

Chapter XLV

Descriptive Of An Affecting Interview Between Mr Samuel Weller And A Family Party. Mr Pickwick Makes A Tour Of The Diminutive World He Inhabits, And Resolves To Mix With It, In Future, As Little As Possible

A few mornings after his incarceration, Mr Samuel Weller, having arranged his master's room with all possible care, and seen him comfortably seated over his books and papers, withdrew to employ himself for an hour or two to come, as he best could. It was a fine morning, and it occurred to Sam that a pint of porter in the open air would lighten his next quarter of an hour or so, as well as any little amusement in which he could indulge.

Having arrived at this conclusion, he betook himself to the tap. Having purchased the beer, and obtained, moreover, the day-but-one-before-yesterday's paper, he repaired to the skittle-ground, and seating himself on a bench, proceeded to enjoy himself in a very sedate and methodical manner.

First of all, he took a refreshing draught of the beer, and then he looked up at a window, and bestowed a platonic wink on a young lady who was peeling potatoes thereat. Then he opened the paper, and folded it so as to get the police reports outwards; and this being a vexatious and difficult thing to do, when there is any wind stirring, he took another draught of the beer when he had accomplished it. Then, he read two lines of the paper, and stopped short to look at a couple of men who were finishing a game at rackets, which, being concluded, he cried out 'wery good,' in an approving manner, and looked round upon the spectators, to ascertain whether their sentiments coincided with his own. This involved the necessity of looking up at the windows also; and as the young lady was still there, it was an act of common politeness to wink again, and to drink to her good health in dumb show, in another draught of the beer, which Sam did; and having frowned hideously upon a small boy who had noted this latter proceeding with open eyes, he threw one leg over the other, and, holding the newspaper in both hands, began to read in real earnest.

He had hardly composed himself into the needful state of abstraction, when he thought he heard his own name proclaimed in some distant passage. Nor was he mistaken, for it quickly passed from mouth to mouth, and in a few seconds the air teemed with shouts of 'Weller!' 'Here!' roared Sam, in a stentorian voice. 'Wot's the matter? Who wants him? Has an express come to say that his country house is afire?'

'Somebody wants you in the hall,' said a man who was standing by.

'Just mind that 'ere paper and the pot, old feller, will you?' said Sam. 'I'm a-comin'. Blessed, if they was a-callin' me to the bar, they couldn't make more noise about it!

Accompanying these words with a gentle rap on the head of the young gentleman before noticed, who, unconscious of his close vicinity to the person in request, was screaming 'Weller!' with all his might, Sam hastened across the ground, and ran up the steps into the hall. Here, the first object that met his eyes was his beloved father sitting on a bottom stair, with his hat in his hand, shouting out 'Weller!' in his very loudest tone, at half-minute intervals.

'Wot are you a-roarin' at?' said Sam impetuously, when the old gentleman had discharged himself of another shout; 'making yourself so precious hot that you looks like a aggrawated glass- blower. Wot's the matter?'

'Aha!' replied the old gentleman, 'I began to be afeerd that you'd gone for a walk round the Regency Park, Sammy.'

'Come,' said Sam, 'none o' them taunts agin the wictim o' avarice, and come off that 'ere step. Wot arc you a-settin' down there for? I don't live there.'

'I've got such a game for you, Sammy,' said the elder Mr Weller, rising.

'Stop a minit,' said Sam, 'you're all vite behind.'

'That's right, Sammy, rub it off,' said Mr Weller, as his son dusted him. 'It might look personal here, if a man walked about with vitevash on his clothes, eh, Sammy?'

As Mr Weller exhibited in this place unequivocal symptoms of an approaching fit of chuckling, Sam interposed to stop it.

'Keep quiet, do,' said Sam, 'there never vos such a old picter- card born. Wot are you bustin' vith, now?'

'Sammy,' said Mr Weller, wiping his forehead, 'I'm afeerd that vun o' these days I shall laugh myself into a appleplexy, my boy.'

'Vell, then, wot do you do it for?' said Sam. 'Now, then, wot have you got to say?'

'Who do you think's come here with me, Samivel?' said Mr Weller, drawing back a pace or two, pursing up his mouth, and extending his eyebrows. 'Pell?' said Sam.

Mr Weller shook his head, and his red cheeks expanded with the laughter that was endeavouring to find a vent.

