

Chapter XXXVII

Honourably Accounts For Mr Weller's Absence, By Describing A Soiree To Which He Was Invited And Went; Also Relates How He Was Entrusted By Mr Pickwick With A Private Mission Of Delicacy And Importance

'Mr Weller,' said Mrs. Craddock, upon the morning of this very eventful day, 'here's a letter for you.'

'Wery odd that,' said Sam; 'I'm afeerd there must be somethin' the matter, for I don't recollect any gen'l'm'n in my circle of acquaintance as is capable o' writin' one.'

'Perhaps something uncommon has taken place,' observed Mrs. Craddock.

'It must be somethin' wery uncommon indeed, as could perduce a letter out o' any friend o' mine,' replied Sam, shaking his head dubiously; 'nothin' less than a nat'ral convulsion, as the young gen'l'm'n observed ven he wos took with fits. It can't be from the gov'ner,' said Sam, looking at the direction. 'He always prints, I know, 'cos he learnt writin' from the large bills in the booking-offices. It's a wery strange thing now, where this here letter can ha' come from.'

As Sam said this, he did what a great many people do when they are uncertain about the writer of a note - looked at the seal, and then at the front, and then at the back, and then at the sides, and then at the superscription; and, as a last resource, thought perhaps he might as well look at the inside, and try to find out from that.

'It's wrote on gilt-edged paper,' said Sam, as he unfolded it, 'and sealed in bronze vax vith the top of a door key. Now for it.' And, with a wery grave face, Mr Weller slowly read as follows -

'A select company of the Bath footmen presents their compliments to Mr Weller, and requests the pleasure of his company this evening, to a friendly swarry, consisting of a boiled leg of mutton with the usual trimmings. The swarry to be on table at half-past nine o'clock punctually.'

This was inclosed in another note, which ran thus -

'Mr John Smauker, the gentleman who had the pleasure of meeting Mr Weller at the house of their mutual acquaintance, Mr Bantam, a few days since, begs to inclose Mr Weller the herewith invitation. If Mr Weller will call on Mr John Smauker at nine o'clock, Mr John

Smauker will have the pleasure of introducing Mr Weller. (Signed)
'JOHN SMAUKER.'

The envelope was directed to blank Weller, Esq., at Mr Pickwick's; and in a parenthesis, in the left hand corner, were the words 'airy bell,' as an instruction to the bearer.

'Vell,' said Sam, 'this is comin' it rayther powerful, this is. I never heerd a biled leg o' mutton called a swarry afore. I wonder wot they'd call a roast one.'

However, without waiting to debate the point, Sam at once betook himself into the presence of Mr Pickwick, and requested leave of absence for that evening, which was readily granted. With this permission and the street-door key, Sam Weller issued forth a little before the appointed time, and strolled leisurely towards Queen Square, which he no sooner gained than he had the satisfaction of beholding Mr John Smauker leaning his powdered head against a lamp-post at a short distance off, smoking a cigar through an amber tube.

'How do you do, Mr Weller?' said Mr John Smauker, raising his hat gracefully with one hand, while he gently waved the other in a condescending manner. 'How do you do, Sir?'

'Why, reasonably conwalessent,' replied Sam. 'How do YOU find yourself, my dear feller?'

'Only so so,' said Mr John Smauker.

'Ah, you've been a-workin' too hard,' observed Sam. 'I was fearful you would; it won't do, you know; you must not give way to that 'ere uncompromisin' spirit o' yourn.'

'It's not so much that, Mr Weller,' replied Mr John Smauker, 'as bad wine; I'm afraid I've been dissipating.'

'Oh! that's it, is it?' said Sam; 'that's a verry bad complaint, that.'

'And yet the temptation, you see, Mr Weller,' observed Mr John Smauker.

'Ah, to be sure,' said Sam.

'Plunged into the very vortex of society, you know, Mr Weller,' said Mr John Smauker, with a sigh.

'Dreadful, indeed!' rejoined Sam.

'But it's always the way,' said Mr John Smauker; 'if your destiny leads you into public life, and public station, you must expect to be subjected to temptations which other people is free from, Mr Weller.'

