BOOK V.

MODERN AUTHORS.

INTRODUCTORY NOTE.

The translator thinks it due to M. Taine to state, that the fifth book, on the Modern Authors, was written whilst Dickens, Thackeray, Macaulay, and Mill were still alive. He also gives the original preface of that book:—

"This fifth book is the complement to the History of English Literature; it is written on another plan, because the subject is different. The present period is not yet completed, and the ideas which govern it are in process of formation, that is, in the rough. We cannot therefore as yet systematically arrange them. When documents are still mere indications, history is necessarily reduced to "studies;" knowledge is moulded from life; and our conclusions cannot be other than incomplete, so long as the facts which suggest them are unfinished. Fifty years hence the history of this age may be written; in the meantime we can but sketch it. I have selected from contemporary English writers the most original minds, the most consistent, and the most contrasted; they may be regarded as specimens, representing the common features, the opposing tendencies, and consequently the general direction of the public mind.

"They are only specimens. By the side of Macaulay and Carlyle we have historians like Hallam, Buckle, and Grote; by the side of Dickens, novel-writers like Bulwer, Charlotte Brontë, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, and many more; by the side of
Tennyson, poets like Elizabeth Browning; by the side of Stuart Mill, philosophers like Hamilton, Bain, and Herbert Spencer. I pass over the vast number of men of talent who write anonymously in reviews, and who, like soldiers in an army, display at times more clearly than their generals the faculties and inclinations of their time and their country. If we look for the common marks in this multitude of varied minds, we shall, I think, find the two salient features which I have already pointed out. One of these features is proper to English civilisation, the other to the civilisation of the nineteenth century. The one is national, the other European. On the one hand, special to this people, their literature is an inquiry instituted into humanity, altogether positive, and consequently only partially beautiful or philosophical, but very exact, minute, useful, and moreover very moral; and this to such a degree, that sometimes the generosity or purity of its aspirations raises it to a height which no artist or philosopher has transcended. On the other hand, in common with the various peoples of our age, this literature subordinates dominant creeds and institutions to private inquiry and established science—I mean, to that irresponsible tribunal which is erected in each man’s individual conscience, and to that universal authority which the diverse human judgments, mutually rectified, and controlled by practice, borrow from the verifications of experience, and from their own harmony.

“Whatever be the judgment passed on these tendencies and on these doctrines, we cannot, I think, refuse them the merit of spontaneity and originality. They are living and thriving plants. The six writers, described in this volume, have expressed efficacious and complete ideas on God, nature, man, science, religion, art, and morality. To produce such ideas we have in Europe at this day but three nations—England, Germany, and France. Those of England will here be found arranged, discussed, and compared with those of the other two thinking countries.”
CHAPTER I.

The Novel—Dickens.

WERE Dickens dead, his biography might be written. On the day after the burial of a celebrated man, his friends and enemies apply themselves to the work; his schoolfellows relate in the newspapers his boyish pranks; another man recalls exactly, and word for word, the conversations he had with him more than a score of years ago. The lawyer, who manages the affairs of the deceased, draws up a list of the different offices he has filled, his titles, dates and figures, and reveals to the matter-of-fact readers how the money left has been invested, and how the fortune has been made; the grandnephews and second cousins publish an account of his acts of humanity, and the catalogue of his domestic virtues. If there is no literary genius in the family, they select an Oxford man, conscientious, learned, who treats the deceased like a Greek author, collects endless documents, overloads them with endless comments, crowns the whole with endless discussions, and comes ten years later, some fine Christmas morning, with his white tie and placid smile, to present to the assembled family three quartos of eight hundred pages each, the easy style of which would send a German from Berlin to sleep. He is embraced by them with tears in their eyes; they make him sit down; he is the chief ornament at their feasts; and his work is sent to the
Edinburgh Review. The latter groans at the sight of the enormous present, and tells off a young and intrepid member of the staff to concoct some kind of a biography from the table of contents. Another advantage of posthumous biographies is, that the dead man is no longer there to refute either biographer or man of learning.

Unfortunately Dickens is still alive, and refutes the biographies made of him. What is worse, he claims to be his own biographer. His translator in French once asked him for a few particulars of his life; Dickens replied that he kept them for himself. Without doubt, David Copperfield, his best novel, has much the appearance of a confession; but where does the confession end, and how far does fiction embroider truth? All that is known, or rather all that is told, is that Dickens was born in 1812, that he is the son of a shorthand-writer, that he was himself at first a shorthand-writer, that he was poor and unfortunate in his youth, that his novels, published in parts, have gained for him a great fortune and an immense reputation. The reader may conjecture the rest; Dickens will tell it him one day, when he writes his memoirs. Meanwhile he closes the door, and leaves outside the too inquisitive folk who go on knocking. He has a right to do so.

1 M. Taine was not wrong in thinking so. In the Life of Charles Dickens by J. Forster we find (vol. i. p. 8) the following words:—"And here I may at once expressly mention, what already has been hinted, that even as Fielding described himself and his belongings in Captain Booth and Amelia, and protested always that he had writ in his book's nothing more than he had seen in life, so it may be said of Dickens, in more especial relation to David Copperfield. Many guesses have been made since his death, connecting David's autobiography with his own. . . . There is not only truth in all this, but it will very shortly be seen that the identity went deeper than any had supposed; and covered experiences not less startling in the reality than they appear to be in the fiction."—Th.
Though a man may be illustrious, he is not on that account public property; he is not compelled to be confidential; he still belongs to himself; he may reserve of himself what he thinks proper. If we give our works to our readers, we do not give our lives. Let us be satisfied with what Dickens has given us. Forty volumes suffice, and more than suffice, to enable us to know a man well; moreover, they show of him all that it is important to know. It is not through the accidental circumstances of his life that he belongs to history, but by his talent; and his talent is in his books. A man's genius is like a clock; it has its mechanism, and amongst its parts a mainspring. Find out this spring, show how it communicates movement to the others, pursue this movement from part to part down to the hands in which it ends. This inner history of genius does not depend upon the outer history of the man; and it is worth more.

§ 1.—The Author.

I.

The first question which should be asked in connection with an artist is this: How does he regard objects? With what clearness, what energy, what force? The reply defines his whole work beforehand; for in a writer of novels the imagination is the master faculty; the art of composition, good taste, the feeling of what is true, depend upon it; one degree more of vehemence destroys the style which expresses it, changes the characters which it produces, breaks the plot in which it is enclosed. Consider the imaginative power
of Dickens, and you will perceive therein the cause of his faults and his merits, his power and his excess.

II.

There is a painter in him, and an English painter. Never surely did a mind figure to itself with more exact detail or greater force all the parts and tints of a picture. Read this description of a storm; the images seem photographed by dazzling flashes of lightning:

"The eye, partaking of the quickness of the flashing light, saw it in its every gleam a multitude of objects which it could not see at steady noon in fifty times that period. Bells in steeples, with the rope and wheel that moved them; ragged nests of birds in cornices and nooks; faces full of consternation in the tilted waggons that came tearing past; their frightened teams ringing out a warning which the thunder drowned; harrows and ploughs left out in fields; miles upon miles of hedge-divided country, with the distant fringe of trees as obvious as the scarecrow in the beanfield close at hand; in a trembling, vivid, flickering instant, everything was clear and plain: then came a flush of red into the yellow light; a change to blue; a brightness so intense that there was nothing else but light; and then the deepest and profoundest darkness." ¹

An imagination so lucid and energetic cannot but animate inanimate objects without an effort. It provokes in the mind in which it works extraordinary emotions, and the author pours over the objects which he figures to himself, something of the ever-welling passion which overflows in him. Stones for him take a voice, white walls swell out into big phantoms, black

¹ *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xliii. The translator has used the "Charles Dickens" edition, 1868, 18 vols.
wells yawn hideously and mysteriously in the darkness; legions of strange creatures whirl 'shuddering over the fantastic landscape; blank nature is peopled, inert matter moves. But the images remain clear; in this madness there is nothing vague or disorderly; imaginary objects are designed with outlines as precise and details as numerous as real objects, and the dream is equal to the reality.

