IN DICKENS STREET

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BY

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TO

A. M. T.

PREFACE

Of the sketches contained in this volume, nine appeared during last year in *The Glasgow Herald*. I have to thank the Editor of that paper for permission to reproduce them here.

In one or two cases the sketches are fuller than when first printed.

The lecture on Mrs Gamp at the end of the book was read at the opening meeting of the Glasgow Dickens Society in October of last year.

January 1912

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POET AND TOWN TRAVELLER

"I AM myself at this moment," writes Mr Chesterton, "walking round and round Micawber, wondering what I shall say. And I have not found out yet." Here Mr Chesterton is but an echo of Mrs Micawber. "They have never understood you, Micawber," said that faithful lady. "They may be incapable of it. If so, that is their misfortune. I can pity their misfortune." But if Micawber belongs, as he undoubtedly does, to the great company of the Misunderstood, can we even say that his wife understood him? He was, as we know, the father of her family, the parent of her twins, the husband of her affections. To the task of

explanation she devoted an amazing wealth of rhetoric. Did she succeed? We think the answer must be in the negative. Did she not say once to Copperfield and Traddles, at a memorable dinner-party—"What is best suited to a person of Mr Micawber's peculiar temperament is a certainty." That observation, we hold, clearly proves that even from Mrs Micawber the Micawber secret was withheld. This is not to be wondered at, since imagination must ever elude mere rhetoric. For precisely the one thing that was not suited to Mr Micawber was a certainty. In presence of a shadow, a contingency, a hope, a possibility, his genius unfolded itself; a certainty would have killed it. We know that once, as law clerk to Uriah Heep, he was brought into touch with reality, and we know how he shrivelled under that awful impact. It was his one period of eclipse. "Mr Micawber is entirely changed. He is reserved. He is secret. . . . Mr Micawber is morose. He is severe. He

has no pride in his twins." So far Mrs Micawber. And then we have his own testimony. "The canker is in the flower. The cup is bitter to the brim. The worm is at his work." He lost for a time his aplomb; his eyeglass hung less easily and his collar drooped. Significant signs for the student of Micawber! The Poet is brought suddenly and tragically face to face with the Real. Micawber is constantly cited as the man waiting for something to turn up. The citation does him grave injustice. If anything had turned up, the Micawber world would have dissolved in the twinkling of an eye, or, at any rate, in the fall of an eyeglass.

The study of Micawber, then, is essentially a study of the artistic temperament. There was, indeed, in that remarkable man what might be called a subsidiary endowment—of oratory, namely—on which much could be said, but it must be disposed of here in a

single remark and a single sample. The remark is that it was of pure Front Bench quality, and would have carried Micawber far in politics had he cared to cultivate it. Here is the sample—the occasion being the removal of the Micawber family to Canterbury :—

"It may be expected that on the eve of a migration which will consign us to a perfectly new sphere of existence I should offer a few valedictory remarks to two such friends as I see before me. But all that I have to say in this way I have said. Whatever station in society I may attain, through the medium of the learned profession of which I am about to become an unworthy member, I shall endeavour not to disgrace, and Mrs Micawber will be safe to adorn. Under the temporary pressure of pecuniary liabilities, contracted with a view to their immediate liquidation, but remaining unliquidated through a combination of circumstances, I have been under the necessity of assuming a garb from which my natural instincts recoil —I allude to spectacles—and possessing myself of a cognomen, to which I can establish no legitimate pretensions."

If anyone can read this passage without detecting, to use Mr Micawber's own phrase, a Prime Minister "in posse," we are sorry for him. But the oratorical gift pales in presence of the poetic. Micawber had that sheer joy in expression which is at once the badge and the ecstasy of the Artist. "At no time of my life," he remarked once, "have I enjoyed a higher degree of satisfaction than in pouring my griefs into the bosom of my friend Copperfield." He was the Poet masquerading as town traveller. We hear of wine, coal, and corn being sold on commission, but these were so many fictions behind which the poet sought refuge from the world of fact. "A man of the higher imaginative powers" was his own phrase of self-description, and we are compelled to accept it. Perhaps nowhere do we get more light on Micawber's whole attitude to life than by considering carefully his relations with his bootmaker. We know the bootmaker. He was a "dirty-faced," disagree-

able personage, who had a disagreeable habit of arriving at the Micawber residence at seven in the morning, and shouting disagreeable things up the staircase, such as—"Pay us, will you? Don't hide, you know; that's mean. Pay us, will you?" Now, let us consider these observations. They are very crude and even harsh observations, totally lacking in atmosphere. Moreover, they are exceedingly definite. They are demands for hard, round, finished things, called coins of the realm. They are therefore demands which Micawber cannot meet. They voice the world of the Real, a world in which Micawber has no dwelling-place. We are not surprised therefore to learn that, while the bootmaker shouted his crudities, Micawber was in a room "on the second floor, transported with grief and mortification, even to the length of making motions at himself with a razor." Here is a situation which we venture to think might help Mr Chesterton. On the street level the noisy world of Fact

utters its demands. But in an upper chamber Micawber is transported with the higher emotions, with grief, pity, despair. We behold at once the splendour and futility of the artist. He can only discharge the world's account in tears or literature. Micawber will give an I.O.U., a bill, a letter; hard cash he cannot give. It is the tragedy of the artistic temperament, though happily not unrelieved. "Less than half an hour afterwards Micawber would polish his boots with extraordinary pains and go out, humming a tune, with a greater air of gentility than ever." The tragedy of a temperament, but, it should be added, the triumph of a temperament.

The briefest study of Micawber's conversation and correspondence confirms what we have said. He was always wounded, yet ever invulnerable. Once, the vulgar would have said, he was imprisoned for debt. What really happened? We have it in his own words—"The God of Day has gone

down upon me. The blossom is blighted, the leaf is withered." In prison he seizes the pen and composes his famous petition. On another occasion it is suggested to him that there is an opening in the "Medway coal trade." "Then let me see the Medway," exclaims Micawber. The world would send him on a business journey, but Micawber really goes on a Pilgrimage. He finds himself under "the shadow of that religious edifice immortalised by Chaucer." We never hear of coal; we do hear of "the resort of Pilgrims." Always and everywhere Micawber is true to his description of himself—"a man of the higher imaginative powers." When the twins are weaned, they "cease to derive their sustenance from nature's founts"; the official who is compelled to cut off the Micawber water supply is a "Minion of Power," "a ribald turncock," contact with whom means "the laceration of a wounded spirit." From every situation Micawber extracts the uttermost

farthing of emotional value. There was a "beautiful little dinner" once at the Canterbury Inn. The Poet took what the hour gave. "Mr Micawber's face shone with the punch, he delivered an eulogium on Mrs Micawber." But will anyone say that the fried sausage and punch yielded greater enjoyment than was derived from composing the letter that within a quarter of an hour followed Copperfield to his lodging? "My dear young friend, the die is cast, all is over. Hiding the ravages of care with a sickly mask of mirth, I have not informed you this evening that there is no hope of the remittance. . . . The bolt is impending and the tree must fall. . . . Let the wretched man who now addresses you be a beacon to you through life.—From the Beggared Outcast, Wilkins Micawber." It may be a shock to some to learn that on the following morning Copperfield saw Micawber on the London coach, "the very picture of tranquil enjoyment, smiling at Mrs Micawber's con-

versation, and eating walnuts out of a paper bag." The initiated, however, will express no surprise. Copperfield's intention, we learn, was to "offer a word of comfort." Did it not occur to him—prosaic mortal!—that a Micawber carries the secret of comfort within himself, and that he had already laid the spectres of the mind by the wand of literature? "The God of Day is once more high upon the mountain-tops."

On Mr Micawber's literary affinities a word must be said in passing. His masters of course were the Romantics—Chaucer, Shakespeare, Gray, and Robert Burns. Shakespeare was the "illustrious ornament of the Elizabethan era," Burns "the immortal Exciseman nurtured beyond the Tweed." It is surprising that so little note has been taken of Micawber's loyalty to Burns. In convivial hours, in moments of genial expansion and of pensive retrospect, when the past was lit by the "prismatic

hues of memory," Burns gave Micawber the fitting word. "As the punch disappeared Mr Micawber became still more friendly. Mrs Micawber's spirits becoming elevated, too, we sang 'Auld Lang Syne.' When we came to 'Here's a hand, my trusty frere,' we all joined hands round the table, and when we declared we would 'Tak' a right gude willie waught,' and had not the least idea what it meant, we were really affected." This is by no means the only reference to Scotland's Bard. Micawber could never recall the days of his first acquaintance with Copperfield without emotion. "I will drink," he said, "if my friend will permit me, to the days when we were younger. I may say of myself and Copperfield that—

> "We twa hae run about the braes
> And pu'd the gowans fine."

Mr Micawber had to admit, it is true, that he did not know what gowans were, adding that he had no doubt that Copper-

field and he "would frequently have taken a pull at them, if it had been feasible," an admission surely that disarms criticism. It would be ungracious to demand from Micawber a literal acquaintance with the Doric. Enough that he had imbibed so much of the spirit.

It remains now only to consider the last phase of Micawber—a difficult subject that has presented stumbling-blocks to critics. Why, it is asked, did Micawber become the denouncer of Heep? What had the soaring Wilkins to do with the writhing Uriah? Why did Micawber suddenly become so earnest and so ethical? Once more—and this is even more serious—why did Micawber emigrate? It is only pushful, energetic, un-Micawberish people who emigrate. Not only did he emigrate, but we hear of him working and even sweating—a monstrous thing! "I've seen that theer bald head of his," said Mr Peggotty, "a-perspiring in

the sun till I a'most thowt it would have melted away. And now he's a Magistrate." This final touch is undoubtedly the most shattering of all. That Micawber should have become a Magistrate seems on first thought to turn his whole career to foolishness. It is an outrage on his genius. A careful study of the documents, however, enables us to hold, notwithstanding certain sinister indications to the contrary, that Micawber remained Micawber. The denunciation of Heep, *e.g.*, was much more than the denunciation of Heep; it was the expression of Micawber. No one can read it without feeling that the ethical interest is quite subordinate to the imaginative. For Copperfield it is the unmasking of a villain; for Micawber it is Art for Art's sake, a literary treat of the most exquisite quality. Nor will we allow the word magistrate to disquiet us unduly. Lovers of Micawber will never believe that the man who went on board the emigrant ship at London,

"provided with a complete suit of oilskin, a straw hat with a very low crown, pitched or caulked on the outside," with a mariner's compass under his arm, and "with a shrewd trick of casting his eye up at the sky, as looking out for dirty weather," could ever sink to the level of a mere magistrate. And they are justified in their belief. Micawber's last letter is a triumphant declaration that he was true to his genius to the end. To say nothing of the quotations from his favourite poets that adorn the letter, take the closing sentence—"Among the eyes elevated towards you from this portion of the globe will ever be found, while it has light and life, The Eye appertaining to Wilkins Micawber, Magistrate." If we have established our thesis, that final word will be for our readers a hateful irrelevance. Thinking of Micawber, they will think of the Elevated Eye.

MRS GUMMIDGE'S SECRET

It may be of course that Mrs Gummidge had no secret. In that case Mr Peggotty's frequent and subdued references to "the old 'un" must be taken quite literally, and we must admit that had we shared his acquaintance with that gentleman there would be no difficulty in accounting for Mrs Gummidge's depression. "You see," remarked Mr Peggotty, "wen Missis Gummidge falls a-thinkin' of the old 'un she an't what you may call good company. Betwixt you and me, wen Mrs Gummidge takes to wimicking she's liable to be considered to be, by them as didn't know the old 'un, peevish like. Now I did know the old 'un, and I knowed his merits, so I unnerstan' her; but 'tan't entirely so, you see, with others—na'trally can't be." This

being accepted, interest in Mrs Gummidge would be scientific rather than human, and her case one for the psychologist. The emotion of grief, we learn from the text-books, has a paralysing effect on the voluntary movements. Mrs Gummidge, it will be remembered, was often in "a low state," and much given to sitting in "a peculiar corner of the fireside." And did she not say once, "If I felt less, I could do more?" Consulting the text-books again, we are informed that "a constant symptom of grief is sensitiveness to cold, and a difficulty in keeping warm." Mrs Gummidge offers an admirable example of the trustworthiness of this scientific generalisation. She frequently complained of cold, and of its "occasioning a visitation in her back which she called 'the creeps.'" Indeed, she would shed tears on the subject, saying that she was a "lone lorn creetur, and that everythink went contrairey to her." "'It is certainly very cold,' said Peggotty, 'every-

one must feel it.' 'I feel it more than other people,' said Mrs Gummidge." This would seem to point simply to an instance of what is known as "latent innervation."

But Mrs Gummidge's case is too human to be explained by abstractions from the text-books. It is better to admit at once that love was the secret of her depression, that Mr Peggotty was the object of her longing, that he was aware of the fact and determined to evade its consequences, having no place in his heart for any passion save that for little Em'ly. It will be found, we believe, that in the light of this theory most of the facts fall easily into their place in a coherent scheme. It explains both the trivial and the important in Mrs Gummidge's career, her sentimental and heroic phases. It might be said that it is not so successful in explaining Mr Peggotty and his oft-repeated phrase, "She's been thinking of the old 'un," that it lays that formula

under the suspicion of insincerity. But this is surely not so if we find in that phrase the expression at once of a fine modesty and of a chivalrous desire to save Mrs Gummidge even from friendly ridicule. At any rate there can be little doubt that the theory explains Mrs Gummidge. It explains the acute melancholy with which she regarded the courtship of Barkis and Peggotty, her tearful collapse on throwing the old shoe after that happy couple on their wedding-day, and, most important of all, her attitude to Mr Peggotty's occasional visits to the Willing Mind. Why Mrs Gummidge should object to Dan'l dropping into his favourite public-house is inexplicable, save on the supposition that she regarded it as a rival. "'You've come from the Willing Mind, Dan'l?' 'Why, yes, I've took a short spell at the Willing Mind to-night,' said Mr Peggotty. 'I'm sorry I should drive you there,' said Mrs Gummidge. 'Drive. I don't want no driving,' said Mr Peggotty,

with an honest laugh, 'I only go too ready.' 'Very ready,' said Mrs Gummidge, shaking her head and wiping her eyes. 'Yes, yes, very ready. I'm sorry that it should be along of me that you're so ready.' 'Along o' you. It an't along o' you,' said Mr Peggotty. 'Yes, yes, it is,' said Mrs Gummidge. 'I know what I am. I know that I'm a lone lorn creetur. It's my misfortune. . . . Dan'l, I'd better go into the house and die and be a riddance.'" Some may detect in these reproaches nothing more than solicitude for Mr Peggotty's morals, and in Mrs Gummidge an ardent friend of temperance. But others, remembering what a man Dan'l was, will find a woman in love.

We have claimed for our theory that it explains Mrs Gummidge's heroism no less than her melancholy. On any other ground, indeed, it seems impossible to understand her transformation on the day of Emily's flight, when black calamity smote the little

house by the sea. Peevish egotism does not yield in a moment the strength and tenderness which Mrs Gummidge revealed. No doubt it is true that she shared the family's affection for Emily, who was the "only thing that did not go contrairey with her." But it was the sight of Dan'l staggering under his blow that disclosed Mrs Gummidge's secret. "'No, no!' cried Mrs Gummidge in a fit of crying. 'No, no, Dan'l, not as you are now. Seek her in a little while, my lone lorn Dan'l, and that'll be but right, but not as you are now. Sit ye down and give me your forgiveness for having ever been a worrit to you, Dan'l—and let us speak a word about them times when she was first an orphan, and when Ham was too, and when I was a poor widder woman and you took me in. It'll soften your poor heart, Dan'l'—laying her head on his shoulder—'and you'll bear your sorrow better.'" No one can doubt that, while there is genuine grief for Emily, Dan'l

is Mrs Gummidge's chief concern. It is really for his sake that she enters on her long vigil. "All times and seasons, you know, Dan'l, I'll be allus here, and everythink will look accordin' to your wishes. Maybe you'll write to me, Dan'l, odd times." "'You'll be a solitary woman here, I'm afeerd,' said Mr Peggotty. 'No, no, Dan'l, I shan't be that. Doen't you mind me. I shall have enough to do to keep a Beein (a home) for you.'" It is a new, yet not entirely new, Mrs Gummidge that speaks here, rather a woman to whose love circumstances have presented a worthier means of expression. "Ever bless you, Mas'r Davy, be a friend to him, poor dear."

If further confirmation of our theory be called for, let two final glimpses of Mrs Gummidge supply it. It is the last day in the old boat-house. Emily has been found, and Mr Peggotty is making preparations for the voyage to Australia. He

has settled a pension on Mrs Gummidge. "I means to make her a 'lowance afore I go, as'll leave her pretty comfort'ble. She's the faithfullest of creeturs." And now Mrs Gummidge sits on one of the lockers, basket on knee, "looking at Mr Peggotty," and not even he will dare to say at this moment that she "is thinkin' of the old 'un." "'Dan'l,' said Mrs Gummidge, suddenly leaving her basket and clinging to his arm, 'my dear Dan'l, the parting words I speak in this house is, I mustn't be left behind. . . . Doen't ye, dearest Dan'l, doen't ye. Take me 'long with you, Dan'l, take me 'long with you and Em'ly. I'll be your servant. I'll be bound to you. I can dig, Dan'l. I can work. I can live hard. Dan'l, deary Dan'l, let me go 'long with you.'" At last Mrs Gummidge's passion had found voice. Here was no "wimicking," as Mr Peggotty was compelled to realise, for on the following day the coach that bore him to London had

Mrs Gummidge as a passenger. "And Mrs Gummidge was happy."

