

I WALLOW IN WORDS

GRAHAM MOTT

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DICKENS, JOURNALISM AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, 1831-1838

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PH. D., ENGLISH

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Thesis
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I have tamed that savage stenographic mystery. I make a respectable income by it. I am in high repute for my accomplishment in all pertaining to the art, and am joined with eleven others in reporting the debates in Parliament for a Morning Newspaper. Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words.

David Copperfield, Chapter 43.

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ABBREVIATIONS AND PRELIMINARY NOTE.

In the footnotes, the following abbreviations are used:

Aspinall, <u>Ps. and P.</u>	Arthur Aspinall, <u>Politics and the Press c. 1780-1850</u> (Brighton, 1973).
<u>AYR</u>	<u>All the Year Round.</u>
Collins, <u>Is. and Rs.</u>	Philip Collins, ed., <u>Dickens: Interviews and Recollections</u> , 2 vols (London, 1981).
<u>Coutts</u>	<u>Letters from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts</u> , ed. Edgar Johnson (London, 1953).
<u>DNB</u>	The <u>Dictionary of National Biography.</u>
<u>Evg. Chr.</u>	The <u>Evening Chronicle.</u>
<u>Exr.</u>	The <u>Examiner.</u>
Fonblanque, <u>7 Admins.</u>	Albany Fonblanque, <u>England under Seven Administrations</u> , 3 vols (London, 1837).
Forster	John Forster, <u>The Life of Charles Dickens</u> , ed. J.W.T. Ley (London, 1928).
<u>HW</u>	<u>Household Words.</u>
<u>Mirror</u>	The <u>Mirror of Parliament.</u>

- Misc. P. Charles Dickens, Miscellaneous Papers, Gadshill edition, ed. B.W. Matz, 2 vols (London, [1908]).
- Mly. Mag. The Monthly Magazine.
- Mng. Chr. The Morning Chronicle.
- Nonesuch The Nonesuch Edition: Letters, ed. Walter Dexter, 3 vols (London, 1938).
- Pilgrim The Pilgrim Edition: The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. (variously) Madeline House, Graham Storey, Kathleen Tillotson and K.J. Fielding, Vols 1-5 (Oxford, 1965, 1969, 1974, 1977, 1981).
- Repr. P. Charles Dickens, Reprinted Pieces, Oxford Illustrated Edition (London, 1958).
- Speeches The Speeches of Charles Dickens, ed. K.J. Fielding (Oxford, 1960).
- Unc. T. Charles Dickens, The Uncommercial Traveller, Oxford Illustrated Edition (London, 1958 -- in one volume with Reprinted Pieces).

References to works by Charles Dickens not mentioned above are to the following editions: the Clarendon Edition for Oliver Twist, Martin Chuzzlewit, Dombey and Son, David Copperfield, Little Dorrit and The Mystery of Edwin Drood; the Norton Critical Edition for Bleak House and Hard Times; the Penguin English Library for Pickwick Papers, Nicholas

Nickleby, Barnaby Rudge, American Notes and A Tale of Two Cities; the Oxford Illustrated Edition for Sketches by Boz and 'Mudfog and Other Sketches' (in one volume), A Child's History of England, Christmas Stories and 'Sunday under Three Heads' (included in one volume with Reprinted Pieces and The Uncommercial Traveller). References give book, chapter and page number, or chapter and page number.

The notes normally omit publication details for works cited, and these are given in the bibliography. All emphases and capitals in quotations are as given in the originals.

PREFACE.

The story of Dickens's sudden rise to fame at the age of twenty-four has often been told, and the outline of his subsequent career as writer and household name is well known. Familiar also are a handful of formative experiences in his childhood, and it does not seem likely that any major new discoveries will be added to a series of recent articles by Michael Allen in the Dickensian concerning Dickens's early years. The intervening period, when Dickens was employed as a journalist and wrote his first sketches, has been less thoroughly researched. The primary materials on which the present study is based are the files of the journals for which he worked, or to which he contributed, at this time. Accurate information on some of the most basic points has hitherto been lacking: so far as I know there has been no previous description of the editorial character of the True Sun, and what little has been written on the policy of the Morning Chronicle in relation to Dickens has mostly been based on a misapprehension; and it has not been known how much Dickens might have heard of the debates on the Reform Bill or the Poor Law Amendment Act.

