

"It's very unfortunate," said the stranger, with a sigh.  
 "Very," said Lowten, scribbling his name on the doorpost with his pen, and rubbing it out again with the feather. "Will you leave a message for him?"

"When do you think he'll be back?" inquired the stranger.  
 "Quite uncertain," replied Lowten, winking at Mr. Pickwick, as the stranger cast his eyes toward the ground.

"You don't think it would be of any use my waiting for him?" said the stranger, looking wistfully into the office.

"Oh no, I'm sure it wouldn't," replied the clerk, moving a little more into the centre of the door-way. "He's certain not to be back this week, and it's a chance whether he will be next; for when Perker once gets out of town, he's never in a hurry to come back again."

"Out of town!" said Mr. Pickwick; "dear me, how unfortunate!"

"Don't go away, Mr. Pickwick," said Lowten, "I've got a letter for you." The stranger seeming to hesitate, once more looked toward the ground, and the clerk winked slyly at Mr. Pickwick, as if to intimate that some exquisite piece of humor was going forward, though what it was Mr. Pickwick could not for the life of him divine.

"Step in, Mr. Pickwick," said Lowten. "Well, will you leave a message, Mr. Watty, or will you call again?"

"Ask him to be so kind as to leave out word what has been done in my business," said the man; "for God's sake don't neglect it, Mr. Lowten."

"No, no; I won't forget it," replied the clerk. "Walk in, Mr. Pickwick. Good morning, Mr. Watty; it's a fine day for walking, isn't it?" Seeing that the stranger still lingered, he beckoned Sam Weller to follow his master in, and shut the door in his face.

"There never was such a pestering bankrupt as that since the world began, I do believe!" said Lowten, throwing down his pen with the air of an injured man. "His affairs haven't been in Chancery quite four years yet, and I'm d—d if he don't come worrying here twice a week. Step this way, Mr. Pickwick. Perker is in, and he'll see you, I know. Devilish cold," he added, pettishly, "standing at that door, wasting one's time with such seedy vagabonds!" Having very vehemently stirred a particularly large fire with a particularly small poker, the clerk led the way to his principal's private room, and announced Mr. Pickwick.

"Ah, my dear sir," said little Mr. Perker, bustling up from his chair. "Well, my dear sir, and what's the news about your matter, eh? Any thing more about our friends in Freeman's Court? They've not been sleeping, I know that. Ah, they're very smart fellows; very smart, indeed."

As the little man concluded, he took an emphatic pinch of snuff, as a tribute to the smartness of Messrs. Dodson and Fogg.

"They are great scoundrels," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Ay, ay," said the little man; "that's a matter of opinion, you know, and we won't dispute about terms; because of course you can't be expected to view these subjects with a professional eye. Well, we've done every thing that's necessary. I have retained Sergeant Snubbin."

"Is he a good man?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Good man?" replied Perker; "bless your heart and soul, my dear sir, Sergeant Snubbin is at the very top of his profession. Gets treble the business of any man in court—engaged in every case. You needn't mention it abroad; but we say—we of the profession—that Sergeant Snubbin leads the court by the nose."

The little man took another pinch of snuff as he made this communication, and nodded mysteriously to Mr. Pickwick.

"They have subpoena'd my three friends," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Ah! of course they would," replied Perker. "Important witnesses; saw you in a delicate situation."

"But she fainted of her own accord," said Mr. Pickwick. "She threw herself into my arms."

"Very likely, my dear sir," replied Perker; "very likely, and very natural. Nothing more so, my dear sir, nothing. But who's to prove it?"

"They have subpoena'd my servant too," said Mr. Pickwick, quitting the other point; for there Mr. Perker's question had somewhat staggered him.

"Sam?" said Perker.

Mr. Pickwick replied in the affirmative.

"Of course, my dear sir; of course. I knew they would. I could have told *you* that, a month ago. You know, my dear sir, if you *will* take the management of your affairs into your own hands after intrusting them to your solicitor, you must also take the consequences." Here Mr. Perker drew



himself up with conscious dignity, and brushed some stray grains of snuff from his shirt frill.

"And what do they want him to prove?" asked Mr. Pickwick, after two or three minutes' silence.

"That you sent him up to the plaintiff's to make some offer of a compromise, I suppose," replied Perker. "It don't matter much, though; I don't think many counsel could get a great deal out of *him*."

"I don't think they could," said Mr. Pickwick; smiling, despite his vexation, at the idea of Sam's appearance as a witness. "What course do we pursue?"

"We have only one to adopt, my dear sir," replied Perker; "cross-examine the witnesses; trust to Snubbin's eloquence; throw dust in the eyes of the judge; throw ourselves on the jury."

"And suppose the verdict is against me?" said Mr. Pickwick.

