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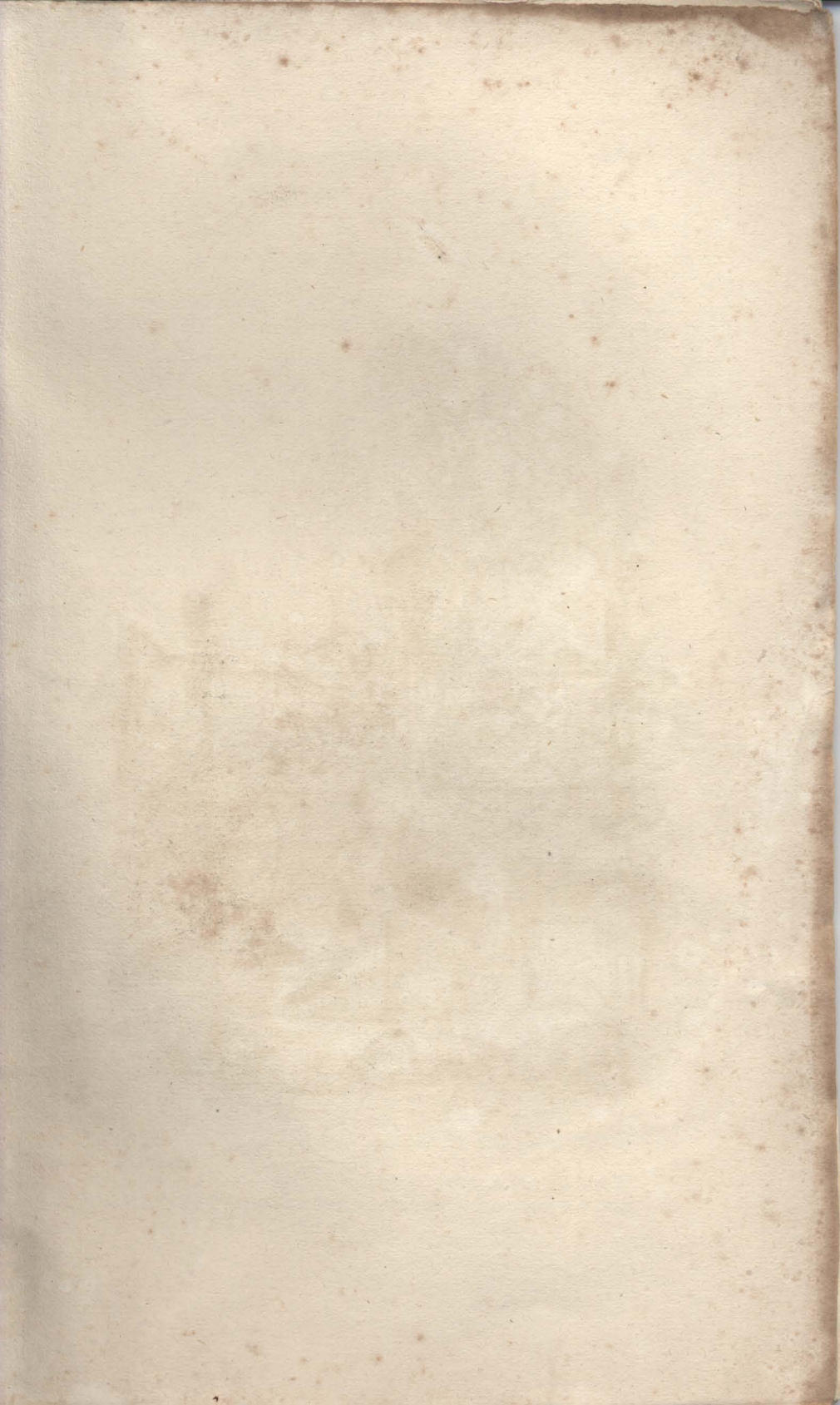
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## CHAPTER XVIII.

BRIEFLY ILLUSTRATIVE OF TWO POINTS;—FIRST, THE POWER OF HYSTERICIS, AND, SECONDLY, THE FORCE OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

FOR two days after the *déjeune* 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.”

Now 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 just 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 tea-pot at the head

of his visitor. "Pleasantry, Sir!—but no, I will be calm; I will be calm, Sir;" and 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?"

"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-townsmen 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,  
And handed her over to W\*\*\*\*\*.”

"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:" and 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,' Ma'am. '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 seem to bear reference to some revenge to be thereafter wreaked upon the head of Pott, produced their full 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 did'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 am 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 body-guard 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 to 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 body-guard, 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 body-guard, 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, Goodwin," murmured Mrs. Pott, clutching at the wrists 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 body-guard.

Pott looked very frightened. It was time for a clencher.

"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:" and 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 body-guard. "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 an internal wish that his visiter 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 bed-room 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 visiter.

"Quite," responded Mr. Winkle.

The breakfast passed off in silence, for each member of the party was brooding over his, or her, own personal grievances. Mrs. Pott was regretting the loss of a bean; Mr. Pott his rash pledge to horse-whip the Independent; and Mr. Winkle his having 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 consolation, old 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?"

