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CHARLES DICKENS THE PICKWICK PAPERS



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THE POSTHUMOUS PAPERS OF
THE PICKWICK CLUB

CHARLES DICKENS

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POSTHUMOUS PAPERS

OF THE

PICKWICK CLUB

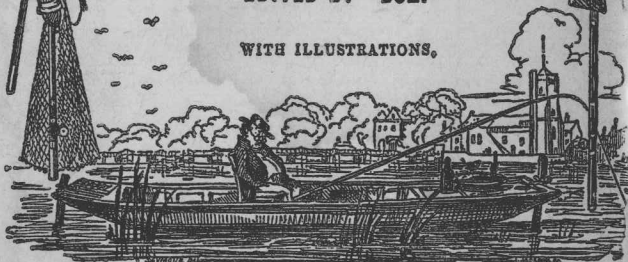
CONTAINING A FAITHFUL RECORD OF THE
PERAMBULATIONS, PERILS, TRAVELS, ADVENTURES

AND

Sporting Transactions
OF THE CORRESPONDING MEMBERS.

EDITED BY "BOZ."

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS.



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CHARLES DICKENS
The Posthumous Papers of
THE PICKWICK CLUB

Edited with an introduction by
Robert L. Patten
and original illustrations by
Robert Seymour, Robert W. Buss, and
Hablot K. Browne ('Phiz')

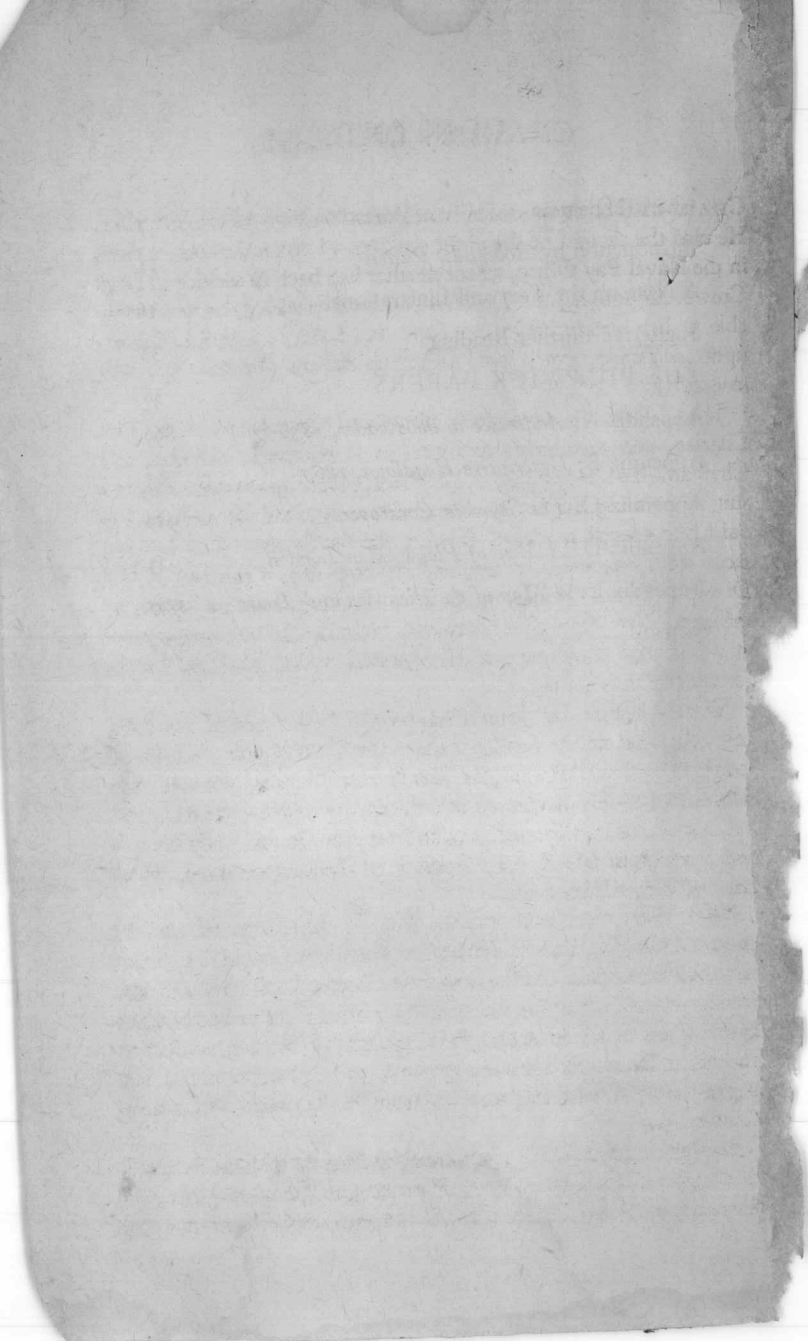
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CHARLES DICKENS

