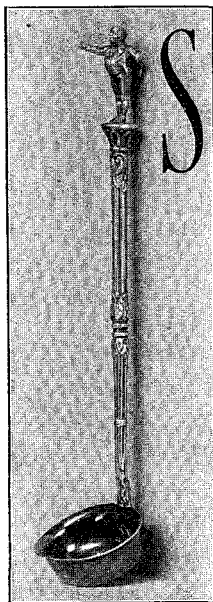


THE PICKWICK LADLE

By Winfield Scott Moody

ILLUSTRATION BY WALTER APPLETON CLARK



SOME of their friends said that Mr. and Mrs. Peter Wyckoff stood in danger of falling into the stupid life in their avoidance of the strenuous. For instance, on this snowy evening, when they might have gone to Mrs. Jenkins's dinner to meet a wandering Irish poet together with all the great and good people who habitually dined at each other's houses about once in so often, these two misguided young persons had made excuse, and were now sitting in front of a

hickory fire in their apartment, soaking themselves in the quiet atmosphere of home.

Their old chairs had embraced three generations of gentle people before these two Wyckoffs; their lamp, of ormolu and old red Bohemian glass, had first lighted the drawing-room of a lady who visited Mrs. Rawdon Crawley, and it stood on a "butterfly table" whose leaves were upheld by the queer little wings which gave it its name. It was a fine new table in the days when Buckingham was governor of Connecticut, and it had suffered the usual ravages of years until it had descended to the humble office of holding milk-pans in the dairy of a New England farmer, where Peter had found it a few summers ago, and gained the reputation of spendthrift in that frugal community by giving the farmer two dollars for it. To-night, as the polished surface of its soft-toned wood reflected the firelight, its simple outlines harmonized perfectly with the warm cheer of Edith Wyckoff's little drawing-room, and its solid legs straddled

comfortably down into the red and blue depths of the dingy old Kazak rug which resisted stoutly even the trampling of Peter's heels.

Their friends would have said, What did we tell you? For Edith had laid down her favorite "Mayor of Casterbridge," and joined her uncontemporaneous husband—Peter left the concerns of the day behind him at the newspaper office, and gave little attention to "news" by his own fireside unless something unusual pressed—in looking through back numbers of *The Cabinet*, an English periodical devoted to old silver, Sheffield plate, enamels of Limoges and Battersea, treasures of Wedgwood, Worcester, Chelsea and Lowestoft, and similar pasture of the collector. Full of beautiful photographs were those alluring pages, and the text was almost disregarded as they browsed contentedly among the teapots and candlesticks, vases and snuff-boxes, helmet pitchers and tea-caddies which were all theirs to enjoy by sight if not to hold in their own hands. But suddenly Petersat up.

"Hallo!" said he; "listen to this, Edith." And he read a paragraph that had been printed in the late nineties.

"At a sale last week by Messrs. Robinson & Fisher of the effects of Mr. Charles Dickens, Junr., the three toddy-ladles, 'Mr. Jingle,' 'Mr. Winkle,' and 'The Fat Boy' went for 22 guineas, 32 guineas, and 30 guineas, respectively. These formed a portion of the celebrated set of six silver Pickwick Ladles, with gilt figures of the characters on the handles, modelled by Woodington and presented to Charles Dickens by his publishers, Messrs. Chapman & Hall, on the completion of 'Pickwick.' They were purchased by Sir Baines Carew, and go to enrich his superb collection of pictures and curiosities at Carew Court."

"By jingo!" said Peter, "do you know, Edith, that I once had the toddy-ladle with Pickwick on it in my hands?"

"Goodness, no," returned his wife in-

credulously. "I never heard of it before. Besides, if you had ever got it into your hands I don't believe you would have laid it down."

"Well, that shows what a good plan it is to buy a really fine thing when you have the chance, and not wait till another day. You go back and find it gone, as I did."

"But tell me, Peter," she rejoined. "I never heard anything about it."

"Why, it was six or eight years ago, before we were married," he said, recalling the incident step by step in his mind. "It was in a bric-a-brac shop in Union Square, kept by a man named MacPherson—he's out of the business, now, I think. It was a little silver ladle with a handle about six or seven inches long, beautifully designed, and with a gilt figure of Mr. Pickwick standing on the top, like the figures on the apostle spoons. He only asked a few dollars for it, but like a fool, I didn't take it when I saw it. But I did take a rubbing of the hall-marks on a cigarette paper, and I tried to spell out the year it was made, but the mark was so small and indistinct I couldn't make it out. But I could see it

was an interesting bit of old silver, though I didn't know anything about all this history of the presentation set; and I went back to get it, about a week afterward, and found it had been sold to somebody, meantime. And to think that I missed getting such a thing as that! Pickwick, too—the most desirable one in the whole lot!"

"But what was it about the hall-mark, Peter?" asked his wife, her instinct for the chase leading her past vain lamentations to the single ciew which seemed to exist.

"Oh, I tried to take a rubbing of the marks on the bottom of the bowl of the ladle, but it wasn't of much use," he said. "I believe I've got the scrap of paper yet—I kept it, I know." He went to a drawer in the top of the old French desk that stood against the wall near the window, and presently fished out an envelope containing a cigarette paper marked with five curious blurred spots.

"O Peter, you are such a magpie!" cried Edith. "How did you come to keep a thing like that? And can you read it?"

Peter shook his head doubtfully. "Afraid not," he admitted. "The marks were so small and the impression was not very distinct. It's hard to tell. But we can look."

They laid the bit of paper upon the dark surface of the table, and studied it with a big reading-glass.

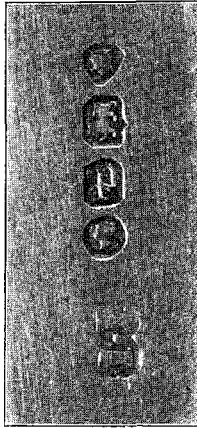
"There are four marks," said Peter, "besides the mark of the maker, which is down here at the side. Thesecond one of the regular marks is clear enough, looking at it sidewise. That's the lion, which is the sterling mark, to show it's of standard silver. But this first mark, the thing that looks here like a rose, is really a leopard's head—I remember seeing it distinctly enough on the ladle itself as I looked at it. That mark shows the piece was made in the city of London. Now, what is that mark at the bottom?" Peter twisted his neck and scrutinized the smudgy mark on the paper. Presently his memory came to his aid, rather than his eyesight.

