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DICKENS AND ROMANTICISM

by

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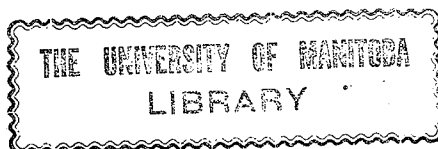
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DICKENS AND ROMANTICISM.

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Irene Greer.

CHAPTER I

His Life: Showing what portions of it influenced him along romantic lines.

Charles Dickens, the second of eight children was born Friday, February 7th, 1812, at Sandport, Portsea where his father held a position in the navy pay office. At his birth-place, and later in the little town of Chatham, the young Charles spent his earliest and happiest years; years to which his mind, in the long hard after life, recurred again and again with tender reminiscence.

Scarcely more than an infant he was introduced to the theatre, which was to exercise such a great influence on his later life and work. His own original dramatic genius awoke and he organized and performed many an amateur theatrical before a circle of admiring friends.

His first literary venture is significant. It was called "Misnar, Sultan of India", and was suspected of being rather closely in line with the "Tales of the Genii", of which, with the Arabian Nights, he was an enthusiastic reader. Gissing speaks of the influence this latter book had upon the youthful author. It aided him, long after, to make an Arabian Nights of London.

To still further stimulate his romantic imagination there existed a certain ghoulish young woman who, discharging the functions of nurse, scared the small Charles into fits by the recital of fearful ghost stories. She was one of his first literary masters and as such she had reason to be proud of her

work, when many years later the Christmas Carol appeared.

At the age of nine the first great division in his life occurred; and he was dragged an unwilling victim to London. Forever he left behind that happy care-free childhood which in after years he idealized and looked back upon with such a wistful, romantic love. Henceforth, he was a child set apart; no more to be as his little playfellows were.

It has been pointed out that Dickens children are always sad and pathetic. He pictures the wistfulness of misunderstood childhood, longing for the common joys and simple experiences of its contemporaries. This attitude was logically the result of his own premature trials in the ugly places of the world.

In London, John Dickens was struggling manfully with increasing difficulties and as nothing had as yet "turned up", the small boy was made a kind of little page about his home and his schooling neglected altogether. A certain dreamy habit of mind, which was inherent in him, was thus accentuated by this unsystematic mode of life. His sister Fanny and he, looking over the dull back yards and chimney pots of Brompton, to the clear sky of evening, saw there one beautiful star, a friend to be eagerly greeted as the lamplighter trudged through the darkening streets, lighting up his little flickering lamps. To these childhood memories we owe the beautiful "Child's Dream of a Star". In the day time he read whatever he could get his hands on and delighted in acting out the parts of his favorite characters in his own person. Here we see, still carrying on under difficulties that indomitable dramatic instinct of his.

Mr. Dickens, after long trembling on the verge of bankruptcy, was at length, with Micawber like majesty ushered into the Marshalsea debtors' prison, declaring grandiloquently "that the sun had set upon him forever!" These fearful words were literally believed by the despairing Charles and caused him unspeakable suffering for which, as Mitton says, he took "ample revenge" years later. His mother opened a Young Ladies Seminary and Charles became a devoted ambassador to the pawn-broker's shop.

Now came the climax of this gradual descent along the road to ruin. Every one knows the history of the blacking warehouse which follows next in order. If Charles Dickens had been less the genius he was, if he had lacked that fancy and imagination which ever had the power of creating a world of its own in the most unlikely environments, he would never have been able to rise from this degradation and despair, to triumph and victory. As it was, he passed through it as in a dreadful monotonous nightmare. His dreamy wanderings about London at dusk, the revelation of new and unknown phases of life, his sense of shame in his occupation, all aided him in escaping from such an experience, not only unspoiled but that much more enriched and prepared for his great life work. This strange life he saw as a little child, uncontaminated or made sophisticated by age and experience. He saw it with the wonder of a little child. And this attitude of mind is evident in all the work of maturity.

After some time, John Dickens was released from confinement by means of an unexpected legacy, and the family re-

established on its old comfortably prosperous basis.

Charles was put to school. Even here he was left pretty much to his own devices, for the headmaster was a most brutal inefficient fellow and the standard of scholarship by no means of the highest. Here he became famous for the invention and propagation of ^asecret language and the encouragement and mainstay of the inevitable theatre, red fire and all.

At the age of fifteen he left school and became a lawyer's clerk. Two or three years later he fell violently in love. This was not the first time, for he records in more than one place his youthful passion for a ^{"peachy"}~~"pearly"~~ faced creature", whose life seemed to be "all made of birthdays", and with whom he ate many a piece of indigestible cake, under the arbor of the great dining room table.

Maria Beadnell, two or three years older than himself, the daughter of a bank manager, was his second flame. The dreadful deeds he committed while in the throes of this passion, may be somewhat imagined in the perusal of David Copperfield's tragi-comic love for Dora. He speaks of it later in his "Uncommercial Traveller", half tenderly, half laughingly - "his Angelica", as he used to call her and the volumes of imaginary letters he wrote to her mother, proposing marriage and thanking her ecstatically for the inestimable boon of her daughter's hand. Angelica herself seems to have merely played with the devotion of her youthful lover, for having no money and no prospects in particular, he receives his "conge" and retires into the wilderness of despair.

This romantic love affair was quite characteristic of

Dickens' impetuous and idealistic nature. The glorified Angelica is part and parcel of the same attitude of mind which created his more faintly touched heroines, beautiful, faultless and romantic as they would appear to a very young man. We shall see that there are two very strong currents in Dickens' genius. His bias toward realism is as strong as his bias toward romanticism. And nowhere more evident than in his treatment of this youthful love. The idyllic Dora could not prevent him from adding the companion picture of the stout, florid, foolish Flora. These two elements, the realistic and the romantic are constantly acting and re-acting upon one another, and nowhere are they so perfectly fused as in "David Copperfield".

Dickens' next step was to become a parliamentary reporter - one of the best, "there never was such a shorthand writer". In this capacity he gained that intimate knowledge of all grades of English life, from the hostler who provided the coach horses he was to travel by, to the long winded members whose speeches to their motley constituents, he was to report. At this time, he travelled all over England meeting with every strange variety of character under the sun.

For the last time his attention was divided between the stage and literature as a career. The acceptance of his first manuscript, "Mr. Minns and his Cousin", decided him for ever and the stage knew him only as a very clever amateur. There is no estimating the influence of the stage on his work, however. He himself was a born actor, and as he wrote his books, he acted them. The essentially dramatic nature of them comes out in their extraordinary facility for reading and

recitation. Construction of plot, character and dialogue all show the effect of Dickens' dramatic genius. He had the actor's capacity for visualizing the creations of his own brain; of sympathizing with them and taking on for the time being, their own identity. This is what makes his most impossible characters so vivid, and all his multitudinous details so intense in their part of the setting.

The "Pickwick Papers" came out serially in 1836-37. His reputation was made and from this time on, he is hailed as the most popular novelist of history. While this book was coming out, the greatest bereavement of his life befell him, in the death of his young sister-in-law Mary Hogarth. It is impossible to gauge the influence which the death of this girl of seventeen, "so young, so beautiful and so good," exercised upon his life and work. He idealized her and worshipped her with all the fervor of his romantic and poetic mind. After her death, she became his good angel, whose influence, coming direct from Heaven, purified and enobled all his life, alone making it worth while. For many months after her death he dreamed of her and to the last year of his life, her memory was as fresh and living as the day she died.

Ward, in his work on Charles Dickens, expresses it thus. "In a word, she was the object of the one great imaginative passion of his life. Many have denied that there is any likeness to nature in the fictitious figure in which according to the wont of imaginative workers he was irresistibly impelled to embody the sentiment with which she inspired him, but the sentiment itself became part of his nature and part of his history."

His love was not of earth; it expressed for him the highest and best longings of his nature; it beckoned him on, beyond all the turmoil and strife of the passing show of life, to the glorious and complete existence beyond the grave.

In 1842, the author of five supremely popular books, he visited America where the Americans expectantly awaited the praise of the fiery radical who first realizes his dream of a brand new republic in first class working order. Dickens was disappointed. The contrast between reality and anticipation was too much, and because his hopes had been raised so high, he went, characteristically to the other extreme in his criticism.

The injustice of the copyright laws and his hatred of slavery were two of the main causes. The Americans waxed very indignant at his frank condemnation, and the result was that he wrote home sorrowfully to Macready that he believed there was no country on earth where freedom of opinion was less allowed, and prophesied that "the heaviest blow ever dealt at liberty will be dealt by this country, in the failure of its example on earth."

Accordingly in "Martin Chuzzlewit" and "American Notes", Dickens presented to the horrified Americans a very queer picture of themselves as Chollops, chopping up people with bowie knives, as Scadders picking their teeth and calmly sending off trustful settlers to splash about in the morass of Eden; as Jefferson Bricks preparing unheard of thunderbolts for the press; and as colonels and majors and captains

and generals, "all the most remarkable men in the country sir", charging madly through American society.

Of course the Americans cried it all down as a monstrous libel. Yet allowing for a certain amount of exaggeration there is much presented in his view of American character which was not only true then but is true today. And what is more, the fairest and ablest leaders of American thought acknowledge it. It is not too much to say that this fearless and uncompromising denunciator possessed also the searching and visionary eyes of the prophet.

After his return from America he spent some time abroad. But he was not influenced by foreign ideals. He was an Englishman and above all a Londoner. To London, time and again he turned for his source of enchantment and inspiration. He called its streets a "great magic lantern", and so they were to him and so he made them to others.

He made some experiments in editorial work in his own newly founded Daily News but soon gave them up and became editor successively of Household Words and All the Year Round. Forster⁽¹⁾ speaks thus of the inauguration of Household Words: "It was to comprise short stories by others as well as himself, matters of passing interest in the liveliest form that could be given to them; subjects suggested by books that might be attracting attention, and poetry in every number if possible; but in any case something of romantic fancy. This was to be a cardinal point. There was to be no mere utilitarian spirit; with all familiar things, but especially those

(1) Forster's Life, Vol. II, p. 72.

repellant on the surface something was to be connected that should be fanciful or kindly; and the hardest workers were to be taught that their lot is not necessarily excluded from the sympathies and graces of imagination." Here we have Dickens' literary creed.

Among other great things, he established the Christmas story as a definitely recognized species of our literature. He gave a new meaning - or rather the old simple meaning it was meant to have - to the great Christian festival; a vision of kindness, brotherly love, and overflowing joy.

He particularly interested himself in all social questions, in the vindication of the rights of the poor whom he spoke of affectionately as his "clients". Here he erected a noble and lasting monument to his genius. He regarded his powers as something held in trust, and while he enjoyed his fame, it never blinded him or slackened him for one moment in the use to which he designed his pen.

During the last years of his life, he conducted the series of public readings which put the last touches to his fame.

In 1868 he was again induced to go to America. Both Dickens and the eagle had matured greatly in that time and they resumed their acquaintance on the most friendly terms. Dickens made ample amends for his former criticisms by declaring that the country had improved immeasurably since his last visit and that what he had criticized then, was not there to criticize now.

In fact, there had been something very comical in the

whole affair. Both parties liked each other immensely in spite of their fierce disagreements and some of Dickens' most intimate and delightful friends were found among the Americans. Besides, as Forster remarks, the Americans had no reason to take offence at Chuzzlewit, for if they were presented with a few Chollops and Jefferson Bricks, England drew Pecksniff, the arch-hypocrite. Dickens was nothing if not impartial.

Dickens had gone to America in 1842 with an idealized picture in his mind, and when he found the picture blurry and colorless, he turned around, in disgust, and rent it to pieces. It was characteristic of the exuberance of his temperament, - that enthusiasm with which he espoused or condemned all the great causes of his day.

The reading tour in America was an unqualified, in fact a wild success. Ticket speculators, trading on the mad eagerness of the public, went to unheard of lengths to obtain tickets. In Boston, they even brought straw and mattresses, blankets and flasks of whiskey, and lining up before the ticket office prepared to spend the night on the pavement. All this in the depths of winter. Huge bonfires were kindled and free-for-all fights, occurring every now and then, added to the brilliance of the scene.

"Edwin Drood" was begun after his return from America. But the course of readings, in which he had persisted, in spite of the advice of his friends, had undermined his health and he died suddenly on June 9th, 1870, literally killed by overwork. He was constitutionally unable to rest, his scintillating,

energetic, too alive temperament prevented it. He says himself (1) "I shall never rest much while my faculties last and (if I know myself) have a certain something in me that would still be active in rusting and corroding me if I flattered myself that I was in repose." And here follows another significant bit - "On the other hand, I think that my habit of easy self-abstraction and withdrawal into fancies has always refreshed and strengthened me in short intervals wonderfully. I always seem to myself to have rested far more than I have worked; and I do really believe that I have some exceptional faculty of accumulating young feelings in short pauses, which obliterates a quantity of wear and tear." Here is the secret of Dickens' eternal youth; he drank of the life-giving fountain of imagination and fancy.

His inventive powers had certainly not failed him up to his death, and according to many critics he had gained in artistry and technique. He was buried in Westminster Abbey; a fitting sepulture for England's greatest novelist and one of the truest, sincerest and most generous of men. Carlyle said: "The good, the gentle, high gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens - every inch of him an honest man." There let it rest.

It seems to me that there is a Providence delegated especially to great men; as to children. In Dickens' life, it seems particularly evident. His early trials, his varied experiences as lawyer's clerk, reporter, and amateur actor,

(1) Letter to W. H. Wills, p. 338, Vol. II, Letters of Charles Dickens.

follow as logically as a course in some invisible school of authorship. Dickens was being prepared unconsciously for his life work and one cannot imagine a training more suitable for bringing out all the hidden genius of the man and developing it in the fullest and most desirable manner. Only by the accident of illness was he prevented from going on the stage. It seems providential. And when at last the hard training was rewarded with an unprecedented success one cannot help but feel it was the natural outcome; the only one to be expected from what had gone before.

CHAPTER II

The Dickens Background: Literary and Social.

Nature sends her great men into the times for which they are best fitted. The early Victorian age, ripened by the French Revolution, was just ready for the man Dickens. Although the Elizabethan and the Victorian times have much in common, although Dickens was intellectually in sympathy with the Elizabethan mind, if he had lived a contemporary of Shakespeare's, vengeful officers of the law would have clapped him in prison for satirizing the queen's court. Supposing he had lived still farther back, in the epoch of the great Rabelais, a grave inquisition might have condemned him to the "dungeon keep", for circulating squibs on the clergy. As a subject of Victoria, he was free to utter his plainest thoughts absolutely unhampered by visions of jails or executions. So he was able to do the greatest good. The early Victorian age had not only many abuses to do away with, (a task he particularly enjoyed) it was not only an age of free speech, but more than this, it was a time of hope - (1) "the great wind of hope and humanity was blowing through it."

The eighteenth century, while highly intellectual was cold, formal and unimaginative. Only the great conflagration of '89 signalized again the reign of the emotions. It is at this time the social conscience first definitely awakens.

John Howard, Elizabeth Fry and Goldsmith indicate the directions in which the new current will flow. Later Wordsworth, Shelley,

(1) Charles Dickens, Chesterton, p. 15.

and Godwin, revealing the depth of passion and pathos in common life, carry on the good work.. These are our first humanitarians.

Pope in mathematical verse stigmatized man's inhumanity to man. Richardson analysed the human heart and in his short sighted way preached a conventional morality. Defoe in such works as his Moll Flanders, exposed with hard unemotional realism, the abuses attendant on the unreflecting administration of rigorous law. Fielding robustly cynical and matter of fact takes us into the debtors' prisons of the time in his Amelia. Smollett, in spite of appalling brutality, seems to be faintly pointing out the horrible cruelty of the prison system, the causes and effects of vice and the falsity of the social code. But these men, from Pope down are painting life; they aim perhaps to reform the individual, they never dream of disrupting society.

Some critics date the reign of emotionalism in literature with the coming of Sterne. He brings in the pathetic combined with the ludicrous - a kind of delicate sentimentality which reacts pleasantly on his own nerves. There is not much connection between him and Dickens - his pathos is primarily egoistic - except in this, the use of detailed and eccentric gesture on the part of his characters.

Rousseau in France, first launches the terrible propaganda which is to destroy eighteenth century society. He shrieks the slogan of "back to nature" and down with all existing laws. Goldsmith was the rational expression of conservative progress - Rousseau the incarnation of bitter destructive-

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ness. In the first swing from cold reason to emotion, the balance is upset and feeling degenerates into morbid egoism; in France, later on in the nineteenth century, the soul torments of Chateaubriand, in England the pose of Byron. Not yet, has emotion really succeeded in getting beyond itself - in looking at the other fellow's emotions. It does not begin with society and end with itself, but begins with itself and desires to destroy society. The real humanitarianism is larger than the emotionalism of Rousseau. It will not annihilate, but reform.

With Walpole's Castle of Otranto, supernaturalism in the form of the Gothic romance again enters into literature. Dickens betrays some influence of Mrs. Radclyffe, but not much. The Gothic romance leads in time to the romance of crime, the detective story, a species which Dickens exploited. "Longsword, Earl of Salisbury", announces the inauguration of the historical romance which culminates in Scott. Dickens wrote two historical novels, with which I shall deal later.

As a typical man of his time, as a genuine Englishman, he exhibits thus the traces of all these movements. From Smollett and Fielding he derived his bias for the realistic. He is in line with Goldsmith and the lake poets in his idealism, democracy and passion for reform. What should be remembered especially in connection with him is that he was a reformer, not a destroyer. Goldsmith and Carlyle are nearer to him than Rousseau or Byron. These latter were egoists. Dickens, in his largeness, comes near to being a communist. He considers

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not how the laws of society affect him first of all, but how they affect others first of all. He is a radical but not a Bolshevist. A Bolshevist usually begins with his own personal grievances. Dickens has been termed sentimentalist without sufficient thought of the meaning of the term. Rousseau was a sentimentalist, so was Sterne; so are most self-conscious people. Dickens possessed too much common sense, too much humor, too much sense of proportion to be merely a sentimentalist. He looked too closely at facts. He was trained from childhood to do so.

A list of his favorite books which he read as a child, he gives us in David Copperfield. "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, Humphrey Clinker, Peregrine Pickle, Tom Jones, The Vicar of Wakefield, Don Quixote, Gil Blas, and Robinson Crusoe came forth 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."

Robinson Crusoe he afterwards criticized as remarkable for having nothing in it either to make one laugh or cry. Peregrine Pickle and Roderick Random he described as "extraordinarily good in their way - which was a way without tenderness". From these writers he cultivated his taste for facts and stirring incident of the picturesque type - from Goldsmith his idealism and refinement. There is no Richardson in this list.

