

Chapter XXV

Is In Part Professional, And Furnishes The Reader With Some Valuable Hints In Relation To The Management Of A Sick Chamber

Mr Mould was surrounded by his household gods. He was enjoying the sweets of domestic repose, and gazing on them with a calm delight. The day being sultry, and the window open, the legs of Mr Mould were on the window-seat, and his back reclined against the shutter. Over his shining head a handkerchief was drawn, to guard his baldness from the flies. The room was fragrant with the smell of punch, a tumbler of which grateful compound stood upon a small round table, convenient to the hand of Mr Mould; so deftly mixed that as his eye looked down into the cool transparent drink, another eye, peering brightly from behind the crisp lemon-peel, looked up at him, and twinkled like a star.

Deep in the City, and within the ward of Cheap, stood Mr Mould's establishment. His Harem, or, in other words, the common sitting room of Mrs Mould and family, was at the back, over the little counting-house behind the shop; abutting on a churchyard small and shady. In this domestic chamber Mr Mould now sat; gazing, a placid man, upon his punch and home. If, for a moment at a time, he sought a wider prospect, whence he might return with freshened zest to these enjoyments, his moist glance wandered like a sunbeam through a rural screen of scarlet runners, trained on strings before the window, and he looked down, with an artist's eye, upon the graves.

The partner of his life, and daughters twain, were Mr Mould's companions. Plump as any partridge was each Miss Mould, and Mrs M. was plumper than the two together. So round and chubby were their fair proportions, that they might have been the bodies once belonging to the angels' faces in the shop below, grown up, with other heads attached to make them mortal. Even their peachy cheeks were puffed out and distended, as though they ought of right to be performing on celestial trumpets. The bodiless cherubs in the shop, who were depicted as constantly blowing those instruments for ever and ever without any lungs, played, it is to be presumed, entirely by ear.

Mr Mould looked lovingly at Mrs Mould, who sat hard by, and was a helpmate to him in his punch as in all other things. Each seraph daughter, too, enjoyed her share of his regards, and smiled upon him in return. So bountiful were Mr Mould's possessions, and so large his stock in trade, that even there, within his household sanctuary, stood a cumbrous press, whose mahogany maw was filled with shrouds, and winding-sheets, and other furniture of funerals. But, though the

Misses Mould had been brought up, as one may say, beneath his eye, it had cast no shadow on their timid infancy or blooming youth. Sporting behind the scenes of death and burial from cradlehood, the Misses Mould knew better. Hat-bands, to them, were but so many yards of silk or crape; the final robe but such a quantity of linen. The Misses Mould could idealise a player's habit, or a court-lady's petticoat, or even an act of parliament. But they were not to be taken in by palls. They made them sometimes.

The premises of Mr Mould were hard of hearing to the boisterous noises in the great main streets, and nestled in a quiet corner, where the City strife became a drowsy hum, that sometimes rose and sometimes fell and sometimes altogether ceased; suggesting to a thoughtful mind a stoppage in Cheapside. The light came sparkling in among the scarlet runners, as if the churchyard winked at Mr Mould, and said, 'We understand each other;' and from the distant shop a pleasant sound arose of coffin-making with a low melodious hammer, rat, tat, tat, tat, alike promoting slumber and digestion.

'Quite the buzz of insects,' said Mr Mould, closing his eyes in a perfect luxury. 'It puts one in mind of the sound of animated nature in the agricultural districts. It's exactly like the woodpecker tapping.'

'The woodpecker tapping the hollow ELM tree,' observed Mrs Mould, adapting the words of the popular melody to the description of wood commonly used in the trade.

'Ha, ha!' laughed Mr Mould. 'Not at all bad, my dear. We shall be glad to hear from you again, Mrs M. Hollow elm tree, eh! Ha, ha! Very good indeed. I've seen worse than that in the Sunday papers, my love.'

Mrs Mould, thus encouraged, took a little more of the punch, and handed it to her daughters, who dutifully followed the example of their mother.

