

Chapter IV

A Field Day And Bivouac - More New Friends - An Invitation To The Country

Many authors entertain, not only a foolish, but a really dishonest objection to acknowledge the sources whence they derive much valuable information. We have no such feeling. We are merely endeavouring to discharge, in an upright manner, the responsible duties of our editorial functions; and whatever ambition we might have felt under other circumstances to lay claim to the authorship of these adventures, a regard for truth forbids us to do more than claim the merit of their judicious arrangement and impartial narration. The Pickwick papers are our New River Head; and we may be compared to the New River Company. The labours of others have raised for us an immense reservoir of important facts. We merely lay them on, and communicate them, in a clear and gentle stream, through the medium of these pages, to a world thirsting for Pickwickian knowledge.

Acting in this spirit, and resolutely proceeding on our determination to avow our obligations to the authorities we have consulted, we frankly say, that to the note-book of Mr Snodgrass are we indebted for the particulars recorded in this and the succeeding chapter - particulars which, now that we have disburdened our consciences, we shall proceed to detail without further comment.

The whole population of Rochester and the adjoining towns rose from their beds at an early hour of the following morning, in a state of the utmost bustle and excitement. A grand review was to take place upon the lines. The manoeuvres of half a dozen regiments were to be inspected by the eagle eye of the commander-in-chief; temporary fortifications had been erected, the citadel was to be attacked and taken, and a mine was to be sprung.

Mr Pickwick was, as our readers may have gathered from the slight extract we gave from his description of Chatham, an enthusiastic admirer of the army. Nothing could have been more delightful to him - nothing could have harmonised so well with the peculiar feeling of each of his companions - as this sight. Accordingly they were soon afoot, and walking in the direction of the scene of action, towards which crowds of people were already pouring from a variety of quarters.

The appearance of everything on the lines denoted that the approaching ceremony was one of the utmost grandeur and importance. There were sentries posted to keep the ground for the troops, and servants on the batteries keeping places for the ladies, and sergeants running to and fro, with vellum-covered books under

their arms, and Colonel Bulder, in full military uniform, on horseback, galloping first to one place and then to another, and backing his horse among the people, and prancing, and curvetting, and shouting in a most alarming manner, and making himself very hoarse in the voice, and very red in the face, without any assignable cause or reason whatever. Officers were running backwards and forwards, first communicating with Colonel Bulder, and then ordering the sergeants, and then running away altogether; and even the very privates themselves looked from behind their glazed stocks with an air of mysterious solemnity, which sufficiently bespoke the special nature of the occasion.

Mr Pickwick and his three companions stationed themselves in the front of the crowd, and patiently awaited the commencement of the proceedings. The throng was increasing every moment; and the efforts they were compelled to make, to retain the position they had gained, sufficiently occupied their attention during the two hours that ensued. At one time there was a sudden pressure from behind, and then Mr Pickwick was jerked forward for several yards, with a degree of speed and elasticity highly inconsistent with the general gravity of his demeanour; at another moment there was a request to 'keep back' from the front, and then the butt-end of a musket was either dropped upon Mr Pickwick's toe, to remind him of the demand, or thrust into his chest, to insure its being complied with. Then some facetious gentlemen on the left, after pressing sideways in a body, and squeezing Mr Snodgrass into the very last extreme of human torture, would request to know 'vere he vos a shovin' to'; and when Mr Winkle had done expressing his excessive indignation at witnessing this unprovoked assault, some person behind would knock his hat over his eyes, and beg the favour of his putting his head in his pocket. These, and other practical witticisms, coupled with the unaccountable absence of Mr Tupman (who had suddenly disappeared, and was nowhere to be found), rendered their situation upon the whole rather more uncomfortable than pleasing or desirable.

