

"CHARLES DICKENS' CONTRIBUTION TO THE SOCIAL NOVEL"

(1836 - 1850)

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## Chapter 1.

Introduction.

The beginning of the 19th century presents a picture of England, nervous, unsettled and uneasy. A brief survey of the changes that had been taking place during the preceding century is important to comprehend the causes of this unrest.

England was not truly Democratic, there was no institution which the aristocracy did not control; and this was particularly true of central and local government. Powerful interests were continually on the watch to fill any empty seats in Parliament with creatures who would voice their opinion, so that the times, when uniform franchise enabled every householder who did "watch and ward" to vote, were forgotten almost. Before this new state of affairs, the qualifications for voting were clear cut. The scot and lot and potwalloper boroughs demanded a uniform qualification of six months residence in 1786. Some boroughs in this category fixed the franchise on the payment of poor rate or church rate; in other boroughs the only stipulation was that the voter had not been a charge on the poor rate.

Boroughs classified as Burgage attached the vote to the possession of property. The electorate in such a case consisted of owners of land, houses, shops or gardens, and the qualification for voting depended upon the possession of title deeds which went by the name of 'snatch papers' because of the speed with which many title deeds changed hands at election times.

Next there were corporation boroughs in which the corporation had obtained the right to elect, independently of the burgesses.

The Freeman boroughs appear to have limited the franchise to inhabitants who belonged to the trade guild.

In outline, this is the political picture that existed before the aristocracy began to concentrate power in their hands. This they did by buying the larger part of the property within boroughs in which they wished to control representation. Two towns, Aldborough and Steyning are quoted as particular examples. Again Lord Radnor could claim ninety-nine out of a hundred burgage tenures at Downton, because the burgage property that granted enfranchisement to its owner was a ploughed field. Residential qualification did not prevent Lord Lonsdale from obtaining a majority in Haslemere. He adopted the simple if expensive expedient of settling a colony of Cumberland miners, in order to satisfy this condition. Corporation boroughs often fell under the rule of "a patron," who bribed the members of the Corporation with money, with livings or clerkships in the state departments, cadetships in the navy and in India."<sup>1</sup> Freeman boroughs did not escape this unscrupulous invasion. With the practice of selling the freedom of the borough to non-residents, men who wanted to become patron, men who wanted to become voters indulged freely in the

1. The Village Labourer 1760-1832 J.L.Hammond and Barbara Hammond - P.10. (Longmans, Green & Co.) 1919.

the traffic. Thus Dunwich which in 1670 contained forty resident freemen, contained in that same year four hundred non-residents. In 1762 two hundred and fifteen freemen were made in Durham in order to control an election. These abuses grew to enormous proportions and in 1793, The Society of Friends of the People sent a petition to the House of Commons, in which it was stated that 157 members were sent to Parliament by 84 individuals. Fox in 1797 declared "When Gentlemen represent populous towns and cities, then it is a disputed point whether they ought to obey their voice or follow the dictates of their own conscience. But if they represent a noble Lord or a noble Duke then it becomes no longer a question of doubt, and he is not considered a man of honour who does not implicitly obey the orders of a single constituent." <sup>1</sup>

Local governments outside the towns showed the same decay and everything seemed to drift into the hands of the Justice of the Peace. In the reign of Edward III this office had been created to carry out some of the precepts of the State. At quarterly ~~quarterly~~ sessions, Justices were given the assistance of juries and exercised criminal jurisdiction. They gradually acquired administrative power, functions and properties of government. The Elizabethan Poor Law allowed the Justice of the Peace to appoint parish overseers. "By the end of the eighteenth century, the entire administration of county affairs, as well as the ultimate authority in parish business, was in the hands of the Justice of the Peace, the High Sheriff, and the Lord-Lieutenant." <sup>2</sup>

1. House of Commons, May 26th, 1797, on Grey's motion for Parliamentary Reform.

2. Ibid - P.17.

By this time the aristocracy was paramount both in local government and in Parliament. In order to preserve its special powers from the folly of individual members, the great landowners adopted the system of entail by means of which each successive generation had only a life interest in the estates, so that they remained in the permanent possession of the family.<sup>1</sup> The abolition of military tenures in 1660 was another step away from the age of feudalism and meant the end of money payments to the Crown by landlords, in lieu of military service. An Excise Tax was to take its place. Although the great landlords were no longer liable to pay the accustomed dues to the Crown, they expected, and still continued to receive feudal dues from the small copyholder. In fact, these signorial dues were of the kind that provoked the French Revolution.

Finally, by the eighteenth century "the ancient universities were the universities of the rich."<sup>2</sup> Like the public schools, these institutions were essential components of the huge structure, institutions for producing an order - a race of rulers.

From 1815 England had been at war with Revolutionary France, whose destiny in the later stages was controlled by the arch-enemy Napoleon. Frequent blockades and counter blockades had thrown out of gear the economic machinery of the country. The uncertainties of war closed the European market for trade purposes. In America also, there was war from 1812- 15 - another element of disturbance to trade.

1. See Contemporary Reviews - Lord Hobhouse - February and March, 1886

2. See Reports of University Commissions.

For the English labouring classes, circumstances like these meant uncertainty and fluctuation in employment. It is reasonable to imagine that in conditions where a moderate demand for labour had created a large number of unemployed, wages would sink to the lowest level and lead to abject misery among the lower orders. If the price of food had been regulated in keeping with the low wage standard, there might have been more than a gleam of hope. But wheat, for instance, rose steeply in price from forty-three shillings a quarter in 1792 to one hundred and twenty-six shillings in 1812. "Tenant farmers, freehold yeomen and receivers of tithes and rent." were benefited by this rise in prices; but when peace was restored, most farmers were ruined and could not afford to pay the rents which had soared skywards as a result of the increased price of wheat.

The Industrial Revolution produced further complications, and further widened the gulf between rich and poor, town-dweller and country-dweller. Gone was the comparative order of the preceding stage of society, to be succeeded by widespread poverty and dismay. The comfortable classes were seemingly blind to the facts around them to the hardships of the poor who could not share in their enjoyment of "the latest publications of Scott and Byron."

Strange indeed, for Byron himself writes :-

"See these inglorious Cincinnati swarm,  
Farmers of war, dictators of the farm;  
Their ploughshare was the sword in hireling hands,  
Their fields measured by gore of other lands;  
Safe in their barns, these sabine tillers sent  
Their brethren out to battle - Why ? for rent!  
Year after year they voted cent for cent  
Blood, sweat, and tear - wrung millions - why ? for rent!  
They roar'd, they dined, they drank, they swore they meant  
To die for England - why then live ? for rent! "

The Industrial Revolution, taking place when it did, added yet another grievous weight to the backs of the masses. The appropriation of monastic lands, the decay and disappearance of the guilds, the enclosures, the changes in school and university and the rise in one trade after another of capitalism in a form that permitted the few to control the productive energy of the many, were some of the mile-stones. With the dissolution of the old village society in which the peasant had rights, but gradually lost them, it is easy to see that the changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution would settle the doom of the common man whose machinery for co-operation was destroyed, so that he had little opportunity or ability to share in the control of the new power. To the members of the upper class, the era of steam and machinery meant a great saving in human labour. "To the worker they seemed to threaten a great degradation of human life. And the worker was right, because the saving of human labour did not mean that the worker worked less or received greater compensation for his toil, but that the capitalist could draw greater profits from the labour of the workers he employed." <sup>I</sup>

In the more favourable past, the worker's wife remained at home to clean and cook, brew the ale and help with the loom. Now she spent the day in the mill. Very soon, the children had to help supplement the family income at ages not sufficiently mature enough for the grim business of earning a living. The introduction of machinery could have meant an increase of leisure for the worker and greater happiness. But because the dominant

1. The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832 - J.L. & B.Hammond - London 1920  
(See P.3)

aim of the capitalists was greater and quicker profits for their enterprise, the results to the workers were criminal. If there were thinkers before the period, who believed that the masses of mankind were intended to spend their lives in hard toil, the Industrial Revolution added momentum to this view. This, to the great trading princes, seemed inevitable in view of the atmosphere of competition which appeared to dominate the new situation. It was quite a popular view that society and the country as a whole would be judged by commercial success. The business men considered themselves instruments of this profit-producing drive. Even the new industrial towns were expressive, in their physical character, of a subordination to the needs of industry. Lack of libraries, galleries, playgrounds tells a dismal story. The masses were not expected to aspire to education, culture and leisure. It was more useful to work at a spinning machine or to work in a forge than to indulge in a game of football. Music in some Lancashire public-houses was forbidden by parsons and magistrates, who thought that the workers would be spoilt by it. "The rich might win their Waterloos on the playing-fields of Eton, but the rivals who were trying to shake our grasp of the new wealth could only be conquered by a nation that shut up its workers in mill or mine or workshop from the rising to the setting of the sun."<sup>1</sup> The long working day for workers was introduced and by the time of the Reform Bill, the percentage of blindness among the 180,000 women and children engaged in the lace industry was considerable. One girl who gave evidence before the Factory Commission worked from six in the

1. Ibid P.7.

morning to ten at night with two hours off for meals. If the demand and the profit of the town employer increased, the labour of the factory workers, most of whom were children, was augmented until many of them were literally worked to death; if that demand diminished, the children were thrown partially or wholly out of work and left to beggary. Any attempts to unite were discouraged and protests against intolerable conditions were remedied by the imposition of heavier restrictions. On the side of the poor we see strikes, demonstrations, outbursts of violence, agitations for a minimum wage in the light of increased cost of living, agitations for the right to combine, attempts to co-operate for mutual rights and mutual education; on the side of the rich and the governing bodies there were employed spies, military occupation, courts of justice used deliberately for a class war, and, generally speaking, armed government.

If the picture of the workers' condition in the towns is horrifying, the lot of the country labourer was, to him, just as bad. In the view of J.L.Hammond, the gradual enclosure of lands, which began earlier but was more or less paralysing in 1801, was a system in which the poor were sacrificed needlessly. Before enclosure, a map of the English village would have indicated arable fields, common meadowland and common waste land. Arable fields were divided into strips with different men owning different strips - some more than others. Cultivation was on a uniform system of agreement, each strip being thrown open to pasturage after harvest. Meadow land was divided similarly and pegged out;

and after the hay had been gathered in, like the arable fields they were also used for pasture. Common waste land consisting of woodland and rough commons were available for common pasture all the year round. The Lord of the Manor was the chief figure in this form of village society, next in descending order being the freeholders, copyholders, Tenant farmers, cottagers, squatters and farm servants living in their employers' houses. From this group were appointed representatives of the Manor Court to decide the system of cultivation and crop rotation. The cultivation of arable strips also carried with it the right to "put commonable beasts upon the Lord's waste and upon the lands of other persons within the same manor." Labourers, whether they were cottagers, squatters or farm servants had rights of commons on the waste and sometimes on the common lands. They could pasture certain animals, cut turf and collect fuel. From the ranks of the squatters were recruited many of the day labourers, the farm servants being usually the children of the small farmers who lived in their masters' houses till they got enough money to marry and build their own cottages. When a farm servant had saved sufficient money, he could hire a cottage which carried with it rights of common, and gradually buy or hire strips of land.

From the beginning of the eighteenth century the enclosure system got under way. It is significant to note that the landlord class became reinforced by men from the ranks of the manufacturers, who brought with them the new industrial revolutionary views and the new production drive. To the new

methods, a dictatorship appeared more suitable than any other form of control. Sir John Sinclair held "The idea of having lands in common, it has been justly remarked, is to be derived from that barbarous state of society, when men were strangers to any higher occupation than those of hunters or shepherds, or had only just tasted the advantages to be reaped from the cultivation of the earth."<sup>1</sup> The old system was considered primitive besides being "harmful to the morals and useless to the pockets of the poor."<sup>2</sup> In John Billingsley's opinion, the possession of a cow, a hog and a few geese afford to the cottager a conception of himself as superior to his equals in the same society. He develops a personal confidence inadequate to his means of support, and sauntering after his cattle leads him to acquire habits of indolence.<sup>3</sup> Bishton writes: "The use of common land by labourers operates upon the mind as a sort of independence.....when the commons are enclosed the labourers will work every day in the year, their children will be put out to labour early and that subordination of the lower ranks of society, which in the present times is so much wanted, would be thereby considerably secured."<sup>4</sup> This attitude

1. Report of Select Committee on Waste Lands, 1795, P.15, App.B.
2. The Village Labourer 1760-1832 - J.L.Hammond & Barbara Hammond P.37.
3. See Report on Somerset for Board of Agriculture in 1795.
4. See Report on Shropshire in 1794.

received considerable support from the seductive economic teaching of the time - Adam Smith in England and the Physiocrats in France. In 1844 the estimate given before the Select Committee on Enclosures indicates that there were one thousand seven hundred private Acts before 1800, and some two thousand between 1800 and 1844.<sup>1</sup> The General Report of the Board of Agriculture on Enclosures gives the acreage enclosed from the time of Queen Anne down to 1805 as 4,187,056.

The machinery for effecting the enclosure of any particular area of land was generally put in motion by a petition from a local person or persons showing the inconvenience of the old system and outlining the advantages of enclosure. Parliament invariably gave permission for a Bill to be introduced, and after a first and second reading of the Bill it was referred to a Select Committee for investigation. When the report of this Committee was received, the Bill would be passed, sent to the House of Lords and receive the Royal Assent. In about nine cases out of ten the petition for enclosure came from a big landowner. Until 1774 when the House of Commons ruled that notice of petition should be nailed on the church door of the parish for at least three Sundays, a petition could be presented without the knowledge of one other person in the district. Thus it often happened that many whose lands were enclosed were completely ignorant of the intention until it became an accomplished fact. Against circumstances like this, the poor had no remedy. They could tear

1. See The Willage Labourer - Hammond P.41.

down notices from church doors, they could break up public meetings and they could generally cause disorders but the result of these actions was merely to increase the hostility of the powerful classes and to array on the side of the rich, the strong arm of the law.

The small farmer, the cottager and the squatter were seriously affected by enclosures. For whereas the enclosure system gave the big farmer a wider field for capital and enterprise, the small farmer's share in the legal costs was overwhelming, not to mention the great expense he incurred in fencing his own allotments. For these reasons he was often compelled to sell his property and to emigrate to America, to an industrial town or to become a day labourer. And so right down to the squatter, each of the small groups became impoverished by a system that afforded benefit to only one class of society. The keeping of domestic animals was discouraged and the economic basis of the independence of the lower classes was destroyed. But against this, the governing classes argued that the losses of individuals were the gains of the state. The peasant is deprived of his rights and status and becomes a labourer without hope, without a future. "Go to an ale-house kitchen of an old enclosed country, and there you will see the origin of poverty and poor-rates. For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they to save? For the parish? If I am diligent, shall I have leave to build a cottage? If I am sober, shall I have land for a cow? If I am frugal, shall I have half an acre of potatoes? You offer no motives; you have nothing but a parish officer and a workhouse! - Bring me another pot."<sup>1</sup>

1. See Annals of Agriculture, Vol. XXXVI. P. 508.

The very sketchy outline of conditions, industrial and agricultural, and especially as they affected the poor, though by no means as exhaustive from the point of view of an historical survey, is useful when later on we consider the serious social abuses that Dickens attacked. But long before Dickens' time the conditions of the poor began to cause such anxiety and embarrassment to the political machinery that by the Speenhamland Act of 1794-5 the magistrates of Berkshire were appointed to meet at Speenhamland of Newbury and fix and enforce a minimum wage for labourers in keeping with the rising price of bread. The recommendations suggested that wages were to be supplemented from parochial levies, and, in effect, the responsibility for providing relief for the poor was placed upon the shoulders of the poor themselves. For both agricultural and industrial workers matters went from bad to worse. Poor Law expenditure in the county of Dorset increased 214%, whilst the population had only increased by 40%. In 1813 more than seven millions were raised in all England for Poor rates, while local taxation for all purposes only amounted to one and a half millions.<sup>2</sup> Agricultural labourers often received part of their wages in bad corn and beer. Demonstrations against this system of payment which often took the form of rioting and burning of ricks were punished by hanging and deportation to Australia as is instanced by three hangings and four hundred and twenty cases of deportation in 1830,

1. See Victoria County History; Dorset, Chap.11. P.259.

2. See English Social History - George Trevelyan - Footnote to P.470.

when starving labourers marched about in winter demanding an additional wage increase to 2/6d a day. The exodus from country to town, from South to North where there were numerous mines, factories and cotton mills, grew in volume, and among this shifting population there were numbers of boys and girls. Craftsmen, millers, weavers, harness makers and many other categories of rural population were squeezed out of a profitable livelihood. Many were attracted to Canada, Australia and New Zealand, and were accepted as ideal material for colonisation. For those who moved from the villages to the towns an equally terrible fate was waiting. Conditions of living were insanitary, and the state of the slums in which these people had to live was extremely crude. Life in the factory was shorn of the personal contacts between farmer and labourer which had been a characteristic of the life in the country. Apart from the fact that employer and employee lived in a different social atmosphere, the labouring classes were provided with no social services or amusements. We have already seen that even in the country public houses, people were discouraged from enjoying the music they loved in their leisure time. We have also seen that drink was for this class of people, their only consolation and their spare time was occupied with discussing their wrongs.

At this critical period of dissatisfaction the Methodist Church exerted what might well be considered the strongest influence in all its history. For it offered religious consolation and strove to divert the attention of the suffering poor from earthly wrongs to the prospect of a state of blissful enjoyment in the life hereafter.

Elie Halévy, the great French historian held the view that the power of the Evangelicals was the chief influence that prevented the whole country from moving along the path of revolutionary violence during this period of social neglect and economic chaos for the poor. "Men of letters disliked the Evangelicals for their narrow Puritanism, men of science for their intellectual feebleness. Nevertheless, during the 19th century, Evangelical religion was the moral cement of English society. It was the influence of the Evangelicals which invested the British aristocracy with an almost stoic dignity, restrained the plutocrats who had newly risen from the masses from vulgar ostentation and debauchery, and placed over the proletariat a select body of workmen enamoured of virtue and capable of self-restraint. Evangelicalism was thus the conservative force which restored in England the balance momentarily destroyed by the explosion of the revolutionary forces."<sup>1</sup>

The attitude of shortsighted politicians was that any yielding to the insistent demands of labour would result in widespread riots, so, in 1812 the year of Dickens' birth, the Luddites unsuccessfully petitioned Parliament to regulate wage rate and daily hours of work because the Combination Act of 1800 had made common action among masters or men for group welfare illegal. Fear of violent disorders among the poor was partly dispelled when Sir Robert Peel's police force began to operate in 1829, though sixteen years before this, Parliament showed its partiality towards the masters

1. See History of English People translated by E.I. Watkins -  
Chap. III. P.166.

of labour by repealing the law which permitted magistrates to enforce a minimum wage for employees. The end of the first quarter of the century, however, marked the turning point of a movement which was hence forth to grow in strength - a movement demanding improved social and economic conditions for the many and an enquiry into the ways and means by which these conditions could be introduced.

From the middle of the eighteenth century the teaching of a powerful group of social theorists made an effective impression on their society. This powerful group were the utilitarians. Jeremy Bentham's name figures prominently as the moving spirit which gave rise to utilitarianism. While on a visit to his brother who was an officer in the Russian army, Bentham in 1787 published Defence of Usury which expressed the view that every man was the best judge of his own interests. That it was desirable for him to pursue it without let or hindrance. This lead him to the conclusion that if any one desired to lend money at usury he would be well within his rights. This laissez-faire doctrine is also to be found in his Manual of Political Economy, 1798. In 1789 he defines the principle of utility in the book Principles of Morals and Legislation. Here he expresses the view that mankind is governed by two motives, pleasure and pain, which the principle of utility recognised. He defines the principle of utility as "that property in any object where by it tends to produce pleasure, good or happiness, or to prevent the happening of mischief, pain, evil or unhappiness to the party whose interest is considered." That the object of legislation ought to be

"the greatest happiness of the greatest number." Bentham's insistence of this last principle cannot be reconciled with his individualistic principle of utility, even though he advocates certain economic measures regarding succession and taxation which conflict with individualism. In his view, also, punishment is admitted to be evil, but an evil which it is lawful to administer to prevent the occurrence of some greater evil.

James Mill (1773-1836) became acquainted with Bentham in 1808, and remained his ally and companion for many years. He adopted and propagated Bentham's theories, and his writings on Education and Government had a strong influence on the Liberal political school. In Elements of Political Economy Mills claimed that a practical reformer's chief object is to limit population on the grounds that capital does not increase at the same rate as population.<sup>1</sup> This line of argument leads to a reference to Thomas Malthus.

Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834) is considered by some scholars to have been a Utilitarian, although he held that over-emphasis should not be placed on the doctrine of perfectibility, because even though perfection might be achieved by Utilitarian practice, it never could remain stable. Malthus' views on social conditions were published in An Essay on the Principles of Population. He argued, among other things, that as among plants and animals, nature provided waste of seed, sickness and premature death, so too among mankind there is misery and vice. That vice often prevails though it could not be regarded as inevitable. No man-made institutions could destroy vice. Malthus writes " I believe, it is

1. see P.11 Para.2, Art.3.

true, that I cannot by means of money raise a poor man, and enable him to live much better than he did before, without proportionally depressing others in the same class."<sup>1</sup> Poor laws, which were framed with the object of affording relief to the depressed classes, are condemned by Malthus for the following reasons :-

1. Parish laws contribute to raise the real price of provisions and to lower the real price of labour.

2. such laws diminish power or will to save among common people.

3. Poor laws are intended to be benevolent, but really give rise to cruelty and tyranny such as the persecution of poor women.<sup>2</sup>

4. Men were encouraged to marry with little or no prospect of maintaining a family. To prevent this, they should be compelled by law to support their aged relations.

Malthus believed that the "struggle for existence" was a great stimulus to labour and to human improvement. One cannot quarrel with this view, but his attitude to the large numbers who suffered through the changed economic conditions appears callous.

1. An Essay on the Principles of Population - P.79.

2. Relief was obtained through the parish boards. Parish officials often refused aid to widows on the grounds that they did not originally belong to the parish, but merely resided there through marriage. On the other hand, the parochial board of the parish in which a woman was born might refuse relief on the argument that her husband's parish was responsible for paying relief.

There were men like sir Robert Heron who saw the problem from an entirely different angle. He writes : "Why do men so frequently complain of the ingratitude of the labouring class, and of servants ? No doubt sometimes with reason, but I am convinced they much oftener complain, most unjustly, of want of gratitude where no favour has been granted. Between a good master and a good servant the obligation is mutual."<sup>1</sup>

Among writers of a different type from the Utilitarians was Thomas Paine (1737-1809) who wrote a number of pamphlets expressing his opinions for the welfare of the human race. His political works, which were widely sold, did not enrich him for he disregarded all profit from this source. His activity spread over America, France and England and The Rights of Man is an open attack on Burke which nearly brought about his arrest but for his timely escape from this country. Although not a social philosopher, he diffused a constructive radical policy which included parliamentary reform, old age pensions and a progressive income tax.

William Godwin (1756-1836) sought to combine philosophy and politics. Political Justice published in 1793 attracted considerable interest among the young generation of his time. He sought to insinuate his views in his novel Caleb Williams and An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice. is believed to have inspired young Wordsworth. Godwin never ceased to believe in man, and that given good reasons for a worthy life, man would do the rest. That social

1. Notes by sir Robert Heron, 3rd Ed. London 1852.

injustices would disappear.

William Cobbett (1762-1835) was the son of a farmer, and loved the country as is revealed in The Rural Rides 1830. He was at first a Tory, and changed his political views from Independent to strong Radical. His disapproval of the existing social conditions was expressed in his weekly newspapers "Cobbett's Political Register." An examination of the "looks and manners" of country labourers convinced him that they did not earn enough to make life tolerable. Some of his beliefs brought punishment upon him, as for example when in 1810 he received a prison sentence of two years for expressing disapproval of military punishment.

Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881) was a strong moral force who championed the spiritual force as against the material. He demanded justice for all classes and emphasised the necessity for due and equal reverence to be paid to all things in heaven and on earth. His book, Carlyle's French Revolution he claims came "truly from a man's very heart." In it, he strove to establish the point that nemesis following abuse of power, neglect of duty and responsibilities, was sure. It warned England to avoid the fate of France and the catastrophe that appeared to be imminent in the clash between the classes. Carlyle regarded himself as a prophet who interpreted the present through the medium of the past. In a review article entitled "Chartism" (1839) he expressed the belief that the salvation of the working classes could best be achieved by reverting to conditions of middle ages when labourers were serfs. That freedom for the working man in his time, was a

delusion which meant the opportunity to be exploited in the labour market, and to be a more miserable beast of burden than he had been before. Carlyle found no virtue in political economy which placed materialism before every other interest, while eliminating religion and morality in man's relationship with man and establishing that relationship on a "profit and loss basis" strictly regulated by laws of contract. He demanded a recognition of the innate nobility in man, be he lord or servant. These teachings<sup>1</sup> are repeated in Past and Present (1843).

Now the investigation leads to a group of writers who were not merely content with the production of political and economic theories for the amelioration of the conditions of the poor, but they turned the growing stream into the narrower channels of investigating the life, doings and intellectual and moral conditions of rich and poor, in a more or less comparative representation. The violent upheavals of the early nineteenth century were also the birth pangs of the social novel, which new literature dates roughly from the third decade of that century. Because the steam engines and the printing press gave greater publicity to the court and nobility, and the professions were being popularised, the English novel of 1830 found scope for a critical examination of the various classes

1. Carlyle's influence on Dickens appears to have been very strong - in fact Dickens' philosophy appears to have a very close resemblance to Carlyle's. Compare later chapter on Dickens' philosophy.

that constituted the nation. Writers of these "novels with a purpose" were convinced that arguments should be based on facts, not on theories. They determined to give voice to the grievances of town and country in the hope, that an awakening to their responsibility in the minds of the governing class would bring about long-needed reform, and avert a revolution between classes like that which broke out in France. "Interventionism" is the name that was given to the movement "for action on behalf of the suffering and struggling working classes, as fit to share in the blessings of human life." Frederick Denison Maurice appears to have been the inspiring force behind the new movement. Round about the 30's, he influenced Kingsley, John Ludlow, Thomas Hughes, Harriet Martineau and Charles Dickens, together with a group consisting of young clergymen, barristers and university scholars, to organise a crusade to press upon the nation for action. Their demands included social regeneration and further political progress. They pressed for a decision on facts not theories and asserted that sympathy with the people proceeded from study of actual conditions and inside information of the unendurable lives of town and country.

About this time, in 1836, the Working Men's Association was founded in London to secure equality of political rights by means of "The People's Charter", and fully enquiry into the social grievances of the working classes. They voiced the facts that agriculture was on the decline and that the extinction of the small landowners as a class was complete. That in the towns the influx of people from the country as well as from distressed Ireland had resulted in the general lowering of wages. Development of machinery had brought about unemployment

and hardships and men, women and children employed in factories worked excessive hours at sweated labour. The Chartists pointed out that the prevalent insanitary conditions of living lead to the prevalence of infectious diseases.

While Kingsley and his friends strove to bring about an improvement in the conditions outlined above, they were aware of the dangers to the nation from the Chartists extremists who condoned destruction of machinery and other acts of violence. And so they endeavoured to gain the goodwill of the working classes, and exerted themselves to appease them by brotherly sympathy and aid, thus running the risk of themselves being called Chartists. But they also taught the working men not to believe that political concessions would assure social reform. This teaching was publicised by word, in lecture halls and in pulpits, and by writing, in pen-tracts, and in journals for workers. Among the tracts Kingsley published were "Politics for the People", "Workmen of England", and "The Friends of Order", the last being a defence of his friends and himself as working for society against anarchy.

In 1848, Kingsley began Yeast - A Problem, a novel published in serial form in Frazer's Magazine. After a few issues of the serial, the editor stopped the publications, for though he was willing to help the cause of "Interventionism", he did not wish to be drawn directly into the movement. This novel raised the question of the relationship of classes in England and enquired into the real wants of the people. His doctrine is summed up by Leslie Stephen in the words "The few for the many, not the many for the few."

In Yeast, the labouring class is again advised to practice self help and not to be contented with making reform their goal. Alton Locke published in 1850 amidst social unrest preaches the same doctrine, but fails to be as forceful and interesting as Yeast. Kingsley who strove for social righteousness has survived as the author of a novel of religious history, as the author of a story for schoolboys<sup>1</sup> and tales for children<sup>2</sup>.

Benjamin Disraeli, another well-known writer of the period, belongs to a different school of thought, probably because his social background was different from that of Kingsley and the other social writers. He began to write at an early age, his first book published when he was 21. He produced the political novels "Coningsby" or "The New Generation" 1844, "Sybil" or "The Two Nations" 1845 and "Tancred" or "The New Crusade" 1847. They were written in development of his views on the necessity for a revision of the Old Tory Creed. Sybil was written in the year when England was suffering from many evils, when "new inventions were perpetually and imperiously calling for new relations between capital and labour, while in the meantime chaos reigned, and any rapacious master had opportunities for rapacity, and violent workman was sorely tempted to violence."<sup>3</sup> We are asked to believe that most of the incidents described really occurred, and that, for instance, a few days before the publication of Sybil, a relative gave an account of many hungry men and women assembled before a

1. The Heroes (1856)
2. The Water Babies (1836)
3. Preface.

country house in Lancashire to beg for food. The custom, in those days, of the inmates of the manor house keeping in store large quantities of food, deeply impressed a little girl whose eyes presumably bulged, and whose mouth watered at the sight of big hams, sides of bacon and cheese. Sybil or The Two Nations is a novel that remains faithful to the second part of its title. Disraeli successfully contrasts the idle, indifferent and pleasure-loving aristocracy with the down-trodden masses. In sketching the life of the former class he begins by illustrating how much more interested scions of aristocratic families were in horse racing and gaming. Egremont, the younger brother of the Lord of Marney Abbey, is one of the few noble characters in the book who appears to be conscious of the responsibility of seeing that the country is well governed for the benefit of the bulk of the population. In contrast, his brother is shown to be a surly and conceited individual whose love for his brother was selfish and shallow. As a husband, he was bullying and overbearing, whilst as a landlord and master he was inconsiderate, harsh and objectionable. This type of noble infuriated Disraeli who wrote :- "To acquire, to accumulate, to plunder each other by virtue of philosophic phrases, to propose a Utopia to consist only of Wealth and Toil, this has been the breathless business of enfranchised England for the last twelve years, until we are startled from our voracious strife by the wail of intolerable serfage." <sup>1</sup>

1. Sybil or The Two Nations - Disraeli - Pub. John Lane, London and New York - 1845. P.46.

It is possible to imagine the disgust in the author's mind as he wrote "O! England, glorious and ancient realm the fortunes of thy polity are indeed strange! The wisdom of the Saxons, Norman valour, the state-craft of the Tudors, the national sympathies of the Stuarts, the spirit of the latter Guelphs struggling against their enslaved sovereignty, these are the high qualities, that for a thousand years have secured thy national development. And now all thy memorial dynasties end in the huckstering rule of some thirty unknown and anonymous jobbers." <sup>1</sup> The picture is of England governed by men who were selfish and self-seeking; men who employed influential women to assert their influence on their behalf. The nobility meanwhile jockey for position and preferment in the way of "coronets, stars, ribbons, smiles and places at Court." Lord Marney's opinion, typical of a number belonging to his class, as to how the poor of England could find relief was by means of "high prices and low church." Sir Vavasour's ambition was to see himself and his friends "going down in procession to Westminster, for example, to hold a chapter. Five or six hundred baronets in green costume - the appropriate dress of equites aurati; each .....belted and scarfed; his star glittering; his pennon flying; his hat white, with a plume of white feathers; of course the sword and the gilt spurs. In his own hand, the thumb-ring and signet not forgotten, we hold our coronets of two balls!"

1. Ibid - P.56.

On the other hand, Disraeli paints frightful pictures of living conditions among the ordinary people; small agricultural towns - dingy inns - crowded lanes of poor cottages - gaping chinks - open drains full of animal and vegetable refuse decomposing into disease, were only a few of the details supplied. Flats in tenements seldom consisted of two or more rooms in which large families were herded without sex discrimination. In surroundings like these, women suffered pangs of child-birth whilst the father often lay prostrate with typhus in another room. The church was indifferent to all the filth and suffering and apparently had run short of the inspiration necessary to reform. It is hardly to be wondered at that the expedition to Mowbray Castle, the most sensational event in the novel, was made possible, and that a riot of excess and debauchery on the part of the rabble, was the result. The author selects for his hero Egremont whom he purges of the irresponsibility typical of the aristocracy before marrying him to Sybil of almost mystical virtue, and herself a disinherited lady of blood. To this overall picture, in Tancred he adds a spice of the romance and mysticism of the East.

The length of his volumes and his frequent philosophical speculations in the nature of the too lavish "asides" of an inexperienced playwright are obvious. He makes up for these defects in his choice of material and in the felicity of his phrasing. But of much greater importance, Disraeli was alive to the shortcomings of the ruling classes, even if he did not sufficiently arouse his readers' interest in the personal and intimate problems

of the depressed. He appears more fitted to the task of revealing the deficiencies of the nobility with which he appears, from experience, to have been quite familiar. The disgraceful method of creating peers, the outlook of politicians and the fashionable scramble for government posts were themes which he handled with a masterly pen. Further than that, he suggests a solution - instead of the Old Toryism there must be a crusade among the younger generation of noblemen so that they will accept responsibility with privilege. Disraeli's approach is more academic than genuinely emotional. He finds selfishness and excesses in the upper circles typified in the character of Sir Vavasour and in the Radicals of which Stephen Morley is an example. Political radicalism, utilitarian philosophy, the profit-making merchants and the manufacturers are equally undesirable. Disraeli believed in the three estates of the realm, and particularly in the welfare of the Church and of the House of Lords, though he thinks the Church defective because of its indifferent officers and its ignorance of oriental language. The doctrine of the Church of Rome and the life of devotion of its priesthood can lend support to emancipate the people. Therefore the union of Egremont and Sybil in the closing chapter of Sybil is symbolic of his vision of things to be when "an exclusive priesthood will no longer be called a National Church, nor Sovereignty the title of something that has no dominion and those who profess themselves the servants of the people will not crave absolute and undisciplined power."

Disraeli is interesting because of his brilliant picture

of contemporary life. The blend of social wit, politics, race, religion and romance is essentially his own. He mingles western romance with "Asian mystery in a successful parody. His works are still interesting contrary to the expectation of his contemporary critics, and he is foremost among the novelists who used politics as the background of novels. "What he might have written had he not entered Parliament in 1837 and fought his way implacably through the warfare of politics till he became Prime Minister in 1868 is a matter for speculation." <sup>1</sup>

To "Disraeli's exotic genius and Kingsley's Crusading spirit" Mrs. Gaskell (1810-65), formerly Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson, brought a clear and shining artistic contribution. She was a writer of charm, pathos and humour. Mary Barton, A Tale Of Manchester Life (1848) was published at a time of terrible depression in manufacturing districts. The story is really concerned with the years 1842 and 1843. Bad harvests beginning from 1837 had lead to Chartists' meetings on Kersal Moor, Manchester 1839. Parliament rejected a large Chartist petition submitted by the Working Men's delegates. Trouble continued through 1840, 1841 and 1842. There was rioting in large areas of Lancashire and another petition with three million signatures was unanimously rejected by the House of Commons. This rejection lead to serious rioting in Manchester and a general strike lasted for some days. In Mary Barton Mrs. Gaskell did not shrink from depicting the social horrors that

1. The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature - George Sampson - Cambridge - 1945 P.779 Para.2.

existed but concentrated on telling a story without bitterness. Her novel is one of the first labour novels and grew out of the author's experience of the lives of Manchester factory hands. It has been referred to as "the crude and melodramatic story of seven deathbeds and a murder" but it established Mrs. Gaskell's reputation as a gifted story-teller. She preached good understanding between masters and men and advised that there could lie no peace except the men were treated by their employers "as brethren and friends." Mary Barton bore the marks of authenticity and its success brought Mrs. Gaskell into a close relationship with Dickens with whom she became associated in writing for magazines and periodicals - "Household Words" and "All the Year Round". Other novels by the same author include Ruth (1853) and North and South 1855, both moving stories which are similar in subject matter to Mary Barton.

Another woman writer associated with this group was George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans). The only political story Mary Ann Evans attempted was Felix Holt, the Radical which is a sketch of rural England about the period when railways were first introduced. Its treatment is not a success but it teaches that true reform does not lie in Reform bills or in Charters, but in self-dependence. Adam Bede, however, is an attractive story and reflects the character of its day in religious feeling and not in social crusading. It expresses the belief that only through man's response to the call of the divine can good be achieved. Her judicious employment of pathos

humour and tragedy was another step towards the great social writer, Dickens, who utilised these tools in the service of the downtrodden and the neglected.<sup>1</sup>

1. The main sources consulted in writing this chapter are :-

- (i ) The Cambridge History of English Literature
- (ii) The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature.  
Ed. George Sampson.
- (iii) History of the English Novel: The Age of Dickens and Thackeray - Ernest A. Baker D.Litt., M.A.
- (iv) The Skilled Labourer 1760-1832 - J.L. and B. Hammond  
Second Ed. Longmans, Green & Co, 1920.
- (v ) The Village Labourer 1760-1832 (authors and publishers  
as above in (iv))
- (VI) The Rise of Modern Industry (authors as in (V) ) Fifth Ed.  
Methuen - 1937.
- (VII) The Age of the Chartists 1832-1854 -(authors as in VI.)  
Longmans, Green & Co. London 1930.
- (VIII) History of English People - transl. by E.I. Watkins.
- (IX) English Social History - George Trevelyan.

## Chapter 11.

General Review of Dickens' Major Publications - 1836 - 50.

In reviewing Dickens' major publications during the period under consideration, it may be fruitful to investigate whether there are any threads which run through unbroken. By this means it should be possible to decide if Dickens had a social philosophy which he advanced from work to work.

Sketches by Boz, a miscellaneous, collection of short writings, represent the author's first successful publications. They are varied in topic though mainly descriptive in style. Even at this early stage of his literary career, Dickens displays his remarkable concentration on physical detail, the excess of which tends to mar the perfection of some of his later works. He writes about the streets as they appear to him in the morning and again as he sees them at night, shops and their tenants, the river, Greenwich Fair, private theatres, omnibuses, early coaches and London recreations. Underlying the description of these scenes one invariably discovers some unconscious reflections which are linked with the people connected with them. With regard to shops and their tenants he writes "We have not the slightest commiseration for the man who can take up his hat and stick, and walk from Covent Garden to St. Paul's Churchyard, and back into the bargain, without deriving some amusement - we had almost said instruction - from his perambulation. And yet there are such beings..... Nothing seems to make an impression on their minds"<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sketches by Boz Chap. 11 P. 80 Para. 1.

The same correlation between scene and people is evident in the closing sentence of the Streets Morning. "The streets are thronged with a vast concourse of people, gay and shabby, rich and poor, idle and industrious".<sup>1</sup> The descriptions in these early sketches are not only confined to scenes and places. Such titles as Our Next-Door Neighbour, The Broker's Man, The Old Lady, The Curate, The Half-Pay Captain, The Schoolmaster and The Four Sisters indicate that Dickens was keenly interested in people, their lives and their thought and action. In his later writings the development of this particular aspect in the service of the social novel will become apparant. In close connection with this theme, to illustrate the hopelessness and degradation of poverty and ignorance, there are sketches under the title of Gin Shops, The Pawnbroker's Shop, Criminal Courts, The Prisoner's Van and A Visit to Newgate. The Election for Beadle and A Parliamentary sketch are mild satire on the democratic institutions of his day. Apart from a superficial observation of people, Dickens appears to have been interested in them as fertile sources of character study. Thus he is able to produce Thoughts About People, The Parlour Orator, shabby-Genteel People, The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce etc. The caprices of young married people receive special attention in a group of sketches - sketches of Young Couples, and the young gentlemen of his day

1 Ibid P.72 Chap.1.

reveal their characters as seen through Dickens' eyes in Sketches of Young Gentlemen.

In summing up sketches by Boz, it is clear that the writer possessed a keen and observant eye which, together with his unschooled genius (for Dickens was no intellectual) led to the publication, in his early twenties, of a collection of writings, humorous and serious, detached as well as intimate. We observe the introduction of the humour, which is later to mask the satire, and the personal influence of a writer who appeals to his readers on account of his sincerity, his fairness and his hatred of injustice, social and economic abuses, sloth, drunkenness and other forms of soul-destroying vice.

The publication of the Pickwick Papers marks a development towards the novel form. The early miscellaneous collection of sketches is succeeded by a central group of characters with Mr. Pickwick sketched in bold outline; but this gentleman's varied adventures, in continually changing circumstances and locality, serve as substitutes for the variety and range of subject matter which characterises the sketches by Boz. It appears to be generally agreed that the Pickwick Papers rank very high in all Dickens' writings. One reason for this is that the author appears to have tackled the new work with the easy assurance and confidence arising out of the success of the sketches. Again, the humour, with which the work abounds, is spontaneous, good-natured and irresistible. Mr. Jingle's encounter with Dr. Slammer, Mr. Winkles' chagrin at the shooting party and the incidents leading <sup>to</sup> the suit -

Bardell V. Pickwick will live a long time. The character of Pickwick is not consistent throughout. The reader is introduced to an eccentric old gentleman who later becomes a lovable figure of benevolence. This, however, appears to have been Dickens' stock method of portraying his good characters.