'Hollow ELM tree, eh?' said Mr Mould, making a slight motion with his legs in his enjoyment of the joke. 'It's beech in the song. Elm, eh? Yes, to be sure. Ha, ha, ha! Upon my soul, that's one of the best things I know?' He was so excessively tickled by the jest that he couldn't forget it, but repeated twenty times, 'Elm, eh? Yes, to be sure. Elm, of course. Ha, ha, ha! Upon my life, you know, that ought to be sent to somebody who could make use of it. It's one of the smartest things that ever was said. Hollow ELM tree, eh? of course. Very hollow. Ha, ha, ha!'

Here a knock was heard at the room door.

'That's Tacker, I know,' said Mrs Mould, 'by the wheezing he makes. Who that hears him now, would suppose he'd ever had wind enough to carry the feathers on his head! Come in, Tacker.'

'Beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Tacker, looking in a little way. 'I thought our Governor was here.'

'Well! so he is,' cried Mould.

'Oh! I didn't see you, I'm sure,' said Tacker, looking in a little farther. 'You wouldn't be inclined to take a walking one of two, with the plain wood and a tin plate, I suppose?'

'Certainly not,' replied Mr Mould, 'much too common. Nothing to say to it.'

'I told 'em it was precious low,' observed Mr Tacker.

'Tell 'em to go somewhere else. We don't do that style of business here,' said Mr Mould. 'Like their impudence to propose it. Who is it?'

'Why,' returned Tacker, pausing, 'that's where it is, you see. It's the beadle's son-in-law.'

'The beadle's son-in-law, eh?' said Mould. 'Well! I'll do it if the beadle follows in his cocked hat; not else. We carry it off that way, by looking official, but it'll be low enough, then. His cocked hat, mind!'

'I'll take care, sir,' rejoined Tacker. 'Oh! Mrs Gamp's below, and wants to speak to you.'

'Tell Mrs Gamp to come upstairs,' said Mould. 'Now Mrs Gamp, what's YOUR news?'

The lady in question was by this time in the doorway, curtsying to Mrs Mould. At the same moment a peculiar fragrance was borne upon the breeze, as if a passing fairy had hiccoughed, and had previously been to a wine-vaults.

Mrs Gamp made no response to Mr Mould, but curtsied to Mrs Mould again, and held up her hands and eyes, as in a devout thanksgiving that she looked so well. She was neatly, but not gaudily attired, in the weeds she had worn when Mr Pecksniff had the pleasure of making her acquaintance; and was perhaps the turning of a scale more snuffy.

'There are some happy creeturs,' Mrs Gamp observed, 'as time runs back'ards with, and you are one, Mrs Mould; not that he need do

nothing except use you in his most owldacious way for years to come, I'm sure; for young you are and will be. I says to Mrs Harris,' Mrs Gamp continued, 'only t'other day; the last Monday evening fortnight as ever dawned upon this Piljian's Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs Harris when she says to me, 'Years and our trials, Mrs Gamp, sets marks upon us all.' - 'Say not the words, Mrs Harris, if you and me is to be continual friends, for sech is not the case. Mrs Mould,' I says, making so free, I will confess, as use the name,' (she curtseyed here), "is one of them that goes agen the obserwation straight; and never, Mrs Harris, whilst I've a drop of breath to draw, will I set by, and not stand up, don't think it.' - 'I ast your pardon, ma'am,' says Mrs Harris, 'and I humbly grant your grace; for if ever a woman lived as would see her feller creeturs into fits to serve her friends, well do I know that woman's name is Sairey Gamp."

At this point she was fain to stop for breath; and advantage may be taken of the circumstance, to state that a fearful mystery surrounded this lady of the name of Harris, whom no one in the circle of Mrs Gamp's acquaintance had ever seen; neither did any human being know her place of residence, though Mrs Gamp appeared on her own showing to be in constant communication with her. There were conflicting rumours on the subject; but the prevalent opinion was that she was a phantom of Mrs Gamp's brain - as Messrs. Doe and Roe are fictions of the law - created for the express purpose of holding visionary dialogues with her on all manner of subjects, and invariably winding up with a compliment to the excellence of her nature.

'And likeways what a pleasure,' said Mrs Gamp, turning with a tearful smile towards the daughters, 'to see them two young ladies as I know'd afore a tooth in their pretty heads was cut, and have many a day seen - ah, the sweet creeturs! - playing at berryins down in the shop, and follerin' the order-book to its long home in the iron safe! But that's all past and over, Mr Mould;' as she thus got in a carefully regulated routine to that gentleman, she shook her head waggishly; 'That's all past and over now, sir, an't it?'

