

His glory will be lasting, in spite of the speculations of dealers and in spite of all the money which streams over his grave. At an hour when more than ever we must try to show French work and French genius at its best throughout the centuries, can we place Degas with those who kept the flame burning, an Ingres and a Delacroix, a Corot, a Millet, a Puvis de Chavannes? Those are really our masters, our masters of heart and spirit. Degas who equals them by his talent, has

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not their soul. He professes his art, and he cares little about the rest; he paints. And, limited to this rôle, he remains the greatest, the most trustworthy of teachers. Ingres and Delacroix, drawing and color, he has combined them; only instead of *l'Apothéose d'Homer* or *l'Apollon vainqueur*, he painted *Danseuses à la barre*. Is it not foolish to want anything more? Perhaps I have already spoken too much about him; 'critics,' he said once, 'explain art without understanding it.'

THE DICKENS CIRCLE*

BY REBECCA WEST

It has been Mr. Leys's object to make a book about Charles Dickens's friends which shall be a useful auxiliary to *Forster's Life*, and in this he has succeeded in spite of the fact that he himself is not an artist and has little understanding of the spirit or process of art. There are just two ways in which the book suffers from this lack on the part of the author. To an artist all human qualities are dear; and to him incongruities in character are a matter for happy deliberation, as the pattern on a butterfly's wing is to an entomologist. An artist biographer would not be afraid of admitting that Dickens, as well as being a great genius and a lovable man, was underbred. He would have been bound to admit it as an explanation of various flaws in Dickens's work. Those preposterous descriptions of the weather that pre-

face and deface so many of his chapters: 'It was a cold night: so cold that . . . that . . . that . . .' and so on, are inexplicable in the austere and splendid artist that Dickens really was, until one considers that they are the exact literary counterparts of the gestures of an old style commercial traveler who comes in out of the cold into the warm bar parlor, puffing and blowing and stamping and rubbing his hands with unnecessary noise and violence. And the artist would have noted without repulsion that Dickens, like all underbred men, was constantly picking quarrels. But Mr. Leys, not being an artist, and consequently not understanding that a man can be lovable and noble although he has hardly a genteel quality to his name, refuses to admit this simple explanation of Dickens's constant estrangements from his friends, and is constantly foisting on us preposterous excuses for his behavior that

* *The Dickens Circle*. By J. W. T. Leys. Chapman and Hall.

arouse the reader's impatience. To take one example. In the chapter on Lever — which incidentally reveals the interesting fact that Lever's masterpiece, *A Day's Ride*, that extraordinary outbreak of penetrating and skeptical imagination which seems entirely foreign to its period, was such a failure as a serial in *All the Year Round* that it very seriously affected the circulation — Mr. Leys seriously states that: 'When *Lorrequer* was published . . . a reviewer declared that he would rather be its author than the author of all the *Pickwicks* and *Nicklebys* in the world. This passage was used, with others of a similar description, in advertisements, giving much annoyance to Dickens, who at last responded ungraciously to a civil letter of Lever's, and it was not for years that friendly relations were resumed. . . . With the comparison or the advertisements Lever had nothing to do. One is glad to have the assurance, for such methods surely were in bad taste.' Now very obviously the bad taste was all on Dickens's side, and the effect of Mr. Leys's defense of his rudeness is to raise our hostility. An artist would simply have set down without extenuation that the poor man got hot and cross and piqued and forgot his manners — if, indeed, any artist would have undertaken this microscopic examination of the texture of the great man's life. Art is so fine that the man who makes it can hardly ever be worthy of it, and by comparison it must always make him seem like the toad who carries the jewel in its head.

The second way that we feel Mr. Leys's lack of the artist's spirit is in the chapter on Leigh Hunt, in which he attempts to defend Dickens from the charge of bad taste in using Hunt as a model for Harold Skimpole. This controversy is always irritating. It is unthinkable that people should ever

