

Dodson. "Pray do, sir, if you feel disposed; now pray do, sir."

"I do," said Mr. Pickwick. "You *are* swindlers."

"Very good," said Dodson. "You can hear down there, I hope, Mr. Wicks?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Wicks.

"You had better come up a step or two higher, if you can't," added Mr. Fogg. "Go on, sir; do go on. You had better call us thieves, sir; or perhaps you would like to assault one of us. Pray do it, sir, if you would; we will not make the smallest resistance. Pray do it, sir."

As Fogg put himself very temptingly within the reach of Mr. Pickwick's clenched fist, there is little doubt that that gentleman would have complied with his earnest entreaty, but for the interposition of Sam, who, hearing the dispute, emerged from the office, mounted the stairs, and seized his master by the arm.

"You just come away," said Mr. Weller. "Battledore and shuttlecock's a wery good game, when you an't the shuttlecock and two lawyers the battledores, in which case it gets too excitin' to be pleasant. Come away, sir. If you want to ease your mind by blowing up somebody, come out into the court and blow up me; but it's rayther too expensive work to be carried on here."

And without the slightest ceremony, Mr. Weller hauled his master down the stairs, and down the court, and having safely deposited him in Cornhill, fell behind, prepared to follow whithersoever he should lead.

Mr. Pickwick walked on abstractedly, crossed opposite the Mansion House, and bent his steps up Cheapside. Sam began to wonder where they were going, when his master turned round, and said:

"Sam, I will go immediately to Mr. Perker's."

"That's just exactly the wery place vere you ought to have gone last night, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"I think it is, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick.

"I *know* it is," said Mr. Weller.

"Well, well, Sam," replied Mr. Pickwick, "we will go there at once, but first, as I have been rather ruffled, I should like a glass of brandy-and-water warm, Sam. Where can I have it, Sam?"

Mr. Weller's knowledge of London was extensive and peculiar. He replied, without the slightest consideration:

"Second court on the right-hand side—last house but vun on the same side the way—take the box as stands in the first fire-place, 'cos there ain't no leg in the middle o' the table, vich all the others has, and it's wery inconvenient."

Mr. Pickwick observed his valet's directions implicitly, and bidding Sam follow him, entered the tavern he had pointed out, where the hot brandy-and-water was speedily placed before him; while Mr. Weller, seated at a respectful distance, though at the same table with his master, was accommodated with a pint of porter.

The room was one of a very homely description, and was apparently under the especial patronage of stage coachmen: for several gentlemen, who had all the appearance of belonging to that learned profession, were drinking and smoking in the different boxes. Among the number was one stout, red-faced, elderly man in particular, seated in an opposite box, who attracted Mr. Pickwick's attention. The stout man was smoking with great vehemence, but between every half-dozen puffs, he took his pipe from his mouth, and looked first at Mr. Weller and then at Mr. Pickwick. Then he would bury in a quart pot as much of his countenance as the dimensions of the quart pot admitted of its receiving, and take another look at Sam and Mr. Pickwick. Then he would take another half-dozen puffs with an air of profound meditation and look at them again. At last the stout man, putting up his legs on the seat, and leaning his back against the wall, began to puff at his pipe without leaving off at all, and to stare through the smoke at the new comers, as if he had made up his mind to see the most he could of them.

At first the evolutions of the stout man had escaped Mr. Weller's observation, but by degrees, as he saw Mr. Pickwick's eyes every now and then turning toward him, he began to gaze in the same direction, at the same time shading his eyes with his hand, as if he partially recognized the object before him, and wished to make quite sure of his identity. His doubts were speedily dispelled, however; for the stout man having blown a thick cloud from his pipe, a hoarse voice, like some strange effort of ventriloquism, emerged from beneath the capacious shawls which muffled his throat and chest, and slowly uttered these sounds—"Wy, Sammy!"

"Who's that, Sam?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Why, I wouldn't ha' believed it, sir," replied Mr. Weller, with astonished eyes. "It's the old 'un."

"Old one," said Mr. Pickwick. "What old one?"

"My father, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "How are you, my ancient?" With which beautiful ebullition of filial affection, Mr. Weller made room on the seat beside him, for the stout man, who advanced pipe in mouth and pot in hand, to greet him.

"Wy, Sammy," said the father, "I ha'n't seen you for two year and better."

"No more you have, old codger," replied the son. "How's mother-in-law?"

"Wy, I'll tell you what, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, senior, with much solemnity in his manner; "there never was a nicer woman as a widdler, than that 'ere second wentur o' mine—a sweet creetur she was, Sammy; all I can say on her now, is, that as she was such an uncommon pleasant widdler, it's a great pity she ever changed her con-dition. She don't act as a wife, Sammy."

"Don't she, though?" inquired Mr. Weller, junior.