I have attempted to focus principally upon two questions: first, what was the character of the periodicals concerned, and, secondly, what might Dickens have absorbed from

them? In the first chapters I give an outline of the publications with which Dickens was connected, in Chapters 2 to 4 as employee and in Chapter 5 as occasional contributor. Chapters 2 and 4 are broadened into a general review of the particular political dispositions to be associated with the True Sun and the Morning Chronicle. A summary, with texts, of Dickens's known or putative contributions to the Chronicle has been omitted for lack of space (no very startling discoveries were made). Dickens worked for the True Sun and the Morning Chronicle as a parliamentary reporter, and in the same capacity for the Mirror of Parliament, and thus Chapter 3 is expanded into a discussion of the character of Parliament at this period, and of Dickens's reaction to it. Chapter 6 recognises that Dickens's literary output is by far the most important point about him, and gives an outline of the Sketches by Boz in the light of the preceding consideration of the journals in which they first appeared.

Seminal to the remaining chapters is a point put forward for discussion by Philip Collins, that Dickens was "'a man of 1832", content to live by the light of that generation, and relatively unresponsive to later ideas and initiatives'.¹ In order to investigate the matter, it is necessary to know first what the attitudes and ideas of that era were, and the periodicals with which Dickens was associated seem the obvious place to start. In Chapter 7 I consider some of the issues which were prominent, and in Chapter 8 I examine the extent to which Dickens may have come into contact with some

1. 'Dickens the Citizen', pp. 71, 65.

current philosophies. In both these chapters I look ahead to the remainder of Dickens's life in order to explore the parallels and contrasts with his own thinking.

There is an imprecision surrounding both the beginning and the end of the period covered by the study, despite the confident appearance of the dates in the chapter headings. In the first instance, and as outlined in Chapter 1, there is uncertainty as to when Dickens commenced his career as a parliamentary reporter. In the second, this phase of his life substantially concludes with his departure from the Morning Chronicle in November 1836, but I have looked beyond that point in considering the continuing influence which the Examiner may have represented -- division by dates is of course arbitrary, and it is only with benefit of hindsight that 1836 is to be seen as Dickens's watershed, and his annus mirabilis. But I have not considered Bentley's Miscellany, which Dickens was to edit on leaving the Chronicle until January 1839, partly because the nature of his association differs fundamentally from the other publications which are examined. It represents the commencement of his career as editor rather than journalist; clearly the two activities are closely related, but a further, practical, reason for the omission exists in that anything which might be said about Bentley's would, no doubt, need to be revised in view of the forthcoming Volume IV of the Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, in which it is to be included.

Also, as is well known, Bentley's Miscellany eschewed politics (the opening chapters of Oliver Twist subverted editorial policy), whereas I am concerned with public

affairs, and with establishing the precise political and other tendencies of the publications under survey. This emphasis is no more than a reflection of the press of the period, which is dominated by politics (often in a notably narrow party spirit) to the point, as it must appear to us, of obsession. The bias may nonetheless seem inappropriate to anyone who recognises that Dickens's own involvement in political issues, though warmly partisan at times, was not the continuing concern of the man with an abiding party political commitment. But his interest is sufficiently attested by his occasional contributions to the Examiner in the forties, and by the character of the Daily News and Household Words, to say nothing of the fiction. Appreciation of the earlier period could be regarded as a necessary prelude to a study of these later activities.

