The landlord slightly inclined his head.

"Slurk, sir," repeated the gentleman, haughtily. "Do you know me now, man?"

The landlord scratched his head, looked at the ceiling, and at the stranger, and smiled feebly.

"Do you know me, man?" inquired the stranger, angrily.

The landlord made a strong effort, and at length replied, "Well, sir, I do *not* know you."

"Great Heaven!" said the stranger, dashing his clenched fist upon the table. "And this is popularity!"

The landlord took a step or two toward the door; the stranger fixing his eyes upon him, resumed:

"This," said the stranger, "this is gratitude for years of labor and study in behalf of the masses. I alight wet and weary; no enthusiastic crowds press forward to greet their champion; the church-bells are silent; the very name elicits no responsive feeling in their torpid bosoms. It is enough," said the agitated Mr. Slurk, pacing to and fro, "to curdle the ink in one's pen, and induce one to abandon their cause forever."

"Did you say brandy-and-water, sir?" said the landlord, venturing a hint.

"Rum," said Mr. Slurk, turning fiercely upon him. "Have you got a fire anywhere?"

"We can light one directly, sir," said the landlord.

"Which will throw out no heat until it is bed-time," interrupted Mr. Slurk. "Is there any body in the kitchen?"

Not a soul. There was a beautiful fire. Every body had gone, and the house door was closed for the night.

"I will drink my rum-and-water," said Mr. Slurk, "by the kitchen fire." So, gathering up his hat and newspaper, he stalked solemnly behind the landlord to that humble apartment, and throwing himself on a settle by the fireside, resumed his countenance of scorn, and began to read and drink in silent dignity.

Now, some demon of discord, flying over the Saracen's Head at that moment, on casting down his eyes in mere idle curiosity, happened to behold Slurk established comfortably by the kitchen fire, and Pott slightly elevated with wine in another room; upon which the malicious demon, darting down into the last-mentioned apartment with inconceivable rapidity, passed at once into the head of Mr. Bob Sawyer, and prompted him for his (the demon's) own evil purposes to speak as follows:

"I say, we've let the fire out. It's uncommonly cold after the rain, isn't it?"

"It really is," replied Mr. Pickwick, shivering.

"It wouldn't be a bad notion to have a cigar by the kitchen fire, would it?" said Bob Sawyer, still prompted by the demon aforesaid.

"I would be particularly comfortable, *I* think," replied Mr. Pickwick. "Mr. Pott, what do you say?"

Mr. Pott yielded a ready assent; and all four travelers, each with his glass in his hand, at once betook themselves to the kitchen, with Sam Weller heading the procession to show them the way.

The stranger was still reading; he looked up and started. Mr. Pott started.

"What's the matter?" whispered Mr. Pickwick.

"That reptile!" replied Pott.

"What reptile?" said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him for fear he should tread on some overgrown black beetle, or dropsical spider.

"That reptile," whispered Pott, catching Mr. Pickwick by the arm, and pointing toward the stranger. "That reptile Slurk, of the *Independent!*"

"Perhaps we had better retire," whispered Mr. Pickwick.

"Never, sir," rejoined Pott, pot-valiant in a double sense, "never." With these words, Mr. Pott took up his position on an opposite settle, and selecting one from a little bundle of newspapers, began to read against his enemy.

Mr. Pott, of course, read the *Independent*, and Mr. Slurk, of course, read the *Gazette;* and each gentleman audibly expressed his contempt of the other's compositions by bitter laughs and sarcastic sniffs; whence they proceeded to more open expressions of opinion, such as "absurd," "wretched," "atrocity," "humbug," "knavery," "dirt," "filth," "slime," "ditch-water," and other critical remarks of the like nature.

Both Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Ben Allen had beheld these symptoms of rivalry and hatred, with a degree of delight which imparted great additional relish to the cigars at which they were puffing most vigorously. The moment they began to flag, the mischievous Mr. Bob Sawyer, addressing Slurk with great politeness, said:

"Will you allow me to look at your paper, sir, when you have quite done with it!"

"You will find very little to repay you for your trouble in this contemptible *thing*, sir," replied Slurk, bestowing a Satanic frown on Pott.

"You shall have this presently," said Pott, looking up, pale with rage, and quivering in his speech, from the same cause. "Ha! ha! you will be amused with this *fellow's* audacity."

Terrific emphasis was laid upon this "thing" and "fellow;" and the faces of both editors began to glow with defiance.

"The ribaldry of this miserable man is despicably disgusting," said Pott, pretending to address Bob Sawyer, and scowling upon Slurk.

Here Mr. Slurk laughed very heartily, and folding up the paper so as to get at a fresh column conveniently, said that the blockhead really amused him.

"What an impudent blunderer this fellow is," said Pott, turning from pink to crimson.

"Did you ever read any of this man's foolery, sir?" inquired Slurk, of Bob Sawyer.

"Never," replied Bob; "is it very bad?"

"Oh, shocking! shocking!" rejoined Slurk.

"Really! Dear me, this is too atrocious!" exclaimed Pott, at this juncture; still feigning to be absorbed in his reading.

"If you can wade through a few sentences of malice, meanness, falsehood, perjury, treachery, and cant," said Slurk, handing the paper to Bob, "you will, perhaps, be somewhat repaid by a laugh at the style of this ungrammatical twaddler."

