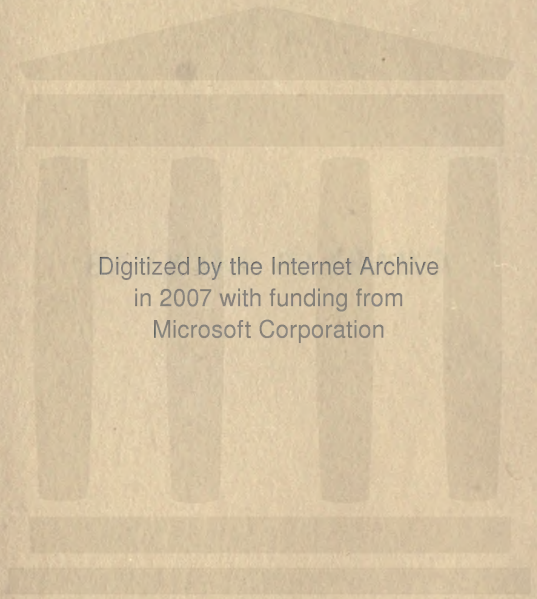
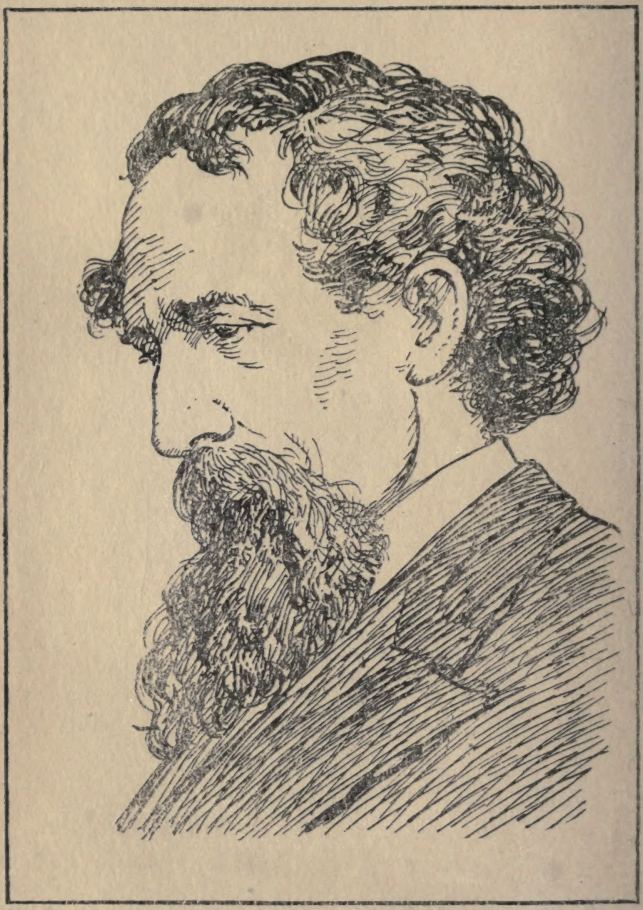
CHARLES DICKENS





CHARLES DICKENS

BY

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CHARLES DICKENS.

I.

THE EXCUSE.

"DICKENS," Mr. G. K. Chesterton has written, "is as individual as the sea and as English as Nelson;" and I can find no better excuse than this for writing another—and a very little—book about him. Dickens is to me a writer apart. I have been reading and re-reading his novels since I was six. I know his characters as I hardly know any of the men and women I have met in the flesh. Dickens is the novelist of the lettered and of the unlettered. The man at the street corner who has hardly heard of Thackeray knows all about Sam Weller and Mrs. Gamp. This is the glory of Dickens. In the pages that follow I have retold, briefly and simply, the events of his life. I have summarised his "cheery, gladsome message," and I have endeavoured to suggest the particular value and significance of each of his principal books. A writer so universal inevitably appeals to different men in different manners. Of

all the books I have read on Dickens, I find myself in most complete agreement with Mr. Chesterton's characteristic monograph. I have quoted frequently from his pages, and I have to acknowledge my indebtedness for many suggestive annotations that have helped to fuller understanding.

II.

BIOGRAPHY.

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Landport, outside Portsmouth, on the 7th of February 1812. He was the eldest son and the second child of John Dickens, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office and the original of Mr. Micawber, his mother appearing in his novels as Mrs. Nickleby. The family a year or two after his birth moved to London, and when Dickens was between four and five years old his father was given an appointment in Chatham Dockyard, and he and his family lived at Chatham until the novelist was nine. In after years he recalled himself as "a very small and not over particularly taken care of boy." He was too sickly to be much good at games, and long before he was in his teens he was a prodigious reader. John Forster says that the account of the early reading of David Copperfield is literally auto-biographical, and that Charles Dickens' boy's imagination was quickened by *Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Humphrey Clinker*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote*, *Gil Blas*, *Robinson Crusoe*,

and *The Arabian Nights*. His reading enthused him with a desire to write, and when he was about eight he composed a tragedy called *Miznar, the Sultan of India*, which was acted by his brothers and sisters. Dickens always loved the theatre and he always had a tendency to "show off," and it is not surprising to know that as a small child he used to sing comic songs at all the family parties.

When he was nine his father was moved to Somerset House, and the family went to live in a small mean house with a small mean back-garden in Bayham Street, Camden Town. John Dickens had become involved in his Micawberesque money entanglements, and there was a great contrast between the comparative comfort of the life at Chatham and the unqualified poverty in Camden Town. The elder Dickens was kindly, affectionate, and conscientious, but he was essentially what is called "easy-going," and, as his son wrote, "he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him in that regard whatever. So I degenerated into cleaning his boots of a morning and my own; and making myself useful in the work of the little house; and looking after my younger brothers and sisters (we were now six in all); and going on such poor errands as arose out of our poor way of living." As a matter of fact it was at Bayham Street, Camden Town, with a washerwoman next door and a Bow Street officer opposite, that Charles

Dickens began his essential education. He began to learn the humour and the dignity that belong to the lives of the simple and the poor. He began the journey that was to end in Charles Dickens, the author of *The Pickwick Papers*, of *David Copperfield*, and of *Bleak House*. The circumstances of the family grew worse and worse. "I know," wrote Dickens, "we got on very badly with the butcher and baker, that very often we had not too much for dinner, and that at last my father was arrested." John Dickens declared that the sun had set for him for ever, and was carried off to the Marshalsea—perhaps the most providential arrest in the whole history of the world, for his son's boyish experiences of the horrors and the stupidity of the debtors' prison brought fruit years afterwards in *Pickwick* and *Little Dorrit*, and directly led to the abolition of the whole cruel absurd system of imprisonment for debt.

Frequent visits to the pawnbroker, and the gradual selling up of the home until there was nothing left "except a few chairs, a kitchen table, and some beds," led to Charles Dickens beginning life as a money earner. He was just ten years old, and the good offices of a relative secured him an engagement at Warren's Blacking Manufactory in Hungerford Market at a salary of six shillings a week. The horror of this part of his life never left him, and it is fully described in *David Copperfield*. No grown man ever remembered the tragedies of his childhood so vividly and so naturally as Dickens remembered them. No

grown man ever sympathised with a child's sorrow so entirely, and this splendid power was a heritage from the blacking factory. In a fragment of autobiography quoted by Forster and largely used in *David Copperfield*, Dickens said :

"It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London, no one had compassion on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt, bodily and mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at any common school. Our friends, I take it, were tired out. No one made any sign. My father and mother were quite satisfied ; they could hardly have been more so if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a Grammar School and going to Cambridge. . . .

"The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless, of the shame I felt in my position, of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day after day what I had learned and thought and delighted in and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me never to be brought back any more, cannot be written."

Soon after he went to the blacking factory the whole family moved into the Marshalsea, and Dickens was sent to lodge in Little College Street, Camden Town, with "a reduced old lady," the original of Mrs. Pipkin in *Dombey and Son*. His father paid his lodging, but otherwise he was left entirely on his own resources—"no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolation, no support from anyone that I can call to mind, so help me God ! " And the boy

was just ten. It is wonderful indeed that he should have grown into the supreme laughter-maker of the after years; and yet, perhaps, as I shall try to show, it was not so wonderful, for miracles do happen and miracles always happen according to natural law—a fact of importance of which both scientists and theologians often appear strangely ignorant.

A legacy of some hundred pounds was left to the elder Dickens. He took his release from the Marshalsea, and soon afterwards he quarrelled with his blacking-manufacturer relative, and Charles was happily discharged. He was sent to a school in the Hampstead Road called the Wellington House Academy, and there he stayed until he was fourteen. Some of the characteristics of the school were used afterwards in the description of Salem House in *David Copperfield*. On leaving school his father obtained for him an engagement in the office of Mr. Edward Blackmore, a solicitor in Gray's Inn, and there he acquired that intimate knowledge of the futility and chicanery of the law which he was to use with such splendid effect in *The Pickwick Papers*, *Bleak House*, and *Great Expectations*.

John Dickens—he was a man of ability and at times of resource—had become a parliamentary reporter on the staff of *The Morning Herald*, and his son decided to learn shorthand as the first step in his real career. He worked almost viciously. "Whatever I have tried to do in life," he once said, "I have tried with all my heart to do well." To teach oneself short-

hand from a text-book is not an easy task. "The changes that were rung upon dots which in such a position meant such a thing, and in such another position something else entirely different; the wonderful vagaries that were played by circles; the unaccountable consequences that resulted from mast-like flies' legs; the tremendous effects of a curve in the wrong place, not only troubled my waking hours, but reappeared before me in my sleep."

He worked as a shorthand writer for two years in an office in Doctors' Commons, and when he was nineteen he entered the House of Commons gallery as one of the representatives of a paper called *The True Sun*. It is one of the characteristics of Charles Dickens' career that despite the hardships of his youth, and his almost entire lack of influential friends, success came to him quickly and easily. He had a story published in *The Old Monthly Magazine* when he was twenty-one. He had constant newspaper work from the time he was nineteen, and this work gave him all kinds of useful knowledge and experience. He does not appear to have had any trouble in getting his writings accepted and published, and in February 1835 the signature "Boz"—the nickname of one of his brothers—first appeared in *The Monthly Magazine*, and his career as a novelist may be said to have begun.

In the latter part of this book I have dealt with each of his novels in their order, and here it is only necessary briefly to summarise the facts of their

publication. In 1836 he collected the *Sketches by Boz*, and sold the copyright for £150, and on the 31st of March of the same year Messrs. Chapman & Hall began the publication in shilling numbers of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*. The same year saw the end of his career as a parliamentary reporter and the production at the St. James's Theatre of a farce of his called *Strange Gentlemen* and an opera *Village Coquettes*, for which he wrote the dialogue and the words of the songs.

Charles Dickens married Miss Catherine Hogarth in the Pickwick year, and he must have been an extremely attractive and impressive-looking young man. Forster when he first saw him was struck by "the quickness, keenness, and practical power, the eager, restless, energetic outlook on each several feature that seemed to tell so little of a student or writer of books and so much of a man of action." Mrs. Carlyle said of his face "that it was as if made of steel," and Leigh Hunt wrote, "It has the life and soul in it of fifty human beings."

No man could possibly have anticipated the enormous popularity achieved by Dickens by his very first book, and unfortunately for him, before that popularity was assured he had entered into agreements which overloaded him with work. While the early numbers of *Pickwick* were appearing, and before Sam Weller had been created, Dickens had agreed with Mr. Bentley to edit a monthly magazine and to write three stories, on terms good enough for a

beginner, but altogether inadequate for the author of *Pickwick*. In the latter part of 1836 he was writing at the same time the first half of *Oliver Twist* and the last half of *Pickwick*. In the years 1837 and 1838 he edited a life of the famous clown Grimaldi, finished *Oliver Twist*, and began *Nicholas Nickleby*, which kept him busy almost to the end of 1839.

He had lived since his marriage in Doughty Street, and although he was still only twenty-seven years old he had become a prominent figure in a literary and artistic society which included Thackeray, Macready, Talfourd, Maclise, Landseer, and Douglas Jerrold. In 1840 he began the publication of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, the idea of which was a weekly threepenny publication based on the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, only far more popular, and in which one of his stories should appear in regular instalments. This story was *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and its success was even greater than that of *Pickwick*. Quite early in his writing life Dickens began his frequent visits to Broadstairs, and in 1840 he moved from Doughty Street to Devonshire Terrace. This year was the year of *Barnaby Rudge*, which he had begun during the progress of *Oliver Twist*, but had put aside for some months.

In January 1842, Dickens made his first visit to America. I have dealt at some length with his impressions in the chapter on *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is very difficult, I think, to label him with any political tag, but he was certainly essentially and emphatically

an anti-Tory, and he was without question prepared to like America and the Americans. And despite the fact that he detested some of the individuals he met when he landed, particularly "one man in very dirty gaiters and with very protruding upper teeth, who said to all comers after him, 'So you've been introduced to our friend Dickens,'" he was extremely touched by his reception. Dickens loved popularity, but his popularity in the United States was a little too insistent:

"If I turn into the street I am followed by a multitude. If I stay at home the house becomes with callers like a fair. If I visit a public institution with only one friend, the directors come down incontinently, waylay me in the yard, and address me in a long speech. I go to a party in the evening, and am so enclosed and hemmed about by people, stand where I will, that I am exhausted for want of air. I dine out, and have to talk about everything to everybody. I go to church for quiet, and there is a violent rush to the neighbourhood of the pew I sit in, and a clergyman preaches at me. I take my seat in a railroad car, and the very conductor won't leave me alone. I get out at a station, and can't drink a glass of water without having a hundred people looking down my throat when I open my mouth to swallow."

He was home again in 1842, and in the months after his return he wrote his *American Notes*, any detailed description of which has been omitted from this book for want of space and because its "line" is almost exactly similar to that of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the first number of which appeared in January 1843. *Martin Chuzzlewit* was a comparative failure, and the

highest sale of any of the numbers was 23,000 as compared with the 50,000 numbers of *Pickwick* and the 60,000 of *The Old Curiosity Shop;* but since Dickens' death it has become the third most popular of all his novels, following *Pickwick* and *David Copperfield. The Christmas Carol* appeared a few days before the Christmas of this year, and was an immediate and tremendous success. A few months later Dickens went for a long holiday in Italy, not returning to England until June 1845, when he at once began working on his scheme for a daily newspaper—he was wedded to the idea of fathering periodicals—and the first number of *The Daily News* appeared under his editorship on the 21st of January 1846. The work was altogether too much for him, and he resigned the position a fortnight afterwards, ceasing to have any connection with the paper after four months, and starting for the Continent again to forget a mistake and to get back again into the vein for writing another novel. His stay in Lausanne and Geneva was followed by three months in Paris. In 1847 he lived a great deal at Brighton and Broadstairs, writing *Dombey and Son. The Haunted Man* was written in 1848, *The Chimes* having been completed in Italy three years before. Dickens spent much of 1849 and 1850 in Broadstairs and Bonchurch, Isle of Wight, with *David Copperfield.* He loathed Bonchurch, and it made him dull and ill. In one of his letters to Forster he says : " Naples is hot and dirty, New York feverish, Washington bilious, Genoa ex-

citing, Paris rainy, but Bonchurch smashing. I am quite convinced that I should die here in a year."

In 1850 he started *Household Words*. The original idea was fantastic and poetical—a weekly journal dominated by a certain Shadow, "a cheerful, useful, and always welcome Shadow," who should express his opinion of all manner of things week after week. But the practical Forster vetoed the Shadow, and *Household Words* with more conventional ambitions first appeared on the 30th of March. The assistant editor was W. G. Wills, and its first serial was written by Mrs. Gaskell.

Dickens left the house in Devonshire Terrace in 1851. Whilst living there his fame had become world-wide, and he had gathered round him a small but desirable circle of genuine friends. Among them were the Macreadys, Mark Lemon, Tenniel, Milner Gibson, Lord Lovelace, John Delane, the Landseers, the Carlyles, Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, Douglas Jerrold, Tennyson, Tom Taylor, the Kembles, Frith, Mazzini, Sims Reeves, Mrs. Keeley, George Henry Lewes, and some others. At this time he was very busy as an amateur actor, playing in his own house and in halls in various parts of the country on behalf of the funds of the Guild of Literature or for some other worthy cause. There is no question that he had very great stage ability, used to the full years afterwards when he gave his public readings. In 1853 he went again to Switzerland and Italy. Although Dickens travelled on the Continent a great deal, as

Mr. Chesterton suggests, he always remained entirely uncosmopolitan, and entirely an Englishman, and it is a highly suggestive and important fact that he should have written so thoroughly an English book as *The Chimes* in Genoa. Dickens had no vulgar racial prejudices. He had none of the detestable John Bull arrogance that has made the Englishman abroad so generally disliked. He simply lacked the faculty to perceive the essentials of any people but his own. He liked Italy and he loved the poor Frenchman, but like the hero of Sir William Gilbert's song he always remained an Englishman.

