

which he had been wholly unable to discover with a light, and if he made the slightest noise in his fruitless attempts to do so, he stood every chance of being shot at, and perhaps killed, by some wakeful traveler. He had no resource but to remain where he was until daylight appeared. So, after groping his way a few paces down the passage, and, to his infinite alarm, stumbling over several pairs of boots in so doing, Mr. Pickwick crouched into a little recess in the wall, to wait for morning as philosophically as he might.

He was not destined, however, to undergo this additional trial of patience: for he had not been long ensconced in his present concealment when, to his unspeakable horror, a man, bearing a light, appeared at the end of the passage. His horror was suddenly converted into joy, however, when he recognized the form of his faithful attendant. It was indeed Mr. Samuel Weller, who after sitting up thus late, in conversation with the Boots, who was sitting up for the mail, was now about to retire to rest.

"Sam," said Mr. Pickwick, suddenly appearing before him, "where's my bedroom?"

Mr. Weller stared at his master with the most emphatic surprise; and it was not until the question had been repeated three several times, that he turned round, and led the way to the long-sought apartment.

"Sam," said Mr. Pickwick as he got into bed, "I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes to-night that ever were heard of."

"Wery likely, sir," replied Mr. Weller, dryly.

"But of this I am determined, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick; "that if I were to stop in this house for six months, I would never trust myself about it, alone, again."

"That's the wery prudentest resolution as you could come to, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "You rather want somebody to look arter you, sir, wen your judgment goes out a wisitin'."

"What do you mean by that, Sam?" said Mr. Pickwick. He raised himself in bed, and extended his hand, as if he were about to say something more; but suddenly checking himself, turned round, and bade his valet "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," replied Mr. Weller. He paused when he got outside the door—shook his head—walked on—stopped—snuffed the candle—shook his head again—and finally proceeded slowly to his chamber, apparently buried in the profoundest meditation.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN WHICH MR. SAMUEL WELLER BEGINS TO DEVOTE HIS ENERGIES TO THE RETURN MATCH BETWEEN HIMSELF AND MR. TROTTER.

IN a small room in the vicinity of the stable-yard, betimes in the morning, which was ushered in by Mr. Pickwick's adventure with the middle-aged lady in the yellow curl-papers, sat Mr. Weller senior, preparing himself for his journey to London. He was sitting in an excellent attitude for having his portrait taken.

It is very possible that at some earlier period of

his career, Mr. Weller's profile might have presented a bold and determined outline. His face, however, had expanded under the influence of good living, and a disposition remarkable for resignation; and its bold fleshy curves had so far extended beyond the limits originally assigned them, that unless you took a full view of his countenance in front, it was difficult to distinguish more than the extreme tip of a very rubicund nose. His chin, from the same cause, had acquired the grave and imposing form which is generally described by prefixing the word "double" to that expressive feature; and his complexion exhibited that peculiarly mottled combination of colors which is only to be seen in gentlemen of his profession, and in underdone roast-beef. Round his neck he wore a crimson traveling-shawl, which merged into his chin by such imperceptible gradations, that it was difficult to distinguish the folds of the one from the folds of the other. Over this, he mounted a long waistcoat of a broad pink-striped pattern, and over that again, a wide-skirted green coat, ornamented with large brass buttons, whereof the two which garnished the waist, were so far apart, that no man had ever beheld them both at the same time. His hair, which was short, sleek, and black, was just visible beneath the capacious brim of a low-crowned brown hat. His legs were encased in knee-cord breeches, and painted top-boots: and a copper watch-chain, terminating in one seal, and a key of the same material, dangled loosely from his capacious waistband.

We have said that Mr. Weller was engaged in preparing for his journey to London—he was taking sustenance, in fact. On the table before him, stood a pot of ale, a cold round of beef, and a very respectable-looking loaf, to each of which he distributed his favors in turn, with the most rigid impartiality. He had just cut a mighty slice from the latter, when the footsteps of somebody entering the room caused him to raise his head; and he beheld his son.

"Mornin', Sammy!" said the father.

The son walked up to the pot of ale, and nodding significantly to his parent, took a long draught by way of reply.

