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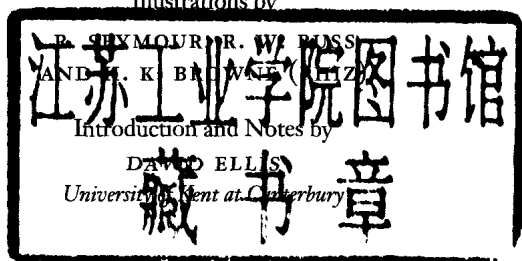
CHARLES DICKENS



THE PICKWICK PAPERS

Charles Dickens

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GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

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INTRODUCTION

When he began writing *The Pickwick Papers* in 1836, Dickens was only twenty-four. There is an exhilaration in turning its pages which comes from being witness to a great comic writer's self-discovery, his growing awareness of the remarkable range of his talent. Just how wide that range is begins to be evident to the reader with Mr Tupman's romantic declaration to Miss Wardle in Dingley Dell. Seated together in an arbour – 'one of those sweet retreats which humane men erect for the accommodation of spiders' – the passion of Mr Tupman's address makes Miss Wardle tremble to such an extent that the pebbles which have accidentally found their way into the watering-can she is still holding, shake 'like an infant's rattle'. They progress to kissing without at first realising they are not alone – '“Mr Tupman, we are observed! – we are discovered!”'; but the expression of utter vacancy on the fat boy's face make it difficult to know whether he has understood what he has seen. As this portly individual trails the loving couple back to the

house however, there is the suspicion of 'an imperfectly suppressed chuckle' coming from behind, although Mr Tupman has to conclude, as he turns sharply round, 'No; it could not have been the fat boy; there was not a gleam of mirth, or anything but feeding in his whole visage.'

Other comic writers might reasonably have felt like resting on their laurels after this well-contrived incident but it is almost immediately succeeded by the arrival of Mr Tupman's fellow Pickwickians, and their host Mr Wardle, hopelessly drunk. Alcohol has different effects on different people so that Mr Winkle, 'supporting himself by the eight-day clock', feebly invokes destruction upon anyone willing to suggest the propriety of his going to bed, while Mr Wardle, who *is* willing to retire, takes 'an affectionate leave of the whole family, as if he was ordered for immediate execution'. What makes one marvel at the richness of Dickens's invention in these scenes is that this second phase of an extended comic sequence also involves the inimitable Mr Jingle, and that it is his attempt to steal Miss Wardle from under Tupman's nose, with the consequent pursuit of the eloping couple by her brother and Mr Pickwick, which will lead to the introduction of Sam Weller. There is a superabundance of different ways of being funny in these events and characters which takes the breath away.

Working in association with Dickens's comic talent is an effortless descriptive power. Those who have crossed it recently, and who therefore know how much the view has changed, are likely to read with as much pain as pleasure the lyrical account in the fifth chapter of Mr Pickwick 'contemplating nature' as he leans over the balustrade of Rochester Bridge; but although Dickens can evoke landscape very successfully when it suits him, he is even more at home among the buildings and streets of London. It is in 'the Borough' that Sam Weller is first discovered and detailed attention to the topography of London will always be one of his creator's great strengths. The grimmest back-alleys and the most dilapidated structures are made magical by his loving eye. A powerful visual imagination is also apparent in the descriptions of the various characters as they appear. These contain so many telling details of dress and deportment, such sharp awareness of individualising mannerisms, that it is no surprise to find the famous illustrations to the first edition, principally by Hablot Knight Browne (or 'Phiz', as he was known), in such harmonious accord with its text.¹

The connection between Dickens's descriptive abilities and humour

1 For a detailed account of these illustrations see the Clarendon Press edition of the novel edited by James Kinsley (Oxford, 1986).

may not always seem strictly necessary or obvious but in *The Pickwick Papers* they aid and abet his theatrical sense, a genius for situation comedy. The fat boy's discovery of Tupman and Miss Wardle will be followed by many other scenes of a similar nature, not least the moment when Mrs Bardell conveniently faints into Mr Pickwick's arms just as his friends enter, or Mr Pickwick find himself in the wrong bedroom as its female occupant prepares to go to bed. These are episodes which could be transferred to the stage with very little modification (the last as 'bedroom farce'), but if they work so well it is partly because Dickens can make us see their participants so clearly. 'It is so graphic,' wrote Mary Russell Mitford in a famous letter to a friend while *The Pickwick Papers* was still appearing in monthly instalments, 'so individual, and so true, that you could curtsy to all the people as you met them in the streets.'²

