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# Great Folk of Old Marylebone.

By MRS. BAILLIE SAUNDERS.

A condensed history of the old town of Marylebone and its Principal Buildings, Streets, and Traditions, from the year 1400 till 1850. Containing accounts of its chief Celebrities, and including chapters on **Charles Dickens**, the **Browning's**, and **Charles Wesley**, with many local anecdotes about these great people as yet unpublished.

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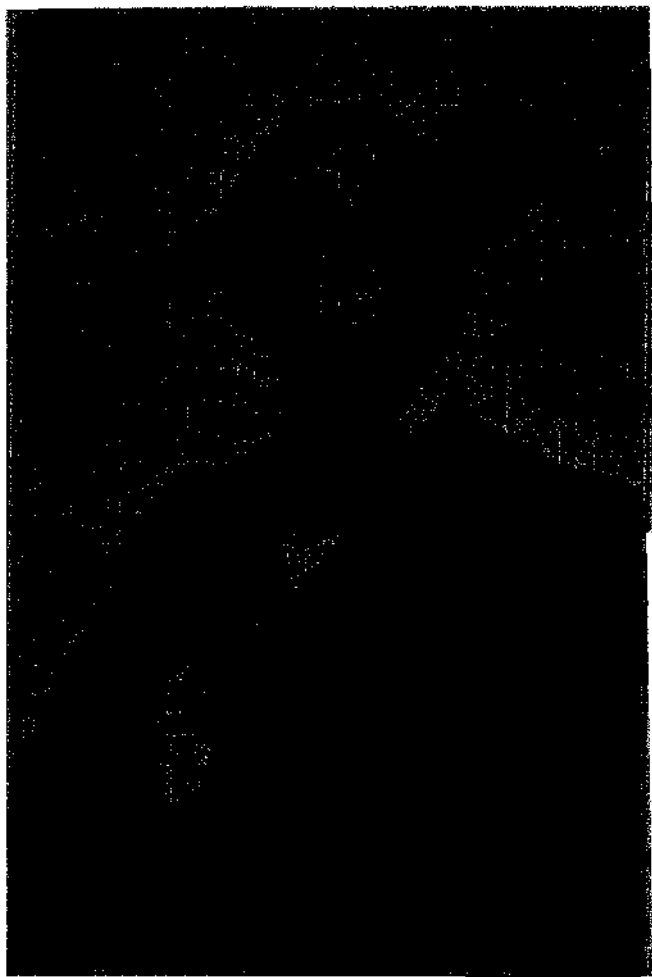
The PALL MALL GAZETTE says; "Mrs. Baillie Saunders has reviewed very brightly and gracefully the history and personal associations of one quarter of London in 'The Great Folk of Old Marylebone.' She tells of the rural attractions once presented in the vicinity of Great Portland-street, of the 'gardens' once fashionable and then notorious, of the sordid memories of Tyburn Tree, and of the more fragrant associations clustered round the names of Johnson and Boswell, of Romney and Turner, Faraday and the Wesley family, Charles Dickens and Robert Browning. It is quite a pleasing souvenir, which should be appreciated by modern residents of Marylebone."

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London: HENRY J. GLAISHER, 57, Wigmore Street,  
Cavendish Square, W.

THE PHILOSOPHY OF DICKENS.



*London Stereoscopic Company.*

CHARLES DICKENS.



# THE PHILOSOPHY OF DICKENS

A STUDY OF HIS LIFE AND TEACHING  
AS A SOCIAL REFORMER

BY

MRS. BAILLIE-SAUNDERS

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT FOLK OF OLD MARYLEBONE."

LONDON:  
HENRY J. GLAISHER,  
57 WIGMORE STREET, CAVENDISH SQUARE, W.

1905.



## PREFACE.

IT is rather a sad fact that the simplest suggestions or outputs of the meekest mind when converted into print suddenly acquire the ferocity of dogma, and appear to be delivered *ex cathedra*. A poor soul comes along with a handful of notions of which he or she has rightly no very large opinion, and as we all have a secret weakness for self-expression, they get into print. Instantly they are assumed to be a kind of Decalogue by the reading people. "How dare you teach *us*?" says the great literary world. "I was only teaching *myself*" murmurs the unwilling lecturer. But no one believes him.

These few chapters, intended without a dream of dogmatism, to point out a few of the glories of one of the greatest men in the world, will be received, it is hoped, not as the upstart assertions of one who would stupidly paint the lily, but as quite personal ideas and observations, submitted as gently as such things would be submitted at a tea-party, and with as much reverence for the opinions of a possible opposing side.

You cannot, of course, praise Dickens, any more than you can praise Shakespeare, or pat a sunset on the back. But as there exists in England at the present time—though not in the Colonies or in America—a rather large group of young people who extract some kind of glory from the professing to be unable to read him, and who make sweeping statements as to the class of his humour and his characters' perhaps there is room for a few words pointing out those consistent teachings, those deeper meanings, which raise this man to a great preacher as well as a humanist and humorist.

To such as make the above boast, these random notions are submitted in all good humour. But those who read him and love him—and their name is legion—have found it all out long ago.

MARGARET BAILLIE-SAUNDERS.

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# The Philosophy of Dickens.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE MAKING OF A PROPHET.

THAT seer who, with the calmness of divine veracity, singled out a little middle-class town of agricultural mediocrity from all the gorgeous cities of a great age, and said, " But thou, Beth-lehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel," would possibly have considered a blacking warehouse by Hungerford Stairs no hopeless cradle for a prophet.

To the clear-eyed Micah, all prophets are above and beyond the mean limits of circumstance and environment. But to the unutterable and snobbish pomposity of England in the 'twenties of the nineteenth century, the notion of divine fire entering any

but a ducal abode, would have seemed a gross impropriety on the part of Providence,—a thing to be shrugged at, and frowned down, and pooh-poohed generally. And that it should descend with a "rushing mighty wind" into the anxious, knitted brow of a thin, grimy, half-fed little factory boy, whose sole duty consisted in covering pots of cheap patent blacking with oilskin and blue paper and sticking labels from early morning till late at night, would have seemed pernicious folly indeed. But in the 'twenties of the nineteenth century, this thing happened.

On the other hand. By a quaint reversion of opinion, we now think of the prophet or preacher with such hyper-sensitive delicacy, that any, ever so vague, allusion to the realities of his life is considered prying and irreverent. We no longer deny the possibility of the holy flame's descent into the head of a struggling mortal: we simply deny that the struggling mortal ever had a struggle, or anything else common and vulgar, and shut him and his affairs up in that respectable cloud of utter mystery, conventional anecdote and reprints from official letters, which we sedately call Biography.

We write to magazines, and describe a great man's very tie, golf-boots, favourite liqueur, marital romance,

or innermost philosophy, so long as he is alive; directly he dies, it is horribly, insanelly wanting in "proper feeling" to allude ever so vaguely to those matters. To print any of his letters but the receipts of his tailor's bills, is called vandalism; and to mention the church at which he was married, calls forth a shriek in the dailies. The tender susceptibilities of our new school of biographical criticism, would shudderingly disguise the Corsican village, the barber's shop, the homely cottage, the Virginian plantation, the blacksmith's forge, and that little house of the suburban sculptor and the midwife, which were the nurseries of Napoleon, Turner, Shakespeare, Washington, Faraday, and Socrates.

Except that Charles Dickens was destined to become the greatest champion of mercy and pity to the poor, the greatest discoverer of the humour and the pathos of the poor that the world has ever known, it would be difficult to understand the why and wherefore of his agonized childhood. It would be difficult to understand why one poor little soul and body bore so much almost unexampled suffering—that red-hot, searing, deeply-wounding woe of childhood which we all who love children know that no after life of success and happiness can ever really efface.

The eternal altruistic law that the one should suffer for the many, alone explains the mystery of this obscure boy-martyrdom down by the shadows of Hungerford Market. There, amongst the blacking-pots, the grime, the din, and the odour of tar and fish and Thames mud, was slowly evolved that miraculous insight into the sufferings and the humour of poverty-stricken humanity which was to be the great mission of Dickens,—a mission which can never die so long as men live.

The schooling of a prophet is wrought in fire, and for little Charles the fire began at eleven years of age. It is this period of his life which seems to me the first really pregnant with coming genius. Up to that time, as most people know, his existence had been that of a rather delicate middle-class boy, whose home with his parents and brothers and sisters, in busy Chatham, was the jog-trot, easy-going, cheery affair that an English home should be.

It has little concern with his future greatness that he was born at Portsea, as all the world knows, in 1812. But it greatly concerns it that his father's affairs at Chatham, when the child was ten years old, began to get hopelessly entangled, and clouds began to seriously darken his lot. Mr. John Dickens held a post in the Navy Pay Department, connected with

Somerset House, and the family now moved to London, rather unexpectedly, and with diminished prospects. They took a small house in Camden Town, described bitterly by Dickens as "a mean tenement." He was left at Chatham for a few sad weeks after the departure of his people to London, in order to complete a term of his schooling. Then he followed in the stage coach, all alone in very rainy weather, finding life, as he quaintly says, "sloppier than I expected to find it."

He was a sensitive, imaginative child, somewhat delicate in frame, and proud with the pride that is noble and stern ; and he felt bitterly the contrast of the Camden Town abode to the happy, well-appointed home he had left. He brooded over its shortcomings, its little squalors, its small meannesses, as proud, thoughtful children do brood: though his great biographer, Kitton, declares that the house could not have been so contemptible, seeing what Camden Town then was, as the hurt and disappointed child thought it. To him, it was small, hideous, and an utter desecration of his boyish pride in home: the more hideous because his father did not seem to see its shortcomings, or only beheld them through rosy Micawberian spectacles. His little brothers and sisters, younger than himself,—his elder sister Fanny

was away at the Royal Academy of Music,—and perhaps happily less imaginative, noticed very little change in the pleasing novelty of their new life, and he was alone to compare their fallen fortunes with what, now that it had become the past, seemed perfect happiness. Everyone who has the faintest pity or thought for sensitive children, knows what secret agony a humiliation at home can give them,—home is their world, their palace, themselves materialized.

Their little hearts are wound into the very furniture, the walls, the fittings. The shape or shabbiness of a door-bell can cause them untold silent misery, even though others may neither see or comment on these things; ill-matched crockery, torn and shabby furniture, roughly served meals, will make a sensitive child shrink with a pain that no one sees or sympathizes with. While the shortcomings of parents are the bitterest stings of all: they who rule, who preside, who make the little world, they who were perfect from the beginning, the types of all perfection, when they begin to fail,—Love shudders.

There is hardly any anguish of childhood to be likened to the first descent of a father from his pedestal of half-god to a position of weak dependent. The first time a little child honestly and quite instinctively despises his parent, although deeply

loving him, is a tragedy that burns itself into his small soul for ever.

John Dickens was a generous and lovable man, too generous to the world at large to keep a home over the heads of his family, yet he meant well, and he was utterly sincere, as such men so often are.

Fathers with fewer good intentions have often done better by their children than he. Mr. Micawber is so perfectly lovable that he cannot be counted as a caricature in the opprobrious sense, and he is the worst picture that Dickens ever gave to the world Of his father. Beyond the creation of Mr. Micawber, which is not bitter but rather pitying and humorous, no word of bitterness has ever escaped Dickens on this subject, a fact which must count in favour of John Dickens also. But that inbred tendency to monetary failure was his utter bane.

Shortly after their arrival in the metropolis, he left his appointment at Somerset House; and having after that no settled source of income, the downward course of their fortunes began.

Creditors pressed upon them and daily necessities demanded daily supplies of money which were not forthcoming. They moved to a house in Gower Street; Mrs. Dickens, poor willing soul, hoping to start a school for girls with a view to paying their

debts, a brass plate was put up on the door, with the legend, "Mrs. Dickens: Establishment for Young Ladies" on it. But there were no young ladies, though little Charles himself took round, as he says, "a great many circulars to a great many houses."

With the failure of this pathetic venture, came worse things. The creditors now became so pressing that the family possessions had to be pawned one by one to bring in any sum that could be raised. And little Charles had to go, day after day, armed with the household gods, to bargain with the pawnbroker for a poor sum of money in exchange for things that had been the first sacred sights of his unfolding world. It must have been something like selling one's first beliefs for a dinner. It must have been like bartering the affections one by one to see those things go. There is no record of these Lares and Penates in detail, but one can picture them. The ormolu clock, that had a character all its own, that had stood sternly ticking on the parlour mantel-piece since the building of the everlasting hills—for to a child Time began with his own first memory—that had to go. That was like selling a Church. Then the little bronze statuettes of martial men on horseback, which were real men, and had real feelings, to a child like Dickens,—they must be put into grimy stranger hands for a paltry

sum of shillings. That was like selling all chivalry and patriotism, and romance. Then, gradually, it came to selling his own books to a tipsy second-hand bookseller, who was contemptuous about them. One by one they went—the loved "Arabian Nights," the Fieldings, the Smolletts, the Goldsmiths,—all the vast wonder-worlds of mighty minds wherein he had strayed from his earliest reading days, and they were early ones indeed. There is no comparison that comes to me for that grief. It was something beyond the final parting with all joy: it must almost have been like parting with one's own soul.

When, a short time later, his father was taken to a debtor's prison in the Marshalsea, and he had to sell his own little bed and lie at nights on the floor, it is possible that he hardly suffered a further pang. His books had gone, his world had gone, the iron had entered into his childish soul, and, like Elijah, in the bitterness of his despair, he said: "It is enough." Such are the mills of God, which grind out great and glorious men.

His mother and infant brothers and sisters were now reduced to a kind of pitiable camping in the only two rooms in the house which still held a little stock of furniture, together with a devoted-servant girl from Chatham workhouse, who would not desert them in

their despair, though wages no longer rewarded her labours. This was not the same as Dickens's early nursemaid, Mary Weller, the original of Peggotty, that most gallant and immortal woman. But she deserves recording in all praise.

At this juncture a relative, James Lamert, procured for little Charles a post in which he could now earn money for his destitute family, upon which the eleven-year-old bread-winner entered the blacking warehouse of Messrs. Lamert (late Warren), at Hungerford Old Stairs, at the gorgeous stipend of six shillings a week. The warehouse was a crazy tumble-down old building, overrun with rats, and standing about where Charing Cross Station (Underground) now stands. Close to it were Hungerford Stairs,—some slimy steps leading down into the muddy bed of the Thames, and used principally by the traders of Hungerford Fish Market, which stood upon the site of the present Charing Cross terminus station.

People who remember the early 'sixties, can recollect those rickety, slimy steps and the wide muddy shore, clustering fish barges with their Turner-esque brown sails, and the shoddy buildings, which then filled the place of what we now know as a properly built Embankment

Of these shoddy buildings, the blacking warehouse

was the shoddiest, and to it little Charles Dickens walked from Gower Street every day, and back again at night, to stick labels on to blacking bottles for his scanty living.

He had a black and grimy colleague, one Bob Fagin—a name ever after to rank with Herod's and Shylock's for Jewish iniquity—who seems to have been not unkind, though coarse and ignorant beyond words. Dickens, who could read Goldsmith almost with his eyes shut, and repeat Shakespeare by the hour, was forced to this poor creature's intellectual level for his only companionship. When he thought he found himself sinking down to the level of such companionship, he says, with terrible simplicity, "No words can express the secret agony of my soul!"

From Hungerford Old Stairs to Gower Street was a far cry, so he could not get home for the dinner hour, he therefore took his poor little dinner with him, supposing there was any at home to take, or, failing that, he bought a saveloy in the Strand, and ate that. And one day he took from home his bread only, wrapped in paper "like a book," and when the dinner hour came, marched royally into the A-la-mode Beef Shop and grandly ordered a fourpenny plate of beet That was a gala day.

There were days when he could only afford a slice

of stodgy pudding for his midday meal, which had to sustain him for hours of work and discomfort.

There were days when he left his floor-bed in the early raw mornings, and had only a scant breakfast of a roll and cup of milk on which to tramp through fog and rain to Charing Cross, to begin his weary duty toil for that pitiable six shillings, the very thought of which almost makes one weep to dwell upon.

There were the half-hours allowed for tea, when he had no money to buy any, and when he used to wander round to Covent Garden Market and look at the pine-apples instead.

There was that other gala day, when he was rich enough to go and grandly order a glass of stout at a public-house down by the embankment—stout of a brand called "The Genuine Stunning,"—and the landlord went and fetched his wife, and she questioned him gently, and gave him what he asked for and gave him back his money—and stooped down and kissed him.

That would be a new theme for an artist of the humanities : that little tender scene in a bygone public-house. The yearning, hungry, half-wondering child, with his pitiful air of being prematurely "grown up"; the puzzled landlord in the background; and

the gracious, stooping figure of the woman, putting her warm, glowing, motherly face down to his, with a rush of sudden tears in her kindly eyes, and a divine rush of insight into the piteous heart-hunger that nothing but her warm kiss could reach.

She may have been a vulgar woman. Perhaps a public-house in that rowdy neighbourhood in the " 'twenties " makes it almost a necessity that she was. But the glow on her face was as light, as pure, and warm, as any Raphael caught for his Madonnas; and, for one passing moment, it is possible that she could have inspired Angelo for a mighty allegorical fresco of the figure of the great Earth-Mother, the All-pitying.

But whatever his fortune or ill-fortune, there was that tramp to and from Gower Street. One can almost see him doing it, with his white little face, his large brilliant eyes, his shock of dark curly hair, his quick movements, his poor shabby clothes, and thin roughened hands—see him doing that morning walk, or evening trudge, with the positively sublime patience and perseverance which exalted him afterwards to the man he became.

His little brothers and sisters, and his grief-stricken mother, unable longer to keep the wolf from the door, in spite of his heroic efforts on their behalf, at last

joined his father in the Marshalsea Prison, where, as most people know, the wives and families of debtors could reside. The vivid pictures in *Little Dorrit* are taken from this experience, Mr. Dorrit being also, in part, a portrait of John Dickens.

Then the little Charles had to take up his abode in lodgings of his own ; thus he first came to be a " man about town " at twelve years of age. And what a heart-breaking little mannikin ! His " chambers " consisted of a garret in Camden Town, in Great College Street. This attic was let to him by one Mrs. Roylance, a grim and vinegar lady in " reduced circumstances," who was afterwards immortalized as Mrs. Pipchin in *Dombey and Son*, and whom Dickens seems to have regarded with feelings much akin to those of little Paul Dombey for Mrs. Pipchin : half fear and half keen criticism.

The blacking business growing, and the shoddy building which contained it waning, it was moved at this period to Chandos Street, Strand; a more attractive site than Hungerford Old Stairs, where the warehouse was slowly sinking into the mud, rats and all. The new premises were situated on the side of Chandos Street now occupied by the Civil Service Stores extension buildings—No. 3, a house quite recently occupied by a firm of chemists bearing the

name of "Wellspring"; the same firm is still in Henrietta Street, just across the way.

When Warren's Patent Blacking firm took the building, it possibly had just the same window as that used by Messrs. Wellspring, for Dickens speaks of an open window, like a shop, at which he and Fagin and the other boys had to stand labelling their blacking bottles at double quick time for the passing world to see. They represented a ghastly form of advertisement as they deftly turned and twisted the hideous little bottles, covering them with oil-skin and labels at lightning speed. Very dirty, grimy little boy£, all of them, though one was by common consent nicknamed "the Gentleman" by all the others, who were only gutter lads, but who recognized in the stately, lonely little Charles a being from a different sphere, with a readiness that wiser and more knowing elders and betters seem to have failed in completely.

It is rather interesting to reflect that had one housekeeper treasured up one single uninteresting blacking-bottle, got from Warren's in those days, it and its grimy label would now be priceless, on the bare chance that the hand of the great master had touched it.

The rats and the mud of Hungerford Stairs were better than this, for at least they spelt privacy. Over

this bitter task bent the half-fed, deserted child, knowing that any passer-by could stop and watch him: knowing that he had reached a depth of worldly degradation lower than which he could hardly go, and thinking of his beloved Chatham schoolmates, and what they would have thought to see him there.

All poverty is hard, but when by its means the dignity of a human creature can be dragged into a street advertisement, the wrong is a crying one. In our so much enlightened days there is no spectacle so ghastly as the long file of starving, despairing, homeless wretches called "sandwich men,"<sup>1</sup> who trudge hopelessly through street after street, street after street, for a miserable shadow of a wage that a rat could hardly live on: a sight made the more awful because of some remote, vague tradition, connected with it, born heaven knows how or where, that the poor wretches who form the procession should bear some faint, dim resemblance to gentility: and in the name of this tradition, battered skeletons of "top-hats" crown the poor debased heads; green and ragged frockcoats buttoned eagerly, where they have buttons, across the thin forms, and sometimes a grey limp thing that was once a collar clings round the poor neck, bent and yoked by its boards of shameful slavery. We all know the sight.

Of such, in his way, little Charles Dickens classed himself and his poor comrades. Various folks used to stop and look at them—lawyers' clerks, working-men, errand-boys, pompous gentlemen in wholesale City trade with ringleted wives on their arms—for in those days the City was a place of quite substantial residence, and Chandos Street would be a by no means entirely commercial thoroughfare, rather a parade of fashion, of sorts.

This was the child's final humiliation. Once, after his father's release, he saw him enter the shop quite jauntily, undisturbed at his little son's menial work. He says, with another touch of that tragic simplicity, "I wondered how he could bear it"

It is amusing to reflect how little those idly curious people in Chandos Street, who watched the lads tying up blacking-pots for dear life, thought that the pale boy with the grim little face was watching them with eyes no deceit could weather, and saw straight down into the recesses of the souls they hardly dreamed they possessed, and would one day hold them up to the world to be remembered through generations to come. For slowly but surely Dickens was learning life. Chatham could not have taught him this. Here, before his blacking-shop window, came in ready procession human nature in every

possible phase: human nature in the raw, never perhaps so raw as when it is dressed up in its would-be deceits; the human nature of the jeering street Arab; the human nature of the haughty East India broker, whose god was the British Constitution; the human nature of the dandy ; the human nature of the sweep ; the several unutterable humanities of the vain, prim, middle-class matron, the ragged street-girl, the hungry, disappointed old clerk, the charitable humbug, the stupid official, the street-loafer, with his glorious wit and empty pockets; the coster Socrates, with his strangely-begot wisdom ; the City legislator, with his really brilliant ignorance.