We are encouraged to laugh at their peculiarities of dress and manner and then discover that their oddity hides some enduring virtue. The merits of the work display placid humour, relieved here and there by crises, which are not, after all, as serious as they originally appear to be.

Dickens sketches his characters with a comic impudence which endears them to our hearts, as though they were so many puppets of his own creation - Jingle, Weller (Senior), Weller (Junior) and Samuel Slumkey. They have been called caricatures not characters, but there is something about them - intimate and familiar - that makes one loathe to regard them as mere caricatures. Perhaps they seem to be caricatures because Dickens picks out their individual idiosyncrasis with which the reader is made familiar whenever they are introduced and which distinguishes them to the end. Underneath the surface of Sam Weller's humorous similes and metaphors, those who care to search, will discover his shrewd commonsense, as they will discover Mr. Pickwick's great heartedness in his habitual eccentric mannerism.

Though generally amusing the Pickwick Papers possesses

the Dickens ingredients - pathos, a desire for prison reform,<sup>1.</sup> ~~a desire for prison reform~~, a burning hatred of vice and undisguised approbation of virtue. The wicked meet their just deserts and in some cases are given an opportunity to reform,<sup>2.</sup> while the virtuous reap the rewards of goodness and patience. In general, the Pickwick Papers upholds the thesis of good will to all men, characterised by complete harmony between master and servant, the spirit of a readiness to share and enjoy the good things of this world without odious condescension on the part of the donors or a complex of inferiority in the recipients. Dickens obviously feels that all should enjoy the pleasures of the board in good fellowship and with simple hearts.

In passing from the Pickwick Papers to Oliver Twist, it would appear as if, once Dickens was assured of success and comfort, he decided to strike at some of the evils then in existence which were intolerable to his sensitive nature. Perhaps, it might have been pardonable if, as a young man, he had kept to safe subjects for a few years longer. His complete switch over to attacks on the crying abuses at this period indicates that there were some things which meant more to the young author than fame and fortune. This is ample evidence of his sincerity. Even if, as is sometimes suggested, Dickens was bitter because of the unpleasant experiences of his boyhood, he certainly did not wish to perpetuate a state of affairs which occasioned so much individual and collective distress. That he succeeded and could

1. See Pickwick in Prison - Chap.XL1 - P.672-704 P.718-50.

2. See Jingle's history.

sway his reading public over to his point of view is mainly due to his blend of pathos and humour. It seems fairly convincing to imagine that bitter and undiluted satire would have failed to achieve the desired effect. How he touched the public conscience will be treated in a later chapter.

The Adventures of Oliver Twist is the first social novel written by Dickens. Already it has been observed by what successive stages he advanced to this production - his keen and observant descriptions of men and things, happy flows of expression and a deep and abiding sincerity. Oliver Twist is a novel with a plot, the moral of which is that virtue triumphs, in the end, over vice. The hero of the story is born in a workhouse and there is some mystery overshadowing his parentage. He flees from a life of misery in which he is starved, buffeted and generally ill-used, and journeys painfully to London where he falls among a band of thieves. At this point the author cannot resist the temptation to dwell at some length on a picture complete in the essential details, of the haunts, life and activities of these lawless people. He shows that members of the gang specialised in crimes ranging from pocket-picking to robbery with violence and even murder. While dealing with these scenes of theft and violence Dickens sketches the life of drunkenness and immorality. For this reason he introduces Bill Sikes and Nancy. It appears as if Dickens became more interested in the activities of Fagin and his gang than with the original outline of his novel, and for this reason it fails to be wholly

successful. But as a social document it is extremely valuable. The author was torn between loyalty to his plot and loyalty to his determination to expose wrong and to draw public attention to the iniquity in its midst. In the preface to Oliver Twist, Dickens writes :- "It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint them in all their deformity, in all their wretchedness, in all the squalid misery of their lives; to show them as they really were, for ever skulking uneasily through the dirtiest paths of life, with the great black ghastly gallows closing up their prospects, turn them where they might; it appeared to me that to do this, would be to attempt a something which was needed, and which would be a service to society". From this time to the end of the period under review, it becomes increasingly clear that though Dickens wrote for the satisfaction of his reading public, he was determined to shock public opinion by the painful revelations of misery, want and vice in England which were too glaring to escape his keen powers of observation.

If the main objects of Oliver Twist were to attack the workhouse system and the futility of the Poor Laws as well as to expose the life and methods of London thieves, Nicholas Nickleby was obviously written as a protest against the wickedness of the large proportion of rascally and ill-fitted schoolmasters of whom Squeers and his Yorkshire colleagues were glaring examples. The education of youth, in the hands of such men as Wackford Squeers,

had become a scandal. Dickens, himself, had few opportunities of receiving a sound education and he was obviously sensitive to the necessity of improved educational facilities as well as opportunities for all. In modern times we are constantly being reminded that school days are the best. When one contemplates that the present government has raised the school leaving age to fifteen, it is clear that education is regarded as one of the national priorities, and it requires very little imagination to compare the present with conditions in the nineteenth century. Again, when the press and radio announce that important decisions will be taken in respect to the total abolition of corporal punishment, the picture, in comparison, of the awful mental and physical consequences to children in a period, where flogging and cruelty took the place of sympathetic understanding of the child, is terrible.

A common feature of the Dickensian novel is that the dominant emphasis on a particular abuse in a particular novel is often accompanied by mention of other abuses in a subordinate degree. Thus in Nicholas Nickleby he humorously satirises aristocratic society and presents Sir Mulberry Hawk, a snobbish, selfish, parasitic and unscrupulous nobleman, Lord Frederick Verisopht, a weak and easily influenced young peer together with Pluck and Pyke their creatures and toadies. Very often Dickens is criticised as a writer who could not paint a fair picture of the aristocracy, as he was never conversant with high society. Dickens' aim was not to write faithfully about high society, he consciously set himself the task of championing the cause of the poor, And so the introduction

of his aristocratic characters, which are few in number, appears to be for the express purpose of indicating how very indifferent the aristocratic class was, and how unmoved by the plight of the poor, and uninspired by their own duties and responsibilities.

Disraeli supports this opinion, although he achieves his effect by a different method. Whereas Disraeli seeks to convert by logical reasoning, a kind of mysticism and the inspiration of service, Dickens attacks with emotional forthrightness, occasionally breaking the tension with flashes of humour. Dickens writes as a representative of the people and sometimes exaggerates his case, while Disraeli described conditions to which he was familiar by upbringing. Each presents a fairly reliable picture of his side of the same problem.

Quite apart from expressing his disapproval of high society, Dickens reveals some of his philosophy in the characters he sketches. The Cheeryble Brothers, Charles and Edwin, of whom he says in his Preface, are "drawn from life" and that "their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature and their unbounded benevolence, are no creations of the author's brain, but are prompting every day (and oftenest by stealth) some munificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honour" were for him the epitome of human virtue and an example to everyone. It is clear that the doctrine Dickens endeavoured to propound was that social inequality, poverty and want could only be remedied by a universal change of heart and Christian charity. John Bwoodie, the stout kind-hearted Yorkshireman, is presented to show that

brotherly love is not confined to one class or to people of culture, but arises out of man's better nature, if only he will let it grow and work. On the contrary, Ralph Nickleby illustrates the logical conclusion of a life devoted to money grasping, greed, hatred and other kindred soul-destroying evils. Even more despicable is the life of Arthur Gride, an old miser like the unreformed Scrooge, whose consciousness of wealth and power leads him to futile and misplaced ambitions.

The author takes a sly dig at Parliament in his representation of Mr. Gregsbury, as well as in sketching the character of Sir Matthew Pysker, a Member of Parliament, and chairman of the meeting called to organise "The United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company." The handling of the theme is light and humorous, but underneath is hidden burning indignation at the fact that while the people starve in ignorance, their representatives pursue careers of selfishness, framing laws for the greater discomfort of those whose interest they were to represent. Another character, Tom Linkinwater, clerk to the Cheeryble brothers who works his way to the position of partner in the firm, is striking. One makes his acquaintance and is left wondering whether there is any special significance attached to him. The answer appears to be in the affirmative. In his own words :- "It's forty-four year, forty-four year next May, since I first kept the books of Cheeryble Brothers. I've opened the safe every morning all that time (Sundays excepted), as the clock struck nine, and gone over the house every night at half-past

ten (except on Foreign Post nights, and then twenty minutes before twelve) to see the doors fastened, and the fires out." If ever Dickens intended to portray a character of unselfish devotion to duty and pride in a job of work well done, that character is Tom Linkinwater. On the other hand, Alfred Mantalini the husband of Madame Mantalini, the fashionable milliner and dressmaker "had married on his whiskers, upon which property he had previously existed, in a genteel manner, for some years; and which he had recently improved, after patient cultivation, by the addition of a moustache, which promised to secure him an easy independence; his share in the labours of the business being at present confined to spending the money." The fate which finally overtakes him is the logical outcome of a lazy and improvident disposition coupled with an over fondness for fine clothes and beautiful trappings. And this lesson is constantly taught throughout the novel, that "Good and evil deeds, like chickens, always return to roost."

Master Humphrey's Clock was started on the 4th of April, 1840 and was a miscellany intended to be issued in weekly numbers and connected together by the fictitious Master Humphrey's Club. It did not meet with an immediate public welcome, but the re-introduction of the characters of Pickwick, Weller (Snr.), and Weller (Jnr.) as well as the character of young Tom Weller, grandson to Weller (Snr.) revived flagging interest and won

favour. It is interesting to note the employment of a literary method, the story telling pastime of several characters, which is observed in the Sketches by Boz and Pickwick Papers and strongly reminiscent of the style of Chaucer in the Canterbury Pilgrims.

Master Humphrey's Clock itself is mildly sentimental, contemplative and morally instructive. It reveals the author's sensitive imagination, his wistful philosophy and denunciation of evil. From the history of the pathetic cripple and his clock, the repository of several old manuscripts written by members of the Club, the reader is swept on to meet the deaf friend and to listen to the chronicles. There is a pause to observe what a selfish creature wealth has made of the Lord Mayor designate, and the contrast in simple heartedness between himself and Joe Toddyhigh, whom, with his usual imaginative genius, Dickens contrives to secrete in the Mansion House while the tutelary deities of London, Gog and Magog indulge in reminiscences. Then there is the story of Hugh Graham and Mistress Alice, a moral of faithfulness to principle in that Graham slays Mistress Alice's seducer and avenges the honour of her broken-hearted father.

In the section 'Correspondence, Dickens satirises the bombastic egoist, he condemns avarice through the story of A Murderer's Confession showing how often the preconceived motives of crime are never satisfied, and by the story of Witches and Witchcraft reveals a brand of sly humour which is particularly refreshing. There is nothing new here; there is no marked

development. If anything, the form shows a certain amount of uncertainty, and its discontinuance was a happy decision. However, it is sufficiently indicative of the importance he attached to the right of the lower order to freedom of enjoyment and a place in the scheme of things, to point out that the formation of Mr. Weller's Watch in imitation of Master Humphrey's Clock is not only humorous - it is symbolic, a further manifestation of the harmony that should exist between master and servant. On one occasion both clubs sat in joint session. In attempting to trace Dickens' literary development from the publication of Oliver Twist 1837-9 to Sketches of Young Couples (1841) most of the works were written contemporaneously with others, and this perhaps accounts for the frequent re-employment of topic and sentiment already previously utilised. Thus, for example Oliver Twist (1837-9) and Nicholas Nickleby (1838-9) though different in the main topics, yet show unmistakable points of resemblance in minor treatment and material. It is also interesting to note that the fact that they were published in serial form for newspapers<sup>1</sup> and in monthly shilling numbers<sup>2</sup> accounts for their length and imperfect revision due to obvious haste.

1. Oliver Twist originally published in serial form in "Bentley's Magazine" and
2. Nicholas Nickleby issued in monthly shilling Numbers illustrated by "Phiz" - Hablot K. Browne.

A review of The Old Curiosity Shop reveals the author's attacks on social injustice produced by callous businessmen, a short-sighted and insincere group of politicians and a government blind to its responsibility to the masses of its own people. He also attacks vice in which the individual indulges and, in which, through lack of ideals and self-control, he voluntarily plunges. In a nutshell, the plot of the novel concerns itself chiefly with what is still considered to-day as an undesirable form of individual vice - Gambling. There is no suggestion that the old man with whom the story is concerned developed this habit through dire poverty or sheer necessity. Although the motive was not strictly personal, for it arose from the desire to see his grand-daughter financially secure for life, it is nevertheless condemned as unnecessary, a deep rooted curse and a source of constant anxiety and unhappiness even to the individual it is meant to benefit. In desperation, the old man attempts to recover his losses by contemplating the theft of money from Mrs. Jarley, the benefactor for a time of Nell and her grandfather. The intensity of his gambling passion together with the vicissitudes that afflict him, drive the old man to a state of mental derangement, but not before he falls into the clutches of the mis-shapen and inhuman Daniel Quilp, who, brute that he is, treats his timid wife with unbelievable cruelty and bends to his wicked will, Sampson Bass, a crooked solicitor, and Sally Brass his sister and partner in crime. At this point, having shown

the wicked side of human nature, be it motivated by personal weakness or by hopes of gain, Dickens repeats his solution of this world's ills by ranging on the side of justice and virtue. The Garlands (Abel and his father) Mr. Witherden, pompous though well meaning notary, Christopher Nubbles, "Kit", honest and model servant and as faithful and dependable as Weller (Jnr.) of Pickwick Papers, and Nell, the heroine, who is too good to be a creature of this world and dies towards the end of the story. As usual, the wicked suffer, the indifferent are converted and the good prosper.

Barnaby Rudge is, of course, the first historical novel, and is concerned with the incidents of the Lord Gordon or Protestant riots, London in 1780. From this point of view, it is unnecessary to study the plot in the usual way, partly because it is not considered pertinent to attempt the sifting of fact from fiction, nor to endeavour to speculate on how much Victorian flavour is present in its composition.

Some of the incidents are striking enough to warrant a supposition that though writing in the past, Charles Dickens was also thinking in the present. We are familiar with the description of London streets which is given as early as 1836 in Sketches by Boz and repeatedly finds its way into nearly every novel. The character of Sir John Chester, who attempts unsuccessfully to break off the attachment between his son Edward and Miss Emma Haredale on the grounds of the poverty of the latter, and because he is ambitious that his son should form an alliance

that will add to his own wealth and importance, is also familiar.

The Gordon Riots<sup>1</sup> as described by Dickens leave the impression that he was attempting to illustrate what results from religious intolerance and the suppression of the masses in ignorance and want. He points out only too clearly that there are no excesses of which an inflamed mob is incapable. To give point to this opinion, is the creation of the "Prentice Knights or United Bull-Dogs" a society formed secretly by the apprentices of London to resist the tyranny of their masters. Mark Gilbert on his admission to this society is described - "Age, nineteen. Bound to Thomas Curzon, hosier, Golden Fleece, Aldgate. Loves Curzon's daughter. Cannot say that Curzon's daughter loves him. Should think it probable. Curzon pulled his ears last Tuesday week"<sup>2</sup>

What appears to be a further addition to the Dickensian thesis is his presentation of his idea of capital punishment. Ned Dennis, the ringleader of the Gordon rioters and a former hangman has a great respect for law and insists upon constitutional procedure. But he sees nearly everybody he meets as a potential

1. "No Popery" riots, London 1780, resulted from the passage of a Bill by Parliament relieving Roman Catholics from certain disabilities and penalties. Many Roman Catholic churches, the residence of Lord Chief Justice Mansfield, numerous private dwellings and Newgate Prison were destroyed.
2. Barnaby Rudge Chap. Vlll. - xxxlx.

victim of the gallows, and thinks it a neat method to hang all who stand in opposition to the rioters. The refusal of his fellow insurgents to adopt his suggestion fills him with disgust. Upon the suppression of the riot and his own condemnation to death, he realises that the satisfaction which he experienced for so long in the execution of capital sentence upon his fellow men was not shared by his unfortunate victims, and in abject fear, he shrinks from his fate.

Of Martin Chuzzlewit Dickens writes :- "My main object in this story was to exhibit in a variety of aspects the commonest of all vices; to show how selfishness propogates itself, and to what a grim giant it may grow from small beginnings." With regard to the American section of the book he further adds:- "As I have never, in writing fiction, had any disposition to soften what is rediculous and wrong at home, I hope (and believe that the good-humoured people of The United States are not generally disposed to quarrel with me for carrying the same usage abroad."<sup>2</sup> The plot of the novel, though it deals with the spirit of cupidity, which sometimes leads even to murder, is marred and complicated by the introduction of innumerable characters and

1. see Preface to Martin Chuzzlewit.

2. The American reading public did, in fact, quarrel with his references to their social and political institutions, both in this book as well as in his American Notes.

incidents. Dickens attempts too much and at last after a vain effort to keep his eyes on too many developments brings his story to an end with the usual bouquets for the good and ruin for the evil.

In Dombey and Son the emphasis is placed on inordinate pride and arrogance. Paul Dombey is a business man whose main hopes and ambitions are centred in his business and its future. In Dickens' description "The <sup>earth</sup> was made for Dombey to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give him light.....common abbreviations took new meaning in his eyes, and had sole reference to them : A.D. had no concern with Anno Domini, but stood for Anno Dombey - and Son." When Dombey's son, Paul, is born his father regards his advent as an auspicious event to further in future, the fortunes of his business. In his selfish way, he maps out the future and carefully supervises the upbringing of his heir. He is completely indifferent to the sweetness of his daughter Florence; who disappoints her father because she was not born a boy. When Paul's mother dies, Dombey Senior decides to marry a second time, Mrs. Granger, handsome, haughty and wilful. She feels neither love nor regard for Mr. Dombey and consents to marriage with him as an exchange of beauty, grace and varied accomplishment for wealth and social position. At the end of the novel Dombey is shown to be a sadly disillusioned creature. Florence, his neglected daughter finds happiness in her marriage with Walter Gay. Paul Dombey (Jnr.) dies at the age of five thus blighting his father's business hopes. Mrs. Edith Dombey, his second wife, completes the downfall of his pride when she elopes with Mr. Carker

Dombey's confidential clerk. In this novel, as in the Old Curiosity Shop, the attack is directed against individual evil.

David Copperfield is generally accepted as outlining some of the main events of the author's life. And here the student of Dickens yields to the temptation to refer to that eminent biographer, John Forster. In Forster's personal comment on the author's popularity in 1850, he boldly asserts :- "Dickens never stood so high in reputation as at the completion of Copperfield. From the first it had surpassed in popularity, though not in scale, all his previous books except Pickwick." <sup>2</sup>

That the work was designed and executed with great sincerity and personal recollections of the past, is evident from this extract of a letter - "Oh, my dear Forster, if I were to say half of what Copperfield makes me feel to-night, how strangely, even to you, I should be turned inside-out ! I seem to be sending some part of myself into the shadowy world" <sup>3</sup> Though there is strong reason to accept the fact that Dickens identified himself, to a certain extent, with the hero of David Copperfield, it is necessary to remember that there is a lurking danger to seek to make the comparison more complete than the writer might ever have intended.

1. The Life of Charles Dickens - John Forster - J.M.Dent & Sons, Ltd. - London & Toronto - 1927.

2. Vol.11. Chap. VII., P.98, Para.1.

3. To John Forster - 21st October, 1850.



The style of David Copperfield is simple and straightforward. The many threads of the plot seem to be well held together in producing the general effect. When Dickens chooses to dwell on interesting characters like Micawber and Betsy Trotwood, they blossom in their own patch, whilst they are subordinated to, and bring into bolder relief the character of the central figure. This novel seems to epitomise and set a seal upon all that preceded or came after it, and satisfactorily reveals in a single volume more of the Dickensian philosophy and teaching than is found in any other isolated book. His humour is restrained, and pathos is cut down to the minimum.

Copperfield, the young hero, tells his own story. Most of the characters are real, the loving, though weak and simple mother, Peggotty, staunch as a rock and as loyal as it is possible to imagine, Mr. Peggotty friendly and lovable - they all live. One cannot say for sure whether child-psychology was receiving any investigation in Dickens' day or whether it existed as a recognised study. We know that at present, all the branches of psychology are not only recognised as subjects for serious and scientific study, but that they are established as such. Thus there is value, to the modern man, in Dickens' faithful presentation to the reader, of the sensitiveness of the mind of a child, its reaction to kindness and cruelty, and its desire for sympathy and understanding.<sup>1</sup>

1. I might here record the fact that my mature interest in Dickens is partly due to the memories of six years of an unhappy childhood, spent away from my parents. In David Copperfield I have discovered a true representation of the misery of an unhappy child.