"Oh, yes," he cried, "that's the Queen's Head—the 'duty mark,' as they call it. That shows that the tax imposed by those careful Britishers on every piece of sterling silver made in

the kingdom had been paid. And the third mark, here—that's the most important one of all. That is a letter, and what it is I never could make out. It stands for the year in which the piece was made. We haven't got any book of English hall-marks, but I could find one in a library and look it up easily if I could only make out what that letter is. But I declare it's beyond me—can you tell?"

Edith could not, nor could any human being, certainly. It was sharper and less smudgy than the others, but its outlines were very blind. It looked like a small black-letter i, like a small d, like an e, or like a broken c. "'Backed like a weasel, and very like a whale,'" commented Peter. The imprint was not much larger than the head of a big pin, and the futility of trying to decipher it was evident.

"You see," said Peter, "each year, from way back, has its own special letter, in various kinds of type, and I'd rather try to find a needle in a whole salt-meadow than at-



Hall-mark of the Pickwick ladle.

tempt to make out such a blind thing as that. And I don't even know the year in which the original set of ladles was made, so I guess we won't lose any sleep over it. But I do wish I had had sense enough to grab Mr. Pickwick when I saw him. If you should ever run across him anywhere, Edith, you'd better buy him for my stocking next Christmas."

The next day as Edith was going her jog-trot round of the housewife between butcher, grocer, fruit-shop, and fish-man, her thoughts recurred to Peter's suggestion about a Christmas gift, and she remembered that though Christmas had but just come and gone, Peter's birthday was looming up within the next month. And since this young woman was always willing to go treasure-hunting if she had half an excuse to soothe her conscience, she went straight to the nearest antiquity shop, which happened to be that of Dirck Amstel, where Peter had once found the Lowestoft hot-water plates which had led them both into strange adventures.

That hearty son of Holland gave her a warm welcome. "Oh, Mrs. Wyckoff, it's a great pleasure to see you," he said, his smile breaking up his rubicund face into a thousand little shining wrinkles, and as the morning sun irradiated his sturdy figure, he looked like his own life-size portrait image in ancient, colored Delft, fit to adorn the city hall of his native Leyden.

"It's always a delight to me to come in here, Mr. Amstel," she replied, with a smile as friendly as his own. "Because your things are always different, and a little nicer than anywhere else; and then, you know, everybody says you tell the truth about them."

Amstel covered his modesty with an obeisance. "Well," he said, "I'm proud to know I have credit of that sort, even if I can't seem to get rich. But I want to show you some lovely bits of china that I've got in since you were here. See these little cups—Ship Lowestoft, or Union Jack Lowestoft, some call them. Ah, they're pretty!" and he took three little bowls from a cabinet. "See—a full-rigged ship in colors, with all the details drawn in so carefully! And then, see this bit of old Wedgwood—isn't that a precious sugar-bowl? Isn't it charming?"

Edith thought it was. A sugar-bowl, doubtless, but fit to be a cup for a nymph's lips to touch. The fragile paste had a color

which was that of a candle-flame seen through an amber ball—or was it the hue of golden straw tanned by the sun—or was it not, rather, the yellow side of a peach, with a hint of late crimson beneath, yet clearly golden? And the down of the peach was matched in the velvety surface of the pottery, smooth as oil to the touch, yet clinging. On either side was a Greek design in low relief of a sacrifice of lambs, each tiny figure delicate and exact as the stamen of a flower; a magnifying-glass only showed more clearly the exquisite drawing and proportion. A conventional border at the base and one corresponding just below the rim completed this song of the potter.

"Oh, lovely!" assented Edith, stroking the little ceramic tenderly, and returning it to Amstel, who folded his hands upon it as though it were the sacred pyx. "How did they do it! I am hunting for something for Mr. Wyckoff's birthday—do you suppose he'd like that? Would it be absurd to give your husband a sugar-bowl? He gave me a snuff-box, once, and another time a pair of silver spurs. But that was a good while ago, when he just bought things for things' sake."

Amstel laughed. "I'm sure he'd like the sugar-bowl for itself, but maybe we can find something else," he said. "Oh, Mr. Wyckoff smokes a pipe, does he not? Well, here is one of the scarcest things I ever had—I've not seen one in fifteen years before. It is an old Holland pipe-stand, with places for three long-stemmed pipes and a drawer below for the cleaners." Amstel lifted the little mahogany rack with its delicately chiselled mountings in ormolu, and setting it before her, extended his hands in admiration. "Pure Empire, Mrs. Wyckoff," he said. "You know the Dutch workmen at that time were strongly under the French influence. It's in perfect condition, and one of the rarest bits I ever had. I don't believe there's another in New York. I've written to Mr. Ten Eyck, of the St. Nicholas Society, about it."

Edith remembered Mr. Ten Eyck's name as that of a rich young bachelor with whom she and Peter had a slight acquaintance. He was a fastidious collector, who only wanted "museum pieces"—things that nobody else had, or could get. He cared little for the intrinsic beauty or interest of a piece, but much for its rarity. Consequently, he had many things in his collec-

tion which were ugly because they were archaic—made before people learned to make more beautiful things. He had a greater respect for the Pyramids than for Giotto's Tower; he valued a muddy old cup of the time of the Chinese Emperor Sung more highly than the finest blue and white vase of the Augustan Ming; he preferred a rusty Saracen helmet (with all the chances of its being spurious) to the finest gold inlay upon steel of Cellini. In short, he was a dismal faddist, and while he was not exactly sordid about his collecting, he had a general idea of getting things which would become increasingly rare with the passing of time, and so worth more money.

Edith remembered all this, and knew he would buy the pipe-rack if he saw it. She also knew Peter would fall in love with it on sight, for its own sake. It was absolutely quaint; perfection of its kind. "How much is it?" she asked.

