

## Chapter LI

### **In Which Mr Pickwick Encounters An Old Acquaintance - To Which Fortunate Circumstance The Reader Is Mainly Indebted For Matter Of Thrilling Interest Herein Set Down, Concerning Two Great Public Men Of Might And Power**

The morning which broke upon Mr Pickwick's sight at eight o'clock, was not at all calculated to elevate his spirits, or to lessen the depression which the unlooked-for result of his embassy inspired. The sky was dark and gloomy, the air was damp and raw, the streets were wet and sloppy. The smoke hung sluggishly above the chimney-tops as if it lacked the courage to rise, and the rain came slowly and doggedly down, as if it had not even the spirit to pour. A game-cock in the stableyard, deprived of every spark of his accustomed animation, balanced himself dismally on one leg in a corner; a donkey, moping with drooping head under the narrow roof of an outhouse, appeared from his meditative and miserable countenance to be contemplating suicide. In the street, umbrellas were the only things to be seen, and the clicking of pattens and splashing of rain-drops were the only sounds to be heard.

The breakfast was interrupted by very little conversation; even Mr Bob Sawyer felt the influence of the weather, and the previous day's excitement. In his own expressive language he was 'flooded.' So was Mr Ben Allen. So was Mr Pickwick.

In protracted expectation of the weather clearing up, the last evening paper from London was read and re-read with an intensity of interest only known in cases of extreme destitution; every inch of the carpet was walked over with similar perseverance; the windows were looked out of, often enough to justify the imposition of an additional duty upon them; all kinds of topics of conversation were started, and failed; and at length Mr Pickwick, when noon had arrived, without a change for the better, rang the bell resolutely, and ordered out the chaise.

Although the roads were miry, and the drizzling rain came down harder than it had done yet, and although the mud and wet splashed in at the open windows of the carriage to such an extent that the discomfort was almost as great to the pair of insides as to the pair of outsides, still there was something in the motion, and the sense of being up and doing, which was so infinitely superior to being pent in a dull room, looking at the dull rain dripping into a dull street, that they all agreed, on starting, that the change was a great improvement, and wondered how they could possibly have delayed making it as long as they had done.

When they stopped to change at Coventry, the steam ascended from the horses in such clouds as wholly to obscure the hostler, whose voice was however heard to declare from the mist, that he expected the first gold medal from the Humane Society on their next distribution of rewards, for taking the postboy's hat off; the water descending from the brim of which, the invisible gentleman declared, must have drowned him (the postboy), but for his great presence of mind in tearing it promptly from his head, and drying the gasping man's countenance with a wisp of straw.

'This is pleasant,' said Bob Sawyer, turning up his coat collar, and pulling the shawl over his mouth to concentrate the fumes of a glass of brandy just swallowed.

'Wery,' replied Sam composedly.

'You don't seem to mind it,' observed Bob.

'Vy, I don't exactly see no good my mindin' on it 'ud do, sir,' replied Sam.

'That's an unanswerable reason, anyhow,' said Bob.

'Yes, sir,' rejoined Mr Weller. 'Wotever is, is right, as the young nobleman sweetly remarked wen they put him down in the pension list 'cos his mother's uncle's wife's grandfather vunce lit the king's pipe with a portable tinder-box.' 'Not a bad notion that, Sam,' said Mr Bob Sawyer approvingly.

, Just wot the young nobleman said ev'ry quarter-day arterwards for the rest of his life,' replied Mr Weller.

'Wos you ever called in,' inquired Sam, glancing at the driver, after a short silence, and lowering his voice to a mysterious whisper - 'wos you ever called in, when you wos 'prentice to a sawbones, to wisit a postboy.'

'I don't remember that I ever was,' replied Bob Sawyer.

'You never see a postboy in that 'ere hospital as you WALKED (as they says o' the ghosts), did you?' demanded Sam.

'No,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'I don't think I ever did.'

'Never know'd a churchyard were there wos a postboy's tombstone, or see a dead postboy, did you?' inquired Sam, pursuing his catechism.

'No,' rejoined Bob, 'I never did.'