The enormous popular success *The Pickwick Papers* had achieved towards the end of its nineteen-month run is a consequence of Dickens's ear as well as of his eye. The work begins with an exercise in the mock-heroic and the parodies which the first chapter contains, of scientific discourse and parliamentary debate, suggest how easy he will later find it both to inhabit a particular idiom and develop aspects of that idiom in ways which make it sound ludicrous. The Eatanswill episodes, for example, contain a hilarious send-up of political rhetoric and a satire on literary pretension in the provinces which has as its centre-piece Mrs Leo Hunter's unforgettable 'Ode to an Expiring Frog' – dying 'on a log' and hunted 'with a dog' ('"Finely expressed", said Mr Pickwick'). The acuteness of ear which permits Dickens to make fun of so many different varieties of expression, however, is also what allows him to furnish his more important characters with such strikingly distinctive ways of speaking. Although he sometimes equals them, Mr Jingle never perhaps surpasses the famous felicities of his first introduction, as instanced, for example, in his account of the dangers tall mothers of five face when they travel on coaches through low archways: 'sandwich in her hand – no mouth to put it in – head of a family off – shocking, shocking!'; but Sam Weller's first appearance gives only a faint impression of how richly he will be developed. "This is a curious old house of yours," says the lawyer who accompanies Pickwick and Wardle on their search for the fugitive Jingle and Miss Wardle as he looks round at the old inn where Sam works. "If you'd sent word you was a-coming, we'd ha' had it repaired," replied the imperturbable Sam.' Imperturbability is certainly one of Sam's qualities, but this first

exchange does not sufficiently suggest how, in subsequent episodes, he will rise dolphin-like above any social environment in which he happens to find himself. That is partly a consequence of a combination of fearlessness and high intelligence conveyed to the reader largely by Sam's readiness of expression, his never being lost for a word. There is a linguistic distinction here that goes with his skill as a narrator of tall stories or his trademark fondness for extended comic comparisons. The further importance of Sam is that through him we are introduced to his father, Tony, and are thus able to watch in action one of the most successful duos in the history of comedy. It would be comforting to think that, since certain routines achieve classic status, the popular comic partnerships of our day would willingly acknowledge a debt to the scene in Chapter xxxiii of this book in which Sam and his father compose a valentine.

All the literary talents Dickens has would be useless without his sense of humour: his ability to find comedy wherever he looks, although, like the eighteenth-century comic novelists he admired – Fielding, for example, or more especially Smollett – he is also perfectly happy to find it where it has so often been found before, in traditional comic stereotypes. Miss Wardle is 'the spinster aunt' and her involvement with Tupman a comedy of ageing lovers. No more politically correct than the fun he has at the expense of her spinsterhood are Tony Weller's expressions of comic alarm at designing 'widders' – to hear him talk one would think that all females over forty were on the prowl and no widow had ever said to herself that once was certainly enough. But comedy of this kind is never fair, dealing as it does with the supposed characteristics of a class rather than particular cases and not being interested in qualifications. It requires the suspension of certain aspects of the critically enquiring intelligence or rather, when it is most successful, effortlessly brings that suspension about. Fat is funny and the fatness of Mr Wardle's boy attendant is specifically attributed to over-eating; yet some of us put on weight more easily than others and there is an impressive medical term for that rare but distressing medical condition in which people find they are unable to keep awake. It would nevertheless show a perverse resistance to Dickens's comic sense to think of this character, not as the fat boy who continually nods off, but as an obese narcoleptic in urgent need of hospital treatment.

The way comedy functions to inhibit the mind from contemplating the serious aspects of a subject can be made clear from Dickens's dealings with drink. No one who strolls in the centre of almost any English town at eleven o'clock on a Saturday night, or travels in a train to a football match, will be inclined to think there is anything funny

about drunkenness. But in the main body of *The Pickwick Papers* the funny side of drink is the only one on show, and what Dickens thought about the infant Temperance Movement is suggested by his presentation of the circles over which the Reverend Mr Stiggins presides. The damage alcohol can do is nevertheless a matter which he understands very well. *The Pickwick Papers* began life as a series of magazine sketches and it was only gradually that Dickens discovered he had imagined characters and situations with the potential to develop into a great comic novel. An indication of its origins in sketch writing are the interpolated stories, the first of which ('The Stroller's Tale') depicts in a vividly melodramatic fashion the devastating effect of drink on one individual and his family. But the world of the stories is strictly separated from that of Pickwick, where it would seem no more apposite to remember that there are unpleasantly violent drunks as well as amiable ones than it would be to wonder, during the lovingly detailed descriptions of all the Christmas food on offer at Dingley Dell, when it was that Mr Wardle last had a check on his cholesterol levels.