All these passed before him, willingly, because unconsciously, posing for his pen, almost seeming to court that gorgeous power of caricature of which he was one day to become the master. They became, quite innocently, a primer for his study—they and beings far more sunk in misery and wretchedness. For though his slave-driven days were spent in this way from early morning till late at night, his Sundays were passed in the Marshalsea Prison with his dejected parents and little brothers and sisters.

There he met and mixed with the submerged world in all its candour: there he beheld crime, folly, **debt**, larceny, innocence and helplessness, all confined

together and enduring identically the same condemnation. Heaven knows, he had a wide schooling in human experience.

He saw most that can be seen in degradation. He saw the criminal from the wretch's own point of view, not the law's, and heard him explain and expound his position. He saw the professional cheat and the weak debtor also from their own point of view, irrespective of the great upper world of wise rulers and nation-makers.

He heard the language and beheld the home habits of all these sunken and miserable creatures, and talked to them in his childish, high, 'cute little voice, watching them with those bright, sparkling eyes that saw far down into their depths of sin and misery, yet looked upon them with kindly good-humour as comrades, and always saw, so unerringly, the funny side as well as the heartrending.

Amidst all the hideous realism, the squalors, the horrors of a prison in those days, he quite gravely and with a childish dignity that has no equal, counted himself as one of that sorrowful herd. His people were brought there through misfortune; for the time, he was of them too. He saw them in all their absoluteness, yet felt the unutterable sense that he was of that world, and not another. For such a child,

this was the finest martyrdom. It was also the finest training.

The marvel of the whole thing was that he was never embittered. One hears that the sweetest natures grow more beautiful in adversity; his must have been superlatively so.

For his love of humour, his courage, his unselfishness, his geniality, grew and fostered under that most stern, most discouraging, most degrading and freezing *regime*, with all the mysterious wonder of the frail white velvety eidelweiss of an ice-bound mountain precipice, or the first miraculous snowdrop lifting a faint white bell on blast-withered northern hill-sides. These are the sweet miracles of God, before which the dogmatist can only bow in awe and silence.

There came a day when he was at last taken from that dark apprenticeship, and placed for a short time at school: a middle-class school, in which flogging seems to have been the main educational principle. "Salem House" is a description of its joys. And with the rise of his father's fortunes to comparative comfort, he was expected to forget those years of agony.

Never does John Dickens appear so truly like Micawber as in this action. To him, what was past

was past: he had come into better things, something had "turned up," in the way of an unexpected legacy' so good-bye to the Marshalsea, the debts, and the sorrows. Charles was reinstated as a gentleman, in outward paraphernalia, that is, and he must be educated, a thing he out of all the world least needed. He was not a brilliant scholar at that middle-class school, looked at from its academic standpoint, but those who remembered him in his school years, say he had a remarkably proud and erect carriage of his boyish head, and very fearless, bright eyes; and that he wrote fascinating stories on odd bits of paper which he sold to other boys for marbles and slate pencils. Those grubby little effusions would be priceless now, if they existed! But marbles, slate pencils, and oranges bought them then.

He was popular with the other boys, and deeply revered for his scribbling powers, and admired for a certain daring and courage combined with a deep reserve as to his own personal affairs. His thoughts at that time must have been interesting, almost volcanic, but no one tried to probe them, and he passed for a proud-spirited but kindly-natured youth of no great talent, except personal charm, if that is talent

From that school he entered a lawyer's office!

where he made a deep study of its luminaries; but not finding the legal profession a too vast amphitheatre for self-expression, he left it and began to work as a reporter. He learnt shorthand laboriously at night classes, and the struggles of David Copperfield after the same end are a description, in part, of his own.

Prior to 1840, the duties of a press reporter were so hard that very few men's constitutions could stand the strain. Yet those duties were his till the *Sketches by Boz* brought him to fame, and *Pickwick* to glory.

That was the making of a Prophet. Neither joy nor sorrow can be measured by the ordinary limitations of time. It is a truism, that great emotions are timeless. You cannot strictly say, "I despaired for five days," or "My rapture lasted for a week," or "I was in a patriotic passion for three hours and a quarter."

In absolute emotion, a week may burn to an aeon : an aeon flash to a week. These things are matters of individual experience. There are single days—twenty-four mean hours alone—which spell years in men's lives; and there are sometimes whole strings of years which signify practically nothing: which might have been got into one day, for all the feeling, joy or sorrow, which they contained in their arid uselessness.

A few years covered the period of Charles Dickens's worst struggles, as men count years, but they made up his main experience of life, and were the source of all the most powerful writings of his full prime; a source from which he continued to draw after the commonplace conditions of respectable affluence lapped him round, and he became, as a natural penalty for inspired yet still human greatness, the slave to some extent of petty social laws and small polite limitations.

The tragedy of a few short years burnt itself deeply into a soul so sensitive and of such a fineness of make, that the marvel is that it bore the test at all, and not that the test was short, as men have chosen to parcel out Time. Trial by fire, which, by-the-bye, is a trial reserved for gold only, may be short in a literal sense, but it is usually complete. Out of it, Charles Dickens rose unspoiled, and unutterably glorified by the supreme love of the poor: of the helpless poor, of the misunderstood poor, of the despised poor, the lonely poor, the shabby-genteel poor, the kindly vulgar poor, the pretentious poor, the unpicturesque poor, the poor of every description and degree: a sorrowful, bedraggled, pathetic crowd enough, and a crowd which has never had such a champion before or since.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF LAUGHTER.

ENGLAND has at last begun to be seriously jolly ; and when England takes up anything seriously—even fun—it does it with a vengeance. Slowly the " problem play " is being edged off the stage, slowly the farcical opera is spreading its sway. People now, in the mass, go to the play to laugh: they long to laugh, they mean to laugh, and the more the play or opera can make them laugh, the better they think it. Also they are beginning to love music for its cheering properties, and less for a pose, which is a happy sign.

The moralist who looks at these things in a cursory fashion—and moralists are often terribly cursory in their judgments—calls it all frivolity. He fails to recognize that joy and a merry heart, providing they be innocent—and there is no such thing as real joy in anything that is not essentially innocent,—are a factor in the making of a good **and**

gallant people. And in a land where for some years past sunshine has been practically *nil*, there is something fine and admirable about a nation which will endeavour all the more to make a little sunshine for itself: to plant gay flowers persistently in the grass of its parks: to fill its Regent Street milliners' windows with gay rhapsodies of summer flowers and shepherdesses' ribbons, when fog and rain devastate outside; and to tempt its theatre-goers to plays, so-called, but which are mainly dancing and singing and scenic effects, where the sole moral is that it is a good thing to be young and hopeful and lively, and to see life's humour, and that pessimism never served any good cause. For Pessimism "went out" with the terrible aesthetic "At Homes" of the 'eighties, where a morbid musician moaned to a crowd who were all too busy talking over their own "morbidity" to attend to anything, but perhaps the length of his hair.

Wherever you go now, unless it be into the remote fastnesses of a provincial Bazaar, you will find people who laugh; people who laugh constantly and genuinely. They do not smile at provincial bazaars, and some suburban "At Homes" are very serious; so also are the people in Tubes, and the people in 'buses, and the people at Albert Hall ballad concerts, and the people at dinner-parties based on grounds of

business or diplomacy, and the people who sing wailing things in side-streets on Sunday afternoons for pence; and policemen, and bridegrooms, and motorists.

But in most places the merry man or woman, or the one ready to be made merry, is in the majority, and there is no trace now of that lonely formalism which Dickens did so much to combat. No longer is a cheery soul dubbed "frivolous" by the socially elect, but, quite the contrary, it is considered an unalloyed blessing to have one in our list of friends, and palace and hovel make him or her a welcome visitor.

There is now no profession which absolutely demands a long and miserable face, though, as I have stated above, certain amusements and some trades require it. But in Dickens's day all the learned professions required a painfully grim deportment from those who entered them, and laughter would have been fatal even to the reputation of a really respectable tradesman; and would have spelt ruination, unless it was ironical, in the House of Commons, Irony was, of course, a respectable form of laughter, just as gout is a respectable form of ailment, suggesting good cellars and a good table. But real happy, natural laughter, such as we hear round us now so constantly, was "not correct"—and that was enough to banish it

The English have good taste, and as a rule it is perfectly safe to leave their laughter to it, knowing that they will rarely care long or in great crowds for anything which is not in good taste. There is a great deal of harmless fun in most of them, and except only the people who go to diplomatic dinner-parties, who never do smile, who never have smiled, and who never will smile, and the women of whom wear jewellery in heavy settings, like fire-irons, which appear to have somehow broken out into billiard-balls, they are nearly all, if taken individually, capable of a good, sincere, merry laugh—even the motorists, when, like Gilbert's burglar, not "engaged in their employment."

This is not only a happy look-out from a general social point of view, but it has the transcendent charm of keeping people younger, for all who are merry keep young longer, whatever beauty-specialists may say about wrinkles. The only ugly wrinkles come with frowning and sneering. The wrinkles, if any, brought on by real, whole-hearted happy laughter, are admittedly even in theory an additional charm to a man's face; and in practice they may be counted to be so in a woman's. If you get tiny, imperceptible "crows' feet" about your eyes at seventy as the penalty for going through life with a

merry heart, you are certainly none the plainer for it, and probably much healthier and better beloved than if you had kept a grim face all those years, only to see it fall into flabby lines and sour twists at the end after all. A woman with a sense of humour, as one whom the gods love, dies young—she cannot age.

The fun of Dickens is the wildest, yet the freest from all taint of broadness and serious vulgarity of any humorist in the world, and it did not sparkle into a gloomy, melancholy England for nothing. As we look back to that grave part of a grave century when he began to write, it becomes clearer still that he intended to rouse a depressed and apathetic constitution out of a gloom which had wrapped it round for many a long day. A blight born of hypocritical custom had long held us in its mildewed thrall, and gaiety of the simplest sort was deemed by the majority to be utterly wrong, with the quite inevitable result that what humour of the day there was, became hopelessly debased and coarse and unfit for decent ears. When Charity cuts her neighbour Joy, they both deteriorate.

The hideous dress, the funereal furniture, the execrable ornaments, of which examples still linger in forgotten corners of London, all show the spirit of that age,—from 1830 to 1850—when, in spite of

hypocritical professions, crime was at one of its highest points on record, and the poor were a crying disgrace, as well as a desperate danger, throughout the land.

Dickens, threading his way about the gloomy country as an ill-paid press reporter, felt the overwhelming spirit of its depression. He saw those who ranged themselves on the side of the angels habitually more melancholy than funeral mutes, in obedience to custom: he saw the women who dare not laugh, but went about with pinched-up lips and one-buttoned gloves folded over their gloomy-tinted shawls, and wearing poke-bonnets and elastic-side boots, representing the "Smart set" in the woman-world: and children who were taught to mince and keep perfectly still in frightful clothes, and to learn dreary copy-book maxims by heart as a sort of moral education, and long portions of the Bible, the loveliest poetry in the world, as a punishment. And he saw those to whom this sort of thing was intolerable, going to the opposite extreme in sheer despair.

Gravity was hypocritical: fun was evil. What a chance for a pessimist! And who might have been a better justified pessimist, than he who had hardly known a childhood?

At the time when he probably felt this dreary

solemnity to be most pernicious, and when, with the publication of *Sketches by Boz*, he first began publicly to laugh, as it were, he was a pale young man, in indifferently cut clothes, earning a very little money for very long hours of toil, and, like the man with only one shirt in the legend, you would have thought him the least likely person to start a mirthless country into a shout of boyish laughter.

But trouble and difficulty are the best school for developing a sense of humour, and that laughter which is the treble part in a rondo of which the bass is tears, is the only real abiding humour. He had tasted the dregs of want and suffering and despair: his thin frame showed it, his deeply sorrowful eyes in those old portraits tell the history more plainly than mere words could do.

Later on, in 1840, when success had come to him, he wrote to Mrs. Watson, a dear friend, of merry faces and cheery scenes, flashes of sunlight that he would never see again, and there is an underlying pathos in his words which comes as a revelation of those deep chords in his nature that the gay music could not hide. He says—" I don't know how it is, but the ideal world in which my lot is cast has an odd effect on the real one, and makes it chiefly precious for such remembrances. I get quite melancholy over

them sometimes, especially when, as now, those great piled-up semicircles of bright faces, at which I have been looking—all laughing, earnest and intent—have faded away like dead people. They seem a ghostly moral of everything in life to me."

When he first began to write, he was far from being out of the wood of his earlier suffering—he had his family to think for still in some degree, and though his name was beginning to be known for clerky accuracy in that first literary world of his, the reporter's world, it was a limited one as regards pecuniary matters in those days.

But it was just then that he began to find that laugh which had been hidden up his sleeve through all his early struggles, just at a time when most young men of nineteen would have become world-worn cynics, for we are all somewhat past emotion at nineteen, especially men. Here comes in his training. As he was a man about town at eleven years old, so at nineteen he was a humorist, a feat which most men do not attain till they are forty, and some never. Consequently he can be said to have been forty in his supreme sense of humour and general balance of things at an age when other young men would just have been giving up all fun as mere folly, and going in for "deep" Ideas about

things, and enigmatical ties and original philosophies. Herein he lost no time.

I heard the other day our dear old friend the remark that Dickens "over-did caricature" brought out quite freshly and ingenuously at a dinner. It is as original, in its way, as that very phoenix of a new idea, which impels people to say that *they* don't mind walking under a ladder for superstitious reasons—they are only afraid of it for fear of a drop of paint falling on to their hats. The gleam of real joy with which everybody one has ever known makes this humorous remark when the subject of walking under ladders crops up, is touching : you cannot enlighten them that you have heard it before somewhere. No one would willingly shatter his neighbour's beliefs when he smiles so gladly.

But the very breadth of caricature of which Dickens is accused is part of his genius. He could not have made his contemporaries laugh with less. He knew that far better than we know it, and as he deliberately, I believe, wanted to make his country a merrier place than it was, he had to draw his comedy strongly and definitely, or he would simply have been stared at by a perfectly blank public for his pains. It is hard to exaggerate the solemnity of his day : a solemnity, for instance, which

called Thackeray a cynic, instead of one of the finest and most finished of humorists: an age which read Disraeli quite seriously, and thought "Lothair" a noble person. Dickens was dramatic to a degree and he drew his characters with the definite hand of a dramatist; they must be strongly marked and brightly coloured to fix the dulled attention of a land whose idol was Dulness: and there is little doubt that the more exaggerated of these were of set purpose made more glaringly ludicrous than they would have been had their author felt his audience to be entirely in sympathy with him. The finer shades of his humour, and they far outnumber the highly coloured, were probably utterly overlooked by the majority of his readers in his own day, as they are overlooked by his present-day critics who state that he overdid caricature.

The finer shades are necessarily lost on such as judge him by his more noisy comedies alone. A scene like that inimitable one between Paul Dombey and Mrs. Pipchin, sitting together over the parlour-fire, is the essence of humour, but it is quite possible that the people who rave against Mr. Mantalini's extravagances do not see it. The scene where David gave a party to the Micawbers and Traddles is intense, and the release of Mr. Dorrit from prison

is another brilliant bit of delicate comedy. No one can say that Miss Betsey Trotwood is exaggerated whose eyes have been open in life at all, and few can honestly state that there are no Podsnaps and Veneerings in a modern form amongst their own acquaintances.

His laughter was all kind, never bitter. He never laughed at vice, and he never made vulgar fun of the weak or the sincerely well intentioned. He laughed at shams and he laughed at spite; and, kindly, he laughed at all the world. And some of his laughter is nearer tears—the loud laugh at Mr. Pickwick has its opposite in the pathetic laughter at Dora, and the grim, rueful laughter wrung from us by *Oliver Twist*.

There is little doubt that his was a mission of fun ; or rather, perhaps, fun with a mission. He meant his country to know its own poor, and to see their humour and their pathos for itself. Agitator, socialist, and missioner had failed to set that picture plainly before the public eye. It remained for a poor reporter, with sad eyes and a shabby coat, to accomplish it gloriously. And how few poor reporters could have done it without falling into a pose? What other man in England could have taken up such a cause, and, finding it successful, resisted taking some sort of a stand on some sort of a tiresome pedestal?

— if not that of the painfully ponderous stone gentlemen in Trafalgar Square, the even more insidious one of a "Man of the People," in a dreadful tie, with unpleasant manners. There are very few eager youths, possessed of genius, or even talent, who would not have taken such an opportunity to rave or rant. Dickens could not rant to save his life. He might have stood on a tub in Hyde Park, with a ring of *Us mistrables* for his listeners, till he and they were ordered to "move on," which would have been ineffectual and melodramatically stupid.

Even by the slow, wheezing, lumbering machinery of legislation, in those days of respectable but rheumatically politics, he could not, had he had the "golden tongue" of Chrysostom, have reached the *salons* and drawing-rooms of England—and drawing-rooms have a large share in the making of a country, though it would be most unwise to tell them so. As a witty lady once said: "If a woman is to have a successful mission in life, she should not know what it is." Women and drawing-rooms, which are the temples of women, exaggerate missions; they perform them best by instinct, or, at most, by sub-consciousness.

**The** women, good and kind, who would not, if left to themselves, eventually overdo and caricature a

mission, however noble, are in the minority even now ; they were fewer still in the 'thirties. But Dickens got at these, and at the other great law-makers in the land, by the most golden of all golden keys—laughter.—Just about the last key that anybody else would have dreamed of using to fit a lock so ponderous and rusty.

What recked he of the formidable and gloomy domestic and civic ideals of those days? What cared he that it was accounted rather vulgar to have eyes even capable of twinkling? Undaunted by the surrounding miasma of hypocrisy, class-jealousy, discipline curdled to tyranny, seriousness mildewed to sourness; undismayed by the vision of a country that had practically forgotten how to smile, this keen-faced, thin, poor young man, who had never had a joy or a ray of sunshine in his life, who had no prospects as we count prospects, and many anxious cares, sat himself down in the market-place and began to pipe—and set all that solemn England dancing.

Like sudden magic, flashed forth the wild joy of his never-equalled humour, and none could resist it. It sparkled, it danced, it flowed, it rippled, it laughed, it raced, it bubbled over, till that most solemn Constitution rocked again. Dickens had made a

discovery beyond Newton, beyond Franklin, beyond Columbus: he had discovered that England had a sense of humour. He had found a gold-mine. He had reached the heart of the Empire by making it laugh.

He made them all join in it—the poor man and the rich together; the women, when it was positively the fashion to be solemn—a most enormous victory; the old and the young—in one great, innocent, jolly, healthy laugh, that swept across England like a wild, salt, racy, life-giving wind from the sea.

What a laugh that was! It began with the *Sketches*, and was carried on in *Pickwick*, the publication of which raised him from a newspaper reporter and itinerant journalist to the most widely read author in the world; and it went on shaking, and souging, and sweeping, and blowing, till all England opened the windows and let in the fresh air.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF WOMEN.

IT is the quite usual experience of the lover of Dickens to hear the remark : " O yes, but he couldn't write about women. The women of Dickens! oh aren't they insipid !" For the most part it is women who make the complaint: generally young women, and invariably those not intensely capable of thinking or reading, and often vaguely imbued with a dim sense that they are "strong-minded" and are proving it by making use of this catch-phrase, for it is a catch-phrase. They heard somebody else say it, and it struck them as good ; it also saved them a great deal of trouble; sounded as though they had read Dickens, and gave the listener the impression that insipidity was not their own particular fault, in fact quite the opposite; so that several birds fell to one stone.

Catch-phrases are so common now, especially since so much of the literature of the young people consists

of halfpenny papers and station advertisements, that it is difficult to discover the talented inventor of this particular one. But it seems to suggest an origin superior to such recent "penny-a-liners" inventions in catch-phrases, such as "heat-wave," "cold-spell," "frost-snip," "felt want," "brain-fag," and "rush of life," which (shade of Johnson!) are gradually becoming a vocabulary; and is rather more reminiscent of those deeper minds which will spend hours comparing Dickens to Thackeray or Thackeray to Dickens, a form of intellectual gymnastics which sets one wondering whether it would not be very effective to write a book on the analytical comparison of Thomas *k* Kempis and Professor Froude, or a deep and searching treatise on the partially hidden dissimilarities of Plato and Jane Austen.

These critics always assume that you know that they mean only Dickens's young and pretty women, that you take for granted, by a sort of mutual understanding, that they mean Dora Spenslow, Amy Dorrit, Kate Nickleby, Florence Dombey, Bella Wilfer, Rosa Budd, Pet Meagles, etc., etc. That by "women" you could possibly mean Peggotty or Mrs. Micawber or anyone like that, never occurs to them; they, and dozens of other women of his creation, who were not actually young and pretty, apparently do not count

This is one of the quaintest sidelights on the condition of thought to-day that has ever flashed forth for our illumination. Beauty is thought so much of, youth is considered such an end to be attained after by our grandmothers themselves, that there is no longer any place in our minds for those who have not these qualities. Our own heroines are "splendid" always, and have "masses" of Titian-red hair, and posters appear on our hoardings with the leading lady in the last play with her massy locks so very Titian that they are suggestive of red hearth-rugs.

A heroine who does not, from the first raising of the curtain to its final fall, pose as the absolutely central figure, is insipid on the stage. A real life heroine who does not do something similar in her friends' drawing-rooms or country houses is considered equally a failure.

We all have before us the daily spectacle of women striving, fighting, struggling to be that central figure; and, by-the-bye, a drawing-room full of central figures can become in time strangely reminiscent of the Zoo at feeding time. And as each year, each month even, we want larger and larger returns for smaller and smaller efforts, or outputs, we have almost given up even pretending to be clever, as a means of centralization ; we have decided that the two royal roads

to that empire are wealth and beauty—if possible, both.

Again, wealth is rather a matter for one's men, but more and more women fight to be beautiful. They wriggle and struggle and twist to excel in that one particular alone. They have quite lost the desire to be lovely, which is another thing altogether: a thing born of gentleness, goodness, purity, humanity, joy, and health. No longer are these fair things considered as having any relation to beauty by the majority of women, except perhaps the latter, and that only in a circumscribed and purely animal sense. He will be thought a dull moralist who ventures to connect them in any way. Ruskin did, and Wesley, Augustine, Shakespeare, Goldsmith, Solomon, Milton, Emerson, and thousands upon thousands more, of whom Dickens is not the least. But then, they were only men, whereas, now, women have become a law unto themselves, and consider that they know best what is the most enviable (and most utilitarian) feminine possession; and they have unanimously decided upon Beauty—sheer physical, large, bold, solid, animal beauty.

