cienly to indulge him; he does what he has to do in furthering the plot of *Persuasion* and that is all; he exists for the sake of the story. Of Mr. Woodhouse we see a great deal more; he is indulged here and there and Miss Austen’s talk about him, her description of his *valetudinarianism*, is among her best comic passages; but he himself only falls gently into his place in the High-bury group; after the first description of him, we know what to expect and receive no more than we expect; he is a stagnant pond rather than a gushing spring of folly. But Mr. Collins comes to life the moment we meet him, nay, before we meet him, for he is all there in that letter which Mr. Bennet reads out at the breakfast table, that letter which makes Elizabeth remark: “He must be an oddity, I think. I cannot make him out.—There is something very pompous in his style.—And what can he mean by apologising for being next in the entail?—We cannot suppose he would help it if he could.—Can he be sensible man, sir?” And Mr. Bennet, that connoisseur of absurdity, answers for all of us when he replies: “No, my dear, I think not. I have great hopes of finding him quite the reverse. There is a mixture of servility and self-importance in his letter, which promises well. I am impatient to see him.” We are all impatient to see him. When he arrives upon the scene, he comes to life immediately and remains alive.
Although we feel that we know what he will do and say next, yet he always goes beyond our expectations just as absurd people in real life do; we know the kind of thing he will say, yet we could not say it for him (as we could with a lesser comic character), for his absurdity is always a little in advance of what we can possibly imagine. Thus he is, as Mr. Saintsbury once remarked somewhere, a creature “of the highest and most Shakespearian comedy.” And being a person of such great lineage, he does not exist simply for the sake of the story (though he plays his part in it), does not fall into his place in the group, but exists in his own right and compels his creator to indulge him all over the place, just as Falstaff black-mailed Shakespeare for scene after scene.

It is not until Mr. Collins has spent a whole evening at the Bennets that Miss Austen describes him, so that she allows us to see him for ourselves and allows Mr. Collins to display himself without any hints and nudges on the part of his creator. This description forms the opening paragraph of Chapter Fifteen, and it is worth noticing that Miss Austen, instead of making the account itself humorous, goes to work coldly, almost scientifically, as if she were describing a somewhat unpleasant insect, and says in effect that, having set Mr. Collins in motion, she intends to let the audience find their own fun.
Mr. Collins

Mr. Collins was not a sensible man, and the deficiency of Nature had been but little assisted by education or society; the greatest part of his life having been spent under the guidance of an illiterate and miserly father; and though he belonged to one of the universities, he had merely kept the necessary terms, without forming at it any useful acquaintance. The subjection in which his father had brought him up had given him originally great humility of manner; but it was now a good deal counteracted by the self-conceit of a weak head, living in retirement, and the consequent feelings of early and unexpected prosperity. A fortunate chance had recommended him to Lady Catherine de Bourgh when the living of Hunsford was vacant; and the respect which he felt for her high rank, and his veneration for her as his patroness, mingling with a very good opinion of himself, of his authority as a clergyman, and his right as a rector, made him altogether a mixture of pride and obsequiousness, self-importance and humility.

It is obvious that there is some excellent material here for a highly satirical sketch of the tuft-hunting eighteenth-century parson, a familiar figure easily capable of arousing feelings of disgust or contempt not untinged with amusement; but such an attitude of disgust or contempt is not one that we can maintain towards any major comic character, or it would not be a major comic character. The superficial view of all comic figures in literature is, of course, that they are contemptible, and good critics who have set out to attack and destroy this view have
sometimes gone to the other extreme in over-emphasising
the lovable aspect of certain great comic characters; neverthe
evertheless these later critics have been much nearer
the truth, for every humorous personage even of the
second rank is something more than a satirical portrait
or sketch and must do something more than arouse our
disgust or even genial contempt. By hook or crook a
comic character, to be successful, must be able to draw
a draft on our sympathy that we are willing to meet,
although we may not be aware of the fact that we are
meeting it. If the question had been put to her, Miss
Austen herself, for all her clear-sightedness, would
probably have said that her purpose was purely satirical;
as the daughter of a parson, she disliked the patronage
system then prevailing and had a contempt for the time-
servers who helped to bolster up that system, so that she
simply set out to caricature the type in Mr. Collins.
Although she certainly enjoyed him, I doubt if she en-
joyed him as we enjoy him now; he was too close to her,
too much bound up in her mind with serious questions.
All the intelligent characters in Pride and Prejudice are
either bored or annoyed by Mr. Collins. Elizabeth
Bennet, rather surprisingly perhaps, considering her un-
doubted sense of humour, very quickly finds him almost
intolerable, and even when she is no longer in any danger
of being proposed to again (though what a delightful
danger, at least to us at a distance), she avoids his society. It is true that she goes to stay at the Hunsford parsonage, but that is only for the sake of the change and her friend Charlotte, now Mrs. Collins: absence, we are told, “had increased her desire of seeing Charlotte again, and weakened her disgust of Mr. Collins.” Her father, as we know, had great hopes of discovering an exquisite fool in Mr. Collins, and was not disappointed; he had at least one delightful afternoon and evening, when “he listened to him (Mr. Collins) with the keenest enjoyment, maintaining at the same time the most resolute composure of countenance . . .”; and we can hardly doubt that the following dialogue was one of Mr. Bennet’s golden moments, to be treasured in the memory. Mr. Collins is speaking:

“. . . I have more than once observed to Lady Catherine, that her charming daughter seemed born to be a duchess, and that the most elevated rank, instead of giving her consequence, would be adorned by her.—These are the kind of little things which please her ladyship, and it is a sort of attention which I feel myself peculiarly bound to pay.”

“You judge very properly,” said Mr. Bennet, “and it is happy for you that you possess the talent of flattering with delicacy. May I ask whether these pleasing attentions proceed from the impulse of the moment, or are the result of previous study?”

“They arise chiefly from what is passing at the time,
and though I sometimes amuse myself with suggesting and arranging such little elegant compliments as may be adapted to ordinary occasions, I always wish to give them as unstudied an air as possible."

Could any gentleman long dedicated to the quest of the ridiculous have asked for anything better? And yet by the following morning, Mr. Bennet is only too anxious to see the last of his young relative, and we never find him anxious to hear any more of Lady Catherine de Bourgh and Rosings. He, like us, could have read about Mr. Collins for ever, but having to meet him in the flesh and listen to his unexpurgated talk, he quickly tired, as we should have done. It is one of the triumphs of art that it can transform the most colossal bores into enchanting personages.

Jane Austen presents to us a great company of snobs, and Mr. Collins is, of course, a member of that company. But he stands apart from the rest, for he is no ordinary snob. With him, what we call snobbery has become a passion, and time-serving and toadyism are raised to a poetical height. A snob has been defined as a person who meanly admires mean things, but if we are to accept this definition, then Mr. Collins escapes, for though he admires mean things (namely, Lady Catherine de Bourgh and his own paltry preferment), he does not admire them meanly. He admires them in a fashion in which few
of us are able to admire anything; he sees them bathed in the light that never was on land or sea. His position at Hunsford, his standing at Rosings, the affability and condescension of Lady Catherine, these are no longer the means to some end, but are an end in themselves; they have become the core of his existence; everything else in life is referred to them and judged by them; and his admiration, his wonder, and his self-satisfaction have combined to form a ruling passion. Had he been an older man, he would not have been such a magnificent oddity, nor should we have liked him so well; but he is young ("a tall, heavy looking young man of five and twenty") and he is also in orders. Now young men very often have some ruling passion and become single-minded under its stress, and if the object of their passion is proportionately significant, if they are driven, say, by love or overmastering ambition, they compel our respect and sympathy, and indeed provide us with the material for our tragedies. If, however, the ruling passion has somehow gathered about a Lady Catherine and her quadrille table, the effect is particularly ludicrous. But it is heightened again by the fact that Mr. Collins is also a clergyman. Priests of all kinds have always been ripe subjects for comedy simply because there is something distinctly comic, at least to disinterested observers, in the contrast between the high solemnity of their office and
their frailties as men. We can never quite reconcile ourselves to the fact that a man may represent the Creator and yet be sadly put out of humour by a badly cooked vegetable. When, therefore, we hear of Mr. Collins for the first time and read, in the letter he sent to Mr. Bennet, such a passage as this:

My mind, however, is now made up on the subject, for having received ordination at Easter, I have been so fortunate as to be distinguished by the patronage of the Right Honourable Lady Catherine de Bourgh, widow of Sir Lewis de Bourgh, whose bounty and beneficence has preferred me to the valuable rectory of this parish, where it shall be my earnest endeavour to demean myself with grateful respect towards her Ladyship, and be ever ready to perform those rites and ceremonies which are instituted by the Church of England.

we are immediately tickled by the evident disproportion. The Lady Catherine-Rosings-Hunsford combination has not only taken a place only to be worthily occupied by, say, Helen of Troy, or the conquest of the East in a young man’s dreams; but as the young man happens to be in orders, it has also become more important than God. Mr. Collins is a Romantic, for all his moments have value because of one secret enchantment; there trills in his heart “that time-devouring nightingale” (as Stevenson, defending his Lantern Bearers, calls the hidden poetry in men); but unfortunately for our
Mr. Collins

gravity, though not, I hope, for our sympathy, we happen to know that the glamorous bird is no other than our old acquaintance Lady Catherine de Bourgh, who is gilding Mr. Collins’ hours by inviting him to her quadrille table or giving him advice about “some shelves in the closets upstairs.”

This simple and by no means entirely prosaic soul, having taken possession so early of his heart’s desire, is so happy, so lost in wonder at his own good fortune, that he is a man apart and the happiest creature in the book, for all his solemn airs. He may bore other people, but nothing bores him. He comes into Hertfordshire, to visit the Bennets, as if he were entering fairyland. He admires the furniture, the pictures, the cooking, and his five fair cousins; everywhere he goes, he finds something to admire and to wonder at; he cannot dance at all well, but he is willing to try; he does not know how to play whist, but sits down to it with pleasure and declares that he will be glad to improve himself; if one young lady is not eligible, he immediately transfers his affections to the next: nothing comes amiss. How should it when he is still the vicar of Hunsford and still under the kindly patronage of no less a person than Lady Catherine? Just as a happy lover asks the world to rejoice with him and sees everything by the light of his mistress’s eyes, so Mr. Collins, secretly dazed and moon-
struck under his elaborate show of formality, has allowed the little imagination he has to be entirely dominated by the wonder of it all; he is so delighted at being in his own place that you cannot expect him to be able to put himself in anybody else's place; he is really a little boy pretending to be grown up; and his apparent snobbery and time-serving are so gross, open, palpable, so all-pervading in their influence, that they cease to be snobbery and time-serving and together become a new kind of passion, an unheard-of poetry, only compelling laughter because it feeds upon such strange food and celebrates so magnificently such paltry triumphs. Though superficially he may be regarded as a particularly mean and foolish toady, yet his natural stupidity, his youth, his wonder at the position in which he finds himself, his single-mindedness, all these contrive to transform him into an enthusiastic innocent. He is not only the happiest creature in the book, he is also the least sophisticated. Mrs. Bennet, for example, is silly and shallow enough, and all her designs are sufficiently transparent, but compared with Mr. Collins she is almost deep. This is well illustrated by that delicious snatch of dialogue between the two when Elizabeth, much to her mother's disgust, has refused Mr. Collins:

'This information, however, startled Mrs. Bennet; she would have been glad to be equally satisfied that her
daughter had meant to encourage him by protesting against his proposals, but she dared not believe it, and could not help saying so.