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Portsmouth on 7 February 1812. He was the second of the eight children of John Dickens, a clerk in the Naval Pay Office, whose mother had been in service to Lord Crewe. Although John Dickens was hard-working, he was rarely able to live within his income, and this brought a series of crises upon his family, which lived under the shadow of menacing social insecurity.

John Dickens's work took him from place to place, so that Charles spent his early childhood in Portsmouth, London, and Chatham. He was happiest at Chatham, where he attended a school run by a young Baptist minister, who recognized his abilities and paid him special attention. In 1823 the family moved to London faced with financial disaster, and, to help out, a relative of Mrs Dickens offered Charles work in a blacking business which he managed. Two days after his twelfth birthday the boy began work at a blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs, labelling bottles for six shillings a week.

Shortly before this John Dickens had been arrested for debt, and soon the whole family, except for Charles who was found lodgings, joined him in the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison. The double blow – his menial job and the family shame – gave Charles a shock which transformed him. In later years he told only his wife and his closest friend, John Forster, of these experiences, which haunted him till his death.

After three months in prison, John Dickens was released by process of having himself declared an Insolvent Debtor, but it was not until weeks later that he withdrew Charles from work and sent him to school, where he did well. At fifteen, Charles began work in the office of a firm of Gray's Inn attorneys. Sensing a vocation elsewhere, he taught himself shorthand, and eighteen months later began to work as a freelance reporter in the court of Doctors' Commons.

In 1829 or 1830 he fell passionately in love with Maria Beadnell, the daughter of a banker. Their affair staggered fruitlessly on until the summer of 1833. Meanwhile, he began to report parliamentary

debates, and won himself a high reputation for speed and accuracy. His first *Sketches by Boz* appeared in magazines soon after he was twenty-one. In 1834 he joined the reporting staff of the *Morning Chronicle*. A well-received volume of his *Sketches* appeared on his twenty-fourth birthday.

His growing reputation secured him a commission from the publishers, Chapman and Hall, to provide the text to appear in monthly instalments beside sporting plates by a popular artist, Seymour. He 'thought of Mr Pickwick'. Two days after the first number appeared he married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of a fellow-journalist, on the prospect. Although early sales were unexceptional, *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) soon became a publishing phenomenon, and Dickens's characters the centre of a popular cult. Part of the secret was the method of cheap serial publication, which Dickens used for all his subsequent novels (some, in fact, being serialized in weekly magazines edited by himself), and which was copied by other writers.

While *Pickwick* was still running, Dickens began *Oliver Twist* (1837). *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9) provided him with a third success, and sales of *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-41) reached 100,000. After finishing *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), Dickens set off with his wife for the United States. He went full of enthusiasm for the young republic, but returned heartily disillusioned, in spite of a triumphant reception. His experiences are recorded in *American Notes* (1842).

