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The Pickwick Papers

Charles Dickens · *1836–1837 · original English text*

The first ray of light which illumines the gloom of Mr. Pickwick's public career opens Dickens's first novel: a club, a stout good man, and a road of coaches, inns, lawsuits, and friends. The hosted text is the Standard Ebooks edition, complete, with the notes gathered at the end.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of goodness can a comic clubman carry through a world of sharpers, courts, and prisons, and who is really saved along the way?

"The first ray of light which illumines the gloom"

The opening of the narrative proper

Pickwick, Winkle, Snodgrass, and Tupman go out to observe the world and are observed by it: Jingle, a breach-of-promise suit, the Fleet, and Sam Weller, who becomes the book's other hero. The hosted English is Standard Ebooks (the catalogue names no Gutenberg number). The narrative opening is exact. Footnotes sit at the end of this file; do not quote them as the tale. A long, generous first novel, comic and finally serious about debt and friendship, for a wide older band. It is complete in this edition.

KEY CHARACTERS

Samuel Pickwick
The stout, good, and sometimes stubborn founder of the club.

Sam Weller
His man, and the book's other hero.

the Pickwickians
Winkle, Snodgrass, and Tupman, whose misadventures fill the road.

Jingle, Mrs. Bardell, and the lawyers
The sharper, the misunderstood landlady, and the court that follows.

A FIRST RAY OF LIGHT

> *"The first ray of light which illumines the gloom"*
>
> The opening of the narrative

Grades 9–12

Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Club, and a First Ray

THE OPENING

The Pickwick Club records a beginning, and the narrative proper opens with the first ray of light on Mr. Pickwick's public career.

- The opening stretch is exact: 'The first ray of light which illumines the gloom.'
- Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C., is already a comic monument and a good man.
- The book will look loose; the friendships are the plot.

> *"The first ray of light which illumines the gloom"*
>
> The opening of the narrative

02

The Open Road

THE EARLY TRAVELS

Coaches, inns, cricket, a lady in a predicament, and Mr. Jingle's tongue. The world is wider and sharper than the club had guessed.

- Keep the travel as comedy with consequences.
- Jingle is funny and a real sharper.
- Sam Weller's entrance is a second beginning.

03

Sam Weller

THE SERVANT WHO BECOMES THE FRIEND

A boots at an inn becomes Mr. Pickwick's man. The book's heart is this loyalty, not only the misadventures.

- Sam is the book's wit and its worldly wisdom.
- Tony Weller and the wider Weller clan matter.
- The comedy of servants and masters here is also a picture of faithfulness.

04

Bardell, and the Fleet

THE LAWSUIT AND THE PRISON

A misunderstanding becomes Bardell v. Pickwick. Pride, principle, and a debtors' prison test the stout good man.

- The law is comic and cruel; teach both.
- The Fleet chapters are the book's serious turn.
- Pickwick's refusal to pay is pride and conscience mixed; the cost falls on more than him.

05

Friends, and a Proper End

THE CLOSE

Marriages, releases, and a last settling of the club's great wanderer. The Standard Ebooks file is complete; notes follow the tale.

- Do not stop in the Fleet; the book ends in restoration.
- Flag the end-notes; quote the novel, not the annotations.
- A long comic novel, Dickens's first, for a wide older band.

Friendship | The Open Road | Comedy and Sharpers | The Law and the Fleet | A Stout Goodness

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is the Standard Ebooks edition of Dickens's original English (1836–1837; the catalogue names no Gutenberg number). Quote this page. The narrative opening is "The first ray of light which illumines the gloom." Footnotes are gathered at the end of this file; do not quote them as the novel.
2. The book is complete in this edition (a long picaresque, including Bardell v. Pickwick and the Fleet). It is comic and finally serious about debt and loyalty, for a wide older band.
3. This is Dickens's first novel, not a later one already mapped. Keep the plots distinct.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Standard Ebooks (English original), the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-pickwick-papers/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.