Chapter XXX

How The Pickwickians Made And Cultivated The Acquaintance Of A Couple Of Nice Young Men Belonging To One Of The Liberal Professions; How They Disported Themselves On The Ice; And How Their Visit Came To A Conclusion

'Well, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, as that favoured servitor entered his bed-chamber, with his warm water, on the morning of Christmas Day, 'still frosty?'

'Water in the wash-hand basin's a mask o' ice, Sir,' responded Sam.

'Severe weather, Sam,' observed Mr Pickwick.

'Fine time for them as is well wropped up, as the Polar bear said to himself, ven he was practising his skating,' replied Mr Weller.

'I shall be down in a quarter of an hour, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, untying his nightcap.

'Wery good, sir,' replied Sam. 'There's a couple o' sawbones downstairs.'

'A couple of what!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick, sitting up in bed.

'A couple o' sawbones,' said Sam.

'What's a sawbones?' inquired Mr Pickwick, not quite certain whether it was a live animal, or something to eat.

'What! Don't you know what a sawbones is, sir?' inquired Mr Weller. 'I thought everybody know'd as a sawbones was a surgeon.'

'Oh, a surgeon, eh?' said Mr Pickwick, with a smile.

'Just that, sir,' replied Sam. 'These here ones as is below, though, ain't reg'lar thoroughbred sawbones; they're only in trainin'.' 'In other words they're medical students, I suppose?' said Mr Pickwick.

Sam Weller nodded assent.

'I am glad of it,' said Mr Pickwick, casting his nightcap energetically on the counterpane. 'They are fine fellows - very fine fellows; with judgments matured by observation and reflection; and tastes refined by reading and study. I am very glad of it.'

'They're a-smokin' cigars by the kitchen fire,' said Sam.

'Ah!' observed Mr Pickwick, rubbing his hands, 'overflowing with kindly feelings and animal spirits. Just what I like to see.' 'And one on 'em,' said Sam, not noticing his master's interruption, 'one on 'em's got his legs on the table, and is a-drinking brandy neat, vile the t'other one - him in the barnacles - has got a barrel o' oysters atween his knees, which he's a-openin' like steam, and as fast as he eats 'em, he takes a aim vith the shells at young dropsy, who's a sittin' down fast asleep, in the chimbley corner.'

'Eccentricities of genius, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'You may retire.'

Sam did retire accordingly. Mr Pickwick at the expiration of the quarter of an hour, went down to breakfast.

'Here he is at last!' said old Mr Wardle. 'Pickwick, this is Miss Allen's brother, Mr Benjamin Allen. Ben we call him, and so may you, if you like. This gentleman is his very particular friend, Mr - '

'Mr Bob Sawyer,'interposed Mr Benjamin Allen; whereupon Mr Bob Sawyer and Mr Benjamin Allen laughed in concert.

Mr Pickwick bowed to Bob Sawyer, and Bob Sawyer bowed to Mr Pickwick. Bob and his very particular friend then applied themselves most assiduously to the eatables before them; and Mr Pickwick had an opportunity of glancing at them both.

Mr Benjamin Allen was a coarse, stout, thick-set young man, with black hair cut rather short, and a white face cut rather long. He was embellished with spectacles, and wore a white neckerchief. Below his single-breasted black surtout, which was buttoned up to his chin, appeared the usual number of pepper- and-salt coloured legs, terminating in a pair of imperfectly polished boots. Although his coat was short in the sleeves, it disclosed no vestige of a linen wristband; and although there was quite enough of his face to admit of the encroachment of a shirt collar, it was not graced by the smallest approach to that appendage. He presented, altogether, rather a mildewy appearance, and emitted a fragrant odour of full-flavoured Cubas.