'Precisely what my uncle said, ven he vent into the public line,' remarked Sam, 'and wery right the old gen'l'm'n wos, for he drank hissself to death in somethin' less than a quarter.' Mr John Smauker looked deeply indignant at any parallel being drawn between himself and the deceased gentleman in question; but, as Sam's face was in the most immovable state of calmness, he thought better of it, and looked affable again. 'Perhaps we had better be walking,' said Mr Smauker, consulting a copper timepiece which dwelt at the bottom of a deep watch-pocket, and was raised to the surface by means of a black string, with a copper key at the other end.

'P'raps we had,' replied Sam, 'or they'll overdo the swarry, and that'll spile it.'

'Have you drank the waters, Mr Weller?' inquired his companion, as they walked towards High Street.

'Once,' replied Sam.

'What did you think of 'em, Sir?'

'I thought they was particklery unpleasent,' replied Sam.

'Ah,' said Mr John Smauker, 'you disliked the killibeate taste, perhaps?'

'I don't know much about that 'ere,' said Sam. 'I thought they'd a wery strong flavour o' warm flat irons.'

'That IS the killibeate, Mr Weller,' observed Mr John Smauker contemptuously.

'Well, if it is, it's a wery inexpressive word, that's all,' said Sam. 'It may be, but I ain't much in the chimical line myself, so I can't say.' And here, to the great horror of Mr John Smauker, Sam Weller began to whistle.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Weller,' said Mr John Smauker, agonised at the exceeding ungenteel sound, 'will you take my arm?'

'Thank'ee, you're wery good, but I won't deprive you of it,' replied Sam. 'I've rayther a way o' putting my hands in my pockets, if it's all the same to you.' As Sam said this, he suited the action to the word, and whistled far louder than before.

'This way,' said his new friend, apparently much relieved as they turned down a by-street; 'we shall soon be there.'

'Shall we?' said Sam, quite unmoved by the announcement of his close vicinity to the select footmen of Bath.

'Yes,' said Mr John Smauker. 'Don't be alarmed, Mr Weller.'

'Oh, no,' said Sam.

'You'll see some very handsome uniforms, Mr Weller,' continued Mr John Smauker; 'and perhaps you'll find some of the gentlemen rather high at first, you know, but they'll soon come round.'

'That's wery kind on 'em,' replied Sam. 'And you know,' resumed Mr John Smauker, with an air of sublime protection - 'you know, as you're a stranger, perhaps, they'll be rather hard upon you at first.'

'They won't be wery cruel, though, will they?' inquired Sam.

'No, no,' replied Mr John Smauker, pulling forth the fox's head, and taking a gentlemanly pinch. 'There are some funny dogs among us, and they will have their joke, you know; but you mustn't mind 'em, you mustn't mind 'em.'

'I'll try and bear up agin such a reg'lar knock down o' talent,' replied Sam.

'That's right,' said Mr John Smauker, putting forth his fox's head, and elevating his own; 'I'll stand by you.'

By this time they had reached a small greengrocer's shop, which Mr John Smauker entered, followed by Sam, who, the moment he got behind him, relapsed into a series of the very broadest and most unmitigated grins, and manifested other demonstrations of being in a highly enviable state of inward merriment.

Crossing the greengrocer's shop, and putting their hats on the stairs in the little passage behind it, they walked into a small parlour; and here the full splendour of the scene burst upon Mr Weller's view.

A couple of tables were put together in the middle of the parlour, covered with three or four cloths of different ages and dates of washing, arranged to look as much like one as the circumstances of the case would allow. Upon these were laid knives and forks for six or eight people. Some of the knife handles were green, others red, and a few yellow; and as all the forks were black, the combination of colours was exceedingly striking. Plates for a corresponding number of guests

were warming behind the fender; and the guests themselves were warming before it: the chief and most important of whom appeared to be a stoutish gentleman in a bright crimson coat with long tails, vividly red breeches, and a cocked hat, who was standing with his back to the fire, and had apparently just entered, for besides retaining his cocked hat on his head, he carried in his hand a high stick, such as gentlemen of his profession usually elevate in a sloping position over the roofs of carriages.

'Smauker, my lad, your fin,' said the gentleman with the cocked hat.

Mr Smauker dovetailed the top joint of his right-hand little finger into that of the gentleman with the cocked hat, and said he was charmed to see him looking so well.

'Well, they tell me I am looking pretty blooming,' said the man with the cocked hat, 'and it's a wonder, too. I've been following our old woman about, two hours a day, for the last fortnight; and if a constant contemplation of the manner in which she hooks-and-eyes that infernal lavender- coloured old gown of hers behind, isn't enough to throw anybody into a low state of despondency for life, stop my quarter's salary.'