Dickens said he did not like Richardson, because "he never seemed to get his top boots off". I cannot understand the criticism which tries to link Dickens up with that writer - one so prudish, so trifling, so conventional in spite of his excellencies - the other so unrestrained, so exuberant, so full of invention.

Several original thinkers have laboriously dug out a likeness between Sam Johnson and his club and Samuel Pickwick and his. Except for the muffin story, which nearly caused a fracas between the Great Cham and his saucy disciple Beauclerk, and which, in a somewhat varied form, Dickens causes Sam Weller to recite to his horrified master, one can find no more resemblance in Boszzy's Life and Dickens' Pickwick, than such as common humanity bears out.

Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were likewise favorites of Dickens. He acted the part of Bobadil in "Every Man in His Humor" with great success and the caricatures of rare Ben should be allowed their due influence on his work.

His "Sketches" betray the influence of the style of Addison and Steele.

So it will be seen that Dickens had for his masters the best of English writers. Yet in spite of literary influences he is absolutely unique. What he is whole generations of English people have made him. He is the direct heir of Chaucer, Langland, Shakespeare, all that is most characteristic of the English genius. I do not mean to say that he is technically influenced by them, that he is even outwardly like them,

but that he is a chip off the same material, that he is akin to them in spirit.

I do not find much congeniality between him and Milton. The hard, stern, cramped majesty of Puritanism did not appeal to them. He particularly hated the Puritan Sunday. On the other hand, he hated still more the lax French Sunday. He believed in sane moderation in all things. He is like the English people themselves, joyous, healthy, effervescing with life, yet gazing unflinchingly at reality and aspiring for the best.

Chesterton calls Dickens the last of the "great mythologists". There is something fundamental and elementary in Dickens, something of that simplicity and awe of spirit which saw the mystery and wonder of the world, yet saw without being crushed by its own insignificance, a kind of childlike matter of factness which is the parent of all those wonderful old tales of giant and gnome, of man and the powers of the universe, of the inherent supernaturalism of existence.

"Dickens in his cheapest cockney utilitarianism was not only English, but unconsciously historic. Upon him descended the real tradition of 'Merry England', and not upon the pallid mediaevalists who thought they were reviving it. The Pre-Raphaelites, the Gothicists, the admirers of the Middle Ages, had in their subtlety and sadness the spirit of the present day. Dickens had in his buffoonery and bravery the spirit of the Middle Ages."⁽¹⁾ Chesterton calls Quilp precisely the devil of the old morality. In his revival of the Christmas

(1) Charles Dickens, p. 123

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festival Chesterton considers him especially mediaeval. Yet as we know Dickens looked with great superciliousness upon the Dark Ages, as times of oppression, ignorance and fanaticism. But the spirit of the Middle Ages, in its simplicity, joviality and reverence is his. He is like a Gothic Cathedral, which points its delicate spires and pinnacles up into the heavens, yet in its fretwork, its gargoyles, and grimacing demon faces, portrays the comedy of daily life, the irrepressible sense of humor which can never be excluded.

It is with this spirit as it ranged down through the centuries, as it expresses itself in such men as Rabelais, Cervantes and most of all in the common people of the Saxon races that Dickens is most nearly akin. Primitive man questioned the powers of nature. Dickens still primitive, questioned the powers of society. Gifted by the fairies it is strange to see him apply his stirring poetic genius to the black pots and kettles of our day. That is what makes him so hard to explain - this union of exalted poetry with squalid prose. That is what makes him absolutely without a parallel.

B. When we of today think of the Victorian age, we see in our mind's eye, a long perspective of wax wreaths, horsehair sofas, mourning brooches and monstrous hoops. And with this, we see formality, conventionality and sheer respectable ugliness. It is quite fashionable to call the Victorians bourgeois to sneer at them as living in a world of glass houses and to laugh at their primnesses, their affectations and their stupidity.

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But in this the people of the twentieth century show their own ignorance. It is the eighteenth century which exemplifies what we commonly understand by "Victorian". It is prim, prudish, insincere - a most awful semi-respectable sham.

The early Victorian era was a hard and cruel time, to be sure. Child labor, factory slavery, antiquated laws, a changing society all made it so. But the best brains of the country were alive to it, and they were all laboring to reform it. Ruskin, Carlyle, Lord Shaftesbury, Bulwer Lytton, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, think of these people exerting all their splendid talents on behalf of the downtrodden - are they not the glory of the race? It is doubtful if there were not more freedom of thought, more originality, more kindness and brotherliness to the race as a whole in that much maligned time, than there is today. There was no analysing of cause and effect, none of these people said "This is life and nature's way of eliminating the weak". These people glorified human nature; they idealized it. They did not realize that man belongs to the animal kingdom; a descendant of that pleasant animal who swung upon trees and chattered senselessly in a weird bestial world of prehistoric ugliness.

Science had not yet, in Dickens' youth, struck religion. Besides the Christian religion, as compared to the Greek, for example, is romantic.

There is a sharp division in the nineteenth century, when the whole point of view of society changed. Dickens was not in the least influenced by it. Tennyson agonized in a sea

of doubt, Dickens all his life long clung trustingly to the religion of the New Testament.

The Victorians were a joyous, emotional race. They were ceremonious but they were not cynical and flippant. They were readily touched by pathos and were not ashamed to show it. Dickens writes to his wife thus:⁽¹⁾ "Anybody who has heard it (The Chimes) has been moved in the most extraordinary manner. Forster read it (for dramatic purposes) to A'Beckett. He cried so much and so painfully that Forster didn't know whether to go on or stop, and he called next day to say any expression of feeling was beyond his power If you had seen Macready last night undisguisedly sobbing and crying on the sofa as I read, you would have felt as I did, what a thing it is to have power."

Can any one imagine a man of our time being moved to violent sobs and tears by a piece of fiction however powerful? If ever really guilty of such bad taste he would commit suicide. There are more parallels between the eighteenth and the twentieth centuries than we imagine. Both extremely intellectual, yet materialistic; one mathematical, the other mechanical and scientific. Both hopeless and cynical, over educated, over introspective - even novel writing done by rule as poetry used to be.

"Man is a disease of the dust", wrote Hardy and that is what our time has believed. It is an age of reform spiritlessly executed. But even these reforms are not of our originating. They were first expressed and clamoured for over a

(1) Letters, Vol. I, p. 155

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hundred years ago, when man rolled up his sleeves, took a long breath, and with extraordinary relish began to clean up the hopeless mess of civilization. We all know how ridiculous that confidence was but he really thought that he could do it. He believed that it was worth doing.

Our social conscience is still in good working order; it is accomplishing splendid things. But the sense of man's sacred individuality has been lost and charity is weighed and measured out like a commodity. It is a good system but the wheels often get entangled. A poor old man one day applied at a poorhouse for shelter. They took him in but barred out his dog, his faithful companion for many years. The old man, in his despair, shot both himself and the dog, rather than live on the husks of a cold, passionless system of red tape. Dickens was an individualist in his treatment of the poor. He had no patience with a system which reduced humanity to averages and tabulations.

Dickens was the leader of the school of philanthropy in the nineteenth century. He was also the leading humorist. But as has been pointed out, he owes something to the minor humorists of the time. Pierce Egan and Theodore Hook were two of the most popular "farceurs", of the day. They are now, however, completely forgotten, save as Hook still lives as the Mr. Gay of Disraeli's "Coningsby", and both added something to the influences which made Dickens. Egan first introduced the cockneys into humorous fiction, a race which Dickens immortalized forever in Sam Weller. Hook in his "Tom and Jerry",

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provided the prototype of Jingle in the person of Kekwich. But what these writers lacked was genius. They repeated over and over again their most telling situations until the public refused any longer to laugh at them. Dickens took this over-worked material and transformed the literature of mechanical farce into the literature of living comedy. To the people of his time, his source of inspiration was more apparent than it is to us, who read only the arch humorist himself, neglecting what helped to produce him. The early "Sketches", in subject matter and manner of treatment show the influence of Hook and Egan and that is why their literary merit is not conspicuous. At times too, Dickens allows his situations to fall into the type of farce which they exploited and it is in these lapses that his enemies seize gladly upon him and denounce him with joyous voices.

Bulwer Lytton and Wilkie Collins both exercised some influence upon their brother novelist, as I shall show later.

It is, however, incomprehensible what resemblance people can find between the "Adventures of Sam Slick the Clock-maker," by Judge Haliburton and the "Adventures of Samuel Pickwick", by Charles Dickens. It has even been hinted that Dickens plagiarized from the former although there is not a shadow of evidence to prove it. It is merely conjectured that Dickens as a young parliamentary reporter must have read the papers in which Haliburton's work was appearing. But even if he had, what likeness is there between the two works? "Oh," cry the detectives, "Sam Slick journeyed about the country in

company with a lawyer and Sam Weller journeyed about the country in company with a merchant." So it is a prohibited thing for more than one author to make knowing lower class originality a foil to likeable upper class simplicity; it is so unlikely that more than one author should hit upon such a startling device. It is a wonder these people do not denounce Dickens as having plagiarized from Cervantes, for Sancho Panza stands in somewhat the same relationship to Don Quixote as Sam Weller does to Pickwick. Such critics might just as well expect to confine the triangle plot to the man who first used it. But those who draw from life itself are sure to be accused of plagiarism. Dickens' Tale of Two Cities bore striking resemblance to a play produced about the same time, yet it is vouched for that neither author saw the work of the other. What many critics, half educated ones especially, do not realize in the construction of a novel, is that plot does not count a red cent, but that individual workmanship and artistry declare the value or worthlessness of a book. Anyone can invent a plot - even a most extraordinary one. But only a genius can compose a novel to illustrate that plot in the most telling manner. The mediaeval writers understood this fact better than we do today.

Stevenson's "Bottle Imp" has been condemned as a mere plagiarism and a slur cast upon the author's character. Yet Stevenson was perfectly justified in taking a well known South Sea legend, known even to his predecessors for De Quincey mentions it, and working it over into so exquisite and so permanent

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a form that it is one of the gems in the diadem of English literature.

But to go back to Dickens - as far as literary influences are concerned, he owes less to his predecessors than any other writer. He owes more to the English common people than any other writer ever did. Nature is democratic in her bestowal of genius. In the case of Dickens she gave it to one as democratic as herself. He employed his genius in the way in which it was meant to be employed - a child of the people, he glorified them.

He is doubly endowed. He is what one may call a double barrelled genius - he could have been almost as great an actor as a novelist. It seems to verify Carlyle's saying that a really great man can be anything. Browning could both write verses and make statues. Thackeray turned to art before he settled on literature. Rossetti combined poetry and painting. Sara Bernhardt is at the same time a great actress, a writer, and an artist. But Dickens' two gifts were more equally balanced than the gifts of these others. And the two gifts were more interdependent, more important in their reaction upon one another, than is always imagined.

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CHAPTER III.

An Explanatory Chapter - So called.

My subject is the romanticism of Dickens. But before I can begin to discuss his romanticism I must first consider what the term means. The first definition is this: "Romanticism is the opposite of Classicism". But romanticism is also the opposite of realism. Then why is Shakespeare called a romantic? He was realistic if anyone ever was.

Next come visions of the ferocious quarrel which took place between the ancients and the moderns concerning the rules of the drama, and of the rivalry of the French and English schools, one flinging Corneille and Racine at the heads of the barbarous islanders, who in their turn charge away with the battering ram of a Shakespeare.

At this time of which I am speaking the terms romantic and classic were applied exclusively to the drama, the most popular literary form as the novel is today. The classicists demanded the strict observance of the unities formulated by Aristotle; of centralization of theme and economy in the number of characters, of appropriateness. The comic and the tragic must be kept absolutely separate. The subject treated is usually aristocratic, the common people being only permitted to be slain in the quarrels of their betters - a state of affairs which was not altogether untrue to the ideals of the time. Shocking events, such as murders, massacres, suicides were performed off stage and merely announced by messenger, so the

audience missed all the thrill. The romantic school, on the other hand, rejected this as stiff, conventional and untrue to life. Their murders they had performed in open view, the audience sitting tight on their chairs and cheering the perpetrators madly on. By a paradox our first romanticists were our first realists for they aimed to present life in which all elements mingle. With the new code came huge panoramas, complicated plots, great leaps of time and space, and a corresponding freedom in verse form and choice of subject.

All this applied to the drama, but it also applies to the new form of the novel. Richardson's novels betray the classic influence. Smollett's do not. A great many of our modern novels in their simplicity of plot, their care in construction, their elimination of incident and incidental characters, are classical. Hardy's novels are like well arranged plays. French novels are mostly all wrought out with extreme attention to rule and the demands of classic art. They are classic in form, at least.

Dickens' novels correspond to the romantic drama. They cover an enormous amount of space. They are often diffuse; there are a dozen different plots careering merrily along at the same time, and they deal with all classes but particularly with the poor. We find the tragic on the same page as the farcical; the fool and the hero conversing, both true to the character each represents. He does not emphasize one phase of life, say the love element, he aims to give us life as a whole, with every incident from birth to death. His vocabulary is exceedingly large and picturesque. His style is poetic, fanciful and

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marked. It is expressive of his own individuality.

Later the terms romanticism and classicism came to be applied to poetry as well as the drama. And in Pope's time, we find a poetry modelled entirely on the French couplet, which in its turn professed to be derived from the classic Greece and Rome. A second rebellion sounds against this monotonous, unnatural mode of expression and the English return again to the romantic form which is really their natural expression. The individual note in poetry is sounded; there is freedom in the choice of theme, the sentiment of nature re-awakens and more than all the sentiment of democracy and the brotherhood of man. The work of Goldsmith, Burns and Gray, the first humanitarian poets, herald the new dawn which breaks into the glorious light of day with Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley.

But what connection has Dickens with the revival of romantic poetry? Simply the fact that though he wrote in prose, he is really a poet. He is a poet, first of all, in his view of human nature. Not a hysterical, unbalanced, egotistical poet, like Rousseau, or Chateaubriand. But like Browning, in his optimism, his sane common sense, his high idealism and his belief in the inherent goodness of the world. He is a poet, if one wishes to go still further, in his sense of a mission to mankind, in his place as a prophet and a reformer. Wordsworth declared his object to be to give the charm of poetry to the things of every day. (1) "Dickens has himself described his purpose to have been to dwell upon the romantic side of familiar things." And that is what he did. He is a poet even in form.

(1) Forster, Vol. II, p. 125

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How musical and how harmonious his prose is. And how natural he finds it to drop into blank verse when he is strongly moved.

But just how much is this romanticism opposed to realism? Here we come to the modern question - romanticism versus realism. People have a contemptuous idea that a romantic is a dreamer who lives in a world of breaking bubbles. There is even a shade of moral disparagement in the word. If anyone wishes to describe a wild, unscrupulous, dare-devil liar, one who puts Annanias and Baron Munchausen to shame, he dubs him a romancer, thus implying that anyone who writes or lives romantically, is existing in a false and unreal world. He quite leaves out of consideration that in the gorgeous fictions of the "romancer" there may be a grain of universal truth which may move a world from its moorings. Truth is not perceived only through the senses but through the imagination also. It is the whole war over again between Plato, who rejected the evidence of the senses in favor of the truth conceived by the mind, and the opposite school of materialists who declared that we received all ideas from our five senses alone.

The romanticist is an idealist, like Plato. He takes in the invisible as well as the visible world; he sees the torments of hell, the joys of Heaven as well as the sense realities of earth. (1) "Its discontent with things as they are, its idealism, aspiration, mysticism, contrast with the realist's conscientious adherence to fact." (2) "What is beyond, what is

(1) Bier's Romanticism in the 18th Century, p. 23.

(2) Ibid, p. 15.

inexpressible attracts us. Hence the greater spirituality of romantic literature, its deeper emotion, its more passionate tenderness. But hence likewise its sentimentality, its melancholy and in particular, the morbid fascination which the thought of death has for the Gothic mind."

This last, "the morbid fascination which the thought of death has for the Gothic mind," I do not believe a characteristic of the true romanticism at all; of that romanticism which has descended to us from primitive times and is born of the common people, who are not afraid of death. The Gothic romance, or pseudo-romanticism, is a product of an artificial, over stimulated age and it is most popular with upper class misanthropes and sentimentalists.

I wish to prove that Dickens is a product of the true romanticism. Any literature which is written by or for the people, which expresses the people is sure to be romantic. Romanticism and democracy go together. French literature, kept in the hands of leisured aristocrats who formed a certain intellectual cult was not, before the revolution at least, romantic.

The romantic type of mind is credulous, adventurous, introspective. It has a strong sense of beauty, of the grotesque and the fantastic, it sees things not only as they are but as they connote. Thackeray said that he had no brains above his eyes. That is the motto of the realist commonly understood. As I hope to explain more fully later, Dickens' observation, although marvellously exact and minute, when united with his fertile imagination, was rendered many times more effective for

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the true interpretation of life. He believed that without the illuminating power of fancy, nothing could be really understood.

But just here I am seized with a great impatience for those two terms, romanticism and realism. The more one tries to get at the basic meaning of them, the more confusing they become. They are such shifting, such varying terms. (1) "Considered merely as literary fashions romanticism and realism are both tricks and tricks alone. . . It is a trick to make a heroine, in the act of accepting a lover suddenly aureoled by a chance burst of sunshine, and then to call it romance. But it is quite as much of a trick to make her in the act of accepting a lover drop her umbrella, or trip over a hassock, and then call it the bold, plain realism of life." So writes the irreverent Chesterton who has produced some of the most brilliant Dickens criticism I have read. It is refreshing to see genius criticizing genius, poet criticizing poet, even though as Mr. Noyes paraphrases Chesterton's own criticism of Dickens - his book is "simply a length cut from the flowing and mixed substance called Mr. Chesterton." In spite of his wild brilliance, Mr. Chesterton has produced the most illuminating, the most really analytic criticism of Dickens which has yet appeared. Dickens has suffered much at the hands of his critics, especially ones like me, poor rooks cawing about the nest of an eagle. His spirit must have breathed a sigh of relief when Mr. Chesterton appeared, whose office is not half scornful, half grudging commendation, or fulsome undiscerning praise, but sim-

(1) Dickensian Bookman, 1914.

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ply energizing, original and stimulating appreciation. And if, occasionally he is dazzled by his own fire works and drops all to chase a paradox to its lair, who will blame him?

