

CHARLES DICKENS
ILLUSTRATED EDITION



**THE MYSTERY OF
EDWIN DROOD**

The Mystery Of Edwin Drood

Charles Dickens

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Charles Dickens - A Biographical Primer

By Thomas Seccombe

The English novelist, was born on the 7th of February 1812 at a house in the Mile End Terrace, Commercial Road, Landport (Portsea) — a house which was opened as a Dickens Museum on 22nd July 1904. His father John Dickens (d. 1851), a clerk in the navy-pay office on a salary of £80 a year, and stationed for the time being at Portsmouth, had married in 1809 Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Barrow, and she bore him a family of eight

children, Charles being the second. In the winter of 1814 the family moved from Portsea in the snow, as he remembered, to London, and lodged for a time near the Middlesex hospital. The country of the novelist's childhood, however, was the kingdom of Kent, where the family was established in proximity to the dockyard at Chatham from 1816 to 1821. He looked upon himself in later years as a man of Kent, and his capital abode as that in Ordnance Terrace, or 18 St Mary's Place, Chatham, amid surroundings classified in Mr Pickwick's notes as "appearing" to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers and dockyard men. He fell into a family the general tendency of which was to go down in the world, during one of its easier periods (John Dickens was now fifth clerk on £250 a year), and he always regarded himself as belonging by right to a comfortable, genteel, lower middle-class stratum of society. His mother taught him to read; to his father he appeared very early in the light of a young prodigy, and by him Charles was made to sit on a tall chair and warble popular ballads, or even to tell stories and anecdotes for the benefit of fellow-clerks in the office. John Dickens, however, had a small collection of books which were kept in a little room upstairs that led out of Charles's own, and in this attic the boy found his true literary instructors in Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphry Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Bias and Robinson Crusoe. The story of how he played at the characters in these books and sustained his idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch is picturesquely told in David Copperfield. Here as well as in his first and last books and in what many regard as his best, Great Expectations, Dickens returns with unabated fondness and mastery to the surroundings of his childhood. From seven to nine years he was at a school kept in Clover Lane; Chatham, by a Baptist minister named William Giles, who gave him Goldsmith's Bee as a keepsake when the call

to Somerset House necessitated the removal of the family from Rochester to a shabby house in Bayham Street, Camden Town. At the very moment when a consciousness of capacity was beginning to plump his youthful ambitions, the whole flattering dream vanished and left not a rack behind. Happiness and Chatham had been left behind together, and Charles was about to enter a school far sterner and also far more instructive than that in Clover Lane. The family income had been first decreased and then mortgaged; the creditors of the "prodigal father" would not give him time; John Dickens was consigned to the Marshalsea; Mrs Dickens started an "Educational Establishment" as a forlorn hope in Upper Gower Street; and Charles, who had helped his mother with the children, blacked the boots, carried things to the pawnshop and done other menial work, was now sent out to earn his own living as a young hand in a blacking warehouse, at Old Hungerford Stairs, on a salary of six shillings a week. He tied, trimmed and labelled blacking pots for over a year, dining off a saveloy and a slice of pudding, consorting with two very rough boys, Bob Fagin and Pol Green, and sleeping in an attic in Little College Street, Camden Town, in the house of Mrs Roylance (Pipchin), while on Sunday he spent the day with his parents in their comfortable prison, where they had the services of a "marchioness" imported from the Chatham workhouse.

Already consumed by ambition, proud, sensitive and on his dignity to an extent not uncommon among boys of talent, he felt his position keenly, and in later years worked himself up into a passion of self-pity in connexion with the "degradation" and "humiliation" of this episode. The two years of childish hardship which ate like iron into his soul were obviously of supreme importance in the growth of the novelist. Recollections of the streets and the prison and its purlieus supplied him with a store of literary material upon

which he drew through all the years of his best activity. And the bitterness of such an experience was not prolonged sufficiently to become sour. From 1824 to 1826, having been rescued by a family quarrel and by a windfall in the shape of a legacy to his father, from the warehouse, he spent two years at an academy known as Wellington House, at the corner of Granby Street and the Hampstead Road (the lighter traits of which are reproduced in Salem House), and was there known as a merry and rather mischievous boy. Fortunately he learned nothing there to compromise the results of previous instruction. His father had now emerged from the Marshalsea and was seeking employment as a parliamentary reporter. A Gray's Inn solicitor with whom he had had dealings was attracted by the bright, clever look of Charles, and took him into his office as a boy at a salary of thirteen and sixpence (rising to fifteen shillings) a week. He remained in Mr Blackmore's office from May 1827 to November 1828, but he had lost none of his eager thirst for distinction, and spent all his spare time mastering Gurney's shorthand and reading early and late at the British Museum. A more industrious apprentice in the lower grades of the literary profession has never been known, and the consciousness of opportunities used to the most splendid advantage can hardly have been absent from the man who was shortly to take his place at the head of it as if to the manner born. Lowten and Guppy, and Swiveller had been observed from this office lad's stool; he was now greatly to widen his area of study as a reporter in Doctors' Commons and various police courts, including Bow Street, working all day at law and much of the night at shorthand. Some one asked John Dickens, during the first eager period of curiosity as to the man behind "Pickwick," where his son Charles was educated. "Well really," said the prodigal father, "he may be said — haw — haw — to have educated himself." He was one of the most rapid and accurate reporters in London

