which the day boarders hung their bonnets and sandwich-bags, he at once stepped into it, of his own accord, and was securely locked in. This revived the others; and Miss Tomkins having been brought to, and brought down, the conference began.

"What did you do in my garden, Man?" said Miss Tomkins, in a faint voice.

"I came to warn you, that one of your young ladies was going to elope to-night," replied Mr. Pickwick, from the interior of the closet.

"Elope!" exclaimed Miss Tomkins, the three teachers, the thirty boarders, and the five servants. "Who with?"

"Your friend, Mr. Charles Fitz-Marshall."

"*My* friend! I don't know any such person."

"Well; Mr. Jingle then."

"I never heard the name in my life."

"Then, I have been deceived, and deluded," said Mr. Pickwick. "I have been the victim of a conspiracy—a foul and base conspiracy. Send to the Angel, my dear ma'am, if you don't believe me. Send to the Angel for Mr. Pickwick's man-servant, I implore you, ma'am."

"He must be respectable—he keeps a man-servant," said Miss Tompkins to the writing and ciphering governess.

"It's my opinion, Miss Tomkins," said the writing and ciphering governess, "that his man-servant keeps him. *I* think he's a madman, Miss Tomkins, and the other's his keeper."

"I think you are very right, Miss Gwynn," responded Miss Tomkins. "Let two of the servants repair to the Angel, and let the others remain here, to protect us."

So two of the servants were dispatched to the Angel in search of Mr. Samuel Weller: and the remaining three stopped behind to protect Miss Tomkins, and the three teachers, and the thirty boarders. And Mr. Pickwick sat down in the closet, beneath a grove of sandwich-bags, and awaited the return of the messengers, with all the philosophy and fortitude he could summon to his aid.

An hour and a half elapsed before they came back, and when they did come, Mr. Pickwick recognized, in addition to the voice of Mr. Samuel Weller, two other voices, the tones of which struck familiarly on his ear; but whose they were, he could not for the life of him call to mind.

A very brief conversation ensued. The door was unlocked. Mr. Pickwick stepped out of the closet, and found himself in the presence of the whole establishment of Westgate House, Mr. Samuel Weller, and —old Wardle, and his destined son-in-law, Mr. Trundle!

"My dear friend," said Mr. Pickwick, running forward and grasping Wardle's hand, "my dear friend, pray, for Heaven's sake, explain to this lady the unfortunate and dreadful situation in which I am placed. You must have heard it from my servant; say, at all events, my dear fellow, that I am neither a robber nor a madman."

"I have said so, my dear friend. I have said so already," replied Mr. Wardle, shaking the right hand of his friend, while Mr. Trundle shook the left.

"And whoever says, or has said, he is," interposed Mr. Weller, stepping forward, "says that which is not the truth, but so far from it, on the contrary, quite the rewerse. And if there's any number o' men on these here premises as has said so, I shall be wery happy to give 'em all a wery convincing proof o' their being mistaken, in this here wery room, if these wery respectable ladies 'll have the goodness to retire, and order 'em up, one at a time." Having delivered this defiance with great volubility, Mr. Weller struck his open palm emphatically with his clenched fist, and winked pleasantly on Miss Tomkins: the intensity of whose horror at his supposing it within the bounds of possibility that there could be any men on the premises of Westgate House Establishment for Young Ladies, it is impossible to describe.

Mr. Pickwick's explanation having already been partially made, was soon concluded. But neither in the course of his walk home with his friends, nor afterward when seated before a blazing fire at the supper he so much needed, could a single observation be drawn from him. He seemed bewildered and amazed. Once, and only once, he turned round to Mr Wardle, and said,

"How did you come here?"

"Trundle and I came down here, for some good shooting on the first," replied Wardle. "We arrived to-night, and were astonished to hear from your servant that you were here too. But I am glad you are," said the old fellow, slapping him on the back. "I am glad you are. We shall have a jovial party on the first, and we'll give Winkle another chance—eh, old boy?"

Mr. Pickwick made no reply; he did not even ask after his friends at Dingley Dell, and shortly afterward retired for the night, desiring Sam to fetch his candle when he rung.

The bell did ring in due course, and Mr. Weller presented himself.

"Sam," said Mr. Pickwick, looking out from under the bed-clothes.

"Sir," said Mr. Weller.

Mr. Pickwick paused, and Mr. Weller snuffed the candle.

"Sam," said Mr. Pickwick again, as if with a desperate effort.

"Sir," said Mr. Weller, once more.

"Where is that Trotter?"

"Job, sir?"

"Yes."

"Gone, sir."

"With his master, I suppose?"

"Friend or master, or whatever he is, he's gone with him," replied Mr. Weller. "There's a pair on 'em, sir."

"Jingle suspected my design, and set that fellow on you, with this story, I suppose?" said Mr. Pickwick, half choking.

"Just that, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"It was all false, of course?"

"All, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "Reg'lar do, sir; artful dodge."

"I don't think he'll escape us quite so easily the next time, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"I don't think he will, sir."

"Whenever I meet that Jingle again, wherever it is," said Mr. Pickwick, raising himself in bed, and indenting his pillow with a tremendous blow, "I'll inflict personal chastisement on him, in addition to the exposure he so richly merits. I will, or my name is not Pickwick."

"And wenever I catches hold o' that there mel-an-cholly chap with the black hair," said Sam, "if I don't bring some real water into his eyes, for once in a way, my name an't Weller. Good-night, sir!"

CHAPTER XVII.

SHOWING THAT AN ATTACK OF RHEUMATISM, IN SOME CASES, ACTS AS A QUICKENER TO INVENTIVE GENIUS.

THE constitution of Mr. Pickwick, though able to sustain a very considerable amount of exertion and fatigue, was not proof against such a combination of attacks as he had undergone on the memorable night recorded in the last chapter. The process of being washed in the night air, and rough-dried in a closet, is as dangerous as it is peculiar. Mr. Pickwick was laid up with an attack of rheumatism.