His first setback came when *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4) did not repeat the extraordinary success of its predecessors, though he promptly inaugurated his triumphant series of *Christmas Books* with *A Christmas Carol* (1843). He now travelled abroad, first to Italy (1844-5) and then to Switzerland and Paris (1846). During a brief interlude in England he projected, not another novel but a paper, the *Daily News*. This first appeared in January 1846, but Dickens resigned after only seventeen days as editor.

His next novel, *Dombey and Son* (1846-8), was more wholly serious and more carefully planned than his early work. In *David Copperfield* (1849-50) he explored his own childhood and youth, thinly disguised. In the 1850s he increased his already intense interest in public affairs. He founded *Household Words*, a weekly

magazine which combined entertainment with social purpose; it was succeeded in 1859 by *All the Year Round*, which sold as many as 300,000 copies. *Bleak House* (1852-3) and *Hard Times* (1854) have strong social themes, and *Little Dorrit* (1855-7) continues Dickens's bitter public denunciation of the whole framework of government and administration which had mismanaged the Crimean War.

In 1858 he separated from his wife. Although Kate, a shadowy slow person, had given him ten children, she had never suited his exuberant temperament very well. He befriended a young actress, Ellen Ternan, who may have become his mistress. He was now living mainly in Kent, at Gad's Hill, near his boyhood home of Chatham. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-61), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) completed his life's main work of fourteen major novels. By the mid-1860s his health was failing, partly under the strain of his successful but exhausting public readings from his own work, which had begun in 1858. An immensely profitable but physically shattering series of readings in America (1867-8) speeded his decline, and he collapsed during a 'farewell' series in England. His last novel, *Edwin Drood* (1870), was never completed; he suffered a stroke after a full day's work at Gad's Hill on 8 June 1870 and died the following day. Lamentation was demonstrative and universal, and he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

Dickens's extreme energy was not exhausted by his unique success as a novelist. His weekly journalism made heavy demands on his time after 1850, and he constantly turned to the stage; first, in many amateur theatricals, given privately or for charity, where he produced and took leading roles with great brilliance; later, in his public readings. His concern with social reform in his novels and journalism was matched by an active personal interest in several charitable projects.

Furthermore, as Lionel Trilling puts it, 'the mere record of his conviviality is exhausting'. His typical relaxation was a long walk at great speed, and he was dedicated to any and every sort of game or jollification. In the early days of his success, observers were sometimes displeased by his flamboyant dress and a hint of vulgarity in his manners, but he had powerful, magnetizing eyes and

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overwhelming charm. Beneath his high spirits, friends could detect a permanent emotional insecurity and restlessness, which flavours the tragi-comic world of his novels.

Two biographies stand out among many: John Forster's *Life* (1872, many times reprinted); and Edgar Johnson's *Charles Dickens, His Tragedy and Triumph* (Gollancz, 1953), which embodies material neglected or suppressed by Forster. Readers interested in Dickens's methods as a novelist will be enlightened by John Butt's and Kathleen Tillotson's *Dickens at Work* (Methuen, 1957). There are innumerable specialized studies of his work, life, and views. A magazine exclusively devoted to this subject, *The Dickensian*, is published three times a year by the Dickens Fellowship.

A.C.

INTRODUCTION

THOUGH *The Pickwick Papers* catapulted an obscure journalist and Parliamentary reporter, writing under the pseudonym of 'Boz', to pre-eminence among all the literary figures of England, the book originated in the minds of others, and, but for a series of mis-adventures, might never have been written by Dickens at all. In November of 1835 a popular but financially embarrassed illustrator and political caricaturist, Robert Seymour, approached the young bookselling and publishing firm of Chapman and Hall about a new project he had conceived. He showed them some sketches for a 'Nimrod Club' of Cockney sportsmen, whom he had observed in his walks through rural London suburbs, who had been made popular by Robert Smith Surtees's portly grocer Mr Jorrocks riding to hounds and by John Poole's series of 'A Cockney's Rural Sports', and whom he had previously depicted in such works as Richard Penn's *Maxims and Hints for an Angler*. Seymour had already himself spent some time seeking out a writer to produce letterpress to accompany and lead up to the illustrations, to be issued monthly on the model of Pierce Egan's *Life in London*, but had met with no success. Since Edward Chapman was about to issue a Christmas book called *The Squib Annual of Poetry, Politics, and Personalities* for which Seymour had supplied the plates, the artist consulted with his publisher about finding someone to do the journeyman hack-writing for the subjects he would draw. Liking the idea, Chapman agreed to cooperate; several literary figures were approached; but the job was comparatively menial, and no one accepted.