The ideal is an American one, but it has become naturalized, and it is not confined to one class only; one *sees* it in the girls of the lower classes just as

much if not more than in the higher; it is in **the** novel as constantly as it is in the play.

The mind, the soul, the sweetness behind this great mask of beauty are at a discount. Who cares for such, except, of course, men, and they are inconsiderable. The "scornful" or the "queenly" style of bearing is the outcome of this idea, and in the lady of position and the shop-girl its evidences are equally apparent

The sweep of skirts, the jangle of bracelets, the rattle of innumerable noisy things, the haughty carriage, the cold stare, the disdainful manner, which are supposed by the owners not only to be the natural accompaniments of beauty but even to make it, we meet them all; they descend from broughams, they rush past in motor-cars, they give you change over the counter, they emerge from Board Schools in the lunch hour with very dirty hands and artificial pearls, they climb on to 'bus tops, they even refuse your offers of domestic posts, and sail away in a superb manner with an elbow crooked up in the latest American style to support a dress that requires mending at the edge. They have looked into life, some way at any rate, mainly in its most portable and condensed form—on the stage, also in novels and novelettes, and they have come to the conclusion,

through these illuminating means, and perhaps by scrap conversations with other women in the drawing-room before the men come upstairs, or, in a different class, with the other shop-girls or school-girls, that power is everything and that Beauty is power, and that the less it is hampered by kindness, modesty, humanity, unselfishness, goodness and so on, and the more it is bolstered up by hard selfishness, self-assertion, noise and barbarian glitter, the more it is Power.

This idea, though vague, has become a sort of creed, but I do not say that even all who believe it act up to it; I only assert that it is there, that it is all around us, and that, generally speaking, it is the feminine "spirit of the age," the woman's *Zeitgeist*, and that it holds fast as a belief even in the minds of girls and women whose own better natures, like the persistent shimmering house-lichen in the chinks of a hideous building, continually shine through its base ugliness—for which let us give devout thanks. But as it is a sort of creed, and as all who live in cities will admit that it is largely existent, it is, to my mind, one of the reasons why we say that Dickens's women are stupid. To such a creed, all beauty and all charm that is not as glaringly obvious as a station advertisement of a new beef, is silly.

The usual accusation, put side by side with what might be said about some of our own modern heroines, is instructive. The chief cry is: "Dickens's women were playful and shook their ringlets"; our women are playful only in a rougher fashion, as in slang and "kitchen" lancers and strange songs; and they shake bangles with "dangles" that rattle like fire-irons, in place of ringlets. There is, however, little essential difference, except that the first were more child-like and joyous than the last. The mode of expression is but a mode. Of the two, the first is, artistically speaking, prettier, but both may hide sterling worth, or both be unutterably inane. Dickens's women fainted and wept—wept very easily. We do not faint, but we require enough "rest cures"<sup>1</sup> to cover the space of the actual time allotted to any amount of fainting-fits.

As we know, the age in which Dickens wrote was for many reasons an age of feminine physical delicacy, mainly, I think, because the rooms were shockingly ventilated, the houses planned and built on an unhygienic scale of which even many dwellings in the present-day slums are not guilty; and in these houses women stayed for days without taking exercise, and, except a chosen few, had too little education or encouragement to intellectual work to

save them from hopeless *ennui*. For the contemplation of pickle-jars and linen-chests to one's neighbours' defects, one's Sunday bonnet, the canary, or the latest "catch," was not a wide area for that "winged thing," a woman's soul.

Perhaps as a result of having positively nothing better to do, it was the fashion to sink gracefully down like a stricken swan, or dramatically like a falling pillar, if anything went wrong. Most women are born with a histrionic vein somewhere, and this was the only possible dramatic outlet in a life so uneventful as that of a middle-class lady in the 'forties. Sometimes it was real—sometimes it was very cleverly done—but in any case it was admittedly the fashion, just as it is now the fashion to race and rush about, refuse to think, get desperately excited, and fly into "rest cures," and plunge into operations as hotly as into opera-boxes, which may also be cleverly done or real, as the case may be. True, the fashions are opposite extremes, but of the two fainting was, perhaps, the more romantic and certainly less expensive. The emotions had also some chance of natural development, though the physical frame was at a disadvantage in those humdrum households. We ourselves are not unaccustomed to the spectacle of emotions in rags. Dickens, like any nice man,

though he may have recognized that fainting was only a fashion, yet gallantly tried to believe in it, and seemed to have succeeded, which showed his grace and tact.

As for weeping, we do not now resort to that so much, partly, no doubt, because our standard of health is better, partly because our nerves are more under control, partly because we are less affectionate. We now admire reserve in matters of grief or mortification, but we show less reserve than they did in matters of boasting or personal aggrandizement. In that they were infinitely better bred than we; afraid to brag, they did not fear to weep. Their gentle tears that flowed so readily from soft eyes over some childish home trouble, had sometimes a grace and loveliness about them that our worldly cynicisms, used to express the same sentiment, rather lack. Whoever a woman may be, she is prettier and sweeter in a soft shower of real tears than in the vulgar aridity of a glibly uttered and parrot-learned cynicism.

As for sentimentality, the woman who, wrecked on the rock of self, finds "life" too much for her, exists in all ages. In those days, discontented, despairing, she wept and kept an album; her modern successor goes to Ibsen matindes and keeps a diary.

Which are we to revere most? The album was at least harmless and capable of some faint literary possibilities ; the diary is egotistical and quite without the latter grace. As for weeping tears of joy, a thing that is charged against the ringleted maidens of Dickens, that we never do, it is apparently an entirely lost emotion.

Scientists must explain why that emotion is ours no more. Perhaps we have less feeling to spare over home things, little joys, little delights. Perhaps it has gone because, as people now say in excuse for nearly everything under the sun: " Life is such a rush." Perhaps it is as well gone, and the modern woman shrugs her shoulders, and Girton rejoices and Newnham is right glad ; but I, who am quite willing to be called sentimental, have hardly a more sacred memory than the dim, long, dead picture of a beautiful young mother dewy-eyed over some little baby achievement of one of her loving, chattering flock, and holding them all clustered together in her encircling arms, that holy tenderness glistening into a smile such as seraphs see who play beside the streams of living waters.

But every age to its taste. Another idol fills to-day the niche of that Madonna. Our views on the woman question have gradually become very

melodramatic. For instance, what Dickens intended for a lesson in the fall of a strong nature into moral depravity, Edith Dombey (about the only young and beautiful woman who was not also good that he ever drew, by-the-bye), would be our heroine to-day. Edith Dombey is not altogether without suggestions of Ibsenism, or rather mock-Ibsenism, when one comes to examine her in the light of a heroine. Her pride, her greed of power, her treachery, her sudden flashes of better feeling, her uncontrollable rage and hatred, her fury against conditions deliberately created by herself, and her wild and selfish violation of all social and moral laws which dragged herself and others into hopeless misery, is very reminiscent of the "massy haired" heroine of our matindes, the ideal of our coming generation.

Dramatic as the scenes are which such women may create in a peaceful English [stage] household, neither these nor their Titian locks, nor their Paquin frocks, would really console or inspire a tired husband in real life with quite the admiration he is expected to show. Positively in real life the Early Victorian woman wears best, and the day will come when to be rather boring and very serene and slightly sentimental, and on the whole intensely unselfish and kind and sweet, will "come in" again; that is, when

we have found the lofty-souled, ruinously-gowned, rash, haughty, selfish lady a little difficult to deal with in practical life, and not altogether satisfactory from a social-evolutionary point of view.

But we must be patient. She will "run" for some time yet, and her own sex will hold her up as the perfect model for many years to come; though, like all fashions, she will filter down gradually through various social grades till she reaches the factory-girl, say, in rather a caricatured form, just as a duke's old coat may come to sweeping a crossing, and the devotion of mediaeval Spain to St. James of Compostello in his armour of silver shells, has come down to the little gutter-baby's cry of "Remember the grotto"; and instead of what in Old Spain meant a Prince's donation to a gem-lit altar, a farthing is expected for the sight of five dirty cockle-shells and a bunch of dead marigolds tied together with red wool.

So all our social systems wear themselves down to the realism of pathetic caricature. Already the artizan's daughter is uproariously proud of not possessing the domestic virtues. Already the shop-girl gives a little shriek and a giggle if anyone suggests that marriage may possibly involve such dull things as unselfishness, duty, or economy. These are signs of the times. But when we see the first

factory-girl with an artificially maroon-coloured head, a regal carelessness of gesture, loud remonstrances against the "caging bars" of social restraint, and a costume corresponding in its degree to the Worth or Paquin of her betters—say off the most select coster-barrow in the Walworth Road, or from a <sup>11</sup> "slop-shop" in Bethnal Green—we shall know that the day of the unwomanly woman is over, and the day of the well-bred, insipid if you will, but dear, jolly, companionable little woman has returned. Roughly speaking, it takes about thirty years for a moral fashion to permeate from the Court to the slums, so that as the discontented but dressy heroine first reared her Titian head about 1885, we have about eleven more years to wait for her antidote.

In the name of all that is sensible and far-seeing, we want women to be healthy and intelligent, but, like Dickens, we want them to retain some vestige of heart. Dickens's women were women of the heart, and those whom his would-be critics chiefly attack, such as Dora, Little Dorrit, Florence Dombey, Rosebud, etc., of the heart only. But if women must run to exaggeration in one particular, surely this special exaggeration is the best. Women who are all head—happily they are very rarely to be met with—a're quite indescribable. A woman without a heart, or

head either, is a nameless thing; and she does not, unless you see her only in occasional glimpses, and those at a softening distance, cut quite the dramatic figure her sex supposes.

Dickens felt this, and in his keen enthusiasm made many of his heroines so full of feeling that they were almost professors of heart. But we must remember that though he had not quite our modern idealisms of selfishness to combat, he had in the 'thirties and 'forties, a similar giant to subdue, and that was the formalism of the women of his era. The formalism, I mean, which made it "correct" to show no natural loving feeling, which thought all sweet human self-expression "immodest," and pinched up its lips and regulated its meagre mind, and minced, and "accepted" a "suitor" only after he had gone down on his knees on the carpet, and even after that addressed him by his surname with the prefix "Mr.,"; the class of stiff, upright, well-governed mind which went with black horse-hair sofas, one-button black kid gloves worn in the house, the glorification of funerals, and the severe treatment of little children. These Spartan females, in wind-mill shaped caps with lappets that required rolling in the fingers, who were ashamed of a reasonable appetite at table, and thought a sense of humour in a woman a sort

of crime—and let us remember that young and fashionable women were like this—must have filled Dickens with a kind of horror which helped to cause his revulsion of feeling in the direction of women of warm, soft, genial, ready emotions: ready-smiling, ready-weeping angels of the hearth, simple, kindly, and dear, if not too clever. Creatures—

" . . . . not too bright and good  
For human nature's daily food;  
For transient sorrows, simple wiles,  
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles."

Being a man, he only glorified what he really loved—the simplest womanliness.

If there is one point more especially interesting than another in Dickens's treatment of women, it lies in the fact that he exalted above all things gentleness and humanity, and hated above all things hardness, selfishness, and cruelty. His typical figures of mischief and evil, of whom his pen is most bitter, are all, under different circumstances, epitomes of one or all three of these ugly *traits*, from Rosa Dartle to Miss Murdstone, and on in their degree to Mrs. Alfred Lammle, Fanny Squeers, Mrs. Squeers, Mrs. Gowan, Mrs. Clennam, Mrs. Pipchin, Mrs. Gargery, to, in a softened and deeply to be pitied sense, Miss Havisham and Edith Dombey.

It is interesting that certain evils existing in all ages, are never by him connected with women, except in a few rare instances where they appear like flitting shadows, such as Martha in *David Copperfield*, only to show the horror of a terrible social wrong.

Intrinsically, Dickens raises woman above the pollution of one great fault Magdalen is not in his category.

To him a woman is a sacred being, a goddess who presides over the hearth and home, a priestess of the mysteries of the happy, cosy, peaceable domestic comfort, whose ready, useful hand is never slack to point the way, gently, to the path of wisdom in wild excess, or of peace in strife; a very lovable person, even to this advanced age, and even if liable to be called by detractors "insipid," and a little person who, somehow, when you do meet her now, a little metamorphosed by her modern surroundings but essentially the same, always seems to be pretty firmly placed on somebody's pedestal, be he husband, brother, or father. She can still be found; sometimes, say, hidden in the far fastnesses of some suburban villa, where a can of milk is left by the milkman on the tiny step every morning, and the loaves of bread repose on the inlaid tiled

**lobby** floor; where a shaky castor-oil plant stands in the one sitting-room window, set off by the legend "C.P." or "D." writ large.

Upon that altar whose mystic altitude is, by-the'bye, not to be measured by its little exterior trimmings, she sits supreme, and makes one, perhaps a circle, as entirely happy as mortals can be made. She hides in many groves. I saw her not long ago in a Park Lane drawing-room, in quite another guise, but quite as dear. She was being worshipped just as heartily by a circle of devotees as her parallel in suburbia. You find her sometimes in a hospital, nursing; sometimes in a farmhouse, or behind a shop-counter, or reigning en a real, visible throne, or driving behind priceless horses, or driving geese. She belongs to no class and to no age. Dickens didn't invent her: he liked her, and he just put her up as his standard of the eternal "beloved feminine." She is the dear, affectionate, innocent, happy, peaceable woman who has always been loved by all men in all ages. "Time cannot wither her" any more than fashion; she is always cropping up in history and in romance, with honours.

Mobs may be clever, or beautiful, or dashing, or Puritanic, or nervous, or athletic, or visionary, or "operationy," or anything else—so wags Fashion—but

this quite "insipid," but most astonishingly powerful little person, goes on through the centuries, undisturbed by such rolling waves of change. She was not peculiar to crinolines and "window-curtain" coiffures. You could have found her sitting, meek-eyed and peach-faced among the first fair Puritans who, in snowy caps, and grey linsey-woolsey gowns, braved the fierce seas and all His "waves and storms" with a sweet sedateness on the deck of that floating romance, the "Mayflower." She could be found clad in brocade in the midst of Borgian court splendours, or blossoming in the slimy shadows of the Bastille. She was sometimes a princess, another time a dancer, a shop-keeper, a house-frau, a *pricieuse*^ a butterfly or a nun. But she was always a mighty power, and convent and castle knew her in far-off ruder days, when, but for her, men would have remained the pedantic savages they have ever been in a little danger of becoming. She even rather puzzled Plato when he was attempting to construct his Republic; she got distinctly in the way, with her impulses and affections, in that beautifully conceived scheme, which plainly wanted her to be a machine only; and there is, perhaps, in all the ages, no funnier spectacle than that of Socrates, Glaucon, and Polemarchus, and, 'the rest of that grave conclave

eternal puzzle of bringing her incorrigible femininity into philosophic line.

As Dickens happened to come across her, she was tainted, as she is in every succeeding age, by fashion and custom, but only tainted. Her taint was formalism in those days—a very dreary thing. Dickens knew that behind her formalism, which was the then *mode*, she had a heart, and to that heart he appealed. He hit at what he found to be the wrong tendency of his day—the shams, the primnesses, the hardnesses, the feminine social cruelties, the cold, grim Puritanism, the arid formality of the woman's kingdom about him—and if to us those tender, loving creatures that he drew so finely seem a trifle too readily emotional, we must remember the Vinegar Ideal that they, with their archnesses, gaities, childishnesses, and tears, were called upon to combat. Truly an innocent, smiling, dimpled flock enough, and a sunnier prospect for what is, after all, a happy world, than the thin-lipped Spartan in bombazine and "Jemima" boots.

In the history [feminine] of the nineteenth century, you can see how she was never actually lost, but very often obscured. In the first twenty years, roughly speaking, she played cards too much, and gossiped and husband-hunted rather calmly, and

spelt inadequately, but she was still counted an angel and gathered in her meed of devotion. In the second twenty she was too formal and a little narrow, and thought it wrong to laugh and rather virtuous to faint; but she was upright and self-respecting and industrious, and loved her "kin" as she called the very small circle of her relations. Dickens tried to make her love a wider world, and show the love more. It is possible that he considered she could hardly be made too emotional after being Spartan so long. He was quite right

From Tortsy to 'sixty she went to church a little immoderately, considering it was done principally because you were expected to, and she was undoubtedly too snobbish and too fond of judging her neighbours, and posing as the domestic fairy; but she could be motherly, self-sacrificing, and sweet, and was beginning to emerge from her formality and to think for herself.

From 'sixty to 'eighty she got ethical and literary, and started over-dressing and publishing volumes of discontented poems, but she also developed a distinct sense of humour and a wider humanitarianism, which was a gain.

From 'eighty to 1900 she hurled herself into novel-writing, Ibsen-worship, athletics, painting,

spiritualism, flirting, daring, defying, and, it must be confessed, doing. She went in for irreligion, a club-land of her own, local government, play-going, slang, smoking, and cycling. But she could be called,, through all this moral jumble, broad-minded, in the main kindly and, in spite of the mass of her materialism, idealistic.

Of the few years that we have seen her since the dawn of this century, the products are very small to all outward seeming, but as it is notoriously impossible to judge the present dispassionately, this need not trouble the sociologist. Her wild passion for " racing " through life, either physically or mentally, or morally, is a little disturbing ; her uproarious vanity, and her greed of gain and glory, are not altogether attractive characteristics, they are what the Scotch call " no pretty." But there are not wanting signs that she is healthier-minded than she was even ten years ago, she is not quite so fond of " problem " matinees, long hours spent in the poisonous gases of artificially-darkened buildings in the day time, listening to dramas whose moral atmosphere was more poisonous and more artificially darkened still. This did not do her good, it rather ensallosed her complexion, and it gave her " views " on life which were at once dyspeptic, suicidal, and useless.

Whether she is perfect or not, she is far better on her motor-car, and far healthier on her golf-links, or racing out with her " show " dogs, or skating, or doing anything to make the blood circulate. Her laugh is growing nicer, it is less nasal and sardonic. In fact, her best symptom is that she laughs often ; and a laughing woman, someone once said, is a morally healthy one. A man who never smokes and a woman who never laughs are to be classed in very much the same drab category.

And perhaps the loss of her capacity to weep tears of joy is not so great a loss if she can laugh heartily and joyously. There need be no fear but that the right sort of tears are very near if wanted. So much for Dickens and his heroines of simple emotion' Are they not the forerunners of our joy ?

As for his hero-women, who grew stronger in suffering, they are many, for surely Esther Summerson, Lizzie Hexham, Rachel, and Agnes Wickfield cannot be called insipid, unless it is insipid to be sternly devoted to duty, however hard; firmly loving and bravely self-sacrificing in the face of great difficulties; silent in anxiety; courageous in danger; merciful when wronged ; and full of practical sincere humanity to those about them, Or if this be the case, we must class as insipid also such women as Portia, Monica,

**Ruth**, and Elizabeth Fry, Grace Darling, Florence Nightingale, Sarah Wesley, Jeanie Deans, and hosts of other heroines in fiction or history.

But if we turn from these and glance at the women of Dickens who are always tacitly ignored in the stricture—those who were not beautiful—we meet a crowd of gallant ladies who are absolutely unequalled for character and individuality of the best sort in the writings of any other author, Shakespeare alone excepted. There is the grand Clara Peggotty, who is as real as one's own nurse and as vigorous and breezy to-day as she ever was ; there is the inimitable Betsey Trot wood, who never can be repeated or outshone by fiction or fact; there is devoted Polly Richards in *Dombey and Son*; there is the patient Bidy in *Bleak House*; there is loyal Mrs. Micawber, who in her bitterest straits would not bonow little David's money ; there is Miss Mowcher, whose vulgarities and oddities hid an intrepid spirit of brave championship ; there is true-hearted Susan Nipper ; there is prim, affected little Miss Tox, with her sympathetic, loving heart; and there are hosts more, warm-hearted generous creatures, whose homely heroism is without parallel, women who reached, instinctively and without dreaming of a "pose," the heights of human possibility; who worked out in drab and hideous, or

dull and common-place surroundings, the perfect ideal of living. Nancy, in *Oliver Twist*, stands out as possibly the most absolutely heroic feminine figure in Dickens. She corresponds in her degree to Sidney Carton, in *A Tale of Two Cities*. She is deathless as a type of loyalty, pity, daring, humanity, and self-sacrifice. She was of the stuff of which martyrs are made, yet also of the gutter. There is hardly a more pathetically splendid figure in fiction.

There are the angel-women—Rose Maylie, Florence Dombey, Lucy Manette, Mary Graham, Kate Nickleby, Amy Dorrit, Pet Gowan, Madeleine Bray are types. And the gentle coquettes, Rosebud, Dora, Emily, and Bella Wilfer; or the cheery, busy, jolly little women like Ruth Pinch, Tilly Price, and Miss La Creevy, Mrs. Lupin, and Sophy, in *David Copperfield*.

There were the snobbish, affected women like Mrs. Witwitterly, Mrs. Gowan, Mrs. Veneering, Mrs. Merdle, Volumnia, Mrs. Markleham, and little Dorrit's sister. And the haughty women, like Mrs. Steerforth, Mrs. Dombey, Miss Havisham, and poor Lady Dedlock. The variety is infinite. The moral too sacred to bear a weak expounding. One requires to live the ordinary span of a human life to understand all the unerring and consistent philosophy of Dickens's

woman-life. But one truth runs through all that wide philosophy—his women made the world they lived in. What they gave they received. Life grew to them just the flowers or weeds they planted—no more and no less. Those who sowed the wind reaped the whirlwind; to the proud came up bitterness; to the gentle, love; to the grasping, disappointment; to the loyal, power, honour, and strength; to the angels of duty, happiness as angelic as any human lot can be.

And to all the good women was granted immense power in the making of at least one man's life; you never get away from that sense of the constant abiding influence of women over men; you feel, after reading Dickens, the almost priestly sanctity of that sweet calling which belonged alike to lady and servant, angel, heroine, coquette or hoyden, so long only as they were true and good, and held that most powerful weapon of influence, a loving heart

It is a perfect lesson beautifully preached, and one in which the teacher seems to bow before the taught and, in the *eyes* of the whole world, stoop and kiss her hand.

## CHAPTER IV.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHILDREN,

**THERE** is throughout the pages of Dickens a terrible silence, as solemn as the stillness of death, and more grim—it is the utter silence from the laughter of children. Dickens never wrote about a happy child.