Bleak House was begun in 1851 and finished at Boulogne in 1853. *Hard Times* was begun in 1853 and finished also at Boulogne in 1854. Dickens was very seriously overworking at this time editing *Household Words*, writing *Bleak House* and the quite unnecessary *Child's History of England* simultaneously. He was living in a turmoil, working to save his soul, trying to put out of his mind the family unhappiness which was beginning to be insupportable. He began *Little Dorrit* in 1855, and he finished the story during his stay in Paris in 1856 to 1857. In 1856 he was in Doncaster at the time of the St. Leger, and it is not without interest that this great anti-Puritanic Englishman should have found horse-racing entirely detestable. "I vow to God," he wrote, "that I can see nothing in it but cruelty, covetousness, calculation, insensibility, and low wickedness." In 1856 he bought the house at Gadshill, outside Chatham, which

was his home during the rest of his life and where he eventually died.

Dickens' marriage with Catherine Hogarth was never, I imagine, entirely satisfactory, and it eventually became impossible. He was a man who, because he was so English, was intensely domestic, earnestly yearning for all that home means to an Englishman. But he was a man who, because he was an artist to whom success and unbounded popularity had come when he was very young, was nervous, jumpy, sensitive, capricious, just the sort of man impossible as a husband to any woman who lacked the genius for loving and for understanding. John Forster bluntly regards Dickens' parting from his wife as a serious blot on his career. Mr. Chesterton, who is also nothing if not domestic, also rates him severely, and evidently regards the parting as largely his fault; but surely, with the very full knowledge that we have of Dickens and the partial and fairly definite knowledge that we have of Mrs. Dickens, their hopeless incompatibility is obvious, and it is evident that if they had gone on living together the man's life would have petered out in utter heart-break and premature sterility. Dickens wrote to Forster in 1856:

"If I were sick or disabled to-morrow, I know how sorry she would be and how deeply grieved myself to think how we had lost each other. But exactly the same incompatibility would arise the moment I was well again; and nothing on earth could make her understand me or suit us to each other. Her temperament will not go with mine. . . . The years have not

made it easier to bear for either of us; and for her sake as well as mine the wish will force itself upon me that something must be done. . . . I claim no immunity from blame, there is plenty of fault on my side I daresay in the way of a thousand uncertainties, caprices, and difficulties of disposition; but only one thing will alter all that, and that is the end which alters everything."

Dickens and his wife parted for ever in May 1857. His eldest son went with his mother, the other children stayed with him. The whole thing was lamentable but absolutely inevitable.

Dickens began his public readings in 1858. He gave altogether four series, one in 1858–59, another in 1861–63, another in 1866–67, and the last in 1868 and 1870. All his instinctive histrionic power came out in these platform experiences. He read with inimitable art, and he moved his audiences exactly as he had moved his readers. He was given royal receptions in every town he visited, and his success in England was repeated when he returned to America in 1867 for a reading tour. Dickens liked America better than he had done on his first visit, and America forgave him *Martin Chuzzlewit* and treated him magnificently. He made £20,000 from the American readings and something like £23,000 from the English series; but the work was too much for him, and the strain was largely responsible for his comparatively early death. In 1859 *Household Words* became *All the Year Round*, and *A Tale of Two Cities* began its serial publication in the first number. In 1860 he wrote *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and in 1860 and 1861 *Great Expectations*,

which also appeared serially in *All the Year Round*. In 1864 and 1865, amid failing health and much family sorrow, he wrote *Our Mutual Friend*, quite the gayest of his later books. He was taken ill during his readings on the 23rd of April 1869, and although he worked on he was never really well again. He died at Gadshill on the 9th of June 1870.

No writer had ever attracted the love of his readers as Dickens attracted it. No professional writer was ever so deeply and genuinely mourned. He was buried in Westminster Abbey on the 14th of June, and for three days, Dean Stanley wrote, "there was a constant pressure on the spot, many flowers were strewn upon it by unknown hands, many tears shed from unknown eyes." Horace Greeley, writing of the grief in America, says: "The loss of no single man during the present generation, if we except Abraham Lincoln alone, has carried mourning into so many families." Carlyle has perhaps written his epitaph better than any other of his contemporaries: "A most cordial, sincere, clear-sighted, quietly decisive, just, and loving man. . . . The good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever friendly, noble Dickens, every inch of him an honest man."

The characters he created are so real to us because they were real to him. "He laughed and wept with them, was as much elated by their fun as cast down by their grief, and brought to the consideration of them a belief in their reality as well as in the influences they

were meant to exercise which in every circumstance sustained him."

He was an affectionate father. "I hope," he wrote to one of his sons, "you will always be able to say in after life that you had a kind father." He was the most considerate and kindly of editors. He was the friend of his poorer neighbours, and never insulted them with patronage. He preached a gospel of brotherly love. He loved ghost stories and he loved children. He was a great dreamer and a great humorist.

III.

THE CHEERY, JOYOUS, GLADSOME MESSAGE.

A MAN'S opinions are generally of small importance either to himself or to anybody else. When our views affect our dreams, they matter to ourselves. When they affect our conduct, they matter to our neighbours. And only then. But it is essential to all of us, both as individuals and as units of society, to think sanely of the world into which we have been born and of the life of which we form a part. It is impossible to live beautifully, which means to add to the total of happiness and to take away from the total of pain, or to dream beautifully, which means to be in complete harmony with the wonders of the universe, unless we have acquired an accurate sense of values, unless we have learned to distinguish the real from the sham, the ephemeral from the eternal, the glitter from the gold. The man, therefore, who can teach this to his fellows is the greatest of all public benefactors.

Charles Dickens is such a man. The gospel according to Dickens is a gospel which no one can afford to disregard. It is a restatement of eternal truth, and the manner of the restatement coming from a

man who is almost a contemporary, adds to its importance, for it is obvious that eternal truth must always be capable of statement in terms of the present. Few things are therefore of more vital importance to the Englishman of to-day than that he should understand Dickens completely and rightly.

Thackeray as a literary artist was limited by the fact that he was always a gentleman. The glory of Dickens is that he was a common man writing about common men for common men. He was magnificently vulgar. He was never shocked by common ways. On the contrary, he realised their splendour and their humour. Sir Arthur Pinero once made the astounding discovery that comedy could only be found in the lives of the leisured and the wealthy. Dickens demonstrates the humour of the commonplace and the lovable heroism of the fool. Most of us are poor and commonplace. Many of us are fools, and Dickens tells us that our lives, as well as the lives of our betters, may be full of colour and thrills. Anyone can see the splendour of the Lord Mayor's coachman. It took Dickens to see the splendour of Mr. Toots. The common man is the victim of his superiors. He is never left alone. He is always, in these "social" days, being inspected and reformed and "chivied" into discomfort and naturalness. But Dickens takes the common man by the hand, invites him to accompany Sam Weller to the "swarry" at Bath, and bids him rejoice in his commonness. The superior person "in a bright crimson coat with

longtails, vividly red breeches, and a cocked hat" (or even if he wears less picturesque raiment) is a pernicious ass. The common man is the child of the gods.

Dickens more than any other great writer knew the life of the very poor and understood the tragedy of the everyday menace of the empty cupboard. But he never forgot the humanity and the humour (the two things are really identical) of the life of the very poor. He and John Bunyan are the only men in the whole pageant of English literature who speak for the inarticulate common poor man. Dickens died a world-famous novelist. He had earned heaps of money. He was buried in Westminster Abbey. But he remained the child of the mean street. Mr. H. G. Wells, a novelist in my opinion generally underestimated by his contemporaries, is nominally by birth of the lower middle class. He has described with great skill and accurate detail the everydays of the struggling little shopkeeper. But compare his description of the small baker's family in *Tono Bungay* with Dickens' picture of the Kenwigs, and the difference between the two writers is at once apparent. Mr. Wells looks back with horror at a life from which he has escaped. Dickens writes of the Kenwigs with the joy and pride of the man who is one of the family. Mr. Wells was born in a strange land, and has moved into his own country. Dickens lived, spiritually, his whole life with his kin. Mr. Wells sees nothing to laugh at in the old squalor. Dickens finds

the Kenwigs enormously funny. It is inhuman not to be amusing. All men are really amusing if one only understands, just because they are human. But it is bad manners to laugh when we do not understand. The man in the bowler is a cad if he laughs at a duke in his coronet. But most dukes are frightfully amusing to the other dukes, just as most dustmen are frightfully amusing to the other dustmen.

But if Dickens proclaims the humanity of the common man by laughing at him, he also demonstrates over and over again his fine dignity. Reginald Wilfer who endured dull work, the nickname of Rumty and a wife, "a tall woman and an angular," and remained a cheerful little cherub, and the more picturesque but not a whit more adorable Bob Cratchit, are evidence of the novelist's understanding of the courage, the self-sacrifice, the lovableness of the man in the street. Only men with souls can be happy when the wind is in the east, and the amazing happiness of the common man is the evidence of his affinity with the eternal. An omnibus on a wet day may appear to be filled with dull fellows journeying from dull offices to dull homes, but Dickens would find it full of heroes journeying with dignity along the pathway trodden before them by heroes and saints.

His attitude to his villains must also be considered in the endeavour fully to understand the Dickens gospel. Sikes is altogether hateful and melodramatic. So are Ralph Nickleby and Sir John Chester and

Jonas Chuzzlewit. But the villains that we really remember are comic—Quilp and Squeers, Mr. Pecksniff and Jingle, even Fagin; and Dickens' attitude to naughtiness is extremely characteristic. Squeers is a most complete and audacious rascal, and yet Squeers makes us laugh. Fagin is a villain of the deepest dye, but for all that he is obviously designed as a comic figure. Under the influence of superior persons we have grown absurdly exclusive. We do not only hate sin (or profess to hate it), but we refuse to regard the sinner as a man and a brother. Consequently we torture the sinners against society's laws, not as our forefathers tortured with easy human neglect, but with soul-killing rules and regulations. We wash them and half-feed them and give them a little work, and we drown their souls in whitewash. I profess that I would sooner be half-starved with Jingle and Job on the poor prisoner's side of the old Fleet than be locked up in the grim modern horror that deadens the beauty of Dartmoor. Dickens was never superior. He was not too refined or too virtuous to laugh at the Artful Dodger. Modern reformers and philanthropists are for ever thanking God that they are not as the other men whom they profess to help. Only the Salvation Army has the real Dickens spirit. Its officers call burglars "brother" and harlots "sister," and they mean it, and, in consequence, the Salvation Army is practically the only organisation that persuades burglars to give up burgling and harlots to abandon their calling. Dickens bids us laugh

at his virtuous characters, at Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller, at Mark Tapley and Tom Pinch, at Captain Cuttle and Mr. Boffin. If he did not also bid us laugh at his vicious creations, he would be at once suggesting that virtue was more amusing than vice, and that the vicious have no souls to be saved.

Man is indeed essentially funny, and in this he stands alone among created things. A lion is not funny, or a cow or a nightingale, or even a hippopotamus, and apes and dogs are only funny when they have been taught to imitate man. It is man's birthright to be funny. The guilelessness of Mr. Pickwick, the good-nature of Mark Tapley, the tender consideration of Captain Cuttle, the weak-mindedness of Mrs. Nickleby, the hypocrisy of Mr. Pecksniff, the dissipation of Dick Swiveller, the smugness of Mrs. Chadband, the devotion of Miss Tox are all funny, and it should be noted that we do not like Mark Tapley any the less or hate Pecksniff any the less because we laugh at them both. The everyday remark, "This is a funny world," is profoundly true. It is a splendid world, a thrilling world, a disappointing world, perhaps at times a sad world, but all the time it is a funny world. Dickens realised this, and it is not without significance that the characters in his novels that we cannot laugh at are the failures, unconvincing and unreal. Mrs. Nickleby, Squeers, Tim Linkinwater, the Brothers Cheeryble, Newman Noggs, are all splendidly human. Kate Nickleby, Nicholas, and Ralph are lay figures. There is blood

in the veins of Mr. Podsnap, but only sawdust in the veins of John Harmon. The man you can never laugh at is not a real man, and to confess that we can see nothing amusing in any man or any woman is to prove that we do not really know them.

It has been said (it is not true) that Dickens invented the English Christmas, and he decidedly found good cheer and much food and drink eminently human and desirable. He loved parties and described them with a relish—Mr. Wardle's party, the Kenwigs' party, the Cratchits' Christmas dinner, old Chuzzlewit's party. Man is a social being and he can only rejoice with his friends, and most of us have far too few parties and festivities. Food and wine loosen tongues and help to destroy the absurd reticence which is the most insistent of our national vices. Who are we that we should desire to hide ourselves from our fellows? If all men were open and candid the world would be ever so much more interesting, and suspicion, dislike, and misunderstanding would be almost completely destroyed. The Dickens man is eager to tell all his secrets and to hear all the secrets of his next-door neighbour. Men tell secrets over the dinner table if the dinner has been good and the company well assorted.

Pickwick, whom all the world loves (Dickens began, by the way, to create a completely ridiculous character and ended quite naturally by making him completely lovable), often drank too much, so did Dick Swiveller. Gabriel Varden was always empty-

ing Toby, and Fips "knocked off his wine pretty handsomely." Dickens certainly had no sort of sympathy with teetotallers (the red-nosed shepherd was a most pernicious humbug) or with any form of asceticism. We cannot imagine him dining at a vegetarian restaurant or adopting a fruitarian diet. I suggest that it is of the first importance that the man whose books, from the first page he wrote to the last, breathe the most splendid humanity should have given the characters he loved best what the man in the street regards as "a good time," and should have had no little sympathy with the roisterer. I am bold enough to believe that man was born to eat red meat and to drink good wine, and that the lentil-fed ascetic (in Europe anyhow—the Asiatic man has different passions, different dreams, and different hopes) is only half a man. It may be the best half, but he is sharply differentiated from the man in the omnibus and he cannot understand. The trail of the lentil lies on much of the literature and much of the legislation of our time, and in consequence the literature is freakish and in its essence divorced from the workaday realities, and the legislation is harassing and ineffective. When we speak of "life" we do not mean life as it is lived by the members of the Fabian Society, by teetotal fanatics, or by super-refined ladies and gentlemen with ample means and leisure, but life as it is led by the common multitude, and it is the glory of Dickens that he understood this common multitude, that he shared its tastes and its prejudices, that he recognised

its sorrows and its humours, and that with his seer's eyes he saw how its living could be made fuller and more splendid and more satisfying. Mr. Bernard Shaw can never help the world very much, for Mr. Shaw, disliking the world that God created, has created a world for himself. He will talk to us, and sell his books and plays to us. But he will not eat with us or drink with us, and he cannot pray with us for he does not understand our prayers. But Dickens was, in the best sense, a man of the world. He is the fellow of the man in the street and the man in the public-house, and he finds it quite amusing that the elderly gentleman should drink too much milk punch on a hot afternoon, and part of the manliness of an excellent locksmith that he should have frequent jugs of beer.

The attitude of Dickens to the criminal is the common attitude of the common man in mean streets. The man in prison is gently spoken of as the man in trouble. His attitude to the weak-witted is similarly common and kind. If I wanted to find an argument against such a law as the Mental Deficiency Act (and heaven knows, it would be easy to find a score !) I should just say "Mr. Toots." There is nothing more profound than the folly of the wise. There is nothing more beautiful than the wisdom of the foolish. The one idea of the Christian religion is summed up in the sentence, "Thou hast hid those things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." It is inevitable that the wise

and prudent should be always with us and that they should never allow us to forget their presence. But sweetness, light, and love and sympathy are best understood by the simple-minded. They give them to us with open hands. Dickens knew this. Mr. Dick would have been, if he had lived to-day, inevitably locked up in an admirably arranged asylum. But happy with his kite and Betsey Trotwood, he did no end of good. Mr. Toots was very silly, but he was the very soul of kindness and consideration and as true a gentleman as Colonel Newcome himself. Dr. Saleeby and his fellow-eugenists must read of his marriage with the Nipper with utter horror, but I am quite certain that their children were altogether delightful and desirable. Almost all the completely lovable characters in the Dickens novels are rather stupid—Mr. Dick and Micawber, Mr. Toots and Captain Cuttle, Tom Pinch, Mr. Pickwick, Joe Gargery, Mr. Boffin, George the trooper, even Sydney Carton. In *The Pickwick Papers* he makes the beautiful Arabella Allen fall in love with the empty-headed Mr. Winkle, and once more demonstrated his profound knowledge of life. No woman really loved a wise man. Women love men that appear wise, but that only means they have discovered some heavenly folly that is hidden from the rest of the world. We vastly overestimate the value of cleverness, and society is unquestionably in grave danger of falling under the heel of a clever minority. Their tyranny will be the hardest that history has ever

known, and it will lead to a revolution, compared to which the French Revolution will be mere child's play. Dickens asserts the fact that in all essentials the simple man—the average common man—understands far more clearly than the learned and the wise. No man by reasoning can discover God, and indeed the man of subtle reasoning is leagues farther from God than the fool. "You are an ignorant man, you say," old Martin Chuzzlewit observed to Mark Tapley. "Wery much so," Mr. Tapley replied. "And I am a learned, well-instructed man, you think?" "Likewise wery much so," Mr. Tapley answered. But the whole story of Martin Chuzzlewit is a demonstration of the blindness of the man who was learned and well-instructed and the splendid sane judgment of the ignorant.