"What's that you said, sir?" inquired Mr. Pott, looking up, trembling all over with passion.

"What's that to you, sir?" replied Slurk.

"Ungrammatical twaddler, was it, sir?" said Pott.

"Yes, sir, it was," replied Slurk; "and *blue bore*, sir, if you like that better; ha! ha!"

Mr. Pott retorted not a word to this jocose insult, but deliberately folded up his copy of the *Independent*, flattened it carefully down, crushed it beneath his boot, spat upon it with great ceremony, and flung it into the fire.

"There, sir," said Pott, retreating from the stove, "and that's the way I would serve the viper who produces it, if I were not, fortunately for him, restrained by the laws of my country."

"Serve him so, sir!" cried Slurk, starting up. "Those laws shall never be appealed to by him, sir, in such a case. Serve him so, sir!"

"Hear! hear!" said Bob Sawyer.

"Nothing can be fairer," observed Mr. Ben Allen.

"Serve him so, sir!" reiterated Slurk, in a loud voice.

Mr. Pott darted a look of contempt, which might have withered an anchor.

"Serve him so, sir!" reiterated Slurk, in a louder voice than before.

"I will not, sir," rejoined Pott.

"Oh, you won't, won't you, sir?" said Mr. Slurk, in a taunting manner; "you hear this, gentlemen! He won't; not that he's afraid; oh, no! he *won't*. Ha! ha!"

"I consider you, sir," said Mr. Pott, moved by this sarcasm, "I consider you a viper. I look upon you, sir, as a man who has placed himself beyond the pale of society by his most audacious, disgraceful, and abominable public conduct. I view you, sir, personally and politically, in no other light than as a most unparalleled and unmitigated viper."

The indignant *Independent* did not wait to hear the end of this personal denunciation; for, catching up his carpet-bag, which was well stuffed with movables, he swung it in the air as Pott turned away, and, letting it fall with a circular sweep on his head just at that particular angle of the bag where a good thick hair-brush happened to be packed, caused a sharp crash to be heard throughout the kitchen, and brought him at once to the ground.

"Gentlemen," cried Mr. Pickwick, as Pott started up and seized the fire-shovel, "gentlemen! Consider, for Heaven's sake—help—Sam—here—pray, gentlemen—interfere, somebody."

Uttering these incoherent exclamations, Mr. Pickwick rushed between the infuriated combatants just in time to receive the carpet-bag on one side of his body, and the fire-shovel on the other. Whether the representatives of the public feeling of Eatanswill were blinded by animosity, or (being both acute reasoners) saw the advantage of having a third party between them to bear all the blows, certain it is that they paid not the slightest attention to Mr. Pickwick, but defying each other with great spirit, plied the carpet-bag and the fire-shovel most fearlessly. Mr. Pickwick would unquestionably have suffered severely for his humane interference, if Mr. Weller, attracted by his master's cries, had not rushed in at the moment, and, snatching up a meal-sack, effectually stopped the conflict by drawing it over the head and shoulders of the mighty Pott, and clasping him tight round the shoulders.

"Take avay that 'ere bag from the t'other madman," said Sam to Ben Allen and Bob Sawyer, who had done nothing but dodge round the group, each with a tortoise-shell lancet in his hand, ready to bleed the first man stunned. "Give it up, you wretched little creetur, or I'll smother you in it."

Awed by these threats, and quite out of breath, the *Independent* suffered himself to be disarmed; and Mr. Weller, removing the extinguisher from Pott, set him free with a caution.

"You take yourselves off to bed quietly," said Sam, "or I'll put you both in it, and let you fight it out vith the mouth tied, as I vould a dozen sich, if they played these games. And you have the goodness to come this here vay, sir, if you please."

Thus addressing his master, Sam took him by the arm and led him off, while the rival editors were severally removed to their beds by the landlord, under the inspection of Mr. Bob Sawyer and Mr. Benjamin Allen; breathing, as they went away, many sanguinary threats, and making vague appointments for mortal combat next day. When they came to think it over, however, it occurred to them that they could do it much better in print, so they recommenced deadly hostilities without delay; and all Eatanswill rung with their boldness—on paper.

They had taken themselves off in separate coaches, early next morning, before the other travelers were stirring; and the weather having now cleared up, the chaise companions once more turned their faces to London.

CHAPTER LII.

INVOLVING A SERIOUS CHANGE IN THE WELLER FAMILY, AND THE UNTIMELY DOWNFALL OF THE RED-NOSED MR. STIGGINS.

CONSIDERING it a matter of delicacy to abstain from introducing either Bob Sawyer or Ben Allen to the young couple until they were fully prepared to expect them, and wishing to spare Arabella's feelings as much as possible, Mr. Pickwick proposed that he and Sam should alight in the neighborhood of the George and Vulture, and that the two young men should for the present take up their quarters elsewhere. To this they very readily agreed, and the proposition was accordingly acted upon; Mr. Ben Allen and Mr. Bob Sawyer betaking themselves to a sequestered pot-shop on the remotest confines of the Borough, behind the bar-door of which their names had in other days very often appeared at the head of long and complex calculations worked in white chalk.

"Dear me, Mr. Weller," said the pretty house-maid, meeting Sam at the door.

"Dear *me* I vish it wos, my dear," replied Sam, dropping behind, to let his master get out of hearing. "Wot a sweet-lookin' creetur you are, Mary!"