It is true what he says in his jocose way of the inadequacy, the real meaninglessness of the terms romanticism and realism. As they are commonly understood very few writers can be put definitely into either class and the really great writer combines the two. And just here, I wish to say, that it is not my intention to prove Dickens either a romanticist or a realist. I wish to take what I consider the romantic elements in his work and discuss them alone. It is true it is difficult to disentangle romance from reality, so closely are they woven in his work. Above all, as any one will agree, he is in a class by himself. Critics realize the futility of their attempt to analyze him by duly apologizing before they begin. He is too big a task for anyone to tackle and even those systematic critics with a genius for classifying and pigeon-holing, will find all their smug little rules at fault in placing him. His very simplicity is against him.

We have parallels to Scott and Stevenson, to Fielding and Thackeray, to Meredith and George Eliot. But where in all the broad earth could one find another Dickens?

As I desire to show all through, he is realistic and romantic at the same time. Dora Spaulow is an idyll, Flora Finching a glaring reality. Both are companion pictures. From the romantic to the absurdity of fact. Occasionally he reverses the process. Mercy Pecksniff starts out as a giggling young "flapper", at whom the novelist gently pokes fun. She

ends quite in the style of his earlier heroines (whom I intend to discuss in the next chapter) - broken hearted, subdued and shadowy. The change is too sudden. I always believed that Dickens should have shown us the gradual crushing of that butterfly spirit - the pathetic attempts at gaiety and coquetishness, the incongruous curls and the tragic lines beginning to mar that young brow - the gradual realization of the truth of her marriage and the utter despair that comes with that realization - if he had pictured that intermediate stage, Mercy Pecksniff would have been one of the greatest characters he ever portrayed. He would have shown us the growth and purification of a woman's soul. As it is, she is first a half ridiculous little flirt and then a colorless ruin. No warning or preparation at all.

But to go back to the unsatisfactory terms of realism and romanticism. I wish to discuss him in this way - in his choice of material, (parliamentary abuses, maladministration of law, oppression of the poor) he is painfully, sordidly realistic; in his treatment of this unpromising mass, he is romantic. He has found the romance of reality. He could describe a common, black kettle and by his marvellous power it would become as glamorous, as fraught with mystery and magic as ever the gigantic, black-plumed helmet of the Castle of Otranto was meant to be.

He is romantic by reason of his optimism, his unbounded faith in humanity. The romanticist is always dissatisfied, he feels that his work is ever incomplete, that the world is incomplete. That is what makes him a reformer. All this

will be enlarged upon in the chapter on Idealism.

Above all what I wish understood at this point, Christianity helped to make Dickens romantic. He possesses the belligerent simplicity of the early Christians, sure of their faith. He is a fighter imbued with a fighting faith. The Christian religion is the parent of the great mediaeval romantic works. The Paganism of Greece and Rome produced the great classics. The Christian religion, in spite of its high ethical teaching, is more primitive than Paganism. It gets right down to the realities of life. The religion of Greece is pretty, artistic, unaspiring. It is aesthetically intellectual. It fits in with life in the sunshine and a dreamlike immortality in the underworld. No man would die for such a religion. Thousands of Christians died for theirs. In contradistinction to the Greek, the Christian religion is above all spiritual. In its greater earnestness, its mysticism, its longing after completer life, its code of sacrifice, the Christian religion is romantic. It is a high development of what primitive man in his most serious, his most awe-stricken moments tried inarticulately to express. It is not a cushioned belief. So Dickens as a Christian, who by his own confession, tried to live according to the teachings of the New Testament, is a romanticist, preaching the struggle of life and the hope of attaining a great end.

The true romanticist, such as Dickens, the descendant of generations of vigorous, healthy, normal people, who mingle a stern sense of reality with a glowing, elevated fancy, fos-

tered with kindly and sincere religious feeling, really represents the best of Saxon literature. To him as to the old believers in Beowulf, life is a mystery, the universe is a mystery, they look at it with the naive wonder of a little child. And to that reverence of spirit, Christianity came, directing the wondering mind to sacrifice of self and service to others, as the surest way to serve the powers of the universe.

Why should literary Gradgrinds condemn his work "as not true to life". The world of the imagination is the complement to the world of sense. This greater, more glorious world opens its doors most widely to the poets and seers of the race. To Dickens, it was given to reveal the wondrous dreams and ideals which cluster thick about the simplest and commonest things of life.

NOTE: I have tried to analyse realism and romanticism and to show that Dickens' romanticism is derived from the Saxon people. Most of the points outlined briefly here are enlarged upon in the following chapters. Realistic material - romantic treatment, that is the keynote of Dickens work.

CHAPTER IV .

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Romantic Pathos - Is it Sentimentality?

Now to discuss the particularly romantic elements of Dickens. I have said that in the largest sense of the word as a lineal descendant of Teutonic literature, in contradistinction to classic, he is romantic; I have said that as the heir of the people he is romantic.

I shall deal here, however, with his romanticism in the generally accepted signification of the word; which does not mean that in this exasperating word there is anything satisfactory or logical. The more superficially understood the word is, the clearer it becomes. If one really tries to analyse it, it will only end by a general tearing of hair.

There has been much wild criticism of the Dickens pathos; particularly that which deals with the deaths of Little Nell and Paul Dombey. To our own literal generation, it is the very excess of sentimentality. Readers grow quite virulent on the subject, particularly after they have learned that some famous critic has taken the lead. A good deal of the hatred of Nell and Paul is just an example of the propensity which most people share with sheep and geese, that of following the leader no matter where he goes. These people make the mistake of judging Nell and Paul in the light of the prosaic standards of common everyday life as they see it.

(It is just as if they objected to poetry because it is not like prose. Nell and Paul are pictures of idealized child-

hood. The inherent poetry of the conception is evident by the unconscious use of blank verse by the author. And in poetry a heightening of beauty, a withdrawal of the commonplace, an insistence upon the more heroic graces, all these are not only quite appropriate but quite accepted as a matter of course. These children, like two hot house lilies, very carefully tended, the elements of the coarse earth which bore them refined away, hold just as strong a place in Dickens' garden of childhood, as the sturdy, care-free, spontaneous children, like open air daisies and buttercups, which reign supreme in his other works.

Them too, these etherealized shadows, beautiful and touching, represent the virtues in contact with the perils and sorrows of the world. Little Nell is purity and heavenly wisdom, personified in a little child, treading its way unharmed through the treacherous byways of life and leaving on every life, the impress of its own pure and innocent existence. Paul embodies the futility of earthly and material things in comparison with the awful independence of the soul. All the money and pride of Dombey could not keep that little spirit on earth. Oliver Twist shows innocence triumphant and Little Dorrit the spirit of the home.

But is this convincing? Is this really pathetic? the critics cry. I can only quote Cross who says:⁽¹⁾ The elemental feelings underlie all Dickens' pathos". I can only recall my own experience, when, having read Little Nell at a very early age, the account of her death seemed profoundly

(1) Cross: Development of English Novel, p. 187.

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touching. I can only recall my childish indignation with Mr. Bumble and his clan, my fiery sympathy with poor neglected Oliver, the tears I wept at the parting of Oliver and little Dick, to feel sure that all that was real pathos. Later on, however, learning that it was bad form to be affected by such pieces of artificial, stilted, gush, I changed my opinion and joined the crowd in cursing little Nell.

Yet, a child can detect false sentiment. It is certain too, that the more childlike race of Victorians wept profusely over Dickens' young heroine and that Dickens himself wrote, "I am for the time being, nearly dead with work and grief for the loss of my child."⁽¹⁾ And there is no doubt that Dickens is not a sentimental man, but a man of sentiment. But, like his compeers, he liked the more beautiful of his creations, pictured with all the delicacy and softness of coloring that it was possible to give them. The rabid insistence upon reality to the letter is the curse of modern literature. People cannot be satisfied with a beautiful thing for itself.

Nell and Paul are abstractions, but they are not maddening and unconvincing in the sense that those prigs, Sandford and Merton are. They express a phase of romanticism, a tendency found in all ages to idealize and refine. Besides, as Gissing points out, Dickens was the first to utter a plea on the behalf of outraged childhood. That plea is couched in the form most acceptable and most impressive to the class of readers he wished to touch.

Again, Dickens idealized women as he did children. His early heroines are the poetic creations of a very young man who has not realized that woman is no more than half angel.

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We all know the influence which the sudden death of Mary Hogarth, "so young, so beautiful and so good", exercised upon him. It left its mark upon his whole character and outlook. Again and again, as some one has remarked, we see this lightly touched, shadowy figure of the young girl of seventeen, appearing in his work. Lucy Manette is seventeen when the story opens; so is Mary Graham, Madeline Bray and Kate Nickleby.

He endows them with all the romantic beauty and faultlessness, with which the earlier romantic novelists ushered in their heroines. They enter to soft music, with drooping curls, modest down cast glance, and thrillingly sweet voices only exceeded by the sweetness of the dispositions they represent. Yet there is a gentleness, a real tenderness and shy shrinking in these little heroines which differentiates them from all their predecessors and places the Dickensian heroine in a class by herself. She is not only to be made love to by the hero; she is to be the joy of all who approach her.

These little women belong to his early youth. They are part of his youthful timidity and idealization in the depiction of women's character. Later as he gained confidence, and came down from the clouds, he painted more colorful portraits.

Not only sentimental in his treatment of women and children, but in that of the poor, the critics declare Dickens. His sympathy is maudlin, his wrath hysterical. But what he sees in the poor is not seen with the imagination alone, but with the piercing eyes of understanding and sympathy, which see

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what is already there and is closed to any other eyes. It takes imagination to put oneself in someone else's place and that is what Dickens could do. Besides he lived intimately among the poor and knew them, heart and soul as no other author of his day. It is the man who has lived in comfort and refinement who regards the poor merely as animals and who declares any refinement and delicacy attributed to them as so much sentimentality.

No one questions the genuineness of Dickens' emotions. The true sentimentalist is the selfish man. We define sentimentality as false sentiment - as something insincere. It is egotistic. The sentimentalist is too much occupied with his own feelings and sensations to care about those of others. He is too introspective. He is the kind of man who will desert his wife because she no longer pleases his eye and call it idealism. He is the same sort who will abandon his family because he is of too high a spirit to bear sordid responsibility. Compare the sentimentality of the "Sorrows of Werther", of "Wilhelm Meister", of the Byronic hero, of "l'homme fatal" of Chateaubriand, with the sentimentality of Dickens over the deaths of little children, the beauties of the world, and the miseries of outcast and oppressed. One is the maunderings of a weak and puerile egoism, the other the genuine tenderness of a strong man over what is helpless and wronged.

It is well to remember that if Dickens sometimes expresses himself in language and in a manner which appear sentimental the sentiment which underlies it all is true and genu-

ine. Sentimentality preys upon itself; sentiment includes the world in its love.

And the healthy "sentimentality" of Dickens is directly opposite to that false sentimentality of the modern school, which calls ugly things by fine names and glosses over the ignoble with a flood of rhetoric and sophistry. What would some of our French naturalistic friends have made of Fagin and his den of thieves? Yet, while they might have produced something only fit to be mentioned in an undertone, they could not have given one whit a more effective presentation of life in the underworld, or impressed the public with a greater realization of the need for reform.

The morbid exploitation of the underworld is one of the most dangerous forms of sentimentality. The exaltation of lawless love, above duty and the rights of others is a still more morbid manifestation. Dickens himself satirizes it: ⁽¹⁾ "About French women going mad and in that state coming to their husbands and saying 'Mon ami, je vous ai trompé. Voici les lettres de mon amant.'" Whereupon the husbands take the letters and think them waste paper, and become extra-philosophical at finding that they really were the lover's effusions. . . though what there is of philosophy in it all, or anything but unwholesomeness it is not easy to see."

All this is true sentimentality - to call it by no worse a name.

Then in discussing Dickens as a "sentimentalist", one must remember, that no real sentimentalist ever lived, who

(1) Forster: Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. II.

possessed a sense of humor.

If Dickens had ever been in danger of mere stagey sentimentality, his humor would have saved him. When he was travelling in America in 1842, a serenade was one night performed outside his inn window. Here is how he describes it:

(1) "In the midst of my sentimentality though, a thought occurred to me which made me laugh so immoderately that I was obliged to cover my face with the bed clothes, 'Good Heavens,' I said to Kate, 'What a monstrously ridiculous and commonplace appearance my boots must have outside the door.' I never was so impressed with a sense of the absurdity of boots in all my life." The thought of the midnight orchestra improvising dulcet melodies to the great author's boots, was too incongruous. It seems to me that boots and music express Dickens' mind all through. A man with a brain like that can never be a sentimentalist.

The Dickens pathos is not sentimentality. Poor Jo is not sentimentality. Nell and Paul are not sentimentality. That word has a glib sound to which critics have succumbed one after another and repeated with the haughty self-sufficiency of a parrot. The fashion of his times had much to do with his style of expression. The pathos of Paul and Nell and of his earlier heroines is particularly in line with the romantic school; of those poets and beauty lovers who opened the nineteenth century. It is a rhetorical ceremonious mode of expression. It is an expression which may easily degenerate into mere slip-slop and gush. We see what it became with

(1) Forster's Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. I.

Byron and Rousseau.

As a romanticist Dickens is an idealist. His pathos is poetic. But it proceeds not from weakness and morbidity but from a genuine tenderness which is as strong a part of his genius as his transcendent humor.

CHAPTER V.

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The Horror Element.

Dickens more than any of his contemporaries displays a great fondness for scenes of horror and fear. Oliphant, a soured and humorless critic, stigmatizes this tendency as⁽¹⁾ "a morbid fondness for scenes of horror." He could not have applied a more inappropriate word than "morbid". While revelling in the frightful and extravagant, Dickens, is of all our novelists, the least morbid. Compare his horrors with the inartistic bugaboos of the Gothic romance or the disgusting and unwholesome orgies of French naturalism. His inherent delicacy, good taste and sense of humor excluded all morbidness from his temperament. And these qualities, in turn, combining with his bias for the grotesque and terrible, rendered his horror a thousand times greater in artistic intensity. Chesterton writes:⁽²⁾ "He had, as Stevenson had, more of the mere boy's love of suffocating stories of blood and darkness, of skulls, of gibbets, of all the things in a word, that are sombre without being sad." A boy's horror is never morbid.

Dickens enjoys making his flesh creep, for the thrill it gives him. As he is extravagantly funny, he is prone to go to the other extreme and be extravagantly horrific. His nature swings through a wide arc. He wishes to dominate his readers by extremes, when they laugh he wants them to roar, when they cry, he wishes them to do it with violence; and when they shudder

(1) Victorian Novelists, p. 38.

(2). Charles Dickens, G. K. Chesterton (Methuen), p. 88.

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they must do so as if they had a thousand agues. It all comes from the intensity of his own nature; from the exuberance of his fancy and the vigor of his sympathies.

The Dickens horror is romantic; for it depends so much on the aids of imagination and fancy. It is romantic because it does not depict things only as they are, but as they appear to a mind strung up, by tragic events to a pitch of extraordinary susceptibility. He makes use of fantastic images, atmospheric effects, grotesque and fearful parallels. All nature shares in the mood of human horror. Every little, accidental, attendant circumstance has its bearing on the central theme. The murderer Rudge hears from a distance the old alarm bell of the Warren tolling for help against the rioters. He sees, the crimson glow of the flaming mansion of the Haredales, reddening the sky and landscape, and it brings back with redoubled force to his guilty mind the frightful crime of twenty five years before. "What hunt of spectres could surpass that dread pursuit and flight! Had there been a legion of them on his track, he could have better borne it. They would have had a beginning and an end, but here all space was full. The one pursuing voice was everywhere: it sounded in the earth, the air; shook the long grass, and howled among the trembling trees. The echoes caught it up, the owls hooted as it flew upon the breeze, the nightingale was silent and hid herself among the thickest boughs: it seemed to goad and urge the angry fire, and lash it into madness; everything was steeped in one prevailing red; the glow was everywhere; nature was drenched in blood: still

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the remorseless crying of that awful voice - the Bell - the Bell."

"It ceased: but not in his ears. The knell was at his heart. No work of man had ever voice like that which sounded there and warned him that it cried unceasingly to Heaven."

So to the guilty conscience, the whole dreadful universe revolved about the crime. Take the scene where Sykes is confronted by the pedlar with his sing-song of "grease stains, mud stains, blood stains," how it works up to a climax, and how all the commonplace inn company are surrounded with the weird halo of a demoniac nightmare, caused by the dread presence of one bloody handed man. Then the fire scene where Sykes dashes as in a dream over the flaming floors, never losing the consciousness of his unspeakable deed amid all the flare and noise about him. The world passes by him like shadows. He cannot flee from himself although it and its realities flee from him. He and his crime alone, drift endlessly through the universe. The whole flight of Sykes is an elemental study in horror. There is something unearthly in it.

Dickens was almost afraid to try that and the murder out on an audience and when he did, the effect was so tremendous that from a dozen to twenty ladies were borne out "stiff and rigid" in the throes of a fainting fit. Yet, in spite of this, it is not morbid. It is too vigorous, too crude in its gusto.

A fine instance of the horrific combined with the grotesque is to be found in the awful old clothes merchant to whom poor David Copperfield sells his waistcoat. No matter

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how often the passage is read, the reader must share again David's horror at the old creature with his uncanny ejaculation of "Goroo, goroo, goroo", and his apostrophies to his limbs and eyes. Yet, if the reader grown up were to see this old man in reality, he would not arouse fear. The horror descends on the old man through the child's eyes. And the reader sees him ever after with the child's eyes.

The observation of Dickens is just as fresh, naive, and painfully exact as that of a sensitive, impressionable child. So his horror is not analytic, such as that of latter day problem artists. It is the virile, simple horror of the romantic people.

Then Dickens invests his humorously-horrible characters with that same almost supernatural atmosphere as of creatures seen in a vision. Quilp, with his demoniac merry-making, his malicious energy, his amusing wickedness is horrible but he is also extremely funny, and because he is funny, the reader feels a sort of love for him. Grandfather Smallweed is just the old goblin, Dickens so often calls him.

Once upon a time, Dickens made an excursion into Vanity Fair - a domain in which Thackeray had reigned supreme hitherto - and he returned dragging captive, a more awfully vain and flaunting old woman than Thackeray with all his "eyes" had ever been able to produce. Her name was Skewton - a weirdly comic monument to vanity, a grisly and beflowered image of impending death. She is terrible, but she is grotesque; she is depressing but she is also very funny. She is

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the incarnation of a ruling passion and far surpasses Thackeray's Miss Crawley, or Isabella, Countess of Castlewood. Mrs. Skewton is raised above mere literal mortality. She never wavers in her monomania of vanity from the time she is first presented to us, decked out by her maid, "who should have been a skeleton", and who rejoiced in the inappropriate title of Flowers, to the time, when stricken with paralysis, with superhuman pains she writes on a slate, "rose-colored curtains for doctors", and finally to the last scene of all, when just as Death touches her, she rises "with her girlish laugh and the skeleton of the Cleopatra manner", and falls back dead!

