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NEW WRITINGS BY DICKENS

ON FEBRUARY 17, 1856, Dickens asked William Henry Wills, the sub-editor of his weekly magazine *Household Words* (1850-59), to prepare a collection of "everything I have written" that has appeared in *Household Words,* but then he added: "You will of course except all composite articles [Dickens' term for pieces he wrote in collaboration with colleagues] and all such *pièces de circonstance* as the opening address and the reference to the almanack." Dickens was fulfilling a contract. Earlier in 1856, he had concluded an agreement with Hachette, the French publishers, giving them translation rights to his complete works and agreeing to supply them with the texts of his writings. Wills apparently followed Dickens' instructions, compiling one collection of the specified contributions for Hachette and one for the office of *Household Words.* But those instructions had unforeseen consequences. They helped to eclipse hundreds of pages of additional writings by Dickens. Those additional writings are still in eclipse, even though they were published while Dickens was at the height of his powers, while he was also writing *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1855-57).

All *Household Words* articles were published anonymously, a policy that favoured eclipse. In *Reprinted Pieces* (1858), Dickens republished about twenty per cent of his *Household Words* writings, including, strangely, one composite essay ("A Plated Article," April 24, 1852, with Wills). But it was not until almost forty years after his death that a comprehensive collection of his solo *Household Words* writings was made. That collection, compiled by B. W. Matz, was published as part of the National Edition (1908). Matz based his identification of Dickens' work on the Office Book (also known as the Contributors' Book) of *Household Words,* which had been kept by Wills, and which came to light shortly before the National Edition was published. With a few minor lapses, this account book showed the author or authors of virtually every article in *Household Words.* All subsequent editions of Dickens' *Household Words* writings have followed Matz's compilation. But Matz missed a few of Dickens' contributions, and he deliberately excluded from his collection Dickens' "com-

posite articles". These pieces have never been collected. Nor have they been studied to determine Dickens' share in them or their place in his canon. The writings will now shortly be published. They run to well over a quarter of a million words, and they cover the whole range of Dickens' interests.

These new writings by Dickens suggest the variety and depth of his interests. He writes about the operation of the post office and the treatment of murderers, the lives of weavers and the burdens of *Household Words*, his estimate of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and his theory of dramatic catharsis, his views on cannibalism and his memories of childhood. There is much more: reveries and manifestoes, familiar themes and ingenious speculations. And there are many types and kinds of writing: exposition, criticism, description, and exhortation; anecdote, sketch, and tale; humour, satire, irony, and invective. There are also experiments with new or uncommon techniques: with montage, interior monologue, discontinuity, and the like.

One form well represented in these new writings is the "process" article (the term is Dickens'). Such articles are accounts, often highly individualized and imaginative, of business and manufacturing processes. There are articles on the production, processing, or management of gold, paper, plate glass, magazines, stockyards, fish markets, post offices, and banks. These articles contain fanciful flights as well as facts and figures; they frequently include meditations, symbolic scenes, parables, reminiscences, or pleas for reform. Any subject at any moment may suddenly be translated from the limbo of the matter-of-fact to the realm of the extraordinary. But this is true of all these pieces. In paragraph, vignette, or long disquisition, in "process" article or descriptive essay, in rewrite or interpolation, Dickens' chief concerns — the concerns one finds in his novels, letters, and daily living — emerge with reiterated force. Through these new writings we can amplify and sometimes extend his view on children, education, progress, drama, crime, and insanity; we can add memorable pages to his childhood reminiscences, to his lore of London and Londoners, to his interest in the polar regions, to his descriptions of weather, food, houses, landscapes, crowds, and the like; we can see again how important fancy, fairy tales, and the literature of childhood were to him; and we can verify once more his sympathy for the poor, his concern for social justice, and his efforts for reform.

By turning for a moment to just one of these areas, to reform, we can get some notion of the range of these writings. They enlarge the record (in some instances they are the primary record) of what he thought about sanitation,

charity schools, ragged schools, public education, teacher training, conditions of labour, rights of labourers, public records, Parliament, legal systems, crime, prisons, punishment, juvenile delinquency, rehabilitation, slavery, patronage, bureaucracy, public executions, social action, involvement, cruelty to animals, funerals, public ceremonies, recreation, and entertainment; they present his views on the treatment of the poor, the sick, the insane, and the young. One could easily expand this list of "reform" writings.

One type of reform writing, for instance, that is well represented in these pieces is the open appeal. Dickens adopted this Carlylean mode of address when he was profoundly concerned by a problem. Through such frontal assaults he hoped to trouble and educate his readers — a prelude to reform. In "Boys to Mend" (September 11, 1852, with Henry Morley) — written while in the midst of *Bleak House*, and sharing its anger and rhetoric — he directly addresses each member of Parliament ("O honourable friend, member for Verbosity"). Where, he asks, would you and your children be "had your birthplace been a filthy fever-breeding alley; had no voice of teacher ever sounded in your ears; had you been made a callous man by rubbing constantly against the hardest side of society?" The rich must understand the capricious origins of their good fortune; understanding, they must stop talking and act to help their fellow human beings, the poor. In "The Metropolitan Protectives" (April 26, 1851, with Wills), another uncollected piece, but written before *Bleak House*, he had also pleaded for action, again using his recurrent emblem of doom, the abandoned streetwaif — an emblem of society's responsibility and danger:

> There are six hundred and fifty-six gentlemen in the English House of Commons assembling in London. There is not one of those gentlemen who may not, in one week, if he choose, acquire as dismal a knowledge of the Hell upon earth in which he lives, in regard of these children . . . as no man can by possibility shut out who will walk this town with open eyes observant of what is crying to GOD in the streets. . . . Do none of the six hundred and fifty-six, care to walk from Charing Cross to Whitechapel — to look into Wentworth Street — to stray into the lanes of Westminster — to go into a prison almost within the shadow of their own Victoria Tower — to see with their eyes and hear with their ears, what such childhood is, and what escape it has from being what it is?