That perfect hush from the wild lilting laughter of children, which strikes cold like the air in vasty church vaults, is the tragedy of this philosopher.

It is rather a serious thought that the gayest of our humorists stopped short at this, as a thing impossible to depict; and it shows what a wound his own early sufferings left; it also shows, for he was never idly sentimental, that he meant the men and women of his day to see to the wrongs of children.

And his method was brilliant. To leave that fearful void where the gaiety of little ones should be, was like Christmas bell-ringers pulling at bells for ever dumb; or recalls that dim, terrible old legend of the

evil spirit, who, disguised as a chorister, entered the monastery choir, and sang so divinely that the good brothers thought him to be an archangel—only that whenever one word occurred he was dumb. It was an ominous word—he could not utter the Holy Name.

The pure fresh fount of a child's laughter, a child that laughs suddenly, wildly, joyously, not for fun or humour so much as for the mere mad joy of living; that shrill, gay, trilling music like the tintinnabulation of millions of little silver bells; that ringing, fresh, irresistible thing which comes as naturally to the silly happy youth of the human baby, as the song comes to the bird, or light to a sunbeam; treble cadences that call up instantaneously to the mind's eye the flashing of falling water in the sunlight, daisy speckled meadows, paradises of cowslips and the singing of larks, the music of running streams in meads all bluebells, fairies, glorious impossibilities, first hopes, and Heaven—that he never drew.

Paul Dombey hardly smiles once, never openly laughs, throughout his pain-wracked sorrowful little life; his sister Florence has the anxieties of a little woman, and spends her infant years tending his pain and bearing her elder's reproaches. The other children at Mrs. Pipchin's, Miss Pankey and Master

Bitherstone, are visions of cramped woe and depression. The boys at Doctor Blimber's are similarly grave. The "Charitable Grinder" whines wretchedly. Oliver jTwist, up to twelve years of age, has nothing **but** hardship and terror to bear, and hardly smiles throughout the book; Dick, his little friend, who said "God bless you," is like the grey wraith of a baby martyr. Amy Dorrit, in her shame and despair, never laughs. Lizzie Hexam, as a child, bears one long agony in grief-stricken silence. Little David Copperfield is as serious as a little old man, with infinite cause. Pip, in *Great Expectations*, has but fears, terrors, and shame as his portion, and never laughs. Smike never even smiles. The two hollow-eyed, pale-faced step-children of Mr. Snawley, are very spectres of children; and their companion who was seen sitting on the box in the inn waiting-room with Mr. Squeers, is another tragedy. Tommy Traddles, as a child, is only recorded as weeping at being flogged, and drawing skeletons for his own gruesome amusement. Master Micawber and his numerous brothers and sisters are never known to laugh, and are so closely connected with dire poverty that it seems only reasonable. The Kenwigs children are ancient for their years, and kept in an atmosphere of squalid primness that allows no record of even

a giggle. And the dying school-boy in the *Old Curiosity Shop* is a pitiful picture. Tattycoram was hardened, aged, and saddened by what Mr. Bumble would have called "porochial" treatment, and never laughed. Tiny Tim is pathos itself. And so one might go on enumerating these pitiful children—the Doll's Dressmaker, the Marchioness, the lads at Dotheboys Hall; the ghastly children put out to "farm" with Mrs. Mann; the unnaturally aged and solemn Infant Phenomenon of Mr. Crummies, with all her infancy long crushed out of her by her calling; the struggling, over-worked page of Mrs. Skewton; the eerie child Betsey Jane, called up by the loquacity of Mrs. Wickham; the tramp boy in *Bleak House*; the poor little ill-cared for, ill-washed miserable children of Mrs. Jellyby; the steerage passengers' children in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, crying with want and cold, and eventually dying one by one of slow fever; the Mormon children aboard the "Amazon" the Charity boy and girl making a dreary pretence at play in the churchyard of St. Ghastly Grim's among the echoing tombs, and getting scolded for it; the little nervous children in *Sketches by Boz*, who are rapped on the head in double knocks by the Beadle's staff; the sorrowful childhood of Sissy Jupe; the pathetic picture of Rachel's little sister in

*Hard Times*; and the boys at Doctor Blimber's who hated going home for the holidays, though their life at school was a misery; Tozer, whose mother had designed him for the Church, and whose shirt collars hurt him, who had a terrible, informing uncle who made his sparse holidays a misery; and Briggs, whose equally instructive father spoilt the one gleam of possible joy in his life, and made him prefer the thralldom of a miserable school to a home that was all formality, solemnity, and classic quotations. These are but a few of the instances that could be cited.

There are just one or two exceptions which only go to make the whole more awful, for these are the laugh of vice at vice, such as the impish laughter of Charley Bates, the boy-thief at Fagin's; the jeering laughter of Wackford Squeers; the hypocritical laughter of sheer terror of the poor boys at Salem House, when Creakle made a miserable joke; and two others which are wonderfully pathetic and far nearer tears: the treble music of Little Nell's laughter over Kit's mistakes, only recorded twice then silent for ever; and the laughter of Little Em'ly—ill-fated, beautiful Little Em'ly, flying shyly away from David across the stretch of sands: somehow it is ghostly from the first, as it echoes faintly over the desolate Yarmouth flats, and there is a sound of fatality and tears in it,

even from the days of the necklace of blue beads and the wind-tossed curls. Little Em'ly is a tragedy even in babyhood, gazing out strangely to the wild sea that drowned her father. Her laughter is like the cooing of a dead babe trembling into one's sleep, but it is not joy.

This is to my mind the deepest and most portentous note in all Dickens's sweet philosophy. That solemn, wan-faced procession of ill-used children, whose joyful shouts are utterly silent, who rarely smile, who never laugh, does not walk slowly through his changing scenes for nothing, dragging bruised feet, holding loose rags, gazing out of the shadows with large, timid woful eyes, and over the whole crowd that pall of perfect silence and stillness—perfect despair.

You hear sometimes in these days, a thoughtless remark to the effect that these children are a little overdrawn, a little too sad. I have heard many complaints of Little Nell from people who honestly could not realize her.

I should like to make a few brief comparisons between the children of the 'forties and ours, if only to show what a glorious mission Dickens has accomplished with that crowd of mirthless little ones at his heels. Take the poor. In his day, as most people

know, poor children were employed in mines at the age of eight years old, and had to go on all-fours, like animals, tied to trucks of coal and other mineral, which it was their business to drag along. They became, as a result of the cramped position and the exclusion of God's daylight, purblind, sickly, unnaturally long in the arms and unnaturally short in the legs, utterly stupid, often criminal, and grew up to become in time the parents of deformed offspring.

Everyone knows of the horrors endured by the little sweeps' apprentices in those days—young boys of eight and nine, whose business it was to climb up the great chimneys cleaning them as they went, and who were often stuck in the choking funnels through sheer breathlessness and terror. It was a common thing for the brutal master to light a fire under them to force them through sheer agony to come down again. There is a fearful allusion to this in *Oliver Twist*. This was a well-known custom in a well-known trade, and so far as can be discovered no one interfered with it—so much for the public feeling about children.

When machinery began to take the place of the old hand looms in Yorkshire and Lancashire, and the children were first employed in the breathless,

stifling mills, their average work time was sixteen hours a day. Such hundreds of quite young boys and girls died off, and so many more committed suicide (suicide at eight years old—let it never be forgotten !), that the parish authorities made arrangements to bury the emaciated little bodies in desolate places, as the churchyards were getting notoriously full of baby-graves, and the burials were often conducted by night lest people should begin to talk of the matter and the cause—even Bumbleism felt a little qualm as to results, though the qualm was hardly conscience.

A brave, north-country gentleman, quite sensible and no fanatic, with a perfectly tidy stock round his neck and well cut hair, and no "pose," called Richard Oastler, of Yorkshire, gave up his fortune, time, and good name in the attempt to rescue the infant martyrs. He was beggared, imprisoned, and now has the additional honour of being forgotten ; but he won the day, and partly through him were established the first lasting measures of reform.

At this time the infernos of mill towns, with their fearful conditions of existence, produced so many idiot children that the parish authorities bound over the mill-owners to take into their employ one idiot child with every twenty sane ones. This was done.

**The** idiots used to disappear: no one knew **what** became of them, and the imagination sickens to picture their fate. Some of those lone northern moorsides could tell tales, darker than Dickens told, of murdered innocents—tales at which the fell work of Herod grows light. It is not a pleasant picture to dwell upon, but it is true. Somehow the wild, human, sobbing of the night-wind over the Yorkshire moors has a wail in it that freezes the blood. It may be only a fanciful connection, but as it sweeps its fateful, solemn dirge over hill and dale of a winter night, one remembers again that army of many martyrs whose cry of vengeance on their blood rises up to the Just One, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

The charities were as cruel as the law and the individuals. The life of a little charity-girl in the 'forties was something so hopeless, so harsh, so utterly bereft of all childish joys, as to make her into a cunning prig long before the normal human infant has much thought of anything but dolls and daisy chains.

The bitter hatred and mistrust of poor Tattycoram, the appalling slyness of the poor "Charitable Grinder," and his kind, of whom, be it remembered, Uriah Heep was a full-grown specimen, were only some of **the**

consequences of the system of applied charity in those brave old days. For instance, in London one immense charity-school of the kind, founded by generous and good people, succeeded in killing off in a few years 10,534 children out of 14,934 received, according to a very reliable authority. A charity-school in Dublin had a mortality of eighty per cent., for which it was eventually suppressed. In Italy a similar institution had a mortality of ninety per cent. Figures sound very dull to most people, but even the most unimaginative will form a faint conception of the extent of concentrated human suffering necessary to produce the deaths of eighty little English children out of every hundred. The amount of starvation, the neglect, the cruelty, required to bring about such a consummation must have been stupendous, and the number of children out of the wretched twenty who managed to live without being maimed or stunted for life, must have been few.

These were public institutions presided over by honourable boards and committees. But in private schools cruelty went on even without that official check, and Dickens's exposure of the Yorkshire schools was purposely worded mildly, and the horrors toned down by him, because he dreaded that if he told the whole truth there would be none to believe

him. Squeers's school is less fearful than the original from which it was taken, on Dickens's own showing. Salem House was his own school, and Doctor Blimber's is considered a mild evil by comparison with the real state of things. As everyone knows, Charlotte Bronte ruined a school by her absolutely true account of Lowood in *Jane Eyre*; and Thackeray, who went to no hole-and-corner private school, but to Charterhouse itself, never forgot his bitter experiences. The wretched bully who broke in his face twice in the course of one year, was never punished, and on his own account the poor child used to pray every night to die. Then the account of Tozer's uncle and Briggs's father, alluded to in *Dombey and Son*, show only too plainly what an average boy's holiday was like, even in a decent class. The life of children in affluent circumstances was horribly drastic and severe. Children of people in good position slept on hard beds, were roused unnaturally early, made to begin lessons long before breakfast, and caned or birched freely if naughty. Their intellectual career began at three years old, when they had to learn the use of the globes and various other strange things, also the making of samplers. At six years of age a well-brought up little girl in the 'twenties and 'thirties could make a sampler full of complicated stitches.

The hours it cost her, the child's fun it denied her, the aching burning eyes and stiff little fingers, are left quite to the imagination ; that it helped to stunt her growth, cramp her little mind, ruin her little temper and her eyesight, and embitter her for life, is a detail. There it was, the hideous, gaudy thing, covered with meaningless stitches and impossible Noah's Ark trees and moral precepts, framed in a narrow black frame and hanging on the wall as an incontrovertible testimony to the hopeless stupidity, if not cruelty, of parents and teachers.

Long, long indeed were the moral lessons read to those dreary children: long, long were those cold, dark, grim Sundays, when the beautiful worship of God was made into a solemn formula with an unintelligible sermon an hour and a half in length, and the sweet Day of Rest into a sepulchral nightmare of eternal weariness, wherein you might not move out of a stiff chair in the parlour for fear of spoiling your Sunday decorum and creasing your starched clothes. The only marvel to me is that England produced so small a crop of prigs, considering her endeavours in that laudable direction, as she did.

Looking back at their childhood, the men and women of the 'sixties and 'seventies were wonderfully free from the taint, and one can only attribute this to

the wider growth of common-sense, political and general, which had sprung up by that time from pens such as those of Dickens, Thackeray, Carlyle, and Kingsley; and such examples in the intelligent and merciful treatment of children from the throne to the gutter, as those of Lord Shaftesbury, Dr. Arnold, and Queen Victoria. In all her long reign, Queen Victoria never did a nobler thing than that of making it the fashion to be kind to children. She certainly did set such a fashion, and her own children were healthy examples of her wide motherly wisdom. She encouraged life in the open air, reasonable hours for study, natural childish gaiety, and health-giving pastimes; also she taught her own favoured children to pity the suffering and the poor. Stateswoman, diplomat, ruler, moralist, as she sometimes was, the aspect of that Queen in the midst of her merry, dancing flock, is always to my mind the most ideally queenlike, as comely, kindly, tender, serene, she seems to come flowing out from the shadows of the past and the grave in a flutter of breezy blue ribbons, May mornings, and childish banter, an undying type of the great wise human motherhood; something gayer and sunnier than all the Madonnas, except, perhaps, only the Madonna della Sedia; something intrinsically happy, therefore intrinsically good.

Since the days of that bright example, and the days that Dickens drew picture after picture of gaunt, mute children, there have been many joyful changes. So much so, that in these times, to the happy middle-class mother and many a kindly, sensible parent, his notions seem a little morbid and his pictures too sad to be real. The great upper and middle classes have had their baby-world purged for them : there his philosophy has already done its work, and those children are reaping the practical results of his striving on their behalf.

The present is an age of child-worship, and is as far removed from the state of things he had to deal with as light is removed from darkness. In every decent home in England the child is made at least the professed first object of care, and every park and suburb will show beves of rosy faces, or dainty perambulators or mail-carts full of creatures as beautiful and healthy as the heart of Dickens could wish. Children are so carefully studied that they have become an art themselves, besides creating an entirely new branch of decoration and design for their service. We all know the " Art " nursery, with the newest sanitation and the newest dados making the time-honoured old child-nonsense into a science; the wonderful toys, the exquisite furnishings, the many meals of carefully

studied foods, the treats, the Indulgences, the loving, slavish parents, the nursemaids who on pain of dismissal may not correct

We also know, alas! the caricatured form of this *regime*, the children who are taught to pose as children ; who are carefully trained to lisp guilelessly, and who do it with a monkey-like glance under their lids on the hunt for admiration ; the children who are photographed and displayed in fashionable photographers' windows as types of an innocence that has been learnt as a poodle learns to look knowing with a cerise ribbon round his neck sitting erect by the smart woman to whose *tout ensemble* he contributes. The children who are so childish that they turn on their incessant parlour-tricks for every visitor's every visit like terrible live gramophones: gramophones that you must listen to, and, if a woman, rapturize over, on pain of annihilation. These tricked-out, over-acted children, satiated with the hysterical admiration of relations, and the hypocritical admiration of acquaintances, are but the result of an effete form of what in a large sense is a kind and humane movement. Children have become such a loving care that some are even taught to act being themselves ; this is usually the case where the mother poses as a mother' Where she is genuine and unaffected, as a rule her

little ones take after her. Such spoilt children **are** largely to be found in the homes of the great middle-classes as represented by Suburbia and provincial towns, but of course they exist in any class. It is a mistake to be too hard on them and to shake our heads and say, "What are we coming to?" because they are at least a sign of a great revulsion of feeling against the awful tyranny exercised by our forefathers over little ones; and after all, they are its grossest exaggeration.

A little less to the fore at public Fancy Dress Balls and theatre parties, there are thousands of lovely, fresh-faced things in pinafores, whose hair is neither artificially curled nor artificially straightened into "Dutch" simplicity (?). Laughing, merry, teasing, romping things, with shrill, gay voices, and keen enthusiasms and intense beliefs. These are the Dickens children: the children whose lot he has made joyful, the children he has helped to create. They are to be found amongst the most cultured and thoughtful of the middle classes, also amongst the higher;—the highest of all, the Prince's children, are beautiful examples.

A happy little animal, also, is the child of the better-class poor, such as respectable artizans, decent working parents—the tidy, honourable poor, who

pay their way and are indignantly political in consequence ; the poor who reckon Mr. Chamberlain in some dim way to be the result of the rates they are kind enough to pay, and, therefore, to be criticized and handled like a piece of foreign beef; and have floating ideas that the South African War was greatly muddled, considering that the water-rate collector only had to call twice. The child of these parents shares some of the privileges of the rich suburban child, and is made a study of in all save the matter of fresh air; he is generally over-fed, and goes to more treats than are, perhaps, wholesome for him; he often belongs to five distinct Bands of Hope, of graduating sects, in consideration of the " tea-fights " to be got out of each one respectively; is sent into the country by the parish for holidays, and has more pocket-money and a great deal more of the commodity called "bluff" than many a gentleman's son. He can be counted a happy child in a physical sense, if a little materialistic in a moral; and if only the parents who feed and clothe him so superfluously would let him have open windows in his home instead of perennially closed ones, would limit him to reasonable abstinence in the matter of treats, and send him to bed early, he really might not have to take to spectacles at seven years old and consumption cures at seventeen.

But there is another class: the class called the submerged poor, which has, as yet, to alter very much before the genial warmth of Dickens's philosophy can touch its children in any wide or permanent sense. A great deal is done for the poor—granted, and there are many people who assert that life is made too easy for paupers now-a-days. However true that may be, it is not made too easy for poor men's children, for the simple reason that their own parents are usually their greatest curse, and that happens to be a curse not easy to rid them of. To use anything approaching common-sense in the bringing up of a little one, either in the matter of feeding, cleanliness, and air—or, later on, the choice of a profession—seems to be utterly beyond the typical poor parents. They are lazy, sulky, indifferent or intemperate in the majority of cases, and the results of these parental characteristics are frightful. Anyone may see them.

Anyone who has walked round the children's ward in a large hospital, and has noted the skinny, shrivelled things called babies, lying quite still on the cots—things with arms like sticks, and faces so near to those of monkeys, as to be barely recognized as human; anybody who has gone into the dwellings of the very poor and seen the ancient, aged,

silent children sitting round the dirty floor, babies tending babies, but all of them mute, except in altercation; anyone who has had these experiences, even for a moment, will admit that Dickens's picture is no exaggeration.

The sins of parents are many. The case of a young girl—two years ago a dimpled, rosy thing, to-day a shadow of fifteen years—came before me recently. Her parents refuse to let her go into service, but force her to toil in a sweating den, for the few shillings a week her life-blood is worth. She is sinking rapidly into consumption, but the efforts of the clergyman and doctor to get her away to a Consumption Hospital are in vain—the parents will not let her go. She will possibly die in their service. Should this event come off, they will launch extensively into mourning with quantities of very brown, brittle crêpe, and have what they call a "lovely" funeral. They will cry copiously into very drab handkerchiefs, and buy a kind of soup-plate full of white tin flowers with green tin leaves, covered with glass, to put on the poor little grave.

These things are done every day, and it is in nobody's power to do much to prevent them. The parents think they are more or less in the right, and will stifle conscience with platitudes and beer if the

child dies; and the neighbours will exalt them into heroes for the time being—for you cannot get more real, genuine ionization out of any feat in slumland equal to that earned by the death of a child.

Here is the servant problem in a nutshell. Nine young daughters of the poor out of ten want to go into service at fourteen years of age, but the parents insist on their taking work which brings in a weekly grist of three or four shillings to the family mill. Thus the sweater's den becomes daily more prosperous,—so does the cemetery. The hospital is beggared for funds. It is to these that the philosophy of Dickens must be brought,—these waifs who are worse off than orphans, being clogged and dragged down by parents.

The other day an idle, unwashed, slattern mother of a family of four children was pointed out to me, across a yard in which she was lounging and gossiping, as a "real lydy."

This distinction was based on the fact that she only need do two days' work a week, and her "old man" likewise, as all the children earned money. I asked how this might be, in the face of present day educational restrictions. The eldest daughter, aged 15, by toiling at carpet-sewing earned a few shillings a week, on the terms of being far gone in anaemia and

consumption, and devoid of all hope, ambition, joy, or laughter, save the wicked laughter of the street jest. The second, a pale boy still at school, walked three miles after school hours, generally having partaken of no food, to sweep up some offices and shops for half-a-crown a week; the third, an emaciated girl of twelve, tended a neighbour's babies for ninepence a week every evening after school ; and the youngest, a nine-year-old old woman, with a knowing face and an irresistible way of wagging her head to emphasize her words, earned the majestic sum of twopence a week for running a neighbour's errands, which seemed to be mainly in the direction of the public-house and the pawn-shop. Upon this wide commercial output the vagabond father and mother were a "lydy and gen'leman"; the family was counted by the neighbours as a moneyed stock, with substantial funded interests' The eldest girl *may* live: if she does, she will not improbably finish her career in prison, having, let us say it pityingly, never known health, moral or physical. The boy may do better, as boys have a better chance of doing. The second girl, who has traces of picturesque good looks, may hope to get taken on at a milliner's at a death-wage on account of her face,, **and** if so her end may be more terrible than prison,, starvation, or death—the death-wage by day leading:

through hunger, discomfort, and despair, to a wage earned by night by the side of which death is a merciful deliverer.

The youngest, with the irresistible waggish eye, is lovable to a degree: what will be her fate? She is too young, and much too old, to predict: she will not appear to know her human chart better at eighty;—she *is* eighty in her grasp of the subject, apparently. She is a philosopher, a cynic, a wit, and a worldling, and yet has, poor shrivelled thing, an impish charm that has a faint withered resemblance to what once in long bygone ages of beggar ancestors may have been childhood, as the sickly blackened, smoke-withered plant stuck in a Tate sugar-box in her yard was once, many years ago, one of the green things upon the earth that "praise Him and magnify Him for ever."

Our poor children must be protected from their parents. Sentimentality about "parental affection" must be put aside if any sort of legislation is to be evolved to meet this hideous problem. Let those poor who prove their parental affection by wise, reasonable, healthy rules for their little ones—and there are some like this,—be helped, not hindered, by all means. But where the child is regarded callously, at any rate in deed, and deeds are the only proofs, as

a miserable means of livelihood, let the parent bring him or herself under a penalty. It is the only way to rescue thousands who are reared in slums for no other purpose. How many hospitals exist simply to patch up the little bodies broken under this frightful social wheel? Why not attack the cause,—the parents? If pleading is useless with them, why not force them to obey certain hygienic laws, and certain restrictions about child wage-earning, at the risk of punishment?