"Oh, this cost me such a lot, for a little thing," sighed Amstel, "I must get a good price for it. I'm asking twenty dollars for it, but you may have it for fifteen. I can't let it go for a cent less—it cost me twelve guilders in Holland, and there's the sixty per cent. duty, and all."

"Oh, I know I shouldn't find anything nearly so good if I hunted for weeks!" she wavered. "But it seems as though I ought to look at a lot of things—it's for his birthday, you know, and I haven't looked around at all."

Amstel waved his hand. "I understand perfectly," he said. "But really I haven't anything else in my shop that I should suggest in preference. It's unique, I believe."

A memory of Peter's lamentation for his lost ladle passed through Edith's mind. "It's a good plan to buy a really fine thing when you have the chance," he had said, "and not wait until another day. You go back for it and find it gone." She rose to the occasion.

"I'll take it, Mr. Amstel," she decided. "I shall be sorry if I don't. Only last night Mr. Wyckoff was telling me how sorry he was that he had not bought a little toddy-ladle with a figure of Mr. Pickwick on the handle when he had the chance. Somebody snapped it up overnight, while he was thinking about it."

Amstel stopped in his gentle polishing of the little mahogany pipe-rack. "What did

you say?" he asked. "A ladle with Mr. Pickwick on the handle? That's queer. I saw one like that yesterday."

"What! where?" demanded Edith.

"Why, up in Saxon's auction rooms," he replied, puzzled. "Mr. Wyckoff said it was sold?"

"Oh, that was years and years ago," she cried. "And you say it is going to be sold at auction? Could it possibly be the same one, do you think?"

"Who knows?" he shrugged. "It is not a common design—I happened to see it in the case with a lot of other things to be sold at the end of this week, I think. I went into the place to look at a little pair of colored Delft vases for a customer of mine—she asked me to go and see them and tell her if they were really old. But alas!" Amstel grinned cheerfully. "Just another good fake. If they were old they would be well worth sixty dollars, but—they were made yesterday—last year. Very pretty, but that's all!"

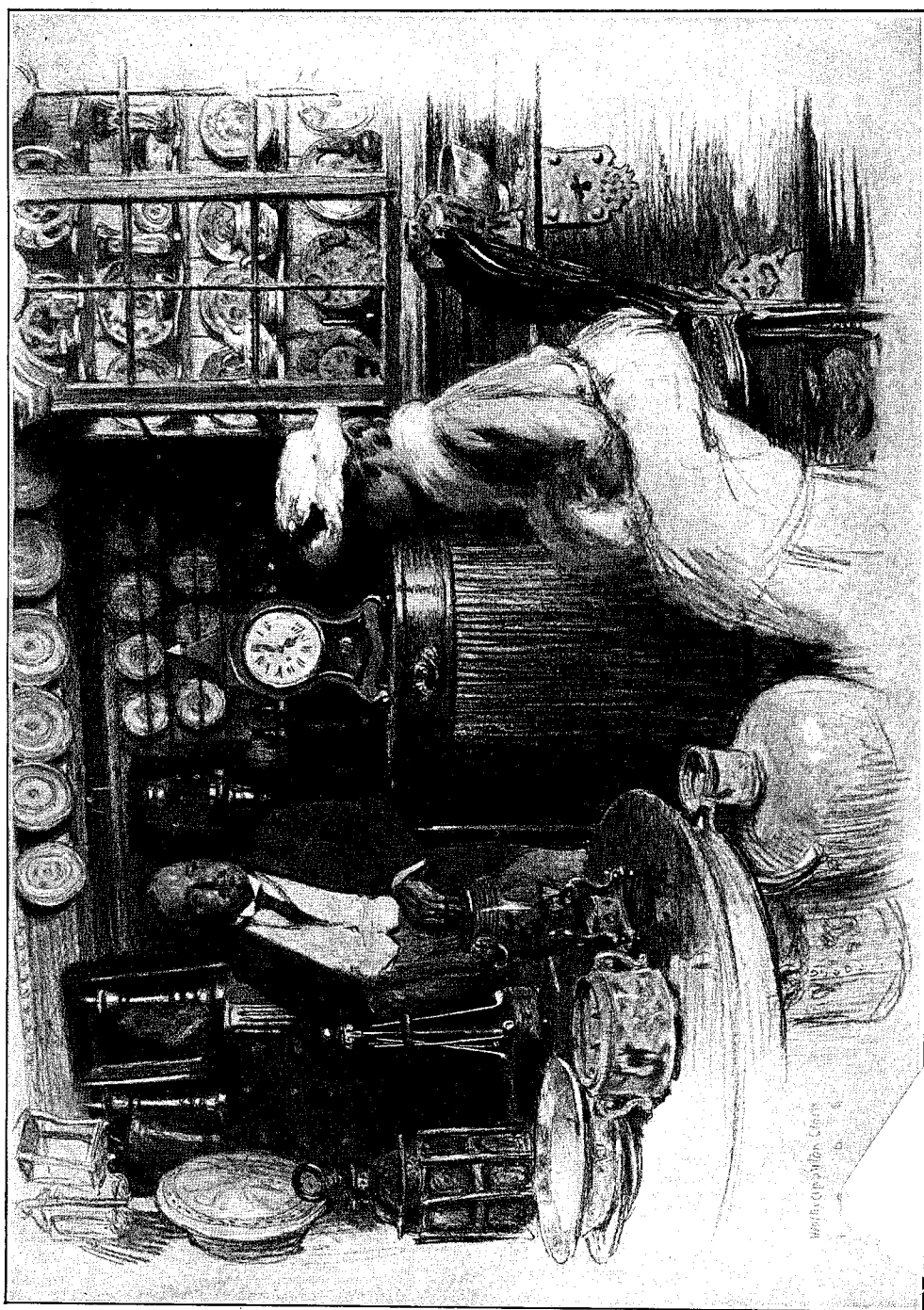
"But the ladle?" Edith brought him back.

"Oh, yes, the ladle," he said. "I don't do much in silver—good things are so dear, and hard to get. But this looked like good work—not Dutch, but English, and I happened to recognize the figure on the handle. I think I once heard that such spoons were popular in England about the time Dickens died. And who can tell? It might be the very one Mr. Wyckoff saw. There's a chance of it, and you know our Dutch proverb, 'If the sky should fall we'd all get blue nightcaps.'"

