

Chapter LV

Mr Solomon Pell, Assisted By A Select Committee Of Coachmen, Arranges The Affairs Of The Elder Mr Weller

'Samivel,' said Mr Weller, accosting his son on the morning after the funeral, 'I've found it, Sammy. I thought it was there.'

'Thought wot was there?' inquired Sam.

'Your mother-in-law's vill, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller. 'In wirtue o' vich, them arrangements is to be made as I told you on, last night, respectin' the funs.'

'Wot, didn't she tell you were it was?' inquired Sam.

'Not a bit on it, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller. 'We was a adjustin' our little differences, and I was a-cheerin' her spirits and bearin' her up, so that I forgot to ask anythin' about it. I don't know as I should ha' done it, indeed, if I had remembered it,' added Mr Weller, 'for it's a rum sort o' thing, Sammy, to go a-hankerin' arter anybody's property, ven you're assistin' 'em in illness. It's like helping an outside passenger up, ven he's been pitched off a coach, and puttin' your hand in his pocket, vile you ask him, vith a sigh, how he finds his-self, Sammy.'

With this figurative illustration of his meaning, Mr Weller unclasped his pocket-book, and drew forth a dirty sheet of letter-paper, on which were inscribed various characters crowded together in remarkable confusion.

'This here is the dockyment, Sammy,' said Mr Weller. 'I found it in the little black tea-pot, on the top shelf o' the bar closet. She used to keep bank-notes there, 'fore she vos married, Samivel. I've seen her take the lid off, to pay a bill, many and many a time. Poor creetur, she might ha' filled all the tea-pots in the house vith vills, and not have inconwenienced herself neither, for she took wery little of anythin' in that vay lately, 'cept on the temperance nights, ven they just laid a foundation o' tea to put the spirits atop on!'

'What does it say?' inquired Sam.

'Jist vot I told you, my boy,' rejoined his parent. 'Two hundred pound wurth o' reduced counsels to my son-in-law, Samivel, and all the rest o' my property, of ev'ry kind and description votsoever, to my husband, Mr Tony Veller, who I appint as my sole eggzekiter.'

'That's all, is it?' said Sam.

'That's all,' replied Mr Weller. 'And I s'pose as it's all right and satisfactory to you and me as is the only parties interested, ve may as vell put this bit o' paper into the fire.'

'Wot are you a-doin' on, you lunatic?' said Sam, snatching the paper away, as his parent, in all innocence, stirred the fire preparatory to suiting the action to the word. 'You're a nice eggzekiter, you are.'

'Vy not?' inquired Mr Weller, looking sternly round, with the poker in his hand.

'Vy not?' exclaimed Sam. 'Cos it must be proved, and probated, and swore to, and all manner o' formalities.'

'You don't mean that?' said Mr Weller, laying down the poker.

Sam buttoned the will carefully in a side pocket; intimating by a look, meanwhile, that he did mean it, and very seriously too.

'Then I'll tell you wot it is,' said Mr Weller, after a short meditation, 'this is a case for that 'ere confidential pal o' the Chancellorship's. Pell must look into this, Sammy. He's the man for a difficult question at law. Ve'll have this here brought afore the Solvent Court, directly, Samivel.'

'I never did see such a addle-headed old creetur!' exclaimed Sam irritably; 'Old Baileys, and Solvent Courts, and alleybis, and ev'ry species o' gammon always a-runnin' through his brain. You'd better get your out o' door clothes on, and come to town about this bisness, than stand a-preachin' there about wot you don't understand nothin' on.'

'Wery good, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller, 'I'm quite agreeable to anythin' as vill hexpedite business, Sammy. But mind this here, my boy, nobody but Pell - nobody but Pell as a legal adwiser.'

'I don't want anybody else,' replied Sam. 'Now, are you a-comin'?'

'Vait a minit, Sammy,' replied Mr Weller, who, having tied his shawl with the aid of a small glass that hung in the window, was now, by dint of the most wonderful exertions, struggling into his upper garments. 'Vait a minit' Sammy; ven you grow as old as your father, you von't get into your veskit quite as easy as you do now, my boy.'