They are very careful to protect themselves, those parents. They are very strong on the subject of "liberty and rights," and very, very grand. They are also, upon occasion and for utilitarian reasons, quite sentimental about their "little 'uns" in their talk; and the crepe and the soup plate of tin roses, when they have buried them, are unexceptionable.

I firmly believe that only women can help these sad-eyed children, but I must not be misunderstood. Without a dream of "woman's rights," without a flicker of a notion of franchise, without the faintest hint at anything approaching a wish to support the "strong-minded" female, who is, at her worst, only amusing, and cannot be taken seriously, I should like to suggest that women should take part in those local politics which refer only to the welfare of children.

There is so much they, and they only, can do on behalf of the incipient citizens of London, so much that they would do so well and so earnestly, for the subject is one on which the most widely divided women as a rule think alike. Surely, if in Plato's *Republic*, which really was rather stern and patronizing to women, they were to be allowed a "say" in the Council, and to fight for their country, they may be allowed an official "say" in the rearing of our future population! Even Socrates, after stipulating that their foolish affections should not run away with them, would, I think, have consented to this. All he was afraid of was their superabundant sentimentality, and illogical preference for their own. He did not seem to think they would "say" too much; he seemed to dread their instincts more than their tongues.

To us, their millinery might present the worst terrors. It is a sorrowful thing that so few women can honestly serve their country or a noble cause without allowing their clothes to suffer. Why "principles" should be inseparable from drab felt hats of a "boat" shape, has never yet been lucidly explained; nor yet why "raked back" hair and very large boots, and gloves with fur on the backs, should be intrinsically connected with strength of mind. Those

troubles did not occur to Socrates, in whose day women were graceful gracious things in beautiful draperies, who had not learnt that virtue or strength of mind were to be measured by the frightfulness of one's costume.

But Dickens, who equally imagined a Republic—the republic of kindness—was willing to leave all that to Time to sift: Time and a growing sense of humour. For the women to do the best they could for the children around them, was his counsel; and to my mind he would have seen nothing very startling in a woman, wise, good, dignified, motherly, elected on a Local Government Board or any public body devoted to civic welfare,—not for the pitiful sake of rivalling men, or for idle self-love, or for any other tiresome reason, but for the pure object of defending little children. She might be called the "Angelis advocata," or angel's advocate; it would be a very stately post, and worthy of all men's respect. Dickens wanted unity in those good works. His most miserable waif Oliver Twist, was rescued by the united love and efforts of an English lady and the debased sweetheart of a burglar and cutthroat

This is the philosophy of Dickens's children: this is the work he puts in the hearts and hands of women—solemnly and out of the unutterable silence of those

children who never laughed: out of the unutterable wideness of his own great love for the helpless and the down-trodden: and out of that grand humanity he had from the Master, who said: "Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

## CHAPTER V.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE-MAKING.

You can see them in the parks, or up the river, or in the quiet suburban streets, or in draughty, deserted museums smiling, or in first-class railway carriages suddenly scowling at innocent new-comers—the followers of this philosophy.

They are entirely ubiquitous, and looked at as a species of fauna, or often, as regards the lady's hat or even face, flora, they are wonderfully abundant; they are also wonderfully tame. They can be found on 'bus-tops in inclement climates strangely appearing to grow side by side under the same umbrella, Siamese fashion; and the student *in* search of rare specimens scorns the lounge of a tea-room, the stairs outside a ball-room, the arbours of a river-garden, or the blatant and glaringly obvious hansom, as pastures too common-place, and productive only of the more ordinary sorts.

Any professor making a collection of the rarer specimens must deeply regret the discontinuation of penny steamers on the Thames, as these were a peculiarly interesting ground, and yielded much study, for one reason because it was utterly impossible to predict of what class the specimens might prove: two costers would dally over by the band distinguishable by a general impression of Royal-blue feather, much noise, bad tobacco, and many buttons; over by the wheel something from the suburbs, with a rose-leaf skin and a shady white hat, looked coy at something unfeignedly gallant in a Panama, with a buttonhole; and quite lost in the contemplation of smoky wharves and Woolwich factories over a sweep of silver water, would hang a pair of quite another sphere, with Bond Street almost written on her hat and perfect boots, and self-consciousness written on the very back of her accurately fitting gown, touching shoulders with one whom obviously Poole had clothed, brisk Society hardened, and love illuminated. These last, intensely afraid of observation, and speaking in eager but modulated tones, used to interest the collector, requiring all his deductive reasoning to work out precisely how they got there, also how they would get out again. Those penny steamers are a loss from his point of view. There used to be a thin, long-haired man of the poor

musician type, clearly consumptive, with "failure"<sup>1</sup> drooping in the limp curves of his clothes, who every Wednesday afternoon met, on the Charing Cross pier, a beautiful dark glowing-faced woman in rich mourn-frig with a stately bearing, and lovely, kind eyes. They used to sit by the handrail of the boat, with her ringed hand laid unobtrusively over his thin one and talk softly, looking out at the grey water and the dim brown barges. They were a minor sonata, a poem. The collector would have to put them in a pigeon-hole alone and only roughly classify. You cannot define tragedy any further than they defined it by the pathos of his eager, dying face, and the greater pathos of her futile wealth, beauty and love. The collector put his puny pencil and note-book in his pocket at their appearing, feeling somehow as though he had been caught making a chemical analysis of altar-lights.

The species vary in bearing. Those in underground railways are pensive; those in boats beyond Richmond on hot afternoons uproarious, with banjo and gramophone and song; those in Kew Gardens blissful and serene; those in museums, amongst the bones of princes and the rings of popes, depressed but hurriedly discursive—in museums, where you are not supposed to speak, the tendency seems to be to say so much in gurgling whispers.

The same applies to picture-galleries, where Botticelli and Filippo Lippi are deserted by these philosophers for deep, lengthy conferences unbroken by the carping comma or the frivolous full-stop. By-the-by, this curious *trait* has never been explained.

In the street, where you may talk, they never do; they never fail, however crowded or deserted it may be, to wander along in silence; but their appearance in a reading-room means hours of whispered discussion. At the Academy they have a regular Spring parliament on the red velvet seats in the middle of the room, and Westminster Abbey, were it not for stern vergers, might on occasions vie with its neighbour the House of Commons in this respect. But, oh I invite them out to tea and sigh for one word in vain! Being expected to talk, they will not do it. Dinner-parties are just as hopeless: their silence is supreme, neither do they eat. Or ask them to a ball, where they are honestly supposed to dance, and they will be found hurriedly and furtively conversing somewhere on the stairs for hours together, without a pause in the muttered dialogue.

Now, whether you collect them or whether you spurn and despise them, or whether you look at them scientifically as an aspect, a phase, of sociology, or whether you look at them wistfully, with a vague

longing to be of them yourself, you must admit that they are a power in the world and have their clear share in the making of its character. Ruskin said that you could gauge a nation's health or the reverse by noting how it treated its girls. You can certainly do so by noting its lovers. A nation which can in this late, weary, effete, over-civilized age, boast of romantic lovers, true lovers, constant lovers, untiring lovers, has not got anything serious the matter with it. The fiery southron who snatches a rose or a stiletto equally readily in the same brief passion may be romantic, but he is not all the other things, and he does not count. As a matter of fact, the "stodgy" German betrothal brought about in a hideous parlour smelling of dinner is often nearer true romance in its constancy, chivalry, and truth, than all the moonlighted, Italian-operesque, flashy (but brief) devotions in the world. Juliet leans over a draper's counter sometimes, instead of a dimly-wrought balcony, and Romeo has been known to be in the City ; and sometimes Dante and Beatrice have tea in an Aerated Bread shop ; or Paolo and Francesca go to Earl's Court and ride on the switchback.

These are the true lovers such as Dickens glorified ; and where they are there is a healthy social state of things, hope for the future, and a hundred uprisings

of new belief and new joy to gladden a rather mechanical world.

The age of Dickens was not romantic in that respect. There was far too much quite frank marrying for money, as well as a terrible amount of formality in small matters. The lover of the middle-classes called on the fair lady's family dressed in black broadcloth and holding a very large top-hat which he always held perched on his knees, as he sat on an upright chair well towards the middle of the room, for some inexplicable reason. He oiled his hair, and spoke cautiously, and there was a good deal of business at the back of his unromantic formula. The lady only saw him in the presence of her critical family—a trying circumstance, considering the funnel-like hat nursed so carefully—and it is to be presumed that she felt for him, putting aside her sisters' positively inevitable remarks as to the swain's appearance, only a commercial interest.

If that ever blossomed out into real romance later on, it was a miracle of beautiful human possibility, triumphing over circumstances, and no thanks to the arid custom.

The girls in Jane Austen's novels, novels which are now admitted to be perfect art, perfect classics, and perfect pictures of what really went on around

the writer in her day, are so *naively* determined to marry, and to marry money, and to marry anything, that we look at them with a little contempt. Yet they were taught to do so and knew no better: it was the custom, and a custom which was still in vogue when Dickens wrote, though many years had elapsed. The novels of his own day were prolific in "highly-connected" romances, with wonderfully picturesque surroundings, and only shadowy griefs; but very few writers thought of love as anything but an artistic dallying, which was the merely ornamental part of books all about Dukes and Marquises; and fewer still thought it had any serious existence among the lower classes, or that it counted for much.

Now, Dickens believed in lovers without exaggeration as heartily as the best of them believed in themselves. Never a word of cynicism escapes him in their connection; he showed in his treatment of the *grande passion*, the eternal law of renewal of life and trust and hope; the phoenix-like capacity of this old, old sentiment which is always new, to lift into fresh vigour those fallen into despair, to elevate afresh those sunk in selfishness and egoism, and to glorify and revive the most common-place and uninteresting mortals. In his eyes love was a *cult* with almost

divine teachings. In his eyes it brought forth courage, unselfishness, patience, humanity, sweet meekness, stern vigour, and universal good.

There is not a pair of lovers in all his works—real lovers—who are not influences for good, or at any rate we always have the spectacle of the one influencing the other for good. The tendency is always upward, to better things. The love of Nancy for Bill Sykes, terrible as were its surroundings and terrible its end, is one of the noblest things in fiction : the softening grace of a love even for a creature so debased as he made Nancy, out of something unnameable, into a tender, brave woman, and taught her to die for a child's sake.

The love of Lizzie Hexham for Eugene Wrayburn turns him to nobler things. The love of Ham for Little Em'ly, rough as he is, is almost that of a guardian angel; and the love of Mr. Jarndyce for Esther Summerson is one of the most pathetic love-passages in all his books, but something entirely ennobling to both and to the group around them. The love of Tom Pinch for Mary Graham, a triumph of unselfishness, is put side by side with the love of Martin for the same girl—a comparison that reveals the mean egoism of the latter so completely that in the end he becomes more worthy of her.

But there is hardly an idyll in all that vast record of loves and lovers so absolutely charming as the love of John Westlock and Ruth Pinch; and that scene in the Temple Gardens, when the fountain dimpled and Ruth dimpled in harmony, is something so airy, and graceful, and exquisite, and yet so utterly true to the very best of life, that it is my own small opinion Dickens never approached it in art or feeling before or since. It is like a soft, fairy love-dream on a French fan. It has all the grace of those eighteenth century garden-dallyings, with rose-petals and Arcadian fountains and lutes, and everlasting youth; and it has all the vigour and dear familiar reality of something that once, long ago, really happened to ourselves, or some day may happen, or could happen, or didn't happen but ought to have done; at any rate, something that we may see happening every day, and thank God for it, for it is the best sign that the weary times can or ever need hope to boast. The lovely, womanly face of little Ruth Pinch, with the rose in her bonnet that got mixed with her glossy hair, and the laughter and the joy in her eyes, must for ever float round the Temple, like one of our beliefs. Ruth Pinch is absolutely real. People who don't believe in Ruth Pinch don't believe in any woman worth knowing or loving.

There is, of course, David's love for Dora which made him work, and carve out a career for himself and her, and which never had a sordid thought or selfish dream. There is by its side, Agnes's love for David, which was utterly self-annihilating, noble, brave, and generous, even to Dora: truly a triumph of pure love over the worst feminine fault—jealousy.

Nicholas Nickleby's love for Madeline made him courageous beyond words, and helped him to do and dare. Rose Fleming's unselfish devotion to Harry Maylie was the cause, in the end, of his leaving a rather selfish petty ambition for a nobler calling; the love of poor Bidly for Pip had its hallowing grace, and the quiet love of John Harmon for wilful Bella did wonders for her; the half comic, half pathetic touch of poor little Miss Tox's devotion to Mr. Dombey made her kind when he was in grief and shame, and gentle to all about him. The love of Rachel for Stephen Blackpool is one of the most beautiful things Dickens ever created, and, with the exception of Nancy, one of the most tragic; it not only kept him from a terrible deed but strengthened him to a brave life and a brave death: the same may be said of the love of Sydney Carton for Lucy Manette, a love which "made fools men, and men divine." The sublimity of Sydney Carton's death is almost without parallel in

fiction, and it is brought about by his love for Lucy. Caddy Jellyby and the poor dancing-master are a touching little romance with its own lesson ; and Florence and Walter are another pair who, through patience and constancy, win happiness both for themselves and others. There is Arthur Clennam's disappointed love for Minnie Meagles, and side by side with it Amy Dorrit's angel love for him. Pip's love that brought proud Estella back to her own true self; the adoring love of the Marchioness for Dick Swiveller, which roused in her her first aspirations after better things ; and the pair of hardly noticed lovers in *Great Expectations*, Herbert and Clara, whose courtship went on to the chorus of " Old Bill Barley " under the greatest possible difficulties, but which in the end won happiness and throughout its course was a lesson in self-sacrifice and cheery courage: these are only a few of the instances of his teaching on the bright side of that ever-fascinating subject.

But he is very stern in regard to love degraded. Not a single pair of his lovers, where both are true and pure in intention, come to grief, with, perhaps, the exception of Rachel and Stephen, and they can hardly be called "lovers" in the ordinary sense of the term—the circumstances are unique—but where two beings purely love each other, he always grants

them reward ; where one is false, things go wrong; and where love is degraded by giving itself for money, or rather love is put aside for gain, all goes wrong, hopelessly and irrevocably.

Lady Dedlock married for money, so did Estella in *Great Expectations*, and both faced despair—one died of it. Edith Dombey married for pique or pride, and Merry Pecksniff for a similar motive; they were both involved in a man's suicide, and brought about their own ruin. The marriage of the two swindlers, the Lammles, in *Our Mutual Friend*, is a ghastly picture of self-interest masquerading in the name of love ; and Cherry Pecksniff's spiteful caricature of love built up to revenge herself on her sister, ends in a fiasco that is tragic as well as comic, which embitters her for life.

Crimes in the name of love were never forgiven by Dickens; to him these were unpardonable sins, while true love, in whomsoever it dawned, however mean, or apparently hopeless, or wretched, always in his teaching raised, revived, and glorified. Do people think so now? We often read in the newspapers that this " is not an age of romance "—a trite remark which might be allowed to take a well-earned repose for a time. No age is an age of romance strictly. The age of romance is a thing totally distinct from **time**, and may appear anywhere and in any century.

To Dickens, life and love never lost their romance; he wrote of love as freshly as a school-girl would do, or as nobly as a sage. One wonders a little sometimes what he would have said to some of our notions of a definition of that word in the present day. He would have had a very great deal to say to the women, who are infinitely to blame and are rather proud of it. Ours is an age capable of much romance, only, sad as it is to say it, the women are so materialistic. The want of the quality is due entirely to them—they could make it universal to-morrow, if they could only alter their present views of things sentimental and tender. So many have lost the wish for true romance, therefore it is in abeyance. It is a forsaken *San Graal*, that is all. If they would search for it, follow it, uphold it, it would shine for them all, as even now it does to a few happy individuals.

But what do we see them doing? Some people will say marrying for money. Perhaps they do, some of them, but that is less a fatal fault than another, and newer one, which is now almost universal and which is yet more deadly to romance—and that is, the sort of idle dallying with love, playing at love, that goes on amongst young people for the girl's glory. Sad to relate, it is undoubtedly

done for the girl's glory, so called. Men, even young men, are willing to be more real in their professions, even in a game like this, for it is a sort of game. The girls at least know it to be a game, and one in which the honours are given to her who can collect the largest number of trophies in the way of presents, photographs, and attentions, etc. They are cheerfully acknowledged to be trophies, offered up to one's quite frank vanity: the girls who collect them discuss them in this spirit, just as they discuss millinery and frocks. "Have you seen my new necklace?—pearls, dear, and the loveliest antique setting. And here is——, look, in the silver frame. Do you think he is handsome? *Such* presents! There, and that is another silly thing—I met him in Scotland. Look at this absurd hat—do you think it suits me?" etc., etc. That mental attitude is death to romance. The young men so collected, as postcards are collected, are themselves not constant, but one can hardly wonder at it. They are sometimes in three persons' collection at the same time, and the three persons say amusing things that strike sparks, and laugh shrilly, and are given to innuendo, though usually passionately friendly with one another in a surface sort of way. The whole aim of the whole thing is to glorify self, self, self. The young men's feelings

are of small account: they are pawns in a game of chess, the prize of which is swollen vanity. The larger the collection, and the more capable of exhibition on a boudoir table the trophies, the better. So much more proof that I, (the eternal I!) am prettier and more attractive than so-and-so. O pitiful glory ! O ragged, sordid dignity.

The young men of to-day, we hear all around us, whether it be true or not, are not chivalrous : are rude, are cynical, are selfish. It is not to be wondered at if they are occasionally all these things. They have nothing to be chivalrous about; there is nothing in all this to call forth consideration or politeness; there is little to stimulate belief in the sweet graces of women ; and to be asked to unselfishly worship at an altar on which the deity herself is blatant selfishness undisguised, is rather unreasonable.

Such affairs as these are found in almost every class, and it is to them that a want of true romance is mainly chargeable, in my opinion. They have become so universally acknowledged that there is no further disguise about them, and they assume in callous hands an almost commercial aspect. The girl hung about with trinkets and decorations which are the trophies of so many men's infinitesimal and passing attentions may feel herself to be a triumph.

Dickens would not have counted her as such: in his philosophy she would have been counted as a be-decked squaw without the dignity: for the squaw at least is true to one, while this is not true even to herself.

It wants a little courage to be quite romantic: it is not so easy as it sounds in this selfish age of sordid matter. There is a girl who often gets laughed at, at the start, and who generally ends by laughing at her friends. I mean the girl who sincerely means to marry the man she loves when she does marry, and into whose sweet ideal neither Vanity nor Greed can ever enter. That girl, supposing she meets and is loved in turn by the right "he," has perfect happiness for her lot. She may get a great deal of gratis advice from her unmarried girl friends, which partakes of the tendency of *Punch's*, and warnings shower round her devoted head like hail from those unto whom no true lover has offered his heart and his life's love. She need not feel afraid. Those gloomy forebodings cannot tarnish her happiness any more than they can tarnish the silver biscuit-boxes, or the butter-dishes, or the pewter trays, beyond human calculation, which turn the study into a sort of fairy silversmith's for those few gorgeous days before the great Day of all' The more adverse feminine advice she gets, the more

she may be sure she has found the right road to true Romance.

Then again, Dickens taught us that romance wants another quality besides courage : it demands unselfishness. True love is a sacrifice: it is a beautiful sacrifice, but such it remains; if it is not that to some extent, then it is not true love. All his true lovers were unselfish. Even we admit it conventionally. Look at the Marriage Service, which plainly defines this by the constant allusions to "cherishing" "in sickness and in health," "for better," "for worse," pointing with a gentle finger to those dear but inevitable demands on the unselfishness of each which even the most perfect life is bound to bring. Those griefs which it *is* a joy to assuage ; those sicknesses which it is a glory to nurse; those little prejudices and self-wills of one's own which it is a sort of honour to put on one side for the sake of a being dearer than self.

But putting aside any idle coquetry, how far is that precious union of thought and will from the low, miserable idea of marriage held by many who are quite sincere, discreet, and good. I heard a woman say not long ago (she is known for her piety and sincerity) : " Oh, but the whole thing was a mistake—her marrying him, you know. I have seen the house

and the furniture. It is not nearly so good as even Arthur's and Nita's. A terrible mistake!" The Marriage Service ought to be rewritten for such philosophers. Furniture—sideboards, coal-pans, tables, chairs, carpets, pans, kettles, fittings : all for the satisfying of a human heart and mind and soul. When the wind sweeps over the sea, or death sweeps his hand over the life of a dear one, and wakes that wild longing for something higher, something more god-like, that passion for truth and eternity which we call a soul,—go home : look at the furniture: see the good mahogany of that sideboard : just look at that stair-carpet : those imitation steel engravings have expensive frames, which ought to be a consolation. And—better than all—they are all superior to the next door neighbour's. What a reason for marrying! I once said of a dear woman who had just married, after years of home trouble: "I am so glad to hear of So-and-so's happiness." "Yes," replied a mutual friend, "so am I. I have been to see the house, and am really quite pleased with the furniture. She will be very happy."

There was an old Scotch lady, who when asked after her newly married daughter, replied : O ay, she's weel and happy. She canna abide her mon, but there's aye a something." If these sophists can

"abide" the position, the house, the furniture, never mind the "mon": he is a negation.

As for duty in such a matter as love, it does not occur to the careless maiden that the two have any connection. Love, thinks she, is a pleasant thing, a self-flattering thing, an occasion for more gaiety and more frocks: something to please Me. That its very essence and meaning is devotion to somebody else, is in very few girls' belief. The girl who will not marry is quite a common experience nowadays: she even builds up a sort of reputation on the number of men she has refused. She professes to be waiting for the "right" one. It is to be hoped, for his own sake, he may never come along, for the reward he will receive for his affection will indeed be a scanty harvest: a poor store of broken promises, developed caprices, petty cynicisms, little greedinesses, emulations, vanity, selfishnesses, and an empty heart. A "wasted Paradise" indeed: a withered Eden.

The real thing, the sacred God-blessed love of the early Puritans; the simple, almost sacramental character of all the perfect loves of history and fable; the love that Dickens drew—it is as far removed from all this vulgarity and cheapness and meanness as the stars are from the snails. And yet, strange to say, it lives on with a steady, quiet, determined sort of life

in it through ages of fashion, and change and chaos, only it does not get into the papers, and they leave it out of novels. In fact, it is generally quite content to keep in corners, whether that is the fashion or not—the corners of courts, or of villages, or of city or suburb. The very fact that it refuses to be interviewed is its own safeguard : it blossoms in quietude, like all blessed things.