"But, depend upon it, Mr. Collins," she added, "that Lizzy shall be brought to reason. I will speak to her about it myself directly. She is a very headstrong, foolish girl, and does not know her own interest; but I will make her know it."

"Pardon me for interrupting you, madam," cried Mr. Collins; "but if she is really headstrong and foolish, I know not whether she would altogether be a very desirable wife to a man in my situation, who naturally looks for happiness in the marriage state. If, therefore, she actually persists in rejecting my suit, perhaps it were better not to force her into accepting me, because if liable to such defects of temper, she could not contribute much to my felicity."

"Sir, you quite misunderstand me," said Mrs. Bennet, alarmed. "Lizzy is only headstrong in such matters as these. In everything else she is as good-natured a girl as ever lived. I will go directly to Mr. Bennet, and we shall very soon settle it with her, I am sure."

But this little dialogue inevitably leads us back to what is the best comic proposal in literature.

It is in this declaration to Elizabeth that Mr. Collins is discovered in his glory; the pompousness and delicious air of absurdity that always run through his speech are here to perfection; his bland and innocent self-approval, his lack of imagination or understanding of 'other persons' feelings and points of view, his almost
idiotic reasonableness, these and other traits are nowhere displayed to better advantage; nor can his own curious scale of values, the disproportion between his feelings and their objects, the whole topsyturvyness of him, be seen so clearly in any other place. He begins, it will be remembered, by assuring Elizabeth that what he imagines to be her modesty (it is actually her distaste for his society) only adds to her charm. Nothing could be better calculated to annoy a frank, high-spirited girl like Elizabeth, of course, than such a smirking comment upon her imaginary coyness. But Mr. Collins only goes from bad to worse. With that bland assumption of masculine superiority, at which Miss Austen is always having sly digs, he points out that as soon as he entered the house (he has only been there a few days) he singled her out as the companion of his future life. Having got so far, he checks himself, much to Elizabeth’s amusement, and remarks:

“But before I am run away with by my feelings on this subject, perhaps it would be advisable for me to state my reasons for marrying—and, moreover, for coming into Hertfordshire with the design of selecting a wife, as I certainly did.”

What follows must have been funny enough to Miss Austen and her friends, but it is probably even funnier to us now, because we have more romantic views of
Mr. Collins

marriage It is obvious that though a man may have many reasons for marrying, the only one of interest to the lady he is proposing to is his desire for the enjoyment of her society and person, particularly, at the present time, her person. But Mr. Collins, innocently floundering further and further into the mire, has only one passion, as we have seen, and has not sufficient interest and imagination left to become a lover, so he proceeds to give reasons that leave his hearer very cold indeed:

"My reasons for marrying are, first, that I think it a right thing for every clergyman in easy circumstances (like myself) to set the example of matrimony in his parish; secondly, that I am convinced it will add very greatly to my happiness; and thirdly, which perhaps I ought to have mentioned earlier, that it is the particular advice and recommendation of the very noble lady whom I have the honour of calling patroness. Twice has she condescended to give me her opinion (unasked too!) on this subject; and it was but the very Saturday night before I left Hunsford—between our pools at quadrille, while Mrs. Jenkinson was arranging Miss de Bourgh's footstool, that she said, 'Mr. Collins, you must marry. A clergyman like you must marry.—Chuse properly, chuse a gentlewoman for my sake; and for your own, let her be an active, useful sort of person, not brought up high, but able to make a small income go a good way. This is my advice. Find such a woman as soon as you can, bring her to Hunsford, and I will visit her.'"

*He then goes on to point out, very characteristically,*
that the promise of Lady Catherine's notice is not the least of the advantages he can offer his wife. All this shows his innocence and want of sophistication, his sheer inability to leave off wondering at his own blessed condition and to look at things from another person's point of view; but his further blundering shows it even better, for he goes steadily from bad to worse. His remark that, being the heir to Mr. Bennet's estate, he felt it almost his duty to choose one of his cousins, is extraordinarily tactless, for no girl wishes to be pitied or condescended to, and Elizabeth can hardly have relished the bland reference to the possibility of her father's early death. But still more tactless, a stupidity beyond any ordinary snob and time-server, is his further statement that he is indifferent to money and knows very well that Elizabeth's portion will be little or nothing. It is at this point that the infuriated girl interrupts him and hastily declines his offer. Mr. Collins, however, so single-minded that it is impossible for him to believe that any rational creature would willingly decline the delights of Hunsford and Rosings, puts on a delicious air of sophistication, like a small boy imitating his elders, and hints that the refusal is mere coyness. He declares that he is not discouraged. This, of course, only increases Elizabeth's annoyance, and she not only declines again but plays a trump card by declaring that Lady
Catherine would find her "in every respect ill qualified for the situation."

This is a terrible suggestion, and it pulls Mr. Collins up short:

"Were it certain that Lady Catherine would think so," said Mr. Collins very gravely—"but I cannot imagine that her ladyship would at all disapprove of you. . . ."

He will speak for her. Miss Bennet then declines his offer again in no measured terms, but the importunate gentleman will not believe that he is refused. It is not that he is conceited and thinks so well of himself that he cannot understand a girl’s rejecting him; it is not himself, his appearance, manners, and so forth, that he is in love with, but his situation in life, the patronage of Lady Catherine and his position at Hunsford; so that his inability to understand Elizabeth’s refusal is not the result of mere blind conceit but of a kind of almost selfless devotion, a devotion, as we have seen, that is only comic because its objects are so preposterous. When, Elizabeth finally exasperated, declares that she does not know how to convince him that she has refused him, he replies, magnificently:

"You must give me leave to flatter myself, my dear cousin, that your refusal of my addresses is merely words of course. My reasons for believing it are briefly
these:—It does not appear to me that my hand is unworthy your acceptance, or that the establishment I can offer would be other than highly desirable. My situation in life, my connections with the family of De Bourgh, and my relationship to your own, are circumstances highly in my favour; and you should take it into further consideration, that in spite of your manifold attractions, it is by no means certain that another offer of marriage may ever be made you. Your portion is unhappily so small that it will in all likelihood undo the effects of your loveliness and amiable qualifications. . . .”

This speech is a model of what not to say to a lady, a monument of tactlessness, and no ingenious time-server, but only a simpleton, could have made it. If there is a certain resentment dawning in it, and there is no doubt that for a time Mr. Collins was very resentful towards Elizabeth, it is, I think, not so much the result of ordinary wounded vanity as of a more general passion springing to the defence of its object. It is not so much himself, William Collins, who has been rejected, as Lady Catherine and Rosings and Hunsford, the beloved idea in which they are grouped, and it is this, if anything, that makes the young and solemn enthusiast resentful. He is already, in his own queer way, a lover, not of a young lady but of an idea that includes, among other things, a foolish old lady; and he is bewildered and somewhat resentful because another person has refused to share his enthusiasm. He cannot, will not, believe it; it is incredible, monstrous.
Mr. Collins

In the later chapters, when we journey to Hunsford with Elizabeth, we discover Mr. Collins, now comfortably married, in the character of the happy enthusiast. Elizabeth, we are told, "was prepared to see him in his glory," and she is not disappointed; Mr. Collins is in his glory and remains there. He takes his guest into the garden and points out every view:

He could number the fields in every direction, and could tell how many trees there were in the most distant clump. But of all the views which his garden, or which the country or the kingdom could boast, none were to be compared with the prospect of Rosings, afforded by an opening in the trees that bordered the park nearly opposite the front of his house.

This is to have an overwhelming enthusiasm, to be something, at least, of a poet, and when we see how Mr. Collins is perpetually engaged at a feast of happiness, how he can be thrown into a kind of ecstasy by the smallest events, we must begin to wonder whether it is not better to have such an enthusiasm as he had, ridiculous as it may be, than to have none at all. How eagerly he assures his visitors that they will soon have the honour of seeing Lady Catherine at church on Sunday and possibly at Rosings. How delighted he is when an invitation arrives from that gracious lady for the whole party:

"I confess," said he, "that I should not have been at
all surprised by her ladyship's asking us on Sunday to drink tea and spend the evening at Rosings. I rather expected from my knowledge of her affability, that it would happen. But who could have foreseen such an attention as this? Who could have imagined that we should receive an invitation to dine there (an invitation, moreover, including the whole party) so immediately after your arrival!"

He can talk of nothing else and tells them all what to expect so that they will not be overpowered by the sight of such magnificence. When the evening arrives, he is in a happy fever of expectation, hurries them all into their clothes, walks through the park on air, and spends delicious hours pointing out the beauty of this and the splendour of that. There is no need to follow him; all that remains to be said is that all the other characters in the book together cannot produce such a spectacle of solid happiness as this is; and it continues throughout the visit, until the final speech, when he tells Elizabeth how delighted he has been to have introduced her into superior society, how she can bear witness in Hertfordshire to Lady Catherine's great attentions to Mrs. Collins, how he hopes she will be as happy in her marriage as he is (he has not forgotten his proposal and its reception), for he and his dear Charlotte have but one mind and one way of thinking. This last is hardly the truth, but it is much nearer the truth than Miss Bennet imagines, for
it is quite clear that Charlotte, who had, we imagine, few illusions about Mr. Collins when she married him and regarded the Lady Catherine and Rosings' enthusiasm much as Elizabeth herself regarded it, has come at last to think more or less as her husband does; once more enthusiasm has conquered common-sense, and Mr. Collins has played Don Quixote to his wife's Sancho. Jane Austen was no friend to romance, and she would certainly be surprised if one of her avowedly satirical figures were pressed into service in a defence of the romantic attitude; yet the fact remains that this ridiculous Mr. Collins of hers, with his snobberies soaring sky-high, lost in wonder, innocently and ostentatiously marching under the banner of toadyism until it is no longer the banner of toadyism, this Mr. Collins is at once a child of romance and perhaps the happiest creature in all her pages. We would rather be in ecstasy with him at Rosings than bored with Darcy in the theatre and the ball-room, for though no sensible person would share Mr. Collins' enthusiasms, and admire what he admires, every one must envy his state of mind, which follows that of the poet and gives significance to things that never were significant before and sees nothing, in the light of its enthusiasm, that is too dull to be noticed; and so can cry out for joy at the sight of a phaeton passing the gate and know strange ecstasies at a dowager's tea-table.
PRINCE SEITHENYN

THAT curious blend of romance and satire, *The Misfortunes of Elphin*, contains the quintessential Peacock, the very marrow of his humour. Its unique flavour comes from the delicious incongruity of subject and treatment, for the sources of the tale, the two old stories that Peacock has fused into one continuous narrative, are from the early Welsh legends and are very vague, very Celtic, very legendary, whereas nothing could be less Celtic, less in the spirit of legend than the story that Peacock tells with such smooth irony. The genuine romantic feeling is not entirely lost (Peacock never did lose it), but the narrative is perhaps best described as a romantic outline filled in with satire, as if a kindlier Swift or a more robust Anatole France had worked upon the synopsis of one of the Waverley Novels. The two legends that Peacock used are that of Elphin and the inundation of Gwaelod, which is mentioned in a note by Lady Guest, and that of Taliesin, the great bard, whose history is given at length in the *Mabinogion*. Actually, the figure of Seithenyn only appears in the.
first legend, the inundation of Gwaelod, but Peacock, having found him and made much of him, fortunately could not let him go and contrived that Seithenyn should play a part in the story of Taliesin. Peacock’s Seithenyn, however, owes very little to the vague figure of the legend. It is true that the legendary character, shadowy though he may be, is a person of some consequence. The Triads refer to him as one of “the three immortal drunkards of the Isle of Britain,” no mean reference when we remember that at no time in the history of this island has such a reputation been easily earned, for it argues both unusual application and uncommon powers. We know too that it was Seithenyn and his drunkenness that were responsible for the present configuration of the coast of Wales, for it was he, and no other, who was in charge of the embankment that protected the low-lying plain of Gwaelod from the sea, and, as a result of his negligence, this embankment was broken down by the spring tides, which overwhelmed the plain of Gwaelod so thoroughly that its pleasant pastures have remained ever since at the bottom of Cardigan Bay. But while there is here a suggestion for an unusually picturesque scene, a suggestion that Peacock turned to good account in the third chapter of The Misfortunes of Elphin, there is hardly more than the slimmest sketch, the merest hint, of a comic character, so that Seithenyn must be considered
Peacock's own creation, and is, in fact, his masterpiece—an immortal drunkard indeed.

