain.

‘How should I know?’ retorted Mr. Weller; ‘I thought they looked wery

like it. Wot are they, then?’

‘Clerks,’ replied Sam.

‘Wot are they all a-eatin’ ham sangwidges for?’ inquired his father.

‘’Cos it’s in their dooty, I suppose,’ replied Sam, ‘it’s a part o’ the

system; they’re alvays a-doin’ it here, all day long!’

Mr. Weller and his friends had scarcely had a moment to reflect upon

this singular regulation as connected with the monetary system of the

country, when they were rejoined by Pell and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire,

who led them to a part of the counter above which was a round blackboard

with a large ‘W.’ on it.

‘Wot’s that for, Sir?’ inquired Mr. Weller, directing Pell’s attention

to the target in question.

‘The first letter of the name of the deceased,’ replied Pell.

‘I say,’ said Mr. Weller, turning round to the umpires, there’s

somethin’ wrong here. We’s our letter--this won’t do.’

The referees at once gave it as their decided opinion that the business

could not be legally proceeded with, under the letter W., and in all

probability it would have stood over for one day at least, had it not

been for the prompt, though, at first sight, undutiful behaviour of Sam,

who, seizing his father by the skirt of the coat, dragged him to the

counter, and pinned him there, until he had affixed his signature to a

couple of instruments; which, from Mr. Weller’s habit of printing, was a

work of so much labour and time, that the officiating clerk peeled and

ate three Ribstone pippins while it was performing.

As the elder Mr. Weller insisted on selling out his portion forthwith,

they proceeded from the bank to the gate of the Stock Exchange, to which

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, after a short absence, returned with a cheque

on Smith, Payne, & Smith, for five hundred and thirty pounds; that being

the money to which Mr. Weller, at the market price of the day, was

entitled, in consideration of the balance of the second Mrs. Weller’s

funded savings. Sam’s two hundred pounds stood transferred to his name,

and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, having been paid his commission, dropped

the money carelessly into his coat pocket, and lounged back to his

office.

Mr. Weller was at first obstinately determined on cashing the cheque in

nothing but sovereigns; but it being represented by the umpires that by

so doing he must incur the expense of a small sack to carry them home

in, he consented to receive the amount in five-pound notes.

‘My son,’ said Mr. Weller, as they came out of the banking-house--‘my

son and me has a wery partickler engagement this arternoon, and I should

like to have this here bis’ness settled out of hand, so let’s jest go

straight avay someveres, vere ve can hordit the accounts.’

A quiet room was soon found, and the accounts were produced and audited.

Mr. Pell’s bill was taxed by Sam, and some charges were disallowed by

the umpires; but, notwithstanding Mr. Pell’s declaration, accompanied

with many solemn asseverations that they were really too hard upon him,

it was by very many degrees the best professional job he had ever had,

and one on which he boarded, lodged, and washed, for six months

afterwards.

The umpires having partaken of a dram, shook hands and departed, as they

had to drive out of town that night. Mr. Solomon Pell, finding that

nothing more was going forward, either in the eating or drinking way,

took a friendly leave, and Sam and his father were left alone.

‘There!’ said Mr. Weller, thrusting his pocket-book in his side pocket.

‘Vith the bills for the lease, and that, there’s eleven hundred and

eighty pound here. Now, Samivel, my boy, turn the horses’ heads to the

George and Wulter!’

CHAPTER LVI. AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE TAKES PLACE BETWEEN MR. PICKWICK

AND SAMUEL WELLER, AT WHICH HIS PARENT ASSISTS--AN OLD GENTLEMAN IN A

SNUFF-COLOURED SUIT ARRIVES UNEXPECTEDLY

Mr. Pickwick was sitting alone, musing over many things, and thinking

among other considerations how he could best provide for the young

couple whose present unsettled condition was matter of constant regret

and anxiety to him, when Mary stepped lightly into the room, and,

advancing to the table, said, rather hastily--

‘Oh, if you please, Sir, Samuel is downstairs, and he says may his

father see you?’

‘Surely,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘Thank you, Sir,’ said Mary, tripping towards the door again.

‘Sam has not been here long, has he?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Oh, no, Sir,’ replied Mary eagerly. ‘He has only just come home. He is

not going to ask you for any more leave, Sir, he says.’

Mary might have been conscious that she had communicated this last

intelligence with more warmth than seemed actually necessary, or she

might have observed the good-humoured smile with which Mr. Pickwick

regarded her, when she had finished speaking. She certainly held down

her head, and examined the corner of a very smart little apron, with

more closeness than there appeared any absolute occasion for.

‘Tell them they can come up at once, by all means,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Mary, apparently much relieved, hurried away with her message.

Mr. Pickwick took two or three turns up and down the room; and, rubbing

his chin with his left hand as he did so, appeared lost in thought.

‘Well, well,’ said Mr. Pickwick, at length in a kind but somewhat

melancholy tone, ‘it is the best way in which I could reward him for his

attachment and fidelity; let it be so, in Heaven’s name. It is the fate

of a lonely old man, that those about him should form new and different

attachments and leave him. I have no right to expect that it should be

otherwise with me. No, no,’ added Mr. Pickwick more cheerfully, ‘it

would be selfish and ungrateful. I ought to be happy to have an

opportunity of providing for him so well. I am. Of course I am.’

