Chapter XLIII

Showing How Mr Samuel Weller Got Into Difficulties

In a lofty room, ill-lighted and worse ventilated, situated in Portugal Street, Lincoln's Inn Fields, there sit nearly the whole year round, one, two, three, or four gentlemen in wigs, as the case may be, with little writing-desks before them, constructed after the fashion of those used by the judges of the land, barring the French polish. There is a box of barristers on their right hand; there is an enclosure of insolvent debtors on their left; and there is an inclined plane of most especially dirty faces in their front. These gentlemen are the Commissioners of the Insolvent Court, and the place in which they sit, is the Insolvent Court itself.

It is, and has been, time out of mind, the remarkable fate of this court to be, somehow or other, held and understood, by the general consent of all the destitute shabby-genteel people in London, as their common resort, and place of daily refuge. It is always full. The steams of beer and spirits perpetually ascend to the ceiling, and, being condensed by the heat, roll down the walls like rain; there are more old suits of clothes in it at one time, than will be offered for sale in all Houndsditch in a twelvemonth; more unwashed skins and grizzly beards than all the pumps and shaving-shops between Tyburn and Whitechapel could render decent, between sunrise and sunset.

It must not be supposed that any of these people have the least shadow of business in, or the remotest connection with, the place they so indefatigably attend. If they had, it would be no matter of surprise, and the singularity of the thing would cease. Some of them sleep during the greater part of the sitting; others carry small portable dinners wrapped in pocket-handkerchiefs or sticking out of their worn-out pockets, and munch and listen with equal relish; but no one among them was ever known to have the slightest personal interest in any case that was ever brought forward. Whatever they do, there they sit from the first moment to the last. When it is heavy, rainy weather, they all come in, wet through; and at such times the vapours of the court are like those of a fungus-pit.

A casual visitor might suppose this place to be a temple dedicated to the Genius of Seediness. There is not a messenger or process-server attached to it, who wears a coat that was made for him; not a tolerably fresh, or wholesome-looking man in the whole establishment, except a little white-headed apple-faced tipstaff, and even he, like an ill-conditioned cherry preserved in brandy, seems to have artificially dried and withered up into a state of preservation to which he can lay no natural claim. The very barristers' wigs are ill-powdered, and their curls lack crispness.

But the attorneys, who sit at a large bare table below the commissioners, are, after all, the greatest curiosities. The professional establishment of the more opulent of these gentlemen, consists of a blue bag and a boy; generally a youth of the Jewish persuasion. They have no fixed offices, their legal business being transacted in the parlours of public-houses, or the yards of prisons, whither they repair in crowds, and canvass for customers after the manner of omnibus cads. They are of a greasy and mildewed appearance; and if they can be said to have any vices at all, perhaps drinking and cheating are the most conspicuous among them. Their residences are usually on the outskirts of 'the Rules,' chiefly lying within a circle of one mile from the obelisk in St. George's Fields. Their looks are not prepossessing, and their manners are peculiar.

Mr Solomon Pell, one of this learned body, was a fat, flabby, pale man, in a surtout which looked green one minute, and brown the next, with a velvet collar of the same chameleon tints. His forehead was narrow, his face wide, his head large, and his nose all on one side, as if Nature, indignant with the propensities she observed in him in his birth, had given it an angry tweak which it had never recovered. Being short-necked and asthmatic, however, he respired principally through this feature; so, perhaps, what it wanted in ornament, it made up in usefulness.

'I'm sure to bring him through it,' said Mr Pell.

'Are you, though?' replied the person to whom the assurance was pledged.

'Certain sure,' replied Pell; 'but if he'd gone to any irregular practitioner, mind you, I wouldn't have answered for the consequences.'

'Ah!' said the other, with open mouth.

'No, that I wouldn't,' said Mr Pell; and he pursed up his lips, frowned, and shook his head mysteriously.

Now, the place where this discourse occurred was the public- house just opposite to the Insolvent Court; and the person with whom it was held was no other than the elder Mr Weller, who had come there, to comfort and console a friend, whose petition to be discharged under the act, was to be that day heard, and whose attorney he was at that moment consulting.

'And vere is George?' inquired the old gentleman.

Mr Pell jerked his head in the direction of a back parlour, whither Mr Weller at once repairing, was immediately greeted in the warmest and most flattering manner by some half-dozen of his professional brethren, in token of their gratification at his arrival. The insolvent gentleman, who had contracted a speculative but imprudent passion for horsing long stages, which had led to his present embarrassments, looked extremely well, and was soothing the excitement of his feelings with shrimps and porter.