And after the lawmakers have looked and been horrified, what then must they do? The answer, given in "Boys to Mend," echoes lines from Shakespeare and Garrick. The lawmakers must inaugurate a system of prevention rather than punishment. The state must put its "Industrial and Farm Schools first,

and its prisons last." "To this complexion you must come. . . . for the thing itself is as sure as Death."

The allusions to prison in these jeremiads are significant. As a boy, Dickens had seen his father taken off to prison; and he had seen most of his family follow his father there. He had spent long boyhood Sundays sitting in his father's prison room, watching his father's prison demeanour, observing his father's prison friends. His novels offer profound testimony that problems of prisons and prisoners, or more broadly, the implications of imprisonment — as a kind of social pathology — were ever after in his mind. In the novels he usually dwells on the psychological and symbolic aspects of alienation and imprisonment; in these newly collected pieces he concentrates on such practical matters as prison economy and prison discipline. But his thinking on such questions is deeply divided. His intuitive sympathy for the pariahlike criminal is complicated by his feelings for the non-criminal pauper. He was infuriated by the knowledge that criminals were usually fed and clothed better than the indigent and the institutionalized poor. He had pointed to this disparity of treatment in "Pet Prisoners" and "A Walk in a Workhouse" (*Household Words*, April 27 and May 25, 1850); in "In and Out of Jail" (May 14, 1853, with Morley and Wills) — another uncollected piece — he made it a crucial measuring rod. "Taking every precaution to ensure the cleanliness and health of criminals," he wrote, "I require that their condition shall, in no particular, present a favourable comparison with the pauper's or the labourer's. Let it do so under any system, and I call that system, however plausible in theory, a manifestly false and absurd one in its practical operation."

But whatever the reform, whether it be of prisons, schools, working conditions, or bureaucracies, the means of achieving it is always the same: group action and individual involvement. This is made explicit in yet another of these new essays, "One Man in a Dockyard" (September 6, 1851, with Richard "Hengist" Horne). In that article, Dickens says that he means to do all he can personally to see that England is "governed by men of merit, and not by fine gentlemen," for the latter have usurped the authority of the state. This assumption of power "shows us, the people, the effect of a little combination on their part; and I think it is almost time for us to show *them* the effect of a little combination on ours." Here the enemy is privilege and bureaucracy, a major villain in *Little Dorrit*, a novel he would not begin for another four years. But these new writings constantly follow, underline, or anticipate ideas that thread through his other works. One finds the appeal for personal involvement in the dawning *Sketches by Boz* (1836) and the unfinished *Edwin*

Drood (1870); one also finds it in much Victorian writing. In these essays one finds it, among other pieces, in "Idiots" (June 4, 1853, with Wills), an article designed to aid institutions that were attempting to teach mentally defective children. Dickens seeks to help such efforts by forcing a confrontation; he compels the public to gaze upon that which they refuse to see:

> Madam . . . this idiot child of thirteen, sitting in its little chair before the fire — as to its bodily growth, a child of six; as to its mental development, nothing — is an odious sight to you. This idiot old man of eight, with the extraordinarily small head, the paralytic gestures, and the half-palsied forefinger, eternally shaking before his hatchet face as he chatters and chatters, disturbs you very much. But, madam, it were worth while to enquire while the brazen head is yet saying unto you "Time is!" how much of the putting away of these unfortunates in past years, and how much of the putting away of many kinds of unfortunates at any time, may be attributable to that same refinement which cannot endure to be told about them.

Open appeals for involvement and reform crop up everywhere in these writings. But such passages are only a small fraction — although an important fraction — of these new pieces. One meets at every turning the imaginative yet workful prose that is the hallmark of Dickens' maturity; one also meets, though less frequently, the extraordinary prose that builds his memorable set pieces. Even the most unlikely sources — the expository portions of the process articles — yield passages of dazzling virtuosity. Here, from "Valentine's Day at the Post-Office" (March 30, 1850, with Wills), is Dickens' description of the Great National Post Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand at a quarter to six in the evening, six being the latest hour at which newspapers could be posted without special fee:

> It was then just drizzling newspapers. The great window of that department being thrown open, the first black fringe of a thundercloud of newspapers impending over the Post-Office was discharging itself fitfully — now in large drops, now in little; now in sudden plumps, now stopping altogether. By degrees it began to rain hard; by fast degrees the storm came on harder and harder, until it blew, rained, hailed, snowed, newspapers. A fountain of newspapers played in at the window. Water-spouts of newspapers broke from enormous sacks, and engulphed the men inside. A prodigious main of newspapers, at the Newspaper River Head, seemed to be turned on, threatening destruction to the miserable Post-Office. The Post-Office was so full already, that the window foamed at the mouth with newspapers. Newspapers flew out like froth, and were tumbled

> in again by the bystanders. All the boys in London seemed to have gone mad, and to be besieging the Post-Office with newspapers. Now and then there was a girl; now and then a woman; now and then a weak old man: but as the minute hand of the clock crept near six, such a torrent of boys, and such a torrent of newspapers came tumbling in together pell-mell, head over heels, one above another, that the giddy head looking on chiefly wondered why the boys springing over one another's heads, and flying the garter into the Post-Office with the enthusiasm of the corps of acrobats at M. Franconi's, didn't post themselves nightly, along with the newspapers, and get delivered all over the world.
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> Suddenly it struck six. Shut Sesame! Perfectly still weather. Nobody there. No token of the late storm — Not a soul, too late!