Running beneath the discussion is the consideration that in some respects Dickens was unprepared for his status as a public man. The paucity of his library shocked G.H. Lewes in late 1837, and his education was conspicuously poorer than that of many of the contemporaries with whom he became familiar as a consequence of fame.² Thus it has been shown recently that John Forster, who shared with Dickens a background which conferred few advantages, received, in his own words, 'an excellent preliminary education', whilst it is to Forster that we owe Dickens's father's apparently complacent observation that his son 'educated

2. George Henry Lewes, 'Dickens in Relation to Criticism', Fortnightly Review, February 1872, repr. George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane Jr., eds., The Dickens Critics, pp. 54-74 (pp. 69-70).

himself'.³ But Dickens had a quick mind, and was more than capable of absorbing prevailing attitudes by a process of osmosis. The periodicals with which he was associated now form, it may be contended, the most reliable index of these potentially formative influences.

If Dickens's mind was receptive, it was more than ordinarily independent too (quite apart from the truly extraordinary capacity of his imaginative processes). If it is surprising that this potentially vital period does not appear to have been researched before, there is always the possibility that the student who commits himself to an investigation of the question, 'What might Dickens have learned from these years?', will find that the answer turns out to be, 'Not very much', or, 'It is difficult to say'. But this is an area where the absence of an affinity can be as illuminating as its presence. In any case, the question forms the major concern of this study.

My work could not have been completed (indeed, hardly begun) without help of various kinds. I have been assisted by the staffs of the libraries of the University of Leicester, the University of Cambridge, the University of London and the Victoria and Albert Museum, and by those at the British Library and its Newspaper Library at Colindale. The University of Leicester Research Board generously made a grant towards my expenses in researching in these various locations. I am grateful also to friends who willingly accommodated me at

3. James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, p. 6; Forster, I, iii, 47.

various times: Liz Beeston, Veronica and Ian Dick, Dave and Gill Kelly, and Phil and Frances Lawn. In kindly giving of their time to answer queries I have been assisted by Dr. James A. Davies, Dr. David Parker and Professor Kathleen Tillotson. I have benefited also from sundry discussions with Iain Crawford, and from his reading, and from Peter White's, of parts of the draft -- I do not doubt that the result would have been improved further had they had time to read more. My greatest academic debt, inevitably, is to my supervisor, Professor Philip Collins.

On a personal level, my labours have been eased by the acquisition, during their progress, of a wife, Ursula, and the result has been much improved through her reading of the complete draft, bringing to it the useful perspective of one who (she will not mind my saying) knows nothing about the subject; not content with that, she has valiantly proof-read the final typescript. The result is dedicated to her, with love and thanks. Our joint production, Lucy P., has been a welcome diversion, if an occasional distraction; she has often attempted to help with the typing, and has not always screwed up the completed pages.

DICKENS AND PUBLIC AFFAIRS, 1830-38: CHRONOLOGICAL SUMMARY.

As events in 1830 are discussed in Chapter 1, I have started in that year, rather than 1831. I have not included the dates of parliamentary sittings after Dickens ceased to be a reporter in 1836.

	<u>Dickens</u>	<u>Public Affairs</u>
1830 ?May	Meets Maria Beadnell.	26 June Death of George IV. July Revolution in France. July General Election.
Nov.	Working in Doctors' Commons.	16 Nov. Wellington resigns; Grey P.M. Autumn Agricultural dis- turbances. 6 Dec. New reporters' gal- lery in Lords.
1831 ?3 Feb.	Starts work for <u>Mirror</u> .	3 Feb. Parliament re- assembles. 1 Mar. Reform Bill intro- duced.

1831

23 Mar. Bill passes Commons
2nd Reading by
one vote.

20 Apr. Government defeated;
General Election.

24 June 2nd Reform Bill
introduced.

8 Oct. Bill defeated in
Lords.

20 Oct. Parliament prorogued.

29-31 Riots in Bristol.

Oct.

Nov. Writes 'The Bill of
Fare' and 'The
Devil's Walk'.

6 Dec. Parliament re-
assembles.

12 Dec. 3rd Reform Bill
introduced.

1832 Mar.(?) Applies for audition
at Covent Garden.

22 Mar. Bill passes Commons.

?7 May Starts work for
True Sun.