At length that low roar of many voices ran through the crowd which usually announces the arrival of whatever they have been waiting for. All eyes were turned in the direction of the sally-port. A few moments of eager expectation, and colours were seen fluttering gaily in the air, arms glistened brightly in the sun, column after column poured on to the plain. The troops halted and formed; the word of command rang through the line; there was a general clash of muskets as arms were presented; and the commander-in-chief, attended by Colonel Bulder and numerous officers, cantered to the front. The military bands struck up altogether; the horses stood upon two legs each, cantered backwards, and whisked their tails about in all directions; the dogs barked, the mob screamed, the troops recovered, and nothing was to

be seen on either side, as far as the eye could reach, but a long perspective of red coats and white trousers, fixed and motionless.

Mr Pickwick had been so fully occupied in falling about, and disentangling himself, miraculously, from between the legs of horses, that he had not enjoyed sufficient leisure to observe the scene before him, until it assumed the appearance we have just described. When he was at last enabled to stand firmly on his legs, his gratification and delight were unbounded.

'Can anything be finer or more delightful?' he inquired of Mr Winkle.

'Nothing,' replied that gentleman, who had had a short man standing on each of his feet for the quarter of an hour immediately preceding. 'It is indeed a noble and a brilliant sight,' said Mr Snodgrass, in whose bosom a blaze of poetry was rapidly bursting forth, 'to see the gallant defenders of their country drawn up in brilliant array before its peaceful citizens; their faces beaming - not with warlike ferocity, but with civilised gentleness; their eyes flashing - not with the rude fire of rapine or revenge, but with the soft light of humanity and intelligence.'

Mr Pickwick fully entered into the spirit of this eulogium, but he could not exactly re-echo its terms; for the soft light of intelligence burned rather feebly in the eyes of the warriors, inasmuch as the command 'eyes front' had been given, and all the spectator saw before him was several thousand pair of optics, staring straight forward, wholly divested of any expression whatever.

'We are in a capital situation now,' said Mr Pickwick, looking round him. The crowd had gradually dispersed in their immediate vicinity, and they were nearly alone.

'Capital!' echoed both Mr Snodgrass and Mr Winkle.

'What are they doing now?' inquired Mr Pickwick, adjusting his spectacles.

'I - I - rather think,' said Mr Winkle, changing colour - 'I rather think they're going to fire.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr Pickwick hastily.

'I - I - really think they are,' urged Mr Snodgrass, somewhat alarmed.

'Impossible,' replied Mr Pickwick. He had hardly uttered the word, when the whole half-dozen regiments levelled their muskets as if they had but one common object, and that object the Pickwickians, and

burst forth with the most awful and tremendous discharge that ever shook the earth to its centres, or an elderly gentleman off his.

It was in this trying situation, exposed to a galling fire of blank cartridges, and harassed by the operations of the military, a fresh body of whom had begun to fall in on the opposite side, that Mr Pickwick displayed that perfect coolness and self-possession, which are the indispensable accompaniments of a great mind. He seized Mr Winkle by the arm, and placing himself between that gentleman and Mr Snodgrass, earnestly besought them to remember that beyond the possibility of being rendered deaf by the noise, there was no immediate danger to be apprehended from the firing.

'But - but - suppose some of the men should happen to have ball cartridges by mistake,' remonstrated Mr Winkle, pallid at the supposition he was himself conjuring up. 'I heard something whistle through the air now - so sharp; close to my ear.' 'We had better throw ourselves on our faces, hadn't we?' said Mr Snodgrass.

'No, no - it's over now,' said Mr Pickwick. His lip might quiver, and his cheek might blanch, but no expression of fear or concern escaped the lips of that immortal man.

Mr Pickwick was right - the firing ceased; but he had scarcely time to congratulate himself on the accuracy of his opinion, when a quick movement was visible in the line; the hoarse shout of the word of command ran along it, and before either of the party could form a guess at the meaning of this new manoeuvre, the whole of the half-dozen regiments, with fixed bayonets, charged at double-quick time down upon the very spot on which Mr Pickwick and his friends were stationed. Man is but mortal; and there is a point beyond which human courage cannot extend. Mr Pickwick gazed through his spectacles for an instant on the advancing mass, and then fairly turned his back and - we will not say fled; firstly, because it is an ignoble term, and, secondly, because Mr Pickwick's figure was by no means adapted for that mode of retreat - he trotted away, at as quick a rate as his legs would convey him; so quickly, indeed, that he did not perceive the awkwardness of his situation, to the full extent, until too late.