At this, the assembled selections laughed very heartily; and one gentleman in a yellow waistcoat, with a coach-trimming border, whispered a neighbour in green-foil smalls, that Tuckle was in spirits to-night.

'By the bye,' said Mr Tuckle, 'Smauker, my boy, you - ' The remainder of the sentence was forwarded into Mr John Smauker's ear, by whisper.

'Oh, dear me, I quite forgot,' said Mr John Smauker. 'Gentlemen, my friend Mr Weller.'

'Sorry to keep the fire off you, Weller,' said Mr Tuckle, with a familiar nod. 'Hope you're not cold, Weller.'

'Not by no means, Blazes,' replied Sam. 'It 'ud be a wery chilly subject as felt cold wen you stood opposite. You'd save coals if they put you behind the fender in the waitin'-room at a public office, you would.'

As this retort appeared to convey rather a personal allusion to Mr Tuckle's crimson livery, that gentleman looked majestic for a few seconds, but gradually edging away from the fire, broke into a forced smile, and said it wasn't bad.

'Wery much obliged for your good opinion, sir,' replied Sam. 'We shall get on by degrees, I des-say. We'll try a better one by and bye.'

At this point the conversation was interrupted by the arrival of a gentleman in orange-coloured plush, accompanied by another selection in purple cloth, with a great extent of stocking. The newcomers having been welcomed by the old ones, Mr Tuckle put the question that supper be ordered in, which was carried unanimously.

The greengrocer and his wife then arranged upon the table a boiled leg of mutton, hot, with caper sauce, turnips, and potatoes. Mr Tuckle took the chair, and was supported at the other end of the board by the gentleman in orange plush. The greengrocer put on a pair of wash-leather gloves to hand the plates with, and stationed himself behind Mr Tuckle's chair.

'Harris,' said Mr Tuckle, in a commanding tone. 'Sir,' said the greengrocer.

'Have you got your gloves on?' 'Yes, Sir.'

'Then take the kiver off.'

'Yes, Sir.'

The greengrocer did as he was told, with a show of great humility, and obsequiously handed Mr Tuckle the carving-knife; in doing which, he accidentally gaped.

'What do you mean by that, Sir?' said Mr Tuckle, with great asperity.

'I beg your pardon, Sir,' replied the crestfallen greengrocer, 'I didn't mean to do it, Sir; I was up very late last night, Sir.'

'I tell you what my opinion of you is, Harris,' said Mr Tuckle, with a most impressive air, 'you're a vulgar beast.'

'I hope, gentlemen,' said Harris, 'that you won't be severe with me, gentlemen. I am very much obliged to you indeed, gentlemen, for your patronage, and also for your recommendations, gentlemen, whenever additional assistance in waiting is required. I hope, gentlemen, I give satisfaction.'

'No, you don't, Sir,' said Mr Tuckle. 'Very far from it, Sir.'

'We consider you an inattentive reskel,' said the gentleman in the orange plush.

'And a low thief,' added the gentleman in the green-foil smalls.

'And an unreclaimable blaygaird,' added the gentleman in purple.

The poor greengrocer bowed very humbly while these little epithets were bestowed upon him, in the true spirit of the very smallest tyranny; and when everybody had said something to show his superiority, Mr Tuckle proceeded to carve the leg of mutton, and to help the company.

This important business of the evening had hardly commenced, when the door was thrown briskly open, and another gentleman in a light-blue suit, and leaden buttons, made his appearance.

'Against the rules,' said Mr Tuckle. 'Too late, too late.'

'No, no; positively I couldn't help it,' said the gentleman in blue. 'I appeal to the company. An affair of gallantry now, an appointment at the theayter.'

'Oh, that indeed,' said the gentleman in the orange plush.

'Yes; raly now, honour bright,' said the man in blue. 'I made a promese to fetch our youngest daughter at half-past ten, and she is such an uncauminly fine gal, that I raly hadn't the 'art to disappoint her. No offence to the present company, Sir, but a petticut, sir - a petticut, Sir, is irrevokable.'

'I begin to suspect there's something in that quarter,' said Tuckle, as the new-comer took his seat next Sam, 'I've remarked, once or twice, that she leans very heavy on your shoulder when she gets in and out of the carriage.'