Dickens, if he were here now, would hunt it out and glorify it still as he did in his own day. A world without it, to him would be a desert. And he would not have to imagine it, either, for it is still in our own midst in spite of the idol of selfishness, in spite of a "rushing" world.

Look about you, O Londoner. To every raw English Spring, in the whistle of east wind and the splash of rain are born faint, frail, white snowdrops in the grass of the Parks, things that we would have said, if asked, could never have been made to rear their pure heads close to the roar of 'bus traffic and the hideous screech of motors. Every Spring, drab corners of the London pavements are half hidden in mountains of glowing bloom—pink, yellow, purple, red, and flame-coloured miracles of sweetness that are sold for so much a bunch, so that we take them **for** granted, and cease to wonder. Every day in some

true heart or hearts, for let us hope they go in twos, there springs into life a sacred flame as fresh, as fair, as gay, as primeval as these bright things, and, if it be true, as eternal as the everlasting hills. Let us guard it and cherish it as the sweetest thing the world can offer: a thing against which gold is shabby pinchbeck, rank a dusty circus, and satisfied vanity the bray of a mouth-organ calling the world to a Punch and Judy Show.

(no)

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SPIRITUAL WORLD.

SOMEONE said to me one day, "Dickens hardly wrote anything about the clergy—and you call him a Christian!" I replied that, considering the clergy of his day, he was a Christian to hold his tongue.

We all know Thackeray's famous clergy, notably the Reverend Charles Honeyman, who had the proprietary chapel over the spirit-cellar, and several others who were frankly designed in some bitterness of spirit, for it is notable that few of Thackeray's clergymen were even gentlemen. Jane Austen, whose period was of course a little earlier, makes her clergy foolish and selfish as a matter of course, though herself a parson's daughter. Charlotte Bronte, reared in a vicarage, has a fearful parson in *Jane Eyre* and only one grand one to several terrible ones in *Shirley*; and George Eliot, whose life was cast amongst country clergy to a large extent, represents few who are not pleasantly fatuous, except Edgar

Tryan in *Scenes from Clerical Life*, and Parson Gilfil in the same work.

These writers treat " the Cloth " thus as a matter of course: they are roused to no hysterics: they are even kindly, if a little contemptuous, and write of things as they saw them with no attempt at disguise or exaggeration. To us who are accustomed to a totally different ministry, this semi-tolerant spirit appears unfair ; and many good people have a vague idea that all really clever writers are biassed against the Church because of it. But as a matter of fact they simply wrote of what they found in days far removed from ours.

Dickens, at any rate, said little on that subject, and what he did say was far from being unkind. He has a notable parson, who is held up as the type of a perfect Christian priest in the chapter called " The Shipwreck " in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, and Mr. Crisparkle in *Edwin Drood* is drawn with a loving hand

And in the chapter on City churches in the same work, in spite of the Reverend Boanerges Boiler, he says that he numbers among his dearest friends many preachers, " not powerful—merely Christian, unaffected and reverential," and he says it in true sincerity and affection. Later on in the same chapter in the course of his perfectly true account of the horrible

condition of the City churches in his day, he alludes to the clergyman with the "vinous" face and "bulbous" boots, the deacons in bibs, and the parson who has to go through the reading-desk to get to the pulpit and through the clerk's desk to get to his own. But these allusions are without rancour and without contempt: they are gay, kindly, as the good-humoured banter of friends.

In the chapter called "The Curate" in *Sketches by £02*, his sarcasm is directed less at the clergy than the people of the congregation; and in "A Visit to Newgate" in the same work, his description of the chapel is frightful, but the chaplain he leaves alone. The Reverend Frank Milvey in *Our Mutual Friend* he loves unreservedly.

He could have said much that was adverse, but perhaps he had enough sense of humour to see that by knocking down the Clergy, you do not build a Church. Perhaps he hoped for better days, dear optimist that he was, and thought that a little of the milk of human kindness set flowing among the flocks might some day reach the shepherds; at any rate, he busied himself among the flocks, and except for a little mild fun, and one grand tribute of praise, left the shepherds to see to themselves and to answer a higher Judge than he.

As a matter of fact, he saw too clearly the relation between man and a higher world, between man's griefs and an Eternal Justice, to waste his time throwing stones at those pastors who failed to see the same thing. Some of us can never recognize a reformer unless he rants and shrieks and raves. A reformer who raises a standard himself, instead of going about knocking down other people's, is beyond the comprehension of a large part of the world. It is very sad that this density is so prevalent, because it is an encouragement to any person whose egoism requires him to rise and scream at all existing institutions, and leads him on to really, in time, believe himself that he is doing good. Of such reformers Dickens was not. His was an honest wish, not by acidity to drive out the world's acids, but by a gentle and wholesome "chemical change," as Professor Drummond says, to turn sour into sweetness, through the kindly antidote of a great spirit of charity.

He saw around him a wide enough field for his teaching, Heaven knows. There stretched the Puritanical grimness of the religious life of those days, the very caricature of the earlier Puritanism, the last exhausted remnants of what had once been a brave, strong, vivifying movement "The letter that killeth" had got hold of religious England to a very large

extent, and the spirit mattered nothing. If you went to church often enough, and slept through long enough sermons, and had enough bibles and prayer-books carried for you by your footman, you were considered by many people impeccable. If you were a churchwarden, howsoever you lacked in virtues during the week, it was enough: you were a pillar of virtue. If you sat on a board of some charity institution which starved children in pompous phrases, or even rented the front pew in church, you were considered spiritually substantial, as it were; and if the hassocks in the pew cost more than similar commodities did in the neighbouring church, a state of things which depended largely upon the business capacities of the clergyman, you rose a little in degree of impeccability. The lady who could wear the ugliest clothes, and we know the possibilities of bombazine and crinolines in that direction, was counted the most edifying in many religious circles; and if she could add to her talent a settled sourness of temper, acid self-righteousness, rigid hair-dressing, and a love of expounding on the duty of other people, with a tendency to stint the servant in sugar, she was considered a pattern of female virtue. Nothing further was asked of her.

Public identification with good works was deemed

the greatest possible, in fact the requisite good, by a large body of people in the church ; and though, as in all ages, the remnant of the faithful still lived and worked quietly—those gentle, honest, loving souls who could never be prigs whatever they were taught, this ugly spirit prevailed largely with the unthinking and the vulgar—two very important component parts of the social fabric. We hear so much of the full churches of those days compared to ours: of the great people who sat in the body of the church, the tradespeople at the sides, the lesser tradespeople and servants in the first gallery, and the grooms and footmen in the second one up in the roof. Whether the great folk really intended to take the " lowest seat " and put the poor grooms nearer the sky than themselves will always remain a problem; but it was dustier and stuffier in the top gallery, and moreover no one could see you there, which is another point that throws a doubt. We are apt, when we make these comparisons, to forget that those good people's social character depended entirely upon their appearing in church : that had they not done so, they would have been shunned as social castaways. The few holding any claims to respectability who dared to do so, were sternly banned. The poor, unless they were picturesque, did not go to church at all; blind crossing-sweepers did so sometimes, and

took care to be standing at the door when the congregation came out; Bath-chairmen did too, devotion of sorts being the natural handmaiden to pulling old ladies about in Bath-chairs; and needy widows would haunt the back aisles like poor little sable ghosts, for reasons pathetic but not strictly spiritual.

The chapels were the poor people's churches in those days, if they had any, for the sermons were more comprehensible than two hours of thunder and Greek epigrams delivered by a preacher in a Geneva gown and bands, remote in a high black pulpit.

In the streets a gloomy silence prevailed, except for the incessant ringing of bells about service time—a thing which seems to have irritated Dickens unspeakably, though to most of us it is a gracious sound. Perhaps in those days he felt its mockery: he detested all sham so ardently, and the notion of many people flocking to a worship of the lip and devoid of all real honesty of devotion, for reasons materialistic and sordid, may have clashed itself into the bells for him and spoilt their sound for ever. Otherwise it is hard to explain how such a lover of purity, noble effort, duty and praise, should have come to hate the sound of church bells.

We who are used to glorious cathedral services and preachers who preach the Gospel sincerely, can hardly

imagine his spiritual surroundings. There was a dull drabness and solemn melancholy about those ugly churches and dreary clergy which it is almost impossible for the modern churchgoer to even faintly picture. The Oxford Movement and the Evangelical Revival were both sorely needed to sweep away some of those collected cobwebs, and the honest and good priests in both these movements, though apparently separated in teaching, were in reality all working for the same great resurrection of living religious devotion in a Church that was dying of depressing formula.

It was a Church without heart, without warmth, without joy: the very ugly tablets on its ugly walls were typical of its dulness, setting forth the dreary pagan qualities of departed members ;—such qualities as those mentioned in an epitaph I know, which says of a Mrs. Eliza Parker that " her deportment was unimpeachable, her language chaste, her talents many; she was a regular Church-goer and a Serviceable Parishioner." She must also have been a trying person to know. Her Unimpeachable Deportment must have weighed heavily on her friends in life, and they felt obliged to put it on her tomb as her chief characteristic after death. It is a terrible thing when a human soul can be writ in marble that it was of " unimpeachable deportment"—nothing more.

In Dickens, without dogmatism, there is reverently taught an aspect of God which is as far removed from the teaching of his day as the Sun is from the tomb. And he seemed to teach it unconsciously, which is his abiding charm. There we always have a sweet doctrine of God manifesting Himself in the young and fair and innocent; in the gracious acts of the wretched and untaught, and the good deeds of the lost; in all weak vessels whatsoever, against which the age of Pharisees he pleaded with were so pitilessly set. Little Nell partakes as nearly of the angelical nature as any mortal child in fiction, and she is the vehicle of grace and the inspiration of good throughout the book. Those words which are his own reflection on her early death, are a picture of his unutterable belief *in* the mission of all pure things, as coming direct from the Almighty. He says : " When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he sets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps, there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven."

His description of Rose Fleming is a glimpse of his teaching on what Ruskin called the religion of Beauty: "The younger lady was in the lovely bloom and springtide of womanhood ; at that age when, if ever angels be for God's good purposes enthroned in mortal forms, they may, without impiety, be supposed to abide in such as hers." From Rose Fleming came Nancy's dream of a better life, and last mute prayer in death; Oliver's restoration ; and Harry Maylie's change from a petty ambition to a higher one.

There is always prevalent in *Dombey and Son* the idea that Mr. Dombey in losing Paul lost more than an earthly treasure; and that in spurning the pure love of little Florence he spurned a holier good, and lost entirely the voice of a higher pleading. His final repentance, against which modern critics sometimes carp, was brought about by the sweetest of all missionaries—a little, helpless, infant.

Again, the description of poor, worried, vulgar, poverty-stricken Mrs. Todgers and her Christian kindness to Merry in her despair, is inimitable as a homily on what may be learnt from the despised. "Commercial gentlemen and gravy had tried Mrs. Todgers's temper ; the main chance—it was such a very small one, that she might have been excused for looking sharp after it lest it should entirely vanish

from her sight—had taken a firm hold on her attention. But in some odd corner of Mrs. Todgers's breast, up a great many steps and in a corner easy to be overlooked, there was a secret door with 'Woman' written on the spring, which, at a touch from Mercy's hand, had flown wide open and admitted her for shelter. When boarding-house accounts are balanced with all other ledgers, and the books of the recording angel are made up for ever, perhaps there may be seen an entry to thy credit, lean Mrs. Todgers, which shall make thee beautiful." This is the religion of Charity.

In Dickens's philosophy of the spiritual *liky* the Eternal Fatherhood loomed pityingly over all, good or bad, rich or poor. But he dwelt most on that aspect which can only be described, in a spirit indeed of the greatest reverence, as the chivalry of God. His allusions to the Sacred Name nearly always occur in connection with the weak, the poor, the sorrowful, and sometimes the sinful, as though he felt intensely the need, in this terribly enigmatical thing we call life, of a great abiding Presence for ever placing itself on the side of the helpless and defenceless. All Dickens's novels tell of a war of good and evil; and his own beautiful faith in God, as perfect justice and perfect love, is one of the most utterly

inspiring things in any master of the humanities since Shakespeare.

He never forces upon us, what was forced upon him in his own day, an aspect of the Almighty as a God of punishment and vengeance: final Justice, but always before that, Love. Punishment, whenever it occurs in any of his works, is always plainly self-inflicted and is brought on by men's own wrong-doing persisted in—an effect always with a tremendous cause—and never without many appeals being made to the better nature first, by some pleading tone, some kindly deed, some innocent thing straying across the sinner's path. Ralph Nickleby has moments of compunction ; Murdstone had to turn away from David's tiny wistful face because it spoilt his harsh designs ; Sikes bound up Oliver's wounds; Bumble coughed uncomfortably when the child pleaded with him, holding tightly on to his laced cuff; the sight of Martha made Steerforth shudder and pause; Jonas Chuzzlewit could not look at his dying father's face because of his guilty secret This is not sentimentality.

It is a very clear showing that we are not distinctly marked white sheep and black : plainly bad, or plainly good. It shows clearly the evolution, as it were, of sin: the gradual growth of selfish evil, through which the heart may be appealed to again and again by the

voice of God, but which eventually closes out the good for ever. When that stage is reached, no one can be more stern than Dickens. He pursues Jonas through chapters of vengeful misery; Sikes's punishment is grim and unrelenting and is not spared one pang; the chapter called "The Storm," which tells the end of Steerforth, is immortal in its Miltonic sternness; and the chapter on the murder in *The Tale of Two Cities* is a pitiless stroke of righteous vengeance, determinedly dealt.

There are hundreds of other examples. He, the gentlest, the gayest, the most pitying of men, was hard to move to wrath. But when, by wrongs done to little children, by the oppression of the poor, by cruelty to the old or the weak, his wrath was roused, it was unrelenting and furious, and spent itself unstintingly to the bitter end. His death sentences are the most utterly solemn of any writer since Shakespeare.

Then again to him the "Church" meant something different to what it meant to the formalists of his day. As he always showed that "home" was not four square walls and some furniture, but was a sacred thing enshrined in the hearts of the inmates, and if that sacred thing was absent, home was not there at all, so he seemed to show most clearly that the Church

was something that must live in the individual souls of the people, not a building, a formula, a custom. The formalists of his day taught that the Church was an independent organization, incapable either of mistake or decay, which would bring to all every possible spiritual blessing, irrespective of the accidents of temperament, education, or general possibility, providing only that its rules were rigidly obeyed.

But he taught a startling truth in those days when he plainly showed that to him the Church was that divine institution created anew in every human soul at every holy inspiration sincerely obeyed, and consisted between each human soul and its God. To him churches, sacred buildings, were what the worshippers made them : no more and no less.

He always speaks tenderly of village churches as typifying the childlike faith of the peasant; but he does not spare the formal empty City conventicles of his day, with a few dreary worshippers dragged there in the royal name of custom; nor does he spare the ladies who went and rented pews in the church where there was a popular curate with a diamond ring and a cough ; or that great gloomy ponderous church where Mr. Dombey was married (Marylebone Parish Church) in which there was a greedy beadle and a time-serving pew-opener who " crackled" when she curtsied

for tips. The grim, half-forgotten old church in the *Old Curiosity Shop* with its solemn, decaying tombs seemed to gain fresh life from the visits of little Nell: it seems as though an angel's shadow had flashed across the sleepy sunbeams of its aisles, and a sudden touch of immortality had swept through the dreamy place like organ music playing among the grey stone graves of the forgotten. Little Nell seems to be nearer the seraphic choir in those long still days before her death than the very church in which her pure spirit lightly lingers: and after it has flown to its eternal home, the memory of her presence seems to glorify the dim old fane she loved. While as for Tom Pinch's church, when he, dear guileless soul, spends hours in its shadowy organ-loft playing those melodies his soul so truly delighted in, it is a sacred place, hallowed with pure thoughts and longings, and we can almost see the dim religious light flooding its quiet aisles, and feel the atmosphere of prayer and praise.

Into the same church comes Pecksniff the hypocrite and suddenly vulgarizes it in the same remarkable way that he was able to vulgarize even Salisbury Cathedral. Suddenly we become aware of the pew of state set apart for the churchwardens, the red curtains, the pompous insignia of office, and selfish place-seeking. Fade the glories of stained pane and

aureole, vanishes the dim religious light, and the whole place becomes bald and crude and common as a town hall or a police-station.

To that philosophy God dwells in the pure soul in the child-like heart, and such sweet temples not made with hands; in generous aspiration, in charity, in truth. Truly in earthly temples, too, when they contain these things; but never alone in phrase, candle, or brick and mortar.

As for his belief in the next world, that shows itself repeatedly in every work ; it is as much a part of his philosophy as is his sense of justice, his great pity. Perhaps it is most beautifully expressed in one of his letters addressed to a friend who had lost his little son; he speaks of " your dear child, now among the angels of God," and adds, ". . . . the traveller who journeyed, in fancy, from this world to the next, was struck to the heart to find the child he had lost many years before building him a tower in heaven. Our blessed Christain hopes do not shut out the belief of love and remembrance still enduring there, but irradiate it to make it sacred. Who should know that better than you, or who more deeply feel the touching truth and comfort of that story in the older book, where, when the bereaved mother is asked, ' Is it well with the child ?' she answered, ' It is well,'"

## CHAPTER VII.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF SOCIAL ORDER.

THERE is a sorry, snobbish carp, which sometimes raises its shabby head against the prince of humorists, *e.g.* that he "only wrote about the middle and lower classes." As a relic of early Victorian barbarism, this weird grumble has a psychical interest; and it would be instructive to future ages, *if* we were to graven such things in marble or say stucco, date them, and place them in the British Museum, as monuments of periodical public opinion. Future theorists on evolution would thus be materially helped or edified.

No doubt it began its existence in the far ruder and cruder days of good, solid nineteenth century snobbishness, but the fact that it can still be found in odd corners in the present day, is most interesting. I met it in a charming drawing-room not long ago, issuing from a mountain of priceless sables and glorious vanity. I greeted it meekly—it is such a

dear old friend, and I am sure the speaker believed she believed in it I could not tell her that its shabby-genteel figure, so green at the seams, and otherwise so green generally, was as familiar to me as a Jack-in-the-Green on May-day. She honestly thought it was original, and that it proved her case—to social superiority. I only felt sorry that that needed proving.

It gets into print occasionally, and has been known within our own memory to seek immortality in a book of essays. It is the sort of disreputable relative of all the other paltry objections to Dickens: the shabby cousin to the carp that he "over-did caricature," and the shady uncle to the carp that his "women were insipid," for it belongs to an older generation.

Yet the great scions of a portion of the great middle-class will welcome it gladly into their houses, feeling honestly that it proves their claim to social fastidiousness, as clearly as entertaining the broken-down and army-cashiered younger son of a duke at their table would do. Perhaps more clearly.

Truly most of Dickens's aristocrats, when he does depict them, do not shine. Sir Leicester Dedlock, Lord Verisopht, Sir Mulberry Hawk, the great family of the Barnacles, are not deeply conducive to respect; and Cousin Feenix, though good-humoured,

is hardly a hero; while his august relative, Mrs. Skewton, and her distinguished friends, amongst whom was the lady with the eyelids, are anything but edifying.

And we are bound to admit that the people who did shine in his works were frankly of a very ordinary type of the middle-class and often of the poor. But the carp alluded to assumes without question that he did this unconsciously, that he could not if he would write about the great, that he was himself, so gently runs the gallant tale, "too vulgar." That is a happy, happy blindness which cannot see its own hideous vulgarity in uttering the objection! It is almost Arcadian in its sheer beauty. Those who speak it are the true Pharisees of Snobbishness, grand in their immovable splendour: descended, on this confession alone, from aspirate-dropping fathers and unspeakable grandfathers. Long may they enjoy the distinction.

The amusing part of this objection is that its very existence in this present age proves without further doubt the supreme necessity of the very attitude towards the question of social order which Dickens took up, and for which it blames him. The class of which these objectors is a remnant, was paramount in his day. In his day the middle-classes (those who did any work whatever) were looked upon with patronage,

doubt, and disdain, and the very poor with contempt, mingled with an only half-disguised terror, by the rulers and law-makers of the land. The children of actors were refused an ordinary education in private schools by common consent, as being unfit to associate with decent persons' sons, and a narrow, mean, pompous spirit of petty division of class and class, profession and profession, trade and trade, held its sway all over England—a spirit most killing to the life of a country, and one whose only outlet *in* course of time, but for one or two firm, sincere Radical reformers, would have been revolution, or something very like it. There is a use for Radicals in certain stages of the world's history, just as there is a use for gunpowder. And that was one of the stages when they alone could rescue England from despair, under whatever name they chose to go or to whatever party they were nominally attached. Dickens himself was the last man in the world to make a party dummy ; but the great movement of Radicalism which swept over England like a wave in the 'forties was supported by him as definitely as it was supported by any of its acknowledged leaders and promoters. In a larger and roomier sense than Bright and Cobden: in the sense that Wellington and Shaftesbury were Radicals, though passing under far other appellations, Dickens

was a Radical; and in the sense that an archangel might feel a passion of earthly patriotism, he was a patriot. Far removed indeed from mean strife, small divisions, party squabbles, and infantile technicalities, his heart burnt to join the great affray of reform on the side of the suffering millions of the poor or the overlooked powers and energies of the middle-classes.

*And* hence his untiring use of these two great factors as a theme for his most powerful writings. The ancient aristocracy of the fine-old-cruised and desperately selfish order he ignored; he felt indeed the passion of the new forces rising around him, the strenuous spirit of the rising manufacturing classes in the north and the midlands, the wild possibilities opening up before the hitherto half-maddened poor, the enormous outlook for political and social England on one condition only—if she could but keep her temper.

The fiery fanaticism of the Chartists, the desperate burning of hayricks, besieging of mills, smashing of machinery, the wild outcries of Ireland, the hatred of Protestant for Catholic Emancipation, the condition of the prisons, the enormous harvest of crime, especially murder, was a state of things not calculated to **make** the stupid armchair theorist feel quite happy. It was a state of things which embittered, and was **almost** calculated to embitter, **the hearts of those who were**

not ill-disposed to try to make England a better country than she had been for many a long year.