7 May Government defeated
in Lords.

The 'Days of May'.

15 May Wellington advises
recall of Grey.

7 June Reform Bill receives
Royal Assent.

?15 Aug. Leaves True Sun.

15 Aug. Parliament prorogued.

Dec. Working for Mirror
(until Aug. 1834).

1832 Dec.	Works as poll clerk at Lambeth.	Dec.	General Election.
1833		29 Jan.	Parliament re-assembles.
27 Apr.	Produces private theatricals.		Factory Act.
May	Affair with Maria Beadnell ends.		Abolition of Slavery.
			East India Act.
1 Dec.-	9 stories in <u>Mly.</u>	29 Aug.	Parliament prorogued.
Feb.'35	<u>Mag.</u>		
1834		4 Feb.	Parliament re-assembles.
		July	Grey resigns; Melbourne P.M.
Aug.	Starts work for <u>Mng. Chr.</u>	Aug.	Poor Law Amendment Act passed.
17-18	Reports Edinburgh public dinner.		
26 Sep.-	'Street Sketches'	16 Oct.	Houses of Parliament destroyed by fire.
15 Dec.	1-5 in <u>Mng. Chr.</u>	14 Nov.	King dissolves Whig ministry.
1 Dec.	Reports Birmingham public meeting.	Dec.	Peel Prime Minister.
18 Dec.	'The Story without a Beginning' in <u>Mng. Chr.</u>		
1835 Jan.	Reports East Anglia election meetings.	Jan.	General Election.

- 1835 31 Jan.- 'Sketches of London'
 20 Aug. 1-20 in Evg. Chr.
- 19 Feb. Parliament re-
 assembles.
 Apr. Whigs resume office;
 Melbourne P.M.
- 2 May Reports S. Devon
 election.
- ?May Becomes engaged to
 Catherine Hogarth. Municipal Reform Act.
- 27 Sep.- 'Scenes and Chars.'
 17 Jan. 1-12 in Bell's
 1836. Life in London.
- 10 Sep. Parliament prorogued.
- 11 Nov. Reports Bristol din-
 ner for Russell.
- Dec. Reports Hatfield
 House fire.
- Dec. Reports Kettering
 by-election.
- Dec. Municipal elections.
- 1836 22 Jan. Reports Lambeth
 public ceremony.
- 4 Feb. Parliament re-
 assembles.
- 8 Feb. Sketches by Boz,
 1st Series.
- 31 Mar.- Pickwick Papers.
- Oct.'37
- 31 Mar., 2 sketches in Lib-
 31 May rary of Fiction.
- 2 Apr. Marries Catherine
 Hogarth.
- June 'Sunday under Three
 Heads'.

- 1836 23 June Reports Norton v.
Melbourne.
- 6 Aug., 2 sketches in Carl-
17 Sep. ton Chronicle. 20 Aug. Parliament prorogued.
- 24 Sep.- 'Sketches by Boz',
26 Oct. n.s., in Mng. Chr.
- 29 Sep. The Strange Gentle-
man produced.
- 4 Nov. Agrees to edit Bent-
ley's Miscellany
from Jan. 1837.
- Nov. Leaves Mng. Chr.
- 6 Dec. The Village Co-
quettes produced.
- 17 Dec. Sketches by Boz,
2nd Series.
- ?25 Dec. Introduced to Forster.
- 1837 6 Jan. 'Charley' born.
- 31 Jan.- Oliver Twist in Bent-
Apr.'39 ley's Miscellany.
- 3 Mar. Is She His Wife?
produced.
- 3 May First public speech.
- 7 May Death of Mary Hogarth.
- 16 June Introduced to
Macready. 20 June Death of William IV.
- July General Election;
Whigs remain in
office.
- 3, 17 Theatre reviews in
Dec. Exr.

1838 28 Jan. Book reviews in Exr.