"Werry good power o' suction, Sammy," said Mr. Weller the elder, looking into the pot, when his first-born had set it down half empty. "You'd ha' made an uncommon fine oyster, Sammy, if you'd been born in that station o' life."

"Yes, I des-say I should ha' managed to pick up a respectable livin'," replied Sam, applying himself to the cold beef with considerable vigor.

"I'm wery sorry, Sammy," said the elder Mr. Weller, shaking up the ale, by describing small circles with the pot, preparatory to drinking. "I'm wery sorry, Sammy, to hear from your lips, as you let yourself be gammoned by that 'ere mulberry man. I always thought, up to three days ago, that the names of Veller and gammon could never come into contact, Sammy, never."

"Always exceptin' the case of a widder, of course," said Sam.

"Widders, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller, slightly changing color. "Widders are 'ceptions to ev'ry rule. I have heerd how many ord'nary women one widder's equal to, in pint o' comin' over you. I think

it's five-and-twenty, but I don't rightly know vether it an't more."

"Well; that's pretty well," said Sam.

"Besides," continued Mr. Weller, not noticing the interruption, "that's a wery different thing. You know what the counsel said, Sammy, as defended the gen'l'm'n as beat his wife with the poker, venever he got jolly. 'And arter all, my Lord,' says he, 'it's a amable weakness.' So I says respectin' widders, Sammy, and so you'll say, ven you gets as old as me."

"I ought to ha' know'd better, I know," said Sam.

"Ought to ha' know'd better!" repeated Mr. Weller, striking the table with his fist. "Ought to ha' know'd better! why, I know a young 'un as hasn't had half nor quarter your eddication—as hasn't slept about the markets, no, not six months—who'd ha' scorned to be let in, in such a vay; scorned it, Sammy." In the excitement of feeling produced by this agonizing reflection, Mr. Weller rang the bell, and ordered an additional pint of ale.

"Well, it's no use talking about it now," said Sam.

"It's over, and can't be helped, and that's one consolation, as they always says in Turkey, ven they cuts the wrong man's head off. It's my innings now, gov'nor, and as soon as I catches hold o' this ere Trotter, I'll have a good 'un."

"I hope you will, Sammy. I hope you will," returned Mr. Weller. "Here's your health, Sammy, and may you speedily vipe off the disgrace as you've inflicted on the family name." In honor of this toast Mr. Weller imbibed at a draught at least two-thirds of the newly-arrived pint, and handed it over to his son, to dispose of the remainder, which he instantaneously did.

"And now, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, consulting the large double-cased silver watch that hung at the end of the copper chain. "Now it's time I was up at the office to get my vay-bill, and see the coach loaded; for coaches, Sammy, is like guns—they requires to be loaded with very great care, afore they go off."

At this parental and professional joke, Mr. Weller junior smiled a filial smile. His revered parent continued in a solemn tone:

"I'm agoin' to leave you, Samivel, my boy, and there's no telling ven I shall see you again. Your mother-in-law may ha' been too much for me, or a thousand things may have happened by the time you next hears any news o' the celebrated Mr. Veller o' the Bell Savage. The family name depends wery much upon you, Samivel, and I hope you'll do wot's right by it. Upon all little pints o' breedin', I know I may trust you as vell as if it was my own self. So I've only this here one little bit of advice to give you. If ever you gets to up'ards o' fifty, and feels disposed to go a-marryin' any body—no matter who—jist you shut yourself up in your own room, if you've got one, and pison yourself off-hand. Hangin's vulgar, so don't you have nothin' to say to that. Pison yourself, Samivel, my boy, pison yourself, and you'll be glad on it arterwards." With these affecting words, Mr. Weller looked steadfastly on his son, and turning slowly upon his heel, disappeared from his sight.

In the contemplative mood which these words had awakened, Mr. Samuel Weller walked forth from the

Great White Horse when his father had left him; and bending his steps toward St. Clement's Church, endeavored to dissipate his melancholy, by strolling among its ancient precincts. He had loitered about for some time, when he found himself in a retired spot—a kind of court-yard of venerable appearance—which he discovered had no other outlet than the turning by which he had entered. He was about retracing his steps, when he was suddenly transfixed to the spot by a sudden appearance; and the mode and manner of this appearance, we now proceed to relate.

