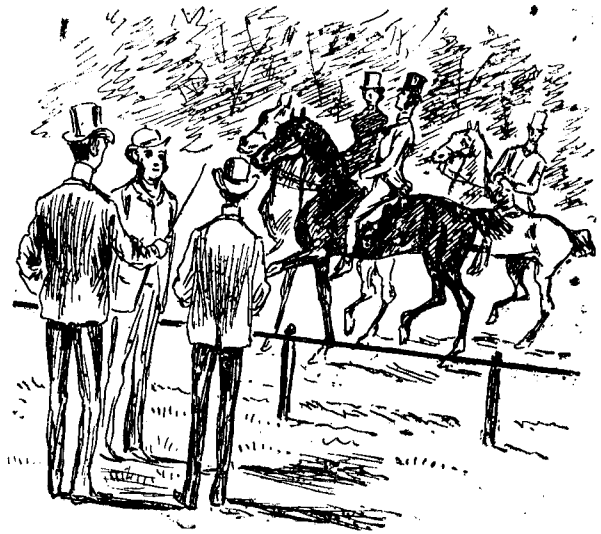


which the old lady never forgot, put the ill tutored rabble to flight, and escorted her in triumph to her home, an old fashioned house standing in its own grounds some hundred paces back from the high-road. This act of gallantry had resulted most favorably for young Vereker, as the old lady who had before been in doubt as to who should have her, by no means contemptible property at her decease, immediately made her will in which Vereker's figured as her sole heir, and such had been his conduct towards her as he grew up into manhood, that she never had occasion to change her mind, and, dying some dozen years afterwards, left all she could not take away with her to her nephew, Vereker. His father was an easy going country gentleman, who, whatever might have been his own hopes and expectations regarding the property of his maiden sister, was only too glad to see his third son so well provided for, as having a numerous family in addition to Vereker, and not discerning any very strongly marked talents or abilities on the part of that young man, he had entertained grave doubts as to what he should do with him. All these doubts, however, had been dispelled at the reading of Miss Rebecca's will, and if he did feel slightly chagrined at not obtaining the property himself, for he had always been on very good terms with his sister, he was at least satisfied that matters had turned out as well as they had done. Vereker, then, on finding himself an independent young man of twenty-three, with a fair education which might have been an excellent one but for his own inherent idleness, for he had been sent to first-rate schools where he had satisfied himself by barely satisfying his instructors, took chambers in London and spent his time in blissful, though not vicious idleness; occasionally taking a run down to the north on a visit to his friends and property. From the fact that his father was a country gentleman and that he himself had lived a great deal in the country, his fellow members of the Junior Pickwick Club (which organization he had joined, at the solicitation of some of his friends who belonged to it, eighteen months before this story opens) had formed a great idea of his sporting proclivities, and he was regarded as the Nimrod of the club, his reputation being by no means diminished by his own accounts of terrific onslaughts on the game on his own and neighbouring "estates," and by the fact that he had a very choice collection of guns of various descriptions in his London chambers, though if the truth must be told, Mr. Vereker Yubbitts' reputation was one of those which are earned no one can tell exactly how, for none of the men of the Junior Pickwick Club had ever seen him fire a single shot; but as the young man rather liked to be looked upon as a sporting character, he would occasionally sacrifice his customary veracity, and more by hints than by direct assertions, lead them to believe that death sure and speedy to all manner of game lurked within the barrels of his Joe Mantons, if he ever felt inclined to take them out of their rack. He was, moreover, regarded as an accurate judge of horseflesh, why or wherefore it would be hard to say, except that he would look knowingly at the horses in the "Row" when strolling in the delectable locality of Hyde Park with one or more of his Junior Pickwickian friends, and would say, pointing to some quadruped passing by, and which for aught the majority of the said Junior Pickwickians were likely to know might have been a zebra or a quagga, "Nice beast, that; fine stepper; there's action for you. I'd like to throw my leg across him for a few minutes," and so on. All of which so impressed his very impressionable companions that Vereker was rather "a knowing hand" and a man who

was "up to a thing or two," all of which, for some occult reason, has a peculiar charm for a great many young men who are *not* "knowing hands" nor "up to a thing or two;" though if the truth must be told, it is very doubtful whether, if Mr. Vereker Yubbitts *had* "thrown his leg over" some of the animals he professed so much to admire, he would not have very speedily repented of his rash action. Be that as it may, Vereker was regarded as



an authority in all matters of "sport," and his opinion was asked on all sorts of sporting questions, and when given, as it invariably was, undoubted.

It was this feature in our friend's character which had caused the worthy President of the Junior Pickwick Club to select him as a representative in the contemplated trip to North America, as it was deemed that his death-dealing gun would be the means of procuring many valuable specimens of the ornithological and zoological inhabitants of that country, the study of which would prove of inestimable value to those gentlemen who made the acquirement of all kinds of scientific knowledge their chief aim in life. If Mr. Vereker Yubbitts ever entertained any doubts in his own mind as to his own qualifications on this head, he certainly never expressed them, but stated his perfect willingness to comply with the wishes of the President and if necessary to start next day, or as soon as he could get his guns thoroughly in order to deal out destruction amongst birds, beasts, and Indians, if necessary, in the vast country on the other side of the Atlantic.

The fourth member upon whom the President's choice had fallen, and who expressed the pleasure it would afford him to do all that lay in his power to further the interests which were so dear to every true Junior Pickwickian, was Mr. Charles Hyperion Crinkle, the poet of the Club. Like the majority of his brother Pickwickians he had no profession, trade or calling, being a young man on whom Fortune had smiled from the first day when he saw the light of heaven. True, his father had been in "trade," but had retired therefrom some years previous to the birth of his son, to whom he had imparted the fact that he, the son, would not be compelled to earn his bread by the sweat of his brow or by the labor of his brain unless he felt impelled to do so by a sense that a man was born to toil. Candor compels the statement that Charles Hyperion never did feel this impulse, and he was perfectly willing to accede to his father's wish and do nothing, that is, nothing which was distasteful to him, and as he discovered soon after leaving school that he had a remark-