I have said enough to prove Dickens' affinity with the average man. I have shown how fine a patriot he was, for there is no work more patriotic than to demonstrate the glories of one's own country. Mr. Gilbert Chesterton writes of him as the child of the great Revolution, as a man of the age that believed in human equality. In common with all the great poets (for the man who discovered Puck in a stable-yard was a poet if ever there was one) Dickens belonged to all ages and to one nation. Men in the nineteenth century may have believed in equality. No one believes in anything so absurd to-day. But men have always yearned for liberty, and the spirit of liberty breathes in the pages of the Dickens novels.

The common natural man (who is to me what the head of Charles I. was to Mr. Dick) is eager to do what he likes, to say what he likes, to sin as he likes. If he is prevented from being himself, his life is tasteless and tiresome, and Dickens with his realisation of the good times the common natural can have, if he is let alone, acclaims the joy of liberty and the utter beastliness of serfdom. Dickens lived and died before the advent of Mr. Sidney Webb (alas and alack! for if he had known him he would assuredly have put him into a novel and killed Webbism for ever), but the two men represent exactly the two fundamentally different points of view. Had Mr. Webb known Mr. Toots and Mr. Micawber he would have regarded them with pity and have proceeded to save them from themselves. Mr. Toots would have been sent to a home for the mentally afflicted, and Mr. Micawber to a labour colony. But Dickens loved Toots and Micawber, and, because he loved them, he was able to understand that, allowed to be themselves, they would have quite a good time, and would help others to a good time also. Most men are happy if they are permitted to live according to the laws of their being. To force the lazy to work, to force the wine-bibber to sign the pledge and to prevent him from breaking it, to force the man who loves to be dirty to wash, is to make unhappiness, and it surely needs some tremendous reason to justify adding to the world's total of unhappiness. Moreover, this desire to force people to change their habits, which I christened

"Webbism" in another book of mine, is absolutely unchristian, for Christianity bids the reformer to seek to change the hearts and the desires, to convince the loafer that it is amusing to work, to persuade the drunkard that it is more thrilling to be sober, to fill the unwashed with the inclination to be clean. And there is something attractively kindly and human in the admonition that, all persuasion having failed, "he that is filthy let him be filthy still." It is of course true that social well-being does demand some restriction of individual action and eccentricity. But the restriction should be as light as possible. England will be an awful hell when we are all made industrious, sober, and clean by Act of Parliament. Indeed it will not be England.

Dickens is the most English of all the great writers who have made the English language glorious, more English than Shakespeare, more English than Bunyan. Shakespeare was a Catholic inasmuch as he was influenced by the colour and the joy of the Catholic religion. Bunyan was Puritan. England and Dickens are neither Catholic nor Puritan, a fact of the first importance that politicians and reformers unfortunately forget. Actual references to religion occur rarely in the novels. Dickens pilloried Chadband and the deputy-shepherd. In *The Old Curiosity Shop* he draws a sympathetic picture of a village clergyman, "a simple-hearted old gentleman of a shrinking subdued spirit, accustomed to retirement and very little acquainted with the world." In *The*

Mystery of Edwin Drood the clerical sketches are equally kindly. Dickens here again is the average Englishman who does not go to church very much, but accepts the Christian doctrines as a matter of course, and is anxious for the presence of a clergyman at marriages and burials. The Englishman who does not label himself is quite properly labelled Church of England, and the main line of the Church of England (I am not forgetting the many enthusiasts) is to regard God as a benevolent but rather distant power always on the side of kindness and right, but not to be spoken of or spoken to except at moments of crises and then with due formality. There is a great deal of nonsense talked about English characteristics. The English are not a law-abiding people. No people ever hated laws and lawyers so much. They obey them because they are lethargic and humorous. The English are not really as reticent as the Irish and they are far more romantic. But it is certainly un-English to talk of one's God.

I have said that the English hate lawyers. We are governed by them because we are too busy gardening, and drinking, and watching football matches, and following other romantic pursuits, to govern ourselves, but we hate them all the same, and Dickens when he drew the comic Dodson and Fogg, that most horrid villain Mr. Tulkinghorn, the offensively clean Mr. Jaggers, Buzfuz the windbag and Stryver the humbug, as well as Fips, who for all his good-nature was content to spend his days behind "a little

blear-eyed glass door" in a very dark passage, and Mr. Perker, who for all his friendship with Mr. Pickwick could not help admiring the rascality of Dodson and Fogg, he created lawyers that are eternal and that exactly represent the common English view. The utter hopeless nonsense of the machinery of law denounced by Shakespeare was held up for hatred and ridicule by Dickens in *Bleak House*. Thanks to him something was done to reform the horror of the Court of Chancery, but the law courts are still the protection of rogues and the scourge of the poor and the foolish.

On Tom Hood's grave is written the legend, "He sang the Song of the Shirt." On Dickens' grave should be written, "He set the Prisoners Free." He laughed the Fleet and the Marshalsea off the face of the earth. He ridiculed imprisonment for debt out of existence. The day that Sam Weller, accompanied by his father, the mottle-faced gentleman, and seven other stage-coachmen, was handed into the custody of Roper and the phlegmatic Neddy, at the gates of the Fleet, the doom of that ancient institution was sealed. Most prisons are ridiculous, as everything cruel is ridiculous. To imprison men for debt was not only wicked, it was silly, but the world did not realise its folly until Dickens proclaimed it. Then the debtors' prisons were pulled down. Our present prisons for thieves and drunkards are equally absurd criminal-making, soul-destroying machines, but they go on existing despite lectures and

newspaper articles and pamphlets, because we do not understand that the country that possesses such absurd institutions is just ridiculous. If Dickens had lived to send Mr. Pickwick to Dartmoor and to incarcerate old Dorrit in Reading gaol, the whole English penal system would have been reformed on lines of sanity and common sense. England does not mind being cruel, but it hates to be ridiculous, and Dickens because he was an Englishman, and because of his understanding of the folly of cruelty, was the most effective reformer that fortune ever sent to these islands.

When he dreamed Bumble he began the humanising of the poor laws. Bumble is the real author of the humane regulations issued by the Local Government Board, notably during the presidencies of Mr. Chaplin and Mr. Walter Long, and Bumble collaborated with Mr. Asquith when he initiated Old Age Pensions. After Oliver Twist had asked for more, the torture of little children in poorhouses became difficult and uncomfortable. The workhouse officials who succeeded Bumble and his wife have been afraid that the inmates may find them absurd if they are harsh. The big human laugh of Charles Dickens has cleansed away the dust of the devil.

Dickens had no great admiration for success. What comedies he would have created from the pages of Dr. Smiles! He jeered honestly and fiercely at the Victorian captains of industry when he drew Gradgrind and Bounderby. He was wholesomely and decently

uninterested in aristocrats, of whom (like most of us) he knew nothing, but his Sir Leicester Dedlock is a conventional English picture, and he obviously approves of George's devotion to his mother's old master. Money-lenders he hated with the fervour of a Russian moujik, and his old Smallweed is more horrible than Shylock. In common with all good Englishmen he never understood foreigners and he always suspected them. In no book in our language are the causes of the French Revolution more clearly indicated than in *A Tale of Two Cities*, but Dickens was too English to see anything but the horror of the revolutionary mob, and his quite natural and quite unintelligent disgust drove him to make a British body-snatcher into a hero. The French maid in *Bleak House* and the foreign gentleman in *Little Dorrit* are stage figures, but very, very English, and it was as an Englishman that Dickens saw and disliked America. Cant flourishes in every country under the sun—less in France than in any other country, more in the United States. We English are not so easily gulled by cant as the Americans—no man dares make a Fourth of July oration here—but we are addicted to it. Popular dramas and popular fiction are all cant. Popular agitations are built on cant. Dickens himself, with all his humour, wrote mere cant when he attempted to describe scenes of passion and sentiment. Edith Dombey's speech to Carker in the French hotel—"How many times have you laid bare my wound of love for that sweet innocent girl

and lacerated it? How often have you fanned the fire in which for two years I have writhed; and tempted me to take a desperate revenge when it has most tortured me"—is every bit as ridiculous as the speech of the American gentleman about the British lion, to which he says: "Bring forth that lion. Alone I dare him. I taunt that lion." It was inevitable that a man addicted to his national variety of cant should be immensely impressed by the absurdity of a novel variety. Englishmen never talk patriotism glibly. It is unusual here to proclaim one's love either for one's wife or one's country. In America, Dickens found men yelling their love for their country at the tops of their voices and all the time, and he invented Mr. Lafayette Kettle and General Choke. He was sore with America for the abominable piracies of his books, and besides, as Mr. Chesterton says, "America is a mystery to any good Englishman," and Dickens was certainly a good Englishman.

Mr. Bernard Shaw, in an Introduction he has recently written to an edition of *Hard Times*, describes Slackbridge, the trade-union organiser, as "a mere figment of the middle-class imagination," and remarks with some truth that while Dickens knew some classes of the poor very well, "of the segregated factory populations of our purely industrial towns, he knew no more than an observant professional man can pick up in a flying visit to Manchester." But Dickens had no class prejudices at all. He dis-

trusted revolution and he disliked all leaders, in this again representing the common man. The rank and file of a trade union always mistrust and dislike their officials, and the life of the labour leader is hard. Moreover, Dickens believed that society's ways would be righted if the man with the privilege and the good fortune paid for them by service and consideration. It is the old and nowadays rather discredited belief of Lord Shaftesbury and Disraeli and George Bentinck and the Christian Church, the belief that might accurately be labelled as " old-fashioned English."

Dickens was the super-Englishman preaching in English to the commonplace English that life was thrilling and splendid and funny, that freedom was the one essential to happiness, that all cruelty was merely silly, that the simple and the poor were more lovable than the learned and the rich, that kindness was the greatest of all virtues, and humbug the worst of all sins. He restated with his own inimitable humour and courage and knowledge the gospel that every preacher has preached if he has received his message from God.

IV.

"THE PICKWICK PAPERS."

THE *Sketches by Boz* are the beginning of Dickens as an imaginative writer. They show that as a boy of little more than twenty he already realised the humour of the commonplace, and therefore its dignity. They show the line of his genius, and they are the promise of his powers. But if the *Sketches by Boz* promise us Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* are Dickens. He wrote *Pickwick* when he was twenty-four, and it remains the best read and the best loved of his novels. Dickens was never a story-teller. He was the creator of gorgeous unforgettable characters, and of all the splendid beings whom he dreamed into existence none are more splendid than Pickwick, Sam Weller, Bob Sawyer, and the Fat Boy.

Messrs. Chapman & Hall gave Dickens a commission to write a series of adventures of a set of comic sportsmen, and it was arranged that an artist called Seymour should supply the illustrations. Seymour did seven pictures and then committed suicide, and

H. B. Browne, the inimitable Phiz, became Dickens' illustrator. After Seymour's death his widow claimed that the whole idea of the book was her husband's, and Dickens, who was always sensitive and rather quarrelsome, was furious; but the claim is quite absurd, because it was not until after Seymour's disappearance that the real *Pickwick* began to be written. The book was published in parts. It was written by a young novelist, just married and with need of every penny he could earn, as a piece of hack work. But it happened to Dickens, as it has happened to many lesser men, that as he wrote he gradually grew interested in his work. The scheme changed and developed, and before he had got half way through he made the great discovery. He discovered Charles Dickens.

Pickwick as a commercial proposition started badly. The first two or three chapters were unquestionably dull, and the public, whatever else it buys, will never patronise dullness. With the appearance of Sam Weller it began to be a popular success, and with the appearance of Sam Weller the Dickens that we know made his bow to the world. With Sam as his companion, Mr. Pickwick is whirled on from one ridiculous adventure to another, and as he whirls the silly old man whom we meet in the first chapter "with one hand gracefully concealed behind his coat tails, and the other waving in the air to assist his glorious declaration," becomes a nineteenth-century Oberon journeying through fairyland with Puck as his com-

panion. Snodgrass, Winkle, and Tupman, all cardboard puppets, are soon dropped (to be picked up now and again for the sake of the proprieties), and as chapter follows chapter, and Dickens lives familiarly with Mr. Pickwick, he learns to love him as we always love the people we laugh with. He came to jeer and he remained to worship, and when at last we arrive at the end of the adventure—they might have gone on for ever and they probably would, had the publishers been willing—Mr. Pickwick remains for all time the figure of dignified simplicity and wise guilelessness, the eternal proof of the wisdom of believing everything you are told, thinking no evil and loving all the world, but especially the unlovable. When Mr. Pickwick thirsts for revenge and chases Jingle from the mansion of the lordly Nupkins, it is Jingle who is the victor and Pickwick who is humiliated :

"'Ha! ha!' said Jingle, 'good fellow Pickwick—true heart—stout old boy—but *must* not be passionate—bad thing, very—bye, bye—see you again some day—keep up your spirits—now Job—trot,'"

—and his exit is the exit of a hero. It is true that Muzzle is said to have immediately afterwards tripped Jingle and Job down the steps, but I never believed that incident. The Jingles of this world are never tripped up by the Muzzles. But when Mr. Pickwick again meets Jingle starving in the Fleet, and forgives and helps him, the tables are

turned and simplicity conquers the astute, as it always does in the end.

Mr. Pickwick is sued by Mrs. Bardell, and suffers grievous things at the hands of Dodson, Fogg, and Buzfuz. While he suffers he still remains deliciously funny, but he retains at the same time a perfectly radiant dignity, and when Dickens gets to this point he is inspired with the great truth that simplicity never can suffer fruitlessly, and he uses Mr. Pickwick to show the hollow sham of courts of justice, and he puts a hammer in his hand and bids him knock the Fleet prison to smithereens.

Sam Weller and his father are Dickens' first picture of the shrewd, self-reliant, humorous, kindly poor. Both the Wellers are incapable of meanness, and both are men of fastidious taste. Mr. Winkle makes love like a clown, Sam makes love chivalrously like a knight. And could anything be finer than old Weller's making over of his legacy to the care of Mr. Pickwick? Humbug they see through and hate. They are both a little dazzled by words and even impressed by Mr. Solomon Pell, though they are suspicious enough in their dealings with that eminent practitioner to appoint umpires to see fair play.

Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen are very drunken and very dirty, but they are very funny and human, and we can quite understand Mr. Pickwick liking them. Mrs. Raddles is the immortal termagant, and Socrates must have suffered from Xanthippe much as Mr. Raddles suffered from his vixenish lady. It is a

rather curious instance, by the way of a change of view, that while Mrs. Raddles bade her husband hold his tongue "for fear I should be perwoked to forgit my sect and strike you," the modern suffragette remembers her sex and breaks windows in consequence.

The characters in *Pickwick* are not the mere characters of a novel. We do not remember them as we remember Becky Sharp and Mrs. Poyser, Tom Jones and Ivanhoe. They belong, as Mr. Chesterton has said, to popular mythology. They are of the same immortal order as Punch, and Christmas and Apollyon. And in *Pickwick* as in his later books, we are impressed with the prodigality of Dickens' invention. He had the lust of creation. In almost every chapter some new prodigy makes his appearance—old Mrs. Wardle, Mr. Pott the bagman, the long gamekeeper, Mr. Nupkins, Jack Hopkins, Mr. Dowler, Mr. John Smawker, all wonderful, unforgettable creations. Dickens calls them into being, and because he has created them they are immortal. Everybody knows them and knows all about them. They have a complete life that has never belonged to the creations of any other writer. They live a fuller life than Hamlet. They have more friends than d'Artagnan.

And they are good to know. They make life more amusing and more interesting, and their friendship leads to sweeter, kinder living. "The age of chivalry is dead," said a purblind politician. "The age of romance and miracles never dies," asserts Dickens.

Shakespeare found Puck in a Warwickshire wood. Dickens discovered him in the Borough. Puck is everywhere with fauns and elfs and dryads. Immortality hides in jerry-built villas. Venus can ascend from a suburban garden as easily as from the waves. *Pickwick* is a farce and a parable, a sort of heavenly pantomime. The curtain goes up and we see the pantaloon " ruminating on the strange multiplicity of human affairs." At the end, " Mr. Pickwick having won the race, pauses for an instant and looks round him. As he does so the tears roll down his cheeks in the fulness of his joy."

And the curtain falls.

There is something surely completely reasonable and natural in Carlyle's story of the dying man who, after having received ghostly consolation from a solemn clergyman, was heard to remark, " Thank God, *Pickwick* will be out in ten days."

" OLIVER TWIST."

After the farce the melodrama, after *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist*. It was the custom of the age, and Dickens, like all simple folk, loved melodrama. He wrote the story with *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Barnaby Rudge* already shaping in his brain, and in the midst of it he suffered bitterly from the death of his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, whom he had dearly loved. But I do not think that *Oliver Twist* needs much

explanation, nor does it appear to me odd that the young writer who had just grown famous with *Pickwick* should have slightly changed his tune. I say "slightly," for although *Oliver Twist* is designedly a melodrama, its reality is another moral farce. The interminable intrigue is of absolutely no consequence. I have read the book (or most of it) scores of times, and I am still hazy as to who Oliver really was. Monks is a tiresome unreality, and no living man was ever the least interested in Rose Fleming, Harry Maylie, or Mr. Brownlow. One amazing figure dominates the whole book and his name is Bumble. Oliver himself is the compère of the story. He "introduces" Bumble, and afterwards Fagin and Sikes—and his real part is played.