"Lor, Mr. Weller, what nonsense you do talk!" said Mary. "Oh! *don't*, Mr. Weller."

"Don't what, my dear?" said Sam.

"Why, that," replied the pretty housemaid. "Lor, do get along with you." Thus admonishing him, the pretty house-maid pushed Sam against the wall,

declaring that he had tumbled her cap, and put her hair quite out of curl.

"And prevented what I was going to say, besides," added Mary. "There's a letter been waiting here for you four days; you hadn't been gone away half an hour, when it came; and more than that, it's got immediate, on the outside."

"Vere is it, my love?" inquired Sam.

"I took care of it for you, or I dare say it would have been lost before this," replied Mary. "There, take it; it's more than you deserve."

With these words, after many pretty little coquettish doubts and fears, and wishes that she might not have lost it, Mary produced the letter from behind the nicest little muslin tucker possible, and handed it to Sam, who thereupon kissed it with much gallantry and devotion.

"My goodness me!" said Mary, adjusting the tucker, and feigning unconsciousness, "you seem to have grown very fond of it all at once."

To this Mr. Weller only replied by a wink, the intense meaning of which no description could convey the faintest idea of; and, sitting himself down beside Mary on a window-seat, opened the letter and glanced at the contents.

"Halloo!" exclaimed Sam, "wot's all this?"

"Nothing the matter, I hope?" said Mary, peeping over his shoulder.

"Bless them eyes o' yourn!" said Sam, looking up.

"Never mind my eyes; you had much better read your letter," said the pretty house-maid; and as she said so, she made the eyes twinkle with such slyness and beauty that they were perfectly irresistible.

Sam refreshed himself with a kiss, and read as follows:

"*Markis Gran*
By dorken
Wensdy.

"MY DEAR SAMMLE,—I am wery sorry to have the plessure of bein a Bear of ill news your Mother in law cort cold consekens of imprudently settin too long on the damp grass in the rain a-hearin of a shepherd who warnt able to leave off till late at night owen to his havin vound his-self up vith brandy-and vater and not being able to stop his-self till he got a little sober which took a-many hours to do the doctor says that if she'd svallo'd varm brandy-and-vater artervards insted of afore she mightn't have been no vus her veels wos immedetly greased and everythink done to set her agoin as could be inwented your farther had hopes as she vould have vorked round as usual but just as she wos a-turnen the corner my boy she took the wrong road and vent down hill vith a welocity you never see and notvithstandin that the drag wos put on drectly by the medikel man it wornt of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evenin havin done the jouney wery much under the reglar time vich praps was partly owen to her haven taken in wery little luggage by the vay your father says that if you vill come and see me Sammy he vill take it as a wery great favor for I am wery lonely Samivel n b he *vill* have it spelt that vay vich I say ant right and as there is sich a many things to settle he is sure your guvner won't object of course he vill not Sammy for I knows him better so he sends his dooty in which I join and am Samivel infernally yours

"TONY VELLER."

"Wot a incomprehensible letter," said Sam; "who's to know wot it means, vith all this he-ing and I-ing! It ain't my father's writin', 'cept this here signater in print letters; that's his."

"Perhaps he got somebody to write it for him, and signed it himself afterward," said the pretty house-maid.

"Stop a minit," replied Sam, running over the letter again, and pausing here and there, to reflect, as he did so. "You've hit it. The gen'l'm'n as wrote it wos a-tellin' all about the misfortun' in a proper vay, and then my father comes a-lookin' over him, and complicates the whole concern by puttin' his oar in. That's just the wery sort o' thing he'd do. You're right, Mary, my dear."

Having satisfied himself on this point, Sam read the letter all over once more, and appearing to form a clear notion of its contents for the first time, ejaculated thoughtfully, as he folded it up,

"And so the poor creetur's dead! I'm sorry for it. She warn't a bad-disposed 'ooman, if them shepherds had let her alone. I'm werry sorry for it."

Mr. Weller uttered these words in so serious a manner, that the pretty house-maid cast down her eyes and looked very grave.

"Hows'ever," said Sam, putting the letter in his pocket with a gentle sigh, "it wos to be—and wos, as the old lady said arter she'd married the footman. Can't be helped now, can it, Mary?"

Mary shook her head, and sighed too.

"I must apply to the hemperor for leave of absence," said Sam.

Mary sighed again. The letter was so very affecting.

"Good-bye!" said Sam.

"Good-bye," rejoined the pretty house-maid, turning her head away.

"Well, shake hands, won't you?" said Sam.

The pretty house-maid put out a hand which, although it was a house-maid's, was a very small one, and rose to go.

"I sha'n't be wery long avay," said Sam.

"You're always away," said Mary, giving her head the slightest possible toss in the air. "You no sooner come, Mr. Weller, than you go again."

Mr. Weller drew the household beauty closer to him, and entered upon a whispering conversation, which had not proceeded far, when she turned her face round and condescended to look at him again. When they parted, it was somehow or other indispensably necessary for her to go to her room, and arrange the cap and curls before she could think of presenting herself to her mistress; which preparatory ceremony she went off to perform, bestowing many nods and smiles on Sam over the banisters as she tripped up stairs.

"I sha'n't be avay more than a day, or two, sir, at the farthest," said Sam, when he had communicated to Mr. Pickwick the intelligence of his father's loss.