'Oh, raly, raly, Tuckle, you shouldn't,' said the man in blue. 'It's not fair. I may have said to one or two friends that she wos a very divine creechure, and had refused one or two offers without any hobvus cause, but - no, no, no, indeed, Tuckle - before strangers, too - it's not right - you shouldn't. Delicacy, my dear friend, delicacy!' And the man in blue, pulling up his neckerchief, and adjusting his coat cuffs, nodded and frowned as if there were more behind, which he could say if he liked, but was bound in honour to suppress.

The man in blue being a light-haired, stiff-necked, free and easy sort of footman, with a swaggering air and pert face, had attracted Mr Weller's special attention at first, but when he began to come out in this way, Sam felt more than ever disposed to cultivate his acquaintance; so he launched himself into the conversation at once, with characteristic independence.

'Your health, Sir,' said Sam. 'I like your conversation much. I think it's very pretty.'

At this the man in blue smiled, as if it were a compliment he was well used to; but looked approvingly on Sam at the same time, and said he hoped he should be better acquainted with him, for without any flattery at all he seemed to have the makings of a very nice fellow about him, and to be just the man after his own heart.

'You're very good, sir,' said Sam. 'What a lucky feller you are!'

'How do you mean?' inquired the gentleman in blue.

'That 'ere young lady,' replied Sam. 'She knows wot's wot, she does. Ah! I see.' Mr Weller closed one eye, and shook his head from side to side, in a manner which was highly gratifying to the personal vanity of the gentleman in blue.

'I'm afraid your a cunning fellow, Mr Weller,' said that individual.

'No, no,' said Sam. 'I leave all that 'ere to you. It's a great deal more in your way than mine, as the gen'l'm'n on the right side o' the garden vall said to the man on the wrong un, ven the mad bull vos a-comin' up the lane.'

'Well, well, Mr Weller,' said the gentleman in blue, 'I think she has remarked my air and manner, Mr Weller.'

'I should think she couldn't very well be off o' that,' said Sam.

'Have you any little thing of that kind in hand, sir?' inquired the favoured gentleman in blue, drawing a toothpick from his waistcoat pocket.

'Not exactly,' said Sam. 'There's no daughters at my place, else o' course I should ha' made up to vun on 'em. As it is, I don't think I can do with anythin' under a female markis. I might keep up with a young 'ooman o' large property as hadn't a title, if she made very fierce love to me. Not else.'

'Of course not, Mr Weller,' said the gentleman in blue, 'one can't be troubled, you know; and WE know, Mr Weller - we, who are men of the world - that a good uniform must work its way with the women, sooner or later. In fact, that's the only thing, between you and me, that makes the service worth entering into.'

'Just so,' said Sam. 'That's it, o' course.'

When this confidential dialogue had gone thus far, glasses were placed round, and every gentleman ordered what he liked best, before the public-house shut up. The gentleman in blue, and the man in orange, who were the chief exquisites of the party, ordered 'cold shrub and water,' but with the others, gin-and- water, sweet, appeared to be the favourite beverage. Sam called the greengrocer a 'desp'rate willin,' and ordered a large bowl of punch - two circumstances which seemed to raise him very much in the opinion of the selections.

'Gentlemen,' said the man in blue, with an air of the most consummate dandyism, 'I'll give you the ladies; come.'

'Hear, hear!' said Sam. 'The young mississes.'

Here there was a loud cry of 'Order,' and Mr John Smauker, as the gentleman who had introduced Mr Weller into that company, begged to inform him that the word he had just made use of, was unparliamentary.

'Which word was that 'ere, Sir?' inquired Sam. 'Mississes, Sir,' replied Mr John Smauker, with an alarming frown. 'We don't recognise such distinctions here.'

'Oh, wery good,' said Sam; 'then I'll amend the obserwation and call 'em the dear creeturs, if Blazes vill allow me.'

Some doubt appeared to exist in the mind of the gentleman in the green-foil smalls, whether the chairman could be legally appealed to, as 'Blazes,' but as the company seemed more disposed to stand upon their own rights than his, the question was not raised. The man with the cocked hat breathed short, and looked long at Sam, but apparently thought it as well to say nothing, in case he should get the worst of it. After a short silence, a gentleman in an embroidered coat reaching down to his heels, and a waistcoat of the same which kept one half of his legs warm, stirred his gin-and-water with great energy, and putting himself upon his feet, all at once by a violent effort, said he was desirous of offering a few remarks to the company, whereupon the person in the cocked hat had no doubt that the company would be very happy to hear any remarks that the man in the long coat might wish to offer.

