

Chapter XXXVI

The Chief Features Of Which Will Be Found To Be An Authentic Version Of The Legend Of Prince Bladud, And A Most Extraordinary Calamity That Befell Mr Winkle

As Mr Pickwick contemplated a stay of at least two months in Bath, he deemed it advisable to take private lodgings for himself and friends for that period; and as a favourable opportunity offered for their securing, on moderate terms, the upper portion of a house in the Royal Crescent, which was larger than they required, Mr and Mrs. Dowler offered to relieve them of a bedroom and sitting-room. This proposition was at once accepted, and in three days' time they were all located in their new abode, when Mr Pickwick began to drink the waters with the utmost assiduity. Mr Pickwick took them systematically. He drank a quarter of a pint before breakfast, and then walked up a hill; and another quarter of a pint after breakfast, and then walked down a hill; and, after every fresh quarter of a pint, Mr Pickwick declared, in the most solemn and emphatic terms, that he felt a great deal better; whereat his friends were very much delighted, though they had not been previously aware that there was anything the matter with him.

The Great Pump Room is a spacious saloon, ornamented with Corinthian pillars, and a music-gallery, and a Tompion clock, and a statue of Nash, and a golden inscription, to which all the water-drinkers should attend, for it appeals to them in the cause of a deserving charity. There is a large bar with a marble vase, out of which the pumper gets the water; and there are a number of yellow-looking tumblers, out of which the company get it; and it is a most edifying and satisfactory sight to behold the perseverance and gravity with which they swallow it. There are baths near at hand, in which a part of the company wash themselves; and a band plays afterwards, to congratulate the remainder on their having done so. There is another pump room, into which infirm ladies and gentlemen are wheeled, in such an astonishing variety of chairs and chaises, that any adventurous individual who goes in with the regular number of toes, is in imminent danger of coming out without them; and there is a third, into which the quiet people go, for it is less noisy than either. There is an immensity of promenading, on crutches and off, with sticks and without, and a great deal of conversation, and liveliness, and pleasantry.

Every morning, the regular water-drinkers, Mr Pickwick among the number, met each other in the pump room, took their quarter of a pint, and walked constitutionally. At the afternoon's promenade, Lord Mutanhed, and the Honourable Mr Crushton, the Dowager Lady Snuphanuph, Mrs. Colonel Wugsby, and all the great people, and all the morning water-drinkers, met in grand assemblage. After this, they

walked out, or drove out, or were pushed out in bath-chairs, and met one another again. After this, the gentlemen went to the reading-rooms, and met divisions of the mass. After this, they went home. If it were theatre-night, perhaps they met at the theatre; if it were assembly-night, they met at the rooms; and if it were neither, they met the next day. A very pleasant routine, with perhaps a slight tinge of sameness.

Mr Pickwick was sitting up by himself, after a day spent in this manner, making entries in his journal, his friends having retired to bed, when he was roused by a gentle tap at the room door.

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock, the landlady, peeping in; 'but did you want anything more, sir?'

'Nothing more, ma'am,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'My young girl is gone to bed, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock; 'and Mr Dowler is good enough to say that he'll sit up for Mrs. Dowler, as the party isn't expected to be over till late; so I was thinking that if you wanted nothing more, Mr Pickwick, I would go to bed.'

'By all means, ma'am,' replied Mr Pickwick. 'Wish you good-night, Sir,' said Mrs. Craddock.

'Good-night, ma'am,' rejoined Mr Pickwick.

Mrs. Craddock closed the door, and Mr Pickwick resumed his writing.

In half an hour's time the entries were concluded. Mr Pickwick carefully rubbed the last page on the blotting-paper, shut up the book, wiped his pen on the bottom of the inside of his coat tail, and opened the drawer of the inkstand to put it carefully away. There were a couple of sheets of writing-paper, pretty closely written over, in the inkstand drawer, and they were folded so, that the title, which was in a good round hand, was fully disclosed to him. Seeing from this, that it was no private document; and as it seemed to relate to Bath, and was very short: Mr Pickwick unfolded it, lighted his bedroom candle that it might burn up well by the time he finished; and drawing his chair nearer the fire, read as follows -

THE TRUE LEGEND OF PRINCE BLADUD

'Less than two hundred years ago, on one of the public baths in this city, there appeared an inscription in honour of its mighty founder, the renowned Prince Bladud. That inscription is now erased.