But although the bodily powers of the great man were thus impaired, his mental energies retained their pristine vigor. His spirits were elastic; his good-humor was restored. Even the vexation consequent upon his recent adventure had vanished from his mind; and he could join in the hearty laughter which any allusion to it excited in Mr. Wardle, without anger and without embarrassment. Nay, more. During the two days Mr. Pickwick was confined to his bed, Sam was his constant attendant. On the first, he endeavored to amuse his master by anecdote and conversation; on the second, Mr. Pickwick demanded his writing-desk, and pen and ink, and was deeply engaged during the whole day. On the third, being able to sit up in his bed-chamber, he dispatched his valet, with a message to Mr. Wardle and Mr. Trundle, intimating that if they would take their wine there that evening, they would greatly oblige him. The invitation was most willingly accepted; and when they were seated over their wine, Mr. Pickwick with sundry blushes, produced the following little tale, as having been "edited" by himself, during his recent indisposition, from his notes of Mr. Weller's unsophisticated recital.

THE PARISH CLERK.

A TALE OF TRUE LOVE.

"Once upon a time in a very small country town, at a considerable distance from London, there lived a little man named Nathaniel Pipkin, who was the parish clerk of the little town, and lived in a little house in the little High Street, within ten minutes' walk of the little church; and who was to be found every day from nine till four, teaching a little learning to the little boys. Nathaniel Pipkin was a harmless, inoffensive, good-natured being, with a turned-up nose, and rather turned-in legs; a cast in his eye, and a halt in his gait; and he divided his time between the church and his school, verily believing that there existed not, on the face of the earth, so clever a man as the curate, so imposing an appartment as the vestry-room, or so well-ordered a seminary as his own. Once, and only once, in his life, Nathaniel Pipkin had seen a bishop—a real bishop, with his arms in lawn sleeves, and his head in a wig. He had seen him walk, and heard him talk, at a confirmation, on which momentous occasion Nathaniel Pipkin was so overcome with reverence and awe, when the aforesaid bishop laid his hand on his head, that he fainted right clean away, and was borne out of church in the arms of the beadle.

"This was a great event, a tremendous era, in Nathaniel Pipkin's life, and it was the only one that had ever occurred to ruffle the smooth current of his quiet existence, when happening one fine afternoon, in a fit of mental abstraction, to raise his eyes from the slate on which he was devising some tremendous problem in compound addition for an offending urchin to solve, they suddenly rested on the blooming countenance of Maria Lobbs, the only daughter of old Lobbs, the great saddler over the way. Now, the eyes of Mr. Pipkin had rested on the pretty face of Maria Lobbs many a time and oft before, at church, and elsewhere; but the eyes of Maria Lobbs had never looked so bright, the cheeks of Maria Lobbs had never looked so ruddy, as upon this particular occasion. No wonder then, that Nathaniel Pipkin was unable to take his eyes from the countenance of Miss Lobbs; no wonder that Miss Lobbs, finding herself stared at by a young man, withdrew her head from the window out of which she had been peeping, and shut the casement and pulled down the blind; no wonder that Nathaniel Pipkin, immediately thereafter, fell upon the young urchin who had previously offended, and cuffed and knocked him about, to his heart's content. All this was very natural, and there's nothing at all to wonder at about it.

"It *is* matter of wonder, though, that any one of Mr. Nathaniel Pipkin's retiring disposition, nervous temperament, and most particularly diminutive income, should, from this day forth, have dared to aspire to the hand and heart of the only daughter of the fiery old Lobbs—of old Lobbs the great saddler, who could have bought up the whole village at one stroke of his pen, and never felt the outlay—old Lobbs, who was well known to have heaps of money, invested in the bank at the nearest market-town—old Lobbs, who was reported to have countless and inexhaustible treasures, hoarded up in the little iron safe with the big key-hole, over the chimney-piece in the back parlor—old Lobbs, who it was well known, on festive occasions garnished his board with a real silver tea-pot, cream ewer, and sugar-basin, which he was wont, in the pride of his heart, to boast should be his daughter's property when she found a man to her mind. I repeat it, to be matter of profound astonishment and intense wonder, that Nathaniel Pipkin should have had the temerity to cast his eyes in this direction. But love is blind: and Nathaniel had a cast in his eye: and perhaps these two circumstances, taken together, prevented his seeing the matter in its proper light.

"Now, if old Lobbs had entertained the most remote or distant idea of the state of the affections of Nathaniel Pipkin, he would just have razed the school-room to the ground, or exterminated its master from the surface of the earth, or committed some

other outrage and atrocity of an equally ferocious and violent description; for he was a terrible old fellow, was Lobbs, when his pride was injured, or his blood was up. Swear! Such trains of oaths would come rolling and pealing over the way, sometimes, when he was denouncing the idleness of the bony apprentice with the thin legs, that Nathaniel Pipkin would shake in his shoes with horror, and the hair of the pupils' heads would stand on end with fright.

"Well! Day after day, when school was over, and the pupils gone, did Nathaniel Pipkin sit himself down at the front window, and while he feigned to be reading a book, throw sidelong glances over the way in search of the bright eyes of Maria Lobbs; and he hadn't sat there many days, before the bright eyes appeared at an upper window, apparently deeply engaged in reading too. This was delightful, and gladdening to the heart of Nathaniel Pipkin. It was something to sit there for hours together, and look upon that pretty face when the eyes were cast down; but when Maria Lobbs began to raise her eyes from her book, and dart their rays in the direction of Nathaniel Pipkin, his delight and admiration were perfectly boundless. At last, one day when he knew old Lobbs was out, Nathaniel Pipkin had the temerity to kiss his hand to Maria Lobbs; and Maria Lobbs, instead of shutting the window, and pulling down the blind, kissed *hers* to him, and smiled. Upon which, Nathaniel Pipkin determined that, come what might, he would develop the state of his feelings, without further delay.