'Changes, Mrs Gamp, changes!' returned the undertaker.

'More changes too, to come, afore we've done with changes, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, nodding yet more waggishly than before. 'Young ladies with such faces thinks of something else besides berryins, don't they, sir?'

'I am sure I don't know, Mrs Gamp,' said Mould, with a chuckle - 'Not bad in Mrs Gamp, my dear?'

'Oh yes, you do know, sir!' said Mrs Gamp, 'and so does Mrs Mould, your 'ansome pardner too, sir; and so do I, although the blessing of a

daughter was deniged me; which, if we had had one, Gamp would certainly have drunk its little shoes right off its feet, as with our precious boy he did, and arterward send the child a errand to sell his wooden leg for any money it would fetch as matches in the rough, and bring it home in liquor; which was truly done beyond his years, for ev'ry individle penny that child lost at toss or buy for kidney ones; and come home arterwards quite bold, to break the news, and offering to drown himself if sech would be a satisfaction to his parents. - Oh yes, you do know, sir,' said Mrs Gamp, wiping her eye with her shawl, and resuming the thread of her discourse. 'There's something besides births and berryins in the newspapers, an't there, Mr Mould?'

Mr Mould winked at Mrs Mould, whom he had by this time taken on his knee, and said: 'No doubt. A good deal more, Mrs Gamp. Upon my life, Mrs Gamp is very far from bad, my dear!'

'There's marryings, an't there, sir?' said Mrs Gamp, while both the daughters blushed and tittered. 'Bless their precious hearts, and well they knows it! Well you know'd it too, and well did Mrs Mould, when you was at their time of life! But my opinion is, you're all of one age now. For as to you and Mrs Mould, sir, ever having grandchildren - '

'Oh! Fie, fie! Nonsense, Mrs Gamp,' replied the undertaker. 'Devilish smart, though. Ca-pi-tal!' - this was in a whisper. 'My dear' - aloud again - 'Mrs Gamp can drink a glass of rum, I dare say. Sit down, Mrs Gamp, sit down.'

Mrs Gamp took the chair that was nearest the door, and casting up her eyes towards the ceiling, feigned to be wholly insensible to the fact of a glass of rum being in preparation, until it was placed in her hand by one of the young ladies, when she exhibited the greatest surprise.

'A thing,' she said, 'as hardly ever, Mrs Mould, occurs with me unless it is when I am indisposed, and find my half a pint of porter settling heavy on the chest. Mrs Harris often and often says to me, 'Sairey Gamp,' she says, 'you raly do amaze me!' 'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'why so? Give it a name, I beg.' 'Telling the truth then, ma'am,' says Mrs Harris, 'and shaming him as shall be nameless betwixt you and me, never did I think till I know'd you, as any woman could sick-nurse and monthly likeways, on the little that you takes to drink.' 'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'none on us knows what we can do till we tries; and wunst, when me and Gamp kept 'ouse, I thought so too. But now,' I says, 'my half a pint of porter fully satisfies; perwisin', Mrs Harris, that it is brought reg'lar, and draw'd mild. Whether I sicks or monthlies, ma'am, I hope I does my duty, but I am but a poor woman, and I earns my living hard; therefore I DO require it, which I makes confession, to be brought reg'lar and draw'd mild.'

The precise connection between these observations and the glass of rum, did not appear; for Mrs Gamp proposing as a toast 'The best of lucks to all!' took off the dram in quite a scientific manner, without any further remarks.

'And what's your news, Mrs Gamp?' asked Mould again, as that lady wiped her lips upon her shawl, and nibbled a corner off a soft biscuit, which she appeared to carry in her pocket as a provision against contingent drams. 'How's Mr Chuffey?'

'Mr Chuffey, sir,' she replied, 'is jest as usual; he an't no better and he an't no worse. I take it very kind in the gentleman to have wrote up to you and said, 'let Mrs Gamp take care of him till I come home;' but ev'rythink he does is kind. There an't a many like him. If there was, we shouldn't want no churches.'

'What do you want to speak to me about, Mrs Gamp?' said Mould, coming to the point.