"As long as may be necessary, Sam," replied Mr. Pickwick, "you have my full permission to remain."

Sam bowed.

"You will tell your father, Sam, that if I can be of any assistance to him in his present situation, I shall be most willing and ready to lend him any aid in my power," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Thankee, sir," rejoined Sam. "I'll mention it, sir."

And with some expressions of mutual good-will and interest, master and man separated.

It was just seven o'clock when Samuel Weller, alighting from the box of a stage-coach which passed through Dorking, stood within a few hundred yards of the Marquis of Granby. It was a cold, dull evening; the little street looked dreary and dismal; and the mahogany countenance of the noble and gallant Marquis seemed to wear a more sad and melancholy expression than it was wont to do, as it swung to and fro, creaking mournfully in the wind. The blinds were pulled down, and the shutters partly closed; of the knot of loungers that usually collected about the door, not one was to be seen; the place was silent and desolate.

Seeing nobody of whom he could ask any preliminary questions, Sam walked softly in. Glancing round, he quickly recognized his parent in the distance.

The widower was seated at a small round table in the little room behind the bar, smoking a pipe, with his eyes intently fixed upon the fire. The funeral had evidently taken place that day; for attached to his hat, which he still retained on his head, was a hat-band measuring about a yard and a half in length, which hung over the top rail of the chair and streamed negligently down. Mr. Weller was in a very abstracted and contemplative mood. Notwithstanding that Sam called him by name several times, he still continued to smoke with the same fixed and quiet countenance, and was only roused ultimately by his son's placing the palm of his hand on his shoulder.

"Sammy," said Mr. Weller, "you're velcome."

"I've been a-callin' to you half a dozen times," said Sam, hanging his hat on a peg, "but you didn't hear me."

"No, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller, again looking thoughtfully at the fire. "I wos in a referee, Sammy."

"Wot about?" inquired Sam, drawing his chair up to the fire.

"In a referee, Sammy," replied the elder Mr. Weller, "regarding *her*, Samivel." Here Mr. Weller jerked his head in the direction of Dorking churchyard, in mute explanation that his words referred to the late Mrs. Weller.

"I wos a-thinkin', Sammy," said Mr. Weller, eying his son, with great earnestness, over his pipe; as if to assure him that however extraordinary and incredible the declaration might appear, it was nevertheless calmly and deliberately uttered. "I wos a-thinkin', Sammy, that upon the whole I wos wery sorry she wos gone."

"Vell, and so you ought to be," replied Sam.

Mr. Weller nodded his acquiescence in the sentiment, and again fastening his eyes on the fire, shrouded himself in a cloud, and mused deeply.

"Those wos wery sensible observations as she made, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, driving the smoke away with his hand, after a long silence.

"Wot observations?" inquired Sam.

"Them as she made, arter she was took ill," replied the old gentleman.

"Wot was they?"

"Somethin' to this here effect. 'Veller,' she says, 'I'm afeard I've not done by you quite wot I ought to have done; you're a wery kind-hearted man, and I might ha' made your home more comfortabler. I begin to see now,' she says, 'ven it's too late, that if a married 'ooman vishes to be religious, she should begin vith dischargin' her dooties at home, and makin' them as is about her cheerful and happy, and that vile she goes to church, or chapel, or wot not, at all proper times, she should be wery careful not to con-wert this sort o' thing into a excuse for idleness or self-indulgence. I *have* done this,' she says, 'and I've vasted time and substance on them as has done it more than me; but I hope ven I'm gone, Veller, that you'll think on me as I wos afore I know'd them people, and as I raly wos by natur'.' 'Susan,' says I—I wos took up wery short by this, Samivel; I von't deny it, my boy—'Susan,' I says, 'you've been a wery good vife to me, altogether; don't say nothin' at all about it; keep a good heart, my dear, and you'll live to see me punch that 'ere Stiggins's head yet.' She smiled at this, Samivel," said the old gentleman, stifling a sigh with his pipe, "but she died arter all!"

"Vell," said Sam, venturing to offer a little homely consolation, after the lapse of three or four minutes, consumed by the old gentleman in slowly shaking his head from side to side, and solemnly smoking; "vell, gov'nor, ve must all come to it, one day or another."

"So we must, Sammy," said Mr. Weller the elder.

"There's a Providence in it all," said Sam.

"O' course there is," replied his father, with a nod of grave approval. "Wot 'ud become of the undertakers vithout it, Sammy?"

Lost in the immense field of conjecture opened by this reflection, the elder Mr. Weller laid his pipe on the table, and stirred the fire with a meditative visage.

While the old gentleman was thus engaged, a very buxom-looking cook, dressed in mourning, who had been bustling about in the bar, glided into the room, and bestowing many smirks of recognition upon Sam, silently stationed herself at the back of his father's chair, and announced her presence by a slight cough: the which, being disregarded, was followed by a louder one.

"Halloo!" said the elder Mr. Weller, dropping the poker as he looked round, and hastily drew his chair away. "Wot's the matter now?"

"Have a cup of tea, there's a good soul," replied the buxom female, coaxingly.

"I von't," replied Mr. Weller, in a somewhat boisterous manner, "I'll see you—" Mr Weller hastily checked himself, and added in a low tone, "furder fust."

"Oh dear, dear! How adversity does change people!" said the lady, looking upward.