'If I couldn't get into it easier than that, I'm blessed if I'd vear vun at all,' rejoined his son.

'You think so now,' said Mr Weller, with the gravity of age, 'but you'll find that as you get vider, you'll get viser. Vidth and visdom, Sammy, always grows together.'

As Mr Weller delivered this infallible maxim - the result of many years' personal experience and observation - he contrived, by a dexterous twist of his body, to get the bottom button of his coat to perform its office. Having paused a few seconds to recover breath, he brushed his hat with his elbow, and declared himself ready.

'As four heads is better than two, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, as they drove along the London Road in the chaise-cart, 'and as all this here property is a wery great temptation to a legal gen'l'm'n, ve'll take a couple o' friends o' mine vith us, as'll be wery soon down upon him if he comes anythin' irreg'lar; two o' them as saw you to the Fleet that day. They're the wery best judges,' added Mr Weller, in a half-whisper - 'the wery best judges of a horse, you ever know'd.'

'And of a lawyer too?' inquired Sam.

'The man as can form a ackerate judgment of a animal, can form a ackerate judgment of anythin',' replied his father, so dogmatically, that Sam did not attempt to controvert the position.

In pursuance of this notable resolution, the services of the mottled-faced gentleman and of two other very fat coachmen - selected by Mr Weller, probably, with a view to their width and consequent wisdom - were put into requisition; and this assistance having been secured, the party proceeded to the public-house in Portugal Street, whence a messenger was despatched to the Insolvent Court over the way, requiring Mr Solomon Pell's immediate attendance.

The messenger fortunately found Mr Solomon Pell in court, regaling himself, business being rather slack, with a cold collation of an Abernethy biscuit and a saveloy. The message was no sooner whispered in his ear than he thrust them in his pocket among various professional documents, and hurried over the way with such alacrity that he reached the parlour before the messenger had even emancipated himself from the court.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Pell, touching his hat, 'my service to you all. I don't say it to flatter you, gentlemen, but there are not five other men in the world, that I'd have come out of that court for, to-day.'

'So busy, eh?' said Sam.

'Busy!' replied Pell; 'I'm completely sewn up, as my friend the late Lord Chancellor many a time used to say to me, gentlemen, when he came

out from hearing appeals in the House of Lords. Poor fellow; he was very susceptible to fatigue; he used to feel those appeals uncommonly. I actually thought more than once that he'd have sunk under 'em; I did, indeed.'

Here Mr Pell shook his head and paused; on which, the elder Mr Weller, nudging his neighbour, as begging him to mark the attorney's high connections, asked whether the duties in question produced any permanent ill effects on the constitution of his noble friend.

'I don't think he ever quite recovered them,' replied Pell; 'in fact I'm sure he never did. 'Pell,' he used to say to me many a time, 'how the blazes you can stand the head-work you do, is a mystery to me.' - 'Well,' I used to answer, 'I hardly know how I do it, upon my life.' - 'Pell,' he'd add, sighing, and looking at me with a little envy - friendly envy, you know, gentlemen, mere friendly envy; I never minded it - 'Pell, you're a wonder; a wonder.' Ah! you'd have liked him very much if you had known him, gentlemen. Bring me three-penn'orth of rum, my dear.'

Addressing this latter remark to the waitress, in a tone of subdued grief, Mr Pell sighed, looked at his shoes and the ceiling; and, the rum having by that time arrived, drank it up.

'However,' said Pell, drawing a chair to the table, 'a professional man has no right to think of his private friendships when his legal assistance is wanted. By the bye, gentlemen, since I saw you here before, we have had to weep over a very melancholy occurrence.'

Mr Pell drew out a pocket-handkerchief, when he came to the word weep, but he made no further use of it than to wipe away a slight tinge of rum which hung upon his upper lip.

'I saw it in the ADVERTISER, Mr Weller,' continued Pell. 'Bless my soul, not more than fifty-two! Dear me - only think.'