There is, amongst others, a description of the night wind, quaint and powerful, which recalls certain pages of *Notre-Dame de Paris*. The source of this description, as of all those of Dickens, is pure imagination. He does not, like Walter Scott, describe in order to give his reader a map, and to lay down the locality of his drama. He does not, like Lord Byron, describe from love of magnificent nature, and in order to display a splendid succession of grand pictures. He dreams neither of attaining exactness nor of selecting beauty. Struck with a certain spectacle, he is transported, and breaks out into unforeseen figures. Now it is the yellow leaves, pursued by the wind, fleeing and jostling, shivering, scared, in a giddy chase, clinging to the furrows, drowned in the ditches, perching on the trees.¹ Here it is the night wind, sweeping round a church,

¹ "It was small tyranny for a respectful wind to go wreaking its vengeance on such poor creatures as the fallen leaves; but this wind happening to come up with a great heap of them just after venting its humour on the insulted Dragon, did so disperse and scatter them that they fled away, pell-mell, some here, some there, rolling over each other, whirling round and round upon their thin edges, taking frantic flights into the air, and playing all manner of extraordinary gambols in the extremity of their distress. Nor was this enough for its malicious fury: for, not content with driving them abroad, it charged small parties of them and hunted them into the wheelwright's saw-pit, and below the planks and timbers in the yard, and, scattering the saw-dust
moaning as it tries with its unseen hand the windows and the doors, and seeking out some crevices by which to enter:

"And when it has got in; as one not finding what he whatever that may be; it wails and howls to issue forth again: and, not content with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters: then flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up stealthily, and creeps along the walls: seeming to read, in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter; and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting."  

Hitherto you have only recognised the sombre imagination of a man of the north. A little further you perceive the impassioned religion of a revolutionary Protestant, when he speaks to you of "a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar; where it seems to chant, in its wild way, of Wrong and Murder done, and false Gods worshipped; in defiance of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has an awful voice, that wind at

in the air, it looked for them underneath, and when it did meet with any, whew! how it drove them on and followed at their heels!

"The scared leaves only flew the faster for all this, and a giddy chase it was: for they got into unfrequented places, where there was no outlet, and where their pursuer kept them eddying round and round at his pleasure; and they crept under the eaves of houses, and clung tightly to the sides of hay-ricks, like bats; and tore in at open chamber windows, and cowered close to hedges; and, in short, went anywhere for safety."—(Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. ii.)

1 The Chimes, first quarter.
Midnight, singing in a church!" But an instant after, the artist speaks again; he leads you to the belfry, and in the jingle of the accumulated words, communicates to your nerves the sensation of an aerial tempest. The wind whistles, blows, and gambols in the arches: "High up in the steeple, where it is free to come and go through many an airy arch and loophole, and to twist and twine itself about the giddy stair, and twirl the groaning weathercock, and make the very tower shake and shiver!" ¹ Dickens has seen it all in the old belfry; his thought is a mirror; not the smallest or ugliest detail escapes him. He has counted "the iron rails ragged with rust;" "the sheets of lead," wrinkled and shrivelled, which crackle and heave beneath the unaccustomed tread; "the shabby nests" which "the birds stuff into corners" of the old oaken joists and beams; the gray dust heaped up; "the speckled spiders, indolent and fat with long security," which, hanging by a thread, "swing idly to and fro in the vibration of the bells," and which "climb up sailor-like in quick-alarm, or drop upon the ground and ply a score of nimble legs to save one life." This picture captivates us. Kept up at such a height, amongst the fleeting clouds which cast their shadows over the town, and the feeble lights scarce distinguished in the mist, we feel a sort of dizziness; and we nearly discover, with Dickens, thought and a soul in the metallic voice of the chimes which inhabit this trembling castle.

He writes a story about them, and it is not the first. Dickens is a poet; he is as much at home in the imaginative world as in the actual. Here the chimes are talking to the old messenger and consoling him.

¹ *The Chimes*, first quarter.
Elsewhere it is the Cricket on the Hearth singing of all domestic joys, and bringing before the eyes of the lonely master the happy evenings, the intimate conversations, the comfort, the quiet cheerfulness which he has enjoyed, and which he has no longer. In another tale it is the history of a sick and precocious child who feels itself dying, and who, sleeping in the arms of its sister, hears the distant song of the murmuring waves which rocked him to sleep. Objects, with Dickens, take their hue from the thoughts of his characters. His imagination is so lively, that it carries everything with it in the path which it chooses. If the character is happy, the stones, flowers, and clouds must be happy too; if he is sad, nature must weep with him. Even to the ugly houses in the street, all speak. The style runs through a swarm of visions; it breaks out into the strangest oddities. Here is a young girl, pretty and good, who crosses Fountain Court and the law purlieus in search of her brother. What can be more simple? what even more trivial? Dickens is carried away by it. To entertain her, he summons up birds, trees, houses, the fountain, the offices, law papers, and much besides. It is a folly, and it is all but an enchantment:

"Whether there was life enough left in the slow vegetation of Fountain Court for the smoky shrubs to have any consciousness of the brightest and purest-hearted little woman in the world, is a question for gardeners, and those who are learned in the loves of plants. But that it was a good thing for that same paved yard to have such a delicate little figure flitting through it; that it passed like a smile from the grimy old houses, and the worn flagstones, and left them duller, darker, sterner than before; there is no sort of doubt. The Temple fountain might have leaped up twenty feet to greet the spring of hopeful maiden-
hood, that in her person stole on, sparkling, through the dry and dusty channels of the Law; the chirping sparrows, bred in Temple chinks and crannies, might have held their peace to listen to imaginary sky-larks, as so fresh a little creature passed; the dingy boughs, unused to droop, otherwise than in their puny growth might have bent down in a kindred gracefulness, to shed their benedictions on her graceful head; old love-letters, shut up in iron boxes in the neighbouring offices, and made of no account among the heaps of family papers into which they had strayed, and of which, in their degeneracy, they formed a part, might have stirred and fluttered with a moment's recollection of their ancient tenderness, as she went lightly by. Anything might have happened that did not happen, and never will, for the love of Ruth."  

This is far-fetched, without doubt. French taste, always measured, revolts against these affected strokes, these sickly prettinesses. And yet this affectation is natural; Dickens does not hunt after quaintnesses; they come to him. His excessive imagination is like a string too tightly stretched; it produces of itself, without any violent shock, sounds not heard elsewhere.

We shall see how it is excited. Imagine a shop, no matter what shop, the most repulsive; that of a mathematical-instrument maker. Dickens sees the barometers, chronometers, telescopes, compasses, charts, maps, sextants, speaking trumpets, and so forth. He sees so many, sees them so clearly, they are crowded and crammed, they replace each other so forcibly in his brain, which they fill and obstruct; there are so many geographical and nautical ideas exposed under the glass cases hung from the ceiling, nailed to the wall, they swamp him from so many sides, and in such abundance,

1 Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. xlv.
that he loses his judgment. "The shop itself, partaking of the general infection, seemed almost to become a snug, sea-going, ship-shape concern, wanting only good sea-room, in the event of an unexpected launch, to work its way securely to any desert island in the world."\footnote{Dombey and Son, ch. iv.}

The difference between a madman and a man of genius is not very great. Napoleon, who knew men, said so to Esquirol.\footnote{See ante, vol. ii. note, page 123} The same faculty leads us to glory or throws us into a cell in a lunatic asylum. It is visionary imagination which forges the phantoms of the madman and creates the personages of an artist, and the classifications serving for the first may serve for the second. The imagination of Dickens is like that of monomaniacs. To plunge oneself into an idea, to be absorbed by it, to see nothing else, to repeat it under a hundred forms, to enlarge it, to carry it, thus enlarged, to the eye of the spectator, to dazzle and overwhelm him with it, to stamp it upon him so firmly and deeply that he can never again tear it from his memory,—these are the great features of this imagination and style. In this, David Copperfield is a masterpiece. Never did objects remain more visible and present to the memory of a reader than those which he describes. The old house, the parlour, the kitchen, Peggotty's boat, and above all the school play-ground, are interiors whose relief, energy, and precision are unequalled. Dickens has the passion and patience of the painters of his nation; he reckons his details one by one, notes the various hues of the old tree-trunks; sees the dilapidated cask, the greenish and broken flagstones, the chinks of the damp walls; he distinguishes the strange smells which rise from them; marks the size of the mildewed spots, reads
the names of the scholars carved on the door, and
dwells on the form of the letters. And this minute
description has nothing cold about it: if it is thus
detailed, it is because the contemplation was intense;
it proves its passion by its exactness. We felt this
passion without accounting for it; suddenly we find it
at the end of a page; the boldness of the style renders
it visible, and the violence of the phrase attests the
violence of the impression. Excessive metaphors bring
before the mind grotesque fancies. We feel ourselves
beset by extravagant visions. Mr. Mell takes his flute,
and blows on it, says Copperfield, "until I almost
thought he would gradually blow his whole being into
the large hole at the top, and ooze away at the keys."¹
Tom Pinch, disabused at last, discovers that his master
Pecksniff is a hypocritical rogue. He "had so long
been used to steep the Pecksniff of his fancy in his tea,
and spread him out upon his toast, and take him as a
relish with his beer, that he made but a poor breakfast
on the first morning after his expulsion."² We think of
Hoffmann's fantastic tales; we are arrested by a fixed
idea, and our head begins to ache. These eccentricities
are in the style of sickness rather than of health.