The opposite troops, whose falling-in had perplexed Mr Pickwick a few seconds before, were drawn up to repel the mimic attack of the sham besiegers of the citadel; and the consequence was that Mr Pickwick and his two companions found themselves suddenly inclosed between two lines of great length, the one advancing at a rapid pace, and the other firmly waiting the collision in hostile array.

'Hoi!' shouted the officers of the advancing line.

'Get out of the way!' cried the officers of the stationary one.

'Where are we to go to?' screamed the agitated Pickwickians.

'Hoi - hoi - hoi!' was the only reply. There was a moment of intense bewilderment, a heavy tramp of footsteps, a violent concussion, a smothered laugh; the half-dozen regiments were half a thousand yards off, and the soles of Mr Pickwick's boots were elevated in air.

Mr Snodgrass and Mr Winkle had each performed a compulsory somerset with remarkable agility, when the first object that met the eyes of the latter as he sat on the ground, staunching with a yellow silk handkerchief the stream of life which issued from his nose, was his venerated leader at some distance off, running after his own hat, which was gambolling playfully away in perspective.

There are very few moments in a man's existence when he experiences so much ludicrous distress, or meets with so little charitable commiseration, as when he is in pursuit of his own hat. A vast deal of coolness, and a peculiar degree of judgment, are requisite in catching a hat. A man must not be precipitate, or he runs over it; he must not rush into the opposite extreme, or he loses it altogether. The best way is to keep gently up with the object of pursuit, to be wary and cautious, to watch your opportunity well, get gradually before it, then make a rapid dive, seize it by the crown, and stick it firmly on your head; smiling pleasantly all the time, as if you thought it as good a joke as anybody else.

There was a fine gentle wind, and Mr Pickwick's hat rolled sportively before it. The wind puffed, and Mr Pickwick puffed, and the hat rolled over and over as merrily as a lively porpoise in a strong tide: and on it might have rolled, far beyond Mr Pickwick's reach, had not its course been providentially stopped, just as that gentleman was on the point of resigning it to its fate.

Mr Pickwick, we say, was completely exhausted, and about to give up the chase, when the hat was blown with some violence against the wheel of a carriage, which was drawn up in a line with half a dozen other vehicles on the spot to which his steps had been directed. Mr Pickwick, perceiving his advantage, darted briskly forward, secured his property, planted it on his head, and paused to take breath. He had not been stationary half a minute, when he heard his own name eagerly pronounced by a voice, which he at once recognised as Mr Tupman's, and, looking upwards, he beheld a sight which filled him with surprise and pleasure.

in an open barouche, the horses of which had been taken out, the better to accommodate it to the crowded place, stood a stout old

gentleman, in a blue coat and bright buttons, corduroy breeches and top-boots, two young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a young gentleman apparently enamoured of one of the young ladies in scarfs and feathers, a lady of doubtful age, probably the aunt of the aforesaid, and Mr Tupman, as easy and unconcerned as if he had belonged to the family from the first moments of his infancy. Fastened up behind the barouche was a hamper of spacious dimensions - one of those hampers which always awakens in a contemplative mind associations connected with cold fowls, tongues, and bottles of wine - and on the box sat a fat and red-faced boy, in a state of somnolency, whom no speculative observer could have regarded for an instant without setting down as the official dispenser of the contents of the before-mentioned hamper, when the proper time for their consumption should arrive.

Mr Pickwick had bestowed a hasty glance on these interesting objects, when he was again greeted by his faithful disciple.

'Pickwick - Pickwick,' said Mr Tupman; 'come up here. Make haste.'