These indications of a musing spirit were addressed to the mottled-faced man, whose eyes Mr Pell had accidentally caught; on which, the mottled-faced man, whose apprehension of matters in general was of a foggy nature, moved uneasily in his seat, and opined that, indeed, so far as that went, there was no saying how things was brought about; which observation, involving one of those subtle propositions which it is difficult to encounter in argument, was controverted by nobody.

'I have heard it remarked that she was a very fine woman, Mr Weller,' said Pell, in a sympathising manner.

'Yes, sir, she was,' replied the elder Mr Weller, not much relishing this mode of discussing the subject, and yet thinking that the attorney, from his long intimacy with the late Lord Chancellor, must know best on all matters of polite breeding. 'She was a verry fine 'ooman, sir, ven I first know'd her. She was a widder, sir, at that time.'

'Now, it's curious,' said Pell, looking round with a sorrowful smile; 'Mrs. Pell was a widow.'

'That's very extraordinary,' said the mottled-faced man.

'Well, it is a curious coincidence,' said Pell.

'Not at all,' gruffly remarked the elder Mr Weller. 'More widders is married than single wimin.'

'Very good, very good,' said Pell, 'you're quite right, Mr Weller. Mrs. Pell was a very elegant and accomplished woman; her manners were the theme of universal admiration in our neighbourhood. I was proud to see that woman dance; there was something so firm and dignified, and yet natural, in her motion. Her cutting, gentlemen, was simplicity itself. Ah! well, well! Excuse my asking the question, Mr Samuel,' continued the attorney in a lower voice, 'was your mother-in-law tall?' 'Not verry,' replied Sam.

'Mrs. Pell was a tall figure,' said Pell, 'a splendid woman, with a noble shape, and a nose, gentlemen, formed to command and be majestic. She was very much attached to me - very much - highly connected, too. Her mother's brother, gentlemen, failed for eight hundred pounds, as a law stationer.'

'Vell,' said Mr Weller, who had grown rather restless during this discussion, 'vith regard to bis'ness.'

The word was music to Pell's ears. He had been revolving in his mind whether any business was to be transacted, or whether he had been merely invited to partake of a glass of brandy-and- water, or a bowl of punch, or any similar professional compliment, and now the doubt was set at rest without his appearing at all eager for its solution. His eyes glistened as he laid his hat on the table, and said -

'What is the business upon which - um? Either of these gentlemen wish to go through the court? We require an arrest; a friendly arrest will do, you know; we are all friends here, I suppose?'

'Give me the dockyment, Sammy,' said Mr Weller, taking the will from his son, who appeared to enjoy the interview amazingly. 'Wot we rekvire, sir, is a probe o' this here.'

'Probate, my dear Sir, probate,' said Pell. 'Well, sir,' replied Mr Weller sharply, 'probe and probe it, is verry much the same; if you don't understand wot I mean, sir, I des-say I can find them as does.'

'No offence, I hope, Mr Weller,' said Pell meekly. 'You are the executor, I see,' he added, casting his eyes over the paper.

'I am, sir,' replied Mr Weller.

'These other gentlemen, I presume, are legatees, are they?' inquired Pell, with a congratulatory smile.

'Sammy is a leg-at-ease,' replied Mr Weller; 'these other gen'l'm'n is friends o' mine, just come to see fair; a kind of umpires.'

'Oh!' said Pell, 'very good. I have no objections, I'm sure. I shall want a matter of five pound of you before I begin, ha! ha! ha!'

It being decided by the committee that the five pound might be advanced, Mr Weller produced that sum; after which, a long consultation about nothing particular took place, in the course whereof Mr Pell demonstrated to the perfect satisfaction of the gentlemen who saw fair, that unless the management of the business had been intrusted to him, it must all have gone wrong, for reasons not clearly made out, but no doubt sufficient. This important point being despatched, Mr Pell refreshed himself with three chops, and liquids both malt and spirituous, at the expense of the estate; and then they all went away to Doctors' Commons.