Fanatical temperance reformers are not usually great readers, but even they, I imagine, would be loth to drive strong drink out of literature, in which a love of good liquor has played a notable part. Drunkenness in good literature is not like drunkenness in real life; it is subtly spiritualised; the sparkle, bloom, and fragrance of wine, the jolly comradeship of the bottle, the Bacchic ardours and ecstasies, are all there, without the hiccoughs and the carbuncles, the sagging mouth and the shaking hand. We feel that the great comic drunkards of literature are something more than mere bibbers and topers, creatures of the tap-room, who chance to make amusing remarks when they are in their cups. They are comic poets and lovers, and the wine they drink is no earthly liquor but is of starry vintage, looted from the cellar of the gods, having divine properties like Falstaff's sherris-sack, which 'ascends me into the brain; drives me there all the foolish and dull and crudy vapours which environ it; makes it apprehensive, quick, forgetive, full of nimble, fiery and delectable shapes; which, delivered o'er to the voice, the tongue, which is the birth, becomes excellent wit.' This passage explains why literature refuses to exile her mighty drinkers. They go to the bottle not for oblivion, not to be soused until they are as
dull and forgetful as the beasts of the field, not so that they may be less than men, but so that they may be more than men, divine for an hour or so, seated above the ruins of Death and Time and Change like the gods themselves, bandying immortal jests. We can no more find it in our hearts to condemn them for letting their affairs rot while they go in pursuit of good liquor and good company than we can to despise Romeo because he too is neglecting his appointments and offices and has taken to haunting the garden of old Capulet. If Juliet is Romeo's excuse, so too sherris-sack is Falstaff's; and if it is not possible for many men to discover so much witchery in a chit of a girl as Romeo found in Juliet, so too it is not possible for them to find their liquor so divinely potent as Falstaff found his sherris-sack. Romeo and his kind are lovers of genius; Falstaff and his kind are drinkers of genius; the first are drawn near to the gates of Paradise by the pressure of a small white hand or by an exquisite glance, whereas the others, the drinkers, sail away to the Happy Isles on roaring but friendly seas of liquor; one set is dignified and tragic, the other is undignified and comic, but both, in their devotion, their ecstasies, their wit and poetry, tower above common humanity, in or out of love, drunk or dry. In this company of glorious tipplers, whose hours of ease are as far above those of ordinary men as are Antony's nights of passion or Hamlet's intense
moments of wonder and disgust, who transform the world into one great tavern and reckon fame and fortune a trifling price to pay for the entry there, whose captain is surely the fat knight, is to be found Peacock’s Prince Seithenyn, and even in this company he cuts no mean figure.

We never meet him out of his cups: he is always reeling ripe. Undismayed by any change of fortune so long as there is liquor to be had, he staggers through the book flourishing his golden goblet and for ever exclaiming, “Guin o eur—Wine from gold.” And he is always at that stage of intoxication which might be called the argumentative and dialectical, when the drinker, floundering in a happy alcoholic mist, attempts that almost insane clarity of speech and that strictly syllogistic method of reasoning which seem to be peculiar to inebriates, philosophers, and certain angry women. Such persons rise above common-sense, which they despise, and end by talking a peculiar kind of nonsense of their own because they are anxious, at all costs, to proffer the pure unadulterated essence of reason. They worship the ideal form, let the spirit wander where it will. An intelligent, sober man is usually content to reason rather loosely so long as his premises are sound and his conclusions sensible; he keeps a pragmatic eye upon his argument and does not trouble himself overmuch about the form in which it is
set forth, being only anxious to arrive somewhere and not to commit himself to absurdities. But drink and the philosophies of the absolute, flying to the head, crumble away common-sense, dim the pragmatic eye, and give the devotee a shining vision of pure dialectic, in contrast with which mere reality is a sordid muddle that can be left out of reckoning; the stage is now set for the comic old drama of *All for Reason*; or *the World well lost for a syllogism*. And this is the stage of intoxication at which we always find Seithenyn. He has too, like so many of Peacock’s characters, a certain crisp rhythm, a tang, in his speech, and this adds just the necessary sparkle of salt to his utterance and gives it the perfect flavour of absurdity. Every considerable speech he makes carries with it the most imposing air of reason, and yet every one ends by being nonsense, matter so tangled that it is impossible to unravel it. Among the great bibulous fools, he takes first place as a dialectician and probably he was long since appointed their official apologist. As a specimen of his characteristic topsyturvy method of reasoning, there is nothing better than his denial of his own death in the scene in which Taliesin discovers him, the supposedly drowned Prince, acting as a butler to King Melvas:

After a silence, which he designed to be very dignified and solemn, the stranger spoke again: “I am the man.”
"What man?" said Taliesin.

"The man," replied his entertainer, "of whom you have spoken so disparagingly; Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi."

"Seithenyn," said Taliesin, "has slept twenty years under the waters of the western sea, as King Gwythno's Lamentations have made known to all Britain."

"They have not made it known to me," said Seithenyn, "for the best of all reasons, that one can only know the truth; for, if that which we think we know is not truth, it is something which we do not know. A man cannot know his own death; for, while he knows anything he is alive; at least, I never heard of a dead man who knew anything, or pretended to know anything: if he had so pretended, I should have told him to his face he was no dead man."

But Seithenyn's great scene is in the earlier chapters, when we meet him in his own castle. He holds the office of Lord High Commissioner of Royal Embankment, and, we are told, "he executed it as a personage so denominated might be expected to do: he drank the profits, and he left the embankment to his deputies, who left it to their assistants, who left it to itself." Along the great sea-wall there are watch-towers, with companies of guards under the command of various officers, who are in their turn subordinate to Seithenyn in his central castle. The officer in charge of a watch-tower at one of the extreme ends of the embankment is a certain Teithrin ap Fathral, who, being new to public service
or somewhat simple-minded, goes to the trouble of keeping his own portion of the embankment in excellent condition. Chancing to discover, however, that the rest of the embankment is by no means in the same condition as his own charge, he is considerably dismayed, and hastens inland to warn the King. Accompanied by the King's son, Elphin, a very public-spirited young man, Teithrin returns to pay a visit of remonstrance to the Lord High Commissioner. They arrive at Seithenyn's castle at night. Outside, the sea, grey, restless, is crumbling away the ruinous mound of the embankment; but inside, the torches blaze, the sound of harp and song bursts through the doors, and wine and wassail go round. A jovial chorus is singing "The Circling of the Mead Horns":

Seithenyn ap Seithyn, the generous, the bold,
Drinks the wine of the stranger from vessels of gold;
But we from the horn, the blue silver-rimmed horn,
Drink the ale and the mead in our fields that were born.

and high above his followers, high, indeed, above reality and the pressure of circumstance, sits the great Seithenyn, flourishing his golden goblet.

"You are welcome all four," he cries, when he notices the two strangers. Then when he learns that one of his visitors is the son of his master, he endeavours "to straighten himself into perpendicularity, and to stand
steadily on his legs." But being very drunk indeed, he finds this too difficult and ends by dropping into his chair like a plummet, at the same time, with the large and generous gestures of the inebriated, waving his royal guest into the seat at his right hand, and, after some effort, managing to compose himself into a dignified attitude that leaves "his right hand at liberty, for the ornament of his eloquence and the conduct of his liquor." Meanwhile, his other visitor, Teithrin, remains at the end of the hall, only to be remonstrated with by Seithenyn, who exclaims with drunken gravity and characteristic confusion: "Come on, man, come on. What if you be not the son of a king, you are the guest of Seithenyn ap Seithyn Saidi. The most honourable place to the most honourable guest, and the next most honourable place to the next most honourable guest; the least honourable guest above the most honourable inmate; and, where there are but two guests, be the most honourable who he may, the least honourable of the two is next in honour to the most honourable of the two, because there are no more but two; and where there are two, there can be nothing between. Therefore sit, and drink. Gwin o eur: wine from gold." Food is then placed before the two visitors, but Seithenyn begs to be excused from joining them in their repast as he is troubled with a feverishness and parching of the mouth, a complaint that necessitates
frequent moistening of the lips and impedes his saying, "All I would say, and will say before I have done, in token of my loyalty and fealty to your highness and your highness's house."

Meanwhile His Highness, who is a crude young man and does not realise that his host and all the company are floating away on seas of liquor to ideal realms and do not wish to be reminded of the reality that ought to have faded away over the horizon long ago, drinks nothing but comes, with something like brutality, to the business in hand. "Prince Seithenyn," he remarks, "I have visited you on a subject of deep moment. Reports have been brought to me, that the embankment, which has been so long entrusted to your care, is in a state of dangerous decay."

Secure in the wisdom that years and the bottle and a conservative mind give a man, Seithenyn sees that his visitor is pathetically young and painfully sober and that, having swallowed little so far in life but facts, has yet to realise that things in this world are strangely complex and only to be fully understood by a mind that has been mellowed and made subtle by the grape. Seithenyn, then, deals gently with him, and answers him as so many fine old conservative apologists have answered young would-be reformers. "Decay," he observes, "is one thing, and danger is another. Everything that is old
must decay. That the embankment is old, I am free to confess; that it is somewhat rotten in parts, I will not altogether deny; that it is any the worse for that, I do most sturdily gainsay. It does its business well: it works well: it keeps out the water from the land, and it lets in the wine upon the High Commission of Embankment. Cup-bearer, fill. Our ancestors were wiser than we: they built it in their wisdom; and if we should be so rash as to try to mend it, we should only mar it."