'Come along, Sir. Pray, come up,' said the stout gentleman. 'Joe! - damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again. - Joe, let down the steps.' The fat boy rolled slowly off the box, let down the steps, and held the carriage door invitingly open. Mr Snodgrass and Mr Winkle came up at the moment.

'Room for you all, gentlemen,' said the stout man. 'Two inside, and one out. Joe, make room for one of these gentlemen on the box. Now, Sir, come along;' and the stout gentleman extended his arm, and pulled first Mr Pickwick, and then Mr Snodgrass, into the barouche by main force. Mr Winkle mounted to the box, the fat boy waddled to the same perch, and fell fast asleep instantly.

'Well, gentlemen,' said the stout man, 'very glad to see you. Know you very well, gentlemen, though you mayn't remember me. I spent some ev'nin's at your club last winter - picked up my friend Mr Tupman here this morning, and very glad I was to see him. Well, Sir, and how are you? You do look uncommon well, to be sure.'

Mr Pickwick acknowledged the compliment, and cordially shook hands with the stout gentleman in the top-boots.

'Well, and how are you, sir?' said the stout gentleman, addressing Mr Snodgrass with paternal anxiety. 'Charming, eh? Well, that's right - that's right. And how are you, sir (to Mr Winkle)? Well, I am glad to hear you say you are well; very glad I am, to be sure. My daughters, gentlemen - my gals these are; and that's my sister, Miss Rachael Wardle. She's a Miss, she is; and yet she ain't a Miss - eh, Sir, eh?'

And the stout gentleman playfully inserted his elbow between the ribs of Mr Pickwick, and laughed very heartily.

'Lor, brother!' said Miss Wardle, with a deprecating smile.

'True, true,' said the stout gentleman; 'no one can deny it. Gentlemen, I beg your pardon; this is my friend Mr Trundle. And now you all know each other, let's be comfortable and happy, and see what's going forward; that's what I say.' So the stout gentleman put on his spectacles, and Mr Pickwick pulled out his glass, and everybody stood up in the carriage, and looked over somebody else's shoulder at the evolutions of the military.

Astounding evolutions they were, one rank firing over the heads of another rank, and then running away; and then the other rank firing over the heads of another rank, and running away in their turn; and then forming squares, with officers in the centre; and then descending the trench on one side with scaling- ladders, and ascending it on the other again by the same means; and knocking down barricades of baskets, and behaving in the most gallant manner possible. Then there was such a ramming down of the contents of enormous guns on the battery, with instruments like magnified mops; such a preparation before they were let off, and such an awful noise when they did go, that the air resounded with the screams of ladies. The young Misses Wardle were so frightened, that Mr Trundle was actually obliged to hold one of them up in the carriage, while Mr Snodgrass supported the other; and Mr Wardle's sister suffered under such a dreadful state of nervous alarm, that Mr Tupman found it indispensably necessary to put his arm round her waist, to keep her up at all. Everybody was excited, except the fat boy, and he slept as soundly as if the roaring of cannon were his ordinary lullaby.

'Joe, Joe!' said the stout gentleman, when the citadel was taken, and the besiegers and besieged sat down to dinner. 'Damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again. Be good enough to pinch him, sir - in the leg, if you please; nothing else wakes him - thank you. Undo the hamper, Joe.'

The fat boy, who had been effectually roused by the compression of a portion of his leg between the finger and thumb of Mr Winkle, rolled off the box once again, and proceeded to unpack the hamper with more expedition than could have been expected from his previous inactivity.

'Now we must sit close,' said the stout gentleman. After a great many jokes about squeezing the ladies' sleeves, and a vast quantity of blushing at sundry jocose proposals, that the ladies should sit in the gentlemen's laps, the whole party were stowed down in the barouche;

and the stout gentleman proceeded to hand the things from the fat boy (who had mounted up behind for the purpose) into the carriage.

