AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE
WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ELEMENTS IN THE WORKS OF CHARLES DICKENS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter I. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THE ENGLAND OF CHARLES DICKENS 1

Introduction
Social Condition in England
Political Reforms

II. CHARACTERISTICS OF DICKENS AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS 10

Dickens the Reformer
Dickens the Humorist
His Sympathy
His Love
His Patriotism
His Keen Observation
His Sense of the Dramatic
His Realism
His Religion

III. DICKENS'S CHILDHOOD AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS 33

Birth and Antecedents, 1812
Life at Chatham, 1817-1822
Life in London, 1822-1827

IV. DICKENS'S YOUTH AND MANHOOD AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS 61

Employment as Law Clerk
Employment as Parliamentary Reporter
Employment as Newspaper Reporter
Marriage
Employment as A Novelist
Travels

V. OTHER ASPECTS OF DICKENS AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS 86

Some Attitudes of Dickens
Some Antipathies of Dickens
Some Proposed Reforms of Dickens
Some Intimate Friends
Conclusion

111
CHAPTER I

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONDITIONS IN THE
ENGLAND OF CHARLES DICKENS

That great, grim philosopher of the nineteenth century, Thomas Carlyle, once said: "In every man's writings, the character of the writer must lie recorded." With this sage opinion Charles Dickens, an ardent admirer of Carlyle, would undoubtedly have agreed, but it is unlikely that he realized to how great an extent he, himself, bore out the truth of the statement.

But Dickens went a step further; he not only exposed, to the view of his readers, his character but also his personal experiences, his life. The student of Dickens, to appreciate fully his works, must first acquaint himself with Dickens's life; and likewise, to understand more fully the man, he must read his works.

But one of the chief factors in determining character is always environment. Hence, it would be well to take a look at the England into which Charles Dickens was born in 1812. It was an England at war with France and America on the outside, and an England not at peace within. Social, political, religious, and economic unrest was seething internally. The American and French revolutions had already
receded into the background of history; but the Industrial Revolution, with all the vast changes it entailed, was in full sway, and England under its domination led the world as an industrial nation.

A casual glance needs must be taken at the elements of the industrial revolution, which played so important a role in the life and works of Dickens.

Agriculture had always been the principal industry of England, but the industrial revolution created an England no longer agricultural, but instead, a manufacturing country with a great middle class and a larger poor element. The factory laborers formed a large body of the population with interests and characteristics very different from those of the farm laborers and the lower classes of the old towns. The men who carried on the factories, invested capital in them, and became wealthy from their products made another group of the upper classes in England equally different from the landowners of the country and the merchants of the cities.

The population began to shift to manufacturing cities, most of which were in the northern and northwestern counties. But London was also a manufacturing city, and her population vastly increased. Another cause for this influx to the cities was the process of inclosing the open fields. Many a laborer who had formerly made use of the common as pasture land now found it inclosed. Many, who had been small farmers, could
not keep up with the new methods, and now became farm laborers or went to a factory town to seek employment.

This accumulating of the masses in the city boded no good either for the individual or the country. Unemployment was common, taxes were high and the price of food was high. As a result, disorder set in and agitation for reform of parliament began. But Parliament, by an outmoded system of representation, was still made up of the same classes that had long had control of it, and often acted with the king in entire opposition to the feelings and wishes of the majority of the people of the country. Agitation for reform of parliament, and in particular for reform in representation, was no new thing in England; it had been the basic cause of the Lord George Gordon Riots in 1780, but with the advent of the French Revolution and the wars with France soon thereafter, agitation had lain dormant for awhile, but soon began to make itself heard again.

The Tory party was in an overwhelming majority in parliament and its leaders were settled in their opposition to reform of any kind. . . . Everything was to be kept just as it was. Therefore when agitation became more widespread, the ministry obtained from parliament the adoption of what were known as the "Six Laws," which allowed the government to forbid seditious meetings, suspended the writ of habeas corpus for six months, and provided for the speedy trial and conviction of breakers of the peace. Popular writers were prosecuted for expressions used in their writings, and in every way, repression was practised.  

Revolt against these acts and the general discontent resulted in many riots and came to a head in 1819 in the Manchester Massacre, sometimes called "Peterloo," from the name of the park in the city, St. Peter's Field, where the crowd assembled. The use of military force for the arrest of the reform speakers resulted in a violent riot which caused the death of several men and the wounding of many.

The violence of the agitation abated somewhat, but the struggle for reform continued throughout the whole of Dickens's life and never really reached its peak until in 1834, championed by the aging Gladstone, fourteen years after Dickens's death. This peak was not achieved, however, without rebuffs and setbacks, and it was always accompanied by riots and threatened civil war.

In 1832, Lord Russell led the renewed fight for reform, and after a terrific struggle, opposed by King William and the House of Lords, the Reform Bill of 1832 was passed. This bill created a more equitable system of representation and increased the franchise. It took the control out of the hands of the aristocracy and put it into the hands of the middle classes in England. It was the first step towards the attainment of self-government by the whole mass of the English people.

There had been deep disappointment among the lower classes with the extent of the bill. The agitation that had died down was again renewed; the "People's Charter" was
drawn up and Chartism became a serious threat to the government. In 1848 the Chartist party broke up and some of its members were punished by the government.

But finally in 1867, the second step in the series of reform bills was accomplished. The bill was introduced by Disraeli, and with constant agitation going on outside of parliament, was passed. This bill also revised representation and extended the franchise to all except farm laborers who held no land and paid no taxes. This group were excluded from the franchise until 1884.

But many reforms other than political were needful in Dickens's England. The need had been great that the government be roused from its lethargy or its laissez-faire state of mind concerning the rights of the common man, but the need of an acceptable standard of living, or, indeed, of a method of "keeping the wolf from the door" was a more urgent need.

The greatest obstacle to achieving this objective was a line of thinking which had been adopted by the middle class whose influence was becoming so great in this period. The chief spokesman and central figure for this new line of thought was Jeremy Bentham. "As a philosopher he was the leading exponent of utilitarianism, with its ambiguous maxim, 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number;' and he interpreted this in a sense which made it the central plank of radical democracy."² He advocated the reduction of

social inequalities; but if equality conflicted with security, equality should yield. He upheld the views of Adam Smith before him for free competition—"If men are allowed to pursue their own interest, the public good will be achieved. For each man knows what will be useful to him, and what is useful to each will be useful to all."3

Another school of thought which brought no comfort to the lower classes but which served as a sop to the conscience of the middle and upper classes was the Malthusian doctrine that only poverty, starvation, plagues, and wars could keep down the population to a number which could survive.

These and many other theories, which encouraged the employer to oppression and discouraged the poor laborer to the point of despair, were points for attack when the time came for Dickens to take up his fight, by means of the pen, as a champion of the oppressed and needy.

Some other reforms which were of especial benefit or interest to the lower classes, and in which Dickens was vitally concerned either in his life or in his writings, were the Reform of the Penal Code in 1824, the Factory Act of 1833, and the New Poor Law of 1834.

The first of these, the reform of the penal code, held probably more personal interest for Dickens than perhaps any of the others.

3 Ibid., p. 43.
Efforts had long been made by certain enlightened men to obtain a reduction of punishments for small offenses, and to these the ministry now gave its support. In 1800 the death penalty was prescribed for as many as two hundred kinds of offenses. Misdemeanors of the most petty character were punishable by death. Picking pockets if the value of what was taken was as much as one shilling, shoplifting if the article stolen was of the value of five shillings, sheep stealing, forgery, counterfeiting, and a great many other offenses of all descriptions were by law all punishable by death.

This severe code left no distinction between such a slight offense as petty thieving and such a terrible crime as murder. The smaller offense was punished by hanging and the greater one could be punished by nothing more. So unreasonable and harsh was the system that juries often declared culprits innocent directly in the face of the evidence of their guilt, or declared very valuable articles worth less than five shillings, rather than inflict such a heavy punishment for so slight a crime. Many who were sentenced to death were pardoned or the death penalty commuted to imprisonment or transportation. Punishment was, therefore, very uncertain; nevertheless crime and its punishment were only too common. Hangings at Tyburn in London and other corresponding places of execution in other towns were a frequent occurrence, and attendance at them was a common and demoralizing form of amusement for the populace.

Concerning this, C. R. Fay, late lecturer of Christ's College stated: "The prisons and hulks were notorious nurseries of crime, and Australia, our youngest Colony, was being populated by gaolers and gaol-birds."\(^5\)

\(^4\)Cheyney, op. cit., p. 620.

\(^5\)Fay, op. cit., p. 40.
lawyer speak for them, and by 1861 the number of capital crimes had been reduced until only murder and high treason were left.

Of the reforms which have already been mentioned, the one which pertained to betterment of the lot of working-children was the Factory Act of 1833. By this law children under nine years of age were prohibited from working in spinning and weaving factories. Those between nine and thirteen were restricted to eight hours a day, and those between thirteen and eighteen, to twelve hours a day. Factory inspectors were appointed to see that the law was enforced. The conditions under which women and children were employed had been for a long time a cancerous spot on the nation's social health. Later years brought about a gradual improvement.

The final reform to come under discussion in this study was the reform of the poor law. The old poor law, like the penal code, had come down from the time of Elizabeth with little or no changes. The new law was intended to force the able-bodied paupers to work, and to cut down the ever-increasing national expenditure. To the historian it appears a logical step toward making a more self-dependent member of society, but to the pauper it was only another intolerable burden to bear. Whereas, heretofore he had received relief from the parish in his own home, he was now compelled to live in the poor house in order to get relief. Supplemental wages from the poor fund were now prohibited. The benefits to be derived
from the law lay in the future, but the present seemed dark to the pauper, and the workhouse or starvation seemed his only choice.

So, in spite of all the reforms, which came slowly over a long period of years, in spite of all the wealth pouring into the industries of the nation, in spite of all the marvellous inventions made, and the great displays of the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851, there yet remained much that was needful in the way of change and improvement in England, Dickens's England. The need he saw, and at once began his own private fight for reform, a fight which lasted all his life and was waged in every book he wrote.
CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF DICKENS AS REVEALED IN HIS WORKS

From the foregoing partial analysis of the conditions existing in England as a result, chiefly, of the industrial revolution, it can be seen that the time was ripe for changes, for reforms, and Charles Dickens was a reformer. He preached reform not from the pulpit or political stand but in his writings. "From the most elaborate of his novels to the shortest of his journalistic articles, he was consistently carrying out a great campaign." 1

Dickens, through the hard experiences of his childhood, was made aware at an early age of the need for improvement in social conditions. Moreover, as a result of pecuniary difficulties in his family, the boy's education was very limited, and he began writing much earlier than most; but peculiarly enough, he achieved fame much sooner than did his contemporary writers.

Dickens commenced his career about the time of the great Reform Bill (1832), a time when he found the nation particularly responsive to his own ideas. This gave him a great opportunity which he used to the full. Doubtless a man of his parts could have forced his way into power and eminence against any current of popular sentiment; nevertheless, it was much that the popular sentiment was upon his side. . . . Dickens appeared when the very

1 J. Cuming Walters, Phases of Dickens, Preface, ix.
mood of the country was changing, and gave that mood
language and stimulus.

In 1834, Dickens had begun his first book. By 1837,
when he began *Oliver Twist*, the tone of his writings had
changed; reform was enthroned and held sway in his works
from then on. In this same year Victoria came to the throne
of England. Her reign, lasting until 1901, was so long and
prosperous and the manners and customs of the queen were so
reflected in society that the age became known as the Victorian
Age.

But Dickens was a Victorian in conflict with his
age. Rightly or wrongly he believed it was an age of
severities and shams. He was in rebellion, and his own
good fortune never made him waver or change, become
lethargic, or sheathe his sword. His democratic spirit
could not brook class distinctions and conditions of
privilege; and surviving forms of thraldom aroused his
wrath. The typical home of the self-satisfied, well-
to-do citizen, with its heavy and stuffy furniture, its
horsehair chairs, its pot-bellied tables, and its un-
attractive decorations excited his derision and his
condemnation because he believed it was indicative of
dulled mentality.

Scarcely one book, scarcely a single sketch which
came from the untiring hand, which had not its special
appeal, its enunciation of moral truth, its rebuke of
some besetting sin in the individual or in the race,
its subtle or rousing call to man's better nature. He
was by temperament a crusader who, without unduly
obtruding his missionary or religious aim, engaged
none the less in as holy a war as the Knight Templar
who went forth under the emblem of the Cross "to break
the heathen and uphold the Christ."

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4 Ibid., p. xiv.
And like the Knight Templar, he was sometimes fanatical in his zeal; he sometimes lost sight of the real purpose in the achieving of his goal.

He was in revolt. The eighteenth-century traditions were abhorrent to him and the early nineteenth-century customs left him dissatisfied. He was eager to be rid of the past; he was impatient with the present; he was on fire to usher in a new era of improved opportunity and of increased happiness for his fellowmen. His self-assigned task was to break down barriers to progress and to point the way to the goal.\(^5\)

Dickens himself tells us in the preface to many of his novels some of the purposes he hoped to achieve or changes he wanted to help bring about. In his preface to Pickwick Papers (1836) he points out that there had been already "some improvement seen in court practises, elections, law relating to imprisonment for debt\(^6\) but adds:

Who knows, but by the time the series reaches its conclusion, it may be discovered that there are even magistrates in town and country, who should be taught to shake hands every day with Common-sense and Justice, that even Poor Laws may have mercy on the weak, the aged, and unfortunate; that Schools, on the broad principles of Christianity, are the best adornment for the length and the breadth of this civilized land; that Prison-doors should be barred on the outside no less heavily and carefully than they are within; that the universal diffusion of common means of decency and health is as much the right of the poorest of the poor, as it is indispensable to the safety of the rich and of the State; that a few petty boards and bodies---less than drops in the great ocean of humanity which

\(^5\)Tbid., p. 9.

roars around them—are not forever to let loose Fever
and Consumption on God's creatures at their will, or
always keep their jobbing little fiddles going for a
Dance of Death.7

In his novels, in his prefaces, in his journals,

the same themes recur, the same battle is fought, the
same text is preached from, the same truths are pro-
claimed, the same goads are used in the casual article
and the elaborate volume; the voice of age was the
voice of youth. Never was greater persistency; never
was grimmer determination.8

And what an array of "Goliaths" he hoped to knock down!

Bad, old fashions, corrupt traditions, ultra-conservatism,
insularity, vicious manners, loathly precedent, charlatanism,
hypocrisy, humbug, workhouses, alms, crime—these were the
giants of ignorance and selfishness against whom he was lined
up for combat.

And success he did have—not at once, and not wholly;

for few reformers are able to see many visible results of
their works or reap the rewards thereof.

In so odious a light did he expose crying iniquities,
practised in private, established by statute, fostered
by officials, or encouraged by custom, that he made
those iniquities intolerable, converted their very
names into words of reproach, and not infrequently
compelled by his keen ridicule or stern denunciation,
their remedy or abolition.9

And what of his weapons?

His problem was how to induce or compel the miracle of
change and amendment to be wrought. "Sheer genius led

7 Ibid., p. xviii.
8 Walters, op. cit., p. 188.
9 Ibid., p. xv.
him to resolve on making the foolish laugh at their own follies. For those who could not be tickled with a straw there remained the lash. But he preferred the lighter weapon, the gentler means. And he had the prescience to realize that what is ridiculed out of existence does not revive, whereas force may only lead to concealment, not to extinction. Dickens, then allows his reforming power mainly to be displayed in satire. Ever and anon he denounced in terms that are terrible and deadly; when he flagellates a delinquent, he is unsparing; but if we review for a moment his horde of rogues and hypocrites we shall see that he holds most of them up to a wholesome contempt and makes them writhe under the scorn that completes their humiliation.  

As has been implied, Dickens diluted the acid of his satire with humor. His humor was "of the broad and boisterous kind. Hearty laughter, playful irony, potent ridicule, a singular love of the grotesque——these are some of the characteristics of Dickens's humor."  

From the preceding pages it is evident that here was a man with a message and with the will and means for proclaiming it. But the question may be asked, "What manner of man is this?" Thomas Carlyle once said:

If an individual is really of consequence enough to have his life and character recorded for public remembrance, we have always been of the opinion that the public ought to be made acquainted with all the inward springs and relations of his character.  

The characteristics of Dickens which may be seen portrayed in his works are legion; but humor, as had been stated, is

10 Ibid., p. 21.  
12 Thomas Carlyle, Burns, p. 259.
conspicuous among them. In fact it was probably this trait that first brought him to the attention of the public. Of all his characters perhaps none he has created has been so well-loved as the gay, jolly, humorous old fellow, Pickwick. Richard Grant White in his discussion of the style of Dickens says:

Humor was Mr. Dickens's great distinctive trait; and for humor pure and simple he produced in all his life nothing quite equal to "Pickwick"—nothing so sustained, so varied, so unstrained.13

Some critics of Dickens even consider him the greatest humorist ever produced by the English people. Nicoll asks:

Has not the time come when we should frankly claim that Dickens was the greatest humorist ever produced by this nation, Shakespeare himself certainly coming second... It was the humour of Dickens that did more to soften the lines between the different sections of English society than any other single influence.14

An example of this humor may be found in an excerpt from Oliver Twist.