The elder Mr. Weller shook his head, as he replied with a sigh, "I've done it once too often, Sammy; I've done it once too often. Take example by your father, my boy, and be wery careful o' widders all your life, specially if they've kept a public-house, Sammy." Having delivered this parental advice with great pathos, Mr. Weller, senior, refilled his pipe from a tin box he carried in his pocket, and, lighting his fresh pipe from the ashes of the old one, commenced smoking at a great rate.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said renewing the subject, and addressing Mr. Pickwick, after a considerable pause, "nothin' personal, I hope, sir; I hope you ha'n't got a widdler, sir."

"Not I," replied Mr. Pickwick, laughing; and while Mr. Pickwick laughed, Sam Weller informed his parent in a whisper of the relation in which he stood toward that gentleman.

"Beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Weller, senior, taking off his hat, "I hope you've no fault to find with Sammy, sir?"

"None whatever," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Wery glad to hear it, sir," replied the old man; "I took a good deal o' pains with his eddication, sir; let him run in the streets when he was wery young, and shift for his-self. It's the only way to make a boy sharp, sir."

"Rather a dangerous process, I should imagine," said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

"And not a wery sure one, neither," added Mr. Weller; "I got reg'larly done the other day."

"No!" said his father.

"I did," said the son; and he proceeded to relate, in as few words as possible, how he had fallen a ready dupe to the stratagems of Job Trotter.

Mr. Weller, senior, listened to the tale with the most profound attention, and, at its termination, said:

"Worn't one o' these chaps slim and tall, with long hair, and the gift o' the gab wery gallopin'?"

Mr. Pickwick did not quite understand the last item of description, but, comprehending the first, said "Yes," at a venture.

"T'other's a black-haired chap in mulberry livery, with a wery large head?"

"Yes, yes, he is," said Mr. Pickwick and Sam, with great earnestness.

"Then I know where they are, and that's all about it," said Mr. Weller; "they're at Ipswich, safe enough, them two."

"No!" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Fact," said Mr. Weller, "and I'll tell you how I know it. I work an Ipswich coach now and then for a friend o' mine. I worked down to the wery day arter the night as you caught the rheumatiz, and at the Black Boy at Chelmsford—the wery place they'd come to—I took 'em up, right through to Ipswich, where the man-servant—him in the mulberries—told me they was agoin' to put up for a long time."

"I'll follow him," said Mr. Pickwick; "we may as well see Ipswich as any other place. I'll follow him."

"You're quite certain it was them, governor?" inquired Mr. Weller, junior.

"Quite, Sammy, quite," replied his father, "for their appearance is wery sing'ler; besides that 'ere, I wondered to see the gen'l'm'n so formiliar with his servant; and, more than that, as they sat in front, right behind the box, I heerd 'em laughing, and saying how they'd done old Fireworks."

"Old who?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Old Fireworks, sir; by which, I've no doubt, they meant you, sir."

There is nothing positively vile or atrocious in the appellation of "old Fireworks," but still it is by no means a

respectful or flattering designation. The recollection of all the wrongs he had sustained at Jingle's hands had crowded on Mr. Pickwick's mind, the moment Mr. Weller began to speak; it wanted but a feather to turn the scale, and "old Fireworks" did it.

"I'll follow him," said Mr. Pickwick, with an emphatic blow on the table.

"I shall work down to Ipswich the day arter to-morrow, sir," said Mr. Weller the elder, "from the Bull in White-chapel; and if you really mean to go, you'd better go with me."

"So we had," said Mr. Pickwick; "very true; I can write to Bury, and tell them to meet me at Ipswich. We will go with you. But don't hurry away, Mr. Weller; won't you take any thing?"

"You're wery good, sir," replied Mr. W., stopping short; "perhaps a small glass of brandy to drink your health, and success to Sammy, sir, wouldn't be amiss."

"Certainly not," replied Mr. Pickwick. "A glass of brandy here!" The brandy was brought: and Mr. Weller, after pulling his hair to Mr. Pickwick, and nodding to Sam, jerked it down his capacious throat as if it had been a small thimbleful.

"Well done, father," said Sam: "take care, old fellow, or you'll have a touch of your old complaint, the gout."

"I've found a sov'rin' cure for that Sammy," said Mr. Weller, setting down the glass.

"A sovereign cure for the gout," said Mr. Pickwick, hastily producing his note-book—"what is it?"

"The gout, sir," replied Mr. Weller, "the gout is a complaint as arises from too much ease and comfort. If ever you're attacked with the gout, sir, jist you marry a widder as has got a good loud voice, with a decent notion of usin' it, and you'll never have the gout agin. It's a capital prescription, sir. I takes it reg'lar and I can warrant it to drive away any illness as is caused by too much jollity." Having imparted this valuable secret, Mr. Weller drained his glass once more, produced a labored wink, sighed deeply, and slowly retired.