It remains only to add that in Australia love came to Mrs Gummidge in the person of a "ship's cook," and that she rejected it. In the light of our theory the very manner of her rejection was significant, if we are to accept the account given by Mr Peggotty to David and Agnes on the occasion of his visit to the old country. "'If you'll believe me,' said Mr Peggotty. 'Missis Gummidge, instead of saying thank you, up'd with a bucket as was standing by and laid it over that theer ship's cook's head 'till he sung out for help, and I went in and reskied of him.'" Yet not even then, when such signal proof of her devotion had been given, was there recompense for Mrs Gummidge. The ship's cook's proposal of marriage moved Dan'l, no doubt. It caused him to swear his mighty and terrible oath—"If a ship's cook didn't make offer fur to marry Missis Gummidge I'm gormed—and

I can't say no fairer than that." But it did not move him to reward devotion in the only way in which it could be rewarded. Yet, who knows? Mrs Gummidge was a determined woman, and perhaps there came a day when Dan'l finally laid to heart the lesson of the whirling bucket. If one could learn of such a day, there would be but one comment possible. We should then be thoroughly and completely "gormed." One "can't say no fairer than that."

THE ESSENTIAL SWIVELLER

In the study of Swiveller the following points, among others, present themselves: (1) his triumph over Quilp; (2) his attitude to Destiny; (3) his wearing of crape; (4) his demeanour in presence of Mr Cheggs; (5) his prolonged and awe-struck contemplation of Sally Brass; and (6) his adventures with the Marchioness. To these must be added, as perhaps most significant of all, his treatment of his furniture. Generally speaking, the Swiveller problem may be thus stated—shall we take Swiveller's view of himself, or Quilp's view? Shall we, in other words, deal with him as a fatalist or dismiss him as a fool? Or, remembering that self-knowledge is the final human achievement, and, further, that a Daniel Quilp can never give us the secret of a Swiveller,

shall we seek for a third view, more fitted to do justice to the facts? It is the object of this study to seek for that third view, to present Swiveller neither as fatalist nor as fool, but as idealist. This, we believe, will bring us face to face with the essential Swiveller.

Quilp's view of Swiveller is hardly worth discussing, save that it throws light on Swiveller's mastery of Quilp, a mastery at once physical and moral. It is not the least of Dick's claims on the gratitude of mankind that he once punched Quilp's head with impunity, and compelled him to swallow the truth about himself. The Quilp view therefore was the offspring of hatred. Quilp tried hard to despise Swiveller, and made elaborate efforts to be sarcastic at his expense, but always with poor success. He could not rid himself of the torturing thought of Swiveller's superiority. Even when drunk Swiveller was Quilp's master. '"Why shouldn't I be your friend?' asked Quilp

once. 'There is no reason why you shouldn't, certainly,' replied Dick, 'if you were a choice spirit, but then you know you're not a choice spirit.' 'I not a choice spirit,' cried Quilp. 'Devil a bit, sir,' replied Dick. 'A man of your appearance couldn't be. If you're any spirit at all, you're an evil spirit. Choice spirits,' added Dick, smiting himself on the breast, 'are quite a different sort of people. You may take your oath on that, sir.'" We are not surprised to be told that when, on hearing this, Quilp wrung Dick's hand declaring that he was "an uncommon character and had his warmest esteem," the expression of friendship was accompanied by a look that plainly told that the hand was not precisely the part of Dick's anatomy that the dwarf would fain have wrung. And what made this assertion of moral superiority all the more galling was that it had been preceded by a no less striking demonstration of physical mastery. The occasion is well

known. It was on the eventful morning of Nell's escape from the Old Curiosity Shop. Quilp, exasperated by the knocking, and by the flight of his victims, "darted out suddenly to favour Mrs Quilp with a gentle acknowledgment of her attention," and encountered Dick. For the first time in his career he found himself "in skilful and experienced hands." "Mr Swiveller was performing a kind of dance round him, and requiring to know 'whether he wanted any more. There is plenty more at the same shop,' said Mr Swiveller, 'a large and extensive assortment always on hand—country orders executed with promptitude and dispatch—will you have a little more, sir—don't say no if you'd rather not.' 'I thought it was somebody else,' said Quilp," making one of the feeblest and truest observations that ever fell from him. The Quilp view of Swiveller, then, is worthless, and the spiteful gibes in which it found expression, quite futile. Quilp was excluded from the

Swiveller world, and raged against his banishment. But the sentence was final—"You are not a choice spirit."

Swiveller's view of himself presents more difficulty, though reflection, we believe, will show that what seems at first a deliberately adopted philosophic attitude is, after all, something of a pose. If this be true, it follows that Swiveller, like so many others, did not really know himself and the secret of his strength. He would impress us at times as a pessimist and fatalist. Life is not the expression of reason; rather it is man's enemy, administering a series of "staggerers" to its victims. The nature of these staggerers need not be discussed—Swiveller enumerated six different sorts. It is rather the conclusion that is of interest. "Under an accumulation of staggerers, no man can be considered a free agent." Here, surely, is the language of fatalism, the true Calvinistic note. "No man knocks himself

down ; if his destiny knocks him down, his destiny must pick him up again." Dangerous doctrine for a Swiveller—if he really believes it. But does he? It is very doubtful. "Then I'm very glad that mine has brought all this upon itself, and I shall be as careless as I can, and make myself quite at home to spite it. So go on, my buck," said Mr Swiveller, "and let us see which of us will be tired first." We venture to think that these concluding words show that Swiveller's fatalism was not essential. He is a man at war with destiny, and he enjoys the contest. He can even address destiny familiarly, slap it on the back as it were, and that is the crowning proof of freedom. Indeed, his view of himself is incompatible with all we know of him. Could a gloomy stoic, we ask, have enjoyed the life tenure of that exalted office which Swiveller adorned as "Perpetual Grand Master of the Glorious Apollers"? The thing is impossible. Could a fatalist have been so lost in wonder

as Swiveller was at the first sight of Sally Brass? The answer is again in the negative, for in the world of the fatalist there is no room for the faculty of wonder. Once, indeed, Swiveller displayed genuine stoic control—at the Wackles's dance and in presence of Mr Cheggs. "'Did you speak to me, sir?' said Mr Cheggs, following him into a corner. 'Have the goodness to smile, sir, in order that we may not be suspected. Did you speak to me, sir?' Mr Swiveller looked with a supercilious smile at Mr Cheggs's toes, then raised his eyes from them to his ankle, from that to his shin, from that to his knee, and so on very gradually keeping up his right leg, until he reached his waistcoat, when he raised his eyes from button to button until he reached his chin, and travelling straight up the middle of his nose came at last to his eyes, when he said abruptly, 'No, sir, I didn't.'" No finer treatment of a successful rival could be imagined. Swiveller was face to face with

the worst staggerer ever dealt him, the loss of Sophy Wackles. But note, the staggerer was not dealt by destiny, it was deliberately self-inflicted. The crisis of that fatal day was Swiveller's own work. Hence the poignancy of his regret. He laments not as the victim of destiny but as a man who has himself to blame. "A being of brightness and beauty will be offered up at Cheggs's altar." Yes, but Swiveller is the priest. His efforts to evade responsibility for the least creditable episode in his career deceive nobody. "I never nursed a dear gazelle, to glad me with its soft black eye, but when it came to know me well and love me, it was sure to marry a market gardener." It is noteworthy that this outburst of unconvincing pathos was followed by the feeblest attempt Swiveller ever made to play the fatalist. "And this is life, I believe. Oh, certainly. Why not? I'm quite satisfied." But if Swiveller was satisfied, why did he wear crape? Mourning is a dismal irrele-

vance in a determinist's universe, and a fatalist can have no regrets. Crape can only be worn consistently in a world of freedom. The conclusion is unavoidable; Swiveller's fatalism was a pose. The "No Thoroughfares" that faced him in all directions were of his own making. "This dinner to-day closes Long Acre. There is only one avenue open to the Strand now, and I shall have to close that up to-night with a pair of gloves." But why enlarge? Swiveller has himself said the final thing on fatalism. Did he not remark once that "soda-water, though a good thing in the abstract, was apt to lie cold upon the stomach unless qualified with ginger," and, on another occasion, did he not say that "he had observed while standing by the post at the street corner a pig with a straw in his mouth issuing out of a tobacco shop, from which appearance he augured that another fine week for the ducks was approaching." Who will deny after this that Swiveller, whatever his philo-

sophic pose, really lived in a world of wonder?

The essential Swiveller, then, was an idealist. And this conclusion is reached not so much by a study of his words, as by contemplating the great and shining achievement of his life. He was given, as is well known, to the expression of fine sentiments. "What's the odds, so long as the fire of soul is kindled at the taper of conwiviality, and the wing of friendship never moults a feather." "The wing of relationship should never be clipped, but be always expanded and serene. Why should a grandson and grandfather peg away at each other with mutual wiolence, when all might be bliss and concord. Why not jine hands and forgit it?" These sayings, and many more that might be quoted, are no doubt valuable enough, but fine speech was easy to a man of Swiveller's accomplishments. We want more than words, and we have more. The

essential Swiveller is seen first of all in his lodging, that single room "which he was pleased to speak of as his apartments or his chambers, conveying to his hearers a notion of indefinite space." "In the flight of fancy Mr Swiveller was assisted by a deceptive piece of furniture, in reality a bedstead, but in semblance a bookcase, which occupied a prominent situation in the chamber, and seemed to defy suspicion and to challenge enquiry. There is no doubt that by day Mr Swiveller firmly believed the secret convenience to be a bookcase and nothing more, that he closed his eyes to the bed, resolutely denied the existence of the blankets, and spurned the bolster from his thoughts." This is Swiveller the idealist. By the power of thought he destroys the bed, and by the same power he creates the bookcase, destroys, be it noted, a common thing that ministers to the senses, and creates a thing of distinction and intellectual worth. Now the Swiveller who created the bookcase did a far

more wonderful thing — he created the Marchioness. There came an hour when Swiveller revealed himself as a king in his own right and conferred a patent of nobility. That was his radiant achievement. It was a great moment in Swiveller's life and in English fiction, when he caught sight of the eye at the keyhole, as he sat playing cards alone in Brass's office. "He heard a kind of snorting or hard breathing sound in the direction of the door, and it seemed to him that it must proceed from the small servant who always had a cold from damp living. Looking intently that way one night, he plainly discerned an eye gleaming and glistening at the keyhole, and having no doubt that his suspicions were correct, he stole softly to the door and pounced upon her before she was aware of his approach. 'Oh! I didn't mean any harm indeed. Upon my word I didn't,' cried the small servant. 'It's so very dull, downstairs. Please, you don't tell upon me, please don't.' 'Tell

upon you,' said Dick. 'Do you mean to say you were looking through the keyhole for company?' 'Yes, upon my word I was,' said the small servant.'" It was Swiveller who first read the tragedy of that "snorting and hard breathing"—he heard in it the panting for life. It was Swiveller who first appreciated the intolerable pathos of the eye "gleaming and glistening at the keyhole." It was Swiveller who descended, like a god, into those lower regions where the small servant starved on Miss Brass's cold potatoes, and emancipated the nameless and ageless waif. It was Swiveller who made a woman of that little battered bit of humanity. "'Now,' said Mr Swiveller, putting two sixpences into a saucer, and trimming the wretched candle, when the cards had been cut and dealt, 'those are the stakes. If you win, you get 'em all. If I win, I get 'em. To make it seem more real and pleasant I shall call you the Marchioness, do you hear?' The small servant nodded.

'Then, Marchioness,' said Mr Swiveller, 'fire away.'" Thus the nameless one, by the grace of God and of Mr Richard Swiveller, became a peeress of the realm of humanity. That was Swiveller's great moment. He created a soul. He summoned a life from the chaos of anonymity, and presented it to the world as Miss Sophronia Sphynx. And in that moment he solved his own problem, for the problems of life are solved by action rather than by thought. "This Marchioness," said Mr Swiveller, "is a very extraordinary person—surrounded by mysteries, ignorant of the taste of beer, unacquainted with her own name, and taking a limited view of society through the keyholes of doors—can these things be her destiny, or has some unknown person started an opposition to the decrees of fate? It is a most inscrutable and unmitigated staggerer." A staggerer, yes, but no longer for Swiveller, rather a staggerer for that destiny over which he had just announced, and made

good, his mastery. Swiveller, it seems, carried two sorts of cards in his pocket, one which bore only his name, and another which announced his dignity to the world as "Perpetual Grand." When Miss Sophronia Sphynx became Mrs Richard Swiveller, it was the second card she left on her calls—

"Mr Richard Swiveller: Perpetual Grand."

A DICKENS GENTLEMAN

This is what Pip said—"'Biddy,' said I, after binding her to secrecy, 'I want to be a gentleman.' 'Oh, I wouldn't if I was you,' she returned. 'I don't think it would answer.' 'Biddy,' said I, with some severity, 'I have particular reasons for wanting to be a gentleman.'" And this is what Joe Gargery said—"For was it not that my only wish were to be useful to you, I should not have had the honour of breaking wittles in the company and abode of gentlemen." Yet Pip purchased the freedom of gentlemanhood at a great price, while Joe was free born. Joe was born in the purple, though he wore a leather apron, and stooped at the anvil. He meets us in a story where the word gentleman occurs more frequently than in any other English

fiction, and, whenever he meets us, we know ourselves to be in presence of the great and fine gentleman of the piece. It would have distressed Joe, of course, to be told this. A glance of bewilderment would have sought us from his blue eyes, and it is highly probable that, after fingering his "right side whisker" for a time, he would have succeeded in ejaculating "What larks!" Yet these disclaimers would not have affected the fact. He is not, it is true, the only gentleman in the story. Herbert Pocket, "the pale young gentleman," has a place by his side. So, most decidedly, has Wemmick, "from a Walworth point of view, and in his private and personal capacity." Whatever Wemmick was in Little Britain, as Mr Jagger's cashier, when he hoisted the drawbridge at his Walworth castle and ran up the flag, or, better still, when he stood nodding and smiling to the "Aged Parent," he was one of the old nobility. Even Abel Magwitch, convict,

had in him the making of a gentleman. "Howsomever, I'm getting low, and I know what's due. Dear boy and Pip's comrade, don't you be afeerd of me being low." But no one challenges Joe's supremacy. Joe is never wrong, never strikes a false note, is never mistaken as to the essentials of life. How he hates Sunday clothes, for instance, with the instinct of the true gentleman! "Pip, I'm wrong in these clothes. It isn't that I'm proud, but I want to be right, as you shall never see me no more in these clothes. I'm wrong out of the forge, the kitchen, and off the meshes." But this was Joe's glorious humility. He was not wrong out of the forge. He was right, everywhere and always. It was the little, stupid world outside of Joe's forge that was wrong; the world before which Joe abased himself, and, in his abasement, condemned and helped to save. We have to realise, if we can, the spiritual stature of Joe Gargery. His esteem is a certificate of character that

the heavenly powers endorse; his distrust, the final proof of moral worthlessness. It is Joe who speaks the last word on Pumblechook,—"Which that same identical do comb my 'air the wrong way sometimes, awful." This is more crushing than a papal anathema. With this word, Pumblechook, "earliest benefactor and founder of fortun's," passes into the outer darkness.

The study of Joe's relations with the first Mrs Gargery is an education in the chivalrous. Our readers know that strenuous and irascible dame. It was she who brought up Pip "by hand," and who wielded "Tickler" with such stinging effect. "'She sot down,' said Joe, 'and she got up, and she made a grab at Tickler, and she Rampaged out. That's what she did, she Rampaged out, Pip.'" This is a fair summary of Mrs Joe's activity. And her language, it must be added, was as strong as her arm. A mistress of picturesque invective, nothing

can equal her contempt for Joe from the intellectual point of view. He is a "staring great stuck pig," a "mooncalf," and, finally, "the dunderheaded king of the noodles." Yet, will it be believed, only once did Joe permit himself a little latitude in response to these purple patches. "'At such times as your sister is on the Rampage, Pip,' Joe sank his voice to a whisper and glanced at the door, 'candour compels me fur to admit that she is a Buster.'" We are not surprised to be told that Joe "pronounced this word as if it began with at least twelve capital Bs." That was the moment of Joe's nearest approach to revolt. On no other occasion did he swerve from loyalty. He would go the length of saying that Mrs Joe was "given to government"—"which I meantersay the government of you and myself"—that she was a "master mind," but no further. His favourite phrase was—and surely it was the very formula of chivalry—"She is a fine—figure—of—a—woman."

He who discerns weakness here has failed to read Joe, for it was the patient strength born of adversity.

