WARD ADOLPHUS WILLIAM

DICKENS

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Dickens:

Содержание

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PREFACE

At the close of a letter addressed by Dickens to his friend John Forster, but not to be found in the English editions of the *Life*, the writer adds to his praises of the biography of Goldsmith these memorable words: "I desire no better for my fame, when my personal dustiness shall be past the control of my love of order, than such a biographer and such a critic." Dickens was a man of few close friendships—"his breast," he said, "would not hold many people"—but, of these friendships, that with Forster was one of the earliest, as it was one of the most enduring. To Dickens, at least, his future biographer must have been the embodiment of two qualities rarely combined in equal measure—discretion and candour. In literary matters his advice was taken almost as often as it was given, and nearly every proof-sheet of nearly every work of Dickens passed through his faithful helpmate's hands. Nor were there many important decisions formed by Dickens concerning himself in the course of his manhood to which Forster was a stranger, though, unhappily, he more than once counselled in vain.

On Mr. Forster's *Life of Charles Dickens*, together with

the three volumes of *Letters* collected by Dickens's eldest daughter and his sister-in-law—his "dearest and best friend"—it is superfluous to state that the biographical portion of the following essay is mainly based. It may be superfluous, but it cannot be considered impertinent, if I add that the shortcomings of the *Life* have, in my opinion, been more frequently proclaimed than defined; and that its merits are those of its author as well as of its subject.

My sincere thanks are due for various favours shown to me in connexion with the production of this little volume by Miss Hogarth, Mr. Charles Dickens, Professor Henry Morley, Mr. Alexander Ireland, Mr. John Evans, Mr. Robinson, and Mr. Britton. Mr. Evans has kindly enabled me to correct some inaccuracies in Mr. Forster's account of Dickens's early Chatham days on unimpeachable first-hand evidence. I also beg Captain and Mrs. Budden to accept my thanks for allowing me to see Gad's Hill Place.

I am under special obligations to Mr. R. F. Sketchley, Librarian of the Dyce and Forster Libraries at South Kensington, for his courtesy in affording me much useful aid and information. With the kind permission of Mrs. Forster, Mr. Sketchley enabled me to supplement the records of Dickens's life, in the period 1838-'41, from a hitherto unpublished source—a series of brief entries by him in four volumes of *The Law and Commercial Daily Remembrancer* for those years. These volumes formed no part of the Forster bequest, but were added to it, under certain

conditions, by Mrs. Forster. The entries are mostly very brief; and sometimes there are months without an entry. Many days succeed one another with no other note than "Work."

Mr. R. H. Shepherd's *Bibliography of Dickens* has been of considerable service to me. May I take this opportunity of commending to my readers, as a charming reminiscence of the connexion between *Charles Dickens and Rochester*, Mr. Robert Langton's sketches illustrating a paper recently printed under that title?

Last, not least, as the Germans say, I wish to thank my friend Professor T. N. Toller for the friendly counsel which has not been wanting to me on this, any more than on former occasions.

A. W. W.

CHAPTER I

BEFORE "PICKWICK."

[1812-1836.]

Charles Dickens, the eldest son, and the second of the eight children, of John and Elizabeth Dickens, was born at Landport, a suburb of Portsea, on Friday, February 7, 1812. His baptismal names were Charles John Huffham. His father, at that time a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, and employed in the Portsmouth Dock-yard, was recalled to London when his eldest son was only two years of age; and two years afterwards was transferred to Chatham, where he resided with his family from 1816 to 1821. Thus Chatham, and the more venerable city of Rochester adjoining, with their neighbourhood of chalk hills and deep green lanes and woodland and marshes, became, in the words of Dickens's biographer, the birthplace of his fancy. He looked upon himself as, to all intents and purposes, a Kentish man born and bred, and his heart was always in this particular corner of the incomparable county. Again and again, after Mr. Alfred Jingle's spasmodic eloquence had, in the very first number of *Pickwick*,

epitomised the antiquities and comforts of Rochester, already the scene of one of the *Sketches*, Dickens returned to the local associations of his early childhood. It was at Chatham that poor little David Copperfield, on his solitary tramp to Dover, slept his Sunday night's sleep "near a cannon, happy in the society of the sentry's footsteps;" and in many a Christmas narrative or uncommercial etching the familiar features of town and country, of road and river, were reproduced, before in *Great Expectations* they suggested some of the most picturesque effects of his later art, and before in his last unfinished romance his faithful fancy once more haunted the well-known precincts. During the last thirteen years of his life he was again an inhabitant of the loved neighbourhood where, with the companions of his mirthful idleness, he had so often made holiday; where, when hope was young, he had spent his honey-moon; and whither, after his last restless wanderings, he was to return, to seek such repose as he would allow himself, and to die. But, of course, the daily life of the "very queer small boy" of that early time is only quite incidentally to be associated with the grand gentleman's house on Gad's Hill, where his father, little thinking that his son was to act over again the story of Warren Hastings and Daylesford, had told him he might some day come to live, if he were to be very persevering, and to work hard. The family abode was in Ordnance (not St. Mary's) Place, at Chatham, amidst surroundings classified in Mr. Pickwick's notes as "appearing to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, offices, and dock-

yard men." But though the half-mean, half-picturesque aspect of the Chatham streets may already at an early age have had its fascination for Dickens, yet his childish fancy was fed as fully as were his powers of observation. Having learned reading from his mother, he was sent with his elder sister, Fanny, to a day-school kept in Gibraltar Place, New Road, by Mr. William Giles, the eldest son and namesake of a worthy Baptist minister, whose family had formed an intimate acquaintance with their neighbours in Ordnance Row. The younger Giles children were pupils at the school of their elder brother with Charles and Fanny Dickens, and thus naturally their constant playmates. In later life Dickens preserved a grateful remembrance, at times refreshed by pleasant communications between the families, of the training he had received from Mr. William Giles, an intelligent as well as generous man, who, recognising his pupil's abilities, seems to have resolved that they should not lie fallow for want of early cultivation. Nor does there appear to be the slightest reason for supposing that this period of his life was anything but happy. For his sister Fanny he always preserved a tender regard; and a touching little paper, written by him after her death in womanhood, relates how the two children used to watch the stars together, and make friends with one in particular, as belonging to themselves. But obviously he did not lack playmates of his own sex; and it was no doubt chiefly because his tastes made him disinclined to take much part in the rougher sports of his school-fellows, that he found plenty of time for amusing himself in his

own way. And thus it came to pass that already as a child he followed his own likings in the two directions from which they were never very materially to swerve. He once said of himself that he had been "a writer when a mere baby, an actor always."

Of these two passions he could always, as a child and as a man, be "happy with either," and occasionally with both at the same time. In his tender years he was taken by a kinsman, a Sandhurst cadet, to the theatre, to see the legitimate drama acted, and was disillusioned by visits behind the scenes at private theatricals; while his own juvenile powers as a teller of stories and singer of comic songs (he was possessed, says one who remembers him, of a sweet treble voice) were displayed on domestic chairs and tables, and then in amateur plays with his school-fellows. He also wrote a—not strictly original—tragedy, which is missing among his *Reprinted Pieces*. There is nothing unique in these childish doings, nor in the circumstance that he was an eager reader of works of fiction; but it is noteworthy that chief among the books to which he applied himself, in a small neglected bookroom in his father's house, were those to which his allegiance remained true through much of his career as an author. Besides books of travel, which he says had a fascination for his mind from his earliest childhood, besides the "Arabian Nights" and kindred tales, and the English Essayists, he read Fielding and Smollett, and Cervantes and Le Sage, in all innocence of heart, as well as Mrs. Inchbald's collection of farces, in all contentment of spirit. Inasmuch as he was no great reader in the days of his authorship,

and had to go through hard times of his own before, it was well that the literature of his childhood was good of its kind, and that where it was not good it was at least gay. Dickens afterwards made it an article of his social creed that the imagination of the young needs nourishment as much as their bodies require food and clothing; and he had reason for gratefully remembering that at all events the imaginative part of his education had escaped neglect.

But these pleasant early days came to a sudden end. In the year 1821 his family returned to London, and soon his experiences of trouble began. Misfortune pursued the elder Dickens to town, his salary having been decreased already at Chatham in consequence of one of the early efforts at economical reform. He found a shabby home for his family in Bayham Street, Camden Town; and here, what with the pecuniary embarrassments in which he was perennially involved, and what with the easy disposition with which he was blessed by way of compensation, he allowed his son's education to take care of itself. John Dickens appears to have been an honourable as well as a kindly man. His son always entertained an affectionate regard for him, and carefully arranged for the comfort of his latter years; nor would it be fair, because of a similarity in their experiences, and in the grandeur of their habitual phraseology, to identify him absolutely with the immortal Mr. Micawber. Still less, except in certain details of manner and incident, can the character of the elder Dickens be thought to have suggested that of the pitiful "Father of the

Marshalsea," to which prison, almost as famous in English fiction as it is in English history, the unlucky navy-clerk was consigned a year after his return to London.

Every effort had been made to stave off the evil day; and little Charles, whose eyes were always wide open, and who had begun to write descriptive sketches of odd personages among his acquaintance, had become familiar with the inside of a pawnbroker's shop, and had sold the paternal "library" piecemeal to the original of the drunken second-hand bookseller, with whom David Copperfield dealt as Mr. Micawber's representative. But neither these sacrifices nor Mrs. Dickens's abortive efforts at setting up an educational establishment had been of avail. Her husband's creditors *would not* give him time; and a dark period began for the family, and more especially for the little eldest son, now ten years old, in which, as he afterwards wrote, in bitter anguish of remembrance, "but for the mercy of God, he might easily have become, for any care that was taken of him, a little robber or a little vagabond."

