Painting by L. Raven Hill. SYDNEY CARTON ON THE SCAFFOLD.

"They said of him, about the City that night, that it was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic." (*A Tale of Two Cities.*)

A DAY WITH CHARLES DICKENS

by

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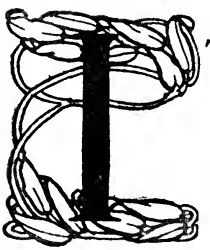

T was a glorious June morning in the year 1857. The scarlet geraniums, dear for their brilliance and colour to their master's heart, were in full flamboyance of flower; the syringas were sending wafts of sweetness through the garden: lovely shadows lay beneath the two great cedar trees,—when a smallish, active, brown-bearded man, strongly resembling a sea-captain ashore, came out to survey his little domain, in all its pomp of midsummer, while yet the dew was on it: for there was to him, as he had said, "something incomparably solemn in the still solitude of the morning."

It is seldom that the man in his maturity may fulfil the half-impossible aspirations of boyhood: but Charles Dickens had done this to the very letter. As a child he had desired this quaint old Georgian house of Gadshill on the Dover Road, with its magnificent views of Cobham Woods, the distant

Thames, the nearer Medway, the stately contours of Rochester Castle and Cathedral. And now, at forty-five years of age, behold him ensconced as the owner thereof. "A grave red brick house," he had written of it, "which I have added to, and stuck bits upon, in all manner of ways, so that it is as pleasantly irregular, and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas as the most hopeful man could possibly desire."

The bronzed, hardy-looking man, with a "face like steel," as Mrs. Carlyle had termed it, looked eagerly to and fro, casting his eyes of extraordinary brilliancy over the glorious panorama of the landscape and the sunlit splendours of the flowers: then, with the quick light step of a practised pedestrian, he crossed the road in front of the house, by an underground passage, to a shrubbery on the opposite side. Here was the Swiss châlet which Fechter had sent him from Paris, and which Dickens had turned into a study. "I have put five mirrors," he told a friend, "in the châlet where I write, and they reflect and refract, in all kinds of ways, the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river. My room is up

among the branches of the trees ; and the birds and butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the clouds seem to come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of the flowers, and indeed of everything that is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious."

The great author ran upstairs and busied himself, with alert movements and dexterous touches, in setting his papers in order for the day's work : for he was the most methodical of men. No writer, it has been said, ever lived, of greater industry and more systematic method. In short, as his daughter Mamie wrote of him, "he was tidy in every way—in his mind, in his handsome and graceful person, in his work, in keeping his writing-table drawers, in his large correspondence, in fact in his whole life." Sometimes, indeed, this propensity to tidiness developed into a fidgetty fussiness of detail,—so that he would entirely re-arrange the whole furniture of some hotel bedroom where he was only staying for the night.

He could not write unless everything was placed exactly ready to his hand in apple-pie order, and unless he had, ranged around and

before him, that singular variety of objects upon which he wished his eye to rest in any momentary respite from actual work. A little cup full of fresh flowers was invariably one of those objects,—a bronze group of toads duelling—a gilt leaf with a seated rabbit—a huge paper knife—a French statuette of a dog-fancier carrying a multiplicity of little dogs. And, amongst these heterogeneous odds and ends, the most popular and the most widely-read man of his time—perhaps of any time—evolved his intricate plots, and created that unrivalled portrait-gallery, which was and is unique in the annals of literature. Four months after he began to write, he was famous: his career had known no checks, no blights, no returned MSS., no sicknesses of hope deferred. "His literary life was a triumphal procession," and his characters were already household words. It is hardly possible to understand in this present day, when novels are multiplied into a weariness of the flesh, the feverish excitement and anticipation, the immense furore, which anticipated and hailed the issue of the monthly parts of "Pickwick" and its successors: when Oxford undergraduates raced each other for the mail coach to secure the first copies, and men told each other seriously

in the City that "Quilp is dead!" But at the time of which we write, some sixty years ago, men had hardly got over their wonder at the cheery optimism of the famous author or ceased chuckling over Mr. Winkle's skating exploits, and the anxieties of Sam Weller over his carefully-concocted "Walentine."