'Mottled-faced man, p'raps?' asked Sam.

Again Mr Weller shook his head.

'Who then?' asked Sam.

'Your mother-in-law,' said Mr Weller; and it was lucky he did say it, or his cheeks must inevitably have cracked, from their most unnatural distension.

'Your mother - in - law, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, 'and the red-nosed man, my boy; and the red-nosed man. Ho! ho! ho!'

With this, Mr Weller launched into convulsions of laughter, while Sam regarded him with a broad grin gradually over-spreading his whole countenance.

'They've come to have a little serious talk with you, Samivel,' said Mr Weller, wiping his eyes. 'Don't let out nothin' about the unnat'ral creditor, Sammy.'

'Wot, don't they know who it is?' inquired Sam.

'Not a bit on it,' replied his father.

'Vere are they?' said Sam, reciprocating all the old gentleman's grins.

'In the snugery,' rejoined Mr Weller. 'Catch the red-nosed man a-goin' anyvere but vere the liquors is; not he, Samivel, not he. Ve'd a very pleasant ride along the road from the Markis this mornin', Sammy,' said Mr Weller, when he felt himself equal to the task of speaking in an articulate manner. 'I drove the old piebald in that 'ere little shay-cart as belonged to your mother-in-law's first wenter, into vich a harm-cheer was lifted for the shepherd; and I'm blessed,' said Mr Weller, with a look of deep scorn - 'I'm blessed if they didn't bring a portable flight o' steps out into the road a-front o' our door for him, to get up by.'

'You don't mean that?' said Sam.

'I do mean that, Sammy,' replied his father, 'and I wish you could ha' seen how tight he held on by the sides wen he did get up, as if he was afeerd o' being precipitayted down full six foot, and dashed into a million hatoms. He tumbled in at last, however, and away ve went; and

I rayther think - I say I rayther think, Samivel - that he found his-self a little jolted ven ve turned the corners.'

'Wot, I s'pose you happened to drive up agin a post or two?' said Sam. 'I'm afeerd,' replied Mr Weller, in a rapture of winks - 'I'm afeerd I took vun or two on 'em, Sammy; he wos a-flyin' out o' the arm-cheer all the way.'

Here the old gentleman shook his head from side to side, and was seized with a hoarse internal rumbling, accompanied with a violent swelling of the countenance, and a sudden increase in the breadth of all his features; symptoms which alarmed his son not a little.

'Don't be frightened, Sammy, don't be frightened,' said the old gentleman, when by dint of much struggling, and various convulsive stamps upon the ground, he had recovered his voice. 'It's only a kind o' quiet laugh as I'm a-tryin' to come, Sammy.'

'Well, if that's wot it is,' said Sam, 'you'd better not try to come it agin. You'll find it rayther a dangerous inwention.'

'Don't you like it, Sammy?' inquired the old gentleman.

'Not at all,' replied Sam.

'Well,' said Mr Weller, with the tears still running down his cheeks, 'it 'ud ha' been a verry great accommodation to me if I could ha' done it, and 'ud ha' saved a good many vords atween your mother-in-law and me, sometimes; but I'm afeerd you're right, Sammy, it's too much in the appleplexy line - a deal too much, Samivel.'

This conversation brought them to the door of the snugery, into which Sam - pausing for an instant to look over his shoulder, and cast a sly leer at his respected progenitor, who was still giggling behind - at once led the way.

'Mother-in-law,' said Sam, politely saluting the lady, 'verry much obliged to you for this here wisit. - Shepherd, how air you?'

'Oh, Samuel!' said Mrs. Weller. 'This is dreadful.'

'Not a bit on it, mum,' replied Sam. - 'Is it, shepherd?'

Mr Stiggins raised his hands, and turned up his eyes, until the whites - or rather the yellows - were alone visible; but made no reply in words.

'Is this here gen'l'm'n troubled with any painful complaint?' said Sam, looking to his mother-in-law for explanation.

'The good man is grieved to see you here, Samuel,' replied Mrs. Weller.

'Oh, that's it, is it?' said Sam. 'I was afeerd, from his manner, that he might ha' forgotten to take pepper vith that 'ere last cowcumber he eat. Set down, Sir, ve make no extra charge for settin' down, as the king remarked wen he blowed up his ministers.'