'For many hundred years before that time, there had been handed down, from age to age, an old legend, that the illustrious prince being afflicted with leprosy, on his return from reaping a rich harvest of knowledge in Athens, shunned the court of his royal father, and consorted moodily with husbandman and pigs. Among the herd (so said the legend) was a pig of grave and solemn countenance, with whom the prince had a fellow-feeling - for he too was wise - a pig of thoughtful and reserved demeanour; an animal superior to his fellows, whose grunt was terrible, and whose bite was sharp. The young prince sighed deeply as he looked upon the countenance of the majestic swine; he thought of his royal father, and his eyes were bedewed with tears.

'This sagacious pig was fond of bathing in rich, moist mud. Not in summer, as common pigs do now, to cool themselves, and did even in those distant ages (which is a proof that the light of civilisation had already begun to dawn, though feebly), but in the cold, sharp days of winter. His coat was ever so sleek, and his complexion so clear, that the prince resolved to essay the purifying qualities of the same water that his friend resorted to. He made the trial. Beneath that black mud, bubbled the hot springs of Bath. He washed, and was cured. Hastening to his father's court, he paid his best respects, and returning quickly hither, founded this city and its famous baths.

'He sought the pig with all the ardour of their early friendship - but, alas! the waters had been his death. He had imprudently taken a bath at too high a temperature, and the natural philosopher was no more! He was succeeded by Pliny, who also fell a victim to his thirst for knowledge.

'This was the legend. Listen to the true one.

'A great many centuries since, there flourished, in great state, the famous and renowned Lud Hudibras, king of Britain. He was a mighty monarch. The earth shook when he walked - he was so very stout. His people basked in the light of his countenance - it was so red and glowing. He was, indeed, every inch a king. And there were a good many inches of him, too, for although he was not very tall, he was a remarkable size round, and the inches that he wanted in height, he made up in circumference. If any degenerate monarch of modern times could be in any way compared with him, I should say the venerable King Cole would be that illustrious potentate.

'This good king had a queen, who eighteen years before, had had a son, who was called Bladud. He was sent to a preparatory seminary in his father's dominions until he was ten years old, and was then despatched, in charge of a trusty messenger, to a finishing school at Athens; and as there was no extra charge for remaining during the

holidays, and no notice required previous to the removal of a pupil, there he remained for eight long years, at the expiration of which time, the king his father sent the lord chamberlain over, to settle the bill, and to bring him home; which, the lord chamberlain doing, was received with shouts, and pensioned immediately.

'When King Lud saw the prince his son, and found he had grown up such a fine young man, he perceived what a grand thing it would be to have him married without delay, so that his children might be the means of perpetuating the glorious race of Lud, down to the very latest ages of the world. With this view, he sent a special embassy, composed of great noblemen who had nothing particular to do, and wanted lucrative employment, to a neighbouring king, and demanded his fair daughter in marriage for his son; stating at the same time that he was anxious to be on the most affectionate terms with his brother and friend, but that if they couldn't agree in arranging this marriage, he should be under the unpleasant necessity of invading his kingdom and putting his eyes out. To this, the other king (who was the weaker of the two) replied that he was very much obliged to his friend and brother for all his goodness and magnanimity, and that his daughter was quite ready to be married, whenever Prince Bladud liked to come and fetch her.

'This answer no sooner reached Britain, than the whole nation was transported with joy. Nothing was heard, on all sides, but the sounds of feasting and revelry - except the chinking of money as it was paid in by the people to the collector of the royal treasures, to defray the expenses of the happy ceremony. It was upon this occasion that King Lud, seated on the top of his throne in full council, rose, in the exuberance of his feelings, and commanded the lord chief justice to order in the richest wines and the court minstrels - an act of graciousness which has been, through the ignorance of traditionary historians, attributed to King Cole, in those celebrated lines in which his Majesty is represented as

Calling for his pipe, and calling for his pot, And calling for his fiddlers three.

Which is an obvious injustice to the memory of King Lud, and a dishonest exaltation of the virtues of King Cole.

'But, in the midst of all this festivity and rejoicing, there was one individual present, who tasted not when the sparkling wines were poured forth, and who danced not, when the minstrels played. This was no other than Prince Bladud himself, in honour of whose happiness a whole people were, at that very moment, straining alike their throats and purse-strings. The truth was, that the prince, forgetting the undoubted right of the minister for foreign affairs to fall

in love on his behalf, had, contrary to every precedent of policy and diplomacy, already fallen in love on his own account, and privately contracted himself unto the fair daughter of a noble Athenian.