"A what!" exclaimed Mr. Weller, apparently horror-stricken by the word.

"A walentine," replied Sam.

"Samivel, Samivel," said Mr. Weller in reproachful accents, "I did'nt think you'd ha' done it . . . . after actiwally seein' and bein' in the company of your own mother-in-law, vich I should ha' thought was a moral lesson as no man could never ha' forgotten to his dyin' day! . . . . Begin again, Sammy."

Sam read as follows: "Lovely creetur I feel myself ashamed and completely circumscribed in a dressin' of yer, for you are a nice girl and nothing but it!"

"That's a werry pretty sentiment," said the elder Mr. Weller, removing his pipe to make way for the remark. "Yes, I think it is raythe good," observed Sam, highly flattered.

"Wot I like in that 'ere style of writin'," said the elder Mr. Weller, "is, that there 'aint no callin' names in it—no Wenuses nor nothin' o' that kind. Wot's the good of callin' a young 'ooman a Wenus or an angel, Sammy? You might just as well call her a griffin, or a unicorn, or a King's arms at once."' (*The Pickwick Papers.*)

Dickens, having completed his preparations to the smallest detail, returned to the house,—that methodical, comfortable house,—"the sweetest and cleanliest I have ever been in," as Marcus Stone said. In all the minutiæ of household management he took a personal and masterful interest: every detail was ordered by his own tastes. It was an ideal home in many respects: and especially arranged with a view to the comfort of those countless visitors whom Charles Dickens loved to entertain. In the hall, which was hung with Hogarth prints, was a large letterbox with the postal hours conspicuously printed on it. In every bedroom was the most somniferous of beds, the most luxurious of sofas, the easiest of chairs: not to mention a writing-table supplied with every kind of paper and envelopes and continuous provision of new quill pens. A small library of books, a lighted

Painting by L. Raven Hill. THE TWO WELLERS.

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fire in winter, a shining copper kettle and a tray with every appurtenance for tea, completed the plenishing of the room: and as a consequence of this thorough-going preparation for every possible need, no servants were ever visible in the house, except at meal-times: this, perhaps, was the chief characteristic of Gadshill. The household appeared to be conducted by invisible agencies, much like the enchanted palace in *Beauty and the Beast*.

Breakfast was at nine: besides the novelist himself, and his wife,—a plump, handsome, amiable, typical Early-Victorian woman,—were several members of his large family, the ten sons and daughters who were growing up around him. Two or three guests were usually present: men of note and name, happy to dwell awhile in that vivacious company, and in that pre-eminently hospitable home. It was a merry breakfast table; for Dickens, who could tell a story well himself, was also a capital listener. He was now, as Hans Andersen had observed, in his best years,—"so youthful, lively, eloquent, and rich in humour, through which the warmest cordiality ever shone. . . . . Select the best of Charles Dickens' works, form from this the image of a man, and you have Dickens."

Breakfast over, the visitors dispersed to amuse themselves,—and that was easy enough, in a charming atmosphere of summer warmth and *dolce far niente*. They smoked, read the papers, and pottered about the garden in sweet content until midday: some, indeed, went walks or drives, but it was much less trouble to potter.

The strenuous host, however, was already hard at work. He had begun, with his usual orderliness, by scanning every corner of his kingdom: "seeing that all was in its place in the several rooms, visiting also the dogs, stables, and kitchen garden, and closing, unless the weather was very bad indeed, with a turn or two round the meadow before settling to his desk." (Forster). He was usually accompanied on this progress by his magnificent St. Bernard, Linda: but this was only one of many canine favourites.

Dickens' love for dogs is not manifested in his novels to the extent that one might expect. With the exception of Bill Sikes' dog, Bull's-eye, in *Oliver Twist,* which plays so prominent a part through the tragedy of the escaped murderer, there are to be found but few instances of a dog figuring notably, as it does in many of Scott's tales.