To learn something about the workhouse system and the place of the "writs" issued by creditors in the hope of recovering loans of money advanced, the reader has merely to follow the fortunes of Micawber, portrayed as an individual of some talent, though buffeted on both sides by an indifferent social-economic system and the results of his own improvidence and indecision. The author satirises the legal profession, and a particular representation in Uriah Heep - a monster of ugliness whose assumed humility and piety mask the wicked determination to bring ruin on the virtuous and good.

In the Steerforth family, we are given examples of unyielding pride and snobbery which, in the end brings ruin upon those who exercise these passions - ruin, which not only destroys them but involves in disgrace the lovable family of the Peggottys. It will be remembered that pride was the chief topic of Dombey and Son.

Reminiscences of Nicholas Nickleby and the wicked Squeers are present in the account of life at Salem House School under the tyranny of Mr. Creakle and his voice and creature Tungay. Writing of Creakle, Dickens records :- "I know him to have been an incapable brute, who had no more right to be possessed of the great trust he held, than to be Lord High Admiral, or Commander-in-Chief: in either of which capacities, it is probable that he would have done infinitely less mischief."<sup>1</sup> Creakle's pupils were badly accommodated, badly governed and ill fed.

Poverty is once again exposed in the description of Mr. Mell, the timid master at Salem House, and his mother. Their mental and physical misery must have been abject. I think it was the

1. David Copperfield - Chap. VII. Page 83.

writer Juvenal who remarked in one of his satires that the most unbearable aspect of poverty was that it made the person afflicted appear ridiculous. It is in this light, but more pathetic than humorous, that Dickens presents the unforgettable scene between the distressed Mr. Mell and the haughty and insolent Steerforth who justifies his rudeness and insubordination to the former by remarking to Mr. Creakle -

"Since you expect me, Mr. Creakle, to justify myself, and to say what I mean - what I have to say is this, that his mother lives on charity in an almshouse."<sup>1</sup>

In these and several other comparisons with his earlier books. David Copperfield seems to sum up concisely much of Dickens' attitude to society and to the individual. Poverty, cruelty, religion in connection with the Murdochs, the workhouse system, the poor-law system, social vices and prisons - all find their place.

All the other books of this period have been classed together as The Christmas Books, and it is in that group that they will be treated. If in the main, the other group of writings dealt with have expressed a dissatisfaction with social and individual evils, the Christmas Books appear to give a message to each individual, a philosophy by which each man and woman can contribute to the general good and happiness. An assessment of this philosophy will follow in a later chapter; but in the preface to A Christmas Carol Dickens said of this as well as of the others, "My purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque, which the good humour of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian Land."

1. Chap. VI. P. 93.

The story centres round Ebenezer Scrooge, surviving partner of the firm of Scrooge and Marley, and shows him a hard, miserly and emotionless wretch, upon whom years of toiling with no other purpose than for gain and greed have left their indelible stamp " a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone..... a queezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner!.....flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire..... he iced his office in the dog-days, and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas." In striking comparison, Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's poor clerk, Bob's wife and their four children, though poor are full of hope for the future, kindness and appreciation of the simple pleasures of their miserable existence. Scrooge's conversion is effected by means of the visit to him on Christmas Eve, of the ghost of Jacob Marley, and the visits of the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Christmas Present and Christmas Yet To Come, and their reminding him of and revealing to him sentiments and emotions to which he had for long been blind and hardened. Obviously, Dickens was advocating "Good will to all men" and human charity during three hundred and sixty-five days of the year. That if the rich shared the good things of life with the poor, not from a sense of condescending charity, but rather impelled by the deep-rooted human emotion of fellow feeling, which every man ought to recognise, then all would be well. When Scrooge learns this lesson he is at peace with his nephew Fred, from whom he had been estranged, he improves the condition of his clerk Bob Cratchit and that of his poor family and, generally generates an atmosphere of happiness

which envelopes all who come within his orbit.

The Chimes returns to a more deliberate consideration of the lot of the poor. Toby Veck (Trotty) is poor, but he loves to earn his keep. His love for the music of the bells in the church near his usual station is perhaps responsible for his dream as he falls asleep by his fireside on Christmas Eve. In his dream, he finds the bells peopled by spirits, phantoms and dwarfs of various sizes, shapes and occupations. After a time they disappear and every bell grows into the shape of a bearded and mysterious figure. The goblin of the great bell reprimands him for sundry instances of wrongdoing and places him in charge of a little child, The spirit of the Chimes, and to Dickens the spirit of Christmas and the New Year, by whom "Trotty" is shown various future sorrowful scenes, the actors in which he knows only too well. The moral is "that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor the good in one another." Toby wakes and is relieved to know he has only been dreaming. He remembers the lesson and the remembrance of his dream makes his New Year happier.

The Cricket on the Hearth illustrates that suspicion and mistrust are often unfounded; that courage and home affection make poverty endurable, and that the simple-hearted often appeal to universal regard through their generosity and forgiveness of wrong.

The Battle of Life, teaches that cynicism and an intellectual indifference to the ordinary human emotions break down when faced with disrupted home life and anxiety for the welfare of those we hold dear.

The Haunted Man is included in the Christmas Collection.

Mr. Redlaw, the central character, sits musing before the fire and broods over each wrong and sorrow that he has suffered. An awful spectral likeness of himself offers to cancel the remembrance of his past sorrows. Not only is he freed from remembrance but he is given the power to impart forgetfulness to others. But interest, compassion and sympathy leave his heart and he becomes unemotional and indifferent to suffering. This poison he also passes on to all he encounters. His influence however, does not affect a ragged child, whose senses, cruelty and hardships have blunted. Redlaw regrets his pact with his own spectre and is restored to peace of mind by the benign influence of Milly, an example of patience, virtue and benevolence. The lesson here is that our own sorrow, wrong and trouble make us sympathetic to the ills and misfortunes of others whom we can help.

One important aspect of a brief review of the works of the period 1836-50 is noteworthy. Once the young writer had tried his wings and discovered that, as a literary artist, Pickwick was better received than he could possibly have imagined, apart from personal considerations and ambitions, it appears that the strongest urge to the effort was the desire to draw the attention of the reading public and that of those in high places to social conditions of ignorance, poverty and squalor. After 1850, with the exception of perhaps Bleak House and Hard Times which are also typical of the earlier matter and method, the early zeal appears to be tempered, perhaps because of a mellowness of judgment brought

about by success, greater maturity or both. All the same, if Dickens did not write another social novel after 1850, it seems certain that he would still be quoted as the greatest single contributor to that class of literature. Whether the author's motive in drawing attention to misery was born out of his own experiences and was strongly influenced thereby cannot be finally decided on the lack of further evidence. It is an eloquent tribute to the man's sincerity and loyalty to a cause, to note that all his lifetime, and particularly during the years under review, he remained steadfast in expressing his beliefs and observations. He made the Victorians laugh, he made them cry; but he did more than any other man of his time or before him, to indicate that England was a country of two nations - the prosperous and the unfortunate. What evils were exposed, and how some of these exposures have improved modern conditions will be dealt with in due course. At the beginning of this chapter, we were looking for a thread of Dickens' social philosophy which ran through the changing pattern of his works. There are many threads, but the most important seems to be his deep-rooted belief in the message of Christmas - Peace on earth and goodwill to all men. Couple with this the fact that he mentions foreigners with no air of superiority on his own part nor reproach to them, his spirit of Christmas finds theoretical acceptance.

Chapter 111.Defects in the social system as Dickens saw them.General living conditions.

In several novels, it is to be observed that great emphasis is placed upon home and home life, especially a happy home. That an Englishman's house is his castle, is a phrase which is very often heard to-day. It requires very little imagination to conclude that, during the period covered by these novels under review, the name of home, with all the connotation of peace and happiness that usually accompanies it, must have sounded hollow to the great majority of the population. There are innumerable examples of intolerable and revolting conditions of home life and living convenience. As regards the wretchedness of building and locality there is this description -

"It was a collection of mere hovels: some, hastily built with loose bricks: others, of old worm-eaten ship-timber: jumbled together without any attempt at order or arrangement, and planted, for the most part within a few feet of the river's bank. A few leaky boats drawn up on the mud, and made fast to the dwarf wall which skirted it: and here and there an oar or coil of rope: appeared, at first to indicate that the inhabitants of these miserable cottages pursued some avocation on the river..... In the heart of this cluster of huts, and skirting the river, which its upper stories overhung; stood a large building, formerly used as a manufactory of some kind. It had, in its day, probably

furnished employment to the inhabitants of the surrounding tenements. But it had long since gone to ruin. The rat, the worm, and the action of damp had weakened and rotted the piles on which it stood;" <sup>1</sup> The picture of abject and soul-degrading poverty was complete - an idle factory, unemployment and misery. No wonder that crime and vice were bred on such a spot. The horror of the appalling conditions in which the labouring classes lived is described in novel after novel. Here again:

"It was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon, when drawing near another cluster of labourer's huts, the child looked wistfully in each, doubtful at which to ask for permission to rest awhile, and buy a draught of milk.

It was not easy to determine, for she was timid and feaful of being repulsed. Here was a crying child, and there a noisy wife. In this, the people seemed too poor; in that, too many" <sup>2</sup> Of the hard tasks of the poor mothers, Kit's mother serves as example:

"The room in which Kit sat himself down, in this condition, was an extremely poor and homely place, but with that air of comfort about it, nevertheless, which - or the spot must be a wretched one indeed - cleanliness and order can always impart in some degree. Late as the Dutch clock showed it to be, the poor woman was still hard at work at an ironing table;" <sup>3</sup>

1. Oliver Twist: P.342 Para. 3.

2. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.164, Para 4.

3. Ibid: P.111, Para. 5.

A far more serious situation of things was the fact that the price of food was high - certainly beyond the means of the poor clerk about whom this passage speaks :

"He has a small plate to-day, because greens are a penny more than potatoes, and he had 'two breads' yesterday, with the additional enormity of 'a cheese' the day before." <sup>1</sup>

Besides, there were shops which apparently catered only for the needs of the poor:

"Again this quarter passed, they came upon a straggling neighbourhood, where the mean houses parcelled off in rooms, and windows patched with rags and paper, told of the populous poverty that sheltered there. The shops sold goods that only poverty could buy, and sellers and buyers were gripped alike.....but tax-gatherer and creditor came there as elsewhere, and the poverty that yet struggled was hardly less squalid and manifest than that which had long ago submitted and given up the game."<sup>2</sup> What follows paints a pitiable picture: -

"Damp rotten houses, many to let, many yet building, many half-built and mouldering away - lodgings, where it would be hard to tell which needed pity most, those who let or those who came to take - children, scantily fed and clothed, spread over every street, and sprawling in the dust - scolding mothers, stamping their slipshod feet with noisy threats upon pavement- shabby fathers,

1. Sketches by Boz: P.260, Para.2.

2. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.159, Para 2.

hurrying with dispirited looks to the occupation which brought them "daily bread" and little more - mangling women, washerwomen, cobblers, tailors, chandlers, driving their trades in parlours and kitchens and back rooms and garrets, and sometimes all of them under the same roof - brick-fields skirting gardens paled with staves of old casks, or timber pillaged from houses burnt down, and blackened and blistered by the flames - mounds of dock-weed, nettles, coarse grass and oyster shells, heaped in rank confusion - small dissenting chapels to teach, with no lack of illustration, the miseries of Earth, and plenty of new churches, erected with a little superfluous wealth, to show the way to Heaven." <sup>1</sup>

In explanation of the last quotation, it is necessary to refer to the state of unrest that was created among the working class as a result of the cumulative effects of various political and economic changes of which, at the time, the Land Enclosure Acts, the Corn Laws and the hardships brought about by the new economy characterised by the Industrial Revolution, were but a few. The author apparently believes that with sympathetic consideration for the depressed classes as well as a desire on the part of the rich, to share generously with the poor, the rougher edges could have been rubbed off from acute want. Besides, as some historians have pointed out, one of the main reasons why a national civil war did not break out was because of the strong influence of methodism which laboured to divert attention from the hardships of material world to future heavenly hope.<sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid: P.159, Para. 3.

2. See Chap.1.

From the point of view of Dickens, this state of affairs was highly unsatisfactory, Religion is an important facet in the life of an individual and certainly ought to be practised sincerely, each in his own way. At the same time present ills require present remedy; those responsible for the government of the country, for its economic policy and for the general welfare of the community should receive timely warning that all was not well, and that it was their responsibility to put matters right. A staunch believer in New Testament teaching as Dickens was, it is possible to imagine him comparing the politicians and business men of his day with the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees who "tithed mint...." but ignored the pressing claims of the poor. Some idea of how, in argument and discussion, logical hairs were split while the poor starved and died can be gleaned from the Report of the Meetings of the Mudfog Association, and while "the filthy and miserable appearance of..... London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it. Wretched houses with broken windows patched with rags and paper: every room let out to a different family, and in many instances to two or even three - fruit and 'sweet-stuff' manufacturers in the cellars, barbers and red-herring vendors in the front parlours, cobblers in the back; a bird-fancier in the first floor, three families on the second, starvation in the attics, Irishmen in the passage, a 'musician' in the front kitchen, and a charwoman and five hungry children in the back one - filth everywhere - a gutter before the houses and a drain behind -

clothes drying and slops emptying, from the windows; girls of fourteen or fifteen, with matted hair, walking about barefoot, and in white great-coats, almost their only covering; boys of all ages, in coats of all sizes and no coats at all; men and women, in every variety of scanty and dirty apparel, lounging, scolding, drinking, smoking, squabbling, fighting and swearing."<sup>1</sup> The description is too vivid for fiction. In contrast to the squalor described the gin-shops are clean and attractive with their "profusion of gas-lights surrounded by stucco rosettes.....perfectly dazzling when contrasted with the darkness and dirt we have just left.....side-aisles of great casks.....'old Tom, 549;' 'Young Tom, 360;' 'Samson, 1421'..... a proprietor, stout, coarse fellow in a fur cap, put on very much on one side to give him a knowing air."<sup>2</sup> Thus the average labouring man found himself beset on one side by poverty and on the other, drink, a temporary panacea for all his ills.

In environment of this description children were born and grew. First of all Dickens points how that the rate of infant mortality was alarmingly high - "it is a fact ascertained, by accurate calculations, that the following immense percentage of babies never attain to two years old."<sup>3</sup> Wretchedness of children's is described by the Phantom thus:

1. Sketches by Boz: P.226, Para.111.
2. Ibid: P.226, Para 4.
3. The Haunted Man: (Christmas Stories) P.421.

"This, (pointing to the boy) is the last, completest illustrations of a human creature.....no softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanising touch, to make a grain of such a memory spring up in his hardened breast. All within this desolate creature is barren wilderness.....Woe, tenfold to the nation that shall count its monsters such as this, lying here, by hundreds, and by thousands!" <sup>1</sup>

Further, attention is drawn to the fact that children die as the result of their parents being thrown out of work - "That's a dead child. I and five hundred other men were thrown out of work, three months ago. That is my third child, and last." <sup>2</sup> The hard lot of the poor families lead them to send their children out to work at a very immature age. Surely this is an expression of the author's own feelings, although the words come from the mouth of one of his characters. "It always grieves me to contemplate the initiation of children into the ways of life, when they are scarcely more than infants. It checks their confidence and simplicity - two of the best qualities that Heaven gives them - and demands that they share our sorrows before they are capable of entering into our enjoyments."

1. Ibid. P.460.

2. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.441.

3. Ibid: P.18.

Very often they were grossly overworked. The diminutive servant of the Brass household "must have been at work from her cradle",<sup>1.</sup> and in her own words - "I do plain cooking. I'm housemaid too; I do all the work of the house."<sup>2</sup>Very often starved or fed on unwholesome food and unwanted scraps they were compelled to steal. If children were brought up in a state of want and ignorance, they naturally and easily fall a prey to vice. In the emotional outburst of the woman who appeals to the officer of the law to pardon her erring son:

"How many of the girls and boys - ah, men and women too - that are brought before you and you don't pity, are deaf and dumb in their minds, and go wrong in that state, and are punished in that state, body and soul, while you gentlemen are quarreling among yourselves whether they ought to learn this or that ?"<sup>3</sup>

A few embrace virtue and never stray from the paths of goodness, in spite of every conspiracy to the contrary. Little Nell is one such example. After listening to a recital of the troubles she has passed through, the kind-hearted schoolmaster reflects silently:

"This child - has this child heroically persevered under all doubts and dangers, struggled with poverty and suffering, upheld and sustained by strong affection and the consciousness of

1. Ibid: P.336.

2. Ibid: P.559.

3. Ibid: P.442.

rectitude alone! And yet the world is full of such heroism." <sup>1</sup>

Education. In England to-day, it is generally accepted that children should be sent to school at the age of five; that school-building, curriculum and teacher should combine to provide the best training possible for each individual child, and that the child should regard school as a place of pleasurable instruction. Games, food, rest and hobbies are but a few items of the modern teacher's responsibilities. The total abolition of corporal punishment is even strongly advocated in some quarters at the present time. Exactly a hundred years ago, this article appeared in "The Times"

A timid and tentative Education Bill was meeting with opposition - though it went no farther than Government grants-in-aid to private schools, administered by a committee of the Privy Council. A leading article characterises the opposition as "the least rational or creditable of all (recent crusades). It is against the only likely or possible remedy for the worst evil and scandal of these realms - the crying ignorance of the poor.

Lord Morpeth - afterwards seventh Earl of Carlisle - who was in charge of the Bill, said at York: "I have come here without statistics..... but I am content with the evidence of what I see and hear. I am content with what passes at every petty sessions, where the far greater part of the fine grown-up young men and women can none of them write their own names; I am content with the details made out by chaplains and governors of prisons, and I

1. Ibid: P.450. Last para.

cannot resist the conviction, that the education of the mass of our working men and women, and of that fearful multitude which goes by the name of the poor, is glaringly, scandalously deficient (Applause) I know that out of the pale of the church, beyond the limits of the denominations, there is a vast destitute neglected mass festering in our streets and alleys, with every sight and sound of contamination, choking the accesses to every sense, without any **sense** of duty to earth or to Heaven, upon whom no word of instruction every falls - upon whom no breath of love ever settles - these, unclaimed by Lambeth, unknown to Geneva, unconverted by Rome, I would invite - I almost wish I could compel - to come in (applause); I do not so much care to which fold, so that there was a hope of teaching them that man is their brother and that "God is love." <sup>1</sup> This expression of opinion based on reliable facts, coming, as it does, from a responsible politician, more than bears out the main argument of Dickens' social novels, and stamps them with the indelible mark of sincerity. For the great majority of the masses, no means of education were provided. What educational opportunities there were, are described vividly. It is difficult to sift fact from fiction in the accounts presented. Evidence supports the opinion that Dickens did, at least, institute a personal enquiry into the worse abuses of the educational system in Yorkshire, as the following quotations from the Preface to Nicholas Nickleby will prove:-

1. From "The Times" - Saturday, April 10th, 1847. Price with a supplement, 5d.

"Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example."

"Any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere;"

"These Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten rung in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worth corner-stone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded laissez-aller neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world."

"I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places near Rochester Castle.....my first impressions of them.....were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife."<sup>1</sup>

".....- at last, having an audience, I resolved to write about them. With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book in very severe winter time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and

1. This incident Dickens relates in Nicholas Nickleby P.517.

was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the Pickwick Papers, I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connexion, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction."<sup>1</sup> The account continues with the author's chance meeting with a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man. Some people think they recognise this character in Nicholas Nickleby's friend John Browdie. He gives this advice to Dickens :

"Weel Mither, we've been vara pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak' my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yan o' our school-measthers, while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in.....I'm dorn'd if ar can gang to bed and not tellee, for weedur's sak', to keep the lattle boy from a' side scoondrels while there's a harse to hoold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in!"

"The author's object in calling public attention to the system would be very imperfectly fulfilled, if he did not state, in his own person, emphatically and earnestly, that Mr. Squeers and his school are faint and feeble pictures of an existing reality, purposely subdued and kept down lest they should be deemed impossible.....that, since he has been engaged upon these Adventures, he has received, from private quarters far beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust, accounts of atrocities, in the

1. With his letters of introduction, the author posed as an agent for a widow, who wished to send her son to a Yorkshire school.

perpetration of which upon neglected or repudiated children, these schools have been the main instrument, very far exceeding any that appear in these pages." Evidence of this nature bears the stamp of truth and sincerity. In broad outline, it indicates the frightful abuses practised in the name of education. For the details, we must return to the novels themselves.