Forster has printed the pathetic fragment of autobiography, communicated to him by Dickens five-and-twenty years after the period to which it refers, and subsequently incorporated with but few changes in the *Personal History of David Copperfield*. Who can forget the thrill with which he first learned the well-kept secret that the story of the solitary child, left a prey to the cruel chances of the London streets, was an episode in the life of Charles Dickens himself? Between fact and fiction there was but

a difference of names. Murdstone & Grinby's wine warehouse down in Blackfriars was Jonathan Warren's blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs, in which a place had been found for the boy by a relative, a partner in the concern; and the bottles he had to paste over with labels were in truth blacking-pots. But the menial work and the miserable pay, the uncongenial companionship during worktime, and the speculative devices of the dinner-hour were the same in each case. At this time, after his family had settled itself in the Marshalsea, the haven open to the little waif at night was a lodging in Little College Street, Camden Town, presenting even fewer attractions than Mr. Micawber's residence in Windsor Terrace, and kept by a lady afterwards famous under the name of Mrs. Pipchin. His Sundays were spent at home in the prison. On his urgent remonstrance—"the first I had ever made about my lot"—concerning the distance from his family at which he was left through the week, a back attic was found for him in Lant Street, in the Borough, "where Bob Sawyer lodged many years afterwards;" and he now breakfasted and supped with his parents in their apartment. Here they lived in fair comfort, waited upon by a faithful "orfling," who had accompanied the family and its fortunes from Chatham, and who is said by Forster to have her part in the character of the Marchioness. Finally, after the prisoner had obtained his discharge, and had removed with his family to the Lant Street lodgings, a quarrel occurred between the elder Dickens and his cousin, and the boy was in consequence taken away from the business.

He had not been ill-treated there; nor indeed is it ill-treatment which leads to David Copperfield's running away in the story. Nevertheless, it is not strange that Dickens should have looked back with a bitterness very unusual in him upon the bad old days of his childish solitude and degradation. He never "forgot" his mother's having wished him to remain in the warehouse; the subject of his employment there was never afterwards mentioned in the family; he could not bring himself to go near old Hungerford Market so long as it remained standing; and to no human being, not even to his wife, did he speak of this passage in his life until he narrated it in the fragment of autobiography which he confided to his trusty friend. Such a sensitiveness is not hard to explain; for no man is expected to dilate upon the days "when he lived among the beggars in St. Mary Axe," and it is only the Bounderbies of society who exult, truly or falsely, in the sordid memories of the time before they became rich or powerful. And if the sharp experiences of his childhood might have ceased to be resented by one whom the world on the whole treated so kindly, at least they left his heart unhardened, and helped to make him ever tender to the poor and weak, because he too had after a fashion "eaten his bread with tears" when a puny child.

A happy accident having released the David Copperfield of actual life from his unworthy bondage, he was put in the way of an education such as at that time was the lot of most boys of the class to which he belonged. "The world has done much better

since in that way, and will do far better yet," he writes at the close of his description of *Our School*, the "Wellington House Academy," situate near that point in the Hampstead Road where modest gentility and commercial enterprise touch hands. Other testimony confirms his sketch of the ignorant and brutal head-master; and doubtless this worthy and his usher, "considered to know everything as opposed to the chief who was considered to know nothing," furnished some of the features in the portraits of Mr. Creakle and Mr. Mell. But it has been very justly doubted by an old school-fellow whether the statement "We were First Boy" is to be regarded as strictly historical. If Charles Dickens, when he entered the school, was "put into Virgil," he was not put there to much purpose. On the other hand, with the return of happier days had come the resumption of the old amusements which were to grow into the occupations of his life. A club was founded among the boys at Wellington House for the express purpose of circulating short tales written by him, and he was the manager of the private theatricals which they contrived to set on foot.

After two or three years of such work and play it became necessary for Charles Dickens once more to think of earning his bread. His father, who had probably lost his official post at the time when, in Mr. Micawber's phrase, "hope sunk beneath the horizon," was now seeking employment as a parliamentary reporter, and must have rejoiced when a Gray's Inn solicitor of his acquaintance, attracted by the bright, clever looks of his son,

took the lad into his office as a clerk at a modest weekly salary. His office associates here were perhaps a grade or two above those of the blacking warehouse; but his danger now lay rather in the direction of the vulgarity which he afterwards depicted in such samples of the profession as Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling. He is said to have frequented, in company with a fellow-clerk, one of the minor theatres, and even occasionally to have acted there; and assuredly it must have been personal knowledge which suggested the curiously savage description of *Private Theatres* in the *Sketches by Boz*, the all but solitary *unkindly* reference to theatrical amusements in his works. But whatever his experiences of this kind may have been, he passed unscathed through them; and during the year and a half of his clerkship picked up sufficient knowledge of the technicalities of the law to be able to assail its enormities without falling into rudimentary errors about it, and sufficient knowledge of lawyers and lawyers' men to fill a whole chamber in his gallery of characters.

Oddly enough, it was, after all, the example of the father that led the son into the line of life from which he was easily to pass into the career where success and fame awaited him. The elder Dickens having obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Herald*, his son, who was living with him in Bentinck Street, Manchester Square, resolved to essay the same laborious craft. He was by this time nearly seventeen years of age, and already we notice in him what were to remain, through life, two of his most marked characteristics

—strength of will, and a determination, if he did a thing at all, to do it thoroughly. The art of short-hand, which he now resolutely set himself to master, was in those days no easy study, though, possibly, in looking back upon his first efforts, David Copperfield overestimated the difficulties which he had conquered with the help of love and Traddles. But Dickens, whose education no Dr. Strong had completed, perceived that in order to succeed as a reporter of the highest class he needed something besides the knowledge of short-hand. In a word, he lacked reading; and this deficiency he set himself to supply as best he could by a constant attendance at the British Museum. Those critics who have dwelt on the fact that the reading of Dickens was neither very great nor very extensive, have insisted on what is not less true than obvious; but he had this one quality of the true lover of reading, that he never professed a familiarity with that of which he knew little or nothing. He continued his visits to the Museum, even when in 1828 he had become a reporter in Doctors' Commons. With this occupation he had to remain as content as he could for nearly two years. Once more David Copperfield, the double of Charles Dickens in his youth, will rise to the memory of every one of his readers. For not only was his soul seized with a weariness of Consistory, Arches, Delegates, and the rest of it, to which he afterwards gave elaborate expression in his story, but his heart was full of its first love. In later days he was not of opinion that he had loved particularly wisely; but how well he had loved is known to every

one who after him has lost his heart to Dora. Nothing came of the fancy, and in course of time he had composure enough to visit the lady who had been its object in the company of his wife. He found that Jip was stuffed as well as dead, and that Dora had faded into Flora; for it was as such that, not very chivalrously, he could bring himself to describe her, for the second time, in *Little Dorrit*.

Before at last he was engaged as a reporter on a newspaper, he had, and not for a moment only, thought of turning aside to another profession. It was the profession to which—uncommercially—he was attached during so great a part of his life, that when he afterwards created for himself a stage of his own, he seemed to be but following an irresistible fascination. His best friend described him to me as "a born actor;" and who needs to be told that the world falls into two divisions only—those whose place is before the foot-lights, and those whose place is behind them? His love of acting was stronger than himself; and I doubt whether he ever saw a play successfully performed without longing to be in and of it. "Assumption," he wrote in after days to Lord Lytton, "has charms for me—I hardly know for how many wild reasons—so delightful that I feel a loss of, oh! I can't say what exquisite foolery, when I lose a chance of being some one in voice, etc., not at all like myself." He loved the theatre and everything which savoured of histrionics with an intensity not even to be imagined by those who have never felt a touch of the same passion. He had that "belief in a play"

which he so pleasantly described as one of the characteristics of his life-long friend, the great painter, Clarkson Stanfield. And he had that unextinguishable interest in both actors and acting which makes a little separate world of the "quality." One of the staunchest friendships of his life was that with the foremost English tragedian of his age, Macready; one of the delights of his last years was his intimacy with another well-known actor, the late Mr. Fechter. No performer, however, was so obscure or so feeble as to be outside the pale of his sympathy. His books teem with kindly likenesses of all manner of entertainers and entertainments—from Mr. Vincent Crummles and the more or less legitimate drama, down to Mr. Sleary's horse-riding and Mrs. Jarley's wax-work. He has a friendly feeling for Chops the dwarf, and for Pickleson the giant; and in his own quiet Broadstairs he cannot help tumultuously applauding a young lady "who goes into the den of ferocious lions, tigers, leopards, etc., and pretends to go to sleep upon the principal lion, upon which a rustic keeper, who speaks through his nose, exclaims, 'Behold the abazid power of woobad!'" He was unable to sit through a forlorn performance at a wretched country theatre without longing to add a sovereign to the four-and-ninepence which he had made out in the house when he entered, and which "had warmed up in the course of the evening to twelve shillings;" and in Bow Street, near his office, he was beset by appeals such as that of an aged and greasy suitor for an engagement as Pantaloon: "Mr. Dickens, you know our profession, sir—no one knows it better,

sir—there is no right feeling in it. I was Harlequin on your own circuit, sir, for five-and-thirty years, and was displaced by a boy, sir!—a boy!" Nor did his disposition change when he crossed the seas; the streets he first sees in the United States remind him irresistibly of the set-scene in a London pantomime; and at Verona his interest is divided between *Romeo and Juliet* and the vestiges of an equestrian troupe in the amphitheatre.