It was like Joe to impart his celestial secret to Pip unintentionally. Setting out to account for his ignorance, he disclosed the springs of his heavenly wisdom. This happened on a great night, when Joe, "holding the poker and slowly raking the fire," became reminiscent. "'Pip,' he said, 'my father he were given to drink, and when he was overtook by drink he hammered away at my mother most onmerciful. It was a'most the only hammering he did 'xcepting at myself. And he hammered at me with a wigour only to be equalled by the wigour with which he did not hammer at the anwil. Consequence, my mother and me, we ran away from my father several times; and then my mother she'd go out to work and she'd say, "Joe," she'd say, "now, please God, you shall have some schooling, child," and

she'd put me to school. But my father were that good in his hart that he couldn't abear to be without us. So he'd come and make such a row at the doors of the houses where we was, that they used to be obligated to have no more to do with us and to give us up to him. And then he took us home and hammered us. Which you see, Pip, were a drawback on my learning.'" Nothing but Joe's mighty charity here restrains reflections unfavourable to Gargery senior. All we can say is that there must have been something good in the man, since Joe, whose mission it is to make us think well of the world, saw it. "Mind you, Pip, rendering unto all their doo, my father were that good in his hart, don't you see." So be it. Let no one rob Joe of his beautiful delusion. The elder Gargery must be left with that epitaph which Joe struck off in a white heat of inspiration, but which never got itself carved in stone because "poetry costs money, cut it how you will, small or large," and

because Joe had his mother to provide for. "Whatsume'er the failings on his part, remember, reader, he were that good in his hart." Joe, it will be seen, cannot give us literature, but he can give us that of which literature is but the pale reflex. In any case the elder Gargery, before he finally went off in a "purple leptic fit," had hammered out a man. Did it never dawn on Mrs Joe that the giant who tiptoed into the kitchen on cleaning days was pursuing a deliberate policy of patience? Pip could have told her after the great night, but, then, Pip was afraid of her. "You see, Pip, my mother were in poor 'elth and quite broke. She warn't long of following, poor soul, and her share of peace came round at last. . . . And last of all, Pip—and this I want to say very serious to you—I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest hart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way

of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself." Such was Joe's secret, revealed, as was fitting, to a child. In Mrs Joe, even on the Rampage and armed with Tickler, Joe saw and reverenced all Womanhood. It is this that lifts his conflict with Orlick, for instance, far above the level of a common fight. It was really a tourney in which a perfect knight went into the lists to fight for an idea. Orlick, it will be remembered, had spoken to Mrs Joe with a frankness to which she was not accustomed, and had declined to desist, notwithstanding Joe's repeated warning, "Leave her alone, will you!" He had called her a "shrew," and intimated that if she "was his wife, he'd put her under the pump, and choke it out of her," when he was invited to "come on," and "very soon found himself among the coal dust, and in no hurry to come out." Joe had intervened. But it was the

intervention of a philosopher, the strength of arm accompanying it being only incidental. One cannot feel that there was anything of the joy of battle in Joe's stroke, effective though it was. It was the stroke of a man who had raised himself above passion into the tranquil atmosphere of the stoic. "On the Rampage, Pip; and off the Rampage, Pip; such is life."

It is strange that no one has thought of extracting a "Pilgrim Scrip" from Joe's meditations. One has come across less profitable reflections in much boomed booklets. Take this, *e.g.* :—"There's one thing you may be sure of, Pip, namely, that lies is lies. Howsever they come, they didn't ought to come, and they come from the father of lies, and work round to the same. Don't you tell no more o' them, Pip." Or this—"The king upon the throne with his crown upon his 'ed, can't sit and write his Acts o' Parliament in print without having begun, when he were an unpromoted prince, with

the alphabet." Sometimes Joe, in speculative mood, would put a question, vague, no doubt, in form, as speculative questions are apt to be, yet with the note of high suggestiveness—"Whether common ones as to callings and earnings mightn't be the better of continuing for to keep company with common ones, instead of going out to play with oncommon ones?" At other times there could be no complaint as to want of directness. "If you can't get to be oncommon through going straight, you'll never get to do it through going crooked." "I ain't much in the habit of drinking at anybody's expense but my own," is a gem from Joe's conversation at The Three Jolly Bargemen, well worth preserving. Philosophising is dry work, and we must not grudge the philosopher the one relaxation he permits himself, viz., an occasional excursion into the realm of the cryptic. Our readers, therefore, will not be too hard on Joe for this—"Shark headers is open

to misrepresentations." Perhaps they will defer consideration of that while they take this: "The oncommonest worker can't show himself oncommon in a gridiron, for a gridiron is a gridiron." Here undoubtedly Joe comes nearer to us. He comes near also in the following—"A man may have had a misfortun' and been in the Church, but that is no reason why you should put him out at such a time, which I meantersay, if the ghost of a man's own father cannot be allowed to claim his attention, what can?" But we must bring our sampling of Joe's wisdom to a close. One definition of life we have had—"On the Rampage and off the Rampage,"—let this other suffice: "Pip, dear old chap, life is made up of ever so many partings welded together, as I may say, and one man's a blacksmith, and one's a whitesmith, and one's a goldsmith, and one's a coppersmith. Divisions among such must come, and must be met as they come."

It takes a great lady to understand a great gentleman, and there was only one person who really understood Joe. We have spoken of his chivalry, his delicacy, his truthfulness; to complete the picture we must speak of his noble pride. And it was Biddy who discovered that. As a gentleman, we have seen, Joe was not quite alone. But Biddy is entirely alone, the one great lady in a story of nearly five hundred pages. Pumblechook ignored Joe. There was no place for Joe in the Pumblechookian scheme. The first Mrs Gargery despised him. Biddy, destined to become the second Mrs Gargery, understood him. "'Have you never considered,' said Biddy to Pip, 'that he may be proud?' 'Proud,' Pip replied with disdainful emphasis. 'Oh, there are many kinds of pride,' said Biddy. 'He may be too proud to let any one take him out of a place he is competent to fill, and fills well and with respect.'" Yet Pip had twice seen notable exhibitions of Joe's pride, in the

interviews with Miss Havisham and Mr Jaggers. Did it never come into his mind, in after days, that Joe was the one man in whose presence the great Jaggers, the tyrant of the Old Bailey, had quailed? "'Which I meantersay,' cried Joe—when Jaggers had offered him money—'that if you come into my place bull-baiting and badgering me, come out! Which I meantersay, if you're a man, come on! Which I meantersay that what I say I meantersay and stand or fall by.'" No wonder Mr Jaggers "rose and backed to the door." It was a novel experience to meet a man prepared "to stand or fall by" his word. At any rate, what was hidden from Pip, with all his opportunities, was known to Biddy. And she got the reward of insight. "'But, dear Biddy, how smart you are!' 'Yes, dear Pip.' 'And Joe, how smart you are!' 'Yes, dear old Pip, old chap.' 'It's my wedding-day,' cried Biddy, in a burst of happiness, 'and I'm married to Joe.'"

But this paper, with its triumphant demonstration of his nobility, is distressing to Joe. As a matter of fact, he has taken to his heels, as he did on a certain memorable morning.

"Not wishful to intrude, I have departured fur you are well again, dear Pip, and will do better without Jo."

"*P.S.*—Ever the best of friends."

THE VIGILANT COMIC

THE proposal to make use of Mr Sam Weller in order to exemplify certain profound principles may arouse the indignation of some of his admirers. What, it will be asked, has Sam Weller to do with principles? We venture to think that those who ask such a question underestimate their hero. Have they forgotten his remark when Mr Pickwick declined to pay the costs of the famous suit? "'Hooroar for the principle, as the money-lender said ven he vouldn't renew the bill.'" Do they not remember that in a court-room on a certain memorable occasion, when Mr Pickwick had demanded his rights as a citizen, it was Sam who went to the root of the matter? "Pickwick and principle," exclaimed Mr Weller. Nor was that the only occasion.

"'You are quite a philosopher, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'It runs in the family, I b'lieve, sir,' replied Mr Weller. 'My father's wery much in that line now. If my mother blows him up he whistles; if she screams very loud and falls into 'sterics he smokes very comfortably till she comes to agin. That's philosophy, sir, ain't it?'" Of course, as is well known, the difficulty is to apply principles to actual situations without becoming something of a casuist. Mr Weller did not altogether escape this difficulty. "If ever I wanted anythin' o' my father, I always asked for it in a very 'specful and obligin' manner. If he didn't give it to me I took it, for fear I should be led to do anything wrong through not having it. I saved him a world of trouble in this way." In view of these observations, we cannot think that Mr Weller himself would offer any serious objections to our proposal. He would at least recognise the good faith of the attempt. "All good

feelin', sir—the wery best intentions, as the gen'l'm'n said ven he run away from his wife 'cos she seemed unhappy with him."

Having vindicated Mr Weller's right to represent principles, let us consider the principles. "Comedy," says Meredith, in the most searching inquiry into the subject in our language, "is the fountain of sound sense." "The vigilant comic is the first-born of common sense." "Comedy proposes the correcting of pretentiousness, of inflation, of dulness, and the vestiges of rawness and crossness to be found among us." Comedy "watches over sentimentalism with a birch rod, but she is not opposed to romance." Could there be any finer comment on Mr Weller's life and work? He is the great "Vigilant Comic" of our literature, whose mission is to compel a world of pretence, inflation and dulness, to yield up its miserable secret. In him the

threefold function of comedy, corrective, castigatory and constructive, is complete. In Sam Weller the Smangles and Smaukers, the Peter Magnuses and Tuckleses, the Dodsons and Foggs, the Buzfuzes, Nupkinses and Stigginses recognise by instinct their natural enemy. In that inexorably genial presence they display perplexity, discomfort, anger; yet they must stand and deliver. To Mr Smauker, *e.g.*, Sam is the Sphinx. "'A very singular young man that,' said Mr Smauker." But "Sam said nothing. He winked, smiled and winked again." Nothing is more instructive than to observe how Wellerism affects different types. In Peter Magnus it arouses impotent hostility. "'I'm not fond of anything original,' said the red-haired man. 'I don't like it.'" Precisely. But the anger of red-haired men armed with platitudes is powerless against Wellerism, which is the great solvent, the great leveller. There was a morning in the Fleet Prison when Mr Pickwick awoke to

find "Sam seated on a very small black portmanteau intently regarding, apparently in a condition of profound abstraction, the stately figure of the dashing Mr Smangle." "'You will know me again,' said Mr Smangle with a frown. 'I'd svear to you anyvears,' replied Sam, cheerfully. 'Don't be impertinent to a gentleman, sir,' said Mr Smangle. 'Not on no account,' replied Sam. 'If you'll tell me wen he wakes I'll be on the wery best, extra-super behaviour.'" Here we have the Weller mission in life. It is to mystify the Smaukers, reduce the Magnuses, and out-stare the Smangles. There is much significance in that intent regard with which Sam envisages Mr Smangle. It is the Weller glance on life, a glance full of intellect—comprehensive, penetrating, revealing. Not even the great Buzfuz, wallowing in an ocean of rhetoric, understands it. He dwells far beyond the confines of Wellerdom. "Would any other gentleman like to ask me anything?" in-

quired Sam, taking up his hat. Here Wellerism challenges the world. The world, however, wisely declines the combat.

But now a problem presents itself. The sinister figure of Job Trotter, "the mulberry man," looms up, and the most ardent Wellerite must admit that once Sam was outwitted. It was a defeat that brought upon him the only rebuke known to have been administered by his admiring parent. "I'm wery sorry, Sammy, to hear as you let yourself be gammoned by that 'ere mulberry man. I always thought that the names of Veller and gammon could never come into contract; Sammy, never." That Sam felt this keenly cannot be doubted. His rather lame attempt to raise the side issue of "widders" does not conceal the fact that Weller senior's shaft had gone home. We know how he vowed to wipe off the stain "on the family name" and how he succeeded, yet the final victory

throws no light on the initial failure. The great fact stands out that Job Trotter, armed with a hymn-book and a handkerchief, made Sam Weller ridiculous, and that he is the only man of whom this can be affirmed. The explanation is, we believe, that Sam for one inglorious hour became the victim of sentimentalism. "Comedy," to go back to Meredith, "watches over sentimentalism with a birch rod." It has to be recorded that Sam Weller once walked abroad leaving that useful instrument of correction at home, and that he was deceived and defeated by tears. The vigilant comic, for once, was off guard. We can forgive Mr Pickwick's tribute to Job—"You are a fine fellow, sir, and I admire your goodness of heart"—for Mr Pickwick was President of the Pickwick Club, but we can never quite get over the shock of Sam's fall. "'You're a soft customer, you are,' said Mr Weller, as Job walked away." A crumb of consolation is

afforded by the fact that during the Trotter episode Sam did what he never did before or after—changed his name — to Walker. One might say that it was Walker whom Job defeated, not Weller. But this is quibbling. The galling fact remains that when Job walked away it was to laugh not with Sam but at him, an intolerable reflection. It was the hour of Sam's eclipse.

It remains now to record—remembering that "comedy is not opposed to romance" —that when romance came to Weller it found him on the alert. Curiously enough, it was while tracking Trotter he met Mary. It was Job who first drew his attention to the green gate through which he was to pass to his destiny. And when Sam became really tender he regained possession of the birch rod. In his address to Job— "Wot are you meltin' with now? The consciousness o' willainy?" — he delivers

the final blow to sentimentalism, but in the same hour falls in love. It is now we find him in romantic situations—climbing trees in the dark to assist Mr Winkle and Arabella, hunting for his hat behind doors, composing love-letters in which words are nicely discriminated to convey the maximum of sentiment, and, generally speaking, to use his father's expression, "werging on the poetical." "'Circumscribed ain't as good a word as circumwented, Sammy,' said Mr Weller gravely. 'Think not,' said Sam. 'Nothin' like it,' replied his father. 'But don't you think it means more?' responded Sam. 'Vell, p'raps it's a more tenderer word,' said Mr Weller. 'Go on, Sammy.'" If Sam had the countenance, though not the full approval, of his parent in his love-making, it must be remembered that the elder Weller, being, as his son said, a "wictim of connubiality," took at times a gloomy view of marriage. "Vether it's worth while goin'

through so much to learn so little, as the charity boy said wen he got to the end o' the alphabet, is a matter o' taste." But, as philosophy ran in the family, the old gentleman steeled himself to part with Sam. "It'll be a wery agonisin' trial to me, but I'm pretty tough, that's vun consolation, as the wery old turkey remarked wen the farmer said he wos afeerd he would be obliged to kill him for the London market." However, on the romantic and even heroic element in Wellerism there is no time to enlarge. It sent Sam up a tree once. It sent him also into the Fleet Prison that he might be with his master. But comedy shrinks from the recital of heroics, shunning that staid and conventional region. We have read learned papers on the birth of tragedy. Take this on the birth of comedy—"You're never safe vith 'em, Mr Pickwick, ven they vunce has designs on you ; there's no knowin' vere you have 'em ; and vile you're considerin'

of it, they have you. I wos married fust that vay myself, and Sammy wos the consekens o' the manoover." Here we stand at the springs of Wellerism. Happy "manoover!" Thrice happy "consekens!"

THE FAT BOY INTERVENES

PERHAPS the Fat Boy's chief title to fame is that he was once kicked by Sam Weller. Of course it was a thoroughly Wellerian kick, that is, delivered not in anger or even in contempt, but in what may be called a fit of amused abstraction. "Mr Weller made no verbal remark in reply; but, eyeing the fat boy for a moment, quite transfixed at his presumption, led him by the collar to the corner, and dismissed him with a harmless but ceremonious kick. After which he walked home whistling." The fat boy had undoubtedly just done a ridiculously daring thing. He had announced himself as Sam's rival in love. "I say, what a pretty girl Mary is, isn't she? I am so fond of her, I am." Yet this very daring reveals an aspect of the youth that is continually overlooked,

notwithstanding that the documents do it full justice. He lives in literature as a scarcely animated gorging apparatus, capable only of fitful displays of somnolent inactivity under the inspiration of capons and veal pasties. It was as such that he aroused the scientific curiosity of Mr Pickwick. "'Very extraordinary boy, that,' said Mr Pickwick, 'does he always sleep in that way?' 'Sleep,' said the old gentleman, 'he's always asleep. Goes on errands fast asleep, and snores as he waits at table.' 'How very odd,' said Mr Pickwick." The astounding thing is that there is no record of Mr Pickwick having made any entries regarding Joe in his note-book for the benefit of his famous club.

What is more astonishing, however, is that Mr Weller, that almost faultless discerner of character, seems to have acquiesced in the prevailing estimate of the fat boy. "'Vell, young twenty stun,' said Sam—on the occasion of their first meeting—'you're

a nice specimen of a prize boy, you are.' 'Thank 'ee,' said the fat boy. 'You ain't got nothin' on your mind as makes you fret yourself, have you?' inquired Sam. 'Not as I knows on,' replied the fat boy. 'I should rayther ha' thought, to look at you, that you were labourin' under an unrequited attachment to some young 'ooman,' said Sam." Here Mr Weller adopts the popular view that the fat boy's sole significance is physical. And his later observations show that he never took the trouble to revise that opinion. In such forms of address as "Young dropsy," "Young opium-eater," "Young boa-constructer," and in the affecting tale—narrated entirely for Joe's benefit —of the "personal inconwenience as was inflicted on the old gen'l'm'n as wore the pigtail," and who, "if you'd put an exact model of his own legs on the dining-room table afore him, wouldn't ha' known 'em," Sam showed that he remained under his first impression. We are well aware that it is a

serious matter to question the Weller estimate of character. But what is the fact?

The remarkable fact is this, that, while no doubt the fat boy was a prominent figure at the Wardle feasts, on the three occasions of emotional crisis in the Wardle family history he was no less prominent. It was the fat boy who broke down under the stress of Mr Pickwick's eloquence at the Trundle marriage breakfast and had to be led weeping from the room by Mr Weller; it was the fat boy who was the sole witness of Mr Tupman's gallantries in the bower; and it was the fat boy who broke in on the love-making of Emily and Mr Snodgrass in the parlour of the Adelphi Hotel. It can hardly be supposed that we have nothing here but pure accident. The fat boy must have had a certain emotional susceptibility, a certain instinct for a sentimental situation. His appearance, it is true, did not indicate that he was a prey to any of the greater passions,

but let it be remembered how Mr Tupman was deceived. When that gentleman sprang to attention he saw the fat boy "perfectly motionless, with his large circular eyes staring into the arbour, but without the slightest expression on his face that the most expert physiognomist could have referred to astonishment, curiosity, or any other known passion that agitates the human breast." And yet there was the sound of "that imperfectly suppressed chuckle." If Mr Tupman had invested that chuckle with the importance it deserved, momentous consequences would have followed. If we carefully examine the chain of events it will be found that the appearance of Sam Weller himself in literature depended on that chuckle. But Mr Tupman was blind. It did not occur to him that the fat boy had not only seen but had realised the tragic and elemental character of the proceedings in the bower. For did he not say on the following day, when divulging the secret to the old lady, "I wants

to make your flesh creep. . . . I see him a-kissin' of her. . . . I see her a-kissin' of him agin." Mr Tupman, then, never made a greater mistake than when he accepted the current formula regarding the fat boy. "'He must have been asleep,' whispered Mr Tupman." But the fat boy was awake. Not only was he awake, but, in the consciousness of rectitude, was prepared to defend himself against any charge of complicity. "Here I am, but I han't a willin'," was his firm reply to Mr Wardle when that old gentleman would have made him responsible for the disaster.