With its power to push into the background both the threatening aspects and the disagreeable consequences of any social or human phenomenon, comedy is able to transform irritations, both major and minor. Reading early Dickens is good for the digestion because he encourages us to laugh rather than fume at annoying travel companions, poor service in eating establishments or physical discomfort: to rise above the everyday annoyances which might ruin our day. On more serious matters the message also tends to be that 'you have to laugh'. The actions of politicians can have a crucial bearing on how we live but for Dickens they are quite literally a joke, and that is how he encourages us to regard them in the Eatanswill episodes. Although he was writing after the 1832 Reform Act, which swept away so many of those 'rotten boroughs' on the Eatanswill pattern, corruption remained rife and this may help to explain why, like many of the political satirists of our own day, he takes no prisoners but regards the whole field of politics as a target for comic contempt. Yet it may simply be also that Dickens instinctively understood how wonderfully energising it can be not to have to remember that some politicians are better than others, or ask oneself what other system than a parliamentary one would serve the country better.

For Dickens, politicians appear to have a less direct effect on the way people live their lives than the law, and, perhaps as a result, his treatment of members of the legal profession is extensive and complicated. He finds its arcane procedures absurd but is also clearly fascinated by them. In the case Mrs Bardell brings against Mr Pickwick for breach

of promise (a direct consequence of her having been discovered in his arms), some of its practitioners are portrayed as ridiculous; but there are other lawyers who are shown as doing a reasonable job and Dickens was sufficiently involved as well as informed (in his adolescence he had been a clerk in a lawyer's office) not to be able to spirit away with humour all the indignation he feels at the law's mistakes and delays. This is particularly the case with those laws concerning debt of which he had had, as a boy, some painful personal experience. When Mr Pickwick loses the case brought against him by Mrs Bardell and refuses to pay the damages awarded because he is so indignant at the behaviour of Dodson and Fogg, her scheming lawyers, he is imprisoned in the Fleet. After his arrest for debt Dickens's father had been sent to the Marshalsea, but his son's inside knowledge of what a debtors' prison looked like, and the kind of dejected and hopeless human beings one would be likely to find there, clearly helps to darken the tone of *The Pickwick Papers*, to make it more 'serious'. There is more concentration on the same locale, more development of the same plot elements, and a more substantial sense of character. The prison episodes may not themselves alter the character of *The Pickwick Papers* but it is as readers work through them that they are likely to become aware that its character has indeed changed. One way of expressing the difference would be to say that it is now more obviously a novel; but another is to note that, after the lightheartedness of the beginning, Dickens wants to explore methods of making his comic view of the world co-exist with the anger and outrage of his more serious concerns. That this will require a new format, perhaps explains the feeling some readers will have that, by the time of the prison scenes, the book has gone on a little too long. Given the difficulty of what Dickens seems to be attempting in them, their message is that it is time for a fresh start. Even Shakespeare did not move from *The Comedy of Errors* to the *Henry IV* plays in a single bound.

One indication of how radically *The Pickwick Papers* has changed by the time of its final chapters can be found in its principal characters. At the beginning, the reader is introduced to the 'too susceptible Tupman', 'the poetic Snodgrass' and 'the sporting Winkle', but these denominations are developed and pursued only fitfully and, during many of the comically absurd episodes in which the three characters are involved, it is often hard to distinguish them sharply one from another. They are the cardboard figures which farce requires. Eventually, however, Mr Winkle is plucked from absurdity in order to become the admirer and then husband of Arabella Allen while there is an even more sudden transformation in the book's translation of Mr Snodgrass into an acceptable consort for Mr Wardle's daughter, Emily. In so far as they

are described at all, both these young women are 'straight' characters: there is nothing comic or absurd about them, and it therefore seems a little hard that they should be burdened for life with two figures who, in the first part of the book, are always shown in a ridiculous light and whom it is impossible to take seriously. There is a gap which is hard to bridge between the Winkle whose wholly unjustified pretensions to sporting prowess lead to the wounding of Mr Tupman in Chapter vii and the young man with the same name who, in the penultimate chapter, defiantly refuses his father's invitation to feel ashamed of having married Arabella without parental permission. One can learn a lot about the way *The Pickwick Papers* develops by studying the different fictional worlds these two figures inhabit.