"Oh, he;—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 with a wafer, 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, 1830.

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 and 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 Wardle. "Well, that's important. There was nothing suspicious then, I suppose?"

Mr. Tupman glanced timidly at his leader. "Why," he said, "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 won't deny it. So I was."

"Hallo!" said Wardle; "for a case in which there's nothing suspicious, this looks rather queer—eh, Pickwick—eh? Ah, sly dog—sly dog!" and he laughed till the glasses on the side-board, 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."

"Very 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 hows'ever, 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." And 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 common-place 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, and 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 colours 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 road-side, before which stood a tall, raw-boned gamekeeper, and a half-booted, leather-legged 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 tolerable colds in the head.

"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 were afraid of it—as there is no earthly reason to doubt that 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 its position, and in so doing, contrived to bring the barrel into pretty smart contact with Mr. Weller's head.

"Hallo!" said Sam, picking up his hat, which had been knocked off, and rubbing his temple. "Hallo, Sir! if you comes it this vay, you'll fill one o' them bags, and something to spare, at one fire."

Here the leather-leggined 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.”

“An’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 very thing,” said Mr. Weller, who was a party interested, inasmuch as he ardently longed to see the sport. “The very thing. Well said, Small-check; 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 unsportsman-like,” reasoned Winkle.

“I don’t care whether it’s unsportsman-like or not,” replied Mr. Pickwick; “I am not going to be shot in a wheelbarrow, 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 Mr. 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 further.

“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 your own vestcoat as in anybody else's."

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. "Where are they! 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 wheelbarrow, 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 fire-arms 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 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 by-standers;—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 very act of falling wounded to the ground. He was just on the point of congratulating 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 shots, 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 clock-work."

"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 way, young leathers. If you walley my precious life don't upset me, as the gen'l man 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 dispatch.

"Weal pie," said Mr. Weller, soliloquising, as he arranged the eatables on the grass. "Wery good thing is a weal pie, when you know the lady as made it, and is quite sure it an'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 an'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 prices o' meat,' says he. 'Mr. Weller,' says he, 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 beef-steak, weal, or kidney, 'cordin 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 vary!'"

"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 an't a woman's. Bread—knuckle o' ham, reg'lar pieter—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'men, '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 tree 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 below 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; and the satisfaction of his 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 their 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 is 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 me 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 wheelbarrow 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 sunk 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 wheelbarrow 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; and 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 wheelbarrow, 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 hundred-fold 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 an’t got no friends. Hurrah!” And then there came a turnip, and 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 away,” said Mr. Weller, jumping up on the box. “Give my compliments—Mr. Weller’s compliments—to the Justice, and tell

him I've spoilt his beadle, and that, if he'll swear in a new 'un, I'll come back agin to-morrow and spoil 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 round 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, and the roar became general. So, to keep up their good humour, they stopped at the first road-side 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 furthest end of Freeman's Court, Cornhill, sat the four clerks of Messrs. Dodson and 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 about 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 and 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 almanack, 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 precious drunk, 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 up stairs 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 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 goodnaturedly 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 up stairs 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' you, Sir," whispered Mr. Weller.

"Twigging 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 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 up stairs.

Up stairs 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 about 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," replied 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 thus 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 further 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 *præcipe* 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 and Fogg for the plaintiff, Aug. 28, 1830.*' All regular, Sir; perfectly." And 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 just 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 very good game, when you an't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores, in vich case it get's too excitin' to be pleasant. Come away, 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," 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 fire-place, 'cos there an't no leg in the middle o' the table, vvhich all the others has, and its 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 gentlemen, 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. And 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—"Vy, 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.

"Vy, Sammy," said the father, "I han't seen you, for two years and better."

"Nor more you have, old codger," replied the son. "How's mother in law?"

"Vy, 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 cretur she was, Sammy and 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 wife, 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 very careful o' widders all your life, specially if they've kept a public house, Sammy;" and having delivered this parental advice with great pathos, Mr. Weller senior re-filled 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 han'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 his-self. 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 regularly done the other day."

"No!" said the 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 rheumatiz, 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 familiar with his servant; and, more than that, as they sat in front, right behind the box, I heard ’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 thimble-full.

“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,” replied 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 widdar as has got a good loud voice, 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 victim o' connubiality, as Blue Beard's domestic chaplain said, with 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' up stairs, Sir," replied Mr. Weller; "p'raps she knows where we can find somebody. Hallo, 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 old 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 wouldn'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 a money-making turn, was sufficiently testified by the fact of a small bulk-head 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 afforded to a pie-man, 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 cyder and Dantzic spruce, while a large black board, 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 displeasing 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 sign-board 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 a 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'lm'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 d'rectly, 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 their's—capital men of business is 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 any thing 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' door—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 lodging 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 I can't," said Mr. Grundy.

"You had better say you won't," replied the chairman.

"Well, then, I 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 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 before, 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 '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 bright grey 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 leant 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 grey 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.

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