Therefore Dickens is admirable in depicting halluci-
nations. We see that he feels himself those of his
characters, that he is engrossed by their ideas, that he
enters into their madness. As an Englishman and a
moralist, he has described remorse frequently. Perhaps
it may be said that he makes a scarecrow of it, and
that an artist is wrong to transform himself into an
assistant of the policeman and the preacher. What of
that? The portrait of Jonas Chuzzlewit is so terrible.

¹ David Copperfield, ch. v. ² Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. xxxvi.
that we may pardon it for being useful. Jonas, leaving
his chamber secretly, has treacherously murdered his
enemy, and thinks henceforth to breathe in peace;
but the recollection of the murder gradually disorganises
his mind, like poison. He is no longer able to control
his ideas; they bear him on with the fury of a terrified
horse. He is for ever thinking, and shuddering as he
thinks, of the room where people believed he slept. He
sees this room, counts the tiles of the floor, pictures
the long folds of the dark curtains, the tumbled bed,
the door at which some one might have knocked. The
more he wants to escape from this vision, the more he
is immersed in it; it is a burning abyss in which he
rolls, struggling, with cries and sweats of agony. He
fancies himself lying in his bed, as he ought to be, and
an instant after he sees himself there. He fears this
other self. The dream is so vivid, that he is not sure
that he is not in London. "He became in a manner
his own ghost and phantom." And this imaginary
being, like a mirror, only redoubles before his conscience
the image of assassination and punishment. He returns,
and shuffles, with pale face, to the door of his chamber.
He, a man of business, a man of figures, a coarse
machine of positive reasoning, has become as fanciful
as a nervous woman. "He stole on, to the door, on tip-
toe, as if he dreaded to disturb his own imaginary rest."
At the moment when he turns the key in the lock, "a
monstrous fear beset his mind. What if the murdered
man were there before him." At last he enters, and
tumbles into bed, burnt up with fever. "He buried
himself beneath the blankets," so as to try not to see
"that infernal room"; he sees it more clearly still.
The rustling of the clothes, the buzz of an insect, the
beatings of his heart, all cry to him Murderer! His mind fixed with "an agony of listening" on the door, he ends by thinking that people open it; he hears it creak. His senses are distorted; he dares not mistrust them, he dares no longer believe in them; and in this nightmare, in which drowned reason leaves nothing but a chaos of hideous forms, he finds no reality but the incessant burden of his convulsive despair. Thenceforth all his thoughts, dangers, the whole world disappears for him in "the one dread question only;" "When would they find the body in the wood?" He forces himself to distract his thoughts from this; they remain stamped and glued to it; they hold him to it as by a chain of iron. He continually figures himself going into the wood, "going softly about it and about it among the leaves, approaching it nearer and nearer through a gap in the boughs, and startling the very flies, that were thickly sprinkled all over it, like heaps of dried currants." His mind was fixed and fastened on the discovery, for intelligence of which he listened intently to every cry and shout; listened when any one came in, or went out; watched from the window the people who passed up and down the street." At the same time, he has ever before his eyes that corpse "lying alone in the wood;" "he was for ever showing and presenting it, as it were, to every creature whom he saw. 'Look here! do you know of this? Is it found? Do you suspect me?' If he had been condemned to bear the body in his arms, and lay it down for recognition at the feet of every one he met, it could not have been more constantly with him, or a cause of more monotonous and dismal occupation than it was in this state of his mind."

1 Martin Chumiscot, ch. ii.
Jonas is on the verge of madness. There are other characters quite mad. Dickens has drawn three or four portraits of madmen, very funny at first sight, but so true that they are in reality horrible. It needed an imagination like his, irregular, excessive, capable of fixed ideas, to exhibit the derangements of reason. Two especially there are, which make us laugh, and which make us shudder. Augustus, a gloomy maniac, who is on the point of marrying Miss Pecksniff; and poor Mr. Dick, partly an idiot, partly a monomaniac, who lives with Miss Trotwood. To understand these sudden exaltations, these unforeseen gloominesses, these incredible summersaults of perverted sensitiveness; to reproduce these hiatuses of thought, these interruptions of reasoning, this recurrence of a word, always the same, which breaks in upon a phrase attempted and overturns re nascent reason; to see the stupid smile, the vacant look, the foolish and uneasy physiognomy of these haggard old children who painfully grope about from one idea to another, and stumble at every step on the threshold of the truth which they cannot attain, is a faculty which Hoffmann alone has possessed in an equal degree with Dickens. The play of these shattered reasons is like the creaking of a door on its rusty hinges; it makes one sick to hear it. We find in it, if we like, a discordant burst of laughter, but we discover still more easily a groan and a lamentation, and we are terrified to gauge the lucidity, strangeness, exaltation, violence of imagination which has produced such creations, which has carried them on and sustained them unbendingly to the end, and which found itself in its proper sphere in imitating and producing their irrationality.
III.

To what can this force be applied? Imaginations differ not only in their nature, but also in their object; after having gauged their energy, we must define their domain; in the wide world the artist makes a world for himself; involuntarily he chooses a class of objects which he prefers; others do not warm his genius, and he does not perceive them. Dickens does not perceive great things; this is the second feature of his imagination. Enthusiasm seizes him in connection with everything, especially in connection with vulgar objects, a curiosity shop, a sign-post, a town-crier. He has vigour, he does not attain beauty. His instrument produces vibrating, but not harmonious sounds. If he is describing a house, he will draw it with geometrical clearness; he will put all its colours in relief, discover a face and thought in the shutters and the spouts; he will make a sort of human being out of the house, grimacing and forcible, which attracts our attention, and which we shall never forget; but he will not see the grandeur of the long monumental lines, the calm majesty of the broad shadows boldly divided by the white plaster; the cheerfulness of the light which covers them, and becomes palpable in the black niches in which it dives as though to rest and to sleep. If he is painting a landscape, he will perceive the laws which dot with their red fruit the leafless hedges, the thin vapour steaming from a distant stream, the motions of an insect in the grass; but the deep poetry which the author of Valentine and André¹ would have felt, will escape him. He will be lost, like the painters of his country, in the minute and

¹ Novels of George Sand.
impassioned observation of small things; he will have no love of beautiful forms and fine colours. He will not perceive that the blue and the red, the straight line and the curve, are enough to compose vast concerts, which amidst so many various expressions maintain a grand serenity, and open up in the depths of the soul a spring of health and happiness. Happiness is lacking in him; his inspiration is a feverish rapture, which does not select its objects, which animates promiscuously the ugly, the vulgar, the ridiculous, and which communicating to his creations an indescribable jerkiness and violence, deprives them of the delight and harmony which in other hands they might have retained. Miss Ruth is a very pretty housekeeper; she puts on her apron; what a treasure this apron is! Dickens turns it over and over, like a milliner's shopman who wants to sell it. She holds it in her hands, then she puts it round her waist, ties the strings, spreads it out, smooths it that it may fall well. What does she not do with her apron? And how delighted is Dickens during these innocent occupations? He utters little exclamations of joyous fun. "Oh heaven, what a wicked little stomacher!" He apostrophises a ring, he sports round Ruth, he is so delighted that he claps his hands. It is much worse when she is making the pudding; there is a whole scene, dramatic and lyric, with exclamations, protasis, sudden inversions as complete as a Greek tragedy. These kitchen refinements and this waggery of imagination make us think, by way of contrast, of the household pictures of George Sand, of the room of Geneviève the flower-girl. She, like Ruth, is making a useful object, very useful, since she will sell it to-morrow for tenpence; but this object is a full-blown rose, whose fragile petals are moulded
by her fingers as by the fingers of a fairy, whose fresh corolla is purpled with a vermilion as tender as that of her cheeks; a fragile masterpiece which bloomed on an evening of poetic emotion, whilst from her window she beheld in the sky the piercing and divine eyes of the stars, and in the depths of her virgin heart murmured the first breath of love. Dickens does not need such a sight for his transports; a stage-coach throws him into dithyrambs; the wheels, the splashing, the cracking whip, the clatter of the horses, harness, the vehicle; here is enough to transport him. He feels sympathetically the motion of the coach; it bears him along with it; he hears the gallop of the horses in his brain, and goes off, uttering this ode, which seems to proceed from the guard's horn:

"Yoho, among the gathering shades; making of no account the deep reflections of the trees, but scampering on through light and darkness, all the same, as if the light of London, fifty miles away, were quite enough to travel by, and some to spare. Yoho, beside the village green, where cricket-players linger yet, and every little indentation made in the fresh grass by bat or wicket, ball or player's foot, sheds out its perfume on the night. Away with four fresh horses from the Bald-faced Stag, where topers congregate about the door admiring; and the last team, with traces hanging loose, go roaming off towards the pond, until observed and shouted after by a dozen throats, while volunteer- ing boys pursue them. Now, with a clattering of hoofs and striking out of fiery sparks, across the old stone bridge, and down again into the shadowy road, and through the open gate, and far away, away into the wold. Yoho!