But perhaps the most memorable scene of horror is that depicted in the death of Krook, the old rag and bone merchant of Chancery Lane. Dickens here has taken up the exploded theory of spontaneous combustion, which had caused a good deal of argument in its time and which he defends with characteristic obstinacy.

Mr. Guppy and Mr. Weevle, (two comic characters used for serious purposes, by the way, a favorite device of Dickens) waiting for the midnight appointment with Krook, have labored under an indefinite uneasiness all evening. This impression is not confined to them alone, but has communicated itself to the whole court. The closeness of the evening, the badness of the air, the unsavory neighborhood, with its dirty, slimy houses all add repulsiveness to the scene. Naturally the two clerks fall to talking of the last lodger, who has died of an overdose of opium in that very room. All this leads up to

the climax. Then Mr. Guppy notices the soot which covers his sleeve and fills him with an unspeakable disgust. He turns with loathing from the greasy window, which he accidentally touches, and the hour having at length struck, he and his friend with great reluctance, effect a forcible entrance to Krook's room, where they find the soot and the oil still thicker, the half stifled cat glaring at them from a corner, and on the floor, a small charred log of wood. This is presented with a darkness of coloring and force of treatment, which only the allegorical likeness this death by spontaneous combustion bears to the future end of Chancery can render tolerable.

It is in analysing the mental torments of murderers and wretches about to die that Dickens becomes most impressive. It is a subject to which he is drawn again and again and on which he expends the dark poetry and vivid imaginings of the more sombre side of his genius. The obscene fear of Fagin, cowering in his den; the last hours of 'Dennis the hangman, wormlike in his abasement and animallike in the will to live; the riotous imagination of Sykes which inherent brutality did not prevent from working; the mental tortures of the coarse fibred Jonas Chuzzlewit; these studies in criminal psychology oppress the mind of the reader with a fierce Hogarthian dread.

In literature as a whole, there are three kinds of horror; the aristocratic, such as that of Edgar Allan Poe; the decadent or pseudo-realistic, such as that of Zola and the democratic which is that of Dickens. The first and the last are romantic. Poe's horror has been called Gothic. It is an example of an over-educated mind with too much

leisure to expend in preying upon itself. His fancy takes the form of weirdly unhappy recluses, shut up in haunted castles. Zola revels in the sheer physical terror of a sordid realism. He deliberately picks out the most revolting side of life and pictures it with the utmost force of which he is capable. The horror of Dickens is mental and spiritual as well as physical. Imagination is the great ally, but it is a healthy, sane and normal manifestation. Cruncher Junior imagines himself chased home by a coffin like a high shouldered man with no neck. There is a ghastly leer upon its face as it waits behind corners, and slips around posts, ready to seize the shuddering youngster. But this is what anyone, of any imagination might have pictured, had he seen, as young Jerry did, the Resurrection men at their unholy work. When he at last reaches home, he jumps into bed, and by morning the terror has all worn off. Which is just as it ought to be.

I have called Dickens' horror democratic, because he likes horrible things as the common people do; not too abstracted for that would disassociate them from all with which they are most familiar; not disgusting and brutal, for that disgust and brutality would reflect on their own characters. Zola pictured the common people as brutes and as M. Brunetiere justly observes, "insulted them."

To the people, the horrible is one form of the spiritual. It gives them an interest beyond themselves; expresses their natural fearlessness in looking at the inevitable terrors of life, causes them to see the mystery of life and death and

to trust, beyond the tragedies of existence to a completer and fuller life, where all their problems will be solved and peace eternal will reign.

Dickens exemplifies the marvellous power of the imagination to transform and interpret the common things, even the common horrors of life. The root of his horror springs from sources universal and common to all mankind. He only expresses in enduring form the unutterable fears, the inescapable dramatic interest in life and the living of it, of all mankind. Therefore his horror is democratic; therefore as an exponent of the people it is romantic.

CHAPTER VI.

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Dickens and the Supernatural.

A. Where did Dickens stand in his belief in the supernatural? Like Browning, with whom he has other affinities, he had no faith in spiritualism. He despised the hysteria of unbalanced faddists who "go in" for spiritualism as for poodle dogs or sham bohemianism, and by their credulous ecstasies render the whole thing ignoble. He was too much of an idealist to view with equanimity tables turning at the behest of fat-faced charlatans. He was a sincere, orthodox Christian, and for the most part, his beliefs lay along such lines.

He writes to Mrs. Trollope:⁽¹⁾ "I have not the least belief in the awful, unseen world being available for evening parties at so much a night." Again to the Reverend James White:⁽²⁾ - "has a thing called the psychographer which writes at the dictation of spirits. It delivered itself a few days ago of this extraordinarily lucid message, X, Y, Z, upon which it was gravely explained that 'the spirits were out of temper about something '"

He satirized Home most unmercifully in his article called The Martyr Medium. "Well Authenticated Rappings", is a mock confession of a convert to spiritualism, who, having been celebrating the night before, awakens with a regular hammering in his temples. "What do they call you?" The spirit evidently under coercion responded in a most solemn

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 466.

(2). Ibid, p. 409.

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manner "Port". Sometime later, while on a railway journey, he is visited by a second spirit, who calls himself "Pork-pie".

But the spiritualists had their revenge - and a most fiendish one it was. After Dickens' death, a spirit, purporting to be Dickens himself(who, if so, must have unaccountably changed his nationality in favor of the humorous eagle, and in the transformation forgotten the trifling accuracies of grammar,) kindly undertook to finish Edwin Drood. How poor Dickens would have raved!

Spiritualism appeared to Dickens a mean cheat, because its professors were mean cheats. Yet like most great men, he had a sense of what Carlyle calls the "mystery" of the universe. He was a mystic. He felt that life was a fleeting dream, that it was only an outward "show". (1) "What a dream it is, this work and strife and how little we do in the dream after all." Then, (2) "This tremendous sickle (death) certainly does cut deep into the surrounding corn when one's own small blade is ripened. But this is all a dream maybe and death will wake us." So speaks the man who won the most brilliant literary success in history.

He had several pet superstitions. He was born on a Friday and all through his life he considered Friday, contrary to the usual belief, his lucky day. He always remarked that the most important events of his life took place quite naturally on that day.

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 53

(2) Forster's Life of Dickens, Vol. II, p. 136.

He believed that all sorts of strange coincidences and chance events were destined to happen to him. He is constantly exclaiming on the fatality by which he is so often mixed up with the inexplicable. "How small the world", he exclaims when he finds himself linked up in a weird out of the way chain, the first links of which began perhaps many years before and which in the ordinary course of events he might never expect to see followed up.

As a matter of fact, his belief that strange things were always happening him was not unjustified. He wrote "David Copperfield" as a partial autobiography, and he did not notice until it was pointed out to him that the initials of his hero were his own reversed. On the 9th of June, 1865, he was in the terrible accident at Staplehurst, where only by a miracle, the carriage in which he sat, was saved from following its predecessors to destruction. The accident seems to have shattered his whole nervous system for he never recovered from the shock. On Friday, the 9th of June, 1870, he died. Another strange "coincidence", happened thus. (1) "Upon the publication of the ghost story, up has started the portrait painter who saw the phantoms! He had been it seems, engaged to write his adventures elsewhere as a story for Christmas, and not unnaturally supposed, when he saw himself anticipated by us, that there had been treachery at his printers. 'In particular,' says he, 'how else was it possible that the date, 13th of September could have been got at. For I never told the date until I wrote it.' Now, my story had no date, but seeing

(1) Forster, Life of Dickens, Vol. III, p. 446.

when I looked over the proof, the great importance of having a date I (C. D.) wrote in unconsciously the exact date on the margin of the proof."

On another occasion he tells of the strange dream he had. (1)"On Thursday night in last week being at the office here, I dreamed that I saw a lady in a red shawl with her back towards me (whom I supposed to be E.) On her turning round I found that I didn't know her and she said, 'I am Miss Napier'. All the time I was dressing next morning I thought - 'What a preposterous thing to have so very distinct a dream about nothing! and why Miss Napier? for I never heard of any Miss Napier.' That same Friday night I read. After the reading, came into my retiring room Mary Boyle and her brother and the lady in the red shawl whom they presented as Miss Napier. There are all the circumstances exactly told."

Dickens must often have reflected how closely our world borders upon the invisible. It seems almost sacrilege to speak of his vision, for vision, not dream it was, of Mary Hogarth, at Genoa and how he awakened with her voice ringing in his ears.

He tells, too, of frequently experiencing a strange sensation which many other people have felt, as if certain events had taken place thousands and thousands of years ago, that he had been an actor in them, and that his subconsciousness was trying to bring the memory to the surface.

Dickens was interested in the occult. He was a successful practiser of mesmerism. Perhaps this partly accounts for

(1) Forster's Life of Dickens, Vol. II, p. 447.

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the uncanny magnetism he exerted over his audiences. One who was present at the rendering of the Cratchits says he can almost swear that he saw the author pass over the stage with Tiny Tim on his shoulder; so strong was the illusion. It is this same power which imparts such startling life to his characters.

The strength of his mind enabled him to conquer all bodily weakness, and his tour in America, where, utterly prostrate by day he was yet enabled to perform his task not only well, but superbly, by evening, is an illustration of his mental power. However his relentless will was too much for the poor body and he died far too young, literally worn out.

As a mesmerist, Dickens relates how his friend Leech was knocked down by a great wave while bathing at sea, and badly bruised, and how in spite of the fact that he had twenty of his "namesakes" crawling on his temples, he was still unable to obtain the relief of sleep and that matters becoming serious, Dickens, by the practise of mesmerism put him to sleep for two hours.

So Dickens in his own case, exemplified the dominion of mind over matter, and although he repudiated spiritualism his mysticism as well as his religion, made him a believer in the invisible world.

B. Now for the supernatural as it manifests itself in his works. It would be absurd to think that because Dickens had, what I call the supernatural or mystic attitude of mind, that he necessarily believed in the ghosts he chose to write about.

The supernaturalism in his books is the cheerful, grotesque, yet strangely awful by reason of its very matter-of-factness, supernaturalism of the Middle Ages. It is not deeply psychological as the supernatural writings of the moderns. He enters into no scientific analysis. He wrote ghost stories because he enjoyed them and because through them he wished to convey certain moral lessons. He told them with the vivacity and grim humor of the common people. His ghosts are simple because his attitude toward them is simple. As his horror is democratic, or in the larger sense romantic, as belonging to the people, so is his supernaturalism. And mingled with it all, and rendering it a thousand times more impressive, is his rollicking, irrepressible humor.

Dickens records himself, in his *Uncommercial Traveller*, his first encounter with the supernatural. "I have spoken of her before, as a skinny, merciless vampire of a nurse. She told him two horrible tales in particular bristling with the elemental horror of elemental minds, and replete with a certain grim grotesquerie which, the little lad, listening to with big horror-struck eyes, was to make great use of later.

These were the stories of Chips the Carpenter, (who had an ancestral rat handed down to him by the devil to whom he had sold himself for an iron pot, and a bushel of tenpenny nails and half a ton of copper, and regretting the bargain later, when he tried to melt the rat up in his furnace it came out again "fresher than paint", with hundreds of other rats who infested his person until death ended his miseries), and Captain Murderer, a blood brother to Bluebeard (who ate up his

young wives and was poisoned by the last who had found out his pranks, and in his death torments "swelling and turning bluer and being more all over spots and screaming until he reached from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall; and then at one o'clock in the morning he blew up with a loud explosion").

The child horror with which Dickens listened to these stories, a horror which cannot be surpassed in the mind of any living creature except a child's, left its trace on all his subsequent supernatural work. It is intense but simple.

Compare his ghost stories with Poe's for instance and the difference between the two authors is clearly made manifest. Poe's mind was unnaturally twisted in the one direction, while Dickens' was the healthy, normal, manifestation of a universal genius toward the supernatural as toward many other sides. It is much more agreeable to be haunted by the ghost of Morley than the ghost of Ligeia.

Pickwick Ghost Stories

Here we find the first hint of the famous "carol", in the merry, demoniac, tombstone dream of sour old Gabriel Grub; who overcome by the contents of a black bottle goes to sleep in a churchyard on Christmas Eve. There he dreams of a mighty concourse of goblins, who draw him to their den, pour burning fire down his throat, gouge his eyes with their elbows and otherwise maltreat him. Then they show him how Christmas is being spent in poor hovels, upon the roaring sea, and in inaccessible hamlets; they show brotherly love and kindly joy in contrast with the misanthropic, inexcusable moroseness of the selfish sexton. After a night of farcical tor-

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ment, and real inculcation of the lessons of Christmas, he awakens shivering and rheumatic, but a sadder and a wiser man.

In Pickwick, too, we find the humorous tales of Tom Smart and the haunted armchair, and the Bagman's Uncle, and the haunted stagecoaches. Dickens also gives some space to the ghost stories of Chambers, a subject he perhaps intended to embody in a more elaborate form. These are told by an incidental character, whom Pickwick meets at Lowten's dinner, a leering, mysterious old man.

Supernaturalism of Nicholas Nickleby

Here we have only one tale, the jolly burlesque of the Baron Grozzwig. It is interesting as showing Dickens' conception of embodied despair. Bunyan made his a giant, Spenser made his a hermit, brooding amid a wilderness of knives, ropes and other instruments of destruction. Dickens gives us a dark, ~~haire~~ ^{faced} pale, ghoulisn figure with a stake plunged through its breast, to whom joyous human laughter is deadly agony and who battens on the woes of suicides.

Christmas Ghost Stories

But his most successful ghost stories were written for Christmas. At the merriest, kindest time of the year, he writes ghost stories. That explains the ghost stories. Imagine Poe writing Christmas ghost stories. Dickens' tales chime in with the roaring fires, plum pudding and unlimited fun with just that touch of seriousness and tenderness which the great Christian festival demands.

The "Christmas Carol" is the first of the series and by far the best and most spontaneous. Chesterton, with his

usual felicity⁽¹⁾ says it begins with "a happy howl". It rises to the lips of the gorgeously happy author just like the welling notes of a carol. He glorifies fog, cold, the joys and sorrows of the poor, all the ordinary things of life which never lose their universal appeal. There is an exuberant energizing gaiety, which never slackens for a moment and which carries the reader on like a mighty current of joy. The Chimes is not so natural and unrestrained. He is in the same vein, but the mood is no longer fresh and replete with the glory of first inspiration.

The Carol has never been surpassed as a Christmas story. Take Scrooge and the knocker which seems like Marley's face; take the broad staircase with the hearse going up it before Scrooge's astonished gaze; take the clanking and rattling of chains which ushers in the ghost; then the ghost himself with his bandaged jaws, the sizzling atmosphere he carries around with him like a cheerful Mephistopheles, "Why this is hell, nor am I out of it", and the long, long chain of prosaic cash boxes and ledgers which he had no idea he had forged and wrought on earth. All this is depicted with the literal and irrepressible horror and laughter of the people. There is a thrill and a chuckle in every paragraph.

People like to joke about graves and skeletons. It is only the decadent who take them seriously. The common people display a kind of splendid irreverence for death. It is not the end of all things and they know it. But this

(1) Charles Dickens, G. K. Chesterton, p. 130.

fascinating story is not told only for its own sake. The allegory is plain. Dickens never forgot that he was first of all a moralist and the Christmas Carol is above all, a glorification of the spirit of Christmas, tender, beautiful and universal.

"The Chimes" was written with a fiercely combative object in view. (1) "To strike a blow upon that part of the brass countenance of wicked cant, when such a compliment is sorely needed at this time," and while an undeniably powerful work its elements are not so nicely and naturally adjusted as those of the Carol. We have the sense of conscious working up while the Carol sprung, full fledged and beautiful from the author's brain the complete growth of one inspiration.

The Chimes was written in Genoa, not in London. So its scenes of city life are reproduced, not from present observation, but from memory. Dickens' greatest inspiration was London and here, in Italy, rejecting the gay scenes of the garish Italian streets, he comes back with unabated love to dirty, swarming old London.

The framework of the story is a dream; one which he was very fond of and which a long line of authors before him has specially favored. It was a pet device of the Middle Ages, who whenever they had anything of a startling, not to say ghostly nature to portray, apologetically cast it in the form of a vision. So in Langland's Piers Plowman, Chaucer's Booke of the Duchesse and Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. A good,

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. I, p. 138

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old-fashioned, recognized bit of mechanism. There was no attempt to make these dreams true to dream psychology; they were complete and logical bits of exposition for which the dream framework only provided the excuse.

But although Dickens in this was in line with the Middle Ages and had many qualities in common, here, he ~~is~~ **expresses himself** rabidly against the "good old times". He can see nothing in them but ignorance and oppression. He had none of Scott's feudalism. His affiliations with the Middle Ages are unconscious. They are affiliations which are permanent and unchangeable rather than definitely belonging to any age or time. So he pours forth his wrath on the backward looking man, who chants at every conceivable moment, "O the good old times! The good old times!"

The story of The Chimes is too well known to need any recapitulation here. The poor ticket porter, lured by the voices of the bells to the old tower where they hang, learns from them that his distrust for his own kind is unfounded and that they may be relied upon in nobility of heart and singleness of purpose far beyond their oppressors and detractors, who are the real "surplus population", whom no one would miss if it were removed.

Dickens was always practical before he was poetic or picturesque. His purpose to show the "romantic side of familiar things" is here achieved. His story is a brief for the poor cast into the highly imaginative form of a ghost story.

"The Cricket on the Hearth" is, in the last analysis,

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more allegorical than supernatural. The cricket personifies the spirit of the home. He endows it with a reasoning mind; silent in the time of doubt and trouble, loud when peace and love are again restored. Not so boisterous as the Carol; not so didactic as the Chimes, there is an atmosphere of quiet, tender, penetrating humor, which, like the cricket itself, is the very essence of home and the domestic ties. When John Perrybingle discovers what he believes to be his wife's faithlessness, the household fairies come to him and exhibit her in all the sweet and tender lights of the kindest fancy, and driving all the anger from his heart, leave him with only a great pity and sacrificial love which bids him yield all for her happiness. Then to signalize the great victory over self and the happiness and explanations to come, the cricket once more chirps merrily forth, the unconquerable spirit of home.

The author ends the story in a light, fanciful way which is beautifully appropriate to the delicate and subdued treatment of it all. The merrymaking figures fade away, little Dot and John, Tilly Slowboy and the baby, Grace and Edward, blind Bertha and her father, they all disappear like a parting vision, and the author sitting by his fire, hears only the chirp, chirp of the cricket, deathless spirit of the deathless home, as it manifests itself through all the generations of the world.