An analogous transformation to that which Winkle undergoes also overtakes Mr Pickwick himself. In the early part of the work he is a figure whom Dickens is often willing to mock. The insolence of the eloping Mr Jingle when he is finally cornered by Wardle and Pickwick so enrages the latter that, Dickens says, 'If any dispassionate spectator could have beheld the countenance of the illustrious man . . . he would have been almost induced to wonder that the indignant fire which flashed from his eyes did not melt the glasses of his spectacles – so majestic was his wrath.' When Pickwick objects to Mr Tupman's plans for attending Mrs Leo Hunter's fancy-dress *fête champêtre* dressed as a bandit, in a 'green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail', feelings run high and Tupman declares that, in spite of his attachment to the person of his leader, he must take summary vengeance on it.

'Come on, sir!' replied Mr Pickwick. Stimulated by the exciting nature of the dialogue, the heroic man actually threw himself into a paralytic attitude, confidently supposed by the two bystanders to have been intended as a posture of defence.

On both these occasions the mockery is gentle but we are none-theless invited to see Mr Pickwick in a foolish light. Throughout the early part of the book the authorial voice speaks of his heroism, learning and efficiency, when what we are simultaneously shown is a child-like incompetence in all adult matters which obliges us to take the 'business' from which he has supposedly retired with a large pinch of salt. (As Orwell wittily said, 'Even Dickens must have reflected occasionally that anyone who was so anxious to give his money away would never have acquired it in the first place.'³) Armed only with his

innocence and good nature, so little is he versed in the ways of the world that crossing the street becomes an almost impossible task for him without the aid of the indispensable Sam Weller.

It is through Sam Weller that the change which comes over the Pickwick figure can be most conveniently identified. Whether the prison episodes instigate or merely confirm this change, they take away any remaining irony from the book's previous descriptions of Mr Pickwick as heroic. Now we are shown someone willing to suffer for his principles, someone chastened by miseries whose existence he had not previously suspected. The Fleet allows him the opportunity of demonstrating magnanimity towards defeated enemies – Jingle in particular but also Mrs Bardell – and, once released, it is as a caring philanthropist that he chiefly functions, his previous 'business' activities having miraculously made money no object. Pickwick in this guise can still be funny on occasions, but it would seem incongruous now to talk of his anger melting the glass in his spectacles. By playing such a central role in the resolution of the other characters' various difficulties, he becomes more serious and substantial, and how we as readers ought to regard him is signalled by Sam whose good sense in so many previous situations has endowed him with an authority which is choric. That he should so respect his employer encourages us to do so also.

The degree of that respect is suggested by the way Sam arranges to have himself arrested for debt so that he can continue to serve Mr Pickwick in the Fleet; but respect modulates into something more like reverence when he insists on delaying his marriage indefinitely rather than abandon his master. This expression of loyalty acts as Pickwick's final consecration; and if it generates unease, a feeling of regret in some readers for that comic Pickwick of the early part of the book who has had so much to do with establishing its dominant, often farcical tone, it is perhaps because Sam's gesture throws into relief one of the weakest aspects of *The Pickwick Papers*: its treatment of sexual feeling. Dickens has no problem with sex when it is meant to be regarded as wholly comic, as in the episodes involving Miss Wardle or Mrs Bardell; but it is part of his conception of Sam's worldly wisdom and general physical aptitude that he should have an interest in young woman which is not ridiculous. As his relationship with Arabella Allen's maid Mary develops, there are several coy references to modest physical intimacies. In Chapter LII, Mary produces 'from behind the nicest little muslin tucker possible' a letter she has been keeping for Sam who thereupon kisses it 'with much gallantry and devotion'. Adjusting the tucker (a piece of lace worn around the top of the bodice), Mary feigns surprise and remarks that he seems to have grown very fond of the letter all at once, but Sam

only replies with a wink. To find later how effortlessly he can subordinate his interest in what lies behind Mary's tucker to his determination to serve Mr Pickwick reduces him to the same emasculated state as the Pickwickians and is a high price to pay for the final transformation of the wonderfully inept author of 'Observations on the Theory of Tittlebats' into the saintly figure of the book's conclusion.