"It's the only thing 'twixt this and the doctor as shall change *my* condition," muttered Mr. Weller.

"I really never saw a man so cross," said the buxom female.

"Never mind. It's all for my own good; vich is the reflection vith wich the penitent school-boy comforted his feelin's ven they flogged him," rejoined the old gentleman.

The buxom female shook her head with a compassionate and sympathizing air; and, appealing to Sam, inquired whether his father really ought not to make an effort to keep up, and not give way to that lowness of spirits.

"You see, Mr. Samuel," said the buxom female, "as I was telling him yesterday, he *will* feel lonely, he can't expect but what he should, sir, but he should keep up a good heart, because, dear me, I'm sure we all pity his loss, and are ready to do any thing for him; and there's no situation in life so bad, Mr. Samuel, that it can't be mended. Which is what a very worthy person said to me when my husband died." Here the speaker, putting her hand before her mouth, coughed again, and looked affectionately at the elder Mr. Weller.

"As I don't rekvire any o' your conversation just now, mum, vill you have the goodness to re-tire?" inquired Mr. Weller, in a grave and steady voice.

"Well, Mr. Weller," said the buxom female, "I'm sure I only spoke to you out of kindness."

"Wery likely mum," replied Mr. Weller. "Samivel, show the lady out, and shut the door arter her."

This hint was not lost upon the buxom female; for she at once left the room, and slammed the door behind her, upon which Mr. Weller, senior, falling back in his chair in a violent perspiration, said,

"Sammy, if I wos to stop here alone vun veek—only vun veek, my boy—that 'ere 'ooman 'ud marry me by force and wiolence afore it was over."

"Wot! Is she so wery fond on you?" inquired Sam.

"Fond!" replied his father, "I can't keep her avay from me. If I was locked up in a fire-proof chest vith a patent Brahmin, she'd find means to get at me, Sammy."

"Wot a thing it is, to be so sought arter!" observed Sam, smiling.

"I don't take no pride out on it, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller, poking the fire vehemently, "it's a horrid sitiwation. I'm actiwally drove out o' house and home by it. The breath was scarcely out o' your poor mother-in-law's body, ven vun old 'ooman sends me a pot o' jam, and another a pot o' jelly, and another brews a blessed large jug o' camomile-tea, vich she brings in vith her own hands." Mr. Weller paused with an aspect of intense disgust, and, looking round, added in a whisper, "They wos all widders, Sammy, all on 'em, 'cept the camomile-tea vun, as wos a single young lady o' fifty-three."

Sam gave a comical look in reply, and the old gentleman having broken an obstinate lump of coal, with a countenance expressive of as much earnestness and malice as if it had been the head of one of the widows last mentioned, said,

"In short, Sammy, I feel that I ain't safe anyveres but on the box."

"How are you safer there than anyveres else?" interrupted Sam.

"'Cos a coachman's a privileged indiwidual," replied Mr. Weller, looking fixedly at his son. "'Cos a coachman may do vithout suspicion wot other men may not; 'cos a coachman may be on the wery amicablest terms with eighty mile o' females, and yet nobody think that he ever means to marry any vun among 'em. And wot other man can say the same, Sammy?"

"Vell, there's somethin' in that," said Sam.

"If your gov'nor had been a coachman," reasoned Mr. Weller, "do you s'pose as that 'ere jury 'ud ever ha' conwicted him, s'posin' it possible as the matter could ha' gone to that extremity? They dustn't ha' done it."

"Wy not?" said Sam, rather disparagingly.

"Wy not!" rejoined Mr. Weller; "'cos it 'ud ha' gone agin their consciences. A reg'lar coachman's a sort o' con-nectin' link betwixt singleness and matrimony, and every practicable man knows it."

"Wot! You mean, they're gen'ral fav'rites, and nobody takes adwantage on 'em, p'raps?" said Sam.

His father nodded.

"How it ever come to that 'ere pass," resumed the parent Weller, "I can't say. Wy it is that long-stage coachmen possess such insiniwations, and is alvays looked up to—a-dored, I may say—by ev'ry young 'ooman in ev'ry town he vurks through, I don't know. I only know that so it is. It's a reg'lation of natur—a dispensary, as your poor mother-in-law used to say."

"A dispensation," said Sam, correcting the old gentleman.

"Wery good, Samivel, a dispensation, if you like it better," returned Mr. Weller; "*I* call it a dispensary, and it's alvays writ up so, at the places vere they gives you physic for nothin' in your own bottles; that's all."

With these words, Mr. Weller refilled and relighted his pipe, and once more summoning up a meditative expression of countenance, continued as follows:

"Therefore, my boy, as I do not see the adwisability o' stoppin' here to be marrid vether I vant to or not, and as at the same time I do not vish to separate myself from them interestin' members o' society altogether, I have come to the determination o' drivin' the Safety, and puttin' up vunce more at the Bell Savage, vich is my nat'ral-born element, Sammy."

"And wot's to become o' the bis'ness?" inquired Sam.

"The bis'ness, Samivel," replied the old gentleman, "good-vill, stock, and fixters, vill be sold by private contract; and out o' the money, two hundred pound, agreeable to a rekvest o' your mother-in-law's to me a little afore she died, vill be inwested in your name in—wot do you call them things agin?"

"Wot things?" inquired Sam.

"Them things as is always a-goin' up and down, in the City."