'Jest this, sir,' Mrs Gamp returned, 'with thanks to you for asking. There IS a gent, sir, at the Bull in Holborn, as has been took ill there, and is bad abed. They have a day nurse as was recommended from Bartholomew's; and well I knows her, Mr Mould, her name bein' Mrs Prig, the best of creeturs. But she is otherways engaged at night, and they are in wants of night-watching; consequent she says to them, having reposed the greatest friendliness in me for twenty year, 'The soberest person going, and the best of blessings in a sick room, is Mrs Gamp. Send a boy to Kingsgate Street,' she says, 'and snap her up at any price, for Mrs Gamp is worth her weight and more in goldian guineas.' My landlord brings the message down to me, and says, 'bein' in a light place where you are, and this job promising so well, why not unite the two?' 'No, sir,' I says, 'not unbeknown to Mr Mould, and therefore do not think it. But I will go to Mr Mould,' I says, 'and ast him, if you like.'" Here she looked sideways at the undertaker, and came to a stop.

'Night-watching, eh?' said Mould, rubbing his chin.

'From eight o'clock till eight, sir. I will not deceive you,' Mrs Gamp rejoined.

'And then go back, eh?' said would.

'Quite free, then, sir, to attend to Mr Chuffey. His ways bein' quiet, and his hours early, he'd be abed, sir, nearly all the time. I will not deny,' said Mrs Gamp with meekness, 'that I am but a poor woman, and that the money is a object; but do not let that act upon you, Mr

Mould. Rich folks may ride on camels, but it an't so easy for 'em to see out of a needle's eye. That is my comfort, and I hope I knows it.'

'Well, Mrs Gamp,' observed Mould, 'I don't see any particular objection to your earning an honest penny under such circumstances. I should keep it quiet, I think, Mrs Gamp. I wouldn't mention it to Mr Chuzzlewit on his return, for instance, unless it were necessary, or he asked you pointblank.'

'The very words was on my lips, sir,' Mrs Gamp rejoined. 'Supposing that the gent should die, I hope I might take the liberty of saying as I know'd some one in the undertaking line, and yet give no offence to you, sir?'

'Certainly, Mrs Gamp,' said Mould, with much condescension. 'You may casually remark, in such a case, that we do the thing pleasantly and in a great variety of styles, and are generally considered to make it as agreeable as possible to the feelings of the survivors. But don't obtrude it, don't obtrude it. Easy, easy! My dear, you may as well give Mrs Gamp a card or two, if you please.'

Mrs Gamp received them, and scenting no more rum in the wind (for the bottle was locked up again) rose to take her departure.

'Wishing ev'ry happiness to this happy family,' said Mrs Gamp 'with all my heart. Good arternoon, Mrs Mould! If I was Mr would I should be jealous of you, ma'am; and I'm sure, if I was you, I should be jealous of Mr Mould.'

'Tut, tut! Bah, bah! Go along, Mrs Gamp!' cried the delighted undertaker.

'As to the young ladies,' said Mrs Gamp, dropping a curtsey, 'bless their sweet looks - how they can ever reconsize it with their duties to be so grown up with such young parents, it an't for sech as me to give a guess at.'

'Nonsense, nonsense. Be off, Mrs Gamp!' cried Mould. But in the height of his gratification he actually pinched Mrs Mould as he said it.

'I'll tell you what, my dear,' he observed, when Mrs Gamp had at last withdrawn and shut the door, 'that's a ve-ry shrewd woman. That's a woman whose intellect is immensely superior to her station in life. That's a woman who observes and reflects in an uncommon manner. She's the sort of woman now,' said Mould, drawing his silk handkerchief over his head again, and composing himself for a nap 'one would almost feel disposed to bury for nothing; and do it neatly, too!'

Mrs Mould and her daughters fully concurred in these remarks; the subject of which had by this time reached the street, where she experienced so much inconvenience from the air, that she was obliged to stand under an archway for a short time, to recover herself. Even after this precaution, she walked so unsteadily as to attract the compassionate regards of divers kind-hearted boys, who took the liveliest interest in her disorder; and in their simple language bade her be of good cheer, for she was 'only a little screwed.'