Edith drew a long breath. Evidently this loyal Dutchman had never happened to hear of the presentation set of ladles. Ought she to tell him? He was so punctiliously honest with her! But no, she reflected; she was buying his pipe-rack, her footing in his shop was paid for, and this bit of information about the ladle was her own. She buttoned her fur collar.

"You'll clean the pipe rack all up for me?" she said. "And send it home carefully wrapped up so Mr. Wyckoff won't see what it is. I'm sure he would never forgive me if I didn't buy it now I've got the chance."

She rushed up to Saxon's, that famous auction room where so many treasured collections have been dispersed to the cheerful



It was absolutely quaint; perfection of its kind.—Page 736.

rhythm of the veteran auctioneer's clattering, sing-song drone. The place was filled with old furniture, rugs, china, and silver plate, and two long cases held hundreds of small objects in silver, gold, ivory, and porcelain. Edith's glance swept over a small collection of exquisite Japanese lacquer boxes, an array of miniatures no more antique than beautiful, and searched among a lot of toys in new Dutch silver till it fell upon the ladle she sought. There it lay on its back, with Mr. Pickwick's right hand outstretched in his most familiar gesture.

She found one of the attendants. "Will you let me see something in this case?" she said. "When are these to be sold?"

The man unlocked the case. "Which piece?"

"That one," and she held the Pickwick ladle in her hand. He gave her a catalogue and consulted his own. "This is No. 552—in Thursday's sale," he said.

Edith found the number in her catalogue. "Old English gravy ladle," she read. No word of Pickwick, no hint that the piece had any special value. She looked at the gracefully carved stem of the ladle, topped with the portly figure of the immortal founder of the Pickwick Club, one hand under his coat-tails, his gaiters, the eyeglass upon his waistcoat, his outstretched hand—all were there; Edith strained her eyes to detect P. C. on the buttons of that snugly fitting coat. And to think that nobody knew Mr. Pickwick when he saw him!

She looked at the bottom of the bowl; there were the four tiny marks, besides the maker's mark in another spot. Her hand trembled as she laid it down.

"Thank you," she said. "How much do you suppose I should have to pay for that spoon?"

"No tellin', ma'am," said the attendant. "Solid silver, hall-marked. Oh, I guess it'll go cheap—not much call for fancy spoons lately."

On Thursday afternoon Peter and Edith came early, and sat in the front row, where there could be no chance of not catching Saxon's eye. As if that experienced distributor of collections were likely to miss their slightest nod! But the Wyckoffs were not victims of the auction habit; antiquity hunters though they were, some special providence had saved them both from indulgence in the dissipation of the auction-

rooms, and they regarded with wonder the band of devoted women who straightway filled the seats about them and bid with the true fervor of their darling habit. The auctioneer knew most of them by name, and he chaffed and hypnotized them by turns. They go to every sale, and always buy something.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," said Saxon, as he screwed himself into his revolving chair on the raised platform, "we'll go on with the sale that stopped yesterday with No. 524." He glanced over the room, and rubbed the black silk skull-cap in which he sheltered himself from the draughts issuing from the cave of the winds behind the crimson curtains which veiled the future from the assembly in the rows of camp-chairs. "Now, if you are ready; No. 525 in your catalogue, if you please, and may I ask that you'll bid promptly, as there are many lots to sell to-day. There you have it," as the attendants held up a picture in a dingy gilt frame. "An old colored print—Morland, isn't it? Of course, Morland; and a treasure. What do you say for it? Bid right along, now. Five, do I hear it, now—what is your pleasure, then?" He accented the syllables like a chant, interrupted by terse prose appeals. "Come, now, start it at something—beautiful old print; oh, well, suit yourselves—what? three? Well, I should say so! Bid right along, please. Three, three, three, three—half will you make it now?—a half, three'n a half, three'n a half—is it four now?" and so on, his chanting voice rising and falling as the panorama of prints, Sheffield cake-baskets, old clocks, chairs and tables in various stages of pleasant decrepitude, and all the variegated wonders drawn by the strong net of the auction-room, appears from behind the crimson veil, passes quickly over the altar of sacrifice, and disappears again, their ownership shifting with the glitter of the overhead light which glorifies for its brief instant even the least attractive "lot" or which Saxon drones his professional "cadabra," while the crowd rustles its logues, confers together, laughs at the auctioneer's historic jokes, and waits, always more feverishly as the time goes on, for the next "lot."

"Things are going pretty cheap," whispered Edith to Peter. "If they wouldn't pay more than twelve dollars for that old

Dutch clock, I'm sure nobody will want that little ladle. But you mustn't get excited, Peter, for if he sees you want it he'll run you up."

"I only hope Ten Eyck isn't after it," said Peter, as he smiled and nodded to a young man with a dark, pointed mustache who sat hunched up against the wall on the other side of the room.

"Oh, is he here?" said Edith, flushing half with the guilty memory of having snatched away the pipe-rack which would have been his, and half with delight in the same thought. "I didn't see him. Well, she went on, "if he should want our ladle, I think it'll be just too mean. For we can't pay as much as he can for it, and he's got so much already."

"Well, we shall know pretty soon, anyhow," returned Peter, "for it's coming now—the next lot to this." And with the passing of the imitation Chippendale mirror then under the hammer, Peter and Edith sat up straight, cleared for action.

"Now we come to the next, No. 552, ladies and gentlemen," said Saxon. "An old English gravy ladle, and what do you say for it? Ten dollars—eight dollars—five do I hear for it? Come, come, bid up, ladies! Beautiful old English ladle, St. George on the handle, I guess; ought to be worth ten dollars for the figure alone; fine old hall-marked English ladle, solid silver, and St. George going out for the dragon—why, bid up, somebody! Come now, let's have it, five do I hear for it? Three, three, three, three; four do you say, madam? Half, madam? Thank you; four will you make it now?"

