

bedsteads made of iron, on one of which lay stretched the shadow of a man, wan, pale, and ghastly. His breathing was hard and thick, and he moaned painfully as it came and went. At the bedside sat a short old man in a cobbler's apron, who, by the aid of a pair of horn spectacles, was reading from the Bible aloud. It was the fortunate legatee.

The sick man laid his hand upon his attendant's arm, and motioned him to stop. He closed the book, and laid it on the bed.

"Open the window," said the sick man.

He did so. The noise of carriages and carts, the rattle of wheels, the cries of men and boys, all the busy sounds of a mighty multitude instinct with life and occupation, blended into one deep murmur, floated into the room. Above the hoarse loud hum arose, from time to time, a boisterous laugh; or a scrap of some jingling song, shouted forth by one of the giddy crowd, would strike upon the ear for an instant, and then be lost amidst the roar of voices and the tramp of footsteps: the breaking of the billows of the restless sea of life, that rolled heavily on without. Melancholy sounds to a quiet listener at any time; how melancholy to the watcher by the bed of death!

"There is no air here," said the sick man, faintly. "The place pollutes it. It was fresh round about, when I walked there, years ago; but it grows hot and heavy, in passing these walls. I can not breathe it."

"We have breathed it together for a long time," said the old man. "Come, come."

There was a short silence, during which the two spectators approached the bed. The sick man drew a hand of his old fellow prisoner toward him, and pressing it affectionately between both his own, retained it in his grasp.

"I hope," he gasped after a while—so faintly that they bent their ears close over the bed to catch the half-formed sounds his pale lips gave vent to—"I hope my merciful Judge will bear in mind my heavy punishment on earth. Twenty years, my friend, twenty years in this hideous grave! My heart broke when my child died, and I could not even kiss him in his little coffin. My loneliness since then, in all this noise and riot, has been very dreadful. May God forgive me! He has seen my solitary, lingering death."

He folded his hands, and murmuring something more they

could not hear, fell into a sleep—only a sleep at first, for they saw him smile.

They whispered together for a little time, and the turnkey, stooping over the pillow, drew hastily back. "He has got his discharge, by G—!" said the man.

He had. But he had grown so like death in life, that they knew not when he died.

#### CHAPTER XLV.

DESCRIPTIVE OF AN AFFECTING INTERVIEW BETWEEN MR. SAMUEL WELLER AND A FAMILY PARTY. MR. PICKWICK MAKES A TOUR OF THE DIMINUTIVE WORLD HE INHABITS, AND RESOLVES TO MIX WITH IT IN FUTURE AS LITTLE AS POSSIBLE.

A FEW mornings after his incarceration, Mr. Samuel Weller, having arranged his master's room with all possible care, and seen him comfortably seated over his books and papers, withdrew to employ himself for an hour or two to come as he best could. It was a fine morning, and it occurred to Sam that a pint of porter in the open air would lighten his next quarter of an hour or so, as well as any little amusement in which he could indulge.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he betook himself to the tap. Having purchased the beer, and obtained, moreover, the day-but-one-before-yesterday's paper, he repaired to the skittle-ground, and seating himself on a bench, proceeded to enjoy himself in a very sedate and methodical manner.

First of all, he took a refreshing draught of the beer, and then he looked up at a window, and bestowed a Platonic wink on a young lady who was peeling potatoes thereat. Then he opened the paper, and folded it so as to get the police reports outward; and this being a vexatious and difficult thing to do when there is any wind stirring, he took another draught of beer when he had accomplished it. Then he read two lines of the paper, and stopped short, to look at a couple of men who were finishing a game at rackets, which being concluded, he cried out "very good" in an approving manner, and looked round upon the spectators, to ascertain whether their sentiments coincided with his own. This involved the necessity of looking up at the windows also;

and as the young lady was still there, it was an act of common politeness to wink again, and to drink to her good health in dumb show in another draught of the beer, which Sam did; and having frowned hideously upon a small boy who had noted this latter proceeding with open eyes, he threw one leg over the other, and, holding the newspaper in both hands, began to read in real earnest.