Mr. Pickwick had been so absorbed in these reflections, that a knock at

the door was three or four times repeated before he heard it. Hastily

seating himself, and calling up his accustomed pleasant looks, he gave

the required permission, and Sam Weller entered, followed by his father.

‘Glad to see you back again, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘How do you do,

Mr. Weller?’

‘Wery hearty, thank’ee, sir,’ replied the widower; ‘hope I see you well,

sir.’

‘Quite, I thank you,’ replied Mr. Pickwick.

‘I wanted to have a little bit o’ conwersation with you, sir,’ said Mr.

Weller, ‘if you could spare me five minits or so, sir.’

‘Certainly,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Sam, give your father a chair.’

‘Thank’ee, Samivel, I’ve got a cheer here,’ said Mr. Weller, bringing

one forward as he spoke; ‘uncommon fine day it’s been, sir,’ added the

old gentleman, laying his hat on the floor as he sat himself down.

‘Remarkably so, indeed,’ replied Mr. Pickwick. ‘Very seasonable.’

‘Seasonablest veather I ever see, sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. Here, the

old gentleman was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which, being

terminated, he nodded his head and winked and made several supplicatory

and threatening gestures to his son, all of which Sam Weller steadily

abstained from seeing.

Mr. Pickwick, perceiving that there was some embarrassment on the old

gentleman’s part, affected to be engaged in cutting the leaves of a book

that lay beside him, and waited patiently until Mr. Weller should arrive

at the object of his visit.

‘I never see sich a aggrawatin’ boy as you are, Samivel,’ said Mr.

Weller, looking indignantly at his son; ‘never in all my born days.’

‘What is he doing, Mr. Weller?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘He von’t begin, sir,’ rejoined Mr. Weller; ‘he knows I ain’t ekal to

ex-pressin’ myself ven there’s anythin’ partickler to be done, and yet

he’ll stand and see me a-settin’ here taking up your walable time, and

makin’ a reg’lar spectacle o’ myself, rayther than help me out vith a

syllable. It ain’t filial conduct, Samivel,’ said Mr. Weller, wiping his

forehead; ‘wery far from it.’

‘You said you’d speak,’ replied Sam; ‘how should I know you wos done up

at the wery beginnin’?’

‘You might ha’ seen I warn’t able to start,’ rejoined his father; ‘I’m

on the wrong side of the road, and backin’ into the palin’s, and all

manner of unpleasantness, and yet you von’t put out a hand to help me.

I’m ashamed on you, Samivel.’

‘The fact is, Sir,’ said Sam, with a slight bow, ‘the gov’nor’s been a-

drawin’ his money.’

‘Wery good, Samivel, wery good,’ said Mr. Weller, nodding his head with

a satisfied air, ‘I didn’t mean to speak harsh to you, Sammy. Wery good.

That’s the vay to begin. Come to the pint at once. Wery good indeed,

Samivel.’

Mr. Weller nodded his head an extraordinary number of times, in the

excess of his gratification, and waited in a listening attitude for Sam

to resume his statement.

‘You may sit down, Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, apprehending that the

interview was likely to prove rather longer than he had expected.

Sam bowed again and sat down; his father looking round, he continued--

‘The gov’nor, sir, has drawn out five hundred and thirty pound.’

‘Reduced counsels,’ interposed Mr. Weller, senior, in an undertone.

‘It don’t much matter vether it’s reduced counsels, or wot not,’ said

Sam; ‘five hundred and thirty pounds is the sum, ain’t it?’

‘All right, Samivel,’ replied Mr. Weller.

‘To vich sum, he has added for the house and bisness--’

‘Lease, good-vill, stock, and fixters,’ interposed Mr. Weller.

‘As much as makes it,’ continued Sam, ‘altogether, eleven hundred and

eighty pound.’

‘Indeed!’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘I am delighted to hear it. I congratulate

you, Mr. Weller, on having done so well.’

‘Vait a minit, Sir,’ said Mr. Weller, raising his hand in a deprecatory

manner. ‘Get on, Samivel.’

‘This here money,’ said Sam, with a little hesitation, ‘he’s anxious to

put someveres, vere he knows it’ll be safe, and I’m wery anxious too,

for if he keeps it, he’ll go a-lendin’ it to somebody, or inwestin’

property in horses, or droppin’ his pocket-book down an airy, or makin’

a Egyptian mummy of his-self in some vay or another.’

‘Wery good, Samivel,’ observed Mr. Weller, in as complacent a manner as

if Sam had been passing the highest eulogiums on his prudence and

foresight. ‘Wery good.’

‘For vich reasons,’ continued Sam, plucking nervously at the brim of his

hat--‘for vich reasons, he’s drawn it out to-day, and come here vith me

to say, leastvays to offer, or in other vords--’

‘To say this here,’ said the elder Mr. Weller impatiently, ‘that it

ain’t o’ no use to me. I’m a-goin’ to vork a coach reg’lar, and ha’n’t

got noveres to keep it in, unless I vos to pay the guard for takin’ care

on it, or to put it in vun o’ the coach pockets, vich ‘ud be a

temptation to the insides. If you’ll take care on it for me, sir, I

shall be wery much obliged to you. P’raps,’ said Mr. Weller, walking up

to Mr. Pickwick and whispering in his ear--‘p’raps it’ll go a little vay

towards the expenses o’ that ‘ere conwiction. All I say is, just you

keep it till I ask you for it again.’ With these words, Mr. Weller

placed the pocket-book in Mr. Pickwick’s hands, caught up his hat, and

ran out of the room with a celerity scarcely to be expected from so

corpulent a subject.