"The Haunted Man" is a professor of chemistry in a large college. He is a naturally kind-hearted man, haunted and embittered by unpleasant memories of a great wrong done him which he cannot forgive. It corrodes and rankles in his heart

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and darkens his whole existence. The ghost which haunts him is a personification of all this,

One Christmas Eve, the reader first meets the ghost, (1) "Out of the heaped up images of gloomy and wintry fancies, the supernatural takes a shape which is not forced or violent, and the dialogue which is no dialogue, but a kind of dreary, dreamy echo is a piece of ghostly imagination better than Mrs. Radcliffe." After some conversation between the professor and the ghost, the former complaining of the load he carries and considering what a good thing it would be to gain absolute oblivion as to the past, the ghost grants the gift and the power of imparting it to others.

But the Haunted Man finds to his horror, that with the power to forget past pain, tenderness, sympathy and high fancy, depart from the life of man and he becomes a selfish, discontented cruel animal. The Haunted Man brings the curse of oblivion wherever he goes. He has the anguish of leaving simple, good and loving people with the beauty of association broken and their whole natures changed by his contact. The only person he cannot influence is a little, miserable street gamin, who has known only brutality and hate and who has no sweet, human memory to connect him with the past. The Haunted Man then realizes to what depths humanity must sink, to be on a level with this boy, and how he has helped to sink it by his perverted will.

Then he repents and asks for revocation of the gift.

(1) Forster's Life of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 67.

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His prayer is granted but the undoing of the curse must be brought about by Milly, the porter's wife, whose sweet and unspoiled nature is above all earthly contamination. Like an unconscious angel, she enters the homes, darkened by the ghost's curse, and restoring memory of past joys as well as past sorrows, brings back the inmates to their old human weaknesses and human virtues.

So the Haunted Man learns his lesson and makes his memory of wrong and sorrow, a medium for sympathizing with and understanding better the life of all humanity. So the ghost is no longer a mocking curse but a blessing.

In Master Humphrey's Clock, itself a framework, Dickens constructed a new framework. Gog and Magog, the guardian spirits of the city, he pictures telling stories all through the long nights. No human ear hears these stories save one, that of a stranger who has accidentally fallen asleep in the great passage and wakens to hear the giants at their talk. The fancy is grotesquely worked out but he chronicles the story of only one night. He imagined something like a new Thousand and One Nights, but he was too much occupied to follow up such a gargantuan task. Chaucer wrote only a fourth of his Canterbury Tales.

Of the novels, the only one with an out and out supernatural element is Bleak House. And that is embodied in the story of the Ghosts' Walk. The step is most audible on the terrace of the Dedlocks when disgrace or calamity is approaching. All through the story we hear the step growing louder and louder, until it climaxes in the crushing blow which falls on

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Lady Dedlock and she wanders forth to die. It is like a low strain of music, which beginning a very undercurrent of tone, rises at last to a stormy finale and blots out all other sounds in its mad frenzy.

There is an element of the supernatural in Barnaby Rudge by reason of the strange fatality by which the murder story is always recurred to quite without premeditation on the nineteenth of March, the day the crime was committed. But I need not discuss it further.

C. I may as well include Dickens' fairy tales in this listing. He wrote several, of which "A Child's Dream of a Star" (if that beautiful phantasy can strictly be called a fairy tale) Prince Bladud of Bath and the Magic Fishbone are the best known. He loved fairy tales and nothing made him so angry as a system of education in which such literature was banished. He shows in Louisa and Tom Gradgrind what the effects of such an education must be in which fancy and imagination are abolished. Cruikshank was publishing a volume of popular fairy tales adapted so as to illustrate some modern propaganda. Dickens killed the whole project by composing his "Frauds on the Fairies" in which he writes "Everyone who has considered the subject knows full well that a nation without fancy, without some romance never did, never can, never will, hold a great plane under the sun."

D. In a few exceptional cases Dickens really did try a genuine ghost story; a ghost story told for its own sake without any moral purpose; one told simply to mystify and thrill,

and told so realistically that credulous persons might believe in it. The others are frameworks for his own ideas. He does not take literally the supernatural element, neither do his readers. His characters are real within an impossible setting. In these exceptions, the characters are subordinate, they are puppets, but the impossible is the impossibility of modern spiritualism.

"To be Read at Dusk" contains two weird stories, one of a disappearing bride, the other of a twin brothers phantom. There is the "Signalman's Story" which is a very good one of its kind, and a tale of a murderer brought to justice by the spirit of his victim. I believe this exhausts the modern type of ghost stories.

In the older stories, there is a kind of agreement between the author and reader, "Let's pretend" they say, and imagine a story which outwardly is supernatural but which really has a parallel to life itself.

I do not mean to imply that Dickens' supernaturalism is merely artificial. To be sure, it is one which he bends to his own purposes and through which he embodies his own teachings. But the mystic note is there which elevates and awakens the sense to the unreal and invisible world. He has not the pseudo-scientific attitude. His mysticism is the older one of Langland, Chaucer and the workers of the Gothic Cathedrals.

He possesses the romantic credulity of all great artists. He is always on the lookout for romantic material. But what I have emphasized time and again is the practical use to which he puts all romance. His supernaturalism is not a mere idle manifestation of a fanciful mind, it is the stern teaching of an ardent, conscientious reformer.

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The Symbolic or Allegorical Element.

Closely allied to the supernatural is the allegorical, and it enters more or less into all his novels. As I have said before, many of his characters are personified vices and virtues. His settings are frequently allegorical. They strike the keynote of the whole story, and give to it its tone. He uses what is called the personal element in nature, making it take its tone from the moods of his personages and act as a kind of Greek chorus.

Chesterton writes of *Bleak House*:⁽¹⁾ "The whole tale is symbolic and crowded with symbols." The story opens in the midst of a dense fog, a fog typical of the curse the story is to labor under. It embodies Chancery Court, where shrouded in dust, smoke and frowsy candle light, the lord high Chancellor and his co-mates stumble through the waste of the law, laying traps for all mankind.

Into this fog, in the first glory of their youth, come Esther Summerson, Ada Clare and Rick Carstone. It clutches them for the short duration of their stay in London but once in the carriage approaching *Bleak House*, the fog relinquishes them and for a brief time they are free of it. It saits though, in London for them, lurking about and in the Court of Chancery, like a huge, gray, shifting boa constrictor sure in the end of swallowing them up in its huge maw. They never enter the great city, but the cursed shadow of Chancery darkens their youth and it slowly sucks the life from one of them at least.

(1) G. K. Chesterton, *Criticisms and Appreciations of the works of Charles Dickens*, p. 152.

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There is still another parallelism running through the story. Chancery is like a fog - it is also like a rag and bone shop. In all its native ugliness, in all its filthiness, in all its tendencies to the magpie accumulation of ragged papers and decaying refuse, Krook's shop is Chancery reduced to its lowest terms. The leering Krook himself, who cannot read the papers he so sedulously collects, and yet hugs himself to think of the power he derives from their possession, is Lord High Chancellor, and his sinister eyed cat is the devil which called Chancery forth, and keeps it going. The frightful end of Krook by spontaneous combustion expresses Dickens' conviction of what the end of Chancery will be. "The Lord Chancellor of that Court, true to his title in his last act, has died the death of all Lord Chancellors, in all courts, and of all authorities in all places under all names soever, where false pretences are made and where injustice is done. Call the death by any name your Highness will, attribute it to whom you will, or say it might have been prevented how you will, it is the same death eternally - inborn, inbred, engendered in the corrupted humors of the vicious body itself, and that only - spontaneous combustion, and none other of all the deaths that can be died."

Little Miss Flite, who lodges in the rag and bone shop with her caged birds, Youth, Beauty, Hope, Dust, Ashes, etc. which she is going to release when Chancery gives a judgment, "on the Day of Judgment", adds her little mad voice to the swelling chorus of wrong, ruin and despair.

Mr. Vholes, that dyspeptic vampire clothed in black, trading on poor Richard Carstone's fascination for the whirlpool that is drawing him in, expresses the evils of Chancery in demoniac form. He is really like a legendary ghoul, as unearthly, as repulsive and as remorseless.

Then outside the Chancery group, we have the nature symbolism relating to the Dedlocks. There are two tragedies in this book, one the greater, more serious tragedy of Chancery, the other the tragedy of a past sin. Both stories are woven together with consummate skill and so close is their interrelation that it is hard to say where one begins and the other ends.

The shadow of ruin hovers over the carefree lovers of Bleak House, the shadow of disgrace over the proud mansion of Chesney Wold. Chesney Wold is beautiful and we often see it in the sunshine but there is always a menacing gloom about it, the sunshine is cold and hard and we never forget the day of soaking rain when the step on the Ghost's Walk louder than ever, Mr. Guppy and Mr. Jobling first discover Lady Dedlock's picture. An atmosphere of dread enfolds the mansion, blasting all its beauty, and the bar of sunlight on my Lady's picture is a threat.

Bleak House begins in fog and the fog does not lift until it has ended its cruel work. It is a close, stuffy, oppressive atmosphere, and it is a relief to turn from the Smallweeds, Krooks and men of law, to the open air inmates of Bleak House and the happiness they at last wrest from the claws of Chancery.

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The symbolic element is strong in "Great Expectations" It also opens in a fog, when a wretched, outcast man, links his life irrevocably to that of a wondering little boy who has stolen out to dream about his parents' tombstone and the "five little stone lozenges" dedicated to the memory of his five brothers and sisters. Years later, in a heavy pelting rain, the same despised outcast comes creeping back to overwhelm his protégé with shame and confusion and at last to bring out by fire, all the nobility and strength of a young man's soul.

Miss Havisham, wronged, eccentric, half crazed lays all her surroundings waste about her, to symbolize her wasted life. When she at last realizes that in Pip, she has wronged someone as unoffending and undeserving of it as she herself at the time of her own cruel disappointment, and that instead of cursing her for the unhappiness she has brought him, he blesses and forgives her, then it comes to her what a terrible retribution her own selfish grief has laid up. Her mind loses its perversion and returns to its old womanly tenderness. This change is coincident with the fire which leaping from the grate, sets fire to the ragged wedding gown she has persisted in wearing as a symbol of her distorted grief, and burns it to tinder. But as the power of the fire was too much for her frail body, so the growth of an unnatural sorrow has penetrated too far into her very soul and its removal means death.

So much for the novels.

The allegorical element is more free and unrestrained in those of his short stories and sketches, designed to exhibit

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the abuses of the social system. He has a strong resemblance to Swift. Lacking his splendid humanitarianism, his kindly sense of humor, and his optimism, he possessed force, virulence and satiric humor sufficient to place him on a par with that acidulous divine.

"A Crisis in the Affairs of Mr. John Bull, as related by Mrs. Bull to the children", is an allegorical satire upon Cardinal Wiseman and Dr. Pusey who were endeavoring to win England back to the Catholic faith. The Bulls of Rome claimed a false relationship to the Bulls of England, which that family indignantly denied, with the exception, however, of Mr. Bull's poor sister (Ireland) who, with her head in the ashes and her body in sackcloth, acknowledged all their claims with a dreadful devotion and was become no more than a wretched fanatic through their wiles.

There are several other allegorical tales of the doings of the Bulls. One called "Prince Bull, a Fairy Tale," deals with the machinations of a certain wicked fairy called Tape who brings to naught all the activities of his subjects, and who, by the mere pronounciation of her name, wipes from the mind of the unhappy prince all the vague suspicions he at times entertains, that things are not going just as they should.

"Our Commission" satirizes abuses in Church and State under the guise of commodities provided for Mr. Bull's own household.

"Another amusing tale (Mr. Bull's Sonnambulist) satirizes Lord Aberdeen and his administration. The sonnambulist,

unfortunately, occupies no less a post than that of Mr. Bull's housekeeper, a doddering old creature who is allowing his house to go to wrack and ruin and who wont be induced to get out.

Still another is entitled "the Haunted House." Needless to say it is typified in Parliament. Mr. Bull's home is haunted by the ghost of Talk which all the powers of earth cannot exorcise.

"A December Vision", in its solemn denunciation and impressiveness, is like the inspired utterance of an old time prophet. "I saw a mighty Spirit, traversing the world without any rest or pause". That spirit is Death. It sees oppression and injustice rampant. But all those who might rectify it, fold their hands and say: "It is a great wrong but it will last my time." But these great wrongs are working their retribution on the innocent ones of those who so flagrantly neglect their duty. Disease and crime, bred among the poor and outcast of society, are avenging the wrongs of the hymble, by entering the homes of those who believed themselves exempt and striking down the sheltered ones there. He shows that one class of society cannot be neglected without affecting all; that the duty of common humanity and justice cannot be shirked without the consequences returning like a boomerang upon the evaders. And his prophecy which is almost a curse, declares that those who put all this aside with the careless remark - "It is a great wrong - but it will last my time", will be called upon to answer for a wrong which will last through all eternity.

"The Last Words of the Old Year", presents an old man making his will, leaving behind him a vast quantity of problems

and wrongs to be solved and remedied by his successor.

"The Thousand and One Humbugs", purports to be an ancient Arabian manuscript, written in the style of the Arabian Nights and strangely applicable to the affairs of the nineteenth century. The Sultan is called Taxedtaurus or Fleeced Bull. The station to which he raises his wives is denominated Howsa Kummauns or Peerless Chatterer. His Grand Vizier is Parmaratoon, (Twirling Weathercock) and Hansardadade, his daughter, endeavors to placate the angry prince by the recital of endless stories, under which we see thinly veiled, the humbugs of politics. Only a few of the Humbugs were written, but the devastating satire and fierce anger underlying the pompous Oriental style must have rendered them very formidable weapons in the hands of the author.

Swift compared men to horses, the balance inclining immeasurably to the quadrupeds. Dickens makes the Raven, the chronicler of the Happy Family (of animals) an iconoclastic satirizer of the foibles and weaknesses of the human race.

The sketch called Perfect Felicity compares the Raven kept in a cage and believed, merely on the grounds that he is a prisoner, incapable of wishing anyone any harm, to human prisoners, indulged and sentimentalized about, whose actual moral nature has undergone no change, no matter what the sentimentalists choose to believe. Meanwhile these "sturdy felons", are fed on the fat of the land, while honest people, laborers and paupers, are oppressed and neglected.

The Raven also takes it upon himself to ridicule public funerals - a subject on which Dickens was prone to be rampageous -

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and he compares the absurd pomposity of man very unfavorably to his own common sense on such matters.

The horse contributes an article on the score of his own honesty and wisdom, who is but an animal and man's unscrupulousness and irrationality, who is supposed to be a reasoning creature.

The most amusing satire of all is that entitled "the Good Hippopotamus." His keeper and several other enterprising citizens conceive the idea of erecting an equestrian statue to the hippopotamus, who has never done anything but eat and drink and stupidly permit the crowds to gaze on it. H. R. H. (His Rolling Hulk) has been a merely passive actor in the whole thing and from this proceeds his goodness. It is a mighty clever satire on Royalty. No matter how stupid and useless the monarch "good" has invariably been the adjective prefixed; "good" because he was too lazy to do harm.

"This, as far as it has yet reached is the history of the monument to the "Good" Hippopotamus. The collector has called, we understand, at a great many houses, but has not yet succeeded in getting into several, in consequence of the entrance being previously occupied by the collector of the Queen's Taxes, going his rounds for the annuity to the young Duke of Cambridge, Whom Heaven preserve!"

What a perfectly fiendish sting in those last two sentences!

As I have indicated before, all these political allegories remind one of Swift. But the burning indignation of

Dickens is not bitterness. No matter how angry he became, he never ended by despising the race. He wished only to clear away the obstacles which obstructed human progress toward a sure and certain goal. He is an idealist, but his idealism is constructive and practical. Swift was perhaps an idealist too. He was not satisfied with things as they were. But he lacked the splendid gifts of optimism and his satire was destructive, and cruel, and in the end, impotent.

The abuses Dickens satirizes under allegorical form are real and indisputable. The manner in which he embodies them is romantic.

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The Melodramatic Villain and Hero.

There is a healthy melodramatic streak in Dickens - his heritage from the sensation loving people. He loves to pose, to make fine speeches, to develop sensational situations. We all know his custom of gathering together all the characters in a grand final tableau, where the villain is unmasked and soundly punished and the heroine is officially handed over to the waiting hero. The villain is always terribly punished; Sampson Brass becomes a slinking tramp; Pecksniff a whining beggar; Carker is run over by an express train and Blondin crushed in the ruins of Clenham's house. This may be melodrama but, by the author's genius, it is melodrama raised to high art. His handling of his situations is masterly. As to happy endings, while Dickens displays a great predilection for them, he has also the courage to give a story a tragic ending. Nell dies; art demands it. Art demanded an unhappy ending to "Great Expectations" and it would have got it, if Lytton had not talked the author out of it.

The melodramatic is more apparent in his earlier work. Dickens from his childhood had always been identified with the theatre and the results of such an interest could not help being impressed upon his books. In his youth, like any other normal human being, he enjoyed indigo-hued villains and impeccable heroes. It is with these that I propose principally to deal. The melodramatic hero and villain mark the extremes of youthful conception. They are a result of simplicity. As one gets older one realizes that emotions are not either

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all black or white, but several shades of grey.

A. AS I have said, the melodramatic hero and villain mark the exuberance and simplicity of youth. Dickens liked to make the villain very appalling, because it was more fun getting mad at him and justified him in bringing him to a blood curdling end. He enjoyed the unimpeachable hero because it gave him great satisfaction to see the many hued plans of the villains slide innocuously off that shining surface. There was an utilitarian aspect to the case too. The faultless being, having no real character of his own, could be dragged riotously through the story without any uncomfortable snags and knobs in his make up injuring its delicate fabric and preventing its completion.

Crummles, Squeers and Noggs have a much better chance to show up against the unadorned background of Nicholas Nickleby than they would have if that gentleman usurped the stage and cut off some of their utterances. To be a hero is uninteresting. It is a stock position. Why not have a stock character to fill it? To be an incidental character offers a thousand times more scope. A hero is naturally expected to perform certain actions; make poetical love to the heroine; defy the villain, etcetera. An incidental personage may do anything he is mad enough to conceive. One cannot imagine a hero wildly chasing his hat along the street on a windy day, and perhaps, tumbling head first into a puddle just as he picks it up, in the midst of the unsympathetic guffaws of the onlookers. He is no longer a hero when he becomes ridiculous, when he is reduced to the level of poor common mortality.

This is a point of view especially taken by the lovers of melodrama. They believe in the propriety of things. They like the place of hero and villain perfectly understood. No whitewashed villain, or vacillating hero for them. They hate sin, and they love virtue with intensity.