Occasionally, when there was some more than usually interesting inquest upon a parish child who had been overlooked in turning up a bedstead, or inadvertently scalded to death when there happened to be a washing—though the latter accident was very scarce, anything approaching to a washing being of rare occurrence in the farm—the jury would take it into their heads to ask troublesome questions, or the parishioners would rebelliously affix their signatures to a remonstrance. But these impertinences were speedily checked by the evidence of the surgeon, and the testimony of the beadle, the former of whom had always opened the body

14Nicoll, op. cit., p. 11.
and found nothing inside (which was very probable indeed), and the latter of whom invariably swore what the parish wanted; which was very self-devotional. Besides, the board made periodical pilgrimages to the farm, and always sent the beadle the day before, to say they were going. The children were neat and clean to behold, when they went; and what more would the people have.

His youngest son, Henry Fielding Dickens, reminisces:

How well do I recall him at dinner time, when he threw aside work for the day and was his own bright irresistible, interesting, radiant self, full of life, with wonderful animal spirits, and bubbling over with humor.

Much has been said concerning Dickens's emotionalism, both in his personality and in his works. Humor, of course, is one phase of this, but a second is his sympathy. This quality he also possessed in full measure, and he displayed it generously in his works. It probably was the real foundation for many of his novels, for how could the brotherhood and toleration which he so sincerely advocated be based on anything but sympathy? However, many of his critics say that his pity, sympathy, or grief becomes pathos, that it is overdone and becomes artificial. Others, however, rise to his defense by declaring that he lived in his characters more than the average author; he partook of their griefs, and travelled with them in their journeys, and experienced their joys.

So carried away by these devotional feelings, that after the pathetic death of some favourite character he would even point the moral, and, as it were, commend

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15 Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 6.
16 Henry F. Dickens, Memories of My Father, p. 14.
the soul to the mercy of its Creator, with a prayer for its welfare. Other writers do not do this. Neither Scott nor Thackeray thus stand by the dying-bed and grave to improve the occasion, as though dealing with a person who has lived. It is certainly evidence of a genuine sincerity and tender heart. 17

Many are the pathetic and tear-provoking scenes in his books. Old Curiosity Shop is usually considered his masterpiece in pathos. The death of the principal character was so tied up with sorrows in his own life that he was as much upset over the writing it as his public was in reading it.

To John Forster, one of his best friends and also his biographer he wrote:

It is such a very painful thing to me, that I really cannot express my sorrow. Old wounds bleed afresh when I only think of the way of doing it: what the actual doing it well be, God knows. 18

Forster again relates a similar instance which occurred seven years later when Dickens was writing Dombey and Son in Paris. The death of one of his characters was so similar to a death in his own life that the writing of it became very painful for him.

There was but one small chapter more to write, in which he and his little friend were to part company forever; and the greater part of the night of the day on which it was written, Thursday the 14th, he was wandering desolate and sad about the streets of Paris. I arrived there the following morning on my visit, and as I alighted from the malle-poste, a little before eight o'clock, found him waiting for me at the gate of the post office bureau. 19

In *Great Expectations* Dickens's hero, overcome with parting from home and friends, bursts into tears. At this point Dickens moralizes a little: "Heaven knows we need never be ashamed of our tears, for they are rain upon the blinding dust of earth, overlying our hard hearts."\(^{20}\)

According to Dickens's son, Dickens himself felt a strange reticence or dislike for "letting himself go" in private life, but when he was deeply moved he was at no pains to hide the depth of his emotion. He gives an account of several of these touching incidents, one of which is the following:

I cannot pass over the impression which was made upon me on the occasion of my youngest brother leaving England for Australia. I accompanied him to Plymouth and the leave-taking between my father and him was on the platform at Paddington Station. The scene that followed was tragic in its emotional intensity. My father openly gave way to his intense grief quite regardless of his surroundings, and I do not think I had ever fully realized till then the depth of his affection for his children.\(^{21}\)

In the opinion of Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Dickens reached his greatest height in dignified pathos, in restrained compassion in *Pickwick*.

Because it has no Dickens "pathos" certain parts are truly pathetic. Dickens, realizing rightly that the whole tone of the book was fun, felt that he ought to keep out of it any great experiments in sadness and keep within limits those that he put in. He used this restraint in order not to spoil the humour; but (if he had known himself better) he might have used it in order not to spoil the pathos. This is the one book in

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20 Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*, p. 185.
which Dickens was, as it were, forced to trample down his tender feelings; and for that very reason it is the one book where all the tenderness there is is quite unquestionably true. 22

Dickens was by nature very emotional; hence his love, no matter upon what it was bestowed, was very ardent. In all his works can be seen these loves reflected: his love for his home and homeland, his respect for his parents, his admiration of his friends, his love for his own family. Nowhere are these separate from his works.

In his "affairs of the heart" he was never fortunate, and in his picturization of them in his works his sentiment sometimes verges on sentimentality. Concerning these phases of his life much has been written and rewritten by his biographers and critics.

In David Copperfield, which is the most autobiographical of his books, his wife does not fulfill his youthful ideal of connubial bliss. Said David,

I loved my wife dearly, and I was happy, but the happiness I had vaguely anticipated, once, was not the happiness I enjoyed, and there was always something wanting. 23

In real life also Dickens’s love for his wife ended in disappointment; but whereas in the novel he let his wife die rather than to drag out this state of disenchantment, in reality he lived with her for many years, until after ten children were born, then separated from her.

22 Gilbert Keith Chesterton, Criticisms and Appreciations of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 223.

Dickens was very fond of his own sister Fanny and of his sisters-in-law, Mary and Georgina Hogarth. His picturization of brother-and-sister love is more convincing than is that of any other kind of love. Percy Fitzgerald, a pupil and ardent admirer of Dickens, calls attention to the number of times that Dickens introduced a brother and sister as hero and heroine.

In Nicholas and his sister Kate; in Pickwick, Ben Allen and Arabella; in Chuzzlewit, Tom Finch and Ruth; in Old Curiosity Shop, Nell and her brother; in Dombey, Florence and Paul; in Little Dorrit, the heroine and her worthless brother; in Hard Times, Mrs. Bounderby and here, with Mrs. Peckybingle and her brother; he paints these displays of affection and self-sacrifice with a genuine sympathy. \(^2^4\)

A word might be said at this point concerning his love of country, or patriotism. He spent much time abroad, and as a result he began to find fault with the narrow concept, the provincialism of England. He truly admired Carlyle, Thackeray, Browning, Tennyson, and others of his British contemporaries, but he could also see the worth of Alexander Dumas, Victor Hugo, Washington Irving, Henry Longfellow, Oliver Wendell Holmes, or Guiseppe Mazzini. But because of his fault-finding and advocating of reform, he was sometimes labeled unpatriotic. But for all that he found fault with, he found much more to praise.

It was John Bull in his worst aspects whom Dickens held up to ridicule and desired to amend. He disliked his insular prejudice and arrogance. He disliked his

overbearing habits, his petty tyranny, his class distinctions, his pretentious superiority. He disliked his official ineptitude, his departmental evasions, his slowness of action, and his unreasonable animus.  

But it was not an enemy who did this thing, but a lover of his countrymen; not a faultfinder eager to betray the shortcomings of his native land, but a patriot who desired her efficiency and supremacy.  

England was the setting of all his novels except two, and part of the plot in those two occurred in England---Tale of Two Cities and Martin Chuzzlewit, whose action moved to France and America respectively. And the criticism has been made that in any other country but England he could not see deeply, that he saw only surface things, superficialities. Andre Maurois touches this lightly with his comment:

From his prolonged residence abroad Dickens brought back several books, but these books, curiously enough were books about England and on the favourite themes of his younger days. It seemed as if this excellent observer lost his sight as soon as he ceased to breathe English air. Occasionally, in a letter, one can find a delightful picture of French or Italian life, but when he introduces foreign ways into one of his novels (as, for example, the picture of Marseilles at the beginning of Little Dorrit) it is always under the conventional masks of the Frenchman or the Italian of the English novel.  

Dickens pictured all phases of English life in his novels, but he felt the most at ease or at home in picturing the lower middle classes, although he aspired to be—and achieved his desire—of the upper ranks of the middle class.  

25Walters, op. cit., p. 194.  
26Ibid., p. 216.  
27Andre Maurois, Dickens, p. 63.
His favorite county was Kent, his favorite city was London, but his characters, especially Pickwick, wandered with him all over the countryside.

And as he wandered he observed; seeing the minutest details, he stored them in his memory. His family, his friends, his public marveled at his powers of observation and his tenacious memory.

People who seek for the literary background on which Dickens's work was based will find it partly in the books he read for himself as a child; these books, and presently the streets and sounds of London and the glittering gaslight of the cheap London stage. But the real basis and background was his instinctive observation and interpretation of the life about him. This was born in him, not made. 28

Fitzgerald is of the same opinion.

His childhood and youth was for him, odd to say, the most fruitful portion of his course; it was then that he observed and took stock of life, and garnered up the knowledge that he later put to such profit . . . . For he later gives us all that he saw and felt at that early period under innumerable disguises; and these personal memories he adapted in the most ingenious, clever fashion to his stories. 29

All his life long he never ceased to observe closely, but he made the most use of his childhood observations. Over and over again those impressions from his childhood are found in his works. In David Copperfield are found these reminiscent lines:

28Stephen Leacock, Charles Dickens, His Life and Work, p. 5.

She took me in both her arms and squeezed me to her stays until the pressure on my nose was extremely painful, though I never thought that till afterwards, when I found it very tender. 30

And from Great Expectations——

I remember Mr. Hubble as a tough high-shouldered stooping old man, of a sawdusty fragrance, with his legs extraordinarily wide apart: so that in my short days I always saw some miles of open country between them when I met him coming up the lane. 31

And again as Pip tells of the torture undergone by a small boy during the cleansing process:

With that she pounced on me, like an eagle on a lamb, and my face was squeezed into wooden bowls in sinks, and my head was put under taps of waterbutts, and I was soaped, and kneaded, and towelled, and thumped, and harrowed, and rasped, until I really was quite beside myself. I may here remark that I suppose myself to be better acquainted than any living authority, with the ridgy effect of a wedding ring, passing unsympathetically over the human countenance. 32

As it was with Stevenson so it was with Dickens. "Both were constantly looking back to their childhood's days and drawing from that source a store of the freshest feelings and impressions." 33

(Another characteristic of Dickens of which great use was made in all his works is his sense of the dramatic. And what could be more natural than for this to be true? From his

30 Charles Dickens, David Copperfield, p. 75.
31 Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 27.
32 Ibid., p. 59.
earliest childhood to his death—brought on prematurely perhaps from his great exertions made in giving theatrical readings—he was interested in the theater. As a result, much in his works is theatrical; many of his plots are suggestive of the stage; many of the speeches of his characters are histrionic. And because of these characteristics, his words are sometimes called melodramatic.

This flair for the dramatic was found even in the man himself, in his actions, in his appearance. Fitzgerald, who knew him well in his later years describes him at a party:

Boz seemed to glitter—he was always showy on these festive occasions—and often wore a jewelled stud with a red flower.34

His features were unusually mobile, a quality which lent itself well to his play-acting and his audience-holding. Thomas Carlyle in a letter to John Carlyle, in 1840, gives this description of Dickens.

He is a fine little fellow—Boz, I think. Clear blue, intelligent eyes, eye-brows that he arches amazingly, large protrusive rather loose mouth, a face of most extreme mobility, which he shuttles about—eyebrows, eyes, mouth, and all—in a very singular manner while speaking. Surmount this with a loose coil of common-coloured hair, and set it on a small compact figure, very small, and dressed a'la D'Orsay rather than well—this Pickwick. For the rest, a quiet, shrewd-looking little fellow, who seems to guess pretty well what he is and what others are.35

34Ibid., p. 208.

Although Dickens was dramatic in his personality, according to the ones who knew him best, he was not ostentatious. On the contrary, Lord Jeffrey, between whom and Dickens there was a great mutual admiration, said of him that "in mixed company, where he is now much sought after as a lion, he is rather reserved, ..."36

Dickens's first efforts in a literary way were made in playwriting. In the same year that his *Sketches By Boz* appeared, his play, *The Strange Gentleman*, was acted at St. James Theatre. His letters to his fiancée, Catherine Hogarth, even before this are full of references to the theater. One of his dearest friends was Macready, the famous actor. He numbered many of his friends among stage people; he became the backer of the General Theatrical Fund; he directed and acted in performances for charity or for any other excuse he could invent, even putting on a special performance for Queen Victoria; he toured England, Scotland, and America doing dramatic readings from his works.

It is impossible to explore far in the half-shrouded byways of Dickens without surprising again and again this secret of his heart—that he wanted to be an actor.37

Is it any wonder then that his works are dramatic in themselves, and that many references are made to the theater?

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37*Alexander Woolcott, Mr. Dickens Goes To The Play*, p. 14.
In Sketches by Boz, playhouses and private theaters are described. David Copperfield on several occasions attended the theater. In Little Dorrit, Frederick Dorrit played a clarinet in the orchestra pit. Mr. Wopsle, in Great Expectations gave up his "moral" exhorting and became an actor, whose performances Tip attended. And finally Nicholas Nickleby, in pursuit of a "living", became a member of the Vincent Crummles Company, a touring theatrical group and was associated with it throughout eight chapters.

The question has been asked, "If Dickens's works are so highly dramatic, can they be real?" Dickens's realism was as paradoxical as the man. The age in which he lived was one of fact and the advancement of science. Dickens, however, in his books took little cognizance of this; in fact, he deplored the loss of imagination in favor of fact and utilitarianism.

Dickens who was always on the side of the fairies, and who pleaded for indulgence in fancy as against the adhesion to fact, saw around him a grim-visaged people fettered to utilitarianism, affrighted at the thought of innocent freedom and frivolity, and solemnly denouncing a bright colour, a pretty ornament, a dainty device, as—"French".38

And Dickens, in his war of the spirit against this false solemnity, used humour as his Trojan Horse.39 But science, in all its new startling phases, failed to arouse in him the warring instinct.

As for scientific ideas or the incipient controversies between science and religion (Dickens was a contemporary of Darwin), nothing of the sort seems ever to have concerned him. It is curious to compare him in this respect, with his contemporaries. . . and one is left in amazement that he could have lived through this great epoch and kept his mind so naive and simple, like a child who listens to the arguments of the learned and then returns to his play, oblivious of all that he has heard.40

But regardless of his tendency to encourage fancy and to ignore science, there was much of realism in his writings. True there was exaggeration; true there was caricature, but the condition behind the exaggeration, or the human nature behind the caricature was all too real, even at a lesser degree.

Moreover, Dickens did not always confine himself to current situations. He went back to conditions just prior to the present, seemingly to remind his readers of times not far removed and to warn them that there must be no relapse to past conditions. By the past, he sought to inspire future improvement.

Innumerable are the illustrations of his realism in relating or in describing, but the following are a few examples. In the first, Pip, who has surreptitiously brought food to a convict escaped from a prison ship and is curiously watching him devour the food, comments thus:

I had often watched a large dog of ours eating his food; and I now noticed a decided similarity between the dog's way of eating and the man's. The man took strong, sharp, sudden bites, just like the dog. He

40Ibid., p. 173.
swallowed, or rather snapped up, every mouthful, too soon and too fast; and he looked sideways here and there while he ate, as if he thought there was danger in every direction of somebody's coming to take the pie away. He was altogether too unsettled in his mind over it, to appreciate it comfortably, I thought, or to have anybody to dine with him, without making a chop with his jaws at the visitor. In all of which particulars he was very like the dog.  

Another example is found in Oliver Twist's experience as a "parochial prentis" to an undertaker. He has just been shown his bed under the counter in the room with the coffins.

Oliver, being left to himself in the undertaker's shop, set the lamp down on a workman's bench, and gazed timidly about him with a feeling of awe and dread, which many people a good deal older than he, will be at no loss to understand. An unfinished coffin on black trestles, which stood in the middle of the shop, looked so gloomy and death-like that a cold tremble came over him, every time his eyes wandered in the direction of the dismal object: from which he almost expected to see some frightful form slowly rear its head, to drive him mad with terror. Against the wall were ranged, in regular array, a long row of elm boards cut into the same shape: looking in the dim light, like high-shouldered ghosts with their hands in their breeches-pockets... The shop was close and hot. The atmosphere seemed tainted with the smell of coffins. The recess beneath the counter in which his flock mattress was thrust, looked like a grave.

The attitude toward religion and morality in the novels of Dickens reveals another interesting trait in his character. Religion in Dickens's day was a subject for controversy. Dickens took no particular side in the matter, but pointed out whatever he thought wrong in any church or sect. Unlike some of his contemporaries he was not torn with doubts. It

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41 Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 20.
42 Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 35.
is doubtful that he would have knowingly defined his religious code, but with Thomas Paine he might have said:

The world is my country,
All mankind are my brethren,
To do good is my religion,
I believe in one God and no more.

Sir William R. Nicoll in his biography of Dickens was greatly concerned over the fact that, although Dickens's parents were Nonconformists, his sister, a devout Nonconformist, and Dickens himself had attended school taught by a capable young Baptist minister, yet he apparently had a strong dislike for Nonconformist ministers. In pursuing this subject farther Nicoll quotes Chesterton's comments on the subject.

He (Dickens) fought for the rights of the grossly oppressed Nonconformists; but he spat out of his mouth the unctiousness of that too easy seriousness with which they oiled everything and held up to them like a horrible mirror the soul fat face of Chadband.43

Chadband was only one of the characters whom Dickens invented to exemplify hypocrisy and cant in religion. His fight was not against ministers, bishops, or the church but against demagoguery and hypocrisy wherever he found it; and radicalism or unnaturalness in religion was a thing to be despised.