Mr. Perker smiled, took a very long pinch of snuff, stirred the fire, shrugged his shoulders, and remained expressively silent.

"You mean that in that case I must pay the damages?" said Mr. Pickwick, who had watched this telegraphic answer with considerable sternness.

Perker gave the fire another very unnecessary poke, and said "I am afraid so."

"Then I beg to announce to you, my unalterable determination to pay no damages whatever," said Mr. Pickwick, most emphatically. "None, Perker. Not a pound, not a penny, of my money, shall find its way into the pockets of Dodson and Fogg. That is my deliberate and irrevocable determination." Mr. Pickwick gave a heavy blow on the table before him, in confirmation of the irrevocability of his intention.

"Very well, my dear sir, very well," said Perker. "You know best, of course."

"Of course," replied Mr. Pickwick hastily. "Where does Sergeant Snubbin live?"

"In Lincoln's Inn, Old Square," replied Perker.

"I should like to see him," said Mr. Pickwick.

"See Sergeant Snubbin, my dear sir!" rejoined Perker, in utter amazement. "Pooh, pooh, my dear sir, impossible. See Sergeant Snubbin! Bless you, my dear sir, such a thing was never heard of, without a consultation fee being

previously paid, and a consultation fixed. It couldn't be done, my dear sir; it couldn't be done."

Mr. Pickwick, however, had made up his mind not only that it could be done, but that it should be done; and the consequence was, that within ten minutes after he had received the assurance that the thing was impossible, he was conducted by his solicitor into the outer office of the great Sergeant Snubbin himself.

It was an uncarpeted room of tolerable dimensions, with a large writing-table drawn up near the fire; the baize top of which had long since lost all claim to its original hue of green, and had gradually grown gray with dust and age, except where all traces of its natural color were obliterated by ink-stains. Upon the table were numerous little bundles of papers tied with red tape; and behind it sat an elderly clerk, whose sleek appearance, and heavy gold watch-chain, presented imposing indications of the extensive and lucrative practice of Mr. Sergeant Snubbin.

"Is the Sergeant in his room, Mr. Mallard?" inquired Perker, offering his box with all imaginable courtesy.

"Yes, he is," was the reply, "but he's very busy. Look here; not an opinion given yet on any one of these cases; and an expedition fee paid with all of 'em." The clerk smiled as he said this, and inhaled the pinch of snuff with a zest which seemed to be compounded of a fondness for snuff and relish for fees.

"Something like practice that," said Perker.

"Yes," said the barrister's clerk, producing his own box, and offering it with the greatest cordiality; "and the best of it is, that as nobody alive except myself can read the Sergeant's writing, they are obliged to wait for the opinions, when he has given them, till I have copied 'em, ha, ha, ha!"

"Which makes good for we know who, besides the Sergeant, and draws a little more out of the clients, eh?" said Perker; "ha, ha, ha!" At this the Sergeant's clerk laughed again; not a noisy boisterous laugh, but a silent, internal chuckle, which Mr. Pickwick disliked to hear. When a man bleeds inwardly, it is a dangerous thing for himself; but when he laughs inwardly, it bodes no good to other people.

"You haven't made me out that little list of the fees that I'm in your debt, have you?" said Perker.

"No, I have not," replied the clerk.



"I wish you would," said Perker. "Let me have them, and I'll send you a check. But I suppose you're too busy pocketing the ready money, to think of the debtors, eh? ha, ha, ha!" This sally seemed to tickle the clerk amazingly, and he once more enjoyed a little quiet laugh to himself.

"But, Mr. Mallard, my dear friend," said Perker, suddenly recovering his gravity, and drawing the great man's great man into a corner by the lappel of his coat; "you must persuade the Sergeant to see me, and my client here!"

"Come, come," said the clerk, "that's not bad either. See the Sergeant! come, that's too absurd." Notwithstanding the absurdity of the proposal, however, the clerk allowed himself to be gently drawn beyond the hearing of Mr. Pickwick; and after a short conversation conducted in whispers, walked softly down a little dark passage, and disappeared into the legal luminary's sanctum: whence he shortly returned on tiptoe, and informed Mr. Perker and Mr. Pickwick that the Sergeant had been prevailed upon, in violation of all established rules and customs, to admit them at once.