The salutation between Mr Weller and his friends was strictly confined to the freemasonry of the craft; consisting of a jerking round of the right wrist, and a tossing of the little finger into the air at the same time. We once knew two famous coachmen (they are dead now, poor fellows) who were twins, and between whom an unaffected and devoted attachment existed. They passed each other on the Dover road, every day, for twenty-four years, never exchanging any other greeting than this; and yet, when one died, the other pined away, and soon afterwards followed him!

'Vell, George,' said Mr Weller senior, taking off his upper coat, and seating himself with his accustomed gravity. 'How is it? All right behind, and full inside?'

'All right, old feller,' replied the embarrassed gentleman.

'Is the gray mare made over to anybody?' inquired Mr Weller anxiously. George nodded in the affirmative.

'Vell, that's all right,' said Mr Weller. 'Coach taken care on, also?'

'Con-signed in a safe quarter,' replied George, wringing the heads off half a dozen shrimps, and swallowing them without any more ado.

'Wery good, wery good,' said Mr Weller. 'Alvays see to the drag ven you go downhill. Is the vay-bill all clear and straight for'erd?'

'The schedule, sir,' said Pell, guessing at Mr Weller's meaning, 'the schedule is as plain and satisfactory as pen and ink can make it.'

Mr Weller nodded in a manner which bespoke his inward approval of these arrangements; and then, turning to Mr Pell, said, pointing to his friend George -

'Ven do you take his cloths off?'

'Why,' replied Mr Pell, 'he stands third on the opposed list, and I should think it would be his turn in about half an hour. I told my clerk to come over and tell us when there was a chance.'

Mr Weller surveyed the attorney from head to foot with great admiration, and said emphatically -

'And what'll you take, sir?'

'Why, really,' replied Mr Pell, 'you're very - Upon my word and honour, I'm not in the habit of - It's so very early in the morning, that, actually, I am almost - Well, you may bring me threepenn'orth of rum, my dear.'

The officiating damsel, who had anticipated the order before it was given, set the glass of spirits before Pell, and retired.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Pell, looking round upon the company, 'success to your friend! I don't like to boast, gentlemen; it's not my way; but I can't help saying, that, if your friend hadn't been fortunate enough to fall into hands that - But I won't say what I was going to say. Gentlemen, my service to you.' Having emptied the glass in a twinkling, Mr Pell smacked his lips, and looked complacently round on the assembled coachmen, who evidently regarded him as a species of divinity.

'Let me see,' said the legal authority. 'What was I a-saying, gentlemen?'

'I think you was remarkin' as you wouldn't have no objection to another o' the same, Sir,' said Mr Weller, with grave facetiousness. 'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr Pell. 'Not bad, not bad. A professional man, too! At this time of the morning, it would be rather too good a - Well, I don't know, my dear - you may do that again, if you please. Hem!'

This last sound was a solemn and dignified cough, in which Mr Pell, observing an indecent tendency to mirth in some of his auditors, considered it due to himself to indulge.

'The late Lord Chancellor, gentlemen, was very fond of me,' said Mr Pell.

'And wery creditable in him, too,' interposed Mr Weller.

'Hear, hear,' assented Mr Pell's client. 'Why shouldn't he be?

'Ah! Why, indeed!' said a very red-faced man, who had said nothing yet, and who looked extremely unlikely to say anything more. 'Why shouldn't he?'

A murmur of assent ran through the company.

'I remember, gentlemen,' said Mr Pell, 'dining with him on one occasion; there was only us two, but everything as splendid as if twenty people had been expected - the great seal on a dumb- waiter at his right hand, and a man in a bag-wig and suit of armour guarding the mace with a drawn sword and silk stockings - which is perpetually done, gentlemen, night and day; when he said, 'Pell,' he said, 'no false delicacy, Pell. You're a man of talent; you can get anybody through the Insolvent Court, Pell; and your country should be proud of you.' Those were his very words. 'My Lord,' I said, 'you flatter me.' - 'Pell,' he said, 'if I do, I'm damned."

'Did he say that?' inquired Mr Weller.

'He did,' replied Pell.

'Vell, then,' said Mr Weller, 'I say Parliament ought to ha' took it up; and if he'd been a poor man, they would ha' done it.'

'But, my dear friend,' argued Mr Pell, 'it was in confidence.'

'In what?' said Mr Weller.

'In confidence.'