These phases of his gospel he illustrated forcibly in his novels. The subject was probably first broached in *Pickwick*. The Shepherd was pictured as "a great fat chap in

black . . . smilin' away like clockwork" and was Mrs. Weller's spiritual adviser. Mr. Stiggins, the deputy sheriff, was a drunken ranter, who in the name of religion, lived on the foolish gullibility of Mrs. Weller and other silly women. This particular imposter Sam Weller exposed at the Brick Lane Temperance meeting, and later soaked him in the horse-trough.

In Old Curiosity Shop, Kit Nubbles, is exposed to the "ministrations" of the Little Bethel, which is faintly reminiscent of the Baptist church by which Dickens had lived in his childhood.

In Bleak House, Chadband, the oily hypocrite, spouts forth on the subject of "Terewth", about which he knew nothing, much to the bewilderment of little Jo, the street sweeper. He stands as a remarkable example of a religious humbug.

Pip, in Great Expectations, is hounded by moral remonstrances and reproaches. He complains bitterly:

They wouldn't leave me alone. They seemed to think the opportunity lost, if they failed to point the conversation at me, every now and then, and stick the point into me. I might have been an unfortunate little bull in a Spanish arena. I got so smartingly touched up by these moral goads.45

Another comment of Pip's runs:

Mrs. Joe was a very clean housekeeper, but had an exquisite art of making her cleanliness more uncomfortable

45 Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 27.
and unacceptable than dirt itself. Cleanliness is next to Godliness, and some people do the same by their religion. 46

Dickens pictured many of his hypocrites as great lovers of strong drink. He did this not because he fought for total abstinence, but, on the contrary, because of their pretenses towards temperance. In his works and in his life Dickens showed an appreciation for good drinks; he especially played-up the punch bowl. The Micawberish art of making punch he evidently inherited from his father. But, according to several accounts, Dickens was very abstemious in his own drinking. In David Copperfield he gives an account, probably based on fact, of getting drunk when out with some youthful friends and of his later being penitent and ashamed of his excesses. But as for the total abstainers, the prohibitionists, they were only trying to rob the poor man of his beer.

Dickens's ingrained dislike of ranting and ranters, which he so denounced in Stiggins and his followers, might be traced to the fanatical zeal of the divines who preached next door to his childhood home in St. Mary's Terrace.

Many years later he gave vent to a bitter complaint, bewailing all that he had suffered from these divines, their meetings and services. "Time was", he says, "when I was dragged by the hair of my head, as one may say, to hear too many preachers." 47

46 Ibid., p. 24.
George Gissing defends Dickens's position on religion thus:

Dickens was not without his reasons for a spirit of distrust towards religion by law established, as well as towards sundry other forms of religion—the spirit which, in his early career, was often misunderstood as hostility to religion in itself, a wanton mocking at sacred things.

Dickens came to his own defense, or at least he stated his position, in his preface to *Pickwick Papers*.

Lest there should be any well-intentioned persons who do not perceive the difference between religion and the cant of religion, piety and the pretense of piety, a humble reverence for the great truths of Scripture and an audacious and offensive obtrusion of its letter and not its spirit in the commonest dissensions and meanest affairs of life, to the extraordinary confusion of ignorant minds, let them understand that it is always the latter and not the former, who is satirized here.

But his last expression of his religious feelings is found in his will. This commitment he made:

I commit my soul to the mercy of God through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and I exhort my dear children humbly to try to guide themselves by the teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and to put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there. In witness whereof I the said Charles Dickens, the testator, have to this my last Will and Testament set my hand this 12th day of May in the year of our Lord 1869.

The characteristics of Dickens are many, but the ones just discussed seem to be the ones which are most obviously revealed in his works.

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49 *Charles Dickens, Pickwick Papers, Preface*, p. xvii.
CHAPTER III

DICKENS'S CHILDHOOD AS REFLECTED
IN HIS WORKS

In the preceding chapter it has been the aim to point out the characteristics of Dickens, the man, which may be readily seen in his works. But since a man's true character cannot be long separated from his actions, it is the purpose of this chapter to trace the manner in which Dickens puts his own life and experiences into his works.

On February 7, 1812, Charles Huffam Dickens was born at No. 387 Mile End Terrace, Landport, a suburb of Portsea. He was the second child of John Dickens, a clerk for the Navy Pay Office, and Elizabeth Barrow Dickens, a daughter of a naval employee who held the responsible position of Chief Conductor of Money In Town.

Charles's paternal grandparents had been employed for almost a lifetime at Crewe Hall, the seat of John Crewe, Member of Parliament for Chester. They served in the capacity of steward and housekeeper respectively. As a result, the Crewes had educated the two sons and provided them with a respectable means of livelihood.

The maternal side of his ancestry, however, had a little greater claim to gentility. "Possibly their relationship to Sir John Barrow, second secretary of the admiralty from 1804
to 1845, may have invested them with a sense of importance.\textsuperscript{1}

At any rate, the relationship between John Dickens and his wife’s family was not always too cordial.

So, from the first, Charles Dickens was closely associated with the lower middle class working people; from the first he was acquainted with things naval. Much of his childhood leisure was spent near the sea or near naval barracks, and his interest in things nautical and his love for reviving old memories concerning his childhood experiences never ceased throughout his life.

Much has been said of Charles Dickens’s power of observation.

But his extraordinary powers of observation began to function before the age of two, for in later life he remembered the garden of his second home in Hawke Street, where he toddled about with his elder sister, watched by their nurse through a kitchen window; he had a vivid recollection of being taken to see the soldiers drilling; and he recalled that when they left Portsmouth the ground was covered with snow.\textsuperscript{2}

In 1814, John Dickens was transferred to Somerset House in London, and the family lodged at 10 Norfolk Street, Fitzroy Square, near the Middlesex Hospital. This was Dickens’s first introduction to the city which played such an important part in his life and works—the city which he soon learned to be familiar with from one end to the other, and whose streets,

\textsuperscript{1}Una Pope Hennessy, \textit{Charles Dickens}, p. 2.

\textsuperscript{2}Hesketh-Pearson, \textit{Dickens}, p. 2.
bridges, buildings, slums, and sections he meticulously described or named in relating the meanderings of his characters.

An example of this familiarity with the London streets and byways is found in Oliver Twist. Oliver has just arrived in London and is being escorted to the habitation of Fagin the Jew.

They crossed from the Angel into St. John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre: through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into little Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels.

The family soon moved to Chatham, a royal shipbuilding center, with its dockyards and fortifications. There they lived at 2 Ordnance Terrace, in a good-looking three-story house, facing a hayfield; there Charles really began storing up the details of his childhood experiences for later use.

At Chatham the Dickens family was in comfortable circumstances. For awhile Mrs. Dickens had two servant girls, Mary Weller, who acted in the capacity of nurse, and Jane Bonney. Both names Dickens later used in his works. Whether the name Bonney was reminiscent of good cookery is not known, but in Nicholas Nickleby, Bonney became the name of the promoter of The United Metropolitan Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. Mary Weller's name was immortalized in Pickwick by being given to Sam Weller, Mr. Pickwick's

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3Charles Dickens, Oliver Twist, pp. 73-74.
faithful man-servant. Mary Weller was probably also the original of Clara Peggotty, David’s beloved nurse and friend in David Copperfield.

A comprehensive picture of Dickens’s earliest education is found in the following:

Charles, who was a weakly boy, early learnt to read from a primer of “fat black letters;” and, thanks to his mother and his Aunt Mary, made rapid progress. Subsequently he was sent to a Dame School situated over a dyer’s shop in Rome Lane, kept by a reverend old lady with hard knuckles who instilled into his mind “the first principles of education for ninepence a week” and was “wont to poke” his “juvenile head occasionally, by way of adjusting the confusion of ideas in which he was generally involved” —— an old lady whom one cannot help associating with Mr. Wopsle’s great aunt in Great Expectations.

Mr. Wopsle’s great aunt, Dickens described as “a ridiculous old woman of limited means and unlimited infirmity, who used to go to sleep from six to seven every evening in the society of youth who paid her two pence per week each, for the improving opportunity of seeing her do it.” To finish the picture of this early quest for knowledge he adds:

Much of my unassisted self, and more by the help of Biddy than of Mr. Wopsle’s great aunt, I struggled through the alphabet as if it had been a bramblebush; getting considerably worried and scratched by every letter. After that I fell among those thieves, the nine figures, who seemed every evening to do something new to disguise themselves and baffle recognition. But, at last I began, in a purblind groping way, to read, write, and cipher; on the very smallest scale.

5Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 49.
6Ibid., p. 50.
The nurse, Mary Weller, described Charles as:

A terrible boy to read . . . his custom was to sit with his book in his left hand, holding his wrist with his right, and constantly moving it up and down and at the same time sucking his tongue.

In *David Copperfield*, Dickens thus describes his own love of reading:

Peggotty and I were sitting one night by the parlour fire, alone. I had been reading to Peggotty about crocodiles. I must have read very perspicuously, or the poor soul must have been deeply interested, for I remember she had a cloudy impression, after I had done, that they were a sort of vegetable. I was tired of reading, and dead sleepy; but having leave, as a high treat, to sit up until my mother came home from spending the evening at a neighbour’s, I would rather have died upon my post (of course) than have gone to bed.

It was probably also Mary Weller who told him ghost stories until the child begged her to stop. Old Mrs. Dickens at Crewe’s Hall, who later moved to Oxford Street, London, after being pensioned, also had a great store of wonderful stories of hobgoblins, wicked enchanters, and fairy tales. These stories and the atmosphere created in them he later remembered and used in the creation of his grotesque effects.

And even Grandmother Dickens herself found her place in *Bleak House*. Her long and loyal devotion to the Crewes is typified in Mrs. Rouncewell, the Dedlock’s housekeeper at Chesney Wold. Her devotion to her employer’s family lived again in Clara Peggotty’s devotion to David Copperfield’s family.

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7Hennessy, op. cit., p. 5.

When Mrs. Copperfield pressed Peggotty anxiously never to leave her she replied:

I'll stay with you till I am a cross cranky old woman. And when I'm too deaf, and too lame, and too blind, and too mumbly for want of teeth, to be any use at all, even to be found fault with, then I shall go to my Davy, and ask him to take me in.9

Charles, it seems, even then was a talented youngster, and his father often took him and his sister Fanny, two years older than he, to the Mitre Inn, where he stood them upon the table and they sang for the company.

Charles and his sister, Fanny, often amused themselves with private theatricals, to which were generally invited their little next door friends, Lucy and George Stroughill (pronounced Struggle) and another pair of small folk named Tribe, from the Mitre, a notable inn in Chatham High Street, which had "a bar that seemed to be the next best thing, it was so snug," and boasted of having been patronized by Nelson.10

The Mitre was probably the first of the many inns of Dickens's experiences. His best description of it, and the one from which the above mentioned reference to the bar was taken, was The Holly Tree.

George Stroughill, a frank, open, and daring boy who used to bring in his magic lantern, was the original of Steerforth in David Copperfield. And Lucy was probably the original of Little Em'ly, "the blue-eyed mite of a child" concerning whom David Copperfield said: "I told Em'ly I adored her, and that unless she confessed she adored me I

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should be reduced to the necessity of killing myself with a sword. She said she did, and I have no doubt she did." Lucy was also the original for another of his fictional children, little Lucy Atherfield, a child who died of exposure in the story, "Golden Mary," one of his Christmas stories.

Another little neighbor, Mary Ann Mitton, later Mrs. Cooper, became one of Dickens's famous children, Little Dorrit.

Mr. Dickens was a genial, carefree, happy sort of fellow, who apparently found time to take young Charles on strolls through the surrounding neighborhood. It was probably on several of these strolls that they passed a fine old residence on Gad's Hill, opposite to the place where Falstaff robbed the travellers and ran away. And Mr. Dickens, seeing his small son's admiration of the place, said to him, "If you were to be very persevering and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it."¹¹ This incident may have been the beginning of Charles's ambition. At any rate, it was a dream which he realized in 1856. There he wrote the conclusion of Little Dorrit, Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations, Our Mutual Friend, The Uncommercial Traveller, and the beginning of Edwin Drood, on which he was working when he died. The house was situated on the Dover Road, between Gravesend and Rochester.

On another occasion, when Charles was eight years old, his father took him on a holiday to London, where he saw

Grimaldi, the famous clown, whose antics pleased him very much. Many years later he was to write, or at least edit, the life of this clown.

But life for John Dickens and his family soon changed its pleasant tenor, for by the time Charles was nine years old his father's financial position called for retrenchment, and they left the pleasant house in Ordnance Terrace for a much cheaper residence in St. Mary's Place. Suddenly life became more earnest. The recitations and songs and magic lantern shows were abandoned.12

The family occupied a mean little house at No. 13 St. Mary's Place, next door to a Providence Baptist Chapel, on a thoroughfare called The Brook. The minister of the little chapel was a Reverend William Giles; and it must have been here, in such close proximity to the little church with its many visiting divines and its fanatical services, that the child, Charles Dickens, became surfeited with what he later termed "cant" in religion. Practically all of his novels emphasize this pitfall to be avoided by the over-zealous, this mockery in religion by the humbugs.

Reverend Giles, the minister next door, had a son, William Giles, who was a graduate of Oxford. This young minister was also a teacher, and to him Charles was sent for further schooling. A warm friendship existed between pupil and teacher, and, as a result of William Giles's teaching and encouragement, Charles developed a love for the English

12 Pearson, op. cit., p. 3.
classics. It was William Giles who first dubbed him "the inimitable Boz," a name which Dickens used in his first work, Sketches By Boz. "Boz" had originally been used as a family nickname for Charles's youngest brother, Augustus, and was a shortened and nasalized form of the word Moses. Charles, from his reading of The Vicar of Wakefield, had named his brother Moses in Dr. Primrose's honor.

Charles's later scholastic training was very limited; hence this early training in Chatham was the real foundation of his literary knowledge. It was here where he discovered that

my father had left a small collection of books in a little room upstairs, to which I had access (for it adjoined my own) and which nobody else in our house ever troubled. From that blessed little room, Roderick Random, Peregrine Pickle, Humphrey Clinker, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, Robinson Crusoe, came out, a glorious host to keep me company. They kept alive my fancy, and my hope of something beyond that place and time,---they, and the Arabian Nights, and the Tales of the Genii,---and did me no harm, . . . I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own ideas of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. . . . When I think of it, the picture always rises in my mind of a summer evening, the boys at play in the church yard, and I sitting on my bed, reading as if for life. Every barn in the neighborhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own, in my mind, connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them. I have seen Tom Pippins go climbing up the church-steeple; I have watched Strap, with the knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I know that Commodore Trunnion held that club with Mr. Pickle, in the parlour of our little village alehouse.13

And certainly the same church and graveyard which David Copperfield saw from 'out the bedroom window, with the dead all lying in their graves at rest, below the solemn moon, at Blunderstone near Yarmouth, were seen by Charles Dickens from his bedroom in St. Mary's Place, Chatham. And it was this same parish church and churchyard through which he and his sister Fanny wandered again in *A Child's Dream of a Star*.

But, as engrossed as he was in his reading, there were still times for him to explore his surroundings, and nothing became more fixed in his mind than did his beloved town. St. Mary's Place was on the borderline between Chatham and Rochester, and it is Rochester which is so often mentioned in his works and which became such an important locality in his life.

Of Chatham, Rochester, and Strood, which practically form one long town, for Strood is separated from Rochester only by the Medway, Dickens retained memories mostly pleasant; but he felt particularly drawn to quaint, dreamy, mediaeval, and ecclesiastical Rochester.

The dockyards in particular were a never-ending source of interest for the child Dickens. The dockyards, the marshes, the prison-ship for the convicts who worked in the dockyard—all these he recalls later but particularly in *Great Expectations*. Thomas Wright in his study of Dickens gives a graphic picture of this phase of his life.

In *St. Clement's Day*, 23 November, the dockyard blacksmiths used to get up a pageant in honor of their patron saint, and, headed by one of their party, masked

\[14\] Ibid., p. 17.

as "Old Clem" and seated in a chair of state, they paraded through the town singing and collecting drink-money. From this custom was borrowed the refrain in Great Expectations,""Beat it out, beat it out, Old Clem! with a clink for the stout, Old Clem." Dickens also recalled "the long files of convict labourers, who guarded by soldiers, carried oak planks through the yard, the tall men bearing all the weight, while the short men walking in their places with their shoulders two or three inches below the plank contentedly carried nothing." The air of the place was "redolent of oak ships, oakum, tarred ropes and canvas."

Lying off the dockyard out on the black water was the "receiving ship," a hulk roofed like Noah's Ark. To this "wicked" barque the convicts "with great numbers on their backs as if they were street doors" returned after their laborious with the planks. When Pip in Great Expectations asked what hulls were, he received an answer, "prison ships right across the meshes (marshes)." But allusions to convict life at Chatham bristle through this story, one of the most vivid being the account of how, in the old coaching days, convicts were removed from London; and how passengers on the box seat were disagreeably made aware of their presence by feeling their breath on the back of their necks, and by their "bringing with them that curious flavour of bread-poultice, baize, rope-yarn, and hearth-stone which attends the convict presence."