10 Feb. Sketches of Young
Gentlemen.

26 Feb. Memoirs of Grimaldi.

6 Mar. Mary Dickens born.

31 Mar.- Nicholas Nickleby.

Sep.'39

1 July Writes on coronation
celebrations in
Exr.

28 June Coronation of Queen
Victoria.

2 Sep. Writes on Scott and
his publishers in
Exr.

Principal sources: Pilgrim, I, xlii-xliii; Mirror of Parliament;
Morning Chronicle; Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, pp.
391-92; Anthony Wood, Nineteenth Century Britain, pp. 445-47;
G.M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, pp. 188-89.

CHAPTER 1. THE TRUE SUN AND THE MIRROR OF PARLIAMENT:
CHRONOLOGY.

All accounts of Dickens's early career are unreliable. They suffer essentially from the fact that at that time he was a young man of no particular note or prominence, and those who knew him had no reason to record the dates or details of his activities. Dickens's own statements as to when he first became a parliamentary reporter cannot be reconciled with one another, and accounts in other sources are similarly inconsistent, probably for the same reason, that they were written many years later. Thus John Forster says that Dickens was aged nineteen when he began with the True Sun,¹ which has often been noted as impossible in that Dickens was twenty when that paper commenced publication on 5 March 1832. The wish to minimize the error is responsible for the prevalent belief that Dickens started working on the paper with its first number, evidence for which is otherwise lacking; and the question becomes of some significance through the existence in that first number of an article (not previously noted) entitled 'Charles-street Sketches -- No. 1', which reads as if it could be by Dickens.²

1. Forster, I, iv, 59.

2. 'Charles-street' in fact refers to premises used as a

Dickens did not discuss these early years much, even with Forster, and it was in a rare moment of self-revelation that he wrote to him of his early attempt to get on the stage:

When I was about twenty, . . . I wrote to Bartley who was stage manager at Covent-garden, and told him how young I was, and exactly what I thought I could do; . . . Bartley wrote to me, almost immediately, to say that they were busy getting up the Hunchback (so they were!) but that they would communicate with me again, in a fortnight. Punctual to the time, another letter came: with an appointment . . . I was laid up, when the day came . . . I wrote to say so, and added that I would resume my application next season. I made a great splash in the gallery soon afterwards; the Chronicle opened to me; I had a distinction in the little world of the newspaper, which made me like it;

. . . This was at the time when I was at Doctors' Commons as a shorthand writer for the proctors. And I recollect I wrote the letter from a little office I had there, where the answer came also. It wasn't a very good living (though not a very bad one), and was wearily uncertain; which made me think of the Theatre in quite a business-like way.

This letter has a curious status as a text, since we rely on Forster for the content, and he made alterations between his first and second editions.³ But it remains one of the most important pieces of evidence concerning this early period. Dickens's reference to The Hunchback enables the incident to be dated almost exactly, as it was produced at Covent Garden

Tory party headquarters between June 1831 and circa November 1833: Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 336-41, 459-60, 467, 480; Fonblanque, 7 Admins., II, 241 (1832); Mirror, Ellice, 21 July 1834, p. 2850.

3. Pilgrim, IV, 244-45 ([?30-31 December 1844 and 1 January 1845]), where the text used follows the first edition of Forster's Life (3 vols, London, 1872-74); in the second edition Forster re-arranged the letter, and one sentence appears twice with different continuations (Forster, I, iv, 59-60, V, i, 380), providing a neat example of his editorial licence.

on 5 April 1832, corroborating Dickens's age as 'about twenty'.⁴ The sequence of events would appear to make it unlikely that he became a reporter before Parliament rose for Easter (exceptionally late that year) on 18 April. But Dickens then conflates a period of over two years within one semi-colon: he did not start working for the Morning Chronicle until August 1834. Even so, it is evident that he has a clear mental image of the occasion as he writes; he was aware at the time and later that it might have determined the whole course of his life, and it is unlikely that he would be substantially mistaken concerning the details.