The eventual canonisation of its protagonist deprives the final chapters of *The Pickwick Papers* of some of the comic verve characteristic of the book as a whole. It is not so much that Dickens flags than that his interests change and are no longer easily accommodated in the essentially picaresque format to which the origins of the work had committed him. Yet a demonstration of the continuing freshness of his powers, should he choose to exert them, comes in Chapter 11 which is only six from the end and which functions as one last triumphant display of the comic talents that make *The Pickwick Papers* the particular kind of classic it is. Accompanied as always by Sam Weller, Mr Pickwick has been to Birmingham in an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Winkle's father to demonstrate approval of his son's recent marriage. His task has not been made any easier by the insistence of Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen that they should accompany him. Qualified by this stage in the book as a medical practitioner, Bob Sawyer must be one of the most complete portraits of the student mentality in English literary history, and he acts as a reminder that, just as there are people who once having worked in a restaurant never eat out again, so there are those who, having socialised with medical students, refuse thereafter to set foot in a hospital. It is his and Ben Allen's unruly behaviour which has helped to ensure the failure of the interview with Winkle's father and Mr Pickwick's spirits are not improved on the following morning by weather which Dickens describes with a characteristic virtuosity and transforming power. 'The smoke,' he writes, 'hung sluggishly above the chimney-tops as if it lacked the courage to rise, and the rain came slowly and doggedly down, as if it had not even the spirit to pour.' To convey more fully the atmosphere, we are told of a game-cock in the stable-yard who, 'deprived of every spark of his accustomed animation', is balancing himself 'dismally on one leg in a corner', and a moping donkey in the outhouse who appears 'from his meditative and miserable countenance to be contemplating suicide'. It takes great ability to evoke so vividly the miseries of a rainy English morning and simultaneously make us smile at them. In order to counter depression, Mr Pickwick and his party decide to take to the road in spite of the weather, but it continues to rain so persistently that even the ebullient Bob Sawyer is ironic when he says, 'This is pleasant.'

Conditions prove so uncomfortable that the travellers decide to call a halt at Towcester and thereby give Dickens the opportunity in which he always delights of describing the move from a harsh, inclement outdoors to a contrasting warmth and comfort inside, with blazing fires, hot drinks and all the other creature comforts a good English inn of his time could provide.

Once they are installed, the discovery by Sam that a fellow guest at the inn is Mr Pott, the fiery editor of the *Eatanswill Gazette*, allows for a positively last appearance of someone who, in the context of the book as a whole, must have been a popular character. He entertains the company with highly rhetorical expressions of distaste for his rival newspaper, the *Eatanswill Independent*, 'still dragging on a wretched and lingering career. Abhorred and despised by even the few who are cognisant of its miserable and disgraceful existence; stifled by the very filth it so profusely scatters; rendered deaf and blind by the exhalations of its own slime . . .' One can feel Dickens's energy levels rising as he sinks himself deeper and deeper into the part. Absurdly surprised that his listeners are not avid readers of the *Eatanswill Gazette*, Mr Pott recommends in particular a 'copious review of a work on Chinese metaphysics' whose author 'read up for the subject, at my desire, in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*'. When Mr Pickwick confesses not to have realised that any information on Chinese metaphysics could be found in that valuable reference work, Mr Pott looks round with an air of intellectual superiority and explains, 'he read for metaphysics under the letter M, and for China under the letter C, and combined his information'. There is, as Eric Morecombe used to say, no answer to that.

In works of a picaresque cast, chance encounters are the norm, but Dickens gives some colour to the arrival at the inn of Mr Pott's great antagonist, the editor of the *Eatanswill Independent*, by referring to the ball in Birmingham which they are both determined to attend. As convinced as Pott of his place at the centre of the world's affairs, Mr Slurk (Dickens was always good at names) protests that the failure of the inn's landlord to recognise him is enough to curdle the ink in his pen. When he and his rival meet in front of the kitchen fire, they confine themselves at first to dark glances and indirect insults, Mr Pott darting looks of contempt that 'might have withered an anchor'. But with a little help from Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen they eventually come to blows although, when Mr Pickwick attempts to come between them, their instincts of self-preservation make them more concerned to belabour him than each other. It is entirely characteristic of their respective roles in *Pickwick Papers* that it should fall to Sam to rescue

Mr Pickwick and calm the situation while Bob Sawyer and his friend do nothing except 'dodge round the group, each with a tortoise-shell lancet in his hand, ready to bleed the first man stunned'. (That 'tortoise-shell' is also characteristic: even in the heat of action Dickens never allows us to forget what things look like.)