Life through, Dickens's warmest sympathies were with creatures nautical; fishermen, boatmen, and "great sea-porkypines" generally, which is not strange seeing that his father, his grandfather, and his god-father [Christopher Huffam] were connected with ships and shipping and that his early boyhood was spent at a great Naval Depot. 

William Giles could have aroused no greater love and admiration in the small Charles Dickens than the grown Charles Dickens aroused in his youthful follower and admirer, Percy Fitzgerald. This admiration colored and probably biased his two-volume biography of Dickens; but since Fitzgerald spent much time with Dickens in Rochester and Gads Hill, the following is quoted from him:

Ibid., pp. 29-30.
I doubt if ever a great writer was so devoted to a single place, or made so much of it as Dickens did in the case of Rochester. . . . From the beginning to the end, from the first to the last, he was perpetually recurring to it: he wrote of it again and again at intervals long or short, and lived there continuously "off and on" . . . When he came to write his first successful book he chose Rochester as the subject of the opening chapters; it was the keynote of the whole . . . When he came to be married, he chose a place near Rochester (Chalk) at which to spend the honeymoon. When he resolved to be a country squire, he selected a house two or three miles from Rochester, which he had known and coveted as a lad. Later, to a single building in the town, the Hospice, he devoted an entire story. In Great Expectations he returned to it again. In his weekly Journal he wrote papers describing the old place once again. At last, when the time was approaching for him to stay his pen, and write no more, he cast about him for a subject, and was mysteriously drawn to the old subject of his old town . . . Finally, he directed in his last will and testament that he was to be laid in Rochester. As his heart in life was always with Rochester, so in death he desired to be placed there. 17

One other thing, which had a bearing on Dickens's later life and works and which probably had its beginning on The Brook, should be included here. Charles's Aunt Mary (Mrs. Allen), a widow who had made her home with them, decided to marry Surgeon Lamert of the Chatham Hospital, and James Lamert, her stepson, came to board with the Dickens family during the honeymoon and may have remained on for awhile. James Lamert was older than Charles and wielded an influence over the boy such as Steerforth wielded over the young David Copperfield.

James's passion for private theatricals made him popular there, and he and Charles, whom he sometimes . . .

took to the Theatre Royal at the foot of Star Hill, Rochester, became inseparable friends. Life through Dickens was fascinated by the Stage.\textsuperscript{18}

Alexander Woolcott has made a study of all the aspects of Dickens's interest in the stage, and he points out that, even at a very early age, Dickens not only attended the theaters at every opportunity, but he also began to try his hand at writing plays.

Earlier even than that the urge to write novels began the itch to write for the stage. For the first works of his pen were tragedies written for performance at home in a nursery packed to the doors with children dragged in from the neighborhood to listen to him. "Misnar, or the Sultan of India" now unhappily lost to posterity was one of these.\textsuperscript{19}

The happy days at Chatham and Rochester were not to last very long, however, for John Dickens was again recalled to Somerset House in London. Young Charles, it seems, stayed behind to finish out his school term. In David Copperfield he relives the parting with his family as follows:

Next morning I met the whole family at the coach-office, and saw them, with a desolate heart, take their places. 

I think as Mrs. Micawber sat at the back of the coach, with the children, and I stood in the road looking wistfully at them, a mist cleared from her eyes, and she saw what a little creature I really was. I think so, because she beckoned to me to climb up, with quite a new and motherly expression in her face, and put her arm round my neck, and gave me just such a kiss as she might have given to her own boy. I had barely time to get down

\textsuperscript{18}Wright, op. cit., p. 29.

\textsuperscript{19}Alexander Woolcott., Mr. Dickens Goes To The Play, p. 15.
again before the coach started, and I could hardly see
the family for the handkerchiefs they waved. It was
gone in a minute. 20

Dickens's mother by this time had had seven children,
two of whom had died in infancy, and her time was occupied
with the smaller children and with trying to maintain a house-
hold with what was left over from John Dickens's salary. *(stayed)*

While his mother was bearing one child after another,
running the house, and educating the family, his father
was spending more money than he earned, enjoying a life
of comparative ease among jovial companions, borrowing
sums which he could not repay, sacrificing his family's
future comfort, and buoyantly, jauntily, stepping down
the path which led them all in due course to a debtors' prison. 21

At this time the young Charles was too young to weigh
motives or causes. His father was a better companion to him
than his mother; therefore his attitude toward him was always,
as a result of his early impressions, more sympathetic than
his attitude toward his mother. His father he later pictured
in David Copperfield—which, of all his novels, was most
nearly autobiographical—as Micawber, the jovial, oratorical,
careless but honest spendthrift. John Dickens also appeared
later in Little Dorrit, a tale of life in the Marshalsea
Prison. He, in this novel appeared as the elder Dorrit, Father
of the Marshalsea.

Dickens's mother was, in some respects, Mrs. Micawber.

Not too much is known from Dickens's works or his biographer's


21 Pearson, op. cit., p. 3.
comments about the real character or personality of Elizabeth Dickens, but, like Mrs. Micawber, she was the mother of a large family of children and was probably too occupied with the smaller children to give much attention to the older ones; she was loyal to her husband in spite of the many misfortunes which befell them through his lack of foresight.

In one of Dickens's letters which he wrote concerning a visit he made to his mother when she was quite old, he hints at her vanity. From this it is easy to see his mother in her younger days in the picture which David Copperfield gives of his mother.

We are playing in the winter twilight, dancing about the parlour. When my mother is out of breath and rests herself in an elbow-chair, I watch her winding her bright curls round her fingers, and straightening her waist, and nobody knows better than I do that she likes to look so well, and is proud of being so pretty.22

But Mrs. Nickleby, in Nicholas Nickleby, a well meaning woman but weak and ineffectual, with her interminable reminiscences and amusing vanity, is supposed to be a more accurate picture of Mrs. Dickens.

In a few months after the family had moved back to London, Charles followed them to the house at No. 16 Bayham Street, Camden Town, on the outer fringe of the city. There he found the family in more than usually desperate straits. No money was available to send him to school. Dickens was painfully disappointed, but later apologetically explains his father's inability to attend to his son's education at this point.

In the case of his temper, and the straitness of his means, he appeared to have utterly lost at this time the idea of educating me at all, and to have utterly put from him the notion that I had any claim upon him, in that regard, whatever. So I degenerated into cleaning his boots of a morning, and my own; and making myself useful in the work of the little house; and looking after my younger brothers and sisters (we were now six in all); and going on such poor errands as arose out of our poor way of living.

From one of the more recent comprehensive biographies of Dickens are taken additional details of the life in Camden.

James Lambert, who was awaiting a commission in the army, had moved with the Dickens family to London, as did a sharp little maid from the Chatham Workhouse—the Marchioness of the Old Curiosity Shop. Fanny, the eldest girl, turned out to be musical and somehow, through the family friend Tomkisson, a piano maker of 77 Dean Street, Soho, obtained a nomination as a pupil-age boarder to the Royal College of Music where she spent four happy years and won distinctions.

Charles did not begrudge his sister her good luck, and, although he felt that he was being neglected, spent his spare time in acquainting himself with all his surroundings.

Boylike and insatiably curious, he set out to examine the adjacent streets and soon knew every corner of the three little towns of Camden, Kentish, and Somers as well as every path leading to Chalcot and Chalk farms. The whole neighborhood appears and reappears in his books. Bob Cratchit [A Christmas Carol] lived in Camden Town, so did Jemima Evans [Sketches from Boz]; Traddles [David Copperfield] lodged there with Micawber: the Toodles family [Our Mutual Friend] lived in Stagg's Garden, "Camberling Town." Heyling in Pickwick ran down his victim in Little College Street, Camden Town, "a desolate place surrounded by fields and ditches."

Often the boy went further afield, getting James Lambert, or anyone else available, to pilot him to Seven Dials, a locality that fascinated him on account of its

24 Hennessy, op. cit., p. 7.
name, its wickedness, and its scoundrel. He liked, too, going to see his godfather, Christopher Huffam, at Limehouse Hole. Huffam was an ear and blockmaker and "Rigger to his Majesty's Navy." (Cuttle, Peggotty, and other seafaring characters are said to have had their origin in Huffam)... Charles also explored the nearer region of Soho, where his mother's eldest brother, Thomas Barrow, lodged over Manson's, the bookshop in Gerrard Street. To this sick uncle the boy became a "little companion and nurse." Through this association he found material for subsequent Sketches, notably his uncle's barber, a very old man who talked of Napoleon's campaigns, and he also depicted, on the pattern of Gil Blas' housekeeper, the deaf old woman who waited on Mr. Barrow. Miscellaneous reading, too, came his way, as Mrs. Manson, widow of the bookseller, let him see the Tatler and Spectator, and lent him Miss Porter's Scottish Chiefs, George Colman's Broad Grins and Holbein's Dance of Death.25

So it was that everything he saw and read was cached away and became a veritable storehouse from which he drew when he finally began to write.

Matters in the Dickens house on Bayham Street grew ever worse; and Elizabeth Dickens, with the idea of opening a school for the children of parents living in the Indies, rented No. 4 Gower Street, North, in her own name. Upon the door was affixed a brass plate with the words "Mrs. Dickens' Establishment." In David Copperfield, Dickens retells this venture as being that of the Micawbers. He tells how he and the other children distributed handbills in the neighborhood, but no pupil appeared.

In the meantime James Lamert, who no longer lived with the Dickens family, had gone into the blacking business with

25 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
his brother-in-law, George Lamart, at 30, Hungerford Stairs, Strand—a business in competition with the original "Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand." James Lamart, knowing the financial situation at No. 4, Gower Street, offered to give Charles a job in the blacking warehouse at a salary of six shillings a week. The offer was accepted, and Charles began that phase of his life which was so humiliating to the sensitive, proud, and ambitious child that he never entirely recovered from its blight; a phase which not even his wife and children knew about until they read it in Forster's biography of Dickens. To Forster only he told the story, of his duties, his companions, and his misery.

The blacking warehouse was the last house on the left-hand side of the way, at old Hungerford-stairs. It was a crazy, tumble-down old house, abutting of course on the river, and literally overrun with rats. Its wainscotted rooms, and its rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again. The counting house was on the first floor, looking over the coal barges and the river. There was a recess in it, in which I was to sit and work. My work was to cover the pots of paste-blacking; first with a piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat, all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label; and then go on again with more pots. Two or three other boys were kept at similar duty down stairs on similar wages. One of them came up, in a ragged apron and a paper cap, on the first Monday morning, to show me the trick of using the string and tying the knot. His name was Bob Fagin; and I took the liberty of using his name, long afterwards in Oliver Twist . . . .
My small work-table, and my grosses of pots, my papers, string, scissors, paste-pot, and labels, by little and little vanished out of the recess in the counting-house, and kept company with the other small work-tables, grosses of pots, papers, string, scissors, and paste-pots downstairs. It was not long before Bob Fagin and I, and another boy whose name was Paul Green, but who was currently believed to have been christened Poll (a belief which I transferred, long afterwards again, to Mr. Sweddle-pipe, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*), worked generally, side by side.26

Probably Dickens did not realize how many times "long afterwards" that he did refer to this "blacking" experience.

When Sam Weller is first introduced on the scene (in *Pickwick*), we find him blacking boots in the yard of the White Hart. Boz strangely describes all the different patterns of boots, and further tells us that Day and Martin's blacking, and not Warren's was the one patronized by the inn. He has even a little stroke at the establishment where he suffered such torture... Further on in the story, when old Weller was criticizing Sam's valentine, he declares that "nobody wrote poetry except a Beadle" on certain festivals "and Warren's blacking," alluding to the apropos verses with which the proprietors filled their advertisements, and some of which Boz himself is believed to have written. He seems to hint at this when in *The Old Curiosity Shop* he introduces Slum, Mrs. Jarley's "poet", who offers a copy of verse originally intended for "Warrens" but which he proposed to adapt to the wax works... Tim Linkinwater ([in *Nicholas Nickleby*]) describes some flowers in a window that were the delight of a poor crippled boy. "Hyacinths", he said, "that were blossoming in—you'll laugh at this—in old blacking bottles." In Krooks shop ([*Bleak House*]) there were quantities of dirty bottles—blacking-bottles, ginger-beer, and soda-water bottles.27

And to add to this prodigious list, in *Oliver Twist*, Mr. Bumble, the beadle, deplores the obstinacy and pride of the pauper husband of a very sick woman.

Why, the husband sends back word that the medicine won't suit his wife's complaint, and so she shan't take it—says she shan't take it sir! Good, strong, wholesome

26Forster, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32.

Dickens was laying the foundation for much of his later work; but, not possessing a crystal ball along with the string, the scissors, and paste, he did not realize this. Instead, he mourned his lot:

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast. 29

And the conditions at home had been steadily growing worse. The butcher, the baker, and the wine-shop keeper descended upon the household with bills and demanded their payment. At last the blow fell——John Dickens was arrested for a forty-pound debt and put in the Marshalsea prison.

Mrs. Dickens then resorted to selling whatever she could of their household equipment. Charles's books were among the first to go, and as he was the chief agent in the selling transactions, he became very well acquainted with all the pawnbrokers in the neighborhood. The mother, children, and the servant girl from the Chatham workhouse camped for awhile longer in the almost emptied house at North Gower Street, but finally gave up the struggle and moved into the Marshalsea. This was a custom of that day, and as John Dickens's salary,

28Dickens, Oliver Twist, p. 41.
peculiarly enough, did not stop, the family was in a more comfortable and happier situation than they had been for some time.

Charles, being already employed at Warren's Blacking Factory, was not included in the Marshalsea party but lodged by his mother's arrangement in Little College Street, Camden Town, with Mrs. Roylance, to become famous as Mrs. Pipchin in Dombey and Son... To begin with, the boy walked daily from Camden Town to the Strand and back at night. On Sundays he would call at the Royal College of Music for his sister Fanny and take her to spend the day at the Marshalsea which lay beyond St. George's Church, Southwark. Camden Town, however, proved so distant and so unbearably lonely that he got his father's consent to move to Lant Street, on the south side of the river, the street "near Guy's and handy for me" in which he was to lodge Bob Sawyer in Pickwick. Charles occupied a back attic looking on to "the pleasant prospect of a timber yard" and found the situation "a paradise." The landlord of his lodging had a quiet wife and a lame son. They were all very good to him and they lived on as the Garland family in The Old Curiosity Shop. He now breakfasted and supped at the Marshalsea and in the evenings explored the creeks and jetties by the river, discovering all sorts of waterfront secrets.

This Marshalsea phase of Dickens's life seemed long during the experiencing of it, but it actually was not many months in duration. John Dickens's mother died in April, 1824, and at her death, he received a small legacy; William Dickens went into court and paid the debt and thus effected his brother's discharge from the Marshalsea. Many are the allusions which Charles Dickens made to this period in all his works; but, after his father's death, he gave a fairly overall picture in the experiences of the Micawber family in

30 Hennessy, op. cit., p. 10.
David Copperfield. Later, the Dorrit family in *Little Dorrit* depicts life in the Marshalsea.

The Marshalsea itself Dickens described as "an oblong pile of barrack buildings, partitioned into squalid houses standing back to back, so that there were no back rooms; environed by a narrow paved yard, hemmed in by high walls duly spiked at top." But this forbidding exterior was as nothing in comparison to the gloom and squalor within. The prison was primarily for debtors and it was noted in the case of both Micawber and Dorrit that after a short time both men and their families, who had taken up their quarters inside also, seemed to relax and almost to enjoy their life here away from their creditors. Both men had been confined not as a result of criminal intent but from injudicious management of their affairs. Both claimed gentility and education, and, as a result, both were looked up to by their fellow-prisoners. And eventually both had the good fortune to be released.

After leaving the prison, the Dickens family moved into the house with Mrs. Roylance on Little College Street. The blacking factory had been moved to Chandos Street; Charles's work was closer at hand, but suddenly, a quarrel developing between John Dickens and James Lamert, Charles, to his great surprise and pleasure, was out of a job. Mrs. Dickens

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intervened to patch up the quarrel; but John Dickens was obdurate, or his conscience was hurting him over his neglect of the boy, and he determined to put him in school.

Many years later, Dickens, when he finally felt impelled to reveal the facts of his childhood to his biographer, expressed his feelings on the subject.

I do not write resentfully or angrily: for I know all these things have worked together to make me what I am: but I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back.

From that hour until this at which I write, no word of that part of my childhood which I have now brought to a close, has passed my lips to any human being. . . . From that hour, until this, my father and mother have been stricken dumb upon it. . . . I have never, until I now impart it to this paper, in any burst of confidence with any one, my own wife not excepted, raised the curtain I then dropped, thank God.

Many years later his son, Henry F. Dickens, verifies this secrecy, or inhibition, concerning the past. The setting was Gad's Hill; a memory game was in progress.

He had been ailing very much and greatly troubled with his leg, which had been giving him much pain; so he was lying on a sofa one evening after dinner, while the rest of the party were playing games . . . My father . . . finished up with his own contribution, "Warren's Blacking, 30, Strand." He gave this with an odd twinkle in his eye and a strange inflection in his voice which at once forcibly arrested my attention and left a vivid impression on my mind for sometime afterwards. Why, I could not, for the life of me, understand. When, however, his tragic history appeared in Forster's Life, this game at Christmas, 1869, flashed across my mind with extraordinary force, and the mystery was explained.