'Young man,' said Mr Stiggins ostentatiously, 'I fear you are not softened by imprisonment.'

'Beg your pardon, Sir,' replied Sam; 'wot vos you graciously pleased to hobserve?'

'I apprehend, young man, that your nature is no softer for this chastening,' said Mr Stiggins, in a loud voice.

'Sir,' replied Sam, 'you're wery kind to say so. I hope my natur is NOT a soft vun, Sir. Wery much obliged to you for your good opinion, Sir.'

At this point of the conversation, a sound, indecorously approaching to a laugh, was heard to proceed from the chair in which the elder Mr Weller was seated; upon which Mrs. Weller, on a hasty consideration of all the circumstances of the case, considered it her bounden duty to become gradually hysterical.

'Weller,' said Mrs. W. (the old gentleman was seated in a corner); 'Weller! Come forth.'

'Wery much obleeged to you, my dear,' replied Mr Weller; 'but I'm quite comfortable vere I am.'

Upon this, Mrs. Weller burst into tears.

'Wot's gone wrong, mum?' said Sam.

'Oh, Samuel!' replied Mrs. Weller, 'your father makes me wretched. Will nothing do him good?'

'Do you hear this here?' said Sam. 'Lady vants to know vether nothin' 'ull do you good.'

'Wery much indebted to Mrs. Weller for her po-lite inquiries, Sammy,' replied the old gentleman. 'I think a pipe vould benefit me a good deal. Could I be accommodated, Sammy?'

Here Mrs. Weller let fall some more tears, and Mr Stiggins groaned.

'Hollo! Here's this unfortunat gen'l'm'n took ill agin,' said Sam, looking round. 'Vere do you feel it now, sir?'

'In the same place, young man,' rejoined Mr Stiggins, 'in the same place.'

'Vere may that be, Sir?' inquired Sam, with great outward simplicity.

'In the buzzim, young man,' replied Mr Stiggins, placing his umbrella on his waistcoat.

At this affecting reply, Mrs. Weller, being wholly unable to suppress her feelings, sobbed aloud, and stated her conviction that the red-nosed man was a saint; whereupon Mr Weller, senior, ventured to suggest, in an undertone, that he must be the representative of the united parishes of St. Simon Without and St. Walker Within.

'I'm afeered, mum,' said Sam, 'that this here gen'l'm'n, with the twist in his countenance, feels rather thirsty, with the melancholy spectacle afore him. Is it the case, mum?'

The worthy lady looked at Mr Stiggins for a reply; that gentleman, with many rollings of the eye, clenched his throat with his right hand, and mimicked the act of swallowing, to intimate that he was athirst.

'I am afraid, Samuel, that his feelings have made him so indeed,' said Mrs. Weller mournfully.

'Wot's your usual tap, sir?' replied Sam.

'Oh, my dear young friend,' replied Mr Stiggins, 'all taps is vanities!'

'Too true, too true, indeed,' said Mrs. Weller, murmuring a groan, and shaking her head assentingly.

'Well,' said Sam, 'I des-say they may be, sir; but wich is your partickler wanity? Wich wanity do you like the flavour on best, sir?'

'Oh, my dear young friend,' replied Mr Stiggins, 'I despise them all. If,' said Mr Stiggins - 'if there is any one of them less odious than another, it is the liquor called rum. Warm, my dear young friend, with three lumps of sugar to the tumbler.'

'Wery sorry to say, sir,' said Sam, 'that they don't allow that particular wanity to be sold in this here establishment.'

'Oh, the hardness of heart of these inveterate men!' ejaculated Mr Stiggins. 'Oh, the accursed cruelty of these inhuman persecutors!'

With these words, Mr Stiggins again cast up his eyes, and rapped his breast with his umbrella; and it is but justice to the reverend gentleman to say, that his indignation appeared very real and unfeigned indeed.

After Mrs. Weller and the red-nosed gentleman had commented on this inhuman usage in a very forcible manner, and had vented a variety of pious and holy execrations against its authors, the latter recommended a bottle of port wine, warmed with a little water, spice, and sugar, as being grateful to the stomach, and savouring less of vanity than many other compounds. It was accordingly ordered to be prepared, and pending its preparation the red-nosed man and Mrs. Weller looked at the elder W. and groaned.