Whatever she was, or whatever name the vocabulary of medical science would have bestowed upon her malady, Mrs Gamp was perfectly acquainted with the way home again; and arriving at the house of Anthony Chuzzlewit & Son, lay down to rest. Remaining there until seven o'clock in the evening, and then persuading poor old Chuffey to betake himself to bed, she sallied forth upon her new engagement. First, she went to her private lodgings in Kingsgate Street, for a bundle of robes and wrappings comfortable in the night season; and then repaired to the Bull in Holborn, which she reached as the clocks were striking eight.

As she turned into the yard, she stopped; for the landlord, landlady, and head chambermaid, were all on the threshold together talking earnestly with a young gentleman who seemed to have just come or to be just going away. The first words that struck upon Mrs Gamp's ear obviously bore reference to the patient; and it being expedient that all good attendants should know as much as possible about the case on which their skill is brought to bear, Mrs Gamp listened as a matter of duty.

'No better, then?' observed the gentleman.

'Worse!' said the landlord.

'Much worse,' added the landlady.

'Oh! a deal badder,' cried the chambermaid from the background, opening her eyes very wide, and shaking her head.

'Poor fellow!' said the gentleman, 'I am sorry to hear it. The worst of it is, that I have no idea what friends or relations he has, or where they live, except that it certainly is not in London.'

The landlord looked at the landlady; the landlady looked at the landlord; and the chambermaid remarked, hysterically, 'that of all the many vague directions she had ever seen or heard of (and they wasn't few in an hotel), THAT was the waviest.'

'The fact is, you see,' pursued the gentleman, 'as I told you yesterday when you sent to me, I really know very little about him. We were school-fellows together; but since that time I have only met him twice. On both occasions I was in London for a boy's holiday (having come up for a week or so from Wiltshire), and lost sight of him again directly. The letter bearing my name and address which you found upon his table, and which led to your applying to me, is in answer, you will observe, to one he wrote from this house the very day he was taken ill, making an appointment with him at his own request. Here is his letter, if you wish to see it.'

The landlord read it; the landlady looked over him. The chambermaid, in the background, made out as much of it as she could, and invented the rest; believing it all from that time forth as a positive piece of evidence.

'He has very little luggage, you say?' observed the gentleman, who was no other than our old friend, John Westlock.

'Nothing but a portmanteau,' said the landlord; 'and very little in it.'

'A few pounds in his purse, though?'

'Yes. It's sealed up, and in the cash-box. I made a memorandum of the amount, which you're welcome to see.'

'Well!' said John, 'as the medical gentleman says the fever must take its course, and nothing can be done just now beyond giving him his drinks regularly and having him carefully attended to, nothing more can be said that I know of, until he is in a condition to give us some information. Can you suggest anything else?'

'N-no,' replied the landlord, 'except - '

'Except, who's to pay, I suppose?' said John.

'Why,' hesitated the landlord, 'it would be as well.'

'Quite as well,' said the landlady.

'Not forgetting to remember the servants,' said the chambermaid in a bland whisper.

'It is but reasonable, I fully admit,' said John Westlock. 'At all events, you have the stock in hand to go upon for the present; and I will readily undertake to pay the doctor and the nurses.'

'Ah!' cried Mrs Gamp. 'A royal gentleman!'

She groaned her admiration so audibly, that they all turned round. Mrs Gamp felt the necessity of advancing, bundle in hand, and introducing herself.

'The night-nurse,' she observed, 'from Kingsgate Street, well bekown to Mrs Prig the day-nurse, and the best of creeturs. How is the poor dear gentleman to-night? If he an't no better yet, still that is what must be expected and prepared for. It an't the fust time by a many score, ma'am,' dropping a curtsey to the landlady, 'that Mrs Prig and me has nussed together, turn and turn about, one off, one on. We knows each other's ways, and often gives relief when others fail. Our charges is but low, sir' - Mrs Gamp addressed herself to John on this head - 'considerin' the nater of our painful dooty. If they wos made accordin' to our wishes, they would be easy paid.'

Regarding herself as having now delivered her inauguration address, Mrs Gamp curtseyed all round, and signified her wish to be conducted to the scene of her official duties. The chambermaid led her, through a variety of intricate passages, to the top of the house; and pointing at length to a solitary door at the end of a gallery, informed her that yonder was the chamber where the patient lay. That done, she hurried off with all the speed she could make.