What success Dickens might have achieved as an actor it is hardly to the present purpose to inquire. A word will be said below of the success he achieved as an amateur actor and manager, and in his more than half-dramatic readings. But, the influence of early associations and personal feelings apart, it would seem that the artists of the stage whom he most admired were not those of the highest type. He was subdued by the genius of Frédéric Lemaître, but blind and deaf to that of Ristori. "Sound melodrama and farce" were the dramatic species which he affected, and in which as a professional actor he might have excelled. His intensity might have gone for much in the one, and his versatility and volubility for more in the other; and in both, as indeed in any kind of play or part, his thoroughness, which extended itself to every detail of performance or make-up, must have stood him in excellent stead. As it was, he was preserved for literature. But he had carefully prepared himself for his intended venture, and when he sought an engagement at Covent Garden, a preliminary interview with the manager was postponed only on account of the illness of the applicant.

Before the next theatrical season opened he had at last—in the year 1831—obtained employment as a parliamentary reporter, and after some earlier engagements he became, in 1834, one of the reporting staff of the famous Whig *Morning Chronicle*, then in its best days under the editorship of Mr. John Black. Now, for the first time in his life, he had an opportunity of putting forth the energy that was in him. He shrunk from none of the difficulties which in those days attended the exercise of his craft. They were thus depicted by himself, when a few years before his death he "held a brief for his brothers" at the dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund: "I have often transcribed for the printer from my short-hand notes important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising; writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post-chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, and through the dead of the night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour.... I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want restuffing. Returning home from excited political meetings in the country to the waiting press in London, I do verily believe I have been upset in almost every description of vehicle known in this country. I have been in my time belated

on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken post-boys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew." Thus early had Dickens learnt the secret of throwing himself into any pursuit once taken up by him, and of half achieving his task by the very heartiness with which he set about it. When at the close of the parliamentary session of the year 1836 his labours as a reporter came to an end, he was held to have no equal in the gallery. During this period his naturally keen powers of observation must have been sharpened and strengthened, and that quickness of decision acquired which constitutes, perhaps, the most valuable lesson that journalistic practice of any kind can teach to a young man of letters. To Dickens's experience as a reporter may likewise be traced no small part of his political creed, in which there was a good deal of infidelity; or, at all events, his determined contempt for the parliamentary style proper, whether in the mouth of "Thisman" or of "Thatman," and his rooted dislike of the "cheap-jacks" and "national dustmen" whom he discerned among our orators and legislators. There is probably no very great number of Members of Parliament who are heroes to those who wait attendance on their words. Moreover, the period of Dickens's most active labours as a reporter was one that succeeded a time of great political excitement; and when men wish thankfully to rest after

deeds, words are in season.

Meanwhile, very tentatively and with a very imperfect consciousness of the significance for himself of his first steps on a slippery path, Dickens had begun the real career of his life. It has been seen how he had been a writer as a "baby," as a school-boy, and as a lawyer's clerk, and the time had come when, like all writers, he wished to see himself in print. In December, 1833, the *Monthly Magazine* published a paper which he had dropped into its letter-box, and with eyes "dimmed with joy and pride" the young author beheld his first-born in print. The paper, called *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*, was afterwards reprinted in the *Sketches by Boz* under the title of *Mr. Minns and his Cousin*, and is laughable enough. His success emboldened him to send further papers of a similar character to the same magazine, which published ten contributions of his by February, 1835. That which appeared in August, 1834, was the first signed "Boz," a nickname given by him in his boyhood to a favourite brother. Since Dickens used this signature not only as the author of the *Sketches* and a few other minor productions, but also as "editor" of the *Pickwick Papers*, it is not surprising that, especially among his admirers on the Continent and in America, the name should have clung to him so tenaciously. It was on a steamboat near Niagara that he heard from his state-room a gentleman complaining to his wife: "Boz keeps himself very close."

But the *Monthly Magazine*, though warmly welcoming its young contributor's lively sketches, could not afford to pay for

them. He was therefore glad to conclude an arrangement with Mr. George Hogarth, the conductor of the *Evening Chronicle*, a paper in connexion with the great morning journal on the reporting staff of which he was engaged. He had gratuitously contributed a sketch to the evening paper as a personal favour to Mr. Hogarth, and the latter readily proposed to the proprietors of the *Morning Chronicle* that Dickens should be duly remunerated for this addition to his regular labours. With a salary of seven instead of, as heretofore, five guineas a week, and settled in chambers in Furnival's Inn—one of those old legal inns which he loved so well—he might already in this year, 1835, consider himself on the high-road to prosperity. By the beginning of 1836 the *Sketches by Boz* printed in the *Evening Chronicle* were already numerous enough, and their success was sufficiently established to allow of his arranging for their republication. They appeared in two volumes, with etchings by Cruikshank, and the sum of a hundred and fifty pounds was paid to him for the copyright. The stepping-stones had been found and passed, and on the last day of March, which saw the publication of the first number of the *Pickwick Papers*, he stood in the field of fame and fortune. Three days afterwards Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the eldest daughter of the friend who had so efficiently aided him in his early literary ventures. Mr. George Hogarth's name thus links together the names of two masters of English fiction; for Lockhart speaks of him when a writer to the signet in Edinburgh as one of the intimate friends of Scott. Dickens's apprenticeship

as an author was over almost as soon as it was begun; and he had found the way short from obscurity to the dazzling light of popularity. As for the *Sketches by Boz*, their author soon repurchased the copyright for more than thirteen times the sum which had been paid to him for it.

In their collected form these *Sketches* modestly described themselves as "illustrative of every-day life and every-day people." Herein they only prefigured the more famous creations of their writer, whose genius was never so happy as when lighting up, now the humorous, now what he chose to term the romantic, side of familiar things. The curious will find little difficulty in tracing in these outlines, often rough and at times coarse, the groundwork of more than one finished picture of later date. Not a few of the most peculiar features of Dickens's humour are already here, together with not a little of his most characteristic pathos. It is true that in these early *Sketches* the latter is at times strained, but its power is occasionally beyond denial, as, for instance, in the brief narrative of the death of the hospital patient. On the other hand, the humour—more especially that of the *Tales*—is not of the most refined sort, and often degenerates in the direction of boisterous farce. The style, too, though in general devoid of the pretentiousness which is the bane of "light" journalistic writing, has a taint of vulgarity about it, very pardonable under the circumstances, but generally absent from Dickens's later works. Weak puns are not unfrequent; and the diction but rarely reaches that exquisite felicity of comic

phrase in which *Pickwick* and its successors excel. For the rest, Dickens's favourite passions and favourite aversions alike reflect themselves here in small. In the description of the election for beadle he ridicules the tricks and the manners of political party-life, and his love of things theatrical has its full freshness upon it —however he may pretend at Astley's that his "histrionic taste is gone," and that it is the audience which chiefly delights him. But of course the gift which these *Sketches* pre-eminently revealed in their author was a descriptive power that seemed to lose sight of nothing characteristic in the object described, and of nothing humorous in an association suggested by it. Whether his theme was street or river, a Christmas dinner or the extensive groves of the illustrious dead (the old clothes shops in Monmouth Street), he reproduced it in all its shades and colours, and under a hundred aspects, fanciful as well as real. How inimitable, for instance, is the sketch of "the last cab-driver, and the first omnibus cad," whose earlier vehicle, the omnipresent "red cab," was not the gondola, but the very fire-ship of the London streets.

Dickens himself entertained no high opinion of these youthful efforts; and in this he showed the consciousness of the true artist, that masterpieces are rarely thrown off at hazard. But though much of the popularity of the *Sketches* may be accounted for by the fact that commonplace people love to read about commonplace people and things, the greater part of it is due to genuine literary merit. The days of half-price in theatres have followed the days of coaching; "Honest Tom" no more paces

the lobby in a black coat with velvet facings and cuffs, and a D'Orsay hat; the Hickses of the present time no longer quote "Don Juan" over boarding-house dinner-tables; and the young ladies in Camberwell no longer compare young men in attitudes to Lord Byron, or to "Satan" Montgomery. But the *Sketches by Boz* have survived their birth-time; and they deserve to be remembered among the rare instances in which a young author has no sooner begun to write than he has shown a knowledge of his real strength. As yet, however, this sudden favourite of the public was unaware of the range to which his powers were to extend, and of the height to which they were to mount.

CHAPTER II

FROM SUCCESS TO SUCCESS

[1836-1841.]

Even in those years of which the record is brightest in the story of his life, Charles Dickens, like the rest of the world, had his share of troubles—troubles great and small, losses which went home to his heart, and vexations manifold in the way of business. But in the history of his early career as an author the word failure has no place.

Not that the *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, published as they were in monthly numbers, at once took the town by storm; for the public needed two or three months to make up its mind that "Boz" was equal to an effort considerably in advance of his *Sketches*. But when the popularity of the serial was once established, it grew with extraordinary rapidity until it reached an altogether unprecedented height. He would be a bold man who should declare that its popularity has very materially diminished at the present day. Against the productions of *Pickwick*, and of other works of amusement of which it

was the prototype, Dr. Arnold thought himself bound seriously to contend among the boys of Rugby; and twenty years later young men at the university talked nothing but *Pickwick*, and quoted nothing but *Pickwick*, and the wittiest of undergraduates set the world at large an examination paper in *Pickwick*, over which pretentious half-knowledge may puzzle, unable accurately to "describe the common Profeel-machine," or to furnish a satisfactory definition of "a red-faced Nixon." No changes in manners and customs have interfered with the hold of the work upon nearly all classes of readers at home; and no translation has been dull enough to prevent its being relished even in countries where all English manners and customs must seem equally uninteresting or equally absurd.

