Perhaps he did; having just left a pleasant little smoking-party of twelve medical students, in a small back parlor with a large fire.

"But I am delighted to see you," said Mr. Ben Allen. "Bless you, Bella!"

"There," said Arabella, bending forward to kiss her brother; "don't take hold of me again, Ben dear, because you tumble me so."

At this point of the reconciliation, Mr. Ben Allen allowed his feelings and the cigars and porter to overcome him, and looked round upon the beholders with damp spectacles.

"Is nothing to be said to me?" cried Wardle, with open arms.

"A great deal," whispered Arabella, as she received the old gentleman's hearty caress and congratulation. "You are a hard-hearted, unfeeling, cruel monster!"

"You are a little rebel," replied Wardle, in the same tone, "and I am afraid I shall be obliged to forbid you the house. People like you, who get married in spite of every body, ought not to be let loose on society. But come!" added the old gentleman aloud, "here's the dinner; you shall sit by me. Joe; why, damn the boy, he's awake!"

To the great distress of his master, the fat boy was indeed in a state of remarkable vigilance; his eyes being wide open, and looking as if they intended to remain so. There was an alacrity in his manner, too, which was equally unaccountable; every time his eyes met those of Emily or Arabella, he smirked and grinned; once, Wardle could have sworn he saw him wink.

This alteration in the fat boy's demeanor originated in his increased sense of his own importance, and the dignity he acquired from having been taken into the confidence of the young ladies; and the smirks, and grins, and winks, were so many condescending assurances that they might depend upon his fidelity. As these tokens were rather calculated to awaken suspicion than allay it, and were somewhat embarrassing besides, they were occasionally answered by a frown or shake of the head from Arabella, which the fat boy considering as hints to be on his guard, expressed his perfect understanding of, by smirking, grinning, and winking, with redoubled assiduity.

"Joe," said Mr. Wardle, after an unsuccessful search in all his pockets, "is my snuff-box on the sofa?"

"No, sir," replied the fat boy.

"Oh, I recollect; I left it on my dressing-table this morning," said Wardle. "Run into the next room and fetch it."

The fat boy went into the next room; and having been absent about a minute, returned with the snuff-box, and the palest face that ever a fat boy wore.

"What's the matter with the boy!" exclaimed Wardle.

"Nothin's the matter with me," replied Joe, nervously.

"Have you been seeing any spirits?" inquired the old gentleman.

"Or taking any?" added Ben Allen.

"I think you're right," whispered Wardle across the table. "He is intoxicated, I'm sure."

Ben Allen replied that he thought he was; and as that gentleman had seen a vast deal of the disease in question, Wardle was confirmed in an impression which had been hovering about his mind for half an hour, and at once arrived at the conclusion that the fat boy was drunk.

"Just keep your eye upon him for a few minutes," murmured Wardle. "We shall soon find out whether he is or not."

The unfortunate youth had only interchanged a dozen words with Mr. Snodgrass: that gentleman having implored him to make a private appeal to some friend to release him, and then pushed him out with the snuff-box, lest his prolonged absence should lead to a discovery. He ruminated a little with a most disturbed expression of face, and left the room in search of Mary.

But Mary had gone home after dressing her mistress, and the fat boy came back again more disturbed than before.

Wardle and Mr. Ben Allen exchanged glances.

"Joe!" said Wardle.

"Yes, sir."

"What did you go away for?"

The fat boy looked hopelessly in the face of every body at table, and stammered out, that he didn't know.

"Oh," said Wardle, "you don't know, eh? Take this cheese to Mr. Pickwick."

Now, Mr. Pickwick being in the very best health and spirits, had been making himself perfectly delightful all dinner-time, and was at this moment engaged in an energetic conversation with Emily and Mr. Winkle: bowing his head courteously, in the emphasis of his discourse, gently waving his left hand to lend force to his observations, and all glowing with placid smiles. He took a piece of cheese from the plate, and was on the point of turning round to renew the conversation, when the fat boy, stooping so as to bring his head on a level with that of Mr. Pickwick, pointed with his thumb over his shoulder, and made the most horrible and hideous face that was ever seen out of a Christmas pantomime.

"Dear me!" said Mr. Pickwick, starting, "what a very—eh?" He stopped, for the fat boy had drawn himself up, and was, or pretended to be, fast asleep.

"What's the matter?" inquired Wardle.

"This is such an extremely singular lad!" replied Mr. Pickwick, looking uneasily at the boy. "It seems an odd thing to say, but upon my word I am afraid that at times he is a little deranged."

"Oh! Mr. Pickwick, pray don't say so," cried Emily and Arabella, both at once.

"I am not certain, of course," said Mr. Pickwick, amidst profound silence, and looks of general dismay; "but his manner to me this moment was really very alarming. Oh!" ejaculated Mr. Pickwick, suddenly jumping up with a short scream. "I beg your pardon, ladies, but at that moment he ran some sharp instrument into my leg. Really, he is not safe."

"He's drunk," roared old Wardle, passionately. "Ring the bell! Call the waiters! He's drunk."

"I ain't," said the fat boy, falling on his knees as his master seized him by the collar. "I ain't drunk."

"Then you're mad; that's worse. Call the waiters," said the old gentleman.

"I ain't mad; I'm sensible," rejoined the fat boy, beginning to cry.