The suffering of a child is the most damnable thing under the sun. Dickens had suffered grievously when he was very young, and he never forgot. No one ever has. To be unhappy when you are a baby is to carry a scarred soul to the grave. I remember hearing the Rev. Stewart Headlam once say that the object of Christianity was the destruction of premature death. It surely aims also at the abolition of premature suffering. In *Oliver Twist*, Dickens found tortured children in workhouses. In *Nicholas Nickleby* he found them in Yorkshire schools. In *Dombey and Son* he found them in well-conducted academies. And at them all he hurled his thunderbolts of ridicule. The English workhouse in 1838 was the torture chamber of the poor—it is better in 1913, but it has by no means

entirely changed its character. Cruelty flourished within its walls, and it was ruled by pinchbeck Torquemadas as conscienceless, as well-meaning, and as bowel-less as their great prototype. To have denounced them as wicked would have done little good and would not altogether have been fair. To have attacked the system as an outrage against the natural rights of man would have been equally useless. Dickens turned the searchlight of his humour on beadle and master and guardians, and cried aloud, " Look at the fools ! " Nothing is really more effective than to call people names, if you have the genius to select the right names. Dickens called the workhouse tyrant " Bumble," and crowned him with immortal ridicule. We shall certainly not understand Dickens if we imagine that it was only the abuses of the Poor Law that stirred his soul to wrath. He hated the whole scheme. Mr. A. C. Benson, writing of *Oliver Twist*, says : " Harsh, dreary, loveless as the life of the workhouse undoubtedly was, it was at least more tolerable than the hideous independence, the filthy confusion it was designed to relieve." That from Dickens' point of view was absolutely untrue, because Dickens regarded freedom as the greatest possession of man. He disliked the idea of locking up any man in a prison. He grew furious at the thought of the imprisonment of the poor. Bumble still flourishes. He has been given new powers. It is possible that he may have still more. But he will remain Bumble to the end, and because Dickens has

made us realise his complete folly, his power to maim and harm will always be modified and restricted.

Oliver Twist is hurried from the workhouse to the thieves' kitchen, and the change is all to his advantage, for Fagin is infinitely more human than Bumble, and even Bill Sikes is to be preferred to the gentleman in the white waistcoat. Dickens had no first-hand knowledge of the life of the criminal class. But he was always attracted by "the dirtiest paths of life," to their suffering, to their fun, to their dignity. Unlike Mr. Shaw, he was a bad critic and a bad appreciator of his own work. Our moderns can never be really great, try how they may. Dickens was great despite himself. In a Preface to *Oliver Twist* he claims, quite unnecessarily, that he had not made crime attractive, and he bashes away at the critics who objected to the sordidness of his characters. "I have," he says, "no faith in the delicacy which could not bear to look upon them." He had indeed no faith in delicacy at all. He could have said with as much truth as the gentleman in *The Private Secretary*, "I am not delicate." He was as humanly indelicate as Rabelais and Shakespeare and Walt Whitman, though I think he did not know it. Mr. Benson says, "When I read it (*Oliver Twist*) as a child, the pathetic and ever charming figure of the book appeared to me to be Fagin. His civility, his patience, his soft-spokenness, and the tragic doom which overwhelmed him, made him a character far removed from anything detestable and revolting.

The young thieves are irresistibly delightful, almost heroic. Nancy is wholly delightful." Here is another instance of Dickens' achievement being quite different from his intention. He intended to paint crime as detestable and pitiful. But the criminals he described were men and women, and as the description developed they became real and funny and eventually likeable. Both Bumble and Fagin are comic characters. We hate Bumble with a righteous hatred because he was a pompous humbug. We never quite hate Fagin because his coat was threadbare and he never pretended to any particular virtue. The Artful Dodger is an immense creation, a Sam Weller as Sam might have been if he had met Fagin instead of Mr. Pickwick. Dickens found men and brothers among thieves as well as among stage-coachmen.

Bill Sikes and Nancy are impossibly black and white. Dickens declared that Nancy was true, and he spelt the word " true " in large capitals. Women have certainly loved burglars as well as other heroic persons. Women have certainly loved men who beat them. The falsehood comes in when such love is represented as dignified and beautiful. It is as wholesome as an affection for sour wine and decayed pheasant. Dickens was an arch-sentimentalist. To him a woman devotedly loving a heartless, ruthless brute was a beautiful sight. As a matter of fact it is a deplorable and revolting insanity. The story of Sikes and Nancy has been told over and over again

by hack novelists and dramatists. But even when Dickens tells a conventional story he embellishes it with some rare distinction, and the flight of Sikes after the murder of Nancy is a flesh-creeping *tour de force* that Poe might have envied. What a wonderful dramatic touch is the meeting with the pedlar with "the invaluable composition for removing all sorts of stains, rust, dirt, mildew, spick, speck, spot, or spatter, from silk, satin, linen, or woollen stuff . . . whether it is wine stain, fruit stain, beer stain, water stain, paint stain, pitch stain, blood stain. . . ." Dickens' stories may have been thin and conventional, but he told them as no other man has ever told them.

"NICHOLAS NICKLEBY."

If the Dickens novels are to be judged by the number of demigods that they contain, *Nicholas Nickleby* stands in the forefront of the great pageant. Mr. de Morgan has quite truthfully said that "the element of plot contributes so small a part of the fascination of the book that only a recent reader would venture to say offhand in what the plot consists." The original intention of *Nicholas Nickleby* was a romance, just as the original intention of *Pickwick* was a pantomime and of *Oliver Twist* a melodrama. Nicholas, a young gentleman, as Mr. Crummles told him, "with genteel comedy in your walk and manner,

juvenile tragedy in your eye," suffers grievous things at the hands of his wicked uncle, is aided in his extremity by the Brothers Cheeryble, and is left prosperous and happily married to the beautiful Madeleine Bray. But the odd thing is that we are never really interested in Nicholas at all, and his only importance to us arises from the splendid people he meets on his journey from poverty to affluence. When the hero of a popular drama kisses the heroine, the gallery always laughs. The common natural Englishman never takes love-making seriously, and Dickens, who so exactly represents the common natural Englishman, when he writes a love story always appears to be writing with his tongue in his cheek. He is serious against his instincts and he becomes artificial and unconvincing. The consequence is that we soon forget his lovers altogether, and our whole interest is absorbed by the genuine Dickens presentation and explanation of the incidental characters.

Nicholas is the only romantic hero who ever had a comic mother. Motherhood is the most completely beautiful thing in the world, and mothers are the most completely lovable persons, and if I am right in my reading of Dickens' philosophy, that everyone who is human and lovable is necessarily funny, then it was essential that he should create a funny mother. Mrs. Nickleby was a good mother. She loved her son and daughter. When the gentleman in the small clothes asked her to be his, she promptly replied that

she had made up her mind to remain a widow and to devote herself to her children. Her ambitions for them were boundless, and if she was easily gulled by Sir Mulberry Hawk and his satellites, it was only because she fancied no position too high for her pretty daughter. Mrs. Nickleby is a fool, but she is a very happy fool. She has had misfortunes, but the misfortunes, far from leaving her hard and bitter, have merely left her with stores of delightful memories. She exhibits all the countless compensations that are given to the simple. Mr. Watkins estreated his bail for which "poor papa" was responsible and ran away to the United States, but "he sent us a pair of snow shoes with such an affectionate letter," and the money loss is entirely forgotten and the snow shoes and the letter are recalled with unfailing delight. Mrs. Nickleby, as the simple often are, is something of a poet. "A fine warm summer day like this," she says, "with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig with sage and onion sauce and made gravy." Who could be unhappy with such amazing thoughts?

The Yorkshire school was the book's hit at the devil, and the devil, who hates ridicule, was sorely wounded. Other people had denounced the horrors of these child-maiming machines. No one else ever created Squeers, and Squeers destroyed the Yorkshire school as certainly as Mr. Pickwick destroyed the Fleet Prison. As in the case of Fagin we never quite hate Squeers, because he is comic and poor and

human. He is given his deserts and we are half-sorry for him.

Mr. Crummles is another great creation, and he illustrates Dickens' fine appreciation of the dignity of failure. Mr. Crummles was not, I imagine, a good actor. He must have always been hard put to it to pay his company and to settle with his landlady, but how he admired his family, how he revelled in his art, how completely he enjoyed himself!

I have already referred to the Kenwigs and the joy with which Dickens describes the fun and happiness of the lives of the struggling carver in ivory who lived in two rooms in "a bygone faded and tumbledown street" with his wife, whose uncle collected the water rate, and his five children. Kenwig was a good fellow, hospitable, proud of his wife and children, and Kenwig despite disappointments had a good time. It takes a seer to discover the good times in "a bygone faded tumbledown" street, and its existence is the best argument for the transportation of its inhabitants, who by being happy declare their relationship with the gods, to more comfortable residences.

Mr. Mantalini is as wonderful as Mrs. Nickleby, more wonderful than Squeers. Mr. Chesterton describes Mantalini as "a comic masterpiece, a perfect absurdity," and quite properly adds that he is above criticism and above analysis. He is just Mantalini, perhaps a distant relation of Micawber, but unlike anyone else who ever existed in dreams or in the

flesh, and how much duller the world would be if we had never known him. Dickens in his eagerness to punish naughtiness is cruel to Mantalini at the end of the book. To be forced to turn a mangle was a dreadful and unworthy end for the colossal creature who compared his wife " to a little rose in a demnition flower-pot."

Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht, Ralph Nickleby and Smike are part of the machinery of the romance, and are as unreal and as inhuman as Nicholas and Kate and Madeleine Bray. They are made of wood, though in the case of Ralph Nickleby the wood is quite cleverly painted. The Brothers Cheeryble exist largely to checkmate Ralph, but good fairies do exist in the world, and good fairies do sometimes live in quiet shady little squares and eat with their knives and have never been to school.

Newman Noggs, the broken-down gentleman, is another of Dickens' loving pictures of failure, a hero for others, a hopeless coward for himself. Gentle, courteous, persistent, shabby, a mighty fine fellow is Newman Noggs. And there are John Browdie and Tim Linkinwater, and little good-hearted Miss La Creedy, happy simple folk whom it makes us happier to know, and Fanny Squeers who for all her cattiness we pity, and the incomparable Mr. Snevellecci. Any one of these characters would make an average successful book, but Dickens is never satisfied. His creative power is almost limitless.

"THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP."

When I was a small boy I read a pernicious book called *Eric, or Little by Little*. I have always hated good children from that date, and among the good children I unhesitatingly include Little Nell and Paul Dombey. Little Nell bores one during her unnatural life of unqualified goodness—her care of her asinine old grandfather is absurd—and her death comes as a welcome relief. For reasons which I shall endeavour to explain I regard *The Old Curiosity Shop* as great among the great, but often as I read it, I always skip the Little Nell chapters, except during the episodes with Mrs. Jarley and Codlin and Short. To understand the genius of Dickens one must thoroughly realise the utter failure of such characters as Nell, which with odd perversity he would go on manufacturing. He is like a woman who leaves her bonny baby in the cradle and invites the world to admire a simpering wax doll. As Mr. Chesterton has said (and I do not pretend to be able to say it half so well), "He could not help making people laugh; but he loved to make them cry." It is an invariable rule that the Dickens characters that make us laugh are flesh and blood, and the characters that ask us to cry (generally in vain) are wax and sawdust.

The real hero of *The Old Curiosity Shop* is Dick Swiveller, and I am inclined to think that he is the finest of all the Dickens creations. Mantalini has

no soul. Micawber feeds on words and is satisfied. Mr. Pecksniff is a conscious humbug. But Dick Swiveller is at once completely comic, completely human, and in consequence completely lovable. He is a profligate. He enjoys his profligacy, but he never for a moment thinks of himself as a virtuous citizen. He does not wish to be a virtuous citizen. He thoroughly enjoys his impecuniosity. He obtains his dinner "on tick" and, as he puts his fist into a large potato, remarks, "I like this plan of sending 'em with the peel on. There's a charm in drawing a potato from its native element (if I may so express it) to which the rich and powerful are strangers." And he is quite right. He is careless, but he is always humorous, and not only is the humorous man nearly always essentially good, but his goodness is so attractive that even the vicious love him. Sampson Brass was sorry to part with Mr. Richard, and he was the only person that Sally ever loved in all her gloomy life. The whole Dickens philosophy may be deduced from Dick Swiveller. "Here," says the novelist, "is an idle vicious amiable young ne'er-do-well. I will show you what a splendid fellow he is." And the showing is a restatement of the basis of the Christian religion.

The love story of Dick Swiveller and the Marchioness is one of the most perfect romances in the whole of literature. We are barely interested in the love of Nicholas Nickleby, of Joe Willet, of Martin Chuzzlewit, of Esther Summerson, of John Harmon.

We are thrilled by the romance of Dick Swiveller because Dickens was only himself when he was comic, and this comic love story is a great and moving love story. No natural man cares a jot for Madeleine Bray or Martin's Mary. But no natural man ever read *The Old Curiosity Shop* without adoring the Marchioness. She is so real, so resourceful, so tender, so feminine, and so comic. And the most splendid of all, she is a little dirty drab of a servant girl sleeping in a cellar. Above all things I believe that man, the common average man, is very mysterious and very wonderful, and Dick and the Marchioness form no small part of the foundation of my faith. Dick required no suggestion from the Marchioness to do his utmost to save Kit, but it was because of the Marchioness that he set out to save Dick. She thought he was a fine fellow and he just had to try and be a fine fellow. That is always the consequence of being loved. Dickens really made a mistake in allowing Dick a hundred and fifty pounds a year instead of the twenty-five thousand pounds he would have had if he had been "another sort of nephew," for he would have spent his money handsomely, and most rich men have such dull ways of getting rid of their fortunes.

Dickens' sympathetic understanding of the pleasure of the poor, which is evidenced in the description of the Kenwigs' party, is shown again in the scene in which Kit and his family go to Astley's. Mrs. Jarley is not unlike Crummles, and is another charming

picture of the small theatrical show folk whom Dickens (because they were ungenteel and struggling) knew and loved. Mrs. Jiniwin, Mr. Chuckster, and the pony are short but characteristic additions to the Dickens gallery, and the villains of the story, Sampson and Sally Brass and Quilp, are colossal. They are all comic characters. Quilp is a variation of the type that has appeared in a hundred stories, the man warped in body and soul, and generally he is made horrible and inhuman, but in *The Old Curiosity Shop* he is possible and human because he is funny. Sampson Brass is another of the lawyer rogues that Dickens loved to portray, and Sally is a better man and a harder rascal than her brother. In this Dickens anticipated Mr. Shaw's great discovery. In all the small things of life (including its small villainies) woman is the superior of man, and when woman is admitted to the roll of attorneys it is by no means certain that the practice of the law will become any more scrupulous.

"BARNABY RUDGE."

Dickens always instinctively disliked the gentleman. There is no gentleman in *Pickwick*, for Mr. Chesterton is surely mistaken in supposing that Dickens meant to satirise the country gentleman when he drew Mr. Nupkins, but in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Sir Mulberry Hawk, gentleman, is more hateful than

Ralph Nickleby the money-lender. In *Barnaby Rudge*, Sir John Chester, that most refined and gentlemanly villain, is the central figure of the intrigue. Sir John was too tidy to be wholesome. When he first introduces him to us, Dickens remembers "his blooming face, white teeth, exactly ordered dress, and perfect calmness"—Carter in *Dombey and Son* also had gleaming teeth—and pictures him "a staid grave, placid gentleman, something past the prime of life, yet upright in his carriage for all that, and slim as a greyhound." Gravity and placidity are popularly supposed to be the accompaniments of virtue, but Dickens knew better. Old Tony Weller had none of the gravity or becoming dignity of age, but he had a heart of gold. Sir John Chester was a hateful rascal. I do not think that Sir John Chester is real, but it is certainly true that gentlemanliness is often hateful.

Barnaby Rudge is a comparative failure. It is not an historical novel at all, any more than Mr. Bernard Shaw's *Cæsus and Cleopatra* is an historical play. Dickens and Mr. Shaw are both entirely without the power of understanding or reproducing the thought and the soul of an age that has passed, and it must be remembered that no age is so far away as the generation that has just passed. The London of the Gordon Riots was farther from the London of Dickens than the Rome of Cæsar from the Bedford Park of the Fabian Society. Dickens loved trying his hand at everything. Some one apparently told him that

the Gordon Riots had never been made the subject for a novel, and he at once determined to use them. If *Barnaby Rudge* is to be judged as an historical novel and compared with Scott and Dumas, with *Esmond*, and Mr. Ford Maddox Hueffer's *The Fifth Queen*, or even with *A Tale of Two Cities*, its failure is pathetic. But of course such comparisons are ridiculous. The label of a Dickens novel is a thing of no importance at all. The outstanding distinction of *Barnaby Rudge* is that it has an idiot for its hero, not a weak-minded Mr. Toots, but a " natural " and a fine hero too, loyal, courageous, loving and lovable. Dickens repeats the old assertion of the charm of simplicity. The real value of the story lies in the fact that the only two characters in the book who really believed in the Anti-Papist cause were Barnaby Rudge and Lord George Gordon himself, and that both of them were daft. Was ever bigotry so brilliantly analysed before ? Barnaby marched with simple-minded gallantry in the ranks of the rioters. He had no thought but the thought of " the cause," and he had not the least idea what " the cause " was.