stand opposite a beautiful arch and point out that its cornerstone has a horror of publicity and cry out on the architect for using it; it is a shame to put the art of fiction under a disadvantage by inventing occasions for offense in its practice. If people should see a likeness between a character in a book and a living person they should keep quiet about it for the sake of art. And besides the average person's view of the author's mental processes in this matter are too crude. The novelist, whose aim it is to invent situations which show the interplay of human instincts, must often find it useful to borrow from life any conspicuous manifestation of an instinct which he may encounter. But he does not, as the vulgar phrase goes, 'put somebody into his books.' That phrase implies a desire to convey the whole of the personality which an artist, who must primarily be interested in the whole subject of the book, can hardly ever be sufficiently interested in one character to feel. He is bound to modify the character according to the needs of his story in a way that removes it from the class of portraiture. But worse than this vulgar accusation of 'putting people into books' is Mr. Leys's terrible suggestion that, 'However Dickens might like Hunt and however much he might be charmed with the poet's manner, is it not probable that he would dislike very strongly some of the extravagant — almost perverse — views on morality that Hunt was in the habit of expressing in print and in conversation? And is it not probable that the novelist tried to present an object lesson of their dangers? Dickens was as strong a believer as ever lived in the importance of self-reliance.' In our horror in finding the adorable Harold Skimpole turned into a moral lesson we feel just such indignation as Dickens himself ex-

pressed in his article called 'A Fraud on the Fairies,' when Cruikshank rewrote certain fairy tales as Temperance Tracts.

But there are many engaging figures that Mr. Leys discloses to us. There is, for instance, the exquisite Mr. Jerdan, that master of the cliché, who wrote like this: 'With Dickens I can claim long friendly relations, and with Thackeray hardly less amicable intercourse. In the first morning beam of public delight upon the former I felt the full glow, and looked with prophetic gladness to the bright day which I was sure must follow so auspicious a dawning.' A style which, as they say of Henry James, must be read aloud to be fully appreciated. 'On a later occasion of the same kind I was flattered by the nomination to occupy the post of honor at the bottom of the table, and am happy to remember that I acquitted myself so creditably of its onerous duties as to receive the approbation of the giver of the feast, his better half, and the *oi polloi* unanimously.' We learn with regret that this gentleman, who sounds so thoroughly good, was 'the puppet of certain booksellers, and dispensed praise and blame at their bidding, and, it may be feared, for a consideration.' Mr. Leys gives very valuable information in drawing attention to the sources of the Pickwick trial.

'Two letters have passed between these parties. Letters that must be viewed with a cautious and suspicious eye; letters that were evidently intended at the time to mislead and delude any third parties into whose hands they might fall. Let me read the first: "How are you?" There is no beginning, you see.' "How are you!" Gentlemen, is the happiness of a sensitive and confiding husband to be trifled away by such shallow artifices as these? The next has no date

whatever, which is in itself suspicious: "I will call about half-past four.—Yours." It seems there may be latent love like latent heat; these productions may be mere covers for hidden fire, mere substitutes for some endearing word or promise, agreeably to a preconcerted system of correspondence artfully contrived . . . and which I confess I am not in a position to explain.'

This is not a rough draft of Sergeant Buzfuz's speech. It is a passage from Sir William Follett's speech in the famous trial in which Lord Melbourne was accused of misconduct with Mrs. Norton. An amazing amount of good art was pure journalism when it was written.

But most valuable is the diffused sense, not to be rendered by anecdote or quotation, of the life of that time. One gets a picture of people sitting about in stuffy rooms, with big fires, and lots of unimaginatively cooked solid food, and massive ugly furniture and thick draperies; living, in fact, a Pimlico sort of life, such as one may envisage any day by looking at the heavy graceless façades and the dingy basements of the streets past Victoria. They had astonishingly bad manners. Things like this happened all the time: 'There was a very full attendance at a dinner at which Mr. Dickens presided. His friend, Mr. John Forster, was at his side. I sat at a side table with a remarkable looking young man opposite to me, who I was told was the Michael Angelo Titmarsh of *Fraser's Magazine*. Mr. Forster rose to propose a toast. He was proceeding with that force and fluency which he always possessed, when there were some interruptions by the cracking of nuts and jingling of glasses among the knot of young barristers, who were probably fastidious as to every style of eloquence except the forensic. The speaker expressed himself angrily; there were

retorts of a very unpleasant character. The Chairman in vain tried to enforce order. . . . They said amazingly few good things; wit had left English society with the eighteenth century, and did not return till Oscar Wilde came over from Dublin as a missionary to labor for the conversation of the heathen. There could not, indeed, be wit, because there was no irony, no challenging of institutions, even among such great men as Thackeray and Dickens. For Thackeray showed in his Lectures on the English Humorists that he could not understand one word of the irony of Swift and Sterne; and a curious little anecdote shows that Dickens suffered from a like disability. 'Wentworth Dilke . . . was acquainted with the great novelist's father, with whom he one day visited the warehouse, and gave the young drudge a half-crown, receiving in return a low bow. In after years Dilke related this story to Forster, who mentioned it to Dickens. "He was silent for several minutes," says the biographer. "I felt that I had unintentionally touched a painful place in his memory; and to Mr. Dilke I never spoke of the subject again.'" A clever young man to-day would be so aware of the irony of the situation that it would largely lose its sting; but in Dickens's day the distinction between masters and men, between the high and the low, was so