"Then what the devil do you run sharp instruments into Mr. Pickwick's legs for?" inquired Wardle, angrily.

"He wouldn't look at me," replied the boy. "I wanted to speak to him."

"What did you want to say?" asked half a dozen voices at once.

The fat boy gasped, looked at the bedroom door, gasped again, and wiped two tears away with the knuckle of each of his forefingers.

"What did you want to say?" demanded Wardle, shaking him.

"Stop!" said Mr. Pickwick; "allow me. What did you wish to communicate to me, my poor boy?"

"I want to whisper to you," replied the fat boy.

"You want to bite his ear off, I suppose," said Wardle. "Don't come near him; he's vicious; ring the bell, and let him be taken down stairs."

Just as Mr. Winkle caught the bell-rope in his hand, it was arrested by a general expression of astonishment; the captive lover, his face burning with confusion, suddenly walked in from the bedroom, and made a comprehensive bow to the company.

"Halloo!" cried Wardle, releasing the fat boy's collar, and staggering back. "What's this!"

"I have been concealed in the next room, sir, since you returned," explained Mr. Snodgrass.

"Emily, my girl," said Wardle, reproachfully, "I detest meanness and deceit; this is unjustifiable and indelicate in the highest degree. I don't deserve this at your hands, Emily, indeed!"

"Dear papa," said Emily, "Arabella knows—every body here knows—Joe knows—that I was no party to this concealment. Augustus, for Heaven's sake, explain it!"

Mr. Snodgrass, who had only waited for a hearing, at once recounted how he had been placed in his then distressing predicament; how the fear of giving rise to domestic dissensions had alone prompted him to avoid Mr. Wardle on his entrance; how he merely meant to depart by another door, but, finding it locked, had been compelled to stay against his will. It was a painful situation to be placed in; but he now regretted it the less, inasmuch as it afforded him an opportunity of acknowledging, before their mutual friends, that he loved Mr. Wardle's daughter deeply and sincerely; that he was proud to avow that the feeling was mutual; and that if thousands of miles were placed between them, or oceans rolled their waters, he could never for an instant forget those happy days when first—and so on.

Having delivered himself to this effect, Mr. Snodgrass bowed again, looked into the crown of his hat, and stepped toward the door.

"Stop!" shouted Wardle. "Why, in the name of all that's—"

"Inflammable," mildly suggested Mr. Pickwick, who thought something worse was coming.

"Well—that's inflammable," said Wardle, adopting the substitute; "couldn't you say all this to me in the first instance?"

"Or confide in me?" added Mr. Pickwick.

"Dear, dear," said Arabella, taking up the defense, "what is the use of asking all that now, especially when you know you had set your covetous old heart on a richer son-in-law, and are so wild and fierce besides, that every body is afraid of you except me. Shake hands with him, and order him some dinner, for goodness gracious' sake, for he looks half-starved; and pray have your wine up at once, for you'll not be tolerable until you have taken two bottles at least."

The worthy old gentleman pulled Arabella's ear, kissed her without the smallest scruple, kissed his daughter also with great affection, and shook Mr. Snodgrass warmly by the hand.

"She is right on one point, at all events," said the old gentleman, cheerfully. "Ring for the wine!"

The wine came, and Perker came up stairs at the same moment. Mr. Snodgrass had dinner at a side table, and when he had dispatched it, drew his chair next Emily, without the smallest opposition on the old gentleman's part.

The evening was excellent. Little Mr. Perker came out wonderfully, told various comic stories, and sang a serious song which was almost as funny as the anecdotes. Arabella was very charming, Mr. Wardle very jovial, Mr. Pickwick very harmonious, Mr. Ben Allen very uproarious, the lovers very silent, Mr. Winkle very talkative, and all of them very happy.

CHAPTER LV.

MR. SOLOMON PELL, ASSISTED BY A SELECT COMMITTEE OF COACHMEN, ARRANGES THE AFFAIRS OF THE ELDER MR. WELLER.

"SAMIVEL," said Mr. Weller, accosting his son on the morning after the funeral, "I've found it, Sammy. I thought it wos there."

"Thought wot wos vere?" inquired Sam.

"Your mother-in-law's vill, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller. "In wirtue o' vich, them arrangements is to be made as I told you on last night, respectin' the funs."

"Wot, didn't she tell you were it wos?" inquired Sam.

"Not a bit on it, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller. "We wos a-adjestin' our little differences, and I wos a-cheerin' her spirits and bearin' her up, so that I forgot to ask any thin' about it. I don't know as I should ha' done it indeed, if I had remembered it," added Mr. Weller, "for it's a rum sort o' thing, Sammy, to go a-hankerin' arter any body's property, ven you're assistin' 'em in illness. It's like helping an outside passenger up, ven he's been pitched off a coach, and puttin' your hand in his pocket, vile you ask him vith a sigh how he finds hisself, Sammy."

With this figurative illustration of his meaning, Mr. Weller unclasped his pocket-book, and drew forth a dirty sheet of letter-paper, on which were inscribed various characters crowded together in remarkable confusion.