'I feel a great delicacy, gentlemen, in coming for'ard,' said the man in the long coat, 'having the misforchune to be a coachman, and being only admitted as a honorary member of these agreeable swarrys, but I do feel myself bound, gentlemen - drove into a corner, if I may use the expression - to make known an afflicting circumstance which has come to my knowledge; which has happened I may say within the soap of my everyday contemplation. Gentlemen, our friend Mr

Whiffers (everybody looked at the individual in orange), our friend Mr Whiffers has resigned.'

Universal astonishment fell upon the hearers. Each gentleman looked in his neighbour's face, and then transferred his glance to the upstanding coachman.

'You may well be sapparised, gentlemen,' said the coachman. 'I will not wenchure to state the reasons of this irreparabel loss to the service, but I will beg Mr Whiffers to state them himself, for the improvement and imitation of his admiring friends.'

The suggestion being loudly approved of, Mr Whiffers explained. He said he certainly could have wished to have continued to hold the appointment he had just resigned. The uniform was extremely rich and expensive, the females of the family was most agreeable, and the duties of the situation was not, he was bound to say, too heavy; the principal service that was required of him, being, that he should look out of the hall window as much as possible, in company with another gentleman, who had also resigned. He could have wished to have spared that company the painful and disgusting detail on which he was about to enter, but as the explanation had been demanded of him, he had no alternative but to state, boldly and distinctly, that he had been required to eat cold meat.

It is impossible to conceive the disgust which this avowal awakened in the bosoms of the hearers. Loud cries of 'Shame,' mingled with groans and hisses, prevailed for a quarter of an hour.

Mr Whiffers then added that he feared a portion of this outrage might be traced to his own forbearing and accommodating disposition. He had a distinct recollection of having once consented to eat salt butter, and he had, moreover, on an occasion of sudden sickness in the house, so far forgotten himself as to carry a coal-scuttle up to the second floor. He trusted he had not lowered himself in the good opinion of his friends by this frank confession of his faults; and he hoped the promptness with which he had resented the last unmanly outrage on his feelings, to which he had referred, would reinstate him in their good opinion, if he had.

Mr Whiffers's address was responded to, with a shout of admiration, and the health of the interesting martyr was drunk in a most enthusiastic manner; for this, the martyr returned thanks, and proposed their visitor, Mr Weller - a gentleman whom he had not the pleasure of an intimate acquaintance with, but who was the friend of Mr John Smauker, which was a sufficient letter of recommendation to any society of gentlemen whatever, or wherever. On this account, he should have been disposed to have given Mr Weller's health with all

the honours, if his friends had been drinking wine; but as they were taking spirits by way of a change, and as it might be inconvenient to empty a tumbler at every toast, he should propose that the honours be understood.

At the conclusion of this speech, everybody took a sip in honour of Sam; and Sam having ladled out, and drunk, two full glasses of punch in honour of himself, returned thanks in a neat speech.

'Wery much obliged to you, old fellers,' said Sam, ladling away at the punch in the most unembarrassed manner possible, 'for this here compliment; which, comin' from sich a quarter, is wery overvelmin'. I've heered a good deal on you as a body, but I will say, that I never thought you was sich uncommon nice men as I find you air. I only hope you'll take care o' yourselves, and not compromise nothin' o' your dignity, which is a wery charmin' thing to see, when one's out a-walkin', and has always made me wery happy to look at, ever since I was a boy about half as high as the brass-headed stick o' my wery respectable friend, Blazes, there. As to the wictim of oppression in the suit o' brimstone, all I can say of him, is, that I hope he'll get jist as good a berth as he deserves; in vitch case it's wery little cold swarry as ever he'll be troubled with agin.'

Here Sam sat down with a pleasant smile, and his speech having been vociferously applauded, the company broke up.

'Wy, you don't mean to say you're a-goin' old feller?' said Sam Weller to his friend, Mr John Smauker.

'I must, indeed,' said Mr Smauker; 'I promised Bantam.'

'Oh, wery well,' said Sam; 'that's another thing. P'raps he'd resign if you disappointed him. You ain't a-goin', Blazes?'

'Yes, I am,' said the man with the cocked hat.

'Wot, and leave three-quarters of a bowl of punch behind you!' said Sam; 'nonsense, set down agin.'