32 Forster, op. cit., p. 49.

33 Henry F. Dickens, Memories of My Father, pp. 23-24.
Dickens's extreme sensitivity to the bitterness or tragedy of this phase of his life seemed to be the main factor in his disinclination to think or speak of it. The Marshalsea experience and the blacking factory episode are so closely related that some must have been an element also. Dickens at one time started a diary or biography but the recollections became too painful, so it was dropped. It was quite by accident that John Forster met up with a Mr. Dilke who had been a friend of John Dickens and had seen Charles at work in the blacking factory. Forster mentioned the matter to Dickens, and a few days later he told him the whole story and gave him his diary notes. Then Dickens himself, after his father's death and after enough time had elapsed to make the retrospect not too disturbing, gave the story in David Copperfield with enough changes in the plot to avoid an actual autobiography. But later, in his novel Little Dorrit, which again pictures life in the Marshalsea, he satirized Mr. Dorrit for working so hard at the job of covering up the fact that he had spent many years in the Marshalsea. Mr. Dorrit's attitude toward establishing his gentility was so vain and artificial, however, that, although the facts are the same, the cases seem quite different. But Dickens, the satirist, was not beyond satirizing even himself.

After leaving prison the family moved to No. 29 Johnson Street, Somers Town. Mr. Dickens had applied for and was
granted a retirement pension from the Navy Pay Office. To supplement his decreased salary by the aid of his brother-in-law, J. H. Barrow, editor of the Mirror of Parliament, procured work as a parliamentary reporter for the British Press. John Dickens was very proficient in shorthand. His son was later to take up this study and follow in his father's steps as a reporter, but at this time his chief concern was to attend school.

Mr. Jones's Classical and Commercial Academy, otherwise Wellington House, was situated at the corner of Granby Street, Hampstead Road. The subjects taught were Latin, mathematics, history and the hornpipe. For at least two years Charles attended the classes there as a day-boy, and it is probable that he worked there for nine months more. He described the school later on for Household Words, dwelling specially on the pets kept by the boys, who contrived "to drill their white mice much better than the master trained the boys." They were very strong in theatricals and mounted small stage-sets for themselves. A school-fellow, Owen Thomas, remembered him as a healthy-looking boy with a general air of smartness, but with nothing to indicate that he would ever "become a celebrity."34

Dickens, himself, stated to Forster that "among the boys the master was supposed to know nothing, and one of the ushers was supposed to know everything."35 So, it was from this school and its usher, Mr. Taylor, that Salem House and Mr. Mell were drawn—in an exaggerated way—in David Copperfield. In Nicholas Nickleby we again find the kindly, gentlemanly usher, in Nickleby.

His schoolfellows—Daniel Tobin, Henry Danson, Owen R. Thomas, and Richard Bray—played very little part in his works; they did, however, furnish Forster with details afterwards. Daniel Tobin, Dickens's favorite classmate, later served in the capacity of his amanuensis, but the association abruptly ended, it is thought, because of Tobin's endless parasitic requests for aid. When Dickens's fame and fortune began to grow he became the recipient of many "begging letters." It is said that the begging letter-writers had his name high on their lists. Where there was need he gave generously; but as was finally the case with Tobin, he often became annoyed with them and denounced them in print.

In *Bleak House*, he ridiculed the philanthropic Mrs. Jellyby and her friends, Mr. Gusher, Mr. Quale, and Mrs. Pardigree for soliciting funds for their extreme charities. In the same book, John Jarndyce was the object of many of these letter-writers. Esther Summerson, his secretary, commented upon the matter thus:

> It seemed . . . that everybody knew him, who wanted to do anything with anybody else's money. It amazed us, when we began to sort his letters, . . . to find how the great object of the lives of nearly all his correspondents appeared to be to form themselves into committees for getting in and laying out money. . . . They wanted everything. They wanted wearing apparel, they wanted linen rags, they wanted money, they wanted coals, they wanted soup, they wanted interest, they wanted autographs, they wanted flannel, they wanted whatever Mr. Jarndyce had—or had not.\(^\text{36}\)

In *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr. Boffin, who had recently come into money, immediately became the target for all the known types of beggars in existence. *Our Mutual Friend* was written in 1865, and was Dickens's last completed book. In it he devoted one whole chapter, called "A Dismal Swamp," to describing these beggars, imposters, toadies, and parasites who sought in devious and cunning ways to use the man or part him from his money. He began the chapter as follows:

And now, in the blooming summer days, behold Mr. and Mrs. Boffin established in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, and behold all manner of crawling, creeping, fluttering, and buzzing creatures, attracted by the gold dust of the Golden Dustman.37

This bitter introduction could have come only from someone whose own case was a parallel of Noddy Boffin's.

Little did Dickens think, back in the Wellington House Academy days, that his feelings might ever be anything but friendly toward one of his favorite school-fellows. This Wellington House Academy period was brief, and the influence that it exerted was slighter than that of any other phase of his education which had come before or was to come later. Yet it served as a finale to his childhood and schooldays; for Dickens, unlike Macaulay, Thackeray, or Tennyson, his literary contemporaries, did not have the privilege of attending a university. Instead he quit school at the age of fifteen and again went to work to help support his father's

family. Dickens was later to feel keenly the need of a more extensive classical education. But his childhood experiences, his keen observation, and his active imagination made a fair substitute for this lack. The real explanation, however, for his power of description, his easy command of the language, his wealth of detail must be that the man had genius.
CHAPTER IV

DICKENS'S YOUTH AND MANHOOD AS
REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS

Charles Dickens's childhood exerted a much greater influence on his works than all that followed thereafter. The greatness which he dreamed of achieving as a child was to become a reality, but the transformation from a little blacking-house drudge to a famous novelist followed a cycle of hard work.

His first job upon leaving school was that of being an office boy to Charles Molloy, solicitor in Symond's Inn. His stay here was only a few weeks in length, but, brief as it was, it afforded him a chance to familiarize himself with the atmosphere and customs of a law office, which knowledge he used very effectively in his novels. In Great Expectations he described the law office of Mr. Jaggers, Pip's guardian.

Mr. Jaggers's room was lighted by a skylight only, and was a most dismal place; the skylight, eccentrically patched like a broken head, and the distorted adjoining houses looking as if they had twisted themselves to peep down at me through it. . . . Mr. Jaggers's own high-backed chair was of deadly black horse-hair, with rows of brass nails round it like a coffin; and I fancied I could see how he leaned back in it, and bit his forefinger at the clients. The room was but small, and the clients seemed to have had a habit of backing up against the wall: the wall, especially opposite Mr. Jaggers's chair, being greasy with shoulders.¹

¹Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 199.
Soon John Dickens managed to get Charles a clerkship with Ellis and Blackmore, solicitors, at No. 1 Raymond Buildings, Gray's Inn. There he remained from May, 1827, until November, 1828. Although he was only an office boy, he was wide awake mentally. Mr. Edward Blackmore wrote of him:

Several incidents took place in the office, of which he must have been a keen observer, as I recognized some of them in his Pickwick and Nickleby; and I am much mistaken if some of his characters had not their originals in persons I well remember.²

While at Gray's Inn, Charles resolved to take up the study of shorthand, and, with this idea in mind, he left the employ of Ellis and Blackmore and devoted himself to this study in order to become a newspaper parliamentary reporter. In addition to this study, he took out a ticket to the British Museum Reading Room, where he studied assiduously to acquire the knowledge that a properly educated youth might be expected to have.

Dickens felt the need of a better education. He craved to be and to be thought a well-educated man. His early hardships supplied him with a knowledge of life that most of his literary contemporaries did not have, but it also deprived him of a classical education which he aspired to have. It was socially more important than now to have a classical education. But the utilitarianism of the period caused

a new trend in thinking along educational lines, and classicism soon became the object of attack for many writers. Later Dickens himself, perhaps because of his own deficiency, began to satirize the study of Greek and Latin. The teachers of these subjects were, in his novels, either humbugs, fanatics, or teachers only because they were forced to be by necessity, never by choice. When Dr. Blimber, of Dombey and Son, began at the dinner table, "It is remarkable that the Romans—,” every boy was supposed, at the introduction of this sacred topic, to stop eating and listen with the deepest interest. Dr. Blimber's daughter, Cornelia, "was dry and sandy with working in the graves of deceased languages. None of your live languages for Miss Blimber. They must be dead——stone dead——and then Miss Blimber dug them up like a Ghoul." The first question she asked the six year-old Paul Dombey was: "How much do you know of your Latin Grammar?" She then took him into the schoolroom where "Mr. Feeder, B. A., who sat at a little desk, had his Virgil stop on, and was slowly grinding that tune to four young gentlemen."  

In Our Mutual Friend, Mr. Boffin, having recently acquired wealth and his wife having become "a highflyer at Fashion," desired a little culture; so he hired Silas Wegg, an old balladstall keeper, to read to him The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.


In *David Copperfield*, Dickens pictured Dr. Strong, the kindly old professor, as being endlessly employed at the job of compiling a Greek dictionary which would probably never be completed. Likewise, in *Great Expectations*, Mr. Pocket, though having been educated at Harrow and Cambridge, had, "after gradually failing in loftier hopes, 'read' with divers who lacked opportunities or neglected them, . . . and had turned his acquirements to the account of literary compilation and correction, . . ."5

There was gradually a lessening of the bitterness in Dickens's satire of schoolmen and classicism. Two factors in this change probably were the gradual improvement of the school system—partly because of his influence—and his own sons' attendance at the universities. Mr. Crisparkle, the breezy, athletic, pleasant tutor in *Edwin Drood*, his incompletely novel, was a far cry from Mr. Creakle, the headmaster of Salem House, in *Nicholas Nickleby*. Dickens's attitude by then may have been in accord with that of the young Charles in the British Museum.

Forster tells of a conversation between John Dickens and a friend. The friend inquired: "Pray, Mr. Dickens, where was your son educated?" To which Mr. Dickens replied: "Why indeed, Sir—ha! ha!—he may be said to have educated himself."6

6 Forster, op. cit., p. 68.
In pursuance of his planned career of parliamentary reporter Dickens began work as a reporter in the Consistory Court of Doctors Commons, which Steerforth in David Copperfield explained in the following manner:"

It's a little out of the way place where they administer what is called ecclesiastical law, and play all kinds of tricks with obsolete old monsters of Acts of Parliament, which three-fourths of the world know nothing about, and the other fourth supposes to have been dug up, in a fossil state, in the days of the Edwards. It's place that has an ancient monopoly in suits about people's wills and people's marriages, and disputes among ships and boats."

Dickens could never understand why experts in ecclesiastical law should be considered competent to deal with nautical affairs. For the first time his eyes were opened to the absurdities of the law. The law and its ministers played an important part in his writings, and he displayed human nature in all its roles as he pictured witnesses under oath on the stand or victims, good and bad, under trial. So valuable was this experience in Doctors Commons that he concluded it the most useful period of his life.

Although the number of years that Dickens actually worked in the law offices and proctor's courts was comparatively few, his interest in court proceedings never failed. He became familiar with every kind of court, every prison; magistrates and cases he carefully studied. And much of all that he surveyed found its way into his works. In David Copperfield he

retraced his steps through clerkship, Doctors Commons, reporting, and authorship. In *Great Expectations*, his guardian, Mr. Jaggers, is a shrewd, successful lawyer. His picturization of Mr. Jaggers shows how keenly he observed while he sat in court.

The magistrates shivered under a single bite of his finger. Thieves and thiefsellers hung in dread rapture on his words, and shrank when a hair of his eyebrows turned in their direction. Which side he was on, I couldn't make out, for he seemed to me to be grinding the whole place in a mill.  

And again he pictured Mr. Jaggers:

He always carried . . . a pocket handkerchief of rich silk and imposing proportions, which was of great value to him in his profession. I have seen him so terrify a client or a witness by ceremoniously unfolding this pocket handkerchief as if he were immediately going to blow his nose, and then pausing, as if he knew he should not have time to do it, before such client or witness committed himself, that the self-committal has followed directly, quite as a matter of course.  

Mr. Jaggers he portrayed in a sympathetic light, but some of his magistrates did not get off so well. Mr. Fang, a magistrate in *Oliver Twist*, who was drawn from a living original, Mr. Laing of Hatton Garden Police Court, he lampooned as follows:

Mr. Fang was a lean, long-backed, stiff-necked, middle-sized man, with no great quantity of hair, and what he had, growing on the back and sides of his head. His face was stern and much flushed. If he were really not in the habit of drinking rather more than was

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9Ibid., p. 295.
exactly good for him, he might have brought action against his countenance for libel, and have recovered heavy damages. 10

Dickens's scornful delineation was not without results.

As a direct result of that scathing indictment Mr. Laing was removed from the bench by the Home Secretary, very shortly afterward, on the occasion of some fresh outbreak of foul ill-temper and intolerable brutality. 11

Another instance which resulted in retirement from the bench for the original, Sir Stephen Gazelee, was that of the rotund Mr. Justice Stareleigh who tried the Bardell-Pickwick case in *Pickwick Papers*. Serjeant Buzfuz, the counsel for Mrs. Bardell, also had his living counterpart in Sergeant Bompas, a prominent member of the bar. Sir Peter Laurie, a prominent City Alderman, a very zealous magistrate whose intention it was to put down suicide, became Alderman Cute in "The Chimes." Thus it went; actual people of Dickens's varied experiences were used, or the characteristics of one were superimposed on the person of another. But attention should be called to the fact that every person whom he pictured as a representative of the law had at least one repellent characteristic.

When Dickens worked he never went at it half-heartedly, yet throughout his life he always found time to go to the theater. Edward Blackmore wrote of Dickens's interest in the theater while working in his employ.

10 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p. 94.

His taste for theatricals was much promoted by a fellow-clerk named Potter, since dead, with whom he chiefly associated. They took every opportunity, then unknown to me, of going together to a minor theatre, where (I afterwards heard) they not unfrequently engaged in parts.\textsuperscript{12}

So this habit formed in childhood was still asserting itself in his young manhood. And along with the idea of becoming a parliamentary reporter was also the one of becoming a stage actor and toward this end he began to study parts and took lessons from a professional actor.

This love for attending the theater also became a favorite pastime in his novels, especially in the ones considered most autobiographical. David Copperfield in the company of Steerforth or Traddles was often found at the theater, and probably even more often Pip and his friend Herbert Pocket attended. In \textit{Little Dorrit}, Fanny Dorrit danced for the theater, and the reader is given a vivid picture of back-stage scenes. In a remote way Dickens may have borrowed the idea of Fanny and her dancing from his own sister Fanny and her singing.

The Dickens family were in fairly comfortable circumstances by this time and many evenings were pleasantly spent at home in the company of Fanny and her musical friends. Among these was one who soon became a very close friend, Henry Kolle. Now Henry Kolle was engaged to the daughter of a bank manager, George Headnall on Lombard Street. Headnall

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{12}Forster, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 67.
had three daughters and Charles immediately became hopelessly infatuated with Maria, the youngest. This young lady was a wilful flirt and used Charles as a dupe for her other suitors. He was handsome, clever, and ardent, but much too ardent to suit the fancy of Maria Bednall or her parents, for was he not just a poor struggling reporter.

Charles recognized no obstacle too great to overcome, and he threw himself into his work with the idea of raising his financial standing to one suitable for a banker's daughter. But the family were very cognizant of the situation; and, with apparently no opposition from the young lady, they sent her off to Paris to a finishing school, much as Mr. Spenlow threatened to do later in David Copperfield: "You may make it necessary, if you are foolish or obstinate, Mr. Copperfield, for me to send my daughter abroad again, . . . All you have got to do, Mr. Copperfield, is to forget it." But while Charles remained at home not forgetting and working with a remarkable determination to overcome all difficulties, Maria became more and more unattainable. She returned from Paris, and after a short stormy period, "when he could no longer stand her ridicule, he returned her presents and set his teeth, determining 'to ride on, rough-shod if need be, smooth-shod if that will do; but ride on.'"

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14 Una Pope Hennessy, Charles Dickens, p. 20.
But Dickens's love for Maria colored his whole life; and twenty-five years later, in 1855, after he had already written *David Copperfield*, in which he sets forth this youthful love in the guise of David's love for Dora Spenlow, he received a letter from Maria, now Mrs. Henry Winter, and all the old feelings rushed back again—to die out suddenly when he saw her, fat, silly, spoiled and artless. This Maria is pictured as Flora Finching, whom the hero, Arthur Gleggum, meets again after many years absence; and his "eyes no sooner fell upon the subject of his old passion, than it shivered and broke to pieces."\(^{15}\)

Even before *David Copperfield* was written, Dickens had put Maria into a novel in the form of the fickle, coquettish Dolly Varden in *Barnaby Rudge*. Again later, in *Great Expectations*, the tantalizing, selfish, fickle ways of Maria are seen in Estella Havisham. Dora, Dolly, and Estella each eventually married the hero, but such was not the case in real life.

In the early part of 1832, Dickens succeeded in getting an appointment with the stage manager of Covent Garden Theatre. His sister Fanny was to go with him and play the songs for his try-out. When the day arrived, however, he had a severe ear-ache and could not go. Before the time came around for a second appointment, he had obtained a post on the staff of

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the True Sun and entered the House of Commons Gallery just in time for the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832. As the subsequent events of his life showed, the stage, by this decision, lost a great actor, and literature gained a great novelist. But for the present it was Parliament's gain; for Dickens was a marvellous reporter and became much in demand as a result of his singular speed and accuracy in writing and transcribing shorthand.