Mr Bob Sawyer, who was habited in a coarse, blue coat, which, without being either a greatcoat or a surtout, partook of the nature and qualities of both, had about him that sort of slovenly smartness, and swaggering gait, which is peculiar to young gentlemen who smoke in the streets by day, shout and scream in the same by night, call waiters by their Christian names, and do various other acts and deeds of an equally facetious description. He wore a pair of plaid trousers, and a large, rough, double-breasted waistcoat; out of doors, he carried

a thick stick with a big top. He eschewed gloves, and looked, upon the whole, something like a dissipated Robinson Crusoe.

Such were the two worthies to whom Mr Pickwick was introduced, as he took his seat at the breakfast-table on Christmas morning.

'Splendid morning, gentlemen,' said Mr Pickwick.

Mr Bob Sawyer slightly nodded his assent to the proposition, and asked Mr Benjamin Allen for the mustard.

'Have you come far this morning, gentlemen?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'Blue Lion at Muggleton,' briefly responded Mr Allen.

'You should have joined us last night,' said Mr Pickwick.

'So we should,' replied Bob Sawyer, 'but the brandy was too good to leave in a hurry; wasn't it, Ben?'

'Certainly,' said Mr Benjamin Allen; 'and the cigars were not bad, or the pork-chops either; were they, Bob?'

'Decidedly not,' said Bob. The particular friends resumed their attack upon the breakfast, more freely than before, as if the recollection of last night's supper had imparted a new relish to the meal.

'Peg away, Bob,' said Mr Allen, to his companion, encouragingly.

'So I do,' replied Bob Sawyer. And so, to do him justice, he did.

'Nothing like dissecting, to give one an appetite,' said Mr Bob Sawyer, looking round the table.

Mr Pickwick slightly shuddered.

'By the bye, Bob,' said Mr Allen, 'have you finished that leg yet?'

'Nearly,' replied Sawyer, helping himself to half a fowl as he spoke. 'It's a very muscular one for a child's.' 'Is it?' inquired Mr Allen carelessly.

'Very,' said Bob Sawyer, with his mouth full.

'I've put my name down for an arm at our place,' said Mr Allen. 'We're clubbing for a subject, and the list is nearly full, only we can't get hold of any fellow that wants a head. I wish you'd take it.'

'No,' replied 'Bob Sawyer; 'can't afford expensive luxuries.'

'Nonsense!' said Allen.

'Can't, indeed,' rejoined Bob Sawyer, 'I wouldn't mind a brain, but I couldn't stand a whole head.' 'Hush, hush, gentlemen, pray,' said Mr Pickwick, 'I hear the ladies.'

As Mr Pickwick spoke, the ladies, gallantly escorted by Messrs. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, returned from an early walk.

'Why, Ben!' said Arabella, in a tone which expressed more surprise than pleasure at the sight of her brother.

'Come to take you home to-morrow,' replied Benjamin.

Mr Winkle turned pale.

'Don't you see Bob Sawyer, Arabella?' inquired Mr Benjamin Allen, somewhat reproachfully. Arabella gracefully held out her hand, in acknowledgment of Bob Sawyer's presence. A thrill of hatred struck to Mr Winkle's heart, as Bob Sawyer inflicted on the proffered hand a perceptible squeeze.

'Ben, dear!' said Arabella, blushing; 'have - have - you been introduced to Mr Winkle?'

'I have not been, but I shall be very happy to be, Arabella,' replied her brother gravely. Here Mr Allen bowed grimly to Mr Winkle, while Mr Winkle and Mr Bob Sawyer glanced mutual distrust out of the corners of their eyes.

The arrival of the two new visitors, and the consequent check upon Mr Winkle and the young lady with the fur round her boots, would in all probability have proved a very unpleasant interruption to the hilarity of the party, had not the cheerfulness of Mr Pickwick, and the good humour of the host, been exerted to the very utmost for the common weal. Mr Winkle gradually insinuated himself into the good graces of Mr Benjamin Allen, and even joined in a friendly conversation with Mr Bob Sawyer; who, enlivened with the brandy, and the breakfast, and the talking, gradually ripened into a state of extreme facetiousness, and related with much glee an agreeable anecdote, about the removal of a tumour on some gentleman's head, which he illustrated by means of an oyster-knife and a half-quartern loaf, to the great edification of the assembled company. Then the whole train went to church, where Mr Benjamin Allen fell fast asleep; while Mr Bob Sawyer abstracted his thoughts from worldly matters, by the ingenious process of carving his name on the seat of the pew, in corpulent letters of four inches long.