So Dickens, the inheritor of the people, romantic with the romanticism of the people, whitened his hero and blackened his villain with zealous brush.

I ran across a passage in "Little Dorrit", put in the mouth of a French landlady, which might be taken to mean that Dickens really believed in the inherent and complete badness of some people. If so, this would explain a large element in the psychology of the melodramatic villain, so called. The hostess is speaking of the sinister Rigaud: "I tell you, my friend, that there are people (men and women both, unfortunately) who have no good in them - none. That there are people who must be dealt with as enemies of the human race; That there are people who have no human heart, and who must be crushed like savage beasts and cleared out of the way." Here is the villain, "without one redeeming point", with a vengeance.

Monks, of Oliver Twist is the melodramatic villain of that book. There is enough rant and brimstone about Monks to identify him with the stock villain who slinks on the scene at midnight garbed in funereal black closely followed by a skinny little man with a fiddle, on whom he at times vents his wrath in the absence of the noble hero. This person has the

power of omnipresence; he hears whispers a mile off and he mutters endlessly through clenched teeth, the words "foiled" and "curses". Dickens is a boy when he imagines such a character and he portrays him from the boy's standpoint.

Of course the value of such a figure cannot be considered at all in comparison with such really magnificent creations as Fagin and Sykes. These embody the melodramatic, individualized and recreated with the art of a Shakespeare who turns old barren plays into monuments of genius.

In Nicholas Nickleby we find (the children shiver) the Wicked Nobleman. He has his familiars; two beings with alliterative names, Pyke and Pluck. These are his bond slaves; incarnate demon voices and nothing more.

Sir Mulberry Hawk was drawn from Dickens' imagination, aided by his melodramatic propensity. He is not a real aristocratic gentleman, who is a great deal more really despicable because more subtle and consequently more dangerous. Sir Mulberry sneers at Nicholas as "boy", swears and snorts vengeance in quite the approved style and comes to a fitting retribution at the hands of the hero. The celebrated phrase, "unhand me villain", is even there; for that is what Kate Nickleby says when the Mephistophelian gentleman tries to detain her against her will.

I would not include Jonas Chuzzlewit among the melodramatic villains any more than Fagin or Sikes. They have the melodramatic elements but they are transformed by the genius of the author into creations distinctive and superb. He per-

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formed the same individualization by means of his humor. Pecksniff personifies the hypocrite. He never did portray a stock hypocrite.

But Dickens does not make over all his heroes and villains into individual conceptions. There are some which are common to all popular literature and it is to these alone I refer as distinctively melodramatic. They are not examples of high art, but Dickens like any other writer could not always be at the height of his genius, keeping his old tendencies and habits of temperament, he must perforce descend at times to the very elements from which he drew his inspiration.

The murderer Rudge of Barnaby Rudge, with his wicked face and stealthy reappearances is melodramatic. Compeyson of Great Expectations, personifies the "gentlemanly villain."

Blondin, the international villain of Little Dorrit is decidedly melodramatic. Take his appearance - hook nose, black moustache. When his moustache goes up in a smile, his nose comes down. His language - "deaths and curses"; his assumption of the gentleman - the unreasoning hatred which he inspires in animals - the theatrical way he gets mixed up in a plot which in no way concerns him - all this is melodramatic, powerful to be sure and fascinating. He comes and goes with the devilish ease of the stock villain. His end is appropriately awful - crushed in the ruins of the house he has tried to destroy. He never impresses us with his reality as Jonas Chuzzlewit, Carker and the others do, although they are every bit as bad and as "unredeemable."

So much for the melodramatic villain, now for the melodramatic hero.

B. Dickens' heroes are more or less figure heads. It is in the characters that other writers would have left subordinate that he excels. They overmastered him. Perhaps he felt too that he could take liberties with them; whereas the rule of propriety bade him keep his hands off his hero.

The melodramatic hero loves to make fine speeches, very much involved and loaded with rhetoric. He is invariably on the side of virtue. His appearance is eminently pleasing, handsome, modest and graceful. If there is an air of mystery about him all the better. To this race belong in varying measure, Edward Chester, Harry Waylie, Walter Gay, John Rokesmith, Allan Woodcourt, Martin Chuzzlewit and above all Nicholas Nickleby. They are there to fill a vacant place in the plot and the author reserves his invention and descriptive powers for other and more deserving characters.

Nicholas Nickleby is the hero of the romance of incident. I believe it was Chesterton who compared him to the young knight, setting out on the quest of life and like all such young knights of romance, eminently successful. He meets many strange figures on the way; has many strange adventures; conquers many strange foes and in the end, he comes triumphant to his lady and lives happy ever after. All this without the least development of character or the least departure from the established model.

Nicholas defies his uncle in the proper manner. To show how chivalrous he was, he horsewhips Squeers in a most

impressive style and departs from the cursed house like a flash of lightning. He displays the proper noble renunciation of self when he refuses to declare his love for Madeline Bray because she has just inherited a fortune, and of course his virtue is rewarded, by the free bestowal of her hand on him.

To do the author justice, though, the horsewhipping of Squeers is a magnificent scene in spite of melodramatic Nicholas. The reader, in his own mind, performs the drubbing, and the very simplicity of the hero enables him to assume the part with the greater relish.

The forcible entrance of Nicholas into the house where the Gride marriage is to be celebrated, at the very moment of Bray's death, his confronting of the balked conspirators, his violent harangue, and his dashing forth with the insensible Madeline in his arms as if a fire or a massacre were in progress is enough to set the gallery cheering.

As he grew older, Dickens tamed down his heroes and made them less strenuous. Martin goes through his adventures with exemplary calm. John Rokesmith unites with the mystery and virtue of the melodramatic hero, something that is really human and real. Edward Chester and Harry Maylie are both "butts" for fate to do its "durndest" on and set right side up at last.

Dickens had no special liking for these conventional heroes. John Rokesmith is not to be compared to Eugene Wrayburn, a secondary character. Chesterton admires this character very much; he says that here ⁽¹⁾ Dickens "turned the

(1) Charles Dickens, G. K. Chesterton, p. 176

accusation 'that he could not describe a gentleman' with a vengeance. In Eugene's purposeless pursuit of Lizzie Hexam, in his yet more purposeless torturing of Bradley Headstone, the author has marvellously realized that singular, empty obstinacy that drives the whims and pleasures of a leisured class."

Charles Darnay, the secondary hero of "A Tale of Two Cities", is characterless and displays the requisite passivity for getting himself and others into trouble and so causing the plot to move. He belongs to the class "about twenty-five years of age, with a bright dark eye and a sunburned cheek." Again and again we see this type in Dickens' work.

Two heroes who really do stand out on a level with the best of his other personages Dickens did create. One is romantic, the other realistic. Sydney Carton is one of the most touching figures of romance. Pip is a genuine psychological study. These two occupy the acknowledged place given to heroes and they are worthy of all the immortals who circulate about them in the course of their respective stories.

Speaking of psychology, Bradley Headstone is a genuine psychological villain. He gains more pity than loathing.

When I speak of "hero" and "villain", I do not wish to be misunderstood. I speak of them literally and technically as occupying certain integral places in the plot. The "heroes" and "villains" of Dickens, properly so called, are a large proportion of them merely minor characters if we compare their artistic merit with his other creations. They are there

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because they are necessary. They are not there to be analysed. That is why the romantic hero and villain occur frequently in his work. It is not at all derogatory to his genius to dismiss them with the adjective "melodramatic". He did not take the pains to make them otherwise and every one will agree that ample excuse is to be found for the author who gave us Micawber, Gamp, Sam Weller and many, many others in their place.

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Dickens and Three Kinds of Romance.

A. The Historical Romance.

(1) Dickens wrote two historical novels, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Barnaby Rudge*. Perhaps the example of his friends, Bulwer-Lytton and Ainsworth turned his thoughts toward this genre. It is certain, however, that the particular field of historic romance which Scott, first, and Ainsworth afterwards exploited was distasteful to him and a butt for his satire. In *Martin Chuzzlewit* he speaks scornfully of "the enormous amount of bravery, wisdom, eloquence, virtue, gentle birth, and true nobility that appears to have come into England with the Norman Conquest." In the preface to *Oliver Twist* he ridicules highway romance. "Here are no canterings upon moonlit heaths, no merry makings in the snugest of all possible caverns, none of the attractions of dress, no embroidery, no lace, no jack-boots, no crimson coats and ruffles, none of the dash and freedom with which 'the road' has been time out of mind invested." The past had no glamour for Dickens. Distance could not obliterate evils and abuses and leave only a soft picturesque illusion. So he repudiated both Scott and Ainsworth and aimed to paint the past just as it was.

Some critics have tried to make a parallel between Scott and Dickens, but I believe no two writers could be more at variance. Dickens, writing of the past was always the reformer, as he was writing of the present. Scott, however, loved the past for its pageantry and romantic splendor and

cared not at all what hideous things lurked beneath that gay exterior.

Similarly, Dickens finds nothing noble or picturesque in evil. The highwayman should be clapped in jail, not feted and admired in a royal progress of inns.

He actually wrote a history, "A Child's History of England", in which he commented satirically and irreverently upon all the lordly thieves and royal plunderers of history, exactly in the manner in which he would discuss misappropriations in the House of Commons.

He was, from a boy, much interested in the life and literature of the eighteenth century. It is not surprising that his two great historical works should be placed in that time. It is not surprising either that they are both political novels and both concerned with rebellions. In spite of projecting himself into a past age, in spite of reproducing perfectly the diction of the time, he is always Dickens of the nineteenth century with something of the splendid unreason of Mark Twain at the court of King Arthur.

Concerning the Tale of Two Cities he wrote:⁽¹⁾ "I set myself the little task of making a picturesque story, rising in every chapter, with characters true to nature, but whom the story should express more than they should express themselves by dialogue. I mean in other words, I fancied a story of incident might be written (in place of the odious stuff that is written under that pretence) pounding the characters in

(1) Forster's Life, Vol. II, p. 315.

its own mortar and beating the interest out of them."

He gathered the material for this "story of incident" almost exclusively from Carlyle. The tale itself, has been criticized as portraying the Revolution from the wrong angle altogether. Certainly Dickens does disregard the purely intellectual forces, as exemplified in such men as Voltaire, Diderot and Rousseau, the "architects" of the Revolution. He pictures forth a great indignant mob, persecuted beyond endurance, burning with hate for the oppressors, liberating themselves in a delirium of blood, conflagration and terror. He declares it the logical result of the tyranny which had gone before. The people are the instruments of this great retribution. Naturally so; as it was theirs to suffer, it is theirs to avenge.

So he chooses the people's activities, for it is they who are most concerned. The revolution in their hands appeals to his love of the picturesque, the dramatic and the democratic. It has the great dramatic motive of poetic justice. Besides, his story moves much faster in the hovels and by-ways of Paris where the terror is brewing, than it would in the cynicism and cultured brilliance of the deistic salons of the time. Out in the mud and slime of the streets are the people to whom have seeped out the words of the gentlemanly sceptics, and who are ready, with terrible enthusiasm, to carry out the disintegration of the social system.

Taken then in this sense, as a portrayal of the hearts and motives of the common people, I cannot see that Dickens'

story places the Revolution in a mistaken and unreal light. He displays a phase, perhaps, but I think he has comprehended mob psychology in this phase in a most wonderfully faithful manner. Common, ordinary people appealed to Dickens where he rejected high born politicians and wielders of state power with scorn. He writes thus to Mr. Charles Fechter who is desirous of producing an English historical play on the subject of Perkin Warbeck: (1) "What you want is something with an interest of a more domestic and general nature - an interest as romantic as you please, but having a more general and wider response than a disputed succession to the throne can have for Englishmen at this time of day. Such interest culminated in the last Stuart and has worn itself out. It would be uphill work to evoke an interest in Perkin Warbeck. I do not doubt the play's being well received, but my fear is that these people would be looked upon as mere abstractions and would have but a cold welcome in consequence and would not lay hold of your audience Perkin Warbeck is too far removed from analogy with the sympathies and lives of the people for a beginning."

The Tale is a wonderfully clean cut dramatic work; and the power and fancy which show the great Revolution casting its fearful shadow over the work from beginning to end, bind it all into a perfect unity. It is a monstrous fate which there is no evading.

The role of Sydney Carton is one which actors love to

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 216.

delineate. He is a purely romantic figure, drawn with that tenderness, pathos and nobility of conception, which render him so dear to all hero worshippers.

Barnaby Rudge is the work of a very young man. It was written in 1841, when Dickens was only twenty nine years of age. It is the history of a riotous mob led by a madman and gathering in its toils an idiot, a vagrant and a hangman. Chesterton⁽¹⁾ remarks on the "picturesqueness" of this story. It moves swiftly and with gusto - a great, shifting panorama of disorderly scenes, farcial interludes and tragic events. Even here the reforming spirit does not desert him, for he denounces with great vigor the inhuman use of capital punishment. The whole story is dream-like in its vividness and intensity. Its mob scenes have never been surpassed. It is "a vision of coarse faces with here and there a blot of flaring smoky light; a dream of demon heads and savage eyes, and sticks and iron bars uplifted in the air and whirled about; a bewildering horror, in which so much was seen and yet so little, which seemed so long, and yet so short, in which there were so many phantoms, not to be forgotten all through life, and yet so many things that could not be observed in that distracting glimpse."

The local color of Barnaby Rudge lies in the events themselves, not in the characters, which might have been embodied in any other of Dickens' works and no one would have noticed any incongruity. Dickens' humanity is the same in

(1) Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, p. 68.

all ages and it is a relief to the reader to feel that old John Willet is just as stupid and pompous in the eighteenth as in the nineteenth centuries, and that Dolly Varden is just as coquetish, light-hearted and natural as Bella Wilfer or Rosa Bud.

So many historical writers, straining after so called realism to the truth of the times, disembody their characters and one feels as if, having lived they must necessarily be removed from all the thoughts and feelings of today. We regard them as schoolboys look on the Romans, warriors always on expedition; statesmen perpetually making speeches; never by any chance to be confounded with the careless happy humanity of our own day. But if the schoolboys happen to go on with their Latin they realize their mistake. They read the epigrams of Martial, the family letters of Cicero and the comic laments of Horace and they see that those old Romans were not inanimate trumpet voices but real human beings.

So Dickens' historical characters are modern. So they will always be modern. He does not dignify and ether-ealize them for the purposes of history and enshrouding them in a false glamor of "haths" and "sirrahs", destroy their semblance to flesh and blood.

(2) His short stories and sketches are thrown farther back into the past than his novels.

The first tale of the series designed to be related by Gog and Magog is set in the time of Queen Elizabeth. It is a story of a gay cavalier, a citizen-lover, and a wronged girl.

There is little humor in it and it is too short to give him much scope.

Embodied in Master Humphrey's Clock is "A Confession found in a Prison in the time of Charles II." It is quite in Dickens' vein. A wicked uncle murders his little nephew for his money, buries him in the garden, and is brought to justice by the agency of two great bloodhounds. It is a study of a repulsive and perverted criminal mind, in all its horror quite worthy of Chuzzlewit and Sykes. It reminds one, too, of the murderous Jasper, especially as Jasper was designed to review his life in prison after his crime had been discovered, and to lay bare all his motives.

Mr. Pickwick's Tale, also in Master Humphrey's Clock, takes place in the time of James II. It is a story of witchcraft in which the violently comic and the violently tragic are set side by side in the old Dickens' manner. John Podgers is a near relation of John Willet.

The "Five Sisters of York" inserted in Nicholas Nickleby, is a sad romantic tale, illustrating the stained glass window, with the sisters' names on the pavement below, in York Cathedral.

B. The Mystery (or Detective, or Criminal)

Romance.

The delineation of crime had a great fascination for Dickens. It appears in all his books. But it is only in one or two that it is dealt with principally and to the exclu-

sion of other themes. In "Bleak House", we find the first definite figure of this type of romance, - that is Bucket, the genuine detective. Later still we find in "Our Mutual Friend" the nearest approach to a mystery so far. The climax comes in "Edwin Drood" which is a mystery above all else, and where crime is dealt with above all else.

One would believe Dickens, with his love for great, loose rambling plots, incapable of succeeding in a type which demands such exceedingly great care in construction, such attention to detail, and such subordination of character. But he had taken lessons from his friend Wilkie Collins, and with his superb imagination, exuberant fancy and creative power, all condensed in the demonstration of a plot impossible to unravel and marvellously put together, he may be said to have out-rivalled him in his own field.

But it takes a good romancer to be a good detective. It takes imagination to see into the heart of things and to fathom motives. Poe, in the mystery of Marie Rouget, made a very good guess at the manner of a real crime. Stevenson, who wrote Treasure Island, also composed Markheim, a study in criminal psychology.

"The Mystery of Edwin Drood" is a most tantalizing affair. W. Walter Cummings offers a most ingenious solution in his book, Phases of Dickens. Mr. Cummings is a detective critic, as Chesterton is a poetic critic and Gissing a realistically limited critic. Many critics believe that Dickens had not definitely killed Edwin. Certainly he was not in the

habit of killing off his heroes, but it looks to me as if he had made the immolation this time. The plan of the story so far as Forster knew it, seems to indicate the death of Edwin. (1)"The story, I learnt immediately afterwards was to be that of the murder of a nephew by his uncle, the originality of which was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he, the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted. The last chapters were to be written in the condemned cell, to which his wickedness, all elaborately elicited from him, as if told of another had brought him. Discovery by the murderer of the utter needlessness of the murder for its object, was to follow hard upon commission of the deed, but all the discovery of the murderer was to be baffled till towards the close, when by means of a gold ring which had resisted the corrosive effects of the lime into which he had thrown the body, not only the person murdered was to be identified, but the locality of the crime and the man who committed it. So much was told to me before any of the book was written; and it will be recollected that the ring taken by Drood to be given to his betrothed was brought away with him from their last interview."

This book is interesting as showing what a gap was bridged over between Pickwick and Edwin. The old inn's, coachmen, top hats are fled to another world. Edwin Drood with its railways, telegraphs, and manners, seems of the twentieth

(1) Forster's Life of Dickens, Vol. II, p. 407.

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century. Rosa Bud at boarding school indulges in a midnight feast, olives, hat pin forks, and all just like any other modern girl, and admits a great liking for "Turkish Delight". Fortunately, however, his characters did not really change; only their surroundings did.

The careful elaboration of the plot required a great subduing of the characters. They are all well drawn; but there is not one that really stands out like Pecksniff, Micawber or Gamp. And the reader misses it. With the exception of Mr. Honeythunder, Dickens is not pugnaciously at war with society; he preaches no moral crusade. It is a private drama he depicts. His other books partook of the nature of sublimated pamphlets.