'Here we have a striking example of one of the manifold advantages of civilisation and refinement. If the prince had lived in later days, he might at once have married the object of his father's choice, and then set himself seriously to work, to relieve himself of the burden which rested heavily upon him. He might have endeavoured to break her heart by a systematic course of insult and neglect; or, if the spirit of her sex, and a proud consciousness of her many wrongs had upheld her under this ill-treatment, he might have sought to take her life, and so get rid of her effectually. But neither mode of relief suggested itself to Prince Bladud; so he solicited a private audience, and told his father.

'it is an old prerogative of kings to govern everything but their passions. King Lud flew into a frightful rage, tossed his crown up to the ceiling, and caught it again - for in those days kings kept their crowns on their heads, and not in the Tower - stamped the ground, rapped his forehead, wondered why his own flesh and blood rebelled against him, and, finally, calling in his guards, ordered the prince away to instant Confinement in a lofty turret; a course of treatment which the kings of old very generally pursued towards their sons, when their matrimonial inclinations did not happen to point to the same quarter as their own.

'When Prince Bladud had been shut up in the lofty turret for the greater part of a year, with no better prospect before his bodily eyes than a stone wall, or before his mental vision than prolonged imprisonment, he naturally began to ruminate on a plan of escape, which, after months of preparation, he managed to accomplish; considerately leaving his dinner-knife in the heart of his jailer, lest the poor fellow (who had a family) should be considered privy to his flight, and punished accordingly by the infuriated king.

'The monarch was frantic at the loss of his son. He knew not on whom to vent his grief and wrath, until fortunately bethinking himself of the lord chamberlain who had brought him home, he struck off his pension and his head together.

'Meanwhile, the young prince, effectually disguised, wandered on foot through his father's dominions, cheered and supported in all his hardships by sweet thoughts of the Athenian maid, who was the innocent cause of his weary trials. One day he stopped to rest in a country village; and seeing that there were gay dances going forward on the green, and gay faces passing to and fro, ventured to inquire of a reveller who stood near him, the reason for this rejoicing.

'Know you not, O stranger,' was the reply, 'of the recent proclamation of our gracious king?'

'Proclamation! No. What proclamation?' rejoined the prince - for he had travelled along the by and little-frequented ways, and knew nothing of what had passed upon the public roads, such as they were.

'Why,' replied the peasant, 'the foreign lady that our prince wished to wed, is married to a foreign noble of her own country, and the king proclaims the fact, and a great public festival besides; for now, of course, Prince Bladud will come back and marry the lady his father chose, who they say is as beautiful as the noonday sun. Your health, sir. God save the king!'

'The prince remained to hear no more. He fled from the spot, and plunged into the thickest recesses of a neighbouring wood. On, on, he wandered, night and day; beneath the blazing sun, and the cold pale moon; through the dry heat of noon, and the damp cold of night; in the gray light of morn, and the red glare of eve. So heedless was he of time or object, that being bound for Athens, he wandered as far out of his way as Bath.

'There was no city where Bath stands, then. There was no vestige of human habitation, or sign of man's resort, to bear the name; but there was the same noble country, the same broad expanse of hill and dale, the same beautiful channel stealing on, far away, the same lofty mountains which, like the troubles of life, viewed at a distance, and partially obscured by the bright mist of its morning, lose their ruggedness and asperity, and seem all ease and softness. Moved by the gentle beauty of the scene, the prince sank upon the green turf, and bathed his swollen feet in his tears.

'Oh!' said the unhappy Bladud, clasping his hands, and mournfully raising his eyes towards the sky, 'would that my wanderings might end here! Would that these grateful tears with which I now mourn hope misplaced, and love despised, might flow in peace for ever!'

'The wish was heard. It was in the time of the heathen deities, who used occasionally to take people at their words, with a promptness, in some cases, extremely awkward. The ground opened beneath the prince's feet; he sank into the chasm; and instantaneously it closed upon his head for ever, save where his hot tears welled up through the earth, and where they have continued to gush forth ever since.

'It is observable that, to this day, large numbers of elderly ladies and gentlemen who have been disappointed in procuring partners, and almost as many young ones who are anxious to obtain them, repair annually to Bath to drink the waters, from which they derive much

strength and comfort. This is most complimentary to the virtue of Prince Bladud's tears, and strongly corroborative of the veracity of this legend.'