'Oh! wery good,' replied Mr Weller, after a little reflection. 'If he damned hisself in confidence, o' course that was another thing.'

'Of course it was,' said Mr Pell. 'The distinction's obvious, you will perceive.'

'Alters the case entirely,' said Mr Weller. 'Go on, Sir.' 'No, I will not go on, Sir,' said Mr Pell, in a low and serious tone. 'You have reminded me, Sir, that this conversation was private - private and confidential, gentlemen. Gentlemen, I am a professional man. It may be that I am a good deal looked up to, in my profession - it may be that I am not. Most people know. I say nothing. Observations have already been made, in this room, injurious to the reputation of my noble friend. You will excuse me, gentlemen; I was imprudent. I feel that I have no right to mention this matter without his concurrence. Thank you, Sir; thank you.' Thus delivering himself, Mr Pell thrust his hands into his pockets, and, frowning grimly around, rattled three halfpence with terrible determination.

This virtuous resolution had scarcely been formed, when the boy and the blue bag, who were inseparable companions, rushed violently into the room, and said (at least the boy did, for the blue bag took no part in the announcement) that the case was coming on directly. The intelligence was no sooner received than the whole party hurried

across the street, and began to fight their way into court - a preparatory ceremony, which has been calculated to occupy, in ordinary cases, from twenty-five minutes to thirty.

Mr Weller, being stout, cast himself at once into the crowd, with the desperate hope of ultimately turning up in some place which would suit him. His success was not quite equal to his expectations; for having neglected to take his hat off, it was knocked over his eyes by some unseen person, upon whose toes he had alighted with considerable force. Apparently this individual regretted his impetuosity immediately afterwards, for, muttering an indistinct exclamation of surprise, he dragged the old man out into the hall, and, after a violent struggle, released his head and face.

'Samivel!' exclaimed Mr Weller, when he was thus enabled to behold his rescuer.

Sam nodded.

'You're a dutiful and affectionate little boy, you are, ain't you,' said Mr Weller, 'to come a-bonnetin' your father in his old age?'

'How should I know who you wos?' responded the son. 'Do you s'pose I wos to tell you by the weight o' your foot?'

'Vell, that's wery true, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller, mollified at once; 'but wot are you a-doin' on here? Your gov'nor can't do no good here, Sammy. They won't pass that werdick, they won't pass it, Sammy.' And Mr Weller shook his head with legal solemnity.

'Wot a perwerse old file it is!' exclaimed Sam. 'always a-goin' on about werdicks and alleybis and that. Who said anything about the werdick?'

Mr Weller made no reply, but once more shook his head most learnedly.

'Leave off rattlin' that 'ere nob o' yourn, if you don't want it to come off the springs altogether,' said Sam impatiently, 'and behave reasonable. I vent all the vay down to the Markis o' Granby, arter you, last night.'

'Did you see the Marchioness o' Granby, Sammy?' inquired Mr Weller, with a sigh.

'Yes, I did,' replied Sam.

'How wos the dear creetur a-lookin'?'

'Wery queer,' said Sam. 'I think she's a-injurin' herself gradivally vith too much o' that 'ere pine-apple rum, and other strong medicines of the same natur.'

'You don't mean that, Sammy?' said the senior earnestly.

'I do, indeed,' replied the junior. Mr Weller seized his son's hand, clasped it, and let it fall. There was an expression on his countenance in doing so - not of dismay or apprehension, but partaking more of the sweet and gentle character of hope. A gleam of resignation, and even of cheerfulness, passed over his face too, as he slowly said, 'I ain't quite certain, Sammy; I wouldn't like to say I wos altogether positive, in case of any subsekent disappointment, but I rayther think, my boy, I rayther think, that the shepherd's got the liver complaint!'

'Does he look bad?' inquired Sam.

'He's uncommon pale,' replied his father, ''cept about the nose, which is redder than ever. His appetite is wery so-so, but he imbibes wonderful.'

Some thoughts of the rum appeared to obtrude themselves on Mr Weller's mind, as he said this; for he looked gloomy and thoughtful; but he very shortly recovered, as was testified by a perfect alphabet of winks, in which he was only wont to indulge when particularly pleased.

'Vell, now,' said Sam, 'about my affair. Just open them ears o' yourn, and don't say nothin' till I've done.' With this preface, Sam related, as succinctly as he could, the last memorable conversation he had had with Mr Pickwick.

'Stop there by himself, poor creetur!' exclaimed the elder Mr Weller, 'without nobody to take his part! It can't be done, Samivel, it can't be done.'

