Charles Dickens

The Pickwick Papers

Klub Pickwicka

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The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club

by Charles Dickens

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;[1] 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.

[1] 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 sight 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.

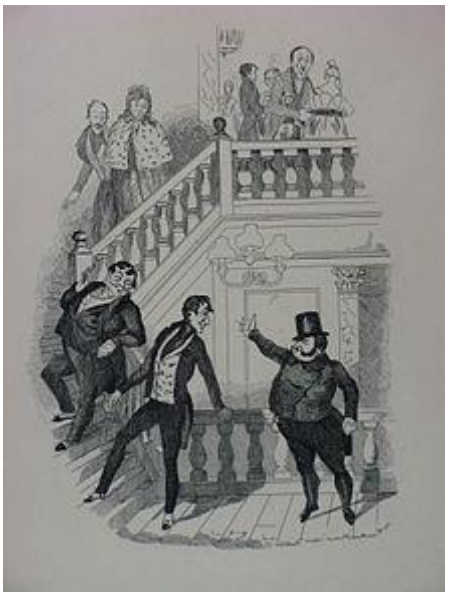
‘Don’t know—never saw her in all my life—cut out the doctor—here goes.’ And the stranger forthwith crossed the room; and, leaning against a mantel–piece, commenced gazing with an air of respectful and melancholy admiration on the fat countenance of the little old lady. Mr. Tupman looked on, in mute astonishment. 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.



Charles Dickens

The Pickwick Papers

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Polska wersja językowa w tłumaczeniu anonimowym

Angielska wersja językowa zgodna z wydaniem z roku 1836

The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club

by Charles Dickens

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;[1] 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.

[1] 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 sight 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 hint 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.

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‘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.

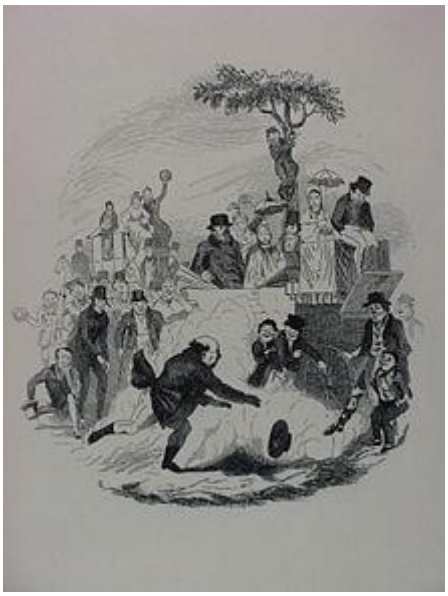
‘Where are we to go to?’ screamed the agitated Pickwickians.

‘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 Shay 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 shay 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.'