'Well, Sammy,' said the gentleman, 'I hope you'll find your spirits rose by this here lively wisit. Wery cheerful and improvin' conwersation, ain't it, Sammy?'

'You're a reprobate,' replied Sam; 'and I desire you won't address no more o' them ungraceful remarks to me.'

So far from being edified by this very proper reply, the elder Mr Weller at once relapsed into a broad grin; and this inexorable conduct causing the lady and Mr Stiggins to close their eyes, and rock themselves to and fro on their chairs, in a troubled manner, he furthermore indulged in several acts of pantomime, indicative of a desire to pummel and wring the nose of the aforesaid Stiggins, the performance of which, appeared to afford him great mental relief. The old gentleman very narrowly escaped detection in one instance; for Mr Stiggins happening to give a start on the arrival of the negus, brought his head in smart contact with the clenched fist with which Mr Weller had been describing imaginary fireworks in the air, within two inches of his ear, for some minutes.

'Wot are you a-reachin' out, your hand for the tumbler in that 'ere sawage way for?' said Sam, with great promptitude. 'Don't you see you've hit the gen'l'm'n?'

'I didn't go to do it, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, in some degree abashed by the very unexpected occurrence of the incident.

'Try an in'ard application, sir,' said Sam, as the red-nosed gentleman rubbed his head with a rueful visage. 'Wot do you think o' that, for a go o' vanity, warm, Sir?'

Mr Stiggins made no verbal answer, but his manner was expressive. He tasted the contents of the glass which Sam had placed in his hand, put his umbrella on the floor, and tasted it again, passing his hand placidly across his stomach twice or thrice; he then drank the whole at a breath, and smacking his lips, held out the tumbler for more.

Nor was Mrs. Weller behind-hand in doing justice to the composition. The good lady began by protesting that she couldn't touch a drop - then took a small drop - then a large drop - then a great many drops; and her feelings being of the nature of those substances which are powerfully affected by the application of strong waters, she dropped a tear with every drop of negus, and so got on, melting the feelings down, until at length she had arrived at a very pathetic and decent pitch of misery.

The elder Mr Weller observed these signs and tokens with many manifestations of disgust, and when, after a second jug of the same, Mr Stiggins began to sigh in a dismal manner, he plainly evinced his disapprobation of the whole proceedings, by sundry incoherent ramblings of speech, among which frequent angry repetitions of the word 'gammon' were alone distinguishable to the ear.

'I'll tell you wot it is, Samivel, my boy,' whispered the old gentleman into his son's ear, after a long and steadfast contemplation of his lady and Mr Stiggins; 'I think there must be somethin' wrong in your mother-in-law's inside, as well as in that o' the red-nosed man.'

'Wot do you mean?' said Sam.

'I mean this here, Sammy,' replied the old gentleman, 'that wot they drink, don't seem no nourishment to 'em; it all turns to warm water, and comes a-pourin' out o' their eyes. 'Pend upon it, Sammy, it's a constitootional infirmity.'

Mr Weller delivered this scientific opinion with many confirmatory frowns and nods; which, Mrs. Weller remarking, and concluding that they bore some disparaging reference either to herself or to Mr Stiggins, or to both, was on the point of becoming infinitely worse, when Mr Stiggins, getting on his legs as well as he could, proceeded to deliver an edifying discourse for the benefit of the company, but more especially of Mr Samuel, whom he adjured in moving terms to be upon his guard in that sink of iniquity into which he was cast; to abstain from all hypocrisy and pride of heart; and to take in all things exact pattern and copy by him (Stiggins), in which case he might calculate on arriving, sooner or later at the comfortable conclusion, that, like him, he was a most estimable and blameless character, and that all his acquaintances and friends were hopelessly abandoned and

profligate wretches. Which consideration, he said, could not but afford him the liveliest satisfaction.

He furthermore conjured him to avoid, above all things, the vice of intoxication, which he likened unto the filthy habits of swine, and to those poisonous and baleful drugs which being chewed in the mouth, are said to filch away the memory. At this point of his discourse, the reverend and red-nosed gentleman became singularly incoherent, and staggering to and fro in the excitement of his eloquence, was fain to catch at the back of a chair to preserve his perpendicular.