"Omnibuses?" suggested Sam.

"Nonsense," replied Mr. Weller. "Them things as is always a fluctooatin', and gettin' theirselves inwolved somehow or another vith the national debt, and the checquers bills, and all that."

"Oh! the funds," said Sam.

"Ah!" rejoined Mr. Weller, "the funs; two hundred pounds o' the money is to be inwested for you, Samivel, in the funs; four and a half per cent. reduced counsels, Sammy."

"Wery kind o' the old lady to think o' me," said Sam, "and I'm very much obliged to her."

"The rest vill be inwested in my name," continued the elder Mr. Weller; "and ven I'm took off the road, it'll come to you; so take care you don't spend it all at vunst, my boy, and mind that no widder gets a inklin' o' your fortun', or you're done."

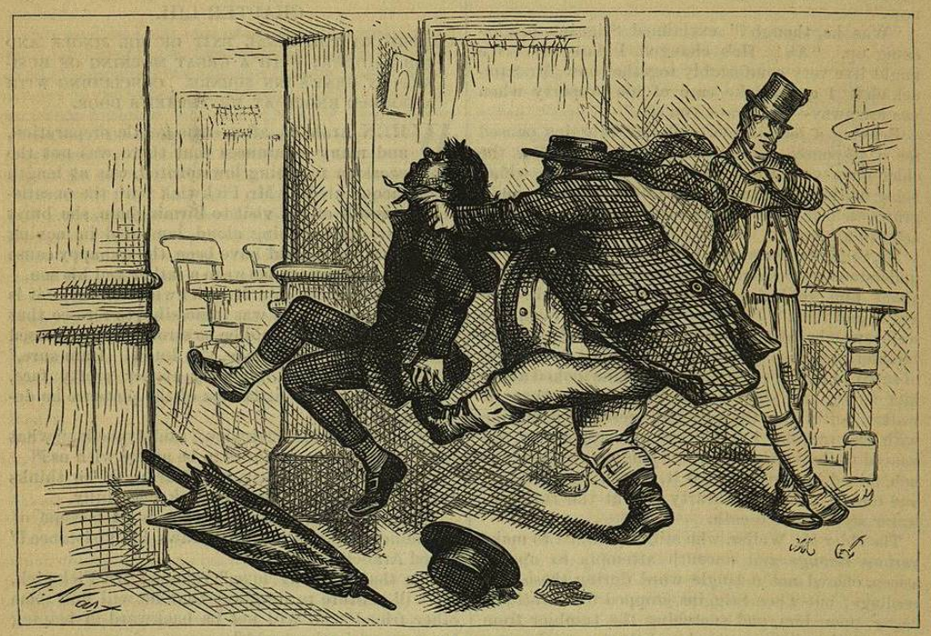
Having delivered this warning, Mr. Weller resumed his pipe with a more serene countenance; the disclosure of these matters appearing to have eased his mind considerably.

"Somebody's a-tappin' at the door," said Sam.

"Let 'em tap," replied his father, with dignity.

Sam acted upon the direction. There was another tap, and another, and then a long row of taps; upon which Sam inquired why the tapper was not admitted.

"Hush," whispered Mr. Weller, with apprehensive looks, "don't take no notice on 'em, Sammy, it's vun o' the widders, p'raps."



RESUMING HIS KICKING WITH GREATER AGILITY THAN BEFORE.

No notice being taken of the taps, the unseen visitor, after a short lapse, ventured to open the door and peep in. It was no female head that was thrust in at the partially opened door, but the long black locks and red face of Mr. Stiggins. Mr. Weller's pipe fell from his hands.

The reverend gentleman gradually opened the door by almost imperceptible degrees, until the aperture was just wide enough to admit of the passage of his lank body, when he glided into the room and closed it after him with great care and gentleness. Turning toward Sam, and raising his hands and eyes in token of the unspeakable sorrow with which he regarded the calamity that had befallen the family, he carried the high-backed chair to his old corner by the fire, and, seating himself on the very edge, drew forth a brown pocket-handkerchief, and applied the same to his optics.

While this was going forward, the elder Mr. Weller sat back in his chair, with his eyes wide open, his hands planted on his knees, and his whole countenance expressive of absorbing and overwhelming astonishment. Sam sat opposite him in perfect silence, waiting, with eager curiosity, for the termination of the scene.

Mr. Stiggins kept the brown pocket-handkerchief before his eyes for some minutes, moaning decently meanwhile, and then, mastering his feelings by a strong effort, put it in his pocket and buttoned it up. After this, he stirred the fire; after that, he rubbed his hands and looked at Sam.

"Oh, my young friend," said Mr. Stiggins, breaking the silence in a very low voice, "here's a sorrowful affliction!"

Sam nodded very slightly.

"For the man of wrath, too!" added Mr. Stiggins; "it makes a vessel's heart bleed!"

Mr. Weller was overheard by his son to murmur something relative to making a vessel's nose bleed; but Mr. Stiggins heard him not.

"Do you know, young man," whispered Mr. Stiggins, drawing his chair closer to Sam, "whether she has left Emanuel any thing?"

"Who's he?" inquired Sam.

"The chapel," replied Mr. Stiggins; "our chapel; our fold, Mr. Samuel."

"She hasn't left the fold nothin', nor the shepherd

nothin', nor the animals nothin'," said Sam, decisively; "nor the dogs neither."