"This here is the dockyment, Sammy," said Mr. Weller. "I found it in the little black tea-pot on the top shelf o' the bar closet. She used to keep bank-notes there afore she vos married, Samivel. I've seen her take the lid off, to pay a bill, many and

many a time. Poor creetur, she might ha' filled all the tea-pots in the house vith vills, and not have inconwenienced herself neither, for she took wery little of any thin' in that vay lately, 'cept on the Temperance nights, ven they just laid a foundation o' tea to put the spirits atop on!"

"What does it say?" inquired Sam.

"Jist vot I told you, my boy," rejoined his parent. "Two hundred pound vurth o' reduced counsels to my son-in-law, Samivel, and all the rest o' my property, of ev'ry kind and description votsoever, to my husband, Mr. Tony Veller, who I appint as my sole eggzekiter."

"That's all, is it?" said Sam.

"That's all," replied Mr. Weller. "And I s'pose as it's all right and satisfactory to you and me as is the only parties interested, ve may as vell put this bit o' paper into the fire."

"Wot are you a-doin' on, you lunatic?" said Sam, snatching the paper away, as his parent, in all innocence, stirred the fire preparatory to suiting the action to the word. "You're a nice eggzekiter, you are."

"Vy not?" inquired Mr. Weller, looking sternly round, with the poker in his hand.

"Vy not!" exclaimed Sam. "'Cos it must be proved, and probated, and swore to, and all manner o' formalities."

"You don't mean that?" said Mr. Weller, laying down the poker.

Sam buttoned the will carefully in a side pocket; intimating by a look, meanwhile, that he did mean it, and very seriously too.

"Then I'll tell you wot it is," said Mr. Weller, after a short meditation, "this is a case for that 'ere confidential pal o' the Chancellorship's. Pell must look into this, Sammy. He's the man for a difficult question at law. Ve'll have this here brought afore the Solvent Court directly, Samivel."

"I never did see such a addle-headed old creetur!" exclaimed Sam, irritably, "Old Baileys, and Solvent Courts, and alleybis, and ev'ry species o' gammon alvays a-runnin' through his brain! You'd better get your out-o'-door clothes on, and come to town about this bisness, than stand a-preachin' there about wot you don't understand nothin' on."

"Wery good, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller, "I'm quite agreeable to any thin' as vill hexpedite business, Sammy. But mind this here, my boy, nobody but Pell—nobody but Pell as a legal adwiser."

"I don't want any body else," replied Sam. "Now, are you a-comin'?"

"Vait a minit, Sammy," replied Mr. Weller, who, having tied his shawl with the aid of a small glass that hung in the window, was now, by dint of the most wonderful exertions, struggling into his upper garments. "Vait a minit, Sammy; ven you grow as old as your father, you von't get into your veskit quite as easy as you do now, my boy."

"If I couldn't get into it easier than that, I'm blessed if I'd vear vun at all," rejoined his son.

"You think so now," said Mr. Weller, with the gravity of age, "but you'll find that as you get vider, you'll get viser. Vidth and visdom, Sammy, alvays grows together."

As Mr. Weller delivered this infallible maxim—the result of many years' personal experience and observation—he contrived, by a dexterous twist of his body, to get the bottom button of his coat to perform its office. Having paused a few seconds to recover breath, he brushed his hat with his elbow, and declared himself ready.

"As four heads is better than two, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, as they drove along the London Road in the chaise-cart, "and as all this here property is a wery great temptation to a legal gen'l'm'n, ve'll take a couple o' friends o' mine vith us, as'll be wery soon down upon him if he comes any thin' irreg'lar; two o' them as saw you to the Fleet that day. They're the wery best judges," added Mr. Weller in a half-whisper, "the wery best judges of a horse you ever know'd."

"And of a lawyer too?" inquired Sam.

"The man as can form a ackerate judgment of a animal, can form a ackerate judgment of any thin'," replied his father; so dogmatically, that Sam did not attempt to controvert the position.

In pursuance of this notable resolution, the services of the mottle-faced gentleman and of two other very fat coachmen—selected by Mr. Weller, probably, with a view to their width and consequent wisdom—were put into requisition; and this assistance having been secured, the party proceeded to the public-house in Portugal Street, whence a messenger was dispatched to the Insolvent Court over the way, requiring Mr. Solomon Pell's immediate attendance.

The messenger fortunately found Mr. Solomon Pell in court, regaling himself, business being rather slack, with the cold collation of an Abernethy biscuit and a saveloy. The message was no sooner whispered in his ear than he thrust them in his pocket among various professional documents, and hurried over the way with such alacrity, that he reached the parlor before the messenger had even emancipated himself from the court.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Pell, touching his hat, "my service to you all. I don't say it to flatter you, gentlemen, but there are not five other men in the world that I'd have come out of that court for to-day."

"So busy, eh?" said Sam.

"Busy!" replied Pell; "I'm completely sewn up, as my friend the late Lord Chancellor many a time used to say to me, gentlemen, when he came out from hearing appeals in the House of Lords. Poor fellow! he was very susceptible of fatigue; he used to feel those appeals uncommonly. I actually thought more than once that he'd have sunk under 'em; I did indeed."

Here Mr. Pell shook his head and paused; on which the elder Mr. Weller, nudging his neighbor, as begging him to mark the attorney's high connections, asked whether the duties in question produced any permanent ill effects on the constitution of his noble friend.