'Now,' said Wardle, after a substantial lunch, with the agreeable items of strong beer and cherry-brandy, had been done ample justice to, 'what say you to an hour on the ice? We shall have plenty of time.'

'Capital!' said Mr Benjamin Allen.

'Prime!' ejaculated Mr Bob Sawyer.

'You skate, of course, Winkle?' said Wardle.

'Ye-yes; oh, yes,' replied Mr Winkle. 'I - I - am RATHER out of practice.'

'Oh, DO skate, Mr Winkle,' said Arabella. 'I like to see it so much.'

'Oh, it is SO graceful,' said another young lady. A third young lady said it was elegant, and a fourth expressed her opinion that it was 'swan-like.'

'I should be very happy, I'm sure,' said Mr Winkle, reddening; 'but I have no skates.'

This objection was at once overruled. Trundle had a couple of pair, and the fat boy announced that there were half a dozen more downstairs; whereat Mr Winkle expressed exquisite delight, and looked exquisitely uncomfortable.

Old Wardle led the way to a pretty large sheet of ice; and the fat boy and Mr Weller, having shovelled and swept away the snow which had fallen on it during the night, Mr Bob Sawyer adjusted his skates with a dexterity which to Mr Winkle was perfectly marvellous, and described circles with his left leg, and cut figures of eight, and inscribed upon the ice, without once stopping for breath, a great many other pleasant and astonishing devices, to the excessive satisfaction of Mr Pickwick, Mr Tupman, and the ladies; which reached a pitch of positive enthusiasm, when old Wardle and Benjamin Allen, assisted by the aforesaid Bob Sawyer, performed some mystic evolutions, which they called a reel.

All this time, Mr Winkle, with his face and hands blue with the cold, had been forcing a gimlet into the sole of his feet, and putting his skates on, with the points behind, and getting the straps into a very complicated and entangled state, with the assistance of Mr Snodgrass, who knew rather less about skates than a Hindoo. At length, however, with the assistance of Mr Weller, the unfortunate skates were firmly screwed and buckled on, and Mr Winkle was raised to his feet.

'Now, then, Sir,' said Sam, in an encouraging tone; 'off vith you, and show 'em how to do it.'

'Stop, Sam, stop!' said Mr Winkle, trembling violently, and clutching hold of Sam's arms with the grasp of a drowning man. 'How slippery it is, Sam!'

'Not an uncommon thing upon ice, Sir,' replied Mr Weller. 'Hold up, Sir!'

This last observation of Mr Weller's bore reference to a demonstration Mr Winkle made at the instant, of a frantic desire to throw his feet in the air, and dash the back of his head on the ice.

'These - these - are very awkward skates; ain't they, Sam?' inquired Mr Winkle, staggering.

'I'm afeerd there's a orkard gen'l'm'n in 'em, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Now, Winkle,' cried Mr Pickwick, quite unconscious that there was anything the matter. 'Come; the ladies are all anxiety.'

'Yes, yes,' replied Mr Winkle, with a ghastly smile. 'I'm coming.'

'Just a-goin' to begin,' said Sam, endeavouring to disengage himself. 'Now, Sir, start off!'

'Stop an instant, Sam,' gasped Mr Winkle, clinging most affectionately to Mr Weller. 'I find I've got a couple of coats at home that I don't want, Sam. You may have them, Sam.'

'Thank'ee, Sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'Never mind touching your hat, Sam,' said Mr Winkle hastily. 'You needn't take your hand away to do that. I meant to have given you five shillings this morning for a Christmas box, Sam. I'll give it you this afternoon, Sam.'