when, at nineteen years of age, in 1831, he realized his immediate ambition and “entered the gallery” as parliamentary reporter to the True Sun. Later he was reporter to the Mirror of Parliament and then to the Morning Chronicle. Several of his earliest letters are concerned with his exploits as a reporter, and allude to the experiences he had, travelling fifteen miles an hour and being upset in almost every description of known vehicle in various parts of Britain between 1831 and 1836. The family was now living in Bentwick Street, Manchester Square, but John Dickens was still no infrequent inmate of the sponging-houses. With all the accessories of these places of entertainment his son had grown to be excessively familiar. Writing about 1832 to his school friend Tom Mitton, Dickens tells him that his father has been arrested at the suit of a wine firm, and begs him go over to Cursiter Street and see what can be done. On another occasion of a paternal disappearance he observes: “I own that his absence does not give me any great uneasiness, knowing how apt he is to get out of the way when anything goes wrong.” In yet another letter he asks for a loan of four shillings.

In the meanwhile, however, he had commenced author in a more creative sense by penning some sketches of contemporary London life, such as he had attempted in his school days in imitation of the sketches published in the London and other magazines of that day. The first of these appeared in the December number of the Old Monthly Magazine for 1833. By the following August, when the signature “Boz” was first given, five of these sketches had appeared. By the end of 1834 we find him settled in rooms in Furnival's Inn, and a little later his salary on the Morning Chronicle was raised, owing to the intervention of one of its chiefs, George Hogarth, the father of (in addition to six sons) eight charming daughters, to one of whom,

Catherine, Charles was engaged to be married before the year was out. Clearly as his career now seemed designated, he was at this time or a little before it coquetting very seriously with the stage: but circumstances were rapidly to determine another stage in his career. A year before Queen Victoria's accession appeared in two volumes Sketches by Boz, Illustrative of Everyday Life and Everyday People. The book came from a prentice hand, but like the little tract on the Puritan abuse of the Sabbath entitled "Sunday under three Heads" which appeared a few months later, it contains in germ all, or almost all, the future Dickens. Glance at the headings of the pages. Here we have the Beadle and all connected with him, London streets, theatres, shows, the pawnshop, Doctors' Commons, Christmas, Newgate, coaching, the river. Here comes a satirical picture of parliament, fun made of cheap snobbery, a rap on the knuckles of sectarianism. And what could be more prophetic than the title of the opening chapter — Our Parish? With the Parish — a large one indeed — Dickens to the end concerned himself; he began with a rapid survey of his whole field, hinting at all he might accomplish, indicating the limits he was not to pass. This year was to be still more momentous to Dickens, for, on the 2nd of April 1836, he was married to George Hogarth's eldest daughter Catherine. He seems to have fallen in love with the daughters collectively, and, judging by subsequent events, it has been suggested that perhaps he married the wrong one. His wife's sister Mary was the romance of his early married life, and another sister, Georgina, was the dearest friend of his last ten years.

A few days before the marriage, just two months after the appearance of the Sketches, the first part of The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club was announced. One of the chief vogues of the day was the issue of humorous, sporting or anecdotal novels in parts, with

plates, and some of the best talent of the day, represented by Ainsworth, Bulwer, Marryat, Maxwell, Egan, Hook and Surtees, had been pressed into this kind of enterprise. The publishers of the day had not been slow to perceive Dickens's aptitude for this species of "letterpress." A member of the firm of Chapman & Hall called upon him at Furnival's Inn in December 1835 with a proposal that he should write about a Nimrod Club of amateur sportsmen, foredoomed to perpetual ignominies, while the comic illustrations were to be etched by Seymour, a well-known rival of Cruikshank (the illustrator of Boz). The offer was too tempting for Dickens to refuse, but he changed the idea from a club of Cockney sportsmen to that of a club of eccentric peripatetics, on the sensible grounds, first that sporting sketches were stale, and, secondly, that he knew nothing worth speaking of about sport. The first seven pictures appeared with the signature of Seymour and the letterpress of Dickens. Before the eighth picture appeared Seymour had blown his brains out. After a brief interval of Buss, Dickens obtained the services of Hablot K. Browne, known to all as "Phiz." Author and illustrator were as well suited to one another and to the common creation of a unique thing as Gilbert and Sullivan. Having early got rid of the sporting element, Dickens found himself at once. The subject exactly suited his knowledge, his skill in arranging incidents — nay, his very limitations too. No modern book is so incalculable. We commence laughing heartily at Pickwick and his troupe. The laugh becomes kindlier. We are led on through a tangle of adventure, never dreaming what is before us. The landscape changes: Pickwick becomes the symbol of kind-heartedness, simplicity and innocent levity. Suddenly in the Fleet Prison a deeper note is struck. The medley of human relationships, the loneliness, the mystery and sadness of human destinies are fathomed. The tragedy of human life is revealed to us amid its most farcical elements. The droll and laughable figure of

the hero is transfigured by the kindness of human sympathy into a beneficent and bespectacled angel in shorts and gaiters. By defying accepted rules, Dickens had transcended the limited sphere hitherto allotted to his art: he had produced a book to be enshrined henceforth in the inmost hearts of all sorts and conditions of his countrymen, and had definitely enlarged the boundaries of English humour and English fiction. As for Mr Pickwick, he is a fairy like Puck or Santa Claus, while his creator is "the last of the mythologists and perhaps the greatest."