Peter nodded. "Four, do you say, sir? Four—do I hear the half? Four, four, four, four—" and so on up till finally: "Eight dollars, eight dollars, eight, eight, eight, eight—half, do I hear it? Why, it's thrown away, but we can't delay if you won't bid anything—eight dollars once, and twice—ah, nine! Almost too late, there; you shouldn't wait like that. Nine dollars, nine dollars, ten, do I hear it?" And he droned along while Peter's head drooped.

Edith clutched his arm nervously. "Oh, is it Ten Eyck?" she whispered.

"Yes," said Peter, "but I'll give him a run for his money," and he nodded to the auctioneer.

"Ten dollars—thank you—ten; where's

the 'leven, now?" sang Saxon, glancing across to Ten Eyck. He got a signal, and the tune began again.

"'Leven dollars—thank you, sir; twelve will you say, now? 'Leven, 'leven—twelve, sir—who'll give me thirteen?" chanted the auctioneer, as he took another bid from Peter.

"Oh, it's foolish, Peter," sighed Edith. "He's bound to get it, and I wouldn't run him up."

Ten Eyck bid another dollar, and as Saxon glanced toward Peter the latter shook his head. Ten Eyck saw the motion, and the faintest grin curled the pointed mustache. But the smile faded in the same instant, for a new bidder struck in.

"Fifteen from two at once—oh, yes, you all want it, now," said Saxon. "Well, which is it? Yours, Mr. B.; very well, fifteen, sixteen from you—I thought so; sixteen, sixteen, where's seventeen, now?" cried Saxon, his eyes brightening as the bidding continued unexpectedly.

"Who is it?" asked Edith excitedly, while Ten Eyck turned and looked toward a knot of dealers who sat at the back of the room, ready to cut each other's throats as cheerfully as those of their customers.

"Why, I believe it's old Bouvier," returned Peter, after a study of the group of *cognoscenti* banded together as if for mutual protection. "I can tell in a minute"—as the bidding went on. "Yes, it is!" he whispered. "O Edith, it must be a good thing if that old rascal is after it!"

Bouvier was an elderly English child of Israel with a French name whose frosty head was full of curious knowledge of his calling. He looked like a sly old white rat as he slipped about his shop, and his customers included some of the richest and most well-informed collectors in New York. He always had a gold snuff-box, or a wonderful ivory miniature, or a few unset gems in his waistcoat pocket. He was a good judge of old paintings and fine antique jewelry, and Peter argued wisely in thinking that he was not bidding on the Pickwick ladle out of mere idle fancy.

"He knows the story," whispered Peter. "And Ten Eyck'll get a run for his money now, sure enough."

On went the bidding, from twenty-five to thirty and forty dollars. Only Ten Eyck and Bouvier were left now, and they

bid up the ladle by fives till seventy dollars was reached. The whole room was interested, and when Bouvier bid seventy-five, after a long deliberation, Ten Eyck paused in his turn. Saxon was long since on his feet, whipping up the bidding, his keen old eye flashing with the excitement of the first real battle of the sale.

"Seventy-five, seventy-five for the ladle," he said. His sing-song was dropped, now, and his glance flitted over the room while he kept a sharp watch of Ten Eyck. "Eighty, do I get it? Only seventy-five dollars for this historic piece?" He knew it must be something historical, by the bidding, and he no longer talked about St. George. "Seventy-five dollars, once—seventy-five dollars, twice—ah, eighty!" he cried, as Ten Eyck nodded again sulkily, for he particularly disliked being forced to pay a big price for anything he wanted. "Eightyeightyeightyeightyeighty!" rattled Saxon with incredible swiftness. "Five, do you say, Mr. B.? Oh, don't lose it for a trifle like that—well, eighty dollars, eighty dollars, e-i-g-h-t-y d-o-l-l-a-r-s," he drawled as slowly now as he had been swift before. "We can't delay, even over this interesting lot—eighty dollars, once! twice!—and sold to Mr. T. E. for eighty dollars."

Peter and Edith rose in the rustle that marked the end of the duel, and while Saxon, once more settled back in his chair, rubbing his skull-cap, was saying, "And now it's the solid mahogany four-poster, ladies, carved by Michael Angelo, I guess," they fared soberly homeward.

"And to think that I didn't know enough to buy that thing when I saw it years ago!" blurted out Peter from the depths of his woe.

"Well, but maybe it isn't worth so much, ventured his wife consolingly. "But I didn't know Mr. Ten Eyck was such a connoisseur in old silver as to know about the Pickwick ladles," she mused.

"Maybe he only bid because he didn't want Bouvier to get it away from him," suggested Peter. "I've known him to go crazy, before, at an auction."

Peter's birthday came and went, and the pipe-rack stood proudly on the side-table, dignified testimony to the fact that Mr. Ten Eyck didn't get *all* the bargains, as Edith said. Peter filled the rack with slender-stemmed clay pipes, and smoked them conscientiously, but every now and then he

returned to the brier which was his particular solace. And if he preferred it to the clays of his remote fatherland, he didn't say so.

Peter seldom found much time to spend in the rooms of the St. Nicholas Society, but he usually attended its annual dinner, in virtue of his heritage of Dutchmanhood. So it came that a few weeks later he was seated beside Ten Eyck at that annual festivity, and in their talk they came around to the subject of the recent auction sale.

"Well, I saw that you captured the Pickwick ladle," said Peter with a smile of resignation.

"What do you call it—the Pickwick ladle?" returned his neighbor. "Oh, do you know anything about that spoon? I don't, and I believe I got stuck pretty badly on it. Is it a very old thing?"

Peter felt himself in a tight corner. Ten Eyck clearly knew nothing about the value of the piece, and Peter was under no obligation to tell him, yet he couldn't lie about it. So he temporized, naturally.

"I'm sure I don't know how old it is," he answered. "But I thought you valued it pretty highly, from the price you paid for it."

"Oh, didn't I get soaked!" returned Ten Eyck, in the vernacular of the auction-room. "But I saw that old robber Bouvier was after it, and I thought it must be a good thing if he wanted it. But what about the Pickwick part of it? What does that mean?"

"Why," said Peter carefully, "I think the little figure on the handle is a statuette of Mr. Pickwick."

"Who was he, anyhow?" asked Ten Eyck quite frankly. "I never can remember."