Trusting parents were taken in by well-constructed newspaper advertisements -

"Education - At Mr. Wachford Squeers's Academy, Dotheboys Hall, at the delightful village of Dotheyboys, near Greta Bridge in Yorkshire, youths are boarded, clothed, booked, furnished with pocket-money, provided with all necessaries, instructed in all languages living and dead etc. etc. etc., Terms, twenty guineas per annum. No extras, no vacations, and diet unparalleled." <sup>1.</sup>

The schoolroom of this establishment is described as " a bare and dirty room, with a couple of windows, whereof a tenth part might be of glass, the remainder being stopped up with old copybooks and paper. There were a couple of long old rickety desks, cut and notched, and inked, and damaged, in every possible way; two or three forms; a detached desk for Squeers; and another for his assistant. The ceiling was supported, like that of the barn, by cross beams and rafters; and the walls were so stained and discoloured that it was impossible to tell whether they had ever been touched with paint or whitewash." <sup>2</sup>

1. Nicholas Nickleby: P.53.

2. Ibid P.123.

The pupils themselves were "Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together; there were the bleared eye, the hare-lip, the crooked foot, and every ugliness or distortion that told of unnatural aversion conceived by parents for their offspring, or of young lives which, from the earliest dawn of infancy, had been one horrible endurance of cruelty and neglect -----faces darkened with the scowl of sullen, dogged suffering; .. childhood with the light of its eye quenched, its beauty gone, and its helplessness alone remaining; .....every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down-----what an incipient Hell was breeding here!" <sup>1</sup>

The method of instruction was not the least outrageous of the abuses. A lesson in English is quite familiar to those acquainted with the sorry facts recorded in Nicholas Nickleby.<sup>2</sup> It emphasises the fact that the ignorant pupils were instructed by teachers whose ignorance was frightful.

Squeers inculcated strength of mind through physical privation. His advice -

"Subdue your appetites, my dears, and you've conquered human nature. This is the way we inculcate strength of mind." <sup>3</sup>

1. Ibid: P.123-124.

2. See P. 127-8

3. Ibid: P.77.

But if his pupils were not inclined to subdue their appetites voluntarily, the economy of Squeers's establishment corrected weak-mindedness. "At one o'clock, the boys, having previously had their appetites taken away by stir-about and potatoes, sat down in the kitchen to some hard salt beef. After this, there was another hour of crouching in the school-room and shivering with cold, and then school began again."<sup>1</sup> The motive for the propaganda to conquer human nature was crystal clear - the profit motive. Boys were infected with scarlet fever so that the attendance of the doctor on the first to contract the disease was paid for by all the victims jointly. When Mrs. Squeers was confined to bed before the birth of young Wackford the whooping cough was run through half-a-dozen boys and her expenses charged among them.<sup>2</sup> Weak and ill boys were given a change of diet and turned out to graze on the turnips and carrots in a neighbour's field. It was a common practice to send natural children to these schools, and so few questions were asked about their welfare. The unfortunate circumstances of Smike, though he was 'nt a natural son, are proof of other motives which led parents to wish to be rid of awkward heirs. After the daily drudgery which was Smike's lot, drudgery unrelieved by a smile of kindness or a word of encouragement, he found himself "vainly endeavouring to master some task which a child of nine years old, possessed of ordinary powers, could have conquered with ease, but which, to the addled brain of the crushed boy of nineteen, was a sealed and hopeless mystery."<sup>3</sup> How Dickens

1. Ibid: P.129.

2. Ibid: P.518.

3. Ibid: P.187.

compares the lot of children with that of slaves is evident from Mr. Squeers's remarks to his wife:

"A slave-driver in the West Indies is allowed a man under him, to see that his blacks don't run away, or get up a rebellion; and I'll have a man under me to do the same with our blacks, till such time as little Wackford is able to take charge of the school." <sup>1</sup>

Flogging was the accepted thing. Squeers thinks of the arrears of flogging waiting for him as the result of his long stay in London. Mr. Murdstone superintends Copperfield's studies; but first "He gave the cane another poise, and another switch; and having finished his preparation of it, laid it down beside him, with an impressive look, and took up his book."<sup>2</sup> Though he might not have been fully aware of it, Dickens's account of Copperfield's agonising emotions on thinking of his lessons under Mr. Murdstone was an appeal on behalf of the claims of the child. "These solemn lessons, I remember as the death-blow at my peace, and a grievous daily drudgery and misery. They were very long, ver numerous, very hard - perfectly unintelligible, some of them, to me - and I was generally as much bewildered by them as I believe my poor mother was herself." <sup>3</sup>

If childish recreation was a thing unthought of in Squeers's establishment, it was never encouraged in the Murdstone

1. Ibid: P.138.

2. David Copperfield: P.53.

3. Ibid: P.49.

household. "As to recreation with other children of my age, I had very little of that; for the gloomy theology of the Murdstones made all children out to be a swarm of little vipers (though there was a child once set in the midst of the Disciples), and held that they contaminated one another." <sup>1</sup>

In Dickens's novels we read of the long list of fiendish cruelties to schoolboys - the school where they broke the boy's ribs, the constant dread of Mr.Creakle and the equally awe-inspiring Tungay, methods of achieving firmness in education and the remainder of the long list of childish woes.

Mr.Slug, as a result of research, presented to the Mudfog Association the following statistics on children's books, regarding the state of infant education among the middle classes of London. "That within a circle of three miles from the Elephant and Castle, the following were the names and numbers of children's books principally in circulation :-

Jack the Giant-killer	7,943	
Ditto and Bean-stalk	8,621	
Ditto and Eleven Brothers	2,845	
Ditto and Jill	1,998	
	<u>21,407</u>	2."
Total	<u><u>21,407</u></u>	

One cannot fail to detect the satire, and can conclude that if the books available for children of the middle class were anything like the figures stated and were really as limited in selection, the lot of the children of the poor was hopeless. The report goes on to

1. Ibid: P.51.

2. Sketches by Boz: P.736.

record the terrible ignorance of the average child.

Even in the more humane establishments which boasted superior pretensions, there was an obvious facade constructed to please parents. At the girls school in Devonshire, at which Kate Nickleby attended before the opening chapters of the account, the girls wrote all the letters home from a circular letter supplied by the staff. The writing-master touched them up afterwards with a magnifying glass and a silver pen.<sup>1</sup>

Copperfield's recollection of Creakle's school consisted mainly of "the waning summer and the changing season; of the frosty mornings when we were rung out of bed, and the cold, cold smell of the dark nights when we were rung into bed again; of the evening schoolroom dimly lighted and indifferently warmed, and the morning schoolroom which was nothing but a great shivering-machine; of the alternation of boiled beef with roast beef, and boiled mutton with roast mutton; of clods of bread and butter, dog's-eared lesson-books, cracked slates, tear-blotted copy books, canings, rulerings, hair-cuttings, rainy Sundays, suet puddings, and a dirty atmosphere of ink surrounding all."<sup>2</sup>

So much for the grim picture. There is a far more agreeable picture of school life, if one is patient enough to search for it. There is no indication in the novels (except Dickens intends Copperfield's happy memories of Dr. Strong to be taken seriously)

1. Nicholas Nickleby. P.407.

2. David Copperfield: P.99.

nor in the Prefaces to the novels to conclude that the author has drawn upon his own experiences or upon the experience of others in the pleasant pictures he sketches. Perhaps he expresses his ideas of the model school and the model schoolmaster. About Dr.Strong's establishment he writes :

"The schoolroom was a pretty large hall, on the quietest side of the house, confronted by the stately stare of some half-dozen of the great urns, and commanding a peep of an old secluded garden belonging to the Doctor, where the peaches were ripening on the sunny south wall. There were two great aloes, in tubs, on the turf outside the windows; the broad hard leaves of which plant (looking as if they were made of painted tin) have ever since, by association, been symbolical to me of silence and retirement. About five-and-twenty boys were studiously engaged at their books when we went in, but they rose to give the Doctor good morning, and remained standing when they saw Mr.Wickfield and me." <sup>1</sup>

"One Adams, who was the head-boy, then stepped out of his place and welcomed me. He looked like a young clergyman, in his white cravat, but he was very affable and good-humoured, and he showed me my place, and presented me to the masters, in a gentlemanly way that would have put me at my ease, if anything could." <sup>2</sup>

The whole school is described as excellent and differing from Creakle's as "good is from evil", "gravely and decorously

1. David Copperfield: P.212.

2. Ibid: P.212.

ordered, and on a sound system" based on an appeal " to the honour and good faith of the boys, and an avowed intention to rely on their possession of those qualities unless they proved themselves unworthy of it, which worked wonders." <sup>1</sup> Because all felt a personal responsibility in the sustaining of the character and dignity of the school they were warmly attached to it. There were "noble games out of hours and plenty of liberty." The headmaster, Dr. Strong was a popular idol, the kindest of men with a simple faith and a character of benevolence. There is another picture of another school and another schoolmaster. The kindly schoolmaster, whom little Nell and her grandfather get to know, was conscientious and ambitious to improve each one of his pupils. Thus he becomes a personal friend to the little sick scholar. He is aware that boys appreciate a half holiday when the sun is shining and when the birds sing. When there are trees waving to all free boys to climb and nestle among their leafy branches, not to mention the sights of the newly cut hay, the green corn, wood and streams.

There can be no mistaking Dickens's belief in education for all. In A Christmas Carol the second of the three spirits, the "Ghost of Christmas Present" showed Scrooge a boy and a girl "yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility." This spirit explained "They are Man's, and they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of

1. Ibid: P.220.

their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it! Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse! And bide the end!"

This surely, is the voice of Dickens raised in anger, in compassion and in terrible warning. For ambitious youths, the prospect might perhaps be that of "small office lads in large hats, who are made men before they are boys.....conscious of their importance and the receipt of seven shillings a week." <sup>1</sup>

#### Physical and Mental Effects of Poverty.

An author who describes for his readers the filthy conditions in which the poor lived, their deprivation of every human feeling of sympathy, the complete absence of the consolation of education for their children, and then proceeds further to reveal the utter physical and mental degradation of their lot, must have been an acutely sensitive sympathiser.

Some people ride poverty with much more cheerfulness than others. The wife, dying before her husband's eyes rushes round seeking financial aid to save her husband from his creditors. In damp and cold weather, she wore a thin dress and broken shoes."The family grew more prosperous, and good fortune arrived. But it was too late. Those children are motherless now, and their father would give up all he has since gained - house, home, goods, money; all that he had, or even can have to restore the wife he has lost." <sup>2</sup>

1. Sketches by Boz: P.71. Para.2.

2. Sketches by Boz: P.51.

The widow's son, a young lad of eighteen or nineteen, supported ~~by~~ his mother by the pittance he earned by copying writings, and translating for booksellers. His mother tried hard to obtain needlework, embroidery - anything for bread. She earned an odd shilling now and then while the boy laboured steadily "dying by minutes, but never once giving utterance to complaint or murmur." <sup>1</sup> His death took place in due course. There is the case of the miserable mother who, with her baby in her arms, sings some popular ballad in the street to earn a few pence for food. "The tears fall thick and fast.....the child is cold and hungry, and its low half-stifled wailing adds to the misery of its wretched mother." <sup>2</sup> Pathos, undeniably; but the kind of pathos for a class that strikes a responsive chord in the human breast. Often a somewhat personal allusion, to the state of a person's wardrobe, rouses anger and a fight results.

Nothing escapes the keen eye of the novelist - "a boy's dress - a town boy - short about legs and arms - bagging at knees - his parents decent but poor - he still wears at work the suit he wore at school." <sup>3</sup> There are the shabby-genteel people who are as purely local to London as the statue at Charing Cross, or the pump at Aldgate. The shabby-genteel man displays "a depressed face, and timorous air of conscious poverty." He is to be found in the British Museum every morning reading "two old dog's-eared folios." The reading room supplies warmth to his body that

1. Ibid: P.63.

2. Ibid P.76.

3. Ibid: P.316.

he can get nowhere else. He sits as close as possible to the table to hide the absence of buttons on his clothing. At two o'clock when all have gone off for lunch he dines on a French roll or a penny loaf, "breaking off little bits in his pocket, and eating them by stealth". His shabby suit and strangely shaped hat, to which long service had imparted a reddish-brown tint are revived by a deceitful black and blue reviver "only to elevate his spirits for a week and depress them, if possible below their original level" so that the transient dignity of the unhappy wearer decreases in exact proportion as the reviver wore off.

Women, wives and mothers particularly, suffer most mentally. They live in scantily and meanly furnished rooms, and spend their lives in grief, want and anxious care. The wife alone clings to her wretched husband in good and evil, in sickness and poverty.

Often, not poverty itself, but the mental state occasioned by its realisation drives, victims to either insanity or to suicide.<sup>1</sup> And this is hardly to be wondered at, for poverty makes marriage and a happy home life unattainable.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, young girls have been lured into love-less marriages with wealthy old men whose financial hold on parents leads the daughters to attempt to loosen by sacrificing their own claims to happiness. An example relevant to the author's contention is the case Madeline Bray whose father finds himself caught fast in the toils of the unscrupulous Ralp Nickleby and Arthur Gride, senile in all but his cupidity and greed. Gride is prepared to cancel Bray's debts - at a price :

1. Ibid P.563-4.

2. Chimes (Christmas Stories) P.130.

"If I offer myself to Bray as his son-in-law, upon one simple condition that the moment I am fast married he shall be quietly released, and have an allowance to live just t'other side the water like a gentleman (he can't live long, for I have asked his doctor, and he declares that his complaint is one of the heart and it is impossible), and if all the advantages of this condition are properly stated and dwelt upon to him, do you think he could resist me?"<sup>1</sup> One is inclined to think that the possibility of such a consummation of a villain's plans is too much for Dickens, and he summons to his aid an outraged imagination that brings about the death of Madeline's father on the morning of the wedding and renders her proposed sacrifice unnecessary.

Poverty has other hardships for young girls - employment at tasks which require long hours and concentrated attention in uncongenial environment. Since the industrial and political emancipation began to gain momentum only in the early years of the present century, it is possible to imagine what conditions were like over a century ago. At an early hour of the day, Kate Nickleby saw -

"Many sickly girls, whose business, like that of the poor worm, is to produce, with patient toil, the finery that bedecks the thoughtless and luxurious, traverse our streets, making towards the scene of their daily labour, and catching, as if by stealth, in their hurried walk, the only gasp of wholesome air and glimpse of sunlight which cheers their monotonous existence during the long train of hours that make a working day."<sup>2</sup>

1. Nicholas Nickleby. P.723.

2. Ibid: P.256.

But if physical hardship were all that girls in this class endured, their lot might still be tolerable. The insolence and inordinate pride of the wealthy were insupportable. Madame Mantalini's clients were guilty of unpardonable rudeness to her nervous dressmaking attendants. For other girls, a career of street walking offered the only solution. In this manner Nancy finds herself, a thief and a young lady of easy morals, in the service of Fagin the Jew and of Bill Sikes. A shortage of housing accommodation in London naturally leads to vagrancy.

The heritage of a child was "The hard realities of the world, with many of its worst privations - hunger and thirst, and cold and want." <sup>1</sup> And yet these conditions thrived in a land of plenty. In bringing this section to a close, two pictures painted by Dickens are recalled to mind. The first :-

"Emporiums of splendid dresses, the materials brought from every quarter of the world; tempting stores of everything to stimulate and pamper the sated appetite and give new relish to the oft-repeated feast; vessels of burnished gold and silver, wrought into every exquisite form of vase, and dish, and goblet; guns, swords, pistols, and patent engines of destruction; screws and irons for the crooked, clothes for the newly-born, drugs for the sick." <sup>2</sup>

The second -

"The rags of the squalid ballad-singer fluttered in the rich light that showed the goldsmith's treasures; pale and pinched-

1. Pickwick Papers: P.350.

2. Nicholas Nickleby: P.485 Para. 1.

up faces hovered about the windows where was tempting food; hungry eyes wandered over the profusion guarded by one thin sheet of brittle glass - an iron wall to them; half-naked shivering figures stopped to gaze at Chinese shawls and golden stuffs of India. There was a christening party at the largest coffin-maker's, and a funeral hatchment had stopped some great improvements in the bravest mansion. Life and death went hand in hand; wealth and poverty stood side by side; repletion and starvation laid them down to-gether." <sup>1</sup>

#### Economic and Political References.

Very little space can be devoted to a discussion on economic and political theory in the ordinary novel form, for considerations of plot, character sketching and dialogue and situation require the author's undivided attention. In the social novels of Dickens, it must be assumed that the writer possessed an intelligent grasp of the pressing problems of the period, and here and there some indication is given of his personal views. Whatever the theory of economics might allow, he showed a satirical disdain for monopolies which prospered a few at the expense of great numbers who were reduced to poverty and beggary. One sees this in his handling of the formation of the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. <sup>2</sup>

1. Ibid: Para. 2.

2. Nicholas Nickleby: P.40, Para.1.

The melancholy state of things that this new-formed company set out to correct, with a capital of Five Millions, in five hundred thousand shares of ten pounds each, was "firstly, by prohibiting, under heavy penalties, all private muffin trading of every description; secondly, by themselves supplying the public generally and the poor at their own homes, with muffins of first class quality at reduced prices. It was with this object that a bill had been introduced into Parliament by their patriotic chairman Sir Matthew Pupker.....it was the supporters of this bill who would confer undying brightness and splendour upon England" The suggestion that "and crumpet" be added after the word muffin was carried triumphantly, only one man in the crowd objecting, and he was "promptly taken into custody and straightway borne off." Apart from the obvious conclusions pointing to monopoly, it is significant that Dickens wishes to point out the unholy alliance between Economics and Politics. At this point, there is a reminder of the evils of the Corn Laws in Mrs. Nickleby's criticism of the recklessness of hackney-coach drivers and their exorbitant charges. Referring to the Act of Parliament by which a driver was legally entitled to charge a shilling an hour extra for having the top open, she says "1. I don't understand the subject, but I should say the corn laws could be nothing to that Act of Parliament." In fact, it is patent that between Politics and Economics the plight of the poor was unbearable. It is Dickens's reflection, not Kits',

1. Ibid: P.405.

that muses: "I wonder if one of these gentlemen knew there was nothing in the cupboard at home, whether he'd stop on purpose, and make believe that he wanted to call somewhere, that I might earn a trifle." <sup>1</sup> (By holding his horse). For the ordinary middle class shopkeeper with great industry and small capital there was no hope of success in the grim world of business. Things always turn out in the same way - the proprietor gets into difficulties, his shop gets into Chancery and everything goes to ruin. <sup>2</sup> One type of shop is an exception to the rule - it flourishes and thrives upon the adversity of others - the pawnbroker's shop. They are pictured as "low, dirty-looking, dusty, with a door standing always doubtfully a little way open: half-inviting, half-repelling the hesitating visitor" <sup>3</sup> with the words over head "Money advanced on plate, jewellery, wearing apparel, and every description of property." With such limited scope to earn a decent living, it is not surprising that such large numbers ended up in the grip of the pawnbroker, the financier, or within the sordid boundaries of a debtor's prison.

As to matters more strictly relating to the state of politics in the country, there are frequent allusions. The report of the Mudfog Association reflects contempt for the pompous and ineffective attitude of a school of politicians

1. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.149.
2. Sketches by Boz: Chapter 111.
3. Ibid: Chapter XX111.

whose responsibility it was to steer the ship of state. Men who continually strained a fly and swallowed a camel. There is satire in the accounts of Mr. Evenson and Mr. Wisbottle<sup>1</sup> and political rivalry detrimental to public interest.<sup>2</sup> These appear very early in Dickens's career as a writer. Prospective Members of Parliament who could not fulfil the necessary financial qualification were accommodated by obliging gentlemen who swore to the qualification "as a mere matter of form"<sup>3</sup> Thus they easily became the dupes of those who helped to put them into power. It is also shown that seats in Parliament could and were obtained by marriage. Men of family, with all the means and superfluities of life within their reach often "married their daughters.....to young men without heads or hearts, to tickle some idle vanity, strengthen some family interest, or secure some seat in Parliament!"<sup>4</sup> And that a good many members were merely puppets that recited the crammed speeches of a poorly paid secretary or a wealthy patron is clear from the interview which Nicholas Nickleby had with Mr. Gregsbury M.P.<sup>5</sup> If Nickleby

1. see Sketches by Boz: P.353.
2. Also Pickwick Papers: P.211. Para.2.
3. Sketches By Boz. P.762.
4. Nicholas Nickleby: P.728.
5. Ibid: P.245.

consented to serve as this gentleman's secretary, he would have had to master foreign policy, read all accounts of public meetings and leading articles, frame questions to the Secretary of State, master the intricacies of home and foreign finances etc. etc. all for the grand sum of thirty-six pounds per annum! In other words, there were numerous politicians who were ambitious to enter upon a parliamentary career without the knowledge, training and general preparation necessary for efficient service. It must have been with a very doubtful conscience that Mr. Gregsbury boasted "Thank Heaven, I am a Briton."<sup>1</sup> His answer to Mr. Pugstyle's request for his resignation in accordance with the wishes of the electorate was,

"actuated by no personal motives, but moved only by high and great constitutional considerations; which I will not attempt to explain, for they are really beneath the comprehension of those who have not made themselves masters, as I have, of the intricate and arduous study of politics; I would rather keep my seat, and intend doing so."<sup>2</sup> From this angle it can be seen how futile were the speeches made in Parliament.