Barnaby was an idiot, but he was picturesque, and like the costermonger, and like Disraeli, and like all Jews who are not ashamed of their race, Dickens loved the picturesque. The greatest of all the deficiences of the English gentleman is that he shivers at the idea of being picturesque, and since the man who is not a gentleman persists in copying the

gentleman, our streets (if they are not peopled by costers) are dull and drab.

Dickens' fine scorn of the whole business of what is humorously called "the administration of justice" led him to revel in the description of the hanging laws (repealed in his day, thanks to Sir Samuel Romilly, that strange phenomenon a humane lawyer) and in the little colourful picture of Dennis the hangman, a Hogarthian caricature, but unforgettable in its strength and completeness. *Barnaby Rudge* brings few notable additions to the Dickens family. Haredale and the two Chesters, Hugh and Joe Willet, and Gashford are all lay figures. Gabriel Varden is attractive, and I have always regarded Dolly as most pleasant and flesh and blood, and Mrs. Varden is splendid, the sketch from which her creator developed Mrs. Wilfer. She was "a lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper—a phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to make everybody more or less uncomfortable." Dickens makes Mrs. Varden repent, but ladies of uncertain temper remain uncertain to the end, and before *Our Mutual Friend* was written he had realised that fact. Mrs. Wilfer never repented.

There remain Sim Tappertit, the immortal burlesque of the romantic hero whom Dickens so often himself tried to create, Miss Miggs, and old John Willet. There is nothing in any of the Dickens novels more delightful than the 'prentice scenes in

Barnaby Rudge. One of the boys has acknowledged that he loves his master's daughter:

"'Have you,' rejoined Mr. Tappertit, catching him by the wrist, and giving him a cuff which would have been expressive of the most deadly malevolence but for an accidental hiccup that rather interfered with it, 'have you a—rival?'

"'Not as I know on,' replied the 'prentice.

"'If you had one—' said Mr. Tappertit—'What would you —eh?'

"The 'prentice looked fierce and clenched his fists.

"'It is enough,' cried Mr. Tappertit hastily; 'we are observed. I thank you!'"

What perfect fooling it is! Miss Miggs, among other things, supplies an answer to the puzzling question as to how the Government finds female prison warders, and Mr. Willet is a salutary warning that as sometimes cleverness may be kindly (it does not happen too often), so sometimes simplicity may be hard-hearted.

"MARTIN CHUZZLEWIT."

The plot of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is the thinnest peg on which mortal has ever hung a masterpiece. The idea apparently (for it is impossible to be quite sure) is to exhibit the folly of selfishness by relating the history of a middle-class family; but, as always happens with Dickens, the first design is left to flow dully and sluggishly through a thrilling border of

side characters and side interests. Old Chuzzlewit's quarrel with his grandson, his elaborate, tiresome, and altogether silly plot to expose a humbug whom no one in the world believed in except Tom Pinch, his final overthrow of the humbug, and his reconciliation with young Martin are all Dickens at his crudest and worst. Jonas is a quite unbelievable villain, and the murder and his subsequent fear are a mere repetition and a pale repetition of Bill Sikes. Yet for all this, much of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is Dickens at his best. Pecksniff, Tom Pinch, Mark Tapley, and Mrs. Gamp are masterpieces, and the whole of the American incidents pitchforked into the middle of the book with the inconsequence of the songs in a musical comedy are splendid. Dickens' supreme skill as a caricaturist is used to the full in this book. With inspired exaggeration he summarises his characters in a sentence. Chevy Slime is always " waiting round the corner." The sharp lacing of the three spinster daughters was " expressed in their noses." A grand-nephew of Mr. Chuzzlewit possessed only " the first idea and sketchy notion of a face," and so on. When he elaborates the descriptions, as with Jonas and his father, we first begin to lose the sense of reality, and after a while we become convinced that they are not real at all.

Pecksniff is the complete humbug, but he is so complete that he ceases to be a humbug. Micawber sincerely believed that Micawber was unlucky, but Pecksniff never believed that Pecksniff was anything

but a hollow fraud. He overdid his sentiments. His true character was apparent to all the world, to Mark Tapley, to John Westlock as well as to Jonas and Montague Tigg. Tom Pinch was entirely impressed by his well-sounding sentences, but Tom Pinch is the type of those simple and on the whole eminently wise people who believe in everyone. Tom was quite happy while he believed in Pecksniff. He was very unhappy when his faith was shaken—it was never more than shaken—and old Chuzzlewit's manœuvres were really unsuccessful as far as Tom was concerned. Tom Pinch is of course almost another Mr. Toots, and it is a splendid truth that the Toots and the Pinches nearly always find a Nipper or a John Westlock to look after them, and to be themselves made happy and dignified by their love. Tom, as I say, worshipped Pecksniff, and it does not really matter what god it is that we worship as long as we do bow ourselves occasionally in humility in the dust.

Mrs. Gamp is the second great character in *Martin Chuzzlewit*—a snuffy, dirty, greedy, and hard-hearted old woman, but still irresistibly comic. If the debtors' prison was pulled down by *Pickwick* and *Dorrit*, and the workhouse was humanised by Bumble, it is also true that the modern capable kindly sick nurse owes her existence to Mrs. Gamp. Reform here, too, has come through laughter. Dickens did not mean us to like Mrs. Gamp. He wanted us to fume with rage at her heartlessness as he meant us to weep

at the death of Paul Dombey and thrill at the noble-heartedness of Nicholas Nickleby. As it is, Mrs. Gamp is a complete joy, and for her we would willingly exchange a wilderness of Paul Dombeys and Nicholas Nicklebys. And once more Dickens shows his never-failing appreciation of humanity (he is the one complete Comtist), for Mrs. Gamp is dignified by her imagination. To the blatant materialism of Betsey Prig there was "no sich a person as Mrs. Harris," but to Mrs. Gamp she was the only real person in the world, and as Sairey lay o' nights in her best bed, "ornamented with divers pippins carved in timber, which on the slightest provocation, and frequently on none at all, came tumbling down," she too dreamt her dreams. The philosophy, too, of the poor, who accept the hardest buffetings of fortune with humour and resignation, was never more aptly summarised than in Mrs. Gamp's immortal reflection: "He was born in a wale, and he lived in a wale, and he must take the consequence of sich a situation."

Tom Pinch, the lovable simpleton, has already been sufficiently described; but his little sister Ruth is one of the most attractive of all Dickens' heroines, and the story of John Westlock's proposal is human and credible because it is fantastic, and the Temple Fountain, the burly drayman, and the fiery-faced laundress are allowed to play parts in its development. Every man is a fantastic, but men and women are never so fantastic as when they are in love. That is

why love scenes on the stage with lovers in fashionable clothes are always silly. Lovers should have flowers wreathed in their hair and be clothed in purple and gold. They have as a matter of fact flowers wreathed in their hair, and they do wear garments of purple and gold; and unless the artist who attempts to picture them for us has sufficient skill to show us the flowers and the fairy raiment, we know instinctively that they are not real. Romeo and Juliet are real, and Antony and Cleopatra, and Tristan and Isolde, and Richard Feverel and Lucy—and Ruth and John Westlock.

Mark Tapley is another edition of Sam Weller, the cheery, honest, self-respecting servant whom Dickens knew and loved. Montague Tigg starts by being farcical and real, and finishes by being melodramatic and rather absurd. Mr. Nadgett, the secret finder, is a brilliant thumbnail sketch. Mr. Mould, Jobling, Mrs. Lupin, Charity Chuzzlewit, and Mrs. Todgers are all admirably Dickensonian.

Dickens had been to America just before he started to write *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and as a consequence (and for no other earthly reason) he took Martin and Mark across the Atlantic. I have already referred to his attitude to America. It was his power to see the fun of things, the fun of pomposity, the fun of humbug, the fun of simplicity, the fun of vice, the fun of virtue. In his own country he had discovered Bumble and Pecksniff, Sir John Chester and Squeers; why should he not with the same discerning eyes discover

in America Mr. Jefferson Brick with his immense belief in the "big word"; Major Pawkins, the patriot, whose motto was "run a moist pen slick through everything and start fresh"; Mr. Scadder, the "honestest fellow in the world"; and Mr. Elijah Pogram, the orator? It is a good thing for a man to love his country, but in his American pictures Dickens shows how grotesque is the patriotism which never ceases talking, and that having exhausted its praise of the praiseworthy is forced to go on to praise of the trivial and the offensive. It is a common fact that no habit is more arresting than that of expressing admiration for the unadmirable, when it has once been begun. Should an Englishman constantly affirm that he loved England because of the beauty of its countryside, the essential liberty of its people, and the stability of its institutions, because it was the birthplace of Shakespeare and Nelson, and because it is the home of bad cooking and wasteful housekeeping, it would inevitably happen that after a while it would be the bad cooking and the wasteful housekeeping that would alone be the subject of his eulogies. Moreover, the United States in the middle of the last century were a new nation inhabited by a very young people. They were proud of their country, but they did not quite know why they were proud. They were a little shy before strangers, and like all shy people they were aggressive and assertive. Fearing criticism they resented it, and they were, in consequence, obstinately determined to acclaim the

beauty of all their institutions, including the gentleman who "sucked his knife for some moments and made a cut with it at the butter."

Dickens' satirical description of the New York woman with the culture pose, whose weekly studies included that of the "philosophy of vegetables," is still sufficiently topical. The modern American woman is the tireless assimilator of small text-books. She may always be relied upon to know a little—a very little—of whatever the world is talking about—Nietzsche or Bergson, theosophy or the Russian ballet.

In his gibes at the Norris family, who, although they were keen abolitionists, believed that there was "a natural antipathy between the two races," Dickens merely represented the ignorance of the negro problem and of the instinctive white feeling to negroes that is always shown by people who have never lived in countries where the black man is an important factor.

It must surely have been from the pages of *Martin Chuzzlewit* that the United States received its name of the "Land of the Dollar." "All their cares," Dickens writes, "hopes, joys, affections, virtues, and associations seemed to be melted down into dollars. Whatever the chance contributions that fell into the cauldron of their talk, they made the gruel thick and stiff with dollars. Men were weighed by their dollars, measures judged by their dollars; life was auctioneered, appraised, put up, and knocked down for its

dollars." That is still partially true of America, and it is, alas! far truer of our England than it was of the England of Dickens.

But it must always be remembered that *Martin Chuzzlewit* was written years before the great and in many respects the splendid war which made the United States a nation and gave it its soul.

" THE CHRISTMAS BOOKS."

It is often said by the ununderstanding that Dickens invented Christmas. As a matter of fact Dickens thoroughly understood the English poor man, and that the English Christmas is the English poor man's idea of a good time. There is not a labourer in a London model dwelling or a peasant in a village alehouse whose heart would not beat with joy at the thought of going with Mr. Pickwick to old Wardle's Christmas party. The blinds drawn and the door locked (and the worse the weather is outside the better), lots and lots to eat and drink, a cosy room and a bright fire and nobody at dinner but one's own family, a gargantuan heavy feast with the church bells ringing (not too loudly) in the distance—that is the English poor man's notion of the way to spend the one great festival of the year. You may not agree with him. You may detest plum pudding and loathe meeting your family. You may prefer to spend Christmas Day ski-ing in Switzerland or dining

at the Metropole, Brighton, but do not make the mistake of supposing that Charles Dickens invented the English Christmas. It would be as rational to suppose that he invented England.

He wrote *The Christmas Carol* in 1843. He wrote *The Chimes* in 1844, in Italy, and it is significant that this essentially English story should have been composed amid essentially un-English surroundings. He went on writing Christmas stories almost to the year of his death. In many respects *The Christmas Carol* is the best of them, but the title of *The Cricket on the Hearth* summarises all that Christmas meant to Dickens and still means to the average common Englishman. It means going home. Dickens, as Forster with his unrivalled knowledge insists over and over again, loved home, needed home. When he was unhappy, he wandered over the face of the earth longing to be happily home all the while. The German loves his country more than the Englishman. The Parisian loves his city more than the Londoner. But the Englishman loves his back parlour, the place where the coal fire burns cheerfully and wastefully and where his slippers are kept. The fire and the slippers and the cricket on the hearth! The Englishman loves his back parlour, for there he is safe from interference, from patronage, and from criticism, the three things that he most abhors! There, at least, he can do what he likes. Scrooge and the ghosts in *The Christmas Carol* are all used to work up an interest in Bob Cratchit's Christmas party and in

Scrooge's nephew, to lead to the splendid simple retelling of the poetry of the life of the poor. How beautifully Dickens could describe the pathos that he understood is shown to perfection in the little scene when Bob comes back from Tiny Tim's grave and says quite simply to his wife: "It would have done you good to see how green a place it is."

"They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were not waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another and contented with the true."

Dickens did not lack indignation for the leaking boots and the thin clothes, but he realised the beneficence of the Christmas spirit that makes it possible for the needy to be happy while social reformers are, with exceeding dilatoriness, thinking out plans for supplying them with new boots and warmer dresses and trousers. Christmas converted Scrooge, and it was a very English conversion. And it was over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop (a most humane and English situation) that he discussed family affairs with his clerk.

In *The Chimes*, Dickens jeers at the people and the tendencies that threaten the English Christmas, and indeed threaten (and more insistently now than when he wrote) everything that we mean when we talk of England. The enemies of the people are the men and women, often highly conscientious and philan-

thropic, who want to rob the people of themselves, which is worse even than robbing them of their common lands. The poor only hate the rich when the rich without understanding indulge in orgies of interference. Sir Joseph Bowley sits on Royal Commissions nowadays; he is often a Socialist, but his speech remains the same:

"'I do my duty as the "Poor Man's Friend and Father;" and I endeavour to educate his mind by illustrating on all occasions the one great moral lesson which that class requires. That is entire Dependence on myself. They have no business whatever with—with themselves. If wicked and designing persons tell them otherwise, and they become impatient and discontented, and are guilty of insubordinate conduct and black-hearted ingratitude—which is undoubtedly the case—I am the Friend and Father still. It is ordained. It is in the nature of things.'"

Certainly Charles Dickens wrote for all time, for to-day as for yesterday.

"DOMBEY AND SON."

Dombey and Son is the last of the early novels of Dickens. *David Copperfield* is the first of the later series. I am not going to attempt to make comparisons between the work of the wonder youth of twenty and the writing of the matured and successful man. It is true that the glaring weakness apparent to many carping critics in *Oliver Twist* and *The Old Curiosity*

Shop appears hardly at all in *David Copperfield*, and comparatively little in the novels that follow it, but at the same time the individual splendour of Dickens is nowhere more insistent than in *Pickwick*. Experience and the reading of other people's books led to a toning down of his faults, but they remained, and they remained faults. His power continued his own, and in their greatness there is a unity in all his writings from *Pickwick* to *Edwin Drood*.

The plot of *Dombey and Son* is far removed from the wild unreality of *Oliver Twist* or the stodgy sentimentality of *Nicholas Nickleby*. The idea is dramatic and human—a proud cold man loving his son and made cruel to his daughter by that love, the death of the boy and an increasing hatred of the girl, a second loveless marriage that the house may be carried on, and at the end utter and complete disappointment. Dombeys have lived in the world. Florence is born a real girl. Edith is a real woman. But the characters in the Dickens novels are only real when they are unreal. He can only describe human souls when he puts them into fairy bodies. All of us have known scores of young women exactly like Florence Dombey, and yet at the end of the novel we know nothing of Florence. We have never been introduced. She does not exist for us at all. None of us has ever known a sea captain like Captain Cuttle, and yet after one chapter we recognise him as a man and a brother. The fact is that the truth can never be told in realistic terms. A photograph

of John Jones does not show us the real John Jones at all, but Max Beerbohm's caricature of Mr. Claud Lowther, standing graceful and gigantic with the Paris boulevards at his feet, is a complete revelation of Mr. Claud Lowther.

Mr. Dombey begins flesh and blood. He soon becomes sawdust. He is real enough in loving Paul and disliking Florence. He is absurd when he sends messages to his wife through his servant. Paul is real when he is being tortured by Mrs. Pipchin and Dr. Blimber (Dickens loved children and hated cruelty), but he too becomes an irritating sentimental puppet when he makes death-bed speeches: "How fast the river runs between its green banks and its rushes, Flo! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves!" Florence is not a real girl at all. She is too sweet and forgiving for this world. Edith is real when she marries Dombey for his money. She is of the world of Surrey-side melodrama when she says to her husband: "If I loved you to devotion, could I do more than render up my whole will and being to you, as you have just demanded? If my heart were pure and all untried and you its idol, could you ask more, could you have more?" Carker is the conventional villain, his gleaming teeth being the sign of villainy, as the riding-breeches of the naughty gentleman used to be at the Adelphi. Dickens had a good story to tell in *Dombey and Son*, but he could not tell it.