'O' course it can't,' asserted Sam: 'I know'd that, afore I came.' 'Why, they'll eat him up alive, Sammy,'exclaimed Mr Weller.

Sam nodded his concurrence in the opinion.

'He goes in rayther raw, Sammy,' said Mr Weller metaphorically, 'and he'll come out, done so ex-ceedin' brown, that his most formiliar friends won't know him. Roast pigeon's nothin' to it, Sammy.'

Again Sam Weller nodded.

'It oughtn't to be, Samivel,' said Mr Weller gravely.

'It mustn't be,' said Sam.

'Cert'nly not,' said Mr Weller.

'Vell now,' said Sam, 'you've been a-prophecyin' away, wery fine, like a red-faced Nixon, as the sixpenny books gives picters on.'

'Who wos he, Sammy?' inquired Mr Weller.

'Never mind who he was,' retorted Sam; 'he warn't a coachman; that's enough for you.' 'I know'd a ostler o' that name,' said Mr Weller, musing.

'It warn't him,' said Sam. 'This here gen'l'm'n was a prophet.'

'Wot's a prophet?' inquired Mr Weller, looking sternly on his son.

'Wy, a man as tells what's a-goin' to happen,' replied Sam.

'I wish I'd know'd him, Sammy,' said Mr Weller. 'P'raps he might ha' throw'd a small light on that 'ere liver complaint as we wos a-speakin' on, just now. Hows'ever, if he's dead, and ain't left the bisness to nobody, there's an end on it. Go on, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, with a sigh.

'Well,' said Sam, 'you've been a-prophecyin' avay about wot'll happen to the gov'ner if he's left alone. Don't you see any way o' takin' care on him?'

'No, I don't, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, with a reflective visage.

'No vay at all?' inquired Sam.

'No vay,' said Mr Weller, 'unless' - and a gleam of intelligence lighted up his countenance as he sank his voice to a whisper, and applied his mouth to the ear of his offspring - 'unless it is getting him out in a turn-up bedstead, unbeknown to the turnkeys, Sammy, or dressin' him up like a old 'ooman vith a green wail.'

Sam Weller received both of these suggestions with unexpected contempt, and again propounded his question.

'No,' said the old gentleman; 'if he von't let you stop there, I see no vay at all. It's no thoroughfare, Sammy, no thoroughfare.'

'Well, then, I'll tell you wot it is,' said Sam, 'I'll trouble you for the loan of five-and-twenty pound.'

'Wot good'll that do?' inquired Mr Weller.

'Never mind,' replied Sam. 'P'raps you may ask for it five minits arterwards; p'raps I may say I von't pay, and cut up rough. You von't think o' arrestin' your own son for the money, and sendin' him off to the Fleet, will you, you unnat'ral wagabone?'

At this reply of Sam's, the father and son exchanged a complete code of telegraph nods and gestures, after which, the elder Mr Weller sat himself down on a stone step and laughed till he was purple.

'Wot a old image it is!' exclaimed Sam, indignant at this loss of time. 'What are you a-settin' down there for, con-wertin' your face into a street-door knocker, wen there's so much to be done. Where's the money?' 'In the boot, Sammy, in the boot,' replied Mr Weller, composing his features. 'Hold my hat, Sammy.'

Having divested himself of this encumbrance, Mr Weller gave his body a sudden wrench to one side, and by a dexterous twist, contrived to get his right hand into a most capacious pocket, from whence, after a great deal of panting and exertion, he extricated a pocket-book of the large octavo size, fastened by a huge leathern strap. From this ledger he drew forth a couple of whiplashes, three or four buckles, a little sample-bag of corn, and, finally, a small roll of very dirty bank-notes, from which he selected the required amount, which he handed over to Sam.

'And now, Sammy,' said the old gentleman, when the whip- lashes, and the buckles, and the samples, had been all put back, and the book once more deposited at the bottom of the same pocket, 'now, Sammy, I know a gen'l'm'n here, as'll do the rest o' the bisness for us, in no time - a limb o' the law, Sammy, as has got brains like the frogs, dispersed all over his body, and reachin' to the wery tips of his fingers; a friend of the Lord Chancellorship's, Sammy, who'd only have to tell him what he wanted, and he'd lock you up for life, if that wos all.'

'I say,' said Sam, 'none o' that.'

'None o' wot?' inquired Mr Weller.