Mr Tuckle was not proof against this invitation. He laid aside the cocked hat and stick which he had just taken up, and said he would have one glass, for good fellowship's sake.

As the gentleman in blue went home the same way as Mr Tuckle, he was prevailed upon to stop too. When the punch was about half gone, Sam ordered in some oysters from the green-grocer's shop; and the effect of both was so extremely exhilarating, that Mr Tuckle, dressed out with the cocked hat and stick, danced the frog hornpipe among

the shells on the table, while the gentleman in blue played an accompaniment upon an ingenious musical instrument formed of a hair-comb upon a curl-paper. At last, when the punch was all gone, and the night nearly so, they sallied forth to see each other home. Mr Tuckle no sooner got into the open air, than he was seized with a sudden desire to lie on the curbstone; Sam thought it would be a pity to contradict him, and so let him have his own way. As the cocked hat would have been spoiled if left there, Sam very considerably flattened it down on the head of the gentleman in blue, and putting the big stick in his hand, propped him up against his own street-door, rang the bell, and walked quietly home.

At a much earlier hour next morning than his usual time of rising, Mr Pickwick walked downstairs completely dressed, and rang the bell.

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, when Mr Weller appeared in reply to the summons, 'shut the door.'

Mr Weller did so.

'There was an unfortunate occurrence here, last night, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, 'which gave Mr Winkle some cause to apprehend violence from Mr Dowler.'

'So I've heerd from the old lady downstairs, Sir,' replied Sam.

'And I'm sorry to say, Sam,' continued Mr Pickwick, with a most perplexed countenance, 'that in dread of this violence, Mr Winkle has gone away.'

'Gone away!' said Sam.

'Left the house early this morning, without the slightest previous communication with me,' replied Mr Pickwick. 'And is gone, I know not where.'

'He should ha' stopped and fought it out, Sir,' replied Sam contemptuously. 'It wouldn't take much to settle that 'ere Dowler, Sir.'

'Well, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, 'I may have my doubts of his great bravery and determination also. But however that may be, Mr Winkle is gone. He must be found, Sam. Found and brought back to me.' 'And s'pose he won't come back, Sir?' said Sam.

'He must be made, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Who's to do it, Sir?' inquired Sam, with a smile.

'You,' replied Mr Pickwick.

'Wery good, Sir.'

With these words Mr Weller left the room, and immediately afterwards was heard to shut the street door. In two hours' time he returned with so much coolness as if he had been despatched on the most ordinary message possible, and brought the information that an individual, in every respect answering Mr Winkle's description, had gone over to Bristol that morning, by the branch coach from the Royal Hotel.

'Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, grasping his hand, 'you're a capital fellow; an invaluable fellow. You must follow him, Sam.'

'Cert'nly, Sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'The instant you discover him, write to me immediately, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'If he attempts to run away from you, knock him down, or lock him up. You have my full authority, Sam.'

'I'll be wery careful, sir,' rejoined Sam.

'You'll tell him,' said Mr Pickwick, 'that I am highly excited, highly displeased, and naturally indignant, at the very extraordinary course he has thought proper to pursue.'

'I will, Sir,' replied Sam.

'You'll tell him,' said Mr Pickwick, 'that if he does not come back to this very house, with you, he will come back with me, for I will come and fetch him.'

'I'll mention that 'ere, Sir,' rejoined Sam.

'You think you can find him, Sam?' said Mr Pickwick, looking earnestly in his face.

'Oh, I'll find him if he's anywere,' rejoined Sam, with great confidence.

'Very well,' said Mr Pickwick. 'Then the sooner you go the better.'

With these instructions, Mr Pickwick placed a sum of money in the hands of his faithful servitor, and ordered him to start for Bristol immediately, in pursuit of the fugitive.

Sam put a few necessaries in a carpet-bag, and was ready for starting. He stopped when he had got to the end of the passage, and walking quietly back, thrust his head in at the parlour door.

'Sir,' whispered Sam.

'Well, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick.

'I fully understands my instructions, do I, Sir?' inquired Sam.

'I hope so,' said Mr Pickwick.

'It's reg'larly understood about the knockin' down, is it, Sir?' inquired Sam.

'Perfectly,' replied Pickwick. 'Thoroughly. Do what you think necessary. You have my orders.'

Sam gave a nod of intelligence, and withdrawing his head from the door, set forth on his pilgrimage with a light heart.