Then Teithrin, that matter-of-fact person, takes a hand, remarking: "The stonework is sapped and mined: the piles are rotten, broken, and dislocated: the floodgates and sluices are leaky and creaky." Seithenyn remains undismayed by such crude tactics; he grasps the nettle: "That is the beauty of it. Some parts of it are rotten, and some parts of it are sound." But this is quite beyond Prince Elphin, who takes refuge in his rank and observes, regally: "It is well that some parts are sound: it were better that all were so."

"So I have heard some people say before," Seithenyn, now thoroughly roused, replies; "perversen people, blind to venerable antiquity: that very unamiable sort of people, who are in the habit of indulging their reason." (This last phrase is rather a poor stroke of Peacock's and is not in character.) "But I say, the parts that are rotten give elasticity to those that are sound: they give them
Prince Seithenyn

elasticity, elasticity, elasticity. If it were all sound it would break by its own obstinate stiffness: the soundness is checked by the rottenness, and the stiffness is balanced by the elasticity. There is nothing so dangerous as innovation. See the waves in the equinoctial storms, dashing and clashing, roaring and pouring, spattering and battering, rattling and battling against it. I would not be so presumptuous as to say, I could build anything that would stand against them half an hour; and here this immortal old work, which God forbid the finger of modern mason should bring into jeopardy, this immortal work has stood for centuries, and will stand for centuries more, if we let it alone. It is well: it works well: let well alone. Cup-bearer, fill. It was half-rotten when I was born, and that is a conclusive reason why it should be three parts rotten when I die."

At this point, we are told, the whole body of the High Commission, now very drunk, roared approbation, as well they might. Seithenyn resumed: "And after all, the worst that could happen would be the overflow of a springtide, for that was the worst that happened before the embankment was thought of; and, if the high water should come in, as it did before, the low water would go out again, as it did before. We should be no deeper in it than our ancestors were, and we could mend as easily as they could make."
He is interrupted by Teithrin, who observes that "the level of the sea is materially altered." But Seithenyn will have none of it. "The level of the sea!" he exclaims. "Who ever heard of such a thing as altering the level of the sea? Alter the level of that bowl of wine before you, in which, as I sit here, I see a very ugly reflection of your very good-looking face. Alter the level of that: drink up the reflection: let me see the face without the reflection, and leave the sea to level itself."

"Not to level the embankment," Teithrin replies.

"Good, very good," remarks Seithenyn, who is by this time washed up on the shores of the Happy Isles. "I love a smart saying, though it hits at me. But whether yours is a smart saying or no, I do not very clearly see; and, whether it hits at me or no, I do not very sensibly feel. But all is one. Cup-bearer, fill." Then, looking as intently as it is possible for a man in his condition to do at Teithrin, he goes on: "I think I have seen something very like you before. There was a fellow here the other day very like you: he stayed here some time: he would not talk: he did nothing but drink: he used to drink till he could not stand, and then he went walking about the embankment. 'I suppose he thought it wanted mending; but he did not say anything. If he had, I should have told him to embank his own throat, to keep'
the liquor out of that. That would have posed him: he could not have answered that: he would not have had a word to say for himself after that.”

“He must have been a miraculous person,” observes Teithrin, who is clearly the libelled visitor, “to walk when he could not stand.” But Seithenyn is too far gone for such quibbles to have any effect. He remarks: “All is one for that. Cup-bearer, fill!”

This will not do for Elphin, who sees that the old toper must be sternly rebuked and so speaks out plainly: “Prince Seithenyn, if I was not aware that wine speaks in the silence of reason, I should be astonished at your strange vindication of your neglect of duty, which I take shame to myself for not having sooner known and remedied. The wise bard has well observed, ‘Nothing is done without the eye of the king.’”

Poised perilously but deliciously upon the very edge of oblivion, the deeply soused Seithenyn makes one last effort and plunges into his final speech of the evening: “I am very sorry that you see things in a wrong light: but we will not quarrel, for three reasons: first, because you are the son of the king, and may do and say what you please without any one having a right to be displeased: second, because I never quarrel with a guest, even if he grows riotous in his cups: third, because there is nothing to quarrel about; and perhaps that is
The best reason of the three; or, rather, the first is the best, because you are the son of the king; and the third is the second, that is, the second best, because there is nothing to quarrel about: and the second is nothing to the purpose, because, though guests will grow riotous in their cups, in spite of my good orderly example, God forbid I should say that is the case with you. And I completely agree in the truth of your remark, that reason speaks in the silence of wine." At this point, making a too vehement gesture, Seithenyn drops his goblet, and in endeavouring to pick it up loses his balance and all his dignity and falls prostrate on the floor. The whole body of the High Commission rise to uplift their fallen chief, but as they are as drunk as he is, they too fall prostrate over the benches and upturned tables and all is confusion. Seithenyn is carried away by the cup-bearers.

The storm that follows, in which the embankment is washed away and the whole plain overrun by the spring tides, must be sought for in Peacock’s own picturesque prose. It is sufficient here to say that Seithenyn is last seen, by Elphin and the others who contrive to escape, plunging into the waves, sword in hand. He disappears into the wild night and, it would seem, out of the fable. But, as we have already seen, he is discovered after the passage of many years acting as butler to King Melvas; in short, like so many comic characters, just when we
Prince Seithynyn

have given up hope of meeting him again, up he pops. This popping up in unexpected places is one of the most delightful characteristics of the comic figures, whose world is filled with strange happy encounters. In the world of the tragic figures, that world overburdened by spirit and clouded with doom, no such chance meetings are possible; we never lose sight of our protagonists, for their feet are clogged by Fate and their every movement is sickeningly inevitable; the gods twiddle their fingers, the wires slacken or tauten, pull this way or that, and we see the lovely puppets move through their several agonies until the curtain falls and the darkness covers them. But in the comic world, whose very essence is rollicking freedom, for cause and effect have been huddled away and Destiny stands giggling helplessly in a corner, life is brimmed with chance meetings and old friends are for ever coming out of the blue. A remembered voice floats through the tavern window, a quaint shadow falls across the garden walk, the lamp-light suddenly illumines a monstrous nose, a gaping mouth, and hey presto!—here is our odd acquaintance once more, him that we last saw, years and leagues away, ruffling it in the Boar’s Head, Eastcheap, or climbing down from the Rochester coach to drink a hot brandy-and-water, or leaping from the walls of his crumbling castle, sword in hand, into the cauldron of the spring tide.
Not only does Seithenyn pop up unexpectedly in the hall of King Melvas, but after we imagine that we have lost him again, up he pops once more. Taliesin, in his wanderings, has occasion to visit the Abbey of Avallon, and when he inquires for the Abbot, he is told that that dignitary is "confessing a penitent." Gaining admission, he finds the Abbot sitting at a small table on which stand an enormous vase and a golden goblet, a goblet that we have seen before and recognise as the property of our old friend Seithenyn, who is, of course, the penitent in question. From this time forward, Seithenyn wanders in and out of the action, goblet in hand. It is true that he refrains from displaying to the full his skill in dialectics in the discussions at which he is present; but he is usually able to persuade the various disputants that they are "a cup too low." "Take a little more," he cries to the Abbot, who admits that he takes a little wine medicinally. "That is the true quantity. Wine is my medicine; and my quantity is a little more. A little more." Does a member of the company see difficulties before him, then Seithenyn is on hand to advise: "Screw yourself with another goblet, you will find the difficulty smooth itself off wonderfully. Wine from gold has a sort of double light, that illuminates a dark path miraculously." If it is admitted that a certain favourable proposition "is nearly true," then Seithenyn fills up
again and remarks, "A little more and it will become quite true," and sees, with something of the satisfaction of the creative artist, the proposition gradually ripening into absolute truth. In the end, when all things are settled, he obtains the post of second butler to King Arthur himself and performs his duties, which have to do with the sampling, purchase or commandeering, and transportation of liquor, with unusual zeal.

Leaving Seithenyn happily swaying behind the Table Round, we have leisure to remark more than one level of humour in the scene described at length, the scene in Seithenyn's castle. When The Misfortunes of Elphin was being written (it was first published in 1829), Peacock was associated, though not intimately, with the Mills and their friends, the Philosophical Radicals, and was at the time something of a Radical himself, as all readers of his earlier tales must have remarked. It is not surprising, then, that this scene was accepted as a Radical satire upon the contemporary Tory attitude, and that Seithenyn's defence of his policy of doing nothing was taken as a parody of Canning's speeches against Parliamentary reform, the embankment, of course, playing the part of the British Constitution. This is the first level, that of topical political satire. "The second level is still one of satire, but we have now dug below the immediate political appeal and can discover in the scene the
opposition of two familiar types of mind. Seithenyn becomes a caricature of those conservative-minded persons who will not have anything changed partly because they have a real veneration for the past and partly because they are both fearful and indolent: it is worth remarking that the passage of years transformed Peacock himself into such a person. But we have nothing to do with either of these levels because humour and not satire is our concern. There is a third level underlying these, and it is that of genuine humour, the Comic Absolute, not touching off a given situation nor ridiculing a certain mode of thought, but working—or rather, exploding—through character. Seithenyn dominates the scene, and it is he who has us in thrall. We see him trying to make his reason serve his idleness, his intellect minister to his thirst, and we ought to despise him. Certainly if he were merely a creature too sodden in drink to use his wits, we should despise him; but we feel that he is above reason rather than below it; he has escaped from our world into some other, some Cloud-Cuckoo-dom of liquor and good company that we have never entered but have glimpsed in those moments when we have let our obligations look after themselves and have taken a moral holiday. And there he remains, or, at least, there his spirit remains, for he himself may be still serving as second butler to King Arthur in his invisible Avallon
and perhaps to this day all the wine of the Round Table passes through his hands—or down his throat. It may be that if we haunted the Welsh Marches long enough we might yet hear him cry Gwin o eur, and catch the flash of his goblet as the old ghosts of chivalry gather about their table or depart, after a stirrup-cup, on their spectral quests.
THE TWO WELLERS