When *The Pickwick Papers* appeared in book form at the close of 1837 Dickens's popular reputation was made. From the appearance of Sam Weller in part v. the universal hunger for the monthly parts had risen to a furore. The book was promptly translated into French and German. The author had received little assistance from press or critics, he had no influential connexions, his class of subjects was such as to "expose him at the outset to the fatal objections of vulgarity," yet in less than six months from the appearance of the first number, as the *Quarterly Review* almost ruefully admits, the whole reading world was talking about the Pickwickians. The names of Winkle, Wardle, Weller, Jingle, Snodgrass, Dodson & Fogg, were as familiar as household words. Pickwick chintzes figured in the linendrapers' windows, and Pickwick cigars in every tobacconist's; Weller corduroys became the stock-in-trade of every breeches-maker; Boz cabs might be seen rattling through the streets, and the portrait of the author of *Pelham* and *Crichton* was scraped down to make way for that of the new popular favourite on the omnibuses. A new and original genius had suddenly sprung up, there was no denying it, even though, as the *Quarterly* concluded, "it required no gift of prophecy to foretell his fate — he has risen like a rocket and he will come down like the stick." It would have needed a very emphatic gift of prophecy indeed

to foretell that Dickens's reputation would have gone on rising until at the present day (after one sharp fall, which reached an extreme about 1887) it stands higher than it has ever stood before.

Dickens's assumption of the literary purple was as amazing as anything else about him. Accepting the homage of the luminaries of the literary, artistic and polite worlds as if it had been his natural due, he arranges for the settlement of his family, decrees, like another Edmund Kean, that his son is to go to Eton, carries on the most complicated negotiations with his publishers and editors, presides and orates with incomparable force at innumerable banquets, public and private, arranges elaborate villegiatures in the country, at the seaside, in France or in Italy, arbitrates in public on every topic, political, ethical, artistic, social or literary, entertains and legislates for an increasingly large domestic circle, both juvenile and adult, rules himself and his time-table with a rod of iron. In his letter-writing alone, Dickens did a life's literary work. Nowadays no one thinks of writing such letters; that is to say, letters of such length and detail, for the quality is Dickens's own. He evidently enjoyed this use of the pen. Page after page of Forster's *Life* (750 pages in the *Letters* edited by his daughter and sister-in-law) is occupied with transcription from private correspondence, and never a line of this but is thoroughly worthy of print and preservation. If he makes a tour in any part of the British Isles, he writes a full description of all he sees, of everything that happens, and writes it with such gusto, such mirth, such strokes of fine picturing, as appear in no other private letters ever given to the public. Naturally buoyant in all circumstances, a holiday gave him the exhilaration of a schoolboy. See how he writes from Cornwall, when on a trip with two or three friends, in 1843. "Heavens! if you could have seen the necks of bottles, distracting in their immense variety of shape, peering out

of the carriage pockets! If you could have witnessed the deep devotion of the post-boys, the maniac glee of the waiters! If you could have followed us into the earthy old churches we visited, and into the strange caverns on the gloomy seashore, and down into the depths of mines, and up to the tops of giddy heights, where the unspeakably green water was roaring, I don't know how many hundred feet below. . . . I never laughed in my life as I did on this journey. It would have done you good to hear me. I was choking and gasping and bursting the buckles off the back of my stock, all the way. And Stanfield" — the painter — "got into such apoplectic entanglements that we were obliged to beat him on the back with portmanteaus before we could recover him."

The animation of Dickens's look would attract the attention of any one, anywhere. His figure was not that of an Adonis, but his brightness made him the centre and pivot of every society he was in. The keenness and vivacity of his eye combined with his inordinate appetite for life to give the unique quality to all that he wrote. His instrument is that of the direct, sinewy English of Smollett, combined with much of the humorous grace of Goldsmith (his two favourite authors), but modernized to a certain extent under the influence of Washington Irving, Sydney Smith, Jeffrey, Lamb, and other writers of the London Magazine. He taught himself to speak French and Italian, but he could have read little in any language. His ideas were those of the inchoate and insular liberalism of the 'thirties. His unique force in literature he was to owe to no supreme artistic or intellectual quality, but almost entirely to his inordinate gift of observation, his sympathy with the humble, his power over the emotions and his incomparable endowment of unalloyed human fun. To contemporaries he was not so much a man as an institution, at the very mention of whose name faces were puckered with grins or