‘Stop him, Sam!’ exclaimed Mr. Pickwick earnestly. ‘Overtake him; bring

him back instantly! Mr. Weller--here--come back!’

Sam saw that his master’s injunctions were not to be disobeyed; and,

catching his father by the arm as he was descending the stairs, dragged

him back by main force.

‘My good friend,’ said Mr. Pickwick, taking the old man by the hand,

‘your honest confidence overpowers me.’

‘I don’t see no occasion for nothin’ o’ the kind, Sir,’ replied Mr.

Weller obstinately.

‘I assure you, my good friend, I have more money than I can ever need;

far more than a man at my age can ever live to spend,’ said Mr.

Pickwick.

‘No man knows how much he can spend, till he tries,’ observed Mr.

Weller.

‘Perhaps not,’ replied Mr. Pickwick; ‘but as I have no intention of

trying any such experiments, I am not likely to come to want. I must beg

you to take this back, Mr. Weller.’

Wery well,’ said Mr. Weller, with a discontented look. ‘Mark my vords,

Sammy, I’ll do somethin’ desperate vith this here property; somethin’

desperate!’

‘You’d better not,’ replied Sam.

Mr. Weller reflected for a short time, and then, buttoning up his coat

with great determination, said--

‘I’ll keep a pike.’

‘Wot!’ exclaimed Sam.

‘A pike!’ rejoined Mr. Weller, through his set teeth; ‘I’ll keep a pike.

Say good-bye to your father, Samivel. I dewote the remainder of my days

to a pike.’

This threat was such an awful one, and Mr. Weller, besides appearing

fully resolved to carry it into execution, seemed so deeply mortified by

Mr. Pickwick’s refusal, that that gentleman, after a short reflection,

said--

‘Well, well, Mr. Weller, I will keep your money. I can do more good with

it, perhaps, than you can.’

‘Just the wery thing, to be sure,’ said Mr. Weller, brightening up; ‘o’

course you can, sir.’

‘Say no more about it,’ said Mr. Pickwick, locking the pocket-book in

his desk; ‘I am heartily obliged to you, my good friend. Now sit down

again. I want to ask your advice.’

The internal laughter occasioned by the triumphant success of his visit,

which had convulsed not only Mr. Weller’s face, but his arms, legs, and

body also, during the locking up of the pocket-book, suddenly gave place

to the most dignified gravity as he heard these words.

‘Wait outside a few minutes, Sam, will you?’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Sam immediately withdrew.

Mr. Weller looked uncommonly wise and very much amazed, when Mr.

Pickwick opened the discourse by saying--

‘You are not an advocate for matrimony, I think, Mr. Weller?’

Mr. Weller shook his head. He was wholly unable to speak; vague thoughts

of some wicked widow having been successful in her designs on Mr.

Pickwick, choked his utterance.

‘Did you happen to see a young girl downstairs when you came in just now

with your son?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Yes. I see a young gal,’ replied Mr. Weller shortly.

‘What did you think of her, now? Candidly, Mr. Weller, what did you

think of her?’

‘I thought she wos wery plump, and vell made,’ said Mr. Weller, with a

critical air.

‘So she is,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘so she is. What did you think of her

manners, from what you saw of her?’

‘Wery pleasant,’ rejoined Mr. Weller. ‘Wery pleasant and comformable.’

The precise meaning which Mr. Weller attached to this last-mentioned

adjective, did not appear; but, as it was evident from the tone in which

he used it that it was a favourable expression, Mr. Pickwick was as well

satisfied as if he had been thoroughly enlightened on the subject.

‘I take a great interest in her, Mr. Weller,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Weller coughed.

‘I mean an interest in her doing well,’ resumed Mr. Pickwick; ‘a desire

that she may be comfortable and prosperous. You understand?’

‘Wery clearly,’ replied Mr. Weller, who understood nothing yet.

‘That young person,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘is attached to your son.’

‘To Samivel Veller!’ exclaimed the parent.

‘Yes,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘It’s nat’ral,’ said Mr. Weller, after some consideration, ‘nat’ral, but

rayther alarmin’. Sammy must be careful.’

‘How do you mean?’ inquired Mr. Pickwick.

‘Wery careful that he don’t say nothin’ to her,’ responded Mr. Weller.

‘Wery careful that he ain’t led avay, in a innocent moment, to say

anythin’ as may lead to a conwiction for breach. You’re never safe vith

‘em, Mr. Pickwick, ven they vunce has designs on you; there’s no knowin’

vere to have ‘em; and vile you’re a-considering of it, they have you. I

wos married fust, that vay myself, Sir, and Sammy wos the consekens o’

the manoover.’

‘You give me no great encouragement to conclude what I have to say,’

observed Mr. Pickwick, ‘but I had better do so at once. This young

person is not only attached to your son, Mr. Weller, but your son is

attached to her.’

‘Vell,’ said Mr. Weller, ‘this here’s a pretty sort o’ thing to come to

a father’s ears, this is!’

‘I have observed them on several occasions,’ said Mr. Pickwick, making

no comment on Mr. Weller’s last remark; ‘and entertain no doubt at all

about it. Supposing I were desirous of establishing them comfortably as

man and wife in some little business or situation, where they might hope

to obtain a decent living, what should you think of it, Mr. Weller?’