On the one hand, the Tories, hard to win from their old fastnesses, yet not intrinsically unjust; on the other, the mobs shrieking for concessions beyond the wildest dreams, yet with real reason intermingled with the nonsense, and real suffering sharpening their cries; and in between these, the middle-classes, half sullen towards either party, as Hunt and Cobden had found to their cost, mistrustful of the tyrant but more mistrustful of the rebel, and ready to join neither the one nor the other: just at that condition of semi-combustion when parties or countries will either fight or laugh.

And here was Dickens, the whilom political reporter, writing away at his household novels, the only one who could and did make them laugh; putting before them pictures of the respectable and the out-cast in good-natured conjunction—not fancy pictures, but real, so real that they palpitate now with the life of true history—not bitter, not cruel, (even the Barnacles are not bitterly treated), but with fun, fun, undying fun rippling over at every line; good humour racing through them; kindly feeling, sympathy, merriment, humour sweetening all the problems and all the social injustices in a way to win the heart

of many a stern statesman, or eager reformer with knitted brow and angry heart, to paths of kindlier change. A humorist who never gibed; a satirist who never cut; a reformer who never ranted; he was, perhaps, the greatest power for good in that turbulent and divided England which she could have dreamed of in her wildest moments of longing. He was like a good fairy, a laughing, jolly fairy in the midst of that weary time. Other writers pointed out the wrongs with the bitter pen, he pointed the way out of the wrongs with a pen of living light.

He was for change—wise, good, sensible change,—but coupled with courtesy, sanity, patience, love. He did not want to lead a mob to fire on the Houses of Parliament as a means of reforming the prisons; he did not want to abolish the House of Lords because workhouses were shockingly managed; and he did not shriek against the aristocracy because house rent was a problem to the professional pickpocket, or do any of the things we are unfortunately obliged often to associate with the words "social reformer."

It is one of the most wonderful parts of his character as a social reformer that he kept his indignation in reasonable check, where indignation was roused; he shows this far more definitely in his letters than in his books. In the former he speaks his mind, suddenly

often, like a flash of lightning ; in the latter, he never forgets his sense of public responsibility and holds his hot words as by a bridle.

He might, of course, have put on a navy-blue tie with white dots on it, made at the shop, and said rude things generally about everybody: that is what Socialists very often do, and it makes them very annoying, and does nobody much good.

He might also have refused all reasonable foods at another man's dinner-table and insisted on eating hominy or haricot-beans, and drinking hot water, or anything else not originally provided, as Socialists have such a convivial way of doing.

But he did none of these things. He was a charming, genial sociable, gentleman, with the graces of the " Old School " and the humanizing good-humour of the new. You would never have been able to make him politically quarrelsome amongst his friends, whom he loved as few men love their friends; nor to his audience or readers, whom also he loved romantically, so that the merest child amongst them could feel it

But in his letters he is very definite. Writing to Mr. Arthur Ryland in the 'forties, he says, for instance,<sup>11</sup> That principle of fair representation of all orders carefully carried out, I believe, will do more good than any of us can yet foresee. Does it not seem a strange

thing to consider that I have never yet seen with these eyes of mine a mechanic in any recognized position on the platform of a mechanic's institute?"

He was for reform that was to begin at home, where his heart was.

Writing about the Russian War in 1855, he cries out bitterly against the absorption of the entire country in war and war only. Every other subject, he says, goes down before it, and adds: "I fear I clearly see that for years to come domestic reforms are shaken to the root: every miserable red-tapist flourishes war over every protester against his humbug." And again, that it "was the wretchedest Ministry that ever was: in whom nobody not in office of some sort believes—yet whom there is nobody to displace."

He was desperately, passionately solicitous for the overlooked millions of poor whose very existence was far too little known in those days of a reticent and costly Press.

He says in one letter: "I am full of mixed feelings about the war: admiration of our valiant men, burning desires to cut the Emperor's throat, and something like despair to see how the old blood-mists obscure the wrongs and the sufferings of the people at home. When I consider the Patriotic Fund on the one hand, and on the other the poverty and wretchedness

engendered by cholera, of which in London alone an infinitely larger number of people than are likely to be slain in the whole Russian War have miserably and needlessly died, I feel as if the whole world had been put back five hundred years."

Truly his was a wider reform than one of things political and public. He knew that the home makes the country, and it was of home things he chiefly spoke. It was of manners, of social meannesses, of the millions of petty cruelties which go towards embittering and eventually ruining a nation that he taught. He wanted individual justice, individual kindness, individual good humour, individual large-mindedness. It was a narrow age, and his doctrine was startlingly new ; it was also startlingly practical; and it may be said to have recreated English society.

It may not be perfect now, but it is a kinder, more honest thing than it was when he knew it, and infinitely healthier. The working man, of whom we from childhood have heard so much, may be tiresome, but he is in the main a law-abiding creature; he does not plot to burn the great in their beds, and he feels little bitterness towards them because he thinks he is just as great himself. He has a way of taking up all the pavement and other graceless habits, but he does not see it. He threatens the Board School Managers

with a law-suit if his pampered son gets a black eye through fighting in the playground, and organizes a kind of blackmail called " Compensation " if his daughter, under the presumed eye of a harassed school-mistress, eats too many roast chestnuts; but he is good natured.

As for the middle-classes, they are now England—they constitute England. Whether this is a good thing or not, the fact remains. The constellations of other spheres fill harmless ministerial posts, and shed a mild light below on to those who do the work, but the work is certainly done, with honourable exceptions of course, by the great men in the middle.

Where their women are capable of holding the reins, and leading with a decent sense of a social ideal, this state of things will eventually work out for good ; but in cases where these copy only the follies and insincerities, without the graces, of the women of those higher constellations, the outlook is rather painful. The "airs" of a duchess without that great lady's serious social responsibilities, her dress and her prejudices without her kindly thought for her inferiors, **her** gaities without her charities, her little earthly emulations without her inborn sense of *noblesse oblige*, courtesy to the weak, and native graciousness, sit badly on the would-be great middle-class matron;

they are unworthy of her, as unworthy as pinchbeck jewellery would be, or kitchen scandal. Until she sees to that, she will not really rule. This may be a topsy-turvy world, but, as the Rugby boy said of Dr. Temple, in some respects it is a "just beast"; and amongst other things, it will not return you homage for kicks, or glory for grasping self-love. It is strangely consistent in some little matters of that kind, and it is a blessing that it is.

Dickens might have had much to say to those good ladies, had he been here in our midst to-day. He would have said it very kindly and genially, but he would not have spared them, if only for their own sakes. Whatever noble, public-spirited, humanising ideal he would have wanted to put before them, or before men, before rich or poor, he would have put it clearly and definitely, but unlike other reformers he would also have put them into a good humour; even the women, even the women without a sense of humour, he would have made laugh at themselves and weep for others.

He put England, from the Crown to the slums, in a good humour—a humour in which it has remained more or less ever since. If he had never done anything else, that alone would have been enough for which to have lived, and suffered, and died.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF FASHION.

IT is a fatal thing for a woman's dress if the average man can describe it, and the greatest possible compliment if he admires it without being able to give a single item a name. This is one of the quaintest laws that hold good in the mystic world of masculine opinion. It is quite unexplainable. It is also quite immovable.

I once heard a man say that a lady looked "charming," but all I could elicit from him was, that she was dressed in "chintz." He might just as well have said that she was clad in cork lino, for any notion this wild statement conveyed. Another, whose frock was beautifully gauged and pouffed was admired exceedingly; but when the admirer was pressed for a description, he said: "Oh, her dress was made of an innumerable series of cushions, I think."

On the other hand, a man who is indignantly disapproving of a woman's appearance, and men always

are indignant when they disapprove of such things, though it is hard to see why, will give you a pretty accurate account of her sartorial sins. "Well, if you'd seen Mrs. So-and-so, in that short blue frock, all bunched up on the shoulders, like this, and her hat a perfect flower-garden of a thing—well—." Or, "She *will* make herself such a frump with that old brown cape thing, and her bonnets ought to be much larger, and her boots have no heels."

One can see these two last ladies in all the realism of a few telling trifles, deftly told ; while the two who won glowing praise stand in a goddess-like mystery of cloud and smoke, only intensified by the words "cushions" and "chintz."

Now whether Dickens was so essentially a man or whether he intended to write essentially for men, this law applies to him as truly as it does to the modern husbands and brothers of England, and to my mind it adds to his charm unspeakably.

You will never get him to tell you what the women that he admires wear: honestly, I think he does not know, like the modern man. But directly he despises or even laughs at a female character, he will describe her dress and do it so well, that he proves the former vagueness to be anything but ignorance.

We have the floating, misty impression only of

Dora's blue ribbons and muslin: her curls and her roseleaf face flash out of the picture of which these are but a dreamy frame. Ruth Pinch, whom Dickens positively loved, is left in a vague halo of general "neatness," and only a rose is mentioned as definitely being in her bonnet, and that because it got mixed up with her hair, and was like her face. Madeline's veil is alluded to, as being characteristic of her gentle shyness; and Kate Nickleby's dainty black mourning frock for the dinner-party, with the little pointed shoes, is a little touch of her "atmosphere" as sorrowful and quiet—a sort of beautiful Quakeress. Amy Dorrit's prison frock is mentioned, giving just an impression of poverty and squalor; and little Em'ly's necklace of blue beads is like a tiny miniature where all but the face and some jewel are in shadow. Rachel's shawl worn over the head, North Country fashion, is alluded to several times and gives her almost a Madonna aspect; and Esther's house-wifely apron and little bunch of keys as she presides over Bleak House like a good fairy, are like a touch of her personality, just as the old painters put beads in the hands of a portrayed Spanish gentleman who was a devotee; and a municipal chain and heavily upholstered bible by the side of some Dutch burgher who wasn't, but who knew how to get on in his

mercantile circle, one way being the having that particular portrait painted.

There is no further description of Mary Graham than the fall of her loosened hair over her shoulders ; and Agnes is left to what I believe is the quite unerring imagination of those who love her. There is always the impression that nothing unladylike—it is an old word, with an older meaning—would or could ever have been possible to his good women. They were not dreary or prudish or dull, but they seem always to have been refinement and dignity itself. That was not an age of overdressing in one sense, but it was one celebrated for its hideous dress—an exuberance of frightfulness. Yet Dickens always makes you feel that his heroines looked pretty, and were dressed sweetly and tastefully.

But when he comes to the women he either laughs at or does not like, he can describe accurately. Mrs. Wilfer's handkerchief arrangement and kid gloves are very definite; so is Mrs. Pipchin's bombazine, drapery that no candles could light up; Volumnia's youthful muslin and pearl necklace and rouge; Mrs. Skewton's fan, finery, and falsity; Miss Blimber's short hair and spectacles; Mrs. Gamp's beaver bonnet and voluminous dresses and undying umbrella ; or Fanny Squeers's party costume, which had a "blue sash

which floated down her back," a "worked apron," long gloves, and a "green gauze scarf worn over one shoulder and under the other"; her hair also, it will be recollected, which was red, was arranged in a "crop curled in five distinct rows up to the very top of her head and arranged dexterously over the doubtful eye." Later on, the same lady wore a brown beaver bonnet and green veil; and on arriving in town to dazzle the great world, a "white frock and spencer with a white muslin bonnet and an imitative damask rose in full bloom in the inside thereof; her luxuriant crop of hair arranged in curls so tight that it was impossible they could come out by any accident, and her bonnet cap trimmed with little damask roses which might be supposed to be so many promising scions of the big rose." With this, as the spencer was short, she wore a broad damask belt, coral bracelets and a coral necklace rather short of beads and showing the very visible black string on which they were threaded. Now this is description with a vengeance, worthy of the most painstaking woman. Cherry Pecksniff's bridal array, with the bonnet trimmed with orange-blossoms, is quite definite; and Merry Pecksniff's curls and girlish pinafore have a paragraph all to themselves. There are few descriptions to approach in humour that of Mrs. Micawber at David's

party, with the shawl and the brown kid gloves, and the air of a Roman matron. Very clearly, though not bitterly, is Miss Havisham's bridal array depicted; and Mrs. Gargery's beaver bonnet, spare shawl, umbrella and pattens, " like Cleopatra on the Rampage "; Miss Murdstone's bracelets, and the " Old Soldier's " turban. From these and many other examples, it seems plain that Dickens had the eminently masculine *trait* of taking pretty dress for granted and only commenting on clothes when they or the wearers were ridiculous.

His women that he loves the best all overshadowed the description of their clothes by their own superabundant personalities: he felt the picture to be too sacred to describe the frame. Sir Joshua Reynolds did something very similar: his stately, sylph-like women are mostly in loose flowing white or light colours with large sparsely trimmed hats, clothes that seem to be a part of their personalities, not individual things bought at a shop and quite distinct from the wearers. Things that seem to serve at once as garments and as a beautiful harmonious kind of self-expression.

It is always natural to imagine Dickens's best women in such expressive clothes. For my part, I can never see Agnes Wickfield in any colour but gray, with soft

folds ; Ruth Pinch might have worn pinks and browns, Rose Fleming white, Dora blue, and so on. But to each the personality came first and the clothes were but the allegorical expression of it.

Now we cannot all find our own ego or personality, unfortunately. If we could, we might follow this out and dress accordingly. But those few women who have discovered such a secret of self-expression are admittedly fascinating, and as a rule win a harvest of admiration that others resent because it is as unexplainable as it is undeniable. One woman will fly to Paris for hats which are beautiful in the hand, or on paper, or on the right woman, and jarring on her. Another will go round the corner to a cheap milliner's and find a kind of sonata on herself, a kind of epitome of her mental and spiritual attitude, and will win all the praise. The cheap milliner has not the secret any more than is the Parisian milliner to blame ; it is the wearer alone whose genius or lack of it makes the difference. If only women could be got to see that clothes are not some glorious and ecstatic state of being, and the more, and the more gorgeous, the better, without respect to self; but that they are the finest and most subtle expression of that self, and if they fail to be such, utter failures. The *spirituelle* woman in red velvet—the dark gipsy-faced, strangely

beautiful person in a drab coat and skirt; the big stately woman in a kilted dress and tiny headgear; the lively *petite* in a picture hat and heavy furs—we all know the types. Let the things themselves be ever so beautiful or good, the general effect is failure. And for why? The individual woman herself remains unexpressed. The greatest lady in the land to day holds that wonderful secret in its perfection; while some of the richest are utterly devoid of it. And who can blame the modiste? She, poor creature, has not time to study your mental pose; to her closest observation you are fair or dark or highly coloured or pale or fat or thin, or something else equally crude, and she shapes you accordingly. The *bizarre*, un-English-looking woman who may be lovely if dressed in a weird, new way, will be hidden by the best-intentioned of dressmakers in good, thick, athletic sort of garment, suitable for playing the organ in a provincial chapel—and lost under a cloud. The noisy woman will be enwreathed in violets by the honest hand of a milliner, who knows nothing of the higher harmonies of things; and the most divinely innocent of fair Quakeresses will be strapped and slashed with scarlet military "frogs" and a highwayman's hat. It never occurs to these two to change. Violets were meant for gentle, quiet women; military "frogs" for the reverse: but neither see it. They are both happy

because they are fashionable. Their plainness of attire is at a discount. People adore jewels, yet though it will be thought a wild thing to say, it is an artistic fact that the most exalted-looking women should never wear jewels; the really *spirituelle* face either of the "angel" type, like a Madonna, or the intellectual and lovable type, like the deathless R6camier, is not only not enhanced, but spoilt by jewellery. Jewels suited Queen Elizabeth, whose face was all that is sharp, cunning and clever and bad: but they would have spoilt Priscilla, or Ruth, or Rosamond unspeakably. Lady Blessington's beauty was of the *spirituelle* order, but a diamond necklace would have robbed her of half of it; Marie Antoinette, lofty, queenly, and on fire with *e'sprit*, is lovely enough without the addition of a diamond necklace, though the story of the procuring of one is the *beginning* of her tragedy. But somehow one can perfectly understand Rubens's well-fed Dutch fraus wearing scintillating things on their arms and necks: they are nearer the earth, and somehow nearer the wallowing mines from which such stones are brought. It is easy to picture them comparing notes on the relative cost of these hard baubles, in fat, contented voices; just as they probably compared house-linen, and illnesses and sideboards and husbands, and other incidental acquirements. Dickens usually ignores jewels except

in the case of Edith Dombey, when they flash with her rising passion, and positively dazzle with their sharp glitter in that final tragic scene where she denounces her husband to his face. She is very beautiful, and very rebellious, and very proud, and very ruthless, and the hard cold sparkle of diamonds intrinsically expresses her mood. But the women he puts upon pedestals would no more have worn such things than they would have worn coal. The altars he erects to his Madonnas, unlike those in Catholic countries, are free from the mineral splendour of wrought gems; they are of lilies and stars.

Nowadays we think so much of splendour. Everyone wants splendour—in dress I mean—from the Society queen to the slum lady: whether that splendour is a true expression of the *ego*, or the circumstances, or not. The woman who will give up her huge establishment for a small flat in order to dress like an Empress, has her imitator in the slum woman who goes to a cheap draper's carrying a starving, half-clad baby, to buy a pearl "dog collar" with diamond bars for 3s. 11¾d. irrespective of the fact that her black sailor hat has a torn brim, and her face is very dirty. The diamonds are of the first water, and one's boots let in too much of that commodity; so it is immaterial that the water company have turned off the water in the house in default of the rate.

The hired "fevvers" on the hat of the Cockney lady—she calls it a "yat"—have their prototype in the Court plumes of the anxious *debutante* ; the shop-girl counts your rings before she decides your station in life ; the " smart woman " sends a roving, if ill-bred, eye wandering over your clothes upon first introduction, pricing up the items with a view to deciding your social whereabouts. Her manner is then regulated accordingly, which is amusing and capable of hours of entertainment. In the suburbs they count the tucks in one another's blouses, or the number of one another's hats, to arrive at the desired estimate; and many honest and good women all the world over calmly gauge one another's illimitable souls by these poor shoddy things. An East End clergyman, who is always receiving appeals to assist the wretched, and amongst these requests that he will pay to get a dress out of pawn, was the other day requested, in view of a coming public holiday, to recover from the pawnbroker a slum lady's chain (she called it a "chine")—a bauble without which she could not possibly appear, she said, in public. She had hardly any boots, and her rags, though fine, were not weather-proof. But she must have her chain. It was a chain of office and meant in her world unutterable social things.

This sort of thing will lead inevitably to a Puritan

revival in dress ; it will have to come, even—who shall say—to elastic-side boots and bombazine and plaid shawls. We may yet be swept by one vast tidal wave of fashion into poke bonnets and spencers. But I sincerely believe that a time is slowly coming when the Dickens ideal of women's dress will to some extent be raised again, yet not of course till the women themselves change a little. For all dress, bad or good, is self-expression of a kind—sometimes a rather fatal kind—and in some way reveals the wearer's character. The lady who buys rubbishy trinkets at a draper's for her adornment before she has dreamed of a manicure or even of soap, reveals herself, but not the self which should find expression. Behind her tawdry tastes and slattern ways she often has a kind heart, a disposition sturdy and true and a sincere faith in God. I have known many such. But of these things she is not proud—so they find no expression. She really is proud of her vanity and laziness—she thinks they show innate ladyhood. She *is* quite unconsciously sardonic. If she were proud of being what she really is, an honest artizan's honest wife, she would dress as such, and her homely linsey-wolseys and tartans and fresh linen would have a positive beauty of their own ; a beauty that many an artist would love and make immortal. But being an artizan's wife, she must dress like at least a Countess,

or her own poor squalid idea of one, and that dog-collar of brittle pearls is the pathetic result.

Many a woman of wealth and education, who is quite good and quite modest and perhaps clever, will dress to look racy, American or Parisian, loud, startling, *bizarre*. She has virtues, but she is not proud of them, she is much prouder of being "up to date," and the nicest part of her character dies unexpressed. The stately simplicity of the Reynolds women, or the classic grace of some of those quaint clothes worn by the lovely and womanly Princess Charlotte, or even the original white-coifed Puritan dress, are all exquisite expression of the highest attributes of womanhood. They express in that order, sentiment and poetry, classic learning, and religion. Doubtless all the individual women who respectively wore them were not quite epitomes of these fair things, but at least the principle was there. The principle was to admire the virtues and the graces, and to set them forth in the allegory of that lovely attire. Now we admire many things and extol many things—but not the virtues.

We have lost the peasant, sartorially at any rate. The farmer's daughter has sham rings and ends of finery, and a nose ready to turn up at all who have not. We are losing even the typical coster lady, with

her brave feathers and long coat. No longer is the Sunday-school teacher a being set apart from her sisters, though this is, perhaps, good news, her particular digression being what it was ; we are losing beadles in gold lace ; and they say the Lord Mayor is slipping from us. Where are all the old landmarks going ? Shall we all look in the future exactly alike ? every trade, every phase, every station ? If so, there is one thing we may do. Let us try to hit upon a universal fashion which will at least express the best of us, not the basest. Let us be ourselves first of all, and after that a clothes-peg, not *vice versa*.

And if we must submit to be pigeon-holed for a pouff or labelled for a lappet by the now accepted, if unintelligent rule, so loved of our sisters, let us at least see that the pouff and the lappet express something rather more worth having than continental clownishness, or the inconsequent vagaries of a *modiste* who wants the fashions to change often enough, but who otherwise cares nothing for her victims and their fate.

Dickens paid women the compliment of implying that they were far and away more fascinating than their clothes. It will be a great day for England when they realize this themselves.

## CHAPTER IX.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF BEGGAR-LAND.

THERE are fashions in mendicants according to the demands of the philanthropic market. It used to be the rage to be a blind beggar with a little girl or a little boy or a little dog to lead you ; if you could manage this pose, all the charitable world delighted in you and supported you substantially. There are very few, if any, blind beggars about -our streets now.

Crossing-sweepers who had crossings *in* front of fashionable churches had a great run; and religious persons, with numbers of children remarkable for being all of one age, used to sing wonderfully weird hymns in quiet streets on Sunday afternoons. Those concerts are rarer than of old, happily. Then it became "the thing" to discard a certain whining tone and to be rough but honest. Poems were written about bluff persons who in the capacity of disabled coast-guards, or broken-down railway porters, told interminable yarns about exciting

occurrences, with a plentiful larding of honest bluff unconscious self-praise which was smug to a degree. These rough but talkative souls were very tiresome; they often turned an honest penny by the simple but unerring expedient of boring people to death, and so being enabled to put a heavy price on their departure.