"I don't think he ever quite recovered them," replied Pell; "in fact I'm sure he never did. 'Pell,' he used to say to me many a time, 'how the blazes you can stand the head-work you do, is a mystery to me.'—'Well,' I used to answer, '*I* hardly know how I do it, upon my life.'—'Pell,' he'd add, sighing, and looking at me with a little envy—friendly envy, you know, gentlemen, mere friendly envy; I never minded it—'Pell, you're a wonder; a wonder.' Ah! you'd have liked him very much, if you had known him, gentlemen. Bring me three penn'orth of rum, my dear."

Addressing this latter remark to the waitress in a tone of subdued grief, Mr. Pell sighed, looked at his shoes, and the ceiling; and, the rum having by that time arrived, drunk it up.

"However," said Pell, drawing a chair to the table, "a professional man has no right to think of his private friendships when his legal assistance is wanted. By-the-bye, gentlemen, since I saw you here before, we have had to weep over a very melancholy occurrence."

Mr. Pell drew out a pocket-handkerchief when he came to the word weep, but he made no further use of it than to wipe away a slight tinge of rum which hung upon his upper-lip.

"I saw it in the *Advertiser*, Mr. Weller," continued Pell. "Bless my soul, not more than fifty-two! Dear me—only think."

These indications of a musing spirit were addressed to the mottle-faced man, whose eyes Mr. Pell had accidentally caught; on which, the mottle-faced man, whose apprehension of matters in general was of a foggy nature, moved uneasily in his seat, and opined that indeed, so far as that went, there was no saying how things *was* brought about; which observation, involving one of those subtle propositions which it is difficult to encounter in argument, was controverted by nobody.

"I have heard it remarked that she was a very fine woman, Mr. Weller," said Pell, in a sympathizing manner.

"Yes, sir, she wos," replied the elder Mr. Weller, not much relishing this mode of discussing the subject, and yet thinking that the attorney, from his long intimacy with the late Lord Chancellor, must know best on all matters of polite breeding. "She wos a wery fine 'ooman, sir, ven I first know'd her. She wos a widder, sir, at that time."

"Now, it's curious," said Pell, looking round with a sorrowful smile; "Mrs. Pell was a widow."

"That's very extraordinary," said the mottle-faced man.

"Well, it is a curious coincidence," said Pell.

"Not at all," gruffly remarked the elder Mr. Weller. "More widders is married than single wimin."

"Very good, very good," said Pell, "you're quite right, Mr. Weller. Mrs. Pell was a very elegant and accomplished woman; her manners were the theme of universal admiration in our neighborhood. I was proud to see that woman dance; there was something so firm and dignified, and yet natural, in her motion. Her cutting, gentlemen, was simplicity itself. Ah! well, well! Excuse my asking the question, Mr. Samuel," continued the attorney, in a lower voice, "was your mother-in-law tall?"

"Not wery," replied Sam.

"Mrs. Pell was a tall figure," said Pell, "a splendid woman, with a noble shape, and a nose, gentlemen, formed to command and be majestic. She was very much attached to me—very much—highly connected, too. Her mother's brother, gentlemen, failed for eight hundred pounds, as a Law Stationer."

"Vell," said Mr. Weller, who had grown rather restless during this discussion, "vith regard to bis'ness."

The word was music to Pell's ears. He had been revolving in his mind whether any business was to be transacted, or whether he had been merely invited to partake of a glass of brandy-and-water, or a bowl of punch, or any similar professional compliment, and now the doubt was set at rest without his appearing at all eager for its solution. His eyes glistened as he laid his hat on the table, and said,

"What is the business upon which—um? Either of these gentlemen wish to go through the court? We require an arrest; a friendly arrest will do, you know; we are all friends here, I suppose?"

"Give me the dockyment, Sammy," said Mr. Weller, taking the will from his son, who appeared to enjoy the interview amazingly. "Wot we rekvire, sir, is a probe o' this here."

"Probate, my dear sir, probate," said Pell.

"Well, sir," replied Mr. Weller, sharply, "probe and probe it, is wery much the same; if you don't understand wot I mean, sir, I dare say I can find them as does."

"No offense, I hope, Mr. Weller," said Pell, meekly. "You are the executor, I see," he added, casting his eyes over the paper.

"I am, sir," replied Mr. Weller.

"These other gentlemen, I presume, are legatees, are they?" inquired Pell, with a congratulatory smile.

"Sammy is a leg-at-ease," replied Mr. Weller; "these other gen'l'm'n is friends o' mine, just come to see fair; a kind of umpires."

"Oh!" said Pell, "very good. I have no objections, I'm sure. I shall want a matter of five pound of you before I begin—ha! ha! ha!"

It being decided by the committee that the five pound might be advanced, Mr. Weller produced that sum; after which, a long consultation about nothing particular took place, in the course whereof Mr. Pell demonstrated to the perfect satisfaction of the gentlemen who saw fair, that unless the management of the business had been intrusted to him, it must all have gone wrong, for reasons not clearly made out, but no doubt sufficient. This important point being dispatched, Mr. Pell refreshed himself with three chops, and liquids both malt and spirituous, at the expense of the estate; and then they all went away to Doctors' Commons.