"Yoho, behind there, stop that bugle for a moment! Come creeping over to the front, along the coach-roof, guard, and make one at this basket! Not that we slacken in our pace the while, not we: we rather put the bits of blood upon their mettle, for the greater glory of the snack. Ah! It is long since this bottle
of old wine was brought into contact with the mellow breath of
night, you may depend, and rare good stuff it is to wet a bugler's
whistle with. Only try it. Don't be afraid of turning up your
finger, Bill, another pull! Now, take your breath, and try the
bugle, Bill. There's music! There's a tone! "Over the hills
and far away," indeed, Yoho! The skittish mare is all alive to-
night. Yoho! Yoho!

"See the bright moon; high up before we know it; making
the earth reflect the objects on its breast like water. Hedges,
trees, low cottages, church steeples, blighted stumps and flourishing
young slips, have all grown vain upon the sudden, and mean
to contemplate their own fair images till morning. The poplars
yonder rustle, that their quivering leaves may see themselves
upon the ground. Not so the oak; trembling does not become
him; and he watches himself in his stout old burly steadfastness,
without the motion of a twig. The moss-grown gate, ill poised
upon its creaking hinges, crippled and decayed, swings to and
fro before its glass like some fantastic dowager; while our own
ghostly likeness travels on, Yoho! Yoho! through ditch and
brake, upon the ploughed land and the smooth, along the steep
hill-side and steeper wall, as if it were a phantom-Hunter.

"Clouds too! And a mist upon the Hollow! Not a dull
fog that hides it, but a light, airy, gauze-like mist, which in our
eyes of modest admiration gives a new charm to the beauties it
is spread before: as real gauze has done ere now, and would
again, so please you, though we were the Pope. Yoho! Why,
now we travel like the Moon herself. Hiding this minute in a
grove of trees, next minute in a patch of vapour, emerging now
upon our broad, clear course, withdrawing now, but always dash-
ing on, our journey is a counterpart of hers. Yoho! A match
against the Moon!

"The beauty of the night is hardly felt, when Day comes
leaping up. Yoho! Two stages, and the country roads are
almost changed to a continuous street. Yoho, past market
gardens, rows of houses, villas, crescents, terraces, and squares;
past waggons, coaches, carts; past early workmen, late stragglers, drunken men, and sober carriers of loads; past brick and mortar in its every shape; and in among the rattling pavements, where a jaunty-seat upon a coach is not so easy to preserve! Yoho down countless turnings, and through countless mazy ways, until an old Inn-yard is gained, and Tom Pinch, getting down, quite stunned and giddy, is in London!" 1

All this to tell us that Tom Pinch is come to London! This fit of lyric poetry, in which the most poetic extravagances spring from the most vulgar commonplaces, like sickly flowers growing in a broken old flower-pot, displays in its natural and quaint contrasts all the sides of Dickens' imagination. We shall have his portrait if we picture to ourselves a man who, with a stewpan in one hand and a postillion's whip in the other, took to making prophecies.

IV.

The reader already foresees what vehement emotions this species of imagination will produce. "The mode of conception in a man governs the mode of thought. When the mind, barely attentive, follows the indistinct outlines of a rough sketched image, joy and grief glide past him with insensible touch. When the mind, with rapt attention, penetrates the minute details of a precise image, joy and grief shake the whole man. Dickens has this attention, and sees these details; this is why he meets everywhere with objects of exaltation. He never abandons his impassioned tone; he never rests in a natural style and in simple narrative; he only rails or weeps; he writes but

1 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, ch. xxxvi.
satires or elegies. He has the feverish sensibility of a woman who laughs loudly, or melts into tears at the sudden shock of the slightest occurrence. This impassioned style is extremely potent, and to it may be attributed half the glory of Dickens. The majority of men have only weak emotions. 'We labour mechanically, and yawn much; three-fourths of things leave us cold; we go to sleep by habit, and we no longer remark the household scenes, petty details, stale adventures, which are the basis of our existence. A man comes, who suddenly renders them interesting; nay, who makes them dramatic, changes them into objects of admiration, tenderness and dread. Without leaving the fireside or the omnibus, we are trembling, our eyes full of tears, or shaken by fits of inextinguishable laughter. We are transformed, our life is doubled, our soul had been vegetating; now it feels, suffers, loves. The contrast, the rapid succession, the number of the sentiments, add further to its trouble; we are immersed for two hundred pages in a torrent of new emotions, contrary and increasing, which communicates its violence to the mind, which carries it away in digressions and falls, and only casts it on the bank enchanted and exhausted. It is an intoxication, and on a delicate soul the effect would be too forcible; but it suits the English public, and that public has justified it.

This sensibility can hardly have more than two issues—laughter and tears. There are others, but they are only reached by lofty eloquence; they are the path to sublimity, and we have seen that for Dickens this path is cut off. Yet there is no writer who knows better how to touch and melt; he makes us weep, absolutely
shed tears; before reading him we did not know there was so much pity in the heart. The grief of a child, who wishes to be loved by his father, and whom his father does not love; the despairing love and slow death of a poor half-imbecile young man: all these pictures of secret grief leave an ineffaceable impression. The tears which he sheds are genuine, and compassion is their only source. Balzac, George Sand, Stendhal have also recorded human miseries; is it possible to write without recording them? But they do not seek them out, they hit upon them; they do not dream of displaying them to us; they were going elsewhere, and met them on their way. They love art better than men. They delight only in setting in motion the springs of passions, in combining large systems of events, in constructing powerful characters: they do not write from sympathy with the wretched, but from love of beauty. When we have finished George Sand's *Mauprat*, our emotion is not pure sympathy; we feel, in addition, a deep admiration for the greatness and the generosity of love. When we have come to the end of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot*, our heart is pained by the tortures of that anguish; but the astonishing inventiveness, the accumulation of facts, the abundance of general ideas, the force of analysis, transport us into the world of science, and our painful sympathy is calmed by the spectacle of this physiology of the heart. Dickens never calms our sympathy; he selects subjects in which it alone, and more than elsewhere, is unfolded: the long oppression of children persecuted and starved by their schoolmaster; the life of the factory-hand Stephen, robbed and degraded by his wife, driven away by his fellow-workmen, accused of theft, lingering six
days at the bottom of a pit into which he has fallen, maimed, consumed by fever, and dying when he is at length discovered. Rachael, his only friend, is there; and his delirium, his cries, the storm of despair in which Dickens envelops his characters, have prepared the way for the painful picture of this resigned death. The bucket brings up a poor, crushed human creature, and we see "the pale, worn, patient face looking up to the sky, whilst the right hand, shattered and hanging down, seems as if waiting to be taken by another hand." Yet he smiles, and feebly said "Rachael!" She stooped down, and bent over him until her eyes were between his and the sky, for he could not so much as turn them to look at her. Then in broken words he tells her of his long agony. Ever since he was born he has met with nothing but misery and injustice; it is the rule—the weak suffer, and are made to suffer. This pit into which he had fallen "has cost hundreds and hundreds o' men's lives—fathers, sons, brothers, dear to thousands an' thousands, an' keeping 'em fro' want and hunger. . . . The men that works in pits . . . ha' pray'n an' pray'n the lawmakers for Christ's sake not to let their work be murder to 'em, but to spare 'em for th' wives and children, that they loves as well as gentlefok loves theirs;" all in vain. "When the pit was in work, it killed wi'out need; when 't is let alone, it kills wi'out need." Stephen says this without anger, quietly, merely as the truth. He has his calumniator before him; he does not get angry, accuses no one; he only charges old Gradgrind to clear him and make his name good with all men as soon as he shall be dead. His heart is up there in heaven, where

1 *Hard Times*, bk. 3, ch. vi.
he has seen a star shining. In his agony, on his bed of stones, he has gazed upon it, and the tender and touching glance of the divine star has calmed, by its mystical serenity, the anguish of mind and body.

"'It ha' shined upon me,' he said reverently, 'in my pain and trouble down below. It ha' shined into my mind. I ha' lookn at't and thowt o' thee, Rachael, till the muddle in my mind have cleared awa, above a bit, I hope. If soom ha' been wantin' in unnerstah' in' me better, I, too, ha' been wantin' in unnerstan' in' them better.

"'In my pain an' trouble, lookin' up yonder,—wi' it shinin' on me.—I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom toogther more, an' get a better unnerstan' in' o' one another, than when I were in't my own weak seln.

"'Often as I coom to myseln, and found it shinin' on me down there in my trouble, I thowt it were the star as guided to Our Saviour's home. I awmust think it be the very star!'