THERE is one queer little period in our literature that has never been adequately discussed by the critics. Roughly we may say that it began in the 'twenties of the last century and ended somewhere in the 'forties; and it may be described, shortly, as the period of high spirits, or, if you will, the period of plentiful spirits and high jinks. The world, with the universe still in attendance upon it, was safe for a moment; there was still leisure, time to do everything; the old picturesque world had not yet crumbled, and the railways, hurling top-hatted gentlemen from Birmingham to London at no less a speed than twenty miles an hour, had not yet driven the coaches from the road nor the landlords of coaching inns, straddling before immense quantities of cheap liquor, out of business; and ideas, beyond a gentlemanly interest in animal magnetism or phrenology, were infrequent and unfashionable, and Darwin had not yet told his grim tale of the species, nor had Mr. Arnold produced, somewhat disdainfully, his culture. England was more an island than it had been.
for centuries, almost a separate continent that was not on speaking terms with Europe, and happy in its seas of rum punch and old brown East India sherry, it drained its glasses, ate its pudding and Stilton, bred its eccentrics and cracked its jokes in a provincial and almost bucolic ecstasy. This period produced a literature of its own that is to be distinguished from what came before and what followed after by its high spirits; these were the days of Barham, Hood, Lever, Surtees, Theodore Hook, Marryat, Peacock, Warren, Walker and his Original, and a hundred more; even criticism was troubled by the prevailing spirit, and so we had Christopher North and his roistering Noctes. The innumerable volumes that these gentlemen produced, between bottle and bottle as it were, shadowed forth a world that was really a reflection of the paradise of, say, a typical lieutenant of dragoons, a world of galloping horses, hot brandy-and-water, oysters, practical jokes, devilled kidneys (against which Poe protested so passionately in his attack upon Lever), funny stories, inn parlours, quaint bewhiskered rascals, bobbing chambermaids, negus and macaroons, idiotic foreigners (usually counts and barons), comic red-nosed and predatory spinsters, gouty old gentlemen, and very perfunctory love affairs. At its worst, nothing could be more stupid than this literature, which compels the reader to dance attendance upon half-witted militia
men and horse dealers and dandies in their dreary half-witted revels, knowing that not a single idea or a really amusing character or even an entertaining remark will ever show a sail above the sickening flood of brandy-and-water. At its best, in spite of innumerable faults of taste and a lack of ideas, this literature of masculine high spirits and comradeship was fleetingly touched with a kind of poetry, for there was about it a certain boyish eagerness, a laughing spontaneity, that raised the world it created above time and change and made it into a Valhalla of whiskered light dragoons, so that there are moments when the reader feels that its lounging bloods, its devil-may-care majors and roguish servants, with their freedom from ordinary care, their immense appetites and immeasurable high spirits, their unflagging gusto, are really gods in disguise. But it had to be subtly humanised and mellowed in the mind of genius, like wine in the brandy cask, before it became great literature; and it is fortunate for the period, whose prevalent mood might otherwise have never had an audience in posterity, that there came along in the middle of it a certain promising young reporter who was given a piece of hack work, common publishers' book-making, to do. The result, of course, was Pickwick Papers.

So much preamble has been necessary because Pickwick, undoubtedly one of the capital books of our literature and
perhaps one of our contributions to the literature of the world, should he seen against the background of its period to be understood critically; it is simply our 1830 tale of high spirits raised and illuminated by genius just as *Hamlet* is simply the Elizabethan melodrama raised and illuminated by genius. The real secret of its appeal lies not in the story it tells, the droll situations it presents, not even in the host of comic characters it contains (important as these are), but, as we may guess from the preceding paragraph, in its atmosphere. It is not so much a prose narrative (as, for example, *David Copperfield* is a prose narrative) as a kind of poem, an epic of high spirits and comradeship, feasting and fun. It bathes the world in a light of its own, a rich firelight of humour and good-fellowship, that brings it near to, and gives it the appearance of, one of those ideal worlds with which the imaginations of men, the unhappy brute in them looking for consolation and the god in them reaching towards creation, have for ever played. Mr. Chesterton, who must inevitably be plundered when Dickens is the subject, has made the same point: "But before he (Dickens) wrote a single real story, he had a kind of vision. It was a vision of the Dickens world—a maze of white roads, a map full of fantastic towns, thundering coaches, clamorous market-places, uproarious inns, strange and swaggering figures. That vision was
Pickwick.” If, then, the secret of Pickwick lies in its comic atmosphere rather than its characters (there are nearly a hundred of them, mostly comic), it will be seen that from our point of view the story is less important than it would first appear. To take one of these fantastic creatures out of the atmosphere in which it is bathed is like plucking out of the green water, which it irradiated with flashes of gold and silver, some little fish that can only gasp and wriggle, colourless and suddenly bereft of its beauty, in the palm of one’s hand. The moment they are taken out of the Pickwick world the majority of its comic personages wither and droop; we are puzzled at our past amusement at such little mechanical toys, these Potts and Leo Hunters and the rest, and yet the moment we put them back they spring into an eccentric life of their own again.

The question, too, is complicated by the fact that Dickens changed his mind about some of the chief personages (really making a subtle change in the character of the book—as he found his own feet in its progress), so that they begin as one thing and end as another, and we can only observe them, as it were, on the wing. Thus, Mr. Pickwick is at first a half-witted, pompous old ass, merely an excuse for all manner of practical jokes and horseplay, but by the time we have seen him safely housed at Dulwich he has become a dignified, serious, and very
lovable old gentleman, a new kind of hero. A similar change is to be observed in the characters of Messrs. Winkle and Snodgrass, who gradually become heroic and dignified, serious young lovers instead of mere knockabout men. But neither in their first state nor their last are any of these personages really very comic. Among the crowd of minor figures—and there never was such a fantastic crowd assembled together between the covers of one book—one may single out a character here and there in accordance with one's personal taste. Thus, I must own that I have had from earliest youth a tenderness (not shared by most of my friends) for our old acquaintance Jingle, not the forlorn and repentant figure of the later chapters, but the glorious impostor whose extraordinary staccato conversation kettle-drums us through so many of the early chapters. There is something magnificent about the manner in which this fourth-rate player contrives to take charge of every situation, popping up unexpectedly in so many strange places. His reappearance in the marquee of the All-Muggleton Cricket Team ("This way—this way—capital fun—lots of beer—hogsheads; rounds of beef—bullocks; mustard—cartloads; glorious day—down with you—glad to see you—very") is one of the great moments of the story, and nothing could be better than the way in which, arriving uninvited from nowhere, he soon
contrives to be the most important personage on the field, "eating, drinking, and talking, without cessation." His subsequent reappearances, I must confess, become less and less entertaining; but I can remember how sorry I used to be that Dickens had not written a whole book describing the adventures of this amusing rascal, and how his repentance at the end used to annoy me: it is as if a magpie should repent.

Excellent, too, are all the medical students. There could hardly be better comic writing than the description of Bob Sawyer's evening party, when Mrs. Raddle, gathering wrath belowstairs, plays malignant destiny, and the magnificent Jack Hopkins relates his astonishing anecdotes of hospital life, and the prim man in the cloth boots forgets his story, and Messrs. Gunter and Noddy, yelling "Sir!" at one another, engage in a very ridiculous quarrel, and Mr. Ben Allen, accompanying the Pickwicksians as far as London Bridge at the lamentable conclusion of the party, announces his intention of cutting the throat of any rival of Bob Sawyer's, bursts into tears, cramis his hat over his eyes, and returns to knock double knocks at the door of the Borough Market office and take short naps on the steps alternately until daybreak, under the impression that he lives there. And among the crowd of minor characters that come like water and go like wind there is at least one other for whom I have
almost a tenderness, and that is the "red-haired, important-looking, sharp-nosed, mysterious-spoken personage, with a bird-like habit of giving his head a jerk every time he said anything," the companion of Mr. Pickwick on his journey to Ipswich, no other than Mr. Peter Magnus. There is something really attractive about the way in which Mr. Magnus finds everything arresting and exciting, as if he had just been born. The fact that he and Mr. Pickwick are both travelling on the outside of the coach to the same town to stay at the very same hotel fills him with ecstasy at such a sequence of coincidences. Every platitudinous remark he makes (and he expressly states, "I am not fond of anything original; I don't like it; don't see the necessity for it") is brought out with the utmost vehemence and gusto. All the delights, such as the company of fellow-travellers, and all the dangers, such as the possibility of losing luggage, are magnified in his mind. His very name enchants him, and he crows with delight that his initials will serve for Post Meridian and that he is able to sign "hasty notes to intimate acquaintances" simply "Afternoon," which entertains them vastly. It is inconceivable that such a person, wonder itself in red hair and spectacles, can ever have had a single dull moment. Spreading boredom like a blight over the countryside, he himself has never known the horrid state of mind, having chosen for ever to bore
and never to be bored. There may, however, be another explanation. Mr. Magnus is travelling to Ipswich to propose to a lady, that very lady, middle-aged and yellow curl-papered, into whose bedroom Mr. Pickwick wanders, and so it is possible that what we are seeing is simply Mr. Magnus in love. Red hair, spectacles, a sharp nose, and a respectable total of years do not prevent a man from falling in love, and so Mr. Magnus, in the full tide of the passion with the port in sight, finds nothing insignificant, but all "a wonder and a wild desire," for he is not really an outside passenger on the Ipswich coach, he is Adam in an Eden that still has the first dew upon it. Happy Mr. Magnus!—he would serve as well as another for the text of a whole volume.

But it is not he but two of his companions on the journey that must serve as the subjects of this chapter, for they alone are of the right stature. And they, of course, are the two Wellers: the stout coachman who has just discoursed, with due gravity, on the philosophy of turnpike keeping; and the perky young man behind, his son, who has just countered one of Mr. Magnus’s genial truisms with the remark: "That’s what I call a self-evident proposition, as the dog’s-meat man said when the housemaid told him he warn’t a gentleman." It is these two philosophers, as English as the beef and beer they carry snugly under their greatcoats, who are beyond
question the two great figures in our comic epic of the English countryside. Both are essentially of their time, their oddest tricks of manner and speech have now passed away, and yet both are essentially of all time, certainly of all English history, for they are the English people from the first Canterbury pilgrims to the latest beanfeast that went clattering down the road. Between them they represent all the English people—that is, all below the middle classes; but each has his own section. Old Tony Weller, you may say, is the rural member, and Sam is the city representative. The two have much in common, heredity is present in them; there is a Wellerishness (of which they themselves are by no means unaware; they have a family pride, always due to make an appearance in any matter of being "gammoned") common to both of them, a distinct family likeness; yet they are different in character and represent two entirely different kinds of life. Old Weller, fat, rubicund, hoarse and horsey, represents an older tradition; there is something rural and earthy in his composition, and his talk has that dark oracular strain which suggests the great rustic; he is not, like Sam, a wit and ironist, but an immense "character," one of those inscrutable humorists, oracles of the rural taproom, in whom simplicity and sophistication seem inextricably tangled, who now appear supremely foolish and then appear supremely wise, who
are not easily fathomed and understood but are easily enjoyed, like a poem or a sunset. Old Weller, we may say, is Old England. Sam represents a newer tradition of the English people; he is essentially a product of the endless streets of the great cities, and particularly the greatest of them, London, with its colossal tolerance and good humour and its never-failing irony, a whetstone for the wits of its poorer citizens.

Although Sam was probably born in the country, most of his time has been passed in London; and if his body did not first make its appearance within sound of the Bow Bells, his soul certainly belongs to the city, for he is perhaps the best representative we have of the real Cockney spirit. He has the necessary breadth of experience. "When I was first pitched neck and crop into the world, to play at leap-frog with its troubles," he tells Mr. Pickwick, "I was a carrier's boy at startin': then a vagginer's, then a helper, then a boots. Now I'm a gen'l'm'n's servant." He has slept under the arches of Waterloo Bridge, and knows all the ropes, even the twopenny ones, the "cheap lodgin'-house, where the beds is twopence a night." His father is careful to tell Mr. Pickwick that Sam's education has not been neglected: "I took a good deal o' pains with his eddication, sir; let him run in the streets when he was very young, and shift for his-self. It's the only way to make a boy sharp,
"The Two Wellers"

From this university Sam has graduated with honours. His knowledge of London is, as we are told, extensive and peculiar. Does Mr. Pickwick require to know where he can obtain a glass of brandy and warm water (to take the taste of Dodson and Fogg out of his mouth), then Sam replies without the slightest hesitation: "Second court on the right-hand side—last house but vun on the same side the vay—take the box as stands in the first fireplace, 'cos there an't no leg in the middle o' the table, wich all the others has, and it 's very inconvenient." (How fortunate it was for us that they should have chosen this particular tavern, for it is here that old Weller makes his first appearance.) His knowledge of life is equally extensive and peculiar. But his running about in the streets, his numerous and very diverse occupations, his acquaintance with the arches by the river and the doss-houses, have only succeeded in sharpening his wits; they have hardened his head but not his heart; so that he provides us with a spectacle new in literature, as Mr. Chesterton has pointed out, namely, that of clever comic servant, whose knowledge of the world is far more extensive than that of his master, but who is not a rascal.