Mr. Samuel Weller had been staring up at the old brick houses now and then, in his deep abstraction, bestowing a wink upon some healthy-looking servant-girl as she drew up a blind, or threw open a bedroom window, when the green gate of a garden at the bottom of the yard opened, and a man having emerged therefrom, closed the green gate very carefully after him, and walked briskly toward the very spot where Mr. Weller was standing.

Now, taking this as an isolated fact, unaccompanied by any attendant circumstances, there was nothing very extraordinary in it; because in many parts of the world, men do come out of gardens, close green gates after them, and even walk briskly away, without attracting any particular share of public observation. It is clear, therefore, that there must have been something in the man, or in his manner, or both, to attract Mr. Weller's particular notice. Whether there was, or not, we must leave the reader to determine, when we have faithfully recorded the behavior of the individual in question.

When the man had shut the green gate after him, he walked, as we have said twice already, with a brisk pace up the court-yard: but he no sooner caught sight of Mr. Weller, than he faltered and stopped, as if uncertain, for the moment, what course to adopt. As the green gate was closed behind him, and there was no other outlet but the one in front, however, he was not long in perceiving that he must pass Mr. Samuel Weller to get away. He therefore resumed his brisk pace, and advanced, staring straight before him. The most extraordinary thing about the man was, that he was contorting his face into the most fearful and astonishing grimaces that ever were beheld. Nature's handiwork never was disguised with such extraordinary artificial carving, as the man had overlaid his countenance with, in one moment.

"Well!" said Mr. Weller to himself, as the man approached. "This is wery odd. I could ha' swore it was him."

Up came the man, and his face became more frightfully distorted than ever, as he drew nearer.

"I could take my oath to that 'ere black hair, and mulberry suit," said Mr. Weller; "only I never see such a face as that, afore."

As Mr. Weller said this, the man's features assumed an unearthly twinge, perfectly hideous. He was obliged to pass very near Sam, however, and the scrutinizing glance of that gentleman enabled him to detect, under all these appalling twists of feature, something too like the small eyes of Mr. Job Trotter, to be easily mistaken.

"Halloo, you sir!" shouted Sam, fiercely.

The stranger stopped.

"Halloo!" repeated Sam, still more gruffly.

The man with the horrible face, looked with the greatest surprise, up the court, and down the court, and in at the windows of the houses—everywhere but at Sam Weller—and took another step forward, when he was brought to again, by another shout.

"Halloo, you sir!" said Sam, for the third time.

There was no pretending to mistake where the voice came from now, so the stranger, having no other resource, at last looked Sam Weller full in the face.

"It won't do, Job Trotter," said Sam. "Come! None o' that 'ere nonsense. You ain't so wery 'andsome that you can afford to throw away many o' your good looks. Bring them 'ere eyes o' your'n back into their proper places, or I'll knock 'em out of your head. D'ye hear?"

As Mr. Weller appeared fully disposed to act up to the spirit of this address, Mr. Trotter gradually allowed his face to resume its natural expression; and then giving a start of joy, exclaimed, "What do I see? Mr. Walker?"

"Ah," replied Sam. "You're wery glad to see me, ain't you?"

"Glad!" exclaimed Job Trotter; "oh, Mr. Walker, if you had but known how I have looked forward to this meeting! It is too much, Mr. Walker; I can not bear it, indeed I can not." And with these words, Mr. Trotter burst into a regular inundation of tears, and, flinging his arms around those of Mr. Weller, embraced him closely, in an ecstasy of joy.

"Get off!" cried Sam, indignant at this process, and vainly endeavoring to extricate himself from the grasp of his enthusiastic acquaintance. "Get off, I tell you! What are you crying over me for, you portable ingine?"

"Because I am so glad to see you," replied Job Trotter, gradually releasing Mr. Weller, as the first symptoms of his pugnacity disappeared. "Oh, Mr. Walker, this is too much."

"Too much!" echoed Sam, "I think it is too much—rayther! Now what have you got to say to me, eh?"

Mr. Trotter made no reply; for the little pink pocket-handkerchief was in full force.

"What have you got to say to me, afore I knock your head off?" repeated Mr. Weller, in a threatening manner.

"Eh!" said Mr. Trotter, with a look of virtuous surprise.