wreathed in smiles. To many his work was a revelation, the revelation of a new world and one far better than their own. And his influence went further than this in the direction of revolution or revival. It gave what were then universally referred to as "the lower orders" a new sense of self-respect, a new feeling of citizenship. Like the defiance of another Luther, or the Declaration of a new Independence, it emitted a fresh ray of hope across the firmament. He did for the whole English-speaking race what Burns had done for Scotland — he gave it a new conceit of itself. He knew what a people wanted and he told what he knew. He could do this better than anybody else because his mind was theirs. He shared many of their "great useless virtues," among which generosity ranks before justice, and sympathy before truth, even though, true to his middle-class vein, he exalts piety, chastity and honesty in a manner somewhat alien to the mind of the low-bred man. This is what makes Dickens such a demigod and his public success such a marvel, and this also is why any exclusively literary criticism of his work is bound to be so inadequate. It should also help us to make the necessary allowances for the man. Dickens, even the Dickens of legend that we know, is far from perfect. The Dickens of reality to which Time may furnish a nearer approximation is far less perfect. But when we consider the corroding influence of adulation, and the intoxication of unbridled success, we cannot but wonder at the relatively high level of moderation and self-control that Dickens almost invariably observed. Mr G. K. Chesterton remarks suggestively that Dickens had all his life the faults of the little boy who is kept up too late at night. He is overwrought by happiness to the verge of exasperation, and yet as a matter of fact he does keep on the right side of the breaking point. The specific and curative in his case was the work in which he took such anxious pride, and such unmitigated delight. He revelled in punctual and

regular work; at his desk he was often in the highest spirits. Behold how he pictured himself, one day at Broadstairs, where he was writing *Chuzzlewit*. "In a bay-window in a one-pair sits, from nine o'clock to one, a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins, as if he thought he was very funny indeed. At one he disappears, presently emerges from a bathing-machine, and may be seen, a kind of salmon-colour porpoise, splashing about in the ocean. After that, he may be viewed in another bay-window on the ground-floor eating a strong lunch; and after that, walking a dozen miles or so, or lying on his back on the sand reading a book. Nobody bothers him, unless they know he is disposed to be talked to, and I am told he is very comfortable indeed. He's as brown as a berry, and they do say he is as good as a small fortune to the innkeeper, who sells beer and cold punch." Here is the secret of such work as that of Dickens; it is done with delight — done (in a sense) easily, done with the mechanism of mind and body in splendid order. Even so did Scott write; though more rapidly and with less conscious care: his chapter finished before the world had got up to breakfast. Later, Dickens produced novels less excellent with much more of mental strain. The effects of age could not have shown themselves so soon, but for the unfortunate loss of energy involved in his non-literary labours.

While the public were still rejoicing in the first sprightly runnings of the "new humour," the humorist set to work desperately on the grim scenes of *Oliver Twist*, the story of a parish orphan, the nucleus of which had already seen the light in his *Sketches*. The early scenes are of a harrowing reality, despite the germ of forced pathos which the observant reader may detect in the pitiful parting between Oliver and little Dick; but what will strike every reader at once in this book is the directness and power of the English

style, so nervous and unadorned: from its unmistakable clearness and vigour Dickens was to travel far as time went on. But the full effect of the old simplicity is felt in such masterpieces of description as the drive of Oliver and Sikes to Chertsey, the condemned-cell ecstasy of Fagin, or the unforgettable first encounter between Oliver and the Artful Dodger. Before November 1837 had ended, Charles Dickens entered on an engagement to write a successor to *Pickwick* on similar lines of publication. *Oliver Twist* was then in mid-career; a *Life of Grimaldi* and *Barnaby Rudge* were already covenanted for. Dickens forged ahead with the new tale of *Nicholas Nickleby* and was justified by the results, for its sale far surpassed even that of *Pickwick*. As a conception it is one of his weakest. An unmistakably 18th-century character pervades it. Some of the vignettes are among the most piquant and besetting ever written. Large parts of it are totally unobserved conventional melodrama; but the *Portsmouth Theatre* and *Dotheboys Hall* and *Mrs Nickleby* (based to some extent, it is thought, upon *Miss Bates* in *Emma*, but also upon the author's *Mamma*) live for ever as Dickens conceived them in the pages of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

Having got rid of *Nicholas Nickleby* and resigned his editorship of *Bentley's Miscellany*, in which *Oliver Twist* originally appeared, Dickens conceived the idea of a weekly periodical to be issued as *Master Humphrey's Clock*, to comprise short stories, essays and miscellaneous papers, after the model of *Addison's Spectator*. To make the weekly numbers "go," he introduced *Mr Pickwick*, *Sam Weller* and his father in friendly intercourse. But the public requisitioned "a story," and in No. 4 he had to brace himself up to give them one. Thus was commenced *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which was continued with slight interruptions, and followed by *Barnaby Rudge*. For the first time we find Dickens obsessed by a highly complicated