The next day there was another visit to Doctors' Commons, and a great to-do with an attesting hostler, who, being inebriated, declined swearing anything but profane oaths, to the great scandal of a proctor and surrogate. Next week, there were more visits to Doctors' Commons, and there was a visit to the Legacy Duty Office besides, and there were treaties entered into, for the disposal of the lease and business, and ratifications of the same, and inventories to be made out, and lunches to be taken, and dinners to be eaten, and so many profitable things to be done, and such a mass of papers accumulated that Mr Solomon Pell, and the boy, and the blue bag to boot, all got so stout that scarcely anybody would have known them for the same man, boy, and bag, that had loitered about Portugal Street, a few days before.

At length all these weighty matters being arranged, a day was fixed for selling out and transferring the stock, and of waiting with that view upon Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, stock-broker, of somewhere near the bank, who had been recommended by Mr Solomon Pell for the purpose.

It was a kind of festive occasion, and the parties were attired accordingly. Mr Weller's tops were newly cleaned, and his dress was arranged with peculiar care; the mottled-faced gentleman wore at his button-hole a full-sized dahlia with several leaves; and the coats of his two friends were adorned with nosegays of laurel and other evergreens. All three were habited in strict holiday costume; that is to say, they were wrapped up to the chins, and wore as many clothes as possible, which is, and has been, a stage-coachman's idea of full dress ever since stage-coaches were invented.

Mr Pell was waiting at the usual place of meeting at the appointed time; even he wore a pair of gloves and a clean shirt, much frayed at the collar and wristbands by frequent washings.

'A quarter to two,' said Pell, looking at the parlour clock. 'If we are with Mr Flasher at a quarter past, we shall just hit the best time.'

'What should you say to a drop o' beer, gen'l'm'n?' suggested the mottled-faced man. 'And a little bit o' cold beef,' said the second coachman.

'Or a oyster,' added the third, who was a hoarse gentleman, supported by very round legs.

'Hear, hear!' said Pell; 'to congratulate Mr Weller, on his coming into possession of his property, eh? Ha! ha!'

'I'm quite agreeable, gen'l'm'n,' answered Mr Weller. 'Sammy, pull the bell.'

Sammy complied; and the porter, cold beef, and oysters being promptly produced, the lunch was done ample justice to. Where everybody took so active a part, it is almost invidious to make a distinction; but if one individual evinced greater powers than another, it was the coachman with the hoarse voice, who took an imperial pint of vinegar with his oysters, without betraying the least emotion.

'Mr Pell, Sir,' said the elder Mr Weller, stirring a glass of brandy-and-water, of which one was placed before every gentleman when the oyster shells were removed - 'Mr Pell, Sir, it was my intention to have proposed the funs on this occasion, but Samivel has vispered to me - '

Here Mr Samuel Weller, who had silently eaten his oysters with tranquil smiles, cried, 'Hear!' in a very loud voice.

- 'Has vispered to me,' resumed his father, 'that it would be better to devote the liquor to vishin' you success and prosperity, and thankin'

you for the manner in which you've brought this here business through. Here's your health, sir.'

'Hold hard there,' interposed the mottled-faced gentleman, with sudden energy; 'your eyes on me, gen'l'm'n!'

Saying this, the mottled-faced gentleman rose, as did the other gentlemen. The mottled-faced gentleman reviewed the company, and slowly lifted his hand, upon which every man (including him of the mottled countenance) drew a long breath, and lifted his tumbler to his lips. In one instant, the mottled-faced gentleman depressed his hand again, and every glass was set down empty. It is impossible to describe the thrilling effect produced by this striking ceremony. At once dignified, solemn, and impressive, it combined every element of grandeur.

'Well, gentlemen,' said Mr Pell, 'all I can say is, that such marks of confidence must be very gratifying to a professional man. I don't wish to say anything that might appear egotistical, gentlemen, but I'm very glad, for your own sakes, that you came to me; that's all. If you had gone to any low member of the profession, it's my firm conviction, and I assure you of it as a fact, that you would have found yourselves in Queer Street before this. I could have wished my noble friend had been alive to have seen my management of this case. I don't say it out of pride, but I think - However, gentlemen, I won't trouble you with that. I'm generally to be found here, gentlemen, but if I'm not here, or over the way, that's my address. You'll find my terms very cheap and reasonable, and no man attends more to his clients than I do, and I hope I know a little of my profession besides. If you have any opportunity of recommending me to any of your friends, gentlemen, I shall be very much obliged to you, and so will they too, when they come to know me. Your healths, gentlemen.'