The honest country-woman with her clean apron and plaid shawl, and her tapes and buttons for sale, has gone back to the daisied pastures (Mile End Road) from which she came; and far fewer grandmothers of deserving children seem to die and require immediate burial than used to be the case. There is less of a craze for funerals amongst all classes than there was even twenty years ago, hence, I suppose, the sudden longevity of the once moribund grandmothers. I knew one who died seven distinct times but who is not buried yet.

The coster with intensely refined feelings has had a tremendous time all to himself for many years, and, though he does not exist, he is rather lovable for the reason that he does not act himself quite so badly as his brethren: his taste is better. Mr. Chevalier has made him into a high art.

A sudden change has taken place. There is now a broken-down University man, who for some reason

not altogether clear wants to get immediately to Maidstone, but has not the amount of the fare. He calls upon you in the regions of such seasons as lunch or dinner that the contrast of your own affluence and his discomfort may be apparent. It is not easy to explain why it should always be Maidstone that he wants to get to, but it always is; one would feel obliged in conscience to write to the Corporation of that town and warn them of the influx of 'Varsity men in difficulties, if one had not invariably found that the "fare" tendered to the troubled graduate only seems able to carry him across to the next street, where he enters a shining palace which may be connected with hops, but certainly is not Maidstone.

There is also, of course, the unemployed working-man, whose very tools are said to be in pawn, and who only asks for the money to get them out again. They seem to be often detained in the very palace described as Maidstone. Oddly enough, he must meet the 'Varsity man there often.

There is one thing Dickens has to my mind taught us very plainly. And that is to look our beggars straight in the face; to see them as they are; to build no castles about their virtues; to see all their wretched faults—and yet to be good to them.

His beggars are drawn with an unerring hand ; they are not glossed over. Every hideous detail is apparent; and yet he loved them. So long as you look at the beggar-world with a critical eye dwelling on what it ought to be and is not, so long will anything like a kingdom of regeneration of the masses be delayed. You must admit the poor to be what they are, in all their blatant realism, before you can permanently or wisely assist them.

We are beginning to do that more and more every year: we must also try not to forget that with his far-seeing eye Dickens also possessed that charity without which all gifts are as nothing.

It is true that the poor are always with us, but it is also true that they are with us in different guises at different periods. The beggars that Dickens knew were perfectly aware that nothing would serve their purpose but cant. Consequently, like Silas Wegg, and Fagin, and the Charitable Grinder, and Nancy, dressing herself up with a clean apron, a market basket, and a door-key, they went in for that style entirely. For real grim squalid poverty was overlooked in the 'thirties and 'forties of that century, and the only poor to be tolerated were those who were undeniably picturesque, and even they were patronized. A spotlessly clean, rather

priggish little village girl, like Wordsworth's heroine in "We are Seven," was worthy of a few pence and a pat on the head ; and there was, to those crinolined ladies, something soothingly dramatic in going down the village street and bestowing tea and a tract on a bed-ridden old woman in a honeysuckle-covered cottage, an old woman who was proportionately grateful, of course, and practically without a fault, who would have curtsied deeply had she not owned the even superior virtue of being bed-ridden. There was a glorious little sense of being a Lady Bountiful, and a personage, in patronizing little charity girls at orphanages, who had already been scrubbed, and snubbed, and soaped, and starved, and admonished, almost out of existence; and whose shiny little red noses and raked-back hair, purple hands and clumsy shoes served as a foil to the crinolined benefactress, a foil happily provided by Providence ; at least, in the eyes of the lady.

The poor, deprived of such necessary scenic effects as red-roofed cottages, Scottish hill-sides, faithful sheep-dogs, honeysuckle, romantic grave-yards, and unimpeachable honesty, were anathema to these philanthropists. To some they did not even exist. A poor person who had no respect for his or her "betters," was non-existent to those grand old Tory

minds, or if existent only so for the purpose of being put out of that condition by the iron clutch of Newgate,

Those poor folk who happened to be born on someone's country estate and who could be generally bullied or condescended to as "tenantry," forming, indeed, a really baronial background to the stage on which their betters disported, could, of course, be tolerated. And to occasionally take them an egg in a basket, together with some missionary literature, was not unpleasant. But this did not touch the masses. In fact nothing did. So far as the towns were concerned, in streets and alleys worthy of Dante's "Inferno" they starved, and fought, and struggled, murdered, robbed, and brought forth disease in hideous herds, and there was practically no legislation except the very summary and final reform of Newgate to meet their case.

It was to get at the real, unpitied, unpicturesque poor that Dickens worked, and to get the great world to see what was going on amongst them, what they needed, and what good they were capable of—and he found a great capacity for that. In those days there was no other voice to tell of what went on in that grim underworld. One does not presume to explain the ways of God, but in this the

explanation seems to come very solemnly and in a great hush of itself—the child Dickens had to endure in his own little sensitive body and soul, cold, shame, hunger, despair, scorn, and bitter suffering; from it he rose and so wrote that henceforward no human heart worthy of the name could ever forget that there is an underworld of cold, shame, hunger, despair, scorn, and bitter suffering.

What he did for Beggar-land is incalculable now. He spent nights on the Embankment, as we know, talking to the houseless and homeless ; but his own early experience taught him more of this crawling, weary life which creeps on under the feet of London than any experiments could do. And he brought about by his writings so practical an interest in this dreary world that its whole outlook has changed. Heaven knows, Beggarism is a grim enough problem even now, but it is becoming a less hopeless problem by slow, very slow, degrees. There are at any rate fairer chances given to beggarhood than there ever were before, thanks to his wide philosophy: at least, to be born to mendicancy does not always lead to it.

Education, it goes without saying, is totally different to that in his day, and the possibilities opening up even to the very poor are greater in

every way. The clever child of a slum home may make himself into a great man if he works hard enough for it; and some of the workhouses are almost equivalent to rather plain hotels, where such may stay for a time till things blow over if difficulties come along. There are clubs for the men and women too, and hundreds of means of temporary relief if the wolf growls too loudly at the home door.

Our charities give to all or most in need, with very little question beyond such as are absolutely necessary to ward off the professional " shark "; and we do not now, thanks to Dickens, demand that the objects of our pity should fulfil the whole law of being picturesque. Positively many people, imitating Dickens, prefer them unpicturesque. The green-seamed, tawdry, hair-oiled unknowns, who creep about the City on goodness knows what business, may and do find Rowton Houses open to them for a trifle.

For the dun-coloured wastrels in parks and under railway bridges there are night shelters provided by the parish, as well as by various charitable bodies, amongst which those of the Church Army and the Salvation Army work untold wonders. Soup' kitchens and dinner-kitchens abound, and there are

not wanting pitying ladies who will work for and pay for these merciful institutions; and, whatever political economy may dictate, anyone with a spark of Dickens's feeling must rejoice that it is so, and that even professional beggarism can get a free meal and a free bed in its moments of despair.

Whatever measures may eventually be brought forward to cure this curse of mendicancy, inhuman indifference and cruelty on our part will not do it. Cruelty never accomplished anything lasting yet.

But there is another class of beggars, who are almost as dependent on chance charity as the absolute professionals, about whom I should like to say a word: people who by reason of owning a few "sticks," as they call them and paying a casual and capricious rent, have a sort of *status* in their own world, and consequently a remote but none the less strong social influence in the making and marring of their country.

Of these people it is becoming true that they are losing gradually the love of, and pride in, home: the sincere ambition for home that Dickens gloried in and preached so grandly. Of course, there are splendid exceptions. I know places where most of the chairs are tin biscuit canisters, varied by sofas of packing cases, whose walls are decorated with

grocers' calendars, where the love of home flourishes like a rose in a desert. There are hundreds of such pathetic philosophers' caves in beggar-land. But that spirit of "new" opinion about home, copied so tragically from "betters," is stalking abroad in slumland to-day, and the Society woman who entertains at a smart restaurant and the beggar's lady who gives "treats" to her friends at the nearest public-house, are inspired with a similar wish to avoid trouble and spurn the home. The "advanced" ideas also about marriage, a theme inseparable from home, of course, are finding the most ghastly imitation in these dark regions.

The idea is pitifully traceable to a greater world: also it means a kind of internal civic ruin. Once the masses grow cynical about home and marriage, you may give your country up as lost. It is now gradually dawning in the dim illogical mind of the slum wife that it is smart to have "differences" with your husband; that to go about among the neighbours saying that he is "that crool," brings with it a certain *cachet*, a distinction that no humdrum happy marriage could possibly confer. This state has not as yet acquired a classical or legal name: it is described as "Her mate's a bad 'un" by the neighbours, but that suffices.

It is really the same as our "marital misunderstanding" made so glorious in our novels, or the more legal sounding "incompatibility," if they could pronounce it, of temper. It is a good thing they cannot pronounce it: they would think the very word contained the magic of legal separation if they could. Long words are often a social safety.

In the old Victorian days, happy marriages, or the pose of happy marriages, were a fashion ; and the poor, copying blindly, went in for the thing too, often with much genuine feeling. Later there came a phase of another kind. The home secrets of the great were blazoned forth in Courts of Law—we are not out of the wood yet—and the very plays helped to make the hideous thing a fashion. It has now reached slumland in a bedraggled form. It is the chief occupant of slumland, that fashion ; it sometimes climbs high up again to its old haunts, and sits shaking its tawdry rags in a "smart" affair, as if to say, "I told you I had seen better days"; but it is getting more and more confined to police-courts, where, of course, it is still considered a "lydy." It trails itself about, and wags its ragged finery before the weary eyes of police-magistrates : ugly, horrible, loathsome, despicable. The papers, when they can, report its cheap followers as being "stylishly dressed"<sup>M</sup>; the plaintiff often

manages to hire herself a hat covered with feathers for the occasion, for the plaintiff is usually "she." Women love the *mode* and this attitude in slumland counts as that of a heroine. Relations and neighbours crowd round to hear and give testimony, and make a "day" of it. I do not know why there is always a widow in very brown crepe amongst them, talking hard, with a blazing eye ; but there always is.

To leave a poor artizan husband because you are "tired" of marriage is beginning to creep into this class. This is practical Ibsenism. To have "words" with him, and so leave him, or get him driven to leave you, is considered a gallant and dashing thing. To break up a married home from whatever reason, more or less idle or perhaps disgraceful, than this is almost a proud boast with many slum women. Tragic tales about the husband going out to "Sarf Arfrica," complaints of bullying (brought on by the wife's selfish idleness), a lazy pernicious system of "independence," a want of loyalty, a want of camaraderie, a passion for notoriety, possesses these wives. And to beg of the charitable on account of the despair caused by these differences at home is considered quite in form.

If it were not for the children, the poor, starved, half-clad children, to do nothing at all for disagreeing

married couples would be good social discipline. **But** the children come in for all the discomfort, all the pinching, most of the slaps, and a great portion of the disgrace, besides being very hungry, and quite unable to understand what it is all about. Later on they learn, of course, that it is fashion ; but sitting terrified and dirty in a corner, with chilblained hands and a hungry little body, watching the *rneUe*, one is apt to take it for inferno. You cannot live at a smart social pace without some discomfort.

Not long ago, a poor woman said to me, " O please 'm, that Mrs. Smith's husband has come out of prison. I saw him a-walking with her on Saturday night."

" Are you sure," I said, " that it was her husband ? He is not due yet."

" O yes," she replied " I'm a-quite sure. They was havm' words, so it must 'a been."

Nothing else, of course, could have proved the marital tie effectually. This was unanswerable.

There was a time when, though the poor quarrelled, they would not tell you so for all they were worth. Now many of them are proud of it. They hear that it is " smart"

There are noble societies doing **a grand work**

amongst these—a work Dickens would have loved : chief amongst these is the " Mothers' Union," a society to which all wives and mothers of every class may and do belong. This society is just a simple joining together of women who promise to uphold the honour of the home and the married state. Though only twelve years old, it numbers about 250,000 members. It is a quiet thing of which we hear too little, but it is the greatest public defence of the home in England that can well be imagined.

In Dickens's day, the poor were a menace to the rich by reason of their own despair, but they loved their own and were loyal to them, as even the best of animals are. The very wretches in the French Revolution loved their hopeless homes. What sort of an outlook is there for a country when the masses cease to be proud of their homes and families ? What hold will legislators have over workmen who regard wife and home with contempt? Or what future is there for those incipient citizens whose mothers with one consent look upon a happy marriage as a failure, and a police-court " affair " as a distinction ?

Burrowing, seething, crowding, struggling under London alone, there are millions of vague, dim, neutral-coloured things like human rats and earth-moles—things that we toss a coin to, and feel a pang

for, and forget all in one second. This is Beggar-land. Do not forget it. It is a power for good or evil; it can do much evil, but it can also when taught do more good. It is kindly and good-humoured in the main: its sins are many but its virtues more. Teach it to live straighter, to care for its children's welfare, to respect its household gods more, to imitate a nobler social fashion than that put before it by the reports of the Court presided over by Sir Francis Jeune, and Beggar-land will take its own share in making a manlier England.

## CHAPTER X.

## CONCLUSION.

THE great life draws to a close—an untimely one. That vast philosophy of which these few short chapters give but a vague, unfinished sketch, is to live for ever, but the man who lived it himself best of all passes away from this to a better, grander world.

To his adorers he is so great and good that the very vision of him blinds them strangely to the fact that he has detractors. Ask an ordinary Dickens-worshipper if he ever hears any of those vague detractions mooted. "Why, no," he will say; "all the world loves him." So it does, in a sense, but it is my own experience, though I too am an adorer, that a good many persons find distinct satisfaction in the daring accomplishment of "running him down," both as a writer and as a man.

The persons are chiefly from those ranks educated on local comic opera, whose religion is got mainly from the red-hot apocryphal novels now abounding, whose art is picture postcards, and whose music the

soul-stirring gramophone. In the land of the jerry-built, this little murmur sometimes raises its thin voice, usually from a very young throat decorated with something highly original in the way of collars or ties. That man or woman of the world under twenty years who has learnt all its wisdom from the suburban stage, will naturally see little of its own experiences reflected in such a writer's works. But it is interesting to think how very charmingly he would have laughed, and teased, and tormented them all out of it, could he be here amongst them again, and how quickly would have faded away the grandiloquent ideas under the warm fire of that affectionate fun. And how they would have loved him !

But there is another whisper we sometimes hear, vague inconsequent, mean beyond words, which is a kind of attack on the man himself—the remains of the wretchedest, squalidest sneer that the poor bosoms of jealous rivals ever cherished.

It is so intangible as to even seem to doubt its own existence when put forth by the morbid or idle collectors of such things: like a white, slimy newt reared underground in some musty cellar crawling into the light of the great wholesome sun will gleam lividly opaque, nebulous, indistinct, a doubting shadow of its own reality.

Some of the generation who remember, who were contemporary with Dickens, have not yet passed away, and it stands to reason that this small, shuddering, underground thing may yet cling in among the cobwebs of one or two half-remembered personal jealousies. Men and women will do anything or say anything in the name of jealousy. It is the source of the vilest things, the most sordid actions, of our experience. Doubtless it was the mother of this thing.

One would not from sheer disgust pick up and caress that white newt under a beer-cask, consequently this thing cannot be expounded, for similar reasons. Suffice it to say that those who are a little older than the critics of his works, will recollect having heard at one time or another a half-audible mutter at his private life, his domestic difficulties, from such of an elder generation who will pick holes where they dare or can, or think they can. It would be ridiculous for any one to aspire to defend a man so absolutely blameless. But the bare possibility of the thing calls up a picture of the accused and accusers, and against these, in their smug impertinence, their gross effrontery, there rises up before my eyes a vision of a kindly-faced man worn thin with countless cares, cares that he knew from childhood to his comparatively early

grave, in one gray unending succession ; a man who impoverished himself for his people, who worked hotly, feverishly, and many now say fatally, in the cause of those who were dear to him ; a man who laughed with children, cheered his friends and joked, humoured, petted, and encouraged all who came within his kindly circle. When I think of those long evening romps on the sands at Broadstairs when, as one friend says of him, he was glad of the dusk, because it hid his too well-known face from the crowd, and grew wilder and wilder in his fun with the boys and girls because at last he could get away from a critical world ; when I think of his grey head growing greyer, his bright eyes growing sadder, his beautiful brilliant face more lined and more thin, in his ever-increasing efforts to serve those who depended on him, his sudden untimely death—I wonder again that there is left a human creature vulgar enough to point the finger at what it is pleased to call his " faults."

As an instance of the kind of thin mist of jealousy hanging like a miasma round the memory of a **man** not yet far enough in the past to escape it, there is an old article in *The Englishwomen's Domestic Magazine* of the 'seventies, which is the most determined and truly feminine attempt at a slight, and also **the** oddest piece of pure self-revelation on the part of **the** writer, that I have ever seen.

The lady's chief causes for complaint seem to be (1) that the great man would not lift her to artistic fame by sitting to her untried brush for his portrait, at a time when he was worried, overworked, and in ill-health ; (2) that he dressed very badly and was too fond of drab nether garments and spreading shirt-fronts; (3) that he paid as much playful fatherly attention to a girl friend of hers who had red hair as he did to her, who, she informs us herself, had golden; lastly, that he would not give a subscription to her pet charity. From these facts she deduces the conclusion that he was not a great writer. Some women are brilliant humorists without ever knowing it. *This* one might have sat for Fanny Squeers.

Most people know the conclusion of the life, begun so sadly and spent so willingly for others: the rapid succession of brilliant works, some of them written at high pressure and under difficulties ; the changes of home; the long visits to the seaside, with the children he loved so perfectly ; his foreign travels ; his amateur theatricals ; his glowing letters ; and later, his readings of his own works in England and America.

His life was the most vivacious, the most crowded, one can imagine; he seemed in his later years to give himself no rest, and he died, surely, of a heart too large to bear the burdens it gave itself. His days, so crammed full of practical editing, planning, seeing

people, writing against time, answering innumerable letters, joining in those celebrated theatricals, helping his friends, and, above all this, joking and laughing, were often concluded by a night spent in the open air after only two hours' rest, tramping in the country studying the weird nocturnal frequenters of wood and lane; or pacing the Thames Embankment, watching the blackest of human depths lying prostrate under the cold, far stars. No one knows his thoughts during these solemn midnight rambles; it was not his habit to analyze himself for the delectation of the Press and its readers. But he looked at those nameless huddled things on the Embankment benches with something more than the pity of the philanthropist, however earnest; with something akin to the divine outlook, an emotion so mysterious, so ageless, so tender, so stern, that he himself must have loomed out of the shadows a dark dim terror, charged with super-human pity and the solemn menace of centuries. He himself, who had been homeless, ragged, starved, forgotten on that very Embankment; who perhaps looked again at the place of Old Hungerford Fish Market, and saw the little, wide-eyed, grey-faced wraith of himself toiling there in the far-off days of his awful boyhood.

It is a picture no artist has yet painted for us, that marvellous simple figure making its midnight way among the fallen forms of dark fearful things—things lying under the shadow of the great fane where the laws that make them possible are made, under the cold eternal moon, hard by the colder river so many such have embraced.

The man was always a mystery even to his nearest and dearest; the very fact that he did not pose as one, perhaps only deepened the sense of this truth. Evening after evening romping with the children like a good fairy, or taking part in gay theatricals with that heart-whole enthusiasm of which he was so pre-eminently capable, and which would, so many say, have made him a famous actor had he never written a novel—and yet such nights! He was like two men—the glad merry hearth brownie, and the dark seer, eternally alone, brooding over the mystery of suffering humanity,

Then came those famous readings in America, meetings for which thousands struggled to get a place, meetings that meant boundless fame and much remuneration, but the wreck of a frame too early tried with deep suffering. Those readings were the **talk** of the world.

Then his health began to be discussed. Then

they said, "Mr. Dickens" was not so strong as formerly,—was "breaking up." One pitiful wretch remarked that his temper was grown "odd," with some small triumph doubtless, some faint wish that the god could be so pulled off his pedestal, or at least twisted a little askew. Such creatures do crawl round altar steps, even now, hoping vaguely for some mishap.

Then one day flashed the news all over the world, Mr. Dickens was dead. People were stunned. It was not only the suddenness of it, his comparative youth, his seemingly untiring vigour—but Dickens was deathless: Dickens could not die. What did it mean? Men and women repeated it with dry lips, trying to bring the awful desolating sense of it home to their stunned hearts. Dickens was dead.

Some even doubted its authenticity. Then the truth began to crawl home, and something sounded like a strange voice from a far country, saying, "The body that held that essence of love, of life, of encouragement, that essence that you too have imbibed, is dead. The case that contained It is worn out, has failed. *It* can never die."

For the first time the world realized that Dickens was human, or partly so. It came as a shock that

set it shuddering. That spirit which had sung at their hearths, had laughed into their drearinesses, had transformed their dull tragedies, and loosened their sluggish hearts—that had passed away suddenly, through the fearful materialism of the tomb, through the common conditions of dead matter, to a vast beyond. It had flown away; it was gone; it had not said "good-bye."

In the hideous silence which followed, they stared at one another with dumb, blanched faces. Then, when the sobbing women began to be heard, and perforce work and life and things had to go on again with them as before, one by one they lifted up their heads to a new suggestion whispered by angels. He had not said "good-bye" because he had not really gone; he never could go. Down miserable alley, in dreary street, in common sight, in vulgar phrase, he was still living. Everything of which he wrote, at which he laughed, breathed of him. People say now as often as ever of a neighbourhood, or a room, "How Dickens it looks," or "Do not alter your house, it is so Dickens." I have heard over and over again, "He is such a dear old fellow—he is so Dickens." Things need no further explanation than this. It conveys a definition unmatched by the most careful description. And perhaps its most

wonderful feature is its insidious spirit of kindness—you cannot be angry with anyone you call "so Dickens." I have never known a single instance of such a possibility. It seems as if the very association breathed good-humour, and toleration, and peace. It is a sort of magic wand that passes us all suddenly into a great world of kindness. The miseries, the naughtinesses of the dirty street *gamin*, which would get a kick in the ordinary course, get a sudden sense of pitying good-fellowship from him to whose lips that undying quotation comes readily. There is no other writer in the world of whom such a vast freemasonry as this has been born. It is unique, and it is one of the most sublime things that our dark and puzzling existence has ever known.

It is the wide, living expounding of love; it is something which has made possible the last vivid words the lips of Christ added to the Decalogue, "And thy neighbour as thyself."

**THE END.**

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