Mr Pickwick yawned several times when he had arrived at the end of this little manuscript, carefully refolded, and replaced it in the inkstand drawer, and then, with a countenance expressive of the utmost weariness, lighted his chamber candle, and went upstairs to bed. He stopped at Mr Dowler's door, according to custom, and knocked to say good-night.

'Ah!' said Dowler, 'going to bed? I wish I was. Dismal night. Windy; isn't it?'

'Very,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Good-night.'

'Good-night.'

Mr Pickwick went to his bedchamber, and Mr Dowler resumed his seat before the fire, in fulfilment of his rash promise to sit up till his wife came home.

There are few things more worrying than sitting up for somebody, especially if that somebody be at a party. You cannot help thinking how quickly the time passes with them, which drags so heavily with you; and the more you think of this, the more your hopes of their speedy arrival decline. Clocks tick so loud, too, when you are sitting up alone, and you seem as if you had an under-garment of cobwebs on. First, something tickles your right knee, and then the same sensation irritates your left. You have no sooner changed your position, than it comes again in the arms; when you have fidgeted your limbs into all sorts of queer shapes, you have a sudden relapse in the nose, which you rub as if to rub it off - as there is no doubt you would, if you could. Eyes, too, are mere personal inconveniences; and the wick of one candle gets an inch and a half long, while you are snuffing the other. These, and various other little nervous annoyances, render sitting up for a length of time after everybody else has gone to bed, anything but a cheerful amusement.

This was just Mr Dowler's opinion, as he sat before the fire, and felt honestly indignant with all the inhuman people at the party who were keeping him up. He was not put into better humour either, by the reflection that he had taken it into his head, early in the evening, to think he had got an ache there, and so stopped at home. At length, after several droppings asleep, and fallings forward towards the bars, and catchings backward soon enough to prevent being branded in the face, Mr Dowler made up his mind that he would throw himself on the bed in the back room and think - not sleep, of course.

'I'm a heavy sleeper,' said Mr Dowler, as he flung himself on the bed. 'I must keep awake. I suppose I shall hear a knock here. Yes. I thought so. I can hear the watchman. There he goes. Fainter now, though. A little fainter. He's turning the corner. Ah!' When Mr Dowler arrived at this point, he turned the corner at which he had been long hesitating, and fell fast asleep.

Just as the clock struck three, there was blown into the crescent a sedan-chair with Mrs. Dowler inside, borne by one short, fat chairman, and one long, thin one, who had had much ado to keep their bodies perpendicular: to say nothing of the chair. But on that high ground, and in the crescent, which the wind swept round and round as if it were going to tear the paving stones up, its fury was tremendous. They were very glad to set the chair down, and give a good round loud double-knock at the street door.

They waited some time, but nobody came.

'Servants is in the arms o' Porpus, I think,' said the short chairman, warming his hands at the attendant link-boy's torch.

'I wish he'd give 'em a squeeze and wake 'em,' observed the long one.

'Knock again, will you, if you please,' cried Mrs. Dowler from the chair. 'Knock two or three times, if you please.'

The short man was quite willing to get the job over, as soon as possible; so he stood on the step, and gave four or five most startling double-knocks, of eight or ten knocks a-piece, while the long man went into the road, and looked up at the windows for a light.

Nobody came. It was all as silent and dark as ever.

'Dear me!' said Mrs. Dowler. 'You must knock again, if you please.' 'There ain't a bell, is there, ma'am?' said the short chairman.

'Yes, there is,' interposed the link-boy, 'I've been a-ringing at it ever so long.'

'It's only a handle,' said Mrs. Dowler, 'the wire's broken.'

'I wish the servants' heads wos,' growled the long man.

'I must trouble you to knock again, if you please,' said Mrs. Dowler, with the utmost politeness.

The short man did knock again several times, without producing the smallest effect. The tall man, growing very impatient, then relieved

him, and kept on perpetually knocking double-knocks of two loud knocks each, like an insane postman.

At length Mr Winkle began to dream that he was at a club, and that the members being very refractory, the chairman was obliged to hammer the table a good deal to preserve order; then he had a confused notion of an auction room where there were no bidders, and the auctioneer was buying everything in; and ultimately he began to think it just within the bounds of possibility that somebody might be knocking at the street door. To make quite certain, however, he remained quiet in bed for ten minutes or so, and listened; and when he had counted two or three-and-thirty knocks, he felt quite satisfied, and gave himself a great deal of credit for being so wakeful.