"A prettier foot, a gayer heart, a more dimpled face, or a smarter form, never bounded so lightly over the earth they graced, as did those of Maria Lobbs, the old saddler's daughter. There was a roguish twinkle in her sparkling eyes, that would have made its way to far less susceptible bosoms than that of Nathaniel Pipkin; and there was such a joyous sound in her merry laugh, that the sternest misanthrope must have smiled to hear it. Even old Lobbs himself, in the very height of his ferocity, couldn't resist the coaxing of his pretty daughter; and when she, and her cousin Kate—an arch, impudent-looking, bewitching little person—made a dead-set upon the old man together, as, to say the truth, they very often did, he could have refused them nothing, even had they asked for a portion of the countless and inexhaustible treasures, which were hidden from the light, in the iron safe.

"Nathaniel Pipkin's heart beat high within him, when he saw this enticing little couple some hundred yards before him one summer's evening, in the very field in which he had many a time strolled about till night-time, and pondered on the beauty of Maria Lobbs. But though he had often thought then, how briskly he would walk up to Maria Lobbs and tell her of his passion if he could only meet her, he felt, now that she was unexpectedly before him, all the blood in his body mounting to his face, manifestly to the great detriment of his legs, which, deprived of their usual portion, trembled beneath him. When they stopped to gather a hedge-flower, or listen to a bird, Nathaniel Pipkin stopped too, and pretended to be absorbed in meditation, as indeed he really was; for he was thinking what on earth he should ever do, when they turned back, as they inevitably must in time, and meet him face to face. But though he was afraid to make up to them, he couldn't bear to lose sight of them; so when they walked faster, he walked faster, when they lingered he lingered, and when they stopped he stopped; and so they might have gone on, until the darkness prevented them, if Kate had not looked slyly back, and encouragingly beckoned Nathaniel to advance. There was something in Kate's manner that was not to be resisted, and so Nathaniel Pipkin complied with the invitation; and after a great deal of blushing on his part, and immoderate laughter on that of the wicked little cousin, Nathaniel Pipkin went down on his knees on the dewy grass, and declared his resolution to remain there forever, unless he were permitted to rise the accepted lover of Maria Lobbs. Upon this, the merry laughter of Maria Lobbs rang through the calm evening air—without seeming to disturb it, though; it had such a pleasant sound—and the wicked little cousin laughed more immoderately than before, and Nathaniel Pipkin blushed deeper than ever. At length, Maria Lobbs being more strenuously urged by the love-worn little man, turned away her head, and whispered her cousin to say, or at all events Kate *did* say, that she felt much honored by Mr. Pipkin's addresses; that her hand and heart were at her father's disposal; but that nobody could be insensible to Mr. Pipkin's merits. As all this was said with much gravity, and as Nathaniel Pipkin walked home with Maria Lobbs, and struggled for a kiss at parting, he went to bed a happy man, and dreamed all night long, of softening old Lobbs, opening the strong box, and marrying Maria.

"The next day, Nathaniel Pipkin saw old Lobbs go out upon his old gray pony, and after a great many signs at the window from the wicked little cousin, the object and meaning of which he could by no means understand, the bony apprentice with the thin legs came over to say that his master wasn't coming home all night, and that the ladies expected Mr. Pipkin to tea at six o'clock precisely. How the lessons were got through that day, neither Nathaniel Pipkin nor his pupils knew any more than you do; but they were got through somehow, and, after the boys had gone, Nathaniel Pipkin took till full six o'clock to dress himself to his satisfaction. Not that it took long to select the garments he should wear, inasmuch as he had no choice about the matter; but the putting of them on to the best advantage, and the touching of them up previously, was a task of no inconsiderable difficulty or importance.

"There was a very snug little party, consisting of Maria Lobbs and her cousin Kate, and three or four romping, good-humored, rosy-cheeked girls. Nathaniel Pipkin had ocular demonstration of the fact, that the rumors of old Lobbs's treasures were not exaggerated. There were the real solid silver tea-pot, cream-ewer, and sugar-basin, on the table, and real silver spoons to stir the tea with, and real china cups to drink it out of, and plates of the same, to hold the cakes and toast in. The only eye-sore in the whole place, was another cousin of Maria Lobbs's, and a brother of Kate, whom Maria Lobbs called 'Henry,' and who seemed to keep Maria Lobbs all to himself, up in one corner of the table. It's a delightful thing to see affection in families, but it

may be carried rather too far, and Nathaniel Pipkin could not help thinking that Maria Lobbs must be very particularly fond of her relations, if she paid as much attention to all of them as to this individual cousin. After tea, too, when the wicked little cousin proposed a game at blind-man's-buff, it somehow or other happened that Nathaniel Pipkin was nearly always blind, and whenever he laid his hand upon the male cousin, he was sure to find that Maria Lobbs was not far off. And though the wicked little cousin and the other girls pinched him, and pulled his hair, and pushed chairs in his way, and all sorts of things, Maria Lobbs never seemed to come near him at all; and once—once—Nathaniel Pipkin could have sworn he heard the sound of a kiss, followed by a faint remonstrance from Maria Lobbs, and a half-suppressed laugh from her female friends. All this was odd—very odd—and there is no saying what Nathaniel Pipkin might or might not have done, in consequence, if his thoughts had not been suddenly directed into a new channel.

"The circumstances which directed his thoughts into a new channel was a loud knocking at the street door, and the person who made this loud knocking at the street door was no other than old Lobbs himself, who had unexpectedly returned, and was hammering away, like a coffin-maker: for he wanted his supper. The alarming intelligence was no sooner communicated by the bony apprentice with the thin legs, than the girls tripped up stairs to Maria Lobbs's bedroom, and the male cousin and Nathaniel Pipkin were thrust into a couple of closets in the sitting-room, for want of any better places of concealment; and when Maria Lobbs and the wicked little cousin had stowed them away, and put the room to rights, they opened the street door to old Lobbs, who had never left off knocking since he first began.