Early in the new year, Seymour pestered Chapman for a decision; Chapman broached the name of Charles Dickens, who was about to publish two volumes of *Sketches by Boz*, and was already under contract to him to provide a contribution to the firm's monthly *Library of Fiction* for the April issue. Seymour agreed to give a chance to the young writer, employed full-time as a newspaper reporter and preparing an operetta in his spare moments, so on Wednesday 10 February 1836, three days after Dickens's twenty-fourth birthday, Chapman dispatched his 'brisk, bird-like' partner,

William Hall, to Dickens's modest chambers at the top of a dark staircase in Furnival's Inn. Upon entering, Hall observed a man whose smooth face and luxuriant brown hair emphasized his youthfulness. Nonetheless, Dickens's beaming eyes, his humorous and cheerful demeanour, and his eager, restless, decisive manner encouraged Hall. For his part, Dickens felt the moment was attended by 'a good omen', for he instantly recognized that Hall was the very man who, over two years before, had sold him the copy of the *Monthly Magazine* containing his first published story.

Thus when Dickens was invited to join the enterprise several crucial decisions had already been made: subject, relation of author to illustrator, publisher, and format. To the firm of Chapman and Hall Dickens had no objection, and, though Ainsworth, Bulwer, and others told him serials were 'a low, cheap form of publication', chiefly employed for religious tracts, racy, sometimes vulgar burlesques of the *demi-monde*, and reprints of standard, though to Dickens, 'interminable novels . . . which used . . . to be carried about the country by pedlars', he agreed to monthly publication. But Dickens argued forcefully against the proposed subject, and, by implication, against being a subordinate collaborator, as he recalled in 1847 when explaining *Pickwick's* origin in the Preface to the 'Cheap Edition':

I objected, on consideration, that although born and partly bred in the country I was no great sportsman, except in regard of all kinds of locomotion; that the idea was not novel, and had been already much used; that it would be infinitely better for the plates to arise naturally out of the text; and that I should like to take my own way, with a freer range of English scenes and people, and was afraid I should ultimately do so in any case, whatever course I might prescribe to myself at starting.

Hall agreed to discuss the counter-proposals with his partner, while Dickens, already sure he had won the day and evidently unclear about Seymour's role, wrote to his fiancée Catherine Hogarth announcing that he had received 'an offer of £14 a month to write and edit a new publication they contemplate, entirely by myself; to be published monthly and each number to contain four wood cuts. I am to make my estimate and calculation, and to give them a decisive answer on Friday Morning. The work will be no joke, but the emolument is too tempting to resist.'

INTRODUCTION

On Friday Dickens turned in his story for the *Library of Fiction*, 'The Tuggs's at Ramsgate', at the publishers' bay-windowed shop at 186 Strand, gave them his decisive affirmative answer, and requested that they send him a written statement of their terms. This they promptly did, specifying that Dickens would be paid 'nine guineas per sheet of 16 pages demy 8vo containing about 500 [printed] words in a page – of which we should require one sheet and [a] half every month' – about 12,000 words every thirty days, with the first two months' writing completed by 15 March. As to subject, Seymour's views still prevailed; the book was to be 'illustrative of manners and life in the Country'.