Mrs Gamp traversed the gallery in a great heat from having carried her large bundle up so many stairs, and tapped at the door which was immediately opened by Mrs Prig, bonneted and shawled and all impatience to be gone. Mrs Prig was of the Gamp build, but not so fat; and her voice was deeper and more like a man's. She had also a beard.

'I began to think you warn't a-coming!' Mrs Prig observed, in some displeasure.

'It shall be made good to-morrow night,' said Mrs Gamp 'Honorable. I had to go and fetch my things.' She had begun to make signs of inquiry in reference to the position of the patient and his overhearing them - for there was a screen before the door - when Mrs Prig settled that point easily.

'Oh!' she said aloud, 'he's quiet, but his wits is gone. It an't no matter wot you say.'

'Anythin' to tell afore you goes, my dear?' asked Mrs Gamp, setting her bundle down inside the door, and looking affectionately at her partner.

'The pickled salmon,' Mrs Prig replied, 'is quite delicious. I can partlck'ler recommend it. Don't have nothink to say to the cold meat, for it tastes of the stable. The drinks is all good.'

Mrs Gamp expressed herself much gratified.

'The physic and them things is on the drawers and mankleshelf,' said Mrs Prig, cursorily. 'He took his last slime draught at seven. The easy-chair an't soft enough. You'll want his piller.'

Mrs Gamp thanked her for these hints, and giving her a friendly good night, held the door open until she had disappeared at the other end of the gallery. Having thus performed the hospitable duty of seeing her safely off, she shut it, locked it on the inside, took up her bundle, walked round the screen, and entered on her occupation of the sick chamber.

'A little dull, but not so bad as might be,' Mrs Gamp remarked. 'I'm glad to see a parapidge, in case of fire, and lots of roofs and chimley-pots to walk upon.'

It will be seen from these remarks that Mrs Gamp was looking out of window. When she had exhausted the prospect, she tried the easy-chair, which she indignantly declared was 'harder than a brickbadge.' Next she pursued her researches among the physic-bottles, glasses, jugs, and tea-cups; and when she had entirely satisfied her curiosity on all these subjects of investigation, she untied her bonnet-strings and strolled up to the bedside to take a look at the patient.

A young man - dark and not ill-looking - with long black hair, that seemed the blacker for the whiteness of the bed-clothes. His eyes were partly open, and he never ceased to roll his head from side to side upon the pillow, keeping his body almost quiet. He did not utter words; but every now and then gave vent to an expression of impatience or fatigue, sometimes of surprise; and still his restless head - oh, weary, weary hour! - went to and fro without a moment's intermission.

Mrs Gamp solaced herself with a pinch of snuff, and stood looking at him with her head inclined a little sideways, as a connoisseur might gaze upon a doubtful work of art. By degrees, a horrible remembrance of one branch of her calling took possession of the woman; and stooping down, she pinned his wandering arms against his sides, to see how he would look if laid out as a dead man. Her fingers itched to compose his limbs in that last marble attitude.

'Ah!' said Mrs Gamp, walking away from the bed, 'he'd make a lovely corpse.'

She now proceeded to unpack her bundle; lighted a candle with the aid of a fire-box on the drawers; filled a small kettle, as a preliminary to refreshing herself with a cup of tea in the course of the night; laid what she called 'a little bit of fire,' for the same philanthropic purpose; and also set forth a small tea-board, that nothing might be wanting for her comfortable enjoyment. These preparations occupied so long, that when they were brought to a conclusion it was high time to think about supper; so she rang the bell and ordered it.

'I think, young woman,' said Mrs Gamp to the assistant chambermaid, in a tone expressive of weakness, 'that I could pick a little bit of pickled salmon, with a nice little sprig of fennel, and a sprinkling of white pepper. I takes new bread, my dear, with just a little pat of fresh butter, and a mossel of cheese. In case there should be such a thing as a cowcumber in the 'ouse, will you be so kind as bring it, for I'm rather partial to 'em, and they does a world of good in a sick room. If they draws the Brighton Old Tipper here, I takes THAT ale at night, my love, it bein' considered wakeful by the doctors. And whatever you do, young woman, don't bring more than a shilling's-worth of gin and water-warm when I rings the bell a second time; for that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond!'