So extraordinary has been the popularity of this more than thrice fortunate book, that the wildest legends have grown up as to the history of its origin. The facts, however, as stated by Dickens himself, are few and plain. Attracted by the success of the *Sketches*, Messrs. Chapman & Hall proposed to him that he should write "something" in monthly numbers to serve as a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by the comic draughtsman, Mr. R. Seymour; and either the publishers or the artist suggested as a kind of leading notion, the idea of a "Nimrod Club" of unlucky sportsmen. The proposition was at Dickens's suggestion so modified that the plates were "to arise naturally out of the text," the range of the latter being left open to him. This explains why the rather artificial machinery of a club was

maintained, and why Mr. Winkle's misfortunes by flood and field hold their place by the side of the philanthropical meanderings of Mr. Pickwick and the amorous experiences of Mr. Tupman. An original was speedily found for the pictorial presentment of the hero of the book, and a felicitous name for him soon suggested itself. Only a single number of the serial had appeared when Mr. Seymour's own hand put an end to his life. It is well known that among the applicants for the vacant office of illustrator of the *Pickwick Papers* was Thackeray—the senior of Dickens by a few months—whose style as a draughtsman would have been singularly unsuited to the adventures and the gaiters of Mr. Pickwick. Finally, in no altogether propitious hour for some of Dickens's books, Mr. Hablot Browne ("Phiz") was chosen as illustrator. Some happy hits—such as the figure of Mr. Micawber—apart, the illustrations of Dickens by this artist, though often both imaginative and effective, are apt, on the one hand, to obscure the author's fidelity to nature, and on the other, to intensify his unreality. *Oliver Twist*, like the *Sketches*, was illustrated by George Cruikshank, a pencil humourist of no common calibre, but as a rule ugly with the whole virtuous intention of his heart. Dickens himself was never so well satisfied with any illustrator as with George Cattermole (*alias* "Kittenmoles"), a connection of his by marriage, who co-operated with Hablot Browne in *Master Humphrey's Clock*; in his latest works he resorted to the aid of younger artists, whose reputation has since justified his confidence. The most

congenial of the pictorial interpreters of Dickens, in his brightest and freshest humour, was his valued friend John Leech, whose services, together occasionally with those of Doyle, Frank Stone, and Tenniel, as well as of his faithful Stanfield and Maclise, he secured for his Christmas books.

The *Pickwick Papers*, of which the issue was completed by the end of 1837, brought in to Dickens a large sum of money, and after a time a handsome annual income. On the whole this has remained the most general favourite of all his books. Yet it is not for this reason only that *Pickwick* defies criticism, but also because the circumstances under which the book was begun and carried on make it preposterous to judge it by canons applicable to its author's subsequent fictions. As the serial proceeded, the interest which was to be divided between the inserted tales, some of which have real merit, and the framework, was absorbed by the latter. The rise in the style of the book can almost be measured by the change in the treatment of its chief character, Mr. Pickwick himself. In a later preface, Dickens endeavoured to illustrate this change by the analogy of real life. The truth, of course, is that it was only as the author proceeded that he recognised the capabilities of the character, and his own power of making it, and his book with it, truly lovable as well as laughable. Thus, on the very same page in which Mr. Pickwick proves himself a true gentleman in his leave-taking from Mr. Nupkins, there follows a little bit of the idyl between Sam and the pretty housemaid, written with a delicacy that could hardly have been

suspected in the chronicler of the experiences of Miss Jemima Evans or of Mr. Augustus Cooper. In the subsequent part of the main narrative will be found exemplified nearly all the varieties of pathos of which Dickens was afterwards so repeatedly to prove himself master, more especially, of course, in those prison scenes for which some of our older novelists may have furnished him with hints. Even that subtle species of humour is not wanting which is content to miss its effect with the less attentive reader; as in this passage concerning the ruined cobbler's confidences to Sam in the Fleet:

> "The cobbler paused to ascertain what effect his story had produced on Sam; but finding that he had dropped asleep, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, *sighed*, put it down, drew the bedclothes over his head, and went to sleep too."

Goldsmith himself could not have put more of pathos and more of irony into a single word.

But it may seem out of place to dwell upon details such as this in view of the broad and universally acknowledged comic effects of this masterpiece of English humour. Its many genuinely comic characters are as broadly marked as the heroes of the least refined of sporting novels, and as true to nature as the most elaborate products of Addison's art. The author's humour is certainly not one which eschews simple in favour of subtle means, or which is averse from occasional desipience in the form of the wildest farce. Mrs. Leo Hunter's garden-party—or rather

"public breakfast"—at The Den, Eatanswill; Mr. Pickwick's nocturnal descent, through three gooseberry-bushes and a rose-tree, upon the virgin soil of Miss Tomkins's establishment for young ladies; the *supplice d'un homme* of Mr. Pott; Mr. Weller junior's love-letter, with notes and comments by Mr. Weller senior, and Mr. Weller senior's own letter of affliction written by somebody else; the footmen's "swarry" at Bath, and Mr. Bob Sawyer's bachelors' party in the Borough—all these and many other scenes and passages have in them that jovial element of exaggeration which nobody mistakes and nobody resents. Whose duty is it to check the volubility of Mr. Alfred Jingle, or to weigh the heaviness, *quot libras*, of the Fat Boy? Every one is conscious of the fact that in the contagious high spirits of the author lies one of the chief charms of the book. Not, however, that the effect produced is obtained without the assistance of a very vigilant art. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the character which is upon the whole the most brilliant of the many brilliant additions which the author made to his original group of personages. If there is nothing so humorous in the book as Sam Weller, neither is there in it anything more pathetic than the relation between him and his master. As for Sam Weller's style of speech, scant justice was done to it by Mr. Pickwick when he observed to Job Trotter, "My man is in the right, although his mode of expressing his opinion is somewhat homely, and occasionally incomprehensible." The fashion of Sam's gnomic philosophy is

at least as old as Theocritus;[1] but the special impress which he has given to it is his own, rudely foreshadowed, perhaps, in some of the apophthegms of his father. Incidental Sam Wellerisms in *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* show how enduring a hold the whimsical fancy had taken of its creator. For the rest, the freshness of the book continues the same to the end; and farcical as are some of the closing scenes—those, for instance, in which a chorus of coachmen attends the movements of the elder Mr. Weller—there is even here no straining after effect. An exception might perhaps be found in the catastrophe of the Shepherd, which is coarsely contrived; but the fun of the character is in itself neither illegitimate nor unwholesome. It will be observed below that it is the constant harping on the same string, the repeated picturing of professional preachers of religion as gross and greasy scoundrels, which in the end becomes offensive in Dickens.

On the whole, no hero has ever more appropriately bidden farewell to his labours than Mr. Pickwick in the words which he uttered at the table of the ever-hospitable Mr. Wardle at the Adelphi.

> "'I shall never regret,' said Mr. Pickwick, in a low voice —'I shall never regret having devoted the greater part of two years to mixing with different varieties and shades of human character; frivolous as my pursuit of novelty may appear to many. Nearly the whole of my previous life having been

[1] See *Idyll*. xv. 77. This discovery is not my own, but that of the late Dr. Donaldson, who used to translate the passage accordingly with great gusto.

> devoted to business and the pursuit of wealth, numerous scenes of which I had no previous conception have dawned upon me—I hope to the enlargement of my mind, and to the improvement of my understanding. If I have done but little good, I trust I have done less harm, and that none of my adventures will be other than a source of amusing and pleasant recollection to me in the decline of life. God bless you all.'"

Of course Mr. Pickwick "filled and drained a bumper" to the sentiment. Indeed, it "snoweth" in this book "of meat and drink." Wine, ale, and brandy abound there, and viands to which ample justice is invariably done—even under Mr. Tupman's heart-rending circumstances at the (now, alas! degenerate) Leather Bottle. Something of this is due to the times in which the work was composed, and to the class of readers for which we may suppose it in the first instance to have been intended; but Dickens, though a temperate man, loved the paraphernalia of good cheer, besides cherishing the associations which are inseparable from it. At the same time, there is a little too much of it in the *Pickwick Papers*, however well its presence may consort with the geniality which pervades them. It is difficult to turn any page of the book without chancing on one of those supremely felicitous phrases in the ready mintage of which Dickens at all times excelled. But its chief attraction lies in the spirit of the whole—that spirit of true humour which calls forth at once merriment, good-will, and charity.