At first, Mr. Weller received with wry faces a proposition involving the

marriage of anybody in whom he took an interest; but, as Mr. Pickwick

argued the point with him, and laid great stress on the fact that Mary

was not a widow, he gradually became more tractable. Mr. Pickwick had

great influence over him, and he had been much struck with Mary’s

appearance; having, in fact, bestowed several very unfatherly winks upon

her, already. At length he said that it was not for him to oppose Mr.

Pickwick’s inclination, and that he would be very happy to yield to his

advice; upon which, Mr. Pickwick joyfully took him at his word, and

called Sam back into the room.

‘Sam,’ said Mr. Pickwick, clearing his throat, ‘your father and I have

been having some conversation about you.’

‘About you, Samivel,’ said Mr. Weller, in a patronising and impressive

voice.

‘I am not so blind, Sam, as not to have seen, a long time since, that

you entertain something more than a friendly feeling towards Mrs.

Winkle’s maid,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘You hear this, Samivel?’ said Mr. Weller, in the same judicial form of

speech as before.

‘I hope, Sir,’ said Sam, addressing his master, ‘I hope there’s no harm

in a young man takin’ notice of a young ‘ooman as is undeniably good-

looking and well-conducted.’

‘Certainly not,’ said Mr. Pickwick.

‘Not by no means,’ acquiesced Mr. Weller, affably but magisterially.

‘So far from thinking there is anything wrong in conduct so natural,’

resumed Mr. Pickwick, ‘it is my wish to assist and promote your wishes

in this respect. With this view, I have had a little conversation with

your father; and finding that he is of my opinion--’

‘The lady not bein’ a widder,’ interposed Mr. Weller in explanation.

‘The lady not being a widow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, smiling. ‘I wish to

free you from the restraint which your present position imposes upon

you, and to mark my sense of your fidelity and many excellent qualities,

by enabling you to marry this girl at once, and to earn an independent

livelihood for yourself and family. I shall be proud, Sam,’ said Mr.

Pickwick, whose voice had faltered a little hitherto, but now resumed

its customary tone, ‘proud and happy to make your future prospects in

life my grateful and peculiar care.’

There was a profound silence for a short time, and then Sam said, in a

low, husky sort of voice, but firmly withal--

‘I’m very much obliged to you for your goodness, Sir, as is only like

yourself; but it can’t be done.’

‘Can’t be done!’ ejaculated Mr. Pickwick in astonishment.

‘Samivel!’ said Mr. Weller, with dignity.

‘I say it can’t be done,’ repeated Sam in a louder key. ‘Wot’s to become

of you, Sir?’

‘My good fellow,’ replied Mr. Pickwick, ‘the recent changes among my

friends will alter my mode of life in future, entirely; besides, I am

growing older, and want repose and quiet. My rambles, Sam, are over.’

‘How do I know that ‘ere, sir?’ argued Sam. ‘You think so now! S’pose

you wos to change your mind, vich is not unlikely, for you’ve the spirit

o’ five-and-twenty in you still, what ‘ud become on you vithout me? It

can’t be done, Sir, it can’t be done.’

‘Wery good, Samivel, there’s a good deal in that,’ said Mr. Weller

encouragingly.

‘I speak after long deliberation, Sam, and with the certainty that I

shall keep my word,’ said Mr. Pickwick, shaking his head. ‘New scenes

have closed upon me; my rambles are at an end.’

‘Wery good,’ rejoined Sam. ‘Then, that’s the wery best reason wy you

should alvays have somebody by you as understands you, to keep you up

and make you comfortable. If you vant a more polished sort o’ feller,

vell and good, have him; but vages or no vages, notice or no notice,

board or no board, lodgin’ or no lodgin’, Sam Veller, as you took from

the old inn in the Borough, sticks by you, come what may; and let

ev’rythin’ and ev’rybody do their wery fiercest, nothin’ shall ever

perwent it!’

At the close of this declaration, which Sam made with great emotion, the

elder Mr. Weller rose from his chair, and, forgetting all considerations

of time, place, or propriety, waved his hat above his head, and gave

three vehement cheers.

‘My good fellow,’ said Mr. Pickwick, when Mr. Weller had sat down again,

rather abashed at his own enthusiasm, ‘you are bound to consider the

young woman also.’

‘I do consider the young ‘ooman, Sir,’ said Sam. ‘I have considered the

young ‘ooman. I’ve spoke to her. I’ve told her how I’m sitivated; she’s

ready to vait till I’m ready, and I believe she vill. If she don’t,

she’s not the young ‘ooman I take her for, and I give her up vith

readiness. You’ve know’d me afore, Sir. My mind’s made up, and nothin’

can ever alter it.’

Who could combat this resolution? Not Mr. Pickwick. He derived, at that

moment, more pride and luxury of feeling from the disinterested

attachment of his humble friends, than ten thousand protestations from

the greatest men living could have awakened in his heart.

While this conversation was passing in Mr. Pickwick’s room, a little old

gentleman in a suit of snuff-coloured clothes, followed by a porter

carrying a small portmanteau, presented himself below; and, after

securing a bed for the night, inquired of the waiter whether one Mrs.

Winkle was staying there, to which question the waiter of course

responded in the affirmative.

‘Is she alone?’ inquired the old gentleman.

‘I believe she is, Sir,’ replied the waiter; ‘I can call her own maid,

Sir, if you--’

‘No, I don’t want her,’ said the old gentleman quickly. ‘Show me to her

room without announcing me.’