"What have you got to say to me?"

"I, Mr. Walker!"

"Don't call me Valker; my name's Veller; you know that vell enough. What have you got to say to me?"

"Bless you, Mr. Walker—Weller I mean—a great many things, if you will come away somewhere, where we can talk comfortably. If you knew how I have looked for you, Mr. Weller—"

"Wery hard, indeed, I s'pose?" said Sam, dryly.

"Very, very, sir," replied Mr. Trotter, without moving a muscle of his face. "But shake hands, Mr. Weller."

Sam eyed his companion for a few seconds, and then, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, complied with his request.

"How," said Job Trotter, as they walked away, "how is your dear, good master? Oh, he is a worthy gentleman, Mr. Weller! I hope he didn't catch cold that dreadful night, sir."

There was a momentary look of deep slyness in Job Trotter's eye as he said this, which ran a thrill through Mr. Weller's clenched fist as he burned with a desire to make a demonstration on his ribs. Sam constrained himself, however, and replied that his master was extremely well.

"Oh, I am so glad," replied Mr. Trotter; "is he here?"

"Is your'n?" asked Sam, by way of reply.

"Oh, yes, he is here, and I grieve to say, Mr. Weller, he is going on worse than ever."

"Ah, ah?" said Sam.

"Oh, shocking—terrible!"

"At a boarding-school?" said Sam.

"No, not at a boarding-school," replied Job Trotter, with the same sly look which Sam had noticed before; "not at a boarding-school."

"At the house with the green gate?" said Sam, eying his companion closely.

"No, no—oh, not there," replied Job, with a quickness very unusual to him, "not there."

"What was *you* a-doin' there?" asked Sam, with a sharp glance. "Got inside the gate by accident, perhaps?"

"Why, Mr. Weller," replied Job, "I don't mind telling you my little secrets, because, you know, we took such a fancy for each other when we first met. You recollect how pleasant we were that morning?"

"Oh yes," said Sam, impatiently. "I remember. Well."

"Well," replied Job, speaking with great precision, and in the low tone of a man who communicates an important secret; "in that house with the green gate, Mr. Weller, they keep a good many servants."

"So I should think, from the look on it," interposed Sam.

"Yes," continued Mr. Trotter, "and one of them is a cook, who has saved up a little money, Mr. Weller, and is desirous, if she can establish herself in life, to open a little shop in the chandlery way, you see."

"Yes."

"Yes, Mr. Weller. Well, sir, I met her at a chapel that I go to: a very neat little chapel in this town, Mr. Weller, where they sing the number four collection of hymns, which I generally carry about with me in a little book, which you may perhaps have seen in my hand—and I got a little intimate with her, Mr. Weller, and from that, an acquaintance sprung up between us, and I may venture to say, Mr. Weller, that I am to be the chandler."

"Ah, and a wery amiable chandler you'll make," replied Sam, eying Job with a side look of intense dislike.

"The great advantage of this, Mr. Weller," continued Job, his eyes filling with tears as he spoke, "will be, that I shall be able to leave my present disgraceful service with that bad man, and to devote myself to a better and more virtuous life; more like the way in which I was brought up, Mr. Weller."

"You must ha' been wery nicely brought up," said Sam.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEREIN MR. PETER MAGNUS GROWS JEALOUS, AND THE MIDDLE-AGED LADY APPREHENSIVE, WHICH BRINGS THE PICKWICKIANS WITHIN THE GRASP OF THE LAW.

WHEN Mr. Pickwick descended to the room in which he and Mr. Peter Magnus had spent the preceding evening, he found that gentleman with the major part of the contents of the two bags, the leathern hat-box, and the brown-paper parcel, displayed to all possible advantage on his person, while he himself was pacing up and down the room in a state of the utmost excitement and agitation.

"Good-morning, sir," said Mr. Peter Magnus. "What do you think of this, sir?"

"Very effective indeed," replied Mr. Pickwick, surveying the garments of Mr. Peter Magnus with a good-natured smile.

"Yes, I think it'll do," said Mr. Magnus. "Mr. Pickwick, sir, I have sent up my card."

"Have you?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"And the waiter brought back word, that she would see me at eleven—at eleven, sir; it only wants a quarter now."