'You're wery good, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'Just hold me at first, Sam; will you?' said Mr Winkle. 'There - that's right. I shall soon get in the way of it, Sam. Not too fast, Sam; not too fast.'

Mr Winkle, stooping forward, with his body half doubled up, was being assisted over the ice by Mr Weller, in a very singular and un-swan-like manner, when Mr Pickwick most innocently shouted from the opposite bank -

'Sam!'

'Sir?'

'Here. I want you.'

'Let go, Sir,' said Sam. 'Don't you hear the governor a-callin'? Let go, sir.'

With a violent effort, Mr Weller disengaged himself from the grasp of the agonised Pickwickian, and, in so doing, administered a considerable impetus to the unhappy Mr Winkle. With an accuracy which no degree of dexterity or practice could have insured, that unfortunate gentleman bore swiftly down into the centre of the reel, at the very moment when Mr Bob Sawyer was performing a flourish of unparalleled beauty. Mr Winkle struck wildly against him, and with a loud crash they both fell heavily down. Mr Pickwick ran to the spot. Bob Sawyer had risen to his feet, but Mr Winkle was far too wise to do anything of the kind, in skates. He was seated on the ice, making spasmodic efforts to smile; but anguish was depicted on every lineament of his countenance.

'Are you hurt?' inquired Mr Benjamin Allen, with great anxiety.

'Not much,' said Mr Winkle, rubbing his back very hard. 'I wish you'd let me bleed you,' said Mr Benjamin, with great eagerness.

'No, thank you,' replied Mr Winkle hurriedly.

'I really think you had better,' said Allen.

'Thank you,' replied Mr Winkle; 'I'd rather not.'

'What do YOU think, Mr Pickwick?' inquired Bob Sawyer.

Mr Pickwick was excited and indignant. He beckoned to Mr Weller, and said in a stern voice, 'Take his skates off.'

'No; but really I had scarcely begun,' remonstrated Mr Winkle.

'Take his skates off,' repeated Mr Pickwick firmly.

The command was not to be resisted. Mr Winkle allowed Sam to obey it, in silence.

'Lift him up,' said Mr Pickwick. Sam assisted him to rise.

Mr Pickwick retired a few paces apart from the bystanders; and, beckoning his friend to approach, fixed a searching look upon him,

and uttered in a low, but distinct and emphatic tone, these remarkable words -

'You're a humbug, sir.' 'A what?' said Mr Winkle, starting.

'A humbug, Sir. I will speak plainer, if you wish it. An impostor, sir.'

With those words, Mr Pickwick turned slowly on his heel, and rejoined his friends.

While Mr Pickwick was delivering himself of the sentiment just recorded, Mr Weller and the fat boy, having by their joint endeavours cut out a slide, were exercising themselves thereupon, in a very masterly and brilliant manner. Sam Weller, in particular, was displaying that beautiful feat of fancy-sliding which is currently denominated 'knocking at the cobbler's door,' and which is achieved by skimming over the ice on one foot, and occasionally giving a postman's knock upon it with the other. It was a good long slide, and there was something in the motion which Mr Pickwick, who was very cold with standing still, could not help envying.

'It looks a nice warm exercise that, doesn't it?' he inquired of Wardle, when that gentleman was thoroughly out of breath, by reason of the indefatigable manner in which he had converted his legs into a pair of compasses, and drawn complicated problems on the ice.

'Ah, it does, indeed,' replied Wardle. 'Do you slide?'

'I used to do so, on the gutters, when I was a boy,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'Try it now,' said Wardle.

'Oh, do, please, Mr Pickwick!' cried all the ladies.

'I should be very happy to afford you any amusement,' replied Mr Pickwick, 'but I haven't done such a thing these thirty years.'