plot. The tonality achieved in *The Old Curiosity Shop* surpassed anything he had attempted in this difficult vein, while the rich humour of *Dick Swiveller* and the *Marchioness*, and the vivid portraiture of the wandering Bohemians, attain the very highest level of Dickensian drollery; but in the lamentable tale of *Little Nell* (though Landor and Jeffrey thought the character-drawing of this infant comparable with that of *Cordelia*), it is generally admitted that he committed an indecent assault upon the emotions by exhibiting a veritable monster of piety and long-suffering in a child of tender years. In *Barnaby Rudge* he was manifestly affected by the influence of Scott, whose achievements he always regarded with a touching veneration. The plot, again, is of the utmost complexity, and Edgar Allan Poe (who predicted the conclusion) must be one of the few persons who ever really mastered it. But few of Dickens's books are written in a more admirable style.

Master Humphrey's Clock concluded, Dickens started in 1842 on his first visit to America — an episode hitherto without parallel in English literary history, for he was received everywhere with popular acclamation as the representative of a grand triumph of the English language and imagination, without regard to distinctions of nationality. He offended the American public grievously by a few words of frank description and a few quotations of the advertisement columns of American papers illustrating the essential barbarity of the old slave system (*American Notes*). Dickens was soon pining for home — no English writer is more essentially and insularly English in inspiration and aspiration than he is. He still brooded over the perverseness of America on the copyright question, and in his next book he took the opportunity of uttering a few of his impressions about the objectionable sides of American democracy, the result being that “all Yankee-doodle-dom blazed up like one universal soda bottle,” as Carlyle said.

Martin Chuzzlewit (1843-1844) is important as closing his great character period. His *sève originale*, as the French would say, was by this time to a considerable extent exhausted, and he had to depend more upon artistic elaboration, upon satires, upon tours de force of description, upon romantic and ingenious contrivances. But all these resources combined proved unequal to his powers as an original observer of popular types, until he reinforced himself by autobiographic reminiscence, as in *David Copperfield* and *Great Expectations*, the two great books remaining to his later career.

After these two masterpieces and the three wonderful books with which he made his debut, we are inclined to rank Chuzzlewit. Nothing in Dickens is more admirably seen and presented than *Todgers's*, a bit of London particular cut out with a knife. Mr Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp, Betsy Prig and "Mrs Harris" have passed into the national language and life. The coach journey, the windy autumn night, the stealthy trail of Jonas, the undertone of tragedy in the Charity and Mercy and Chuffey episodes suggest a blending of imaginative vision and physical penetration hardly seen elsewhere. Two things are specially notable about this novel — the exceptional care taken over it (as shown by the interlineations in the MS.) and the caprice or nonchalance of the purchasing public, its sales being far lower than those of any of its monthly predecessors.

At the close of 1843, to pay outstanding debts of his now lavish housekeeping, he wrote that pioneer of Christmas numbers, that national benefit as Thackeray called it, *A Christmas Carol*. It failed to realize his pecuniary anticipations, and Dickens resolved upon a drastic policy of retrenchment and reform. He would save expense by living abroad and would punish his publishers by withdrawing his custom from them, at least for a time. Like everything else

upon which he ever determined, this resolution was carried out with the greatest possible precision and despatch. In June 1844 he set out for Marseilles with his now rapidly increasing family (the journey cost him £200). In a villa on the outskirts of Genoa he wrote *The Chimes*, which, during a brief excursion to London before Christmas, he read to a select circle of friends (the germ of his subsequent lecture-audiences), including Forster, Carlyle, Stanfield, Dyce, Maclise and Jerrold. He was again in London in 1845, enjoying his favourite diversion of private theatricals; and in January 1846 he experimented briefly as the editor of a London morning paper — the *Daily News*. By early spring he was back at Lausanne, writing his customary vivid letters to his friends, craving as usual for London streets, commencing *Dombey and Son*, and walking his fourteen miles daily. The success of *Dombey and Son* completely rehabilitated the master's finances, enabled him to return to England, send his son to Eton and to begin to save money. Artistically it is less satisfactory; it contains some of Dickens's prime curios, such as Cuttle, Bunsby, Toots, Blimber, Pipchin, Mrs MacStinger and young Biler; it contains also that masterpiece of sentimentality which trembles upon the borderland of the sublime and the ridiculous, the death of Paul Dombey ("that sweet Paul," as Jeffrey, the "critic laureate," called him), and some grievous and unquestionable blemishes. As a narrative, moreover, it tails off into a highly complicated and exacting plot. It was followed by a long rest at Broadstairs before Dickens returned to the native home of his genius, and early in 1849 "began to prepare for *David Copperfield*."

"Of all my books," Dickens wrote, "I like this the best; like many fond parents I have my favourite child, and his name is *David Copperfield*." In some respects it stands to Dickens in something of the same relation in which the contemporary *Pendennis* stands to Thackeray. As in that

book, too, the earlier portions are the best. They gained in intensity by the autobiographical form into which they are thrown; as Thackeray observed, there was no writing against such power. The tragedy of Emily and the character of Rosa Dartle are stagey and unreal; Uriah Heep is bad art; Agnes, again, is far less convincing as a consolation than Dickens would have us believe; but these are more than compensated by the wonderful realization of early boyhood in the book, by the picture of Mr Creakle's school, the Peggottys, the inimitable Mr Micawber, Betsy Trotwood and that monument of selfish misery, Mrs Gummidge.