"Now it did unfortunately happen that old Lobbs being very hungry was monstrous cross. Nathaniel Pipkin could hear him growling away like an old mastiff with a sore throat; and whenever the unfortunate apprentice with the thin legs came into the room, so surely did old Lobbs commence swearing at him in a most Saracenic and ferocious manner, though apparently with no other end or object than that of easing his bosom by the discharge of a few superfluous oaths. At length some supper, which had been warming up, was placed on the table, and then old Lobbs fell to, in regular style; and having made clear work of it in no time, kissed his daughter, and demanded his pipe.

"Nature had placed Nathaniel Pipkin's knees in very close juxtaposition, but when he heard old Lobbs demand his pipe, they knocked together, as if they were going to reduce each other to powder; for, depending from a couple of hooks, in the very closet in which he stood, was a large brown-stemmed, silver-bowled pipe, which pipe he himself had seen in the mouth of old Lobbs, regularly every afternoon and evening, for the last five years. The two girls went down stairs for the pipe, and up stairs for the pipe, and everywhere but where they knew the pipe was, and old Lobbs stormed away meanwhile, in the most wonderful manner. At last he thought of the closet, and walked up to it. It was of no use a little man like Nathaniel Pipkin pulling the door inward, when a great strong fellow like old Lobbs was pulling it outward. Old Lobbs gave it one tug, and open it flew, disclosing Nathaniel Pipkin standing bolt upright inside, and shaking with apprehension from head to foot. Bless us! what an appalling look old Lobbs gave him, as he dragged him out by the collar, and held him at arms-length.

"'Why, what the devil do you want here?' said old Lobbs, in a fearful voice.

"Nathaniel Pipkin could make no reply, so old Lobbs shook him backward and forward, for two or three minutes, by way of arranging his ideas for him.

"'What do you want here?" roared Lobbs; 'I suppose *you* have come after my daughter, now?'

"Old Lobbs merely said this as a sneer: for he did not believe that mortal presumption could have carried Nathaniel Pipkin so far. What was his indignation, when that poor man replied:

"'Yes, I did, Mr. Lobbs. I did come after your daughter. I love her, Mr. Lobbs.'

"'Why, you sniveling, wry-faced, puny villain,' gasped old Lobbs, paralyzed by the atrocious confession; 'what do you mean by that? Say this to my face! Damme, I'll throttle you!'

"It is by no means improbable that old Lobbs would have carried this threat into execution, in the excess of his rage, if his arm had not been stayed by a very unexpected apparition, to wit, the male cousin, who, stepping out of his closet, and walking up to old Lobbs, said:

"'I can not allow this harmless person, sir, who has been asked here, in some girlish frolic, to take upon himself, in a very noble manner, the fault (if fault it is) which I am guilty of, and am ready to avow. *I* love your daughter, sir; and *I* am here for the purpose of meeting her.'

"Old Lobbs opened his eyes very wide at this, but not wider than Nathaniel Pipkin.

"'You did?' said Lobbs: at last finding breath to speak.

"'I did.'

"'And I forbade you this house, long ago.'

"'You did, or I should not have been here, clandestinely, to-night.'

"I am sorry to record it, of old Lobbs, but I think he would have struck the cousin, if his pretty daughter, with her bright eyes swimming in tears, had not clung to his arm.

"'Don't stop him, Maria,' said the young man: 'if he has the will to strike me, let him. I would not hurt a hair of his gray head, for the riches of the world.'

"The old man cast down his eyes at this reproof, and they met those of his daughter. I have hinted once or twice before, that they were very bright eyes, and, though they were tearful now, their influence was by no means lessened. Old Lobbs turned his head away, as if to avoid being persuaded by them, when, as fortune would have it, he encountered the face of the wicked little cousin, who, half afraid for her brother, and half laughing at Nathaniel Pipkin, presented as bewitching an expression of countenance, with a touch of shyness in it too, as any man, old or young, need look upon. She drew her arm coaxingly through the old man's, and whispered something in his ear; and do what he would,

old Lobbs couldn't help breaking out into a smile, while a tear stole down his cheek at the same time.

"Five minutes after this, the girls were brought down from the bedroom with a great deal of giggling and modesty; and while the young people were making themselves perfectly happy, old Lobbs got down the pipe, and smoked it: and it was a remarkable circumstance about that particular pipe of tobacco, that it was the most soothing and delightful one he ever smoked.

"Nathaniel Pipkin thought it best to keep his own counsel, and by so doing gradually rose into high favor with old Lobbs, who taught him to smoke in time; and they used to sit out in the garden on the fine evenings, for many years afterward, smoking and drinking in great state. He soon recovered the effects of his attachment, for we find his name in the parish register, as a witness to the marriage of Maria Lobbs to her cousin; and it also appears, by reference to other documents, that on the night of the wedding he was incarcerated in the village cage, for having, in a state of extreme intoxication, committed sundry excesses in the street, in all of which he was aided and abetted by the bony apprentice with the thin legs."

CHAPTER XVIII.

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

FOR two days after the breakfast at Mrs. Hunter's the Pickwickians remained at Eatanswill, anxiously awaiting the arrival of some intelligence from their revered leader. Mr. Tupman and Mr. Snodgrass were once again left to their own means of amusement; for Mr. Winkle, in compliance with a most pressing invitation, continued to reside at Mr. Pott's house, and to devote his time to the companionship of his amiable lady. Nor was the occasional society of Mr. Pott himself wanting to complete their felicity. Deeply immersed in the intensity of his speculations for the public weal and the destruction of the *Independent*, it was not the habit of that great man to descend from his mental pinnacle to the humble level of ordinary minds. On this occasion, however, and as if expressly in compliment to any follower of Mr. Pickwick's, he unbent, relaxed, stepped down from his pedestal, and walked upon the ground, benignly adapting his remarks to the comprehension of the herd, and seeming in outward form, if not in spirit, to be one of them.