Having preferred these moderate requests, Mrs Gamp observed that she would stand at the door until the order was executed, to the end that the patient might not be disturbed by her opening it a second time; and therefore she would thank the young woman to 'look sharp.'

A tray was brought with everything upon it, even to the cucumber and Mrs Gamp accordingly sat down to eat and drink in high good humour. The extent to which she availed herself of the vinegar, and sipped up that refreshing fluid with the blade of her knife, can scarcely be expressed in narrative.

'Ah!' sighed Mrs Gamp, as she meditated over the warm shilling's-worth, 'what a blessed thing it is - living in a wale - to be contented! What a blessed thing it is to make sick people happy in their beds, and never mind one's self as long as one can do a service! I don't believe a finer cowcumber was ever grow'd. I'm sure I never see one!'

She moralised in the same vein until her glass was empty, and then administered the patient's medicine, by the simple process of clutching his windpipe to make him gasp, and immediately pouring it down his throat.

'I a'most forgot the piller, I declare!' said Mrs Gamp, drawing it away. 'There! Now he's comfortable as he can be, I'm sure! I must try to make myself as much so as I can.'

With this view, she went about the construction of an extemporaneous bed in the easy-chair, with the addition of the next easy one for her feet. Having formed the best couch that the circumstances admitted of, she took out of her bundle a yellow night-cap, of prodigious size, in shape resembling a cabbage; which article of dress she fixed and tied on with the utmost care, previously divesting herself of a row of bald old curls that could scarcely be called false, they were so very innocent of anything approaching to deception. From the same repository she brought forth a night-jacket, in which she also attired herself. Finally, she produced a watchman's coat which she tied round her neck by the sleeves, so that she become two people; and looked, behind, as if she were in the act of being embraced by one of the old patrol.

All these arrangements made, she lighted the rush-light, coiled herself up on her couch, and went to sleep. Ghostly and dark the room became, and full of lowering shadows. The distant noises in the streets were gradually hushed; the house was quiet as a sepulchre; the dead of night was confined in the silent city.

Oh, weary, weary hour! Oh, haggard mind, groping darkly through the past; incapable of detaching itself from the miserable present; dragging its heavy chain of care through imaginary feasts and revels, and scenes of awful pomp; seeking but a moment's rest among the long-forgotten haunts of childhood, and the resorts of yesterday; and dimly finding fear and horror everywhere! Oh, weary, weary hour! What were the wanderings of Cain, to these!

Still, without a moment's interval, the burning head tossed to and fro. Still, from time to time, fatigue, impatience, suffering, and surprise, found utterance upon that rack, and plainly too, though never once in words. At length, in the solemn hour of midnight, he began to talk; waiting awfully for answers sometimes; as though invisible companions were about his bed; and so replying to their speech and questioning again.

Mrs Gamp awoke, and sat up in her bed; presenting on the wall the shadow of a gigantic night constable, struggling with a prisoner.

'Come! Hold your tongue!' she cried, in sharp reproof. 'Don't make none of that noise here.'

There was no alteration in the face, or in the incessant motion of the head, but he talked on wildly.

'Ah!' said Mrs Gamp, coming out of the chair with an impatient shiver; 'I thought I was a-sleepin' too pleasant to last! The devil's in the night, I think, it's turned so chilly!'

'Don't drink so much!' cried the sick man. 'You'll ruin us all. Don't you see how the fountain sinks? Look at the mark where the sparkling water was just now!'

'Sparkling water, indeed!' said Mrs Gamp. 'I'll have a sparkling cup o' tea, I think. I wish you'd hold your noise!'

He burst into a laugh, which, being prolonged, fell off into a dismal wail. Checking himself, with fierce inconstancy he began to count - fast.

'One - two - three - four - five - six.'

'One, two, buckle my shoe," said Mrs Gamp, who was now on her knees, lighting the fire, 'three, four, shut the door,' - I wish you'd shut your mouth, young man - 'five, six, picking up sticks.' If I'd got a few handy, I should have the kettle boiling all the sooner.'