'Pooh! pooh! Nonsense!' said Wardle, dragging off his skates with the impetuosity which characterised all his proceedings. 'Here; I'll keep you company; come along!' And away went the good-tempered old fellow down the slide, with a rapidity which came very close upon Mr Weller, and beat the fat boy all to nothing.

Mr Pickwick paused, considered, pulled off his gloves and put them in his hat; took two or three short runs, baulked himself as often, and at last took another run, and went slowly and gravely down the slide,

with his feet about a yard and a quarter apart, amidst the gratified shouts of all the spectators.

'Keep the pot a-bilin', Sir!' said Sam; and down went Wardle again, and then Mr Pickwick, and then Sam, and then Mr Winkle, and then Mr Bob Sawyer, and then the fat boy, and then Mr Snodgrass, following closely upon each other's heels, and running after each other with as much eagerness as if their future prospects in life depended on their expedition.

It was the most intensely interesting thing, to observe the manner in which Mr Pickwick performed his share in the ceremony; to watch the torture of anxiety with which he viewed the person behind, gaining upon him at the imminent hazard of tripping him up; to see him gradually expend the painful force he had put on at first, and turn slowly round on the slide, with his face towards the point from which he had started; to contemplate the playful smile which mantled on his face when he had accomplished the distance, and the eagerness with which he turned round when he had done so, and ran after his predecessor, his black gaiters tripping pleasantly through the snow, and his eyes beaming cheerfulness and gladness through his spectacles. And when he was knocked down (which happened upon the average every third round), it was the most invigorating sight that can possibly be imagined, to behold him gather up his hat, gloves, and handkerchief, with a glowing countenance, and resume his station in the rank, with an ardour and enthusiasm that nothing Could abate.

The sport was at its height, the sliding was at the quickest, the laughter was at the loudest, when a sharp smart crack was heard. There was a quick rush towards the bank, a wild scream from the ladies, and a shout from Mr Tupman. A large mass of ice disappeared; the water bubbled up over it; Mr Pickwick's hat, gloves, and handkerchief were floating on the surface; and this was all of Mr Pickwick that anybody could see.

Dismay and anguish were depicted on every countenance; the males turned pale, and the females fainted; Mr Snodgrass and Mr Winkle grasped each other by the hand, and gazed at the spot where their leader had gone down, with frenzied eagerness; while Mr Tupman, by way of rendering the promptest assistance, and at the same time conveying to any persons who might be within hearing, the clearest possible notion of the catastrophe, ran off across the country at his utmost speed, screaming 'Fire!' with all his might.

It was at this moment, when old Wardle and Sam Weller were approaching the hole with cautious steps, and Mr Benjamin Allen was holding a hurried consultation with Mr Bob Sawyer on the advisability of bleeding the company generally, as an improving little bit of

professional practice - it was at this very moment, that a face, head, and shoulders, emerged from beneath the water, and disclosed the features and spectacles of Mr Pickwick.

'Keep yourself up for an instant - for only one instant!' bawled Mr Snodgrass.

'Yes, do; let me implore you - for my sake!' roared Mr Winkle, deeply affected. The adjuration was rather unnecessary; the probability being, that if Mr Pickwick had declined to keep himself up for anybody else's sake, it would have occurred to him that he might as well do so, for his own.

'Do you feel the bottom there, old fellow?' said Wardle.

'Yes, certainly,' replied Mr Pickwick, wringing the water from his head and face, and gasping for breath. 'I fell upon my back. I couldn't get on my feet at first.'

The clay upon so much of Mr Pickwick's coat as was yet visible, bore testimony to the accuracy of this statement; and as the fears of the spectators were still further relieved by the fat boy's suddenly recollecting that the water was nowhere more than five feet deep, prodigies of valour were performed to get him out. After a vast quantity of splashing, and cracking, and struggling, Mr Pickwick was at length fairly extricated from his unpleasant position, and once more stood on dry land.

'Oh, he'll catch his death of cold,' said Emily.

'Dear old thing!' said Arabella. 'Let me wrap this shawl round you, Mr Pickwick.'