There is no particular point to Chapter LI and, were it omitted, the narrative of *Pickwick Papers* would be no less coherent than it is at present. Yet there are many other chapters in the work which also exist primarily to have fun and provoke laughter. Plato felt that the young guardians of his ideal Republic should avoid laughter, presumably because it was demeaning and implied a loss of self-control, while, somewhat later, Lord Chesterfield warned his son that, 'Frequent and loud laughter is the characteristic of folly and ill-manners.'⁴ Anyone who expressed such opinions in our day, when failing to display a sense of humour can be made to seem a capital crime, would be regarded with disdain. Yet not everything is or ought to be funny. This is a consideration which becomes more important to Dickens as *The Pickwick Papers* progresses and, in his later work, he successfully combines humour with profound explorations of both social and individual consciousness. Although he never loses his ability to make his readers laugh, the comedy he writes in those later novels is in a context which necessarily conditions its character. Compared with *Little Dorrit*, for example, in which a debtors' prison also features prominently, *The Pickwick Papers* is distinctly lightweight. Yet there is in its tone a youthful exuberance, a sprightly insouciance, which the world would be infinitely poorer without and which, in the inevitable nature of things, he would never entirely recapture. You are only twenty-four once.

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4 *The Republic*, iii, 395 (in the Jowett translation); Lord Chesterfield's letter was written on 9 March 1748.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Charles Dickens was born at Landport (Portsea), near Portsmouth, Hampshire, on 7 February 1812. He was the second of eight children. His father, John, was a clerk in the Naval Pay Office at Portsmouth. The Dickens family, although not poor by the standards of the time, lived through a series of financial crises and the accompanying social insecurity. Dickens's childhood was spent in Portsmouth, London and Chatham in Kent, where there was a large naval dockyard. In 1822, facing financial ruin, the family moved to London and, on 5 February 1824, Charles began work in a blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs where he was employed to label bottles for six shillings a week. A short time previously Charles's father had been arrested for debt and the family, except for Charles, had joined him in Marshalsea Debtors' Prison. The combination of this family trauma and his own menial job profoundly affected Charles's life and view of the world and was to haunt him for the rest of his days. John Dickens was released after three months in prison by having himself declared an Insolvent Debtor. Charles was sent to school at the age of twelve, where he did well, and at the age of fifteen he began work in the office of a legal firm in Gray's Inn. Here he taught himself shorthand, and eighteen months later started as a freelance reporter in the court of Doctors' Commons. In 1829 Dickens fell deeply in love with Maria Beadnell and the affair dragged on inconclusively until the summer of 1833. Meanwhile, Dickens's career was prospering, with his rapid and accurate reporting of debates in the House of Commons for the *Morning Chronicle*, and good reviews for his literary work, which led to his being commissioned by the publishers, Chapman & Hall, to provide text in monthly instalments to accompany sporting plates by the artist Seymour. It was in this way that the hugely successful *Pickwick Papers* was published in 1836/7. In 1858, Dickens separated from his wife, by whom he had had ten children, and developed his friendship with a young actress called Ellen Ternan. Dickens's health, adversely affected by the strain of his very popular readings, which he instituted in 1858, and a demanding tour of America in 1867/8, began to fail in the late 1860s. He suffered a stroke at his home at Gad's Hill, near Rochester, Kent, on 8 June 1870, and died the next day.

FURTHER READING

A Garland Annotated Bibliography for *The Pickwick Papers* by Elliot Engel appeared in 1990. The first, still useful, biography of Dickens was published by John Forster in the early 1870s and is now most conveniently available in A. H. Hoppé's two-volume Everyman edition (1966). Two recent biographies worth consulting, both of which appeared under the title *Dickens*, are by Fred Caplan (1988) and Peter Ackroyd (1990). The following selective list of critical material includes most of those books or essays to which critics writing today tend to refer.

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