"They carried him very gently along the fields, and down the lanes, and over the wide landscape; Rachael always holding the hand in hers. Very few whispers broke the mournful silence. It was soon a funeral procession. The star had shown him where to find the God of the poor; and through humility, and sorrow, and forgiveness, he had gone to his Redeemer's rest." 1

This same writer is the most railing, the most comic, the most jocose of English authors. And it is moreover a singular gaiety! It is the only kind which would harmonise with this impassioned sensibility. There is a laughter akin to tears. Satire is the sister of elegy: if the second pleads for the oppressed, the first combats the oppressors. Feeling painfully all the wrongs that are committed, and the vices that are practised, Dickens

1 *Hard Times*, bk. 3, ch. vi.
avenges himself by ridicule. He does not paint, he punishes. Nothing could be more damaging than those long chapters of sustained irony, in which the sarcasm is pressed, line after line, more sanguinary and piercing in the chosen adversary. There are five or six against the Americans,—their venal newspapers, their drunken journalists, their cheating speculators, their women authors, their coarseness, their familiarity, their insolence, their brutality,—enough to captivate an absolutist, and to justify the French Liberal who, returning from New York, embraced with tears in his eyes the first gendarme whom he saw on landing at Havre. Starting of commercial companies, interviews between a member of Parliament and his constituents, instructions of a member of the House of Commons to his secretary, the outward display of great banking-houses, the laying of the first stone of a public building, every kind of ceremony and lie of English society, are depicted with the fire and bitterness of Hogarth. There are parts where the comic element is so violent, that it has the semblance of vengeance,—as the story of Jonas Chuzzlewit. "The very first word which this excellent boy learnt to spell was gain, and the second (when he came into two syllables) was money." This fine education had unfortunately produced two results: first, that, "having been long taught by his father to overreach everybody, he had imperceptibly acquired a love of overreaching that venerable monitor himself;" secondly, that being taught to regard everything as a matter of property, "he had gradually come to look with impatience on his parent as a certain amount of personal estate," who would be very well "secured," in that particular description of strong-box which is
commonly called a coffin, and banked in the grave.\footnote{Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. viii.}

"Is that my father snoring, Pecksniff?" asked Jonas; "tread upon his foot; will you be so good? The foot next you is the gouty one."\footnote{Ibid} Young Chuzzlewit is introduced to us with this mark of attention; we may judge by this of his other feelings. In reality, Dickens is gloomy, like Hogarth; but, like Hogarth, he makes us burst with laughter by the buffoonery of his invention and the violence of his caricatures. He pushes his characters to absurdity with unwonted boldness. Pecksniff hits off moral phrases and sentimental actions in so grotesque a manner, that they make him extravagant. Never were heard such monstrous oratorical displays. Sheridan had already painted an English hypocrite, Joseph Surface; but he differs from Pecksniff as much as a portrait of the eighteenth century differs from a cartoon of \textit{Punch}. Dickens makes hypocrisy so deformed and monstrous, that his hypocrite ceases to resemble a man; we would call him one of those fantastic figures whose nose is greater than his body. This exaggerated comicality springs from excess of imagination. Dickens uses the same spring throughout. The better to make us see the object he shows us, he dazzles the reader’s eyes with it; but the reader is amused by this irregular fancy: the fire of the execution makes him forget that the scene is improbable, and he laughs heartily as he listens to the undertaker, Mould, enumerating the consolations which filial piety, well backed by money, may find in his shop. What grief could not be softened by

"Four horses to each vehicle . . . velvet trappings . . . drivers in cloth cloaks and top-boots . . . the plumage of the
ostrich, dyed black . . . any number of walking attendants, dressed in the first style of funeral fashion, and carrying batons tipped with brass . . . a place in Westminster Abbey itself, if he choose to invest it in such a purchase. 'Oh! do not let us say that gold is dross, when it can buy such things as these.' 'Ay, Mrs. Gamp, you are right,' rejoined the undertaker. 'We should be an honoured calling. We do good by stealth, and blush to have it mentioned in our little bills. How much consolation may I—even I,' cried Mr. Mould, 'have diffused among my fellow-creatures by means of my four long-tailed prancers, never harnessed under ten pound ten!"'  

Usually Dickens remains grave whilst drawing his caricatures. English wit consists in saying very jocular things in a solemn manner. Tone and ideas are then in contrast; every contrast makes a strong impression. Dickens loves to produce them, and his public to hear them.

If at times he forgets to castigate his neighbour, if he tries to sport, to amuse himself, he is not the more happy for all that. The chief element of the English character is its want of happiness. The ardent and tenacious imagination of Dickens is impressed with things too firmly, to pass lightly and gaily over the surface. He leans too heavily on them, he penetrates, works into, hollows them out; all these violent actions are efforts, and all efforts are sufferings. To be happy, a man must be light-minded, as a Frenchman of the eighteenth century, or sensual, as an Italian of the sixteenth; a man must not get anxious about things, if he wishes to enjoy them. Dickens does get anxious, and does not enjoy. Let us take a little comical accident, such as we meet with in the street—a gust of

1 Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. xix.
wind, which blows about the garments of a street-porter. Scaramouche will grin with good humour; Le Sage smile like a diverted man; both will pass by and think no more of it. Dickens muses over it for half a page. He sees so clearly all the effects of the wind, he puts himself so entirely in its place, he imagines for it a will so impassioned and precise, he shakes the clothes of the poor man hither and thither so violently and so long, he turns the gust into a tempest, into a persecution so great, that we are made giddy; and even whilst we laugh, we feel in ourselves too much emotion and compassion to laugh heartily:

"And a breezy, goose-skinned, blue-nosed, red-eyed, stony-toed, tooth-chattering place it was, to wait in, in the wintertime, as Toby Veck well knew. The wind came tearing round the corner—especially the east wind—as if it had sallied forth, express, from the confines of the earth, to have a blow at Toby. And often-times it seemed to come upon him sooner than it had expected; for, bouncing round the corner, and passing Toby, it would suddenly wheel round again, as if it cried: 'Why, here he is!' Incontinent his little white apron would be caught up over his head like a naughty boy's garments, and his feeble little cane would be seen to wrestle and struggle unavailingly in his hand, and his legs would undergo tremendous agitation; and Toby himself, all aslant, and facing now in this direction, now in that, would be so banged and buffeted, and tussled, and worried, and hustled, and lifted off his feet, as to render it a state of things but one degree removed from a positive miracle that he wasn't carried up bodily into the air as a colony of frogs or snails or other portable creatures sometimes are, and rained down again, to the great astonishment of the natives, on some strange corner of the world where ticket-porters are unknown."  

1 The Chimes, the first quarter.
If now we would picture in a glance this imagination,—so lucid, so violent, so passionately fixed on the object selected, so deeply touched by little things, so wholly attached to the details and sentiments of vulgar life, so fertile in incessant emotions, so powerful in rousing painful pity, sarcastic raillery, nervous gaiety,—we must fancy a London street on a rainy winter's night. The flickering light of the gas dazzles our eyes, streams through the shop windows, floods over the passing forms; and its harsh light, settling upon their contracted features, brings out, with endless detail and damaging force, their wrinkles, deformities, troubled expression. If in this close and dirty crowd we discover the fresh face of a young girl, this artificial light covers it with false and excessive lights and shades; it makes it stand out against the rainy and cold blackness with a strange halo. The mind is struck with wonder; but we carry our hand to our eyes to cover them, and, whilst we admire the force of this light, we involuntarily think of the real country sun and the tranquil beauty of day.

§ 2.—The Public.

I.

Plant this talent on English soil; the literary opinion of the country will direct its growth and explain its fruits. For this public opinion is its private opinion; it does not submit to it as to an external constraint, but feels it inwardly as an inner persuasion; it does not hinder, but develops it, and only repeats aloud what it said to itself in a whisper.

The counsels of this public taste are somewhat like.
this; the more powerful because they agree with its natural inclination, and urge it upon its special course:—

"Be moral. All your novels must be such as may be read by young girls. We are practical minds, and we would not have literature corrupt practical life. We believe in family life, and we would not have literature paint the passions which attack family life. We are Protestants, and we have preserved something of the severity of our fathers against enjoyment and passions. Amongst these, love is the worst. Beware of resembling in this respect the most illustrious of our neighbours. Love is the hero of all George Sand's novels. Married or not, she thinks it beautiful, holy, sublime in itself; and she says so. Don't believe this; and if you do believe it, don't say it. It is a bad example. Love thus represented makes marriage a secondary matter. It ends in marriage, or destroys it, or does without it, according to circumstances; but whatever it does, it treats it as inferior; it does not recognise any holiness in it, beyond that which love gives it, and holds it impious if it is excluded. A novel of this sort is a plea for the heart, the imagination, enthusiasm, nature; but it is also often a plea against society and law: we do not suffer society and law to be touched, directly or indirectly. To present a feeling as divine, to make all institutions bow before it, to carry it through a series of generous actions, to sing with a sort of heroic inspiration the combats which it wages and the attacks which it sustains, to enrich it with all the force of eloquence, to crown it with all the flowers of poetry, is to paint the life, which it results in, as more beautiful and loftier than others, to set it
far above all passions and duties, in a sublime region, on a throne, whence it shines as a light, a consolation, a hope, and draws all hearts towards it. Perhaps this is the world of artists; it is not the world of ordinary men. Perhaps it is true to nature; we make nature give way before the interests of society. George Sand paints impassioned women; paint you for us good women. George Sand makes us desire to be in love; do you make us desire to be married.