'Wy, none o' them unconstitootional ways o' doin' it,' retorted Sam. 'The have-his-carcass, next to the perpetual motion, is vun of the blessedest things as wos ever made. I've read that 'ere in the newspapers wery of'en.'

'Well, wot's that got to do vith it?' inquired Mr Weller.

'Just this here,' said Sam, 'that I'll patronise the inwention, and go in, that vay. No visperin's to the Chancellorship - I don't like the notion. It mayn't be altogether safe, vith reference to gettin' out agin.'

Deferring to his son's feeling upon this point, Mr Weller at once sought the erudite Solomon Pell, and acquainted him with his desire to issue a writ, instantly, for the SUM of twenty-five pounds, and costs of process; to be executed without delay upon the body of one Samuel Weller; the charges thereby incurred, to be paid in advance to Solomon Pell.

The attorney was in high glee, for the embarrassed coach- horser was ordered to be discharged forthwith. He highly approved of Sam's attachment to his master; declared that it strongly reminded him of his own feelings of devotion to his friend, the Chancellor; and at once led the elder Mr Weller down to the Temple, to swear the affidavit of debt, which the boy, with the assistance of the blue bag, had drawn up on the spot.

Meanwhile, Sam, having been formally introduced to the whitewashed gentleman and his friends, as the offspring of Mr Weller, of the Belle Savage, was treated with marked distinction, and invited to regale himself with them in honour of the occasion - an invitation which he was by no means backward in accepting.

The mirth of gentlemen of this class is of a grave and quiet character, usually; but the present instance was one of peculiar festivity, and they relaxed in proportion. After some rather tumultuous toasting of the Chief Commissioner and Mr Solomon Pell, who had that day displayed such transcendent abilities, a mottled-faced gentleman in a blue shawl proposed that somebody should sing a song. The obvious suggestion was, that the mottled- faced gentleman, being anxious for a song, should sing it himself; but this the mottled-faced gentleman sturdily, and somewhat offensively, declined to do. Upon which, as is not unusual in such cases, a rather angry colloquy ensued.

'Gentlemen,' said the coach-horser, 'rather than disturb the harmony of this delightful occasion, perhaps Mr Samuel Weller will oblige the company.'

'Raly, gentlemen,' said Sam, 'I'm not wery much in the habit o' singin' without the instrument; but anythin' for a quiet life, as the man said wen he took the sitivation at the lighthouse.'

With this prelude, Mr Samuel Weller burst at once into the following wild and beautiful legend, which, under the impression that it is not generally known, we take the liberty of quoting. We would beg to call particular attention to the monosyllable at the end of the second and

fourth lines, which not only enables the singer to take breath at those points, but greatly assists the metre.

ROMANCE

I

Bold Turpin vunce, on Hounslow Heath, His bold mare Bess bestrode-er; Ven there he see'd the Bishop's coach A-coming along the road-er. So he gallops close to the 'orse's legs, And he claps his head vithin; And the Bishop says, 'Sure as eggs is eggs, This here's the bold Turpin!'

CHORUS

And the Bishop says, 'Sure as eggs is eggs, This here's the bold Turpin!'

II

Says Turpin, 'You shall eat your words, With a sarse of leaden bul-let;' So he puts a pistol to his mouth, And he fires it down his gul-let. The coachman he not likin' the job, Set off at full gal-lop, But Dick put a couple of balls in his nob, And perwailed on him to stop.

CHORUS (sarcastically)

But Dick put a couple of balls in his nob, And perwailed on him to stop.

'I maintain that that 'ere song's personal to the cloth,' said the mottled-faced gentleman, interrupting it at this point. 'I demand the name o' that coachman.'

'Nobody know'd,' replied Sam. 'He hadn't got his card in his pocket.'

'I object to the introduction o' politics,' said the mottled- faced gentleman. 'I submit that, in the present company, that 'ere song's political; and, wot's much the same, that it ain't true. I say that that coachman did not run away; but that he died game - game as pheasants; and I won't hear nothin' said to the contrairey.'

As the mottled-faced gentleman spoke with great energy and determination, and as the opinions of the company seemed divided on the subject, it threatened to give rise to fresh altercation, when Mr Weller and Mr Pell most opportunely arrived.

'All right, Sammy,' said Mr Weller.

'The officer will be here at four o'clock,' said Mr Pell. 'I suppose you won't run away meanwhile, eh? Ha! ha!'

'P'raps my cruel pa 'ull relent afore then,' replied Sam, with a broad grin.

'Not I,' said the elder Mr Weller.