This kind of writing exhibits what Dickens called "fancy": everyday reality is re-seen imaginatively, even fantastically, but the result increases rather than diminishes our sense of the reality depicted. And this is what he meant when he said in "A Preliminary Word" (March 30, 1850) — the credo that inaugurated the first issue of *Household Words* — that he wished to "show to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it out." The "Shut Sesame!" then is significant; magic has been performed: reality, while still reality, has been translated into romance. This ability to raise the ordinary to the extraordinary contributes to Dickens' power and universality: it also contributes to — or to put it another way, is an outgrowth of — his style. For rendering reality through fantastic, even grotesque figures, is a central feature of his style. This attribute is especially pronounced in his "process" pieces, for there, by definition, the familiar workaday world *must* be re-seen and re-experienced — that is the whole point of such articles. The stylistic correlatives are immediately apparent. We see the post office in a storm of newspapers; we see the saws in a sawmill ("One Man in a Dockyard") as participants in a fantastic rite. When a workman makes a sign to the "fierce-looking teeth" of three hungry saws, "all standing bolt upright," they "instantly commence a dance." "It is a grim and grotesque *pas de trois* to their own hoarse music of a smothered scream, and the 'drum' accompaniment of buzzing wheels which have set them in motion." And that dance, so ominously begun, is sustained throughout the passage.

This fanciful writing is no trick; it is a direct projection of Dickens' animistic imagination. We come upon these transfigurations everywhere. They emerge effortlessly (or so it seems) from the very act of perception. Though artificial, they are also wonderfully and intricately appropriate; they help

us to see and to feel. Often the organizing figures are richer, more subtly allusive, than the singly developed conceit of a storm or a dance. In another of these new pieces, "The Old Lady in Threadneedle Street" (July 6, 1850, with Wills), Dickens transforms the Strong Room of the Bank of England, with its ledgers and its rows upon rows of strongboxes, into a corrupt library. The library houses the hollow books of heart's desire. But the figure is not simple; it is developed with masterful, almost disdainful, freedom; and it is dropped at the end for an associated figure of extraordinary compression and intricacy:

> Sweating and wasting in this vast silent library, like manuscripts in a mouldy old convent, are the records of the Dividends that are, and have been, and of the Dividends unclaimed. Some men would sell their fathers into slavery, to have the rummaging of these old volumes. Some, who would let the Tree of Knowledge wither while they lay contemptuously at its feet, would bestir themselves to pluck at these leaves, like shipwrecked mariners. These are the books to profit by. This is the place for X. Y. Z. to hear of something to his advantage in. This is the land of Mr. Joseph Ady's dreams [Ady was a notorious circular-letter impostor]. This is the dusty fountain whence those wondrous paragraphs occasionally flow into the papers, disclosing how a labouring thatcher has come into a hundred thousand pounds — a long, long way to come — and gone out of his wits — not half so far to go. Oh, wonderful Old Lady! threading the needle with the golden eye all through the labyrinth of the National Debt, and hiding it in such dry hay-stacks as are rotting here!

The power that transfigures the Strong Room also works on persons, scenes, ideas, things — on all the kinds of impulses that throng from moment to moment through the mind. One marvels at the transfiguration; one also marvels at the range of sympathy that absorbs and transforms so much. There are many other examples in these new writings of Dickens' ability to deepen and widen what he re-creates. In "The Heart of Mid-London" (May 4, 1850, with Wills), Dickens' attack on the inefficiency and brutality of the Smithfield cattle market is more than an attack. His description of a night-time droving of cattle grows darker and more terrible as it proceeds, until the discordant notes of the wretched "church-organs" call forth what they herald, a Bosch-like vision of hell:

> Across their horns, across their hocks, across their haunches . . . the heavy blows rain thick and fast . . . Obdurate heads of oxen, bent down in mute agony, bellowing heads of oxen lifted up, snorting out smoke and slaver; ferocious men,

cursing and swearing and belabouring oxen; made the place a panorama of cruelty and suffering. By every avenue of access to the market, more oxen were pouring in: bellowing, in the confusion, and under the falling blows, as if all the church-organs in the world were wretched instruments — all there — and all being tuned together. Mixed up with these oxen, were great flocks of sheep, whose respective drovers were in agonies of mind to prevent their being intermingled in the dire confusion; and who raved, shouted, screamed, swore, whooped, whistled, danced like savages; and, brandishing their cudgels, laid about them most remorselessly. All this was being done, in a deep red glare of burning torches, which were in themselves a strong addition to the horrors of the scene; for the men who were arranging the sheep and lambs in their miserably confined pens, and forcing them to their destination through alleys of the most preposterously small dimensions, constantly dropped gouts of the blazing pitch upon the miserable creatures' backs; and to smell the singeing and burning, and to see the poor things shrinking from this roasting, inspired a sickness, a disgust, a pity and an indignation, almost insupportable.

This enhancement, this imaginative transfiguration of artifact, detail, and process, was often accompanied by parallel transformations throughout that article. Sometimes long passages, sometimes whole essays become (as in the old pantomimes Dickens loved so well) exercises in transformation. In "Valentine's Day at the Post-Office," the post office not only stimulates magical visions and magical words (storms of newspapers, "Shut Sesame!") but becomes itself a magical palace. We are in London, but we are also in the land of childhood romance. All this is very explicit. The note is struck early in the article. "Like knights-errant in a fairy tale," Wills and Dickens enter an enormous hall and find that though the workers have not been "transformed into statues, or stricken fast asleep," they have fallen under a spell and lapsed into "an enchanted state of idleness." And at the end of the piece, when Dickens leaves the great hall, it is to the accompaniment of striking clocks, disappearing postmen, and *Cinderella* imagery. Dickens sounds these and similar associations throughout his share of the article. Such blendings and montages help us to a double vision: we see with the intelligent, abstracting vision of maturity, but at the same time we recover for a moment the unhackneyed, uncommitted vision of childhood.