"Well, what do you think of what your father says, Sam?" inquired Mr. Pickwick, with a smile.

"Think, sir!" replied Mr. Weller; "why, I think he's the wictim o' connubiality, as Blue Beard's domestic chaplain said, with a tear of pity, ven he buried him.

There was no replying to this very apposite conclusion, and therefore Mr. Pickwick, after settling the reckoning, resumed his walk to Gray's Inn. By the time he reached its secluded groves, however, eight o'clock had struck, and the unbroken stream of gentlemen in muddy high-lows, soiled white hats, and rusty apparel, who were passing toward the different avenues of egress, warned him that the majority of the offices had closed for that day.

After climbing two pairs of steep and dirty stairs, he found his anticipations were realized. Mr. Perker's "outer door" was closed; and the dead silence which followed Mr. Weller's repeated kicks thereat, announced that the officials had retired from business for the night.

"This is pleasant, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick; "I shouldn't lose an hour in seeing him; I shall not be able to get one wink of sleep to-night, I know, unless I have the satisfaction of reflecting that I have confided this matter to a professional man."

"Here's an old 'ooman comin' up stairs, sir," replied Mr. Weller; "p'raps she knows where we can find somebody. Halloo, old lady, vere's Mr. Perker's people?"

"Mr. Perker's people," said a thin, miserable-looking old woman, stopping to recover breath after the ascent of the staircase, "Mr. Perker's people's gone, and I'm agoin' to do the office out."

"Are you Mr. Perker's servant?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"I am Mr. Perker's laundress," replied the old woman.

"Ah," said Mr. Pickwick, half aside to Sam, "it's a curious circumstance, Sam, that they call the old women in these inns, laundresses. I wonder what's that for."

"Cos they has a mortal awersion to washing any thin', I suppose, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Mr. Pickwick, looking at the old woman, whose appearance, as well as the condition of the office, which she had by this time opened, indicated a rooted antipathy to the application of soap-and-water; "do you know where I can find Mr. Perker, my good woman."

"No, I don't," replied the old woman, gruffly; "he's out o' town now."

"That's unfortunate," said Mr. Pickwick; "where's his clerk? Do you know?"

"Yes, I know where he is, but he won't thank me for telling you," replied the laundress.

"I have very particular business with him," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Won't it do in the morning?" said the woman.

"Not so well," replied Mr. Pickwick.

"Well," said the old woman, "if it was any thing very particular, I was to say where he was, so I suppose there's no harm in telling. If you just go to the Magpie and Stump, and ask at the bar for Mr. Lowten, they'll show you in to him, and he's Mr. Perker's clerk."

With this direction, and having been furthermore informed that the hostelry in question was situated in a court, happy in the double advantage of being in the vicinity of Clare Market, and closely approximating to the back of New Inn, Mr. Pickwick and Sam descended the rickety staircase in safety, and issued forth in quest of the Magpie and Stump.

This favorite tavern, sacred to the evening orgies of Mr. Lowten and his companions, was what ordinary people would designate a public-house. That the landlord was a man of a money-making turn, was sufficiently testified by the fact of a small bulkhead beneath the tap-room window, in size and shape not unlike a sedan-chair, being underlet to a mender of shoes; and that he was a being of a philanthropic mind, was evident from the protection he afforded to a pie-man, who vended his delicacies without fear of interruption on the very door-step. In the lower windows, which were decorated with curtains of a saffron hue, dangled two or three printed cards, bearing reference to Devonshire cider and Dantzic spruce, while a large black board, announcing in white letters to an enlightened public that there were 500,000 barrels of double stout in the cellars of the establishment, left the mind in a state of not unpleasing doubt and uncertainty as to the precise direction in the bowels of the earth in which this mighty cavern might be supposed to extend. When we add, that the weather-beaten sign-board bore the half-obliterated semblance of a magpie intently eyeing a crooked streak of brown paint, which the neighbors had been taught from infancy to consider as the "stump," we have said all that need be said of the exterior of the edifice.

On Mr. Pickwick's presenting himself at the bar, an elderly female emerged from behind a screen therein, and presented herself before him.

"Is Mr. Lowten here, ma'am?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Yes he is, sir," replied the landlady. "Here, Charley, show the gentleman in to Mr. Lowten."

"The gen'l'm'n can't go in just now," said a shambling pot-boy, with a red head, "cos Mr. Lowten's a-singin' a comic song, and he'll put him out. He'll be done d'rectly, sir."

The red-headed pot-boy had scarcely finished speaking, when a most unanimous hammering of tables, and jingling of glasses, announced that the song had that instant terminated; and Mr. Pickwick, after desiring Sam to solace himself in the tap, suffered himself to be conducted into the presence of Mr. Lowten.