Toots is the real hero of the book, and Toots, as I

have already hinted, is also the typical Dickens hero, dull, stupid, unattractive, but modest, loyal, sincere, altogether lovable. Walter Gay is a bore, and always must be a bore. But Toots would be a charming companion if one took the trouble to know him. Captain Cuttle is worthy to be Toots's friend. He could think no evil because he had never dreamed evil. His eyes were clear and his heart was simple. " Captain Gills," says Mr. Toots, " let me have the pleasure of shaking hands. You've a way of saying things that gives me an agreeable warmth all up my back." Glorious Captain Cuttle (as John Forster calls him) has given tens of thousands that same agreeable warmth. Susan Nipper is comic, while Florence is pathetic, and Susan is warm and lovable. Major Bagstock is one of the greater Dickens characters. He is a near relation of Pecksniff, and, as Mr. Chesterton says, he is the better humbug because the affectation of rugged geniality is much more effective than the affectation of smug humility. Miss Tox is pathetic, but she is comically pathetic. It is sad to love Dombey and not to be loved by him. But it is funny to love Dombey at all, and Miss Tox, because of her funny love, is real and interesting. Polly, Cousin Feenix (almost the only aristocrat that Dickens ever had a good word for), Jack Bunsby, the Game Chicken, are all gratefully added to the memories Dickens has given us.

Dickens himself had suffered from Mrs. Pipchin, and in *Dombey and Son* he bashes away at the torture

of children which he had already so valiantly attacked in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. The rich boy left to the tender mercies of Mrs. Pipchin—"a marvellous ill-favoured, ill-conditioned old lady of a stooping figure, with a mottled face, like bad marble, a hook nose, and a hard grey eye which looked as if it might have been hammered at on an anvil without sustaining any injury"—was every bit as much to be pitied as the poor boy left to Mr. Bumble. It was her system "not to encourage a child's mind to develop and expand itself like a young flower, but to open it by force like an oyster"—a system quite as cruel and idiotic as that of Mr. Squeers. If Paul Dombey had been created a generation later, he would not have been subsequently sent to Dr. Blimber's establishment but to a public school, and it would have been good to have had Dickens' picture of that institution. Paul would certainly have worked less and played more, and perhaps he would have been happier, but he and his fellows would doubtless still have regarded the Romans as "their implacable enemies," and quite justifiably.

Dickens defended himself from the charge that the conversion of Mr. Dombey was forced and unnatural. He declares in his Preface that "Mr. Dombey undergoes no violent change, either in this book or in real life." The change in the book is surely violent enough. But there is no change in real life, because Dombey does not exist in real life. And whether he changes or not does not matter a jot. It is Toots

and Cuttle, and Susan and Mrs. Pipchin that matter, and heaven forfend that they should ever change!

"DAVID COPPERFIELD."

"I seem to be sending some part of myself into the Shadowy World," wrote Dickens to John Forster as he was finishing *David Copperfield*. There was more than a small part of Dickens in every book he wrote (we all of us, even the least considerable, put ourselves into our books if they have any meaning at all), but he did not send himself into a world of shadows but into a world of warm realities. *David Copperfield* is, in its incidents, largely autobiographical, but there is less of the essential Dickens to be discovered in David than can be discovered in Captain Cuttle or Newman Noggs.

David Copperfield is commonly said to mark the beginning of the novelist's second period. But it is easy vastly to exaggerate the importance of the transition. If in *Pickwick* Dickens shows us the farce of the commonplace, in *Oliver Twist* the tragedy of the commonplace, and in *The Christmas Carol* the pathos and heroism of the commonplace, he shows us in *David Copperfield* the romance of the commonplace. He had been accused of wild exaggeration, and although no man ever exaggerated so superbly or with so fine a sense of truth, with the odd perver-

sion that always made him resent himself, he was eager to deny and disprove the charge. He determined to write a book with a scheme which would prevent him constantly dropping into fantasy. He would confine himself to real life. The incidents should be incidents that had actually happened. He would write his own story. And the result is another fairy tale. When he sat down to remember exactly what had happened to Charles Dickens, he discovered that the adventures were just as gorgeously improbable and the meetings just as completely thrilling as anything that ever happened to Martin Chuzzlewit or Mr. Pickwick. Every true biography is a fairy tale, because every real man and every real woman are fairies. The realist is always an unconscious liar. He does not tell the truth because the truth cannot be told in his language. Everything about a man—his birth, his life, and his death—is utterly improbable, wild, contradictory, eerie. We must obey the fairy laws (like the lady in the Savoy opera), whether we will or no; but we do not know that we are obeying them, and we make funny little laws for ourselves which it does not matter a jot whether we obey or not. Dickens saw the fairies all the time. When he began to write *David Copperfield* he determined to shut his eyes to everything that was not revealed to the stockbroker. But the fairies were not to be denied, he could not shut himself away from them, and David had hardly been born before the wicked fairy Murdstone and the fairy godmother Peggotty were hurting

and blessing him. *David Copperfield* is above all things the complete assertion that Everyman's life is a romantic adventure, even if Everyman be a successful novelist, and success more than anything else makes adventure and romance difficult.

The great distinction of the first part of the novel is that Dickens not only remembered the incidents of his childhood, but he remembered exactly how those incidents affected him when he was a child. He was always, as has already been said more than once, righteously wroth at the torture of children, but until *David Copperfield* his children are themselves uninteresting monstrosities—Oliver Twist, Smike, Nell, Paul Dombey, Florence, are all ridiculously false. But Dickens exactly remembered what he himself was like, or rather he had the rare knowledge of what he was like, and David is real, and the world in which David lived is the world as David saw it. The charm of the earlier chapters of *David Copperfield* is exactly the charm of *Peter Pan*. Sir James Barrie's hero is a genuine boy, and he lives in a genuine boy's world. So does David. Mr. Chesterton has already pointed this out. Murdstone, if David Copperfield had met him when he was grown up, would necessarily have been a less hateful person, and Steerforth would most certainly not have been a hero. We have all of us suffered the horrible disillusionment that comes from meeting our school hero when he has married and begotten a family. Dan'l Peggotty, Barkis, Ham, even Em'ly, are described as the boy saw them, and

they remain until the end characters seen through a boy's eyes. David first met Micawber when he was a child, and we shall never understand the whole grandeur of Micawber if we forget this fact. It is profoundly true that our entire judgment of our fellows depends upon the first five minutes of our acquaintance. To be introduced to a stranger when we are suffering from acute dyspepsia is instinctively to dislike that stranger to the end of our days even if his virtues are conspicuous and his failings undiscoverable. Similarly we love our mothers and reverence their judgments because we are never more than three or four years old in our relations with them. They are to us exactly as they were when we first knew them. As with individuals, so with incidents. The horrors of the bottling factory were the horrors felt by a sensitive child. Just as Thackeray in *Esmond* contrived to think and to write absolutely in the manner of the seventeenth century, so in *David Copperfield* Dickens contrived to judge exactly in the manner of a small boy.

David himself ceases to be interesting, ceases almost to be real when he ceases to be a child. There is some justification for Mr. Hall Caine's assertion that "the latter part of *David Copperfield* is a great falling off from the earlier portion," and it is certainly true that after Mr. Dick has made his famous suggestion that David shall first be washed and then put to bed, we care for him very little. But delightful adventurers gather round his path—Betsey Trot-

wood with her fine appreciation of the lovableness of simple Mr. Dick; Uriah Heep, the greatest of all revelations of the pride of humility; Traddles, made human by his hair; Dora, the Peggottys, and above all the Micawbers. Dickens may have, with *David Copperfield*, passed to a fuller and more perfect art, but Agnes is the same perfectly imperfect heroine as Madeleine Bray, more actively virtuous, but just as artificial, and Dr. Strong is equally compact of sentimentality. Dora is the most delicious young woman in the Dickens novels. The quite useless things and the quite useless people in this world are often the most delightful and therefore the most useful. Dora could not cook and she could not housekeep. She was irresponsible and entirely simple. And she was admirable. The best thing that David Copperfield ever did was to love her. The worst thing that Dickens ever did was to make Dora implore her husband to marry Agnes after her death. In one short scene he almost destroys a beautiful creation. Dora naturally loves Betsey Trotwood. She would naturally have been afraid of Agnes, and no human wife ever nominated her successor. In his description of Dora's death Dickens for once restrained his tendency to mawkish sentiment, and then comes at the end this gruesome jar. It is as if a saint were to spend his last moments on earth strumming a banjo.

The whole story of little Em'ly and Steerforth is sheer Adelphi melodrama, another version of the

old story of the guileless village maiden and the wicked baronet. No girl was ever so guileless as Em'ly. Steerforth, and his mother, and Rosa Dartle are merely padding though Steerforth's later life (he is interesting as a boy) is to an extent rescued by his death, which gives Dickens the opportunity for a rare colourful example of descriptive word painting. Dan'l Peggotty is a repetition of the dignity of the poor. Mr. Hall Caine calls him as magnificent an English gentleman as Colonel Newcome. The word gentleman nowadays has acquired an arbitrary meaning, and it stands for most of the qualities that Dickens detested, but Dan'l is a mighty fine old man. Referring to him, Forster says, "the humour uplifts and refines the sentiment," and the sentence is full of suggestion. Sentiment sans humour is inhuman. Ham is as simple as Mr. Dick, but Ham is merely stupid while Mr. Dick is comic, and Mr. Dick is real —we know him and love him—and Ham is tiresome and easily (almost gladly) forgotten.

There remain the Micawbers, Dickens' masterpieces. Mr. Chesterton boldly declares that Mrs. Micawber is "very nearly the best thing in Dickens." Her resignation is superb. Her faith is magnificent, and its magnificence is mainly due to the fact that nothing ever can possibly turn up. It was, of course, a fatal error to send the Micawbers to Australia, and it is quite certain that their failure there would have been as complete as it was on the banks of the Medway. Dickens was the victim of the fashion for

happy endings. He had to clear things up in his last chapters and leave all his characters content and prosperous. There is no artistic objection to happy endings, for fortunately most human stories end with smiles. But men can only end as they began, by being themselves. The Micawbers must remain Micawbers, and to be a Micawber is to be a failure. To Mrs. Micawber's loyal mind the whole business is incomprehensible, an interesting and not unpleasant puzzle. Her husband is, without question, a failure, but why, since there appears every reason that he should be a success? But logic is of small value. Things never happen according to the rules. Mrs. Micawber's devotion to her husband is as beautiful as Lady Macbeth's devotion to hers. She is the comic wife as Mrs. Nickleby is the comic mother, and she is a perfect wife. She declares that she will never desert Mr. Micawber, and she never does. She never even dreams of deserting him. Failure is his chief possession. To fail is his function in life, and her whole existence revolves round his failures. They are her landmarks. "My mamma," she says, "departed this life before Mr. Micawber's difficulties commenced, or at least before they became pressing. My papa lived to bail Mr. Micawber several times, and then expired regretted by a numerous circle." Mrs. Micawber was never unhappy, only a little bewildered. "Here," she declared on a memorable occasion, "is Mr. Micawber without any suitable position or employment. Where does the responsibility rest?

Clearly with society. Then I would make a fact so disgraceful known, and boldly challenge society to set it right." After which there was clearly nothing left for Mrs. Micawber to do but to finish her punch and to go to bed.

Micawber was suggested by the novelist's father, and Dickens was far too sensitive and far too sentimental to have deliberately lampooned his father. There is no vice in failure, and there is no virtue in success. It is possible to succeed magnificently, though few men manage to do it. It is equally possible to fail magnificently. Besides, from his own point of view Micawber was anything but a failure. He enjoyed himself prodigiously. Every crisis brought its thrill. Every difficulty was a text for fine talk. Micawber is the master talker. Words are his food and drink. The Uriah Heep incident is a mistake. Micawber as a detective is a wild incongruity. But Micawber talking of himself is a joy. The success of the Salvation Army is unquestionably partly due to the fact that it allows ex-sinners to make speeches about their sins and to exaggerate their former wickedness. It is tremendously exciting to be a horrible example. Micawber was his own horrible example. Micawber had his troubles, but he had infinite compensations. He was very poor, but he was generally happy. Very poor men often are very happy, and this fact, if we carefully consider it, is the finest possible argument for strenuous efforts to abolish the existence of poverty.

" BLEAK HOUSE."

The enthusiasts for the first and second periods theory point out that in *Bleak House* the plot is essential and sustained, that in the second chapter Lady Dedlock's " past " is suggested, and that the story moves steadily along the line of the mystery until it is finally established by the detestable Tulkinghorn that she is the mother of Esther Summerson and that she has been the mistress of the mysterious law writer. This in a partial sense is true. It is true that Dickens set out to write the tragedy of Lady Dedlock, and that this time he persisted and carried out his intention. But for all that the tragedy of Lady Dedlock is a small part of *Bleak House*, almost an inconsiderable part. The real subject of the book is the tragedy of the law. John Forster says " that the didactic in Dickens' earlier novels derived its strength from being merely incidental . . . and not in a small degree from the playful sportiveness and fancy that lighted up its graver illustrations." In *Bleak House* the didactic, Forster continues, " is of sterner stuff, is too little relieved and all-pervading." But what Forster regards as a weakness, Mr. Chesterton applauds as a virtue. The debtors' prison is an episode in *Pickwick*, the Yorkshire school is only an episode in *Nicholas Nickleby*. " He puts," says Mr. Chesterton, " the Court of Chancery in the middle of the stage. . . . The righteous indignation

of the book is not at the red heat of anarchy, but at the white heat of art." But I suggest that while the denunciation is more sustained, the method is exactly the same. Dickens sent a funny old man into the Fleet prison and showed that the Fleet prison was cruel and silly. He imagined a funny scoundrel as the master of a Yorkshire school, and he showed, because he had created Squeers, that Yorkshire schools were cruel and silly. Squeers was the effective shot, not Smike. Similarly the rotten stupidity of the Court of Chancery is brought vividly into the light, not by Richard Carstone's gradual demoralisation, but by the comic-pathetic figure of Miss Flite sighing at the back of the court in Lincoln's Inn, with her bag of documents, waiting for a verdict, and by the comic-grotesque Krook, the proprietor of the rag-and-bottle shop in Chancery Lane. "There's no great odds between my noble and learned brother and myself," he tells Esther; "they call me Lord Chancellor and my shop Chancery, and we both grub on in a muddle." A filthy collection of old bottles and musty useless parchment, of rusty keys and rags, was Dickens' tremendous simile for the court; and a funny old man, "short, cadaverous, and withered," his inspired caricature of its Chancellor. Death, misery, heartache, insanity were ground out by the machine, but the machine itself was a thing to laugh at. Its judge was as hideously absurd as Bumble. The worst of the evils of the Court of Chancery have disappeared, laughed out of exist-

ence by the same immortal humorist who laughed away the debtor's prison and laughed the workhouses cleaner.

It is worth remarking that never once did Dickens create a really attractive lawyer, for even Perker and Fips are lawyers first and men afterwards. He knew lawyers, and not even his great laughter could humanise a race that must inevitably fatten on humanity. England is still the prey of lawyers. The administration of the law still encourages trickery, dishonour, and lies, and the poor and the honest are still hopelessly penalised in the world of wigs and precedents. In *Bleak House* all the lawyers are in the conspiracy to fleece clients, and not one of them is the least affected by any desire for the attainment of justice. They live by rather boring trickery, by acting a dreary drama. To Conversation Kenge, his client was a singular man because he declined to have any dealings with law courts. Mr. Vholes knew quite well he was leading Richard to destruction, but he went on doing it. Mr. Tulkinghorn is the most real and the most hateful villain in the whole of Dickens, one of those inhuman monsters that stray at times into the world to prove that the devil still exists. Ralph Nickleby is wicked but unreal. Fagin is wicked but threadbare and comic. Mr. Tulkinghorn is alive and bloodless. The bloodless man (and there are men in the world without blood in their veins) is tiresome when he is virtuous. When he is wicked, he is horrible. Mr. Tulkinghorn hurt Lady Dedlock just

for the sake of hurting her, coldly, deliberately, without a trace of anger. There was no earthly reason for his persistence. He had not the excuse of Torquemada. He cared nothing for her soul. He merely loved to wound. He is one of those grim figures that cause men to call upon their God for protection, for humanity cannot fight the inhuman. Dickens' picture of Mr. Tulkinghorn is perfect. His villain is villainously clothed. "The old gentleman is rusty to look at. . . . He is of what is called the old school—a phrase generally meaning any school that seems never to have been young—and wears knee-breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters and stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsive to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses when not professionally consulted." Thrice hateful Mr. Tulkinghorn! Dickens did well to contrive that he should be murdered. It was the only thing to do with him.