In the year 1836, which the commencement of the *Pickwick*

Papers has made memorable in the history of English literature, Dickens was already in the full tide of authorship. In February, 1837, the second number of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a new monthly magazine which he had undertaken to edit, contained the opening chapters of his story of *Oliver Twist*. Shortly before this, in September and December, 1836, he had essayed two of the least ambitious branches of dramatic authorship. The acting of Harley, an admirable dry comedian, gave some vitality to *The Strange Gentleman*, a "comic burletta," or farce, in two acts, founded upon the tale in the *Sketches* called *The Great Winglebury Duel*. It ran for seventy nights at Drury Lane, and, in its author's opinion, was "the best thing Harley did." But the adaptation has no special feature distinguishing it from the original, unless it be the effective bustle of the opening. *The Village Coquettes*, an operetta represented at the St. James's Theatre, with music by Hullah, was an equally unpretending effort. In this piece Harley took one part, that of "a very small farmer with a very large circle of intimate friends," and John Parry made his *début* on the London stage in another. To quote any of the songs in this operetta would be very unfair to Dickens.[2] He was not at all depressed by the unfavourable criticisms which were passed upon his libretto, and against which he had to set the round declaration of Braham, that there had been "no such music since

[2] For operas, as a form of *dramatic* entertainment, Dickens seems afterwards to have entertained a strong contempt, such as, indeed, it is difficult for any man with a sense of humour wholly to avoid.

the days of Shiel, and no such piece since *The Duenna*." As time went on, however, he became anything but proud of his juvenile productions as a dramatist, and strongly objected to their revival. His third and last attempt of this kind, a farce called *The Lamplighter*, which he wrote for Covent Garden in 1838, was never acted, having been withdrawn by Macready's wish; and in 1841 Dickens converted it into a story printed among the *Picnic Papers*, a collection generously edited by him for the benefit of the widow and children of a publisher towards whom he had little cause for personal gratitude. His friendship for Macready kept alive in him for some time the desire to write a comedy worthy of so distinguished an actor; and, according to his wont, he had even chosen beforehand for the piece a name which he was not to forget—*No Thoroughfare*. But the genius of the age, an influence which is often stronger than personal wishes or inclinations, diverted him from dramatic composition. He would have been equally unwilling to see mentioned among his literary works the *Life of Grimaldi*, which he merely edited, and which must be numbered among forgotten memorials of forgotten greatness.

To the earlier part of 1838 belong one or two other publications, which their author never cared to reprint. The first of these, however, a short pamphlet entitled *Sunday under Three Heads*, is not without a certain biographical interest. This little book was written with immediate reference to a bill "for the better observance of the Sabbath," which the House of Commons had recently thrown out by a small majority; and its

special purpose was the advocacy of Sunday excursions, and harmless Sunday amusements, in lieu of the alternate gloom and drunkenness distinguishing what Dickens called a London *Sunday as it is*. His own love of fresh air and brightness intensified his hatred of a formalism which shuts its ears to argument. In the powerful picture of a Sunday evening in London, "gloomy, close, and stale," which he afterwards drew in *Little Dorrit*, he almost seems to hold Sabbatarianism and the weather responsible for one another. When he afterwards saw a Parisian Sunday, he thought it "not comfortable," so that, like others who hate bigotry, he may perhaps have come to recognise the difficulty of arranging an English *Sunday as it might be made*. On the other hand, he may have remembered his youthful fancy of the good clergyman encouraging a game of cricket after church, when thirty years later, writing from Edinburgh, he playfully pictured the counterpart of *Sunday as Sabbath bills would have it*: describing how "the usual preparations are making for the band in the open air in the afternoon, and the usual pretty children (selected for that purpose) are at this moment hanging garlands round the Scott monument preparatory to the innocent Sunday dance round that edifice with which the diversions invariably close." The *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*, published in the same year, are little if at all in advance of the earlier *Sketches by Boz*, and were evidently written to order. He finished them in precisely a fortnight, and noted in his diary that "one hundred and twenty-five pounds for such a book, without any name

to it, is pretty well." The *Sketches of Young Couples*, which followed as late as 1840, have the advantage of a facetious introduction, suggested by her Majesty's own announcement of her approaching marriage. But the life has long gone out of these pleasantries, as it has from others of the same cast, in which many a mirthful spirit, forced to coin its mirth into money, has ere now spent itself.

It was the better fortune of Dickens to be able almost from the first to keep nearly all his writings on a level with his powers. He never made a bolder step forwards than when, in the very midst of the production of *Pickwick*, he began his first long continuous story, the *Adventures of Oliver Twist*. Those who have looked at the MS. of this famous novel will remember the vigour of the handwriting, and how few, in comparison with his later MSS., are the additions and obliterations which it exhibits. But here and there the writing shows traces of excitement; for the author's heart was in his work, and much of it, contrary to his later habit, was written at night. No doubt he was upheld in the labour of authorship by something besides ambition and consciousness of strength. *Oliver Twist* was certainly written *with a purpose*, and with one that was afterwards avowed. The author intended to put before his readers—"so long as their speech did not offend the ear"—a picture of "dregs of life," hitherto, as he believed, never exhibited by any novelist in their loathsome reality. Yet the old masters of fiction, Fielding in particular, as well as the old master of the brush whom Dickens cites (Hogarth), had not

shrunk from the path which their disciple now essayed. Dickens, however, was naturally thinking of his own generation, which had already relished *Paul Clifford*, and which was not to be debarred from exciting itself over *Jack Sheppard*, begun before *Oliver Twist* had been completed, and in the self-same magazine. Dickens's purpose was an honest and a praiseworthy one. But the most powerful and at the same time the most lovable element in his genius suggested the silver lining to the cloud. To that unfailing power of sympathy which was the mainspring of both his most affecting and his most humorous touches, we owe the redeeming features in his company of criminals; not only the devotion and the heroism of Nancy, but the irresistible vivacity of the Artful Dodger, and the good-humour of Charley Bates, which moved Talfourd to "plead as earnestly in mitigation of judgment" against him as ever he had done "at the bar for any client he most respected." Other parts of the story were less carefully tempered. Mr. Fang, the police-magistrate, appears to have been a rather hasty portrait of a living original; and the whole picture of Bumble and Bumbledom was certainly a caricature of the working of the new Poor-law, confounding the question of its merits and demerits with that of its occasional maladministration. On the other hand, a vein of truest pathos runs through the whole of poor Nancy's story, and adds to the effect of a marvellously powerful catastrophe. From Nancy's interview with Rose at London Bridge to the closing scenes—the flight of Sikes, his death at Jacob's Island, and the end of the Jew

—the action has an intensity rare in the literature of the terrible. By the side of this genuine tragic force, which perhaps it would be easiest to parallel from some of the "low" domestic tragedy of the Elizabethans, the author's comic humour burst forth upon the world in a variety of entirely new types: Bumble and his partner; Noah Claypole, complete in himself, but full of promise for Uriah Heep; and the Jew, with all the pupils and supporters of his establishment of technical education. Undeniably the story of *Oliver Twist* also contains much that is artificial and stilted, with much that is weak and (the author of *Endymion* is to be thanked for the word) "gushy." Thus, all the Maylie scenes, down to the last in which Oliver discreetly "glides" away from the lovers, are barely endurable. But, whatever its shortcomings, *Oliver Twist* remains an almost unique example of a young author's brilliant success in an enterprise of complete novelty and extreme difficulty. Some of its situations continue to exercise their power even over readers already familiarly acquainted with them; and some of its characters will live by the side of Dickens's happiest and most finished creations. Even had a sapient critic been right who declared, during the progress of the story, that Mr. Dickens appeared to have worked out "the particular vein of humour which had hitherto yielded so much attractive metal," it would have been worked out to some purpose. After making his readers merry with *Pickwick*, he had thrilled them with *Oliver Twist*; and by the one book as by the other he had made them think better of mankind.

But neither had his vein been worked out, nor was his hand content with a single task. In April, 1838, several months before the completion of *Oliver Twist*, the first number of *Nicholas Nickleby* appeared; and while engaged upon the composition of these books he contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany*, of which he retained the editorship till the early part of 1839, several smaller articles. Of these, the *Mudfog Papers* have been recently thought worth reprinting; but even supposing the satire against the Association for the Advancement of Everything to have not yet altogether lost its savour, the fun of the day before yesterday refuses to be revived. *Nicholas Nickleby*, published in twenty numbers, was the labour of many months, but was produced under so great a press of work that during the whole time of publication Dickens was never a single number in advance. Yet, though not one of the most perfect of his books, it is indisputably one of the most thoroughly original, and signally illustrates the absurdity of recent attempts to draw a distinction between the imaginative romance of the past and the realistic novel of the present. Dickens was never so strong as when he produced from the real; and in this instance—starting, no doubt, with a healthy prejudice—so carefully had he inspected the neighbourhood of the Yorkshire schools, of which Dotheboys Hall was to be held up as the infamous type, that there seems to be no difficulty in identifying the site of the very school itself; while the Portsmouth Theatre is to the full as accurate a study as the Yorkshire school. So, again, as every one knows, the Brothers

Cheeryble were real personages well known in Manchester,[3] where even the original of Tim Linkinwater still survives in local remembrance. On the other hand, with how conscious a strength has the author's imaginative power used and transmuted his materials: in the Squeers family creating a group of inimitable grotesqueness; in their humblest victim Smike giving one of his earliest pictures of those outcasts whom he drew again and again with such infinite tenderness; and in Mr. Vincent Crummles and his company, including the Phenomenon, establishing a jest, but a kindly one, for all times! In a third series of episodes in this book, it is universally agreed that the author has no less conspicuously failed. Dickens's first attempt to picture the manners and customs of the aristocracy certainly resulted in portraying some very peculiar people. Lord Frederick Verisopht, indeed—who is allowed to redeem his character in the end—is not without touches resembling nature.

> "'I take an interest, my lord,' said Mrs. Wititterly, with a faint smile, 'such an interest in the drama.'
>
> "'Ye-es. It's very interasting,' replied Lord Frederick.
>
> "'I'm always ill after Shakspeare,' said Mrs. Wititterly. 'I scarcely exist the next day. I find the reaction so very great after a tragedy, my lord, and Shakspeare is such a delicious creature.'
>
> "'Ye-es,' replied Lord Frederick. 'He was a clayver

[3] W. & D. Grant Brothers had their warehouse at the lower end of Cannon Street, and their private house in Mosely Street.

man.'"