'Do,' said Sam.

'Not on no account,' replied the inexorable creditor.

'I'll give bills for the amount, at sixpence a month,' said Sam.

'I won't take 'em,' said Mr Weller.

'Ha, ha, ha! very good, very good,' said Mr Solomon Pell, who was making out his little bill of costs; 'a very amusing incident indeed! Benjamin, copy that.' And Mr Pell smiled again, as he called Mr Weller's attention to the amount.

'Thank you, thank you,' said the professional gentleman, taking up another of the greasy notes as Mr Weller took it from the pocket-book. 'Three ten and one ten is five. Much obliged to you, Mr Weller. Your son is a most deserving young man, very much so indeed, Sir. It's a very pleasant trait in a young man's character, very much so,' added Mr Pell, smiling smoothly round, as he buttoned up the money.

'Wot a game it is!' said the elder Mr Weller, with a chuckle. 'A reg'lar prodigy son!'

'Prodigal - prodigal son, Sir,' suggested Mr Pell, mildly.

'Never mind, Sir,' said Mr Weller, with dignity. 'I know wot's o'clock, Sir. Wen I don't, I'll ask you, Sir.'

By the time the officer arrived, Sam had made himself so extremely popular, that the congregated gentlemen determined to see him to prison in a body. So off they set; the plaintiff and defendant walking arm in arm, the officer in front, and eight stout coachmen bringing up the rear. At Serjeant's Inn Coffee-house the whole party halted to refresh, and, the legal arrangements being completed, the procession moved on again.

Some little commotion was occasioned in Fleet Street, by the pleasantry of the eight gentlemen in the flank, who persevered in walking four abreast; it was also found necessary to leave the mottled-faced gentleman behind, to fight a ticket-porter, it being arranged that

his friends should call for him as they came back. Nothing but these little incidents occurred on the way. When they reached the gate of the Fleet, the cavalcade, taking the time from the plaintiff, gave three tremendous cheers for the defendant, and, after having shaken hands all round, left him.

Sam, having been formally delivered into the warder's custody, to the intense astonishment of Roker, and to the evident emotion of even the phlegmatic Neddy, passed at once into the prison, walked straight to his master's room, and knocked at the door.

'Come in,' said Mr Pickwick.

Sam appeared, pulled off his hat, and smiled.

'Ah, Sam, my good lad!' said Mr Pickwick, evidently delighted to see his humble friend again; 'I had no intention of hurting your feelings yesterday, my faithful fellow, by what I said. Put down your hat, Sam, and let me explain my meaning, a little more at length.'

'Won't presently do, sir?' inquired Sam.

'Certainly,' said Mr Pickwick; 'but why not now?'

'I'd raythe r not now, sir,' rejoined Sam.

'Why?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

''Cause - ' said Sam, hesitating.

'Because of what?' inquired Mr Pickwick, alarmed at his follower's manner. 'Speak out, Sam.'

''Cause,' rejoined Sam - ''cause I've got a little bisness as I want to do.'

'What business?' inquired Mr Pickwick, surprised at Sam's confused manner.

'Nothin' partickler, Sir,' replied Sam.

'Oh, if it's nothing particular,' said Mr Pickwick, with a smile, 'you can speak with me first.'

'I think I'd better see arter it at once,' said Sam, still hesitating.

Mr Pickwick looked amazed, but said nothing.

'The fact is - ' said Sam, stopping short.

'Well!' said Mr Pickwick. 'Speak out, Sam.'

'Why, the fact is,' said Sam, with a desperate effort, 'perhaps I'd better see arter my bed afore I do anythin' else.'

'YOUR BED!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick, in astonishment.

'Yes, my bed, Sir,' replied Sam, 'I'm a prisoner. I was arrested this here wery arternoon for debt.'

'You arrested for debt!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick, sinking into a chair.

'Yes, for debt, Sir,' replied Sam. 'And the man as puts me in, 'ull never let me out till you go yourself.'

'Bless my heart and soul!' ejaculated Mr Pickwick. 'What do you mean?'

'Wot I say, Sir,' rejoined Sam. 'If it's forty years to come, I shall be a prisoner, and I'm very glad on it; and if it had been Newgate, it would ha' been just the same. Now the murder's out, and, damme, there's an end on it!'

With these words, which he repeated with great emphasis and violence, Sam Weller dashed his hat upon the ground, in a most unusual state of excitement; and then, folding his arms, looked firmly and fixedly in his master's face.