Sam's experience, like that of most genuine philosophers, has taught him to be cynical about the little, unimportant things of this life, such as the conduct of lawyers or the business of voting, but it has left him
optimistic about the important things, eating and drinking, travel and adventure, service and love. Like the good Cockney he is, he can see the greater part of life for what it is, a colossal show at which the wise man can stare and laugh, and over which he can nod and wink to other merry philosophers. London has been the greatest of cities for many a year now, and it has probably outlasted the other great capitals of the world, which have worn their bravery of towers and their lace of streets insolently under the stars for a short space and then have been waved back by the gods to the dust: and it has outlasted them probably because it has always been the most tolerant of the great cities. The iron has never entered its soul; kindness and laughter and a mellow irony have never been entirely banished, with the sunshine, from its maze of dark streets. Its poorer citizens, immured in bricks and mortar as they are, seemingly doomed to the most drab of existences, living often with less than a pavement’s width between themselves and utter destitution, have never lost their zest for life and only require a few hours of leisure and a shilling or two to spend to find their way back to Cockaigne. Whoever would learn what harm the modern city can do to the bodies and souls of its inhabitants must not remain in London, but must visit the dark mushroom cities of the provinces, whose grey-faced crowds would often seem to be utterly spiritless.
and crushed. But that gay ironist, the Cockney, pushing his way about the great show of London, knowing that he is at the heart of things, still moves through a world—a world of unfailing humour, stout and oysters and fried fish, betting and boxing, song and dance and odd figures in bar parlours, and all a jumble of queer streets—that is still the nearest thing we have to the world Dickens knew and to the supernormal world he created for himself.

Sam Weller is the ideal member for Cockneydom. He knows his way about and has so much self-confidence that he can always afford to be waggish and impudent with the world. He is ready for anything, a drink, a kiss, a fight, an adventure, at a moment's notice. The constant irony that is still beloved of the London poor, who as spectators of the staggering show and appalling contrasts of London life must perforce develop into ironic and humorous philosophers, is the very breath of his nostrils. Almost every day in some London street there could be matched such comments as those of his on the electorate of Eatanswill:

"Reg'lar game, sir," replied Mr. Weller; "our people's a col-lecting down at the Town Arms, and they're a hollering themselves hoarse already."

"Ah," said Mr. Pickwick, "do they seem devoted to their party, Sam?"

"Never see such devotion in my life, sir."

"Energetic, eh?" said Mr. Pickwick.
"Uncommon," replied Sam; "I never see men eat and drink so much afore. I wonder they an't afeer'd o' bustin'!"

"That's the mistaken kindness of the gentry here," said Mr. Pickwick.

"Wery likely," replied Sam, briefly.

Or his remark after hearing the clerks at Dodson and Fogg's discuss their idea of a "capital man of business":

"Nice men these here, sir," whispered Mr. Weller to his master; "wery nice notion of fun they has, sir."

Or even his delectable conversation with the footman at Bath:

"Have you been long in Bath, sir?" inquired the powdered-headed footman. "I have not had the pleasure of hearing of you before."

"I haven't created any wery surprisin' sensation here, as yet," rejoined Sam, "for me and the other fash'nables only come last night."

"Nice place, sir," said the powdered-headed footman.

"Seems so," observed Sam.

"Pleasant society, sir," remarked the powdered-headed footman. "Very agreeable servants, sir."

"I should think they wos," replied Sam. "Affable, unaffected, say-nothin'-to-nobody sort o' fellers."

"Oh, very much so, indeed, sir," said the powdered-headed footman, taking Sam's remark as a high compliment. "Very much so indeed. Do you do anything in this way, sir?" inquired the tall footman, producing a small snuff-box with a fox's head on the top of it.
"Not without sneezing," replied Sam.

"Why, it is difficult, sir, I confess," said the tall footman. "It may be done by degrees, sir. Coffee is the best practice. I carried coffee, sir, for a long time. It looks very like rappee, sir."

Here a sharp peal at the bell reduced the powdered-headed footman to the ignominious necessity of putting the fox's head in his pocket, and hastening with a humble countenance to Mr. Bantam's "study." By the bye, who ever knew a man who never read or wrote either, who hadn't got some small back parlour which he would call a study!

"There is the answer, sir," said the powdered-headed footman. "I am afraid you'll find it inconveniently large."

"Don't mention it," said Sam, taking a letter with a small enclosure. "It's just possible as exhausted nature may manage to survive it."

"I hope we shall meet again, sir," said the powdered-headed footman, rubbing his hands, and following Sam out to the door-step.

"You are very obligin', sir," replied Sam. "Now, don't allow yourself to be fatigued beyond your powers; there's a amiable bein'. Consider what you owe to society, and don't let yourself be injured by too much work. For the sake o' your feller-creatures, keep yourself as quiet as you can; only think what a loss you would be!" With these pathetic words, Sam Weller departed.

"A very singular young man that," said the powdered-headed footman, looking after Mr. Weller, with a countenance which clearly showed he could make nothing of him.
—unlike posterity, which has been able to make a great deal of him.

Sam is always a deliberate and conscious humorist, or, perhaps better, wit, and has few if any unconscious absurdities. His set pieces of humour, such as, for example, the tall stories with which he regales his innocent master, seem to me his least interesting passages, though there was a time when I revelled in the story of the pieman and the kittens, or that of the very fat old gentleman and his watch, or that of the melancholy gentleman of principle who ordered in and ate three-shillings'-worth of crumpets and then blew out his brains, and it may well be that I loved them so much as a boy that I contrived to suck out of them then all the marrowy nourishment of humour and finally left them dry bones. Nor—and this is a more serious confession—do I find myself so enthusiastic as most admirers of Pickwick over Sam's characteristic allusions and queer similes. Some of them, like that remark about the soldier at the trial, have produced what are by this time classical quotations, and one or two of them, notably that one about the dog's-meat man already quoted, are gems that the memory will wear for ever; but a great number of them seem to me distinctly forced and not very funny. Indeed, it is as a figure moving through the story and not as the author of comic quotations that Sam Weller is really great. There is
hardly anything better in the whole range of Dickens than the relation between him and his master, so productive of rich comedy—and yet so profoundly true and, curious as it may sound, so significant; for once it is admitted that Sam Weller is a worthy representative of the English populace, almost its total history can be deduced from this relation. For Sam is at once extremely disrespectful and extremely devoted; in short, he is essentially individualistic and independent, like the people of this country, and particularly the poorer people of the great towns; but, like them too, he frankly admires and supports an aristocratic tradition, knowing "a gen'l'm'n" when he sees one. And as the book proceeds and Mr. Pickwick becomes less and less a silly old fool and more and more a kind of stout English Don Quixote in spectacles and gaiters, so this relation between master and servant deepens. As Mr. Chesterton has pointed out, Sam's cheerful knowledge of the world is made to serve his master's still more cheerful ignorance of the world; the winking ironist of the London streets walks into prison to devote himself to that figure of happy innocence and will not be driven back to liberty.

Old Mr. Weller, as we have already noted, has many characteristics in common with his son, but, though he is a less significant figure in the chronicle, he is perhaps a richer droll. He belongs to a different world, and,
with his coach and his country tavern, suggests a background of the countryside just as Sam inevitably calls to mind the London streets. There is about him a rustic gravity and solemnity in which, however, there gleams an infinity of humour. Like Sam, he is a philosopher, as the former tells us himself:

"You are quite a philosopher, Sam," said Mr. Pickwick. "It runs in the family, I b'lieve, sir," replied Mr. Weller. "My father's wery much in that line, now. If my mother-in-law blows him up, he whistles. She flies in a passion, and breaks his pipe; he steps out and gets another. Then she screams very loud, and falls into 'sterics: and he smokes very comfortably 'til she comes to agin. That's philosophy, sir, an't it?"

It is the height of it, philosophy carried beyond the sphere of mere speculation into that of conduct and there severely tested and emerging in triumph from the ordeal. The core of Mr. Weller's system is, of course, the menace of the widow. As Sam tells us when we first meet him at the White Hart, if old Mr. Weller had not been offered a marriage licence when he visited Doctors' Commons, after his first wife died and left him four hundred pounds, then he would not have married again and we should not have had the benefit of his profound reasoning on his own experience. He is essentially a practical philosopher. We can gather that from his
very first speeches, when he and Sam and Mr. Pickwick meet in the tavern:

"Wy, Sammy," said the father, "I han't seen you for two year and better."

"No more you have, old codger," replied the son. "How's mother-in-law?"

"Wy, I'll tell you what, Sammy," said Mr. Weller senior, with much solemnity in his manner; "there never was a nicer woman as a widder, than that 'ere second wentur o' mine—a sweet creetur she was, Sammy; all I can say on her now, is, that she was such an uncommon pleasant widder, it's a great pity she ever changed her condition. She don't act as a wife, Sammy."

"Don't she, though?" inquired Mr. Weller junior.

The elder Mr. Weller shook his head, as he replied with a sigh, "I've done it once too often, Sammy; I've done it once too often. Take example by your father, my boy, and be very careful o' widders all your life, specially if they've kept a public-house, Sammy."

Having delivered this parental advice with great pathos, Mr. Weller senior re-filled his pipe from a tin box he carried in his pocket, and, lighting his fresh pipe from the ashes of the old one, commenced smoking at a great rate.

It is soon evident that the old gentleman, like the thinker he is, is capable of transforming a personal and private grievance into something of universal application. Thus he has discovered a sovereign cure for the gout:

* "The gout, sir," replied Mr. Weller, "the gout is
a complaint as arises from too much ease and comfort. If ever you're attacked with the gout, sir, jist you marry a widder as has got a good loud voice, with a decent notion of usin' it, and you'll never have the gout agin. It's a capital prescription, sir. I takes it reg'lar, and I can warrant it to drive away any illness as is caused by too much jollity.” Having imparted this valuable secret, Mr. Weller drained his glass once more, produced a laboured wink, sighed deeply, and slowly retired.

Nothing could be sounder than his attitude towards that brand of evangelical Christianity, a mixture of tea and toast, pine-apple rum, and flannel waistcoats and moral pocket-handkerchiefs for the infant negroes, patronised by Mrs. Weller. The Shepherd’s description of him as “a man of wrath” is really a great compliment, a tribute to his worth as a thinker and his courage as a husband. Not that he is unaware of the limitations of his power; he is too wise for that, as his reply to Sam clearly shows, when the latter asks why he should allow Mr. Stiggins to show his red nose in the “Marquis of Granby” at all:

Mr. Weller the elder fixed on his son an earnest look, and replied, “'Cause I'm a married man, Samivel, 'cause I'm a married man. When you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't understand now; but vether it's worth while goin' through so much, to learn so little, as the charity-
boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste. I rayther think it isn't."