Mr. Sergeant Snubbin was a lantern-faced, sallow-complexioned man, of about five-and-forty, or—as the novels say—he might be fifty. He had that dull-looking boiled eye which is often to be seen in the heads of people who have applied themselves during many years to a weary and laborious course of study; and which would have been sufficient, without the additional eye-glass which dangled from a broad black ribbon round his neck, to warn a stranger that he was very near-sighted. His hair was thin and weak, which was partly attributable to his having never devoted much time to its arrangement, and partly to his having worn for five-and-twenty years the forensic wig which hung on a block beside him. The marks of hair-powder on his coat-collar, and the ill-washed and worse tied white neckerchief round his throat, showed that he had not found leisure since he left the court to make any alteration in his dress: while the slovenly style of the remainder of his costume warranted the inference that his personal appearance would not have been very much improved if he had. Books of practice, heaps of papers, and opened letters, were scattered over the table, without any attempt at order or arrangement; the furniture of the room was old and rickety; the doors of the book-case were rotting in their hinges; the dust flew out from the carpet in little

clouds at every step; the blinds were yellow with age and dirt; the state of every thing in the room showed, with a clearness not to be mistaken, that Mr. Sergeant Snubbin was far too much occupied with his professional pursuits to take any great heed or regard of his personal comforts.

The Sergeant was writing when his clients entered; he bowed abstractedly when Mr. Pickwick was introduced by his solicitor; and then, motioning them to a seat, put his pen carefully in the inkstand, nursed his left leg, and waited to be spoken to.

"Mr. Pickwick is the defendant in Bardell and Pickwick, Sergeant Snubbin," said Perker.

"I am retained in that, am I?" said the Sergeant.

"You are, sir," replied Perker.

The Sergeant nodded his head, and waited for something else.

"Mr. Pickwick was anxious to call upon you, Sergeant Snubbin," said Perker, "to state to you, before you entered upon the case, that he denies there being any ground or pretense whatever for the action against him; and that unless he came into court with clean hands, and without the most conscientious conviction that he was right in resisting the plaintiff's demand, he would not be there at all. I believe I state your views correctly; do I not, my dear sir?" said the little man, turning to Mr. Pickwick.

"Quite so," replied that gentleman.

Mr. Sergeant Snubbin unfolded his glasses, raised them to his eyes; and, after looking at Mr. Pickwick for a few seconds with great curiosity, turned to Mr. Perker, and said, smiling slightly as he spoke:

"Has Mr. Pickwick a strong case?"

The attorney shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you propose calling witnesses?"

"No."

The smile on the Sergeant's countenance became more defined; he rocked his leg with increased violence; and, throwing himself back in his easy-chair, coughed dubiously.

These tokens of the Sergeant's presentiments on the subject, slight as they were, were not lost on Mr. Pickwick. He settled the spectacles, through which he had attentively regarded such demonstrations of the barrister's feelings as he had permitted himself to exhibit, more firmly on his nose;



and said with great energy, and in utter disregard of all Mr. Perker's admonitory winkings and frownings:

"My wishing to wait upon you for such a purpose as this, sir, appears, I have no doubt, to a gentleman who sees so much of these matters as you must necessarily do, a very extraordinary circumstance."

The Sergeant tried to look gravely at the fire, but the smile came back again.

"Gentlemen of your profession, sir," continued Mr. Pickwick, "see the worst side of human nature. All its disputes, all its ill-will and bad blood, rise up before you. You know from your experience of juries (I mean no disparagement to you, or them) how much depends upon *effect*: and you are apt to attribute to others a desire to use, for purposes of deception and self-interest, the very instruments, which you, in pure honesty and honor of purpose, and with a laudable desire to do your utmost for your client, know the temper and worth of so well, from constantly employing them yourselves. I really believe that to this circumstance may be attributed the vulgar but very general notion of your being, as a body, suspicious, distrustful, and overcautious. Conscientious as I am, sir, of the disadvantage of making such a declaration to you, under such circumstances, I have come here, because I wish you distinctly to understand, as my friend Mr. Perker has said, that I am innocent of the falsehood laid to my charge; and although I am very well aware of the inestimable value of your assistance, sir, I must beg to add, that unless you sincerely believe this, I would rather be deprived of the aid of your talents than have the advantage of them."

Long before the close of this address, which we are bound to say was of a very prosy character for Mr. Pickwick, the Sergeant had relapsed into a state of abstraction. After some minutes, however, during which he had re-assumed his pen, he appeared to be again aware of the presence of his clients; raising his head from the paper, he said, rather snappishly:

"Who is with me in this case?"

"Mr. Phunky, Sergeant Snubbin," replied the attorney.

"Phunky, Phunky," said the Sergeant, "I never heard the name before. He must be a very young man."

"Yes, he is a very young man," replied the attorney.

"He was only called the other day. Let me see—he has not been at the Bar eight years yet."

"Ah, I thought not," said the Sergeant, in that sort of pitying tone in which ordinary folks would speak of a very helpless little child. "Mr. Mallard, send round to Mr.—Mr.—"

"Phunky's—Holborn Court, Gray's Inn," interposed Perker. (Holborn Court, by-the bye, is South Square now.) "Mr. Phunky, and say I should be glad if he'd step here a moment."

Mr. Mallard departed to execute his commission; and Sergeant Snubbin relapsed into abstraction until Mr. Phunky himself was introduced.