The next day there was another visit to Doctors' Commons, and a great to do with an attesting hostler, who, being inebriated, declined swearing any thing but profane oaths, to the great scandal of a proctor and surrogate. Next week there were more visits to Doctors' Commons, and there was a visit to the Legacy Duty Office besides, and there were treaties entered into, for the disposal of the lease and business, and ratifications of the same, and inventories to be made out, and lunches to be taken, and dinners to be eaten, and so many profitable things to be done, and such a mass of papers accumulated, that Mr. Solomon Pell, and the boy, and the blue bag to boot, all got so stout that scarcely any body would have known them for the same man, boy, and bag, that had loitered about Portugal Street, a few days before.

At length all these weighty matters being arranged, a day was fixed for selling out and transferring the stock, and of waiting with that view upon Wilkins Flasher, Esq., stock-broker, of somewhere near the Bank, who had been recommended by Mr. Solomon Pell for the purpose.

It was a kind of festive occasion, and the parties were attired accordingly. Mr. Weller's tops were newly cleaned, and his dress was arranged with peculiar care; the mottle-faced gentleman wore at his button-hole a full-sized dahlia with several leaves; and the coats of his two friends were adorned with nosegays of laurel and other evergreens. All three were habited in strict holiday costume; that is to say, they were wrapped up to the chins, and wore as many clothes as possible, which is, and has been, a stage-coachman's idea of full dress ever since stage-coaches were invented.

Mr. Pell was waiting at the usual place of meeting at the appointed time; even Mr. Pell wore a pair of gloves, and a clean shirt much frayed at the collar and wristbands by frequent washings.

"A quarter to two," said Pell, looking at the parlor clock. "If we are with Mr. Flasher at a quarter past, we shall just hit the best time."

"What should you say to a drop o' beer, gen'l'm'n?" suggested the mottle-faced man.

"And a little bit o' cold beef," said the second coachman.

"Or a oyster," added the third, who was a hoarse gentleman, supported by very round legs.

"Hear, hear!" said Pell; "to congratulate Mr. Weller, on his coming into possession of his property: eh? ha! ha!"

"I'm quite agreeable, gen'l'm'n," answered Mr. Weller. "Sammy, pull the bell."

Sam complied; and the porter, cold beef, and oysters being promptly produced, the lunch was done ample justice to. Where every body took so active a part, it is almost invidious to make a distinction; but if one individual evinced greater powers than another, it was the coachman with the hoarse voice, who took an imperial pint of vinegar with his oysters, without betraying the least emotion.

"Mr. Pell, sir," said the elder Mr. Weller, stirring a glass of brandy-and-water, of which one was placed before every gentleman when the oyster-shells were removed; "Mr. Pell, sir, it wos my intention to have proposed the funs on this occasion, but Samivel has vispered to me—"

Here Mr. Samuel Weller, who had silently eaten his oysters with tranquil smiles, cried "Hear!" in a very loud voice.

"—Has vispered to me," resumed his father, "that it vould be better to dewote the liquor to vishin' you success and prosperity, and thankin' you for the manner in which you've brought this here business through. Here's your health, sir."

"Hold hard there," interposed the mottle-faced gentleman, with sudden energy, "your eyes on me, gen'l'm'n!"

Saying this, the mottle-faced gentleman rose, as did the other gentlemen. The mottle-faced gentleman reviewed the company, and slowly lifted his hand, upon which every man (including him of the mottled countenance) drew a long breath, and lifted his tumbler to his lips. In one instant the mottle-faced gentleman depressed his hand again, and every glass was set down empty. It is impossible to describe the thrilling effect produced by this striking ceremony. At once dignified, solemn, and impressive, it combined every element of grandeur.

"Well, gentlemen," said Mr. Pell, "all I can say is, that such marks of confidence must be very gratifying to a professional man. I don't wish to say any thing that might appear egotistical, gentlemen, but I'm very glad, for your own sakes, that you came to me: that's all. If you had gone to any low member of the profession, it's my firm conviction, and I assure you of it as a fact, that you would have found yourselves in Queer Street before this. I could have wished my noble friend had been alive to have seen my management of this case. I don't say it out of pride, but I think—however, gentlemen, I won't trouble you with that. I'm generally to be found here, gentlemen, but if I'm not here, or over the way, that's my address. You'll find my terms very cheap and reasonable, and no man attends more to his clients than I do, and I hope I know a little of my profession besides. If you have any opportunity of recommending me to any of your friends, gentlemen, I shall be very much obliged to you, and so will they too, when they come to know me. *Your* healths, gentlemen."

With this expression of his feelings, Mr. Solomon Pell laid three small written cards before Mr. Weller's friends, and, looking at the clock again, feared it was time to be walking. Upon this hint, Mr. Weller settled the bill, and, issuing forth, the executor, legatee, attorney, and umpires, directed their steps toward the City.

The office of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, of the Stock Exchange, was in a first-floor up a court behind the Bank of England; the house of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was at Brixton, Surrey; the horse and stanhope of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, were at an adjacent livery-stable; the groom of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was on his way to the West End to deliver some game; the clerk of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, had gone to his dinner; and so Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, himself cried, "Come in," when Mr. Pell and his companions knocked at the counting-house door.

"Good-morning, sir," said Pell, bowing obsequiously. "We want to make a little transfer, if you please."

"Oh, come in, will you?" said Mr. Flasher. "Sit down a minute; I'll attend to you directly."

"Thank you, sir," said Pell, "there's no hurry. Take a chair, Mr. Weller."