Mr Stiggins did not desire his hearers to be upon their guard against those false prophets and wretched mockers of religion, who, without sense to expound its first doctrines, or hearts to feel its first principles, are more dangerous members of society than the common criminal; imposing, as they necessarily do, upon the weakest and worst informed, casting scorn and contempt on what should be held most sacred, and bringing into partial disrepute large bodies of virtuous and well-conducted persons of many excellent sects and persuasions. But as he leaned over the back of the chair for a considerable time, and closing one eye, winked a good deal with the other, it is presumed that he thought all this, but kept it to himself.

During the delivery of the oration, Mrs. Weller sobbed and wept at the end of the paragraphs; while Sam, sitting cross-legged on a chair and resting his arms on the top rail, regarded the speaker with great suavity and blandness of demeanour; occasionally bestowing a look of recognition on the old gentleman, who was delighted at the beginning, and went to sleep about half-way.

'Brayvo; wery pretty!' said Sam, when the red-nosed man having finished, pulled his worn gloves on, thereby thrusting his fingers through the broken tops till the knuckles were disclosed to view. 'Wery pretty.'

'I hope it may do you good, Samuel,' said Mrs. Weller solemnly.

'I think it vill, mum,' replied Sam.

'I wish I could hope that it would do your father good,' said Mrs. Weller.

'Thank'ee, my dear,' said Mr Weller, senior. 'How do you find yourself arter it, my love?'

'Scoffer!' exclaimed Mrs. Weller.

'Benighted man!' said the Reverend Mr Stiggins.

'If I don't get no better light than that 'ere moonshine o' yourn, my worthy creetur,' said the elder Mr Weller, 'it's verry likely as I shall continey to be a night coach till I'm took off the road altogether. Now, Mrs. We, if the piebald stands at livery much longer, he'll stand at nothin' as we go back, and p'raps that 'ere harm-cheer 'ull be tipped over into some hedge or another, with the shepherd in it.'

At this supposition, the Reverend Mr Stiggins, in evident consternation, gathered up his hat and umbrella, and proposed an immediate departure, to which Mrs. Weller assented. Sam walked with them to the lodge gate, and took a dutiful leave.

'A-do, Samivel,' said the old gentleman.

'Wot's a-do?' inquired Sammy.

'Well, good-bye, then,' said the old gentleman.

'Oh, that's wot you're aimin' at, is it?' said Sam. 'Good-bye!'

'Sammy,' whispered Mr Weller, looking cautiously round; 'my duty to your gov'nor, and tell him if he thinks better o' this here bis'ness, to com-moonicate vith me. Me and a cab'net- maker has dewised a plan for gettin' him out. A pianner, Samivel - a pianner!' said Mr Weller, striking his son on the chest with the back of his hand, and falling back a step or two.

'Wot do you mean?' said Sam.

'A pianner-forty, Samivel,' rejoined Mr Weller, in a still more mysterious manner, 'as he can have on hire; vun as von't play, Sammy.'

'And wot 'ud be the good o' that?' said Sam.

'Let him send to my friend, the cabinet-maker, to fetch it back, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller. 'Are you awake, now?'

'No,' rejoined Sam.

'There ain't no vurks in it,' whispered his father. 'It 'ull hold him easy, vith his hat and shoes on, and breathe through the legs, vich his holler. Have a passage ready taken for 'Merriker. The 'Merrikin gov'ment will never give him up, ven vunce they find as he's got money to spend, Sammy. Let the gov'nor stop there, till Mrs. Bardell's dead, or Mr Dodson and Fogg's hung (wich last ewent I think is the most likely to happen first, Sammy), and then let him come back and write

a book about the 'Merrickins as'll pay all his expenses and more, if he blows 'em up enough.'

Mr Weller delivered this hurried abstract of his plot with great vehemence of whisper; and then, as if fearful of weakening the effect of the tremendous communication by any further dialogue, he gave the coachman's salute, and vanished.

Sam had scarcely recovered his usual composure of countenance, which had been greatly disturbed by the secret communication of his respected relative, when Mr Pickwick accosted him.

'Sam,' said that gentleman.

'Sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'I am going for a walk round the prison, and I wish you to attend me. I see a prisoner we know coming this way, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick, smiling.

'Wich, Sir?' inquired Mr Weller; 'the gen'l'm'n with the head o' hair, or the interestin' captive in the stockin's?'

'Neither,' rejoined Mr Pickwick. 'He is an older friend of yours, Sam.'