'No!' rejoined Sam triumphantly. 'Nor never vill; and there's another thing that no man never see, and that's a dead donkey. No man never see a dead donkey 'cept the gen'l'm'n in the black silk smalls as know'd the young 'ooman as kep' a goat; and that wos a French donkey, so wery likely he warn't wun o' the reg'lar breed.'

'Well, what has that got to do with the postboys?' asked Bob Sawyer.

'This here,' replied Sam. 'Without goin' so far as to as-sert, as some wery sensible people do, that postboys and donkeys is both immortal, wot I say is this: that wenever they feels theirselves gettin' stiff and past their work, they just rides off together, wun postboy to a pair in the usual way; wot becomes on 'em nobody knows, but it's wery probable as they starts away to take their pleasure in some other world, for there ain't a man alive as ever see either a donkey or a postboy a-takin' his pleasure in this!'

Expatriating upon this learned and remarkable theory, and citing many curious statistical and other facts in its support, Sam Weller beguiled the time until they reached Dunchurch, where a dry postboy and fresh horses were procured; the next stage was Daventry, and the next Towcester; and at the end of each stage it rained harder than it had done at the beginning.

'I say,' remonstrated Bob Sawyer, looking in at the coach window, as they pulled up before the door of the Saracen's Head, Towcester, 'this won't do, you know.'

'Bless me!' said Mr Pickwick, just awakening from a nap, 'I'm afraid you're wet.'

'Oh, you are, are you?' returned Bob. 'Yes, I am, a little that way, Uncomfortably damp, perhaps.'

Bob did look dampish, inasmuch as the rain was streaming from his neck, elbows, cuffs, skirts, and knees; and his whole apparel shone so with the wet, that it might have been mistaken for a full suit of prepared oilskin.

'I AM rather wet,' said Bob, giving himself a shake and casting a little hydraulic shower around, like a Newfoundland dog just emerged from the water.

'I think it's quite impossible to go on to-night,' interposed Ben.

'Out of the question, sir,' remarked Sam Weller, coming to assist in the conference; 'it's a cruelty to animals, sir, to ask 'em to do it. There's beds here, sir,' said Sam, addressing his master, 'everything

clean and comfortable. Wery good little dinner, sir, they can get ready in half an hour - pair of fowls, sir, and a weal cutlet; French beans, 'tatars, tart, and tidiness. You'd better stop vere you are, sir, if I might recommend. Take adwice, sir, as the doctor said.' The host of the Saracen's Head opportunely appeared at this moment, to confirm Mr Weller's statement relative to the accommodations of the establishment, and to back his entreaties with a variety of dismal conjectures regarding the state of the roads, the doubt of fresh horses being to be had at the next stage, the dead certainty of its raining all night, the equally mortal certainty of its clearing up in the morning, and other topics of inducement familiar to innkeepers.

'Well,' said Mr Pickwick; 'but I must send a letter to London by some conveyance, so that it may be delivered the very first thing in the morning, or I must go forwards at all hazards.'

The landlord smiled his delight. Nothing could be easier than for the gentleman to inclose a letter in a sheet of brown paper, and send it on, either by the mail or the night coach from Birmingham. If the gentleman were particularly anxious to have it left as soon as possible, he might write outside, 'To be delivered immediately,' which was sure to be attended to; or 'Pay the bearer half-a-crown extra for instant delivery,' which was surer still.

'Very well,' said Mr Pickwick, 'then we will stop here.'

'Lights in the Sun, John; make up the fire; the gentlemen are wet!' cried the landlord. 'This way, gentlemen; don't trouble yourselves about the postboy now, sir. I'll send him to you when you ring for him, sir. Now, John, the candles.'

The candles were brought, the fire was stirred up, and a fresh log of wood thrown on. In ten minutes' time, a waiter was laying the cloth for dinner, the curtains were drawn, the fire was blazing brightly, and everything looked (as everything always does, in all decent English inns) as if the travellers had been expected, and their comforts prepared, for days beforehand.

Mr Pickwick sat down at a side table, and hastily indited a note to Mr Winkle, merely informing him that he was detained by stress of weather, but would certainly be in London next day; until when he deferred any account of his proceedings. This note was hastily made into a parcel, and despatched to the bar per Mr Samuel Weller.