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firmly believed in that it had the power to hurt even the brightest intelligence. They were not candid about many things of which a man must speak the truth or become wholly a liar; in furniture they went in for veneered mahogany, in morality for veneered monogamy. It is no wonder that Dickens, the supreme genius, with his marvelous power of perception and emotion, spent his latter life in passing through innumerable phases of irritation, personal quarrel, with journeys to live abroad in Italy when such migrations were not yet the fashion among middle-class people, a furious absorption in amateur theatricals, and that final gesture of despair with which he turned from his real creative art to the infinitely inferior work of his *Readings*. That curious and willful abandonment of the first-rate for the second-rate can only be explained by the hypothesis that he had taken a dislike to his public. He despaired of making them think, he would be content to make them laugh and cry. It is pathetic to think of a man getting all the fun that the artist gets out of inventing real characters from his invention of the Murdstones, and then suddenly recognizing that the Murdstones were real people, and what was more, the people for whom he had to write. And that, putting it roughly, was the fate of Charles Dickens.

A LONDON 'UNCLE'

BY W. R. TITTERTON

I AM not sure if Sol Abrams is typical, for, although I have often appeared at the 'saloon bar' to exchange a watch or other trinket for a handful of silver and a coupon, he is the only pawnbroker with whom I have touched glasses. I come of a class in which it is shameful to have dealings with the pop-shop: dealings there are, but they are *sub rosa*. We had none of the frank reliance on Uncle you find in the class half a semitone lower in the scale. So that when there was a prospective hiatus between the last sovereign and pay day the Carnival excursion with wrapped-up valuables was made under cover of darkness and a shabby domino. A pawn ticket which I surreptitiously read, let me into the secret of the nature of the sally and its destination: 'Sol Abrams, Pawnbroker, Jeweler, and Marine Stores, 243, Old Mandy Street, Stepney.' Stepney, I may observe, was a parish or two away. So, when my turn to bet on the future came, I went to Sol.

I could not have gone to Mr. J. W. Morton, the big local man, though him I knew intimately — not that he ever touched glasses, except to test if the crystal rang true. He was a pillar of our local conventicle, and a by-word for respectability. He was, I am sure, a very good man, and a kindly, even on occasions a merry, one. But you could not very well pawn things with a man who has lately led you in prayer.

So I went to Sol. With a Jew of an alien parish you could be on fighting terms, and these, I considered, in my

folly, to be the normal relations of pawner and pawnee.

I found his shop in a long, narrow, crooked dirty street between a greengrocer's and a *cul de sac*. The three balls, the dingiest I had ever seen, hung anyhow from a drooping bracket.

Of course, I was blushing hotly, and so I halted to look into the window, and for some time saw nothing but flippant odds and ends of glitter, dancing jigs, and reels. Then I saw placards, 'real gold,' '16 — 14 — 8 carat gold,' 'rolled gold,' 'sterling silver,' 'English lever,' 'genuine Swiss,' 'valuable antique.' My eyes focused themselves on the 'valuable antique.' It proved to be one of those crinkled South Sea shells, Victorious, placed upon the mantelpiece.

Choosing a moment when I had no near neighbors in the street, I darted through the shop door, almost blinding and choking in a press of second-hand clothing hung out as an ensign above it. Inside was darkness and a merry babble of voices — one rich female voice above the rest exclaiming, 'Now, Uncle, you know I always liked your face.' In front of me I saw a stretch of indecently obvious shop, but I knew there were cubicles. I turned to the left, and groped past door-handles — seizing and releasing each in turn; from behind each door came that merry chorus.

At last I surmised a silence, gave a gulp, turned a handle, and stumbled into an empty cubicle. At No. 1 there was a draggled fragment of man pendant from the counter. The man did not