He took a keen delight in the birds, especially the nightingales, around Gadshill; but that he knew one species from another is quite problematical. Grip, the Raven in *Barnaby Rudge,* is treated more as one of the *dramatis personæ* than as a typical bird. And, indeed, it is the peculiarity of Dickens, that with all his indubitable delight in out-door pursuits, he still regarded nature mainly as a *mise-en-scène.* Scenery was to him the back-ground, or the drop-curtain,—animal and bird-life were but the chorus,—the sunshine, or the moonbeams, were simply extra limelight effects upon the stage of his inexhaustible dramatic imagination. Take, for example, the opening chapter of *The Chimes,* which demonstrates his method of visualising the wind.

"The night wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes: and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors: and seeking out some crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in: as one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be, it wails and howls to issue forth again; and, not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and, tempting the great organ, soars up to the roof, and strives

to rend the rafters ; then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls, seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions Sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter : and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting . . Ugh ! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire ! It has an awful voice, that wind at midnight, singing in a church ! "

In every book that proceeded from the pen of Dickens, the same minuteness of observation and description was used for the same effects. The result, although it left the reader a very long way from the original simplicities of nature, was undeniably fine ; the limelighting was done by a master-hand.

His daily inspection of the little estate performed, the novelist ascended to his sanctum in the châlet, and there wrote for a good three hours—sedulously, carefully,—thorough in all that he undertook, plodding on with neither haste nor faltering, deliberately covering sheet after sheet in his small neat handwriting. For he took himself very seriously as regards his profession: and considered system, in this as

in all other matters, to be the very foundation of it.

"I never could have done what I have done," he said, "without the habits of punctuality, order and diligence; without the determination to concentrate myself upon one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels . . . Whatever I have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well . . . In great aims and small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest."

"In the matter of concentrated toil and clear purpose and unconquerable worldly courage, he was like a straight sword." And although the Dickens villains never eventually usurp, like Scott's, the place and interest due to the hero,—although he painted good and bad in the most uncompromising colours,—this admiration of the set, strong purpose is very noticeable, even in the characters of the vilest. One has only to recall Carker, in *Dombey and Son,*— Jasper, in *Edwin Drood,*— Jonas, in *Martin Chuzzlewit,*— as examples of this unswerving course towards some goal which becomes, humanly speaking, through very force of that purpose, inevitable. By virtue also of this set

unflinching aim, the weak acquire strange strength; and to Dickens, whose main end, consciously or unconsciously, was to reveal the "soul of goodness in things evil," the portrayal of this gradual recovery of lost chances, this slow retrieval of errant steps, must have been a labour of love. Its most signal exponent, maybe, is Sydney Carton in the *Tale of Two Cities,* the reckless and devil-may-care Carton, purified by passionate emotion, climbing on the ladder of a hopelessly-unrequited love to a height of self-sacrifice where few can follow him —the height of the guillotine platform where he stands in another man's name. In the *Tale of Two Cities,* Dickens reached a summit, and maintained a solemn nobility of attitude, which he only touched in this one historical novel of his. Humour is here for the most part a minor quantity; but in the man who becomes, at the crucial moment, the central figure of the piece, there is an austere joyfulness of altruism, which can bring tears to the eyes of the most *blasé* novel-reader.

"They said of him, about the city that night, that it was the peacefullest man's face ever beheld there. Many added that he looked sublime and prophetic.

"One of the most remarkable sufferers by the same axe—a woman—had asked at the foot of the same scaffold, not long before, to be allowed to write down the thoughts that were inspiring her. If he had given any utterance to his, they would have been these."

"'I see the lives for which I lay down my life, peaceful, useful, prosperous and happy, in that England which I shall see no more. I see Her with a child upon her bosom, who bears my name.'"

"'I see that child who lay upon her bosom and who bore my name, a man winning his way up in that path of life which once was mine. I see him winning it so well, that my name is made illustrious there by the light of his. I see the blots I threw upon it, faded away. I see him . . bringing a boy of my name with a forehead that I know and golden hair, to this place . . and I hear him tell the child my story, with a tender and a faltering voice.'"

"'It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known.'"

(*A Tale of Two Cities.*)

Charles Dickens was not, to outward semblance, what is usually termed a religious

man; yet his morning and evening prayers were part of his unvarying routine, and he adhered to them with a child's punctuality. Strongly Church of England, yet averse from forcing his opinions on others, he was a passionate hater of cant and rant, rather than a passionate lover of any special form of devotion. His Christianity, one might infer, was more of the head than of the heart; but it was an inflexible and deeply-rooted conviction none the less.

"Try to do to others," he wrote, when his youngest son was leaving for Australia, "as you would have them do to you, and do not be discouraged if they fail sometimes. It is much better for you that they should fail in obeying the greatest rule laid down by Our Saviour, than that you should. I put a New Testament among your books for the very same reasons, and the very same hopes, that made me write an easy account of it for you when you were a little child. Because it is the best book that ever was, or ever will be, known in the world: and because it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature, who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty, can possibly be guided. As your brothers have gone away one

by one, I have written to each such words as I am now writing to you, and have entreated them all to guide themselves by the Book, putting aside the interpretations and inventions of man.

"You will remember that you have never at home been worried about religious observances or mere formalities. You will therefore understand the better what I now solemnly impress upon you, the truth and beauty of the Christian religion as it came from Christ Himself. . . . Never abandon the wholesome practice of saying your own private prayers, night and morning. I have never abandoned it myself, and I know the comfort of it."

And undoubtedly, Charles Dickens, "who alone of modern writers did really destroy some of the wrongs he hated, and bring about some of the reforms he desired," was as powerful an exponent of practical Christianity as ever led an apparently forlorn hope in the eternal crusade against evil. "He was a good man," it has been written of him, "as men go in this bewildering world of ours: brave, transparent, tender-hearted, scrupulously independent and honourable." And Carlyle, not born to flatter, called him "the good, the gentle, high-gifted, ever-friendly, noble Dickens—every inch of

him an honest man;" a philanthropist, as Jowett said, "in the true sense."

The midsummer morning passed all too soon, and the novelist at last threw down his pen with a sigh of relief. The last page of *Little Dorrit* was completed: in a few days the tale, which had been issued in monthly numbers, would be published as a whole; and a certain sense of strain was now exchanged for a corresponding relaxing of mental effort.

"When I sit down to my book," he wrote, "some beneficent power shows it all to me, and tempts me to be interested, and I don't invent it—really do not—*but see it*, and write it down. . . . It is only when it all fades away and is gone, that I begin to suspect that its momentary relief has cost me something."

"He is said to have declared . . . that every word uttered by his characters was distinctly heard by him before it was written down." Yet on the other hand he averred, "I work slowly and with great care, and never give way to my invention recklessly, but constantly restrain it." It is possible that so fertile, so spendthrift an invention needed the bit rather than the spur. To take the briefest glance at the immense range, scope and variety of Charles

Dickens' creations, is absolutely dazzling and bewildering. One may accuse him of staginess, of exaggeration, of "pushing the hilarity to the point of incredible character-drawing," debasing sentiment into sentimentalism, and turning comedy into farce. The fact remains that there are "chords in the human mind," as Mr. Guppy remarked in *Bleak House,* which he touched as no novelist of wider scholarship and loftier style has done: that "in everybody there is a certain thing that loves babies, that fears death, that likes sunlight: that thing enjoys Dickens." And possibly, as a specimen of robust humour drawn with the most incisively delicate touches, there is no portrait to surpass that of Dick Swiveller. Dickens took an infinity of pains and trouble in the composing of *The Old Curiosity Shop:* the impending fate of Little Nell weighed upon his mind, till even his customary good sleep forsook him. But he worked up conscientiously for "a great effect at last with the Marchioness," and got it—in those inimitable chapters where Dick Swiveller introduces her to cribbage.

"Now," said Mr. Swiveller, putting two sixpences into a saucer, and turning the wretched candle, when the cards had been cut and dealt, "those are the stakes. If you win, you get 'em all.

If I win, I get 'em. To make it seem more real and pleasant, I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?" The small servant nodded. "Then, Marchioness," said Mr. Swiveller, "fire away!" The Marchioness, holding the cards very tight in both hands, considered which to play: and Mr. Swiveller, assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required, took another pull at the tankard, and waited for the lead. . . "The Baron Sampsono Brasso and his fair sister are (you tell me) at the play?" said Mr. Swiveller, leaning his left arm heavily upon the table, and raising his voice, and his right leg, after the manner of a theatrical bandit. The Marchioness nodded. "Ha!" said Mr. Swiveller, with a portentous frown, "'Tis well. Marchioness! but no matter. Some wine there. Ho!" He illustrated these melodramatic morsels by handing the tankard to himself with great humility, receiving it haughtily, drinking from it fiercely, and smacking his lips fiercely." (*The Old Curiosity Shop.*)

Luncheon-time having now arrived, Dickens put his writing-table in order, fastened his papers together, and returned to the house. He glanced with fond admiration, as he passed by, at the increasing splendour of his flower-beds. Colour

Painting by L. Raven Hill. DICK SWIVELLER AND THE MARCHIONESS.

"The Marchioness, holding the cards very tight in both hands, considered which to play; and Mr. Swiveller, assuming the gay and fashionable air which such society required, . . . waited for the lead." (*The Old Curiosity Shop.*)

was with him a passion—manifested, it must be confessed, in a somewhat crude and barbarous form. For the tender *nuances* and mezzotints beloved of the painter, the exquisite gradations of beauty, "silent silver lights and darks undreamed of," he cared little. He revelled in profusions and in sudden shocks of strong colour: not only to look upon, but to wear. He was capable of combining a bright green waistcoat with a vivid scarlet tie and a huge bouquet in his buttonhole; or of a sky-blue coat with red cuffs, with a huge gold chain and tie-pin. But these trifling eccentricities endeared him the more, perhaps, to his friends, who appreciated the true lovable worth of the man. Some of these friends were already awaiting him now. Albert Smith, the novelist and entertainer, with the high treble voice. Frank Stone, the tall good-looking painter; Wilkie Collins, with his small form and huge spectacles. They sat down, full of mirth and gaiety, at the comfortable table, which was bright with flowers, and at which—a daring innovation—the dishes were handed round to each guest, instead of being planked down simultaneously according to the custom of the period. Luncheon at Gadshill was a substantial meal: although the host himself

rarely ate more than a little bread and cheese and ale. No "shop" talk jarred upon the easy flow of conversation, as far as he himself was concerned: for "there never was so remarkable an author as Dickens," to quote John Forster, "who carried so little of authorship into ordinary social intercourse. . . . Traces or triumphs of literary labour were no part of the influence he exerted over friends. To them he was only the pleasantest of companions, with whom they forgot that he had ever written anything." He had sound but not recondite tastes in literature; of Tennyson's poems, for instance, he was a profound admirer: but anything which was "caviare to the general" was out of his focus altogether. He had but a middle-class appreciation of painting: in music he had little interest, and it is rarely alluded to in his writings. The ordinary songs of the day, whether jovial or sentimental, and the incidental music to melodramas, sufficed his simple needs.

Yet a livelier, a more amusing and charming companion could hardly exist, than Dickens when surrounded by his family and friends. He not only gave, as R. H. Horne said, "the general impression of a first-rate practical in-

tellect, with no nonsense about him," but he was singularly genial in conversation. Avoiding argument, and evincing the broadest sympathies, he never talked for effect, but was full of "light easy talk, and touch-and-go fun." Although his expression, in the words of Frith, had settled into "that of one who has reached the topmost rung of a very high ladder, and is perfectly aware of his position," he was perfectly unaffected and unassuming, as breezy and bracing in personality as the sea-captain home for a holiday, which his appearance so frequently suggested.

Luncheon over, Dickens' astounding vitality, which never allowed him to lounge, now evinced itself in proposing a game of bowls upon the lawn. Not all his guests had sufficient energy to join him: some preferring the coolness of the billiard room, and others finding, in the library with its rows of sham book-titles, that *Hansard's Guide to Refreshing Sleep* was by no means a misnomer. The novelist, after half an hour's energetic bowling, returned to his châlet workroom. In addition to actual creative work, he had a vast amount of editorial business in connection with *Household Words*, and an enormous correspondence to cope with. The successful author of those days had neither amanuensis,

stenographer, or typist, and the quantity of sheer manual labour entailed was consequently very great; though, to a man of Dickens' remarkable personal activity, this was all part of the day's work and could never be regarded as a hardship.

He was shut up in the châlet till six o'clock, the dinner-hour: and then at last he might lay by his literary labours, and find fresh outlets for his mental and bodily unrest.

Fresh visitors had arrived during the afternoon: James White, the kindly jovial Scotsman, one of Dickens' dearest friends,—the small, thin, dull-looking Procter ("Barry Cornwall") and his daughter Adelaide, a charming but singularly plain woman: and the Carlyles, husband and wife: the one, tall, lean, rugged, with "the head of a thinker, the eye of a lover, and the mouth of a peasant," and the other slim, bright, upright, with her great lustrous eyes of gypsy black: the most brilliant conversationalist, perhaps, that ever entered that house.

But Dickens was not a man, *per se,* who attracted women: especially clever ones. He was intimate with but "few women of any great strength of character, or power of will." He was too domineering for them, too fond of his own way. And although they must some-

Painted by L. Raven Hill. MR. MICAWBER IN HIS ELEMENT.

"I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself . . as Mr. Micawber that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred, and mixed, and tasted." (*David Copperfield.*)

times have yielded—even the most intellectual—to the charm of that rich, deep, full voice, "capable of imparting without effort every tone and half-tone of emotion . . . that any spoken words may demand" (Justin McCarthy), it is certain that the prevalent type of Dickens heroine was not cast in a very mighty mould. To be charming, virtuous, gay and lively,—pretty, as a matter of course,—to be, potentially, the most loving and domesticated of wives for the not-particularly-deserving hero—that was the recognised formula for the characteristic Dickens' *ingénue*. And even if few of his women sink to the childishness of Dora, the great heroines of English fiction are not to be found among them. Dolly Varden is an excellent specimen of her attractive sisterhood.

"The very pink and pattern of good looks, in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle, with a hood of the same drawn over her head, and upon the top of that hood, a little straw hat trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, and worn the merest trifle on one side—just enough, in short, to make it the wickedst and most provoking head-dress that ever malicious milliner devised. And not to speak of the manner

in which these cherry-coloured decorations brightened her eyes, or vied with her lips, or shed a new bloom on her face, she wore such a cruel little muff, and such a heartrending pair of shoes, and was surrounded and hemmed in, as it were, by aggravations of all kinds." (*Barnaby Rudge.*)

Dinner was the same genial and delightful meal that lunch had been, enlivened by the most entertaining conversation, full of wit and free from the least spice of ill-nature: in all points a comfortable repast. Comfort, indeed, "is, like charity, a very English instinct," and Dickens, the most inherently, almost insularly English of all our great writers, positively worshipped this ideal of comfort: whether in the abstract or in the concrete. It is quite obvious that he relished nothing better than describing the preparations for a meal made as comfortable as circumstances would allow. In cases where the fare was of the plainest, the company of the humblest, you can almost see him rubbing his hands over the prospect of these folk about to enjoy themselves. There is a gusto, a flavour of absurd satisfaction, even in Mr. Pecksniff's introductory repast for the benefit of young Martin Chuzzlewit.

"Festive preparations on rather extensive scale were already completed, and the two Miss Pecksniffs were awaiting their return with hospitable looks. There were two bottles of currant wine, white and red; a dish of sandwiches (very long and very slim); another of apples; another of captains' biscuits (which are always a moist and jovial sort of viand); a plate of oranges cut up small and gritty; with powdered sugar, and a highly geological home-made cake. The magnitude of these preparations quite took away Tom Pinch's breath: for though the new pupils were usually let down softly, as one may say, particularly in the wine department, which had so many stages of declension that sometimes a young gentleman was a whole fortnight in getting to the pump; still, this was a banquet; a sort of Lord Mayor's feast in private life; a something to think of and hold on by, afterwards.

To this entertainment, which apart from its own intrinsic merits had the additional choice quality, that it was in strict keeping with the night, being both light and cool, Mr. Pecksniff besought the company to do full justice.

"Mr. Pinch, if you spare the bottle, we shall quarrel!" . . . .

"This," he said, in allusion to the party, not the wine, "is a mingling that repays one for much disappointment and vexation. Let us be merry." Here he took a captain's biscuit. "It is a poor heart that never rejoices; and our hearts are not poor. No!"

With such stimulants to merriment did he beguile the time, and do the honours of the table; while Mr. Pinch, perhaps to assure himself that what he saw and heard was holiday reality, and not a charming dream, ate of everything, and in particular disposed of the slim sandwiches to a surprising extent." (*Martin Chuzzlewit*).

It is the same hankering desire after comfort—to the limit of circumstances—which pervades the account of David Copperfield's party to the Micawbers and Mr. Traddles.

"Having laid in the materials for a bowl of punch, to be compounded by Mr. Micawber; having provided a bottle of lavender water, two wax candles, a paper of mixed pins, and a pincushion, to assist Mrs. Micawber in her toilet at my dressing table; having also caused the fire in my bedroom to be lighted for Mrs. Micawber's convenience: and having laid the cloth with my own hands: I awaited the result with

Painted by L. Raven Hill. **DOLLY VARDEN.**

"The very pink and pattern of good looks, in a smart little cherry-coloured mantle . . . and a little straw hat trimmed with cherry-coloured ribbons, and worn the merest trifle on one side." (*Barnaby Rudge.*)

composure. . . . When I conducted Mrs. Micawber to my dressing-table, and she saw the scale on which it was prepared for her, she was in such raptures that she called Mr. Micawber to come and look. . . . I informed Mr. Micawber that I relied upon him for a bowl of punch, and led him to the lemons. His recent despondency, not to say despair, was gone in a moment. I never saw a man so thoroughly enjoy himself amid the fragrance of lemon peel and sugar, the odour of burning rum, and the steam of boiling water, as Mr. Micawber did that afternoon. It was wonderful to see his face shining at us out of a thin cloud of these delicate fumes, as he stirred and mixed and tasted." (*David Copperfield*).

When the various guests had departed for town, as the evening wore on, the indefatigable novelist set out for his daily walk. Never was so determined a devotee of "Shanks's Mare." "I am incapable of rest," he told Forster, "If I could not walk fast and far, I should just explode and perish." So he took pleasure in exploring the whole beautiful Kentish neighbourhood, for miles and miles around, and "discovered that the seven miles between Maidstone and Rochester is one of the most

beautiful walks in England." He would walk round Cobham Park and village, or through the marshes to Gravesend, or to the weird and dreary churchyard at Cooling. And this extraordinary delight in merely covering so much distance, finds outcome and evidence in nearly all his books. The long, long miles by which Oliver Twist tramped to Barnet: the vague perpetual peregrination of Nell and her aged grandfather,—the Dover Road on which David Copperfield spent such weary days, — the wanderings of Nicholas Nickleby and Smike,— and a score of other instances, all bear witness to the keen observation, the excellent memory, and the personal experience of Charles Dickens himself.