Peter looked to see if the man were joking, but his face was that of a contented child. So Peter answered:

"Why, he was the leading character in Charles Dickens's famous book, the 'Pickwick Papers.' It was very popular fifty or sixty years ago."

"Never read it myself," returned Ten Eyck placidly. "But I suppose this is or of the souvenirs they got out—eh? Something like the 'Trilby' craze, maybe read that book, but I didn't think much of it. Very improbable sort of story, and no plot at all, that I could see. But I don't find many books that interest me—I don't read many, anyhow."

Here was a howling waste of ignorance, indeed. Peter decided it was not for him

to make a garden of it. But Ten Eyck went on:

"I suppose that thing is solid silver; it's hall-marked all over the bottom. Can you read 'em?"

"No," said Peter, "I never knew very much about hall-marks. But I'll tell you what to do," he added, as an idea struck him. "You take it up to Burlington Norfolk, and he can tell you. He's the son of the famous old jeweller and silversmith, Norfolk & Co., you know, and he has just published a book on 'Old English Silver.' That's your best play. He can tell you just how old it is by the mark."

Ten Eyck assented, and Peter went home that night with a sense of having done his full duty by his neighbor. If Ten Eyck should learn from Norfolk about the presentation set of ladles, and the mark should correspond with that year, then Ten Eyck would find out what he had got, and why Bouvier wanted it. But Peter felt he couldn't have said less, and he had no wish to tell him more.

When Ten Eyck went into the fine, old-fashioned shop of Norfolk & Co. the next day, he found that Mr. Burlington Norfolk was out. But the senior partner, Mr. Norfolk, was in, the salesman told him. Ten Eyck thought he would probably do just as well, or better; the older man's memory would run further back. So he displayed his ladle to Mr. Norfolk and asked him if it was a very rare piece of silver.

The old gentleman looked it over. "Oh, no," he said promptly. "I've seen wholesets of these things in the silversmiths' windows in St. Martin's Lane, twenty or thirty years ago. It's a nice bit of silver," he went on, "but modern—oh, quite modern."

"Can you read the date?" asked Ten Eyck, not greatly disappointed. "How do you tell?"

The old man studied the little mark through his glass. "Yes, it's just what I thought," he answered. "1870 is the year. I hope you didn't pay too much for it."

"I paid altogether too much, I think," said Ten Eyck with growing disgust; and thanking Mr. Norfolk briefly, he left the shop. Now that he had heard definitely that the ladle was merely "a nice bit of modern silver" he was more and more chagrined at his folly in following Bouvier's lead. But what had been the old dealer's

idea in bidding so high for it? Ten Eyck thought for a moment of offering it to Bouvier, for he was not at all above "hedging" his speculations, but he dismissed the idea instantly because he knew the ways of dealers well enough to be sure that whatever Bouvier might have been willing to pay for the ladle at the auction, he would rather die by torture than pay more than a trifle for it if it were offered to him by the person who had bid higher, especially if that person were not a dealer, but a "private gentleman," in the lingo of the trade. But it was futile, he knew, to speculate on Bouvier's motive in wanting the ladle; he might have had a commission from somebody to buy it for him; the intricacies of the business are too great to be guessed at. So Ten Eyck lighted a cigar and dismissed the ladle from his mind as one more bad job.

But the subject recurred to him a few days later, as he saw the ladle lying on his table, and he thought of Peter Wyckoff and his fancy for it. He remembered that Peter had advised him to consult Burlington Norfolk about it, and that he had not seen Peter since. So he made his leisurely way to the Wyckoffs' that evening, and found them both at home.

"So the old man put an end to any hopes I might have had about the thing," he said at the end of his recital, "and I know I just got stuck good and hard, once more. Said he'd seen cases full of 'em in the jewellers' windows in London," he added. "And I was led right up by the nose and paid eighty dollars for that one. I think I'll get a case made for it, it's so precious."

Peter laughed. "Oh, never mind," he said soothingly, "you got it away from old Bouvier, anyhow. Try a pipe, won't you, and burn care." He walked to the side-table and brought over the birth-day pipe-rack into the soft radiance of the reading-lamp.

Ten Eyck opened his eyes wide. "Oh, so it was *you* who got that pipe-rack!" he exclaimed, and then to Edith: "I beg your pardon, Mrs. Wyckoff, but that pipe-stand is of interest to me. Old Amstel wrote me about it, but I didn't go in there for a week or so, and when I did, I found it gone. I know it's the same one, from Amstel's description. May I look at it? It's very pretty, and Amstel said it was a scarce kind of thing."

"Yes, Mr. Amstel told me he had not seen one before in a long time, and didn't

believe there was another in New York," said Edith demurely. "I happened to see it, and got it for Mr. Wyckoff's birthday."

"Gracious!" exclaimed the visitor, as he drew his fingers along the slender shaft that supported the centre of the quaint little rack, and tapped the ormolu ornament at the top. "I hope you won't think me rude, but I wish I had got in at Amstel's ahead of you, Mrs. Wyckoff. I'm afraid your husband wouldn't have had such a fine birthday gift. I haven't seen anything in years that I want so much as that!"

Edith's eyes met Peter's, and if they both laughed Ten Eyck didn't see it. But Mr. Ten Eyck, being a gentleman not exactly placid under disappointment, persisted with the effrontery of a spoiled child.

"If ever you want to sell that pipe-rack, Wyckoff," he said, "I wish you'd let me know. But, of course, you won't sell it—your birthday gift—but maybe you'd swap it for something," he went on, with a kindling imagination. "How'd you like to swap it for my valuable Pickwick ladle? You were bidding on that at the auction. Come, now, don't you want to get an eighty-dollar ladle at a bargain?"

The two Wyckoffs looked at each other in genuine surprise, and Edith made a swift and almost imperceptible motion of assent. But Peter demurred:

"Oh, how can I swap off something Mrs. Wyckoff gave me? Besides, don't you think I like it myself? Why, it's unique, that pipe-rack!" Thus Peter, but meanwhile his left hand was gently caressing the bowl of his old brier pipe, snugly hidden in his pocket.