‘Eh, Sir?’ said the waiter.

‘Are you deaf?’ inquired the little old gentleman.

‘No, sir.’

‘Then listen, if you please. Can you hear me now?’

‘Yes, Sir.’

‘That’s well. Show me to Mrs. Winkle’s room, without announcing me.’

As the little old gentleman uttered this command, he slipped five

shillings into the waiter’s hand, and looked steadily at him.

‘Really, sir,’ said the waiter, ‘I don’t know, sir, whether--’

‘Ah! you’ll do it, I see,’ said the little old gentleman. ‘You had

better do it at once. It will save time.’

There was something so very cool and collected in the gentleman’s

manner, that the waiter put the five shillings in his pocket, and led

him upstairs without another word.

‘This is the room, is it?’ said the gentleman. ‘You may go.’

The waiter complied, wondering much who the gentleman could be, and what

he wanted; the little old gentleman, waiting till he was out of sight,

tapped at the door.

‘Come in,’ said Arabella.

‘Um, a pretty voice, at any rate,’ murmured the little old gentleman;

‘but that’s nothing.’ As he said this, he opened the door and walked in.

Arabella, who was sitting at work, rose on beholding a stranger--a

little confused--but by no means ungracefully so.

‘Pray don’t rise, ma’am,’ said the unknown, walking in, and closing the

door after him. ‘Mrs. Winkle, I believe?’

Arabella inclined her head.

‘Mrs. Nathaniel Winkle, who married the son of the old man at

Birmingham?’ said the stranger, eyeing Arabella with visible curiosity.

Again Arabella inclined her head, and looked uneasily round, as if

uncertain whether to call for assistance.

‘I surprise you, I see, ma’am,’ said the old gentleman.

‘Rather, I confess,’ replied Arabella, wondering more and more.

‘I’ll take a chair, if you’ll allow me, ma’am,’ said the stranger.

He took one; and drawing a spectacle-case from his pocket, leisurely

pulled out a pair of spectacles, which he adjusted on his nose.

‘You don’t know me, ma’am?’ he said, looking so intently at Arabella

that she began to feel alarmed.

‘No, sir,’ she replied timidly.

‘No,’ said the gentleman, nursing his left leg; ‘I don’t know how you

should. You know my name, though, ma’am.’

‘Do I?’ said Arabella, trembling, though she scarcely knew why. ‘May I

ask what it is?’

‘Presently, ma’am, presently,’ said the stranger, not having yet removed

his eyes from her countenance. ‘You have been recently married, ma’am?’

‘I have,’ replied Arabella, in a scarcely audible tone, laying aside her

work, and becoming greatly agitated as a thought, that had occurred to

her before, struck more forcibly upon her mind.

‘Without having represented to your husband the propriety of first

consulting his father, on whom he is dependent, I think?’ said the

stranger.

Arabella applied her handkerchief to her eyes.

‘Without an endeavour, even, to ascertain, by some indirect appeal, what

were the old man’s sentiments on a point in which he would naturally

feel much interested?’ said the stranger.

‘I cannot deny it, Sir,’ said Arabella.

‘And without having sufficient property of your own to afford your

husband any permanent assistance in exchange for the worldly advantages

which you knew he would have gained if he had married agreeably to his

father’s wishes?’ said the old gentleman. ‘This is what boys and girls

call disinterested affection, till they have boys and girls of their

own, and then they see it in a rougher and very different light!’

Arabella’s tears flowed fast, as she pleaded in extenuation that she was

young and inexperienced; that her attachment had alone induced her to

take the step to which she had resorted; and that she had been deprived

of the counsel and guidance of her parents almost from infancy.

‘It was wrong,’ said the old gentleman in a milder tone, ‘very wrong. It

was romantic, unbusinesslike, foolish.’

‘It was my fault; all my fault, Sir,’ replied poor Arabella, weeping.

‘Nonsense,’ said the old gentleman; ‘it was not your fault that he fell

in love with you, I suppose? Yes it was, though,’ said the old

gentleman, looking rather slily at Arabella. ‘It was your fault. He

couldn’t help it.’

This little compliment, or the little gentleman’s odd way of paying it,

or his altered manner--so much kinder than it was, at first--or all

three together, forced a smile from Arabella in the midst of her tears.

‘Where’s your husband?’ inquired the old gentleman, abruptly; stopping a

smile which was just coming over his own face.

‘I expect him every instant, sir,’ said Arabella. ‘I persuaded him to

take a walk this morning. He is very low and wretched at not having

heard from his father.’

‘Low, is he?’ said the old gentlemen. ‘Serve him right!’

‘He feels it on my account, I am afraid,’ said Arabella; ‘and indeed,

Sir, I feel it deeply on his. I have been the sole means of bringing him

to his present condition.’

‘Don’t mind it on his account, my dear,’ said the old gentleman. ‘It

serves him right. I am glad of it--actually glad of it, as far as he is

concerned.’

The words were scarcely out of the old gentleman’s lips, when footsteps

were heard ascending the stairs, which he and Arabella seemed both to

recognise at the same moment. The little gentleman turned pale; and,

making a strong effort to appear composed, stood up, as Mr. Winkle

entered the room.

‘Father!’ cried Mr. Winkle, recoiling in amazement.

‘Yes, sir,’ replied the little old gentleman. ‘Well, Sir, what have you

got to say to me?’