But Sir Mulberry Hawk is a kind of scoundrel not frequently met with in polite society; his henchmen Pluck and Pyke have the air of "followers of Don John," and the enjoyments of the "trainers of young noblemen and gentlemen" at Hampton races, together with the riotous debauch which precedes the catastrophe, seem taken direct from the transpontine stage. The fact is that Dickens was here content to draw his vile seducers and wicked orgies just as commonplace writers had drawn them a thousand times before, and will draw them a thousand times again. Much of the hero's talk is of the same conventional kind. On the other hand, nothing could be more genuine than the flow of fun in this book, which finds its outlet in the most unexpected channels, but nowhere so resistlessly as in the invertebrate talk of Mrs. Nickleby. For her Forster discovered a literary prototype in a character of Miss Austen's; but even if Mrs. Nickleby was founded on Miss Bates, in *Emma*, she left her original far behind. Miss Bates, indeed, is verbose, roundabout, and parenthetic; but the widow never deviates into coherence.

Nicholas Nickleby shows the comic genius of its author in full activity, and should be read with something of the buoyancy of spirit in which it was written, and not with a callousness capable of seeing in so amusing a scamp as Mr. Mantalini one of Dickens's "monstrous failures." At the same time this book displays the desire of the author to mould his manner on the old models. The very title has a savour of Smollett about it;

the style has more than one reminiscence of him, as well as of Fielding and of Goldsmith; and the general method of the narrative resembles that of our old novelists and their Spanish and French predecessors. Partly for this reason, and partly, no doubt, because of the rapidity with which the story was written, its construction is weaker than is usual even with Dickens's earlier works. Coincidences are repeatedly employed to help on the action; and the *dénoûment*, which, besides turning Mr. Squeers into a thief, reveals Ralph Nickleby as the father of Smike, is oppressively complete. As to the practical aim of the novel, the author's word must be taken for the fact that "Mr. Squeers and his school were faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible." The exposure, no doubt, did good in its way, though perhaps Mr. Squeers, in a more or less modified form, has proved a tougher adversary to overcome than Mrs. Gamp.

During these years Dickens was chiefly resident in the modest locality of Doughty Street, whither he had moved his household from the "three rooms," "three storeys high," in Furnival's Inn, early in 1837. It was not till the end of 1839 that he took up his abode, further west, in a house which he came to like best among all his London habitations, in Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park. His town life was, however, varied by long rustications at Twickenham and at Petersham, and by sojourns at the sea-side, of which he was a most consistent votary. He is found in various years of his life at Brighton, Dover, and Bonchurch—where he

liked his neighbours better than he liked the climate; and in later years, when he had grown accustomed to the Continent, he repeatedly domesticated himself at Boulogne. But already in 1837 he had discovered the little sea-side village, as it then was, which for many years afterwards became his favourite holiday retreat, and of which he would be the *genius loci*, even if he had not by a special description immortalised *Our English Watering-place*. Broadstairs—whose afternoon tranquillity even to this day is undisturbed except by the Ethiopians on their tramp from Margate to Ramsgate—and its constant visitor, are thus described in a letter written to an American friend in 1843: "This is a little fishing-place; intensely quiet; built on a cliff, whereon—in the centre of a tiny semicircular bay—our house stands; the sea rolling and dashing under the windows. Seven miles out are the Goodwin Sands (you've heard of the Goodwin Sands?), whence floating lights perpetually wink after dark, as if they were carrying on intrigues with the servants. Also there is a big light-house called the North Foreland on a hill beyond the village, a severe parsonic light, which reproves the young and giddy floaters, and stares grimly out upon the sea. Under the cliff are rare good sands, where all the children assemble every morning and throw up impossible fortifications, which the sea throws down again at high-water. Old gentlemen and ancient ladies flirt after their own manner in two reading-rooms and on a great many scattered seats in the open air. Other old gentlemen look all day through telescopes and never see anything. 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 were very funny indeed. His name is Boz."

Not a few houses at Broadstairs may boast of having been at one time or another inhabited by him and his. Of the long-desired Fort House, however, which local perverseness triumphantly points out as the original of *Bleak House* (no part even of *Bleak House* was written there, though part of *David Copperfield* was), he could not obtain possession till 1850. As like Bleak House as it is like Chesney Wold, it stands at the very highest end of the place, looking straight out to sea, over the little harbour and its two colliers, with a pleasant stretch of cornfields leading along the cliff towards the light-house which Dickens promised Lord Carlisle should serve him as a night-light. But in 1837 Dickens was content with narrower quarters. The "long small procession of sons" and daughters had as yet only begun with the birth of his eldest boy. His life was simple and full of work, and occasional sea-side or country quarters, and now and then a brief holiday tour, afforded the necessary refreshment of change. In 1837 he made his first short trip abroad, and in the following year, accompanied by Mr. Hablot Browne, he spent a week of enjoyment in Warwickshire, noting in his *Remembrancer*: "Stratford; Shakspeare; the birthplace; visitors, scribblers, old woman (query whether she knows what Shakspeare did), etc." Meanwhile, among his truest home enjoyments were his friendships. They were few in number,

mostly with men for whom, after he had once taken them into his heart, he preserved a life-long regard. Chief of all these were John Forster and Daniel Maclise, the high-minded painter, to whom we owe a charming portrait of his friend in this youthful period of his life. Losing them, he afterwards wrote when absent from England, was "like losing my arms and legs, and dull and tame I am without you." Besides these, he was at this time on very friendly terms with William Harrison Ainsworth, who succeeded him in the editorship of the *Miscellany*, and concerning whom he exclaimed in his *Remembrancer*: "Ainsworth has a fine heart." At the close of 1838, Dickens, Ainsworth, and Forster constituted themselves a club called the Trio, and afterwards the Cerberus. Another name frequent in the *Remembrancer* entries is that of Talfourd, a generous friend, in whom, as Dickens finely said after his death, "the success of other men made as little change as his own." All these, together with Stanfield, the Landseers, Douglas Jerrold, Macready, and others less known to fame, were among the friends and associates of Dickens's prime. The letters, too, remaining from this part of Dickens's life, have all the same tone of unaffected frankness. With some of his intimate friends he had his established epistolary jokes. Stanfield, the great marine painter, he pertinaciously treated as a "very salt" correspondent, communications to whom, as to a "block-reeving, main-brace-splicing, lead-heaving, ship-conning, stun'sail-bending, deck-swabbing son of a sea-cook," needed garnishing with the obscurest technicalities and strangest

oaths of his element. (It is touching to turn from these friendly buffooneries to a letter written by Dickens many years afterward —in 1867—and mentioning a visit to "poor dear Stanfield," when "it was clear that the shadow of the end had fallen on him.... It happened well that I had seen, on a wild day at Tynemouth, a remarkable sea effect, of which I wrote a description to him, and he had kept it under his pillow.") Macready, after his retirement from the stage, is bantered on the score of his juvenility with a pertinacity of fun recalling similar whimsicalities of Charles Lamb's; or the jest is changed, and the great London actor in his rural retreat is depicted in the character of a country gentleman strange to the wicked ways of the town. As in the case of many delightful letter-writers, the charm of Dickens as a correspondent vanishes so soon as he becomes self-conscious. Even in his letters to Lady Blessington and Mrs. Watson, a striving after effect is at times perceptible; the homage rendered to Lord John Russell is not offered with a light hand; on the contrary, when writing to Douglas Jerrold, Dickens is occasionally so intent upon proving himself a sound Radical that his vehemence all but passes into a shriek.

In these early years, at all events, Dickens was happy in the society of his chosen friends. His favourite amusements were a country walk or ride with Forster, or a dinner at Jack Straw's Castle with him and Maclise. He was likewise happy at home. Here, however, in the very innermost circle of his affections, he had to suffer the first great personal grief of his life. His younger

sister-in-law, Miss Mary Hogarth, had accompanied him and his wife into their new abode in Doughty Street, and here, in May, 1837, she died, at the early age of seventeen. No sorrow seems ever to have touched the heart and possessed the imagination of Charles Dickens like that for the loss of this dearly-loved girl, "young, beautiful, and good." "I can solemnly say," he wrote to her mother a few months after her death, "that, waking or sleeping, I have never lost the recollection of our hard trial and sorrow, and I feel that I never shall." "If," ran part of his first entry in the Diary which he began on the first day of the following year, "she were with us now, the same winning, happy, amiable companion, sympathising with all my thoughts and feelings more than any one I knew ever did or will, I think I should have nothing to wish for but a continuance of such happiness. But she is gone, and pray God I may one day, through his mercy, rejoin her." It was not till, in after years, it became necessary to abandon the project, that he ceased to cherish the intention of being buried by her side, and through life the memory of her haunted him with strange vividness. At the Niagara Falls, when the spectacle of Nature in her glory had produced in him, as he describes it, a wondrously tranquil and happy peace of mind, he longed for the presence of his dearest friends, and "I was going to add, what would I give if the dear girl, whose ashes lie in Kensal Green, had lived to come so far along with us; but she has been here many times, I doubt not, since her sweet face faded from my earthly sight." "After she died," he wrote to her mother in May, 1843,

"I dreamed of her every night for many weeks, and always with a kind of quiet happiness, which became so pleasant to me that I never lay down at night without a hope of the vision coming back in one shape or other. And so it did." Once he dreamt of her, when travelling in Yorkshire; and then, after an interval of many months, as he lay asleep one night at Genoa, it seemed to him as if her spirit visited him and spoke to him in words which he afterwards precisely remembered, when he had awaked, with the tears running down his face. He never forgot her, and in the year before he died he wrote to his friend: "She is so much in my thoughts at all times, especially when I am successful and have greatly prospered in anything, that the recollection of her is an essential part of my being, and is as inseparable from my existence as the beating of my heart is!" In a word, she was the object of the one great imaginative passion of his life. Many have denied that there is any likeness to nature in the fictitious figure in which, according to the wont of imaginative workers, he was irresistibly impelled to embody the sentiment with which she inspired him; but the sentiment itself became part of his nature, and part of his history. When in writing the *Old Curiosity Shop* he approached the death of Little Nell, he shrunk from the task: "Dear Mary died yesterday, when I think of this sad story."