"No, I suppose you oughtn't to trade away tokens of love and affection for old spoons," chaffed Ten Eyck, "but still, if Mrs. Wyckoff should agree to it, wouldn't you? Think how fine Mr. Pickwick would look on the table when you have a dinner!"

Peter caught Edith's eye again, and the little gesture of assent, slight as a drawn eyebrow, was repeated.

"Why, Mr. Ten Eyck!" she said. "I didn't know you cared so much for the pipe-stand."

"Never saw it till to-night," he answered, "but I know what I want when I see it. And I'm sure about this. What do you say, Mrs. Wyckoff?"

"Why, it's just as Mr. Wyckoff thinks," she replied. "I like the ladle very much,

and if he is willing to exchange the pipe-rack for it, I shall be entirely satisfied."

Ten Eyck's eager glance turned to Peter. "Well, what do you say?" he pressed.

"Oh, I'll go you," said Peter. "I'll send the rack up to-morrow and you can send down the ladle."

"I'll take it with me!" cried the delighted Ten Eyck, and take it he did, a little later, leaving the Wyckoffs to look at each other and laugh.

"But it isn't the original," said Peter.

"No," said his wife, "and if it had been we could hardly have traded the pipe-rack for it. But it's a beautiful piece of silver, and I'm perfectly delighted to have Mr. Pickwick living with us, aren't you?"

"Of course," said Peter, "and he could never have felt at home with Ten Eyck. Just think of a man who never read the 'Pickwick Papers.' What great empty holes there must be in his background! What a life to lead! But we've got it, and you really gave it to me, dear, for you nodded when Ten Eyck proposed the trade."

The next evening the ladle came, elaborately cased in an old Persian box, "with Mr. Ten Eyck's compliments to Mrs. Wyckoff," and Peter and Edith sat up till very late admiring the old spoon and puzzling over the hall-marks. They made a rubbing from the date letter and compared it with the old rubbing that Peter had made years ago from the ladle in the bric-a-brac shop in Union Square, but the strange thing was that they could not make them look alike.

"I suppose the old rubbing must have got blurred," said Peter finally, as they enshrined Mr. Pickwick in the most conspicuous place in their cabinet, and went to bed.

The following day, while Peter was grinding in his mill, Edith sat with Mr. Pickwick in her lap (*pace* Mrs. Bardell!) and mused upon the series of circumstances which had brought him into the Wyckoff family. Suddenly it occurred to her that Ten Eyck had not seen Mr. P. lington Norfolk, the expert, when he was to make inquiries. She put Mr. Pickwick in her muff, and invaded Norfolk & Co.

She found Mr. Burlington Norfolk, a grave young gentleman with a penetrating eye and a catholic interest in all old English silver. She introduced herself to him, recounted the story of the presentation set

of ladles, of which Mr. Norfolk had heard, and the sale by the executors of Charles Dickens, Jr., of the three ladles to Sir Baines Carew; she explained how this ladle had come into her possession, and told how Peter had let the ladle slip through his fingers years ago, and how the senior partner of Norfolk & Co. had said this ladle was made in 1870. Mr. Burlington Norfolk took the ladle and retired into his private office, with the air of the high priest going in to stand before the ark. From her chair she could see him examine it very carefully with his glass, and consult two big books which seemed to be full of cabalistic characters. He returned to her with a smile on his face.

"It is not often that I venture to disagree with my father, madam," he said, "but in this case I think he has made a mistake. Now, of course we have no proof whatever that Dickens the elder ever had this ladle in his hands, but however that may be, this bit of silver was made in 1837."

Edith drew a long breath. "Why—" she faltered, "that would bring it back to—"

"To just about the time of the original presentation set," said Mr. Norfolk, sympathizing with her dawning rapture. "Of course, as I say, we have no absolute proof that this is the original Pickwick ladle, but it looks very much like it!"

Edith poured out her tale to Peter that evening, and almost wept as she finished. "But of course, if it is the original ladle, we must give it back to Mr. Ten Eyck, because he was misinformed as to its age, but oh, just to think of a man owning it who never heard of Mr. Pickwick! Isn't it awful!"

Peter assented gravely. "We couldn't keep it, really, for it would be very valuable, and he traded off what he thought was an 1870 spoon. But we don't know, for sure, yet," he went on. "I'll write to-night to Sir Baines Carew, who has got the three ladles of the original set, and ask him to tell me what year of manufacture their hallmarks show, and also, if he knows of the present whereabouts of the original Pickwick ladle. And I've got another string to pull," he said. "I'll write to Tom Allison, our London correspondent, and get him to shell out some facts from some of those London dealers. He knows a lot of 'em—he's always junk-hunting, the same as I am."

So Peter sat down and wrote his two letters, and for the next month the Wyckoff family exercised the virtue of patience in waiting.

Allison's answer came first. "I've had quite a hunt to run down your ladle story," he wrote, "but I believe I've got the rights of it, at last. I went to an old Abraham who knows more about old silver and old Wedgwood than any other human being in the world—a nice old boy he is, and my visits to his shop cost me about ten pounds in things I bought, before I got away. But this is the ladle business: A set of six silver punch ladles was presented to Charles Dickens by his publishers, Messrs. Chapman & Hall, on the completion of 'Pickwick.' They were modelled by a man named Woodington, and on the handle of each ladle was represented a Pickwick character. The figures were silver gilt. After Charles Dickens's death, these ladles were sold by Messrs. Christie Manson & Woods, July 9, 1870. The ladle with the 'Pickwick' handle was bought by Mr. A. Halliday; those with 'Sam Weller' and 'Old Weller' by Messrs. T. Agnew & Son; and the other three, which were 'Jingle,' 'Winkle,' and the Fat Boy,' were bought by Charles Dickens, Jr. There was a great Dickens craze, just then, of course, and so the Agnews had the ladles reproduced. They must have had the consent of the family to do this; but anyhow, several sets of them were made."

"Ah," said Edith, finding her breath again, "that's what old Mr. Norfolk meant when he said he had seen the London shop-windows full of them, years ago."