Jasper, probably the main study of the book, recalls Bradley Headstone and Jonas Chuzzlewit.

"Hunted Down" is a short story based on the Wainewright murders. In it, as some critics aver, is found the germ of Jonas Chuzzlewit.

Three little stories, scarcely more than sketches, are put into the mouth of a police official. They are (1) The Pair of Gloves; (2) The artful Touch; (3) The Sofa.

We see by this, the wonderful versatility of Dickens. Those critics who sneered that he could never invent a real plot, received their contradiction in Edwin Drood.

Nevertheless in spite of the artistic power of Edwin Drood, I think his best loved books are the old, disorderly, exasperatingly plotted ones, where characters reign supreme,

and fierce bursts of satire, loud roars of laughter, and tender championship of the oppressed, ring the changes upon all the human emotions. I do not like the idea that Dickens should be tamed down and pruned to a nice propriety. He is a forest, not a flower bed.

C. The Romance of Adventure.

Among these we may class sea stories. "The Wreck of the Golden Mary" was composed jointly with Collins. The style is unindividualized so as to weld the portions told by each author into one artistic whole. There is one characteristic Dickensian touch in it, however; the old wicked man who trusts to the pretty innocent child as a talisman to protect the lives of those exposed in the open boat and who, when she dies, gives up all as lost. There is a certain implicit suggestion of unspeakable crime and evil conscience back of this old man which is quite fearful.

"Perils of Certain English Prisoners", is also written in partnership with Collins. It is a tale of pirates, black men, and a handful of English, set in a tropical background.

Dickens from his own confession, had a great predilection for tales of the sea. He could tell off details of actual shipwrecks and castings away by the score. In his home at Tavistock House he produced two sea dramas; the Lighthouse and the Frozen Deep, of which Clarkson Stanfield painted the scenery and at which all the literary notables of London formed the audience. Perhaps if he had lived longer, he

would have given us a great novel on such a theme.

"Holiday Romance" is a collection of stories supposed to be written by children. One is quite a charming little fairy tale; another is a pirate story. They sound like remote ancestors of the "Young Visitors", and rather strangely one of the child composers is called Nettie Ashford. The pirate story has for hero a certain young gentleman who quarrels with his family, sails round the world, conquers cannibals and wreaks diabolical revenge upon his Latin master; all this told in a grandiose, melodramatic style manifestly imitated from the books of travel the young man has been perusing.

These three different branches of romance, are sufficient to show the variety of his work. He tried every branch of literature; poetry, drama, biography, criticism and every kind of novel. He left his distinctive mark upon them all. But what was pre-eminently his own field, which he definitely appropriated for all time, was that of the humanitarian novel.

CHAPTER X

1.

A. The Question of Caricature.

Is a caricaturist a realist? And is Dickens a caricaturist? These are much disputed questions. Symonds in his Introduction to English Literature relates how a friend of his saw in London "Bob Sawyer advancing toward him arm in arm with Mr. Wilkins Micawber". Many people declare that they have found Dickens' grotesques in real life. Certainly they do express certain individualities very clearly. Say of a man, "he's a Pecksniff or a Micawber," and he is labelled for life. Pecksniff and Micawber, however, stand each for one outstanding quality. Pecksniff is hypocrisy, Micawber unreasoning optimism.

Such characters display no psychological change. They are fixed for all time. Like the clown who revived sufficiently to turn a "flip-flop" just before he died they are dominated for ever by some ruling passion. To select such peculiarities and to dwell upon them to the exclusion of all else is Dickens' method.

One may object that this also is the very method of caricature which picks out the most prominent characteristics and enlarging them beyond all reason yet succeeds in producing a grotesquely accurate likeness.

Dickens' characters talk in the terms of their occupations. Mr. Toodle expresses life as a series of allegorical junctions and switches. Mr. Weller Senior likens Mrs. Weller's sickness and death to a coach going down hill, "Notwithstanding that the drag was put on directly by the medikel man, it wornt

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of no use at all for she paid the last pike at twenty minutes afore six o'clock yesterday evenin'". Captain Cuttle reduces everything to the metaphor of those who go down to the sea in ships. Mr. Lillyvick finds it impossible to forget the fact that he is a water rate collector and discourses learnedly of mains and cut-offs. Mr. Dennis can think of nothing except in relation to its capacity for being "worked off", in the exercise of his profession. And so it goes on. Many critics relegate all this to the realm of farce where exaggeration is carried to the last limit and the tricks of expression ^{are} merely mechanical.

There are those who go to the other extreme and staunchly believe in his exact fidelity to truth. And in their support one has only to appeal to the memory of any average person. Everyone surely can look back through the years and recall real living beings of character so peculiar and so strongly marked, that if embodied whole in one of Dickens' books would be scouted as mere caricatures.

So the viewpoint which insists on the exact reality of his characters is by no means unreasonable. Most of them, were, as a matter of fact, founded on living models. Miss Moucher, Mr. Boythorn, Mr. Skimpole, because their originals were well known in society, drew down considerable censure upon the author. Even in his childhood he wrote character sketches of these about him, founded on reality, not on mere imagination as one might expect in a youthful writer. Mr. Pickwick's outer appearance at least is described from life. Mr. Pod-

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Forster's right arm swing is taken from his very dear friend Forster, although needless to say, all resemblance ceased there. Dickens was quite in the habit of transferring traits from a dozen people and combining them into one creation.

He was extremely quick to see the abnormal and extraordinary. His imagination led him perhaps to exaggerate these peculiarities. Chesterton, however, says: (1) "Exaggeration is the definition of art. That Dickens and the moderns understood. Art is in its inmost nature fantastic." He justifies it. Bulwer Lytton in an unpublished note reproduced in Forster's Life, justifies also such such exaggeration." (2) The greatest masters of the novel of modern manners have generally availed themselves of humor for the illustrations of manners, and have with a deep and true, but perhaps unconscious knowledge of art, pushed the humor almost to the verge of caricature. For as the serious ideal requires a certain exaggeration in the proportions of the natural, so also does the ludicrous." He cites Aristophanes and Cervantes in favor of his contention. "It follows therefore that art and correctness are far from identical and that the one is sometimes proved by the disclaim of the other. For the ideal whether humorous or serious does not consist in the imitation, but the exaltation of nature. And we must accordingly enquire of art, not how far it resembles what we have seen, so much as how far it embodies what we can imagine."

(1) Charles Dickens, p. 21

(2) Vol. II, p. 311

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There is no doubt that Dickens' caricatures embody "what we can imagine". The illustration of his work is, to all imaginative artists, a perfect joy.

Dickens characters are exaggerated for the purposes of his art, but they are actually founded on reality. But so wonderful is the world, and such are the diversities of character, that it is really a debatable question whether such beings have not existed esaggeration and all. Certainly those readers who prefer to take them as actual photographs, do not deserve to be dismissed with mere contempt. Certain it is, to every reader, literal or partial believers, as the case may be, all his freat humorous characters feel real in their own strange way.

(1) George Bernard Shaw writes: "It is not too much to say that Dickens could not only draw a character more accurately than any of the novelists of the nineteenth century but could do it without ceasing for a single sentence to be not merely impossible but outrageous in his unrestrained fantasy and fertility of imagination. No combination of photography and cinematography could reproduce Micawber, Mrs. Sparsit and Silas Wegg from contemporary reality as vividly as Dickens, yet their monstrous and side-splitting verbal antics never for a moment come within a mile of any possible human utterance. That is what I call mastery; knowing exactly how to be unerringly true and serious while entertaining your reader with every trick, freak and sally that imagination and humor can conceive &

(1) Dickensian number of Bookman, 1914.

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at their freest and wildest."

In Shaw's opinion, Dickens succeeded in producing a true likeness by artistic exaggeration.

Gissing scouts the idea of caricature altogether.

Dickens' art is something finer than mere caricature. (1) "Caricature proceeds by a broad and simple method. It is no more the name for Dickens' full fervor of creation than for Shakespeare's in his prose comedy. Each is a supreme idealist."

"The Mrs. Gamp of our novel is a piece of the most delicate idealism." (2)

It seems to me that Gissing here has approached the truth. Caricature is far too coarse a term to apply to Dickens' great character studies. The correct phrase is humorous idealism.

B. Humor and Satire.

To appreciate Dickens one must possess above all the rudiments of a sense of humor. One must abandon oneself freely to the rules of his own queer world; without this humor and this abandonment his work becomes the most bewildering madness ever penned. M. Taine, persisting with painstaking obstinacy in criticizing English literature from the standpoint of French, sometimes rather ludicrously exemplifies his limitations.

Dickens' real psychology is unexplicable to him. He belongs to another world, which excellent as it is, is as far apart as the famous 'East and West'. I do not mean to say that the French people are wholly incapable of understanding or appreciating

(1) Charles Dickens, Victorian Era Series, p. 131.

(2) Ibid, p. 90.

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Dickens for he is deservedly popular with them; I only mean that their literary critics, in endeavouring to interpret him, judge him not as an Englishman but as a Frenchman. They cannot be satisfied with mere enjoyment, limited as it may be, by lack of complete comprehension, they must try to explain him. And their efforts are as amusing as ours probably are when we attempt to analyse Voltaire. The temperaments of the two nations are too diametrically opposed. They may respect and like each other, but they can never fully understand each other.

The French are witty but they are not humorous. That is the reason romanticism was a dreadful failure with them. French romanticism degenerated into mere hysteria and morbidity. Humor is the natural balancing power of romanticism. We see what happened to the English Gothic romance when humor was excluded. The English genius is naturally romantic and in its healthiest manifestation it is always endowed with humor. The French is most happily classic. Victor Hugo, the great French romantic, although in the mistaken enthusiasm of the time ranked next to Shakespeare, possesses little humor and so is incapable of a true interpretation of life. In the French re-action against romanticism, brought about by its extravagance and excesses, he has dwindled like a pin pricked bladder although strangely enough, owing perhaps to his flattering adoption of their principles, the delusion of his greatness is still rampant in English speaking countries. Romanticism in France was regarded as a kind of intoxication, execrated and loathed as soon as its glamour had departed.

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As long as each nation remains true to its natural bent just so long will its literature remain a sane and true expression of its mentality.

But I must quote poor M. Taine's struggle with the intricacies of English humor: "Dickens has drawn three or four portraits of madmen very funny at first sight, but so true that they are in reality horrible. It needed an imagination like his, irregular, excessive, capable of fixed ideas to exhibit the derangements of reason. Two especially there are which make us laugh and which make us shudder. Augustus, a gloomy maniac, who is on the point of marrying Miss Pecksniff; and poor Mr. Dick, partly an idiot, partly a monomaniac who lives with Miss Trotwood. To understand these sudden exaltations, these unforeseen gloominesses, these incredible summersaults of perverted sensitiveness; to reproduce these hiatuses of thought, these interruptions of reasoning, this recurrence of a word, always the same, which breaks in upon a phrase attempted and overturns nascent reason; to see the stupid smile, the vacant look, the foolish and uneasy physiognomy of these haggard old children who painfully grope about from one idea to another, and stumble at every step on the threshold of the truth which they cannot attain, is a faculty which Hoffman alone has possessed in an equal degree with Dickens. The play of these shattered reasons is like the creaking of a door on its rusty hinges; it makes one sick to bear it."

M. Taine also speaks pityingly of the lack of "happiness" in the English temperament. The truth is that he cannot

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understand a state of happiness which extends even to the madmen. Dickens is not gloomy when he depicts Mr. Dick. There was nothing to make one gloomy in Mr. Dick. He was happy as a child and lovable as a child. Barnaby Rudge, another "madman" would have been infinitely more pitiable if he had been sane. He is not tragic himself save inasmuch as he is the result of a tragedy. His beautiful innocence and simplicity were the redeeming fruit of a fearful crime. And was Dickens dissolved in tears over the awful affliction of insanity when he described Mrs. Nickleby's maniac lover kicking and bellowing in the chimney? How could anyone in his senses talk of the undercurrent of melancholy underlying that cucumber throwing old philanderer. He was certainly a subject for melancholy reflections before he became insane. Afterwards he was merry and made others merry.

To be sure Chuffey, Smike and Doctor Manette are depressing and sad; yet the depression and sadness do not arise from insanity itself but from the cruel attendant circumstances which induced it.

As for Augustus Moddle, he is not a "gloomy maniac" at all. He is merely a sentimentalist, a parody of Rousseau. Of course if we take it this way, that none but a maniac would marry Miss Pecksniff, M. Taine may have accidentally hit the nail on the head.

Poor M. Taine, to believe that Moddle and Mr. Dick can be seriously analysed. Although M. Taine's criticism might make the uninitiated believe so, Dickens never attempted a

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scientific analysis of insanity. Mr. Taine has missed half of Dickens' greatness - but what could one expect when, in accordance with French taste he considers "Hard Times", his greatest novel. (1) "A most delightful manifestation of the idealism of Dickens in his humor." "We may notice," says Gissing, (2) "how Dickens makes use of farcial extravagance to soften the bitterness of truth." He cites the relations of Sally Brass and the Marchioness, of Judy Smallweed and Charley, as examples of painful tragedy presented under the guise of comedy. "Omit the jest and the story becomes too unpleasant to remember." Mrs. Gamp provides another instance of humorous idealism. Gissing declares that if she had been presented without humor, the author would not only have disgusted people but failed to destroy her.

Dickens makes his humor and satire weapons to destroy that which he hates. He realizes the annihilating strength of ridicule. But he is not a cynic. A cynic's satire is a lazy kind of wit. Dickens' fierce bursts of denunciation, his virulent satire and irrepressible scorn display all the exaggeration of a fervent nature determined to sweep away evil. He exalts the virtues of one class while emphasizing the vices of another. The downtrodden he pictures as worthy of respect and veneration. So when he satirizes the Barnacles, the Chancery officials, the Bumbles he does it all the more violently because his ideals are so high and his championship of the poor so disinterested and true. His optimism never deserts him.

(1) Development of English Novel, Cross, p. 189.

(2) Charles Dickens, Gissing, p. 169

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The people are worth fighting for and will in the end reach a worthy goal.

In the characters he loved, such as Micawber, Weller and Pickwick, the humorous exaggeration in which he indulges tends to their exaltation in the mind of the reader. The funnier they are the more lovable they become. Dickens loved his fools. In a letter of advice to a young author he warned against "condescension" to one's characters; against that superior raillery which young writers are apt to indulge in. His humor, in the service of simplicity, is kindly and tender. He only pours out his scorn on the base and impudent.

It is interesting to compare the treatment accorded to two similar characters by two such dissimilar writers as Jane Austen and Dickens. Mrs. Bennet and Mrs. Nickleby have often been compared, but Jane Austen while realizing the comedy of the former, plainly shows her scorn and dislike. Dickens is all the while sympathizing with Mrs. Nickleby even when he makes her most ludicrous. He is fascinated by her and he is so grateful to her for being so funny, that he regards her as a benefactor, not as a nuisance.

On the whole in her delineation of character Jane Austen is more impersonal than Dickens. (1) "Humor was his only medium of approaching emotion." The personal element of warm love or violent hate which entered into Dickens' humor made it an emotion. He sympathized keenly with all his characters. Many of his most pathetic effects are paradoxically due

(1) Charles Dickens, Chesterton, p. 185.

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to humorous presentation. Through comedy, he revealed nobility steadfastness of soul and unassuming virtue. With his satire he levelled the hypocrites and tricksters. With his kindly humor he glorified the humble and the obscure.

The uncommon vividness of his imagination often laid him open to the charge of exaggeration. (1) "I think it is my infirmity to fancy or perceive relations in things which are not apparent generally. Also, I have such an inexpressible perception of what I see in a droll light, that I dare say I pet it as if it were a spoilt child." It was his desire to restrain this tendency as much as possible. Yet the very necessity for restraint proves the greatness of his gift.

(1) Forster's Life, Vol. II, p. 306.

CHAPTER XI.

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His Imagination Manifested by

A. - Idealism.

Dickens above all was an idealist. There are two reasons for this. First of all, he is temperamentally idealistic. Secondly he is idealistic because the code of his art demanded it. English art and Victorian art in particular, demands a discreet veiling and softening of the unpleasant facts of life. This does not proceed from hypocrisy, but from innate dignity and reserve. It is involuntary homage to virtue.

An idealist by temperament - Dickens believed implicitly in the real nobility of soul, the fancy and spirituality of the people, hid though it might be beneath an unpromising exterior. He turns with tiger-like ferocity upon the supercilious aristocrat who in the words of Steerforth expresses his thought thus: "Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us. They are not expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt very easily. They are wonderfully virtuous I daresay - some people contend for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them - but they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that like their coarse, rough skins they are not easily wounded."

And then Dickens sets off against this cruel speech the noble Daniel Peggotty and his nephew Ham. Ham expresses his love for Em'ly. "She warn't no higher than you was Mas'r Davy - when you first come - when I thought what she'd grow up

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to be. I see her grow up - gent'lmen - like a flower. I'd lay down my life for her - Mas'r Davy - oh! most content and cheerful! She's more to me - gent'lmen - than - she's all to me that ecer I can want, and more than ever I - than ever I could say. I - I love her true. There aint a gent'lman in all the land - nor yet sailing upon all the sea - that can love his lady more than I love her, though there's many a common man - would say better - what he meant."

That is Dickens' idea of the delicacy of the common people. And is it untrue? Steerforth shocked Davy by his delicate verdict, "That's rather a chuckle-headed fellow for the girl", and firm in his belief that nothing could hurt such coarse-grained creatures destroyed all their happiness in one treacherous blow.

This view of the poor is not taken from Dickens' imagination alone. He knew and loved them as no man ever did. He wished to believe in the common people and they justified his belief. But it needed a poetic tenderness to interpret the real beautiful soul of the toiling masses. His idealism did not transform black into white, or white into black. It reached out and expressed an idealism which, inherent in the meanest and humblest, had never been conceived of before.

Ham and Daniel Peggotty are exactly right. In his delineation of Stephen Blackpool he oversteps the bounds of legitimate idealism. Stephen personifies too patently the perfect workman. ^{But} ~~And~~ that there is a real pathos about Stephen no one will deny.

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Dickens called to his aid imagination in his portrayal of life. The naturalistic or scientific writer cries: "Is this the truth which he gives us? Is it life? Photograph, don't paint." But what photograph could render the haunting visage of a Mona Lisa? What photograph^{or} could place his models in the tableau of the Last Supper, snap his machine, and declare he had produced a more realistic, a truer portrait than the great painter himself? The painter sees more than the machine. He sees the soul beneath. So the mechanical writers who shriek, "observe, tabulate, copy", render by their method only the half of life, the soulless body. In the really great writer as in life itself, imagination and actuality, realism and romance are inextricably blended. (1) "Neither mode (real and ideal) can exist at all properly without the other. No matter how sensitive the mind to external impressions or how keen the observation, to whatever can be seen, without the rarer seeing of imagination nothing will be arrived at that is real in any genuine artist sense."