'Rap rap-rap rap-rap rap-ra, ra, ra, ra, rap!' went the knocker.

Mr Winkle jumped out of bed, wondering very much what could possibly be the matter, and hastily putting on his stockings and slippers, folded his dressing-gown round him, lighted a flat candle from the rush-light that was burning in the fireplace, and hurried downstairs.

'Here's somebody comin' at last, ma'am,' said the short chairman.

'I wish I was behind him with a bradawl,' muttered the long one.

'Who's there?' cried Mr Winkle, undoing the chain.

'Don't stop to ask questions, cast-iron head,' replied the long man, with great disgust, taking it for granted that the inquirer was a footman; 'but open the door.'

'Come, look sharp, timber eyelids,' added the other encouragingly.

Mr Winkle, being half asleep, obeyed the command mechanically, opened the door a little, and peeped out. The first thing he saw, was the red glare of the link-boy's torch. Startled by the sudden fear that the house might be on fire, he hastily threw the door wide open, and holding the candle above his head, stared eagerly before him, not quite certain whether what he saw was a sedan-chair or a fire-engine. At this instant there came a violent gust of wind; the light was blown out; Mr Winkle felt himself irresistibly impelled on to the steps; and the door blew to, with a loud crash.

'Well, young man, now you HAVE done it!' said the short chairman.

Mr Winkle, catching sight of a lady's face at the window of the sedan, turned hastily round, plied the knocker with all his might and main, and called frantically upon the chairman to take the chair away again.

'Take it away, take it away,' cried Mr Winkle. 'Here's somebody coming out of another house; put me into the chair. Hide me! Do something with me!'

All this time he was shivering with cold; and every time he raised his hand to the knocker, the wind took the dressing-gown in a most unpleasant manner.

'The people are coming down the crescent now. There are ladies with 'em; cover me up with something. Stand before me!' roared Mr Winkle. But the chairmen were too much exhausted with laughing to afford him the slightest assistance, and the ladies were every moment approaching nearer and nearer. Mr Winkle gave a last hopeless knock; the ladies were only a few doors off. He threw away the extinguished candle, which, all this time he had held above his head, and fairly bolted into the sedan-chair where Mrs. Dowler was.

Now, Mrs. Craddock had heard the knocking and the voices at last; and, only waiting to put something smarter on her head than her nightcap, ran down into the front drawing-room to make sure that it was the right party. Throwing up the window-sash as Mr Winkle was rushing into the chair, she no sooner caught sight of what was going forward below, than she raised a vehement and dismal shriek, and implored Mr Dowler to get up directly, for his wife was running away with another gentleman.

Upon this, Mr Dowler bounced off the bed as abruptly as an India-rubber ball, and rushing into the front room, arrived at one window just as Mr Pickwick threw up the other, when the first object that met the gaze of both, was Mr Winkle bolting into the sedan-chair.

'Watchman,' shouted Dowler furiously, 'stop him - hold him - keep him tight - shut him in, till I come down. I'll cut his throat - give me a knife - from ear to ear, Mrs. Craddock - I will!' And breaking from the shrieking landlady, and from Mr Pickwick, the indignant husband seized a small supper-knife, and tore into the street. But Mr Winkle didn't wait for him. He no sooner heard the horrible threat of the valorous Dowler, than he bounced out of the sedan, quite as quickly as he had bounced in, and throwing off his slippers into the road, took to his heels and tore round the crescent, hotly pursued by Dowler and the watchman. He kept ahead; the door was open as he came round the second time; he rushed in, slammed it in Dowler's face, mounted to his bedroom, locked the door, piled a wash-hand-stand, chest of

drawers, and a table against it, and packed up a few necessaries ready for flight with the first ray of morning.

Dowler came up to the outside of the door; avowed, through the keyhole, his steadfast determination of cutting Mr Winkle's throat next day; and, after a great confusion of voices in the drawing-room, amidst which that of Mr Pickwick was distinctly heard endeavouring to make peace, the inmates dispersed to their several bed-chambers, and all was quiet once more.

It is not unlikely that the inquiry may be made, where Mr Weller was, all this time? We will state where he was, in the next chapter.