There are other ways of enforcing this double vision. "Discovery of a Treasure Near Cheapside" (November 13, 1852, with Morley) is an article about gold refining, but it is also something more, for both the gold and the process itself take on the power and mystery of myth (the romance of everyday

life again). Dickens begins this transformation with a torrent of associations: "Fortunatus had only a life interest in his purse; and we all know too well that when he died, it vanished with him. Sinbad the Sailor, a munificent merchant in his way, gave the porter of Bagdad only a poor one hundred sequins every day after dinner. Aladdin sent his mother to propose for the Sultan's daughter, with a tolerable present of jewels, but still with no more than could be spread forth on a china dish and tied up in a napkin." This array of allusions grows more and more golden as the passage proceeds, and the passage proceeds in this manner for many hundreds of words. When it does conclude, it is immediately followed by a superbly matter-of-fact description of the ordinary London streets in which the refinery is situated, which is followed, in turn, by the visit itself: discovering the "treasure"— a golden, though everyday scene, that (in point of value, unexpectedness, and alchemical transformations) beggars the old fables.

These fairy-tale allusions and transformations are part of Dickens' childhood heritage. Like other (but less gifted) children, he had lingered over the literature of childhood; but unlike other children, he had been saved — or so he felt — by that magical literature. That literature became, thereafter, a sort of beneficent amulet; it became a way of continuing to save himself and of saving others; it also became a favourite way of apprehending reality. The reflexive vision of childhood — in this case the persistent vision of early stories and imaginings — appears strongly in these new pieces, as it does in all his writings. Sometimes it consists simply of images and allusions. In "Valentine's Day at the Post-Office" the sight of men carrying mailsacks reminds Dickens of millers (really bandits) carrying sacks of grain (really gunpowder) to a mill (really a hideout) — re-enactment of his favourite toy-theatre play "The Miller and His Men." This image, or variations of it, recurs scores of times in his writings (it occurs in two different portions of the post-office article), as do many other permutations of the play and its title. But the heritage of childhood and its inexorable impositions emerge in many other ways. His descriptions of schools exaggerate the two very different schools of his childhood — the succouring one (Mr. Giles' school) or the neglectful one (Wellington House Academy) — so that all later schools tend to become idealized and charming or dismal and nightmarish. In one of these new pieces, "Received, a Blank Child" (March 19, 1853, with Wills), the infant school of the London Foundling Hospital becomes a flourishing garden (the antithesis of the barren factual farm that Dickens was to

create in *Hard Times* a year later): "We found perhaps a hundred tiny boys and girls seated in hollow squares on the floor, like flower borders in a garden; their teachers walking to and fro in the paths between sowing little seeds of alphabet and multiplication table broadcast among them. The sudden appearance of the secretary and matron whom we accompanied, laid waste this little garden, as if by magic. The young shoots started up with their shrill hooray! twining round and sprouting out from the legs and arms of the two officials with a very pleasant familiarity."

This description of a school and schoolchildren contrasts with similar descriptions elsewhere in these writings. In "A Free (and Easy) School" (November 15, 1851, with Morley) the waiflike child who haunts Dickens' imagination starts up again, as though rising from Dickens' past. The scene is spectrelike. A pale, worn, ghostly little boy "glides in" at the schoolhouse door. What is this apparition? Perhaps it is an "hallucination, or a guiding wraith." When Dickens imagines the schoolroom, the desks become "worm-eaten . . . more than worm-eaten — child-eaten — bitten," and the joyless children swarm "pale as maggots". "And as it is in some dreams where the grotesque scene works itself out before us, and all the actors seem unconscious of our presence, so here, for a brief space, the work of school goes on."

The spell of childhood seems to touch all Dickens' visions of his boyhood home of Chatham and Rochester — visions that recur many times in these pages — and to evoke a nostalgic, almost elegiac tone from the death-haunted depths of memory. "The Doom of English Wills" (September 28, 1850, with Wills) contains such a vision. In images and cadences that anticipate his last evocation of Rochester (as Cloisterham in death-interrupted *Edwin Drood*), Dickens describes a cathedral town and the cathedral itself: its associations with the "dusky Past", its "universal gravity, mystery, decay, and silence", and its "earthy smell, preaching more eloquently than deans and chapters, of the common doom". He goes on in this tone, concluding the paragraph with the cathedral organ "whose sound fills all that space, and all the space it opens in the charmed imagination".

For Dickens the "charmed imagination" is always circling back to a time and place that can never be forgotten and yet can never be recovered. He summons the sights and feelings of a distant day, but the day itself has fled, and with it a portion of the world's freshness and glory. One can remember, but one cannot repossess. Dickens knows this, but he cannot forgo the pursuit. He must re-create the vanished sights and sounds; he must triumph over time. This impulse is especially strong whenever childhood is evoked. In these

writings (as in all Dickens' writing) the places and associations of childhood force him back through time: imperceptibly he becomes what he once was. In "One Man in a Dockyard," the note of "juvenility" and dwindling stature, appropriate to the strategy of the essay, is even more appropriate to the remembrances he is calling up. For as he clambers about Rochester Castle, he is clambering over his past, visiting again the nooks and byplaces in which he read and dreamed as a boy; and when he leaves Rochester Castle and saunters down the road to Chatham, he is sauntering still deeper into his past:

> I surveyed that massive ruin [of Rochester Castle] from the Bridge, and thought what a brief little practical joke I seemed to be, in comparison with its solidity, stature, strength, and length of life. I went inside, and, standing in the solemn shadow of its walls, look[ed] up at the blue sky, its only remaining roof (to the disturbance of the crows and jackdaws, who garrison the venerable fortress now) . . . I climbed the rugged staircase, stopping now and then to peep at great holes where the rafters of floors were once — bare as toothless gums now — or to enjoy glimpses of the Medway through dreary apertures like eye-sockets without eyes; and looking down from the Castle ramparts on the Old Cathedral, and on the crumbling remains of the old Priory, and on the row of staid old red brick houses where the Cathedral dignitaries live, and on the shrunken fragments of one of the old City gates, and on the old trees with their high tops below me, felt quite apologetic to the scene in general for my own juvenility and insignificance. . . .
>
> As I sauntered along the old High Street on my way toward Chatham, I seemed to dwindle more and more.