Sam left it with the landlady, and was returning to pull his master's boots off, after drying himself by the kitchen fire, when glancing casually through a half-opened door, he was arrested by the sight of a gentleman with a sandy head who had a large bundle of newspapers

lying on the table before him, and was perusing the leading article of one with a settled sneer which curled up his nose and all other features into a majestic expression of haughty contempt.

'Hollo!' said Sam, 'I ought to know that 'ere head and them features; the eyeglass, too, and the broad-brimmed tile! Eatanswill to vit, or I'm a Roman.'

Sam was taken with a troublesome cough, at once, for the purpose of attracting the gentleman's attention; the gentleman starting at the sound, raised his head and his eyeglass, and disclosed to view the profound and thoughtful features of Mr Pott, of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Beggin' your pardon, sir,' said Sam, advancing with a bow, 'my master's here, Mr Pott.'

'Hush! hush!' cried Pott, drawing Sam into the room, and closing the door, with a countenance of mysterious dread and apprehension.

'Wot's the matter, Sir?' inquired Sam, looking vacantly about him.

'Not a whisper of my name,' replied Pott; 'this is a buff neighbourhood. If the excited and irritable populace knew I was here, I should be torn to pieces.'

'No! Would you, sir?' inquired Sam.

'I should be the victim of their fury,' replied Pott. 'Now young man, what of your master?'

'He's a-stopping here to-night on his way to town, with a couple of friends,' replied Sam.

'Is Mr Winkle one of them?' inquired Pott, with a slight frown.

'No, Sir. Mr Vinkle stops at home now,' rejoined Sam. 'He's married.'

'Married!' exclaimed Pott, with frightful vehemence. He stopped, smiled darkly, and added, in a low, vindictive tone, 'It serves him right!' Having given vent to this cruel ebullition of deadly malice and cold-blooded triumph over a fallen enemy, Mr Pott inquired whether Mr Pickwick's friends were 'blue?' Receiving a most satisfactory answer in the affirmative from Sam, who knew as much about the matter as Pott himself, he consented to accompany him to Mr Pickwick's room, where a hearty welcome awaited him, and an agreement to club their dinners together was at once made and ratified.

'And how are matters going on in Eatanswill?' inquired Mr Pickwick, when Pott had taken a seat near the fire, and the whole party had got their wet boots off, and dry slippers on. 'Is the INDEPENDENT still in being?'

'The INDEPENDENT, sir,' replied Pott, 'is still dragging on a wretched and lingering career. Abhorred and despised by even the few who are cognisant of its miserable and disgraceful existence, stifled by the very filth it so profusely scatters, rendered deaf and blind by the exhalations of its own slime, the obscene journal, happily unconscious of its degraded state, is rapidly sinking beneath that treacherous mud which, while it seems to give it a firm standing with the low and debased classes of society, is nevertheless rising above its detested head, and will speedily engulf it for ever.'

Having delivered this manifesto (which formed a portion of his last week's leader) with vehement articulation, the editor paused to take breath, and looked majestically at Bob Sawyer.

'You are a young man, sir,' said Pott.

Mr Bob Sawyer nodded.

'So are you, sir,' said Pott, addressing Mr Ben Allen.

Ben admitted the soft impeachment.

'And are both deeply imbued with those blue principles, which, so long as I live, I have pledged myself to the people of these kingdoms to support and to maintain?' suggested Pott.

'Why, I don't exactly know about that,' replied Bob Sawyer. 'I am - '

'Not buff, Mr Pickwick,' interrupted Pott, drawing back his chair, 'your friend is not buff, sir?'

'No, no,' rejoined Bob, 'I'm a kind of plaid at present; a compound of all sorts of colours.'

'A waverer,' said Pott solemnly, 'a waverer. I should like to show you a series of eight articles, Sir, that have appeared in the Eatanswill GAZETTE. I think I may venture to say that you would not be long in establishing your opinions on a firm and solid blue basis, sir.' 'I dare say I should turn very blue, long before I got to the end of them,' responded Bob.

Mr Pott looked dubiously at Bob Sawyer for some seconds, and, turning to Mr Pickwick, said -

'You have seen the literary articles which have appeared at intervals in the Eatanswill GAZETTE in the course of the last three months, and which have excited such general - I may say such universal - attention and admiration?'