Whole volumes on the subject have said less than is contained in this notable rejoinder.

He shares with his son an astonishing mass of curious, out-of-the-way information that gives rise to many sage comments on life. There is, for example, that matter of the poor and their passion for oysters and pickled salmon, a passion that increases with their poverty, which is discussed, for the benefit of Mr. Pickwick, notebook in hand, on the coach going to Ipswich. There is that other matter of turnpike-keepers, who are, it seems, according to old Mr. Weller, "all on 'em men as has met with some disappointment in life. Consequence of vich, they retires from the world, and shuts themselves up in pikes; partly with the view of being solitary, and partly to rewenge themselves on mankind, by takin' tolls."

There is, of course, much in his philosophy that must inevitably appear obscure to a superficial student, and that demands a more profound examination than we can afford to give it in this place. When he and Sammy discuss the valentine, some of his literary judgments are very shrewd indeed, but it seems a pity that so ripe a thinker should have such a horror of poetry:

- "'Tain't in poetry, is it?" interposed his father.
- "No, no," replied Sam.
"Wery glad to hear it," said Mr. Weller. "Poetry's unnat'ral; no man ever talked poetry 'cept a beadle on boxin' day, or Warren's blackin', or Rowland's oil, or some o' them low fellows; never let yourself down to talk poetry, my boy. . . ."

He is probably right in holding that "circumwented" is a better, though a less tender, word than "circumscribed"; and many good judges will probably join in demanding "Wot's the good o' callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or a angel? You might jist as well call her a griffin, or a unicorn, or king's arms at once, which is wery well known to be a col-lection o' fabulous animals." Though a richer and riper thinker than his son, he is, as we might well suppose, less successful as a practical man. Thus, his recommendation that Mr. Pickwick in his trial will be well advised to "never mind the charac-ter, and stick to the alleybi," though well meant, can hardly be said to be of much service. His further recom-mendations that Mr. Pickwick should be smuggled out of the Fleet either in "a turn-up bedstead" or disguised as an old woman; or his later plan, devised by himself and a friendly cabinetmaker, for removing the old gentleman in a piano—a very elaborate plot this—

"There ain't no vurks in it. It 'ull hold him easy, with his hat and shoes on, and breathe through the legs, wich his holler.' Have a passage ready taken for 'Merriker.
The 'Merrikin gov'ment will never give him up, ven they find as he's got money to spend, Sammy. Let the gov'ner stop there, till Mrs. Bardell's dead, or Mr. Dodson and Fogg's hung (which last ewent I think is the most likely to happen first, Sammy), and then let him come back and write a book about the 'Merrikins as 'll pay all his expenses and more, if he blows 'em up enough”—

though all very ingenious indeed, are more picturesque than useful. Indeed, it is in these legal affairs that Mr. Weller displays his greatest weakness. Those of us who count ourselves among his admirers, both as a man and a philosopher, must deplore his lamentable admiration for Mr. Solomon Pell, that greasy “friend of the Lord Chancellor,” and it goes to our heart to see our old friend, backed by a ton or so of fellow-coachmen, gazing with something like awe at this Pell as he drinks his innumerable three-pennyworths of rum. That other weakness of old Mr. Weller's, connected with widows, is, as he says himself, a very different thing, for widows are exceptions to every rule and are equal to at least five-and-twenty ordinary women: it is, in his own words, “a amable weakness,” the heel of Achilles, that Mr. Weller shares with other great men, giants of thought or of action, Socrates with his Xanthippe, Napoleon and his Josephine. That which has caused the ruin of empires has laid him low for a season; but though he could not
save himself, he will save others, and so has turned philosopher.

There is no space here in which to comment on all the droll and, occasionally, pathetic actions in which father and son are involved. They are landed in the end, Sam at Mr. Pickwick’s house at Dulwich and old Mr. Weller at the public-house near Shooter’s Hill (where he was reverenced, very rightly too, as an oracle), at one of those ports of domestic comfort and cosiness at which Dickens loved to land his virtuous characters when he took a final leave of them. We smile at the notion of such epics of the grotesque ending in a ponderous, drowsy Victorian interior, all the white roads of England and all the strange adventures they framed only leading at last to crumpets and horse-hair and heavy Madeira and seven dull neighbours sitting down to saddle-of-mutton; and yet such was the end of many an actual epic of incredible adventure and endurance, and it was the vision of such comfort and cosiness and dull respectability that led many a man to take a desperate chance on the high seas or at the diggings and sustained him through year after year under brazen and hostile skies. Later, it will be remembered, Dickens resurrected these characters, but the experiment was not a success; something had been lost, some brightness had fallen from the air; he was to create individual characters of an equal richness and drollery,
but never again could he set them in such an atmosphere as that of *Pickwick*, which was conceived in a mood that could never be captured again, and is, indeed, a May morning of English humour, the Comic Spirit, still young and innocent, suddenly let loose from school.
DICK SWIVELLER

DICK SWIVELLER, like Pistol, is a creature compact of great phrases. But he is more credible, more of a human being and less of a grotesque puppet, than Falstaff's Ancient. At this late date, we can hardly visualise Pistol; he belongs to a vanished world in which London taverns swarmed with rusty, out-at-elbows captains, with tall swords and even taller phrases, lean, hungry rats who always appeared to be passing swiftly through a little space of ease and inaction between two wars, two epics, but who, in truth, finding the taverns more agreeable than the camps, usually contrived to avoid any actual campaigns and lived as bullies and parasites rather than as soldiers. The type was so familiar that it was recognised as soon as the long sword and the long moustachios made their appearance, and Pistol was merely a supremely comic specimen of it. But now, though his astonishing phrases, those purple patches he clipped from the tragedians, the very cloak and dagger of speech, are securely lodged (and, I hope, freely entertained) in our memories, Pistol himself is
nothing but a figure fading out of some old tapestry. Swiveller, on the other hand, is a creature of our own time. His hat and coat, his tricks of speech, his songs and his tipple, may all belong to the day before yesterday; but Swiveller himself still exists and may be lolling on a high stool (no mean accomplishment) at the "General Office" round the corner: we have sadly wasted our time if we have never met him. It would be better to use the plural and say that the Swivelers, the family, the type, still exist. They have not that greatness of phrase which distinguishes Dick, their representative in letters, but they have the same characteristics, and Dick is only the essence of them, winged about, as no essence was ever winged before, with great words.

When young people are sufficiently imaginative to appreciate art but not imaginative enough to create it, when they are buried in sophistication and yet still wanting in experience, they generally pass through a period in which life seems less than nothing if it is not eked out with art. This does not mean merely that art is necessary to their lives, that their imagination must have its rich, sustaining food: it means that their existence itself must be somehow pressed into the patterns of art, that their actions, gestures, and speech must take on a likeness to the actions, gestures, and speech that they have come to know in admired works of art, in poetry,
fiction, and the drama. They have not sufficient imagina-
tion to turn life into art, to remark the epic, the tragedy,
and the comedy, lurking somewhere in the common stuff
of existence; but they have sufficient imagination to
turn art into life, to play at being a figure in an epic or
a tragedy (but not a comedy, for then they would really
see themselves and their attitudes would collapse) and
transfigure their surroundings and disguise the persons
they meet with the aid of coloured lights and hidden
orchestras sounding themes of doom. This is the period
of high-falutin. Girls, like Jane Austen's Catherine
Morland, move like somnambulists through the most
prosaic scenes as the heroines of wild romance. Serious
young men wrap themselves in Byronic gloom and pace
the dark streets enjoying their utter despair. But there
are some young men, who happen to have imagination
but also a lively sense of the ludicrous, who walk into this
maze but never leave go of the silken thread of common-
sense, so that while they enjoy their romantic play-acting,
relishing the large gestures and the tremendous speeches,
they also contrive to enjoy the absurdity of it all, knowing
very well that they are play-acting. Thus they are
walking parodies of art. A good parody is the product
of a double enjoyment, for the parodist has really enjoyed
imitating the good things, the music, the resounding,
phrase, and so forth, in a writer, while he has also en-
joyed letting his sense of humour play over the bad things that he has exaggerated and so emphasised. Thus it is that our friend Swiveller, who is undoubtedly one of the lively young men mentioned above, enjoys his high-falutin, smacks his lips over his magnificent phrases, but knows very well that he is absurd and enjoys that fact too. The only difference is that Swiveller is not deliberate, like the parodist; he has just drifted into his happy condition just as he has drifted into debt.

When we first meet him, Dick Swiveller is existing precariously in a room above a tobacconist's shop (you had only to step out on to the staircase and sniff heartily to save yourself the cost of many a pinch of snuff) near Drury Lane. Although he always takes care to speak of his rooms or lodgings or chambers, he is actually the tenant of a small single apartment, in which the only object of interest is a bedstead that looks like a bookcase and, indeed, has to be regarded as a bookcase by any visitor who wishes to be considered a friend. His finances are in a deplorable state. Indeed, he owes money in all directions and is gradually closing down whole sections of the town because he is in debt to so many of the neighbouring shops. This we know from his own account of the matter:

"I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can't go down while the shops are open. This
dinner to-day closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop up that to-night with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in every direction, that in about a month's time, unless my aunt sends me a remittance, I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way."

Never were finance and topography so quaintly wedded. He sees the lady of his choice, Miss Sophy Wackles, accept the hand and heart of one Cheggs, a market gardener, a creature from the outer darkness. Later, he enters the office of Sampson Brass and there is entombed, so far as it is possible for so mercurial a soul to be entombed, for weeks and months on end, until at last he takes to his bed with a raging fever, to be nursed by his curious little friend, the Marchioness. Here, it is evident, is very poor material for a care-free, happy existence; this is not the stuff out of which a romantic and poetical life can be fashioned; and yet Dick, a romantic and poetical soul, contrives to be happy. Indeed, he is probably the happiest figure in the whole book.

He contrives to enjoy himself by indulging, without stint, his literary sense. If he cannot have the romantic trappings, the poetical action, he can, and does, have the language. He feasts sumptuously on rich quotations. Gorgeous phrases clothe him in silks and velvet. He is
wafted where he will, far above dull reality, far beyond the clutch of circumstance, on the wings of metaphor. Noble adjectives wait upon him, the lord of language. This passion for words, marvellous in themselves and miraculous in felicitous arrangement, is the mark of the literary sense and the very soul of literature, and Dick Swiveller, like one of the few comic characters in recent fiction that have real vitality, Mr. Polly, and unlike so many modern critics, who can appreciate ideas but have no interest in or enjoyment of expression, the power of the word, and are therefore shut off from literature, talk of it as they will, has the literary sense in no common degree and so contrives to turn his daily existence into a kind of wild literature that he reads and enjoys as it passes. It is true that he is fortified against anxiety and depression by one of those happy-go-lucky temperaments that can forget all their troubles over a glass, a song, and a chat with a friend. But that is not his secret. A glass of cold gin and water would always help him to put trouble and care on one side for the moment, but when he can call it, as he does, "the rosy wine," and can tell his companion (who is using the same tumbler) to "fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship," he is something more than merely forgetful of misery, he is definitely happy, intoxicated not so much by the gin he is drinking as by the phrases he is making.
He moves happily in a mist, not of alcohol, but of romance and art. "What is the odds," he remarks in one place, referring, it must be confessed, to the fact that he had been extremely drunk on the previous evening, "what is the odds so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conviviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather!" And what are a headache and an empty purse when here to hand are such glorious draughts of metaphor, such shining heaps of newly minted phrases?