The modern press does, to a certain extent, exercise a watchful interest in the business of parliament. Dickens seems to think that the true function of the Press is to offer sincere and unbiased information and advice to the public, but the Press of his day appeared to assume a role of subservience to one or other of the political groups. Some journalists were

1. Ibid: P.241.

2. Ibid: P.243.

inspired to work because of their desire for the gratitude of enthusiastic crowds, reception committees and ringing church bells, without which signs of approval they might be moved "to curdle the ink in their pen and abandon their cause for ever."<sup>1</sup> The disappointment of Toby is the disappointment of his creator. Of the press he says sadly,

"The Papers is full of observations as it is; and so's the Parliament, Here's last week's paper, now; full of observations! Full of observations! I like to know the news as well as any man but it almost goes against the grain with me to read a paper now. It frightens me almost. I don't know what we poor people are coming to. Lord send we may be coming to something better in the New Year nigh upon us!"<sup>2</sup> It was therefore not to be wondered at that legislation was permitted which allowed tired little chimney-sweeps to knock at doors, but forbade them from calling out, no matter how long a leepy housemaid chose to delay in answering the door.<sup>3</sup> Poverty, which compelled one of His Majesty's subjects to sleep under a haystack, did not prevent the culprit from serving a prison sentence, the view being held that the circumstance lay him open to strong suspicion of burglary with violence.<sup>4</sup>

1. Pickwick Papers: P.840.
2. The Chimes: (Christmas stories) P.112.
3. Sketches By Boz.P.66.
4. Oliver Twist: P.287.

Although repeated glimpses of life in the big and growing industrial towns are shown, from certain references we know that life in the country, and Parochial life in particular, was hardly any better. "The Parish" conveyed to Dickens "tales of distress and misery, of broken fortune and ruined hopes, of unrelieved wretchedness and successful knavery. A poor man with small earnings, and a large family living from hand to mouth..... his taxes are in arrears, quarter-day passes by, another quarter-day arrives: he can procure no more quarter for himself, and is summoned by - the parish."<sup>1</sup>

From birth till death, the average individual is constantly passed on from one parish official to the other - "the parish vestry, the parish infirmary, the parish surgeon, the parish officers, the parish beadle." When distress and drunkenness have done their work upon the average parishioners, he is maintained, a harmless babbling idiot, in the parish asylum.<sup>2</sup> The means of conveying paupers from one place to another was usually in open carts. Parochial officials were continually investigating the possibility of throwing their paupers upon another parish to cut down their poor relief expenses. Mr. Bumble gumbles to Mrs. Corney that in one afternoon twenty quartern loaves and a cheese and a half were given to the poor, and expresses indignation that one of the recipients had actually asked for a pocket handkerchief full of coal to toast his cheese.<sup>3</sup> The pauper, who died in the street

1. Sketches by Boz: P.17, Chap. I

2. Ibid

3. See Oliver Twist: P.213

because of an unsuccessful application for relief, is described as obstinate. National apathy as regards pressing need for reform at home is frequently contrasted with various anti-slavery petitions to Parliament while "men mismanaged the workhouse, ground the paupers, diluted the beer, slack-baked the bread, boned the meat, heightened the work, and lowered the soup."<sup>1</sup>

Bad as the Poor House system appeared to be, Malthusian doctrine seemed to have found ready support in some quarters. This attitude is ruthlessly attacked by Dickens. Mr. Bumble, the parochial beadle is once more the ridiculous mouth-piece.

"Outdoor relief properly managed is the parochial safeguard. The great principle of outdoor relief is to give the paupers exactly what they don't want; and then they get tired of coming ..... that's the great principle; and that's the reason why, if you look at any cases that get into them owdacious newspapers, you'll always observe that sick families have been relieved with slices of cheese. But these are official secrets, not to be spoken of, except among parochial officers."<sup>2</sup>

Scrooge wants to know whether there are no prisons to house the "many thousands in want of common necessaries."<sup>3</sup> and the Union workhouses, the Treadmill and the Poor Law, he wants to know if they have all failed in their object. He believes that if the poor refuse to commit themselves to these state establishments,

1. Sketches by Boz: P.40

2. Oliver Twist: P.214

3. Christmas Carol: P.12

they were better dead as long as they decrease the surplus population.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Tetterby thinks "Poor people ought not to have children at all."<sup>2</sup>

In this connection Dickens has a straight reply to Malthus and his school:

"If man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered what the surplus (population) is, and where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust."<sup>3</sup>

Institutions. To turn specifically to the institutions that house the poor - "the hospital is a refuge and resting-place for hundreds, who but for such institutions must die in the streets and doorways."<sup>4</sup> This reference is by way of introduction to the prisons and the workhouses about which, the author writes with a wealth of feeling and resentment.

In writing about prison conditions, Dickens was treading on grounds well known to him, if any credence is to be given to Forster's well-known biography. Mr. Dickens Senior, pressed by his creditors, was obliged to take up residence in the Marshalsea, a

1. Ibid: P.14

2. The Haunted Man: (Christmas Stories), P.467

3. Christmas Carol: P.92

4. Sketches by Boz: P.288

well-patronised depository for debtors.<sup>1</sup> His account of prison life as pieced together from various novels, may be regarded as an earnest and sensitive narrative. Something of the sensitiveness he must have felt is seen in this description of the exterior of Newgate prison:

"How dreadful its rough heavy walls, and low massive doors, appeared to us - the latter looking as if they were made for the express purpose of letting people in, and never letting them out again. Then the fetters over the debtors' door, which we used to think were a bona fide set of irons, just hung up there for convenience sake, ready to be taken down at a moment's notice, and riveted on the limbs of some refractory felon. We were never tired of wondering how the hackney-coachmen on the opposite stand could cut jokes in the presence of such horrors, and drink pots of half-and-half so near the last drop."<sup>2</sup> We are given several pen-pictures of the lives of the inmates.

A portion of Newgate called the "School" was set apart for boys under fourteen. "There were fourteen of them in all, some with shoes, some without; some in pinafores without jackets, others in jackets without pinafores, and one in scarce anything at all ..... We never looked upon a more disagreeable sight, because we never saw fourteen such hopeless creatures of neglect, before."<sup>3</sup>

1. The Life of Chas. Dickens - Vol. I (Everyman) John Forster, P.23

2. Sketches by Boz: P.240, Para. I

3. Ibid: P.251

The women's side is described as nearest the Sessions House and visitors and friends communicated with them from the outside of an iron cage, five feet ten inches high.<sup>1</sup> The inmates of this portion varied in age, from the very young to the old and feeble. In many cases, sin-hardened cases could be discerned, in whose breast there was no parental solicitude, no reminiscences of a happy childhood and merry games. What they could and did understand was "hunger and the streets, beggary and stripes, the gin-shop, the station-house, and the pawnbrokers."<sup>2</sup>

The author appears to be emphatic in his belief that prison sentences were not always inflicted for crimes against society, but frequently resulted from ignorance and want. Debt was a more frequent cause and many unfortunate victims found themselves guests of Her Majesty on account of a readiness to put their names to bills presented to them by their friends.<sup>3</sup> Debtors prisons were furnished in parts according to the requirements of the inmates. Conditions, a little more tolerable, were available to those who could afford the extra comfort. But the "poor" of a felon was to be preferred to that of a poor debtor. "We still leave unblotted in the leaves of our statute book, for the reverence and admiration of succeeding ages, the just and wholesome law which declares that the sturdy felon shall be fed and clothed, and that the penniless debtor shall be left to die of starvation

1. Ibid: P.248

2. Ibid: P.249

3. Ibid: P.517

and nakedness. This is no fiction. Not a week passes over our heads, but, in every one of our prisons for debt, some of these men must inevitably expire in the slow agonies of want, if they were not relieved by their fellow prisoners."<sup>1</sup> Alfred Jingle throws some light on his attempts to keep alive in prison, in his own inimitable style:

"Everything - Job's too - all shirts gone - never mind - saves washing. Nothing soon - lie in bed - starve - die - Inquest - little bone house - poor prisoner - common necessaries - hush it up - gentlemen of the jury - warden's tradesmen - keep it snug - natural death - coroner's order - workhouse funeral - serve him right - all over - drop the curtain."<sup>2</sup>

Capital punishment also comes under attack in the social novels of Dickens, and it appears to have met with his strong disapproval. Dennis, the hangman in Barnaby Rudge meets with the same fate which for long he has been instrumental in inflicting upon others - a fate made a thousand times worse by his knowledge and experience of all the horrible details. One likes to believe that, here, the writer is preaching a sermon on poetic justice. The average prison has its condemned pen, a black pen in which victims singled out for execution are placed on the Sunday preceding the dreadful day.<sup>3</sup> In full view of their fellow prisoners, they

1. Pickwick Papers: P.697

2. Ibid: P.701

3. Sketches by Boz: P.253

are compelled to hear prayers for their souls and join in the responses of their own burial service. Dickens states emphatically that it used to be the practice for the men's coffins to be placed in the pen beside them.<sup>1</sup> He expresses the hope "that the increased spirit of civilisation and humanity which abolished this frightful and degrading custom, may extend itself to other usages equally barbarous; usages which have not even the plea of utility in their defence, as every year's experience has shown them to be more and more inefficacious."

Describing another group of condemned prisoners the author writes - "they had all been sentenced to death, it is true, and the recorder's report had not yet been made; but we question whether there was a man among them, who did not know ..... that it never was intended that his life should be sacrificed. On the table lay a Testament, but there were no tokens of its having been in recent use."<sup>2</sup> Finally, an execution by hanging is described by the mother of the dead man as "pitiless, inhuman murder."<sup>3</sup> Considering the bitterness with which the practice of capital punishment is attacked, could Dickens have wished the New Testament teaching of conquest by love to be the standard set

1. Ibid: P.253

2. Ibid: P.254. (Further reference to the New Testament adds more point to the view advanced in the chapter dealing with Dickens' philosophy).

3. Ibid: P.442-3

for reclaiming the violent man?

Of prison conditions in general, we have the author's comment in the form of a footnote:

"The regulations of the prison relative to the confinement of prisoners during the day, their sleeping at night, their taking their meals, and other matters of gaol economy, have been all altered - greatly for the better - since this sketch was first published. Even the construction of the prison itself has been changed."<sup>1</sup>

Hardships and suffering, in prison institutions which might find official explanation in debt, robbery, vagrancy and violence, were not shut out from the workhouses, to which thousands of the poor turned in despair from the economic storms of a world, in which there was no comfort for the unfortunate. The association of scorn with a miserable inmate of state or charitable institution is a common modern practice, and a survival of the nineteenth century. The story of *Oliver Twist* is full of peeps into workhouse administration and practice. Oliver's mother dies in a workhouse, which according to Dickens, was always to be found among the public buildings of every town. On the death of his mother, the situation of the unfortunate orphan is described as "hungry and destitute."<sup>2</sup>

1. Sketches by Boz: footnote to Page 251.

(For further references to prison conditions, see Sketches by Boz: pp. 244, 328, 515; Pickwick 661 (inhumanity of bailiffs), 672, 675, 731;

Nicholas Nickleby: P.901; David Copperfield: pp. 44, 791, 792; Curiosity Shop: P.707).

2. Oliver Twist: P.22.

The parish authorities resolve, "magnanimously and humanely" to "farm" Oliver - "that he should be despatched to a branch workhouse where twenty or thirty other juveniles - offenders against the poor-laws, rolled about the floor all day, without the inconvenience of too much food or too much clothing, who received the culprits at and for the consideration of sevenpence-halfpenny per small head per week."<sup>1</sup> The female who presided over this institution is described as "a great experimental philosopher" who appropriated the greater part of the weekly stipend to her own use. Needless to say, little or no care was bestowed upon her charges and children sickened from want and cold, fell into the fire from neglect or were smothered by accident. If the frequency of deaths led a jury to ask any awkward questions, the parish officials supported by the evidence of the parish surgeons launched a staunch defence.

Mr. Bumble, the parish beadle, is a representative of a class of official, unimaginative, unscrupulous and officious. As a beadle, he was snappish and lacked any spark of humanity. The parochial board he served was made up of men about whom there is this description:

"The members of this board were very sage, deep, philosophical men; and when they came to turn their attention to the workhouse, they found out at once, what ordinary folks would never have discovered - the poor people liked it! It was a regular place of public entertainment for the poorer classes; a tavern where

1. Ibid

there was nothing to pay; a public breakfast, dinner, tea, and supper all the year round; a brick and mortar elysium, where it was all play and no work. 'Oho!' said the board, looking very knowing 'we are the fellows to set this to rights; we'll stop it all, in no time.'<sup>1</sup> So, they established the rule, that all poor people should have the alternative (for they would compel nobody, not they), of being starved by a gradual process in the house, or by a quick one out of it. With this view, they contracted with the water-works to lay on an unlimited supply of water; and with the corn-factor to supply periodically small quantities of oatmeal, and issued three meals of thin gruel a day, with an onion twice a week, and half a roll on Sundays. They made a great many other wise and humane regulations, having reference to the ladies ..... kindly undertook to divorce poor married people in consequence of the great expense of a suit in Doctors Commons; and, instead of compelling a man to support his family, as they had theretofore done, took his family away from him, and made him a bachelor. .... The relief was inseparable from the workhouse and the gruel; and that frightened people."<sup>2</sup> In this reference Dickens supplies a summary of workhouse policy and practice. Nearly every schoolboy knows of the incident when Oliver asked for more. It is significant of the principle that the poor had no rights, and any demand on their part for more consideration was labelled ingratitude! The

1. A strong savour of Malthus.

2. Oliver Twist: P.29

workhouses were places where the poor were expected to die.

Tugby's wife tells her husband:

"The back-attic is Going."

Tugby - "He must Go, you know, before he's Gone."

Mrs.Tugby - "You had better leave him where he is. he can't live long."

Tugby - "He's going to die here after all ....."

Mrs.Tugby - "And where should he have died, Tugby?"

Tugby - "In the workhouse, what are workhouses made for?"

And so, it appears, the poor were given the choice of prison or workhouse. It did not matter which, as long as the results were the same!

mention is made of charitable societies which undertook the task of succouring the needy; but apart from their scope being limited on account of finance, it appears as if those who undertook this work showed a complete lack of the right spirit of service. In the opinion of Dickens, the value of their work was spoilt by an atmosphere of rivalry among the local societies thus engaged. Again, energies were addressed to relieving secondary, instead of primary wants. There were bible and prayer-book societies and a host of others. As Dickens puts it:-

"Our Parish is very prolific in ladies' charitable institutions. In winter, when wet feet are common, and colds not scarce, we have the ladies' soup distribution society, the ladies' coal distribution society; in summer, when stone fruits flourish

and stomach aches prevail, we have the ladies' dispensary and the ladies' sick visitation committee; and all the year round we have the ladies' child's examination society, the ladies' bible and prayer-book circulation society, and the ladies' childbed-linen monthly loan society. The two latter are decidedly the most important; whether they are productive of more benefit than the rest, it is not for us to say, but we can take upon ourselves to affirm, with the utmost solemnity, that they create a greater stir and more bustle, than all the others put together."<sup>1</sup> An account of a charity dinner in aid of "Indigent Orphans' Friends' Benevolent Institution"<sup>2</sup> is a mixture of humour and pathos. The Committee is present and fully conscious of its importance; the orchestra, the waiters, the wine list - everything is just right. When the dinner is over, the Treasurer bids the guests charge their glasses and drink to the health of Her Majesty who has commanded that the Treasurer of Her Majesty's household should pay to the society "the annual donation of twenty five pounds in aid of the funds of the society!" All drink lustily and "professional gentlemen" sing "God save the Queen." Next comes the most important toast of the evening "Prosperity to the charity" after which the charity children, specially lined up against the walls for the occasion, retire. When the secretary adjusts his spectacles and proceeds to read the report and list of subscriptions, tremendous applause attends the

1. Sketches by Boz: P.52

2. Ibid: P.203 (Chap. XIX).

enumeration of each individual's name who has denoted a guinea. Each of the officials of the institution is toasted. Finally, the author brings the account to an end:

"We can only entreat our readers not to imagine, because we have attempted to extract some amusement from a charity dinner, that we are at all disposed to underrate, either the excellence of the benevolent institutions with which London abounds, or the estimable motives of those who support them," which, one believes was the very opposite of his true intentions. It seems quite obvious that Dickens was clearly opposed to charity which was bestowed grudgingly, especially when it was closely linked to patronage.

Passing mention may be made of Dickens' attitude towards the aristocracy. Some critics declare that he never drew a true picture of an aristocrat, and if Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht represent his criteria, one is compelled to agree with them. He tells his readers about the snobbery of the class;<sup>1</sup> he shows them spending all their time drinking, and drunk,<sup>2</sup> and gives a disgusting picture of their revels.<sup>3</sup> He satirises "men of blood"<sup>4</sup> and the aristocracy.<sup>5</sup> The finishing touch is given when he writes:

"Everybody said that now, when a Baronet and the son

1. Pickwick Papers: PP. 49 & 50

2. Sketches by Boz: P.484

3. Nicholas Nickleby: P.398

4. David Copperfield : P.349

5. Old Curiosity Shop: P.394

of a Baronet played at skittles, the country was coming round again, as fast as it could come."<sup>1</sup> For an approximate picture of the aristocracy of this period, Disraeli in his "Young England Novels" is a more reliable painter. Disraeli knew the aristocracy, he moved in their circle; Dickens did not, therefore most of his heroes come from the strata of society with which he was familiar - the middle and lower classes.

### Lawyers.

Dickens believes that everyone should be employed. All his characters are occupied, and in the end even Micawber makes good in Australia. But as a class, he appears to have no faith in lawyers. Mr. Abel's son in The Old Curiosity Shop is one of the notable exceptions. His disgust for legal corruption is seen in Copperfield's conversation with Mr. Spewlow in which the latter outlines how much money a solicitor could get for himself where there was a disputed will to decide the ownership of "a neat little estate of thirty or forty thousand pounds."<sup>2</sup> There were "pretty pickings" in the way of arguments in every stage of the proceedings, evidence upon interrogatory and counter-interrogatory with the possibility of a small fortune arising out of an appeal to the Delegates and then to the Lords. Then, of course, there was always the bill of costs to be presented. We are initiated into all the slippery and doubtful mazes of the Commons, the Consistory, the Arches, the Delegates

1. The Chimes: (Christmas Stories) P.161

2. David Copperfield: P.361

and the Ecclesiastical Delegates. When Copperfield finally turns his back on the legal profession "there dropped in, every now and then, an obliging proposal from one of the numerous outsiders always lurking about the Commons, to practise under cover of my name (if I would take the necessary steps remaining to make a proctor of myself), and pay me a percentage on the profits. But I declined these offers; being already aware that there were plenty of such covert practitioners in existence, and considering the Commons quite bad enough, without my doing anything to make it worse."<sup>1</sup> In these novels, he repeatedly returns to the attack - Mr. Brass, his sister Miss Brass (a little more unscrupulous than her brother), Messrs. Snitchley & Craggs and Uriah Heep, are notorious examples. Perhaps indisputable facts lead Dickens to form the opinion "that they now took a shot at this Plaintiff, and now aimed a chop at that Defendant, now made a heavy charge at an estate in Chancery, and now had some light skirmishing among an irregular body of small debtors, just as the occasion served, and the enemy happened to present himself."<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, though Snitchley and Craggs (legal partners) "were the best friends in the world, and had a real confidence in one another" between them there linked an undercurrent of suspicion which their respective wives played upon and nursed.

In the view of Dickens, lawyers were a dishonest professional group of social parasites that fattened themselves

1. David Copperfield: P.789

2. The Battle of Life: (Christmas Stories) P.323

on their unfortunate victims and added to the load of misery and impoverishment from which diseases, so many suffered.

So far, there has been an attempt to list the important and glaring evils existing in society that Dickens attacked.

Already, mention has been made of individual shortcomings that did not escape his keen observation and his ready pen, and before completing this chapter these shortcomings deserve some further comment.<sup>1</sup> Man, in Dickens' opinion, is a creature with a capacity for good and evil, and he sometimes embraces the latter through personal choice, uncongenial environment and weakness of will, as was the case of the condemned son, who pursues a career of crime without a thought of the voluntary privations, insult and violence his mother had endured on his account.<sup>2</sup>

There is, too, the spendthrift son portrayed in the character of Michael Warden Esq. who spends his inheritance, wasting, pawning, borrowing and selling what assets remain. At the age of thirty he is almost ruined, except that Snitchley and Craggs offer to direct his estate for six or seven years until it is completely cleared of liability.