'Why,' replied Mr Pickwick, slightly embarrassed by the question, 'the fact is, I have been so much engaged in other ways, that I really have not had an opportunity of perusing them.'

'You should do so, Sir,' said Pott, with a severe countenance.

'I will,' said Mr Pickwick.

'They appeared in the form of a copious review of a work on Chinese metaphysics, Sir,' said Pott.

'Oh,' observed Mr Pickwick; 'from your pen, I hope?'

'From the pen of my critic, Sir,' rejoined Pott, with dignity.

'An abstruse subject, I should conceive,' said Mr Pickwick.

'Very, Sir,' responded Pott, looking intensely sage. 'He CRAMMED for it, to use a technical but expressive term; he read up for the subject, at my desire, in the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica.''

'Indeed!' said Mr Pickwick; 'I was not aware that that valuable work contained any information respecting Chinese metaphysics.'

'He read, Sir,' rejoined Pott, laying his hand on Mr Pickwick's knee, and looking round with a smile of intellectual superiority - 'he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information, Sir!'

Mr Pott's features assumed so much additional grandeur at the recollection of the power and research displayed in the learned effusions in question, that some minutes elapsed before Mr Pickwick felt emboldened to renew the conversation; at length, as the editor's countenance gradually relaxed into its customary expression of moral supremacy, he ventured to resume the discourse by asking -

'Is it fair to inquire what great object has brought you so far from home?'

'That object which actuates and animates me in all my gigantic labours, Sir,' replied Pott, with a calm smile: 'my country's good.' 'I supposed it was some public mission,' observed Mr Pickwick.

'Yes, Sir,' resumed Pott, 'it is.' Here, bending towards Mr Pickwick, he whispered in a deep, hollow voice, 'A Buff ball, Sir, will take place in Birmingham to-morrow evening.'

'God bless me!' exclaimed Mr Pickwick.

'Yes, Sir, and supper,' added Pott.

'You don't say so!' ejaculated Mr Pickwick.

Pott nodded portentously.

Now, although Mr Pickwick feigned to stand aghast at this disclosure, he was so little versed in local politics that he was unable to form an adequate comprehension of the importance of the dire conspiracy it referred to; observing which, Mr Pott, drawing forth the last number of the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and referring to the same, delivered himself of the following paragraph: -

HOLE-AND-CORNER BUFFERY.

'A reptile contemporary has recently sweltered forth his black venom in the vain and hopeless attempt of sullyng the fair name of our distinguished and excellent representative, the Honourable Mr Slumkey - that Slumkey whom we, long before he gained his present noble and exalted position, predicted would one day be, as he now is, at once his country's brightest honour, and her proudest boast: alike her bold defender and her honest pride - our reptile contemporary, we say, has made himself merry, at the expense of a superbly embossed plated coal-scuttle, which has been presented to that glorious man by his enraptured constituents, and towards the purchase of which, the nameless wretch insinuates, the Honourable Mr Slumkey himself contributed, through a confidential friend of his butler's, more than three-fourths of the whole sum subscribed. Why, does not the crawling creature see, that even if this be the fact, the Honourable Mr Slumkey only appears in a still more amiable and radiant light than before, if that be possible? Does not even his obtuseness perceive that this amiable and touching desire to carry out the wishes of the constituent body, must for ever endear him to the hearts and souls of such of his fellow townsmen as are not worse than swine; or, in other words, who are not as debased as our contemporary himself? But such is the wretched trickery of hole-and-corner Buffery! These are not its only artifices. Treason is abroad. We boldly state, now that we are goaded to the disclosure, and we throw ourselves on the country and its constables for protection - we boldly state that secret preparations are at this moment in progress for a Buff ball; which is to be held in a Buff town, in the very heart and centre of a Buff population; which is to be conducted by a Buff master of the



ceremonies; which is to be attended by four ultra Buff members of Parliament, and the admission to which, is to be by Buff tickets! Does our fiendish contemporary wince? Let him writhe, in impotent malice, as we pen the words, WE WILL BE THERE.'

'There, Sir,' said Pott, folding up the paper quite exhausted, 'that is the state of the case!'