Mr. Guppy is another of the *Bleak House* lawyers. He is only a lawyer's clerk—"brought up in a sharp school and accustomed to a variety of general practice"—a not too scrupulous little cad, and just because he is a little cad infinitely less detestable than Mr. Tulkinghorn. Dickens could always see the soul of the cad. He could rarely see the soul of a gentleman. Gentlemanliness is unquestionably one of the curses of England. There was indeed supreme wisdom in the

often-quoted assertion of my friend, Rev. Charles Marson, that " the Church of England wants fewer gentlemen and more sanctified cads like the apostles." Mr. Guppy's mother only appears for a moment, but she gives Dickens the opportunity for writing one of his supreme farcical scenes :

" ' Why, get along with you,' said she to my Guardian. ' What do you mean ? Ain't my son good enough for you . You ought to be ashamed of yourself. Get out with you ! '

" ' My good lady,' returned my Guardian, ' it is hardly reasonable to ask me to get out of my own room.'

" ' I don't care for that,' said Mrs. Guppy, ' get out with you. If we ain't good enough for you, go and procure somebody that is good enough. Go along and find 'em.' "

Dickens' attitude to the society of his day is very clearly indicated in *Bleak House*. It is not quite clear that he was a Radical, if by a Radical is meant that Dickens ever believed that mid-Victorian England was governed by an aristocracy and was angry about it. In *Bleak House* and in *Little Dorrit* he pilloried government by incompetent professional politicians, the people who remain our governors. " Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle would not come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no government." In *Pickwick* he satirised elections, and he was properly suspicious of elected persons, here again speaking for the common average man, become, since the novelist died, even more completely the slave of the man for whom he votes. For the House of

Commons he expressed the contempt which is now being expressed by the rank and file of the trade unions, and he foresaw the gulf ever growing wider, in prejudice and desire, between the governors and the governed. Dickens did not, I think, resent aristocracy, but he had the same pity for the aristocrat that the lodge-keeper habitually has for the squire. It is quite untrue that the poor envy the rich. They always laugh at them (not too obtrusively, for the poor are generally well-mannered) and they pity them. The picture of Sir Leicester Dedlock is drawn with an evident desire to be absolutely fair. Pride is his main characteristic, but Dickens accents his chivalry. He is a fine old proud English gentleman, and his moral is that a proud gentleman is pitiful and ridiculous because he is proud and a gentleman. But because too of his qualities, the people who serve him, who accept his interpretation of himself and give him unselfish service—Mrs. Rouncewell and her son George—attain a dignity that never belongs to Sir Leicester himself. Dickens understood the servant class. He never falsely exaggerated their servility. Rather he depicts them as strong men and women self-exiled from their own people, humorously mothering their betters. The elder Rouncewell, the successful ironmaster, a Dr. Smiles character, is drawn hastily and sympathetically perhaps, to please "the damned compact Liberal majority." When in *Hard Times* he elaborated Rouncewell he became Bounderby.

The melodrama of *Bleak House* is the most effective melodrama Dickens ever wrote, but it is melodrama. Lady Dedlock and her lover, Joe and the French maid all belong to the old Adelphi, though in Joe the hatred of cruelty and the impatience with official stupidity are once more very evident. The " young gonoph " had been " a-moving and a-moving on " ever since he was born, and he was puzzled where he could move on to any more. Mr. Snagsby was perplexed by the problem. But the constable was quite sure about things. " My instructions don't go to that; my instructions are that every boy is to move on."

Jarndyce, and Ada and Esther Summerson are cloyingly good and not convincing. As Mr. Galsworthy says, " the novelist who looks up to his characters never makes them live. Jarndyce and Esther Summerson are not vitalised properly because Dickens cast an upturned eye on them; he dared not touch them with the comic, and their blood therefore lacks the red corpuscles that inhabit the veins of characters less solemnly conceived." Mrs. Jellyby and Mr. Chadband are both blows at pose and humbug. Dickens, for all the exaggeration of his imagination, loved restraint in religion. He was so English that he was keenly Church of England, and his distaste for Puritanism and Nonconformity unquestionably led him to rather unfair caricatures. Stiggins and Chadband are both a little malicious and a good deal ignorant. Old Turveydrop, the man who taught

gentility to the ungenteel, is a far more effective portrait, and the Bagnets are another splendid family of the poor and unpretentious.

Harold Skimpole demands more detailed consideration. It is a matter of small concern now whether or not Skimpole was founded on Leigh Hunt. He is a very near relation of Micawber's, anyway, but while Dickens loved Micawber he disliked Skimpole. With his average common man's instinct he mistrusted success, and in Micawber he drew the immortal failure. But Micawber with all his bills and all his duns was always genuinely hopeful that something would turn up, and fully determined to take advantage of the something when it appeared. But Skimpole had no such illusions. He was a humbug. His pose of being an innocent child was just as much hypocrisy as Mr. Pecksniff's pose of philanthropy. He was a highly successful amiable sponger. He had hothouse grapes while Mr. Micawber only had small beer, and he was guilty of petty meannesses that would have made Micawber blush and that would have sent Mrs. Micawber back to her family. Yet Skimpole talks prodigious wisdom. There is a scene early in the story when the bailiff is in possession at his house:

"'Then you didn't think, at all events,' proceeded Mr. Skimpole, 'to this effect. Harold Skimpole loves to see the sun shine, loves to hear the wind blow, loves to watch the changing lights and shadows; loves to hear the birds, those choristers in Nature's great cathedral. And does it seem to

me that I am about to deprive Harold Skimpole of his share in such possessions which are his only birthright! You thought nothing to that effect?'

"'I certainly did—NOT,' said Coavinses. . . .

"'Very odd and very curious the mental process is in you men of business,' said Mr. Skimpole thoughtfully."

Out of the mouths of scamps as well as out of the mouths of babes and sucklings sometimes cometh wisdom. The mental process in men of business is odd and curious, and when once men of business do begin to bother their heads about other people's birthrights and other people's happiness, the whole machinery of business will quite completely come to an end. Dickens did not like Skimpole as an individual, but he was one of the great unsuccessful and was an average common man, and Dickens used him to enunciate great truths. " Every man's not obliged to be solvent," said Mr. Skimpole. It is the birthright of man to be insolvent, intemperate, lazy, foolish if he will, that is, to be himself. That is the idea of all the Dickens novels. It is the great human idea at which the Gradgrinds of the 'fifties jibed, and against which our purblind reformers declaim.

Bleak House is, after *The Pickwick Papers*, my favourite Dickens novel. It is so full, so varied—as Mr. Galsworthy has said, " so utterly readable."

"HARD TIMES."

Mr. Bernard Shaw, in an essay on *Hard Times*, suggests that it marks Dickens' "definite break with the Manchester rule of Radicalism," and that in it he is found with "Karl Marx, Carlyle, Ruskin, Morris, and Carpenter rising up against civilisation as a disease." Ruskin himself thought the book "in several respects the greatest work he has written." But if my interpretation of Dickens is even comparatively correct, both Ruskin and Mr. Shaw must be read with caution, for Ruskin wished that in such a book as *Hard Times* Dickens "would use severer and more accurate analysis"—would, that is, cease to be Dickens. While Mr. Shaw makes the amazingly rash and quite inaccurate statement that "England is not full of Micawbers and Swivellers," the whole significance of Dickens as a national benefactor is that he has shown us that every cheap suburb is full of Micawbers and Swivellers. Mr. Shaw is of course quite right when he says that Dickens had little first-hand knowledge of the details of life in the industrial towns. He was always a Cockney. But he knew enough to have discovered another misery-making machine and to denounce it. Debtors' prisons, workhouses, Yorkshire schools, law courts made men and children unhappy, and were therefore hateful and damnable. Now Dickens, with Lord Shaftesbury and the rest of the men of good intent of his generation,

discovered that factories also made for unhappiness, and he at once turned his hot satirical indignation against them. John Halifax was a factory owner, and was drawn as a saint—a smug contrast to his naughty aristocratic landlord. Rouncewell, the iron-master, is more dignified and more manly than Sir Leicester Dedlock. But Bounderby in *Hard Times* is a hateful, narrow-souled, ignorant tyrant. There is something suggestive and important in Dickens' almost malignant hatred of Bounderby. He was a self-made man. He boasted that he had come from the gutter. Now it is notorious that the most disliked of all masters are the masters who have themselves been men. Popular instincts are nearly always right. The heroes of Dr. Smiles are detested by the bricklayers, the engineers, the labourers they employ, because the bricklayers, the engineers, and the labourers laugh at the Smilesian virtues, and are well aware of the lying, the intrigues, the unwholesome industry that are needed to cause a man to rise above his fellows. Bounderby, to make his greatness the more dazzling, blasphemed against his mother. He sweated and toiled and bullied, and as Dickens went on elaborating him and hating him he at last began to laugh at him, and Bounderby shed his skin of unreality and became, for all time, the type of hard, soulless, stupid employer.

Bounderby is real. We have all met the man, the large, assertive wealthy ass, and we have all chortled with joy at the warning addressed to him by Mr.

E. W. B. Childers, the circus proprietor: "That isn't a strong building, and too much of you might bring it down."

Unhappily Stephen Blackpool, the unlucky workman, is inhumanly good. He is never a real man at all, and is merely used to point out the horrors of a bad marriage (still indissolvable if you are poor) and the misery of the factory. Dickens does not seem to know how the factory can be abolished. "Lettin' alone will never do it," says Blackpool. He was, with Ruskin, against *laissez-faire*. He saw no good in trade unionism, foreseeing again with a seer's insight the creation of a new tyranny. Mr. Shaw points out that he had no sort of faith in democracy, in the people setting things right for themselves. In fifty years they have done pitifully little. The average common man never has arranged things for himself and never can, and it is only when "they as is put over me" (masters, labour leaders, what you will) understand and love their neighbours as well as themselves that the money-making machine will be finally scrapped.

Gradgrind begins as a conscientious child-torturer and finishes as a shadow. James Harthouse is yet another laugh at the gentleman, Mrs. Sparsit is one of the great grotesques, a ladylike Mrs. Gamp, Sissy Jupe is a natural, lovable girl whose language is as high-falutin as Edith Dombey's.

Hard Times is not one of the outstanding successes. It was a topical story with a moral, and the moral is

that the world must make its facts and figures subservient to Faith and Hope and Charity.

"LITTLE DORRIT."

"A gentleman I am, a gentleman I'll live, and a gentleman I'll die. It's my intent to be a gentleman. It's my game." The words are the words of Blandois, the French villain of *Little Dorrit*, a stage villain, the wicked Frenchman as a very English Englishman imagined him, cousin-german to the ruffian in yellow whiskers and protruding teeth, who in the days before the *entente* appeared in every cheap French melodrama to ejaculate "Godam!" every minute and perpetrate all manner of naughtiness. But Blandois is the familar protest against gentlemanliness. He was the worse villain because of his gentility. Henry Gowan is the other prominent gentleman of the story, a miserable, cowardly creature, despising the goodness of the Meagles and accepting benefits from them, living on his wife and looking down on her—the very summary of the hatefulness of the class whom Dickens disliked and in a sense dreaded.

Little Dorrit is a gloomy story. It has many of the old characteristics, a heroine impossibly heroic, another Little Nell; a hero, a hopeless prig, duller because older than Nicholas Nickleby. Doubtless

Arthur Clenham and Amy will be very happy after their marriage, but they will be very tiresome people to meet. Old Dorrit is the child of the Marshalsea, not the father. His pomposity, his selfishness, his vain posturings, his ungracious sponging are the direct result of his years in prison. When fortune comes to him he is arrogant, foolish, and insolent. His manhood has been killed by the law. There is no hope for old Dorrit. Prisons do kill men's souls. They are doing it every day in England. But it is a very curious fact that the tragedy of Dorrit is not as effective in making us realise the wickedness of prisons as the farce of Mr. Pickwick in the Fleet. The horror of imprisonment for debt never left Dickens. His father had been locked in the Marshalsea. His first book laughed at the folly of the whole business. In *Little Dorrit* he almost weeps at its wickedness. Perhaps we shall one day realise that all prisons are just as foolish and just as wicked as debtors' prisons used to be, but that will only be when the Howard Society has discovered another Dickens to laugh down their walls. The contrast between Dorrit, who neither understood nor felt and was comparatively content, and his humble brother Frederick, who understood and felt and was very unhappy, is deft and dramatic. In Uriah Heep, Dickens had shown the beastliness of humility. In Frederick Dorrit he shows its pathos. All virtues (and possibly all vices) have two sides at least, and sometimes a dozen. Fanny and Tip are comically

pitiful and very real. Flora and Mr. F.'s aunt are deliciously comic, while old Casby the benevolent patriarch, and bustling good-hearted Mr. Panck who at the patriarch's orders screwed the last penny out of his unlucky tenants in Bleeding Heart Yard, must surely have suggested to Mr. Bernard Shaw the plot of his *Widowers' Houses*.

The Circumlocution Office, where things were never done and which existed only to give the Barnacles nice fat jobs, was, and indeed is, a fine summary of the greed and the stupidity of the people who govern England. Dickens pulled down prisons, but despite his satire the Circumlocution Office still flourishes. " He had," he once said, " very little confidence in the people who govern us (with a small *p*), and very great confidence in the people whom they govern (with a large P)," and the Circumlocution Office explains his want of confidence. Dickens always detested what is called society, and in Mr. Merdle, who stole and forged to get into society only to be utterly bored when he got there, he laughs at the idiocy of the whole business. Mrs. Clenham is a sober, dark figure of religious gloom and selfishness, a far more effective proof of the horrors of the self life than Anthony Chuzzlewit or Jonas; and in Miss Wade he makes us realise the highly important truth that the man and woman who shut their lives tightly up within themselves grow almost inevitably into self-tormentors. The man who is always being slighted and humiliated is the man who lives for

himself and thinks of himself as himself. The man who is happy and unsnobbable, who is never slighted and always petted, is the man who sends his soul flying round the world and insists on being a man and a brother.

Little Dorrit gives me less pleasure than any of the other novels. It is not a complete failure. It is certainly not "twaddle," as it was described in *Blackwood's*, and it is interesting to remember that while Bismarck and Jules Favre were negotiating for the surrender of Paris, Von Moltke sat reading *Little Dorrit*. That was only a few months after Dickens' death. Perhaps the great soldier was realising that the description of the Circumlocution Office supplies the explanation of why England is not as great as we always feel she ought to be.

"A TALE OF TWO CITIES."

Using the word novel in its conventional sense, Dickens only wrote two novels, and one of them, *Edwin Drood*, was never finished. The other, *A Tale of Two Cities*, was a deliberate attempt to do something which he had never done before. He is, in fiction, the supreme creator of characters. In *A Tale of Two Cities* he is concerned primarily with incidents. In a letter to Forster he said: "I set myself the little task of making a picturesque story,

rising in every chapter, with characters true to nature, but whom the story should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean, in other words, that I fancied a story of incident might be written . . . pounding its characters in its own mortar and beating their interest out of them."

As a story the book is a superb success. "There is no piece of fiction known to me," writes Forster, "in which the dramatic life of a few simple private people is in such a manner knitted and interwoven with the interest of a terrible public event that the one seems part of the other." One was part of the other. The lives of thousands of simple private people were affected by the French Revolution. Mr. Chesterton refers to the novel's "dignity and eloquence," and Forster to its "dramatic vivacity and constructive art;" and when we realise that Dickens was working in a new and unfamiliar medium, his success is the more remarkable.

The plot is of course borrowed from Carlyle. To Dickens the Revolution was based on and inspired, not by the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, but by the misery of the people. Mr. Chesterton declares that the revolution was "a war for intellectual principles." Dickens is concerned only with the motive of hunger, and without that motive there would have been no revolution. Prince Krapotkin writes: "Two great currents prepared and made the great French Revolution. One of them, the current of ideas con-

cerning the political reorganisation of the State, came from the middle classes; the other, the current of action, came from the people, both peasants and workers in towns, who wanted to obtain immediate and definite improvements in their economic condition." Mme. Defarge, knitting the condemnation of aristocrats in the wine-shop in the Faubourg St. Antoine, is not only the figure of colourful romance; she is the figure of history. The story is developed very deftly: the old Marquis (the familiar gentlemanly villain, too black for reality), sowing oppression; his nephew, the man of sympathy and the new era, reaping revenge. The coil of the Revolution intrigue that begins in the wine-shop and reaches the road-mender is thrillingly woven. The Manettes, with old Lorry the stout-hearted bank manager, Miss Pross the faithful operator, and Jerry the body-snatcher messenger, are brought into the plot with convincing naturalness, and incident follows incident with Greek inevitableness. We can feel that Dr. Manette's prayers and sufferings are not to contrive to save his daughter's happiness, and we cannot see how her pain is to be averted. Then comes Sydney Carton, the god in the machine, the great outstanding figure in the novel, waster, drunkard, hero. Dickens before had found humour and kindness in drunkards. Carton dies quickly, with no rant or fine words, for the woman he loves. The substitution for Darnay is plausible. The death on the guillotine is beautifully told. Even Carton's hackneyed death speech has a

natural dignity. Sydney Carton was his own enemy. He was Everyman's friend.