That was not the only occasion on which the fat boy had, though innocent, to bear the burden of a serious charge, and, be it noted, in the cause of love. One might almost hail him as love's martyr. In that sacred cause he had been called a villain; he was to hear himself called drunk and mad. That took place, it will be remembered, when the fat boy found Mr Snodgrass imprisoned

in Mr Wardle's bedroom. Never was a fat boy called to deal with a more desperate situation. He had to wait the table in one room, knowing that in the next was a lover who had still to submit to and satisfy the parental tests. No wonder he was pale, and that in his efforts to gain Mr Pickwick's attention without attracting notice he made "the most hideous face that was ever seen out of a Christmas pantomime." "'This is such an extremely singular lad,' said Mr Pickwick. 'He's drunk,' roared old Wardle, passionately. 'Call the waiters; he's drunk.' 'I ain't,' said the fat boy, 'I ain't drunk.' 'Then, you're mad,' said the old gentleman. 'I ain't mad, I'm sensible,' said the fat boy, beginning to cry." One trembles to think what would have happened had Mr Snodgrass not boldly walked in upon the astonished company. The fat boy would most certainly have been bled, for Mr Bob Allen was present. Fortunately such extremes were avoided. But the fact stands out that the fat

boy was at the heart of the crisis, and that the events, so to speak, grouped themselves round him. Once more we find him in an emotional setting of a most thrilling kind.

It has to be admitted of course that in what might be called the technique of love the fat boy was sadly deficient. Nothing could be less subtle than his courting of Mary. "'What a nice young lady Miss Emily is,' said Mary. 'I knows a nicerer.' 'Indeed,' said Mary. 'Yes, indeed,' said the fat boy. 'What's her name?' inquired Mary. 'What's yours?' 'Mary.' 'So's hers,' said the fat boy, 'you're her.'" Certainly the fat boy made the mistake of his life when he entered the lists against such a finished courtier as Sam Weller. And perhaps that is why Sam kicked him. It was the kick of one who could not tolerate inefficiency.

JENNY WREN'S SUPERMAN

ALTHOUGH Jenny Wren lived before the days of Nietzsche, and had never heard of the "blond beast" or of the world "beyond good and evil," she dreamed her dream of the Superman, and it was a dream that came true. The Superman was neither Charley Hexam nor Bradley Headstone nor even Eugene Wrayburn. He dwelt apart in the region of the Ideal until Mr Sloppy appeared with the request for "little Miss Harmonses doll." Then he suddenly materialised, and, after blushing, "threw back his head and laughed with measureless enjoyment." "For goodness' sake, stop, Giant, or I shall be swallowed up," cried Jenny Wren. But this was only an affectation of terror. In reality it was the woman's

rapturous recognition of the coming of the Master.

It is important to note that in Jenny Wren realism and romance strove for mastery, and that, therefore, there were moments when Sloppy's fate hung in the balance. For Sloppy was a knight who could enter Jenny Wren's life only by the gates of romance. When these were shut, we have to do with a young lady of truly Nietzschean quality. "All creators," said Nietzsche—meaning, one supposes, creators of Supermen—"are hard." "This new table, O my brothers, I put over you. Become hard." Now Jenny Wren, as is well known, could be hard—so hard that her friends had to remonstrate. "Don't you think you are rather hard on him"—that is, on the Superman—said Lizzie Hexam once. "'Not a bit,' replied the sage Miss Jenny Wren. 'They don't care for you, those fellows, if you're *not* hard.'" And need we remind readers of the policy she

proposed to adopt with naughty children. Black doors were to be opened into black vaults, and, when the vaults were filled with children, the doors were to be locked, and pepper was to be blown through the keyhole. "'And what would be the use of blowing in pepper,' asked Charley Hexam. 'To make them sneeze,' said Jenny Wren. 'And when they were all sneezing, I'd mock them through the keyhole.'" Dreadful as this is, there are further symptoms of ferocity to be noted. What a gruesome fate, for example, awaited the Superman if he should resemble the "bad child," and consume the major portion of his weekly wage. Boiling liquor was to be taken hissing from a saucepan with a red-hot spoon and poured down his throat "to blister and choke him." This Dantesque touch gives us Jenny Wren at her fiercest. Fortunately for Sloppy, though it gives us Jenny Wren the realist, it does not give us the real Jenny Wren.

The secret of Jenny Wren's hardness is revealed in a conversation with Lizzie Hexam. "'I am sure you would do no such horrible thing,' said Lizzie—when the boiling-liquor threat was uttered. 'Shouldn't I? Well; perhaps I shouldn't. But I should like to.' 'I'm equally sure you would not.' 'Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you have not always lived among it as I have, and your back isn't bad, and your legs are not queer.'" Here we come to the secret of Jenny Wren's Nietzscheanism, and, who knows, of all Nietzscheanism. It is the hysteria of weakness, the plaint of a sick soul. Your creator of supermen is apt to be a dabbler in the inhuman. Circumstances conspired to make Jenny Wren a fierce critic of the universe, to kindle within her a contempt for the mob, to destroy her faith in human nature. Her back was bad and her legs were queer. Then there was the horror of the streets, with their crowd of mocking

children, and, at home, there was the bad child, the traitorous old sniveller, whose Saturday evening contribution to household expenses amounted only to seven and eightpence halfpenny. How was Jenny Wren to know that such a world contained a Sloppy, or to believe that it was capable of producing a Sloppy? Why blame her if, at first, the Superman was defined in a series of ruthless negatives? He was not to be Charley Hexam. "'What is the latest news, Jenny?' 'The latest news is, that I don't mean to marry your brother.'" He was not to resemble, in the least degree, the bad old boy, although that person was Jenny Wren's father. And he was not to be a gentleman. "When He turns up, he shan't be a gentleman. I'll very soon send him packing if he is." Why blame her if there were moments when it seemed as if the only use to which the great, mysterious "He" could be put was to deliver her dolls, and "call for orders in his clumsy way." Has not Nietzsche said,

"Man's happiness is 'I will.' Woman's happiness is 'He will.'" Jenny Wren thoroughly accepted this. "Wherever He may happen to be at present," she said, "I know his tricks, and I give him warning to look-out."

It is a relief to turn to the true Jenny Wren, the Jenny Wren who made Mr Sloppy the Giant blush and tremble. For Jenny Wren the realist could never have appealed to that Sir Galahad of the Gutter. There was something elemental about Sloppy. He was called Sloppy because "he was found on a sloppy night." He was one of Betty Higden's "Minders," "Full Private Number One in the Awkward Squad," yet registered in high heaven as Jenny Wren's Superman—the man of her dreams and visions. The Jenny Wren who smelt flowers, "the white and pink may in the hedges," who heard the birds sing, and saw the children "in long slanting rows" with something shining

on the borders of their white dresses and on their heads, who heard them say, "Who is in pain? Come and play with us," was Sloppy's destined bride. In her high moments, when the harsh world fell silent and her back ceased to hurt, when, above the narrow streets, she saw the clouds rushing and "the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the winds come," she waited for him, and anticipated the mating hour. Meanwhile Sloppy was turning the mangle for Betty Higden, but performing that task, be it noted, with an energy and concentrated loyalty of spirit worthy of an explorer or a martyr. "There's Mrs Higden. Mrs Higden goes before all. And she must be turned for, must Mrs Higden. Where would Mrs Higden be if she warn't turned for?" This is Sloppy faced by the Categorical Imperative. The dazzling prospect of a daily dinner at Mr Boffin's had just been spread before him, a dinner too, "off of all four on 'em," *i.e.*,

meat, vegetable, beer and pudding. The temptation was tremendous, but Sloppy triumphed. "The turning might be in the night. I don't want no sleep, I don't, or even if I anyways should want a wink or two, I could take 'em turning. I've took 'em turning many a time, and enjoyed 'em wonderful." It is Sloppy's loyalty that chiefly impresses us. He was not, as we know, without literary tastes and even dramatic gifts — "Sloppy is a beautiful reader of a newspaper. He do the police in different voices" — but these pale in presence of his sheer loyalty. Sloppy could put the unanswerable question—the question of heroes—"Where would Mrs Higden be if she warn't turned for?" It is a question that has made the universe credible and habitable to the best in many a weltering hour.

But it was from a larger stage than Betty Higden's kitchen afforded, and from more

stirring exploits than mangle-turning that Sloppy finally came into the presence of Jenny Wren. He had been guardian of the Mounds—the Mounds of the Golden Dustman—had shadowed Mr Silas Wegg, and had played a prominent part in that gentleman's final exit. When Wegg put the crowning query to Boffin—"What is the price of a man's mind?"—Sloppy, we are told, was executing "singular and incomprehensible movements" in his rear. And when Mr Boffin finally appraised Wegg's intellectual worth at "a couple of pound" Sloppy knew that the moment had come to act. The spectacle of a literary man, even with a wooden leg, in rapid and assisted transit to a dust-cart is humiliating no doubt to those who wield the pen, but Sloppy here is the arm of justice. Yet it was not by his strength that Sloppy became Jenny Wren's Superman, but by one exquisite and chivalrous word. "It seems to me you hardly want it at all," he said, when

he saw her use the crutch. He was the first whose eyes were closed to her deformity. "Thank you," said Jenny Wren. After that there was nothing to do but to dispose for ever of the great shadowy "He." "I suppose He won't mind, and if he does he may." "'Meaning him that you call your father, Miss,' said Sloppy. 'No, no,' replied Miss Wren; 'Him, Him, Him!' 'Oh! *him*,' said Sloppy. 'When is he coming, Miss?' 'What a question,' cried Miss Wren.' 'How should I know?' 'Where is he coming from, Miss?' 'Why, good gracious, how can I tell? He's coming from somewhere or other, I suppose.'" It was then Sloppy laughed. And well he might. For he knew that the great "He" would never come, because as a matter of fact he had arrived.

THE ETERNAL FEMININE

Mr Chesterton reminds us that *Nicholas Nickleby* belongs to Dickens's romantic period. It was written when "he was full of the afterglow of his marriage." Perhaps that is why it is The Book of Admiring Husbands. We have one classic—"Heroes and Hero Worship"; why not another, "Heroines and Heroine Worship," displaying Mr Vincent Crummles, Mr Kenwigs, Mr Wititterly and Mr Squeers at the shrine. It would be a pleasure to add Mr Mantalini to this select band, did not a too catholic taste in beauty, and a too lavish hand in scattering terms of endearment, disqualify him. After all, the temple is no place for the eclectic. If one could only forget the lady with the mangle, and other ladies, Mr Mantalini's linguistic

endowment would entitle him to a high place among the elect. But a lady given to throwing clothes-baskets with unerring aim is not to be lightly disregarded. Perhaps the explanation of Mr Mantalini's tragic fate is that his interest in women was never more than literary. A man who addresses his partner in life as "my cup of happiness's sweetener" is obviously more bent on turning a phrase than on satisfying love's imperious demand for expression. The language of passion came as lightly to his lips as that of profanity. Playing with life and love, even as in tragic moments he played with the breakfast knife and the razor, what wonder that, in his own picturesque phrase, he went "to the demnition bow-wows." It will be remembered that when Mr Mantalini proposed to commit suicide by knocking his head against the wall, he kept so well in the middle of the room that the execution of his project was impossible. It was a highly characteristic

proceeding. He never would come into contact with reality.

Mr Lillyvick's case was different. In him we find the genuine devotional note. "Fine women, sir, aye, but not so fine as Henrietta Petowker, for she is an uncommon specimen. But such women don't fall in every man's way I can tell you." This is almost worthy of Mr Kenwigs himself. But here it is the woman who fails us. "Yesterday was a week she eloped with a half-pay captain." "'Yes,' repeated Mr Lillyvick, 'basely and falsely eloped with a half-pay captain, with a bottle-nosed captain that any man might have considered himself safe from. It was in this room that I first see Henrietta Petowker. It is in this room that I turn her off, for ever.'" Yet Henrietta was once "purity and elegance combined." A heroine worshipper spoiled by feminine perfidy. Such is Mr Lillyvick—a warning to elderly water-collectors about to embark on the matrimonial venture.

While Mr Mantalini and Mr Lillyvick, the Eclectic and the Disillusioned—must be excluded from the Noble Company of Husbands, no doubt arises as to the others. Not for a moment do Messrs Crummles, Kenwigs, Wititterly and Squeers falter in their homage. Mrs Kenwigs is admired on account of her beauty and social status. It must never be forgotten that she was Mr Lillyvick's niece. "'Such a woman as Mrs Kenwigs was afore she was married! good gracious, such a woman! Talk of fairies,' continued Mr Kenwigs, 'I never see anybody so light, to be alive, never. Such manners too, so playful, yet so sewerely proper. As for her figure! It isn't generally known,' said Mr Kenwigs, dropping his voice, 'but her figure was such at that time that the sign of the Britannia over in the Holloway Road was painted from it.'" This is the very language of chivalry. But Mr Kenwigs had more than the language. Was ever more delicate compliment paid to a wife

than when he, having purchased a pair of white kid gloves at fourteenpence, affixed the right-hand one to the knocker of the door in Golden Square, to announce to the world that that family of five—which, he said once, was a "dream" to him—was on the eve of augmentation? It was the act of a man in whose attitude to his wife there never failed something of the reverential. To describe it fittingly one must fall back on his own words: "This is an ewent at which Evins itself looks down."

In the Kenwigs's case there is a simplicity which is absent from the Wititterly. The appeal of a fine figure, like Mrs Kenwigs's, is immediate and direct—simple, sensuous, and passionate, so to speak. The appeal of a soul is a different matter. And such was Mrs Wititterly's appeal. Without attempting anything in the way of spiritual diagnosis, let us take the verdict of that eminent specialist, Sir Tumley Snuffim, whose favourite patient Mrs Wititterly was.

"'My dear doctor,' said Mr Wititterly, 'what is my wife's complaint? Tell me, I can bear it. Is it nerves?' 'My dear fellow,' said Sir Tumley, 'be proud of that woman, make much of her. Her complaint is soul.'" This was the ground then—if one may use such a solid kind of word in dealing with so delicate a matter—of Mr Wititterly's devotion. His wife was all soul. To Mr Wititterly, a true Browningite in this respect, nothing else was worth study save incidents in the development of Mrs Wititterly's soul. She had a soul that "swelled, expanded, dilated." It could also collapse, for she once collapsed after dancing with a baronet's son. Moreover, she was always "ill after reading Shakespeare." The fine arts and the nobility made too drastic a drain on her emotional resources. No wonder Mrs Nickleby was deeply impressed. Undoubtedly the proudest moment of Mr Wititterly's life was when he carried his wife's senseless form upstairs to bed after

the attack on Kate Nickleby. To most husbands such prostration would have been alarming. It would have terrified Mr Kenwigs; it exalted Mr Wititterly to the heights of husbandly triumph. It was invested with a splendid significance. It was "the reaction, the reaction." "This is all soul, you know, every bit of it," cried he proudly, as he assumed his burden.

As Mrs Wititterly's Shakespearean studies probably unfitted her for criticism, we do not know how she regarded those who hold —relying mainly on the famous lines: "All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand"—that Lady Macbeth was a small, fair woman, "perhaps even fragile." All we can say is, that those critics cannot surely have seen Mrs Crummles's impersonation of that famous character. For Mrs Crummles was "stout and portly," and had a "large hand" with an "iron grip." Further, since she had a "sepulchral voice," and walked always as if "going to an execu-

tion," she must have satisfied the Aristotelean definition of tragedy—which purges us by pity and terror. Such, at any rate, was Mr Crummles's firm conviction. Indeed, to him there was no canon of criticism which that extraordinary woman did not satisfy. "Ah! Johnson, what a woman that is!" Mr Crummles lived in what might truly be called a continual renaissance of wonder. No sooner did life crown itself with splendour than it burst forth in fresh efflorescence. One feels that it is a pity Mr Crummles lived before the days of Bergson, since, under the guidance of that acute philosopher, he might have understood a little more clearly some of life's incredible things. It might, for instance, have been at least partially explained to him how the Phenomenon could be succeeded by another. "I thought such a child as the Phenomenon must be a closer; but it seems we are to have another. She is a very remarkable woman."

Lastly, the case of Mr Squeers. In these days when historical students on the outlook for fresh subjects are given to the white-washing of ancient blackguards, may not a word be put in for Mr Squeers! He is known as a schoolmaster. Has justice been done him as a philosopher? Yet it is only when we try to do justice to him in this respect that we are in a position to understand his devotion to Mrs Squeers. As a mere schoolmaster, Mr Squeers might have been, and probably would have been, a wife-beater of a peculiarly offensive kind, and so for ever excluded from the noble company. But, as a philosopher, the doors of the temple fly open to him. Himself given to abstruse speculations, it was Mrs Squeers's practical genius that won and held his regard. Prolonged meditation on the ultimate problems is apt to unfit a man for practical life. One is not surprised that this was so with Mr Squeers, when the range of his speculations is considered. "'Measles, rheumatics,

hooping-cough, fevers, agers and lumbagers,' said Mr Squeers, 'is all philosophy together; that's what it is. The heavenly bodies is philosophy, and the earthly bodies is philosophy. If there is a screw loose in a heavenly body, that's philosophy; and if there's a screw loose in an earthly body, that's philosophy too; or it may be that sometimes there's a little metaphysics in it, but that's not often, Philosophy's the chap for me.'" Here is an aspect of Mr Squeers that has been persistently neglected by his critics. Yet, as we have said, it explains his devotion as a husband. Philosophy, we have been told, bakes no bread. Neither does it provide and administer sulphur and treacle. Hence Mr Squeers's admiration when his wife triumphantly performed this latter feat. "'I don't know her equal,' said he; 'I don't know her equal. That woman, Nickleby, is always the same—always the same bustling, active, lively, saving creetur that you see her now.'" He further gave it

as his opinion that there was no woman in England could "bring anybody's spirit down so quick" as Mrs Squeers could. It was the idealist's sneaking admiration for the pragmatist.