"Very near the time," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Yes, it is rather near," replied Mr. Magnus, "rather too near to be pleasant—eh! Mr. Pickwick, sir?"

"Confidence is a great thing in these cases," observed Mr. Pickwick.

"I believe it is, sir," said Mr. Peter Magnus. "I am very confident, sir. Really, Mr. Pickwick, I do not see why a man should feel any fear in such a case as this, sir. What is it, sir? There's nothing to be ashamed of; it's a matter of mutual accommodation, nothing more. Husband on one side, wife on the other. That's my view of the matter, Mr. Pickwick."

"It is a very philosophical one," replied Mr. Pickwick. "But breakfast is waiting, Mr. Magnus. Come."

Down they sat to breakfast, but it was evident, notwithstanding the boasting of Mr. Peter Magnus, that he labored under a very considerable degree of nervousness, of which loss of appetite, a propensity to upset the tea-things, a spectral attempt at drollery, and an irresistible inclination to look at the clock every other second, were among the principal symptoms.

"He—he—he," tittered Mr. Magnus, affecting cheerfulness, and gasping with agitation. "It only wants two minutes, Mr. Pickwick. Am I pale, sir?"

"Not very," replied Mr. Pickwick.

There was a brief pause.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Pickwick; but have you ever done this sort of thing in your time?" said Mr. Magnus.

"You mean proposing?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Yes."

"Never," said Mr. Pickwick, with great energy, "never."

"You have no idea, then, how it's best to begin?" said Mr. Magnus.

"Why," said Mr. Pickwick, "I may have formed some ideas upon the subject, but, as I have never submitted them to the test of experience, I should

"Oh, very, Mr. Weller, very," replied Job. At the recollection of the purity of his youthful days, Mr. Trotter pulled forth the pink handkerchief, and wept copiously.

"You must ha' been an uncommon nice boy, to go to school vith," said Sam.

"I was, sir," replied Job, heaving a deep sigh. "I was the idol of the place."

"Ah," said Sam, "I don't wonder at it. What a comfort you must ha' been to your blessed mother."

At these words, Mr. Job Trotter inserted an end of the pink handkerchief into the corner of each eye, one after the other, and began to weep copiously.

"Wot's the matter vith the man," said Sam, indignantly. "Chelsea water-works is nothin' to you. What are you melting vith now? The consciousness o' willainy?"

"I can not keep my feelings down, Mr. Weller," said Job, after a short pause. "To think that my master should have suspected the conversation I had with yours, and so dragged me away in a post-chaise, and after persuading the sweet young lady to say she knew nothing of him, and bribing the school-mistress to do the same, deserted her for a better speculation! Oh! Mr. Weller, it makes me shudder."

"Oh, that was the vay, was it?" said Mr. Weller.

"To be sure it was," replied Job.

"Vell," said Sam, as they had now arrived near the Hotel, "I vant to have a little bit o' talk with you, Job; so if you're not partickler engaged, I should like to see you at the Great White Horse to-night, somewheres about eight o'clock."

"I shall be sure to come," said Job.

"Yes, you'd better," replied Sam, with a very meaningful look, "or else I shall perhaps be asking arter you, at the other side of the green gate, and then I might cut you out, you know."

"I shall be sure to be with you, sir," said Mr. Trotter; and wringing Sam's hand with the utmost fervor, he walked away.

"Take care, Job Trotter, take care," said Sam, looking after him, "or I shall be one too many for you this time. I shall, indeed." Having uttered this soliloquy, and looked after Job till he was to be seen no more, Mr. Weller made the best of his way to his master's bedroom.

"It's all in training, sir," said Sam.

"What's in training, Sam?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"I have found 'em out, sir," said Sam.

"Found out who?"

"That 'ere queer customer, and the melan-choly chap with the black hair."

"Impossible, Sam!" said Mr. Pickwick, with the greatest energy. "Where are they, Sam; where are they?"

"Hush, hush!" replied Mr. Weller; and as he assisted Mr. Pickwick to dress, he detailed the plan of action on which he proposed to enter.

"But when is this to be done, Sam?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"All in good time, sir," replied Sam.

Whether it was done in good time, or not, will be seen hereafter.