Excerpt from
MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT
By Charles Dickens

"He walked into the dining-room and slipped into a chair next the colonel, which that gentleman (by this time nearly through his dinner), had turned down in reserve for him with its back against the table.

"It was a numerous company, eighteen or twenty perhaps. Of these some five or six were ladies who sat wedged together in a little phalanx by themselves. All the knives and forks were working away at a rate that was quite alarming; very few words were spoken; and everybody seemed to eat his utmost, as if a famine were expected to set in before breakfast time to-morrow morning, and it had become high time to assert the first law of nature. The poultry, which may perhaps be considered to have formed the staple of the entertainment--for there was a turkey at the top, a pair of ducks at the bottom, and two fowls in the middle--disappeared as rapidly as if every bird had had the use of its wings. The oysters, stewed and pickled, leaped from their capacious reservoirs, and slid by scores into the mouths of the assembly. The sharpest pickles vanished, whole cucumbers at once, like sugar-plumbs, and no man winked his eye. Great heaps of indigestible matter melted away as ice before the sun. Even dyspeptic individuals bolted their food in wedges, feeding not themselves but broods of nightmares, who were continually standing at livery with them. Spare men, with lank and rigid cheeks, came out unsatisfied from the destruction of heavy dishes, and glared with watchful eyes upon the pastry. What Mrs. Pawkins felt each day at dinner-time is hidden from all human knowledge. But she had one comfort. It was very soon over."