"Mr. Weller took a chair, and Sam took a box, and the umpires took what they could get, and looked at the almanac and one or two papers which were wafered against the wall, with as much open-eyed reverence as if they had been the finest efforts of the old masters.

"Well, I'll bet you half a dozen of claret on it; come!" said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, resuming the conversation to which Mr. Pell's entrance had caused a momentary interruption.

This was addressed to a very smart young gentleman who wore his hat on his right whisker, and was lounging over the desk, killing flies with a ruler.

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was balancing himself on two legs of an office-stool, spearing a wafer-box with a pen-knife, which he dropped every now and then with great dexterity into the very centre of a small red wafer that was stuck outside. Both gentlemen had very open waistcoats and very rolling collars, and very small boots, and very big rings, and very little watches, and very large guard-chains, and symmetrical inexpressibles, and scented pocket-handkerchiefs.

"I never bet half a dozen," said the other gentleman. "I'll take a dozen."

"Done, Simmery, done!" said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

"P. P., mind," observed the other.

"Of course," replied Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, entered it in a little book, with a gold pencil-case, and the other gentleman entered it also, in another little book with another gold pencil-case.

"I see there's a notice up this morning about Boffer," observed Mr. Simmery. "Poor devil, he's expelled the house!"

"I'll bet you ten guineas to five, he cuts his throat," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

"Done," replied Mr. Simmery.

"Stop! I bar," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, thoughtfully. "Perhaps he may hang himself."

"Very good," rejoined Mr. Simmery, pulling out the gold pencil-case again. "I've no objection to take you that way. Say, makes away with himself."

"Kills himself, in fact," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

"Just so," replied Mr. Simmery, putting it down. "'Flasher—ten guineas to five, Boffer kills himself.' Within what time shall we say?"

"A fortnight?" suggested Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

"Con-found it, no," rejoined Mr. Simmery, stopping for an instant to smash a fly with the ruler. "Say a week."

"Split the difference," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. "Make it ten days."

"Well; ten days," rejoined Mr. Simmery.

So, it was entered down in the little books that Boffer was to kill himself within ten days, or Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was to hand over to Frank Simmery, Esquire, the sum of ten guineas; and that if Boffer did kill himself within that time, Frank Simmery, Esquire, would pay to Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, five guineas instead.

"I'm very sorry he has failed," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. "Capital dinners he gave."

"Fine port he had too," remarked Mr. Simmery. "We are going to send our butler to the sale to-morrow, to pick up some of that sixty-four."

"The devil you are," said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. "My man's going too. Five guineas my man outbids your man."

"Done."

Another entry was made in the little books with the gold pencil-cases; and Mr. Simmery having by this time killed all the flies and taken all the bets, strolled away to the Stock Exchange to see what was going forward.

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, now condescended to receive Mr. Solomon Pell's instructions, and having filled up some printed forms, requested the party to follow him to the Bank, which they did; Mr. Weller and his three friends staring at all they beheld in unbounded astonishment, and Sam encountering every thing with a coolness which nothing could disturb.

Crossing a court-yard which was all noise and bustle; and passing a couple of porters who seemed dressed to match the red fire-engine which was wheeled away into a corner; they passed into an office where their business was to be transacted, and where Pell and Mr. Flasher left them standing for a few moments, while they went up stairs into the Will Office.

"Wot place is this here?" whispered the mottle-faced gentleman to the elder Mr. Weller.

"Counsel's Office," replied the executor, in a whisper.

"Wot are them gen'l'm'n a-settin' behind the counters?" asked the hoarse coachman.

"Reduced counsels, I s'pose," replied Mr. Weller. "Ain't they reduced counsels, Samivel?"

"Wy, you don't suppose the reduced counsels is alive, do you?" inquired Sam, with some disdain.

"How should I know?" retorted Mr. Weller; "I thought they looked wery like it. Wot are they, then?"

"Clerks," replied Sam.

"Wot are they all a-eatin' ham sangwidges for?" inquired his father.

"'Cos it's in their dooty, I suppose," replied Sam, "it's a part o' the system; they're alvays a-doin' it here, all day long!"

Mr. Weller and his friends had scarcely had a moment to reflect upon this singular regulation as connected with the monetary system of the country, when they were rejoined by Pell and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, who led them to a part of the counter above which was a round black board with a large "W." on it.

"Wot's that for, sir?" inquired Mr. Weller, directing Pell's attention to the target in question.

"The first letter of the name of the deceased," replied Pell.

"I say," said Mr. Weller, turning round to the umpires. "There's somethin' wrong here. We's our letter—this won't do."

The referees at once gave it as their decided opinion that the business could not be legally proceeded with under the letter W, and in all probability it would have stood over for one day at least, had it not been for the prompt, though, at first sight, undutiful behavior of Sam, who, seizing his father by the skirt of the coat, dragged him to the counter, and pinned him there, until he had affixed his signature to a couple of instruments; which, from Mr. Weller's habit of printing, was a work of so much labor and time, that the officiating clerk peeled and ate three Ripstone pippins while it was performing.