'O' mine, Sir?' exclaimed Mr Weller.

'You recollect the gentleman very well, I dare say, Sam,' replied Mr Pickwick, 'or else you are more unmindful of your old acquaintances than I think you are. Hush! not a word, Sam; not a syllable. Here he is.'

As Mr Pickwick spoke, Jingle walked up. He looked less miserable than before, being clad in a half-worn suit of clothes, which, with Mr Pickwick's assistance, had been released from the pawnbroker's. He wore clean linen too, and had had his hair cut. He was very pale and thin, however; and as he crept slowly up, leaning on a stick, it was easy to see that he had suffered severely from illness and want, and was still very weak. He took off his hat as Mr Pickwick saluted him, and seemed much humbled and abashed at the sight of Sam Weller.

Following close at his heels, came Mr Job Trotter, in the catalogue of whose vices, want of faith and attachment to his companion could at all events find no place. He was still ragged and squalid, but his face was not quite so hollow as on his first meeting with Mr Pickwick, a few days before. As he took off his hat to our benevolent old friend, he murmured some broken expressions of gratitude, and muttered something about having been saved from starving.

'Well, well,' said Mr Pickwick, impatiently interrupting him, 'you can follow with Sam. I want to speak to you, Mr Jingle. Can you walk without his arm?'

'Certainly, sir - all ready - not too fast - legs shaky - head queer - round and round - earthquaky sort of feeling - very.'

'Here, give me your arm,' said Mr Pickwick.

'No, no,' replied Jingle; 'won't indeed - rather not.'

'Nonsense,' said Mr Pickwick; 'lean upon me, I desire, Sir.'

Seeing that he was confused and agitated, and uncertain what to do, Mr Pickwick cut the matter short by drawing the invalided stroller's arm through his, and leading him away, without saying another word about it.

During the whole of this time the countenance of Mr Samuel Weller had exhibited an expression of the most overwhelming and absorbing astonishment that the imagination can portray. After looking from Job to Jingle, and from Jingle to Job in profound silence, he softly ejaculated the words, 'Well, I AM damn'd!' which he repeated at least a score of times; after which exertion, he appeared wholly bereft of speech, and again cast his eyes, first upon the one and then upon the other, in mute perplexity and bewilderment.

'Now, Sam!' said Mr Pickwick, looking back.

'I'm a-comin', sir,' replied Mr Weller, mechanically following his master; and still he lifted not his eyes from Mr Job Trotter, who walked at his side in silence. Job kept his eyes fixed on the ground for some time. Sam, with his glued to Job's countenance, ran up against the people who were walking about, and fell over little children, and stumbled against steps and railings, without appearing at all sensible of it, until Job, looking stealthily up, said -

'How do you do, Mr Weller?'

'It IS him!' exclaimed Sam; and having established Job's identity beyond all doubt, he smote his leg, and vented his feelings in a long, shrill whistle.

'Things has altered with me, sir,' said Job.

'I should think they had,' exclaimed Mr Weller, surveying his companion's rags with undisguised wonder. 'This is rayther a change for the worse, Mr Trotter, as the gen'l'm'n said, wen he got two

doubtful shillin's and sixpenn'orth o' pocket-pieces for a good half-crown.'

'It is indeed,' replied Job, shaking his head. 'There is no deception now, Mr Weller. Tears,' said Job, with a look of momentary slyness - 'tears are not the only proofs of distress, nor the best ones.'

'No, they ain't,' replied Sam expressively.

'They may be put on, Mr Weller,' said Job.

'I know they may,' said Sam; 'some people, indeed, has 'em always ready laid on, and can pull out the plug wenever they likes.'

'Yes,' replied Job; 'but these sort of things are not so easily counterfeited, Mr Weller, and it is a more painful process to get them up.' As he spoke, he pointed to his sallow, sunken cheeks, and, drawing up his coat sleeve, disclosed an arm which looked as if the bone could be broken at a touch, so sharp and brittle did it appear, beneath its thin covering of flesh.

'Wot have you been a-doin' to yourself?' said Sam, recoiling.

'Nothing,' replied Job.

'Nothin'!' echoed Sam.

'I have been doin' nothing for many weeks past,' said Job; and eating and drinking almost as little.'

Sam took one comprehensive glance at Mr Trotter's thin face and wretched apparel; and then, seizing him by the arm, commenced dragging him away with great violence.