Such having been the demeanor of this celebrated public character toward Mr. Winkle, it will be readily imagined that considerable surprise was depicted on the countenance of the latter gentleman, when, as he was sitting alone in the breakfast-room, the door was hastily thrown open, and as hastily closed, on the entrance of Mr. Pott, who, stalking majestically toward him, and thrusting aside his proffered hand, ground his teeth, as if to put a sharper edge on what he was about to utter, and exclaimed, in a saw-like voice,—

"Serpent!"

"Sir!" exclaimed Mr. Winkle, starting from his chair.

"Serpent, sir," repeated Mr. Pott, raising his voice, and then suddenly depressing it; "I said, Serpent, sir—make the most of it."

When you have parted with a man, at two o'clock in the morning, on terms of the utmost good-fellowship, and he meets you again, at half-past nine, and greets you as a serpent, it is not unreasonable to conclude that something of an unpleasant nature has occurred meanwhile. So Mr. Winkle thought. He returned Mr. Pott's gaze of stone, and in compliance with that gentleman's request, proceeded to make the most he could of the "serpent." The most, however, was nothing at all; so, after a profound silence of some minutes' duration, he said,—

"Serpent, sir! Serpent, Mr. Pott! What can you mean, sir?—this is pleasantry."

"Pleasantry, sir!" exclaimed Pott, with a motion of the hand, indicative of a strong desire to hurl the Britannia metal tea-pot at the head of his visitor. "Pleasantry, sir!—but no, I will be calm; I will be calm, sir;" in proof of his calmness, Mr. Pott flung himself into a chair, and foamed at the mouth.

"My dear sir," interposed Mr. Winkle.

"*Dear* sir!" replied Pott. "How dare you address me, as dear sir, sir? How dare you look me in the face and do it, sir?"

"Well, sir, if you come to that," responded Mr. Winkle, "how dare you look *me* in the face, and call me a serpent, sir?"

"Because you are one," replied Mr. Pott.

"Prove it, sir," said Mr. Winkle, warmly. "Prove it."

A malignant scowl passed over the profound face of the editor, as he drew from his pocket the *Independent* of that morning; and laying his finger on a particular paragraph, threw the journal across the table to Mr. Winkle.

That gentleman took it up, and read as follows:

"Our obscure and filthy contemporary, in some disgusting observations on the recent election for this borough, has presumed to violate the hallowed sanctity of private life, and to refer, in a manner not to be misunderstood, to the personal affairs of our late candidate—ay, and notwithstanding his base defeat, we will add, our future member, Mr. Fizkin. What does our dastardly contemporary mean? What would the ruffian say, if we, setting at naught, like him, the decencies of social intercourse, were to raise the curtain which happily conceals HIS private life from general ridicule, not to say from general execration? What if we were even to point out, and comment on, facts and circumstances, which are publicly notorious, and beheld by every one, but our mole-eyed contemporary—what if we were to print the following effusion, which we received while we were writing the commencement of this article, from a talented fellow-townsman and correspondent!

"'LINES TO A BRASS POT.

"'Oh Pott! if you'd known
How false she'd have grown,
When you heard the marriage-bells tinkle;
You'd have done then, I vow,
What you can not help now,
And handed her over to W*****.'"

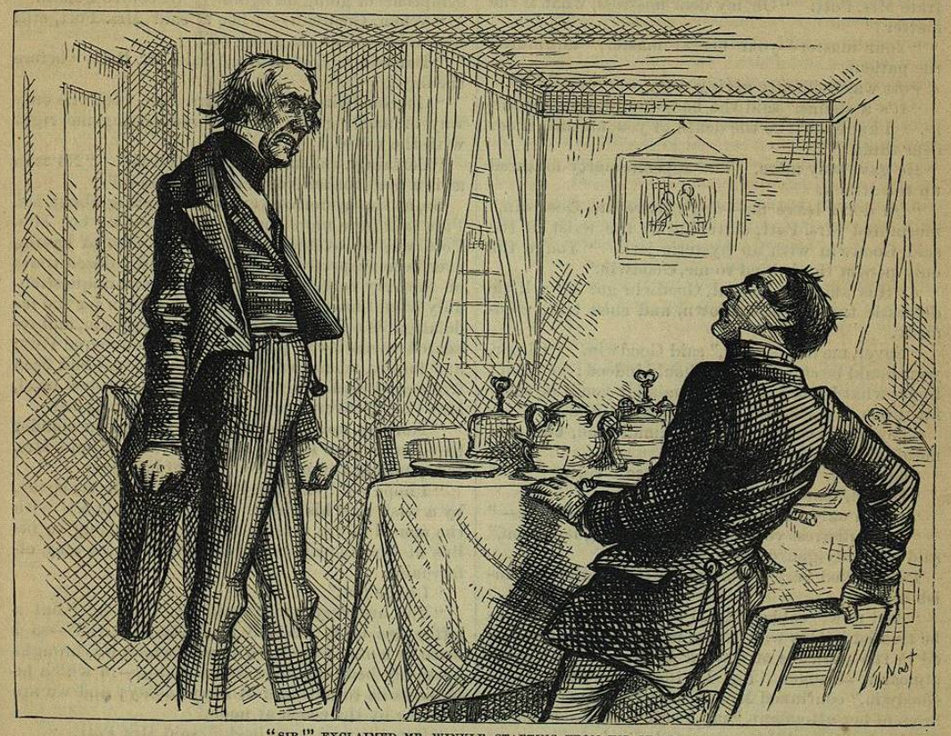
"What," said Mr. Pott, solemnly: "what rhymes to 'tinkle,' villain?"

"What rhymes to tinkle?" said Mrs. Pott, whose entrance at the moment forestalled the reply. "What rhymes to tinkle? Why Winkle, I should conceive:" saying this, Mrs. Pott smiled sweetly on the disturbed Pickwickian, and extended her hand toward him. The agitated young man would have accepted it, in his confusion, had not Pott indignantly interposed.