The landlord and waiter entering at the moment with dinner, caused Mr Pott to lay his finger on his lips, in token that he considered his life in Mr Pickwick's hands, and depended on his secrecy. Messrs. Bob Sawyer and Benjamin Allen, who had irreverently fallen asleep during the reading of the quotation from the Eatanswill GAZETTE, and the discussion which followed it, were roused by the mere whispering of the talismanic word 'Dinner' in their ears; and to dinner they went with good digestion waiting on appetite, and health on both, and a waiter on all three.

In the course of the dinner and the sitting which succeeded it, Mr Pott descending, for a few moments, to domestic topics, informed Mr Pickwick that the air of Eatanswill not agreeing with his lady, she was then engaged in making a tour of different fashionable watering-places with a view to the recovery of her wonted health and spirits; this was a delicate veiling of the fact that Mrs. Pott, acting upon her often-repeated threat of separation, had, in virtue of an arrangement negotiated by her brother, the lieutenant, and concluded by Mr Pott, permanently retired with the faithful bodyguard upon one moiety or half part of the annual income and profits arising from the editorship and sale of the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

While the great Mr Pott was dwelling upon this and other matters, enlivening the conversation from time to time with various extracts from his own lucubrations, a stern stranger, calling from the window of a stage-coach, outward bound, which halted at the inn to deliver packages, requested to know whether if he stopped short on his journey and remained there for the night, he could be furnished with the necessary accommodation of a bed and bedstead.

'Certainly, sir,' replied the landlord.

'I can, can I?' inquired the stranger, who seemed habitually suspicious in look and manner.

'No doubt of it, Sir,' replied the landlord.

'Good,' said the stranger. 'Coachman, I get down here. Guard, my carpet-bag!'

Bidding the other passengers good-night, in a rather snappish manner, the stranger alighted. He was a shortish gentleman, with very stiff black hair cut in the porcupine or blacking-brush style, and standing stiff and straight all over his head; his aspect was pompous and threatening; his manner was peremptory; his eyes were sharp and restless; and his whole bearing bespoke a feeling of great confidence in himself, and a consciousness of immeasurable superiority over all other people.

This gentleman was shown into the room originally assigned to the patriotic Mr Pott; and the waiter remarked, in dumb astonishment at the singular coincidence, that he had no sooner lighted the candles than the gentleman, diving into his hat, drew forth a newspaper, and began to read it with the very same expression of indignant scorn, which, upon the majestic features of Pott, had paralysed his energies an hour before. The man observed too, that, whereas Mr Pott's scorn had been roused by a newspaper headed the Eatanswill INDEPENDENT, this gentleman's withering contempt was awakened by a newspaper entitled the Eatanswill GAZETTE.

'Send the landlord,' said the stranger.

'Yes, sir,' rejoined the waiter.

The landlord was sent, and came.

'Are you the landlord?' inquired the gentleman.

'I am sir,' replied the landlord.

'My name is Slurk,' said the gentleman.

The landlord slightly inclined his head.

'Slurk, sir,' repeated the gentleman haughtily. 'Do you know me now, man?'

The landlord scratched his head, looked at the ceiling, and at the stranger, and smiled feebly.

'Do you know me, man?' inquired the stranger angrily.

The landlord made a strong effort, and at length replied,

'Well, Sir, I do not know you.'

'Great Heaven!' said the stranger, dashing his clenched fist upon the table. 'And this is popularity!'

The landlord took a step or two towards the door; the stranger fixing his eyes upon him, resumed.

'This,' said the stranger - 'this is gratitude for years of labour and study in behalf of the masses. I alight wet and weary; no enthusiastic crowds press forward to greet their champion; the church bells are silent; the very name elicits no responsive feeling in their torpid bosoms. It is enough,' said the agitated Mr Slurk, pacing to and fro, 'to curdle the ink in one's pen, and induce one to abandon their cause for ever.'

'Did you say brandy-and-water, Sir?' said the landlord, venturing a hint.

'Rum,' said Mr Slurk, turning fiercely upon him. 'Have you got a fire anywhere?'

'We can light one directly, Sir,' said the landlord.

'Which will throw out no heat until it is bed-time,' interrupted Mr Slurk. 'Is there anybody in the kitchen?'

Not a soul. There was a beautiful fire. Everybody had gone, and the house door was closed for the night.