At the end of March 1850 commenced the new twopenny weekly called Household Words, which Dickens planned to form a direct means of communication between himself and his readers, and as a means of collecting around him and encouraging the talents of the younger generation. No one was better qualified than he for this work, whether we consider his complete freedom from literary jealousy or his magical gift of inspiring young authors. Following the somewhat dreary and incoherent Bleak House of 1852, Hard Times (1854) —an anti-Manchester School tract, which Ruskin regarded as Dickens's best work — was the first long story written for Household Words. About this time Dickens made his final home at Gad's Hill, near Rochester, and put the finishing touch to another long novel published upon the old plan, Little Dorrit (1855-1857). In spite of the exquisite comedy of the master of the Marshalsea and the final tragedy of the central figure, Little Dorrit is sadly deficient in the old vitality, the humour is often a mock reality, and the repetition of comic catch-words and overstrung similes and metaphors is such as to affect the reader with nervous irritation. The plot and characters ruin each other in this amorphous production. The Tale of Two Cities, commenced in All the Year Round (the successor of Household Words) in 1859, is much

better: the main characters are powerful, the story genuinely tragic, and the atmosphere lurid; but enormous labour was everywhere expended upon the construction of stylistic ornament.

The Tale of Two Cities was followed by two finer efforts at atmospheric delineation, the best things he ever did of this kind: Great Expectations (1861), over which there broods the mournful impression of the foggy marshes of the Lower Thames; and Our Mutual Friend (1864-1865), in which the ooze and mud and slime of Rotherhithe, its boatmen and loafers, are made to pervade the whole book with cumulative effect. The general effect produced by the stories is, however, very different. In the first case, the foreground was supplied by autobiographical material of the most vivid interest, and the lucidity of the creative impulse impelled him to write upon this occasion with the old simplicity, though with an added power. Nothing therefore, in the whole range of Dickens surpassed the early chapters of Great Expectations in perfection of technique or in mastery of all the resources of the novelist's art. To have created Abel Magwitch alone is to be a god indeed, says Mr Swinburne, among the creators of deathless men. Pumblechook is actually better and droller and truer to imaginative life than Pecksniff; Joe Gargery is worthy to have been praised and loved at once by Fielding and by Sterne: Mr Jaggery and his clients, Mr Wemmick and his parent and his bride, are such figures as Shakespeare, when dropping out of poetry, might have created, if his lot had been cast in a later century. "Can as much be said," Mr Swinburne boldly asks, "for the creatures of any other man or god?"

In November 1867 Dickens made a second expedition to America, leaving all the writing that he was ever to complete behind him. He was to make a round sum of

money, enough to free him from all embarrassments, by a long series of exhausting readings, commencing at the Tremont Temple, Boston, on the 2nd of December. The strain of Dickens's ordinary life was so tense and so continuous that it is, perhaps, rash to assume that he broke down eventually under this particular stress; for other reasons, however, his persistence in these readings, subsequent to his return, was strongly deprecated by his literary friends, led by the arbitrary and relentless Forster. It is a long testimony to Dickens's self-restraint, even in his most capricious and despotic moments, that he never broke the cord of obligation which bound him to his literary mentor, though sparring matches between them were latterly of frequent occurrence. His farewell reading was given on the 15th of March 1870, at St James's Hall. He then vanished from "those garish lights," as he called them, "for evermore." Of the three brief months that remained to him, his last book, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was the chief occupation. It hardly promised to become a masterpiece (Longfellow's opinion) as did Thackeray's *Denis Duval*, but contained much fine descriptive technique, grouped round a scene of which Dickens had an unrivalled sympathetic knowledge.

In March and April 1870 Dickens, as was his wont, was mixing in the best society; he dined with the prince at Lord Houghton's and was twice at court, once at a long deferred private interview with the queen, who had given him a presentation copy of her *Leaves from a Journal of our Life in the Highlands* with the inscription "From one of the humblest of authors to one of the greatest"; and who now begged him on his persistent refusal of any other title to accept the nominal distinction of a privy councillor. He took for four months the Milner Gibsons' house at 5 Hyde Park Place, opposite the Marble Arch, where he gave a brilliant reception on the 7th of April. His last public appearance