'Now, Joe, knives and forks.' The knives and forks were handed in, and the ladies and gentlemen inside, and Mr Winkle on the box, were each furnished with those useful instruments.

'Plates, Joe, plates.' A similar process employed in the distribution of the crockery. 'Now, Joe, the fowls. Damn that boy; he's gone to sleep again. Joe! Joe!' (Sundry taps on the head with a stick, and the fat boy, with some difficulty, roused from his lethargy.) 'Come, hand in the eatables.'

There was something in the sound of the last word which roused the unctuous boy. He jumped up, and the leaden eyes which twinkled behind his mountainous cheeks leered horribly upon the food as he unpacked it from the basket.

'Now make haste,' said Mr Wardle; for the fat boy was hanging fondly over a capon, which he seemed wholly unable to part with. The boy sighed deeply, and, bestowing an ardent gaze upon its plumpness, unwillingly consigned it to his master.

'That's right - look sharp. Now the tongue - now the pigeon pie. Take care of that veal and ham - mind the lobsters - take the salad out of the cloth - give me the dressing.' Such were the hurried orders which issued from the lips of Mr Wardle, as he handed in the different articles described, and placed dishes in everybody's hands, and on everybody's knees, in endless number. 'Now ain't this capital?' inquired that jolly personage, when the work of destruction had commenced.

'Capital!' said Mr Winkle, who was carving a fowl on the box.

'Glass of wine?'

'With the greatest pleasure.' 'You'd better have a bottle to yourself up there, hadn't you?'

'You're very good.'

'Joe!'

'Yes, Sir.' (He wasn't asleep this time, having just succeeded in abstracting a veal patty.)

'Bottle of wine to the gentleman on the box. Glad to see you, Sir.'

'Thank'ee.' Mr Winkle emptied his glass, and placed the bottle on the coach-box, by his side.

'Will you permit me to have the pleasure, Sir?' said Mr Trundle to Mr Winkle.

'With great pleasure,' replied Mr Winkle to Mr Trundle, and then the two gentlemen took wine, after which they took a glass of wine round, ladies and all.

'How dear Emily is flirting with the strange gentleman,' whispered the spinster aunt, with true spinster-aunt-like envy, to her brother, Mr Wardle.

'Oh! I don't know,' said the jolly old gentleman; 'all very natural, I dare say - nothing unusual. Mr Pickwick, some wine, Sir?' Mr Pickwick, who had been deeply investigating the interior of the pigeon-pie, readily assented.

'Emily, my dear,' said the spinster aunt, with a patronising air, 'don't talk so loud, love.'

'Lor, aunt!'

'Aunt and the little old gentleman want to have it all to themselves, I think,' whispered Miss Isabella Wardle to her sister Emily. The young ladies laughed very heartily, and the old one tried to look amiable, but couldn't manage it.

'Young girls have such spirits,' said Miss Wardle to Mr Tupman, with an air of gentle commiseration, as if animal spirits were contraband, and their possession without a permit a high crime and misdemeanour.

'Oh, they have,' replied Mr Tupman, not exactly making the sort of reply that was expected from him. 'It's quite delightful.'

'Hem!' said Miss Wardle, rather dubiously.

'Will you permit me?' said Mr Tupman, in his blandest manner, touching the enchanting Rachael's wrist with one hand, and gently elevating the bottle with the other. 'Will you permit me?'

'Oh, sir!' Mr Tupman looked most impressive; and Rachael expressed her fear that more guns were going off, in which case, of course, she should have required support again.

'Do you think my dear nieces pretty?' whispered their affectionate aunt to Mr Tupman.

'I should, if their aunt wasn't here,' replied the ready Pickwickian, with a passionate glance.

'Oh, you naughty man - but really, if their complexions were a little better, don't you think they would be nice-looking girls - by candlelight?'

'Yes; I think they would,' said Mr Tupman, with an air of indifference.

'Oh, you quiz - I know what you were going to say.'