He had hardly composed himself into the needful state of abstraction, when he thought he heard his own name proclaimed in some distant passage. Nor was he mistaken, for it quickly passed from mouth to mouth, and in a few seconds the air teemed with shouts of "Weller?"

"Here!" roared Sam, in a stentorian voice. "Wot's the matter? Who wants him? Has an express come to say that his country house is afire?"

"Somebody wants you in the hall," said a man who was standing by.

"Just mind that 'ere paper and the pot, old feller, will you?" said Sam. "I'm a-comin'. Blessed, if they was a-callin' me to the bar, they couldn't make more noise about it!"

Accompanying these words with a gentle rap on the head of the young gentleman before noticed, who, unconscious of his close vicinity to the person in request, was screaming "Weller!" with all his might, Sam hastened across the ground, and ran up the steps into the hall. Here the first object that met his eyes was his beloved father sitting on a bottom stair, with his hat in his hand, shouting out "Weller!" in his very loudest tone, at half-minute intervals.

"Wot are you a-roarin' at!" said Sam, impetuously, when the old gentleman had discharged himself of another shout; "makin' yourself so precious hot that you looks like a aggravated glass-blower. Wot's the matter?"

"Aha!" replied the old gentleman, "I began to be afeerd that you'd gone for a walk round the Regency Park, Sammy."

"Come," said Sam, "none o' them taunts agin the wictim o' avarice, and come off that 'ere step. Wot are you a-sittin' down there for? I don't live there."

"I've got such a game for you, Sammy," said the elder Mr. Weller, rising.

"Stop a minit," said Sam, "you're all vite behind."

"That's right, Sammy, rub it off," said Mr. Weller, as his

son dusted him. "It might look personal here, if a man walked about with whitevash on his clothes, eh, Sammy?"

As Mr. Weller exhibited in this place unequivocal symptoms of an approaching fit of chuckling, Sam interposed to stop it.

"Keep quiet, do," said Sam; "there never vos such a old picter-card born. Wot are you bustin' vith now?"

"Sammy," said Mr. Weller, wiping his forehead, "I'm afeerd that vun o' these days I shall laugh myself into a appleplexy, my boy."

"Vell, then, wot do you do it for?" said Sam. "Now, wot have you got to say?"

"Who do you think's come here with me, Samivel?" said Mr. Weller, drawing back a pace or two, pursing up his mouth, and extending his eyebrows.

"Pell?" said Sam.

Mr. Weller shook his head, and his red cheek expanded with the laughter that was endeavoring to find a vent.

"Mottle-faced man, p'raps?" suggested Sam.

Again Mr. Weller shook his head.

"Who, then?" asked Sam,

"Your mother-in-law," said Mr. Weller; and it was lucky he did say it, or his cheeks must inevitably have cracked, from their most unnatural distention.

"Your mother-in-law, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, "and the red-nosed man, my boy; and the red-nosed man. Ho! ho! ho!"

With this Mr. Weller launched into convulsions of laughter, while Sam regarded him with a broad grin gradually overspreading his whole countenance.

"They've come to have a little serious talk with you, Samivel," said Mr. Weller, wiping his eyes. "Don't let out nothin' about the unnat'ral creditor, Sammy."

"Wot, don't they know who it is?" inquired Sam.

"Not a bit on it," replied his father.

"Vere are they?" said Sam, reciprocating all the old gentleman's grins.

"In the snuggery," rejoined Mr. Weller. "Catch the red-nosed man agoin' any vere but vere the liquors is; not he, Samivel, not he. Ve'd a verry pleasant ride along the road from the Markis this mornin', Sammy," said Mr. Weller, when he felt himself equal to the task of speaking in an articulate manner. "I drove the old piebald, in that ere

little shay-cart as belonged to your mother-in-law's first wenter, into vich a harm-cheer was lifted for the shepherd; and I'm blest," said Mr. Weller, with a look of deep scorn, "I'm blest if they didn't bring a portable flight o' steps out into the road a front o' our door, for him to get up by."