was made at the Royal Academy banquet early in May. He returned to his regular methodical routine of work at Gad's Hill on the 30th of May, and one of the last instalments he wrote of Edwin Drood contained an ominous speculation as to the next two people to die at Cloisterham: "Curious to make a guess at the two, or say at one of the two." Two letters bearing the well-known superscription "Gad's Hill Place, Higham by Rochester, Kent" are dated the 8th of June, and, on the same Thursday, after a long spell of writing in the Chalet where he habitually wrote, he collapsed suddenly at dinner. Startled by the sudden change in the colour and expression of his face, his sister-in-law (Miss Hogarth) asked him if he was ill; he said "Yes, very ill," but added that he would finish dinner and go on afterwards to London. "Come and lie down," she entreated; "Yes, on the ground," he said, very distinctly; these were the last words he spoke, and he slid from her arms and fell upon the floor. He died at 6-10 P.M. on Friday, the 9th of June, and was buried privately in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, in the early morning of the 14th of June. One of the most appealing memorials was the drawing by his "new illustrator" Luke Fildes in the Graphic of "The Empty Chair; Gad's Hill: ninth of June, 1870." "Statesmen, men of science, philanthropists, the acknowledged benefactors of their race, might pass away, and yet not leave the void which will be caused by the death of Charles Dickens" (The Times). In his will he enjoined his friends to erect no monument in his honour, and directed his name and dates only to be inscribed on his tomb, adding this proud provision, "I rest my claim to the remembrance of my country on my published works."

Dickens had no artistic ideals worth speaking about. The sympathy of his readers was the one thing he cared about and, like Cobbett, he went straight for it through the avenue of the emotions. In personality, intensity and range

of creative genius he can hardly be said to have any modern rival. His creations live, move and have their being about us constantly, like those of Homer, Virgil, Chaucer, Rabelais, Cervantes, Shakespeare, Bunyan, Molière and Sir Walter Scott. As to the books themselves, the backgrounds on which these mighty figures are projected, they are manifestly too vast, too chaotic and too unequal ever to become classics. Like most of the novels constructed upon the unreformed model of Smollett and Fielding, those of Dickens are enormous stock-pots into which the author casts every kind of autobiographical experience, emotion, pleasantries, anecdote, adage or apophthegm. The fusion is necessarily very incomplete and the hotch-potch is bound to fall to pieces with time. Dickens's plots, it must be admitted, are strangely unintelligible, the repetitions and stylistic decorations of his work exceed all bounds, the form is unmanageable and insignificant. The diffuseness of the English novel, in short, and its extravagant didacticism cannot fail to be most prejudicial to its perpetuation. In these circumstances there is very little fiction that will stand concentration and condensation so well as that of Dickens.

For these reasons among others our interest in Dickens's novels as integers has diminished and is diminishing. But, on the other hand, our interest and pride in him as a man and as a representative author of his age and nation has been steadily augmented and is still mounting. Much of the old criticism of his work, that it was not up to a sufficiently high level of art, scholarship or gentility, that as an author he is given to caricature, redundancy and a shameless subservience to popular caprice, must now be discarded as irrelevant.

As regards formal excellence it is plain that Dickens labours under the double disadvantage of writing in the

least disciplined of all literary genres in the most lawless literary milieu of the modern world, that of Victorian England. In spite of these defects, which are those of masters such as Rabelais, Hugo and Tolstoy, the work of Dickens is more and more instinctively felt to be true, original and ennobling. It is already beginning to undergo a process of automatic sifting, segregation and crystallization, at the conclusion of which it will probably occupy a larger segment in the literary consciousness of the English-spoken race than ever before.

Portraits of Dickens, from the gay and alert "Boz" of Samuel Lawrence, and the self-conscious, rather foppish portrait by Maclise which served as frontispiece to *Nicholas Nickleby*, to the sketch of him as Bobadil by C. R. Leslie, the Drummond and Ary Scheffer portraits of middle age and the haggard and drawn representations of him from photographs after his shattering experiences as a public entertainer from 1856 (the year of his separation from his wife) onwards, are reproduced in Kitton, in Forster and Gissing and in the other biographies. Sketches are also given in most of the books of his successive dwelling places at Ordnance Terrace and 18 St Mary's Place, Chatham; Bayham Street, Camden Town; 15 Furnival's Inn; 48 Doughty Street; 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park; Tavistock House, Tavistock Square; and Gad's Hill Place. The manuscripts of all the novels, with the exception of the *Tale of Two Cities* and *Edwin Drood*, were given to Forster, and are now preserved in the Dyce and Forster Museum at South Kensington. The work of Dickens was a prize for which publishers naturally contended both before and after his death. The first collective edition of his works was begun in April 1847, and their number is now very great. The most complete is still that of Messrs Chapman & Hall, the original publishers of *Pickwick*; others of special interest are the Harrap edition, originally edited by F. G.

Kitton; Macmillan's edition with original illustrations and introduction by Charles Dickens the younger; and the edition in the World's Classics with introductions by G. K. Chesterton. Of the translations the best known is that done into French by Lorain, Pichot and others, with B.H. Gausseron's excellent Pages Choiesies (1903).