It would be unfair, however, to dwell only on the hard, practical side of Mrs Squeers. After all, there was something finer. She was a woman. It will be remembered that when Miss Squeers was reproaching the Browdies, words failed her, and that her father, as became one of his academic position, had to supply the adequate term. I "'blush for my—for my—' 'Gender,' suggested Mr Squeers. 'Yes,' said Miss Squeers, 'but I thank my stars that my ma is of the same.'" The Eternal Feminine!

THE SHEWING-UP OF MR TOOTS

"It is of no consequence at all," of course, yet surely the critics who say that Dickens's characters did not develop under his hand have not considered the case of Mr Toots. Have they contrasted the almost monosyllabic Toots of Dr Blimber's, whose "How are you?" to Paul Dombey completely exhausted his conversational resources, with the fervid, eloquent Toots, the Toots with the gift of tongues, who frequented The Little Midshipman? Are they aware that a slight examination brings out the amazing result that, once, to a conversation that could not have lasted much more than a quarter of an hour, Mr Toots contributed at least a thousand words, and, further, that, at the close of that conversation, he said "in an impassioned tone" that he

could have expressed his feelings "in a most remarkable manner" if he "could only get a start." Obviously we are far away from the Toots of the monosyllable, the chuckle, and the blush, and dealing with a Toots who has found himself and his voice.

How are we to account for this striking evolution? The first explanation that suggests itself is that Mr Toots, when he came into his money, and set up an establishment in London, hired a professor of Rhetoric—remembering Mrs Blimber's devotion to Cicero and "beautiful Tusculum." But of this there is no record. We know that he engaged the services of the Game Chicken, and had introduced to him a "marker who taught billiards, and a Life Guard who taught fencing, a jobmaster who taught riding, and a Cornish gentleman who was up to anything in the athletic line," but of a teacher of eloquence we hear nothing, unless he was included among the "two or three friends no less intimately connected with the

fine arts," of whom mention is made. But this is mere conjecture. It is fairer to Mr Toots to say that his eloquence was not hired but sprang from something in the man himself. A deeper knowledge will confirm this. "You never can know me," he said once to Captain Cuttle, "if you don't give me the pleasure of your acquaintance." To which we may reply with the Captain, "Well said, my lad, and true."

If Mr Toots strikes us at first as a person lacking in initiative and too much given to a regard for externals, the blame is his own. One remembers how at Blimber's party his mind seemed to be wholly occupied by the problem presented by the bottom button of his waistcoat, and his wristbands. "Observing that Mr Feeder's were turned up, Mr Toots turned his up; but the wristbands of the next arrival being turned down, Mr Toots turned his down." And later, his respect for Burgess & Co., "fashionable tailors, but very dear," was excessive. Mr

Toots must be held to have been at one time a member of the Dandiacal Body, satirised by Teufelsdröckh. He firmly believed that "there is safety in a swallow-tail." But it must also be said that he had in him, from the first, seeds of heresy. Even at Blimber's we can discern the longing for a wider world in those letters he addressed to himself—"P. Toots, Esq., Brighton, Sussex." Mr Toots, hurrying home to answer a letter from the Duke of Wellington, is surely a romantic Toots, Burgess & Co. notwithstanding. When the god of love addresses a communication to him he will not fail to respond. Needless to say, it was in behalf of Florence that this missive was sent, and it found Mr Toots at home. After that, Toots dropped his imaginary correspondents and passed from fiction to fact.

It was Florence who had the making of the new Toots. She was Burgess & Co.'s most formidable rival, for gradually Mr Toots grew thin, and lost interest in his clothes.

"I know I'm wasting away. Burgess & Co. have altered my measure. I'm in that state of thinness. It is gratifying to me. I'm glad of it. I—I'd a great deal rather go into a decline, if I could." This is the cry of a man whom physical culture and fashionable clothes had ceased to satisfy. It is a Werther Toots we have now to deal with, a Toots without an appetite, and gloomily proud of his emaciation. "I'm getting more used up every day. . . . If you could see my legs when I take my boots off, you'd form some idea of what unrequited affection is." Sir Willoughby Patterne "had a leg," which, to the eye of Mrs Mountstuart Jenkinson, was highly instructive; Mr Toots's legs had also their significance. For with the shrinkage of these members the new and eloquent Toots came into being. The flesh retreated before the spirit's advance.

Another sign of the new Toots was his changed attitude to the Game Chicken,—who represented the physical side of things,

—and his desire for Captain Cuttle's society. Indeed the history of Toots might be put in a sentence—it was a journey from the Chicken to the Captain. For the Captain assuredly was on the side of the angels. "'You come from her,' said the Captain. 'I should think I do,' chuckled Mr Toots. 'Then all I have to observe is,' said the Captain, 'that you know an angel, and are chartered by an angel.'" It will be remembered that the Game Chicken had a method—a handy method, as became his profession—of solving Mr Toots's love problem. He proposed to "double up" Mr Dombey. It seemed to the Chicken—whose ideas were without subtlety—that the crumpling up of Florence's dignified parent would simplify the situation. But the situation had developed far beyond the Chicken's knowledge and skill. Hence his bewilderment and scorn when Mr Toots reconciled himself to the great renunciation, and gave Florence into the hands of Walter. The

Chicken found himself in a world he could not understand, and among values he could not appreciate. He could understand the Larkey Boy—whose arguments were direct and decisive. He had been "fibbed" and "grassed," "tapped," and "bunged," and "made groggy" by the Larkey Boy. But the new Toots was beyond him. The truth is, that when Mr Toots whispered to the Captain, "the Chicken is admirable, but he is not everything," the Chicken's day was over. So there came a day when the Chicken "wanted to know." "'Come, Master,' said the Chicken. 'Is it to be gammon or pluck? Which? Here's wot it is. Are any on 'em to be doubled up?' 'Chicken,' returned Mr Toots, 'your expressions are coarse, and your meaning is obscure.' 'Why, then, I tell you what, Master,' said the Chicken. 'This is where it is. It's mean. To give in. W'y it's mean.' 'Chicken,' said Mr Toots, 'you're a perfect vulture. Your sentiments are atrocious.' 'My sentiments

is Game and Fancy, Master,' returned the Chicken. 'I'm afore the public. I'm to be heerd on at the bar of the Little Helephant, an' no Guv'ner o' mine mustn't go an' do wot's mean. That's where it is. It's mean.'" After that there was nothing for the Chicken but to take his fifty pounds and go. With the disappearance of the Chicken the new and higher Toots came into play. The shrinkage of Mr Toots's legs is paralleled by the retiral of the Chicken. In both cases it is the retreat of the flesh.

There is little more to record save Mr Toots's eloquence. Whereas in the first phase, at Blimber's, no one could make him speak, at The Little Midshipman he leads the conversation. When Blimber's is revisited, the Doctor cannot restrain his admiration. "Very good, Toots. Very well said, indeed, Toots." Mr Toots now drops sentiments and sentences worthy of Micawber or Swiveller at their best. "May the torch of Hymen be the beacon of joy,

and may the flowers we have this day strewed on their path be the banishers of gloom." At times a fine frenzy possesses him. We hear of a heart that is "a deserted island," and even of the "yawning" of "the silent tomb." Indeed so overcharged is he that "it's exactly as if Burgess & Co. wanted to oblige a customer with an extraordinary pair of trousers and *could not* cut out what they had in their minds."

But we do not part company with Mr Toots without hearing the note of reconcilement. The day came when he was able to inform Florence that it was not his intention to neglect his person any longer. "I shall consider it my duty to make the best of myself, and to have my boots as brightly polished as circumstances will admit of." How much Miss Susan Nipper had to do with this recovery of mental balance it would be interesting to inquire. We know that Susan could not endure Major Bagstock.

"'If I was acquainted with any Majors myself (which Heaven forbid) it wouldn't be a blue one.' 'Hush, Susan,' urged Florence, gently. 'I can't help it, blue he is, and while I was a Christian, although humble, I would have natural coloured friends or none.'" Susan's detestation of the blue Major was eminently characteristic. As a practical person she hated the blues, and, when poor Toots fell into them, it was she who did more than anyone to restore his natural colour. She brought him back to sanity and decently polished boots, and got her reward. Of course, Florence remained Mr Toots's Beatrice—"the most beautiful, the most amiable, the most angelic of her sex"—but as Susan thoroughly agreed with this, no harm was done. Indeed, nothing but good, for Toots and the Nipper were drawn together by a common loyalty. So happy was the consummation, that, when Mr Toots reported to Captain Cuttle and Sol Gills the latest instance of his wife's sagacity,

the Captain could not contain himself. "I'll tell you what," said he, "I'll give you Lovely Peg right through; and stand by, both of you, for the chorus."

A DICKENS MYSTERY

In a recent issue of *Blackwood*, Mr Andrew Lang returns to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* question, reviewing the matter afresh with characteristic shrewdness and charm. One reason for writing the article seems to be that Mr Lang wishes to recant the opinion expressed in his "little book of 1905," viz., that Jasper failed in his attempt on Edwin Drood's life. This recantation, however, does not mean that Mr Lang has gone over to the other side—for, like Tariff Reform and Heredity, Dickens's unfinished story has given rise to opposing schools—but that he has abandoned hope of a solution. He has now "no theory as to how the novel would have been wound up," and believes that it "manifestly passes the wit of man to discover how the mystery would have been solved by

its maker." Having lost hope in himself, Mr Lang naturally has little confidence in the other learned men, "Heads of Houses and Professors of Greek," who have written books and articles on the subject. So, in the most friendly and pleasant way, he advises them to return to the Homeric Question, on which the "purest bosh may be, and is, written by the gravest authorities." Here surely is candour worthy of Mrs Billickin herself. "I do not tell you that your bedroom floors is firm, for they are not. . . . Your slates are all a little loose at that elewation." One hopes that the "Heads of Houses," etc., are not like Mr Honeythunder, who remarked once, frowningly, "A joke, sir, is wasted upon me."

We know from Forster what Dickens's plan of the story was before it was started, and there is nothing in the twenty-three chapters we possess inconsistent with that plan. Indeed it may be said that careful preparations are made for the carrying out

of the plan, and, ere the fragment closes, the appearance of Datchery means that Jasper is to have the crime brought home to him. Datchery has realised the significance of Durdles. It is quite true, of course, as Mr Lang says, that Dickens's method of novel writing being "hab nab at a venture," any one of a score of considerations might have led him to depart from his original plan. He might have restored the missing Drood, might have taken pity on Jasper as on a being possessed, might have whipt off Datchery's white wig, and revealed Edwin himself in the "idle buffer" who was never really idle, might even have made Neville Landless a quite uniquely subtle and brazen villain. When, having seen Datchery fall to "with a good appetite" at Mrs Tope's breakfast-table, we come upon those tragic asterisks that tell of the sudden quenching of a mighty genius, the whole world of conjecture is before us. Is it worth while setting out since the guide has fallen silent?

One feels that had the story been finished, both Durdles and the Deputy would have been "in" at the unravelling. Was not the Deputy himself something of a mystery? "Don't you go a-makin' my name public. When they says to me in the Lock-up, a-going to put me down in the book, 'What's your name?' I says to them, 'Find out.' Likeways, when they says, 'What's your religion?' I says, 'Find out.'" And Durdles from the very first appears as a man not to be approached lightly, as Mr Sapsea can testify. "You are my friend," said Mr Sapsea. "Don't you get into a bad habit of boasting," retorted Durdles. "It'll grow upon you. . . . I don't like liberties." Further, Durdles is the man with the keys, and he is not happy when they are being handled and clinked by Jasper. On the night of the visit to the cathedral, the first thing he noted on awaking from the drugged sleep was that the key had dropped from his hand. Undoubtedly we are meant to regard

Durdles as having the power of the keys. That peculiar malady of his, "Tombatism," by virtue of which he was on familiar terms with "the old 'uns," has a significance in relation to the clearing up of the mystery. With the two-foot rule and the hammer Durdles can tell where the dead lie in the cathedral. "Durdles comes by his knowledge through grubbing deep for it, and having it up by the roots when it don't want to come." Surely the care expended on Durdles, on his foot-rule, his hammer, and keys, is inconsistent with a merely hidden and not murdered Drood. Dickens could treat his plots with royal indifference, but nothing could exceed the tenacity with which he clung to his odd characters. It is difficult to get away from Durdles's own statement: "Everybody knows where to find Durdles when he is wanted," and to doubt that when he was finally wanted he was able to produce the key. "'Why, Durdles,' exclaimed Jasper, 'you are undermined with pockets.' 'And I carries weight

in 'em too, Mr Jasper. Feel those,' producing two other large keys."

"There remains," says Mr Lang, "the great puzzle, who was Datchery? Nobody can tell." Professor Jackson's theory, following that of Mr Cumming Walters, that Datchery was Helena Landless in disguise, is described by Mr Lang as incredible. Edith Dombey, as Mr Chesterton says, might as well impersonate Major Bagstock; yes, and it might be added, Miss Twinkleton the Flying Waiter. The present writer has not gone through the literature of the subject, but wonders if any one has suggested that Bazzard was Datchery? Certainly, from the time Datchery appears in Cloisterham, Bazzard is seen no more in Mr Grewgious's office in Staple Inn. And Mr Grewgious's allusion to his absence is peculiar. There is a casualness about it quite absent from his ordinary references to Bazzard, of whom he stood somewhat in awe. "In fact he is off duty, here, just at present, and a firm down-

stairs lend me a substitute." "But," he adds, "it would be extremely difficult to replace Mr Bazzard." Now we know that Mr Grewgious more than suspected Jasper, and Mr Grewgious is one of those characters who, in a Dickens story, are never wrong. Their instincts are never at fault, for the simple reason that they are the instincts of good and true men. Grewgious is the faithful, romantic sort whom Dickens loves to exalt. His goodness is not mere simplicity, but real insight. As is well-known, he was an "Angular" man, and so likely to err in dealing with "globular" topics. But that was just his modest self-estimate. As a matter of fact, his method of handling affairs was distinguished by nothing so much as its "globular" quality; he could see all round a subject better than most. Now it is quite possible that Bazzard—though, according to Mr Grewgious, an "Angular" clerk—had also "globular" gifts, and that, as Datchery, he found scope for these in Cloisterham.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty in the way of this theory is that Bazzard was a literary man —though that, of course, would account for the "idle buffer." He was a literary man, and had a tragedy, *The Thorn of Anxiety*, on its way round the managers, pleading vainly for acceptance. Yet the fact that it was dramatic literature that attracted him, might explain his willingness to cast himself into the Cloisterham mystery. The author of *The Thorn of Anxiety* would at least have an eye for a dramatic situation. At any rate Mr Grewgious was the one man who kept his eye on Jasper; Mr Grewgious was a lawyer; Mr Grewgious had a clerk Bazzard, whose unvarying formula in replying to his master, when business was under discussion, was, "I follow you, sir," and this clerk disappeared from Mr Grewgious's office just when Datchery turned up in Cloisterham.

Yet, who knows? Perhaps, after all, Datchery was a new character introduced for specific reasons. Amid much darkness

there is one point of light—Datchery was not Mrs Billickin in disguise. That lady's candour makes the very thought of such a thing impossible. "'Can we see the rooms,' asked Mr Grewgious. 'Mr Grewgious, you can,' replied Mrs Billickin. 'I will not disguise it from you, sir, you can.'" In any case, Mrs Billickin was physically unfit for Datchery's task. For this we have her own word—"I was put in youth to a very genteel boarding-school, and a poorness of blood flowed from the table which has run through my life."

THE FESTIVAL OF THE CHILD

"If I no more come home at Christmas time," wrote Dickens, "there will be boys and girls (thank Heaven!) while the world lasts, and they do. . . . And I do come home at Christmas. We all do, or we all should." Yes, we all come home at Christmas time. It is the festival of home, for it is the festival of the child. We break the fetters that the years forge and weld on our limbs. We push up the leaden sky a bit to make room for the angels, and sweep the clouds aside that we may see the star. We

> "See how from far upon the eastern road
> The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet."

When they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. Dickens, with his optimism, his joy of life, his great pity, had the Christmas secret. He never failed to come home with the boys and girls. Con-

trast his joy with the profound melancholy of one on whom the shadow of our questioning time has fallen. "I might have spent the Christmas with one of my children," writes Mark Rutherford, "but they live far away, and travelling is now irksome to me. . . . I have locked the door of my cottage, and shall walk to No-Man's Corner. . . . It is a dark day; the sky is covered evenly with a thick cloud. In the wood not a leaf falls. O eternal sleep, death of the passions, the burial of failures, follies, bitter recollections, the end of fears, welcome sleep!" Something of the same note we hear in William Watson's sonnet on Christmas Day :—

> "Fated among time's fallen leaves to stray,
> We breathe an air that savours of the tomb,
> Heavy with dissolution and decay;
> Waiting till some new world emotion rise,
> And with the shattering might of the simoom
> Sweep clear the dying Past that never dies."

But no man will visit No-Man's Corner at Christmas time under Dickens's guidance.

He will have us under the holly. "Welcome, old aspirations. We know you, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves. Welcome, all that was once real to our hearts, and, for the earnestness that made you real, thanks to Heaven." This may be sentimental and "Mid-Victorian," an expression of Dickens's "vulgar optimism." But optimism must be vulgar, for it includes all. It is only pessimism that can afford to be fastidious and exclusive. The Christmas secret is an open one. It is joy. And joy is infectious and levelling. The Christmas secret eludes logic, analysis, and criticism, but humanity captures and holds it. If the Christmas spirit has any dealings with science at all it is under the mistletoe, where the most wizened specialist must pay his forfeit.