"You don't mean that?" said Sam.

"I *do* mean that, Sammy," replied his father, "and I wish you could ha' seen how tight he held on by the sides wen he did get up, as if he wos afeerd o' being precipitayted down full six foot, and dashed into a million o' hatoms. He tumbled in at last, however, and avay ve vent; and I rayther think—I say I rayther think, Samivel—that he found hissself a little jolted wen ve turned the corners."

"Wot, I s'pose you happened to drive up agin a post or two?" said Sam.

"I'm afeerd," replied Mr. Weller, in a rapture of winks, "I'm afeerd I took vun or two on 'em, Sammy; he wos a-flyin' out o' the harm-cheer all the way."

Here the old gentleman shook his head from side to side, and was seized with a hoarse internal rumbling, accompanied with a violent swelling of the countenance, and a sudden increase in the breadth of all his features; symptoms which alarmed his son not a little.

"Don't be frightened, Sammy, don't be frightened," said the old gentleman, when, by dint of much struggling, and various convulsive stamps upon the ground, he had recovered his voice. "It's only a kind o' quiet laugh as I'm a-tryin' to come, Sammy."

"Well, if that's wot it is," said Sam, "you'd better not try to come it again. You'll find it rayther a dangerous inwention."

"Don't you like it, Sammy?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Not at all," replied Sam.

"Well," said Mr. Weller, with the tears still running down his cheeks, "it 'ud ha' been a wery great accommodation to me if I could ha' done it, and 'ud ha' saved a good many vords atween your mother-in-law and me, sometimes; but I am afeerd you're right, Sammy: it's too much in the apple-plexy line—a deal too much, Samivel."

This conversation brought them to the door of the snugery, into which Sam—pausing for an instant to look over his shoulder, and cast a sly leer at his respected progenitor, who was still giggling behind—at once led the way.

"Mother-in-law," said Sam, politely saluting the lady, "wery much obliged to you for this here wisit. Shepherd, how air you?"

"Oh, Samuel!" said Mrs. Weller, "this is dreadful."

"Not a bit on it, mum," replied Sam. "Is it, shepherd?"

Mr. Stiggins raised his hands, and turned up his eyes, till the whites—or rather the yellows—were alone visible; but made no reply in words.

"Is this here gen'I'm'n troubled with any painful complaint?" said Sam, looking to his mother-in-law for explanation.

"The good man is grieved to see you here, Samuel," replied Mrs. Weller.

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Sam. "I was afeerd, from his manner, that he might ha' forgotten to take pepper vith that 'ere last cowcumber he eat. Set down, sir; ve make no extra charge for the settin' down, as the king remarked wen he blowed up his ministers."

"Young man," said Mr. Stiggins, ostentatiously, "I fear you are not softened by imprisonment."

"Beg your pardon, sir," replied Sam; "wot wos you graciously pleased to hobserve?"

"I apprehend, young man, that your nature is no softer for this chastisement," said Mr. Stiggins, in a loud voice.

"Sir," replied Sam, "you're wery kind to say so. I hope my natur is *not* a soft vun, sir. Wery much obliged to you for your good opinion, sir."

At this point of the conversation, a sound, indecorously approaching to a laugh, was heard to proceed from the chair in which the elder Mr. Weller was seated; upon which Mrs. Weller, on a hasty consideration of all the circumstances of the case, considered it her bounden duty to become gradually hysterical.

"Weller," said Mrs. W. (the old gentleman was seated in a corner); "Weller! Come forth."

"Wery much obleeged to you, my dear," replied Mr. Weller; "but I'm quite comfortable vere I am."

Upon this, Mrs. Weller burst into tears.

"Wot's gone wrong, mum?" said Sam.

"Oh, Samuel!" replied Mrs. Weller, "your father makes me wretched. Will nothing do him good?"

"Do you hear this here?" said Sam. "Lady wants to know vether nothin' 'ull do you good."

"Wery much indebted to Mrs. Weller for her po-lite inquiries, Sammy," replied the old gentleman. "I think a pipe vould benefit me a good deal. Could I be accommodated, Sammy?"