Bibliography. — During his lifetime Dickens's biographer was clearly indicated in his guide, philosopher and friend, John Forster, who had known the novelist intimately since the days of his first triumph with *Pickwick*, who had constituted himself a veritable encyclopaedia of information about Dickens, and had clung to his subject (in spite of many rebuffs which his peremptory temper found it hard to digest) as tightly as ever Boswell had enveloped Johnson. Two volumes of Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens* appeared in 1872 and a third in 1874. He relied much on Dickens's letters to himself and produced what must always remain the authoritative work. The first two volumes are put together with much art, the portrait as a whole has been regarded as truthful, and the immediate success was extraordinary. In the opinion of Carlyle, Forster's book was not unworthy to be named after that of Boswell. A useful abridgment was carried out in 1903 by the novelist George Gissing. Gissing also wrote *Charles Dickens: A Critical Study* (1898), which ranks with G. K. Chesterton's *Charles Dickens* (1906) as a commentary inspired by deep insight and adorned by great literary talent upon the genius of the master-novelist. The names of other lives, sketches, articles and estimates of Dickens and his works would occupy a large volume in the mere enumeration. See R. H. Shepherd, *The Bibliography of Dickens* (1880); James Cooke's *Bibliography of the Writings of Charles Dickens* (1879); *Dickensiana*, by F. G. Kitton (1886); and *Bibliography* by J. P. Anderson, appended to Sir F. T. Marzials's *Life of Charles Dickens* (1887). Among the earlier sketches may be

specially cited the lives by J. C. Hotten and G. A. Sala (1870), the Anecdote-Biography edited by the American R. H. Stoddard (1874), Dr A. W. Ward in the English Men of Letters Series (1878), that by Sir Leslie Stephen in the Dictionary of National Biography, and that by Professor Minto in the eighth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica. The Letters were first issued in two volumes edited by his daughter and sister-in-law in 1880. For Dickens's connexion with Kent the following books are specially valuable: — Robert Langton's Childhood and Youth of Charles Dickens (1883); Langton's Dickens and Rochester (1880); Thomas Frost's In Kent with Charles Dickens (1880); F. G. Kitton's The Dickens Country (1905); H. S. Ward's The Real Dickens Land (1904); R. Allbut's Rambles in Dickens Land (1899 and 1903). For Dickens's reading tours see G. Dolby's Charles Dickens as I knew him (1884); J. T. Fields's In and Out of Doors with Charles Dickens (1876); Charles Kent's Dickens as a Reader (1872). And for other aspects of his life see M. Dickens's My Father as I recall him (1897); P. H. Fitzgerald's Life of C. Dickens as revealed in his Writings (1905), and Bozland (1895); F. G. Kitton's Charles Dickens, his Life, Writings and Personality, a useful compendium (1902); T. E. Pemberton's Charles Dickens and the Stage, and Dickens's London (1876); F. Miltoun's Dickens's London (1904); Kitton's Dickens and his Illustrators; W. Teignmouth Shore's Charles Dickens and his Friends (1904 and 1909); B. W. Matz, Story of Dickens's Life and Work (1904), and review of solutions to Edwin Drood in The Bookman for March 1908; the recollections of Edmund Yates, Trollope, James Payn, Lehmann, R. H. Horne, Lockwood and many others. The Dickensian, a magazine devoted to Dickensian subjects, was started in 1905; it is the organ of the Dickens Fellowship, and in a sense of the Boz Club. A Dickens Dictionary (by G. A. Pierce) appeared in 1872 and 1878; another (by A. J. Philip) in 1909; and a Dickens Concordance by Mary Williams in 1907.



The Mystery Of Edwin Drood

Chapter I—The Dawn

An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive

gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around. He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms. Through the ragged window-curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed, upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her.

'Another?' says this woman, in a querulous, rattling whisper. 'Have another?'

He looks about him, with his hand to his forehead.

'Ye've smoked as many as five since ye come in at midnight,' the woman goes on, as she chronically complains. 'Poor me, poor me, my head is so bad. Them two come in after ye. Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack! Few Chinamen about the Docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in, these say! Here's another ready for ye, deary. Ye'll remember like a good soul, won't ye, that the market price is dreffle high just now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And ye'll remember that nobody but me (and Jack Chinaman t'other side the court; but he can't do it as well as me) has the true secret of mixing it? Ye'll pay up accordingly, deary, won't ye?'

She blows at the pipe as she speaks, and, occasionally bubbling at it, inhales much of its contents.

'O me, O me, my lungs is weak, my lungs is bad! It's nearly ready for ye, deary. Ah, poor me, poor me, my poor hand shakes like to drop off! I see ye coming-to, and I ses to my poor self, "I'll have another ready for him, and he'll bear in mind the market price of opium, and pay according." O my poor head! I makes my pipes of old penny ink-bottles, ye see, deary—this is one—and I fits-in a mouthpiece, this way, and I takes my mixer out of this thimble with this little horn spoon; and so I fills, deary. Ah, my poor nerves! I got Heavens-hard drunk for sixteen year afore I took to this; but this don't hurt me, not to speak of. And it takes away the hunger as well as wittles, deary.'

She hands him the nearly-emptied pipe, and sinks back, turning over on her face.

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearth-stone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.



‘What visions can *she* have?’ the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. ‘Visions of many butchers’ shops, and public-houses, and much credit? Of an increase of hideous customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and this horrible court swept clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that!—Eh?’