The clear implication of this letter is that Dickens's sole means of livelihood in March 1832 was in Doctors' Commons. But his other recollections do not bear this out. In 1856 he wrote, vaguely and parenthetically, that he first became a parliamentary reporter '(at about eighteen I suppose)'. In 1865 he was more positive that he was 'not yet eighteen', a form of words which might suggest that the birthday was imminent, and would point to the start of the parliamentary session on 4 February 1830.⁵ But the progression between the two statements may well represent the tendency for memory to harden into certainty to compensate for its increasing unreliability; or the second may exhibit either the idealization consequent upon an extempore after dinner reminiscence which was not intended for publication,

4. Pilgrim, I, 3-4; Allardyce Nicoll, ~~the Nineteenth Century~~ Early Nineteenth Century Drama 1800-1850, p. 339; The Times, review, 6 April 1832.

5. Nonesuch, II, 777-78 (6 June 1856, to Wilkie Collins); Speeches, p. 347 (20 May 1865).

or, more charitably, temporary confusion between 'eighteen' and 'not yet nineteen'. The 1831 session opened on 3 February (when he would have been 'not yet nineteen').

More substantial, but indirect, evidence is available from elsewhere in the 1865 speech. Dickens said, with his usual eye for incongruous detail,

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 pen in the old House of Lords, where we used to be huddled together like so many sheep [laughter], kept in waiting, say, until the woolsack might want re-stuffing. [A laugh.]⁶

The 'old' Houses of Parliament were burnt down in October 1834. But before this, on 15 October 1831, 'the Lords took the sensible, yet portentous, action of providing a Gallery for the reporters'. Parliament was prorogued on 20 October 1831, and 'The Gallery was first used at the opening of the new Parliament', on 6 December 1831. These facts were given some seventy years ago by Michael Macdonagh, who notes the application to Dickens; but the reference appears to have eluded his biographers.⁷

Making due allowance for Dickens's speech being made for effect, its essential veracity is not to be doubted. It suggests that he had a fair degree of acquaintance with the sheep-pen (which was actually a railed-off area in the space before the Bar), and this must date from before 20 October 1831. That would allow a reference in a letter of early

6. Speeches, p. 347.

7. Michael Macdonagh, The Reporters' Gallery, pp. 356; 357; see also p. 345. The Times, 7 December 1831, confirms that the new gallery was used when Parliament was re-opened.

March 1831 to having been 'so exceedingly tired from my week's exertions that I slept on the Sofa the whole day' to be ascribed with near certainty to his parliamentary work. The letter was written at the conclusion of the first week's debate on the Reform Bill, during which the Commons sat late every night. The coincidence is too great for the reference to be assigned realistically to any other cause. Late sittings continued through until October, when they reached their apogee, since both Houses were involved -- the Lords on the Bill and the Commons on other subjects which had been delayed in consequence of the long discussions on the Committee stage.⁸ This parliamentary log-jam had been predictable for some months and must have stretched the resources of the Mirror; it can reasonably be assumed that all their available reporters, Dickens included, would have been pressed into service. Tentatively, then, it can be supposed that he worked on the journal with some degree of continuity from not later than March to at least October 1831. Two conclusions thus emerge: it is certain that there was an overlap between Dickens's employment on the Mirror and on the True Sun (since the True Sun was not founded until after he was working on the Mirror), and it appears (from the letter to Forster quoted above) that there was an overlap between his employment in Doctors' Commons and as a parliamentary reporter.

8. Pilgrim, I, 2 ([7 March 1831], to Mary Anne Leigh). During the week commencing 28 February, the Commons sat until times varying between 12.45 a.m. and 2.30 a.m.; in the week commencing 3 October, the earliest the Commons rose was at 1.45 a.m., and the earliest for the Lords was 12.30 a.m.: times from the Mirror, supplemented by The Times.

The puzzle which remains is why Dickens should say 'I made a great splash in the gallery soon afterwards' if he had already been working for the Mirror of Parliament for some months. He appears not to have been securely established on the Mirror in Spring 1832, otherwise it is difficult to see either why he was still working in Doctors' Commons, or why he wrote very speculatively to a theatre for an audition, or why he became involved with the True Sun. