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The Origin of Pickwick

WALTER DEXTER

has edited

The Dickensian (Quarterly) since 1925

*Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens, His
Letters to Her.* Constable, 1935

Dickens to his Oldest Friend. Put-
nams, 1932

and is the author of

Days in Dickens Land. Methuen,
1934

The England of Dickens. Cecil
Palmer, 1924

★

J. W. T. LEY

has edited

Forster's Life of Dickens. With
Notes. Cecil Palmer, 1928

and is the author of

The Dickens Circle. Chapman and
Hall, 1918

THE ORIGIN OF PICKWICK

*New Facts now First Published in the
Year of the Centenary*

By
WALTER DEXTER
and
J. W. T. LEY



London
CHAPMAN AND HALL LTD.
Eleven Henrietta Street, W.C.2
Dickens's Original Publishers

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We are indebted to the Dickens Fellowship for the loan of many of the blocks used in the illustration of this book.

Mary Hogarth from her most aff. friend
Charles Dickens



No. 1.

THE

[PRICE 1s

POSTHUMOUS PAPERS

OF THE

PICKWICK
CLUB

CONTAINING A FAITHFUL RECORD OF THE

PERAMBULATIONS, PERILS, TRAVELS, ADVENTURES

AND

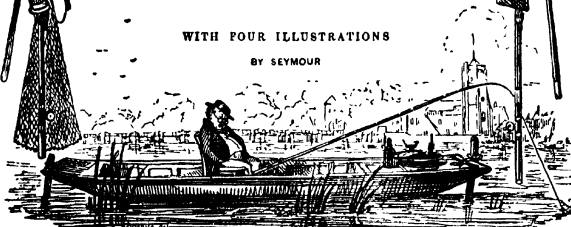
Sporting Transactions

OF THE CORRESPONDING MEMBERS.

EDITED BY "BOZ."

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

BY SEYMOUR



LONDON: CHAPMAN & HALL, 186, STRAND.

MDCCCXXXVI.

Cover of the first monthly number of *The Pickwick Papers*, 1836. Part of the series presented by Dickens to his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth.

[Facing page 11

INTRODUCTION

CONTROVERSY over the origin of *The Pickwick Papers* still persists. It was started nearly ninety years ago by Mrs. Seymour, the widow of the original illustrator of the book, and she nursed her imaginary grievance until it developed into a monstrosity.

There is still with us a type of mind to which Dickens is anathema, which is ever ready to accept anything that seems to detract from his reputation. Periodically we have the allegation revived that Dickens behaved shabbily towards Seymour, and continually we have suggestions as to the origins of characters in the book that, in effect, deny to Dickens the very quality that is his in special measure—the creative quality. Seymour designed the figure of Pickwick, therefore it was he and not Dickens who created that immortal character!

The story of the origin of *Pickwick* was told by Forster briefly but accurately enough; Dickens and Edward Chapman both made statements on the subject; the late Percy Fitzgerald wrote a delightful book about it. The excuse for this further addition to Pickwickiana is the Centenary of the first publication of what is probably the greatest humorous masterpiece the literature of the world has produced, and the discovery of certain documents which clear up several

The Origin of Pickwick

doubtful points. To this must be added an earnest desire to do justice to an artist named Buss who, after the suicide of the original artist Seymour, was engaged to supply the illustrations. Buss supplied two illustrations only to the third monthly part, and was then summarily dismissed.

Buss never claimed that his two etchings were successes, but he was always conscious that the fault was not his; that his want of success was due to a peculiarly unfortunate set of circumstances. Clearly Dickens's official biographer knew nothing of these circumstances; he was much too honest and too generous a man knowingly to do Buss an injustice. As a matter of fact, Buss wrote to him and received a characteristically manly reply, but the allusion to the unfortunate artist remained, and it must remain for so long as Charles Dickens is of interest to his fellow men.

Realizing this, Buss did the only possible thing. He had children, and he had grandchildren, and it was a harsh thought that his children's children should see his name perpetually linked with *Pickwick* as the artist who failed. More annoying was the thought, because it awakened a long-dormant sense of grievance. He was convinced, not only that he had been an unlucky victim of circumstances, but that he had been treated inconsiderately, and even ungenerously, by the publishers. He therefore determined to leave with his children a full account of his association with the book. That account was in his own handwriting,

Introduction

and he gave it to his eldest son. Others of his children, jealous of their father's reputation, made copies of it, and it is well they did for after the death of the eldest son the original was lost and has never been recovered.

In 1907, when Mr. Ley was Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship, a Pickwick Exhibition was held in the New Dudley Gallery, Piccadilly. He was visited there by the late Rev. A. J. Buss, the artist's eldest son, who brought with him a cutting from a leading London newspaper. This consisted of a notice of the Exhibition. In briefly telling the story of the origin of *Pickwick*, it said that after the death of Seymour "a man named Buss was engaged, but proved a failure". Here was the very thing that "the man named Buss" had foreseen thirty-six years before. The son was much concerned. He pointed out that several years earlier, some attempt to do his father justice had been made in the Jubilee edition of *Pickwick*, and in one or two articles in the *Athenaeum* and other papers, but he felt that at long last something might be done to acquaint the world with the truth.

The outcome was that Mr. Ley, after having read Buss's own account, wrote an article which appeared in *The Dickensian* in two instalments, in 1910. Twenty years later, in the course of a short article in that same magazine, Mr. Ley expressed the opinion that Buss was more entitled to sympathy than Seymour. This brought forth a letter from the Rev. F. Fleetwood Buss, a grandson of the artist. He thanked the writer for his consistently sympathetic references

The Origin of Pickwick

to his grandfather, and quoted from his copy of the Statement, which was made and certified by his father, a younger son of the artist.

Mr. Buss has agreed to the publication of the Statement, with introduction and comments, and we feel that the occasion of the Centenary justifies the retelling of the story of the birth of one of the world's great books in the light of reliable knowledge, and in as straightforward a manner as possible.

The Statement contains a number of obvious inaccuracies, and there is no doubt but that for some facts Buss was indebted to second-hand information. It is equally clear that that information came from somebody who was not too friendly to Dickens. His grandson agrees with us that in all probability it came from the Seymour family, who pursued a bitter vendetta. But it will be seen that nowhere does Buss associate himself with any criticism of the novelist, of whom he remained a great admirer to the end of his days.

The Statement is definitely historical, and its publication adds an item of real interest to the famous book. The unfortunate artist was not merely "a man named Buss". He was one of the best-known artists of his time, and a successful book illustrator. By an extraordinarily unfortunate combination of circumstances his name is unjustly linked as a failure with one of the most successful books in history, and it is surely time that some attempt should be made to do justice to his memory.

THE TWENTY-FOUR YEARS BEFORE
PICKWICK

1812. CHARLES DICKENS born at Portsmouth, February 7th, second child of John Dickens, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office.

1816. Family moves to London.

1817. John Dickens transferred to Chatham. House taken at 2 Ordnance Terrace. CHARLES goes to a dame's school with his sister Fanny.

1821. Family moves into a smaller house in Chatham (18 St. Mary's Place) owing to the father's improvident habits. CHARLES goes to a boys' school.

1822. John Dickens ordered back to London. House taken at 16 Bayham Street, Camden Town. Here CHARLES develops into a family drudge, and is given no schooling.

1823. Owing to increasing financial difficulties, the family moves into lodgings at 4 Gower Street North, where Mrs. Dickens unsuccessfully establishes a boarding school for young ladies.

1824. John Dickens arrested for debt and taken to the Marshalsea prison (February 20th). CHARLES sent to work at Warren's blacking warehouse, Hungerford market. Mother and family (excepting

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CHARLES) live in the debtors' prison with the father; lodging found for CHARLES in Lant Street, Borough. John Dickens released on May 28th, and takes a house at Johnson Street, Somers Town. Shortly after, CHARLES is removed from the hateful occupation of covering the tops of blacking bottles, and sent to school at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road.

1827. CHARLES leaves school (March) and goes as office-boy to Charles Molloy, solicitor, Symonds Inn. In May, obtains situation with another firm of solicitors in Raymond Buildings, Grays Inn. John Dickens being again in difficulties, the family moves into lodgings in The Polygon, Camden Town.

1828. CHARLES leaves the firm of solicitors (November), and takes up shorthand under the guidance of his uncle, John Barrow, a journalist.

1829. CHARLES works for the Proctors in Doctors' Commons.

1830. Starts as a shorthand-writer in a one-room office at 5 Bell Yard, Carter Lane. On February 8th takes out a ticket for the British Museum reading-room. In November reports a case in Doctors' Commons, the original of which is preserved in St. Bartholomew's Church.

1831. Family now living at 10 Norfolk Street, Fitzroy Square.

1832. Family moves, first to 70 Margaret Street,

The Twenty-four Years before Pickwick

then to 13 Fitzroy Street. CHARLES tries to obtain an engagement as an actor at Covent Garden Theatre. In March obtains situation as Parliamentary reporter for the *True Sun*. Also working for his uncle's paper the *Mirror of Parliament*. Leaves the *True Sun* in August.

1833. Family moves to 18 Bentinck Street in January. Holds a coming-of-age party there for CHARLES in February. His first piece of fiction *A Dinner at Poplar Walk*, appears in the *Monthly Magazine*.

1834. Regular contributions to the *Monthly Magazine* until May, for which he does not receive any payment. In August first story signed "Boz" appears in that magazine. At the same time he joins the staff of the *Morning Chronicle*, to which, on September 26th, he contributes the first of four *Street Sketches*. In October, makes further contribution to the *Monthly Magazine*. In December leaves home and takes chambers in Furnival's Inn.

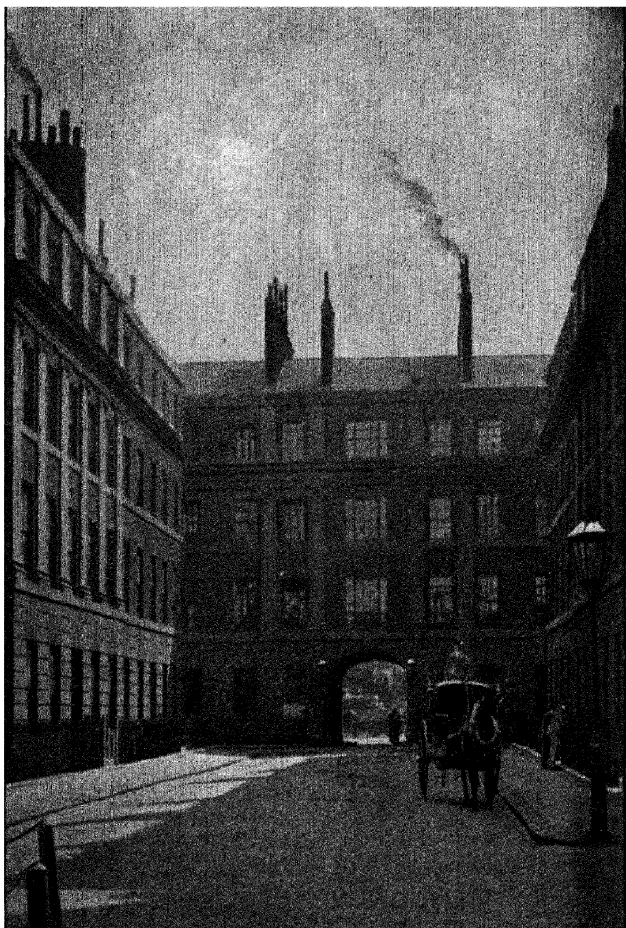
1835. Further contributions to the *Monthly Magazine* in January and February. On January 31st appears the first number of the *Evening Chronicle* to which Dickens contributes the first of *Sketches of London* signed "Boz". These are continued until August. In May, becomes engaged to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of the editor of the *Evening Chronicle*. On September 27th contributes first of a series of *Scenes and Characters to Bell's Life in London*; continued weekly until January 17th, 1836. In

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October arranged for the publication of his various sketches in two volumes.

1836. *Sketches by Boz* published 1st February. DICKENS celebrates his twenty-fourth birthday on February 7th.

The first monthly number of *Pickwick* appears on March 31st.



Furnivals Inn.

Here Dickens commenced *Pickwick*. His chambers were on the left-hand side.

CHAPTER ONE
THE EMBRYO PICKWICK

I

IN the making of *The Pickwick Papers*, three parties at least were concerned, the artist, the publishers, and the author. It is convenient to consider each of them in that order.

Robert Seymour was a hard-working artist with a real gift for humorous work, and a special sense of the ludicrous in most forms of sport. He was an illegitimate child of Henry Seymour, a Somerset gentleman, who apprenticed him to Vaughan, the engraver. The matter of his parentage is of no great importance to us, of course, save that there may lie in the fact some explanation of Seymour's sensitiveness, of his readiness to nurse grievances. A consciousness of illegitimacy has warped many a man's mentality and embittered his life.

In his frequent walks in rural Islington, Highgate, Hornsey, Hampstead, and so on, Seymour was much amused by the Cockneys who came there shooting small birds and angling for small fish, and he made a number of sketches of these folk. This sort of thing always attracted him, and he had in fact already nibbled at the idea in a little book called *Maxims and Hints for an Angler and Miserics of Fishing*, to which are added *Maxims and Hints for a Chess*

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Player. This forgotten work has a real importance for us. About a dozen years ago it inspired a book



One of Seymour's Drawings for *Hints and Maxims for an Angler* 1833.

entitled *When Mr. Pickwick went Fishing*, to which some attention must be given.

It was noted as a curious fact by Percy Fitzgerald, in his *History of Pickwick* (1891), that while the cover design is dominated by fishing tackle, with Mr. Pickwick asleep in a punt, fishing-

The Embryo Pickwick

rod at his side, there is not a single reference to the sport in the book. Now, *Maxims and Hints for an Angler* purported to be a reprint of minutes from the Commonplace Book of the Houghton Fishing Club. Its author was a Richard Penn; its illustrator was Robert Seymour; and it was published in 1833—three years before *Pickwick* was begun. It is rather startling to open it and discover several pictures of the immortal Pickwick. There is no mistake about it. There he is, indubitably the figure that all the world knows so well. In one picture he is standing on the river bank, fishing-rod in hand, wearing the immortal tights and spectacles. In the distance is a church spire, behind him is a figure that might well be the Fat Boy. In another plate he is playing chess, and here the likeness is the more complete, because he is, of course, hatless, and we see his bald head. Another drawing depicts him reading by the fire-side, and the title is *Enjoying Christmas*. In yet another he is acting with true Pickwickian quixotry by holding an umbrella over a brood of ducks in a thunderstorm. And in one picture there is a figure that is certainly suggestive of Sam Weller.

All this is extremely interesting, and it would be useless to deny that it has significance. But we should be wrong in drawing deductions from it in respect to *The Pickwick Papers*. The idea of the book was Seymour's. Dickens never dreamed of denying it. The story is easily pieced together.

Seymour had been successful with his *Cockney*

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Sporting Sketches. He had a portfolio of similar comic drawings, and he felt that the vein was not worked out. His work was popular, and he thought there would be a sale for a further series of sketches if a competent writer could be found to provide appropriate letterpress. The idea took shape in a "Nimrod Club" of "Cockney neophytes, whose misfortunes and adventures he was, by long practice, thoroughly qualified to depict".¹ He mentioned the idea to Mr. Spooner, who was publishing *The Book of Christmas* which the artist was editing. Spooner liked it, and suggested Theodore Hook as the writer, but the scheme hung fire as Spooner was much occupied with his *Book of Christmas*. Seymour grew impatient. At one time he determined to publish the work himself, and to ask Henry Mayhew to do the letterpress; but evidently did not get very far advanced in this direction. At length, in the latter part of 1835, he mentioned his plan to Edward Chapman. Seymour was at that time illustrating a work for Chapman and Hall, entitled *The Squib Annual of Poetry, Politics, and Personalities*.

Chapman was interested, and, it is said, at Seymour's suggestion, wrote to William Clarke, author of *Three Courses and a Dessert*, but received no reply. There was delay, and Seymour again became impatient. He pestered Chapman with the scheme which had by now become almost an obsession with him, and at length, early in the New Year, the pub-

¹ *Pictorial Pickwickiana*.



Mr. Pickwick addresses the Club.

Robert Seymour's original illustration.

The Embryo Pickwick

lishers began to think seriously of finding an author. We have to bear in mind that in their view the author was quite the secondary consideration. They wanted a competent man, of course, for Seymour's reputation was a high one, but it was the artist's name that really mattered. It is clear that several names were mentioned—among them, it is said Leigh Hunt's—but none of these people was approached, possibly because, being men of reputation, it was feared that their fees would be prohibitive.

At length, early in February, Chapman and Hall turned to Charles Whitehead, who was editing their *Library of Fiction*. They asked him to collaborate with Seymour, but he declined. He had not enough confidence in his own strength of character to sustain such a task. He was a most able journalist, and a novelist who deserves better recognition than he has been accorded, but he lacked moral staying power. He ultimately drifted to Australia, and died there in poverty.

Whitehead was then asked if he knew anybody whom he could recommend for the task. He immediately named a young newspaper man whom he knew well—Charles Dickens.

II

In February 1836 when these inquiries were proceeding, the name of Charles Dickens was unknown except to a very few newspaper men, and then probably confined to the reporters' gallery of the

events, possessed—for me—the charm of perfect novelty. As I may infer, from the occasional appearance of such histories, that my readers have an interest in the matter, I will relate how they came into existence.

I was a young man of three-and-twenty, when the present publishers, attracted by some pieces I was at that time writing in the Morning Chronicle newspaper (of which one series had lately been collected and published in two volumes, illustrated by my esteemed friend Mr. George Cruikshank), waited upon me to propose a something that should be published in shilling numbers—then only known to me, or I believe, to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, that used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over which I remember to have shed innumerable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life.

When ~~the moment~~ I opened my door in Furnival's Inn to the managing partner who represented the firm, I recognized in him the person from whose hands I had bought, two or three years previously, and

whom I had never seen before or since, my first copy of the Magazine in which my first effusion—dropped stealthily one ~~night~~ ^{evening at twilight}, with fear and trembling, into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street—appeared in all the glory of print; on which occasion ~~by~~-the-bye, how well I recollect ~~it~~ ^{! !} I walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half-an-hour, because my eyes were dimmed with joy and pride, that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there. I told my visitor of the coincidence, which we both hailed as a good omen; and so fell to business

The idea propounded to me was that the monthly something should be a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by MR. SERVAUR, and there was a notion ~~was~~ on the part of that admirable humourist or of my visitor, (I forget which,) that a "NIMROD Club," the members of which were to go out shooting, fishing, and

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House of Commons, where he was regularly employed by the *Morning Chronicle*, then the next most influential paper after *The Times*. He had a reputation there, although not yet twenty-four years of age, of being one of the very best shorthand writers. In addition to his work as a parliamentary reporter, Dickens had contributed a series of stories to *The Monthly Magazine*; but as this magazine did not make any payment for his work, he ceased his contributions to it and confined himself to his own paper, the evening edition of it published three times weekly under the title of the *Evening Chronicle*, and a weekly newspaper called *Bell's Life in London*.

These stories and sketches were signed with the nom de plume BOZ; a strange name which owed its origin to the pet name, "Moses", of a younger brother, pronounced through the nose by that youngster (whose real name was Augustus) as "Bozes"; and Boz was a natural contraction.

The name of Boz was fairly familiar to the readers of the above-named papers, and, introduced by Harrison Ainsworth, a publisher named John Macrone was found for a collection of these *Sketches* which had been issued early in February in two volumes at the price of one guinea.

This book attracted a certain amount of attention. The *Morning Chronicle* gave it a very good send-off written by the editor, George Hogarth, to whose daughter, Catherine, Dickens was engaged to be married. In the course of a long review it said:

The Embryo Pickwick

These *Sketches* are evidently the work of a person of various and extraordinary intellectual gifts. He is a close and acute observer of character and manners, with a strong sense of the ridiculous and a graphic faculty of placing in the most whimsical and amusing lights the follies and absurdities of human nature. He has the power, too, of producing tears as well as laughter. His pictures of the vices and wretchedness which abound in this vast city are sufficient to strike to the heart of the most careless and insensible reader.

The earliest independent notice was that given in the *Literary Gazette* for 13th February. In the course of a long review, prominently displayed, it said:

“The scenes of many coloured life he drew” may be fairly applied to the present essayist, who displays not only humour and feeling, but a genuine acquaintance with his subjects in these numerous sketches of common life. The author has traced his characters, their occupations, their pursuits, and their pleasures with much talent and apparent fidelity; and those who wish to have a peep into pawnbrokers’ shops, dancing academies, private theatres, gin-shops, marine-stores, marine excursions, and similar resorts and occupations of the middling and lower orders, will find them cleverly and amazingly described in these pages.

In the same week the *Satirist* wrote:

We have seldom read two more agreeable volumes than these. We have before had a laugh over some of the well-drawn sketches they contain, and which are in their way inimitable. The author is a man of unquestionable talent and of great and correct observation.

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And the *Sun* was of similar opinion about the *Sketches*:

They evince great powers of observation, and fidelity of description, combined with a humour which, though pushed occasionally to the very verge of caricature, is on the whole full of promise. But their principal merit is their matter of factness, and the strict literal way in which they adhere to nature.

These favourable reviews had probably come to the notice of the various parties concerned in their search for an author: at any rate, they appeared before Dickens was approached on the subject.

III

So Whitehead introduced Dickens to Chapman and Hall. Joseph Grego, in *Pictorial Pickwickiana* (1899) says that "Whitehead had already been in successive positions enabling him editorially to lend the young writer a helping hand". What those positions were is not stated, but the pair were on friendly terms, and it may well be that Whitehead was not absolutely ignorant of the worries Dickens suffered in those days through the persistent thriftlessness of his father. That being so, he would not unnaturally, in recommending his friend, tell the publishers that Dickens would be very glad of the money. What more natural, then, than that Chapman and Hall should communicate this to Seymour? If this did happen—and there is no improbability in

The Embryo Pickwick

the suggestion—Seymour may have repeated it to his wife, and it was this which she so maliciously distorted in her pamphlet to which we shall refer later.¹ Whitehead also probably knew that his young friend was engaged to be married to the daughter of a colleague, and therefore would be very glad of the commission. He knew, too, of Boz's sketches in the *Morning Chronicle* and elsewhere, and in his capacity as editor of *The Library of Fiction* had already invited him to contribute a story to the first number which was due to appear at the end of the next month. This story was *The Tuggs's at Ramsgate*, for which, curiously enough, Seymour had supplied an illustration.

According to both Mrs. Seymour and Buss, Chapman procured a copy of *Sketches by Boz*, gave it to Seymour, and asked him to read it and say whether he thought its author would suit the purpose in mind. Against this we must place Chapman's statement to Dickens in after years,² that he did not mention him to Seymour. Yet most likely the story had some foundation in fact.

The next step on the part of the publishers was no doubt to ask Whitehead to arrange an appointment with Dickens at his chambers in Furnival's Inn.

At the interview Hall learned Dickens's views, and then reported them to his partner; Seymour in turn was doubtless consulted.

This is much more probable than the generally

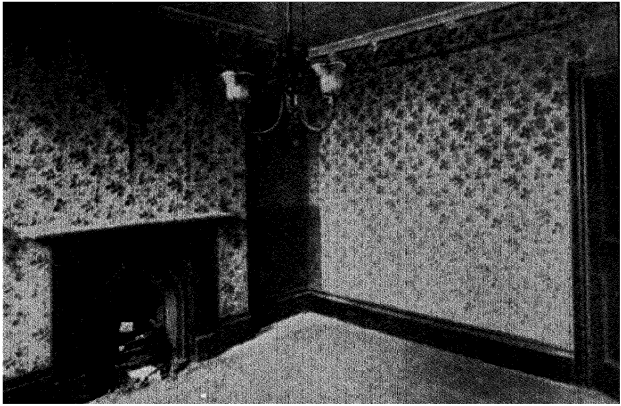
¹ See page 86. ² See page 89.

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assumed happening—that Hall went straight to Furnival's Inn, laid the scheme before Dickens, listened to his objections, acquiesced in them, and forthwith commissioned him to do the work according to his own ideas at a fee of fourteen guineas a month. It is not at all likely that Seymour's long-cherished plan was jettisoned in that way. Obviously, Hall would have to report to his partner, and they would have to see Seymour, and Whitehead was probably brought into consultation.

Most writers on this subject have assumed that Hall's visit was a surprise, and that everything was settled at the one interview. We do not doubt but that Dickens was expecting Hall, and that he knew what sort of proposition was to be laid before him. He had had an opportunity of thinking the matter over; he was ready with his objections; he was ready with his alternative proposals. The surprise lay in the identity of his visitor—in the discovery that the publisher with whom he was to negotiate was none other than the man who had sold to him a couple of years before the copy of the *Monthly Magazine* which contained his first essay in fiction.

He has told the story of that first effusion, as he called it, how he dropped it stealthily “one evening at twilight into a dark letter-box, in a dark office, up a dark court in Fleet Street”, and how, when it appeared in all the glory of print, he walked down to Westminster Hall, and turned into it for half an hour, “because my eyes were so dimmed with joy



The Front Room at 15, Furnivals Inn.



Photo:

Entrance to Village of Pickwick, near Bath.

Walter Dexter

The Embryo Pickwick

and pride that they could not bear the street, and were not fit to be seen there". He records: "I told my visitor of the coincidence, which we both hailed as a good omen; and so fell to business".

IV

It cannot be supposed that Hall went to Dickens with a cut-and-dried offer of fourteen guineas a month. All that was in his mind was that this young man had been recommended to him as capable of doing the ephemeral piece of hack work, and as one who would be glad of the chance of earning the money. It is, therefore, hardly conceivable that the rate of pay had already been fixed at as much as fourteen guineas a month. Where is the publisher even to-day who would go to a twenty-four years old newspaper reporter, with nothing to recommend him but a few newspaper sketches, with an offer of £294 for a book yet to be written? If Barabbas was not a publisher, a publisher is certainly not a Don Quixote!

Dickens was always a good man of business. It is true that within the next three years he committed himself to some impossible contracts, but that was not because of lack of business acumen, but from a sheer necessity of earning money while the opportunity offered. The full story of his life at this time has yet to be told. Much that was only vaguely guessed at before has been revealed by the publication

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in 1932 of the letters to Thomas Beard. They prove what a drag his thriftless father continued to be upon him, how the more the young man made his way in life the less scrupulous the father seemed to become. Thus, though he had established himself in quite a good position, he was being kept poor and he could not afford to miss any opportunity of adding to his income. We may therefore believe that if Hall had offered him half the sum he would not have rejected the offer without grave consideration.

Whatever financial offer was made to Dickens in the first place, he was quite honest. He did not feel that there was anything in the scheme as outlined to him. He knew little of sport, and he felt that he could not do the thing worthily. "Whatever I have tried to do in life", he wrote to one of his sons long afterwards, "I have tried to do well". He had no real knowledge of sport; he felt that he could not carry through such a plan with justice to himself. Moreover, the plan was not new, and he said so frankly.¹ He was not prepared to undertake a work which at best was of a hackneyed character, but which in any case he did not feel he could do well. This was characteristic of him all his life. Whatever else may be said of Dickens, it has always to be acknowledged that no man ever held his art in more jealous regard.

His reminder to Hall that the plan proposed was

¹ A large number of works of the kind which had already *been* published are named in *Pictorial Pickwickiana*.

The Embryo Pickwick

hackneyed must have caused the publisher to hesitate, and to reflect whether after all Seymour's name was quite the sufficient guarantee of success that it had been deemed to be. But Dickens had a proposal to make. He suggested that:

It would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text, and that I should like to take my own way, with a freer range of scenes and people, and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever course I might prescribe to myself at starting.

There must have been something singularly attractive and impressive about this young man—he was not more than a week or two past his twenty-fourth birthday, with “eyes wonderfully beaming with intellect and running over with humour and cheerfulness”. He had been invited to do what many better-known men than himself would have been glad to do—to write a book in association with the second most popular illustrator of the time. He had not only turned the offer down, but had coolly suggested that the long-discussed plan should be reversed, and that he, an unknown man (almost a youth), should be commissioned to write a book which the famous artist should illustrate! There must have been something arresting about his personality that caused Hall to pay serious attention to such a proposal. It is true he was able to point to the fact that the great George Cruikshank had illustrated this collection of his *Sketches* pub-

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lished only three weeks before; nevertheless he must have had a wonderful confidence in himself and a striking personality to win Hall over to his proposition forthwith.

Seymour was a very unlucky man. For months he had planned this work; he had induced an enterprising firm of publishers to take it up; now they reported to him that the young and unknown writer, whom they had together agreed to ask to write the letterpress, had consented to do so only on his own terms, which were that the inspirer of the scheme, the famous artist whose name had been deemed to be the only real asset, should play second fiddle! Cannot we hear Seymour protesting indignantly? That this young fellow of whom they had never heard until Whitehead mentioned his name should calmly lay down his own terms in this way, and that the publishers should be so ready to acquiesce—it must have been exasperating. If Seymour regarded it as an insult there was good excuse for him.

The circumstances that Hall had been greatly impressed with Dickens; that Whitehead's recommendation had been strongly supported, and the undeniable good quality of the *Sketches* made it difficult for Seymour to object to the scheme, but it is certain that he protested against his plan being side-tracked. The publishers were adamant, however. Seymour's plan *was* an old one, Dickens unquestionably had great ability, the alternative plan that he



Moses Pickwick in 1835, at about 37 years of age.
From a painting in possession of Mr. Cecil Sainsbury, Bath.

The Embryo Pickwick

had proposed seemed to them preferable. Why did not Seymour then say he would take his suggestion to another publisher? His name was "good upon 'Change", so to speak, "for anything he cared to put his hand to". The explanation is that probably he could not afford to break with Chapman and Hall. They were an enterprising young firm, and he was doing a lot of work for them. Nor did they want to lose him. They agreed to compromise if possible. The position was explained to Dickens; he agreed to the compromise, and Seymour gave way.

"Nimrod" was discarded, but "Club" remained; but how should it be called. After the name of its founder? Dickens sat down at his desk and thought—and the name Pickwick, well-sounding and crisp to the lips, suggested by the name of the proprietor of the coach he had not long ago travelled in on a journey to Bath, occurred to him; and he started right away on the first page.

Especially for Mr. Seymour's sake, he created the "sporting" character of Mr. Winkle; and so Seymour was partially mollified. But he never shook off his annoyance, and when a short story of an intensely dramatic character was introduced into the second number, he regarded it as the last straw, as we shall see presently.

CHAPTER TWO
THE HAPPY DICKENS

I

THE engagement to write *Pickwick* made Dickens supremely happy. Here at last was regular work to supplement his income from the *Morning Chronicle*. Fourteen guineas every month for many months to come, and then more, if only the public would continue to ask for it. Of course they would; he was quite certain of it. He knew he could give them what they wanted. Full of hope and energy he wrote to his sweetheart on the evening of Wednesday, 24th February, 1836:

MY DEAREST KATIE,

The house is up; but I am very sorry to say that I *must* stay at home. . . .

They (Chapman and Hall) have made me an offer of £14 a month to write and edit a new publication they contemplate, entirely by myself; to be published monthly, and each number to contain four wood cuts. I am to make my estimate and calculation, and to give them a decisive answer on Friday morning. The work will be no joke, but the emolument is too tempting to resist.

The letter, printed in facsimile for the first time by kind permission of Messrs. Constable and Co., Ltd., publishers of *Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dickens*,

Fornival Inn

Wednesday, Evening

My dearest Katie -

The house is up; but I am very sorry to say that I must stay at home. I have had a visit from the Publisher this morning, and the story cannot be any longer delayed - it must be done tomorrow, as there are more important considerations than the mere payment for the story, involved too, I must exercise a little self denial, and set to work.

They [Chapman & Hall] have made me an offer of £ 14 a month to write and edit a new publication

they contemplate, entirely by myself; to be published monthly and each number to contain four wood cuts. I am to make my estimate and calculation, and to give them a decisive answer on Friday morning. The work will be no joke, but the emolument is too tempting to resist.

I hope I shall be able to get out to Drompton to dinner on Friday. I have to see these people, and then Kacrona with whom I shall be detained some time, but I trust I shall be able to manage

it. Should I be disappointed
(I don't think I shall be
though) of course I shall be
out early on Saturday

• Please me (in haste)
My dearest love
Ever yours most affect.

~~Richard~~

The Origin of Pickwick

His Letters to Her (1935), goes on to say that he hopes to see her on Friday; the reason for delay being that he was hot on the Pickwick idea, and wanted to get right on with his new commission. Consequently we find him writing to Chapman and Hall the very next day:

Pickwick is at length begun in all his might and glory. The first chapter will be ready to-morrow. I want to publish *The Strange Gentleman*. If you have no objection to doing it, I should be happy to let you have the refusal of it. I need not say that nobody else has seen or heard of it.

Believe me (in Pickwickian haste),

Faithfully yours,

CHARLES DICKENS

The Strange Gentleman was a play, produced later in the year at the St. James' Theatre. It was published in book form the following year.

It is interesting to note here that the word 'Pickwickian', as an adjective, which has since almost passed into the current language, was first used by Dickens himself when he had not yet finished the first chapter; also that in the very first sentence of the story he refers to his creation as "immortal".

A little more than a week later he again wrote to his future wife. It was on a Sunday evening, the date was probably March 6th:

I have at this moment got Pickwick and his friends on the Rochester coach and they are going on swim-

commanding tone.

"Sir" said the green-poece.
 "Now take the ^{if you don't see your clock on} ~~knife~~ ^{off}!"

"Yes Sir."

The green-poece did as he was told with ^{admirable} humility, and obediently handed Mr Pickles the carving knife; in doing which, he accidentally ~~pricked~~ ^{pricked} himself.

"What do you mean by that, ^{Sir} ~~Pickles~~?" said Mr Pickles, with great indignation.

"I beg your pardon Sir" - replied the crest-fallen green-poece - "I didn't mean to do it Sir; I was up very late last night."

"I tell you what my opinion of you is, Harris" - said Mr Pickles ~~in~~ with a most impressive air "You're a ~~low~~ vulgar beast."

"I hope gentlemen" - said Harris "that you won't be ~~too~~ ^{too} ~~kind~~ ^{kind} severe with me, gentlemen. I'm very much obliged to you indeed gentlemen for your patronage, and also for your recommendations gentlemen whenever additional assistance in waiting is required. ~~etc etc etc~~ I hope gentlemen, ~~and~~ ^{and} ~~will~~ ^{will} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~best~~ ^{best} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~service~~ ^{service}."

A Page of the Original MS. of *The Pickwick Papers* Presented to The Dickens House by Count de Suzannet.

Only forty-four pages of the original manuscript are known to be in existence. Six are in the British Museum; one is at the Dickens House, London, and thirty-seven are in the hands of private collectors. Their value is exceedingly great. Five pages were sold at Sotheby's in 1928 for £7,500.

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mingly, in company with a very different character from any I have yet described, who I flatter myself will make a decided hit. I want to get them from the ball to the inn before I go to bed; and I think that will take until one or two o'clock at the earliest. The publishers will be here in the morning, so you will readily suppose I have no alternative but to stick at my desk.

Five days later there is another letter concerning a visit to the theatre and apologizing for a short note. "Pickwick must be attended to", he says, and he is already late, having mistaken the time.

On March 18th he appears to be busy on Number Two, working under pressure in view of the respite from toil his honeymoon, a fortnight hence, was to afford him. "The sheets are a weary length", he writes,

I had no idea there was so much in them. It will certainly be finished by Sunday morning, but I hope to do it to-night if I get a short turn.

There was certainly not much time for the first number, as the publication was to commence at the end of the month, and with his parliamentary work to do his hands were indeed full. Sunday did not see him through his work as he had expected. "I am tired and worn out to-day in mind and body", he wrote his "Dearest Katie". Then he begs her not to be "coss" with him for not paying her a visit. He did not get home until three o'clock that morning, owing no doubt to the late sitting of the House. He could not commence his writing until

Memorandum. Check 29th 1896. Received
of Messrs Chapman & Hall the
sum of Twenty nine Pounds, for the
two first numbers of the Pickwick
Paper.

A highly stylized, cursive handwritten signature, likely belonging to Charles Dickens, written in dark ink. The signature is composed of several overlapping loops and flourishes, characteristic of his handwriting.

The Origin of Pickwick

one o'clock, and estimated that he had still that to do which would take him until one or two o'clock in the early hours of the morning.

In another letter he writes:

Forced as I am to deny myself the least recreation, and to sit chained to my table, when a regard for my own health, or my own wishes, would move me away.

“To-morrow”, he wrote on 25th March—a little more than a week off the day arranged for their marriage, “I *must* write all day, or I really shall never get this thing done”. But “done” it was; the second number was delivered to the publishers before the first had appeared, and on March 29th he signed a receipt for £29, being the payment for “the two first numbers”; bad composition certainly; but remember, it was only a few days before his marriage and he had come through a remarkable spell of hard work.

II

On March 26th, 1836, publication of this new monthly serial novel was advertised in *The Times* and the *Athenaeum*, and the next day in several weekly newspapers as “to be published on March 31st”; a similar notice appeared in several of the daily papers. In *The Library of Fiction* published at the same time as *Pickwick*, the following long advertisement, undoubtedly the work of Dickens himself, appeared:

The Happy Dickens

Now publishing,
to be completed in about twenty monthly numbers,
Price One Shilling each.

No. 1 of the
POSTHUMOUS PAPERS

of

THE PICKWICK CLUB

containing a faithful record of the
perambulations, perils, travels, adventures
and

sporting transactions
of the corresponding members,
with biographical notices by the secretary.

Edited by "Boz",

and each monthly part
embellished with four illustrations

by SEYMOUR.

THE PICKWICK CLUB, so renowned in the annals of Huggin Lane, and so closely entwined with the thousand interesting associations connected with Lothbury and Cateaton Street, was founded in the year one thousand eight hundred and twenty-two, by Mr. Samuel Pickwick—the great traveller, whose fondness for the useful arts prompted his celebrated journey to Birmingham in the depth of winter; and whose taste for the beauties of nature even led him to penetrate to the very borders of Wales in the height of the summer.

This remarkable man would appear to have infused a considerable portion of his restless and inquiring spirit into the breasts of other members of the Club, and to have awaked in their minds the same insatiable thirst for travel which so eminently characterized his own. The whole surface of Middlesex, a part of Surrey, a portion

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of Essex, and several square miles of Kent were in their turns examined and reported on. In a rapid steamer they smoothly navigated the placid Thames; and in an open boat they fearlessly crossed the turbid Medway. High-roads and by-roads, towns and villages, public conveyances and their passengers, first-rate inns and roadside public houses, races, fairs, regattas, elections, meetings, market days—all the scenes that can possibly occur to enliven a country place, and at which different traits of character may be observed and recognized, were alike visited and beheld by the ardent Pickwick and his enthusiastic followers.

The Pickwick travels, the Pickwick diary, the Pickwick correspondence, in short, the whole of the Pickwick Papers, were carefully preserved, and duly registered by the secretary, from time to time, in the voluminous transactions of the Pickwick Club. These transactions have been purchased from the Patriotic Society at an immense expense, and placed in the hands of "Boz", the author of sketches illustrative of every-day life, every-day people—a gentleman whom the publishers consider highly qualified for the task of arranging these important documents, and placing them before the public in an attractive form. He is at present immersed in his arduous labours, the first-fruits of which appeared on the 31st March. Seymour has devoted himself, heart and graver, to the task of illustrating the beauties of Pickwick. It was reserved to Gibbon to paint, in colours that will never fade, the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire; to Hume to chronicle the strife and turmoil of the two proud houses that divided England against herself—to Napier to pen in burning words the history of the war in the Peninsula; the deeds and actions of the gifted Pickwick yet remain for "Boz" and SEYMOUR to hand down to posterity.



A Portrait of Dickens (*circa* 1836) in stained glass by John Winbolt,
now in The Dickens House.

The Happy Dickens

The honeymoon in Kent was of brief duration. Before April 14th the young couple were back at Furnival's Inn, as Dickens had to supervise the publication of the second part of his work, and was especially anxious about the drawings of Seymour, whom he had not yet met. He was relying much on his power for the macabre which had been commented on by several reviewers of the *Sketches*, and had by him a specially poignant story entitled *The Stroller's Tale*, which was to appear in the second number. For this, Seymour was to make a special illustration.

CHAPTER THREE
THE UNFORTUNATE SEYMOUR

I

WITH little excuse Seymour settled down to his task with an exceedingly bad grace. Publishers and author had deferred to him considerably, and having agreed to the terms proposed to him he had no justification for the attitude he adopted. The first chapter should have done much to appease him. There was the Club he wanted; there was Mr. Winkle: Messrs. Tupman and Snodgrass were excellent material for him. The second number, however, seems to have exasperated him. The Pickwickians were suddenly transported to Rochester, and Mrs. Seymour says that not only did her husband not know that part of the country, but it was a departure from the agreed plan. This suggestion is, of course, absurd. It had been agreed that Dickens should be given a wider range of scenes and characters than Seymour had contemplated, and the first chapter had made it clear that the Pickwickians were to travel. Moreover, the advertisement of the book was explicit on this very point.

It makes it clear that the departure for Rochester was not sprung upon him. Kent and the Medway were expressly mentioned in the advertisement.¹

¹ See page 46.

The Unfortunate Seymour

Moreover, Dickens was obviously keeping the original plan in mind. The fight with the cabman, the quarrel with Dr. Slammer, and the burlesque duel were certainly not alien to it, and Seymour ought to have welcomed a character like Jingle. But the rejection or, rather, modification of his original plan was rankling.

It was the introduction into Part 2 of an intensely dramatic story that caused his resentment to burst into flame. This was undoubtedly a departure from the plan as he had all along understood it. That plan was for broad comedy, and it may be admitted that he had some cause for resentment in respect of the interpolation of a story of this kind.

These short stories that Dickens introduced into *Pickwick* were obviously originally intended for the *Chronicle* or *Bell's Life*. He had probably a few ready for use when he received the excellent *Pickwick* commission. He had now no immediate use for them, and so "worked them off" in this way. Why, though, did he drag into the second number of *Pickwick* this story which was wholly alien to the scheme? Well, immediately the agreement was a settled thing, he made preparations for his wedding, and as we have seen was married just after the first number appeared. Amid all the distraction it was a relief that he had some "copy" by him with which he could fill a few pages.

But when Seymour found he was expected to illustrate a highly dramatic story, dragged by the

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heels into a work which had been designed as one of pure comedy, he had some excuse for protesting. His much cherished scheme had been whittled down to almost nothing, and here even the little that was left was being ruthlessly marred. As a consequence his drawing for *The Stroller's Tale* was inferior. Dickens did not like it, neither did the publishers. At that time Dickens had not met Seymour, and Chapman and Hall thought that a round-table conference might do a great amount of good. Accordingly, Dickens sent this most carefully worded letter to Seymour on the 14th April:

15 FURNIVAL'S INN,
Thursday morning

MY DEAR SIR,

I had intended to write to you to say how much gratified I feel by the pains you have bestowed on our mutual friend, Mr. Pickwick, and how much the result of your labours have surpassed my expectations. I am happy to be able to congratulate you, the publishers, and myself on the success of the undertaking, which appears to have been most complete.

I have now another reason for troubling you. It is this. I am extremely anxious about *The Stroller's Tale*, the more especially as many literary friends on whose judgment I place great reliance think it will create considerable sensation. I have seen your design for an etching to accompany it. I think it is extremely good, but still it is not quite my idea; and as I feel so very solicitous to have it as complete as possible, I shall feel personally obliged to you if you will make another drawing. It will give me great pleasure to see you, as well as the drawing, when it is completed. With this view I have asked



The Dying Clown.
Robert Seymour's last etching.

The Unfortunate Seymour

Chapman and Hall to take a glass of grog with me on Sunday evening (the only night I am disengaged), when I hope you will be able to look in.

The alterations I want I will endeavour to explain. I think the woman should be younger—the “dismal man” decidedly should, and he should be less miserable in appearance. To communicate an interest to the plate, his whole appearance should express more sympathy and solicitude, and while I represented the sick man as emaciated and dying, I would not make him too repulsive. The furniture in the room you have depicted *admirably*. I have ventured to make these suggestions, feeling assured that you will consider them in the spirit in which I submit them to your judgment. I shall be happy to hear from you that I may expect to see you on Sunday evening.

Dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

CHARLES DICKENS

It is difficult to see why Seymour should have resented such a letter, but it is certain that he did.

What had happened is clear. Mrs. Seymour declares it was only at her solicitation that her husband allowed *The Stroller's Tale* to appear. It is quite possible that she advised him against throwing up the work. He was a very highly strung man; to-day he would be described as a neurotic. He had undertaken the work in a state of exasperation, and had been chafing all along. When this story was introduced we can easily imagine him storming and declaring that he would have nothing more to do with the undertaking, and it is quite probable

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that his wife advised him against any such rash action. He then did a design and took it to Chapman and Hall, probably venting his indignation to them. They showed it to Dickens, who suggested alterations. Can we not imagine the publishers, driven to distraction, throwing up their hands in despair, and exclaiming: "Oh dear! You had better meet Seymour yourself, explain your wishes to him and see if you cannot bring him to a more amenable frame of mind"? And so Dickens arranged to invite them all to his house, or rather, chambers, and talk the whole thing over in the hope of bringing about a more satisfactory state of affairs. Dickens's letter to Seymour is couched in terms which suggest that he knew he had a very "touchy" individual to deal with.

Seymour called at Furnival's Inn that Sunday evening, but what happened will never be known. Chapman and Hall were presumably both present. Mrs. Dickens was there too, as well as the novelist's brother, Frederick. Clearly every effort was made to ensure an atmosphere of sociability and cordiality. Exactly thirty years later—that is to say, in April 1866—Dickens wrote to his eldest son asking him to request his mother to put into writing her recollections of that evening.¹ It appears that she did so, but unfortunately the document was destroyed when Dickens made a bonfire of all his correspondence at Gad's Hill a little later.

¹ See page 103.

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The interview was probably stormy at times. There must have been electricity in the atmosphere. What is certain is that once for all it was made clear to Seymour that the agreement must be adhered to—that he must illustrate whatsoever Dickens might choose to write.

He was not really appeased. He left Furnival's Inn with his mind seething with exasperation. All next day he was at work on the engraving, but it was completely spoilt. According to Mrs. Seymour:

When he saw it he was dumb with astonishment, which Mr. Chapman perceiving, said, "If it is your wish, Mr. Seymour, it shall be engraved again." But so disgusted was my husband that he wished to have nothing more to do with the concern. He found that little faith was to be placed in either of the parties.

How far this is true cannot be known, but if there is any truth in it we can understand it being, so to speak, the last straw. That Monday was April 18th; the next number had to be on sale on May 1st, so time was short. Only two illustrations had been done. Following what must have been to him the unpleasant interview of the Sunday evening, he had worked again at this picture on the Monday with nerves vibrant. Maybe his condition of mind was the cause of something going wrong with the plate. We cannot withhold sympathy. From his point of view everything had gone awry with one of the most cherished schemes of his life. He must have been in an appalling state of mind the whole

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of the following day. The next morning he rose early, went to the summer-house in his garden, placed the muzzle of a fowling-piece in his mouth, pulled the trigger by means of a piece of string, and blew out his brains.

Bell's Life in London gave the following account of the inquest in its issue of April 24th, 1836:

Mr. Robert Seymour, the celebrated caricaturist, was found dead in his garden, Barnsbury Park, Islington, on Wednesday morning, having destroyed himself with a loaded gun, which he discharged into his body, and which was found lying by his side. He was about 40 years of age, and left a wife and three children to deplore their loss. A Coroner's jury found a verdict of "Insanity". The following letter was found close to the body of the deceased. "Best and dearest of wives—for best of wives you have been to me—blame, I charge you, not any one, it is my own weakness and infirmity. I don't think anyone has been a malicious enemy to me; I have never done a crime; my country's laws punish with death. Yet I die, my life it ends. I hope my Creator will grant me peace, which I have prayed so for in vain whilst living." There was no date, signature, or superscription to the letter.

Thus the most famous humorous book in our language was born in tragedy. Sympathy with Seymour we are bound to have, but by no stretch of imagination can any blame be attached to Dickens.



Robert Seymour.



R. W. Buss.

CHAPTER FOUR
THE UNLUCKY BUSS

I

WE now come to another story which also demands our sympathy, though happily it has not a tragic ending. It is told explicitly enough by R. W. Buss, whose statement, now published for the first time, deals with his own personal association with *Pickwick*. It may be accepted as accurate when it deals with matters of which he had personal knowledge, but it must be admitted to be unreliable when he relates matters at second hand.

In his account of the origin of the book, Forster, after recording the death of Seymour, wrote: "There was little difficulty in replacing him, and for a single number Mr. Buss was interposed". When that was published (1872) Buss was still living. It awakened for him memories of a humiliation that had deeply hurt him in the past. In the course of thirty-six years the recollection of an unhappy experience had become dimmed, but this slight—almost slighting, certainly quite inadequate—reference to him in the official biography of the novelist stirred again the old sense of grievance, and reminded him of the might-have-been; reminded him that if the Fates had been a little kinder, his name, and not "Phiz's", might have been happily linked with that of Boz. It meant more

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than that, however, for he must have realized that now his association with *Pickwick* must remain only historical; that all else he had achieved in life—all his success as artist, lecturer, teacher, author—was in danger of paling in the sight of future generations by the light of his failure as the illustrator of this immortal book. In all future biographies of Charles Dickens it would be recorded that, in the emergency caused by the tragic death of Seymour, R. W. Buss had been given the opportunity, that he had contributed two plates, that these had been failures, and that he had been superseded in consequence. That he had good reason for this apprehension is shown by the fact that very recently one of the leading provincial newspapers in England recorded that he had committed suicide because of his failure to give satisfaction to Dickens and the publishers!

II

Seymour's death, for all the worry and irritation he had caused, must have been almost a staggering blow to the young publishing firm of Chapman and Hall. The modest expectations of the success of the first number of *The Pickwick Papers* were based almost wholly upon Seymour's name. The illustrations for the second number were not completed and the enterprise was threatened. Nevertheless, there was no question at the moment of abandoning the scheme; the letterpress was ready, and three out of

The Unlucky Buss

the four illustrations had been finished. It duly appeared "in time", with the following "Address":

Before this number reaches the hands of our readers, they will have become acquainted with the melancholy death of Mr. Seymour, under circumstances of a very distressing nature. Some time must elapse before the void which the deceased gentleman has left in his profession can be filled up; the blank which his death has occasioned in the society which his amiable nature won, and his talents adorned, we can hardly hope to see supplied.

We do not allude to this distressing event in the vain hope of adding, by any eulogium of ours to the respect in which the late Mr. Seymour's memory is held by all who ever knew him. Some apology is due to our readers for the appearance of the present number with only three plates. When we state that they comprise Mr. Seymour's last efforts, and that on one of them in particular (the embellishment to *The Stroller's Tale*) he was engaged up to a late hour of the night preceding his death, we feel confident that the excuse will be deemed a sufficient one.

Arrangements are in progress which will enable us to present the ensuing numbers of the *Pickwick Papers* on an improved plan, which, we trust, will give entire satisfaction to our numerous readers.

This announcement was dated exactly a week after Seymour's death. The third number contained the following announcement:

We announced in our last, that the ensuing numbers of the *Pickwick Papers* would appear in an improved form, and we now beg to call the attention of our readers to the fulfilment of our promise.

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Acting on a suggestion which has been made to them from various influential quarters, the Publishers have determined to increase the quantity of the Letter Press in every monthly part, and to diminish the number of plates. It will be seen that the present number contains eight additional pages of closely-printed matter, and two engravings on steel by Mr. Buss—a gentleman already known to the public as a very humorous and talented artist.

This alteration in the plan of the work entails upon the publishers a considerable expense, which nothing but a large circulation would justify them in incurring. They are happy to have it in their power to state that the rapid sale of the two first numbers, and the daily-increasing demand for this Periodical, enables them to acknowledge the patronage of the Public in the way which they hope will be deemed most acceptable.

May 30th, 1836.

The last paragraph need not be taken too literally. It is not known positively what Seymour received for his work; there can be no doubt that he commanded at that time a higher fee than Buss. Thus, by reducing the number of plates to two the publishers were effecting a substantial saving, which was not entirely balanced by the increase in the amount of letterpress. What had really happened was that Dickens had asserted himself. We have seen how in the very beginning he had objected to Seymour's plan, and had consented to follow it in part only out of deference to the request of the publishers, who regarded Seymour's co-operation as vitally necessary. If Seymour had lived, the restraint thus cast upon Dickens would

The Unlucky Buss

have chafed, and there is no doubt he would have cast it off sooner or later. He insisted on grasping the opportunity thus offered unexpectedly. He felt that now there was no longer any reason why he should not be given the free hand he had asked for in the very beginning. Chapman and Hall could not hope to find another artist whose name would command the same popularity as Seymour's, and they agreed now to carry out the plan to which they had been favourable ever since Hall's first interview with Dickens. It has been suggested that they might have approached Cruikshank, the only illustrator of the period whose name was of great value, but Dickens would have none of that. There had been enough trouble with Seymour; he was not willing to agree to an artist of even greater reputation taking Seymour's place. He felt his own strength, and he was not prepared to risk clashes with a man of Cruikshank's standing and force of personality, nor to endanger his friendship with that artist. He insisted that whosoever might be engaged must be subordinate to him, and he got his way. We know that he had a definite voice in the appointment of the artist. Thackeray, as all the world knows, sought the honour, and he makes it clear that Dickens had the last word. "I recollect", he said in a speech, "walking up to his chambers in Furnival's Inn, with two or three drawings in my hand, which, strange to say, he did not find suitable." The pair were unacquainted then. Obviously the tragic death of Seymour gave the

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work a definite publicity. John Leech, too, was an applicant.

Why was not William Heath appointed? Why not Onwhyn? Or Sibson?—all well-known illustrators. In all probability for the same reason that Cruikshank was not. All Dickens wanted was a competent artist who, if not young and absolutely unknown—the case with the man finally chosen—was a man unlikely to thrust his own personality into the forefront, one who would work to instructions, and accept a position subordinate to the author. Such a man was not easy to find, and the selection was delayed until time was seriously pressing. It was then that the publishers turned to J. Jackson, the engraver, and asked him if he could recommend somebody. Jackson was probably the leading wood engraver of the time. It was he who had engraved the wrapper design for *Pickwick*, and Chapman and Hall might have turned to him earlier—but they did not.

Jackson had no hesitation in recommending R. W. Buss.

III

Robert William Buss was born in the city of London in 1804, and apprenticed to his father, an engraver and enameller. He early showed marked gifts as an artist, and so he became a pupil of G. Clint, A.R.A. For some years he followed the lead of his master by painting a number of theatrical portraits. Many of the leading actors of the day sat to

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him, including J. P. Harley, Charles Mathews, Buckstone, J. Vanderhoff, J. Cooper, John Reeve, etc. Then he applied himself to subject pictures, and his second canvas was accepted by the Royal Academy. He continued to exhibit at the Academy for many years, and also at Suffolk Street, at the British Institution, and so on. Some of his pictures are well known to the present generation—"Introduction of Tobacco by Sir Walter Raleigh", for instance. Many of his works were engraved, and one or two of the best-known may be mentioned: "The Biter Bit", the series entitled "The March of Intellect", "Watt's First Experiment with Steam", "The Musical Bore", "Benefit of Clergy", "Time and Tide wait for no Man". In many of these pictures there is manifest a sense of humour which justified Jackson in recommending him to Chapman and Hall. Others were historical works, and some were definitely serious-minded: in short, he was an artist of marked versatility, and while one dare not say that he would have succeeded as "Phiz" did if he had been vouchsafed the same opportunity, it can hardly be doubted that if he had been given the chance for one more number he would have given satisfaction to Dickens, the publishers, and the public.

Buss was an able teacher in painting in oil and in water colours, and a competent writer on art. He became later in life the editor of the *Fine Arts Almanack and Artist's Remembrancer*, which appeared in 1850 and the three following years—declared

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at that date to be the best work of its kind ever published.

He was a successful lecturer, and one course of his lectures was published under the title of *English Graphic Satire, and its relation to different styles of Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving. A Contribution to the History of the English School of Art*. In his earlier years he had lectured on "English Comic and Satiric Art", and later he had a popular lecture on "Fresco Painting", which he illustrated by laying the ground in mortar on a wooden frame, and painting on it, when floated, a head of Gascoigne, larger than life.

When the Houses of Parliament were built he entered the competition for the frescoes, and he has recorded how he produced his gigantic designs, which would not go into his studio. He painted them in parts, set them up in his garden, and then climbed to the second floor of the house, from where he could judge their effect. The subjects he submitted were "Bertha" (who converted the king, Ethelbert) and "The Power of the Law" (Prince Hal's submission to Judge Gascoigne).

It is historical that R. W. Buss, his wife, and his daughter were pioneers in the matter of education for women. They founded the famous North London Collegiate School for Girls, and Miss Buss remained its head until comparatively recent years. In any history of education in this country that school must have prominent mention. For years Buss taught there

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drawing, chemistry, and other subjects, and his wife also took part in the teaching.

Of the man's personal qualities there is not much occasion to speak. He may not have entirely lacked ambition, but he seems to have lacked the capacity to shoulder his way through the world, and as a consequence, what with family responsibilities, and the necessity for hard work always with him, he never achieved the full ripeness of his undoubted gifts. But the purity of his character impressed all who knew him, and though his driving force always was the necessity of earning the wherewithal to maintain a considerable family, all his work was marked by an unfailing conscientiousness. As to his gifts, it is not claimed that they were of the highest order, but they were first class, and the variety and steadily maintained quality of his work should have won for him better recognition than he was ever accorded.

IV

Now as to the part Buss played in the origin of *Pickwick*. We have already seen that he was an artist of repute before that book was born. Six years previously he had painted a picture which is even nowadays reproduced—"The Frosty Reception". In 1831 he painted "The Biter Bit". Neither may be a memorable piece of work, but both reveal him as a good artist with a gift of humour. Then came his series of portraits for *Cumberland's British Drama*, and many

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illustrations for Charles Knight's *Penny Magazine*, and for the *Pictorial Edition* of Shakespeare. In this same period he had painted "Time and Tide wait for no Man" and "A Musical Bore". He was a book illustrator of established reputation, and had produced pictures of a humorous nature. He was known to be reliable, conscientious, level-headed. Therefore Jackson's recommendation was a sound one. But for one unfortunate fact, Buss would almost certainly have had his name linked with Dickens's in a far happier way. If there had been no urgency, if the next issue had not been due to appear for six or eight weeks, or if Seymour had left enough illustrations for the third number, Buss would probably have been successful.

The unfortunate fact is related by Buss himself. He had no experience with the etching needle, and though he tried desperately hard to master the art in time, he failed. His failure was due to the anxiety of the publishers not to delay the third number of *Pickwick* beyond the appointed date.

It is not suggested that Buss would have done better work than "Phiz" ultimately did, or even work as good, but if the urgency had not existed he would have had time to perfect his technique in etching and there would have been no thought of seeking another artist. If Buss had been able to give immediate satisfaction for payment at the rate of 15s. a plate, it is not to be supposed that the publishers would have felt any necessity to look elsewhere.

CHAPTER FIVE
THE PROGRESS OF PICKWICK

I

ON the thirty-first of March 1836 there appeared the first number of *The Pickwick Papers*, a thin pamphlet of twenty-six pages and four illustrations, enclosed in a green wrapper, price one shilling.

The publication of works in monthly parts was not anything out of the ordinary in the days when *Pickwick* appeared; these, however, were not new works, but re-publication of already popular novels, previously published in three-volume form, usually at the price of one-and-a-half guineas. Thus in February 1836 we find *Brambletye House*, by Horace Smith, being advertised "in six monthly numbers" at one shilling each, and No. 1 of *The Pilgrims of the Rhine* at half-a-crown per part. Neither was a new story.

To publish in this manner a new work by an un-established author was a bold experiment on the part of the publishers, and they took the wise course of giving it as extensive a publicity as they thought was warranted by all the circumstances. They were, however, as we have seen, basing their real hopes on the popularity of the artist.

Forster, in his *Life of Charles Dickens*, states that the first five parts appeared "without newspaper

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notice or puffing". He then goes on to say that it later "sprang into a popularity that each part carried higher and higher, until people at this time talked of nothing else".

Forster is incorrect in his first statement, for the publishers were by no means sparing in the newspaper advertising of *Pickwick*. As regards the later rise to fame, that is general knowledge; but no attempt has hitherto been made to ascertain from contemporary sources what were the causes which led to the great popularity the work achieved within a comparatively short time. It is well known that the first few numbers were a failure, but with part five, in which Sam Weller made his second appearance, the circulation took a turn for the better and thousands were called for where only hundreds had been sold before.

The earliest advertisement of *Pickwick* was in the *Athenaeum* for March 26, 1836, where it occupied the upper half of Chapman and Hall's full-page advertisement. The full announcement as on page 45 was compressed into the six inches of space purchased. A shorter advertisement appeared that week (that is, prior to publication) in seven other weekly papers—*Bell's Life in London*, the *Observer*, *John Bull*, the *Weekly Dispatch*, the *Satirist*, the *News and Sunday Herald*, and *The Times*.

On April 1st there was an advertisement in both *The Times* and the *Morning Post*. The next day a similar announcement appeared in the *Court Journal*, and the day following in the *Age*.

On the 31st of March will be published, to be continued Monthly, price ONE SHILLING, the First Number of

THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS

OF

THE PICKWICK CLUB

CONTAINING A FAITHFUL RECORD OF THE

PERAMBULATIONS, PERILS, TRAVELS, ADVENTURES, AND SPORTING TRANSACTIONS OF
THE CORRESPONDING MEMBERS.

EDITED BY 'BOZ.'

And each MONTHLY PART embellished with FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS by SEYMOUR.

The PICKWICK CLUB, so renowned in the annals of Huzzen-lane, and so closely entwined with the thousand interesting associations connected with Lechlery and Cret-street, was founded in the year One Thousand Eight Hundred and Twenty-two, by Samuel Pickwick, the great traveller—whose fondness for the useful art impelled his celebrated journey to Bromingham in the depth of winter, and whose taste for the beauties of nature even led him to quit track to the very borders of Wales in the height of summer.

This remarkable man would appear to have included a considerable portion of his recollections inquiring spirit into the bosoms of other humans. The Club, said to have originated in their minds the same inextinguishable thirst for travel which so emphatically characterised his own. The whole surface of Middlesex, a part of Surrey, a portion of Essex, and several square miles of Kent, were in their minds examined, and recorded in his journal. In the year 1825, he has visited the placid Thames, and in the hope that they might possibly cross the tulip Meads, High-roads and bye-roads, hives and willows, public conveniences and their passengers, first-rate inns and rural de public houses, ricks, fairs, ragdicks, rectories, vicars, in other days—all the scenes that can possibly occur to children on a country place, and at which did not treat of the racter may be observed and recognised, were all visited and beheld, by the ardent Pickwick and his enthusiastic followers.

The Pickwick Travels, the Pickwick Diary, the Pickwick Correspondence—in short, the whole of the Pickwick Papers, were carefully preserved, and duly registered by the secretary, from time to time in the voluminous Transactions of the Pickwick Club. These transactions have been purchased from the patriotic secretary, at an immense expense, and placed in the hands of 'Boz,' the author of 'Sketches Illustrative of Every Day Life, and Every Day People—a gentleman whom the publishers consider highly qualified for the task of arranging these important documents, and placing them before the public in an attractive form. He is at present deeply immersed in his arduous labours, the first fruits of which will appear on the 31st March.

Seymour has devoted himself, heart and soul, to the task of illustrating the beauties of Pickwick. It was reserved to Gibson to paint, in colours that will never fade, the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire—to Hume to trumpet the serine and turmoil of the two proud houses that dwelt at Elzard against her self—to Scapier to pour, in burning words, the History of the War in the Peninsula—the deeds and actions of the gifted Pickwick, yet roman for 'Boz' and Seymour to hand down to posterity.

From the press at appearance of these important documents, and the probable extent of the selections from them, it is presumed that the series will be completed in about twenty numbers.

The first advertisement of *The Pickwick Papers* from
The Athenæum, 26th March, 1836.

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This was a very good record for those days, but the advertisements did not in all cases bring further immediate publicity in the way of notices or reviews.

The first review we have been able to discover appeared in the *Atlas* three days after publication. They referred to it as "a strange publication" of which they had "in vain endeavoured to discover the purpose". It "ostensibly professes to be very funny", continued the writer of the review, but he found it "excessively dull". "The wit of the writer has no wider range than through that melancholy region of exhausted comicality, which Hood and Poole and Smith and Cruikshank have reaped until they have not left a single laugh behind".

That was the sum total of the notice taken by the Press during the first week of issue. "Strange publication". "Exhausted comicality". "Excessively dull". Did Dickens see that notice, we wonder? He most probably did, but was too immersed in the more important matters of a honeymoon to pay much attention to it. Besides, we have an idea, from his letters during the writing of the first two numbers, that he knew he was on sure ground.

It is evident that the reviewer in the *Atlas* lacked appreciation of the new humour; so did the *Bath Herald* the following week:

This appears to us to be a squib directed against the British Association for the encouragement of the arts, sciences, literature, etc., which has had meetings in London, Edinburgh [*sic*], Dublin, and is about to sit

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next in Bristol. If this be really not its drift, we must leave the solution of the enigma to some other Oedipus.

Neither the *Observer* nor *The Times* made any comment on the publication, in spite of the advertisements they received. *The Times* very rarely indeed reviewed publications in those days, and when it did, it was not a work of fiction that was noticed. Yet somebody on the staff read the first number of *Pickwick*, and chuckled over it, then extracted the tall story about the cabman's horse and printed it in the issue of April 7th, naming the source whence it came. The result of this was to give a large public a taste of the new humour.

The first long extract to be lifted by another periodical and tacked on to a "review" appeared on April 9th in the *Literary Gazette*, and must have done more than any large displayed advertisement to help on the sale of the publication. It is evident that advertisements did not in those days control the reviews. The *Literary Gazette*, like the *Atlas*, was one of the weeklies in which the new work was not advertised; perhaps the publishers thought that as an advertisement had appeared in *The Times* and the *Athenaeum*, the class of public to which *Pickwick* would appeal would not be interested in seeing a further advertisement in this high-class and important weekly. But the *Literary Gazette* did not fail to notice this new publication in an article combining also the other new publication of Chapman and Hall, *The*

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Library of Fiction, to which Dickens contributed a story. It said:

Both these commencing periodicals promise well. The first contains original, selected and translated stories; and *The Tuggs at Ramsgate*—with which it sets out—possesses drollery and characteristicity. The *Pickwick Club Papers* bid fair, however, to surpass their contemporary. The design is playful, and the opportunities for good natured satire, if we may judge from a few pages, do not seem likely to be neglected.

That same week, two newspapers in which the work had been advertised came out with fairly lengthy reviews. The *News and Sunday Herald* said: “This is a novelty in the monthly innumerable”, but found fault with the manner in which the work had been advertised.

These “papers” come before us with the unexceptionable claims to our best consideration, save that they are heralded by an advertisement of pompous insipidity, in which modesty is sacrificed to a contemptible thirst for display, and a wretched attempt at tawdry smartness substituted for the common-sense and business air that should characterise tradesmen’s bulletins.

An appreciative review appeared in *Bell’s Life in London*, to which, it will be remembered, Dickens had contributed some of his *Sketches*:

A periodical under the title of *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* has just come forth. It is edited by Boz, whose humorous productions are already familiar to our readers, and whose power of describing

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the singular and the ridiculous, in the human character is not excelled by any writer of modern times. The present work is full of quaint humour and close observation of the eccentricities of mankind, and will amply sustain the fame which "Boz" has already acquired in the same amusing style.

Fraser's Literary Chronicle for April 9th also reviewed *The Library of Fiction* at the same time, calling them "merry periodicals" the perusal of which had afforded them much pleasure.

The misfortunes of Mr. Pickwick and his company on the first day of their adventures in search of the marvellous are splendidly described. The rencontre of the party with the respectable unknown, the duel of Mr. Winkle and Dr. Slammer, and Mr. Pickwick's encounter with the cabman are all points of humour exquisitely told. Picking at random, we offer our readers the following extract.

Their selection was the same as that of *The Times* two days previously, the story of the cabman and his horse.

A week later there was a good notice in *The Spectator*:

Boz has commenced a periodical under the title of the *Pickwick Club* which feigns to be a record of the sayings, doings and adventures of a knot of aspiring Cocknies whom he makes butts of for ridiculing the airs of superiority and importance commonplace people are apt to assume by way of propitiating their self-love. The "Trip to Rochester" in the first number is cleverly done, though forced. The characters have too much of carica-

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ture, and the incidents belong to the stage rather than to real life. "The Duel", when one of the Pickwickians goes out to give satisfaction for an insult he only supposes he might have offered because he cannot recollect what he did overnight, but which was really given by an adventurer who borrows his coat, is a scene for a farce. "The Assembly" is capitally hit off.

Advertisements of the book were not confined to London papers. One appeared in *The Lincoln Gazette* for April 19th. This paper gave on that date quite a long review, ending with: "To the laughter-loving reader, *The Pickwick Papers* must prove a rich acquisition, and we defy the owner of the most frigid visage to scan over them without a violent excitement of his risible faculties".

The *Court Journal* reviewed the first number at the end of the month, when the tragic death of Seymour had drawn a little more attention to the work on which he had been engaged.

We have glanced at the humorous designs with which this first number is illustrated in a less mirthful mood than this whim and spirit were intended to create. . . . In Boz, who is the editor of these Pickwickian pleasantries, Seymour found a writer of congenial spirit and humour.

The death of Seymour appears also to have been the key-note of the May number of the *Metropolitan Magazine*, of which Captain Marryat was the editor. It said:

The hilarity with which we were about to hail the

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appearance of this new comic work is dreadfully overcast by the memory of the miserable death of poor Seymour. . . . However, our regrets must not prevent us doing justice to the genuine humour of this the first number of these posthumous papers. "Boz" is a rising writer; in his prosperous navigation he has but one shoal to beware of—extravagance. Yet even extravagance may be pardoned in his, when he makes it so laugh provoking. When we receive the next number, we will give a more detailed account of this paragon of clubs.

Although somewhat belated, the *Morning Post* gave prominence to the first number of *Pickwick* in their issue of May 11th, when the second part was already published.

We have been highly amused by the perusal of this number, the first of a series. "Boz" is a shrewd observer of all the phases of citizenship . . . and has the happiest knack in the world of combining the glowing outlines of personal sublimity, with that recipient risibility of conception which makes them unconsciously waver into profiles of the ridiculous. His imitations of Parliamentary eloquence and etiquette in the proceedings of the Pickwick Club are particularly good.

The *Satirist*, which had already written in high praise of the *Sketches by Boz*, terming them "in their way inimitable", was somewhat tardy in expressing its opinion of *Pickwick*. Although the publication had been advertised in its columns, there was no notice during April of the first number; but on the day of the appearance of number two, it made the following reference to it:

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Boz is really an agreeable fellow, and whether he travels by himself or in association, enough is seen of him to give us a high relish for his company. He has an aptitude of delineation that must render him at all times amusing, and many of his scenes are sketched with a master hand. He is one of the few authors of whom we never tire.

II

The first number of *Pickwick* did not go like the proverbial hot cakes. According to a statement made at a later date by Mr. Aked, the binder, the first order for binding up Number 1 was for four hundred copies, all of which included Seymour's original work. It is this which has made a really fine first edition of *Pickwick* command such a high price whenever it has come upon the market.

True to its promise, the next month (May) the *Metropolitan* again returned to *The Pickwick Papers*, and especially to the tragic death of Seymour, who was, of course, a more real figure to the reading public of the day than the fresh young Boz; and there the reviewer gives an opinion which the present writers have for long held, but which has not since been stated in print, so far as they are aware: that the death of Seymour was hastened somewhat by the vivid story of *The Stroller's Tale* and the equally vivid drawing the artist made of it. Said the *Metropolitan*:

It is a heart-rending subject, that engraving, and too exciting for the sensitive and overwrought nerves of

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misery. Might it not have been the one drop of bitterness which made the cup of anguish overflow, and thus incite him to pour out his life hastily with it.

Mr. Pickwick himself is, as the nurse of Juliet says, "A man of wax—a mould—a bright light among his brethren." We hope, notwithstanding the ominous word 'Posthumous', that he is not quite dead—buried, at least, in oblivion, he never will be. We hope some day to view him in all the vigour of vitality and in his own improper person.

The immortality of Mr. Pickwick, predicted at so early a stage of his career, was remarkably prophetic. And the desire, too, to see that worthy in the flesh was but the forerunner of that claim to kinship which has persistently grown during the last hundred years, until the word 'Pickwickian' has found a place in the Oxford Dictionary, and Mr. Pickwick has been once more immortalized in a book entitled *Personalities and Powers*, by Knut Hagberg (1930), where a chapter is devoted to Mr. Pickwick cheek by jowl with such actual personalities as Kitchener, Gladstone, John Stuart Mill, and Cecil Rhodes, and where he is described as "a gentleman in that word's most aristocratic significance".

The *Sun* appeared to have a strange opinion of the make-up of *Pickwick*, for in its issue of May 2nd it said:

The second number of an entertaining, miscellaneous collection of tales, anecdotes, etc., collected and arranged by Boz, and illustrated by Seymour. The best, at least the most vigorously written tale is the one which de-

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scribes the death of a low pantomime actor at one of the minor theatres.

Bell's Life in London wrote of the second number in its issue of May 1st:

The second number of the highly humorous *Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* by "Boz" is out, and in all respects sustains the reputation for characteristic originality which the author has so justly earned. It is illustrated by these admirable sketches, from the pencil of the unfortunate Seymour, which, from his melancholy fate, become doubly valuable.

Number two of *Pickwick* was not reviewed by the *Bath Herald* (which had noticed the first number), but we find this understanding notice of it in the *Bath Chronicle*:

The second number of this humorous publication is as full of sly and racy fun as the first. Intimate acquaintance with that strange piece of patchwork—human life—peeps forth in every page.

III

Although each number had been advertised in *John Bull*, it was not until after the third number had appeared that this paper gave it a notice. This was on June 12th, when it said, after dealing with some of the monthly magazines:

Another periodical work of a very different character claims our particular attention—we mean *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* illustrated by plates

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from sketches by Mr. Buss, who has succeeded to that department of the work upon the death of the lamented Mr. Seymour. There is as much genuine humour, and as much real fun, in the Pickwick Papers, as in these days generally fall to the share of half a dozen books of the same size. We have not the least knowledge of the author, or even his name. His *nom de guerre* is Boz under which he has written another extremely entertaining work. If the Pickwick Papers keep up to their present level, they will, in conclusion, assume a high place in the ranks of comic literature.

Here was praise indeed, and although three months elapsed before *John Bull* gave the publication a further notice, we can see from its implication that the writer had been joyfully devouring the intervening numbers.

On September 11th it said:

The Pickwick Papers are this month irresistibly good. Smollett never did anything better than the sixteenth chapter of the present number. The loss of Mr. Seymour to the work, as far as illustrations go, is obvious; but while the author continues to serve up such rare treats as those which he has already laid upon our table, he will find the public appetite so sharpened as to be ready to gobble it all up even without plates.

When reviewing the third number, the *Metropolitan Magazine*, which had been so interested in the fate of poor Seymour, seems to have got into a confusion over the name of the artist engaged in that unfortunate artist's place; for in announcing the title of the publication, it says, "With illustrations by R. W. Boz", and the artist Buss was again referred to

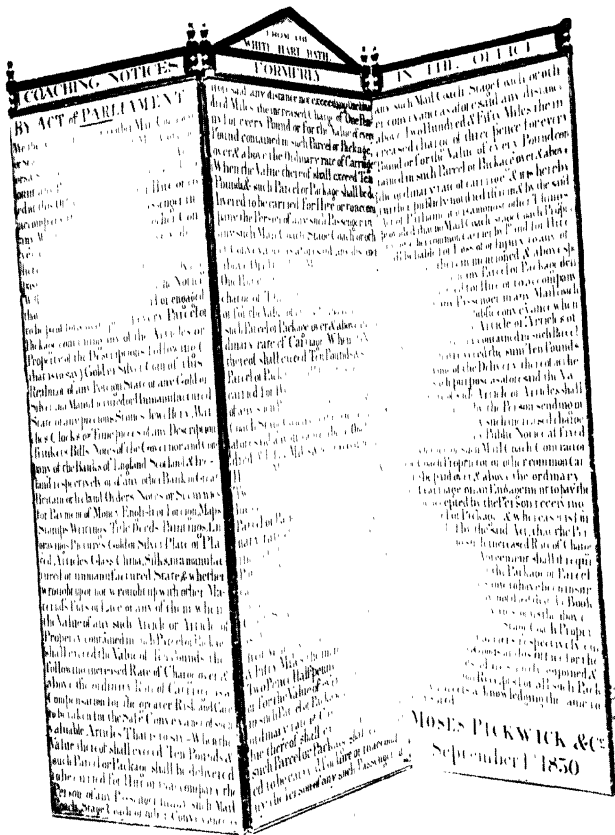


Photo:

The screen formerly in the coach-office of Moses Pickwick & Co., at Bath.

Walter Dexter

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as Boz at the end of the review. The same mistake appears in the August number of the magazine reviewing the fourth number, in which "Phiz's" first sketches appear. This is what was said about the third number:

The third number of this amusing work is well sustained, with the same humour and drollery that have made the preceding parts so popular. The Fat Boy improves upon us, and we find that he turns out to be not quite so great a fool as the world had generally supposed. His betrayal of the loves of the elderly Mr. Tupman and the not less elderly Miss Wardle, to his mistress, is a very rich scene. The cricket match, also, is well described. We are glad again to meet Mr. Jingle on the scene, though he is but a sad rogue at best and comes but to create all manner of mischief. We predict that these papers will never be at a discount, though we prophesy that there will always be a great run upon the publishers for them. Mr. R. W. Boz has done his part well, and much lessens our regret at the want of Mr. Seymour's spirited hand.

Another notice of the third number appeared in the *Sunday Times* for June 12th:

This little work is brought out under the editorship of the gentleman who, under the whimsical nomenclature of Boz, has already afforded us no ordinary gratification by his laughable sketches of character. The style is that of Fielding and Smollett, and we can truly affirm that no modern writer has approached so nearly to these great originals. The graphic illustrations to the early numbers were by Seymour, whose melancholy suicide we mentioned some time since.

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There is no comment here on the illustrations by Buss, but in the *Bath Herald* of June 11th we find this mention:

Library of Fiction No. 3. The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club No. 3.

These comic and diverting series are illustrated by a new hand. As far as regards the graphic designs "Buss" now sketches the drolleries which "Boz" relates, and the operation of the two will banish "black melancholy" as effectually as a dose of laughing gas.

The *Brighton Guardian* did not devote much space to literature of any kind, but on the 15th June 1836 it felt forced to note the publication which was beginning to be talked about among the visitors from London. This is what it said, in presenting a long extract:

The current number of this work is now before us, and we can only remark that it is equal to its predecessors in sharp and pungent humour. We have no room for extracts, or "The Cricket Match at Muggleton" and the Dinner after it, and the flirtation of the spinster aunt should certainly adorn our columns.

IV

Three months had gone, and still *The Pickwick Papers* was hanging fire. It is doubtful if more than four or five hundred copies of each number had been sold. The publishers appealed to Charles Tilt, a large wholesale bookseller, to help them to push the sale; they had every confidence in the ultimate success of

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their project, if it could only be brought more directly to the notice of the reading public. Tilt's plan was to send out "on sale or return" fifteen hundred copies of each of the three issues; this was done, but it was disastrous. On an average, fourteen hundred and fifty copies came back; net result, fifty copies sold, of each. The death of Seymour was said to be the reason. Buss's illustrations to the third number were not satisfactory.

Still the publishers persevered. Hablot K. Browne, quite a young man, even younger than the youthful author of the work itself, was engaged as artist in place of Buss; to save expense, the number of the illustrations was reduced from four to two; the letter-press was increased to thirty-two pages per number, and Dickens agreed to accept the reduced payment of ten guineas per number for his work.

And so Number 4 came out in July. To Mr. Jingle, who had so far held the stage, was added a new character, a cockney type, Sam Weller; there was a graphic piece of writing describing the chase of Jingle and Rachel Wardle to London; Sam had made his bow with a few whimsicalities, and the number concluded with a powerful interpolated tale, *A Madman's Manuscript*.

The Press notices, as each month went by, appear to have become alarmingly fewer. Only two London papers commented on Number 4. One was the constant *Bell's Life in London* (July 3rd), but it said never a word about Sam.

The Origin of Pickwick

The fourth number of this periodical is before us, and we find in it all the well-known raciness of the talented Editor "Boz", who is ever at home in delineating the nice shades and eccentricities of human nature. It is illustrated by two humorous drawings, and also contains an affecting paper called *A Madman's Manuscript*.

The *Bath Herald* of July 9th dealt with Number 4 of each *Pickwick* and *The Library of Fiction* (to which Dickens did *not* contribute), and also with *Sunday Under Three Heads* in omnibus fashion:

Our readers are already acquainted, from previous notices, with the merits of the first two series, of which the humour, sentiment, and oddity are so powerfully aided and illustrated by the graphic fancy of "Buss" the mighty co-operator of "Boz".

This is amusing, as R. W. Buss was no longer illustrating the publication at the time, and in any case "Buss" was not a nom de plume like "Boz" or "Phiz"; but whilst R. W. Buss had been announced on the cover of Number 3 as providing the illustrations, the name of "Phiz" did not appear on the cover of Number 4—only the remark, "With Illustrations".

It was probably the *Literary Gazette* of W. Jerdan which saved *Pickwick*; at any rate, it was the first paper to recognize Sam Weller as a force to reckon with. It had given a fairly lengthy extract from the first number. The publication was not advertised in it until June 4th (in May there had been an advertisement of *The Library of Fiction* but not of *Pickwick*),

The Progress of Pickwick

when Number 3 of *The Pickwick Papers* was announced as "now ready". But even then there was no further notice of the story in this discerning weekly. When Mr. Sam Weller appeared in the July part (Number 4) Jerdan could not resist the humour of that character, and we find in the issue of July 9 the passage commencing "A loud ringing" from Chapter 10 quoted in full, prefixed by the following:

The members of the Pickwick Club continue to display the humour and talent of this clever writer. The last number, for instance, gave us the following good description of Boots, at an ancient inn in the borough.

v

The *Literary Gazette* was evidently not going to let *Pickwick* alone for a while. Next month it did not hesitate once again to speak most highly of the work and to quote yet another typical extract from it. Giving the public a sample of the goods offered was an excellent idea, and the publishers and Dickens had much to thank Jerdan for.

Of Numbers 4 and 5 there were still fifteen hundred copies being sent out "on sale or return", and regularly the greater part came back.

Jerdan's review of Number 5 undoubtedly paved the way for an increase in the sale of the next part, published at the end of the month. It will be found in the issue of August 13th. The title was somewhat incorrectly given, but what did that matter?

The Origin of Pickwick

“*The Pickwick Club Papers*, edited by Boz. London: Chapman and Hall”. It says:

We hope and believe that this clever and characteristic publication prospers, as it deserves to do. The present number has a very amusing tale of a bagman, told in Boz's best style, which we recommend to readers, and would indeed extract, were it not too gross an act of plunder from so small a tome. We will, however, copy (as a specimen of an election “miraculous circumstance”) as related by Sam the coachman, as happening in his father's time.

We have not found any more London reviews of Number 5, but the two Bath papers still continued to enjoy the perusal and to recommend it to their readers. The *Bath Chronicle* said on August 7th:

The fifth number is out, and sustains the well earned fame of Boz whose descriptive faculty was never more humorously displayed. The characters are admirably drawn, and Hogarth in his last days, could not have given us such faithful pictures on canvas, as Boz has on paper.

The *Bath Herald* the same week had specially to excuse itself from quoting a long extract, in the following words:

The best episode is a most whimsical and laughable dialogue between a travelling bagman and an old-fashioned arm-chair, which we could wish our space would allow us to transcribe entire, for it admits not of amputation or division.

The Progress of Pickwick

The *Brighton Guardian*, after missing the fourth number, returned to the fold in August with a further favourable review, using the word 'inimitable' in connexion with it, but that by the way in reference to "Phiz's" drawing and not to the text by Boz!

The present number contains as usual, plenty of food for mirth. The scene between Mr. Pickwick and Mrs. Bardell is highly ludicrous. We advise our political friends to peruse the account of the election at Eatanswill. To the lovers of the marvellous, the Bagman's Story will prove highly amusing. The illustrations which accompany this number seem to us to be a shade superior to those which appeared in the two numbers for June and July. The scene in which Mr. Pickwick is taken by surprise with Mrs. Bardell in his arms, by his fellow Pickwickians, is inimitable; the likenesses are well preserved.

A short notice of Number 5, with a long extract concerning Sam, was given in *The Lincoln Gazette*, and of the following number it said, on 13th September: "Boz has already earned a name that will roll down the stream of time, and his inexhaustible wit will be the delight of many generations".

A magazine which had forgotten Dickens for a while now woke up. In the September *Metropolitan* we find a reference to "the great Mr. Pickwick" as well as the following eulogy:

Boz marches on triumphantly, and has completely taken possession of our ear, and of the hearts, too, of his countrymen.

The Origin of Pickwick

VI

The circulation of Number 6, published at the end of August, showed signs of improvement; everybody wanted to read about this man Pickwick and his comical servant, Sam Weller, and orders poured in for the previous month's issue; and then more Sam was wanted; "When did he first come into this remarkable story?" people asked; and placed an order for the back Number 4; and enjoyed it so much that Numbers 1 to 3 had to be purchased. From a modest circulation of from 400 to 1,000 copies of each of these first five numbers, all at once the publishers found themselves inundated with orders; it is no exaggeration to say that the circulation leaped to 40,000 copies, and "Phiz" was kept hard at it, etching and re-etching not only his own illustrations but those of Buss and Seymour.

One hundred years ago not only was the population much smaller than to-day, but only a small proportion of it were potential book buyers, owing to the lack of education. *Sketches by Boz* had done well with a circulation of 1,000; but here were forty times that number of *Pickwicks* in demand. No wonder Dickens should write his first publisher, John Macrone, the laconic phrase in a large hand, "PICKWICK TRIUMPHANT". The success of *Pickwick* was the talk of the literary world, and Macrone put a fresh edition of the *Sketches* in hand at once!

The Progress of Pickwick

Mr. Chapman and Mr. Hall were delighted; young Dickens had stood by them in taking a smaller payment a couple or so months ago; now it was time for them to show their appreciation; they increased his monthly "emolument" to twenty-five pounds.

CHAPTER SIX

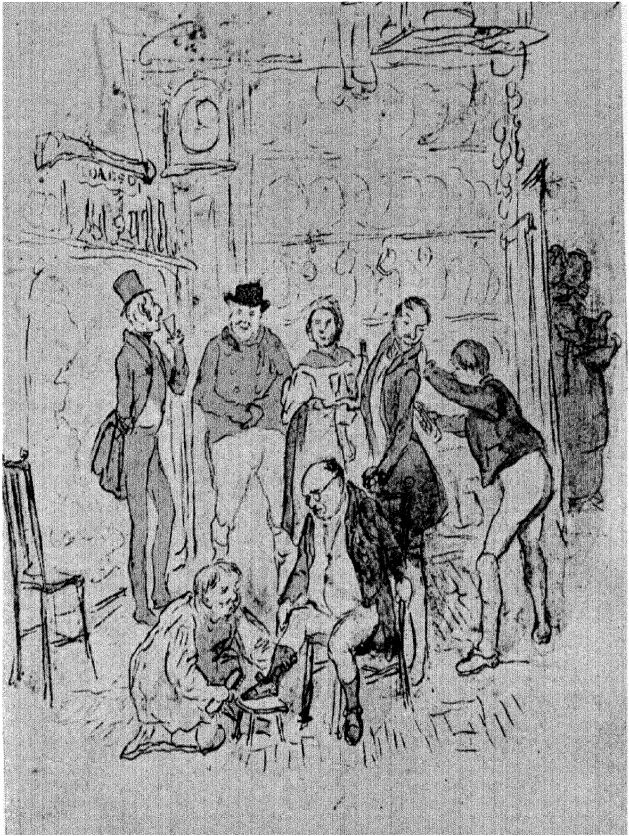
THE IMPORTUNATE MRS. SEYMOUR

I

WE must now have something to say about the pamphlet, already referred to more than once, issued by Mrs. Seymour in 1854. It was entitled *Origin of the Pickwick Papers*, and it was of a most scurrilous character. It was full of palpable inaccuracies, distortions of fact, and libels on Dickens, and it was suppressed as soon as it was published.

Not many copies can have got into circulation, for when the late F. G. Kitton reprinted it in 1901 there were only two copies known to be in existence, and as far as we are aware none has been discovered since.

It appears that at the time of her husband's death Mrs. Seymour had a small competency—not wealth by any means, but sufficient for her needs—but that investments in foreign securities deteriorated in value and greatly impaired her position. If she had then applied to Chapman and Hall or to Dickens for help, they would probably have consented. They might well have said, "Seymour illustrated only the first two numbers of *Pickwick*, but it is true that the original suggestion came from him, and it was he



An unpublished sketch for *The Pickwick Papers* by Seymour.

The Pickwickians in Wardle's kitchen.

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

who drew the world-famous figures of the Pickwickians. We cannot deny, therefore, that his family have some claim upon us now that they are in need", and from all that is known of them there is no excuse for suggesting that they would not have helped her.

But Mrs. Seymour made any such action impossible. She seems to have nursed a grievance from the beginning. Even before her circumstances had declined she had persistently spread the story that her husband had been shabbily treated both by Chapman and Hall, and by Dickens, particularly by the latter. She had asserted that Dickens had declined to allow her husband any credit at all in respect of the origin of *Pickwick*,¹ and she made the assertions in such a way that both publisher and author were bound to reject her appeals—or rather, demands.

In the summer of 1849 she wrote Dickens a letter which he described as of "a perfectly mad character", and as she mentioned in it Mrs. S. C. Hall (no connexion, of course, with the publishing firm of Chapman and Hall) Dickens sent it to that lady with a covering letter, printed on the following pages, which is here published for the first time.

¹ How that allegation persists is shown by a passage in a recent book to the effect that the wrapper of the first number bore the words "Edited by Boz", but had no reference to Seymour. The author can only have seen a reprint. The first issue bore the words "Illustrated by R. Seymour".

The Origin of Pickwick

DEVONSHIRE TERRACE,

Wednesday, Eighteenth July, 1849

MY DEAR MRS. HALL,

I have been out of town until last night, or I should have written you sooner, to tell you that your present made me laugh heartily (you cannot conceive the ridiculous gravity with which I opened the box before I knew its contents) and that I am very much obliged to Hall for his good-natured and exact remembrance of my wishes. I think I should have come down to say so, but that we are going to Bonchurch on Monday, for ten weeks, and I am over head and ears, clearing off a few hundred letters in reply to a few hundred people who have written to me on various subjects, taking a wide range between nothing at all, and proposals from elderly ladies in Wales that I will set their sons up in business in various parts of the world.

I have received a letter from Mrs. Seymour, the widow of Seymour the artist, of a perfectly mad character—extraordinarily insulting—and containing various statements about the origin of Pickwick, which are utterly false from beginning to end. Among a number of people she names, of whom I know nothing, and a rambling account she gives of circumstances I am supposed to know, of which I never heard, she mentions as friends who have been kind to her yourself and Hall. Now, although I believe, very confidently, that neither of you would suppose me to be guilty of a meanness or injustice, I am sufficiently impressed by the audacious character of this woman's assertions to desire, that if you really have been in communication with her, you should know what kind of person she is, in reference to that little essential of life which we call truth. And if it will not bore you to read two letters, I should be glad to send

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

you what she has written to me, and what Mr. Chapman the book-seller has also written to me, on my sending him her letter with these words, "Be good enough to inform me whether you are as much surprised as I have been, by the enclosed communication, and whether there is any truth in it?"

Shall I send you the two letters?

Faithfully yours always,

CHARLES DICKENS

Mr. Chapman's reply to the question put to him by Dickens was dated July 7th, 1849, and was as follows:

In November 1835 we published the *Squib Annual* with plates by Seymour; and it was during my visit to him to see after them that he said he should like to do a series of Cockney Sporting Plates of a superior sort. I said I thought they might do, if accompanied by letter-press, published in monthly parts; and this being agreed to, we wrote to the author of *Three Courses and a Dessert* and proposed it, but receiving no answer the scheme dropped until Seymour said he wished us to decide, as another job had offered, and it was on this we decided to ask you to do it. We naturally applied to you to do the *Pickwick*; but I do not think we ever mentioned our intention to Mr. Seymour.

II

In her pamphlet, Mrs. Seymour asserts that her husband did not want Dickens to write the book, but that she urged him to consent because she had heard that the young reporter was in great poverty. She states that when the question of a writer was

The Origin of Pickwick

under consideration, Chapman gave Seymour the two volumes of *Sketches by Boz*, and that

When he came home he gave them to me, observing at the time: "Janey dear, will you read these volumes and tell me whether you think 'Boz' will answer my purpose to write *The Pickwick Papers*? I am told that he is a young man, extremely poor; his works have been unsuccessful." I replied: "Poor fellow, then I will see what can be done for him." I read one or two of the *Sketches*. They created no amusement for me; I was too glad to escape into my beautiful garden. Remembering only Dickens's poverty and misfortunes, I said "Select him. Fifteen pounds a month will be a little fortune to him."

Later she says, "Our sympathies with his misfortune alone induced us to permit him to write the book", and again, she declares that "the sketches for *Pickwick* had been seen by several parties before we had heard of Dickens, and all our misfortunes ought to claim his assistance". She proceeds:

He had once claimed our sympathies when he was a struggling author, and had we been so callous to his sufferings the probability is that he would have been where a poor author is, or was, for he was said to be dying, and who was said to have been the author of some of the books which bore Mr. Dickens's name. These I have suppressed, that the feelings of the family should not be wounded. The name of another has been given to me as the author of some of "Boz's" successful works—I think a Mr. Morris, but whether true or false I can neither affirm or deny. People will talk of Mr. Dickens, and I cannot help hearing.

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

That extract alone is sufficient to explain why the pamphlet was suppressed! It is typical of the astonishing malignity with which Mrs. Seymour pursued Dickens, and it explains his refusal to have anything to do with her.

But let us look at the assertions she makes. Although we have recently learned through the publication of the Letters to Thomas Beard¹ that Dickens in his reporting days had family financial anxieties of which we were previously unaware, and of which it is just possible Seymour had heard whispers, it is certainly not the fact that he was in poverty at that time. It is conceivable that, in recommending Dickens for the work, Charles Whitehead had hinted to Chapman or to Hall that his friend would be glad of the money, and that this had been repeated to Seymour. If that were the case Mrs. Seymour maliciously distorted the fact. Certainly the artist could not have known anything about Dickens's early miseries; we know that not even his wife had that knowledge until after his death. The truth was, as all the world knows, that the young man was earning a salary of five guineas a week as a Parliamentary reporter, augmented by two guineas in recognition of the *Sketches* he was contributing to his paper. As to the allegation that his works had been failures, we know how false this is.

It will be noted that Mrs. Seymour says that her husband asked her to consider whether Boz could

¹ *Dickens to his Oldest Friend* (Putnam's, 1932).

The Origin of Pickwick

answer his purpose to write *The Pickwick Papers*. This is equally untrue as that title for the projected book had not been chosen at that time; Seymour always spoke of the projected work as *The Nimrod Club*.

Another example of the manner in which Mrs. Seymour distorted the facts, is in the publication of the one and only letter written by Dickens to Seymour, which gives an entirely false conception of what took place on the one occasion when the two met. That it was based on the complete letter printed on pages 93-5 is very plain to see. It read as follows:

15 FURNIVAL'S INN

MY DEAR SIR,

How much the result of your labour has surpassed my expectations. I am happy to be able to congratulate you on the success of the undertaking, which appears to have been most complete. I am extremely anxious and very solicitous about the *Strollers Tale*, especially as many literary friends, on whose judgment I rely, think it will make a great sensation. I have seen the drawing to accompany it, and I think it extremely good. I should feel personally obliged if you would make another drawing. It will give me great pleasure to see you with the drawing on Sunday evening; my idea I will endeavour to explain, etc. I have ventured to make these suggestions feeling sure that you will consider them in the spirit in which I submit them to your judgment, and shall be happy to hear from you that I may expect you on Sunday evening.

Dear Sir,

Very truly yours,

CHARLES DICKENS

The Impertunate Mrs. Seymour

Fortunately Dickens's original letter was preserved by the Seymour family in an album containing that artist's original designs, sold at Sothebys in 1899 for the then very considerable sum of £500. The buyer

15 *Survival*, Inc.
Thursday Evening

My Dear Sir

I had intended to write you, to
how much gratified I feel by the
praise you have bestowed on our mutual
friend Mr. Perkins, and how much the
result of your labours has surpassed
my expectations. I am happy to be able
to congratulate you, the public here, and
myself on the success of the undertaking,
which appears to have been most complete

I have now another reason for
troubling you. It is this. I am
extremely anxious about "The Skollen's
Sale" - not more especially as many
literary friends, on whose judgment
I place great reliance, think it
will create considerable sensation. I
have seen your design for an etching to
accompany it. I think it extremely
good, but still, it is not quite

The Origin of Pickwick

was Augustin Daly of New York. Later the album was purchased by Harry Elkins Widener, and it now reposes in the Library bearing his name, at Harvard University. By courtesy of the Librarian, we are able to reproduce the letter in facsimile.

my idea; and as I feel so very solicitous when it is as complete as possible, I shall feel personally obliged, if you will make another drawing. It will give me great pleasure to see you, as well as the drawing, when it is completed. With this view, I have asked Chapman and Hale, to take a glass of frog with me on Sunday evening (the only night I am distinguished!) when I hope you will be able to look in.

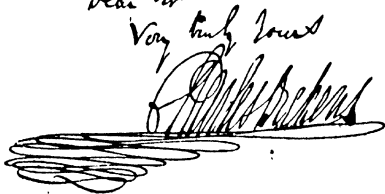
The alterations I want, I will endeavour to explain. I think the woman should be younger - the "dismal man" decidedly should, and he should be less miserable in appearance. For - communicate an interest to the plate, his whole appearance should express more sympathy and solicitude; and

while I represented the sick man as unaccounted
and dying, I would not make him too
repulsive. The furniture of the room,
you have depicted admirably.

I have ventured to make these suggestions,
feeling assured that you will consider
them in the spirit in which I submit
them to your judgment. I shall be
happy to hear from you. That I may
expect to see you on Sunday evening --

Dear Sir

Very truly yours



III

This album also contains a letter, undated, from Seymour's son to the original purchaser. It reads as follows:

Though it would afford me much pleasure to gratify your inquiries into the circumstances connected with the original designs for *Pickwick*, which you purchased from me on the 11th inst., I can I fear, add little to what ought to be pretty well known on the subject by this time. But as you seem to require a sort of warranty

The Origin of Pickwick

for your purchase of some little addition to your stock of analecta upon a subject of interest, the following brief statement of facts is very much at your service :

The six drawings in the scrap book which you purchased from me, were done by my father, Robert Seymour, the well known artist, and are the original designs for *Pickwick*.

The two illustrations, 'The Runaway Chaise' and 'The Pickwickians in Wardle's Kitchen' have never been engraved, i.e. as far as I may rely on an estimate of probabilities which amounts to conviction in my own mind.

Of the four out of the six original designs which were etched, I should say that the slight sketch for the scene of the dying clown was the first sketch for that subject, but of this, you may, perhaps, be able to form an accurate judgment for yourself, if you compare it with the published version and with Dickens's criticism, contained in the letter which you possess. You are, however, certainly in error in the notion that my father was engaged upon that design on the night preceding his death, and it is an error evidently derived from a statement of Dickens, who, it is well known, carried his bias for fictitious narrative to ultra professional lengths. I have several times heard my mother say that Dickens had the drawing in his possession some time before that sad event. At the same time to allow C. Dickens his due it must be admitted that he showed considerable sense of dramatic propriety in the alteration he suggested for Dr. Slammer's attitude. I am rather sorry now that I did not preserve the letter, though Dickensoniana literature has little attraction for me.

I quite agree with you that the best of the drawings is that in which Mr. Pickwick is addressing the Club, which is full of humour, and contains also those suggestions of sporting adventure which were to form the



An unpublished sketch for *The Pickwick Papers* by Seymour.

The Runaway Chaise.

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

groundwork of the book. I allude of course to Mr. Winkle's sporting equipments, etc.

The long letter to my father, in which C. Dickens congratulates him upon the success of the first number of *Pickwick* our mutual friend, and proposes various alterations in designs for further illustrations, at the same time inviting him to meet Chapman and Hall at his lodging at Furnival's Inn, is the only one of the letters from Mr. Dickens which I preserved. My father accepted the invitation, and that, I believe, was the first and last time that they met.

With regard to the pamphlet 'account of the designs of *The Pickwick Papers*' I am sorry to say that I am not able to furnish you with a copy, but I have a few odds and ends of my father's work still by me, though not all for sale, which, as you take an interest in these works you might perhaps like to see. At all events, as I shall be in town in a few days, I will call upon you with some of them.

Yours truly,

R. SEYMOUR

IV

In 1866 the matter was revived through an announcement in the *Athenaeum* that there would be shortly published a new edition of Seymour's *Sketches*, with a memoir of the artist by Mr. Henry G. Bohn.

Seymour's son thereupon wrote a long letter to the *Athenaeum* (24th March, 1866), alleging that Mr. Bohn was infringing his rights in his father's work, etc.

It was addressed from Eelbrook Terrace, Fulham,

The Origin of Pickwick

dated 19th March, 1866, and concluded with the following reference to *Pickwick*.

As regards *Pickwick*, it is true that the original plan was to give the adventures of a club of cockney sportsmen, and the idea and the title of the work was my father's, who had so far matured his plan as to show it to Mr. McLean and afterwards to Mr. Spooner, who had some idea of publishing it, and proposed that Theodore Hook should write the letterpress. We have reason to infer from an entry in the artist's book, that the first four plates were etched before he showed the work, and that they were afterwards re-etched and modified in some degree, to suit Mr. Dickens's views—which circumstance may account for the style of his letter to my father, written just after the first number appeared, where he seems to claim a share of merit in originating the design.

15 FURNIVAL'S INN

MY DEAR SIR,

I had intended to write you to say how much gratified I feel by the pains you have bestowed on our mutual friend Mr. Pickwick, and how much the result of your labours has surpassed my expectations. I am happy to be able to congratulate you, the publishers and myself, on the success of the undertaking which appears to have been most complete.

Dear sir,

Very truly yours,

CHARLES DICKENS

I reserve a fuller refutation of the inaccuracies and misstatements in Mr. Bohn's memoir appended to his unauthorized ninety engravings, together with an account, which I trust will not prove entirely uninteresting

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

of the origin of *The Pickwick Papers*, for a complete edition of the one hundred and eighty sketches which I am about publishing for my mother.

R. SEYMOUR

The reader will note carefully this second variation of Dickens's one and only letter to Seymour, used by the Seymours to attempt to prove their claim.

To this letter Dickens immediately replied, and his answer was printed in the *Athenaeum* for March 31st, 1866, under the heading *History of Pickwick*.

GAD'S HILL PLACE,

Twenty-eighth March, 1866

As the author of *The Pickwick Papers* (and of one or two other books) I send you a few facts, and no comments, having reference to a letter signed "R. Seymour", which in your editorial discretion you published last week.

Mr. Seymour the artist never originated, suggested, or in any way had to do with, save as illustrator of what I devised, an incident, a character (except the sporting tastes of Mr. Winkle), a name, a phrase, or a word, to be found in *The Pickwick Papers*.

I never saw Mr. Seymour's handwriting, I believe, in my life.

I never even saw Mr. Seymour but once in my life, and that was within eight-and-forty hours of his untimely death. Two persons, both still living, were present on that short occasion.

Mr. Seymour died when only the first twenty-four printed pages of *The Pickwick Papers* were published; I think before the next three or four pages¹ were com-

¹ See page 102 for correction.

The Origin of Pickwick

pletely written; I am sure before one subsequent line of the book was invented.

In the Preface to the Cheap Edition of *The Pickwick Papers*, published in October, 1847, I thus described the origin of the work: "I was a young man of three-and-twenty, when the present publishers, attracted by some pieces I was at that time writing in the *Morning Chronicle* Newspaper (of which one series had lately been collected and published in two volumes, illustrated by my esteemed friend Mr. George Cruickshank), waited upon me to propose a something that should be published in shilling numbers—then only known to me, or, I believe, to anybody else, by a dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars, and over some of which I remember to have shed innumerable tears, before I served my apprenticeship to Life. The idea propounded to me was that the monthly something should be a vehicle for certain plates to be executed by Mr. Seymour, and there was a notion, either on the part of that admirable humorous artist, or of my visitor (I forget which), that a "Nimrod Club", the members of which were to go out shooting, fishing, and so forth, and getting themselves into difficulties through their want of dexterity, would be the best means of introducing these. I objected, on consideration, that although born and bred partly in the country I was no great sportsman, except in regard of all kinds of locomotion; that the idea was not novel, and had been already much used; that it would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text; and that I should like to take my own way, with a freer range of English scenes and people, and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever course I might prescribe to myself at starting. My view being deferred to, I thought of Mr. Pickwick, and wrote the

The Importunate Mrs. Seymour

first number; from the proof-sheets of which Mr. Seymour made his drawing of the Club, and that happy portrait of its founder, by which he is always recognized, and which may be said to have made him a reality. I connected Mr. Pickwick with a club, because of the original suggestion, and I put in Mr. Winkle expressly for the use of Mr. Seymour. We started with a number of twenty-four pages instead of thirty-two, and four illustrations in lieu of a couple. Mr. Seymour's sudden and lamented death before the second number was published, brought about a quick decision upon a point already in agitation; the number became one of thirty-two pages with two illustrations, and remained so to the end.

In July, 1849, some incoherent assertions made by the widow of Mr. Seymour, in the course of certain endeavours of hers to raise money, induced me to address a letter to Mr. Edward Chapman, then the only surviving business partner in the original firm of Chapman and Hall, who first published *The Pickwick Papers*, requesting him to inform me whether the foregoing statement was correct.

In Mr. Chapman's confirmatory answer, immediately written, he reminded me that I had given Mr. Seymour more credit than was his due. "As this letter is to be historical," he wrote, "I may as well claim what little belongs to me in the matter, and that is the figure of Pickwick. Seymour's first sketch"—made from the proof of my first chapter—"was of a long thin man. The present immortal one he made from my description of a friend of mine at Richmond."

CHARLES DICKENS

Dickens sent a correction of a slight error in his letter, and this appeared in the *Athenaeum*, April 7th, 1866:

The Origin of Pickwick

There is a verbal mistake in the letter I addressed to you last week, as it is printed in your journal. In the fifth paragraph "I think, before the next *three or four* pages were completely written", should stand "I think, before the next *twenty-four* pages were completely written".

CHARLES DICKENS

To his eldest son, Dickens sent the following letter in respect to this matter:

6 SOUTHWICK PLACE, HYDE PARK.

April 4th, 1866

MY DEAR CHARLEY,

There has been going on for years an attempt on the part of Seymour's widow, to extort money from me, by representing that he had some inexplicable and ill-used part in the invention of *Pickwick*!!! I have disregarded it until now, except that I took the precaution some years ago, to leave among my few papers Edward Chapman's testimony to the gross falsehood and absurdity of the idea.

But last week I wrote a letter to the *Athenaeum* about it, in consequence of Seymour's son reviving the monstrosity. I stated in that letter that I had never so much as seen Seymour but once in my life, and that was some eight-and-forty hours before his death. I stated also that two persons still living were present at the short interview. Those were your uncle Frederick and your mother. I wish you would ask your mother to write to you, for my preservation among the aforesaid few papers, a note giving you her remembrance of that evening—of Frederick's afterwards knocking at our door before we were up, to tell us that it was in the papers that Seymour had shot himself, and of his perfect know-

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ledge that the poor little man and I looked upon each other for the first and last time that night in Furnival's Inn. It seems a superfluous precaution, but I take it for the sake of our descendants long after.¹

Yours ever affectionately,

C. D.

In the next number of the *Athenaeum*, Mr. Bohn replied, describing Seymour's letter as "gratuitous misrepresentation . . . damaging to my character as well as to my property in the work", and set forth his refutation of the statements made.

Referring to Mrs. Seymour's pamphlet *Account and Origin of The Pickwick Papers*, Mr. Bohn described the pamphlet as "a mere outpouring of spleen and vituperation".

Editorially, the following remark was made:

We have received from Mr. Seymour another letter, repeating his former opinions with regard to his father's share in *The Pickwick Papers* in answer to Mr. Charles Dickens's statement of facts. Our readers have already heard both sides of the story, and there is no need to carry the controversy further in these columns.

V

Dickens's statement that

My views being deferred to, I thought of Mr. Pickwick, and wrote the first number, from the proof-sheets of which Mr. Seymour made his drawing of the Club, and that happy portrait of its founder by which he is

¹ See page 52.

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always recognized, and which may be said to have made him a reality. I connected Mr. Pickwick with a Club because of the original suggestion, and I put in Mr. Winkle expressly for the use of Mr. Seymour.

needs a little consideration. It is essentially true, but it requires amplification. Doubtless the plan had been expounded to him in detail. That he was aware that it had been born of Seymour's rambles in rural North London is evident from the description in the first chapter of Mr. Pickwick as the man who had "traced to their source the mighty ponds of Hampstead", and evolved a theory of tittlebats. But his acquaintance with Seymour's plan went even further; he had seen some of Seymour's sketches. It would be the obvious thing for Hall to take with him to Furnival's Inn some of the drawings which were to be the basis of the proposed work, in order to make clear just what was expected of the writer. Mrs. Seymour says her husband had seven designs finished. The meaning is probably seven *finished* designs. Seymour must have had by him a large number of rough sketches. Probably when he was satisfied that Chapman and Hall were to take up the scheme and it was only a question of their coming to terms with the writer so strongly recommended to them, he proceeded to make some finished designs. These would be the pictures to which his widow refers. That they were now useless would be an aggravation of his annoyance.

Therefore if Dickens had written "I *retained*

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Mr. Winkle" it would have been more strictly correct. There is surely significance in the fact that Mr. Winkle appears on the wrapper design, shooting at a tiny bird? That wrapper was obviously designed without much, if any, reference to the author; else how are we to account for all the fishing paraphernalia?

This leads us to another interesting point. Dickens does give Seymour the credit for the picture of the hero, but Edward Chapman made a claim which, if it stood alone, would entirely deprive him of it. In his statement¹ he writes:

The figure of Pickwick, Seymour's first sketch, was of a long thin man. The present immortal one he made from my description of a friend of mine at Richmond, a fat old beau, who would wear, in spite of the ladies' protests, drab tights and black gaiters. His name was John Foster.

That has always been accepted as the final word on the subject, but in point of fact there is a good deal more to be said. The claim was made by Chapman in perfectly good faith, and it is not to be questioned that he did suggest the hero should be short and plump, and that he did describe his acquaintance at Richmond. But nobody will suppose that Seymour ever saw John Foster. There are plenty of passages in the book that suggest that Chapman's description was of more service to the author than to the illustrator.

¹ See page 89.

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We see now the significance of that little book to which reference has already been made.¹ Pickwick already existed! He had been created by Seymour three years before! It is clear that he had made the hero of this new book a thin, tall man in deliberate contrast to the principal character in *Maxims and Hints for an Angler* which he had illustrated in 1833. Chapman, unaware of that earlier book, suggested a short, stout man, and described his friend at Richmond. It was the very fellow that Seymour had previously drawn. If that was the type that was wanted, there he was, already in existence. The picture in *Maxims and Hints*, entitled "Enjoying Christmas", might be included in any edition of *Pickwick* to depict the hero reading *A Madman's Manuscript*. There is the immortal man in every detail. Thus, though the suggestion came from Chapman, the character had been in existence for three years, and was Seymour's.

Here, then, is the explanation of the fact which has been so often commented upon, that the cover design is dominated by a sport that is never mentioned in the book. Seymour, in adopting Chapman's idea, turned to the book on fishing, and used a figure therein which exactly fitted the description which had been given to him. Mere force of suggestion would cause him to introduce that sport into the design, which was most likely drafted before Dickens was approached. Seymour had previously drawn a man of

¹ See pages 19-21.

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Pickwickian type standing on the river bank, fishing-rod in hand. He had to use the same character for the new book. What was more natural than that he should just vary that design by placing the character in a punt? As to the figure of Mr. Winkle, is it not fair to assume that this was one of the characters in his portfolio, and that Dickens agreed to retain him in response to Seymour's protests? Mrs. Seymour, it may be noted, declares that Winkle existed long before Dickens came to the work, and while we cannot accept anything she says as reliable, this statement may be accepted as true.

The statements of Dickens and Chapman are not in entire agreement. Dickens says:

I thought of Mr. Pickwick and wrote the first number, from the proof-sheets of which Mr. Seymour made his drawing of the Club, and that happy portrait of its founder by which he is always recognized.

That is hardly reconcilable with Chapman's statement that the first design for Mr. Pickwick was of a long, thin man. If Seymour drew the portrait from the proof-sheets of the first number, how came he to depict a tall, thin man? We know by all the accounts that the portrait of Mr. Pickwick was Seymour's absolutely. Let it be kept steadily in mind that the scheme from the very inception had been for a Club, and so attached to that idea was Seymour, that against Dickens's original wish it was adhered to simply out of deference to him. He had a

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portfolio of sketches. He had previously drawn a Cockney sporting hero as a stout man, wearing gaiters and tights. He naturally decided not to repeat that type, and so drew a tall thin man, wearing gaiters and tights. Chapman, who probably knew nothing about the book of 1833, suggested that a stout man would be more comic, and Seymour adopted his suggestion. Chapman and Hall having decided to undertake the work, and only the choice of a writer remaining, Seymour began to finish some of his designs. In such a work the obvious subject for the first picture would surely be a meeting of the Club, at which the leading characters would be introduced. We suggest that Seymour designed that picture with a tall, thin Pickwick and that Hall took it, and others, with him when he went to see Dickens. It seems the natural thing. And it certainly would account for the artist's extreme annoyance when he found that the bulk of his designs were to be useless owing to the publishers' decision to defer to Dickens's suggestion. In consequence of Seymour's plea it was decided to retain the Club idea, and so this plate of the Club was used with a stout Pickwick instead of a thin one. In short, in respect of this one plate the original idea of the author writing up to Seymour's picture was adopted, and Dickens's imagination at once started to work around the characters therein depicted.



Portrait of Dickens, by Cruikshank, 1836.

CHAPTER SEVEN
MY CONNEXION WITH
THE PICKWICK PAPERS

By ROBERT W. BUSS

A transcript of the certified copy of the original Statement by the Artist in the possession of his Grandson, the Rev. F. Fleetwood Buss, and now first published.

THE following ten sheets contain my trials in etching,¹ in order to obtain practice in the use of the etching needle, and also in the more difficult process of biting-in, and stopping out of those parts of the design which may be bitten sufficiently.

These were undertaken at the request of Messrs. Chapman and Hall, when they engaged me and broke their agreement in regard to the illustrations of the 'Pickwick Club'.

Many years ago, in fact at the commencement of Dickens's brilliant career as a novelist, it was my misfortune to be temporarily in connexion with Messrs. Chapman and Hall, and through them with Charles Dickens. In justice to myself I feel called upon to explain the whole affair, as some few points are for the first time spoken of with which not merely the publishers, but Dickens himself, as well as the

¹ Posted in the book are proofs showing Buss's progress in his efforts at etching.

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public, were and are unacquainted. *Seymour*, the artist, principally known as a caricaturist, was really the originator of the "Club", now so popular wherever the English language is read or spoken, and known by the name of the 'Pickwick Club'. This famous book, the basis of the great novelist's fame, is by the reading world absolutely attributed to him as the author and originator of the work. How far this is true I shall endeavour to explain. *Seymour's father* was a well-to-do pattern draughtsman of the name of Vaughan,¹ and living very comfortably in the City of London near West Smithfield. Seymour, however, had no legal right to take his father's name; but as in civilized society a name is a necessary adjunct to any individual born into this world of weal and woe, he bore his mother's name. It would appear that for some years little Seymour was under his mother's care, and that in consequence his education amounted to very little. So deficient was he in this important matter that in after years poor Seymour was stung to the quick by the publication of his business notes, with autobiographical and grammatical remarks by that pungent wit, Gilbert à Beckett,² who cut up Seymour remorselessly after he had urged the payment of some sums due to him for work done for the

¹ This is not correct. Seymour was illegitimate but he used his father's name. See Chapter I.

² The correspondence with à Beckett was published in Mrs. Seymour's pamphlet. A perusal of it leaves one with a feeling of sympathy for poor Seymour that he should thus have fallen to the mercy of such a man.

Buss's Statement

Figaro, the *Punch* of that day. In due time the cloud cleared off from Seymour's youth; and his father acknowledged him, and took him into his study, or office, or workshop—whatever may have been its designation—and here, in companionship with a brother bearing the paternal name of Vaughan, and an apprentice nicknamed 'Wonk', he drew patterns for the calico-printers. This practice gave Seymour a neat and minute style of drawing, which proved of great use to him in his after-career as an artist. Mr. Thomas Vaughan followed steadily the pursuit of pattern-drawing, had received a good education as times went then, and devoted his leisure time to the study and practice of music, in which for an amateur he had made much progress. But in the cases of Seymour and of 'Wonk', inspiration had fallen upon them; they had "*souls above buttons*", and *entered upon the pursuit of high art!* Clubbing their earnings together, they got "high" enough, even if their works did not merit this appellation, for they rented a room in the old Tower ascribed to Queen Elizabeth at Canonbury, and their room was at the very top of the high building. Here they placed such casts from the antique as their means would allow, and drew assiduously from them, thus obtaining the only real education in art which was accessible to them. Seymour profited much by this study; but poor 'Wonk's' inspiration proved to be a mere bladder of wind, for repeated failures drove him hopelessly back into the despised pattern-drawing, where

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he vanished from our vision. Before abandoning the pattern-drawing, however, Seymour picked up a few occasional pounds by drawing, very neatly, portraits of friends who consented to sit to him. At the same time he plunged into the mystic diableries of the German literature, made known to him by *Faust* and *Der Freischutz*. The result of this study was a large picture filled with numerous carefully painted figures. Here we had the Giant of the Brocken, the Skeleton hunt, the casting of bullets, and a full meal of all the German horrors eagerly swallowed by the public of that day. The picture itself was a very creditable piece of work, and was for some long time in a picture room in Baker Street Bazaar. It cured Seymour of High Art, for he found that the pursuit was a very agreeable one when backed by a private fortune; and that without such aid a painter of High Art was only a beggar or dependant on any kind soul who would lend him money on works for which there was no demand. So Seymour descended from his "fool's paradise", and took to designing on wood, for which his previous practice in clear, neat drawing especially fitted him. He obtained employment on *Bell's Life in London*, and on the scurrilous *Figaro*; to these were added many drawings for works of lesser importance, so that at very small prices he had a very large connexion. Seymour was now fairly established as a humorous designer, principally upon wood, but he occasionally drew in lithography, and ventured upon etching. In this branch of art there

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is a volume upon Christmas and its customs, feebly executed by Seymour, who evidently was never at home upon copper or steel, the mere technicalities of the biting-in always evidently annoying him. A bitter quarrel with the Editor of *Figaro* was kept up on both sides with extreme acrimony, greatly irritating poor Seymour and embittering the latter part of his life. Residing at Islington—the Islington of many years ago, when green fields, green lanes, old trees, and a really rural aspect had not given way to bricks and mortar—Seymour loved to ramble about the old Roman encampment and its delightful neighbouring walks. In these walks he constantly met with boys, with hobbledchoys, and silly young men who indulged in a grotesque love of sport, as they imagined, catching tittlebats, and shooting cats and sparrows, with now and then a stray pig to be bagged. With the keen relish for fun, Seymour enjoyed immensely the absurd and comic incidents almost daily observed in his walks. To this we owe the numerous designs of Cockney sportsmen which Seymour executed. His brain and his folios overflowed with sketches of this kind. The fund of humour he brought to this work is manifest from the few selections from his designs here introduced.

Engaged by Messrs. Chapman and Hall, the eminent publishers, upon some work entrusted to Seymour for pictorial fun, he repeatedly spoke to them about a scheme he had for a long time had in his mind. That was to publish these Cockney scenes

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he had prepared, and to *work them up as 'Club of Cockney Sportsmen'*, while the illustrations were to be tacked together with some comic letter-press, so as to form a book. After considerable time, and frequent mention of the subject, Chapman and Hall paid some attention to Seymour's suggestions, and looked over the collection he had made. Upon this Messrs. Chapman and Hall considered the matter as settled, and began to think of some author who would accomplish their object successfully. The work was *proposed to Leigh Hunt*, and declined by him, and then to other known men who wrote light articles for magazines, but not one of them seemed to enter with cordiality upon the proposal. Seymour's proposition thus missed fire for a considerable time, and the *Club of Cockney Sportsmen* seemed doomed never to appear.

It happened that between Seymour's visit to Chapman and Hall, Mr. Macrone, a publisher, had failed, and among the property brought to the hammer was the copyright and remaining stock of *Sketches by Boz*, a work but little appreciated at the time, although the author was Charles Dickens, and the artist supplying the illustrations was no less than George Cruikshank. The entire property in this early work of Dickens was purchased by Chapman and Hall, merely, it would seem, to sell off the copies on hand at as profitable a price as possible.¹ On

¹ This is incorrect. The *Sketches* had only just been published. Macrone died about two years later.

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Seymour's next visit to the above publishers, they, bearing in mind the *Cockney Club*, presented a copy in two volumes to him, and asked him to read the book and give them his opinion as to the capabilities of the author Charles Dickens, then only heard of under his *nom de plume* of "Boz", to work up the idea he had so long entertained. On Seymour's return home, he found a party bent upon spending the evening with him. As soon as the tea business was finished, Seymour opened the *Sketches by Boz*, and read them one after the other to his assembled friends. Now, owing to Seymour's scanty education when he was a mere boy, it was his misfortune frequently to murder the Queen's English, yet he read fluently, and with the exception of miscalling a few words here and there, he read well. One great point was that he himself, brim full of fun, perceived the originality and the intensity of this very quality in Boz's *Sketches*. As he read on, he absolutely revelled in Boz's humour; he laughed till he cried, and he sent all his friends into convulsions of laughter, till at a late hour of the evening, or rather night, his friends with aching sides were forgotten! On the question being put as to Boz's qualifications for Seymour's proposed work, the vote was unanimous, as one of the party told me; and moreover they declared that no other writer could carry out Seymour's plan with a chance of success at all equalling that of Dickens, or rather Boz at that time. This point being settled, at the very next visit paid by

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Seymour to Chapman and Hall they were urged by all means to communicate as early as possible with Dickens, and propose to him to furnish the letter-press to Seymour's designs. From what passed between the publishers and him arose the 'Club', which he at once undertook to conduct in the best way he could; and entering upon Seymour's scheme, threw himself heartily into the 'Club', which he named the 'Pickwick Club', a name as we know now, destined to be heard all over the civilized world, and to become the foundation of Dickens's unparalleled success as an author; and to lay up a fortune for the publishers of the 'Club'. The name 'Pickwick', we are told, Dickens adopted from its alliterative sound, and from its owner, a coach proprietor, as seeming to him a good one for the Club. Some doubts arise in my mind as to Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Chapman claims his obese figure as the result of his own suggestion, but from former sketches by Seymour, I am inclined to believe the figures of Mr. Pickwick and his club-mates were in existence before Dickens had any connexion whatsoever with Seymour's work. The etching of the Pickwick Club in full conclave is exactly illustrative of Seymour's stout old gentleman in former designs, while his companions resemble the Cockneys of previous scenes, congregated in the parlour of a respectable public house, such as Seymour may have occasionally visited.

The personages forming the Club are beyond

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dispute Seymour's own invention,¹ but the names were given by Dickens when he fathered the original idea of the artist. Seymour's Club, then, written to by Dickens most felicitously, was, as all the world knows, under the name of the 'Pickwick Club' by Boz, tolerably successful at the very first; but its popularity increased daily and with each succeeding number, until it became pronounced by its publishers as a success. The publishers at this time received many foolish letters, to be forwarded to Boz, upon ridiculous subjects only likely to enter the heads of a shallow-pated, conceited jackanapes; also notes of remonstrance from old ladies over their tea-tables deploring the state of mind that Boz must be in to relate such a cruel statement as that of the cabman's mode of keeping his exhausted horse up to his work. There were also considerable doubts as to the propriety of relating the wonderful story of the dog Ponto reading the notice-board against trespassing dogs! as if all these matters were related in sober seriousness instead of in rollicking fun! Such mock sentimentalism and pseudo-humanitarianism were scarcely worth mention, were it not that a great public interest in the 'Pickwick Club' is indicated by the remarks made.

The work was now fairly established as a success; its popularity and its sale daily increasing, when an unfortunate event threatened destruction to it. This was no less than the *death of poor Seymour*. At this

¹ This confirms the opinions expressed in Chapter VI. Buss must have been acquainted with some member of Seymour's family.

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time, of the two men employed upon the 'Pickwick Club' Seymour was the better known. A long career as a humorous artist, and as a caricaturist on the *Figaro* had obtained for him a reputation, while his co-adjutor, Boz, was only then rising into public notice. This is necessary to be remembered in order to account for the wide-spread and deep sympathy expressed by the public and the daily journals at the untoward fate of a favourite artist. It was the misfortune of Seymour to be in great demand as a designer of humorous subjects at a ridiculously small price; but as his invention was very fertile they cost him but little labour. So ready was he that a boy has been sent to him for a design to a given subject, and instructed to wait until it was finished. Such instances were of frequent occurrence, and helped to overwork, with the numerous demands of others, a brain ill-calculated to bear such pressure. The illustrations to 'Pickwick'—*four each month*—were not only an additional demand upon his brain, but added to this was the uncertainty of what is technically called "copy", being the proof set up for press corrections, as also the materials for the artist to produce his designs from. When this copy was delayed, it drove all the work into a space of time maddeningly short! Beyond this was the worry and uncertainty of the "biting-in" of the subjects upon the steel plates. An examination of Seymour's etchings for the 'Pickwick' shows that in the application of the dilute nitric acid to corrode the lines produced

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by the etching point or needle, he had been greatly troubled, and no doubt had to save his designs, and to keep faith with the publishers and the public, to apply for help in his need to one of the artist-engravers residing in his neighbourhood. This is not the place to give an account of the process of etching and the purely technical matter of "biting-in", but it may be briefly stated that to be sure of success in the operation very great experience and constant practice is required to avoid "foul-biting", and the filling in of the lines by the tendency of the nitrate of iron to subside into them. I have no doubt of the fact that the worry arising from this cause, added to an already overtaxed brain, overthrew poor Seymour's mind and produced a state of insanity in which *the poor fellow shot himself through the head.*¹ This deplorable event took place in a summer-house in his garden at the back of his residence in Liverpool Road, Islington. He had attached a string to the trigger of a fowling-piece, and by pulling it, sent the charge through his head. As might be

¹ All this serves to emphasize the state of distraction into which poor Seymour had fallen. If Buss is right in what he says, it is clear that Seymour must have worked himself into a pitiful state. All these worries were additional to the fact that he was boiling with resentment at the rejection of his long-cherished plan. Instead of supplying pictures as his fancy evolved them to be written up to, he not only had to illustrate what Dickens chose to write, but with monthly publication the copy would be supplied, as it were, from hand to mouth. If he was experiencing so much trouble with the etching the worry must have been tremendous, and then when he was confronted with a demand for a highly dramatic picture, which was both alien to the scheme he had contemplated, and outside his own proper scope, he lost all heart.

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imagined, this melancholy termination to the career of a favourite provider of fun created a great sensation among the public generally, and the readers and admirers of his designs for the 'Pickwick Club' in particular, producing another flood of letters to the publishers, full of lamentation at his loss.

In this junction of matters, with the fate of their new work trembling as it were, in the balance of success, *what was to be done?* It may be easily imagined how nervously anxious were Messrs. Chapman and Hall to supply the place of Seymour. At this time it was a very difficult thing indeed to find a designer of humorous subjects capable of etching them on steel. With the exception of George Cruikshank, there was really no artist-etcher of his own designs to be found, for the style of illustration was, with the single exception alluded to, a novelty; in fact the rage or fashion for etching had not then set in. I do not know whether Chapman and Hall had applied to Cruikshank or not, but it certainly was unlikely that he, giant as he was in his own peculiar walk, would consent to follow the footsteps of Seymour.¹ Under all the trying circumstances, they,

¹ One probable reason for Cruikshank not being approached has been discussed in another chapter, namely, that Dickens was determined to have no more of the shackles of having to please the artist, which he had objected to in the very beginning. He had given way because he could not resist the fact that the whole scheme was Seymour's. With a man of Cruikshank's still higher standing, and known force of character, the last state, so to speak, might easily be worse than the first. But another deciding reason was that Cruikshank would not be likely to work at the same rate of remuneration that had satisfied Seymour.

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the publishers of *Pickwick*, were in a state of mind very far from agreeable. Dickens, finding his footing as the author safe, now pressed them to reduce by one half the art illustrations, and to give an additional quantity of letter-press, thus securing to himself an extra remuneration at the expense of the art portion of the work, a proceeding which was clearly a breach of faith towards the original subscribers to the *Pickwick*. But in Dickens the publishers found a man who wished to be liberally paid for his labours, and one with whom these gentlemen could not play off any shabby tricks without fear of losing his services altogether; so their interests obliged them to adopt Dickens's proposition—at first much to the disgust of the original subscribers.¹

Having reduced the illustrations by one half, the next step was to find an artist to undertake the work, under these disadvantageous circumstances. *Mr. John Jackson*, the eminent wood engraver, being then engaged upon a work in course of publication by

¹ This is hardly a fair way of putting it. Dickens had pressed in the very beginning for the conditions which were now agreed to. The death of Seymour had removed every objection to a plan which he had urged, and with which the publishers were in sympathy, and which had been adopted only out of deference to Seymour. The suggestion that they realized that they could not play shabby tricks with Dickens is unconvincing in the light of the fact that they never had any but a verbal agreement with him, and that ultimately they paid him some two thousand pounds in respect of this book which they were under no legal obligation to pay. As to the new arrangement being a breach of faith with the subscribers, it is certain these did not number more than perhaps five hundred at this time, so there is little in the point. But Buss could not think in other than bitter terms of Chapman and Hall.

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Messrs. Chapman and Hall, was asked if he could help them in their dilemma, and he knew of no artist who could etch his own designs, the style being then a novelty. After some consideration, he told them that he thought I was the most likely artist to enter upon the work, and *advised an immediate application to me*, as the time was fast running away to the date when the monthly number would become due. Upon this advice Chapman and Hall acted, and Mr. Hall called upon me at a time when I was busy in preparing a picture for exhibition. He placed the position they were in before me, and urged me to undertake the illustrations for the ensuing number of *Pickwick*. Taken by surprise at the application, I told him I had never in the whole course of my life had an etching needle in my hand, and that I was entirely ignorant of the process of etching as far as practice was concerned. He assured me it was very easy to do, and that with my talent I was sure to succeed. I thought of the Irishman who, when asked if he could play the violin, said he thought he could though he had never had a violin in his hand! On my hesitating, he urged me still more to try and help them in their hour of need, hinting that of course due consideration would be shown towards the want of practice in etching.

Situated thus, urged by Hall, feeling complimented by my friend Jackson, and sharing the public sympathy in poor Seymour's sad end; besides which was my great admiration of the talent shown

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by Dickens, whose works as Boz I had from the first *Sketches* in the *Morning Chronicle* held in great store, I consented to put aside my picture, and devote my whole time to acquiring the peculiar touch for etching and getting practice in "biting-in" the design on the steel plate. I immediately commenced pen and ink practice almost day and night, as there really was no time to lose! I introduced specimens of my work. A plate was procured, etching-ground, needles, and the various necessary implements for the practice of etching, and after some trials at scratching in figures (a most disagreeable work upon steel—observe, etching upon copper is quite pleasant compared to the hard surface presented by a steel plate) I succeeded in producing an etching, such as it was! After much time entirely devoted to this end, I etched a plate, taking the subject of *Mr. Pickwick at the Review* being jammed in the crowd by a soldier forcing him back with the butt-end of a musket. Here is the only impression: of course it was full of faults inevitable to anyone in the early stage of practice in etching. All this occupied much time which was every hour becoming more and more valuable as the date of publication was close at hand. I had barely time to prepare my subjects for the next number of *Pickwick*, in pencil, to submit them for approval to Chapman and Hall, who returned them, being much pleased with my efforts.

The subjects I selected were "*The Fat Boy Watch-*

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ing *Mr. Tupman and Miss Wardle in the Arbour*", and "*The Cricket Match*". The little experience I had had in etching on steel, added to a sufficient knowledge of the uncertainty attending upon applying the nitric acid, that is, "biting-in" the design, made me painfully aware that a breakdown in this part of the business would inevitably cause a stop to be put to the issue of the next number. Nervously anxious on this point, and with no other motive than a sincere desire to serve in the best way the interests of Messrs. Chapman and Hall, I was, in an evil hour, induced to place my designs in the hands of an experienced engraver to be etched and "bitten-in". This work he did very well indeed, but as might have been expected, had I had time for thought, the free touch of an original work was entirely wanting. The etching itself failed, but the "biting-in" was admirably done. "Time was up"; the plates must be placed at once in the printer's hands; and so, there being no help for it, the plates were printed, the numbers stitched and duly published. Thus my name appeared to designs, not one touch of mine being on the plates. I felt greatly annoyed at this, and had I been allowed time, would have cancelled those two plates and etched my designs with my own hand, resolving by next month to publish my own two etchings, and to request the others to be cancelled.

On venturing on the steel plate, various experiments were made by me in etching hands and figures. Of course the vexing process of "foul-biting", i.e.



The Cricket Match.
Suppressed plate by R. W. Buss.

Buss's Statement

of the acid breaking up the ground and biting parts of the plate that are not wanted, was one of the difficulties I encountered. I prepared a design of *Mr. Pickwick at the Review* being pushed backward by a tall Grenadier: only one impression of this was taken, however, as through using a fresh piece of emery-paper to polish the surface of the plate, innumerable fine lines were scratched all over the plate. It was, however, shown to the publishers, and approved by them, though as might be expected, it was thin and scratchy in execution. The acid also was applied only once.

The etching of the Dingley Dell Cricket Match was in its pencil-sketch stage submitted to and approved by Messrs. Chapman and Hall. The etching itself, as I have elsewhere stated, is not my actual work on the steel. I had laid the etching-ground for it on a steel plate, and commenced with the etching needle, when to my dismay I found the ground break up owing to my want of experience in laying etching-grounds. Time was running fast away, so I took the plate to an engraver friend of mine, who both etched it and bit it in. This is one of the two subjects done for the 'Pickwick', and was, I think unnecessarily and unjustly, the cause of my discontinuance on that work. For more than twenty years these etchings and drawings have been hidden from me by my wife, and only since Mr. Forster has in his *Life* of our great novelist mentioned my unfortunate connexion with Chapman and Hall has a general

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“rummage” taken place by which these sketches were discovered.

The Sketch of Mr. Tupman and Miss Wardle in the Arbour was also submitted to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, and approved by them, upon which I proceeded to etch this subject, as both subjects were on the same large steel plate, it became in this case, as in the former, involved in the defective etching-ground, for on trying to etch this subject, I found the ground equally bad, and had to give it up. My engraver friend also etched and bit-in this subject. In this second etching, however, he has lost the freedom and touch required on the figures; the landscape portion is nicely touched in, and the biting-in is well done.

These two etchings were sent in good time by dint of very hard work to Messrs. Chapman and Hall, thence to the printers, thence to the bookbinders. Those *terminated my connexion with Chapman and Hall, and indirectly with Dickens.*

And now on taking leave of these gentlemen, I can only say that I am, after a lapse equal to the literary life of Charles Dickens, more than ever certain that I was ill-used by them. Disgusted at their treatment of me, I destroyed everything that came in my way that had any reference to ‘Pickwick’. A vague impression was left on my mind that these etchings were abominably bad, and utterly devoid of promise or hope. On again seeing them after so many years which have passed away since that painful transaction

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so frequently spoken of, I was surprised to find them so good. The engraved point is really good, vastly superior to Mr. Browne's efforts at first. The cricket match is well etched, freely touched, and, for the subject selected, leaves little to be desired. The garden scene would have been better had the touch upon the figures possessed more freedom. The shading is very formal, and wanting in painter-like effect. Both together, they are, as first efforts in a difficult and unpractised branch of art, better than could have been expected, and really *in many respects better than Mr. Browne's first essays in etching*. They are certainly not equal to the illustrations by Seymour, but he had had a life devoted to comic designs and to lithographic pen-and-ink drawing, and to etching. On the contrary, I had had but three weeks' practice at most. I think perhaps the size of the figures might have been smaller, and with better effect for the subject, but the business of a designer is to fill his space as well as he can, and to do this it is not desirable to make the figures diminutive and to fill up with uninteresting details.

The truth is there was a senseless lament because I was not Seymour, and had Mr. Browne been pushed into the gap as I was, he would have been "howled at" as I was. Had I been allowed to work my way, as Mr. Browne was, and been supported by Chapman and Hall, I should have satisfied the public craving, as he has in time succeeded in doing.

When I state that the *wretchedly ridiculous sum of*

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30s. was all the remuneration I was to receive for the work, I am sure no one will deny I simply undertook the work for love and glory; certainly not because of liberal pay. Did Dickens work for them at this rate? When Hall imparted to me this specimen of the liberality of the firm I expressed my surprise, *but he assured me that Seymour received no more*. I can only say that I do not wonder at Seymour or any other unfortunate devil of an artist blowing out his brains, if he had any left, after such an experience of publishers' pay! I am morally certain that Seymour's suicide was precipitated by the incessant worry consequent upon the wretched sums, not more than 10s. on an average, which he received for a design. In addition to his general engagements, he had undertaken to supply the *Pickwick* with the etched subjects every month in good time for publishing day.¹ Many of the designs he had prepared for the contemplated work were useless for that purpose, because we know from Dickens himself that finding the 'Club' machinery hampered him in his writing, he cast it off as soon as possible, carrying Mr. Pickwick away from Islington, Goswell Street or Cockneydom, to Rochester and into localities unknown to Seymour. If, on any account, "copy" be furnished late to the artist, as no doubt it

¹ It is a pity we do not know what remuneration Seymour received in view of Buss's complaint that 15s. was an inadequate payment for himself. It will have been noted that he says Seymour worked for small fees, and it is quite possible that he received very little, if any, more than was paid to Buss. Certainly Chapman and Hall would not be likely to offer Buss *more* than they had paid Seymour.

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was to Seymour, he is by that driven to work almost day and night to keep faith with publishers and the public. Seymour had to produce from designs to meet Dickens's description of Rochester, etc. This, with other vexations incidental to the process of etching, render it by no means difficult for an overworked brain to give way, and its unfortunate possessor to take refuge in suicide. Of the inner history of Seymour's fate the public were ignorant.

Having sent in my first two illustrations, I resumed my painting till next month's were due. Several days over that fortnight passed, *when a curt note from Chapman and Hall* informed me that they had placed the work in the hands of Mr. Hablot Browne! This was their mode of acknowledging the favour I had done them at their request! I had been unable to finish my picture in time for the Exhibition. Did they suppose that their beggarly 30s. was a recompense for this? I had had employment from Mr. Charles Knight for years, and in no one case did he ever treat me in this inconsiderate and ungentlemanly way; and I was certainly surprised and deeply hurt at this specimen of publishers' generosity and sense of justice!

Besides Mr. Charles Knight, I have had engagements from *Mr. Bentley, Mr. Colburn, Messrs. Saunders and Otley*, and other publishers of less rank. These have all kept their promises. It was reserved for Messrs. Chapman and Hall to violate their words as gentlemen, and treat me in a manner that I can

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only stigmatise as brutal. I was advised to seek a remedy against them at law, but Hall was cunning enough to know that his promises in the name of the firm were but verbal, made with me alone in my painting room, and so took a mean advantage of my compliance with their solicitation, knowing that I could prove nothing at law. I was so disgusted that no money compensation would have been acceptable. I simply snatched up all my etching instruments and hid them as soon as possible from my sight, tearing up every scrap of drawings or etchings that came under my hands. So much for *Pickwick* and my engagement in that famous work!

After Seymour's suicide the publishers were deluged with letters of condolence—of advice—offerings to undertake the illustrations—of indignation at the reduction in the number of etchings—and upon every imaginable subject that bore in the remotest degree upon *Pickwick*. The book was rapidly becoming famous, and everyone took an interest in it. Artists offered to do the illustrations for love, not for gain. Among these applicants were men of considerable reputation—W. M. Thackeray and Crowquill, besides Browne, Lee, and others I have heard of,¹ but have forgotten their names. Thackeray had practised etching for some years, having taken lessons off my

¹ Thackeray's reputation was not very considerable at this time. We may be sure he did not offer to do the work for nothing; nor would Crowquill. The book at that time had no such reputation as such offers would imply.

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friend Mr. Roe, an engraver and print-seller at Camberwell, while he was yet an undergraduate. Thackeray's style was unsuitable, also Crowquill's. Of Hablot Browne's work, and the assumed name of "Phiz", it is unnecessary to speak. His designs speak for themselves.

Seymour during life received scarcely a journeyman carpenter's wages, but when dead the public declared that never was his equal and never could be. Granted that Chapman and Hall were in a difficulty, two courses lay before them—to have asked me to relinquish the illustrations, and to have compensated me for my loss of time, or to have stood fast by me until success attended my designs. Instead of which, they unscrupulously did wrong to me and chanced the consequences. Mr. Browne was engaged without even the slightest notice to me. Mr. Browne had been placed with Messrs. Finden, engravers, but this work proved irksome, and having a talent for a light touchy style of sketching, he abandoned his engraving for the more agreeable pursuit of free design. But having been in Finden's studio, he was supposed to be well versed in the technicalities of etching—of biting-in, stopping out, re-biting, burnishing, etc.

Now the whole affair of Seymour's successor was really reduced to two men—myself and Browne. As to myself, that I was treated harshly and hastily will appear from the etchings I made for Mr. Colburn not long after my disrespectful treatment by Chapman and Hall. I am ready to admit that my first efforts were

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not quite satisfactory, but they were not so abominably bad as to justify Chapman and Hall's conduct.

Mr. Browne had this advantage—that public sympathy had subsided—their wrath had been expended upon me. Well, *Mr. Browne* produced his first etching. He had the advantage of a new character to delineate—the immortal Sam Weller. As far as the figure of Sam went, it was good, but as an etching the drawing was thin and poor, besides being miserably etched, far worse than I could do. The fact was he wanted, as I did, experience and practice. He could not successfully “bite-in” the design. Accordingly my old friend *Mr. Sands* was called in to help. And it was arranged that the plates should be polished, cleaned, and have the etching ground nicely laid and smoked with wax tapers, and, thus prepared, sent to *Mr. Browne* to be etched. This he did, and it was then delivered to *Mr. Sands*, who carefully examined the work, and with his etching point made the shades and various tints even, smoothing whatever might give a rough, unfinished look to the etching when printed, and strengthening such points as required such aid. This done, the acid was applied and the lines properly bitten-in: then came the delicate process of stopping out until the design had acquired strength. This done, the ground was melted off, the plate cleaned and sent for a proof to the printers. By this proof *Mr. Sands* proceeded to lay a re-biting ground, and bite up certain portions to the required effect. The plate being again cleaned, and judicious touches with

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the graver put in, tints softened by burnishing, etc., the plate was again proved, and if satisfactory to Mr. Browne, was delivered to Chapman and Hall for printing. For this service *Mr. Sands was paid* exactly what I was to receive for all the work, viz., 15s. for each design, or 30s. for two subjects on one steel plate. What Mr. Browne received I never heard, but I feel sure he did not work at the starvation prices paid to Seymour and me. Mr. Browne's point was to produce a light, clever pencil sketch, which he traced on the etching ground and etched, after which he had no trouble. *Why was not this attention paid to me?* Just because of their conceit and vulgar off-hand style of doing business. Upon such terms as they were obliged to accept from Mr. Browne almost any artist could have supplied the illustrations. Assistance of this kind is not proclaimed by those who resort to it. Cruikshank and Seymour both have had assistance from practical biters-in, but they do not inform the public that such is the fact.

It is singular that I should never have made the acquaintance of Mr. Browne. But I have always admired his clever and spirited etchings, and cannot help thinking that those who have glorified Dickens might have bestowed some higher praise upon Phiz, for it is indisputable that much of Dickens's popularity is due to the admirable way in which Phiz illustrated his works. Dickens was essentially "of the people", and was at first pooh-poohed by the "refined" portion of society. But when they found

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him to be too great a lion to be despised, they attempted to "refine" him, and so managed to persuade him to slight his old friend Browne. Hence *Mr. George Cattermole* was to be the "refined" illustrator of *Master Humphrey's Clock*.¹ The result was a failure, and Browne was reinstated. For some years Dickens and Browne went on together; then *Mr. Marcus Stone* was thrust in between, and the last work unfinished by Dickens was illustrated as far as it went by some other "refined" artist.

The ungentlemanly treatment I received from Chapman and Hall was in a considerable degree compensated by an engagement to make a series of etched designs for *The Widow Married*, by Mrs. Trollope. These I did on far more liberal terms than the beggarly sum allowed by Chapman and Hall. Mr. Colburn kept his promises, and satisfaction resulted on both sides. Engagements also with other publishers and authors were made.

As years rolled on, my connexion with *Pickwick* has been touched upon by those who attempted the Life of Dickens, often to my disadvantage. Of these I took no notice, but Forster, in his *Life of Dickens*, again alludes to the matter; so, for the first time, I wrote to him to explain the true state of the case. He saw that I had been ill-treated. Whether in the second

¹ This statement goes to show the bitterness with which Buss looked back on those days. There is, of course, nothing convincing in the suggestion that the "snobocracy" regarded the supercession of Browne by Cattermole as a stage in the process of "refining" Dickens.

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edition of his *Life* he will do me justice, I know not, but he ought. One point of duty, however, I consider as only just to myself, i.e. as my children move in circles where these matters are alluded to, I am only doing what is simple justice to leave with them a complete and circumstantial account of the affair. I am, after all, sometimes amused to think how in time to come *futile bibliomaniacs* will rave over a scarce copy of *Pickwick* having in it my two unfortunate etchings.¹ I have now done with the whole affair, and with its unpleasant associations. I leave the matter with the quotation:

*"The evil that men do lives after them,
The good is oft interred with their bones."*

1872, March 2nd.

(Signed) ROBERT WILLIAM BUSS

14 Camden Street, Camden Town.

To the Statement is appended the following note:

June, 1877

The above is copied by me, Septimus Buss, from the book in possession of my sister, Miss F. M. Buss, and is verbatim except towards the close, when it is abbreviated.

¹ Buss foresaw exactly what has happened. The difference in value between an early copy with his plates and one without them is enormous, and there is irony in the fact.

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The book was lent March 31st, 1887, to Mr. Charles Johnson, of 11 Savile Row, Editor of Chapman and Hall's Jubilee Edition of *Pickwick*. I had written to Chapman and Hall, at 11 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, at F.M.B.'s suggestion, and had two or three interviews, during which Mr. Fred Chapman expressed a wish to have some original drawings for reproduction. I objected to leave the book without F.M.B.'s consent. Having obtained it, I took the book down to Henrietta Street, saw Mr. Johnson by appointment, and authorised him to make such use of its contents as he thought fit, leaving the book with him. He afterwards wrote the article in the *Athenæum* of June 4th, 1887.¹

APPENDIX

R. W. Buss's connexion with "The Widow Married", by Mrs. Trollope, told by himself.

In his account of his work for Mrs. Trollope's book, *The Widow Married*, Buss says that he had proved his practice plates, and also his *Pickwick* plates, at the office of Mr. Lahee, and in this way had become friendly with Mr. Harrison, his head clerk. Mr. Lahee's employees were holding a ball, and they

¹ The references to Buss in the Jubilee edition of *Pickwick* and in the *Athenæum* article are the only serious attempts to explain Buss's position, with the exception of the article in *The Dickensian* referred to in the introduction to this volume.

Pickwickian INNS.



George and Vulture.



Golden Cross.



Osborn's Hotel.



White Hart, Bath.



Bush, Bristol.



Old Royal, Birmingham.



Leather Bottle.

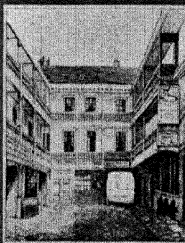
Cobham.



The "Bell Savage".



The Royal, Bath.



White Hart.

Berough.



Spaniards.



Bull.

Rochester.



White Horse, Ipswich.



Angel.

Sudbury, Edmonds.

Photos by

[T. W. Tyrrell
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wanted a design for the card of invitation. Buss offered to do it, and he says:

“The little design was much liked, and when my friend Harrison heard of the ungentlemanly way in which I had been treated by Chapman and Hall, he said my practice in etching was too good to throw away. Soon after—I believe about ten days after my *Pickwick* affair—Mr. Harrison introduced me to the well-known publisher, Mr. Colburn, and by him I was at once engaged to etch several subjects for Mrs. Trollope’s work about to be published, *The Widow Married*. The practice I had had enabled me to avoid many difficulties in etching, and gave me considerable power with the etching-point, also with the management of the acid, and the process of biting-in. My intense disgust at Chapman and Hall’s conduct therefore lasted about a week or ten days. After having thrown all my etching implements into a box and locked them up in a cupboard, I was by my friend Harrison induced to put them again in order to etch these designs.

“It is curious how when I again took up the etching-point, the little practice I had had gave me considerable freedom, and I became quite enamoured of etching. Of course, it was simply the first difficulties in etching that I had overcome. I now was able to express my design by means of the etching-point.

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“ At this time I really was superior to Phiz, for now I could etch and bite-in my own designs, which he could only do in a very imperfect manner. By comparing these etchings it will be seen how variety of tone and effects, freedom of drawing, and other qualities increase plate after plate, until the best effect is reached, I think, in ‘ The Dinner Party ’. My real power was appreciated by Mr. Colburn, and all my transactions with him were agreeable and satisfactory on both sides.

“ Here I may state that I found no help to me was required, for I could now help myself. However, accidents will sometimes occur. I remember to have been interrupted while the acid was on the plate by a genteel beggar, who kept me to hear his talk for at least a quarter of an hour. When I returned to my plate the acid had broken up the ground and bitten the head and shoulders of one figure into a mere black hole! Although greatly annoyed at this, I knew how to help myself, so clearing off the acid and the ground, I took the plate to a writing engraver, who punched the plate at the damaged part quite flat and polished the plate. So when I got home I laid a fresh ground, and re-etched the damaged part.”

NOTE

Buss also included in his manuscript book a statement of his connexion with *Peter Simple*, *Jacob Faithful*, etc., but this is not germane to the present

Buss's Statement

work. It is a thousand pities that the original has been lost, because there would have been great value in the specimens it contained of Phiz's early work. As far as the specimens of Buss's own work are concerned, duplicates are preserved in the volume from which these extracts are taken.

CHAPTER EIGHT
JUSTICE FOR BUSS

I

ACTUALLY one feels that the publishers never committed themselves to Buss. His Statement makes it clear that there was no contract, and it would appear that the publishers never gave him to understand that they were definitely engaging him to illustrate *Pickwick*; nor is there any suggestion even by himself that he ever assumed that he had been so engaged. We have to try to lay aside all our knowledge of the subsequent success of the book, of which nobody dreamed at that time; and we have to bear in mind that Buss wrote his Statement many years after *Pickwick* was assured of immortality. Apart from these facts, there was at the time nothing out of the ordinary in the commission, which could hardly have overwhelmed a man who had exhibited at the Royal Academy and had illustrated *Cumberland's British Drama*. Buss was appealed to in an emergency, and agreed to do his best. The most surprising thing of all is that Jackson should have recommended for this particular job a man who could not etch. Jackson may have been unaware of this, or he may have had confidence in Buss's ability to master the disability.

Justice for Buss

It is clear, however, that Buss was grievously offended with Chapman and Hall's treatment of him on his failure to give satisfaction with the first plate. His resentment did not arise from the fact that he had lost the opportunity of illustrating a famous book, and it is fair to him that this should be stated definitely. It is no question of a grievance born after the book had become a wonderful success. The reflection that with just a small piece of good fortune he might have been associated happily with one of the world's most famous books was naturally a bitter one, but he was acutely angry at the time when there was not a hint of that fame. He threw all his etching paraphernalia into a drawer in disgust. His grandson writes: "My mother told me that for years after the *Pickwick* incident my grandfather could not bear to have the matter mentioned in his hearing, and at the time he destroyed the greater part of the *Pickwick* plates and etchings". It was natural that when the book became famous, references to his unhappy association with it should have been painful to him, but it is also quite certain that he felt at the time that he had not been treated justly in what was an ordinary business matter.

When, on the recommendation of Jackson, Chapman and Hall approached him and told him that they were in a serious difficulty, he pointed out that he was busy, and that time was short. They replied that they were reducing the number of illustrations, and would want only two, and begged him to assist them out of their trouble. He was willing to help, if pos-

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sible; but while it was true that he was used to book work, he had done no etching. They urged him to do his best, and at last he rather reluctantly agreed. His grievance was that, having done his best, and failed only because of his inexperience of a particular process—of which they had been aware—he was cast out, as it were, without a “Thank you”, and paid a mere nominal sum. In the cheque he received, no consideration at all was given to the special circumstances of the case, or to the fact that in order to do this work he had laid aside his Academy picture, which in consequence was not exhibited until the following year. It is hardly surprising that he should feel a sense of disappointment. One doubts, however, whether his inability to bear any reference to the matter was immediate. He may have flung down his etching tools in the moment of irritation—though for the moment he had no further use for them—but it is doubtful whether this feeling of disgust would have persisted if *Pickwick* had not suddenly sprung into unique popularity.

We come back to the point that Buss undertook this task only under pressure, and in order to help the publishers out of a difficulty. It is inconceivable that with his ignorance of etching he would have attempted it in the time save in such special circumstances. He tells the story very clearly, and it is a pathetic story in its way. He laid aside his work and forthwith set himself to practise etching. He produced designs which satisfied the publishers, but when

Justice for Buss

it came to putting them on to the metal he found himself faced with what was really an impossible situation. Note the principal figure in the picture of the cricket match. It is lamentable that he should have had to be judged by that plate. It is certain that he could draw better than that! His original design was approved; but it was the etching process that defeated him. Possibly the publishers were justified in judging him by that etching; they may not have known, of course, that the actual etching was not his own work. They were anxious about this periodical, but a reference to his previous work and to the original design should have told them that with another month's practice he should be able to produce results of a far higher standard. Actually he had attempted the impossible—to produce his designs and etch them in a couple of weeks, starting in complete ignorance of the art. The book had been commenced in absolute reliance on Seymour's popularity. His death had jeopardised it. The sensation caused by that death and the wide-spread sympathy aroused had led to a more or less morbid interest in the second number. If a worthy successor could not be found at once, there was little hope for the undertaking. The publishers might know why Buss had failed, but the public could not know. There was a very real danger of a slump in the sales. They could not afford to take the risk. But they might have manifested some appreciation of Buss's honest efforts to serve them!

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II

George Somes Layard has suggested that Buss's dismissal was due to Dickens himself. "Dickens was no doubt much annoyed", he says, "at the poorness of the new illustrations, no allowance being made for the difficulties under which Buss had laboured, and of which probably the author was in ignorance. In this same year Dickens had written the pamphlet, *Sunday Under Three Heads*, in which H. K. Browne had delightfully caught the spirit of the well-meant though somewhat vulgar brochure.¹ Dickens at once insisted upon this artist taking the place of Buss, and the publishers realizing by this time the importance and masterfulness of the young author, thought well to submit. Hence the cavalier treatment of which Buss had good reason to complain."

That is quite reasonable. It is possible that Dickens had not seen the original designs, but that, the matter being so urgent, the publishers had rushed the thing through without reference to him. In that case we have no difficulty in realizing his dissatisfaction with the finished plates. He probably protested to the publishers, and pointed out that young Browne had already illustrated a little work of his very satisfactorily, and then insisted that he should be given a trial. This may easily have happened; but, after all,

¹ The preface to *Sunday Under Three Heads* is dated June, and the book was reviewed in the London Press as early as July 3, so that Chapman and Hall must have been acquainted with Phiz some time before.

Justice for Buss

the publishers were fully aware of the difficulties under which Buss had laboured, and of the sacrifice he had made, and they might have dismissed him a little more courteously. He had worked day and night in response to their appeal, and when all is said and done, he was not an obscure artist, but a man of some repute.

Whoever it was that suggested Browne, must have had a moment of inspiration. If it was Dickens one naturally wonders why he had not thought of him before. Possibly he had, but Browne was a practically untried youngster. However, when Buss had failed, Dickens asserted himself. We doubt if Mr. Layard is right when he says that the publishers had by this time realized the importance of the young author. Nothing had happened as yet to suggest that he was a better writer than they had assumed him to be when they engaged him. But there is no doubt that they had recognized his masterfulness from the very beginning, and now, when he put his foot down, they really had no answer for him. Buss had failed: there must be no more risk. Browne had already done good work for him, his promise was beyond doubt, even though Buss's original designs were satisfactory, Browne was a better draftsman, and being young, he would certainly be amenable to the author's domination. The publishers could have had no excuse for resisting Dickens if he put his arguments in that way.

Browne was fortunate. In his very first number he

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was presented with Sam Weller. May we not assume that he was shown that little book which had been shown to Dickens in the beginning, *Maxims and Hints for an Angler*? That contained the model for Sam, just as it contained the perfect Pickwick that all the world knows. Browne's picture of Sam is the one that all the world will always recognize, but when he first drew it neither he nor anybody else foresaw that Sam was an immortal. He did a picture that met with approval. We can hardly doubt but that it was based on Seymour's figure. There came immediately the astounding popularity of the book, and the rest was easy for "Phiz".

III

What Buss might have done it is futile to attempt to guess, but his son had justification for the opinion that "If he could have had another fortnight he would have given satisfaction". We do not suggest that he would have done work equal to that of "Phiz", but he would have done acceptable work, and would have shared in the book's fame. This is emphasized by what happened immediately afterwards. Within little more than a fortnight, according to his own statement, he actually was illustrating a book by this very process of etching, a book by an author much better known than Dickens yet was, for a publisher of higher standing than Chapman and Hall had yet attained. How this came about Buss

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explains in his statement. It arose more or less out of his *Pickwick* disappointment. He had proved his plates for that book at the printing office of Mr. Lahee,¹ and there he had become friendly with the chief clerk, Mr. Harrison. He had volunteered to design a card of invitation for a staff ball, the design had been liked, and he had become *persona grata* at the office. It was inevitable that they should learn of his trouble over *Pickwick*; he unburdened himself to Harrison, who was sympathetic and offered to introduce him to Colburn—whose widow was to marry Dickens's great friend, John Forster, many years later. Colburn was about to publish Mrs. Trollope's *The Widow Married*. Mrs. Trollope was a popular author, and Colburn was a publisher of repute—and it must be assumed that he did not engage Buss to illustrate that work unless he was satisfied that he was equal to the task. So may we assume that Colburn was told the story of Buss's unhappy association with *Pickwick*, and that he had seen the work done for that book. We are bound to assume it, for it is impossible to believe that a man like Colburn would promptly have engaged as illustrator of a book by an established author a man who had just failed badly in illustrating another book; he must have been fully aware of all the circumstances, and was satisfied that Buss was really competent. All this supports the suggestion that Chapman and Hall had acted hastily, and lends colour to the suggestion that

¹ See page 136.

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Buss's cavalier dismissal was the result of Dickens's insistence.

At any rate, this engagement was ample compensation to Buss. Indeed, for the moment he must have experienced a sense of real satisfaction. He had not been deemed good enough to illustrate a book by an unknown newspaper reporter, published by a very young firm of publishers, but he was considered by a publisher of Colburn's standing quite good enough to illustrate a book by one of the popular authors of the day. He must, in short, have felt more than compensated, and it was not until a month or two later, when *Pickwick* suddenly sprang into unique popularity, and he realized how narrowly he had missed fame, that he began to feel that bitterness which remained with him for the rest of his life. And, in fairness, it should be said that that bitterness was born less of the realization that he had missed fame than of realization that almost certainly his name would be inseparably linked as a failure with an immortal book. It must have been a terribly galling thought, and we cannot wonder that henceforth he could not bear to hear the matter discussed.

His work for *The Widow Married* was good. There is none of "Phiz's" easy play of fancy and lightness of touch about it, but it is good, competent work, and this is the more noteworthy by reason of the fact that the whole of the etchings were made and "bitten-in" by himself. It will be seen that he declares that at the time he was thus etching his

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own designs for *The Widow Married*, "Phiz" was floundering about with poor, thin drawing, and quite incapable of "biting-in" and finishing his own designs. "At this time", he says, "I really was superior to 'Phiz', for now I could etch and bite-in my own designs, which he could only do in a very imperfect way". This is certainly true. "Phiz" was only 21 years of age, and it would appear to be the case that when he was engaged he had no more experience of etching than Buss had when he was dismissed. Buss goes further, and says that "Phiz" was given facilities which had never been vouchsafed to him. It is not possible to verify this, but it is probably true. One is all the more inclined to accept it for the reason that, for all his bitterness, Buss nowhere speaks disparagingly of "Phiz", or manifests any sort of jealousy of his more fortunate rival. On the contrary he pays unqualified tribute to his work, and speaks sympathetically in regard to "Phiz's" supercession by Cattermole for the *Clock*, and by Marcus Stone many years later for *Our Mutual Friend*. No doubt Dickens had urged that Buss should be dismissed and "Phiz" engaged; no doubt he and the publishers were convinced of "Phiz's" ability and, determined to avoid any more worries, they gave the young artist the fullest assistance. Time was not quite so pressing now as it had been immediately after Seymour's death, and "Phiz" must have had nearly double the time that Buss had had in which to produce his first plates, and therefore they could afford

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to show a little more forbearance in his case. That was Buss's bad luck. All the fates seem to have conspired against him.

That Buss had mastered the process of etching and was doing good work for Colburn, while "Phiz" was still struggling with it, is a certainty. This is confirmed by no less a critic than George Somes Layard, who wrote:

I do not hesitate to affirm that they are better pictures, better illustrations, and better etchings than those done for its sequel *The Widow Wedded. Adventures of the Barnabys in America*, by John Leech, in which that great artist has shown his wisdom by adopting and carrying on in the most conscientious manner the types introduced by "Buss".

Less than a year later Buss was illustrating a much greater book—Marryat's *Peter Simple*, and Layard says of these illustrations, "They are elaborately etched pictures, not merely the pot-boilers of a professional 'book embellisher'". Undoubtedly they are excellent, and the fact is impressive, because they were done while *Pickwick* was running its course; the man who had not been deemed competent enough to illustrate it while it was yet an obscure work successfully illustrated—*by the etching process*—two books by two of the best-known authors of the time. It is time justice was done to unlucky Buss!

In a final word it may be said that Buss left an unfinished Dickens picture—"A Souvenir of

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Dickens". It depicts the novelist seated in his chair at Gad's Hill (the scene is obviously taken from Luke Fildes's famous painting "The Empty Chair"), the air peopled by his creations. Thanks to the kindness of Buss's grandson, the Rev. F. Fleetwood Buss, this picture is now the property of the nation, and hangs in the Dickens House in Doughty Street, where the latter part of *Pickwick* was written.

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