Mr. Stiggins looked slyly at Sam; glanced at the old gentleman, who was sitting with his eyes closed, as if asleep; and drawing his chair still nearer, said,

"Nothing for *me*, Mr. Samuel?"

Sam shook his head.

"I think there's something," said Stiggins, turning as pale as he could turn. "Consider, Mr. Samuel; no little token?"

"Not so much as the vorth o' that 'ere old umberella o' yourn," replied Sam.

"Perhaps," said Mr. Stiggins, hesitatingly, after a few moments' deep thought, "perhaps she recommended me to the care of the man of wrath, Mr. Samuel?"

"I think that's wery likely, from what he said," rejoined Sam; "he wos a-speakin' about you jist now."

"Was he, though?" exclaimed Stiggins, brightening up. "Ah! He's changed, I dare say. We might live very comfortably together now, Mr. Samuel, eh? I could take care of his property when you are away—good care, you see."

Heaving a long-drawn sigh, Mr. Stiggins paused for a response. Sam nodded, and Mr. Weller the elder gave vent to an extraordinary sound, which being neither a groan, nor a grunt, nor a gasp, nor a growl, seemed to partake in some degree of the character of all four.

Mr. Stiggins, encouraged by this sound, which he understood to betoken remorse or repentance, looked about him, rubbed his hands, wept, smiled, wept again, and then, walking softly across the room to a well-remembered shelf in one corner, took down a tumbler, and with great deliberation put four lumps of sugar in it. Having got thus far, he looked about him again, and sighed grievously; with that, he walked softly into the bar, and presently returning with the tumbler half full of pine-apple rum, advanced to the kettle which was singing gayly on the hob, mixed his grog, stirred it, sipped it, sat down, and taking a long and hearty pull at the rum-and-water, stopped for breath.

The elder Mr. Weller, who still continued to make various strange and uncouth attempts to appear asleep, offered not a single word during these proceedings; but when Stiggins stopped for breath, he darted upon him, and snatching the tumbler from his hand, threw the remainder of the rum-and-water in his face, and the glass itself into the grate. Then, seizing the reverend gentleman firmly by the collar, he suddenly fell to kicking him most furiously: accompanying every application of his top-boots to Mr. Stiggins's person with sundry violent and incoherent anathemas upon his limbs, eyes, and body.

"Sammy," said Mr. Weller, "put my hat on tight for me."

Sam dutifully adjusted the hat with the long hatband more firmly on his father's head, and the old gentleman, resuming his kicking with greater agility than before, tumbled with Mr. Stiggins through the bar, and through the passage, out at the front door, and so into the street; the kicking continuing the whole way, and increasing in vehemence, rather than diminishing, every time the top-boot was lifted.

It was a beautiful and exhilarating sight to see the red-nosed man writhing in Mr. Weller's grasp, and his whole frame quivering with anguish as kick followed kick in rapid succession; it was a still more exciting spectacle to behold Mr. Weller, after a powerful struggle, immersing Mr. Stiggins's head in a horse-trough full of water, and holding it there until he was half suffocated.

"There!" said Mr. Weller, throwing all his energy into one most complicated kick, as he at length permitted Mr. Stiggins to withdraw his head from the trough, "send any vun o' them lazy shepherds here, and I'll pound him to a jelly first, and drownd him artervards! Sammy, help me in, and fill me a small glass of brandy; I'm out o' breath, my boy."

CHAPTER LIII.

COMPRISING THE FINAL EXIT OF MR. JINGLE AND JOB TROTTER; WITH A GREAT MORNING OF BUSINESS IN GRAY'S INN SQUARE. CONCLUDING WITH A DOUBLE KNOCK AT MR. PERKER'S DOOR.

WHEN Arabella, after some gentle preparation, and many assurances that there was not the least occasion for being low-spirited, was at length made acquainted by Mr. Pickwick with the unsatisfactory result of his visit to Birmingham, she burst into tears, and sobbing aloud, lamented in moving terms that she should have been the unhappy cause of any estrangement between a father and his son.

"My dear girl," said Mr. Pickwick, kindly, "it is no fault of yours. It was impossible to foresee that the old gentleman would be so strongly prepossessed against his son's marriage, you know. I am sure," added Mr. Pickwick, glancing at her pretty face, "he can have very little idea of the pleasure he denies himself."

"Oh my dear Mr. Pickwick," said Arabella, "what shall we do, if he continues to be angry with us?"

"Why, wait patiently, my dear, until he thinks better of it," replied Mr. Pickwick, cheerfully.

"But, dear Mr. Pickwick, what is to become of Nathaniel if his father withdraws his assistance?" urged Arabella.

"In that case, my love," rejoined Mr. Pickwick, "I will venture to prophesy that he will find some other friend who will not be backward in helping him to start in the world."

The significance of this reply was not so well disguised by Mr. Pickwick but that Arabella understood it. So, throwing her arms round his neck and kissing him affectionately, she sobbed louder than before.

"Come, come," said Mr. Pickwick, taking her hand, "we will wait here a few days longer, and see whether he writes or takes any other notice of your husband's communication. If not, I have thought of half a dozen plans, any one of which would make you happy at once. There, my dear, there!"

With these words, Mr. Pickwick gently pressed Arabella's hand, and bade her dry her eyes, and not distress her husband. Upon which, Arabella, who was one of the best little creatures alive, put her handkerchief in her reticule, and by the time Mr.