As the elder Mr. Weller insisted on selling out his portion forthwith, they proceeded from the Bank to the gate of the Stock Exchange, to which Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, after a short absence, returned with a check on Smith, Payne, and Smith, for five hundred and thirty pounds; that being the sum of money to

which Mr. Weller, at the market-price of the day, was entitled, in consideration of the balance of the second Mrs. Weller's funded savings. Sam's two hundred pounds stood transferred to his name, and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, having been paid his commission, dropped the money carelessly into his coat-pocket, and lounged back to his office.

Mr. Weller was at first obstinately determined on cashing the check in nothing but sovereigns; but it being represented by the umpires that by so doing he must incur the expense of a small sack to carry them home in, he consented to receive the amount in five-pound notes.

"My son," said Mr. Weller, as they came out of the banking-house, "my son and me has a very particular engagement this arternoon, and I should like to have this here bis'ness settled out of hand, so let's jest go straight avay someveres, vere ve can hordit the accounts."

A quiet room was soon found, and the accounts were produced and audited. Mr. Pell's bill was taxed by Sam, and some charges were disallowed by the umpires; but, notwithstanding Mr. Pell's declaration, accompanied with many solemn asseverations that they were really too hard upon him, it was by very many degrees the best professional job he had ever had, and one on which he boarded, lodged, and washed, for six months afterward.

The umpires having partaken of a dram, shook hands and departed, as they had to drive out of town that night. Mr. Solomon Pell, finding that nothing more was going forward, either in the eating or drinking way, took a friendly leave, and Sam and his father were left alone.

"There!" said Mr. Weller, thrusting his pocket-book in his side pocket. "Vith the bills for the lease and that, there's eleven hundred and eighty pound here. Now, Samivel, my boy, turn the horses' heads to the George and Wulter!"

CHAPTER LVI.

AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE TAKES PLACE BETWEEN MR. PICKWICK AND SAMUEL WELLER, AT WHICH HIS PARENT ASSISTS. AN OLD GENTLEMAN IN A SNUFF-COLORED SUIT ARRIVES UNEXPECTEDLY.

MR. PICKWICK was sitting alone, musing over many things, and thinking, among other considerations, how he could best provide for the young couple whose present unsettled condition was matter of constant regret and anxiety to him, when Mary stepped lightly into the room, and, advancing to the table, said, rather hastily,

"Oh, if you please, sir, Samuel is down stairs, and he says may his father see you?"

"Surely," replied Mr. Pickwick.

"Thank you, sir," said Mary, tripping toward the door again.

"Sam has not been here long, has he?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"Oh no, sir," replied Mary, eagerly. "He has only just come home. He is not going to ask you for any more leave, sir, he says."

Mary might have been conscious that she had communicated this last intelligence with more warmth than seemed actually necessary, or she might have observed the good-humored smile with which Mr. Pickwick regarded her, when she had finished speaking. She certainly held down her head, and examined the corner of a very smart little apron, with more closeness than there appeared any absolute occasion for.

"Tell them they can come up at once, by all means," said Mr. Pickwick.

Mary, apparently much relieved, hurried away with her message.

Mr. Pickwick took two or three turns up and down the room; and rubbing his chin with his left hand as he did so, appeared lost in thought.

"Well, well," said Mr. Pickwick at length, in a kind but somewhat melancholy tone, "it is the best way in which I could reward him for his attachment and fidelity; let it be so, in Heaven's name. It is the fate of a lonely old man, that those about him should form new and different attachments, and leave him. I have no right to expect that it should be otherwise with me. No, no," added Mr. Pickwick, more cheerfully, "it would be selfish and ungrateful. I ought to be happy to have an opportunity of providing for him so well. I am. Of course I am."

Mr. Pickwick had been so absorbed in these reflections, that a knock at the door was three or four times repeated before he heard it. Hastily seating himself, and calling up his accustomed pleasant looks, he gave the required permission, and Sam Weller entered, followed by his father.

"Glad to see you back again, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick. "How do you do, Mr. Weller."

"Wery hearty, thankee, sir," replied the widower; "hope I see *you* well, sir."

"Quite, I thank you," replied Mr. Pickwick.

"I wanted to have a little bit of conversation with you, sir," said Mr. Weller, "if you could spare me five minits or so, sir."

"Certainly," replied Mr. Pickwick. "Sam, give your father a chair."

"Thankee, Samivel, I've got a cheer here," said Mr. Weller, bringing one forward as he spoke; "uncommon fine day it's been, sir," added the old gentleman, laying his hat on the floor as he sat himself down.

"Remarkably so, indeed," replied Mr. Pickwick. "Very seasonable."

"Seasonablest veather I ever see, sir," rejoined Mr. Weller. Here, the old gentleman was seized with a violent fit of coughing, which, being terminated, he nodded his head and winked and made several supplicatory and threatening gestures to his son, all of which Sam Weller steadily abstained from seeing.

Mr. Pickwick, perceiving that there was some embarrassment on the old gentleman's part, affected to be engaged in cutting the leaves of a book that lay beside him, and waited patiently until Mr. Weller should arrive at the object of his visit.

"I never see sich a aggerawatin' boy as you are, Samivel," said Mr. Weller, looking indignantly at his son; "never in all my born days."

"What is he doing, Mr. Weller?" inquired Mr. Pickwick.

"He von't begin, sir," rejoined Mr. Weller; "he knows I ain't ekal to ex-pressin' myself ven there's any thin' partickler to be done, and yet he'll stand and see me a-settin' here takin' up your walable time, and makin' a reg'lar spectacle o' myself, rayther than help me out vith a syllable. It ain't filial conduct, Samivel," said Mr. Weller, wiping his forehead; "wery far from it."