After mulling over the terms through the weekend, Dickens on Monday 16 February expressed his 'entire concurrence', requesting only an abatement in the length of time prior to publication before copy need be delivered. He promised to finish a Prospectus by noon on Thursday, having both his regular Parliamentary stint and a move to larger quarters at No. 15 Furnival's Inn, in anticipation of his forthcoming marriage, to accomplish in the interim.

Meanwhile, Seymour learned that the project was definitely on, and set to work on a cover design, emphasizing his Cockney sporting conception with a frame of rods, creels, gun, and quiver, enclosing a dapperly dressed hunter shooting at an unconcerned bird above, while below a fat fisherman, somnolent after consuming half a meat pie and an evidently generous portion of spirits from a commodious bottle, dozes blissfully unaware that his line has hooked a fish, and his punt drifted into the marshes. By Thursday Dickens had written a Prospectus, presumably similar to the elaborate advertisement for Number I,* that tactfully, though not altogether convincingly, promises both sporting sketches and a freer range of English subjects. The same division is apparent in the letterpress for the wrapper, which alludes to 'PERAMBULATIONS, PERILS, TRAVELS, ADVENTURES' and, in Gothic black letter, 'Sporting Transactions'.

Dickens faced a major task: to write enough matter to fill forty-eight closely printed pages of text, around 200 pages of manuscript, within six weeks, while preparing for his marriage in early April, working on the operetta, finishing up some other small commissions, and taking his daily share of Parliamentary reporting, at a

* See Appendix A.

time when, unfortunately, the Commons was sitting in debates on the Irish Corporations Bill that extended far into the night. We cannot be sure which, if any, of Seymour's sketches he had before him, though the artist's widow asserts that seven drawings had already been transferred to steels. Closest to Seymour's original conception are the first plate, of Mr Pickwick addressing the Club, with hunting, fishing, and billiard equipment on the floor; the third plate, of the sagacious dog; and the seventh, of Mr Winkle soothing the refractory steed. The incidents Dickens devised to lead up to these subjects may therefore show the strongest indebtedness to the 'Nimrod Club' proposal; and Winkle was, by Dickens's own admission, 'put in . . . expressly for the use of MR SEYMOUR'. On certain of the other plates, as Dickens got more into the writing, it became necessary to ask for alterations in Seymour's design. The artist had originally drawn a thin Pickwick, but Edward Chapman, noting that 'good humour and flesh had always gone together since the days of Falstaff', suggested instead a figure modelled on a friend, a fat, genial beau from Richmond addicted to drab tights and black gaiters. Seymour knew this type equally well, having drawn him on several occasions, and thus the immortal Pickwick was born. On the design for the fourth plate, Dr Slammer defying Jingle, Dickens sketched an alteration in the elevation and gesture of the irascible Doctor's arm. To be dictated to on the effectiveness of his humorous drawing was exceedingly galling to Seymour, whose caricatures for *Figaro in London*, a forerunner of *Punch*, had been the talk of the town. But for that unlucky artist nothing was going right; the publisher of *Figaro* had reneged on his debts, and *Pickwick* was the best chance of recouping his fortune, so Seymour laboured on.

Meanwhile, Dickens was much harassed by the quantity of copy he had to turn out; his 'estimate and calculation' had been overly optimistic. Repeatedly he had to cancel engagements with Catherine, explaining, 'The sheets are a weary length - I had no idea there was so much in them.' By mid March, he was 'tired and worn out . . . mind and body'. But late in the month he completed all 24,000 words of the first two numbers, received his £29 pay, and proceeded with the marriage and honeymoon, leaving his publishers to cope with the problem of an awkward amount of overmatter to Chapter 2 of Number I, which necessitated adding

another leaf to *Pickwick*, making 26 pages instead of the contracted 22.