These journeys into the past are also journeys into romance; Rochester Cathedral and Rochester Castle are versions of the romantic picturesque. Dickens often combined his past and the picturesque. Childhood haunts and activities glow in the soft multicoloured penumbra of a romantic haze. Many memorable experiences of his early years — his childhood reading, theatre-going, exploring, and the like — are conceived in this mode and recorded lovingly in these pages. Some of these episodes are worth quoting at length, not simply because they are charming in themselves, or because they demonstrate how Dickens glorified his lost Chatham days (one strong tendency in his summonings of childhood), but because they encoruscate new biographical details. In "First Fruits" (May 15.1852, with George Augustus Sala) we find Dickens remembering an old picture book, *The Dandies' Ball; or, High Life in the City*:

We date from the time of the Prince Regent, and remember picturebooks about dandies — satires upon that eminent personage himself, possibly — but *we* never knew it. In those times there was a certain bright, smooth cover for picture-books, like a glorified surgical plaster. It has gone out this long, long time. The picture-book that seems to have been our first, was about one Mr. Pillblister (in the medical profession, we presume, from the name), who gave a party. As the legend is impressed on our remembrance, it opened thus:

Mr. Pillblister and Betsey his sister,
Determined on giving a treat:
Gay dandies they call
To a supper and ball
At their house in Great Camomile Street.

The pictures represented male dandies in every stage of preparation for this festival; holding on to bed-posts to have their stays laced; embellishing themselves with artificial personal graces of many kinds; and enduring various humiliations in remote garrets. One gentleman found a hole in his stocking at the last moment.

A hole in my stocking,
O how very shocking!
Says poor Mr. (Some one) enraged.
It's always my fate
To be so very late,
When at Mr. Pillblister's engaged!

If we recollect right, they all got there at last, and passed a delightful evening. When we first came to London . . . we rejected the Tower, Westminster Abbey, Saint Paul's and the Monument, and entreated to be immediately taken to Great Camomile Street.

And here, from the same essay, is a memory of childhood visits to the tiny Theatre Royal, Rochester:

The first play! The promise, the hope deferred; the saving-clause of "no fine weather, no play;" the more than Murphian, or H.P. of Bermondsey Square [weather prognosticators], scrutiny of the weather during the day! Willingly did we submit, at five o'clock that evening, to the otherwise, and at any other time, detestable ordeal of washing, and combing, and being made straight. We did not complain when the soap got into our eyes; we bore the scraping of the comb, and the rasping of the brush without a murmur: we were going to the play, and we were happy. Dressed, of course, an hour too soon; drinking tea as a mere form and ceremony — for the tea might have been hay and hot water (not impossible), and the bread and butter might have been sawdust, for anything we could taste of it: sitting with petful impatience in the parlour, trying on

the first pair of white kid gloves, making sure that the theatre would be burnt down, or that papa would never come home from the office, or mamma prevented, by some special interference of malignant demons, from having her dress fastened; or that (to a positive certainty) a tremendous storm of hail, rain, sleet, and thunder would burst out as we stepped into the cab, and send us, theatreless, to bed. We went to the play, and were happy. The sweet, dingy, shabby little country theatre, we declared, and believed, to be much larger than either Drury Lane or Covent Garden, of which little Master Cheesewright — whose father was a tailor, and always had orders — was wont to brag! Dear, narrow, uncomfortable, faded-cushioned, flea-haunted, single tier of boxes! The green curtain, with a hole in it, through which a bright eye peeped; the magnificent officers, in red and gold coats (it was a garrison town), in the stage-box, who volunteered, during the acts, the popular catch of—

> "Ah! how, Sophia, can you leave
> Your lover, and of hope bereave?"

— for our special amusement and delectation, as we thought then, but as we are inclined to fear now, under the influence of wine! The pit, with so few people in it; with the lady, who sold apples and oranges, sitting in a remote corner, like Pomona in the sulks. And the play when it did begin — stupid, badly acted, badly got up as it very likely was. Our intense, fear-stricken admiration of the heroine, when she let her back hair down, and went mad, in blue. The buff-boots of Digby the manager. The funny man (there never was such a funny man) in a red scratch wig, who, when imprisoned in the deepest dungeon beneath the castle moat, sang a comic song about a leg of mutton. The sorry quadrille band in the orchestra, to our ears as scientifically melodious as though Costa had been conductor; Sivori, first fiddle; Richardson, flute; or Bottesini, double bass. The refreshment, administered to us by kind hands during the intervals of performance, never to be forgotten — oranges, immemorial sponge-cakes. The admonitions to "sit up," the warnings not to "talk loud," in defiance of which (seeing condonatory smiles on the faces of those we loved) we screamed outright with laughter, when the funny man, in the afterpiece, essaying to scale a first floor front by means of a rope ladder, fell, ladder and all, to the ground. The final fall of the green curtain, followed by an aromatic perfume of orange-peel and lamp-oil, and the mysterious appearance of ghostly brown Holland draperies from the private boxes. Shawlings, cloaking, home.