"You said you'd speak," replied Sam; "how should I know you wos done up at the wery beginnin'?"

"You might ha' seen I warn't able to start," rejoined his father; "I'm on the wrong side of the road, and backin' into the palins, and all manner of unpleasantness, and yet you von't put out a hand to help me. I'm ashamed on you, Samivel."

"The fact is, sir," said Sam, with a slight bow, "the gov'nor's been a-drawin' his money."

"Wery good, Samivel, wery good," said Mr. Weller, nodding his head with a satisfied air, "I didn't mean to speak harsh to you, Sammy. Wery good. That's the vay to begin. Come to the pint at once. Wery good indeed, Samivel."

Mr. Weller nodded his head an extraordinary number of times, in the excess of his gratification, and waited in a listening attitude for Sam to resume his statement.

"You may sit down, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick, apprehending that the interview was likely to prove rather longer than he had expected.

Sam bowed again and sat down; his father looking round, he continued,

"The gov'nor, sir, has drawn out five hundred and thirty pound."

"Reduced counsels," interposed Mr. Weller, senior, in an undertone.

"It don't much matter vether it's reduced counsels, or wot not," said Sam; "five hundred and thirty pound is the sum, ain't it?"

"All right, Samivel," replied Mr. Weller.

"To vich sum, he has added for the house and bisness—"

"Lease, good-vill, stock, and fixters," interposed Mr. Weller.

—"As much as makes it," continued Sam, "altogether, eleven hundred and eighty pound."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Pickwick. "I am delighted to hear it. I congratulate you, Mr. Weller, on having done so well."

"Vait a minit, sir," said Mr. Weller, raising his hand in a deprecatory manner. "Get on, Samivel."

"This here money," said Sam, with a little hesitation, "he's anxious to put someveres vere he knows it'll be safe, and I'm wery anxious too, for if he keeps it, he'll go a-lendin' it to somebody, or inwestin' property in horses, or droppin' his pocket-book down a airy, or makin' a Egyptian mummy of hisself in some vay or another."

"Wery good, Samivel," observed Mr. Weller, in as complacent a manner as if Sam had been passing the highest eulogiums on his prudence and foresight. "Wery good."

"For vich reasons," continued Sam, plucking nervously at the brim of his hat; "for vich reasons, he's drawd it out to-day, and come here vith me to say, leastvays to offer, or in other vords to—"

"—To say this here," said the elder Mr. Weller, impatiently, "that it ain't o' no use to me. I'm agoin' to vork a coach reg'lar, and ha'nt got noveres to keep it in, unless I vos to pay the guard for takin' care on it, or to put it in vun o' the coach-pockets, vich 'ud be a temptation to the insides. If you'll take care on it for me, sir, I shall be wery much obliged to you. P'raps," said Mr. Weller, walking up to Mr. Pickwick and whispering in his ear, "p'raps it'll go a little vay toward the expenses o' that 'ere conwiction. All I say is, just you keep it till I ask you for it again." With these words, Mr. Weller placed the pocket-book in Mr. Pickwick's hands, caught up his hat, and ran out of the room with a celerity scarcely to be expected from so corpulent a subject.

"Stop him, Sam!" exclaimed Mr. Pickwick, earnestly. "Overtake him; bring him back instantly! Mr. Weller—here—come back!"

Sam saw that his master's injunctions were not to be disobeyed; and catching his father by the arm as he was descending the stairs, dragged him back by main force.

"My good friend," said Mr. Pickwick, taking the old man by the hand; "your honest confidence overpowers me."

"I don't see no occasion for nothin' o' the kind, sir," replied Mr. Weller, obstinately.

"I assure you, my good friend, I have more money than I can ever need; far more than a man at my age can ever live to spend," said Mr. Pickwick.

"No man knows how much he can spend till he tries," observed Mr. Weller.

"Perhaps not," replied Mr. Pickwick; "but as I have no intention of trying any such experiments, I am not likely to come to want. I must beg you to take this back, Mr. Weller."

"Wery well," said Mr. Weller, with a discontented look. "Mark my vords, Sammy. I'll do somethin' desperate vith this here property; somethin' desperate!"

"You'd better not," replied Sam.

Mr. Weller reflected for a short time, and then, buttoning up his coat with great determination, said,

"I'll keep a pike."

"Wot!" exclaimed Sam.

"A pike," rejoined Mr. Weller, through his set teeth; "I'll keep a pike. Say good-bye to your father, Samivel. I dewote the remainder o' my days to a pike."

This threat was such an awful one, and Mr. Weller, besides appearing fully resolved to carry it into execution, seemed so deeply mortified by Mr. Pickwick's refusal, that that gentleman, after a short reflection, said,

"Well, well, Mr. Weller, I will keep the money. I can do more good with it, perhaps, than you can."

"Just the wery thing, to be sure," said Mr. Weller, brightening up; "o' course you can, sir."

"Say no more about it," said Mr. Pickwick, locking the pocket-book in his desk; "I am heartily obliged to you, my good friend. Now sit down again. I want to ask your advice."

The internal laughter occasioned by the triumphant success of his visit, which had convulsed not only