'Where are you going, Mr Weller?' said Job, vainly struggling in the powerful grasp of his old enemy. 'Come on,' said Sam; 'come on!' He deigned no further explanation till they reached the tap, and then called for a pot of porter, which was speedily produced.

'Now,' said Sam, 'drink that up, ev'ry drop on it, and then turn the pot upside down, to let me see as you've took the medicine.'

'But, my dear Mr Weller,' remonstrated Job.

'Down vith it!' said Sam peremptorily.

Thus admonished, Mr Trotter raised the pot to his lips, and, by gentle and almost imperceptible degrees, tilted it into the air. He paused

once, and only once, to draw a long breath, but without raising his face from the vessel, which, in a few moments thereafter, he held out at arm's length, bottom upward. Nothing fell upon the ground but a few particles of froth, which slowly detached themselves from the rim, and trickled lazily down.

'Well done!' said Sam. 'How do you find yourself arter it?' 'Better, Sir. I think I am better,' responded Job.

'O' course you air,' said Sam argumentatively. 'It's like puttin' gas in a balloon. I can see with the naked eye that you gets stouter under the operation. Wot do you say to another o' the same dimensions?'

'I would rather not, I am much obliged to you, Sir,' replied Job - 'much rather not.'

'Vell, then, wot do you say to some wittles?' inquired Sam.

'Thanks to your worthy governor, Sir,' said Mr Trotter, 'we have half a leg of mutton, baked, at a quarter before three, with the potatoes under it to save boiling.'

'Wot! Has HE been a-purwidin' for you?' asked Sam emphatically.

'He has, Sir,' replied Job. 'More than that, Mr Weller; my master being very ill, he got us a room - we were in a kennel before - and paid for it, Sir; and come to look at us, at night, when nobody should know. Mr Weller,' said Job, with real tears in his eyes, for once, 'I could serve that gentleman till I fell down dead at his feet.'

'I say!' said Sam, 'I'll trouble you, my friend! None o' that!'

Job Trotter looked amazed.

'None o' that, I say, young feller,' repeated Sam firmly. 'No man serves him but me. And now we're upon it, I'll let you into another secret besides that,' said Sam, as he paid for the beer. 'I never heerd, mind you, or read of in story-books, nor see in picters, any angel in tights and gaiters - not even in spectacles, as I remember, though that may ha' been done for anythin' I know to the contrairey - but mark my vords, Job Trotter, he's a reg'lar thoroughbred angel for all that; and let me see the man as wenturs to tell me he knows a better vun.' With this defiance, Mr Weller buttoned up his change in a side pocket, and, with many confirmatory nods and gestures by the way, proceeded in search of the subject of discourse.

They found Mr Pickwick, in company with Jingle, talking very earnestly, and not bestowing a look on the groups who were

congregated on the racket-ground; they were very motley groups too, and worth the looking at, if it were only in idle curiosity.

'Well,' said Mr Pickwick, as Sam and his companion drew nigh, 'you will see how your health becomes, and think about it meanwhile. Make the statement out for me when you feel yourself equal to the task, and I will discuss the subject with you when I have considered it. Now, go to your room. You are tired, and not strong enough to be out long.'

Mr Alfred Jingle, without one spark of his old animation - with nothing even of the dismal gaiety which he had assumed when Mr Pickwick first stumbled on him in his misery - bowed low without speaking, and, motioning to Job not to follow him just yet, crept slowly away.

'Curious scene this, is it not, Sam?' said Mr Pickwick, looking good-humouredly round.

'Wery much so, Sir,' replied Sam. 'Wonders 'ull never cease,' added Sam, speaking to himself. 'I'm wery much mistaken if that ,ere Jingle worn't a-doin somethin' in the water-cart way!'

The area formed by the wall in that part of the Fleet in which Mr Pickwick stood was just wide enough to make a good racket-court; one side being formed, of course, by the wall itself, and the other by that portion of the prison which looked (or rather would have looked, but for the wall) towards St. Paul's Cathedral. Sauntering or sitting about, in every possible attitude of listless idleness, were a great number of debtors, the major part of whom were waiting in prison until their day of 'going up' before the Insolvent Court should arrive; while others had been remanded for various terms, which they were idling away as they best could. Some were shabby, some were smart, many dirty, a few clean; but there they all lounged, and loitered, and slunk about with as little spirit or purpose as the beasts in a menagerie.