The drama, wrapped in nostalgia, emerges in such childhood reminiscences; shorn of nostalgia it also emerges elsewhere in these new writings. In "Foreigners' Portraits of Englishmen" (September 21, 1850, with Wills and E. C. Grenville Murray) Dickens interpolates amusing accounts of how European theatres portray Englishmen ("fitted up with a wig of violently red hair, like

a carriage-rug, and . . . dressed in a kind of fusion of an English jockey with a French Field-Marshal"). In "Shakespeare and Newgate" (October 4, 1851, with Horne), he describes what Samuel Phelps had to contend with when he took over the management of the Sadler's Wells Theatre in 1844. On opening night, Phelps chose to present *Macbeth*. Dickens portrays the scene, with its "catcalls, shrieks, yells, oaths, blasphemy, obscenity, apples, oranges, nuts, biscuits, ginger-beer, porter, and pipes." But all this was only a prelude to the performance itself. "Cans of beer, each with a pint measure to drink from (for the convenience of gentlemen who had neglected the precaution of bringing their own pots in their bundles), were carried through the dense crowd at all stages of the tragedy. Sickly children in arms were squeezed out of shape, in all parts of the house. Fish was fried at the entrance doors. Barricades of oyster-shells encumbered the pavement. Expectant half-price visitors to the gallery, howled defiant impatience up the stairs, and danced a sort of Carmagnole all round the building." The article goes on to relate how such audiences, purged eventually of hucksters and rowdies, were willing to watch something better than their usual vulgarities; they were willing to forgo claptrap for Shakespeare. This demonstration was close to Dickens' heart. The drama, like literature, was a way of easing the harshness of a mechanical age. The people must have their amusements; it were well, Dickens thought, if these amusements ennobled rather than debased. Such ennoblement was not an impossible ideal. In the theatre, Phelps had shown that quality could hold a working-class audience; in literature, Dickens had provided a similar demonstration. One of Dickens' chief purposes in founding *Household Words* had been to give the lower classes an opportunity to read something better than their steady diet of cheap confessions and lurid adventures — and *Household Words* had hurt the "villainous literature." Dickens' impulse in these matters was not simply moral or didactic. He viewed art as a deeply social force, as a way of humanizing life; but he also felt that art satisfied profound psychological and aesthetic needs. In another essay in this collection, "A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree" (January 17, 1852, with Wills), he mused on these needs and on the nature of dramatic illusion and the sources of the theatre's appeal. The pantomime, for example, appeals because it creates a "jocund world". It is a world where

> there is no affliction or calamity that leaves the least impression; where a man may tumble into the broken ice, or dive into the kitchen fire, and only be the droller for the accident; where babies may be knocked about and sat upon, or choked with gravy spoons, in the process of feeding, and yet no Coroner be

wanted, nor anybody made uncomfortable; where workmen may fall from the top of a house to the bottom, or even from the bottom of a house to the top, and sustain no injury to the brain, need no hospital, leave no young children; where every one, in short, is so superior to all the accidents of life, through encountering them at every turn, that I suspect this to be the secret (though many persons may not present it to themselves) of the general enjoyment which an audience of vulnerable spectators, liable to pain and sorrow, find in this class of entertainment.

Here and elsewhere these writings demonstrate that Dickens was willing to speculate and theorize. Yet the concrete, not the abstract, was his chief mode. His theorizing is usually brief and tentative, and it invariably emerges from an accumulation of trenchant details. Technical justifications or explanations of a work of art —or of art in general — were alien to his spirit. Dickens' reticence in such matters is a sign of disinclination, not of disability. Yet he sometimes spoke out. In one of these new pieces, "H. W." (April 16, 1853, with Morley), he describes what real writing demands. The literary dilettante, says Dickens, has no conception of those demands:

> He has a general idea that literature is the easiest amusement in the world. He figures a successful author as a radiant personage whose whole time is devoted to idleness and pastime — who keeps a prolific mind in a sort of corn-sieve, and lightly shakes a bushel of it out sometimes, in an odd half hour after breakfast. It would amaze his incredulity beyond all measure, to be told that such elements as patience, study, punctuality, determination, self-denial, training of mind and body, hours of application and seclusion to produce what he reads in seconds, enter into such a career. He has no more conception of the necessity of entire devotion to it, than he has of an eternity from the beginning. Correction and re-correction in the blotted manuscript, consideration, new observation, the patient massing of many reflections, experiences and imaginings for one minute purpose, and the patient separation from the heap of all the fragments that will unite to serve it — these would be Unicorns or Griffins to him — fables altogether.

This exasperated declaration offers further testimony — testimony corroborared by Dickens' letters, proofs, and "blotted manuscripts," but still regarded as Unicorns and Griffins by some — that Dickens' art was meticulously wrought. He simply preferred practice to preachment; art, he felt, should speak for itself.

These new writings do speak for themselves; they also underline some of

Dickens' preoccupations: reform, "fancy", childhood, education, and the theatre — categories that have been touched upon in part. But Dickens was equally concerned with other categories and other modes of writing, and they too will be found in these freshly-gathered pieces. We come upon cheap-Jacks and diplomats, labourers and prostitutes, banks and police stations, idylls and tragedies. We are presented with meditations and mood pieces, confessions and farces, analyses and descriptions. We trudge through dull October landscapes, gazing at "melancholy oaks, and red and yellow copses"; we splash through wet Sundays and find ourselves "completely varnished from head to foot with rain." We meet Literary Ladies who constantly address Gentle Readers; we are introduced to pugnacious cabdrivers driving "crazy, ricketty, jolting, ramshackle, ugly, unsavoury, cheating" cabs. We discover dozens of brilliant characterizations and scores of superb vignettes. In "The Metropolitan Protectives", in an hilarious scene much too long to quote, we come upon Mrs. Megby, a cousin (not so distant) of Mrs. Gamp ("'She then turns back between me and Henry Lupvich *Es*-quire, and commits an assault upon me, which I am not a acquisition and will not endoor or what is more submit to'"). And in "Spitalfields" (April 5, 1851, with Wills), in a stark vignette, also very long, but worth quoting in part to give some notion of these new writings at a longer stretch, we visit a weaver's room and meet a doomed man at his doomed work. The vision haunts us. The caged bird, the clashing loom, the setting sun, the hollow cough, the symbolic pike-head, the rushing railroad, the watery-headed baby — all fuse together and form a small masterpiece:

> Up a dark narrow winding public stair, such as are numerous in Lyons or in the wynds and closes of the old town of Edinburgh, and into a room where there are four looms; one idle, three at work.
>
> A wan thin eager-eyed man, weaving in his shirt and trousers, stops the jarring of his loom. He is the master of the place. Not an Irishman himself, but of Irish descent.
>
> "Good day!"
>
> "Good day!" Passing his hand over his rough chin, and feeling his lean throat.
>
> "We are walking through Spitalfields, being interested in the place. Will you allow us to look at your work?"
>
> "Oh! certainly."
>
> "It is very beautiful. Black velvet?"
>
> "Yes. Every time I throw the shuttle, I cut out this wire, as you see, and

put it in again — so!" Jarring and clashing at the loom, and glancing at us with his eager eyes.

"It is slow work."

"Very slow." With a hard dry cough, and the glance.

"And hard work."

"Very hard." With the cough again.

After a while he once more stops, perceiving that we really are interested and says, laying his hand upon his hollow breast and speaking in an unusually loud voice, being used to speak through the clashing of the loom.

"It tries the chest, you see, leaning for'ard like this for fifteen or sixteen hours at a stretch."

"Do you work so long at a time?"

"Glad to do it when I can get it to do. A day's work like that, is worth a matter of three shillings."

"Eighteen shillings a week."

"Ah! But it ain't always eighteen shillings a week. I don't always get it, remember! One week with another, I hardly get more than ten, or ten-and-six."

"Is this Mr. Broadelle's loom?"

"Yes. This is. So is that one there;" the idle one.

"And that, where the man is working?"

"That's another party's. The young man working at it, pays me a shilling a week for leave to work here. That's a shilling, you know, off my rent of half-a-crown. It's rather a large room."

"Is that your wife at the other loom?"

"That's my wife. She's making a commoner sort of work, for bonnets and that."

Again his loom clashes and jars, and he leans forward over his toil. In the window by him, is a singing-bird in a little cage, which trolls its song, and seems to think the loom an instrument of music. The window, tightly closed, commands a maze of chimney-pots, and tiles, and gables. Among them, the ineffectual sun, faintly contending with the rain and mist, is going down. A yellow ray of light crossing the weaver's eager eyes and hollow white face, makes a shape something like a pike-head on the floor.

The room is unwholesome, close, and dirty. Through one part of it the staircase comes up in a bulk, and roughly partitions off a corner. In that corner are the bedstead and a fireplace, a table, a chair or two, a kettle, a tub of water, a little crockery. The looms claim all the superior space and have it. Like grim enchanters who provide the family with their scant food, they must be propitiated with the best accommodation. They bestride the room, and pitilessly squeeze the children — this heavy, watery-headed baby carried in the arms of its staggering little brother, for example — into the corner. The children sleep at night between

the legs of the monsters, who deafen their first cries with their whirr and rattle, and who roar the same tune to them when they die.

Come to the mother's loom.

"Have you any other children besides these?"

"I have had eight. I have six alive."

"Did we see any of them, just now, at the ——"

"Ragged School? O yes! You saw four of mine at the Ragged School!"

She looks up, quite bright about it — has a mother's pride in it — is not ashamed of the name: she, working for her bread, not begging it — not in the least.

She has stopped her loom for the moment. So has her husband. So has the young man.

"Weaver's children are born in the weaver's room," says the husband, with a nod at the bedstead. "Nursed there, brought up there — sick or well — and die there."

To which, the clash and jar of all three looms — the wife's, the husband's, and the young man's, as they go again — make a chorus.

"This man's work, now, Mr. Broadelle — he can't hear us apart here, in this noise? —"

"Oh, no!"

—"requires but little skill?"

"Very little skill. He is doing now, exactly what his grandfather did. Nothing would induce him to use a simple improvement (the 'fly shuttle') to prevent that contraction of the chest of which he complains. Nothing would turn him aside from his old ways. It is the old custom to work at home, in a crowded room, instead of in a factory. *I* couldn't change it, if I were to try."

Good Heaven, is the house falling! Is there an earthquake in Spitalfields! Has a volcano burst out in the heart of London! What is this appalling rush and tremble?

It is only the railroad.

The arches of the railroad span the house; the wires of the electric telegraph stretch over the confined scene of his daily life; the engines fly past him on their errands, and outstrip the birds; and what can the man of prejudice and usage hope for, but to be overthrown and flung into oblivion! Look to it, gentlemen of precedent and custom standing, daintily opposed to progress, in the bag-wigs and embroidered coats of another generation, you may learn from the weaver in his shirt and trousers!

There, we leave him in the dark, about to kindle at the poor fire the lamp that hangs upon his loom, to help him on his labouring way into the night. The sun has gone down, the reflection has vanished from the floor. There is nothing in the gloom but his eager eyes, made hungrier by the sight of our small present:

the dark shapes of his fellow-workers mingling with their stopped looms; the mute bird in its little cage, duskily expressed against the window; and the watery-headed baby crooning in a corner God knows where.

Many of the persons, places, and actions in these new writings have their counterparts elsewhere in Dickens' works. The melancholy toil of the weaver anticipates the melancholy workfulness of Coketown; the rainy opening of "The Wind and the Rain" (May 31, 1851, with Morley) foreshadows the foggy opening of *Bleak House*; the redoubtable Mrs. Megby reminds us of the immortal Mrs. Gamp; the cabdrivers, waiters, and cheap-Jacks recall or portend — to mention only three examples — the cabdrivers of *Sketches by Boz*, the waiters of *David Copperfield*, and the cheap-Jacks of *Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions* (1865). But despite these similarities, Dickens never repeats himself. He summons and re-summons the endless reiterations of life, but he distils their infinite freshness. The cheap-Jack calls in a different patter, the waiter bows in a stiffer way, the rain slants down with a new persistence. We have been here before; we recognize the voice and the method; we even recognize the familiar nineteenth-century modes that Dickens encoruscates; yet the vision is always new.