"Back, ma'am—back!" said the editor. "Take his hand before my very face!"

"Mr. P.!" said his astonished lady.

"Wretched woman, look here," exclaimed the husband. "Look here, ma'am—'Lines to a brass Pot.' 'Brass pot;'—that's me, ma'am. 'False *she*'d have grown;'—that's you, ma'am—you." With this ebullition of rage, which was not unaccompanied with something like a tremble, at the expression of his wife's face, Mr. Pott dashed the current number of the Eatanswill *Independent* at her feet.



"SIR!" EXCLAIMED MR. WINKLE, STARTING FROM HIS CHAIR.

"Upon my word, sir," said the astonished Mrs. Pott, stooping to pick up the paper. "Upon my word, sir!"

Mr. Pott winced beneath the contemptuous gaze of his wife. He had made a desperate struggle to screw up his courage, but it was fast coming unscrewed again.

There appears nothing very tremendous in this little sentence, "Upon my word, sir," when it comes to be read; but the tone of voice in which it was delivered, and the look that accompanied it, both seeming to bear reference to some revenge to be thereafter visited upon the head of Pott, produced their full effect upon him. The most unskillful observer could have detected in his troubled countenance, a readiness to resign his Wellington boots to any efficient substitute who would have consented to stand in them at that moment.

Mrs. Pott read the paragraph, uttered a loud shriek, and threw herself at full length on the hearth-rug, screaming, and tapping it with the heels of her shoes, in a manner which could leave no doubt of the propriety of her feelings on the occasion.

"My dear," said the petrified Pott—"I didn't say I believed it;—I—" but the unfortunate man's voice was drowned in the screaming of his partner.

"Mrs. Pott, let me entreat you, my dear ma'am, to compose yourself," said Mr. Winkle; but the shrieks and tappings were louder, and more frequent than ever.

"My dear," said Mr. Pott, "I'm very sorry. If you won't consider your own health, consider me, my dear. We shall have a crowd round the house." But the more strenuously Mr. Pott entreated, the more vehemently the screams poured forth.

Very fortunately, however, attached to Mrs. Pott's

person was a body-guard of one, a young lady whose ostensible employment was to preside over her toilet, but who rendered herself useful in a variety of ways, and in none more so than in the particular department of constantly aiding and abetting her mistress in every wish and inclination opposed to the desires of the unhappy Pott. The screams reached this young lady's ears in due course, and brought her into the room with a speed which threatened to derange, materially, the very exquisite arrangement of her cap and ringlets.

"Oh, my dear, dear mistress!" exclaimed the body-guard, kneeling frantically by the side of the prostrate Mrs. Pott. "Oh, my dear mistress, what is the matter?"

"Your master—your brutal master," murmured the patient.

Pott was evidently giving way.

"It's a shame," said the body-guard, reproachfully. "I know he'll be the death of you, ma'am. Poor dear thing!"

He gave way more. The opposite party followed up the attack.

"Oh don't leave me—don't leave me, Goodwin," murmured Mrs. Pott, clutching at the wrist of the said Goodwin with an hysteric jerk. "You're the only person that's kind to me, Goodwin."

At this affecting appeal, Goodwin got up a little domestic tragedy of her own, and shed tears copiously.

"Never, ma'am—never," said Goodwin. "Oh, sir, you should be careful—you should indeed; you don't know what harm you may do missis; you'll be sorry for it one day, I know—I've always said so."

The unlucky Pott looked timidly on, but said nothing.

"Goodwin," said Mrs. Pott, in a soft voice.

"Ma'am," said Goodwin.

"If you only knew how I have loved that man—"

"Don't distress yourself by recollecting it, ma'am," said the body-guard.

Pott looked very frightened. It was time to finish him.

"And now," sobbed Mrs. Pott, "now, after all, to be treated in this way; to be reproached and insulted in the presence of a third party, and that party almost a stranger. But I will not submit to it! Goodwin," continued Mrs. Pott, raising herself in the arms of her attendant, "my brother, the Lieutenant, shall interfere. I'll be separated, Goodwin!"

"It would certainly serve him right, ma'am," said Goodwin.

Whatever thoughts the threat of a separation might have awakened in Mr. Pott's mind, he forbore to give utterance to them, and contented himself by saying, with great humility:

"My dear, will you hear me?"

A fresh train of sobs was the only reply, as Mrs. Pott grew more hysterical, requested to be informed why she was ever born, and required sundry other pieces of information of a similar description.

"My dear," remonstrated Mr. Pott, "do not give way to these sensitive feelings. I never believed that the paragraph had any foundation, my dear—impossible. I was only angry, my dear—I may say outrageous—with the *Independent* people for daring to insert it; that's all;" Mr. Pott cast an imploring look at the innocent cause of the mischief, as if to entreat him to say nothing about the serpent.

"And what steps, sir, do you mean to take to obtain redress?" inquired Mr. Winkle, gaining courage as he saw Pott losing it.

"Oh, Goodwin," observed Mrs. Pott, "does he mean to horsewhip the editor of the *Independent*—does he, Goodwin?"

"Hush, hush, ma'am; pray keep yourself quiet," replied the body-guard. "I dare say he will, if you wish it, ma'am."

"Certainly," said Pott, as his wife evinced decided symptoms of going off again. "Of course I shall."

"When, Goodwin — when?" said Mrs. Pott, still undecided about the going off.

"Immediately, of course," said Mr. Pott, "before the day is out."

"Oh, Goodwin," resumed Mrs. Pott, "it's the only way of meeting the slander, and setting me right with the world."

"Certainly, ma'am," replied Goodwin. "No man as is a man, ma'am, could refuse to do it."