Most of the unhappiness in The Old Curiosity Shop is brought about by gambling which in the end develops into a mania from which it is almost impossible to break free. It seems to matter little that the old man's motive was to set up his granddaughter Nell as a lady of ample means. His vice brings more

1. See chapter on the "Philosophy of Charles Dickens"

2. Pickwick Papers: P.115

misery to any other character in the novel. In spite of heavy reverses, in spite of his granddaughter's plea that he should put away all thoughts of cards and gambling the old man replies:

"They must not be forgotten. We must make amends as soon as we can. Patience - patience, and we'll right thee yet. I promise thee. Lose today, win tomorrow. And nothing can be won without anxiety and care - nothing."<sup>1</sup> At this stage it has become a curse. It made no difference that the old man hoped to win money from "men who lived by plunder, profligary and riot"; that he began when it occurred to him how little he had saved, and how long a time it took to save at all; nor did it matter that he "found no pleasure in it and expected none". The indulgence of this vice but lead to "anxious days and sleepless nights; loss of health and peace of mind, and gain of feebleness and sorrow!"<sup>2</sup>

The case against debt is outlined by references to Micawber and Newman Noggs. Richard Swiveller develops this failing until it becomes almost a fine art:

"I enter in this little book the names of the streets that I can't go down while the shops are open. This dinner today closes Long Acre. I bought a pair of boots in Great Queen Street last week, and made that no thoroughfare too. There's only one avenue to the Strand left open now, and I shall have to stop that tonight with a pair of gloves. The roads are closing so fast in

1. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.297

2. See The Old Curiosity Shop: PP. 106 and 107

every direction, that in about a month's time ..... I shall have to go three or four miles out of town to get over the way."<sup>1</sup>

Drunkenness receives comment. Many references to this vice are to be found, and although in some instances it is shown to result from poverty despair and unhappiness. The familiar picture of drunkenness we find when this vice is the topic is:

"A slouching, moody, drunken sloven, wasted by intemperance and vice, and with his matted hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder; but with some traces on him too, of having been a man of good proportion and good features in his youth."<sup>2</sup>

Even if the individual contrives to steer clear of these vicious excesses, there are pitfalls which mar the sweetness of the character of an individual. One of these is boastfulness, which reminds a reader of Pickwick of Mr. Winkle's performance when he went skating on the ice, and Mr. Pickwick's righteous indignation. Also there is the familiar incident of the 'crack shot' who went rook shooting to prove himself worse in the handling of firearms than a sincere novice.

There is also snobbery, practised by people who feel superior to others because of a liberal possession of material goods and an exalted station in life. Miss Monflathers disliked Miss Edwards because the latter was a dependent on her school, being motherless, poor, apprenticed at the school and taught, boarded and lodged "for nothing". Miss Edwards shows kindness to Little Nell

1. Ibid: P.87

2. The Chimes: (Christmas Stories) P.166

and Miss Monflathers reproves her thus:-

"Is it not a most remarkable thing, that you have an attachment to the lower classes which always draws you to their sides; or, rather, is it not a most extraordinary thing that all I say and do will not wean you from propensities which your original station in life have unhappily rendered habitual to you, you extremely vulgar - minded girl?"<sup>1</sup>

Finally, although Daniel Quilp may have been a demon in mind and in body, he appears to have dispersed the gossipers, who collected in his absence at his wife's house, with the blessing of Charles Dickens.

1. The Old Curiosity Shop: P.312

An assessment of the philosophy of Chas. Dickens

In 1937 T.A.Jackson added, to the already existing critical literature of Chas. Dickens and his works, a volume, the main aim of which is an endeavour to present the author as a Radical.<sup>1</sup> One cannot quarrel with the label Radical when the original meaning of the word is implied. The term had a fairly precise political connotation in the nineteenth century - one who did not accept the state of society as it existed and wanted to get down to the roots. It did not necessarily mean a socialist. Since that time the term has suffered considerable misuse at the hands of those who find it a convenient name for either a socialist or a political rebel against established government. For a person, too, whose sympathies lie on the side of Communism and kindred political creeds. It is as possible for a scholar to read into an author's meaning what he expects to find as it has been possible for certain Russian criticisms of Dickens to find in his books sanction of, and support for Communism. Speaking of Forster's<sup>2</sup> opinion of Dickens as a reformer, T.A.Jackson writes:- "He sees, as it most just, that with Dickens the desire to set right what was wrong, was the paramount cause of his attack. But since, unlike Dickens, he sees only incidental social abuses awaiting remedy, and does not see, as Dickens

1. Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical - (Lawrence and Wishart) London.

2. "That he desired to set right what was wrong, that he held no abuse to be unimprovable, that he left none of the evils named exactly as he found them, and that to influences drawn from his writings were due not a few of the salutary changes which marked the age in which he lived"

Forster: Life of Dickens, Book XI, III

came to see, that it was not incidentals only, but bourgeois society itself, that constituted the wrong, Forster cannot see the cause of Dickens' growing bitterness - his growing sense that the only possible remedy for so vast an evil, that of complete social revolution, was one that then seemed completely unattainable." When in the same chapter Jackson goes on to draw out points of resemblance between Dickens and Marx and Engels, one is compelled to conclude that he considers Communism the only remedy, and subtly presents Dickens as a champion of its cause. The picture of Jackson's ideas is made more complete to the reader by means of catch phrases - "exploiting the labourers", "empty-minded bourgeois" and "division of labour" - phrases present in Engels: Anti - Duhring, Chap. III, iii. One finds no evidence that from his works, Dickens had Communist sympathies, as will be seen when we turn to our understanding of this writer.

Another critic, Humphrey House, has presented his views on "Dickens' attitude to reform, to the relations between employers and employed, and to what Bagehot called his 'sentimental radicalism'." House's criticisms include a representation of Dickens with no notion of finance, of too much sympathy for debtors and too little for creditors ..... and so it goes on. This critic appears to lose sight of the fact that Dickens was a novelist, not a thinker or an economist. His duty was to get the thinkers and the economists, through disgust with conditions as they were, to work out a just plan that would bring happiness to all classes. But in his novels, he could and did criticise what he thought was the inhuman plan of Malthus and the supporters of the Poor Law. To try and discover what exactly Dickens was trying to teach, it is useful to examine the speeches of the characters in his book which he obviously meant to

be good, and the writer's own frequent philosophical musings and asides. This appears to be the only way of arriving at a personal conviction of the truth.

We already have seen the generally accepted picture, painted by Forster, of the author's childhood. From his works there are glimpses of another Dickens - hardworking and disciplined. It is impossible to overlook the intensity which his writing reveals, a steady concentration on the job in hand. Though often introspective Dickens was never self-centred as his painstaking descriptions indicate. He was capable of great anger and one can imagine that on occasion he was moody. Nevertheless, in spite of whatever human weaknesses he possessed he carried about a heart big with love for his fellowmen and sympathy for the suffering.

Dickens possessed a burning and intense love for England. In every chapter he wrote, whether sad or gay, in exposure of evil or in praise of virtue, one has the impression that his ambition is to make this country a fit and beautiful home for all Englishmen. All men cannot be equal in every respect, but weak and strong have reciprocal responsibilities. This fact is nowhere more apparent than in this passage which is here reproduced at some length:

"Oh! if those who rule the destinies of nations would but remember this - if they would but think how hard it is for the very poor to have engendered in their hearts, that love of home from which all domestic virtues spring, when they live in dense and squalid masses where social decency is lost, or rather never found, - if they would but turn aside from the wide thoroughfares and great houses,

and strive to improve the wretched dwellings in byways where only Poverty may walk - many low roofs would point more truly to the sky, than the loftiest steeple that now rears proudly up from the midst of guilt and crime and horrible disease, to mock them by its contrast. In hollow voices from Workhouse, Hospital and Jail, this truth is preached from day to day, and has been proclaimed for years. It is no light matter - no outcry from the working vulgar - no mere question of the people's health and comforts that may be whistled down on Wednesday nights. In love of home, the love of country has its rise; and who are the truer patriots or the better in time of need - those who venerate the land, owning its wood, and stream, and earth, and all that they produce? or those who love their country, boasting not a foot of ground in its wide domain?"<sup>1</sup> But in this respect, one is reminded that there was nothing distinctive in Dickens' emphasis on country as the Victorians were saying it endlessly. From this love of country in general, the author proceeds to consider the family social unit, the happiness of which is to be found in home life and love, and the revelation of another strong Victorian sentiment.<sup>2</sup> He continually repeats his conviction that home is the starting point towards complete happiness. Of Emily's home in Mr. Peggotty's converted boat, Mr. Omer, the undertaker, says -

"She has made a home out of that old boat, Sir, that stone and marble cannot beat"<sup>3</sup>

1. The Old Curiosity Shop Chap. XXXVIII, P.372
2. See: Victorian family albums
3. David Copperfield. Chap. XXX, P.409

The cynical Tackleton remarks to John the carrier - "Bah! what's home? Four walls and a ceiling!"<sup>1</sup> Dickens answers for the Victorians: "O Home, so true to us, so often slighted in return be lenient to them that turn away from thee"<sup>2</sup> The author's benediction is bestowed upon Mrs. Jetterby when she confesses to her husband Dolf - "I thought there was no air about you; but there is, and it's the air of home, and that's the purest and best there is, and God bless home once more, and all belonging to it, Dolf!"<sup>3</sup>

Home is scarcely complete without a family, the author thinks, and so Abel Garland and his wife reared a family "because any propagation of goodness and benevolence is no small addition to the aristocracy of nature, and no small subject of rejoicing for mankind at large"<sup>4</sup> Children he regards as more precious than wealth and pride, and affection each for the other are common in a self-sacrificing mother and a dutiful and successful son.

Human happiness does not consist of the overflowing stock of human possessions for Gabriel Grub realises that "men who worked hard, and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy."<sup>5</sup> The poor Nicklebys were "social and happy, while the rich Nickleby was alone and miserable"<sup>6</sup>

1 The Cricket on the Hearth (Christmas Books) P.220

2 The Battle of Life (Christmas Stories) P.333

3 The Haunted Man (Christmas Stories) P.469

4 The Old Curiosity Shop P.709

5 Pickwick Papers P.483

6 Nickolas Nickleby P.541

This same distinction is shown in the comparative happiness of the lives of the Cratchit family and that of miserly Scrooge. The success of a happy life cannot be judged by standards of riches or greatness. The Doctor's ward, Alfred Heathfield, is successful on account of the conscientious performance of his duty as a physician, in watching of sick beds, and "in his daily knowledge of gentleness and goodness."<sup>1</sup>

In order to reach this goal, Dickens preaches tolerance, sympathy and charity, good humour which destroys anger, honest joy in labour, pity for the unfortunate, a simple life and Hope. The last named is described as "young, fresh, buoyant, vigorous and bright despite years of work and poverty."<sup>2</sup>

Misfortune in life may be due to circumstances over which we have no control and for which we cannot be held responsible, as well as to vice, into which we sink through weakness of character and through choice. Micawber waits for something to turn up, whilst Daniel Quilp, of his own free will, elects to be cruel. The former is aware that if a man had twenty pounds a year for his income, and spent nineteen pounds nineteen shillings and sixpence, he would be happy, but if he spent twenty pounds one shilling he would be miserable. After admitting as much to young Copperfield, Micawber significantly borrows a shilling from him and spends it for porter.

For Dickens, Religion and living appear to be closely associated. He exposes the thin veneer which covers Mr. Murdstone's

1. The Battle of Life (Christmas Stories) P.369

2. The Chimes (Christmas Stories) P.113

real religion, despite his apparent religious zeal, and Kit's mother's regular attendance at the Little Bethel meetings is treated with indulgent satire. In David Copperfield the case is clear - Mr. Murdstone "delivers public addresses and it is said ..... the darker tyrant he has lately been, the more ferocious is his doctrine ..... that what such people miscall their religion, is a vent for their bad humours and arrogance ..... they are very free in consigning everybody who dislikes them to perdition." <sup>1</sup> The crux of religion to Dickens is that one should do as he would be done by. Clemency tells the lawyer Mr. Snitchey "Do as you - would - be - done by." His retort "Do, or you'll be done brown, you mean." <sup>2</sup> Every man's religion is determined by his own free will since "Man's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead. But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change." <sup>3</sup>

According to the Dickensian idea of practical religion, the lower order participates in the bounty of the rich, and here we have a blend of moral philosophy which points the way to a social philosophy both of which are cemented by all embracing goodwill. Dickens, it has been mentioned previously, does not write as though he approves of a wholesale levelling of society to a classless order.

1 David Copperfield Chap. LIX, P. 7778-9 (For further views on Religion see The Letters of Chas. Dickens Vol. II, Chapman and Hall, London 1882 - i 47, ii 123, 184, 202, 219, 234, 366, 373, 417)

2 The Battle of Life (Christmas Stories) P.317

3 Christmas Carol P.142

There is nowhere the slightest suggestion that all men should have property in common. On the contrary, the reader is continually reminded that personal industry and virtue bring their own rewards. What seems to lurk at the back of his mind is a benevolent state of Christain feudalism - s state of society where there are no drones and in which there is no room for vice for all will be happily employed. Nicholas Nickleby achieves success, more through good fortune, but also because he is industrious, ambitious and not afraid of hard work. The same applies to Tim Linkinwater. Dickens is continually referring to past incidents as though they were of topical interest at the time of writing, as for instance his enthusiasm over the stage coaching days when in effect, the new wonder was the locomotive. In matters like this he shows marked conservative tendencies, and so one feels tempted to assume that because he was not satisfied with the state of society that the industrial revolution had brought into being, and lacking the constructive vision to project his mind a hundred years ahead, he naturally preferred to regard the feudal past as a kind of golden age which it were desirable to reintroduce. But there must be an aristocracy of worth instead of an aristocracy of stupid snobbery. The evils of laissez-faire must be removed and warm human emotions must govern social and economic life. There will be rich men but there should be no case of poverty and need in a community of kindness and love. He approves of Mr.Pickwick and the Cheerybles whom he confesses to have drawn straight from life, as also Kit's master Mr.Garland. A feast in the great hall of the mansion is accompanied by a feast in the servant's hall; there is a Pickwick and a Sam Weller, a Master Humphrey's Clock and a

Mr. Weller's Watch. Some writers refer to Dickens as "a middle class snob", but in his works snobbish tendencies are rare. True, Nicholas Nickleby says to Sir Mulberry Hawk - "I am the son of a country gentleman, your equal in birth and education, and your superior I trust in everything besides." It is more charitable to regard such a speech as issuing from one character to another in a personal quarrel and in circumstances befitting the outburst. On the other hand, when the Cheeryble Brothers invite to a feast all connected with their warehouse, "the sturdiest and jolliest subordinate claims:

"We're allowed to take a liberty once a year, gen'lemen, and if you please we'll take it now." The subordinate proceeds to praise the "free, generous-spirited masters" who treat them handsomely, thanks them for their goodness and wishes that "they may live long and die happy!"<sup>1</sup>

Benevolence must be repaid by honest joy in labour, and of this virtue, Tim Linkinwater is held up as an example. By faithful service over a long period, he works his way up steadily from clerk in the office to partner in the firm of the Cheerybles. Kit is faithful, not only to the Garlands, who employ him later on, but to the old man and his granddaughter Nell. When Mr. Garland pays him his quarter's salary, he says "Christopher here's your money, and you have earned it well."<sup>2</sup>

2 The Old Curiosity Shop Chap. XXXIX, P.382

1 Nicholas Nickleby Chap. XXXVII P.565

Even Old Toby is worth his salt. "He loved to earn his money .... Toby was very poor, and couldn't well afford to part with a delight - that he was worth his salt."<sup>1</sup>

There are other threads in the pattern of his philosophy which illuminate a disposition of kindness. There is no excuse for war - it brings unhappiness to victor and vanquished alike, nor can empty glory compensate for untold misery and tragedy to the individual. Writing of a battle, the futility of conflict is described thus, "On this ground ..... so many lives were lost, that within my recollection, generations afterwards, a churchyard full of bones, and dust of bones, and chips of cloven skulls, has been dug from underneath our feet here. Yet not a hundred people in that battle knew for what they fought, or why; ... Not half a hundred people were the better for the gain or loss ... nobody ever knew anything distinct, about it, but the mourners of the slain."<sup>2</sup> In short, Dickens lays it down that "violent deeds live after men and traces of war and bloodshed survive in mournful shapes long after those who worked the desolation are but atoms of earth themselves." Retributions overtakes the wrongdoer with a sure and stealthy step.

Sometimes people - or a class of people - commit violence, not primarily because events dictate these deeds. Meg and an abject crowd loiter in the snow until an officer appointed to

<sup>1</sup> The Chimes (Christmas Stories) P.110

<sup>2</sup> The Battle of Life (Christmas Stories) P.311

disperse public charity ("the lawful charity; not that once preached upon a mount") directs them here and there, tells them 'Go to such a place' to that one 'Come next week' and they are passed from hand to hand, from house to house until, wearied they are either forced to lie down and die or "start up and rob and so become higher criminals whose claims allow of no delay."<sup>1</sup> Nancy tells Rose Maylie that people who have friends to care for them and keep them in childhood, and shield them from hunger, cold, riot, drunkenness and prostitution have much for which they should be thankful.

Selfishness is another hateful vice, hateful not only in money grabbers but in those who are unwilling to share more food and drink than they can comfortably consume. All through his books, Dickens breathes an atmosphere of good cheer and plenty - well loaded tables and bumpers of wine - which is the hallmark of hospitality and generosity. But even without riches and luxury, there is no joy to equal the pleasures of a simple life. Traddles is never financially comfortable in the sense of owning a big bank balance, but he can go out for a walk in the evenings and find enjoyment in the streets, look in the jewellers' shops and select what he would buy his wife if he could afford it, stroll into the squares and great streets - in short, happiness comes from within. True happiness is to be achieved through labour, earnestness and contentment.

1 The Chimes (Christmas Stories) P.182

Copperfield is admonished by his aunt - "Never be mean in anything; never be false; never be cruel. Avoid those three vices, Trot, and I can always be hopeful of you."<sup>1</sup> In the same Chapter Micawber gives voice to what has become a hackneyed saying "Never do tomorrow what you can do today. Procrastination is the thief of time."<sup>2</sup>

A social community has no use for people who continually mope and fret. Few people who have read David Copperfield will forget the depressing Mrs. Gummidge and her continual complaining. On the other hand, merriment should come from the heart. "The benevolent clergyman looked pleasantly on; ..... and thought the merriment was rather boisterous, still it came from the heart and not from the lips: and this is the right sort of merriment, after all."<sup>3</sup>

In Dickens' novels, good always triumphs over evil and comes to acknowledge its supremacy. To Charles Cheeryble, Ralph Nickleby confesses "Men say you are truth itself Sir. You speak truth now, at all evants, and I'll not contradict you."<sup>4</sup>

Much has been written in an attempt to present Dickens' true attitude to the government of his times, and to Parliament in general. The question can be answered not only in consideration of what has been written, but also in reference to the impressions his parliamentary experience left on his mind.