Mr. Winkle remained silent.

‘You are ashamed of yourself, I hope, Sir?’ said the old gentleman.

Still Mr. Winkle said nothing.

‘Are you ashamed of yourself, Sir, or are you not?’ inquired the old

gentleman.

‘No, Sir,’ replied Mr. Winkle, drawing Arabella’s arm through his. ‘I am

not ashamed of myself, or of my wife either.’

‘Upon my word!’ cried the old gentleman ironically.

‘I am very sorry to have done anything which has lessened your affection

for me, Sir,’ said Mr. Winkle; ‘but I will say, at the same time, that I

have no reason to be ashamed of having this lady for my wife, nor you of

having her for a daughter.’

‘Give me your hand, Nat,’ said the old gentleman, in an altered voice.

‘Kiss me, my love. You are a very charming little daughter-in-law after

all!’

In a few minutes’ time Mr. Winkle went in search of Mr. Pickwick, and

returning with that gentleman, presented him to his father, whereupon

they shook hands for five minutes incessantly.

‘Mr. Pickwick, I thank you most heartily for all your kindness to my

son,’ said old Mr. Winkle, in a bluff, straightforward way. ‘I am a

hasty fellow, and when I saw you last, I was vexed and taken by

surprise. I have judged for myself now, and am more than satisfied.

Shall I make any more apologies, Mr. Pickwick?’

‘Not one,’ replied that gentleman. ‘You have done the only thing wanting

to complete my happiness.’

Hereupon there was another shaking of hands for five minutes longer,

accompanied by a great number of complimentary speeches, which, besides

being complimentary, had the additional and very novel recommendation of

being sincere.

Sam had dutifully seen his father to the Belle Sauvage, when, on

returning, he encountered the fat boy in the court, who had been charged

with the delivery of a note from Emily Wardle.

‘I say,’ said Joe, who was unusually loquacious, ‘what a pretty girl

Mary is, isn’t she? I am \_so\_ fond of her, I am!’

Mr. Weller made no verbal remark in reply; but eyeing the fat boy for a

moment, quite transfixed at his presumption, led him by the collar to

the corner, and dismissed him with a harmless but ceremonious kick.

After which, he walked home, whistling.

CHAPTER LVII. IN WHICH THE PICKWICK CLUB IS FINALLY DISSOLVED, AND

EVERYTHING CONCLUDED TO THE SATISFACTION OF EVERYBODY

For a whole week after the happy arrival of Mr. Winkle from Birmingham,

Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller were from home all day long, only returning

just in time for dinner, and then wearing an air of mystery and

importance quite foreign to their natures. It was evident that very

grave and eventful proceedings were on foot; but various surmises were

afloat, respecting their precise character. Some (among whom was Mr.

Tupman) were disposed to think that Mr. Pickwick contemplated a

matrimonial alliance; but this idea the ladies most strenuously

repudiated. Others rather inclined to the belief that he had projected

some distant tour, and was at present occupied in effecting the

preliminary arrangements; but this again was stoutly denied by Sam

himself, who had unequivocally stated, when cross-examined by Mary, that

no new journeys were to be undertaken. At length, when the brains of the

whole party had been racked for six long days, by unavailing

speculation, it was unanimously resolved that Mr. Pickwick should be

called upon to explain his conduct, and to state distinctly why he had

thus absented himself from the society of his admiring friends.

With this view, Mr. Wardle invited the full circle to dinner at the

Adelphi; and the decanters having been thrice sent round, opened the

business.

‘We are all anxious to know,’ said the old gentleman, ‘what we have done

to offend you, and to induce you to desert us and devote yourself to

these solitary walks.’

‘Are you?’ said Mr. Pickwick. ‘It is singular enough that I had intended

to volunteer a full explanation this very day; so, if you will give me

another glass of wine, I will satisfy your curiosity.’

The decanters passed from hand to hand with unwonted briskness, and Mr.

Pickwick, looking round on the faces of his friends with a cheerful

smile, proceeded--

‘All the changes that have taken place among us,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘I

mean the marriage that \_has \_taken place, and the marriage that WILL

take place, with the changes they involve, rendered it necessary for me

to think, soberly and at once, upon my future plans. I determined on

retiring to some quiet, pretty neighbourhood in the vicinity of London;

I saw a house which exactly suited my fancy; I have taken it and

furnished it. It is fully prepared for my reception, and I intend

entering upon it at once, trusting that I may yet live to spend many

quiet years in peaceful retirement, cheered through life by the society

of my friends, and followed in death by their affectionate remembrance.’

Here Mr. Pickwick paused, and a low murmur ran round the table.

‘The house I have taken,’ said Mr. Pickwick, ‘is at Dulwich. It has a

large garden, and is situated in one of the most pleasant spots near

London. It has been fitted up with every attention to substantial

comfort; perhaps to a little elegance besides; but of that you shall

judge for yourselves. Sam accompanies me there. I have engaged, on

Perker’s representation, a housekeeper--a very old one--and such other

servants as she thinks I shall require. I propose to consecrate this

little retreat, by having a ceremony in which I take a great interest,

performed there. I wish, if my friend Wardle entertains no objection,

that his daughter should be married from my new house, on the day I take

possession of it. The happiness of young people,’ said Mr. Pickwick, a

little moved, ‘has ever been the chief pleasure of my life. It will warm

my heart to witness the happiness of those friends who are dearest to

me, beneath my own roof.’