'Ah, that's the best thing you can do,' said Wardle; 'and when you've got it on, run home as fast as your legs can carry you, and jump into bed directly.' A dozen shawls were offered on the instant. Three or four of the thickest having been selected, Mr Pickwick was wrapped up, and started off, under the guidance of Mr Weller; presenting the singular phenomenon of an elderly gentleman, dripping wet, and without a hat, with his arms bound down to his sides, skimming over the ground, without any clearly-defined purpose, at the rate of six good English miles an hour.

But Mr Pickwick cared not for appearances in such an extreme case, and urged on by Sam Weller, he kept at the very top of his speed until he reached the door of Manor Farm, where Mr Tupman had arrived some five minutes before, and had frightened the old lady into palpitations of the heart by impressing her with the unalterable

conviction that the kitchen chimney was on fire - a calamity which always presented itself in glowing colours to the old lady's mind, when anybody about her evinced the smallest agitation.

Mr Pickwick paused not an instant until he was snug in bed. Sam Weller lighted a blazing fire in the room, and took up his dinner; a bowl of punch was carried up afterwards, and a grand carouse held in honour of his safety. Old Wardle would not hear of his rising, so they made the bed the chair, and Mr Pickwick presided. A second and a third bowl were ordered in; and when Mr Pickwick awoke next morning, there was not a symptom of rheumatism about him; which proves, as Mr Bob Sawyer very justly observed, that there is nothing like hot punch in such cases; and that if ever hot punch did fail to act as a preventive, it was merely because the patient fell into the vulgar error of not taking enough of it.

The jovial party broke up next morning. Breakings-up are capital things in our school-days, but in after life they are painful enough. Death, self-interest, and fortune's changes, are every day breaking up many a happy group, and scattering them far and wide; and the boys and girls never come back again. We do not mean to say that it was exactly the case in this particular instance; all we wish to inform the reader is, that the different members of the party dispersed to their several homes; that Mr Pickwick and his friends once more took their seats on the top of the Muggleton coach; and that Arabella Allen repaired to her place of destination, wherever it might have been - we dare say Mr Winkle knew, but we confess we don't - under the care and guardianship of her brother Benjamin, and his most intimate and particular friend, Mr Bob Sawyer.

Before they separated, however, that gentleman and Mr Benjamin Allen drew Mr Pickwick aside with an air of some mystery; and Mr Bob Sawyer, thrusting his forefinger between two of Mr Pickwick's ribs, and thereby displaying his native drollery, and his knowledge of the anatomy of the human frame, at one and the same time, inquired -

'I say, old boy, where do you hang out?' Mr Pickwick replied that he was at present suspended at the George and Vulture.

'I wish you'd come and see me,' said Bob Sawyer.

'Nothing would give me greater pleasure,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'There's my lodgings,' said Mr Bob Sawyer, producing a card. 'Lant Street, Borough; it's near Guy's, and handy for me, you know. Little distance after you've passed St. George's Church - turns out of the High Street on the right hand side the way.'

'I shall find it,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Come on Thursday fortnight, and bring the other chaps with you,' said Mr Bob Sawyer; 'I'm going to have a few medical fellows that night.'

Mr Pickwick expressed the pleasure it would afford him to meet the medical fellows; and after Mr Bob Sawyer had informed him that he meant to be very cosy, and that his friend Ben was to be one of the party, they shook hands and separated.

We feel that in this place we lay ourself open to the inquiry whether Mr Winkle was whispering, during this brief conversation, to Arabella Allen; and if so, what he said; and furthermore, whether Mr Snodgrass was conversing apart with Emily Wardle; and if so, what HE said. To this, we reply, that whatever they might have said to the ladies, they said nothing at all to Mr Pickwick or Mr Tupman for eight-and-twenty miles, and that they sighed very often, refused ale and brandy, and looked gloomy. If our observant lady readers can deduce any satisfactory inferences from these facts, we beg them by all means to do so.