Although an infant barrister, he was a full-grown man. He had a very nervous manner, and a painful hesitation in his speech; it did not appear to be a natural defect, but seemed rather the result of timidity, arising from the consciousness of being "kept down" by want of means, or interest, or connection, or impudence, as the case might be. He was over-awed by the Sergeant, and profoundly courteous to the attorney.

"I have not had the pleasure of seeing you before, Mr. Phunky," said Sergeant Snubbin, with haughty condescension.

Mr. Phunky bowed. He *had* had the pleasure of seeing the Sergeant, and of envying him too, with all a poor man's envy, for eight years and a quarter.

"You are with me in this case, I understand?" said the Sergeant.

If Mr. Phunky had been a rich man, he would have instantly sent for his clerk to remind him; if he had been a wise one, he would have applied his forefinger to his forehead, and endeavored to recollect, whether, in the multiplicity of his engagements he had undertaken this one, or not; but as he was neither rich nor wise (in this sense at all events) he turned red, and bowed.

"Have you read the papers, Mr. Phunky?" inquired the Sergeant.

Here again, Mr. Phunky should have professed to have forgotten all about the merits of the case; but as he had read such papers as had been laid before him in the course of the action, and had thought of nothing else, waking or sleeping, throughout the two months during which he had been retained as Mr. Sergeant Snubbin's junior, he turned a deeper red, and bowed again.



"This is Mr. Pickwick," said the Sergeant, waving his pen in the direction in which that gentleman was standing.

Mr. Phunky bowed to Mr. Pickwick with a reverence which a first client must ever awaken; and again inclined his head toward his leader.

"Perhaps you will take Mr. Pickwick away," said the Sergeant, "and—and—and—hear any thing Mr. Pickwick may wish to communicate. We shall have a consultation, of course." With this hint that he had been interrupted quite long enough, Mr. Sergeant Snubbin, who had been gradually growing more and more abstracted, applied his glass to his eyes for an instant, bowed slightly round, and was once more deeply immersed in the case before him; which arose out of an interminable lawsuit, originating in the act of an individual, deceased a century or so ago, who had stopped up a pathway leading from some place which nobody ever came from, to some other place which nobody ever went to.

Mr. Phunky would not hear of passing through any door until Mr. Pickwick and his solicitor had passed through before him, so it was some time before they got into the Square; and when they did reach it, they walked up and down, and held a long conference, the result of which was, that it was a very difficult matter to say how the verdict would go; that nobody could presume to calculate on the issue of an action; that it was very lucky they had prevented the other party from getting Sergeant Snubbin; and other topics of doubt and consolation, common in such a position of affairs.

Mr. Weller was then roused by his master from a sweet sleep of an hour's duration; and, bidding adieu to Lowten, they returned to the City.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

DESCRIBES, FAR MORE FULLY THAN THE COURT NEWSMAN EVER DID, A BACHELOR'S PARTY, GIVEN BY MR. BOB SAWYER AT HIS LODGINGS IN THE BOROUGH.

THERE is a repose about Lant Street, in the borough, which sheds a gentle melancholy upon the soul. There are always a good many houses to let in the street: it is a by-street too, and its dullness is soothing. A house in Lant Street would not come within the denomination of a first-rate residence, in the strict acceptation of the term; but it is a most desirable spot, nevertheless. If a man wished to abstract himself from the world—to remove himself from within the reach of temptation—to place himself beyond the possibility of any inducement to look out of the window—he should by all means go to Lant Street.

In this happy retreat are colonized a few clear-starchers, a sprinkling of journeymen book-binders, one or two prison agents for the Insolvent Court, several small housekeepers who are employed in the Docks, a handful of mantua-makers, and a seasoning of jobbing tailors. The majority of the inhabitants either direct their energies to the letting of furnished apartments, or devote themselves to the healthful and invigorating pursuit of mangling. The chief features in the still life of the street are green shutters, lodging-bills, brass door-plates, and bell-handles; the principal specimens of animated nature, the pot-boy, the muffin-youth, and the baked-potato man. The population is migratory, usually disappearing on the verge of quarter-day, and generally by night. His Majesty's revenues are seldom collected in this happy valley; the rents are dubious; and the water communication is very frequently cut off.

Mr. Bob Sawyer embellished one side of the fire, in his first-floor front, early on the evening for which he had invited Mr. Pickwick, and Mr. Ben Allen the other. The preparations for the reception of visitors appeared to be completed. The umbrellas in the passage had been heaped into the little corner outside the back-parlor door; the bonnet and shawl of the landlady's servant had been removed from the bannisters; there were not more than two pairs of patens on the street-door mat, and a kitchen candle, with a very long snuff, burned cheerfully on the ledge of the stair-

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