Lolling from the windows which commanded a view of this promenade were a number of persons, some in noisy conversation with their acquaintance below, others playing at ball with some adventurous throwers outside, others looking on at the racket-players, or watching the boys as they cried the game. Dirty, slipshod women passed and repassed, on their way to the cooking-house in one corner of the yard; children screamed, and fought, and played together, in another; the tumbling of the skittles, and the shouts of the players, mingled perpetually with these and a hundred other sounds; and all was noise and tumult - save in a little miserable shed a few yards off, where lay, all quiet and ghastly, the body of the Chancery prisoner who had died the night before, awaiting the mockery of an inquest. The body! It is

the lawyer's term for the restless, whirling mass of cares and anxieties, affections, hopes, and griefs, that make up the living man. The law had his body; and there it lay, clothed in grave-clothes, an awful witness to its tender mercy.

'Would you like to see a whistling-shop, Sir?' inquired Job Trotter.

'What do you mean?' was Mr Pickwick's counter inquiry.

'A wistlin' shop, Sir,' interposed Mr Weller.

'What is that, Sam? - A bird-fancier's?' inquired Mr Pickwick.

'Bless your heart, no, Sir,' replied Job; 'a whistling-shop, Sir, is where they sell spirits.' Mr Job Trotter briefly explained here, that all persons, being prohibited under heavy penalties from conveying spirits into debtors' prisons, and such commodities being highly prized by the ladies and gentlemen confined therein, it had occurred to some speculative turnkey to connive, for certain lucrative considerations, at two or three prisoners retailing the favourite article of gin, for their own profit and advantage.

'This plan, you see, Sir, has been gradually introduced into all the prisons for debt,' said Mr Trotter.

'And it has this wery great advantage,' said Sam, 'that the turnkeys takes wery good care to seize hold o' ev'rybody but them as pays 'em, that attempts the willainy, and wen it gets in the papers they're applauded for their wigilance; so it cuts two ways - frightens other people from the trade, and elewates their own characters.'

'Exactly so, Mr Weller,' observed Job.

'Well, but are these rooms never searched to ascertain whether any spirits are concealed in them?' said Mr Pickwick.

'Cert'nly they are, Sir,' replied Sam; 'but the turnkeys knows beforehand, and gives the word to the wistlers, and you may wistle for it wen you go to look.'

By this time, Job had tapped at a door, which was opened by a gentleman with an uncombed head, who bolted it after them when they had walked in, and grinned; upon which Job grinned, and Sam also; whereupon Mr Pickwick, thinking it might be expected of him, kept on smiling to the end of the interview.

The gentleman with the uncombed head appeared quite satisfied with this mute announcement of their business, and, producing a flat

stone bottle, which might hold about a couple of quarts, from beneath his bedstead, filled out three glasses of gin, which Job Trotter and Sam disposed of in a most workmanlike manner.

'Any more?' said the whistling gentleman.

'No more,' replied Job Trotter.

Mr Pickwick paid, the door was unbolted, and out they came; the uncombed gentleman bestowing a friendly nod upon Mr Roker, who happened to be passing at the moment.

From this spot, Mr Pickwick wandered along all the galleries, up and down all the staircases, and once again round the whole area of the yard. The great body of the prison population appeared to be Mivins, and Smangle, and the parson, and the butcher, and the leg, over and over, and over again. There were the same squalor, the same turmoil and noise, the same general characteristics, in every corner; in the best and the worst alike. The whole place seemed restless and troubled; and the people were crowding and flitting to and fro, like the shadows in an uneasy dream.

'I have seen enough,' said Mr Pickwick, as he threw himself into a chair in his little apartment. 'My head aches with these scenes, and my heart too. Henceforth I will be a prisoner in my own room.'

And Mr Pickwick steadfastly adhered to this determination. For three long months he remained shut up, all day; only stealing out at night to breathe the air, when the greater part of his fellow-prisoners were in bed or carousing in their rooms. His health was beginning to suffer from the closeness of the confinement, but neither the often-repeated entreaties of Perker and his friends, nor the still more frequently-repeated warnings and admonitions of Mr Samuel Weller, could induce him to alter one jot of his inflexible resolution.