"But even these reproductions are very scarce, now, and highly prized by collectors," continued Peter, from Allison's letter. "At the death of the younger Dickens, his three ladles were sold at auction and purchased by Sir Baines Carew, who has a great collection of all sorts of antiquities at Carew Court. And that is all I have been able to discover on the subject." "That agrees with the paragraph we saw in the *Cabinet*," cried Edith, "but there is no news of the original 'Pickwick' ladle, nor the two 'Wellers,' since 1870."

"Maybe Sir Baines will have something to tell us," suggested Peter. "Anyhow, we've got something to start on. 'Pickwick' was sold in 1870 to Mr. A. Halliday, whoever he was. Wonder if he was a dealer

like the Agnews? Maybe; dealers will pay the biggest price for things, sometimes."

The letter from Sir Baines Carew came shortly afterward. It was extremely courteous, but contained little which they did not know already. "I very much fear," wrote the baronet, "that I can give you no satisfactory information respecting your 'Mr. Pickwick' toddy ladle. All that I understood at the time about these ladles was that after the death of Charles Dickens, Senr., the whole presentation set of six ladles was sold at public auction. Three of them were bought by persons unknown to me, and the three I now have became the property of my friend, the late Mr. Charles Dickens, Junr. At his death, the three ladles now in my possession were bought by me at the sale of his effects. I have consulted Mr. Charles Dickens, Junr.'s solicitor, who is a personal friend of mine, and he confirms this account. But he cannot tell me anything concerning the other three ladles, though a rumour did reach me that the 'Mr. Pickwick' ladle had been sold by a dealer to a collector in the north of England for ninety guineas."

Peter whistled. "Ninety guineas!" he repeated, "that's about \$450. Ten Eyck would think his ladle was cheap at eighty dollars after all, wouldn't he?"

"But the date of Sir Baines's three ladles, Peter," broke in Edith. "That's the great point. What is the year they were made?"

"I find the date marked on the bottom of my three ladles to be 1837," read Peter from the baronet's letter.

Edith fell back in her chair. "O, Peter, it's too bad, too bad!" she cried. "And Mr. Ten Eyck thought Pickwick was a new kind of breakfast food!"

"The preface to the original edition of 'Pickwick' is dated 1837," said Peter. "This looks as if we had the original ladle, sure as a gun, and yet we've got to throw it away on that philistine. It is a blessed shame, I'll admit. But come, Edith, let's take these two letters up to Mr. Norfolk, and get the verdict of the supreme court on our case," he said; and so they presently laid all the facts before the expert, with the ladle and the letters as exhibits *a*, *b*, and *c*.

Young Mr. Norfolk read the letters twice, carefully, and then extended his hand to Peter. "I must congratulate you on having drawn the grand prize," he said. "I'll take

one more look at this little old gentleman, and then give you a memorandum, if you like, of its date and general authenticity."

Peter and Edith, the fortunate winners of the grand prize, sat like two stony statues of grief, while Mr. Burlington Norfolk withdrew into his inner office. He stayed for ten minutes, and Edith confessed to Peter afterward that she was ready to scream from sheer nervousness, when the expert reappeared with the most curious expression of sheepishness on his face.

"Mr. and Mrs. Wyckoff," he began, and then stopped, coughed, and extended his hands in frank appeal for mercy. "I have to confess to you that I made a mistake the other day, and that my father was right about the date of this ladle, and I was wrong. It was made in 1870, and I was trying to read the date letter upside down. I am very much mortified. I cannot imagine how I made such a blunder."

To the amazement of the chagrined expert, his two visitors sprang to their feet, their faces radiant with happy smiles. Mr. Norfolk wondered if they had suddenly gone insane, and almost tripped backward over a little carved Italian cabinet masking a steel safe which contained some half a million dollars' worth of diamonds.

"Then it isn't the original Pickwick ladle, after all?" they cried in joyful chorus.

"Why, no; it is undoubtedly one of Agnew's reproductions," replied Mr. Norfolk. "But you don't seem to mind—didn't you want to get the original?"

"Oh, Peter, now we can keep Mr. Pickwick ourselves!" sang Edith, her eyes overflowing with delight. She turned to Mr. Norfolk with a beautiful blush. "Don't think me crazy, will you, please? But now we sha'n't have to give up our dear old Pickwick to that Mr. Ten Eyck, who didn't know who he was, and only wanted him if he was unique," she explained. "Of course, we couldn't have kept so valuable piece as the original ladle, but this one's our own now. I'm so glad, Mr. Norfolk."

That connoisseur in rarities stood perplexed, for a moment, and then perceived the situation.

"Oh, I'm greatly relieved," he said, laughing. "I was afraid you would never forgive my stupid blunder. But it's all right now, after all. You have a nice bit of silver, and nobody's injured."

"But what *I* want to know," said Peter, as they walked home, "is why my old rubbing doesn't tally at all with the mark on this ladle. It couldn't have been the same one. For that old rubbing shows a different letter from this capital black-letter

P, that stands for 1870. All the ladles made in 1870 would have the same mark, and only the original could be different. And so the question is: *Was* the original Pickwick ladle ever in America, and did I see it; and if so, where is it now?"

TO A RIVER GOD

By Edith Wyatt

THERE is a river flowing,
Fast flowing toward the sea;
Past bluff and levee blowing,
His mantle glances free;
Past pine and corn and cotton-field
His foam-winged sandals flee.

From dock and dune and reedy brake,
Through lock and basin wide,
Long-linked lagoon and terraced lake
Drop down to watch his pride,
And rivers North and rivers South
To speed his coursing ride.

*Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,
Cotton-drift and cane,
Serried lances rippling fleet,
Dappled tides of grain,
Dip beside him where he goes
Flying to the main.*

By full-sown fields and fallow,
By furrows green and buff,
Past bar and rock-bound shallow,
His torrent washes gruff.
By tamarack and mallow,
Past bottom-land and bluff.

From highland and from lowland,
Farm, town, and city see
His foam-winged footsteps going,
His mantle blowing free,
Past dusky mart and black-spined crown,
Fast flowing to the sea.

*Wheat and corn, and corn and wheat,
Cotton-drift and cane,
Serried lances rippling fleet,
Dappled tides of grain,
Dip beside him where he goes
Speeding to the main.*