"This has its disadvantages without doubt; art suffers by it, if the public gains. Though your characters give the best examples, your works will be of less value. No matter; you may console yourself with the thought that you are moral. Your lovers will be uninteresting; for the only interest natural to their age is the violence of passion, and you cannot paint passion. In Nicholas Nickleby you will show two good young men, like all young men, marrying two good young women, like all young women; in Martin Chuzzlewit you will show two more good young men, perfectly resembling the other two, marrying again two good young women, perfectly resembling the other two; in Dombey and Son there will be only one good young man and one good young woman. Otherwise there is no difference. And so on. The number of your marriages is marvellous, and you marry enough couples to people England. What is more curious still, they are all disinterested, and the young man and young woman snap their fingers at money as sincerely as in the Opéra Comique. You will not cease to dwell on the pretty shynesses of the betrothed, the tears of the mothers, the tears of all the guests, the amusing and touching scenes of the dinner table; you will create a crowd of family pictures,
all touching, and almost all as agreeable as screen-paintings. The reader is moved; he thinks he is beholding the innocent loves and virtuous attentions of a little boy and girl of ten. He should like to say to them: 'Good little people, continue to be very proper.' But the chief interest will be for young girls, who will learn in how devoted and yet suitable a manner a lover ought to court his intended. If you venture on a seduction, as in Copperfield, you do not relate the progress, ardour, intoxication of love; you only depict its miseries, despair, and remorse. If in Copperfield and the Cricket on the Hearth you present a troubled marriage and a suspected wife, you hasten to restore peace to the marriage and innocence to the wife; and you will deliver, by her mouth, so splendid a eulogy on marriage, that it might serve for a model to Emile Augier. If in Hard Times the wife treads on the border of crime, she shall check herself there. If in Dombey and Son she flees from her husband's roof, she remains pure, only incurs the appearance of crime, and treats her lover in such a manner that the reader wishes to be the husband. If, lastly, in Copperfield you relate the emotions and follies of love, you will rally this poor affection, depict its littlenesses, not venture to make us hear the ardent, generous, undisciplined blast of the all-powerful passion; you turn it into a toy for good children, or a pretty marriage-trinket. But marriage will compensate you. Your genius of observation and taste for details is exercised on the scenes of domestic life; you will excel in the picture of a fireside, family

1 A living French author, whose dramas are all said to have a moral purpose.—Tr.

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prattle, children on the knees of their mother, a husband watching by lamplight by the side of his sleeping wife, the heart full of joy and courage, because it feels that it is working for its own. You will describe charming or grave portraits of women; of Dora, who after marriage continues to be a little girl, whose pouting, prettinesses, childishnesses, laughter, make the house gay, like the chirping of a bird; Esther, whose perfect goodness and divine innocence cannot be affected by trials or years; Agnes, so calm, patient, sensible, pure, worthy of respect, a very model of a wife, sufficient in herself to claim for marriage the respect which we demand for it. And when it is necessary to show the beauty of these duties, the greatness of this conjugal love, the depth of the sentiment which ten years of confidence, cares, and reciprocal devotion have created, you will find in your sensibility, so long constrained, speeches as pathetic as the strongest words of love.¹

¹ The worst novels are not those which glorify love. A man must live across the Channel to dare what the French have dared. In England, some admire Balzac; but no man would tolerate him. Some pretend that he is not immoral; but every one will recognise that he always and everywhere makes morality an abstraction. George Sand has only celebrated one passion; Balzac has celebrated them all. He has considered them as forces; and holding that force is beautiful, he has supported them by their causes, surrounded them by their circumstances, developed them in their effects, pushed them to an extreme, and

¹ David Copperfield, ch. lxv.; the scene between the doctor and his wife.
magnified them so as to make them into sublime monsters, more systematic and more true than the truth. We do not admit that a man is only an artist, and nothing else. We would not have him separate himself from his conscience, and lose sight of the practical. We will never consent to see that such is the leading feature of our own Shakspeare; we will not recognise that he, like Balzac, brings his heroes to crime and monomania, and that, like him, he lives in a land of pure logic and imagination. We have changed much since the sixteenth century, and we condemn now what we approved formerly. We would not have the reader interested in a miser, an ambitious man, a rake. And he is interested in them when the writer, neither praising nor blaming, sets himself to unfold the mood, training, shape of the head, and habits of mind which have impressed in him this primitive inclination, to prove the necessity of its effects, to lead it through all its stages, to show the greater power which age and contentment give, to expose the irresistible fall which hurl mankind into madness or death. The reader, caught by this reasoning, admires the work which it has produced, and forgets to be indignant against the personage created. He says, What a splendid miser! and thinks not of the evils which avarice causes. He becomes a philosopher and an artist, and remembers not that he is an upright man. Always recollect that you are such, and renounce the beauties which may flourish on this evil soil.

"Amongst these the first is greatness. A man must be interested in passions to comprehend their full effect, to count all their springs, to describe their whole course, They are diseases; if a man is content to blame them
he will never know them; if you are not a physiologist, if you are not enamoured of them, if you do not make your heroes out of them, if you do not start with pleasure at the sight of a fine feature of avarice, as at the sight of a valuable symptom, you will not be able to unfold their vast system, and to display their fatal greatness. You will not have this immoral merit; and, moreover, it does not suit your species of mind. Your extreme sensibility, and ever-ready irony, must needs be exercised; you have not sufficient calmness to penetrate to the depths of a character, you prefer to weep over or to rail at it; you lay the blame on it, make it your friend or foe, render it touching or odious; you do not depict it; you are too impassioned, and not enough inquisitive. On the other hand, the tenacity of your imagination, the vehemence and fixity with which you impress your thought into the detail you wish to grasp, limit your knowledge, arrest you in a single feature, prevent you from reaching all the parts of a soul, and from sounding its depths. Your imagination is too lively, too meagre. These, then, are the characters you will outline. You will grasp a personage in a single attitude, you will see of him only that, and you will impose it upon him from beginning to end. His face will always have the same expression, and this expression will be almost always a grimace. Your personages will have a sort of knack which will not quit them. Miss Mercy will laugh at every word; Mark Tapley will say 'jolly' in every scene; Mrs. Gamp will be ever talking of Mrs. Harris; Dr. Chillis will not venture a single action free from timidity; Mr. Micawber will speak through three volumes the same kind of emphatic phrases, and will pass five or six times, with
comical suddenness, from joy to grief. Each of your characters will be a vice, a virtue, a ridicule personified; and the passion, with which you endow it, will be so frequent, so invariable, so absorbing, that it will no longer be like a living man, but an abstraction in man’s clothes. The French have a Tartuffe like your Pecksniff, but the hypocrisy which he represents has not destroyed the other traits of his character; if he adds to the comedy by his vice, he belongs to humanity by his nature. He has, besides his ridiculous feature, a character and a mood; he is coarse, strong, red in the face, brutal, sensual; the vehemence of his blood makes him bold; his boldness makes him calm; his boldness, his calm, his quick decision, his scorn of men, make him a great politician. When he has entertained the public through five acts, he still offers to the psychologist and the physician more than one subject of study. Your Pecksniff will offer nothing to these. He will only serve to instruct and amuse the public. He will be a living satire of hypocrisy, and nothing more. If you give him a taste for brandy, it is gratuitously; in the mood which you assign to him, nothing requires it; he is so steeped in oily hypocrisy, in softness, in a flowing style, in literary phrases, in tender morality, that the rest of his nature has disappeared; it is a mask, and not a man. But this mask is so grotesque and energetic, that it will be useful to the public, and will diminish the number of hypocrites. It is our end and yours, and the list of your characters will have rather the effect of a book of satires than of a portrait gallery.

“For the same reason, these satires, though united, will continue effectually detached, and will not constitute a genuine collection. You began with essays, and
your larger novels are only essays, tagged together. The only means of composing a natural and solid whole is to write the history of a passion or of a character, to take them up at their birth, to see them increase, alter, become destroyed, to understand the inner necessity for their development. You do not follow this development; you always keep your character in the same attitude; he is a miser, or a hypocrite, or a good man to the end, and always after the same fashion: thus he has no history. You can only change the circumstances in which he is met with, you do not change him; he remains motionless, and at every shock that touches him, emits the same sound. The variety of events which you contrive is therefore only an amusing phantasmagoria; they have no connection, they do not form a system, they are but a heap. You will only write lives, adventures, memoirs, sketches, collections of scenes, and you will not be able to compose an action. But if the literary taste of your nation, added to the natural direction of your genius, imposes upon you moral intentions, forbids you the lofty depicture of characters, vctoes the composition of united aggregates, it presents to your observation, sensibility, and satire, a succession of original figures which belong only to England, which, drawn by your hand, will form a unique gallery, and which, with the stamp of your genius, will offer that of your country and of your time."