Mr. Pickwick paused again: Emily and Arabella sobbed audibly.

‘I have communicated, both personally and by letter, with the club,’

resumed Mr. Pickwick, ‘acquainting them with my intention. During our

long absence, it has suffered much from internal dissentions; and the

withdrawal of my name, coupled with this and other circumstances, has

occasioned its dissolution. The Pickwick Club exists no longer.

‘I shall never regret,’ said Mr. Pickwick in a low voice, ‘I shall never

regret having devoted the greater part of two years to mixing with

different varieties and shades of human character, frivolous as my

pursuit of novelty may have appeared to many. Nearly the whole of my

previous life having been devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth,

numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon

me--I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and the improvement of my

understanding. If I have done but little good, I trust I have done less

harm, and that none of my adventures will be other than a source of

amusing and pleasant recollection to me in the decline of life. God

bless you all!’

With these words, Mr. Pickwick filled and drained a bumper with a

trembling hand; and his eyes moistened as his friends rose with one

accord, and pledged him from their hearts.

There were few preparatory arrangements to be made for the marriage of

Mr. Snodgrass. As he had neither father nor mother, and had been in his

minority a ward of Mr. Pickwick’s, that gentleman was perfectly well

acquainted with his possessions and prospects. His account of both was

quite satisfactory to Wardle--as almost any other account would have

been, for the good old gentleman was overflowing with hilarity and

kindness--and a handsome portion having been bestowed upon Emily, the

marriage was fixed to take place on the fourth day from that time--the

suddenness of which preparations reduced three dressmakers and a tailor

to the extreme verge of insanity.

Getting post-horses to the carriage, old Wardle started off, next day,

to bring his mother back to town. Communicating his intelligence to the

old lady with characteristic impetuosity, she instantly fainted away;

but being promptly revived, ordered the brocaded silk gown to be packed

up forthwith, and proceeded to relate some circumstances of a similar

nature attending the marriage of the eldest daughter of Lady

Tollimglower, deceased, which occupied three hours in the recital, and

were not half finished at last.

Mrs. Trundle had to be informed of all the mighty preparations that were

making in London; and, being in a delicate state of health, was informed

thereof through Mr. Trundle, lest the news should be too much for her;

but it was not too much for her, inasmuch as she at once wrote off to

Muggleton, to order a new cap and a black satin gown, and moreover

avowed her determination of being present at the ceremony. Hereupon, Mr.

Trundle called in the doctor, and the doctor said Mrs. Trundle ought to

know best how she felt herself, to which Mrs. Trundle replied that she

felt herself quite equal to it, and that she had made up her mind to go;

upon which the doctor, who was a wise and discreet doctor, and knew what

was good for himself, as well as for other people, said that perhaps if

Mrs. Trundle stopped at home, she might hurt herself more by fretting,

than by going, so perhaps she had better go. And she did go; the doctor

with great attention sending in half a dozen of medicine, to be drunk

upon the road.

In addition to these points of distraction, Wardle was intrusted with

two small letters to two small young ladies who were to act as

bridesmaids; upon the receipt of which, the two young ladies were driven

to despair by having no ‘things’ ready for so important an occasion, and

no time to make them in--a circumstance which appeared to afford the two

worthy papas of the two small young ladies rather a feeling of

satisfaction than otherwise. However, old frocks were trimmed, and new

bonnets made, and the young ladies looked as well as could possibly have

been expected of them. And as they cried at the subsequent ceremony in

the proper places, and trembled at the right times, they acquitted

themselves to the admiration of all beholders.

How the two poor relations ever reached London--whether they walked, or

got behind coaches, or procured lifts in wagons, or carried each other

by turns--is uncertain; but there they were, before Wardle; and the very

first people that knocked at the door of Mr. Pickwick’s house, on the

bridal morning, were the two poor relations, all smiles and shirt

collar.

They were welcomed heartily though, for riches or poverty had no

influence on Mr. Pickwick; the new servants were all alacrity and

readiness; Sam was in a most unrivalled state of high spirits and

excitement; Mary was glowing with beauty and smart ribands.

The bridegroom, who had been staying at the house for two or three days

previous, sallied forth gallantly to Dulwich Church to meet the bride,

attended by Mr. Pickwick, Ben Allen, Bob Sawyer, and Mr. Tupman; with

Sam Weller outside, having at his button-hole a white favour, the gift

of his lady-love, and clad in a new and gorgeous suit of livery invented

for the occasion. They were met by the Wardles, and the Winkles, and the

bride and bridesmaids, and the Trundles; and the ceremony having been

performed, the coaches rattled back to Mr. Pickwick’s to breakfast,

where little Mr. Perker already awaited them.

Here, all the light clouds of the more solemn part of the proceedings

passed away; every face shone forth joyously; and nothing was to be

heard but congratulations and commendations. Everything was so

beautiful! The lawn in front, the garden behind, the miniature

conservatory, the dining-room, the drawing-room, the bedrooms, the

smoking-room, and, above all, the study, with its pictures and easy-

chairs, and odd cabinets, and queer tables, and books out of number,

with a large cheerful window opening upon a pleasant lawn and commanding

a pretty landscape, dotted here and there with little houses almost

hidden by the trees; and then the curtains, and the carpets, and the

chairs, and the sofas! Everything was so beautiful, so compact, so neat,

and in such exquisite taste, said everybody, that there really was no

deciding what to admire most.