R. L. Stevenson, who stood in the true Dickens succession, although he preached the gospel of joy with less exuberance, wrote

in his Christmas sermon, "The kingdom of Heaven is of the childlike, of those who are easy to please, who love and who give pleasure." To Stevenson, "to miss the joy was to miss all." When he knelt in the soul's confessional it was to ask forgiveness of the Most High if he had faltered "in the great task of happiness," or failed to show among his fellows "the glorious morning face." We must connect Stevenson's quick knowledge of the child and child-life with his native sunniness. It was by virtue of his gift of gaiety that he was worthy to take part in the festival of the child. Like Dickens, Stevenson had no difficulty in retracing his steps and recovering the past. Neither lost his childhood. That is why one turns to them at Christmas time.

With no part of the New Testament has criticism dealt more sternly than with the chapters at the beginning of the First and Third Gospels. When these chapters are

placed in what Browning called "The exhausted air-bell of the critic," they shrivel, and the enchanted world into which they lead us vanishes. "The beginnings of the life of Jesus," says Bossuet, "are plunged in darkness." "To discuss the possibility or impossibility of the several incidents," says Holtzmann, "would betray a want of taste of which we do not wish to be guilty." "We know nothing," says Harnack, "of the history of Jesus for the first thirty years of His life." One is reminded of the Göttingen professor in Browning's Christmas Eve vision, who ascended

> "By the creaking rail to the lecture-desk
> Step by step, deliberate,
> Because of the cranium's over-freight,"

and with "grave voice, sweet though hoarse, broke into his Christmas Eve discourse." But the enchanted world of Christmas will not dissolve at the fiat of the lecture-room. It is too spacious, and supplies too perfectly the luminous background for the Divine

Story of pity and passion; it accords too well with man's deepest need and dearest hope. "Enter these enchanted woods, you who dare," cried Meredith, guarding as with sword of flaming fire his beloved temple of Nature. And the Christmas world is for those who dare, for the fearlessness of the poet, and the child, and the faithful. It is the world where the painter discovers the Annunciation, and stands before his canvas with eyes that see Heaven opened, where the star leads to the child, and where hoary wisdom kneels to pay homage to innocence. There is a night-time suddenly illumined by the sheen of angel wings; Heaven sets a little child in the midst of a world all astir and waking into wonder, and says, "Behold, of such is the kingdom." This Christmas world, too, is a world of song. The Benedictus and the Magnificat, the Gloria and the Nunc Dimittis roll through the temple of innocence. In Simeon the Old World greets the

New, and, like a veteran who has stood too long on guard, seeks its discharge, content to pass in peace, having seen the vision ; the new sends aloft its note of gladness from the lips of The Mother. Everywhere there is the sense of expansion and delight, everywhere vision and uplifting. He that is mighty is doing great things, and holy is His name. We have Faith's consciousness of a great and ineluctable good that has come to the world, its sense of something having happened destined to exceed all other happenings. It is not so strange, perhaps, after all, that Modernism disposes of Christmas. For Christmas is very old, old as the glance of wistfulness and wonder that searches us from the eyes of the child.

Christmas is the most human of all festivals. "The man," says Mr Chesterton, "who quotes some German historian against the tradition of the Catholic Church, is strictly appealing to aristocracy. He is

appealing to the superiority of one expert against the awful authority of a mob." This is the authority that surrounds Christmas, the authority of a mob of children, and of men and women who will at all costs recapture their childhood. It is the time of gifts—even the poorest gives and receives something. People set themselves deliberately to make others happy. The happiness is born of the conviction that love is in the world, that it is the "roof and crown of things," a conviction surely that not only makes life tolerable but makes it reasonable. In the Gospel story "they began to be merry" the moment a life had made this great discovery of love. Love is so great that we may well worship at its cradle. It speaks the first and last word. Philosophers expound to us "Christianity as the Absolute Religion," but the exposition is forestalled by that word that comes to us out from the Land of Enchantment—"This child is set for the fall and rising again of many."

THE DAY OF THE EAST WIND

If one asks why John Jarndyce lived in a house called Bleak House, and suffered so much from the east wind, the answer is that the John Jarndyces of life have often to do just that. It is not permitted to some people to spend the winter in Egypt. If John Jarndyce had only possessed Mr Chadband's capacity for joy! "My friends," said Mr Chadband once, "eightpence is not much; it might justly have been one and fourpence; it might justly have been half a crown. O let us be joyful, joyful! O let us be joyful!" But indeed the whole matter was once put by that optimistic divine in his inimitable way—"Can we fly, my friends? We cannot. Why can we not fly, my friends? Is it because we are calculated to walk? It is."

Mr Chadband, it will be remembered, went on to explain where the strength comes from which enables a man to walk—"From bread in various forms, from butter which is churned from the milk which is yielded untoe us from the cow, from the eggs which are laid by the fowl, from ham, from tongue, from sausages, and from such like" —but we need not go into all that. It is sufficient to say that John Jarndyce had to submit to the law of Nature which Mr Chadband so impressively expounded. He could not fly. That was why he rubbed his head so often and complained that the wind was in the east. In this respect John Jarndyce was totally unlike his friend, Skimpole, who could fly, and whose very name suggested flight. He was "a gossamer creature." His study was a bird's cage. "This is where the bird lives and sings. They pluck his feathers now and then, and clip his wings; but he sings, he sings." When Mr Skimpole had honey for break-

fast—and he liked honey at breakfast—he discoursed on bees. They reminded him of the sunshine. "Some men want legs of beef and mutton for breakfast, I don't. Give me my peach, my cup of coffee, and my claret; I am content. I don't want them for themselves, but they remind me of the sun. There's nothing solar about legs of beef and mutton." As Mr Skimpole uttered these beautiful sentiments he kept "looking at a collection of wallflowers on the balcony," much to the delight of Arethusa, Laura and Kitty, the Beauty daughter, the Sentiment daughter, and the Comedy daughter. If Mrs Skimpole sighed at times in the background, and seemed to suggest by her sighing the east wind, not a breath of it reached her happy husband. "We're all children in this family," cried he, "and I am the youngest." For Mr Skimpole had caught Mr Chadband's secret. "My friends, let us be joyful." "'We have

sympathy, my roses,' said Mr Skimpole, 'sympathy for everything. Have we not?' 'O yes, papa,' cried the three daughters." Strange, isn't it, that while Mr Chadband's face glistened with satisfaction and Mr Skimpole nibbled his peach and sipped condensed sunshine in the form of claret, John Jarndyce should be found in "the Growlery" complaining of the east wind? We have to remember, however, that Bleak House was exposed. "'It is exposed,' said Mr Jarndyce; 'no doubt that's the cause. Bleak House has an exposed sound.'"

The east wind that troubled John Jarndyce was of various sorts—perhaps it would be more correct to say was of varying intensity. There was the Jellyby east wind, the Pardiggle east wind, the Skimpole east wind, very shrewd and nipping, and, most searching and blighting of all, the Chancery east wind.

The Jellyby east wind could be pretty trying. It began to blow whenever John

went under the archway leading to Thavies' Inn, and came opposite the house whose tarnished brass plate bore the inscription "Jellyby." And it followed him into the house, causing shivers which not even Mrs Jellyby's "agreeable voice" could altogether allay. For while that lady's handsome eyes —that seemed to look a long way off— "saw nothing nearer than Africa, and the natives of Borrioboola — Gha on the left bank of the Niger," John Jarndyce saw Caddy and Peepy, and the rest of the little Jellybys, Peepy, with "a strip of plaister on his forehead," and Caddy, jaded and unhealthy-looking, with the "tumbled hair" and "the frayed and broken satin slippers trodden down at heel." It was the memory of these things that sent John Jarndyce up and down the parlour at Bleak House rubbing his hair.

"'These little Jellybys,' said Richard—'I can't help expressing myself strongly, sir— are really in a devil of a state.

"'She means well,' said Mr Jarndyce, hastily. 'The wind's in the east.'

"'It was in the north, sir, as we came down,' observed Richard.

"'My dear Rick,' said Mr Jarndyce, poking the fire. 'I'll take an oath it's either in the east or going to be. I'm always conscious of an uncomfortable sensation now and then when the wind is blowing in the east.'

"'Rheumatism, sir?' said Richard.

"'I daresay it is, Rick. I believe it is. And so the little Jell—I had my doubts about 'em—oh, Lord, yes, it's easterly,' said Mr Jarndyce."

It was only when he learned that Esther had washed and nursed Peepy and the rest, told them stories and bought them keepsakes, that the climatic conditions showed signs of improvement. "'Where did you say the wind was, Rick?' 'In the north, sir, as we came down.' 'You're right. There is no east wind. A mistake of mine.'"

From which it will be seen that even Nature's own north wind was more genial, and less conducive to rheumatism than the Jellyby east wind. Indeed, so trying was this, that Mr Jarndyce had to convert a room in his London lodging into a Growlery. It was there he found refuge on a certain morning when Caddy and Peepy visited Ada and Esther. Mrs Jellyby was at Mile-end that morning on the business of the East London Branch Aid Ramification. It so happened that everything Peepy wore was either too large or too small for him. He had on the boots of a ploughman, the hat of a bishop and the gloves of a baby. Owing to scratches, his legs "looked like maps." "Oh dear me," said Mr Jarndyce, "due east." But it was when he heard that Mrs Jellyby was putting out five thousand new circulars that he collapsed entirely and withdrew to the Growlery. "Oh dear me. This is a very trying wind." Now Mr Chadband would never have succumbed so ingloriously.

The sight of Peepy would only have stimulated his oratorical powers. Mr Skimpole, of course, being only a child, would have been incapable of understanding a child's tragedy. On that cold morning, both these gentlemen would have been quite warm and comfortable. They would have been as comfortable as, say, Mr Turveydrop, senior, before his looking-glass, and that is saying a good deal. But there—John Jarndyce's rheumatism is a rare complaint.

Sometimes, in March very likely, the Jellyby east wind settled down to a long steady blow. These were the days when Mr Quale's testimonial was being got up by Mr Gusher, the "flabby gentleman with the moist surface." One's first thought is that Mr Quale well deserved a testimonial since the "very roots of his hair were almost ready to fly out of his head in inappeasable philanthropy." John Jarndyce evidently thought differently. At any rate it is on record that when Mr Gusher spoke

"for an hour and a half on the subject to a meeting, including two charity schools of small boys and girls, who were specially reminded of the widow's mite," the "wind was in the east for three whole weeks."

The Pardiggle east wind was quite as biting as the Jellyby, and if anything more boisterous. We all know Mrs Pardiggle. She was the wife of O. A. Pardiggle, F.R.S. She herself never affirmed this in express terms—one has difficulty in conceiving of Mrs Pardiggle making any admission that would imply a relation of dependence on anybody. But as she once referred to Mr Pardiggle as the father of the five little Pardiggles, we may take it for granted. She was a School lady, a Visiting lady, a Reading lady, a Distributing lady. She was on the local Linen Box Committee, and many general Committees, and her canvassing alone was very extensive. For all this she is our authority. She "seemed to come in like the cold weather, and to make the little Par-

diggles blue as they followed her." Further, she was a lady with a loud voice, and gave the impression of "wanting a good deal of room." It was noticed by Ada and Esther that the wind always changed when Mrs Pardiggle became the subject of conversation. Then John Jarndyce would remark on the two classes of charitable people, "The people who did a little and made a great deal of noise, and the people who did a great deal and made no noise at all." It is well known that while Mrs Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby were at one on the subject of philanthropy, a great gulf divided them as to methods of family training. Mrs Jellyby neglected her family; but Mrs Pardiggle went nowhere without her boys. They were with her as she said "during the revolving duties of the day." You must have seen their names on many a printed subscription list. Egbert, aged twelve, sent his pocket-money, five and threepence, to the Tockahoopo Indians; Oswald, ten and a

half, sent two and ninepence to the Great National Smithers Testimonial, while Alfred, aged five, "had voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and was pledged never, through life, to use tobacco, in any form." Poor Peepy, certainly, comes very badly out of a comparison with these immaculate creatures. Yet Esther could never see Peepy without wanting to take him in her arms. It is not on record that the youngest member of the Infant Bonds of Joy excited similar sentiments. The truth is, that Esther was quite incapable of doing justice to the little Pardiggles. Apart from the lady herself, Mr Chadband is the only one known to us who was equal to that task. This is how Mr Chadband would have addressed them if the opportunity had ever been given him. "For what are you, my young friend? Are you a beast of the field? No. A bird of the air? No. A fish of the sea or river? No. You are a human boy, my young friend. A human boy. Oh

glorious to be a human boy. And why glorious, my young friend? Because you are capable of receiving the lessons of wisdom, because you are capable of profiting by this discourse, which I am delivering for your good, because you are not a stick, or a staff, or a stock, or a stone, or a post, or a pillar.

"'O running stream of sparkling joy,
To be a soaring, human boy.'"

We do not say that Mr Chadband's eloquence would have carried conviction to his audience, but these are certainly the terms in which he would have addressed them. Esther noticed that the very mention of the Tockahoopo Indians brought a savage look to Egbert's face, "as if he were one of the most baleful members of that tribe." Mr Chadband would never have quailed at that look. Indeed it would have warmed him up. But it would have brought on a very acute attack of John Jarndyce's rheumatism.

The peculiarity of the Skimpole east

wind was—if one may so say—that it seemed to come from the south. That was what puzzled Mr Jarndyce. He went out, as he thought, into the sun, and caught a chill. Mrs Pardiggle quite plainly spelt March: there was no doubt about it. But Harold Skimpole seemed to spell June. There was talk of bees and roses—yet the east wind nipped. Part of the explanation is that John Jarndyce—a man who never at any time wore a fur coat—was unusually lightly clad when he went into the Skimpole region. He went out to play with a child, not knowing that he was in the presence of the oldest, grimmest, and ugliest thing in the universe. Nothing, *e.g.*, pleased him more than to hear Mr Skimpole declare, that, if he had his way, the path of life should be "strewn with roses." "It should lie through bowers where there was no spring, autumn nor winter, but perpetual summer." At such times John Jarndyce would pat Skimpole on the head "as if he were really a child."

What then of the east wind? Perhaps it was "Coavinses" who was responsible for it. This we know, that, on the memorable evening of Skimpole's arrest for debt, "Coavinses" "appeared to have a cold in his head," and made such a snort that he quite startled Esther. "'Are you arrested for much, sir,' enquired Esther of Mr Skimpole. 'My dear Miss Summerson,' he said, shaking his head pleasantly, 'I don't know. Some pounds, odd shillings, and halfpence, I think, were mentioned.' 'It's twenty-four pound, sixteen and sevenpence ha'penny,' observed the strange man. 'That's wot it is.' 'And it sounds—somehow it sounds'—said Mr Skimpole, 'like a small sum.'" As the strange man made no reply to this beyond emitting another snort, we may infer that his cold was getting worse. Whatever the explanation, when John Jarndyce heard that Richard and Esther had pooled their savings to pay Mr Skimpole's debt, there was a sudden change of weather.

"'Oh dear me! What's this they tell me? Rick, my boy, Esther, my dear, what have you been doing? Why did you do it? How much apiece was it? The wind's round again. I feel it all over me. Come, Rick, come! I must settle this before I sleep. How much are you out of pocket? Oh Lord, yes, it's due east—must be!'"

That night promised badly for Mr Jarndyce. "But really—to get hold of you and Esther—and to squeeze you like a couple of tender young Saint Michael's oranges! It'll blow a gale in the course of the night!" However, it did not blow a gale. Mr Skimpole being at the piano in the drawing-room, playing some dainty scraps of his own composing, Esther remarked that he was "quite a child," and at once the barometer began to rise. "'You're right,' said Mr Jarndyce, brightening. 'He is a child—an absolute child. Nobody but a child would have thought of you two having the money.'" And, just as the girls were lighting their

candles to retire, he peeped in again with a smiling face and said, "Oh, I've been looking at the weathercock, I find it was a false alarm about the wind. It is in the south." And he went away singing to himself. It is a relief to remember that Mr Jarndyce never quite fathomed the mystery of the Skimpole east wind. It is a wind from which a man shall be as an hiding-place. What would have happened had he known that it was Skimpole who sold poor Jo for a five-pound note, one trembles to think. Esther mercifully kept that from him. The result was, that, notwithstanding a good deal of head rubbing and vague discomfort, he believed to the end in the Skimpole sunshine, although it was tempered by a "coolness" that arose between the two. In Skimpole's diary, published after his death, this entry was found :—"Jarndyce, in common with most men I have known, is the Incarnation of Selfishness." That was perhaps the greatest tribute the master of Bleak House ever

received. Therein also lies the damnation of the Skimpoles.

But no wind smote John Jarndyce so cruelly as the Chancery east wind,—all the more cruelly indeed because he knew that he was not the chief victim. It smote also little Miss Flite, driving her mad. It smote George Gridley, "the man from Shropshire." And it smote Richard Carstone, drying up the sap of his youth, and withering him into a moody, suspicious, despairing man, e'er it blew him into his grave. It was to escape this wind that the Growlery was specially fitted up in Bleak House. Yet this wind came from a quarter where a stately, benevolent-looking gentleman, in scarlet, sat on a bench "with the mace and seals on a red table before him, and an immense flat nosegay, like a little garden, which scented the whole Court." To enjoy this wind one had to be mad like Miss Flite; she was the only person in court who smiled on the Lord Chancellor. "'Mad,' whispered Richard.