1 David Copperfield. Chap. XV, P. 209

2 Ibid P. 163

3 Pickwick Papers. Chap. VI, P. 110

4 Nicholas Nickleby. Chap. LIX, P. 887

As to his experiences in parliament, as a reporter to a newspaper, he speaks for himself -

"I went into the gallery of the House of Commons as a parliamentary reporter when I was a boy .... I have worn my knees by writing on them on the old back-row of the old gallery of the old House of Commons; and I have worn my feet by standing to write in a preposterous pew in the old House of Lords."<sup>1</sup> On his opinion of Parliamentary business, Forster writes - "I will add that his observation while there, had not led him to form any high opinion of the House of Commons or its heroes; and that, of the Pickwickian sense which so often takes the place of common sense in our legislature, he omitted no opportunity of declaring his contempt at every part of his life."<sup>2</sup> Even later on, when he had achieved success and recognition, the early impressions of parliament persisting, Dickens declined to enter parliament on more occasion than one. In a letter to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton and dated Thursday, Twentieth July, 1865, his contempt is unmistakable - "..... I shudder at the thought of such life as political life. Would there not seem to be something horribly rotten in the system of it, when one stands amazed how any man, not forced into it by position, as you are - can bear to live it?"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Speech delivered on presiding at the second annual dinner of the Newspaper Press Fund - May 1865

<sup>2</sup> Life of Chas. Dickens: John Forster (Everymans) Vol. I, Chap 4

<sup>3</sup> See Letters of Chas Dickens (Pub. Chapman & Hall) Vol. II  
1882 - 41, 48, 49

A communication to Mr. James Field indicates that Dickens takes a mischievous delight in giving his critics the idea that he was a Radical, that their anger amused him, and that with politicians as a class he had no patience. "I hope you may have met with the little touch of Radicalism I gave them at Birmingham in the words of Buckle? With pride I observe that it makes the regular political traders, of all sorts, perfectly mad. Such was my intention, as a grateful acknowledgment of having been misrepresented."<sup>1</sup> One of Dickens' letters shows how closely linked together were his philosophy and his personal religious beliefs. Writing to the Rev. Thomas Robinson<sup>2</sup> a dissenting minister, he confesses that he finds himself unable to agree with the religious body to which that gentleman belongs. But that, in the love of virtue and hatred of vice, in the detestation of cruelty and encouragement of gentleness and mercy, all men who endeavour to be acceptable to their Creator in any way, may freely agree. That there are more roads to Heaven than any sect believes. He ends: "While you teach in your walk of life the lessons of tenderness you have learnt in sorrow, trust me that in mine, I will pursue cruelty and oppression, the enemies of God's creatures of all codes and creeds, so long as I have the energy of thought and the power of giving it utterance." These are not the utterances of a red-hot Radical nor of a revolution preaching communist. For him the lessons of the New Testament were all the guide necessary for ordering human conduct.

<sup>1</sup> To Mr. James T. Fields, Friday Fourteenth January, 1870

<sup>2</sup> Thursday, April 8th, 1841

"Half the misery and hypocrisy of the Christian world arises, (as I take it) from a stubborn determination to refuse the New Testament as a sufficient guide in itself, and to force the Old Testament into alliance with it - whereof comes all manner of camel-swallowing and gnat-straining."<sup>1</sup> This view of life may appear unpractical to many, but one does not have to be a staunch Christian to realise that there is much in New Testament teaching that is good philosophy for everyday life. Today the Christian Church complains that the nervous and unsettled state of the world is due to the fact that men believe that religion is a thing apart, and should not be allowed to intrude into politics, commerce and social conduct. With such a view of religion - not a religion that owed allegiance to one particular sect, but a world-wide fraternity of believers in the laws of love, charity, forbearance, pity for the poor, a generous disposition to share our worldly goods, of feeding the hungry and visiting the sick, it is simple to understand Dickens' violent disgust with a Parliament that, in his opinion, wasted time in wordy and unfruitful debate while Ignorance, Want and Vice, like wolves, roamed unchecked among the people. If the New Testament preached the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, it seemed incredible that a Christian country should prefer the comfortless and disturbing doctrine of Malthus and the extreme selfishness of laissez-faire.

<sup>1</sup> Letter written to Mr. Frank Stone A.R.A. - dated Monday, Thirteenth December, 1858

We cannot, therefore, agree with any critic who holds that Dickens could expose abuses and urge reforms the clue to which he never left in any of his works. Christian philosophy is concerned with directing men's actions by providing a deep and abiding moral motive - it never presented a hard and fast code similar to the statutes of Hammurabi or the ten commandments. It is the spirit of the New Testament that is introduced into the Christmas stories and makes all the difference in character between Scrooge, the miser, and Scrooge the benefactor. "How our sublime and so - different Christian religion is to be administered in the future I cannot pretend to say, but that the Church's hand is at its own throat I am fully convinced ..... as many forms of consignment to eternal damnation as there are articles, and all in one forever quarrelling body - the Master of the New Testament puts out of sight .... varying interpretation without end - these things cannot last."<sup>1</sup> And so in the last letter to his youngest son on the day of his departure for Australis he advises:

"Never take a mean advantage of anyone in any transaction, and never be hard upon people who are in your power. Try to do to others, as you would have them do to you, and do not be discouraged if they fail sometimes .....

I put a New Testament among your books ..... it is the best book that ever was and it teaches you the best lessons by which any human creature who tries to be truthful and faithful to duty can possibly be guided.

<sup>1</sup> Letter to M. De Cerjat - Tuesday Twenty-Fifth October, 1864

I impress upon you the truth and beauty of the Christian religion as it came from Christ himself, and the impossibility of your going far wrong if you humbly but heartily respect it." <sup>1</sup>

It was in the practical belief of this philosophy that the great writer dedicated his life and talent in the service of those who hungered, suffered persecution, imprisonment, cruelty and need.

<sup>1</sup> To Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens : 1868

Chapter VConclusion

History records that all far-reaching movements, be they national or international, have grown as a result of the labours of a small group, be they thinkers or otherwise, of which there can be distinguished one outstanding figure by whose forcefulness and personality the character of the movement is moulded. In this manner, one is led to associate the rugged personality of Martin Luther with the spirit of the Reformation in Europe, Abraham Lincoln with slavery in America, Wilberforce, Buxton and Clarkson as pioneers in the British Empire, Elizabeth Fry and English Prison Reform and Charles Dickens as the friend and champion of the underdog. Frequent references to J.B.Priestley as "the modern Dickens" is partial proof that Dickens has become an English institution. The term "English Institution" has become so hackneyed as to be extremely difficult and embarrassing to explain - especially to a Britisher. For a foreigner, who is spared the awkwardness of introspection, the task is easier. An Englishman's sensitive emotions are so deep that he seldom speaks about them. But if the glory of the British Empire, as a political and economic force, were to disappear overnight, and the outward and visible symbols of majesty and pomp were to be removed, British ideals of justice, tolerance, fairplay and the ability to treat triumph and disaster just the same would never fail to impress an admiring world. In my opinion, these ideals have influenced the British character and way of life, and they abound in the pages of English Literature.

It is because Dickens in his own way, advanced popular opinion from the narrow boundaries of selfish aims to the consideration of the needs of the unfortunate, with a view to ameliorating existing conditions that he is recognised as an institution as regards social reform. I would venture the opinion that Shakespeare and Dickens are more popular to people outside England than any other two English writers it is possible to select. It is doubtful whether any other writers have been paid as much critical attention by foreign scholars. If this is true, there must be some irresistible quality in their work which lifts them out of the category of outstanding national characters and elevates them to the class of the very few universal immortals.

Though Dickens is regarded as an institution, of all the great writers of English literature, he has received the smallest attention from biographers, scholars and critics. As Edmund Wilson puts it, the middle class regard him as "a familiar joke, a favourite dish and a Christmas ritual."<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful whether in some quarters he is even considered as a great artist and a social critic. One, in time, gets accustomed to hearing that his characters are caricatures, and occasionally, in conversation, there is dropped a grudging admission that Pickwick was one of the best things he ever wrote; George Gissing's work on Dickens is acknowledged to be among the best critical works on the subject, and G.K.Chesterton is regarded as an authority.

1. See: The Wound and the Bow

Edmund Wilson believes that some of Chesterton's conclusions are excellent; but that there are others which "melt away into that peculiar pseudo - poetic booziness which verbalises with large conceptions and ignores the most obtrusive actualities." Between Chesterton and Bernard Shaw the reader finds himself in a whirl. A jolly Dickens is the ideal of the former while the latter extols Little Dorrit as typical of the gloomier Dickens. In the most recent re-issue of Great Expectations, Shaw's preface depicts Dickens as almost a Marxist; but he holds that "Dickens never had time to form a philosophy or to frame a faith." It has already been mentioned that there hardly appears to be a definite universal conception of Dickens.

The fact that, as a young author, Dickens' fame was instantaneous, is no longer news. Trollope writes "It was manifest that he could make not only his own fortune, but that of his publishers, and that he was a literary hero bound to be worshipped by all literary grades of men, down to the "devils" of the printing office."<sup>1</sup>

In the first Chapter, it has been pointed out that the social novel owed its birth in the nineteenth century, mainly to the works of Dickens, Disraeli and Mrs. Gaskell.

<sup>1</sup> English Men of Letters (Thackeray) Anthony Trollope -  
Macmillan & Co. Ltd. London 1909

Disraeli and Mrs. Gaskell approached their work more from the intellectual point of view than from the angle of righteous indignation, which is characteristic of the genius who has not only felt and suffered, but also makes his reading public feel and suffer with those whose cause he championed. All three social writers differ in their individual temperament as to the understanding of social problems.

Charles Dickens was temperamentally fitted for his life work. The childhood humiliations, which are so well outlined in Forster's biography as well as Dickens' biography in the story of David Copperfield, strongly influenced the author's character as he reached maturity. As a result, he pursued success with an earnestness that has been seldom equalled or surpassed. Once the goal had been reached, it is natural that in the consciousness of his great gifts, he should reflect on the difficulties that had to be overcome and how easy it could be for an individual with less character to succumb to the unequal struggle and embrace a career of vice, robbery, violence and drunkenness. Although he writes as a representative of the petit - bourgeois - their sufferings and aspirations - he is particularly sympathetic to the lower order, for as a Londoner and a journalist, he was fully qualified to write about abuses with which he had grown so familiar. His beliefs in Christian Feudalism do not display any deep knowledge of industrial theories, nor does he probe into the new labour conditions. Very often Dickens lives in the past - his references to Rochester, Canterbury, the old London quarters and his love for stage coaches. Again and again his panacea for all social ills was charity - political, economic and individual.

The perfection of the individual will lead to the perfection of society. From what we have seen of his philosophy, we can imagine this excerpt from the New Testament recurring continually in his mind, "Faith, Hope and Charity - these three; but the greatest of these is Charity." But Charity, as Dickens understood it, was no mere condescending benevolence, a vague gesture arising out of a superiority complex. It was the result of a close and sympathetic identification of interests with the object of charity.

We may consider his view impracticable; but it was impracticable because few people have the moral courage and determination to live up to the ideals which they profess. The modern age which has extolled the rights of the individual has also sanctioned some of the worst forms of economic exploitation that the world has known. Therefore, if Dickens' theory is impracticable the obvious defect is not in the theory but in each individual that constitutes the political unit. Dickens expressed great faith in the rights and dignity of the individual, but more important still, each individual is considered with feelings of humanity. There is humanity in the way he describes coachmen in his portrait of Sam Weller and in his presentation of Joe Gargery, Kit's brother-in-law.

The general thesis of the novels is stress on poverty and riches and the implications arising out of the disparity. The 1837-50 period was the period of his prime, the period in which was published all the novels containing his essential teaching. His Christmas philosophy is considered to be his vague outline of his Christian social feudalism.

Some critics maintain that it was a philosophy which corresponded to the needs of an almost extinct society of personal relations, families and small-shop units. One finds it impossible to extol the excellence of Christian philosophy and at the same time subscribe to the objections to Dickens.

Against such a background, the author's hatred for the Tory aristocracy of his day becomes intelligible. He preaches the doctrine of solidarity, stresses, like Disraeli, the duties of the rich, and to the poor he offers advice to avoid violence and hate. There is nowhere any reference to Chartism and no suggestion of a political social doctrine. Like Carlyle, he thinks<sup>1</sup> revolution logical and inevitable unless the ruling class is prepared to shoulder their responsibility with charity to all. Utilitarianism and the doctrines of Malthus are strongly opposed.

Sensibility and imaginative power are harnessed to specific campaigns. For example he attacks the school system in Nicholas Nickleby and the poor house system in Oliver Twist. His attacks on the law arises from a disapproval of punishment and procedure, and includes the theory of divorce for the rich only, public executions, and the law as it affected debtors. Sometimes, although specific legal references are meant to be incidental, Dickens cannot resist the temptation to treat them as episodes.

<sup>1</sup> See Filer. The Chimes (Christmas Stories)  
Also Scrooge - Christmas Carol

As a result we are confronted with a few exaggerated pictures like Bardell V Pickwick in Pickwick Papers, and Brass and Selby in The Old Curiosity Shop. Dickens knew the public for which he wrote and he was able to carry them along with him. In many of the essential points he made, he was proved correct by contemporary events. The newspapers of the times, the debates in Parliament, even the literature of the period, teem with stories of unnecessary harshness to paupers. Old men, suddenly forced into the workhouse, were separated from their wives; mothers were separated from their infant children ..... In many workhouses the diet was insufficient for the bare sustenance of life; the medical men complained that they could not obtain adequate food for their patients. This is some proof that, as a writer, he exerted considerable influence in his day and he was a strong force on the side of reform. Factory Acts against the employment of child labour were certainly influenced by the revelations in Oliver Twist and in David Copperfield.

The methods Dickens adopted were best suited to his genius and to the community in which he lived. He acts by suggestion, hence the importance of his characters. There can be no doubt about which characters are meant to represent vice because they are often over-portrayed. Good characters, too, are often over-painted so that it would be impossible to miss the point of his teaching. Everywhere good and bad characters display a marked moral antithesis, and eventually lead to the clarification of his social thesis. Included in the gallery of unpleasant characters are

business and financial magnates (Dombey) and Utilitarian and orthodox political economy theorists (Ralph Nickleby, Scrooge and Chuzzlewit). He exposes false values of money and pride, and sees in the characters representative, enemies of human solidarity. Secondary bourgeois vices arise from snobs and senseless aristocrats who are shown to lack ordinary human feeling. He constantly correlates the social question to the moral question. One is given the impression that his description of what he hates is governed by his peculiar temperament and his emotion, for he appears to treat the aristocracy with unnecessary bitterness.

The pleasant characters in his book are more numerous than the unpleasant ones. Thus he inculcates love of the humble better than hate for the selfish. For the first time we encounter heroes of novels who are not gentlemen. For this he was attacked by his political opponents. "The upper crust was undoubtedly kneaded by reformers, who now rule the roast ..... The lower we descend in the social scale, the nearer we approach the brute, devoid of any thought beyond sensual necessities and gratifications, destruction, reproduction ..... It is perfectly natural that Oliver Twist should be the joy of the ten-pounders."<sup>1</sup> Another writer makes this observation:

"They tend to bring the poor into the fairest position for obtaining the sympathy of the rich and powerful, by displaying the goodness and fortitude often found amidst want and wretchedness, together with the intervals of joyousness and comic humour."<sup>2</sup>

1 The Quarterly: Vol. 6. June - October 1839; article IV

2 New Spirit of the Age: Horne, Vol. 1, P. 70

Even in their abject poverty, Dickens makes the poor sympathetic, and this is one of his greatest influences. Bob Cratchit and his family, Kit's mother, the schoolmaster friend of Little Nell and her grandfather, "Old Trotty" of The Chimes - they all possess the philosophy of Christmas. Among the rich there are a few exceptions, Pickwick, Wardle, and the Cheerybles, and in portraying them, Dickens approaches nearest to the Young England conception of Disraeli. "At bottom, all Dickens' novels come down to one sentence, this : Be kind and love; there is no true joy except in the emotions of the heart; sensibility is the whole of man".<sup>1</sup> In this way the union between sentiment and altruism is affected, and thus he attempts to restore the balance after the hard utilitarian influence in the name of his own temperament and that of Christian ethics.

If his understanding of industrial problems is shallow, he is aware of the sweated labour of the seamstresses in Madame Mantalini's establishment, although prior to this most of his humble types are clerks, governesses etc. who receive treatment as individuals. The essence of Dickens' social novels is a deep emotion towards the existing inequalities of life that can be remedied. His influence was deep, for not only was he able to present the case for reform, but he stirred the ruling class into activity by reminding them that something had to be done to avert revolution. He showed the average man as a citizen with right to sympathetic consideration in a land of changing economic conditions.

<sup>1</sup> Literature of England, Taine, V, 63

Gissing maintains:

"Nickleby taught him his power as a social reformer .....

again and again he repeated this success. Oliver Twist had a twofold moral purpose: to exhibit the evil working of the Poor Laws Act, and to give a faithful picture of the life of thieves in London. The motives hung well together for in Dickens' view the pauper system was directly responsible for excessive crime .... He is the thorough going advocate of the poor."<sup>1</sup>

George Orwell makes the interesting point that "Dickens seems to have succeeded in attacking everybody and antagonising nobody".<sup>2</sup> That his aim is to see a change in human nature and not so much society - "If men would behave decently the world could be decent." To present the case for children he stands inside the child's mind and gives vent to its secret agonies. The early nineteenth century was certainly not a period when much sympathy was wasted on children. Boys were hanged for theft and children were tried at the bar. A current doctrine was that of "breaking the child's spirit" and gives ideas of child discipline. Naughty children were sometimes compelled to eat their dinners under a gibbet from which the rotting corpse of a murderer was suspended. It is common knowledge that children as young as six worked under merciless masters in saw and cotton mills. So Dickens' sentiments find almost universal appeal and he is loved not because the sentiment is his own but because it is representative of the class for which he fought.

<sup>1</sup> The Immortal Dickens - George Gissing (Cecil Palmer) - London 1925, P.99

<sup>2</sup> See Inside the Whale - George Orwell - London 1940

"Chesterton considers him a brand of mediaevalism, T.A.Jackson regards him as a blood-thirsty revolutionary, Marxists considers him almost a Marxist, Catholics - almost a Catholic, Marxist and Catholics regard him as champion of proletariat, and finally Nadesha Krupskaya in a book on Lenin relates that Lenin considered Christmas Carol full of 'bourgeois sentiment'".<sup>1</sup> These conflicting claims are easily explained. Dickens rises above the level of narrow nationalism because of a real largeness of mind, a belief in the universal brotherhood of man, a negative political attitude and a lack of imperialistic feeling. He is so much an Englishman as to be unaware of it. For this reason, his social teaching gains a hearing in every land where English literature is read and appreciated. Individual or national violence is, to him, gross stupidity. For him, human progress is moral progress, though he cannot be called a Religious man as he is more concerned with practice than theory. Today more people than ever are responsive to the idea of human brotherhood, to which idea Dickens gave great impetus. The existence of a Dickens Fellowship today, that aims to spread the love of humanity which is the keynote of all his work, is sufficient proof that the author's influence is alive and active. Between 1903 and 1923, the membership expanded from 3,464 to 50,000.

end

At the/ of nearly two thousand years of civilised progress, mankind is only vaguely realising that the happiness or misery of the mass depends upon the welfare of the individual. After the two most

1 Inside the Whale - George Orwell - Chap. 1

bloody world wars in history, the world has begun to awaken to the lot of the ordinary common man of every country and to ensure for everyone, freedom from fear and freedom from want. Since Dickens' day much has been done - the welfare and proper education of children and young people is receiving a great deal of attention; there has recently been great indignation over the case of parents who have ill-treated their young daughter.<sup>1</sup> Great plans have been drawn up, and in some cases are in operation, to destroy slum life and all its attendant evils. There is talk of an enquiry into the possibility of abolishing capital punishment. There are prisons without bolts and bars.<sup>2</sup> Criminals who need it receive expert psychological treatment, and there are signs that bench and bar approach their duties with loftier aims. Of the evils which Dickens attacked there is a strong national consciousness in England now. The National Health Service Bill will ensure that every man, woman and child in the country will receive the best medical attention that their particular ailments require. All these are proof that the spirit of Dickens walks abroad. In this new spiritual consideration the people of other parts of the Empire share. It is no longer true to maintain that

1 See The Titchner case on behalf of Jean Titchner

2 Note: "The Birmingham Mail": 20.XI.1931 reports an interview with G.K.Chesterton during which he revealed "Captain Chesterton, the Governor of Coldbathfields Prison, a contemporary of Dickens, a great-grand uncle of mine, achieved some amelioration in the lot of the prisoners under his charge. He introduced the modern idea of comfort, cleanliness, orderly reform and discipline, into his prison. He was a great and close friend of Dickens; so some such beneficial result, arising out of the novelist's attacks, seems to have been realised.

the old spirit of Imperialism and Exploitation is unaltered. Crying abuses in the Empire, in India, in Africa and in the West Indies are receiving attention. Colonial development and welfare schemes to bring happiness and prosperity to millions, are in operation, schemes which involve millions of pounds from the pocket of the British taxpayer. The bitterest critics of the English will grudgingly admit their inherent fairness and devotion to an accepted principle. To the principle of sympathy for the underdog, help to the weak and justice to all men, this thesis maintains that by his life work, Dickens has contributed more than any other writer; and that he has preached that social reform and consideration, arising out of the inherent decency of mankind, is more than an academic ideal. As Field Marshal Smuts very aptly presents the case: "It is generally admitted that there are great economic and social evils. They have to be removed. This can and must be done without our resorting to new plans or new orders which may affect and undermine fundamental ideas and principles. Fundamentally, the world has no need of a new order or a new plan, but only of the honest and courageous application of the historic Christian idea. Our Christian civilization is based on eternal order, an endless plan in the message of Christ. His message is 'Cherish in love your fellow-man irrespective of race or language; cherish and keep the divine idea in your heart as the highest good.'<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> From an address delivered by Field-Marshal Smuts at Potchefstroom -  
March 25th 1942