And in the midst of all this, stood Mr. Pickwick, his countenance

lighted up with smiles, which the heart of no man, woman, or child,

could resist: himself the happiest of the group: shaking hands, over and

over again, with the same people, and when his own hands were not so

employed, rubbing them with pleasure: turning round in a different

direction at every fresh expression of gratification or curiosity, and

inspiring everybody with his looks of gladness and delight.

Breakfast is announced. Mr. Pickwick leads the old lady (who has been

very eloquent on the subject of Lady Tollimglower) to the top of a long

table; Wardle takes the bottom; the friends arrange themselves on either

side; Sam takes his station behind his master’s chair; the laughter and

talking cease; Mr. Pickwick, having said grace, pauses for an instant

and looks round him. As he does so, the tears roll down his cheeks, in

the fullness of his joy.

Let us leave our old friend in one of those moments of unmixed

happiness, of which, if we seek them, there are ever some, to cheer our

transitory existence here. There are dark shadows on the earth, but its

lights are stronger in the contrast. Some men, like bats or owls, have

better eyes for the darkness than for the light. We, who have no such

optical powers, are better pleased to take our last parting look at the

visionary companions of many solitary hours, when the brief sunshine of

the world is blazing full upon them.

It is the fate of most men who mingle with the world, and attain even

the prime of life, to make many real friends, and lose them in the

course of nature. It is the fate of all authors or chroniclers to create

imaginary friends, and lose them in the course of art. Nor is this the

full extent of their misfortunes; for they are required to furnish an

account of them besides.

In compliance with this custom--unquestionably a bad one--we subjoin a

few biographical words, in relation to the party at Mr. Pickwick’s

assembled.

Mr. and Mrs. Winkle, being fully received into favour by the old

gentleman, were shortly afterwards installed in a newly-built house, not

half a mile from Mr. Pickwick’s. Mr. Winkle, being engaged in the city

as agent or town correspondent of his father, exchanged his old costume

for the ordinary dress of Englishmen, and presented all the external

appearance of a civilised Christian ever afterwards.

Mr. and Mrs. Snodgrass settled at Dingley Dell, where they purchased and

cultivated a small farm, more for occupation than profit. Mr. Snodgrass,

being occasionally abstracted and melancholy, is to this day reputed a

great poet among his friends and acquaintance, although we do not find

that he has ever written anything to encourage the belief. There are

many celebrated characters, literary, philosophical, and otherwise, who

hold a high reputation on a similar tenure.

Mr. Tupman, when his friends married, and Mr. Pickwick settled, took

lodgings at Richmond, where he has ever since resided. He walks

constantly on the terrace during the summer months, with a youthful and

jaunty air, which has rendered him the admiration of the numerous

elderly ladies of single condition, who reside in the vicinity. He has

never proposed again.

Mr. Bob Sawyer, having previously passed through the \_Gazette\_, passed

over to Bengal, accompanied by Mr. Benjamin Allen; both gentlemen having

received surgical appointments from the East India Company. They each

had the yellow fever fourteen times, and then resolved to try a little

abstinence; since which period, they have been doing well. Mrs. Bardell

let lodgings to many conversable single gentlemen, with great profit,

but never brought any more actions for breach of promise of marriage.

Her attorneys, Messrs. Dodson & Fogg, continue in business, from which

they realise a large income, and in which they are universally

considered among the sharpest of the sharp.

Sam Weller kept his word, and remained unmarried, for two years. The old

housekeeper dying at the end of that time, Mr. Pickwick promoted Mary to

the situation, on condition of her marrying Mr. Weller at once, which

she did without a murmur. From the circumstance of two sturdy little

boys having been repeatedly seen at the gate of the back garden, there

is reason to suppose that Sam has some family.

The elder Mr. Weller drove a coach for twelve months, but being

afflicted with the gout, was compelled to retire. The contents of the

pocket-book had been so well invested for him, however, by Mr. Pickwick,

that he had a handsome independence to retire on, upon which he still

lives at an excellent public-house near Shooter’s Hill, where he is

quite reverenced as an oracle, boasting very much of his intimacy with

Mr. Pickwick, and retaining a most unconquerable aversion to widows.

Mr. Pickwick himself continued to reside in his new house, employing his

leisure hours in arranging the memoranda which he afterwards presented

to the secretary of the once famous club, or in hearing Sam Weller read

aloud, with such remarks as suggested themselves to his mind, which

never failed to afford Mr. Pickwick great amusement. He was much

troubled at first, by the numerous applications made to him by Mr.

Snodgrass, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Trundle, to act as godfather to their

offspring; but he has become used to it now, and officiates as a matter

of course. He never had occasion to regret his bounty to Mr. Jingle; for

both that person and Job Trotter became, in time, worthy members of

society, although they have always steadily objected to return to the

scenes of their old haunts and temptations. Mr. Pickwick is somewhat

infirm now; but he retains all his former juvenility of spirit, and may

still be frequently seen, contemplating the pictures in the Dulwich

Gallery, or enjoying a walk about the pleasant neighbourhood on a fine

day. He is known by all the poor people about, who never fail to take

their hats off, as he passes, with great respect. The children idolise

him, and so indeed does the whole neighbourhood. Every year he repairs

to a large family merry-making at Mr. Wardle’s; on this, as on all other

occasions, he is invariably attended by the faithful Sam, between whom

and his master there exists a steady and reciprocal attachment which

nothing but death will terminate.

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