At the announcement of "gentleman to speak to you, sir," a puffy-faced young man, who filled the chair at the head of the table, looked with some surprise in the direction from whence the voice proceeded: and the surprise seemed to be by no means diminished, when his eyes rested on an individual whom he had never seen before.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mr. Pickwick, "and I am very sorry to disturb the other gentlemen too, but I come on very particular business; and if you will suffer me to detain you at this end of the room for five minutes, I shall be very much obliged to you."

The puffy-faced young man rose, and drawing a chair close to Mr. Pickwick in an obscure corner of the room, listened attentively to his tale of woe.

"Ah," he said, when Mr. Pickwick had concluded, "Dodson and Fogg—sharp practice theirs—capital men of business, Dodson and Fogg, sir."

Mr. Pickwick admitted the sharp practice of Dodson and Fogg, and Lowten resumed.

"Perker ain't in town, and he won't be, neither, before the end of next week; but if you want the action defended, and will leave the copy with me, I can do all that's needful till he comes back."

"That's exactly what I came here for," said Mr. Pickwick, handing over the document. "If any thing particular occurs, you can write to me at the post-office, Ipswich."

"That's all right," replied Mr. Perker's clerk; and then seeing Mr. Pickwick's eye wandering curiously toward the table, he added, "Will you join us, for half an hour or so? We are capital company here to-night. There's Samkin and Green's managing-clerk, and Smithers and Price's chan-

cery, and Pimkin and Thomas's out-o'-door—sings a capital song, he does—and Jack Bamber, and ever so many more. You're come out of the country, I suppose. Would you like to join us?"

Mr. Pickwick could not resist so tempting an opportunity of studying human nature. He suffered himself to be led to the table, where, after having been introduced to the company in due form, he was accommodated with a seat near the chairman, and called for a glass of his favorite beverage.

A profound silence, quite contrary to Mr. Pickwick's expectations, succeeded.

"You don't find this sort of thing disagreeable, I hope, sir?" said his right-hand neighbor, a gentleman in a checked shirt, and Mosaic studs, with a cigar in his mouth.

"Not in the least," replied Mr. Pickwick, "I like it very much, although I am no smoker myself."

"I should be very sorry to say I wasn't," interposed another gentleman on the opposite side of the table. "It's board and lodging to me, is smoke."

Mr. Pickwick glanced at the speaker, and thought that if it were washing too, it would be all the better.

Here there was another pause. Mr. Pickwick was a stranger, and his coming had evidently cast a damp upon the party.

"Mr. Grundy's going to oblige the company with a song," said the chairman.

"No he ain't," said Mr. Grundy.

"Why not?" said the chairman.

"Because he can't," said Mr. Grundy.

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

"Well, then, he won't," retorted Mr. Grundy. Mr. Grundy's positive refusal to gratify the company occasioned another silence.

"Won't anybody enliven us?" said the chairman, despondingly.

"Why don't you enliven us yourself, Mr. Chairman?" said a young man with a whisker, a squint, and an open shirt-collar (dirty), from the bottom of the table.

"Hear! hear!" said the smoking gentleman in the Mosaic jewelry.

"Because I only know one song, and I have sung it already, and it's a fine of 'glasses round' to sing the same song twice in a night," replied the chairman.

This was an unanswerable reply, and silence prevailed again.

"I have been to-night, gentlemen," said Pickwick, hoping to start a subject which all the company could take a part in discussing, "I have been to-night in a place which you all know very well, doubtless, but which I have not been in before for some years, and know very little of: I mean Gray's Inn, gentlemen. Curious little nooks in a great place like London, these old Inns are."

"By Jove," said the chairman, whispering across the table to Mr. Pickwick, "you have hit upon something that one of us, at least, would talk upon forever. You'll draw old Jack Bamber out; he was never heard to talk about anything else but the Inns, and he has lived alone in them till he's half crazy."

The individual to whom Lowten alluded was a little, yellow, high-shouldered man, whose countenance from his habit of stooping forward when silent, Mr. Pickwick had not observed before. He wondered though, when the old man raised his shriveled face, and bent his gray eye upon him, with a keen inquiring look, that such remarkable features could have escaped his attention for a moment. There was a fixed grim smile perpetually on his countenance; he leaned his chin on a long, skinny hand, with nails of extraordinary length; and as he inclined his head to one side, and looked keenly out from beneath his shaggy gray eyebrows, there was a strange, wild slyness in his leer, quite repulsive to behold.

This was the figure that now started forward, and burst into an animated torrent of words. As this chapter has been a long one, however, and as the old man was a remarkable personage, it will be more respectful to him, and more convenient to us, to let him speak for himself in a fresh one.