'Right! Mad, young gentleman,' she returned. 'I was a ward myself. I was not mad then. I had youth and hope. I believe beauty. It matters very little now. I have the honour to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a Judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations is the great seal. It has been open a long time. Pray accept my blessing." Miss Flite, it will be remembered, kept a score or so of birds in her garret lodging above Krook's shop—larks, linnets and goldfinches, to be liberated on the day her case was issued. But they died, "their lives being short in comparison with Chancery proceedings." The Great Seal was evidently on their cages too. It is little wonder they died. For although Miss Flite shrank from giving their names, old Krook had no such delicacy. They were "Hope, Joy, Youth, Peace, Rest, Life, Dust, Ashes, Waste, Want, Ruin, Despair, Madness, Death,

Cunning, Folly, Words, Wigs, Rags, Sheepskin, Plunder, Precedent, Jargon, Gammon and Spinach." "'This is a bitter wind,' muttered Mr Jarndyce. 'If ever the wind was in the east,' he continued, pretending to look out of the window for a weathercock, 'I think it's there to-day.'" The wind was never more bitter than when he discovered that the poison of Jarndyce and Jarndyce had entered into Richard, and that he—the "dear Rick" of the old happy days—had come to look upon his Guardian as his enemy. Nothing had such power to make the "south wind easterly" as that famous Chancery suit. Only one man known to us could have faced it with composure—Mr Skimpole. "I have not the power of counting," said that gentleman once. "Call it four and ninepence, call it four pound nine. If that is responsibility, I am responsible." But, alas, the others had the power of counting, and counting the days and months and years wore Richard Carstone

out. When little Miss Flite added two birds to her collection and called them the wards in Jarndyce, she showed that weird sanity that sometimes only the mad seem to possess. Everybody knows the ending. There came the day when it was discovered that the whole estate had been absorbed in costs, and Richard was found in a corner of the court with his mouth full of blood. One cannot be exposed to the east wind for years without risk of hæmorrhage. It is some consolation to know that just at the end the wind changed. Richard became "dear Rick" again. "The clouds have cleared away, dear Rick," said John Jarndyce, as he sat by Richard's bedside, holding his hand, "and it's bright now. We can see now." It is always grey and gloomy in east wind. "I'll begin the world again," said Richard, with something of his old spirit. "I've had a troubled dream." But "it was not this world, oh, not this. The world that sets this right." On the evening

of the day of Richard's death, Miss Flite came weeping to tell Esther that she had given her birds their liberty. She may have thought that she was sending them out after Richard's soul into a wider, freer world. Or perhaps in her poor, little, tumbled brain there was the thought that the day of judgment had actually arrived. She had always expected judgment, you remember. "Shortly. On the Day of Judgment."

It remains now to note that there came a day when for John Jarndyce the wind left the east entirely, and he was able to lock the door of the Growlery on the outside. This was brought about by Esther Summerson, the good angel of Bleak House. Ah, you say there is nothing mysterious about this change of weather. Does not Miss Summerson's very name suggest the days when the wind comes up genially and quietly from the west? But the wonderful thing is that it was when he lost Esther Summerson that this great change took place. Here surely

is something of a difficulty. Take again the case of Mr Skimpole. He was always talking of summer, and seemed to be the very representative and incarnation of that season. Yet in no man's presence did Mr Jarndyce rub his head more vigorously, or shiver more frequently. But in Esther Summerson's presence Mr Jarndyce never rubbed his head. She was true summer—warm, bright, beautiful. She really strewed the path of life with roses—for John Jarndyce and others. Ask Caddy, or Peepy, or Charley, about that. And John Jarndyce loved her. How came it about then, that, by losing her, he found the west wind? This brings us to John Jarndyce's great moment. You know about it. He loved Esther and asked her to be his wife, yet gave her up to Allan Woodcourt. For he came to know, that, while Esther loved him, it was with a daughter's love, and that her heart was Allan's. Now is that not a thing to give a man the cold shivers—to see the

woman he loves the wife of another? Not if that man is John Jarndyce. Incredible as it may seem, John Jarndyce never had a happier day than when he led Esther to the porch of the little house he had set up for her and Allan, and showed her the writing over it—"Bleak House." It was not exposed like the old Bleak House. It had "a pretty little orchard where the cherries were nestling among the green leaves, and the shadows of the apple trees were sporting on the grass. . . . Such a lovely place, so tranquil and so beautiful, with such a rich and smiling country spread around it; with water sparkling away into the distance, here all overhung with summer growth, there turning a humming mill; at its nearest point glancing through a meadow by the cheerful town, where cricket players were assembling in bright groups, and a flag was flying from a white tent that rippled in the sweet west wind."

That was the kind of Bleak House John Jarndyce built for his friends.

"Hush, little woman! Don't cry; this is to be a day of joy. I have looked forward to it for months and months. . . . This is Bleak House. This day I give this house its little mistress, and, before God, it is the happiest day of my life."

So the wind went round into the west. "It is due west, little woman, due west. Let no one thank me, for I am going to revert to my bachelor habits, and if any one disregards this warning, I'll run away, and never come back." Perhaps we should have remarked earlier on this curious tendency in Mr Jarndyce—which he shared, by the way, with Joe Gargery, who must have been a far-out relation, though there is no record of the fact—the tendency, viz., to run away when there was the least hint of moving a vote of thanks to him. Sometimes, even, he would go hurriedly to the window as if he meant to jump out. One wonders what Mr Quale and Mr Gusher thought of this peculiar trait when they happened to meet Mr Jarndyce at one or

other of the meetings convened by Mrs Jellyby. Whatever these gentlemen thought, Esther and Allan laid the warning to heart. Mr Jarndyce did not run away. Moreover, the weather seems to have become very settled. For when Esther, now Mrs Woodcourt, remarked to him long after that the wind never seemed to be in the east now, he replied, "No, truly; it had finally departed from that very quarter, on that very day."

If Bleak House were still standing—the old Bleak House, of course—and we could make a pilgrimage to it, I suppose it would be to the Growlery that we should first turn our steps. It must ever be by far the most interesting room in the house. "This you must know is the Growlery," said Mr Jarndyce to Esther. "When I'm out of humour I come and growl here." Some of us might do worse than set up a Growlery—I mean of the Bleak House sort. But even apart from the Bleak House sort, it might not be a bad thing. Most of us do our growling in

public, in the parlour, in the very centre of the family circle, in the office among the clerks, perhaps at a church meeting now and then. And it is disagreeable. If we must growl, why not in a Growlery? I suppose we think that there is no satisfaction in growling alone. It is a waste of energy. And so it is, unless we are going to growl after John Jarndyce's fashion. It would be the greatest mistake in the world to regard the Growlery at Bleak House as a mere safety-valve. It was rather a power station. Nay, we can go further and say that it was John Jarndyce's oratory, his sanctuary, his temple. It was the place set apart where he thought of others, felt for others, and planned how he could help others. And so, small as it was, it was by far the largest room in the house. It was Peepy's room, *e.g.*, though he never saw it; Joe of Tom-All-Alone's had a share in it too. Indeed, it might truly be said that the Growlery did not belong to John Jarndyce at all. It belonged to everybody who was

outcast, neglected and in want. Even the proud Lady Dedlock came to be a sharer in it, when her pride broke, and the woman and mother triumphed over the lady. A little room, but spacious as John Jarndyce's sympathy, and large as his compassion. It was the room where he fought the east wind, the cell, where, like an ancient monk, he contended with and put to flight whole legions of devils, the place where misery found sanctuary, the temple where the Dagons of Humbug and Hypocrisy, of Cruelty and Fraud, fell down before Unselfishness, the one living and true God. That was John Jarndyce's Growlery. Hats off! ladies and gentlemen, when you enter it.

John Jarndyce told Esther once that the Growlery was the best-used room in the house. "When I am deceived or disappointed in the wind, and it's easterly, I take refuge here." Was it strange that, on being told this, Esther trembled and wept tears of gratitude? She had divined the

secret. Let this query be our last. When John Jarndyce on a certain memorable night went away "singing to himself," what was the burden of his song? If no one can say positively, I'll hazard this. It was—

> "O a' the airts the wind can blaw,
> I dearly loe the West."

MRS GAMP

It is in the company of Mr Pecksniff that we first seek out and become acquainted with Mrs Gamp. Mr Pecksniff, you remember, was not only "a grave man, a moral man, a man of noble sentiments and speech," he was a man of an enquiring and even speculative mind, a man on the hunt for new impressions. It was Mr Pecksniff who having found in the course of his architectural experience that "a pump is very chaste practice, that a lamp-post is calculated to refine the mind and give it a classical tendency, and that an ornamental turnpike has a remarkable effect upon the imagination," said to Martin Chuzzlewit, "I should very much like to see your notion of a cow-house." This may strike one as a modest ambition; but Mr Pecksniff could soar to greater heights. He

never rose higher than after the feast given in his honour at Todgers', when, having mounted the stairs and leaning over the banisters he said, "I should like very much to see Mrs Todgers's notion of a wooden leg, if perfectly agreeable to herself." It is under the guidance, then, of this daring spirit that we are led to Mrs Gamp. One feels how fitting this is. For Pecksniff and Mrs Gamp are kindred souls. No difference of circumstances or of sex, of appearance or profession, can obscure the essential oneness of these two. They are one in their copious gift of speech and in their colossal complacency; one in the belief that Providence conferred an unspeakable boon on humanity by bringing them into the world. Their careers were curiously alike. Both enjoyed a period of immense repute; both were rather ignominiously disposed of at the end. Mr Pecksniff, indeed, essayed to retire in the glow in which he had lived, a glow of dignified virtue. "But the effect of his

departure was much impaired by his being immediately run against and nearly knocked down by, a monstrously excited little man in velveteen shorts and a very tall hat, who came bursting up the stairs and straight into the chambers of Mr Chuzzlewit as if he were deranged." A little later Mrs Gamp, with clasped hands and upturned eyes, was led away in one of her walking swoons—a malady of which she possessed the professional secret—murmuring feebly, "Less liquor! Sairey Gamp! Bottle on the chimley piece and let me put my lips to it when I am so dispoged." It is melancholy to see the curtain fall on such a quantity of outraged innocence. But we must not anticipate. The curtain has only been rung up for Mrs Gamp. Her career is still before her. It would be ungracious to dwell too minutely on her fall, before seeking to do justice to her eminent achievements, not only in the department of day and night nursing, but as an observer and critic of human life.

Mrs Gamp lived in Kingsgate Street, High Holborn, and thither Mr Pecksniff, having been implored by Jonas Chuzzlewit to spare no expense, went in a hackney cab. Like many persons of lofty merit, Mrs Gamp was in humble circumstances. She "lodged at a bird fancier's, next door but one to the celebrated mutton-pie shop, and directly opposite to the original cat's-meat warehouse." "It was a small house." Nor was Mrs Gamp's apartment a spacious one. But, like its mistress, it had a character of its own, and to understand that required intelligence and even ingenuity. It seems that the dominating article of furniture in Mrs Gamp's abode was the bedstead, and it was only after the visitor had, as it were, come to terms with this article, and acquired, to use a golfing term, the art of negotiating it, that he could move in the room with safety and comfort. Only then "you might stoop to look under the little round table for anything you had dropped without hurting your-

self against the chest of drawers, or qualifying as one of Mrs Gamp's patients by falling into the fire." Everything in the room bore witness to the practical genius of the owner—unkind people might say to her genius for subordinating everything to her own comfort. Her tastes were marked by a certain fastidious simplicity. "To whatever place I goes I stick to this one mortar. I'm easy pleased; it is but little that I wants; but I must have that little of the best and to the minute when the clock strikes, else we do not part as I could wish, but bearing malice in our arts." In this characteristic passage Mrs Gamp appears as the high priestess of the simple life. True, she likes her wants attended to, "to the minute, when the clock strikes," but note, this demand is made not so much in her own interest as in that of morality. Strict and prompt attention to Mrs Gamp's wants sweetens the relations of life. It is indeed a beautiful sight—this of Mrs Gamp in her humble lodging, surrounded by a

"pair of bellows, a pair of pattens, a toasting-fork, a kettle, a spoon for the administration of medicine to the refractory, and, finally, the umbrella," which, "as something of great price and rarity, was displayed with particular ostentation." We note "the little cupboard by the fireplace, beginning below the surface, as in Nature, with the coals, and mounting gradually upwards to the spirits, which, from motives of delicacy, she kept in a tea-pot." The whole surroundings fitly frame one, who, if we are to accept her own testimony, lived only to be of help to her fellow-mortals.

In personal appearance Mrs Gamp does not seem to have been specially attractive. Indeed, anything more unlike those slim, swift figures in blue, grey, or brown, who are so familiar on our streets, could not well be imagined. "She was a fat old woman with a husky voice and a moist eye, which she had a remarkable power of turning up and only showing the white of. Having

very little neck, it cost her some trouble to look over herself, if one may say so, at those to whom she talked. She wore a very rusty black gown rather the worse for snuff, and a shawl and bonnet to correspond. Her face, the nose in particular, was somewhat red and swollen." Now this is not only not a flattering description ; it is a damaging one. Yet it would be unfair to build hastily upon it conclusions unfavourable to Mrs Gamp's character. She is a widow when we meet her first, and had had her troubles. In particular, the deceased Gamp was not, so far as one can learn, a person calculated to assist his wife in preserving her good looks, if she ever had any. Indeed, Mrs Gamp's habitually mournful estimate of life may be largely accounted for by the fact that she had to spend a great part of it in the company of a husband who was unworthy of her. She frequently refers to this world as "a wale," "a wale of tears," "the walley of the shadder." "I have seen a deal of trouble my own self,"

are her words on a certain occasion, "and I can feel for them as has their feelings tried." It is abundantly evident that Gamp considered as a husband was decidedly trying to the feelings. He had, it seems, a wooden leg —a fact which does not, of course, in itself militate against his character. But it seems to have been a wooden leg of quite extraordinary and even sinister significance, so much so that when his widow looked back on the past, the wooden leg stood out, or up, as a kind of symbol of the man. "As to husbands, there's a wooden leg likewise gone to its account, which in its constancy of walkin' into wine vaults, and never comin' out again till fetched by force, was quite as weak as flesh, if not weaker." It is clear that Gamp's wooden leg was no more stoical in virtue than other parts of his constitution. As a matter of fact, it was not only a temptation to him, but could, on occasion, be the instrument of his wickedness. "The blessing of a daughter was deniged me," remarked

the widow once, "which, if we had had one, Gamp would certainly have drunk its little shoes right off its feet, as with our precious boy he did, and afterward send the child to sell his wooden leg for any money it would fetch as matches in the rough." One regrets to say that to this weakness for drink there was added a tendency to do personal violence. Mrs Gamp had a limited supply of teeth in the days of our acquaintance with her, and the explanation we get from her own lips. "Which Gamp himself, bein' in liquor, at one blow struck out four, two single and two double, as was took by Mrs Harris for a keepsake." With these facts before us, it must surely be put to Mrs Gamp's credit, that, when Gamp's shameless career ended in a hospital, she was genuinely affected. "Ah, dear, when Gamp was summoned to his long home, and I see him a-lying in Guy's hospital, with a penny piece on each eye, and his wooden leg under his left arm, I thought I should have fainted away. But I bore up."

Rumour had it that Mrs Gamp bore up so well as to consent to leave her husband's remains at the hospital for the benefit of science. But rumour is proverbially uncharitable.

If Mrs Gamp then was lacking in those graces which we associate with a nurse to-day, it must be admitted that there is reason for the lack. No wonder her voice was husky and her eye moist. If Gamp had been the man he ought to have been—but it is idle to speculate. Had he been a more reputable character, circumstances might never have challenged the exercise of those great gifts which have enrolled his widow among the immortals.

A question arises which may be profitably discussed here in passing. Did Mrs Gamp ever seriously contemplate a second marriage? If she did, who will blame her? The years spent with Gamp, it is true, were hardly such as to warrant a second matrimonial experiment. But, on the other hand, she

may well have sighed for a companion more appreciative of her varied talents and charms. The only tender passages in Mrs Gamp's career as we know it were with that ingenious young gentleman, Mr Bailey Junior, and it may be said at once that they were not serious, at any rate, on Mr Bailey's side. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine anything serious occurring in connection with that young man. We meet him first of all in the famous Todgers', where his versatile genius found scope in all sorts of employment, from the blacking of boots to waiting at table. Even then his humorous faculty was in full operation. When, *e.g.*, laying the cloth for dinner, he would deliver himself of a remark like this to the visitors :—"Young ladies : there's soup to-morrow. She's a-makin' it now. Ain't she putting water in it? Oh, not at all, neither." Or this : "I say, there's fowls to-morrow. Not skinny. Oh, no." Or this : "When I come up she was dodging among the tender bits and eating of them."

A youth with this gift of candid criticism could obviously not remain long in a boarding-house. His very presence there was a menace to all the principles on which such an establishment was conducted. Nor was he a youth likely to succumb to the charms of Mrs Gamp. His experience of life was too mature. As he put himself: "He hoped he knowed wot o'clock it wos in gineral, and didn't date his letters to his friends, from Todgers, for nothing." Further, we can gather from the remark that he would rather be hit "with a cannon ball than a rolling-pin," that he preferred military to matrimonial adventures. It may be doubted, too, if Mrs Gamp would have made a satisfactory housekeeper to one who said, "I an't a-goin' to have every rise in prices visited on me," and whose chief objection to Todgers' found expression in these words: "Oh! yes! Wot do you go a-lowerin' the table beer for then, and destroying my constitooshun?" Of course, when Mr Bailey Junior met Mrs Gamp, he con-

ducted himself with all the easy affability that ever distinguished him. For instance, when at their first interview Mrs Gamp made a romantic allusion to the speed of the wings of love, Mr Bailey Junior enquired if the wings of love was a horse. The next encounter may be supposed to have more significance. "Hullo," he said, "Sairah, I needn't ask how you've been this long time, for you're in full bloom. All a-blowin' and a-growin'. Ain't she, Poll?" It is unquestionable that Mrs Gamp was flattered by this salutation. What she said was: "Why drat the Bragian boldness of that boy. What an imperrent young sparrow it is. I wouldn't be that creetur's mother, no, not for fifty pound." The sentimentalists may see in this the beginning of love. Certainly, Mrs Gamp admired Mr Bailey Junior. She admired his knowledge of the world. "All the wickedness of the world is print to him," was one of her tributes. But if she cherished any designs of a more ambitious sort, they

were in vain, for in strict confidence Mr Bailey Junior remarked to his friend Sweedlepipe that there was "the remains of a fine woman in Sairey." That remark I hold to be absolutely conclusive as to his sentiments.