And sometimes the mode is new as well. In these freshly-collected pieces (as in many of his other works) Dickens is writing in less established ways; he is experimenting, for instance, with rendering consciousness. Here, from "Epsom" (June 7, 1851, with Wills), is part of his description of the Derby Day scene at Epsom Downs as he picnics, watches the races, and observes the crowd:

> As if the great Trafalgar signal had been suddenly displayed from the top of the Grand Stand, every man proceeds to "do his duty." The weaker spirits, who were ashamed to set the great example, follow it instantly, and all around me there are table-cloths, pies, chickens, hams, tongues, rolls, lettuces, radishes, shellfish, broad-bottomed bottles, clinking glasses, and carriages turned inside out. Amidst the hum of voices a bell rings. What's that? What's the matter? It's only the dog upon the course. Is that all? Glass of wine. Another roar. What's that? It's only the man who wants to cross the course, and is intercepted, and brought back. Is that all? I wonder whether it is always the same dog and the same man, year after year! A great roar. What's the matter? By Jupiter, they are going to start.
>
> A deeper hum and louder roar. Everybody standing on Fortnum and Mason. Now they're off! No. *Now* they're off! No. *Now* they're off. No. *Now* they are! Yes!

> There they go! Here they come! Where? Keep your eye on Tattenham Corner, and you'll see 'em coming round in half a minute. Good gracious, look at the Grand Stand, piled up with human beings to the top, and the wonderful effect of changing light as all their faces and uncovered heads turn suddenly this way! Here they are! Who is? The horses! Where? Here they come! Green first. No: Red first. No: Blue first. No: the Favorite first. Who says so? Look! Hurrah! Hurrah! All over. Glorious race. Favorite wins! Two hundred thousand pounds lost and won. You don't say so? Pass the pie!

This is an experiment in the manner of the twentieth century: an attempt to make a linear mode record the density of time, the simultaneity of events. In "Epsom," and in many other works, Dickens succeeded brilliantly in such renderings. In such experiments (especially in those that attempt to re-create the impression of consciousness), he used many techniques now lumped together under the label "stream of consciousness": the transitionless juxtaposition of discrete but simultaneous actions; the jumbling of outward events and inward feelings; the interjection of impressions from a variety of the senses; the blurrings, montages, interruptions, and discontinuities of darting thoughts — in short, devices designed to fracture the narrative sequences and simulate the mind's flux. These technical feats are worth dwelling on for two reasons. First, because Dickens' experimentation (experimentation in other techniques also — in "expressionism" and "surrealism", for example) has not been sufficiently recognized. Second, because the so-called "experimental" novel of the twentieth century has not been sufficiently linked to its nineteenth-century English sources. Thoroughout Dickens' writings, but increasingly in his later works, we find him experimenting — with an hallucinated consciousness in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-44), with interior monologue in *Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy* (1864), and with a "scattered consciousness" (the term is Dickens') in *Edwin Drood*, to mention only three instances of one kind of experimentation. Of course Dickens, unlike Joyce or Virginia Woolf or Faulkner, did not make such devices central. For Dickens these techniques were *a* way rather than *the* way of rendering reality. But the difference is one of degree rather than kind. A shift in sensibility (the shift occurs over a wide front and with increasing speed as the nineteenth century progresses) is not a break with tradition. "Epsom," other writings by Dickens, writings by Carlyle, Browning, and Hopkins, as well as works by still earlier writers, by Sterne and Shakespeare, for example, can help us define that tradition.

In that attempt to see and understand, these new writings can play their role — not merely by helping us to complete the record of what Dickens

thought and wrote, but by helping us to understand the forces that formed us. We see with fresh penetration the factories, schools, and slums, the obsessions, anxieties, and aspirations of a rich and various age — the age that is father to our own — and we see all this through the eyes of its greatest writer. We see also — and this, unaccountably, has gone almost without notice or comment —-that Dickens is a superb essayist, entitled by virtue of these and his formerly collected essays to rank with the great English practitioners of that form. His range and versatility are extraordinary. He writes memorably on politics, education, and the theatre; on manufacturing, crime, and everyday life. He can persuade, exhort, and satirize; he can be meditative or polemical, angry or humorous. He can strike a public pose or make a personal confession. Though he sometimes plods, sometimes strains, and sometimes becomes too shrill, he usually has the words and the voice and the vision to make us listen and remember.

NOTE

[1]This article is taken, in modified form, from a portion of the Introduction to my edition of *Charles Dickens: Uncollected Writings from "Household Words" (1850-59)*, to be published in 1968 by the Indiana University Press.

In order to eliminate elaborate documentation — what Dickens termed "hicupping references"— I have incorporated such signposts as seemed needful into the text itself. When making significant use of a letter, I have included the date. This will enable the reader to turn quickly to the reference in any edition of the letters — though many of the letters will be found only in the edition which I used: *The Letters of Charles Dickens,* ed. Walter Dexter, 3 vols. (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1938). Significant references to articles in *Household Words* include, in the first citation, title and date, and so can be located at once. In composite articles, the joint author is also included in the first citation. Information regarding the day-to-day transactions of *Household Words* — authorship of articles, names of collaborators, etc. — is based upon the Office Book (also known as the Contributors' Book) of *Household Words* kept by W. H. Wills, the sub-editor of the magazine. This account book is now in the Parrish collection of the Princeton University Library.

In drawing upon these writings, I have used only those passages that seem to me assuredly by Dickens, and I have treated them as in fact his. The evidence for such ascriptions will be found in the edition cited in the first paragraph of this note. That evidence would swamp this brief survey.