So, as the hysterics were still hovering about, Mr. Pott said once more that he would do it; but Mrs. Pott was so overcome at the bare idea of having ever been suspected, that she was half a dozen times on the very verge of a relapse, and most unquestionably would have gone off, had it not been for the indefatigable efforts of the assiduous Goodwin, and repeated entreaties for pardon from the conquered Pott; and finally, when that unhappy individual had been frightened and snubbed down to his proper level, Mrs. Pott recovered, and they went to breakfast.

"You will not allow this base newspaper slander to shorten your stay here, Mr. Winkle?" said Mrs. Pott, smiling through the traces of her tears.

"I hope not," said Mr. Pott, actuated, as he spoke, by a wish that his visitor would choke himself with the morsel of dry toast which he was raising to his lips at the moment: and so terminate his stay effectually.

"I hope not."

"You are very good," said Mr. Winkle; "but a letter has been received from Mr. Pickwick—so I learn by a note from Mr. Tupman, which was brought up to my bedroom door, this morning—in which he requests us to join him at Bury to-day; and we are to leave by the coach at noon."

"But you will come back?" said Mrs. Pott.

"Oh, certainly," replied Mr. Winkle.

"You are quite sure?" said Mrs. Pott, stealing a tender look at her visitor.

"Quite," responded Mr. Winkle.

The breakfast passed off in silence, for each member of the party was brooding over his, or her, own personal grievances. Mrs. Pott was regretting the loss of a beau; Mr. Pott his rash pledge to horsewhip the *Independent;* Mr. Winkle his having innocently placed himself in so awkward a situation. Noon approached, and after many adieux and promises to return, he tore himself away.

"If he ever comes back, I'll poison him," thought Mr. Pott, as he turned into the little back office where he prepared his thunder-bolts.

"If I ever do come back, and mix myself up with these people again," thought Mr. Winkle, as he wended his way to the Peacock, "I shall deserve to be horsewhipped myself—that's all."

His friends were ready, the coach was nearly so, and in half an hour they were proceeding on their journey, along the road over which Mr. Pickwick and Sam had so recently traveled, and of which, as we have already said something, we do not feel called upon to extract Mr. Snodgrass's poetical and beautiful description.

Mr. Weller was standing at the door of the Angel, ready to receive them, and by that gentleman they were ushered to the apartment of Mr. Pickwick, where, to the no small surprise of Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass, and the no small embarrassment of Mr. Tupman, they found old Wardle and Trundle.

"How are you?" said the old man, grasping Mr. Tupman's hand. "Don't hang back, or look sentimental about it; it can't be helped, old fellow. For her sake, I wish you'd had her; for your own, I'm very glad you have not. A young fellow like you will do better one of these days—eh?" With this consolation, Wardle slapped Mr. Tupman on the back, and laughed heartily.

"Well, and how are you, my fine fellows?" said the old gentleman, shaking hands with Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass at the same time. "I have just been telling Pickwick that we must have you all down at Christmas. We're going to have a wedding—a real wedding this time."

"A wedding!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, turning very pale.

"Yes, a wedding. But don't be frightened," said the good-humored old man; "it's only Trundle there, and Bella."

"Oh, is that all!" said Mr. Snodgrass, relieved from a painful doubt which had fallen heavily on his breast. "Give you joy, sir. How is Joe?"

"Very well," replied the old gentleman. "Sleepy as ever."

"And your mother, and the clergyman, and all of 'em?"

"Quite well."

"Where," said Mr. Tupman, with an effort—"where is—*she*, sir?" and he turned away his head, and covered his eyes with his hand.

"*She!*" said the old gentleman, with a knowing shake of the head. "Do you mean my single relative—eh?"

Mr. Tupman, by a nod, intimated that his question applied to the disappointed Rachael.

"Oh, she's gone away," said the old gentleman. "She's living at a relation's, far enough off. She couldn't bear to see the girls, so I let her go. But come! Here's the dinner. You must be hungry after your ride. *I* am, without any ride at all; so let us fall to."

Ample justice was done to the meal; and when they were seated round the table, after it had been disposed of, Mr. Pickwick, to the intense horror and indignation of his followers, related the adventure he had undergone, and the success which had attended the base artifices of the diabolical Jingle.

"And the attack of rheumatism which I caught in that garden," said Mr. Pickwick, in conclusion, "renders me lame at this moment."

"I, too, have had something of an adventure," said Mr. Winkle, with a smile; and at the request of Mr. Pickwick he detailed the malicious libel of the Eatanswill *Independent*, and the consequent excitement of their friend, the editor.

Mr. Pickwick's brow darkened during the recital. His friends observed it, and, when Mr. Winkle had concluded, maintained a profound silence. Mr. Pickwick struck the table emphatically with his clenched fist, and spoke as follows:

"Is it not a wonderful circumstance," said Mr. Pickwick, "that we seem destined to enter no man's house without involving him in some degree of trouble? Does it not, I ask, bespeak the indiscretion, or, worse than that, the blackness of heart—that I should say so!—of my followers, that, beneath whatever roof they locate, they disturb the peace of mind and happiness of some confiding female? Is it not, I say—"

Mr. Pickwick would in all probability have gone on for some time, had not the entrance of Sam, with a letter, caused him to break off in his eloquent discourse. He passed his handkerchief across his forehead, took off his spectacles, wiped them, and put them on again; and his voice had recovered its wonted softness of tone when he said:

"What have you there, Sam?"

"Called at the Post-office just now, and found this here letter, as has laid there for two days," replied Mr. Weller. "It's sealed with a vafer, and directed in round hand."

"I don't know this hand," said Mr. Pickwick, opening the letter. "Mercy on us! what's this? It must be a jest; it—it—can't be true."

"What's the matter?" was the general inquiry.

"Nobody dead, is there?" said Wardle, alarmed at the horror in Mr. Pickwick's countenance.

Mr. Pickwick made no reply, but, pushing the letter across the table, and desiring Mr. Tupman to read it aloud, fell back in his chair with a look of vacant astonishment quite alarming to behold.