When at last he reached Gadshill once more, the moth-time and the twilight surrounded it. Scents of syringas and roses floated out to welcome him at the gate: the exquisite odours of a June evening rose like incense from the whole surrounding country. He saw, by the lights in the upper windows, that his younger children were retiring to rest: and ran, unexhausted, inexhaustible, upstairs,—to sing them a jolly song or two, that they might go to sleep merry and light-hearted.

For Dickens was excessively fond of children. The remembrance of his own unhappy childhood, far from souring him, inspired him with the desire to make life sunny for others. He could enter, as the veriest child himself, buoyant and boisterous, into all their little frolics and amusements. He delighted to play nursery games, to dance *Sir Roger de Coverley*: and his easily-stirred emotions responded readily to any hint of pathos or tragedy in child-life. In many parts of his work there is, as has been pointed out, "evidence of some peculiar affection for a strange sort of little girl." A queer little girl, too old or too young for her years, full of startling possibilities,—you have only to think one moment to recall the Marchioness in *The Old Curiosity Shop*—Jenny Wren in *Our Mutual Friend*—Tattycoram in *Little Dorrit*; Little Dorrit herself: though she perhaps ranks more readily beside the touching figure of Little Nell. The episode of the tiny runaway couple in the *Holly Tree Inn* is another charming example of sympathetic understanding towards the child mind. And perhaps there are few passages in English literature more fraught with *lachrymæ rerum* than those which treat of Johnny in the Children's Hospital.

"He had to be washed and tended, and remedies were applied: and though those offices were far, far more skilfully and lightly done than anything had been done for him in his little life, so rough and short, they would have hurt and tired him but for an amazing circumstance which laid hold of his attention. This was no less than the appearance on his one little platform, in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark: the elephant leading, and the fly, with a diffident sense of his size, politely bringing up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest. . . . The mite with a broken leg was restless and wearied: but after a while turned his face towards Johnny's bed to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and so fell asleep. On most of the beds, the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down; and, in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity they might have stood for the children's dreams. The doctor came in to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him. "What is it, Johnny?"

Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle. "Him," said the little fellow, "Those!" The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbour, the mite with the broken leg. With a weary yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and, seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said, "A kiss for the boofer lady." Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it." (*Our Mutual Friend*).

The oft-quoted death of little Paul Dombey, the poignant sadness of the gradual decline of Little Nell, the piteous ending of poor Jo, are worthy pendants to this. Yet perhaps the tale which carried, as in a nutshell, the epitome of Dickens' whole cheery philosophy—*The Christmas Carol*—also contains the most popular example of his genuine power to draw tears,—in the touching portraiture of Tiny Tim. From the moment when little Bob Cratchit enters to the tremendous event of the Christmas dinner,

"his threadbare clothes darned up and brushed to look seasonable, and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!"—to the vision of the father going upstairs and kissing the little face of the dead child,—this stunted, ricketty, crippled creature took a firm hold of the reader's heart: and there is no one but is conscious of a pang of relief on subsequently hearing that "Tiny Tim did NOT die."

But, as has been observed, "the real work of Dickens was the revealing of a certain grotesque greatness inside obscure and even unattractive type. It reveals the great paradox of spiritual things, that the inside is always larger than the outside." And nowhere did he demonstrate this paradox more successfully, than in depicting poor, and plain, and even deformed children. . . .

. . Working and walking, talking and thinking, had at length brought the day to an end, and laid a pleasant lassitude of fatigue over that exuberant and indomitable energy. With footsteps a little slower than his wont, the master of Gadshill, lighting a cigar, went round the garden in the fragrant dusk: then, with the

exactness and punctuality which characterised his every deed, he entered the house at a given minute, and was soon plunged in a sleep of absolute profundity. There, for a few brief hours, the restless mind and body were quiescent. "As to repose," he had written, "for some men there's no such thing in this life:" but even for him there was the temporary respite and refreshment which may be born of a midsummer night's dream.