

and it swung slowly backwards, revealing a bare and gloomy hall wainscoted with grimy oak and hung with mildewed flock-paper. "*Donnerwetter!* how you smell here!" he commented, having taken in a chestful of the medium that served the inhabitants of the Inn buildings for air. "But I suppose you're used to it!"

"Comparing our atmosphere with that of other London offices, I should be inclined to call us rather fresh than otherwise," said Mr. Chown, who had dropped his latchkey and was groping for it on the dirty floor by the oblong of daylight admitted by the open hall-door. "But I suppose—as some of the gentlemen who rent chambers here are still away on their vacations—the place might seem—to a stranger from the country—a trifle close."

"Stuffy!" corrected the young man, whose expression of disgust was highly uncomplimentary. "Drainy, black-beetly, mousey, dusty, &c., &c." With a tinge of escaped gas and a something else that I——" He sniffed and said, puckering a sagacious nose: "Why, it's gunpowder! The place is chock-full of the fumes of burnt gunpowder. . . . Here! Hallo! What the devil are you trying to do? What do you mean?"

For the other, who had risen to his feet with a reversion to the sallow change of countenance previously observed in him, had caught him by the arm, as his eager foot had touched a dilapidated mat that lay as a snare for the unwary at the foot of the uncarpeted staircase, and with unexpected strength and quickness had swung him to the hall-door, and was endeavouring to push him over the threshold.

"I mean——" Mr. Chown was of middle age and evidently quite unused to wrestling: and as he strove with the shaggy young man upon the threshold of the dingy hall, it was evident that he would very soon give in. "I mean . . ." he panted, ". . . that you . . . can't you be sensible?"