Awaiting this desirable consummation, she sat down so close to the fender (which was a high one) that her nose rested upon it; and for some time she drowsily amused herself by sliding that feature backwards and forwards along the brass top, as far as she could, without changing her position to do it. She maintained, all the while, a running commentary upon the wanderings of the man in bed.

'That makes five hundred and twenty-one men, all dressed alike, and with the same distortion on their faces, that have passed in at the window, and out at the door,' he cried, anxiously. 'Look there! Five hundred and twenty-two - twenty-three - twenty-four. Do you see them?'

'Ah! I see 'em,' said Mrs Gamp; 'all the whole kit of 'em numbered like hackney-coaches, an't they?'

'Touch me! Let me be sure of this. Touch me!'

'You'll take your next draught when I've made the kettle bile,' retorted Mrs Gamp, composedly, 'and you'll be touched then. You'll be touched up, too, if you don't take it quiet.'

'Five hundred and twenty-eight, five hundred and twenty-nine, five hundred and thirty. - Look here!'

'What's the matter now?' said Mrs Gamp.

'They're coming four abreast, each man with his arm entwined in the next man's, and his hand upon his shoulder. What's that upon the arm of every man, and on the flag?'

'Spiders, p'raps,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Crape! Black crape! Good God! why do they wear it outside?'

'Would you have 'em carry black crape in their insides?' Mrs Gamp retorted. 'Hold your noise, hold your noise.'

The fire beginning by this time to impart a grateful warmth, Mrs Gamp became silent; gradually rubbed her nose more and more slowly along the top of the fender; and fell into a heavy doze. She was awakened by the room ringing (as she fancied) with a name she knew:

'Chuzzlewit!'

The sound was so distinct and real, and so full of agonised entreaty, that Mrs Gamp jumped up in terror, and ran to the door. She expected to find the passage filled with people, come to tell her that the house in the city had taken fire. But the place was empty; not a soul was there. She opened the window, and looked out. Dark, dull, dingy, and desolate house-tops. As she passed to her seat again, she glanced at the patient. Just the same; but silent. Mrs Gamp was so warm now, that she threw off the watchman's coat, and fanned herself.

'It seemed to make the wery bottles ring,' she said. 'What could I have been a-dreaming of? That dratted Chuffey, I'll be bound.'

The supposition was probable enough. At any rate, a pinch of snuff, and the song of the steaming kettle, quite restored the tone of Mrs Gamp's nerves, which were none of the weakest. She brewed her tea; made some buttered toast; and sat down at the tea-board, with her face to the fire.

When once again, in a tone more terrible than that which had vibrated in her slumbering ear, these words were shrieked out:

'Chuzzlewit! Jonas! No!'

Mrs Gamp dropped the cup she was in the act of raising to her lips, and turned round with a start that made the little tea-board leap. The cry had come from the bed.

It was bright morning the next time Mrs Gamp looked out of the window, and the sun was rising cheerfully. Lighter and lighter grew the sky, and noisier the streets; and high into the summer air uprose the smoke of newly kindled fires, until the busy day was broad awake.

Mrs Prig relieved punctually, having passed a good night at her other patient's. Mr Westlock came at the same time, but he was not admitted, the disorder being infectious. The doctor came too. The doctor shook his head. It was all he could do, under the circumstances, and he did it well.

'What sort of a night, nurse?'

'Restless, sir,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Talk much?'

'Middling, sir,' said Mrs Gamp.

'Nothing to the purpose, I suppose?'

'Oh bless you, no, sir. Only jargon.'

'Well!' said the doctor, 'we must keep him quiet; keep the room cool; give him his draughts regularly; and see that he's carefully looked to. That's all!'

'And as long as Mrs Prig and me waits upon him, sir, no fear of that,' said Mrs Gamp.

'I suppose,' observed Mrs Prig, when they had curtseyed the doctor out; 'there's nothin' new?'

'Nothin' at all, my dear,' said Mrs Gamp. 'He's rather wearin' in his talk from making up a lot of names; elseways you needn't mind him.'

'Oh, I shan't mind him,' Mrs Prig returned. 'I have somethin' else to think of.'

'I pays my debts to-night, you know, my dear, and comes afore my time,' said Mrs Gamp. 'But, Betsy Prig' - speaking with great feeling, and laying her hand upon her arm - 'try the cowcubers, God bless you!'