Mr. Tupman, with a trembling voice, read the letter, of which the following is a copy:

"*Freeman's Court, Cornhill, August 28th*, 1830.

"*Bardell against Pickwick.*

"*Sir,—Having been instructed by Mrs. Martha Bardell to commence an action against you for a breach of promise of marriage, for which the plaintiff lays her damages at fifteen hundred pounds, we beg to inform you that a writ has been issued against you in this suit in the Court of Common Pleas; and request to know, by return of post, the name of your attorney in London, who will accept service thereof. We are, sir,*

"*Your obedient servants,*

"DODSON AND FOGG.

"Mr. SAMUEL PICKWICK."

There was something so impressive in the mute astonishment with which each man regarded his neighbor, and every man regarded Mr. Pickwick, that all seemed afraid to speak. The silence was at length broken by Mr. Tupman.

"Dodson and Fogg," he repeated mechanically.

"Bardell and Pickwick," said Mr. Snodgrass, musing.

"Peace of mind and happiness of confiding females," murmured Mr. Winkle, with an air of abstraction.

"It's a conspiracy," said Mr. Pickwick, at length recovering the power of speech; "a base conspiracy between these two grasping attorneys, Dodson and Fogg. Mrs. Bardell would never do it;—she hasn't the heart to do it;—she hasn't the case to do it. Ridiculous—ridiculous."

"Of her heart," said Wardle, with a smile, "you should certainly be the best judge. I don't wish to discourage you, but I should certainly say that, of her case, Dodson and Fogg are far better judges than any of us can be."

"It's a vile attempt to extort money," said Mr. Pickwick.

"I hope it is," said Wardle, with a short, dry cough.

"Who ever heard me address her in any way but that in which a lodger would address his landlady?" continued Mr. Pickwick, with great vehemence. "Who ever saw me with her? Not even my friends here—"

"Except on one occasion," said Mr. Tupman.

Mr. Pickwick changed color.

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

Mr. Tupman glanced timidly at his leader. "Why," said he, "there was nothing suspicious; but—I don't know how it happened, mind—she certainly was reclining in his arms."

"Gracious powers!" ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, as the recollection of the scene in question struck forcibly upon him; "what a dreadful instance of the force of circumstances! So she was—so she was."

"And our friend was soothing her anguish," said Mr. Winkle, rather maliciously.

"So I was," said Mr. Pickwick. "I won't deny it. So I was."

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

"What a dreadful conjunction of appearances!" exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, resting his chin upon his hands. "Winkle—Tupman—I beg your pardon for the observations I made just now. We are all the victims of circumstances, and I the greatest." With this apology Mr. Pickwick buried his head in his hands, and ruminated; while Wardle measured out a regular circle of nods and winks, addressed to the other members of the company.

"I'll have it explained though," said Mr. Pickwick, raising his head and hammering the table. "I'll see this Dodson and Fogg! I'll go to London to-morrow."

"Not to-morrow," said Wardle; "you're too lame."

"Well, then, next day."

"Next day is the first of September, and you're pledged to ride out with us, as far as Sir Geoffrey Manning's grounds, at all events, and to meet us at lunch, if you don't take the field."

"Well, then, the day after," said Mr. Pickwick; "Thursday.—Sam!"

"Sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"Take two places outside to London, on Thursday morning, for yourself and me."

"Wery well, sir."

Mr. Weller left the room, and departed slowly on his errand, with his hands in his pockets, and his eyes fixed on the ground.

"Rum feller, the hemperor," said Mr. Weller, as he walked slowly up the street. "Think o' his making up to that ere Mrs. Bardell—vith a little boy, too! Always the vay vith these here old 'uns hows'ever, as is such steady-goers to look at. I didn't think he'd ha' done it, though—I didn't think he'd ha' done it!" Moralizing in this strain, Mr. Samuel Weller bent his steps toward the booking-office.

CHAPTER XIX.

A PLEASANT DAY, WITH AN UNPLEASANT TERMINATION.

THE birds, who, happily for their own peace of mind and personal comfort, were in blissful ignorance of the preparations which had been making to astonish them, on the first of September, hailed it, no doubt, as one of the pleasantest mornings they had seen that season. Many a young partridge who strutted complacently among the stubble, with all the finicking coxcombry of youth, and many an older one who watched his levity out of his little round eye, with the contemptuous air of a bird of wisdom and experience, alike unconscious of their approaching doom, basked in the fresh morning air with lively and blithesome feelings, and a few hours afterward were laid low upon the earth. But we grow affecting: let us proceed.

In plain commonplace matter-of-fact, then, it was a fine morning—so fine that you would scarcely have believed that the few months of an English summer had yet flown by. Hedges, fields, and trees, hill and moorland, presented to the eye their ever-varying shades of deep rich green; scarce a leaf had fallen, scarce a sprinkle of yellow mingled with the hues of summer, warned you that autumn had begun. The sky was cloudless; the sun shone out bright and warm; the songs of birds, and hum of myriads of summer insects, filled the air; and the cottage gardens, crowded with flowers of every rich and beautiful tint, sparkled, in the heavy dew, like beds of glittering jewels. Every thing bore the stamp of summer, and none of its beautiful colors had yet faded from the dye.

Such was the morning, when an open carriage, in which there were three Pickwickians, (Mr. Snodgrass having preferred to remain at home,) Mr. Wardle, and Mr. Trundle, with Sam Weller on the box beside the driver, pulled up by a gate at the roadside, before which stood a tall, raw-boned gamekeeper, and a half-booted, leather-leggined boy: each bearing a bag of capacious dimensions, and accompanied by a brace of pointers.

"I say," whispered Mr. Winkle to Wardle, as the man let down the steps, "they don't suppose we're going to kill game enough to fill those bags, do they?"

"Fill them!" exclaimed old Wardle. "Bless you, yes! You shall fill one, and I the other; and when we've done with them, the pockets of our shooting-jackets will hold as much more."