§ 3.—The Characters.

I.

Take away the grotesque characters, who are only introduced to fill up and to excite laughter, and you will
find that all Dickens' characters belong to two classes — people who have feelings and emotions, and people who have none. He contrasts the souls which nature creates with those which society deforms. One of his last novels, *Hard Times*, is an abstract of all the rest. He there exalts instinct above reason, intuition of heart above positive knowledge; he attacks education built on statistics, figures, and facts; overwhims the positive and mercantile spirit with misfortune and ridicule; and the aristocrat; falls foul of manufacturing towns, combats the pride, harshness, selfishness of the merchant towns of smoke and mud, which fetter the body in an artificial atmosphere, and the mind in a factitious existence. He seeks out poor artisans, mountebanks, a foundling, and crushes beneath their common sense, generosity, delicacy, courage, and gentleness, the false science, false happiness, and false virtue of the rich and powerful who despise them. He satirises oppressive society; mourns over oppressed nature; and his elegiac genius, like his satirical genius, finds ready to his hand in the English world around him, the sphere which it needs for its development.

II.

The first fruits of English society is hypocrisy. It ripens here under the double breath of religion and morality; we know their popularity and sway across the Channel. In a country where it is shocking to laugh on Sunday, where the gloomy Puritan has preserved something of his old rancour against happiness, where the critics of ancient history insert dissertations on the relative virtue of Nebuchadnezzar, it is natural that the appearance of morality should be
serviceable. It is a needful coin: those who lack good money coin bad; and the more public opinion declares it precious, the more it is counterfeited. This vice is therefore English. Mr. Pecksniff is not found in France. His speech would disgust Frenchmen. If they have an affectation, it is not of virtue, but of vice: if they wish to succeed, they would be wrong to speak of their principles: they prefer to confess their weaknesses; and if they have quacks, they are boasters of immorality. They had their hypocrites once, but it was when religion was popular. Since Voltaire, Tartuffe is impossible. Frenchmen no longer try to affect a piety which would deceive no one and lead to nothing. Hypocrisy comes and goes, varying with the state of morals, religion, and mind; we can see, then, how Pecksniff’s suits the dispositions of his country. English religion is not very dogmatical, but wholly moral. Therefore Pecksniff does not, like Tartuffe, utter theological phrases; he expands altogether in philanthropic tirades. He has progressed with the age; he has become a humanitarian philosopher. He calls his daughters Mercy and Charity. He is tender, he is kind, he gives vent to domestic effusions. He innocently exhibits, when visited, charming domestic scenes; he displays his paternal heart, marital sentiments, the kindly feeling of a good master. The family virtues are honoured now-a-days; he must muffle himself therewith. Orgon formerly said, as taught by Tartuffe:

“My brother, children, mother, wife might die!
You think I’ll care; no surely, no! not I!”

“Et je verrais mourir frère, enfants, mère, et femme
Que j’aime soucierais autant que de cela.”

These lines, said by Orgon to his brother-in-law Cléante, are from Molière’s Tartuffe, i. vi.
Modern virtue and English piety think otherwise; we must not despise this world in view of the next; we must improve it. Tartuffe speaks of his hair-shirt and his discipline; Pecksniff, of his comfortable little parlour, of the charm of friendship, the beauties of nature. He tries to make men "dwell in unity." He is like a member of the Peace Society. He develops the most touching considerations on the benefits and beauties of union among men. It will be impossible to hear him without being affected. Men are refined now-a-days, they have read much elegiac poetry; their sensibility is more active; they can no longer be deceived by the coarse impudence of Tartuffe. This is why Mr. Pecksniff will use gestures of sublime long-suffering, smiles of ineffable compassion, starts, free and easy movements, graces, tendernesses which will seduce the most reserved and charm the most delicate. The English in their Parliament, meetings, associations, public ceremonies, have learned the oratorical phraseology, the abstract terms, the style of political economy, of the newspaper and the prospectus. Pecksniff talks like a prospectus. He possesses its obscurity, its wordiness, and its emphasis. He seems to soar above the earth, in the region of pure ideas, in the bosom of truth. He resembles an apostle, brought up in the Times office. He spouts general ideas on every occasion. He finds a moral lesson in the ham and eggs he has just eaten. As he folds his napkin, he rises to lofty contemplations:

"Even the worldly goods of which we have just disposed, even they have their moral. See how they come and go. Every pleasure is transitory." ¹

¹ Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. ii.
The process of digestion, as I have been informed by anatomical friends, is one of the most wonderful works of nature. I do not know how it may be with others, but it is a great satisfaction to me to know, when regaling on my humble fare, that I am putting in motion the most beautiful machinery with which we have any acquaintance. I really feel at such times as if I was doing a public service. When I have wound myself up, if I may employ such a term, said Mr. Pecksniff with exquisite tenderness, 'and know that I am Going, I feel that in the lesson afforded by the works within me, I am a Benefactor to my Kind!'

We recognise a new species of hypocrisy. Vices, like virtues, change in every age.

The practical, as well as the moral spirit, is English; by commerce, labour, and government, this people has acquired the taste and talent for business; this is why they regard the French as children and madmen. The excess of this disposition is the destruction of imagination and sensibility. Man becomes a speculative machine, in which figures and facts are set in array; he denies the life of the mind, and the joys of the heart; he sees in the world nothing but loss and gain; he becomes hard, harsh, greedy, and avaricious; he treats men as machinery; on a certain day he finds himself simply a merchant, banker, statistician; he has ceased to be a man. Dickens has multiplied portraits of the positive man—Ralph Nickleby, Scrooge, Anthony Chuzzlewit, Jonas Chuzzlewit, Alderman Cute, Mr. Murdstone and his sister, Bounderby, Gradgrind: we can find them in all his novels. Some are so by education, others by nature; but all are odious, for they all rail at and destroy kindness, sympathy, compassion, disinterested

1 'Martin Chuzzlewit, ch. viii.'
affections, religious emotions, a fanciful enthusiasm, all that is lovely in man. They oppress children, strike women, starve the poor, insult the wretched. The best are machines of polished steel, methodically performing their official duties, and not knowing that they make others suffer. These kinds of men are not found in France. Their rigidity is not in the French character. They are produced in England by a school which has its philosophy, its great men, its glory, and which has never been established amongst the French. More than once, it is true, French writers have depicted avaricious men, men of business, and shopkeepers: Balzac is full of them; but he explains them by their imbecility, or makes them monsters, like Grandet and Gobseck. Those of Dickens constitute a real class, and represent a national vice. Read this passage of *Hard Times*, and see if, body and soul, Mr. Gradgrind is not wholly English:

"Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, sir!"

"The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker’s square forefinger emphasised his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster’s sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarge in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker’s mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The
emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum-pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was—all helped the emphasis.

"'In this life we want nothing but Facts, sir; nothing but Facts!'

"The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim."

"'THOMAS GRADGRIND, sir! A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind. (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, sir!'

"In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words 'boys and girls' for 'sir,' Thomas Gradgrind now pre-

1 Hard Times, book i. ch. i.
sented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.”

Another fault arising from the habit of commanding and striving is pride. It abounds in an aristocratic country, and no one has more soundly rated aristocracy than Dickens; all his portraits are sarcasms. James Harthouse, a dandy disgusted with everything, chiefly with himself, and rightly so; Lord Frederick Verisopht, a poor duped idiot, brutalised with drink, whose wit consists in staring at men and sucking his cane; Lord Feenix, a sort of mechanism of parliamentary phrases, out of order, and hardly able to finish the ridiculous periods into which he always takes care to lapse; Mrs. Skewton, a hideous old ruin, a coquette to the last, demanding rose-coloured curtains for her death-bed, and parading her daughter through all the drawing-rooms of England, in order to sell her to some vain husband; Sir John Chester, a wretch of high society, who, for fear of compromising himself, refuses to save his natural son, and refuses it with all kinds of airs, as he finishes his chocolate. But the most complete and most English picture of the aristocratic spirit is the portrait of a London merchant, Mr. Dombey.