When we come to study Mrs Gamp's character we are met at the outset by a singular fact. With one exception, all the tributes which we have to her excellences come either from her own lips or from those of Mrs Harris. And even the one solitary tribute from the outside—for we shall see that Mrs Harris cannot be said to belong to the outside—cannot be taken by the impartial historian without qualification. This will be clear when it is remarked that it was paid by Mr Mould the undertaker. Now an undertaker can hardly avoid having a certain professional interest in a nurse. And, in this case, Mr Mould's professional interest was enhanced by personal gratitude. He

had just been flattered in the most unblushing way by Mrs Gamp; and, though an undertaker, he was human. It is very human to believe that those who praise us are persons of exceptional intelligence and insight. And Mr Mould had just been told that he was a highly estimable person, that he looked younger than ever, that his wife bore none of the marks that "years and trials sets upon us," that his daughters were charming creatures. What man could be expected to remain proof against that? Mr Mould's tribute then is in accordance with Nature, though we discount it. It is also expressed in terms whose fitness is at once apparent.

"That's a very shrewd woman. That's a woman whose intellect is immensely superior to her station in life. She observes and reflects in an uncommon manner. She's the sort of woman now"—and Mould drew his silk handkerchief over his head and composed himself for a nap—"one would almost

feel disposed to bury for nothing and do it neatly too."

Surely esteem can attain no higher height than this.

But Mr Mould's praise of Mrs Gamp, when compared with Mrs Gamp's praise of herself, is as moonlight unto sunlight and as water unto wine. "The soberest person going and the best of blessings in a sick room is Mrs Gamp. Send a boy to Kingsgate Street and snap her up at any price, for she is worth her weight and more in goldian guineas." Then note her noble indifference to the baser rewards of life. "I will not deny that I am but a poor woman and that money is a object, but do not let that act upon you. Rich folks may ride on camels, but it an't so easy for them to see out of a needle's eye. That is my comfort, and I hope I knows it." Further, this lofty consciousness of integrity demanded confidence from others. "I am not a Rooshan or a Prooshan, and consequently cannot suffer spies to be set over

me. . . . It is not an easy matter to live when you're left a widder woman, particular when your feelings work on you to that extent that you find yourself going out on terms which are a certain loss and never can repay. But in whatever way you earn your bread, you may have rules and regulations of your own which cannot be broke through. Some people may be Rooshans and some may be Prooshans, they are born so and will please themselves. Them which is of other naturs thinks different." Thus does Mrs Gamp, in true British fashion, proclaim her superiority to the mere foreigner and her own incorruptible virtue. One feels that contentment must have been the portion of such a virtuous soul. And so it was.

"What a blessed thing it is living in a wale to be contented."

"What a blessed thing it is to make sick people happy in their beds, and never mind oneself, so long as one can do a service."

Sensibility, conscientiousness and perfect

contentment with self — these are Mrs Gamp's characteristics. I leave it to moralists to say whether these can exist together in a life that is really worthy of esteem. Is Mrs Gamp's monumental belief in self consistent with the best service of others? Doubts arise at this point, and these can only be resolved by an appeal to fact. Now it is extremely difficult to submit Mrs Gamp to the test of fact, to snapshot her, as it were, in action. Her inexhaustible eloquence drains off most of her energy. She lives in such a haze and maze of words that it is the rarest exception to find her doing anything. "We never know wot's hidden in each other's hearts, and if we had glass winders there, we'd need to keep the shutters up, some of us, I do assure you." Mrs Gamp is something of an enigma, yet it must be said that when we see her in action the spectacle is at painful variance with what her words would lead one to look for. She went once to nurse a sick man. "I think, young woman,"

she said to the servant-maid who was deputed to attend her, "that I could pick a little bit of pickled salmon with a nice little sprig of fennel, and a sprinkling of white pepper. I takes new bread, my dear, with a pat of fresh butter, and a morsel of cheese. In case there should be such a thing as a cowcumber in the house, will you be so kind as bring it, for I am rather partial to them, and they does a world of good in a sick room. If they draws the Brighton Tipper here, I takes that ale at night, my love, it being considered wakeful by the doctors. And whatever you do, young woman, don't bring more than a shilling's worth of gin, for that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond."

Now this is disconcerting. And yet none of us who know how easy it is to invest our preferences with the dignity of what we are pleased to call our duty, will be in haste to condemn Mrs Gamp. Has no one here ever made the discovery that a "cowcumber"

does a world of good in a sick room? What if Mrs Gamp happened to be partial to that vegetable. Was it not rather a happy coincidence than otherwise? If there is anyone here who has never desired a "cowcumber," or sought to justify that desire to himself by the pious reflection that they do a world of good in a sick room, then one should like to meet him, and, metaphorically speaking, sit at his feet. And if Mrs Gamp did take a draught of the Brighton Tipper. Did not the doctors recommend it as a wakeful ale, a wakeful and stimulating sleeping-draught—the very kind of draught for a nurse. And who can fail to detect and admire the note of austerity in Mrs Gamp's voice when she orders the shilling's worth of gin? "Young woman," and the tones are those of stoical virtue, "that is always my allowance, and I never takes a drop beyond." The supper disposed of, Mrs Gamp "went about the construction of an extemporaneous bed in

the easy-chair, with the addition of the next easy one for her feet. Having formed the best couch that the circumstances admitted of, she took out of her bundle a yellow nightcap of prodigious size, in shape resembling a cabbage; which article of dress she fixed and tied on with the utmost care, previously divesting herself of a row of old curls that could scarcely be called false, they were so very innocent of anything approaching to deception. From the same repository she brought forth a night jacket, in which she also attired herself. Finally, she produced a watchman's coat, which she tied round her neck by the sleeves. . . . All these arrangements made, she lighted the rushlight, coiled herself up on the couch, and went to sleep."

It was thus that Mrs Gamp gave practical proof of the statement that she was "worth her weight and more in goldian guineas."

But no study of Mrs Gamp can be called complete which does not take account of

Mrs Harris. Indeed, Mrs Gamp cannot be understood at all apart from that elusive and fascinating personage. Mrs Harris is Mrs Gamp's creation, and, in some respects, her ideal. Like many ideals, she is somewhat shadowy. She hovers on the borders of the real; there are times when, at the summons of Mrs Gamp's imagination, she flutters on the very verge of the visible; yet a glimpse of her we never get. Although Mrs Gamp's titanic imagination almost gives her embodiment, she remains a presence rather than a flesh-and-blood being. All we learn of her abode, for example, is that it "was through the square and up the steps a-turning round by the tobacker shop." How tantalisingly vague! "By her sister's marriage with a master sawyer," she was, we learn further, aunt to "an engine-driver on a railway only three years opened." Mrs Gamp had once nursed Mrs Harris's father, a musical old gentleman, "as pleasant a singer, Mr Chuzzlewit, as ever you heerd, with a voice

like a jews' harp in the bass notes." Further, Mrs Harris was the mother of nine, and had a husband whose brother was six foot three, and "marked with a mad bull in Wellington boots on the left arm, on account of his precious mother having been worrited by one into a shoemaker's shop." The wealth of detail with which Mrs Harris and her surroundings are described makes it hard to believe that she lived only in Mrs Gamp's imagination. She "had a woman's and a mother's heart a-beatin' in her mortal breast." She was "the sweetest and best of women." "I have knowed that sweetest and best of women ever since afore her first." "I have knowed Mrs Harris five-and-thirty years." "Oh, Mrs Harris, m'am, your countenance is quite an angel's." A woman of stainless character, with a large family and a kind heart—such was Mrs Harris. Needless to say, she was held in the highest esteem by her husband. He had her "picture done afore marriage at ten-and-six, and wore it

faithful next his heart till the colour ran, when the money was declined to be give back and no arrangement could be come to." But, chiefly, Mrs Harris was a woman with an unbounded admiration for Mrs Gamp. To know Mrs Gamp in her glory we must hear the tributes of Mrs Harris. "'No, Sairey Gamp,' says she, 'you best of hard-working and industrious creatures, as ever was underpaid at any price, which underpaid you are.'" "'Mrs Gamp,' she says, 'if ever there was a sober creetur to be got at eighteenpence a day for working people and three-and-six for gentlefolks, night-watchin'—you are that inwalable person.'" "'Mrs Harris,' I says to her, 'don't name the charge, for if I could afford to lay all my fellow-creeturs out for nothink, I would gladly do it, sich is the love I bear them.'" "'Sairey Gamp,' said Mrs Harris on another occasion, 'you really do amaze me.' 'Mrs Harris,' I says, 'why so, give it a name, I beg.' 'Telling the truth then, m'am,' says Mrs Harris, 'and shaming him

as shall be nameless betwixt you and me, never did I think till I knowed you that any woman could sick-nurse on the little you takes in drink.' 'Mrs Harris,' I said, 'none on us knows what we can do till we tries, and wunst, when me and Gamp kept house, I thought so too. But now,' I says, 'my half a pint of porter fully satisfies, perwising, Mrs Harris, that it is brought reglar and drawed mild. I am but a poor woman, and I earns my living hard, therefore I do require it to be brought reglar and drawed mild.'" At times Mrs Harris's admiration became almost speechless in its intensity. At these times it was rewarded by cryptic and almost mystic utterances. "'O Sairey Gamp,' she says, 'how is it done?' 'Mrs Harris, m'am,' I says, 'we gives no trust ourselves and puts a deal o' trust elsevere; these is our religious feelin's and we makes them answer.' 'Sairey,' says Mrs Harris, 'sich is life. Vich likewise is the hend of all things.'"

The only thing that seemed to lessen the perfect accord of the two souls was a tendency in Mrs Harris to take even a darker view of life than her friend took. "'I says to Mrs Harris only the other day, the last Monday evening fortnight as ever dawned on this Pilgians Projiss of a mortal wale; I says to Mrs Harris when she says to me, "Years and our trials, Sairey, sets marks upon us all," "Say not the words, Mrs Harris, if you and me is to continue friends, for sich is not the case."'"

It is painful to have to record that an unimaginative and brutal world questioned the reality of Mrs Harris. The world treats the creations of genius with rude hand, and the world in the person of Betsy Prig was no tenderer than its wont to Mrs Harris. Betsy Prig and Mrs Gamp had once been friends. They had shared cases and spoken of each other in terms of laudation. Time was when Mrs Gamp had referred to Betsy as the "best of creeturs," and when they had

been able to exchange such intimate professional confidences as these :—

"'Wishin' you lots o' sickness, my darling creetur',' said Mrs Gamp, 'and good places. It won't be long afore we works together I hope, off and on, again, Betsy, and may our next meeting be at a large family's, where they all takes it reglar, one from another, turn and turn about, and has it business-like.'" It is only on the basis of old friendship that such an exchange of confidence can take place. And even on the day of the great quarrel Mrs Gamp received her professional sister with terms of endearment. "Betsy, my precious, you're late." What was it that shattered this long-standing friendship? It was Mrs Harris. Other causes contributed, no doubt. The absence of a cucumber from Mrs Gamp's tea-table ruffled Betsy's temper. A certain suggestion of patronage in Mrs Gamp's manner did not tend to improve matters. But these things in themselves cannot explain the catastrophe.

It was a difference in artistic creed that separated them, and their quarrel had all the bitterness of a creed conflict.

"'Mrs Harris, Betsy,' said Mrs Gamp, after tea had been disposed of, and they pledged each other in a most friendly spirit. 'Mrs Harris.' 'Bother Mrs Harris,' said Betsy Prig." Mrs Gamp looked at her in amazement, incredulity and indignation, when Mrs Prig, shutting her eyes still closer and folding her arms still tighter, uttered those memorable and tremendous words, "I don't believe there's no sich a person." It is one of the great moments in English fiction, and it is impossible to do justice to it save by quoting him who created it. "After the utterance of these words she leaned forward and snapped her fingers, once, twice, thrice—each time nearer to the face of Mrs Gamp—and then rose to put on her bonnet as one who felt that there was now a gulf which nothing could ever bridge across.

"The shock of the blow was so violent

and sudden that Mrs Gamp sat staring at nothing with uplifted eyes, and her mouth open as if she were gasping for breath, until Betsy Prig had put on her bonnet and her shawl and was gathering the latter about her throat. Then Mrs Gamp rose—morally and physically rose—and denounced her. 'What,' said Mrs Gamp, 'you bage creature, have I knowed Mrs Harris five-and-thirty years to be told at last that there is no sich a person livin'? Have I stood her friend in all her troubles, great and small, for it to come at last to such a end as this, which her own sweet picter hanging up before you all the time to shame your Bragian words. But well you may not believe there's no sich a creetur, for she would not demean herself to look at you; and often has she said, when I have made mention of your name, which to my sinful sorrow I have done, "What, Sairey Gamp, debage yourself to her. Go along with you."' 'I'm a-goin', m'am, an't I?' said Mrs Prig, stopping as

she said it. 'You had better, m'am,' said Mrs Gamp. 'Go along with you. I blush for you.'"

Undoubtedly that was the severest blow Mrs Gamp ever received. Her ideal world was invaded by that determined realist, Betsy Prig, and declared to be a sham. It did not destroy Mrs Gamp's faith, it is true. She still clung to her mysterious friend, and clothed her in the attributes of time. She could bear any loss but that of Mrs Harris. "I could have bore it with a thankful art, but the words she spoke of Mrs Harris lambs could not forgive." She continued to see her and speak with her as of yore. "Don't I know as that dear woman is expectin' of me at this minute, and is a-lookin' out of the winder down the street, with little Tommy Harris in her arms, which calls me his own Gammy, and truly calls, for bless the little mottled legs of that there precious child." There is something magnificent in Mrs Gamp's fidelity to the creature of her

own brain. The climax was reached when she installed Mrs Harris in the place of the discarded Betsy, and determined to reap the reward of both day and night nursing in partnership with a phantom. It was the highest effort of the genius of that indomitable woman, and we cannot wonder that even she faltered when asked to name her new assistant, and could only gasp out the word "Harris." When Jonas Chuzzlewit demanded a sight of the person who was sharing Mrs Gamp's self-sacrificing toil, that great woman's supreme trial seemed to have arrived. We cannot but be glad that she was saved the crowning indignity of admitting that after all Betsy Prig was right.

But note, with the failure of Mrs Harris to appear, the whole story collapses. We are left to the Chuzzlewits, and not even Mr Tapley can make us feel jolly. Joy goes with Mrs Gamp. With her departure we are left in the region of the conventional. Mr Chesterton has remarked that *Martin*

Chuzzlewit is, on the whole, a sad book. So it is, and but for Mrs Gamp it would be an almost intolerable book—a book in regard to which we could only express our sentiments in Mrs Gamp's own words, "Which fiddle-strings is weakness to expredge my nerves this night."

Yet with all our admiration for Mrs Gamp, there must be a note of criticism. One feels that she was not truly loyal even to Mrs Harris. She put upon that lady's shoulders a burden which even she could not bear, the burden namely of completely justifying Mrs Gamp in every one of her actions. It must be said of Mrs Gamp that she misused her ideal, making it an echo, a kind of invisible chorus to sing her praises. In this, of course, she is not unlike many people who have not a tithe of her genius. Great gifts of imagination degraded to the service of self—that is what we find in Mrs Gamp. She was one of those who make their ideals minister to their complacency,

who, when they look up to the celestial regions, behold the reflection of their own excellences and hear welcoming anthems. And so, when Dickens brings her out of the fantastic world of caricature into the light of common day, and sets her face to face with that incarnation of commonplace, old Martin Chuzzlewit, no doubt the judgment passed on her is deserved. "'Mr Sweedlepipe,' said old Martin, 'take as much care of your lady lodger as you can, and give her a word or two of good advice now and then—such as hinting at the expediency of a little less liquor and a little more humanity, and a little less regard for herself and a little more regard for her patients, and perhaps a trifle of additional honesty. Or when Mrs Gamp gets into trouble, Mr Sweedlepipe, it had better not be when I am near enough to the police-station to volunteer as a witness to her character. Endeavour to impress that upon her at your leisure, if you please."

It is greatly to be regretted that on the

utterance of these portentous words Mrs Gamp fell into that walking swoon, and so for the time lost the power of retort. One feels sure that her observations would have been the only ones possible in the circumstances. For who was Martin Chuzzlewit to pass judgment on Mrs Gamp? Indeed, we never pass from Dickens's world of humour to that of his morals without a shock. Sam Weller's world, and Mr Pickwick's, and Mrs Gamp's is not on the map; Chuzzlewit's is. And into that larger world, presided over by the Comic Spirit, we need not go armed with the conventionalities. To laugh at Mrs Gamp is not really to condone her faults, for laughter has its morality no less than gravity, and it is by laughter that we pass our judgments in that world which is Dickens's own. Dickens gives us the cleansing of laughter. "In comedy," says Meredith, "we see charity issuing forth from disdain under the stroke of honourable laughter." No charity

issues from Chuzzlewit's disdain, for no hearty laugh ever shook that meagre frame. "It requires a deal of courage to be a humorous writer," said Walter Bagehot, and Dickens had, to quote the same critic, the "courage of his faculty." He dared to make men laugh. And, perhaps, when we come to see that selfishness and vanity are supremely ridiculous, we shall conceive a distaste for them that many sermons might fail to awaken. We have all our Mrs Harris. And if Dickens can make us laugh at the hugely foolish figures we cut often in life, he has gone a long way in helping us towards that self-criticism which is the basis of improvement.

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