Concurrently with his engagement on the True Sun, Dickens became a member of the regular reporting staff of his uncle's Mirror of Parliament, on which his father was already employed. This remarkable publication purported to furnish a full record of the parliamentary debates, and had earned a high reputation for the accuracy of its reports. In David Copperfield, Dickens refers to this accomplishment.

I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the debates in Parliament for a morning newspaper.

It was while working on the True Sun that Dickens met his friend and biographer, John Forster. Forster, at this time, was the dramatic critic of the paper, and in this capacity of critic, he afterwards exerted a great influence upon Dickens's novels. In fact, Dickens was so amenable to his suggestions that in one of his novels, Old Curiosity Shop,

16 W. J. Carlton, Charles Dickens Shorthand Writer, p. 73.
he, contrary to his own ideas and feelings on the matter, let Little Nell die because Forster wanted it thus.

Other influences were also making themselves felt during this time of parliamentary reporting. The ideas concerning the need of reforms in England, which Dickens preached in all his works, probably had their beginnings in his bitter childhood experiences; but they now began to take form. When his first definite reform book, *Oliver Twist*, appeared, "critics reviewing it thought it impertinent for a young new author to write in this vein, for how could so young a novelist possibly know what he was talking about." But they had not lived through his experiences, sat through innumerable stormy sessions of parliament, or covered the countryside for news.

Among the statesmen whose eloquence the young stenographer recorded were many whose names are prominent in parliamentary annals. In the Commons were Lord John Russell, fresh from his triumphant conduct of the Reform Bill; Lord Althorp, Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House; Lord Palmerston, Foreign Secretary. The opposition was led by Sir Robert Peel, and on the back benches were such men of mark as William Cobbett, Joseph Hume, Daniel O'Connell, and Richard Shiel. In the Upper House sat the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, for whose style of oratory Dickens conceived an intense dislike. "The shape of his head (I see it now) was misery to me and weighed down my youth," he wrote thirty years afterwards. Lord Melbourne, soon to take up the reins of government, was also in the Ministry, while the Tory opposition was led by the Duke of Wellington.

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18 Hennessy, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

Exert an influence on Dickens these men certainly did, but few of them aroused his admiration. J. W. T. Ley in his study of the friends of Dickens says this:

Among authors, artists, actors, and lawyers Dickens formed many intimate friendships. There was one class, however, that scarcely found any place at all in his circle. I mean the politicians. He had a poor opinion of them as a class. Forster tells us that his observations while a reporter in the Press Gallery at the House of Commons had not led him to form any high opinion of the House or its heroes. In his letters he often speaks contemptuously of our legislators, and there are many similarly contemptuous references to them in his books, and in his Articles for Household Words and All the Year Round.

Two statesmen toward whom he felt a great antipathy and whom he caricatured in his novels were Sir Robert Peel, as the hypocritical Pecksniff in Martin Chuzzlewit, and Lord Brougham, the great Whig chancellor, as Mr. Pott, editor of the Estanswill Gazette in Pickwick Papers. Pecksniff may have been a mixture of personalities, but Mr. Pott was unmistakably Lord Brougham.

There were, of course, exceptions to Dickens's rule of contempt for statesmen. Lord John Russell, the great reform leader, fell in this category. Later, Gladstone he admired as a reformer. Lord Ashley (Shaftesbury), the great philanthropist, Dickens admired very much and resolved to aid him in his fight for better conditions in the factories. This he did afterwards in his novel Hard Times. Likewise, "in

Household Words, in All the Year Round, he again and again supported the reforms that Lord Shaftesbury advocated.\textsuperscript{21}

For Lord John Russell, Dickens had a profound respect and a great personal liking. As late as 1869, Dickens, at a banquet in Liverpool, expressed this admiration:

There is no man in England whom I more respect in his public capacity, whom I love more in his private capacity, or from whom I have received more remarkable proofs of his honour and love of literature.\textsuperscript{22}

It was to Lord Russell that he dedicated The Tale of Two Cities. And it was to another friend whom he first met in his parliamentary reporter days that he dedicated the volume edition of Pickwick. This young barrister was Thomas Noon Talfourd, from Reading. In 1849 he became a judge. Dickens was probably first drawn to Talfourd because of the fight which he made for the cause of the copyright. This was a subject in which Dickens was more concerned than perhaps any other novelist of his day, and with more cause. This was also one of the subjects over which Dickens later quarrelled with America in his writings and during his first visit there, in 1842. But Dickens's friendship was not simply based on gratitude. In the figure of Traddles in David Copperfield Dickens shows Talfourd to be kindly, genial, and always happy. They remained close friends until Talfourd's sudden death in 1854.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., p. 197.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., p. 199
In December, 1833, Charles Dickens tried his hand at writing a short story which he called "A Dinner at Poplar Walk." He fearfully dropped it in the letter box of the Monthly Magazine. The next week, to Dickens's great pride and joy, it was published. Although no cash was paid for the sketches, as he called them, he continued sending them in anonymously until August, 1834, when for the first time he signed a sketch with the name "Boz". Concerning this David Copperfield speaks for Dickens.

I have come out in another way. I have taken with fear and trembling, to authorship. I wrote a little something in secret, and sent it to a magazine. Since then I have taken heart to write a good many trifling pieces.23

In the meantime, through the influence of his uncle, John Barrow of the Times, he had obtained employment as a reporter for the newspaper, Morning Chronicle, at a salary of five guineas a week. Employed on this same paper was Thomas Beard, the first and closest friend he had made when he had begun reporting in the House of Commons. Together in Parliament they worked and together they were sent over the country—to Bath, to Edinburgh, to Essex—to cover elections and to listen to speeches.

Of these hectic days and nights of reporting Dickens said:

I have been in my time belated on miry by-roads to the small hours, forty or fifty miles from London,

in a rickety carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken postboys, and got back in time for publication. From such scenes as these Dickens was to draw later on for his vivid scenes of coaching. One especially vivid scene is found in the opening chapter of Tale of Two Cities, in which the mail coach labors up Shooter's Hill on its way to Dover; another, near the end of the novel is the flight, from Paris, of Dr. Manette and the Darnays.

In January, 1835, a new evening paper was being planned. The new managing editor was a Scotchman, George Hogarth. To him Charles Dickens proposed that he should write sketches for the Evening Chronicle for an additional two guineas a week. To this Hogarth agreed, and as David Copperfield's boss had done, so Hogarth did; he took Charles Dickens home with him to meet his daughters.

In a very short time he became engaged to Catherine, the eldest of the charming daughters. The happy congenial atmosphere of the Hogarth home, the thoughts of his approaching marriage inspired him to greater activity in his work. At his own home, however, John Dickens was again having trouble with his creditors. The family troubles were always Charles's troubles; his letters to Thomas Beard, from whom he occasionally was forced to borrow money in these financial crises, and to Catherine Hogarth reveal these family troubles. As with John Dickens so it was later with Micawber, and in one...
instance Traddles tells David Copperfield of Micawber's difficulty over rent. "He has changed his name to Mortimer, in consequence of his temporary embarrassments; and he don't come out till after dark—and then in spectacles." Finally Dickens decided to rent a separate lodging. So, with his brother Frederick, he took a room at 13 Furnival's Inn to be nearer Catherine and to be out of the family squabbles, and he set to work with a will.

No one worked harder than Dickens, or for that matter played harder than Dickens, when he once set his mind to it. His feelings along these lines David Copperfield expressed just before his marriage to Dora.

Whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that in great aims and in small, I have been thoroughly in earnest. . . . Never to put one hand to anything on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was, I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

John Black, the editor of the Morning Chronicle predicted great things of the young man and gave him much encouragement. William Harrison Ainsworth, a popular young novelist whose Rookwood had made a hit in 1834, took an interest in the young writer and suggested that Dickens publish the Sketches in book form. Toward this end, he introduced Dickens to Macrone, the editor, and George Cruikshank, the illustrator. Early in

25 Ibid., p. 69.
the year 1836 the two volumes of *Sketches by Boz* appeared, for which "Boz" received one hundred fifty pounds.

About this time the firm of Chapman and Hall had also become interested in the young author; they now proposed that he write a new monthly publication with a sporting background, since Robert Seymour, a sporting artist, was to be the illustrator. Dickens was to be paid fourteen pounds an installment. Dickens, not caring for sports, later changed the plan for writing the sketches, which became known as *Pickwick Papers*. But for the present he accepted the plan, and the first issue came out on March 31, 1836.

On April 2, he married Catherine Thomson Hogarth. Only the two families and Thomas Beard, the best man—instead of Traddles—were present at St. Luke's Church, Chelsea, to witness "my walking so proudly and lovingly down the aisle with my sweet wife upon my arm."27 The honeymoon was spent at Chalk, on the Dover Road, close to Rochester in Kent, and the young couple were soon back at Furnival's Inn in London.

Back at work again, Dickens saw Seymour's design for the second number of *Pickwick* and politely but firmly asserted that he should take the lead in writing the papers and Seymour should fit his illustrations to the work. The publishers agreed, but Seymour, a very nervous, highly-strung artist, his vanity wounded, committed suicide. A new illustrator was

secured, Hablot K. Browne, who, already known as Phiz, remained Dickens's illustrator for twenty-three years. Browne was very amenable to suggestions, and he entered into the very spirit of Dickens creations.

At first *Pickwick* appeared to be a failure, but after the fourth issue, when Dickens introduced Sam Weller, his famous comic character, the sales began to soar and Dickens's reputation as a writer was established. When the book was published it was found that Chapman and Hall had made a net profit of 20,000 pounds and Dickens had received 2,500 pounds.

It is thought that the original for Sam Weller may have been Sam Vale, a comedian whom Dickens had seen at the theater. This actor was known to have used the same sort of humorous sayings that Sam Weller used, and which were later called "Wellerisms". Some examples of these are:

- Away with melancholy, as the little boy said when his school missis died.  

- Sorry to do anything as may cause an interruption to such very pleasant proceedings, as the king said when he dissolved the parliament.

As soon as Dickens had established himself as a writer he "noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time," he resigned from the *Morning Chronicle* and reverted to his old love, the theater. He began writing...

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plays. His first, *The Strange Gentleman*, a farce in two acts, was produced in September, 1835, at St. James's Theatre; the second a comic opera in two acts, *The Village Coquettes*, in December, 1836; and the third, a farce in one act, *Is She His Wife?*, in March 1837. All of these were quite successful.

In November of 1835, Dickens also began another new project. He accepted an offer to edit Richard Bentley's magazine, called *Bentley's Miscellany*, starting in January, and to supply a serial story for it. The story was *Oliver Twist*, which began in the February number and continued until March, 1839.

In the fall of 1836, Dickens's sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, came to live with them at Furnival's Inn. Dickens's eldest son was born in January, 1837. With these increases in the family, a larger house was needed and the family, which also included Dickens's brother, Frederick, moved into No. 48 Doughty Street.

When Mary moved into the Dickens household, there came a new influence which was felt throughout Dickens's life and especially seen in his works. Mary was a favorite daughter in her father's home, and she was no less adored in her new one. She was pretty, intelligent, and sweet. Dickens, she worshipped, sympathized with, and encouraged.

While his wife was preoccupied with domestic responsibilities he took Mary all over the place, to receptions, to the houses of friends, to picture exhibitions, to the theatre. It was the happiest period of his life: he revelled in the applause of the world and basked in
the admiration of Mary. But the period was as brief as it was happy. On Saturday evening, May 6th, only five weeks after they had taken possession of their new home, Kate and Mary went with Dickens to a performance at the St. James's Theatre. After spending a happy evening, Mary retired to bed at one o'clock "in perfect health and her usual delightful spirits." But before she had undressed she was taken ill. A doctor was instantly sent for; his services were unavailing; and she died of heart disease the following afternoon. "Thank God she died in my arms," wrote Dickens, "and the very last words she whispered were of me."31

The shock to the whole family was great, but to Dickens with his emotional and sensitive nature it was overpowering. He was unable to concentrate on his work; Pickwick and Oliver Twist failed to appear the following month.

The readers of Bentley's paper were told that he was mourning the death "of a very dear young relative to whom he was most affectionately attached and whose society has been for a long time the chief solace of his labours."32

In later life Dickens experienced the loss of many of his beloved friends, his small daughter Dora, whom he named after the heroine of David Copperfield, his dearly loved sister Fanny, and his parents, but the loss of none of these affected him as did Mary's death.

In Oliver Twist is found the first eulogy to Mary. Rose Maylie was the image of Mary reincarnated. Again Dickens lived his feelings concerning her death in the near-death of Rose Maylie.

31 Pearson, op. cit., p. 47.
32 Ibid., p. 48.
Oh! the suspense, the fearful, acute suspense, of standing idly by while the life of one we dearly love, is trembling in the balance; oh! the racking thoughts that crowd upon the mind, and make the heart beat violently, and the breath come thick, by the force of the images they conjure up before it; the desperate anxiety to be doing something to relieve the pain, or lessen the danger, which we have no power to alleviate, the sinking of soul and spirit, which the sad remembrance of our helplessness produces; what tortures can equal these; what reflections or endeavors can, in the full tide and fever of the time, allay them? 33

In *Old Curiosity Shop* he tortured himself again by actually letting Little Nell, who possessed all the lovely qualities of Mary, die. Again and again Mary reappears in his novels. In *Nicholas Nickleby* she is Kate Nickleby; in *David Copperfield* she is a mixture of herself and Dickens’s sister Fanny in the person of Agnes Wickfield; in *Little Dorrit* she is the young saint, Little Dorrit; and in *Dombey and Son* she is the lovely, patient, Florence Dombey. The list could go on and on. Dickens thought of her, he dreamed of her, and he wrote of her repeatedly.

But life went on, and he went on writing; and the more he wrote, the greater grew his fame. And accompanying his fame were new friends, new responsibilities, and new demands on his time, his purse, and his strength.

In July, accompanied by his wife and “Phiz”, he made his first trip abroad, to Belgium. In September he and his wife and child went to Broadstairs to get away from the confusion in London; in October, to Brighton, where he gloried in the

33 Charles Dickens, *Oliver Twist*, p. 302.
stormy seacoast weather. This trip to Belgium and visit to the southern-England coast marked the first of Dickens's many similar excursions. Soon a retreat was sought in France, usually in Paris or Boulogne; Genoa, Italy, also was favored; Switzerland was visited. Generally he was accompanied by his wife and members of his family, sometimes by his friends. Wherever he was, Dickens was the soul of hospitality.

These new scenes which Dickens visited did not play as important a role as would be expected in his novels. It almost seems as if he crossed to the Continent to think about England. But there are instances in which he made use of his familiarity with these foreign places. In *Little Dorrit* the action of the story begins in Marseilles, France, then shifts to London and its vicinity. *The Tale of Two Cities*, a novel of the French Revolution, was of London and Paris, but of a time somewhat prior to Dickens's birth. He spared himself no pains, however, in visiting jails, towers, and places of interest to be used in the novel. And near the close of *David Copperfield*, David went to France, Italy, and Switzerland, where he roamed for three years in order to find peace of mind or to find himself.

The results of his two visits to America are found in *American Notes* and in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, whose hero wandered to America and back to London.

Dickens never visited Australia, although he did toy with the idea. The place had a fascination for him, and in
David Copperfield he sent Micawber and his whole family, as well as Mr. Peggotty and Little Emily, to Australia, a place where Mr. Micawber would be appreciated and the Peggottys could make a fresh start in life. His references to Australia were many, as for example, Mr. Wemmick was heard to say of Mr. Jaggers the lawyer, "He's deep, deep as Australia."34

By 1842 Dickens's fame was established as a novelist; he was the father of four children; he and his family had moved into a beautiful big house on Devonshire Terrace; his mother and father had been established in a charming little country house, which he had purchased for them, at Alphington, near Exeter; he had been honored not only in England but also in Scotland, at a great public dinner in Edinburgh; he had even been offered a seat in the House of Commons to represent the borough of Reading; and finally in a visit made to America during that year, 1842, he had been lionized and honored in that country also. Here he was, a young man of thirty years, yet with fame and fortune such as he must have dreamed of when a child back in Camden Town.

In the years afterwards he was to continue this success. His novels continued to pour from his pen; his body became weary and his mind tired, but his mental faculties never failed him, and he was in the midst of writing a novel when he died. He was also to receive additional fame, as well as

great personal satisfaction, with his "readings" from his novels. These readings were finally, more or less, to satisfy that craving of the actor in him for a visible acknowledgment of his genius and power. But they brought him to his grave.

His son gives an account of his farewell reading in St. James Hall in January, 1870. The following is a quotation from this account.

"From these garish lights I vanish now for evermore with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell." When he ceased to speak a kind of sigh seemed to come from the audience, followed almost at once by such a storm of cheering as I have never seen equalled in my life. He was deeply touched that night but infinitely sad and broken.35

But these later years of his life, as important as they were to the man and to the world, had little effect upon his novels. By the time he reached maturity the pattern was already set; his trends of thought already developed, and from these he never varied. From first to last, the same style, the same attitudes, the same scenes are repeated over and over again. It is true, however, that travel broadened him somewhat; he became more tolerant, but his fundamental views never changed.

35Henry F. Dickens, Memories Of My Father, p. 20.
CHAPTER V

OTHER ASPECTS OF DICKENS AS REFLECTED IN HIS WORKS

Much has been said in the preceding chapters concerning the actual incidents of Dickens's life which are traceable in his works. But there has been little mention of his attitudes and theories which can be traced throughout his novels and are a direct product of the incidents of his life.