That convivial circle, the "Glorious Apollers," were wise in electing our friend Swiveller as Perpetual Grand Master. They were wise not only because he is the soul of convivial oratory and song, pledged to see that the wing of friendship "is not clipped but expanded and serene," in short, the very man for the chair, but for a deeper reason, because he is one of those choice spirits who serve Apollo himself and are sustained by him. Never does Mr. Swiveller speak without paying, indirectly, homage to the radiant tuneful god. Never does he quit what he calls "the gay and festive scene and halls of dazzling light" without sacrificing a heap of metaphors to the deity, who must have blessed, with winged words and unfailing melody, any convivial circle presided over by Mr. Swiveller. What could be better than the fraternal greeting between him and Mr. Chuckster, another Glorious Apollo:
“Won’t you come in?” said Dick. “All alone. 
Swiveller solus. ‘’Tis now the witching——’”
“‘Hour of night!’”
“‘When churchyards yawn.’”
“‘And graves give up their dead.’”

At the end of this quotation in dialogue, each gentleman 
struck an attitude, and immediately subsiding into prose 
walked into the office. Such morsels of enthusiasm are 
common among the Glorious Apollos, and were indeed 
the links that bound them together, and raised them above 
the cold dull earth.

Who that has known shabby young clerks, spirited souls 
captured in a web of routine, immured as they are in 
dungeons of brick, mortar, and ledgers, has not seen them 
indulge in such antics, rushing for a second or so into 
some mad world of romance, an Aldebaran’s distance 
from their double-entry, discovering a kind of safety-
valve in such wistful absurdities? Did not Mr. Swiv-
eller and Mr. Chuckster, after thus greeting one another 
and then finding that each was in good health, “in 
compliance with a solemn custom of the ancient Brother-
hood to which they belonged,” then join in a fragment 
of the duet, “All’s well,” with a long shake at the end?
And having thus relieved their feelings, all is well with 
them: desperate as their condition is, wedged tight as 
they are in the dullest and bleakest prose of life, they can 
yet break through to give their souls a breath of poetry: 
they have been saved by their tutelary god, Apollo.
The advantage of having such a temperament as Dick Swiveller’s is that situations that would be either foolish or painful to ordinary persons are nothing less than meat and drink to your romantic self. Thus the affair of Sophy Wackles is a godsend to Swiveller. Around this lost love (who would have accepted him quickly enough if he had offered himself) most of his imperishable phrases are heaped. There is nothing richer in the whole book than his parting dialogue, in which he rapturously assumes the part of an injured swain, with the fickle Sophy:

Near the door sat Miss Sophy, still fluttered and confused by the attentions of Mr. Cheggs, and by her side Richard Swiveller lingered, for a moment to exchange a few parting words.

"My boat is on the shore and my bark is on the sea, but before I pass this door I will say farewell to thee," murmured Dick, looking gloomily upon her.

"Are you going?" said Miss Sophy, whose heart sunk within her at the result of her stratagem, but who affected a light indifference notwithstanding.

"Am I going!" echoed Dick bitterly. "Yes, I am. What then?"

"Nothing, except that it’s very early," said Miss Sophy, "but you are your own master of course."

"I would that I had been my own mistress too," said Dick, "before I had ever entertained a thought of you. Miss Wackles, I believed you true, and I was blest in so believing, but now I mourn that e’er I knew, a girl so fair yet so deceiving."
Miss Sophy bit her lip and affected to look with great interest after Mr. Cheggs, who was quaffing lemonade in the distance.

"I came here," said Dick, rather oblivious of the purpose with which he had really come, "with my bosom expanded, my heart dilated, and my sentiments of a corresponding description. I go away with feelings that may be conceived, but cannot be described: feeling within myself the desolating truth that my best affections have experienced, this night, a stifler!

"I am sure I don't know what you mean, Mr. Swiveller," said Miss Sophy with downcast eyes. "I'm very sorry if——"

"Sorry, ma'am!" said Dick, "sorry in the possession of a Cheggs! . . ."

Secure in such an abyss of disillusion, he is now completely happy. Like a good many more serious persons, he can wring more pleasure out of the idea of a Sophy lost to him for ever than he ever could have wrung out of the girl's actual company. Unreciprocated love is a theme for which he has an abundant store of apt quotations and very original and very moving phrases, and later, whenever we discover him in his cups or otherwise expansive, though by this time he has probably forgotten everything about the girl, he makes some reference to the lost Sophy, now plighted to her market gardener. When Quilp, that convivial horror, demands from Dick the name of some beauty for a toast, we are not surprised
when Sophy is immediately named. But what bitterness, what despair, unfathomable, is suggested when that name is mentioned: "a Being of brightness and beauty will be offered up a sacrifice at Cheggs' altar"; and later the same sacrificial metaphor is introduced again, for we are told that Sophy is "immolating herself upon the shrine of Cheggs." The emphasis upon the name of the fortunate suitor is significant, and suggests that our Glorious Apollo, his literary instinct repelled, would forgive the girl her imaginary renunciation of him if only she had not chosen a Cheggs. The literary artist in him, a thorough romantic, appears to be incensed mainly by the thought that "Cheggs" is to be perpetuated. And long after this scene with Quilp, indeed immediately after he has been playing cribbage with the Marchioness, he returns to the matter, but by this time his mood has changed, the bitterness has almost gone, and he speaks, sternly yet with a touch of wistfulness, as one who has outstared the Gorgon-face of this life's tragedy and can but mutely wave a hand of pity towards the failures, stricken in stone, he passes by the way:

"These rubbers," said Mr. Swiveller, putting on his nightcap in exactly the same style as he wore his hat, "remind me of the matrimonial fireside. Cheggs' wife plays cribbage; all-fours likewise. She rings the changes on 'em now. From sport to sport they hurry
her, to banish her regrets, and when they win a smile from her they think that she forgets—but she don't. By this time, I should say," added Richard, getting his left cheek into profile, and looking complacently at the reflection of a very little scrap of whisker in the looking-glass; "by this time, I should say, the iron has entered into her soul. It serves her right."

We can almost catch a glimpse of poor Sophy looking out over a dreary sea of Cheggs, while in the far distance the happy isles of Swiveller, a mist of gold upon the horizon, pale and recede and utterly vanish.

It was the opinion of both Mr. Sampson Brass and Miss Sally Brass that Dick Swiveller had mistaken his calling and would never make a lawyer, no, not if he lived a thousand years. They were driven to this conclusion, which we share, because Dick proved uncommonly slow when Mr. Brass hinted that the strange lodger, then engaged in his twenty-six hours' sleep, might have said that he wished his property on the premises to fall to Mr. Brass if anything should happen to him. Dick, who knew no more than Apollo himself of these little sharp practices, proved on this occasion to have an inconveniently clear memory. But he also proved that a young gentleman of courage, address, and imagination has his uses in the world. After the new lodger had been asleep six-and-twenty hours and every effort had been made to waken him accidentally, including
frequent double-knocks at the street door, the moving of chests of drawers on the floor above, and instructions to the little maid-servant to fall downstairs every now and then, all to no purpose, it was Swiveller who battered the upper panels of the door with a large ruler and thus succeeded in rousing the sleeper, and it was he who faced the angry man when the Sampsons had fled. Not only did he stand his ground, but he dealt with the whole situation, a very unusual one, manfully, and contrived to rebuke this glutton of unconsciousness:

"... We have been distracted with fears that you were dead, sir," said Dick, gently sliding to the ground, "and the short and the long of it is, that we cannot allow single gentlemen to come into this establishment and sleep like double gentlemen without paying extra for it."

"Indeed!" cried the lodger.

"Yes, sir, indeed," returned Dick, yielding to his destiny and saying whatever came uppermost; "an equal quantity of slumber was never got out of one bed, and if you're going to sleep in that way, you must pay for a double-bedded room."

The matter in a nutshell.

No matter how we straddle and gesticulate, light our coloured fires, and bid the toy trumpets sound from the mimic battlements, no matter, in short, how we play at romance, it frequently happens that when real romance has come to us, it has stolen in unobserved while we have
been at our play. Mr. Swiveller, who could be romantic about anything and everything, began his acquaintance with Sally Brass's little half-starved drudge, the tiny maid who lived like a mole out of sight, and is known to us now, thanks to our friend's whimsical invention, as the Marchioness, in a mood of idle good-humour. Finding that she looked through the office key-hole when he was alone there ("for company"), he joined the queer little creature downstairs, treated her to a plate of bread and beef and a hot drink, of which she was sadly in need, and taught her to play cribbage. She was not much of an audience, being entirely ignorant of everything that passed outside the house just as she missed nothing, not a look nor a syllable, of what went forward inside the house, but she would do, and Dick gave her a taste of what a Glorious Apollo could be like in his hours of slippered ease. They make a quaint pair, sitting down to cribbage in the gloomy basement; the fantastic clerk, with his battered hat still perched on the side of his head, and his aquatic jacket with the tight sleeves; and the under-sized drudge, as sharp-featured as a little mouse, in her odds and ends of tattered garments, her appetite satisfied for once, fiercely concentrating on the new delight of cards, and somewhat alarmed by the strange gestures and speech of the visiting god, now full of warm liquor and nonsense:
“With which object in view, Marchioness,” said Mr. Swiveller gravely, “I shall ask your ladyship’s permission to put the board in my pocket, and to retire from the presence when I have finished this tankard; merely observing, Marchioness, that since life like a river is flowing, I care not how fast it rolls on, ma’am, on, while such purl on the bank still is growing, and such eyes light the waves as they run. Marchioness, your health. You will excuse my wearing my hat, but the palace is damp, and the marble floor is—if I may be allowed the expression—sloppy.”

As a precaution against this latter inconvenience, Mr. Swiveller had been sitting for some time with his feet on the hob, in which attitude he now gave utterance to these apologetic observations, and slowly sipped the last choice drops of nectar.

“The Baron Sampsono Brasso and his fair sister are (you tell me) at the Play?,” said Mr. Swiveller, leaning his left arm heavily upon the table, and raising his voice and his right leg after the manner of a theatrical bandit.

The Marchioness nodded.

“Ha!,” said Mr. Swiveller, with a portentous frown. “’Tis well. Marchioness!—but no matter. Some wine there. Ho!,” He illustrated these melodramatic morsels, by handing the tankard to himself with great humility, receiving it haughtily, drinking from it thirstily, and smacking his lips fiercely.

Mr. Swiveller retires that night to meditate for a moment or so upon his lost Sophy and then to play on his flute, very slowly and very badly, the air “Away with melancholy,” for several hours in bed. But his romance has