Here Mrs. Weller let fall some more tears, and Mr. Stiggins groaned.

"Halloo! Here's this unfort'nate gen'l'm'n took ill again," said Sam, looking round. "Where do you feel it now, sir?"

"In the same place, young man," rejoined Mr. Stiggins; "in the same place."

"Where may that be, sir?" inquired Sam, with great outward simplicity.

"In the buzzim, young man," replied Mr. Stiggins, placing his umbrella on his waistcoat.

At this affecting reply, Mrs. Weller, being wholly unable to suppress her feelings, sobbed aloud, and stated her conviction that the red-nosed man was a saint; whereupon Mr. Weller, senior, ventured to suggest, in an undertone, that he must be the representative of the united parishes of Saint Simon Without, and Saint Walker Within.

"I'm afeerd, mum," said Sam, that this here gen'l'm'n, with the twist in his countenance, feels rayther thirsty, with the melancholy spectacle afore him. Is it the case, mum?"

The worthy lady looked at Mr. Stiggins for a reply; that gentleman, with many rollings of the eye, clenched his throat with his right hand, and mimicked the act of swallowing, to intimate that he was athirst.

"I am afraid, Samuel, that his feelings have made him so, indeed," said Mrs. Weller, mournfully.

"Wot's your usual tap, sir?" replied Sam.

"Oh, my dear young friend," replied Mr. Stiggins, "all taps is vanities!"

"Too true, too true, indeed," said Mrs. Weller, murmuring a groan, and shaking her head assentingly.

"Well," said Sam, "I des-say they may be, sir; but which is your partickler wanity. Vich wanity do you like the flavor on, best, sir?"

"Oh, my dear young friend," replied Mr. Stiggins, "I despise them all. If," said Mr. Stiggins, "if there is any one of them less odious than another, it is the liquor called rum. Warm, my dear young friend, with three lumps of sugar to the tumbler."

"Wery sorry to say, sir," said Sam, "that they don't allow that particular wanity to be sold in this here establishment."

"Oh, the hardness of heart of these inveterate men!" ejaculated Mr. Stiggins. "Oh, the accursed cruelty of these inhuman persecutors!"

With these words, Mr. Stiggins again cast up his eyes, and rapped his breast with his umbrella; and it is but justice to the reverend gentleman to say that his indignation appeared very real and unfeigned indeed.

After Mrs. Weller and the red-nosed gentleman had commented on this inhuman usage in a very forcible manner, and had vented a number of holy and pious execrations against its authors, the latter recommended a bottle of port-wine, warmed with a little water, spice, and sugar, as being grateful to the stomach, and savoring less of vanity than many other compounds. It was accordingly ordered to be prepared. Pending its preparation, the red-nosed man and Mrs. Weller looked at the elder W. and groaned.

"Well, Sammy," said that gentleman, "I hope you'll find your spirits rose by this here lively wisit. Wery cheerful and improvin' conversation, ain't it, Sammy?"

"You're a reprobate," replied Sam; "and I desire you won't address no more o' them ungraceful remarks to me."

So far from being edified by this very proper reply, the elder Mr. Weller at once relapsed into a broad grin; and this inexorable conduct causing the lady and Mr. Stiggins to close their eyes, and rock themselves to and fro on their chairs in a troubled manner, he furthermore indulged in several acts of pantomime, indicative of a desire to pummel and wring the nose of the aforesaid Stiggins, the performance of which appeared to afford him great mental relief. The old gentleman very narrowly escaped detection in one instance; for Mr. Stiggins happening to give a start on the arrival of the negus, brought his head in smart contact with the clenched fist with which Mr. Weller had been describing imaginary fire-works in the air, within two inches of his ear, for some minutes.

"Wot are you a-reachin' out your hand for the tumbler in that 'ere sawage way for?" said Sam, with great promptitude. "Don't you see you've hit the gen'l'm'n?"

"I didn't go to do it, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, in some degree abashed by the very unexpected occurrence of the incident.

"Try an in'ard application, sir," said Sam, as the red-nosed