The *Old Curiosity Shop* has long been freed from the encumbrances which originally surrounded it, and there is little except biographical interest in the half-forgotten history of *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Early in the year 1840, his success and

confidence in his powers induced him to undertake an illustrated weekly journal, in which he depended solely on his own name, and, in the first instance, on his own efforts, as a writer. Such was his trust in his versatility that he did not think it necessary even to open with a continuous story. Perhaps the popularity of the *Pickwick Papers* encouraged him to adopt the time-honoured device of wrapping up several tales in one. In any case, his framework was in the present instance too elaborate to take hold of the public mind, while the characters introduced into it possessed little or nothing of the freshness of their models in the *Tatler* and the *Spectator*. In order to re-enforce Master Humphrey, the deaf gentleman, and the other original members of his benevolent conclave, he hereupon resorted to a natural, but none the less unhappy, expedient. Mr. Pickwick was revived, together with Sam Weller and his parent; and a Weller of the third generation was brought on the stage in the person of a precocious four-year-old, "standing with his little legs very wide apart as if the top-boots were familiar to them, and actually winking upon the house-keeper with his infant eye, in imitation of his grandfather." A laugh may have been raised at the time by this attempt, from which, however, every true Pickwickian must have turned sadly away. Nor was there much in the other contents of these early numbers to make up for the disappointment. As, therefore, neither "Master Humphrey's Clock" nor "Mr. Weller's Watch" seemed to promise any lasting success, it was prudently determined that the story of the *Old Curiosity Shop*, of which the

first portion had appeared in the fourth number of the periodical, should run on continuously; and when this had been finished, a very short "link" sufficed to introduce another story, *Barnaby Rudge*, with the close of which *Master Humphrey's Clock* likewise stopped.

In the *Old Curiosity Shop*, though it abounds in both grotesquely terrible and boisterously laughable effects, the key-note is that of an idyllic pathos. The sense of this takes hold of the reader at the very outset, as he lingers over the picture, with which the first chapter concludes, of little Nell asleep through the solitary night in the curiosity-dealer's warehouse. It retains possession of him as he accompanies the innocent heroine through her wanderings, pausing with her in the church-yard where all is quiet save the cawing of the satirical rooks, or in the school-master's cottage by the open window, through which is borne upon the evening air the distant hum of the boys at play upon the green, while the poor school-master holds in his hand the small cold one of the little scholar that has fallen asleep. Nor is it absent to the last when Nell herself lies at rest in her little bed. "Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless forever." The hand which drew Little Nell afterwards formed other figures not less affecting, but none so essentially poetic. Like many such characters, this requires, for its full appreciation, a certain tension of the mind; and those who will not, or cannot,

pass in some measure out of themselves, will be likely to tire of the conception, or to declare its execution artificial. Curiously enough, not only was Little Nell a favourite of Landor, a poet and critic utterly averse from meretricious art, but she also deeply moved the sympathy of Lord Jeffrey, who at least knew his own mind, and spoke it in both praise and blame. As already stated, Dickens only with difficulty brought himself to carry his story to its actual issue, though it is hard to believe that he could ever have intended a different close from that which he gave to it. His whole heart was in the story, nor could he have consoled himself by means of an ordinary happy ending.

Dickens's comic humour never flowed in a pleasanter vein than in the *Old Curiosity Shop*, and nowhere has it a more exquisite element of pathos in it. The shock-headed, red-cheeked Kit is one of the earliest of those ungainly figures who speedily find their way into our affections—the odd family to which Mr. Toots, Tom Pinch, Tommy Traddles, and Joe Gargery alike belong. But the triumph of this serio-comic form of art in the *Old Curiosity Shop* is to be found in the later experiences of Dick Swiveller, who seems at first merely a more engaging sample of the Bob Sawyer species, but who ends by endearing himself to the most thoughtless laugher. Dick Swiveller and his protégée have gained a lasting place among the favourite characters of English fiction, and the privations of the Marchioness have possibly had a result which would have been that most coveted by Dickens—that of helping towards the better treatment of a

class whose lot is among the dust and ashes, too often very bitter ashes, of many households. Besides these, the story contains a variety of incidental characters of a class which Dickens never grew weary of drawing from the life. Messrs. Codlin, Short, and Company, and the rest of the itinerant showmen, seem to have come straight from the most real of country fairs; and if ever a *troupe* of comedians deserved pity on their wanderings through a callous world, it was the most diverting and the most dismal of all the mountebanks that gathered round the stew of tripe in the kitchen of The Jolly Sandboys—Jerry's performing dogs.

> "'Your people don't usually travel in character, do they?' said Short, pointing to the dresses of the dogs. 'It must come expensive if they do.'
>
> "'No,' replied Jerry—'no, it's not the custom with us. But we've been playing a little on the road to-day, and we come out with a new wardrobe at the races, so I didn't think it worth while to stop to undress. Down, Pedro!'"

In addition to these public servants we have a purveyor of diversion—or instruction—of an altogether different stamp. "Does the caravan look as if *it* know'd em?" indignantly demands the proprietress of Jarley's wax-work, when asked whether she is acquainted with the men of the Punch show. She too is drawn, or moulded, in the author's most exuberant style of fun, together with *her* company, in which "all the gentlemen were very pigeon-breasted and very blue about the beards, and all the ladies were miraculous figures; and all the ladies and all the gentlemen

were looking intensely nowhere, and staring with extraordinary earnestness at nothing."

In contrast with these genial products of observation and humour stand the grotesquely hideous personages who play important parts in the machinery of the story, the vicious dwarf Quilp and the monstrous virago Sally Brass. The former is among the most successful attempts of Dickens in a direction which was full of danger for him, as it is for all writers; the malevolent little demon is so blended with his surroundings—the description of which forms one of the author's most telling pictures of the lonely foulnesses of the river-side—that his life seems natural in its way, and his death a most appropriate ending to it. Sally Brass, "whose accomplishments were all of a masculine and strictly legal kind," is less of a caricature, and not without a humorously redeeming point of feminine weakness; yet the end of her and her brother is described at the close of the book with almost tragic earnestness. On the whole, though the poetic sympathy of Dickens when he wrote this book was absorbed in the character of his heroine, yet his genius rarely asserted itself after a more diversified fashion.

Of *Barnaby Rudge*, though in my opinion an excellent book after its kind, I may speak more briefly. With the exception of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was Dickens's only attempt in the historical novel. In the earlier work the relation between the foreground and background of the story is skilfully contrived, and the colouring of the whole, without any elaborate attempt at accurate fidelity, has a generally true and harmonious effect. With the help of

her portrait by a painter (Mr. Frith) for whose pictures Dickens had a great liking, Dolly Varden has justly taken hold of the popular fancy as a charming type of a pretty girl of a century ago. And some of the local descriptions in the early part of the book are hardly less pleasing: the Temple in summer, as it was before the charm of Fountain Court was destroyed by its guardians; and the picturesque comforts of the Maypole Inn, described beforehand, by way of contrast to the desecration of its central sanctuary. The intrigue of the story is fairly interesting in itself, and the gentlemanly villain who plays a principal part in it, though, as usual, over-elaborated, is drawn with more skill than Dickens usually displays in such characters. After the main interest of the book has passed to the historical action of the George Gordon riots, the story still retains its coherence, and, a few minor improbabilities apart, is successfully conducted to its close. No historical novel can altogether avoid the banalities of the species; and though Dickens, like all the world, had his laugh at the late Mr. G. P. R. James, he is constrained to introduce the historical hero of the tale, with his confidential adviser, and his attendant, in the familiar guise of three horsemen. As for Lord George Gordon himself, and the riots of which the responsibility remains inseparable from his unhappy memory, the representation of them in the novel sufficiently accords both with poetic probability and with historical fact. The poor lord's evil genius, indeed, Gashford—who has no historical original—tries the reader's sense of verisimilitude rather hard; such

converts are uncommon except among approvers. The Protestant hangman, on the other hand, has some slight historical warranty; but the leading part which he is made to play in the riots, and his resolution to go any lengths "in support of the great Protestant principle of hanging," overshoot the mark. It cannot be said that there is any substantial exaggeration in the description of the riots; thus, the burning of the great distiller's house in Holborn is a well-authenticated fact; and there is abundant vigour in the narrative. Repetition is unavoidable in treating such a theme, but in *Barnaby Rudge* it is not rendered less endurable by mannerism, nor puffed out with rhetoric.

One very famous character in this story was, as personages in historical novels often are, made up out of two originals.[4] This was Grip the Raven, who, after seeing the idiot hero of the tale safe through his adventures, resumed his addresses on the subject of the kettle to the horses in the stable; and who, "as he was a mere infant when Barnaby was gray, has very probably gone on talking to the present time." In a later preface to *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens, with infinite humour, related his experiences of the two originals in question, and how he had been ravenless since the mournful death before the kitchen fire of the second of the pair, the *Grip* of actual life. This occurred in the house at Devonshire

[4] As there is hardly a character in the whole world of fiction and the drama without some sort of a literary predecessor, so Dickens may have derived the first notion of Grip from the raven Ralpho—likewise the property of an idiot—who frightened Roderick Random and Strap out of their wits, and into the belief that he was the personage Grip so persistently declared himself to be.