'What?' inquired Mr Tupman, who had not precisely made up his mind to say anything at all.

'You were going to say that Isabel stoops - I know you were - you men are such observers. Well, so she does; it can't be denied; and, certainly, if there is one thing more than another that makes a girl look ugly it is stooping. I often tell her that when she gets a little older she'll be quite frightful. Well, you are a quiz!'

Mr Tupman had no objection to earning the reputation at so cheap a rate: so he looked very knowing, and smiled mysteriously.

'What a sarcastic smile,' said the admiring Rachael; 'I declare I'm quite afraid of you.'

'Afraid of me!'

'Oh, you can't disguise anything from me - I know what that smile means very well.'

'What?' said Mr Tupman, who had not the slightest notion himself.

'You mean,' said the amiable aunt, sinking her voice still lower - 'you mean, that you don't think Isabella's stooping is as bad as Emily's boldness. Well, she is bold! You cannot think how wretched it makes me sometimes - I'm sure I cry about it for hours together - my dear brother is SO good, and so unsuspecting, that he never sees it; if he did, I'm quite certain it would break his heart. I wish I could think it was only manner - I hope it may be - ' (Here the affectionate relative heaved a deep sigh, and shook her head despondingly).

'I'm sure aunt's talking about us,' whispered Miss Emily Wardle to her sister - 'I'm quite certain of it - she looks so malicious.'

'Is she?' replied Isabella. - 'Hem! aunt, dear!'

'Yes, my dear love!'

'I'm SO afraid you'll catch cold, aunt - have a silk handkerchief to tie round your dear old head - you really should take care of yourself - consider your age!'

However well deserved this piece of retaliation might have been, it was as vindictive a one as could well have been resorted to. There is no guessing in what form of reply the aunt's indignation would have vented itself, had not Mr Wardle unconsciously changed the subject, by calling emphatically for Joe.

'Damn that boy,' said the old gentleman, 'he's gone to sleep again.'

'Very extraordinary boy, that,' said Mr Pickwick; 'does he always sleep in this way?'

'Sleep!' said the old gentleman, 'he's always asleep. Goes on errands fast asleep, and snores as he waits at table.'

'How very odd!' said Mr Pickwick.

'Ah! odd indeed,' returned the old gentleman; 'I'm proud of that boy - wouldn't part with him on any account - he's a natural curiosity! Here, Joe - Joe - take these things away, and open another bottle - d'ye hear?'

The fat boy rose, opened his eyes, swallowed the huge piece of pie he had been in the act of masticating when he last fell asleep, and slowly obeyed his master's orders - gloating languidly over the remains of the feast, as he removed the plates, and deposited them in the hamper. The fresh bottle was produced, and speedily emptied: the hamper was made fast in its old place - the fat boy once more mounted the box - the spectacles and pocket-glass were again adjusted - and the evolutions of the military recommenced. There was a great fizzing and banging of guns, and starting of ladies - and then a Mine was sprung, to the gratification of everybody - and when the mine had gone off, the military and the company followed its example, and went off too.

'Now, mind,' said the old gentleman, as he shook hands with Mr Pickwick at the conclusion of a conversation which had been carried on at intervals, during the conclusion of the proceedings, 'we shall see you all to-morrow.'

'Most certainly,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'You have got the address?'

'Manor Farm, Dingley Dell,' said Mr Pickwick, consulting his pocket-book. 'That's it,' said the old gentleman. 'I don't let you off, mind, under a week; and undertake that you shall see everything worth seeing. If you've come down for a country life, come to me, and I'll give you plenty of it. Joe - damn that boy, he's gone to sleep again - Joe, help Tom put in the horses.'

The horses were put in - the driver mounted - the fat boy clambered up by his side - farewells were exchanged - and the carriage rattled off. As the Pickwickians turned round to take a last glimpse of it, the setting sun cast a rich glow on the faces of their entertainers, and fell upon the form of the fat boy. His head was sunk upon his bosom; and he slumbered again.