'I will drink my rum-and-water,' said Mr Slurk, 'by the kitchen fire.' So, gathering up his hat and newspaper, he stalked solemnly behind the landlord to that humble apartment, and throwing himself on a settle by the fireside, resumed his countenance of scorn, and began to read and drink in silent dignity.

Now, some demon of discord, flying over the Saracen's Head at that moment, on casting down his eyes in mere idle curiosity, happened to behold Slurk established comfortably by the kitchen fire, and Pott slightly elevated with wine in another room; upon which the malicious demon, darting down into the last-mentioned apartment with inconceivable rapidity, passed at once into the head of Mr Bob Sawyer, and prompted him for his (the demon's) own evil purpose to speak as follows: -

'I say, we've let the fire out. It's uncommonly cold after the rain, isn't it?'

'It really is,' replied Mr Pickwick, shivering.

'It wouldn't be a bad notion to have a cigar by the kitchen fire, would it?' said Bob Sawyer, still prompted by the demon aforesaid.

'It would be particularly comfortable, I think,' replied Mr Pickwick. 'Mr Pott, what do you say?'

Mr Pott yielded a ready assent; and all four travellers, each with his glass in his hand, at once betook themselves to the kitchen, with Sam Weller heading the procession to show them the way.

The stranger was still reading; he looked up and started. Mr Pott started.

'What's the matter?' whispered Mr Pickwick.

'That reptile!' replied Pott.

'What reptile?' said Mr Pickwick, looking about him for fear he should tread on some overgrown black beetle, or dropsical spider.

'That reptile,' whispered Pott, catching Mr Pickwick by the arm, and pointing towards the stranger. 'That reptile Slurk, of the INDEPENDENT!'

'Perhaps we had better retire,' whispered Mr Pickwick.

'Never, Sir,' rejoined Pott, pot-valiant in a double sense - 'never.' With these words, Mr Pott took up his position on an opposite settle, and selecting one from a little bundle of newspapers, began to read against his enemy.

Mr Pott, of course read the INDEPENDENT, and Mr Slurk, of course, read the GAZETTE; and each gentleman audibly expressed his contempt at the other's compositions by bitter laughs and sarcastic sniffs; whence they proceeded to more open expressions of opinion, such as 'absurd,' 'wretched,' 'atrocious,' 'humbug,' 'knavery,' 'dirt,' 'filth,' 'slime,' 'ditch-water,' and other critical remarks of the like nature.

Both Mr Bob Sawyer and Mr Ben Allen had beheld these symptoms of rivalry and hatred, with a degree of delight which imparted great additional relish to the cigars at which they were puffing most vigorously. The moment they began to flag, the mischievous Mr Bob Sawyer, addressing Slurk with great politeness, said -

'Will you allow me to look at your paper, Sir, when you have quite done with it?'

'You will find very little to repay you for your trouble in this contemptible THING, sir,' replied Slurk, bestowing a Satanic frown on Pott.

'You shall have this presently,' said Pott, looking up, pale with rage, and quivering in his speech, from the same cause. 'Ha! ha! you will be amused with this FELLOW'S audacity.'

Terrible emphasis was laid upon 'thing' and 'fellow'; and the faces of both editors began to glow with defiance.

'The ribaldry of this miserable man is despicably disgusting,' said Pott, pretending to address Bob Sawyer, and scowling upon Slurk. Here, Mr Slurk laughed very heartily, and folding up the paper so as to get at a fresh column conveniently, said, that the blockhead really amused him.

'What an impudent blunderer this fellow is,' said Pott, turning from pink to crimson.

'Did you ever read any of this man's foolery, Sir?' inquired Slurk of Bob Sawyer.

'Never,' replied Bob; 'is it very bad?'

'Oh, shocking! shocking!' rejoined Slurk.

'Really! Dear me, this is too atrocious!' exclaimed Pott, at this juncture; still feigning to be absorbed in his reading.

'If you can wade through a few sentences of malice, meanness, falsehood, perjury, treachery, and cant,' said Slurk, handing the paper to Bob, 'you will, perhaps, be somewhat repaid by a laugh at the style of this ungrammatical twaddler.'

'What's that you said, Sir?' inquired Mr Pott, looking up, trembling all over with passion.