Dickens changed sides while he was writing *A Tale of Two Cities*. At the beginning he was all with the revolutionists. We sit with him in the wine-shop or trudge along with the road-mender, and we are eager for the day when they shall pay a reckoning to the oppressor. At the Bastille he is still on their side. But the Terror revolts him. I do not think he at all understands its cause or its full significance, but he thoroughly understands the horror of vengeance. Sometimes punishment must come. But woe to him whose hand must punish! To be revenged is to be demoralised, whether the vengeance is trivial or awful. Lucie went to Mme. Defarge to beg her aid:

"'As a wife and a mother,' cried Lucie most earnestly, 'I implore you to have pity on me and not to exercise any power that you possess against my innocent husband, but to use it on his behalf. O sister-woman, think of me as a wife and a mother.'

"Madame Defarge looked, coldly as ever, at the suppliant and said, turning to her friend The Vengeance:

"'The wives and mothers we have been used to see since we were as little as this child, and much less, have not been greatly considered. We have known their husbands and fathers laid in prison and kept from them, often enough. All our lives we have seen our sister-women suffer in themselves and in their children, poverty, nakedness, hunger, thirst, sickness, misery, oppression, and neglect of all kinds.'

"'We have seen nothing else,' returned The Vengeance.

"'We have borne this a long time,' said Madame Defarge, turning her eyes again upon Lucie. 'Judge you! Is it likely

that the trouble of one wife and mother would be much to us now ?'

"She resumed her knitting and went out."

Cruelty begets cruelty, and Lucie is the victim of Monseigneur the Marquis as fully as the child whom his coach ran over. Dickens saw the necessity of the revenge, but he saw the horror of the revenge when it was achieved. The whole drama is true, and the truth is reflected by a man who knew men and women, their souls and their dreams.

The metamorphosis of Jerry Cruncher from a ghoulish criminal to a valiant servant was, as I have suggested before, evidently due to Dickens' British antipathy to the crowd (average men and women, be it said) who gathered joyfully round the guillotine, and the death of Madame Defarge, shot accidentally by poor Miss Pross, is one of the most dramatic scenes in the book. It was, as he said himself, "divine justice." "When I use Miss Pross," he wrote in one of his letters, "to bring about such a catastrophe, I have the positive intention of making that half-comic intervention a part of the desperate woman's failure; and of opposing that mean death, instead of a desperate one in the streets which she wouldn't have minded, to the dignity of Carton's."

Madame Defarge lived in gloomy and not undignified tragedy. Her death was comic. Carton lived in comic failure. His death was splendid tragedy. It is in this way that fate hands out its compensations.

"GREAT EXPECTATIONS."

I have carefully avoided in this little book any attempt to place the Dickens novels in their order of merit, particularly as I personally certainly do not subscribe to the average critical judgment. But it is only fair to say that *Great Expectations* is generally regarded as among the two or three most completely artistic of its author's achievements. It is almost a sombre story, a dramatic presentment of the deceitfulness of riches. Pip at the beginning has many points of resemblance with David Copperfield, but while David is chastened into manliness by adversity, Pip is utterly demoralised by comparative wealth. Generally speaking, the only rich men who are not detestable are the men who are born rich. The motif of *Great Expectations* is far subtler and far more observant than that of any of the earlier books. Dickens, as a rule, presumes that grapes will be gathered from grape vines, although it is absurd to expect to gather them from thistles. But unhappily it happens in the world that evil follows the best intentions, and that often when we mean to aid, we only succeed in injuring. Magwitch, the escaped convict, whom Pip befriended on the marshes outside Chatham, hugs the memory of the boy's simple kindness to his heart. It had come to him as an odd solitary unexpected phenomenon. Kindness had passed Magwitch by. He had terrified the child

into stealing food for him, but neither Magwitch nor any other living creature was insensible to sympathy :

" Pitying his desolation and watching him as he gradually settled down before the fire, I made bold to say, ' I am glad you enjoy it.'

" ' Did you speak ? '

" ' I said, I was glad you enjoy it.'

" ' Thankee, my boy, I do.' "

And at once Pip became the biggest personality in the convict's life. He loved him, and when he grew rich, after being transported to Australia, he was eager to pay for the pie, and his one misty idea of how to pay for it was to make Pip a gentleman.

" ' I swore that time, soon as ever I earned a guinea, that guinea should go to you. I swore arterwards, sure as ever I spec'lated and got rich, you should get rich. I lived rough that you should live smooth, I worked hard that you should be above work. What odds, dear boy ? Do I tell it for you to feel an obligation ? Not a bit. I tell it fur you to know as that there hunted dunghill dog wot you kep life in, got his head so high that he could make a gentleman—and Pip, you're him.' "

Pip was him, and that was the pathos and tragedy of it. The " dunghill dog " found his soul with the faith that he was making a gentleman—and the gentleman was just a futile snob who forgot the love of Joe Gargery and allowed himself to be patronised by Pumblechook, the pompous, oily corn-chandler.

But when Magwitch stole back to London to review his handiwork, and incidentally to risk his life, he saved Pip from himself. The first knowledge that he owed his fortune to a convict, a mean low thief, "a heavy grubber," was horrible. "I remained too stunned to think; and it was not until I began to think that I began fully to know how wretched I was, and how the ship in which I had sailed was gone to pieces." But Magwitch believed that Pip was a gentleman and his love made Pip a man. He stood by his benefactor in his peril unto the very end.

"'And what's the best of all,' he said, 'you've been more comfortable alonger me since I was under a dark cloud, than when the sun shone. That's best of all!'"

Men can only be saved by love. That is the one great fact of life compared to which all other facts are of small importance. Love is omnipotent and can never fail. The love of Magwitch, the "heavy grubber," made a hateful shallow snob into a decent man. No argument, no reason, no philosophy could ever have wrought that miracle. There is nothing in English literature more splendid, more complete, and more effective than the love of Magwitch for Pip. To love is to live, for there is no life without love. And to live is to make life.

Apart from its central theme, *Great Expectations* is to me—and I write with the genuine modesty that

becomes a heavy debtor to the genius of Dickens—sketchy and unsatisfactory. Jaggers, the criminal lawyer, is perhaps the most attractive of all the Dickens lawyers, but he is hard and far too clean, and his devotion to "the strict line" of fact led him, as was inevitable, to the support of a very cruel lie. Wemmick, his clerk, is delightful, kindly, poor, and humorous, a real man and an ideal Dickens man. Miss Havisham and Estella are both melodramatic. Dickens was persuaded by Bulwer Lytton to change the end of the story and allow Pip after all to marry Estella. "Bulwer, who has been, as I think you know," he wrote Forster, "extraordinarily taken by the book, so strongly urged it upon me after reading the proofs, and supported his views with such good reasons, that I resolved to make the change." It did not matter very much, for *Great Expectations* really ends with the death of Magwitch.

Joe Gargery is another splendid simple man, and the descriptive scenes in the haze of the marshes, and the March day on the river, are among the best things of the sort that Dickens ever wrote.

The story carries on the exposure of gentlemanliness. "I've seen my boy, and he can be a gentleman without me," said Magwitch when he was arrested for the last time. . . . "It's best as a gentleman should not be knowed to belong to me now."

"I will never stir from your side," said I, "when I am suffered to be near you."

The gentleman had grown into a man!

"OUR MUTUAL FRIEND."

Our Mutual Friend has two distinctions—a villain, Bradley Headstone, made real not by his comicality but by his suffering, and a gentleman, Eugene Wrayburn, who is almost a hero. The book was written with difficulty and in a period of worry and ill-health. John Forster declared that it will never "rank with his higher efforts," and Forster has had a tremendous influence on the popular judgment of the Dickens novels, but I entirely agree with Mr. William de Morgan's recent eulogy. It has something of the constructive skill of *A Tale of Two Cities*, and much of the exuberant humour of the earlier books. Indeed Mr. de Morgan does not go too far when he says, that "in respect of its humour it is in no respect inferior to any work of Charles Dickens, and that for its redundant wealth of that quality it might almost claim to stand highest." The book contains forty-five characters, and in creating them Dickens' originality certainly shows no falling off. Boffin, the golden dustman, is sneered at by the superior, but he is a jolly, lovable, common old man, altogether worthy of his jolly, lovable, common old wife, and his love for Bella Wilfer and his devotion to John Harmon are beautiful and human. Bella is a delightful heroine. Compare her with Arabella Allen, or Kate Nickleby, or Rose Maylie, or Mary or Florence Dombey, or Agnes

Wickfield, or Esther Summerson, or Estella, and her flesh-and-bloodness is splendidly apparent. She is as real as Dolly Varden or Dora, and the reader envies John Harmon his bride, which is the feeling the reader must have when the heroine of a novel is real. John Harmon in himself is one of the lay figures created merely to feign to be dead, as Dickens practically admitted in one of his letters. But little Reginald Wilfer, Bella's cherubic father, the plucky little clerk struggling with adversity and a wearing wife, is entirely delicious. Mrs. Wilfer is another of the greater characters, a complete satire on dignity. To describe her as based on Mrs. Nickleby is inexact. She is grisly, feasting on her own importance, the summary of the absurdity of "standing on your dignity," for only men and women without dignity are ever dignified. Equally splendid is Silas Wegg, the man with one leg and no heart, who dropped into poetry and battened on Boffin. Perhaps if Dickens had created Silas Wegg ten years earlier he might have been as lovable as Tony Weller. As it is, while he is completely wicked he is completely funny, and it is with something akin to regret that we read of his summary ejection from the Harmon household by the energetic Sloppy.

Charley Hexam is an example of the fact that a little learning is not only dangerous but degrading. "The educated boy in spectacles," whom Dickens and Leech once saw at Chatham, is in every respect a worse man than his "uneducated father in fustian,"

meaner, quite as cruel, infinitely more a coward. Mrs. Higden and the doll's dressmaker repeat the dignity and the humour of poverty. Riah and Fledgely are an admission that a Jew may be kindly and a Christian cruel. Mr. de Morgan will not have it that Riah was intended as a sort of analogy for Fagin, and he points out that the reason why Fagin was the leader and Bill Sikes and his fellows were the led, was because Fagin did not drink and they did. Riah is not an apology for Fagin, for Fagin needed no apology. He is a kindly old Jew, over-sentimentalised and not too real.

Twemlow is the pathos of gentlemanliness; the Veneerings, "bran new people in a bran new house," its farce; Lady Tapkins and the Lammles, the genteel adventurers, its tragedy. Podsnap is another Dombey, and in him Dickens has satirised the successful wealthy English middle class that believes in itself with the flimsiest reason, and that is completely oblivious of the glorious fact that life is a thrilling adventure. Podsnap was "a too smiling large man with a fatal freshness in him." He was quite satisfied, and "he never could quite make out why everybody was not quite satisfied." When Podsnap denounced things as not English, "with a flourish of the arm and a flush of the face they were swept away," and it was Podsnap who invented "the young person." He had a young person of his own, a daughter, and Miss Podsnap envied sweeps, because they apparently enjoyed themselves on May Day.

Podsnappery still counts for a good deal in England, but Miss Podsnap is working out her emancipation by bonneting policemen and hunger-striking.

Pip is a good fellow who is degraded by becoming a gentleman. Wrayburn is a good fellow who wastes his life and is mischievous and cruel because he is born a gentleman. He can eat and drink and be moderately (very moderately) merry without the necessity for work, and to fill his empty hours he pursues Lizzie Hexam and is insolent to Bradley Headstone. "I scorn you," said Headstone to him, and although scorn is always stupid, there is no question that the earnest, industrious, conscientious schoolmaster was superficially far and away the better man. But Dr. Smiles is not always right, and Lizzie Hexam chose wisely when she preferred Eugene to Headstone. Love always sees clearly and fully, and love taught Lizzie that Wrayburn's failings had "grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in and care for and think well of." To be idle and thoughtless is to be damned! So it happened, and it happened in accordance with the laws of life, that Lizzie's love, and the dignity that belongs to love, made a man of Wrayburn even at the eleventh hour, as Magwitch's love made a man of Pip. And even a gentleman can be saved.

As I have suggested, Dr. Smiles would have joyed over Headstone and he would have delighted Mr. Peter Keary. He was compact of virtues, and yet

Dickens, with the insight of a poet, quite properly makes him the villain of his story. Wrayburn wanted Lizzie for himself, as a sort of plaything, with little or no thought for her happiness. But he laughed at himself, and because he could laugh at himself and could look at the world as a man and not merely as Eugene Wrayburn, he was able at last to see the beauty of Lizzie's character, and gradually to learn to love her, and the first sign of love is the desire to make the loved one happy. Bradley Headstone never laughed at himself. He saw nothing funny in Bradley Headstone. Dr. Smiles' young men never do see how funny they are, which is why they are so successful and so detestable. He too wanted Lizzie for himself. He had no thought of her happiness. He hated Eugene and tried to murder him, not because he feared he would hurt Lizzie, but because he prevented him securing her. Jealousy is always irrational and always beastly. A dog in the manger is a figure completely hateful. Mr. de Morgan says, "I place the scene in which Bradley Headstone discloses his fatal passion for Lizzie above every analogous scene known to me in fiction," and certainly the revelation of character is amazingly complete. He goes to her as self-satisfied as Podsnap himself. He is "a man of unimpeachable character who has made for himself every step of his way in life," and he says to her:

"'I love you. What other men mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell. What I mean is that I am under the

influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure or disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage you could draw me to any good—every good—with equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. . . . Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered and I make it with all my heart.' "

Condescension and conceit breathe in every sentence and a woeful lack of humour. What woman ever loved a man because of his unimpeachable character and his high reputation? What love is it that calculates and considers instead of laughing and singing? Dr. Smiles' young men do "love" (save the mark) like this, and Dickens showed his sense of the eternal fitness of things by hurrying off his Smilesian young man to a rough drowning in a weir.

For the rest, Rough Riderhood is a humorous rascal, Miss Abbey is an attractively strong-minded female, and the whole book is to me compact of delight.

"THE MYSTERY OF EDWIN DROOD."

The Mystery of Edwin Drood is really Dickens' second novel. It stands with *A Tale of Two Cities* in

a class apart, and it is the superior of its predecessor. *A Tale of Two Cities* is a good historical story, *Edwin Drood* is a supreme detective story. Its mystery is so mysterious that it has not been discovered to this day. Dickens was ill when he began it; he died before it was half finished. Its craftmanship is finer than that of any of his other books. In it Dickens has proved that he can observe and construct and relate in the manner of the masters of fiction. In it he dreams and exaggerates, and laughs out great truths no longer in the manner of the Charles Dickens whom the world loves. *Edwin Drood* is a sad book. It is sad because of the gloom of its atmosphere and its theme. It is sad because it reminds us that few men are ever themselves allowed to write "finis" to their works. It is still more sad because it is a proof (there are many proofs) that as a man grows old, particularly when he is successful and prosperous, he grows more and more unlike himself. At twenty we are all individual. At fifty we are all more or less like each other. The world can only be really moved to kindness by the young, because it is only the young who have words and voices, and alack! there are so many old folk on the earth and they are so sadly deaf.

Edwin Drood is the tragedy of an opium maniac. The voice of Jasper is the key of the intrigue. Dickens remained English, at least, to the end. He was tolerant to the excessive imbibing of beer and punch. He was horror-stricken by an excess that he did

not understand. I do not suggest that Jasper is impossible or even unfairly exaggerated. But if Jasper is real, so are De Quincey and Francis Thompson. The English view is the right view for an Englishman, but like other views it is partial and does not see everything.

The book, or I should say the fragment, abounds with well-defined characters. Landless and Jasper are fearful in their awful possibilities. Durdles is humourless, but not unrelated to the body-snatcher of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Honeythunder is another Dickensian onslaught on pretentious humbug, and Mr. Crisparkle is, of all the characters whom Dickens conceived and did not adorn with his matchless exaggeration, the most real and most appealing. He is sane, honest, clean, a sterling man with a proper disbelief in platform heroics, and a thorough determination not to be affected by any "moved and seconded and carried unanimously profession of faith in some ridiculous delusion or mischievous imposition." We are nowadays being "moved and seconded and carried unanimously" into all kinds of cruel and wild absurdities, but happily there are many Crisparkles left in England.

I have not space to discuss here the suggestions as to how the story should have been developed and ended. Sir William Robertson Nicoll has recently devoted a whole volume to the subject. I am concerned only with what Dickens wrote and not with what he might have written, and I confess that the

Drood speculations do not particularly interest me. He began his swan song and he was stayed in the middle, and there is no more to be said.

Only this. The Dickens of *Edwin Drood* is not the Dickens of *Pickwick* or even of *Our Mutual Friend*, but on one page at least he laughs in the old wild and splendid fashion. Mrs. Sapsea's epitaph is, as Mr. Chesterton says, "entirely delightful and entirely insane," and to be delightfully insane must surely be to be magnificently sane. Mrs. Sapsea's name was Ethelinda—"the reverential wife of Mr. Thomas Sapsea, auctioneer, valuer, estate agent, &c., of this city, whose knowledge of the world, though somewhat extensive, never brought him acquainted with a spirit more capable of looking up to him. Stranger, pause and ask thyself the question, Canst thou do likewise? If not, with a blush retire."

It is impossible to comment on such a piece of wondrous nonsense; we can only laugh and be thankful.

THE END.

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