As has been said, Dickens was a true representative of the middle class which utilitarianism had brought to the fore in nineteenth-century England. Dickens had been born into the lower levels of the middle class and aspired to be in the upper levels of this class but no farther. The democratic spirit of the age was great in him, and he stubbornly contended for the rights of the common man, which to him meant primarily the working man.

Dickens was a great extoller of the virtue of gentility. In his novels he satirized the person who laid claim to such a virtue who had not the basic qualities to justify the claim. In his own case, he felt that his origin, though humble, was genteel. From his father or his father's mother, who was for so many years an esteemed employee at Crewe's Hall, he may have gained impressions of the desirability of a higher social
standing than the one his father's family occupied. It is reasonably certain that from his mother's family he must have inherited some of their pride of descent, however galling may have been her family's supposed superiority over that of John Dickens. It may have been this pride in ancestry and its ensuing condescension which Charles felt as a child and even into manhood that caused him later in his works to attack vain pride in ancestry, rank, or wealth.

In *Great Expectations* Pip is puzzled at Mrs. Pocket's passive, negligent attitude toward her seven children, but finds the answer to be that Mrs. Pocket was the only daughter of a certain quite accidental deceased Knight, who had invented for himself a conviction that his deceased father would have been made a Baronet but for somebody's determined opposition arising out of entirely personal motives... and had tacked himself on to the nobles of the earth in right of this quite supposititious fact... He had directed Mrs. Pocket to be brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebeian domestic knowledge.

In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens satirized snobbery and extreme pride in ancestry. He called the reader's attention to this at once by devoting the whole first chapter to an ironical tracing of the Chuzzlewit genealogy. He facetiously absolves the family of the guilt of false pride.

If it should ever be urged by grudging and malicious persons, that a Chuzzlewit, in any period of the family history, displayed an overweening amount of family pride,

surely the weakness will be considered not only pardonable but laudable, when the immense superiority of the house to the rest of mankind, in respect of this its ancient origin, is taken into account.

In Little Dorrit, Mr. Dorrit, who had spent twenty-five years in the Marshalsea prison, suddenly inherited a large fortune and was released from debtors prison. His attempts at forgetting the past and pretending to gentility are extremely ludicrous. Toward that end he immediately began his endeavors to re-shape his own and his daughters' actions and attitudes in conformance with their new position in society. And as a further step he hired Mrs. General, "a lady, well bred, accomplished, well connected, well accustomed to good society, who was qualified at once to complete the education of his daughters, and to be their matron or chaperon," and who, with her majestic serenity and her perpetual adherence to the proprieties and niceties of correct Society, became the bane of his daughters' existence.

In Dombey and Son, Cleopatra Skewton, "who chiefly lived upon the reputation of some diamonds, and her family connections" finally succeeded in marrying-off her daughter Edith to Mr. Dombey, the wealthy merchant whose one idea in life was the maintaining of the prestige and perpetuating the name of his long-established firm. So intent was he on the

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2Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit, Vol. I.
accomplishment of this goal, that the birth of a daughter was of no importance whatever. "What was a girl to Dombey and Son! In the capital of the House's name and dignity, such a child was merely a piece of base coin that couldn't be invested—a bad Boy—nothing more."5

An even more personal example of Dickens's feelings along this line of thought is found in Mr. Spenlow's rejection of David Copperfield as a desirable suitor for his daughter's hand in matrimony. David's birth may have been genteel enough, but there was the matter of position and wealth to be considered, and Mr. Spenlow indignantly demanded, "Have you considered my daughter's station in life, the projects I may contemplate for her advancement, the testamentary intentions I may have with reference to her? Have you considered anything, Mr. Copperfield?"6 In Dickens's real experience, Mr. Spenlow's counterpart, Mr. Beadnall, had been more subtle and had sent his daughter Maria off to Paris without consulting young Dickens concerning his intentions.

Dickens's attitude toward "Society" in general was extremely radical. As his fame as a novelist grew, he was deluged with invitations from people of high social standing and would have been lionized, but he preferred the pleasure of his own home and his own circle of intimate friends. He made

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5Ibid., p. 5.
a few exceptions to the rule of not accepting invitations, however, and often visited in the home of Baroness Burdett-Coutts, a very wealthy woman who greatly admired and respected him. Miss Coutts, like Lord Shaftesbury, whom Dickens also included in his list of exceptions, was a great philanthropist; with Dickens's advice and guidance she spent large sums for the benefit of the poor and needy.

Queen Victoria herself attended plays which Dickens and his troupe, made up of family and friends, gave for charity purposes. The first she attended was at the Haymarket Theatre, London; the second was performed at the London house of the Duke of Devonshire and was attended by an aristocratic audience, as well as by Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. A third play, which Queen Victoria attended, was performed for the benefit of Douglas Jerrold's family; and the Queen had offered a room in Buckingham Palace for a private performance, but it was given instead at the Gallery of Illustration in Regent Street.

Dickens's reason for declining the use of Buckingham Castle had been that he did not wish his daughters to appear before the Queen as actresses, since such a circumstance would call for their being presented to her socially. After the play the queen sent two separate requests to Dickens for him to see her and personally receive her thanks. Both requests he declined by explaining that he did not wish to be presented to her in costume and appearance that were not his own. It
was not until 1870, the year of Dickens's death, that the Queen finally succeeded in meeting him, which she had been determined to do. An hour's interview took place in March between him and the Queen, and at a levee which he also agreed to attend, Mamie, his daughter, was presented to court.

Dickens in his hatred of toadyism and currying favor had leaned over backwards from Victoria's advances for fear of being thought guilty of cupidity or even of subservience. The shams, the toadyism, the falseness of society, as he saw it, he brought out in his novels. Even in his very first book, Sketches by Boz, he made fun of cheap snobbery, but his light raillery soon turned to stronger satire. In Dombey and Son Dickens seemed to be observing closely the actual manners and character of society. The theme was pride, and was especially exemplified in Mr. Dombey.

In Little Dorrit society was made more obnoxious. Mrs. Merdle, a great society lady, had snubbed the Dorrits in their poverty, but when she met them later in Italy after they had become wealthy, she was glad to have Fanny Dorrit as her daughter-in-law. But in Our Mutual Friend Dickens climaxd his satire on society by picturing the Veneerings, the newly-rich, at whose dinner table was heard the voice of Society. Lady Tippins, a garrulous, vain old woman, was usually at these Veneering functions, as well as were the Landles, social adventurers; Podsnap, the pompous, pig-headed business man;
Fledgeby, the usurer; and Twemlow, the only gentleman in the lot, who was always invited because he was a cousin of Lord Snigsworth.

Dickens's picturization of the aristocracy was almost always severe. Sir Leicester Dedlock in Bleak House he drew as follows:

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet, but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its execution on your great county families.

And again he is lampooned:

Sir Leicester is generally in a complacent state, and rarely bored. When he has nothing else to do, he can always contemplate his own greatness. It is a considerable advantage to a man, to have so inexhaustible a subject.

In his two historical novels Dickens is especially harsh toward the aristocracy. In Tale of Two Cities the cruel Marquis Evremond he represents as typical of French aristocracy before the revolution. In Barnaby Rudge he drew an exaggerated picture of Lord Chesterfield and called him Sir John Chester, who was a cynical, selfish, unprincipled rogue.

Although Dickens's picturization of society was intentionally an exaggerated caricature, yet it must be admitted

7Charles Dickens, Bleak House, Vol I, p. 11.
8Ibid., p. 137.
that Dickens's knowledge was not first-hand, as was the case with Thackeray; or, as in the case of his historical novels, his knowledge was not as accurate or comprehensive as Macaulay's. But in the field of the lower underprivileged classes, his knowledge and understanding of the real conditions there surpassed that of both these literary men.

Dickens from his own early hardships knew what it was to experience want. During his blacking-factory days he was often hungry, because a child does not know how to spend his money wisely in the matter of buying food. In those days, also, he had an avid curiosity about the poor, about criminals, slums, and by-ways of London. Perhaps in his childhood he was reprimanded for asking questions, for in Great Expectations Pip's sister told him: "People are put in the Hulks because they murder, and because they rob, and forge, and do all sorts of bad, and they always begin by asking questions." And in David Copperfield, David recalled that Peggotty "made such impressive motions to me not to ask any more questions, that, I could only sit and look at all the silent company, until it was time to go to bed." But Mrs. Pipchin in Dombey and Son tried to silence young Paul Dombey's questions by saying, "Never you mind, Sir. Remember the story

9Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 16
of the little boy that was gored to death by a mad bull for asking questions.\textsuperscript{11}

But Dickens the man still retained his curiosity. He observed, he questioned, he listened, and recalled. And from so doing he formed his convictions about the poor, about workhouses, about education, about the factory system, about crime, and about customs of the times. These conclusions made him unhappy, and he became fired with a zeal for reforming.

With his first reform novel, \textit{Oliver Twist}, Dickens concerned himself with the problem of England's national disgrace, poverty, and its aftermath, crime. Seven Dials, one of London's worst slums, was not far from his childhood home, and he had visited the place whenever at all possible. His newspaper reporting had given him a rare chance to survey the poverty stricken of London, and he had listened to all the parliamentary debates on the subject of reforming the poor laws. Moreover, he made a point of hunting out and investigating these notorious spots, sometimes with a policeman for an escort, but more often without. In a letter to Catherine Hogarth, in 1835, he wrote: "I have been today over Newgate and the house of Correction, ... I was intensely interested in everything I saw."\textsuperscript{12} He also went to Wapping and visited the women's wards; he went to Whitechapel.


\textsuperscript{12}Walter Dexter, \textit{Mr. and Mrs. Dickens}, p. 34.
and saw hungry, shivering wretches lying on the muddy pavement, shut out of the workhouses for lack of room. He wrote from observation, not from supposition.  

The publication of *Oliver Twist*, which pointed out the deplorable condition of the workhouses, slums, and penal system of London, attracted the attention of Sir Frances Burdett, who publicly praised the young author. His daughter, Miss Burdett-Coutts, perhaps, at this time, became Dickens's warm admirer. In him Lord Shaftesbury also recognized a co-worker for the cause of the poor, and in 1836 Dickens allied himself with Lord Shaftesbury in his efforts to alleviate working conditions in the factories and to shorten working hours, but he waited until 1853 before he wrote *Hard Times*, a novel of the factory town, Manchester, which he named Coketown. Carlyle, with his attacks on working conditions and "Captains of Industry", also influenced the views of Dickens which are expressed in this novel, and to him Dickens dedicated this work. The theme of the novel was the evil of hard "Facts" as opposed to "Sentiment" or "Fancy".  

The chief proponent of the theory of fact, in the novel, was Thomas Gradgrind, the schoolmaster. His code was given in the first paragraph of the novel.

*Now what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Fact. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts.*
nothing else will ever be of service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!13

The young Gradgrinds were all models; no little Gradgrind knew of tastes or fancies.

No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog, who worried the cat, who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a graminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs.14

This novel, Dickens meant to be a satire, but it was also an appeal to the indifferent wealthy classes for a sympathy and understanding of the mass of degraded humanity at their doors.

But before Hard Times was written, Dickens had attacked the problem of reforming the educational system. This was not a new idea to the country, nor was it to Dickens, for from his own inferior schooling, both at the dame school and at Wellington House Academy, he had early formed an opinion adverse to the existing school system. This problem he attacked in his novel Nicholas Nickleby.

For the background of his story, Dickens not only used his old school, Wellington House Academy, its headmaster, Jones, and its usher, Taylor, but he also made a trip to Yorkshire, where the charity schools were notorious for cruelty.

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14 Ibid., p. 10.
and had already been exposed in law courts. From Forster it is learned that Dickens had long known of conditions there:

"I cannot call to mind now how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was not a very robust child, sitting in by-places near Rochester castle, with a head full of Partridge, Strap, Tom Pipes, and Sancho Panza; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time."15

On the way to Yorkshire, Dickens and his illustrator, Hablot K. Browne, by chance, met up with "a very queer old lady", the mistress of a Yorkshire school. "She was very communicative, drank a great deal of brandy and water, and towards evening became insensible."16 They left her at the inn and went on to Barnard Castle, where they, under the guise of being prospective patrons, were able to visit a nearby school, whose headmaster was a one-eyed gentleman, William Shaw. Although Dickens later said that his Do-the-boys Hall did not represent any particular school, its exterior resembled the Bowes school so much, and its brutal, one-eyed headmaster, Squeers, resembled Shaw's appearance so closely that, with the publication of the novel, Shaw's school was ruined.

The gentlemanly usher, Nicholas Nickleby, who gave the headmaster a severe beating before leaving the school, was partly drawn from Dickens's own teacher, Mr. Taylor, but he—

16 Dexter, op. cit., p. 72.
also had the admirable traits of his brother-in-law, Henry Burnett, a musician in Manchester.

By 1851, when Dickens began Bleak House, the subject of reform had become fixed in his mind and in his novels. His experiences in solicitors' offices and in parliamentary practices had brought to his attention the enormous waste of time and money which characterized Chancery Court proceedings. In the preface to his novel, he called the public attention to two shocking suits which had been in Chancery for years and years and were no nearer to their termination than when they first began. Both the Gridley case and the Jarndyce and Jarndyce case found in the novel are based on real cases.

In the first chapter Dickens declared:

Jarndyce and Jarndyce has passed into a joke. That is the only good that has ever come of it. It has been death to many, but it is a joke in the profession.

No man's nature has been made better by it. In trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good.17

And of Chancery Court itself he said:

This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn out lunatic in every madhouse, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance, which gives to monied might, the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and

breaks the heart; that there is not an honourable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, "Suffer any wrong that can be done to you, rather than come here!"18

Another issue in Bleak House was the duty of attending to the neglected classes, rather than to "educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger."19

Toms-all-alone, where Jo the pitiable little crossing sweeper lived, was a dreadful slum—a result of the Chancery suit—and had its counterpart in a London slum, probably the Rookery of St. Giles with which Dickens was familiar. The potters field, burial place of the poor, he described as

a hemmed-in churchyard, pestiferous and obscene, whence malignant diseases are communicated to the bodies of our dear brothers and sisters who have not departed. . . . Into a beastly scrap of ground which a Turk would reject as a savage abomination, and a Caffre would shudder at, they bring our dear brother here departed, to receive Christian burial.20

Another object for reform, in nature similar to that of the Chancery Court, was the Circumlocution Office. The sources from which Dickens had derived his knowledge of and distaste for this phase of government were the same as those concerning the Chancery Court. The Crimean War had brought the bad effects of endless governmental "Red Tape" to the fore. This defect in government Dickens assailed in the

18 Ibid., p. 3.
19 Ibid., p. 45.
20 Ibid., p. 183.
members of the Barnacle Family, found in his novel, Little Dorrit, who were especially gifted in the art of "How not to do it."  

One other reform which Dickens undertook was that pertaining to sanitation. In the preface to Martin Chuzzlewit, he expressed this purpose: "In all my writings, I hope I have taken every available opportunity of showing the want of sanitary improvements in the neglected dwellings of the poor."  

No reform which Dickens undertook could have been more needed than this one. Concerning the unsanitary conditions of London at this time Heskith Pearson has drawn a very distasteful but probably true picture:  

Mid-Victorian London was a sink and cesspool for the poor, breeding crime and disease in equal measure. Unemployment and abject poverty produced a population of half-starved, wholly brutal parents, and semi-naked, utterly neglected children, all huddled together like vermin in disgusting courts and insanitary alleys, in windowless rooms where the floor boards were rotten and the walls were mildewed, with the stench of excreta in their nostrils, living on garbage, exuding infection, prompting contagion, and carrying lice. The human degradation was so horrible, the reek of decaying matter so foul, that visitors to these plague spots frequently fainted or vomited.

During the Crimean War, cholera exterminated over twenty thousand people in England and Wales. And it was during this same Crimean campaign that Florence Nightingale became famous as a nurse and a champion for sanitation. A direct opposite

23 Heskith Pearson, Dickens, p. 200.
to this benefactor of humanity was drawn in *Martin Chuzzlewit* in the person of Mrs. Camp. Mrs. Camp, who was "a fair representation of the hired attendant on the poor in sickness"\(^{24}\) is described as follows:

She was a fat old woman, this Mrs. Camp, with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up, and only showing the white of it... She wore a very rusty black gown, rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. ... The face of Mrs. Camp—the nose in particular—was somewhat red and swollen, and it was difficult to enjoy her society without becoming conscious of a smell of spirits. Like most persons who have attained to great eminence in their profession, she took to hers very kindly; insomuch, that setting aside her natural predilections as a woman, she went to laying-in or a laying-out with equal zest and relish.\(^{25}\)

Dickens not only wrote for the cause of sanitation in his novels and in his journals, but he undertook to aid the cause materially by helping Miss Coutts in the pioneer work of slum clearance. "They went down to Bethnal Green, and picked on a spot known as Nova Scotia Gardens, which was nothing but a vast dung heap, played upon by the dirty, ragged, barefooted children of thieves and prostitutes."\(^{26}\) The place was cleaned up; four blocks of model flats were built, accommodating about a thousand people. This was Columbia Square, a living example of Dickens's practising what he preached. If there had been no intense personal feeling involved, there


\(^{25}\)Ibid., p. 381.