Winkle joined them, exhibited in full lustre the same beaming smiles and sparkling eyes that had originally captivated him.

"This is a distressing predicament for these young people," thought Mr. Pickwick, as he dressed himself next morning. "I'll walk up to Perker's, and consult him about the matter."

As Mr. Pickwick was further prompted to betake himself to Gray's Inn Square by an anxious desire to come to a pecuniary settlement with the kind-hearted little attorney without further delay, he made a hurried breakfast, and executed his intention so speedily, that ten o'clock had not struck when he reached Gray's Inn.

It still wanted ten minutes to the hour when he had ascended the staircase on which Perker's chambers were. The clerks had not arrived yet, and he beguiled the time by looking out of the staircase window.

The healthy light of a fine October morning made even the dingy old houses brighten up a little: some of the dusty windows actually looking almost cheerful as the sun's rays gleamed upon them. Clerk after clerk hastened into the square by one or other of the entrances, and looking up at the Hall clock, accelerated or decreased his rate of walking according to the time at which his office hours nominally commenced; the half-past nine o'clock people suddenly becoming very brisk, and the ten o'clock gentlemen falling into a pace of most aristocratic slowness. The clock struck ten, and clerks poured in faster than ever, each one in a greater perspiration than his predecessor. The noise of unlocking and opening doors echoed and re-echoed on every side; heads appeared as if by magic in every window; the porters took up their stations for the day; the slipshod laundresses hurried off; the postman ran from house to house; and the whole legal hive was in a bustle.

"You're early, Mr. Pickwick," said a voice behind him.

"Ah, Mr. Lowten," replied that gentleman, looking round, and recognizing his old acquaintance.

"Precious warm walking, isn't it?" said Lowten, drawing a Bramah key from his pocket, with a small plug therein, to keep the dust out.

"You appear to feel it so," rejoined Mr. Pickwick, smiling at the clerk, who was literally red-hot.

"I've come along rather, I can tell you," replied Lowten. "It went the half hour as I came through the Polygon. I'm here before *him*, though, so I don't mind."

Comforting himself with this reflection, Mr. Lowten extracted the plug from the door-key, and having opened the door, replugged and repocketed his Bramah, and picked up the letters which the postman had dropped through the box. He then ushered Mr. Pickwick into the office. Here, in the twinkling of an eye, he divested himself of his coat, put on a threadbare garment which he took out of a desk, hung up his hat, pulled forth a few sheets of cartridge and blotting-paper in alternate layers, and sticking a pen behind his ear, rubbed his hands with an air of great satisfaction.

"There you see, Mr. Pickwick," he said, "now I'm complete. I've got my office-coat on, and my pad out, and let him come as soon as he likes. You haven't got a pinch of snuff about you, have you?"

"No, I have not," replied Mr. Pickwick.

"I'm sorry for it," said Lowten. "Never mind. I'll run out presently, and get a bottle of soda. Don't I look rather queer about the eyes, Mr. Pickwick?"

The individual appealed to surveyed Mr. Lowten's eyes from a distance, and expressed his opinion that no unusual queerness was perceptible in those features.

"I'm glad of it," said Lowten. "We were keeping it up pretty tolerably at the Stump last night, and I'm rather out of sorts this morning. Perker's been about that business of yours, by-the-bye."

"What business?" inquired Mr. Pickwick. "Mrs. Bardell's costs?"

"No, I don't mean that," replied Mr. Lowten. "About getting that customer that we paid the ten shillings in the pound to the bill-discounter for on your account—to get him out of the Fleet, you know—about getting him to Demerara."

"Oh! Mr. Jingle?" said Mr. Pickwick, hastily. "Yes. Well?"

"Well, it's all arranged," said Lowten, mending his pen. "The agent at Liverpool said he had been obliged to you many times when you were in business, and he would be glad to take him on your recommendation."

"That's well," said Mr. Pickwick. "I am delighted to hear it."

"But I say," resumed Lowten, scraping the back of the pen preparatory to making a fresh split, "*what* a soft chap that other is!"

"Which other?"

"Why, that servant, or friend, or whatever he is; *you* know; Trotter."

"Ah!" said Mr. Pickwick, with a smile. "I always thought him the reverse."

"Well, and so did I, from what little I saw of him," replied Lowten; "it only shows how one may be deceived. What do you think of *his* going to Demerara, too?"

"What! And giving up what was offered him here!" exclaimed Mr. Pickwick.

"Treating Perker's offer of eighteen bob a week, and a rise if he behaved himself, like dirt," replied Lowten. "He said he must go along with the other one, and so they persuaded Perker to write again, and they've got him something on the same estate; not near so good, Perker says, as a convict would get in New South Wales if he appeared at his trial in a new suit of clothes."

"Foolish fellow," said Mr. Pickwick, with glistening eyes. "Foolish fellow."

"Oh, it's worse than foolish; it's downright sneaking, you know," replied Lowten, nibbing the pen with a contemptuous face. "He says that he's the only friend he ever had, and he's attached to him, and all that. Friendship's a very good thing in its way: we are all very friendly and comfortable at the Stump, for instance, over our grog, where every man pays for himself; but damn hurting yourself for any body else, you know! No man should have more than two attachments—the first to number one, and the second to the ladies; that's what I say