'What's that to you, sir?' replied Slurk.

'Ungrammatical twaddler, was it, sir?' said Pott.

'Yes, sir, it was,' replied Slurk; 'and BLUE BORE, Sir, if you like that better; ha! ha!'

Mr Pott retorted not a word at this jocose insult, but deliberately folded up his copy of the INDEPENDENT, flattened it carefully down, crushed it beneath his boot, spat upon it with great ceremony, and flung it into the fire.

'There, sir,' said Pott, retreating from the stove, 'and that's the way I would serve the viper who produces it, if I were not, fortunately for him, restrained by the laws of my country.'

'Serve him so, sir!' cried Slurk, starting up. 'Those laws shall never be appealed to by him, sir, in such a case. Serve him so, sir!'

'Hear! hear!' said Bob Sawyer.

'Nothing can be fairer,' observed Mr Ben Allen.

'Serve him so, sir!' reiterated Slurk, in a loud voice.

Mr Pott darted a look of contempt, which might have withered an anchor.

'Serve him so, sir!' reiterated Slurk, in a louder voice than before.

'I will not, sir,' rejoined Pott.

'Oh, you won't, won't you, sir?' said Mr Slurk, in a taunting manner; 'you hear this, gentlemen! He won't; not that he's afraid - , oh, no! he WON'T. Ha! ha!'

'I consider you, sir,' said Mr Pott, moved by this sarcasm, 'I consider you a viper. I look upon you, sir, as a man who has placed himself beyond the pale of society, by his most audacious, disgraceful, and abominable public conduct. I view you, sir, personally and politically, in no other light than as a most unparalleled and unmitigated viper.'

The indignant Independent did not wait to hear the end of this personal denunciation; for, catching up his carpet-bag, which was well stuffed with movables, he swung it in the air as Pott turned away, and, letting it fall with a circular sweep on his head, just at that particular angle of the bag where a good thick hairbrush happened to be packed, caused a sharp crash to be heard throughout the kitchen, and brought him at once to the ground.

'Gentlemen,' cried Mr Pickwick, as Pott started up and seized the fire-shovel - 'gentlemen! Consider, for Heaven's sake - help - Sam - here - pray, gentlemen - interfere, somebody.'

Uttering these incoherent exclamations, Mr Pickwick rushed between the infuriated combatants just in time to receive the carpet-bag on one side of his body, and the fire-shovel on the other. Whether the representatives of the public feeling of Eatanswill were blinded by animosity, or (being both acute reasoners) saw the advantage of having a third party between them to bear all the blows, certain it is

that they paid not the slightest attention to Mr Pickwick, but defying each other with great spirit, plied the carpet-bag and the fire-shovel most fearlessly. Mr Pickwick would unquestionably have suffered severely for his humane interference, if Mr Weller, attracted by his master's cries, had not rushed in at the moment, and, snatching up a meal - sack, effectually stopped the conflict by drawing it over the head and shoulders of the mighty Pott, and clasping him tight round the shoulders.

'Take away that 'ere bag from the t'other madman,' said Sam to Ben Allen and Bob Sawyer, who had done nothing but dodge round the group, each with a tortoise-shell lancet in his hand, ready to bleed the first man stunned. 'Give it up, you wretched little creetur, or I'll smother you in it.'

Awed by these threats, and quite out of breath, the INDEPENDENT suffered himself to be disarmed; and Mr Weller, removing the extinguisher from Pott, set him free with a caution.

'You take yourselves off to bed quietly,' said Sam, 'or I'll put you both in it, and let you fight it out with the mouth tied, as I would a dozen sich, if they played these games. And you have the goodness to come this here way, sir, if you please.'

Thus addressing his master, Sam took him by the arm, and led him off, while the rival editors were severally removed to their beds by the landlord, under the inspection of Mr Bob Sawyer and Mr Benjamin Allen; breathing, as they went away, many sanguinary threats, and making vague appointments for mortal combat next day. When they came to think it over, however, it occurred to them that they could do it much better in print, so they recommenced deadly hostilities without delay; and all Eatanswill rung with their boldness - on paper.

They had taken themselves off in separate coaches, early next morning, before the other travellers were stirring; and the weather having now cleared up, the chaise companions once more turned their faces to London.