\(^{26}\)Pearson, op. cit., p. 201.
would have been no novel. Dickens's own words verified this, for in a letter to Catherine Hogarth he said:

You know I have frequently told you that my composition is peculiar; I never can write with effect—especially in the serious way—until I have got my steam up, or in other words, until I have become so excited with my subject that I cannot leave off.27

Dickens was a great philosopher as well as a reformer, but he seldom bored his reader with the statement of his philosophies. He used various devices for avoiding this, as for example, in Nicholas Nickleby he lets Miss LaCheevy, the little miniature painter, talk to herself. A second device was the introduction of letters into the story, as was the case, in David Copperfield, with Mr. Micawber's innumerable letters. It may be said in passing that Dickens's own innumerable letters also revealed much of the man and his philosophies.

But Dickens's usual method of expressing his philosophies was by letting his characters in their actions and words convey what he wished to say. Mrs. Gamp, by her acts and appearance, illustrated his views on the current status of nursing. A sermon against hypocrisy was preached in his characters, Uriah Heep, in David Copperfield, and Mr. Pecksniff, in Martin Chuzzlewit.

The reader does stumble occasionally, however, on little bits of stated philosophy, such as, in Great Expectations.

27Dexter, op. cit., p. 36.
when Pip cogitated as follows: "So, throughout life, our worst weaknesses and meannesses are usually committed for the sake of the people whom we most despise." On another occasion, Pip decides: "All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self swindlers . . . ."

Pip was in a peculiar position to express Dickens's philosophies, for Pip, as the hero of Great Expectations, was portrayed, in some respects, autobiographically. David Copperfield was a truer autobiography. And in Bleak House, Dickens is represented in the person of Esther Summerson, who expressed her views in her diary.

Dickens, like almost any other author, had some pet antipathies which crept into his works. One, in particular he felt so strongly that it can even be seen in his will. This was the matter of ostentatious funeral ceremonies. These he satirized in Great Expectations, when Pip first experienced death in his family. He described the funeral preparations thus:

At last I came within sight of the house, and saw that Trabb and Co. had put in a funereal execution and taken possession. Two dismally absurd persons, each ostentatiously exhibiting a crutch done up in a black bandage---as if that instrument could possibly communicate any comfort to anybody---were posted at the front door. . . .

Another sable warder (a carpenter who had once eaten for a wager) opened the door and showed me into

Charles Dickens, Great Expectations, p. 267.
Ibid., p. 276.
the best parlour. Here Mr. Trabb had taken unto himself
the best table, and had got all the leaves up, and was
holding a kind of black Bazaar, with the aid of a quan-
tity of black pins. At the moment of my arrival, he
had just finished putting somebody's hat into black long-
clothes, like an African baby; so he held out his hand
for mine.  

He again expressed his sarcastic attitude toward current
funeral customs in Martin Chuzzlewit. Old Anthony Chuzzlewit
had died, and his rascally, hypocritical son, Jonas Chuzzlewit,
had ordered "everything done that money could do" to show his
filial devotion, much to the pleasure of Mr. Mould, the under-
taker, who said:

It can give him four horses to each vehicle; it can give
him velvet trappings; it can give him drivers in cloth
coats and top-boots; it can give him any number of
walking attendants, dressed in the first style of fu-
neral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass;
it can give him a place in Westminster Abbey itself,
if he choose to invest it in such a purpose.  

Ironically enough, Dickens—contrary to his expressed
wish in his will that he be buried in the churchyard of
Rochester cathedral—was buried in Westminster Abbey. His
directions as to the funeral ceremony were observed carefully.

They were as follows:

I emphatically direct that I be buried in an inexpensive,
unostentatious, and strictly private manner; that no
public announcement be made of the time or place of my
burial; that at the utmost not more than three plain
mourning coaches be employed; and that those who attend

my funeral wear no scarf, cloak, black hat, long hand, or other such revolting absurdity. 32

Another custom which annoyed Dickens, but not to such an extent as the ridiculous funeral obsequies, was tipping. This he referred to in *Great Expectations* via Pip.

> The bill paid, and the waiter remembered, and the ostler not forgotten, and the chambermaid taken into consideration—in a word, the whole house bribed into a state of contempt and animosity, and Estella's purse much lightened—we got into our post-coach and drove away. 33

This was probably Dickens the reporter or Dickens the traveler speaking from his extensive acquaintance with coaches and inns. And this was a subject upon which even the most generous man of today might agree.

Thus far in this study it has been the purpose to show that Dickens revealed himself and his life in his works, but it is also true that he revealed himself in his relations with his fellowmen. Many of these relationships became an element in his works. Many were portrayed outright; many were used only as patterns, and from many were borrowed a characteristic only. Whatever came within his scope or knowledge he used—books, environment, family, friends.

Dickens had an unusual faculty of attracting friendship. Many of the most brilliant men and women of the time were in his circle of friends. He seemed to have a keen perception.

33 *Great Expectations*, p. 329.
for the innate qualities of a man, and, much to the wonder of everyone, claimed a life-long friendship with men who had such uneven tempers that they could not live peacefully with anyone for any great length of time. Such a one was Charles William Macready, the great British actor, to whom Dickens dedicated Nicholas Nickleby, perhaps because this work contained so much concerning the theater. Between the two men there was the greatest love and admiration. Dickens, as a mere boy, had watched him devotedly from the pit. Although Macready was never actually portrayed as a character in Dickens's novels, he served as a great inspiration to him. The actor in Dickens craved an audience; he often read his works aloud to Macready, before they were published, and moved that great actor to tears with his melodramatic writings. It was Dickens's ambition to have Macready act in one of his plays and he wrote The Lamplighter for this purpose, but the plot was not satisfactory. Dickens had no greater admirer of his works or of his histrionic abilities than Macready, and the great actor is said to have facetiously remarked, "I am glad the public buy his books, for if they did not, he would go to the stage and eclipse us all." 34

Another actor of similar nature who claimed Dickens's friendship was the French actor, Charles Albert Fechter, whose genius Dickens discovered while attending a Little

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theater in Paris. Dickens's enthusiasm brought Fechter to London and later heralded his visit to America. Fechter showed his appreciation by giving Dickens a place in which to write—a Swiss chalet which he caused to be erected and furnished in the shrubbery at Gad's Hill. Much of Dickens's work was done there. The shrubbery grew in at the windows, the birds and butterflies flew in, and the river could be glimpsed from his desk. There he spent the whole day, instead of his usual half-day, writing of Rochester, then went down to dinner, where he suffered the stroke that caused his death.

Dickens numbered among his friends another well-known gentleman who was known for his irascible disposition, his petty squabbles, his frequent lawsuits. This was the poet, Walter Savage Landor, in whom Dickens saw gentleness and courtesy, a man whose bark was truly much worse than his bite. Of their friendship J. W. T. Ley said.

On the novelist's side there were reverence and enthusiasm for a "grand old man; on Landor's there was a whole-hearted welcome for a young writer who promised to carry on the great fight against oppression and corruption, that he himself had waged all his life, and whose earnestness and frank joy of life must have had an irresistible appeal for him. There was, in short, a mutual admiration that developed into genuine affection, almost as of parent and child."  

Dickens and Forster traveled to Bath for many years to help celebrate the old man's birthday. In 1841, Dickens's

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second son was christened Walter Landor Dickens and in 1852, Dickens again honored his old friend by depicting him in the figure of Boythorn in *Bleak House*. In character, appearance, and actions, Boythorn was Landor. Esther Summerson, heroine of the novel, described him thus:

There was a sterling quality in his laugh, and in his vigorous healthy voice, and in the roundness and fullness with which he uttered every word he spoke, and in the very fury of his superlatives, which seemed to go off like blank cannons and hurt nothing. . . . He was not only a very handsome old gentleman—upright and stalwart as he had been described to us—with a massive grey head, a fine composure of face when silent, a figure that might have become corpulent but for his being so continually in earnest that he gave it no rest, and a chin that might have subsided into a double chin but for the vehement emphasis in which it was constantly required to assist; but he was such a true gentleman in his manner, so chivalrously polite, his face was lighted by a smile of so much sweetness and tenderness, and it seemed so plain that he had nothing to hide, but showed himself exactly as he was—incapable. . . of anything on a limited scale, and firing away with those blank great guns, because he carried no small arms whatever.36

The Boythorn who squabbled with his neighbor, Sir Leicester Dedlock, over a right-of-way, was Landor quarreling with his neighbors in Monmouthshire, or the Landor of a libel suit in which he had been involved in Bath. And the Boythorn who loved his little canary was Landor and his dog—-or even Dickens, who loved his raven, Grip.

Another writer friend of Dickens was treated—or mistreated—in *Bleak House*. This was Leigh Hunt. When *Bleak House* was published in 1853, Dickens and Hunt had been friends.

for many years. In one of Dickens's letters, written in 1839, he mentioned that Leigh Hunt, Ainsworth, and Forster had attended his birthday dinner. Leigh Hunt, like Landor, was many years older than Dickens. He had been a friend of Shelley and Byron, and one of Shelley's relatives had made him an allowance. He had been imprisoned for his political views, and seemed always to be out of luck or funds. Dickens and his company of amateur actors put on plays at Manchester and Liverpool for his benefit; the London engagements were cancelled when Hunt was granted a Civil List pension.

Dickens loved the charming, brilliant man, but the energetic, self-sufficient Dickens could not help but find fault with a man who was somewhat of a dilettante, who accepted patronage, and who was too careless in expressing odd doctrines. Unluckily he took these characteristics along with the characteristics which he admired and gave them to a selfish and unprincipled character, Harold Skimpole, the child of the universe. From Addison's Tatler Dickens had borrowed the idea of "La Fontaine, who goes and lives twenty years with some rich friend, as innocent of any harm in it as a child, and who writes what he thinks charming verses, sitting all day under a tree." In Bleak House, the rich man, John Jarndyce said of Skimpole: "He is grown-up—he is at least as old as I am—but in simplicity, and freshness, and enthusiasm, and a fine guileless inaptitude for all worldly
affairs, he is a perfect child." And Esther Summerson, who spoke for Dickens, said:

He was a little bright creature, with a rather large head; but a delicate face, and a sweet voice, and there was a perfect charm in him. All he said was so free from effort and spontaneous, and was said with such a captivating gaiety that it was fascinating to hear him.

He was quite enchanting. If I felt at all confused at that early time, in endeavoring to reconcile anything he said with anything I had thought about the duties and accountabilities of life (which I am far from sure of), I was confused by not exactly understanding why he was free of them. That he was free of them, I scarcely doubted; he was so very clear about it himself.

Dickens may have wished to show what harm could be done when an unprincipled fellow like Skimpole practised the theories of a man like Leigh Hunt; but he made his portrait too recognizable, and the similarity was pointed out to Leigh Hunt. Hunt and his friends were offended; Dickens apologized and tried to make alterations, but the damage was done. "With reservations, Skimpole resembled Hunt, but too often the statement is made, without reservations, "Skimpole is Leigh Hunt."

Perhaps Dickens's closest friend was John Forster, his biographer, and Forster, the bluff, level-headed adviser and critic, was loved and admired by most of Dickens's friends; in fact he was the intimate friend of practically every contemporary writer of any pretensions at all—of practically

38 Ibid., p. 35.
everyone that mattered. He was inclined to be stolid, self-complacent, and assertive, which characteristics were the direct opposite of Dickens's own and were often very annoying to him.

This pompous, self-complacent side of Forster, Dickens portrayed in John Podsnap, a solid, pig-headed business man in Our Mutual Friend. He was a constant guest of the Veeneerings, and from his attitude of "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!"—said with a "peculiar flourish of his right arm"39—arose the term, Podsnappery.

In Percy Fitzgerald's description of Forster as "a rough, uncompromising personage, who from small and obscure beginnings, shouldered his way to the front until he came to be looked on by all as a guide, friend, and arbiter,"40 can be seen the "shouldering" Mr. Stryver, the barrister friend of Sydney Carton in Tale of Two Cities, or, the "self-made" Mr. Bounderby, a banker in Hard Times, if only the manner and not the baseness of character is remembered.

In spite of the eccentricities of Forster, Dickens loved him and a great and rare friendship existed between them. In spite of his gruffness and pompousness Dickens could say, "I

can assure you, he is the finest and most chivalrous old fellow in the world."

Dickens's "use" of his friends and acquaintances in his novels was many and varied, yet few close friends are found there, or at least they were not recognized. One more friendship should probably be mentioned, however. This was his friendship with the Honorable Richard and Mrs. Watson, of Rockingham Castle, Northamptonshire. Dickens met the Watsons at Lausanne, Switzerland, in 1846. They spent many happy hours there together, which were renewed at Rockingham Castle. Dickens often visited there, and in 1850 he supervised the building of a little theater in which he and his troupe put on a performance. There he met Mary Boyle, an amateur actress, who later was one of the most frequent and welcome visitors at Tavistock House and Gadshill.

In a letter to Forster in 1849 Dickens expressed his enthusiasm over the Watson house and estate and declared it to be by far the best of all he had seen in England, and he later immortalized it as Chesney Wold, the ancestral home of the Dedlocks in Bleak House. Servants of the Watson household and incidents occurring there Mrs. Watson could recognize from his writings, but his greatest show of appreciation of their friendship may be seen in his dedication of David Copperfield, his "favorite child", to the Watsons. To them he wrote in July, 1850:

\[41 \text{Ibid., p. 200.}\]
Everyone is cheering David on, and I hope to make your book a good one. I like it very much myself—thoroughly believe in it all, and go to work every month with an energy of the finest description.42

And a good one it was, for in the consensus of opinion of most of the world it was his masterpiece. Although the Watsons were not portrayed in any definite character in the novel, yet, in fancy, the young David must have seen them during his trip to Switzerland.

Dickens often purposely or knowingly put his family and friends into his characters, but he also put much of himself into them, perhaps unconsciously. This he did from the beginning, for in his first real novel, Mr. Pickwick in his geniality, his merriment, his love of travel, his flashiness, his emotionalism, and his British concepts was also Dickens.

In Dick Swiveller, the kind, sentimental, optimistic friend of Little Nell, In Old Curiosity Shop, with his sense of the absurd and his vulgarity, are seen comparable elements of Dickens. And Quilp, the fantastic dwarf who caused Little Nell so much grief, who derived so much enjoyment out of life at the other person's expense, and who was implacable in his hatred was in an extreme way Dickens himself, who could be unpredictably impish, humorous, and even violent or implacable when he thought personal insult was concerned. "He was

42Ley, op. cit., p. 254.
multiform, and Quilp, and all the rest, were the archetypal, ultimate, and extreme reflections of their creator.  

Dickens's many characters were the product of his varied experiences, and no author had more widely different types of characters. Dickens himself was, to a great extent, a product of his experiences, and no man had more varied ones. As Samuel Johnson would have said, he was "a man of parts." He was a writer, he was an actor; he was a reformer, he was a playmate; he was a roamer, he was a national institution. He seldom maintained for any great length of time any one aspect of his character. Visitors in his home for the first time were shocked at his quick changes. When he worked, he threw his soul into it, speaking to no one, seeing no one; then, suddenly, upon quitting his work, he made a Jekyll and Hyde-like change and threw himself ardently into playing or being the most charming and entertaining of hosts. And all these phases of the man are reflected in his works—in his genius, his emotionalism, his moral code, his humour, his ardour, his love of travel, and his love of home. Certainly variety was an essential condiment in his life and works.

In a study of Dickens and his works, it is easy to over-emphasize some certain interesting or familiar phase, but since Dickens himself emphasized the theater to such a great extent in his life, in his works, and often in the selection

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of his friends, it seems fitting here to take a final quick glance at this phase of his personality. Alexander Woolcott, who made a study of Dickens's love for acting, has written a very penetrating and striking summation, which, even though ironical in tone, is still sympathetic and comprehensive.

Had Dickens lived in the twentieth century, the Freudians, taking one shrewd, amused, infuriatingly perspicacious look at him, would have analyzed him on the spot. They would have noted his clumsy efforts at playwriting, his adoration of Macready, his wistful loiterings at the stage door, of which the faint unmistakable aroma was ever the breath of his nostrils, and his disarming readiness to laugh and cry at the most ordinary performances in any theatre. They would have noted his pantomimic gyrations when in the throes of his composition. They would have known that the young novelist who walked the night-mantled streets of Paris in an agony of sympathy for the dying Paul Dombey was a sidetracked actor. They would have noted his own incongruous capacity for self-pity, his grotesque sensitiveness to the most piddling criticism, his comically transparent excuses for appearing in amateur dramatics, his gallant and undeniably Thespian appearance and his flamboyant raiment, geranium in the buttonhole, brilliantine on the hair, rings on the fingers and all, which destressed his sedate friends but which satisfied something within him. They would have noted all these things, and published in some obscure journal an article written to demonstrate that Mr. Dickens was suffering from an exhibition complex. This would have maddened him. He would have dictated sixteen furious letters demanding retraction, growing the redder in the face as he paced the floor, because he would have known that it was all quite true. That half-smothered desire gnawed at him through all the years of his growth until at last it found an outlet which brought him peace.44

The actor in Dickens copied faithfully in his works what he had observed. The writer, assimilated what he observed, then selected and re-created therefrom; thus some absurdity

or peculiarity, when touched up by the artist, became a trait of character. The actor-writer creator was Dickens; his creations were his novels, and his novels were the self-revelations of a genius.
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**Articles**