Terrace, into which the family had moved two years before (in 1839).

As Dickens's fame advanced his circle of acquaintances was necessarily widened; and in 1841 he was invited to visit Edinburgh, and to receive there the first great tribute of public recognition which had been paid to him. He was entertained with great enthusiasm at a public banquet, voted the freedom of the city, and so overwhelmed with hospitalities that, notwithstanding his frank pleasure in these honours, he was glad to make his escape at last, and refreshed himself with a tour in the Highlands. These excitements may have intensified in him a desire which had for some time been active in his mind, and which in any case would have been kept alive by an incessant series of invitations. He had signed an agreement with his publishers for a new book before this desire took the shape of an actual resolution. There is no great difficulty in understanding why Dickens made up his mind to go to America, and thus to interrupt for the moment a course of life and work which was fast leading him on to great heights of fame and fortune. The question of international copyright alone would hardly have induced him to cross the seas. Probably he felt instinctively that to see men and cities was part of the training as well as of the recreation which his genius required. Dickens was by nature one of those artists who when at work always long to be in sympathy with their public, and to know it to be in sympathy with them. And hitherto he had not met more than part of his public of readers face to face.

CHAPTER III

STRANGE LANDS

[1842-1847.]

A journey across the Atlantic in midwinter is no child's-play even at the present day, when, bad though their passage may have been, few people would venture to confess doubts, as Dickens did, concerning the safety of such a voyage by steam in heavy weather. The travellers—for Dickens was accompanied by his wife—had an exceptionally rough crossing, the horrors of which he has described in his *American Notes*. His powers of observation were alive in the midst of the lethargy of sea-sickness, and when he could not watch others he found enough amusement in watching himself. At last, on January 28, 1842, they found themselves in Boston harbour. Their stay in the United States lasted about four months, during which time they saw Boston, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, and Buffalo. Then they passed by Niagara into Canada, and after a pleasant visit to Montreal, diversified by private theatricals with the officers

there, were safe at home again in July.

Dickens had met with an enthusiastic welcome in every part of the States where he had not gone out of the way of it; in New York, in particular, he had been fêted, with a fervour unique even in the history of American enthusiasms, under the resounding title of "the Guest of the Nation." Still, even this imposed no moral obligation upon him to take the advice tendered to him in America, and to avoid writing about that country—"we are so very suspicious." On the other hand, whatever might be his indignation at the obstinate unwillingness of the American public to be moved a hair's-breadth by his championship of the cause of international copyright,[5] this failure could not, in a mind so reasonable as his, have outweighed the remembrance of the kindness shown to him and to his fame. But the truth seems to be that he had, if not at first, at least very speedily, taken a dislike to American ways which proved too strong for him to the last. In strange lands, most of all in a country which, like the United States, is not in the least ashamed to be what it is, travellers are necessarily at the outset struck by details; and Dickens's habit of minute observation was certain not to let him lose many of them. He was neither long enough in the country to study very closely, nor was it in his way to ponder very deeply, the problems involved in the existence of many of the institutions with which he found

[5] After dining at a party including the son of an eminent man of letters, he notes in his *Remembrancer* that he found the great man's son "decidedly lumpish," and appends the reflexion, "Copyrights need be hereditary, for genius isn't."

fault. Thus, he was indignant at the sight of slavery, and even ventured to "tell a piece of his mind" on the subject to a judge in the South; but when, twenty years later, the great struggle came, at the root of which this question lay, his sympathies were with the cause of disunion and slavery in its conflict with the "mad and villanous" North. In short, his knowledge of America and its affairs was gained in such a way and under such circumstances as to entitle him, if he chose, to speak to the vast public which he commanded as an author of men and manners as observed by him; but he had no right to judge the destinies and denounce the character of a great people on evidence gathered in the course of a holiday tour.

Nor, indeed, did the *American Notes*, published by him after his return home, furnish any serious cause of offence. In an introductory chapter, which was judiciously suppressed, he had taken credit for the book as not having "a grain of any political ingredient in its whole composition." Indeed, the contents were rather disappointing from their meagreness. The author showed good taste in eschewing all reference to his personal reception, and good judgment in leaving the copyright question undiscussed. But though his descriptions were as vivid as usual—whether of the small steamboat, "of about half a pony power," on the Connecticut river, or of the dismal scenery on the Mississippi, "great father of rivers, who (praise be to Heaven) has no young children like him!"—and though some of the figure-sketches were touched off with the happiest of hands, yet the

public, even in 1842, was desirous to learn something more about America than this. It is true that Dickens had, with his usual conscientiousness, examined and described various interesting public institutions in the States—prisons, asylums, and the like; but the book was not a very full one; it was hardly anything but a sketch-book, with more humour, but with infinitely less poetic spirit, than the *Sketch-book* of the illustrious American author whose friendship had been one of the chief personal gains of Dickens's journey.

The *American Notes*, for which the letters to Forster had furnished ample materials, were published in the year of Dickens's return, after he had refreshed himself with a merry Cornish trip in the company of his old friend, and his two other intimates, "Stanny" and "Mac." But he had not come home, as he had not gone out, to be idle. On the first day of the following year, 1843, appeared the first number of the story which was to furnish the real *casus discriminis* between Dickens and the enemies, as well no doubt as a very large proportion of the friends, whom he had left behind him across the water. The American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* did not, it is true, begin till the fifth number of the story; nor is it probable from the accounts of the sale, which was much smaller than Dickens had expected, that these particular episodes at first produced any strong feeling in the English public. But the merits of the book gradually obtained for it a popularity at home which has been surpassed by that of but one or two other of Dickens's works; and in proportion to

this popularity was the effect exercised by its American chapters. What that effect has been, it would be hypocrisy to question.

Dickens, it is very clear, had been unable to resist the temptation of at once drawing upon the vast addition to his literary capital as a humourist. That the satire of many of the American scenes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* is, as satire, not less true than telling, it needs but a small acquaintance with American journalism and oratory even at the present day to perceive; and the heartrending history of Eden, as a type of some of the settlements "vaunted in England as a mine of Golden Hope," at least had the warrant of something more than hearsay and a look in passing. Nor, as has already been observed, would it have been in accordance either with human nature, or with the fitness of things, had Dickens allowed his welcome in America to become to him (as he termed it in the suppressed Preface to the *Notes*) "an iron muzzle disguised beneath a flower or two." But the frankness, to say the least, of the mirror into which he now invited his late hosts to gaze was not likely to produce grateful compliments to its presenter, nor was the effect softened by the despatch with which this *souvenir* of the "guest of the nation" was pressed upon its attention. No doubt it would have been easy to reflect that only the evil, not the good, sides of social life in America were held up to derision and contempt, and that an honourable American journalist had no more reason to resent the portraiture of Mr. Jefferson Brick than a virtuous English paterfamilias had to quarrel with that

of Mr. Pecksniff. Unfortunately, offence is usually taken where offence is meant; and there can be little doubt as to the *animus* with which Dickens had written. Only two months after landing at Boston Dickens had declared to Macready, that "however much he liked the ingredients of this great dish, he could not but say that the dish itself went against the grain with him, and that he didn't like it." It was not, and could not be, pleasant for Americans to find the "*New York Sewer*, in its twelfth thousand, with a whole column of New Yorkers to be shown up, and all their names printed," introduced as the first expression of "the bubbling passions of their country;" or to be certified, apropos of a conversation among American "gentlemen" after dinner, that dollars, and dollars only, at the risk of honesty and honour, filled their souls. "No satirist," Martin Chuzzlewit is told by a candid and open-minded American, "could, I believe, breathe this air." But satire in such passages as these borders too closely on angry invective; and neither the irresistible force nor the earnest pathos of the details which follow can clear away the suspicion that at the bottom lay a desire to depreciate. Nor was the general effect of the American episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* materially modified by their conclusion, to which, with the best of intentions, the author could not bring himself to give a genuinely complimentary turn. The Americans did not like all this, and could not be expected to like it. The tone of the whole satire was too savage, and its tenor was too hopelessly one-sided, for it to pass unresented; while much in it was too

near the truth to glance off harmless. It is well known that in time Dickens came himself to understand this. Before quitting America, in 1868, he declared his intention to publish in every future edition of his *American Notes* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* his testimony to the magnanimous cordiality of his second reception in the States, and to the amazing changes for the better which he had seen everywhere around him during his second sojourn in the country. But it is not likely that the postscript, all the more since it was added under circumstances so honourable to both sides, has undone, or will undo, the effect of the text. Very possibly the Americans may, in the eyes of the English people as well as in their own, cease to be chargeable with the faults and foibles satirised by Dickens; but the satire itself will live, and will continue to excite laughter and loathing, together with the other satire of the powerful book to which it belongs.

For in none of his books is that power, which at times filled their author himself with astonishment, more strikingly and abundantly revealed than in *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit*. Never was his inventive force more flexible and more at his command; yet none of his books cost him more hard work. The very names of hero and novel were only the final fortunate choice out of a legion of notions; though "Pecksniff" as well as "Charity" and "Mercy" ("not unholy names, I hope," said Mr. Pecksniff to Mrs. Todgers) were first inspirations. The MS. text too is full of the outward signs of care. But the author had his reward in the general impression of finish which is conveyed

by this book as compared with its predecessors; so that *Martin Chuzzlewit*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.