Despite Mrs Seymour's later claims, *Pickwick* was not an overnight success. Of the early numbers, only fifty copies each were taken by provincial booksellers; the printing order for Number II was cut in half to a wholly uneconomic 500, which, even if all copies were sold, would yield, retail, less than the cost of text and plates. On his return to London from his honeymoon at Chalk, Dickens invited Seymour, Chapman, and Hall 'to take a glass of grog' with him, Catherine, and his brother Frederick in Furnival's Inn, the first and only time that he met Seymour in person. In his letter of invitation to the artist, Dickens also requested that Seymour redraw the design for 'The Stroller's Tale' (Number II), which his literary friends assured him 'will create considerable sensation'. Dickens explained that Seymour's design, though admirable as to the furniture, had not enough 'sympathy and solicitude' in it. Seymour's sense of grievance took a quantum leap. The subject, a melancholy and horrifying 'introduced story' about a dying clown's *delirium tremens*, while exactly suited to Cruikshank, who had illustrated the *Sketches*, bore no relation to Seymour's rapidly disappearing idea of a 'Nimrod Club'. The harried artist, eternally sensitive, nearly bankrupt, only halfway through etching the four designs for the May number, and facing the twin cul-de-sacs of the loss of any control over his plates and the absolute financial necessity, nonetheless, of continuing the project, dutifully attended the Sunday evening party, and in the next two days worked to redraw and etch the third of his four subjects for Number II. Having finished the hateful job, in the early hours of April he walked out into the summerhouse of his Islington garden, wrote a farewell to his 'Best and dearest of wives' blaming only his 'own weakness and infirmity', and then shot himself through the heart.

In the Strand and Furnival's Inn there was consternation. Number II would contain only three plates; the powerful attraction of Seymour's name was lost; sales were inadequate; and though the reviews were mildly favourable, there was little incentive to continue. At this point Dickens took charge. He recommended increasing the amount of monthly letterpress from twenty to thirty-two pages and decreasing the number of plates from four to three. He urged the publishers to seek out another artist; and

he requested that his own payment be *increased* to ten guineas per sheet, or twenty guineas for the two sheets per month. These daring proposals had two major consequences. First, the illustrator hereafter was hired by Dickens and the publishers, to work according to their instructions and on their sufferance. Indeed, R. W. Buss, selected to do the plates for Part III because he had just illustrated another sketch of Dickens's for the third number of the *Library of Fiction*, displeased the others because he could not etch his designs successfully, and was summarily fired. Later Dickens had Buss's plates ('The Arbour Scene' and 'The Cricket Match') replaced with substitutes produced by the third, and final artist, 'Phiz'. Thereafter the author dictated all subjects and reviewed all designs, withholding approval until every detail satisfied him. Second, whereas the first two numbers required that Dickens come up with a new subject on an average of every six pages, forcing him to an episodic conjunction of humorous incidents, now, with thirty-two pages of letterpress to two illustrations, he had nearly three times as much room to develop his situations. Ironically, then, the 'improvable plan' caused by Seymour's death and announced on 27 April¹⁸³⁷ resulted in transforming *Pickwick* from another example of illustrated comic sporting sketches to a novel, whose pace and style were controlled by the author, not the illustrator. When *Pickwick* became a success, the monthly-number format and the relation between text and illustrations became a model, not only for Dickens, but also for other Victorian authors, including Thackeray, Ainsworth, and Trollope. The misfortunes associated with *Pickwick's* beginning determined the shape of much major Victorian fiction between 1837 and 1870.

After Buss was fired, a search began for his replacement. In June evening two months after his own first piece was published, Thackeray, on his uppers after the failure of the Calcutta agency house in which his remaining fortune had been invested, was desperate for any work at all, dined out to celebrate – mistaken, as he soon learned – his appointment as *Pickwick's* third illustrator. Ironically, it was his dinner companion, Hablot Knight Browne, who eventually proved to be the successful candidate. Browne, yet twenty-one, had been apprenticed to a prominent London engraving firm, had won awards for his comic engravings.

* See Appendix A.