The actual material which Dickens exploited was sordid and unattractive, but it was enobled by the optimism and idealism of his own attitude to life. And by his method he rendered a truer, a more convincing picture of those humble ones who have endured so much insult, non-comprehension and blasphemous analysis at the hands of aristocratic vandals. His method was but a higher kind of reality.

(1) Forster's Life, Vol. II.

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"Nothing is as good as it is thought" said Lord Melbourne. "Nor as bad", rejoined Dickens. He loved and trusted in the innate goodness of the common people and believed that at any great crisis, where the destinies of the nation hung in the balance it would be their truth and honor which would turn the scales to victory. He declared he had "no faith in the people who governed but illimitable faith in the People who were governed."

We come now to his artistic idealism. This, strictly speaking is more artificial. Dickens knows he is not giving the exact truth, a little poetized, with a loving tenderness, as in the delineation of the Peggotties, of Joe Gargery and countless others. He wishes to describe the underworld. Good taste forbids the rendering of it "in toto". It must be adapted to the demands of art - the attractive, the humorous elements must be left in - the gross veiled or only vaguely indicated. (1) "To select, to adapt, to idealize" - he treads warily on such ground. As Gissing points out, such figures as Nancy are idealized. The Peggotties are revealed fully without fear. Fagin's den of thieves is true to life, with limitations.

(2) "Hogarth has copied in the strict sense of the word. He has given us life and we cannot bear it." Dickens idealization of the underworld was necessary so as to get his facts before the public. He has given us only the comedy of the Art-

(1) Poetry of Chaucer, Root, p. 116

(2) Charles Dickens, Victorian Era Series, p. 90.

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ful Dodger and in this way he has rendered him lovable, although the reader's eyes are not closed to the moral obliquity involved. But if he had depicted some of his more unpleasant qualities he would have rendered him intolerable; have defeated his own purposes which were to incite people to sweep even such amusing blackguards out of society.

Which type of writer after all works the more enduring reforms? I think there is no comparison in the results wrought by Dickens' method and those accomplished through the "realism" of the hopeless and "despairing photographers of life."

The domain of science I am glad to say was a closed world to Dickens. He had no idea of "determinism", of evolution with its soul destroying doctrine of the "survival of the fittest", of the laws of heredity and environment. Writers who follow such creeds take the heart all out of a man and leave him saying, "What's the use?" Dickens was a strong exponent of the doctrine of free will - his whole life was a demonstration of it. He had no patience with chicken hearted gentlemen who sorrowfully declare themselves "doomed by fate," and set them down and weep. Man is master of his fate. Life is a good thing and the world in spite of temporary setbacks ever tending upwards.

Dickens in the largest sense was a true painter of life. Ruskin that sober minded critic bears testimony.)1) "Allowing for his manner of telling them, the things he tells us

(1) Unto This Last, Essay on Roots of Honor.

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are always true." He is entirely right in drift and purpose in every book he has written."

By the way, Dickens poetizing of the commonplaces of life seems to have given much offence to M. Taine who has daringly written a history of English literature. Every Dickensian will recollect that charming picture of little Ruth Pinch making a beefsteak pudding. M. Taine cannot bear to see such good poetry wasted on a kitchen. In his droll French way he writes, (1) "And how delighted is Dickens during these innocent occupations? He utters little exclamations of joyous fun. He spostrophizes a ring, he sports round Ruth, he is so delighted that he claps his hands."

He compares the (2) "kitchen refinements and waggery of imagination", expended on dear little Ruth very unfavorably with George Sand's description of Genevieve, the flower girl, fashioning a delicate paper rose in her slender fingers and languishing at the stars of evening which remind her of her lover. Flowers and youth and beauty. How appropriate - even paper ones. But puddings and youth and beauty - such a conjunction, even with adoring brothers who first realize their dreams of home come true looking admiringly on, is absolutely outside the domain of good taste. It seems to me this criticism fully represents the difference between English and French, between romantic and classic taste. An Englishman can be a poet in the

(1) History of English Literature, Vol. IV, p. 130

(2) Ibid, p. 130

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kitchen as well as in the parlor. He loves above all his home, every bit of it. He can write a sonnet to the teakettle, and not consider it incongruous. Dickens did it in "The Cricket on the Hearth". The classic taste demands a stage set with neatness, propriety and careful removal of the prosaic. Nature must be pruned, presented in a dress suit with hair newly cut. To Dickens, as to any great romantic, the commonest things, the commonest emotions of life are worthy of the grandest poetry.

M. Taine cannot understand the "Yoho" lyric which ushers Tom Pinch into London⁽¹⁾. "All this to tell us that Tom Pinch has come to London. This fit of lyric poetry in which the most poetic extravagances spring from the most vulgar commonplaces, like sickly flowers growing in a broken old flower pot displays in its natural and quaint contrasts all the sides of Dickens' imagination. We shall have his portrait if we picture to ourselves a man, who with a stewpan in one hand and a postillion's whip in the other took to making prophecies." And why not make prophecies? It is only the charlatans who garb themselves in cloaks of mystic ceremonial to declare their oracles to the populace. The real prophet is not abstruse. He interprets his message free to all men through the commonest, most universal terms of life. It is these which are the most genuinely susceptible of the high, the noble and the poetic.

To speak in all reverence, Our Saviour did not disdain such homely similes as the leaven of bread set by some poor woman, or the lost coin, which being found is likened to a lost

(1) History of English Literature, Vol. IV, p. 133

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soul come back into the fold.

So Dickens, in lavishing all the wealth of a poetic imagination, a feeling heart, and an understanding mind upon "kitchen waggery", and stooping simple minded Tom Pinches did not waste his great gifts, but intensified and immortalized them to the glory and inspiration of the race.

(1)"The more we see of life and its brevity, and the world and its varieties, the more we know that no exercise of our abilities in any art, but the addressing of it to the great ocean of humanity in which we are drops and not to by-ponds (very stagnant) here and there, ever can or ever will lay the foundations of an endurable retrospect."

(2)"When I saw those places (in Venice) how I thought that to leave one's hand upon the time, lastingly upon the time, with one tender touch for the mass of toiling people that nothing could obliterate, would be to lift oneself above the dust of all the Doges in their graves and stand upon a Giant's Staircase that Sampson couldn't overthrow."

B. Picturesqueness of Descriptions.

It is a hackneyism to say that Dickens is an artist in the employment of words. In his use of simile and metaphor he is equal to Shakespeare. Shakespeare wrote "And jocund day stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops;" Dickens personified nature many times in as beautiful a metaphor. He personified not only nature but inanimate objects. The whole universe is

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. II, p. 351.

(2) Morster's Life, Vol. I

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endowed with a spirit beautiful, freakish and grotesque as the author's fancy dictates. Pip awakens on the morning he commits the awful crime of stealing from his sister's pantry to find the window wet with mist, "as if some goblin had been crying there all night and was using it for a pocket handkerchief."

See how he describes the coming of a chill autumn evening. "The sun went down beneath the long, dark lines of hill and cloud which piled up in the west an airy city, wall heaped on wall, and battlement on battlement; the light was all withdrawn; the shining church turned cold and dark, the stream forgot to smile, the birds were silent, and the gloom of winter dwelt on everything.

"An evening wind uprose too, and the lighter branches cracked and rattled as they moved, in skeleton dances, to its moaning music."

Uriah Heep, which the more one thinks of it the funnier it seems and the more suitable, has the door closed on him by the disgusted David, "like a great walnut put there to be cracked". It so expresses the faculty of great writhing Uriah for getting in everybody's way and waiting snakily for anyone with the temerity to kick him or squash him.

His letters from Italy fairly run riot with exquisite nature description. It shows the versatility of his genius that he was as much at home with the beauties of nature as with the grotesque and that his facile pen could turn from one to the other with the most astonishing ease and rapidity.

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But where his picturesqueness is most evident is in his portrayal of London. His descriptions are so vivid that one can taste the fog, smell the dust and see the miles of grimy streets, gleaming with a strange, fearful, entrancing splendor. He has made them a fairyland, yet a fairyland which anyone who looks for it may find in his own life. That curious union of the fanciful with the commonplace is everywhere evident. By his marvellous imagination he endows gas lamps, street doors and passing faces with a picturesqueness no one had ever been able to see before. There is no such thing to Dickens as a dull man or woman. The whole world to him is dramatic and interesting.

C. Variety of Conceptions in matter of
Character.

Dickens excels as an inventor of character. Of course this was due to a large extent to his extraordinary powers of observation. But what use observation without the power to assimilate it? We have many observers who make a practise, when passing a shop window, say, to enumerate all the articles they see in one passing glance, until they arrive at such perfection that there is scarcely one missed. But these people never really turn their observation to account. It is a mere mathematical gift; it does not make them painters or writers. Dickens possessed this same gift of memory and observation. But he united with it the inventiveness and constructive power of a genius.

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It is astounding to consider the number of characters he has created, who are yet totally distinct from one another. They all bear the mark of the Dickens workshop. It could not be otherwise with an author whose style and temperament are so markedly original. Thackeray's characters can many of them be divided into groups.

1. The Rawdon Crawley type of hero.
2. The terrible old lady who will never admit age.
3. The brilliant adventuress such as Becky Sharp.

And then the innumerable minor characters such as pompous old merchants, tuft hunting mammas, and sporting noblemen whom we meet over and over again and by which, according to Thackeray, all society is represented.

The characters of Dickens show an endless variety. We have such powerfully drawn hypocrites as Pecksniff, Heep, Chadband and Stiggins. They may all be classed under the one term, hypocrite, but think how they are individualized. There are such monuments of cheerfulness as Micawber, Weller and Mark Tapley and such fixtures of villainy as Carker, Jasper, Bradley and Jonas.

The minor characters display the same quality. No writer has invented such a gallery and they seem to have come to him so effortlessly and naturally. But no matter how wild and ecstatic he became in their delineation, there is a strange sense of life and reality which is never absent.

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D. Love of Color.

"Dickens owned that he had the primeval savage's love for bright positive colors." He often expressed regret that fashion decreed a comparatively sober style of dress. He would have liked to rustle forth attired in the silks and satins of Elizabeth's day with a gleaming sword clanging about his ankles. Even as it was he did pretty well. Here is a contemporary's picture of him. "On one occasion we were walking down Wellington Street and just passing the office of Household Words, when a hansom cab stopped and out stepped a gairly dressed gentleman; his bright green waistcoat and vivid scarlet tie any one would have noticed, but the size of the nosegay in his buttonhole riveted my attention!"

Since that time the bright hued waistcoat has been cruelly filched from the wardrobe of the well dressed gentleman and only the tie remains on which to expend his lyric taste in finery.

Dickens' waistcoat was evidently a matter of importance to him. Not even the waistcoats of his friends were safe in his hands. (1)"You (Macready) once - only once - gave the world assurance of a waistcoat. You wore it sir, I think in 'Money'. It was a remarkable and precious waistcoat wherein certain broad stripes of blue or purple disported themselves as by a combination of extraordinary circumstances, too happy to occur again. I have seen it on your manly chest in private life. I saw it, sir, I think, the other day in the cold

(1) Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. I, p. 169.

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light of morning - with feelings easier to be imagined than described. Mr. Macready, sir, are you a father? If so, lend me that waistcoat for five minutes. I am bidden to a wedding (where fathers are made) and my artist cannot, I find, (how should he?) imagine such a waistcoat. Let me show it to him as a sample of my tastes and wishes and, ha, ha, ha! - eclipse the bridegroom.

"I will send a trusty messenger at half past nine precisely in the morning. He is sworn to secrecy. He durst not for his life betray us, or Swells in ambush would have the waistcoat at the cost of his heart's blood.

Thine,

The Unwaistcoated One."

He loved the bright, prismatic light reflected from many mirrors in a room and his favorite flower was the red geranium. His daughter Kate once said to him "I believe, Papa, that when you become an angel, your wings will be made of looking glasses and your crown of scarlet geraniums."

His writings are as colorful as his dress and surroundings. He did not like dull, neutral tints in his opinions or in his loves or hates. His favorite motto was "What is worth doing at all, is worth doing well." So he threw himself heart and soul into whatever he was doing, to the exclusion of all else. So his villains are monsters of wickedness, while his fools are monuments of absurdity. When he is indignant, he is in the last extremities of indignation and when he espouses the cause of the forsaken he does so with a wealth of tenderness

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and pathos just as strong in raising up as his wrath in casting down. He is a man of many moods each of which in turn dominates with concentrated force. That is what makes his work so virile and alive. Life is very intense to him. He sees everything in a strong glare - with the spotlight on. He sees the minutest details and he reproduces them in the most glowing hues.

Not that his work was coarse, for strength is not coarseness; not that he was incapable of delicate or subdued portrayal, for anyone who has studied his works, knows that he has produced some of the finest, most delicate of etchings. But he sees the world as something very near to him; he is so riotously alive and so in sympathy with all life, the chords of his being vibrate so readily to the slightest touch, that it is no wonder that all things appear to him in the extremes of clearness of form and warmth of coloring.

CHAPTER XII

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His Romanticism as compared to that of
Scott, Stevenson and Conrad.

A healthy humanitarian movement which had commenced with Goldsmith and Rousseau and was further developed by Godwin, Mary Walstoncraft, and Thomas Day, in the general reaction which followed the fearful excesses of the French Revolution became submerged. And at the psychological moment, when readers were longing for the world of pure fancy rather than that of stern fact, the genius of Scott awoke. His romanticism consists in a conscious return to the Middle Ages for inspiration. His novels with their stirring revival of the picturesque past, their feudalism and exclusion of social problems at once caught the fancy of a public desiring passionately distraction, stimulation and a sense of an indestructible social system. But what people did not realize then was the reactionary tendency of his work. That became evident to a later generation. George Borrow blames Scott rightly for his influence on the Oxford movement and the activities of those who sought to bring back Catholicism to England.

The romanticism of Dickens is above all practical. He is in line with the romantic poets, those who opened the nineteenth century, Shelley, Wordsworth, Burns. He is a propagandist, obsessed by the nightmare of injustice, false laws and a false social code. He belongs to the romantic rebels, not the romantic entertainers. In the novel he is in line with

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the school of theory. Yet, he is not like so many of its disciples, unbalanced and hysterical. He never advocates the abolition of church and government. He realizes that there must be forms; that there must be laws. But he demands substance back of these forms and laws. He demands that substance expressed by the best forms and the best laws, as Carlyle would say. Every man has an inalienable right to "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness". Under a properly organized society he will get it.

Where Scott saw only the beauty of the past, Dickens realizes the beauty of the present struggling through a mask of shams and injustices. He differs from Scott in being a novelist with a purpose.

Stevenson is a follower of Scott. But he is tinged with the humanitarian influence. He is, too, a psychologist. He deals with the romance of spiritual adventure as well as physical. In this way he is more nearly allied to Dickens. Stevenson loved pirate stories; Dickens' pirates were the barnacles of society and he entered with as much gusto in the depiction of them as Stevenson in the portrayal of his most ferocious sea robber.

Conrad goes a step further than Stevenson in his bias toward the psychological. He displays the mental reaction of his heroes to the stimulus of thrilling adventures. He deals almost wholly with the sea; but its storms and surges are re-echoed in the hearts of his heroes. He has no social pur-

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pose in his writings - only external nature and the world of the soul.

Dickens' purpose was "to dwell on the romantic side of familiar things." Like the young romantic poets who embodied in their work vexing social problems and preached their sermons in beautiful and moving verse, Dickens took an ugly world with ugly people and ugly surroundings and revealed an unknown beauty, tenderness and magic. Social affairs seem unworthy such a bright, glowing gift of imagination (affairs of pamphlets and reports) but by his genius, he rendered them not only interesting but food for fancy as well as intellect.

Like most of the splendid race of agitators he has been dubbed visionary and unbalanced. It was the fate of a prophet. But in spite of the fact that he is romantic, with all the dangers of excess and hysteria to which romanticists are especially susceptible, his splendid humor and common sense kept him sane. Although impatient in his demands, they were not unreasonable or incapable of realization. Practical he is above all. He was there to get results and he got them. By the diversity of his gifts he could appeal to all classes. Those who did not like one element could find another which absolutely expressed their feelings. Some enjoyed his humor more than his satire; others loved his championship of children. All were overpowered by the sheer dramatic splendor of his work. It was more fascinating than Don Quixote or the Arabian Nights.

So like a sugar coated pill, Dickens' propaganda slipped down the throats of his readers enveloped in one of the most enthralling and entertaining forms imaginable.

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All this that I have written - to what conclusion does it point? Have I tried to prove Dickens exclusively a romanticist? Have I declared him a realist? Most certainly not.

As I have said over and over again in the last analysis there is neither one nor the other. The greater the author the more he will combine what is commonly understood by both. Taken together they express life as a whole. They are as closely bound as spirit and body. One is poetry, the other prose.

At the risk of monotony I repeat again, the fundamental basis of his work rests on reality; his treatment is romantic.

Within the last few years there are indications of a great return to these depreciated and neglected Victorian giants. After all, in spite of what we call their narrowness, ignorance and insularity, they are wonderfully sane. But then sanity does not spring from self-satisfaction and lack of inspiration. They were red hot radicals; - they considered themselves quite desperate fellows, *but* they were sane because the nightmare of science had not yet quite choked the life out of them. They brought the energy of hope to the gigantic task of turning the antiquated social system of the dark ages to the modern system which purports, at least, that men are equal and are entitled to equal chances in life. *We reap the results of* their efforts. But there is a vigor and a freshness in their work which is wanting in our tired age. Their impetus makes us still reformers, from habit. Perhaps the great war will

supply to the twentieth century the place of the Revolution to the nineteenth. Strangely enough, after a great murderous upheaval, the world seems to value life and individuality the more

What made the Victorian writers such powerful agents for reform was the fact that they did not disassociate literature from the practical ends of life - and life they saw intuitively and unelaborately. They lived gladly in the midst of it - they did not get upon an eminence and look down. Their genius was enlisted single-heartedly in what they considered the cause of right. And the honesty and sincerity of these men and women who felt that life was worth living and humanity worth saving, must still be potent. As soon as people stop worrying their heads about science and machinery, so soon will the message and inspiration of that by-gone age, united with all the knowledge gained by the passage of time lead literature to a new and undreamed of goal in the unselfish service of humanity

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