In France people do not look for types among the merchants, but they are found among that class in England, as forcible as in the proudest châteaux. Mr. Dombey loves his house as if he were a nobleman, as much as himself. If he neglects his daughter and longs for a son, it is to perpetuate the old name of his bank. He has his ancestors in commerce, and he likes to have his descendants in the same branch of business. He maintains traditions, and continues a

1 *Hard Times*, book i. ch. ii.
power. At this height of opulence, and with this scope of action, he is a prince, and with a prince's position he has his feelings. We see there a character which could only be produced in a country whose commerce embraces the globe, where merchants are potentates, where a company of merchants has trafficked in continents, maintained wars, destroyed kingdoms, founded an empire of a hundred million men. The pride of such a man is not petty, but terrible; it is so calm and high, that to find a parallel we must read again the Mémôirs of the Duke of Saint Simon. Mr. Dombey has always commanded, and it does not enter his mind that he could yield to any one or anything. He receives flattery as a tribute to which he has a right, and sees men beneath him, at a vast distance, as beings made to beseech and obey him. His second wife, proud Edith Skewton, resists and scorns him; the pride of the merchant is pitted against the pride of the high-born woman, and the restrained outbursts of this growing opposition reveal an intensity of passion, which souls thus born and bred alone can feel. Edith, to avenge herself, flees on the anniversary of her marriage, and gives herself the appearance of being an adulteress. It is then that his inflexible pride asserts itself in all its rigidity. He has driven out of the house his daughter, whom he believes the accomplice of his wife; he forbids the one or the other to be recalled to his memory; he commands his sister and his friends to be silent; he receives guests with the same tone and the same coldness. With despair in his heart, and feeling bitterly the insult offered to him by his wife, the conscientiousness of his failure, and the idea of public ridicule, he remains as firm, as haughty, as calm
as ever. He launches out more recklessly in speculations, and is ruined; he is on the point of suicide. Hitherto all was well: the bronze column continued whole and unbroken; but the exigencies of public morality mar the idea of the book. His daughter arrives in the nick of time. She entreats him; his feelings get the better of him, she carries him off; he becomes the best of fathers, and spoils a fine novel.

III.

Let us look at some different personages. In contrast with these bad and factitious characters, produced by national institutions, we find good creatures such as nature made them; and first, children.

We have none in French literature. Racine's little Joas could only exist in a piece composed for the ladies' college of Saint Cyr; the little child speaks like a prince's son, with noble and acquired phrases, as if repeating his catechism. Now-a-days these portraits are only seen in France in New-year's books, written as models for good children. Dickens painted his with special gratification; he did not think of edifying the public, and he has charmed it. All his children are of extreme sensibility; they love much, and they crave to be loved. To understand this gratification of the painter, and this choice of characters, we must think of their physical type. English children have a colour so fresh, a complexion so delicate, a skin so transparent, eyes so blue and pure, that they are like beautiful flowers. No wonder if a novelist loves them, lends to their soul a sensibility and innocence which shine forth from their looks, if he thinks that these frail and charming roses are crushed by the coarse
hands which try to bend them. We must also imagine to ourselves the households in which they grow up. When at five o'clock the merchant and the clerk leave their office and their business, they return as quickly as possible to the pretty cottage, where their children have played all day on the lawn. The fireside by which they will pass the evening is a sanctuary, and domestic tenderness is the only poetry they need. A child deprived of these affections and this happiness seems to be deprived of the air we breathe, and the novelist does not find a volume too much to explain its unhappiness. Dickens has recorded it in ten volumes, and at last he has written the history of David Copperfield. David is loved by his mother, and by an honest servant girl, Peggotty; he plays with her in the garden; he watches her sew; he reads to her the natural history of crocodiles; he fears the hens and geese, which strut in a menacing and ferocious manner in the yard; he is perfectly happy. His mother marries again, and all changes. The father-in-law, Mr. Murdstone, and his sister Jane, are harsh, methodical, and cold beings. Poor little David is every moment wounded by harsh words. He dare not speak or move; he is afraid to kiss his mother; he feels himself weighed down, as by a leaden cloak, by the cold looks of the new master and mistress. He falls back on himself; mechanically studies the lessons assigned him; cannot learn them, so great is his dread of not knowing them. He is whipped, shut up with bread and water in a lonely room. He is terrified by night, and fears himself. He asks himself whether in fact he is not bad or wicked, and weeps. This incessant terror, hopeless and issueless, the spectacle of this wounded
sensibility and stupefied intelligence, the long anxieties, the sleepless nights, the solitude of the poor imprisoned child, his passionate desire to kiss his mother or to weep on the breast of his nurse,—all this is sad to see. These children's grieves are as heart-felt as the sorrows of a man. It is the history of a frail plant, which was flourishing in a warm air, beneath a mild sun, and which, suddenly transplanted to the snow, sheds its leaves and withers.

The working-classes are like children, dependent, not very cultivated, akin to nature, and liable to oppression. And so Dickens extols them. That is not new in France; the novels of Eugène Sue have given us more than one example, and the theme is as old as Rousseau; but in the hands of the English writer it has acquired a singular force. His heroes possess feelings so delicate, and are so self-sacrificing, that we cannot admire them sufficiently. They have nothing vulgar but their pronunciation; the rest is but nobility and generosity. We see a mountebank abandon his daughter, his only joy, for fear of injuring her in any way. A young woman devotes herself to save the unworthy wife of a man who loves her, and whom she loves; the man dies; she continues, from pure self-sacrifice, to care for the degraded creature. A poor waggoner, who thinks his wife unfaithful, loudly pronounces her innocent, and all his vengeance is to think only of loading her with tenderness and kindness. None, according to Dickens, feel so strongly as they do the happiness of loving and being loved—the pure joys of domestic life. None have so much compassion for those poor deformed and infirm creatures whom they so often bring into the world, and who seem only born to die. None have a juster and more inflexible moral sense. I confess even that

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Dickens' heroes unfortunately resemble the indignant fathers of French melodramas. When old Peggotty learns that his niece is seduced, he sets off, stick in hand, and walks over France, Germany, and Italy, to find her and bring her back to duty. But above all, they have an English sentiment, which fails in Frenchmen: they are Christians. It is not only women, as in France, who take refuge in the idea of another world; men turn also their thoughts towards it. In England, where there are so many sects, and every one chooses his own, each one believes in the religion he has made for himself; and this noble sentiment raises still higher the throne upon which the uprightness of their resolution and the delicacy of their heart has placed them.

In reality, the novels of Dickens can all be reduced to one phrase, to wit: Be good, and love; there is genuine joy only in the emotions of the heart; sensibility is the whole man. Leave science to the wise, pride to the nobles, luxury to the rich; have compassion on humble wretchedness; the smallest and most despised being may in himself be worth as much as thousands of the powerful and the proud. Take care not to bruise the delicate souls which flourish in all conditions, under all costumes, in all ages. Believe that humanity, pity, forgiveness, are the finest things in man; believe that intimacy, expansion, tenderness, tears, are the sweetest things in the world. To live is nothing; to be powerful, learned, illustrious, is little; to be useful is not enough. He alone has lived and is a man who has wept at the remembrance of a kind action which he himself has performed or received.
IV.

We do not believe that this contrast between the weak and the strong, or this outcry against society in favour of nature, are the caprice of an artist or the chance of the moment. When we penetrate deeply into the history of English genius, we find that its primitive foundation was impassioned sensibility, and that its natural expression was lyrical exaltation. Both were brought from Germany, and make up the literature existing before the Conquest. After an interval you find them again in the sixteenth century, when the French literature, introduced from Normandy, had passed away: they are the very soul of the nation. But the education of this soul was opposite to its genius; its history contradicted its nature; and its primitive inclination has clashed with all the great events which it has created or suffered. The chance of a victorious invasion and an imposed aristocracy, whilst establishing the enjoyment of political liberty, has impressed on the character habits of strife and pride. The chance of an insular position, the necessity of commerce, the abundant possession of the first materials for industry, have developed the practical faculties and the positive mind. The acquisition of these habits, faculties, and mind, to which must be added former hostile feelings to Rome, and an inveterate hatred against an oppressive church, has given birth to a proud and reasoning religion, replacing submission by independence, poetic theology by practical morality, and faith by discussion. Politics, business, and religion, like three powerful machines, have created a new man above the old. Stern dignity, self-command, the need of authority, severity in its exercise, strict
morality, without compromise or pity, a taste for figures and dry calculation, a dislike of facts not palpable and ideas not useful, ignorance of the invisible world, scorn of the weaknesses and tendernesses of the heart,—such are the dispositions which the stream of facts and the ascendency of institutions tend to confirm in their souls. But poetry and domestic life prove that they have only half succeeded. The old sensibility, oppressed and perverted, still lives and works. The poet subsists under the Puritan, the trader, the statesman. The social man has not destroyed the natural man. This frozen crust, this unsociable pride, this rigid attitude, often cover a good and tender nature. It is the English mask of a German head; and when a talented writer, often a writer of genius, reaches the sensibility which is bruised or buried by education and national institutions, he moves his reader in the most inner depths and becomes the master of all hearts.