With this expression of his feelings, Mr Solomon Pell laid three small written cards before Mr Weller's friends, and, looking at the clock again, feared it was time to be walking. Upon this hint Mr Weller settled the bill, and, issuing forth, the executor, legatee, attorney, and umpires, directed their steps towards the city.

The office of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, of the Stock Exchange, was in a first floor up a court behind the Bank of England; the house of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was at Brixton, Surrey; the horse and stanhope of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, were at an adjacent livery stable; the groom of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was on his way to the West End to deliver some game; the clerk of Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, had gone to his dinner; and so Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, himself, cried, 'Come in,' when Mr Pell and his companions knocked at the counting-house door.

'Good-morning, Sir,' said Pell, bowing obsequiously. 'We want to make a little transfer, if you please.'

'Oh, just come in, will you?' said Mr Flasher. 'Sit down a minute; I'll attend to you directly.'

'Thank you, Sir,' said Pell, 'there's no hurry. Take a chair, Mr Weller.'

Mr Weller took a chair, and Sam took a box, and the umpires took what they could get, and looked at the almanac and one or two papers which were wafered against the wall, with as much open-eyed reverence as if they had been the finest efforts of the old masters.

'Well, I'll bet you half a dozen of claret on it; come!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, resuming the conversation to which Mr Pell's entrance had caused a momentary interruption.

This was addressed to a very smart young gentleman who wore his hat on his right whisker, and was lounging over the desk, killing flies with a ruler. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was balancing himself on two legs of an office stool, spearing a wafer-box with a penknife, which he dropped every now and then with great dexterity into the very centre of a small red wafer that was stuck outside. Both gentlemen had very open waistcoats and very rolling collars, and very small boots, and very big rings, and very little watches, and very large guard-chains, and symmetrical inexpressibles, and scented pocket-handkerchiefs.

'I never bet half a dozen!' said the other gentleman. 'I'll take a dozen.'

'Done, Simmery, done!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'P. P., mind,' observed the other.

'Of course,' replied Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, entered it in a little book, with a gold pencil-case, and the other gentleman entered it also, in another little book with another gold pencil-case.

'I see there's a notice up this morning about Boffer,' observed Mr Simmery. 'Poor devil, he's expelled the house!'

'I'll bet you ten guineas to five, he cuts his throat,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Done,' replied Mr Simmery.

'Stop! I bar,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, thoughtfully. 'Perhaps he may hang himself.'

'Very good,' rejoined Mr Simmery, pulling out the gold pencil-case again. 'I've no objection to take you that way. Say, makes away with himself.'

'Kills himself, in fact,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Just so,' replied Mr Simmery, putting it down. 'Flasher - ten guineas to five, Boffer kills himself.' Within what time shall we say?'

'A fortnight?' suggested Wilkins Flasher, Esquire.

'Con-found it, no,' rejoined Mr Simmery, stopping for an instant to smash a fly with the ruler. 'Say a week.'

'Split the difference,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'Make it ten days.'

'Well; ten days,'rejoined Mr Simmery.

So it was entered down on the little books that Boffer was to kill himself within ten days, or Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, was to hand over to Frank Simmery, Esquire, the sum of ten guineas; and that if Boffer did kill himself within that time, Frank Simmery, Esquire, would pay to Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, five guineas, instead.

'I'm very sorry he has failed,' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'Capital dinners he gave.'

'Fine port he had too,' remarked Mr Simmery. 'We are going to send our butler to the sale to-morrow, to pick up some of that sixty-four.'

'The devil you are!' said Wilkins Flasher, Esquire. 'My man's going too. Five guineas my man outbids your man.'

'Done.'

Another entry was made in the little books, with the gold pencil-cases; and Mr Simmery, having by this time killed all the flies and taken all the bets, strolled away to the Stock Exchange to see what was going forward.

Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, now condescended to receive Mr Solomon Pell's instructions, and having filled up some printed forms, requested the party to follow him to the bank, which they did: Mr Weller and his three friends staring at all they beheld in unbounded astonishment, and Sam encountering everything with a coolness which nothing could disturb.

Crossing a courtyard which was all noise and bustle, and passing a couple of porters who seemed dressed to match the red fire engine which was wheeled away into a corner, they passed into an office where their business was to be transacted, and where Pell and Mr Flasher left them standing for a few moments, while they went upstairs into the Will Office.

'Wot place is this here?' whispered the mottled-faced gentleman to the elder Mr Weller.

'Counsel's Office,' replied the executor in a whisper.

'Wot are them gen'l'men a-settin' behind the counters?' asked the hoarse coachman.

'Reduced counsels, I s'pose,' replied Mr Weller. 'Ain't they the reduced counsels, Samivel?'

'Wy, you don't suppose the reduced counsels is alive, do you?' inquired Sam, with some disdain.

'How should I know?' retorted Mr Weller; 'I thought they looked wery like it. Wot are they, then?'

'Clerks,' replied Sam.

'Wot are they all a-eatin' ham sangwidges for?' inquired his father.

'Cos it's in their dooty, I suppose,' replied Sam, 'it's a part o' the system; they're always a-doin' it here, all day long!' Mr Weller and his friends had scarcely had a moment to reflect upon this singular regulation as connected with the monetary system of the country, when they were rejoined by Pell and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, who led them to a part of the counter above which was a round blackboard with a large 'W.' on it.

'Wot's that for, Sir?' inquired Mr Weller, directing Pell's attention to the target in question.

'The first letter of the name of the deceased,' replied Pell.

'I say,' said Mr Weller, turning round to the umpires, 'there's somethin' wrong here. We's our letter - this won't do.'

The referees at once gave it as their decided opinion that the business could not be legally proceeded with, under the letter W., and in all probability it would have stood over for one day at least, had it not been for the prompt, though, at first sight, undutiful behaviour of

Sam, who, seizing his father by the skirt of the coat, dragged him to the counter, and pinned him there, until he had affixed his signature to a couple of instruments; which, from Mr Weller's habit of printing, was a work of so much labour and time, that the officiating clerk peeled and ate three Ribstone pippins while it was performing.

As the elder Mr Weller insisted on selling out his portion forthwith, they proceeded from the bank to the gate of the Stock Exchange, to which Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, after a short absence, returned with a cheque on Smith, Payne, & Smith, for five hundred and thirty pounds; that being the money to which Mr Weller, at the market price of the day, was entitled, in consideration of the balance of the second Mrs. Weller's funded savings. Sam's two hundred pounds stood transferred to his name, and Wilkins Flasher, Esquire, having been paid his commission, dropped the money carelessly into his coat pocket, and lounged back to his office.

Mr Weller was at first obstinately determined on cashing the cheque in nothing but sovereigns; but it being represented by the umpires that by so doing he must incur the expense of a small sack to carry them home in, he consented to receive the amount in five-pound notes.

'My son,' said Mr Weller, as they came out of the banking-house - 'my son and me has a wery partickler engagement this arternoon, and I should like to have this here bis'ness settled out of hand, so let's jest go straight away someveres, vere ve can hordit the accounts.'

A quiet room was soon found, and the accounts were produced and audited. Mr Pell's bill was taxed by Sam, and some charges were disallowed by the umpires; but, notwithstanding Mr Pell's declaration, accompanied with many solemn asseverations that they were really too hard upon him, it was by very many degrees the best professional job he had ever had, and one on which he boarded, lodged, and washed, for six months afterwards.

The umpires having partaken of a dram, shook hands and departed, as they had to drive out of town that night. Mr Solomon Pell, finding that nothing more was going forward, either in the eating or drinking way, took a friendly leave, and Sam and his father were left alone.

'There!' said Mr Weller, thrusting his pocket-book in his side pocket. 'Vith the bills for the lease, and that, there's eleven hundred and eighty pound here. Now, Samivel, my boy, turn the horses' heads to the George and Wulter!'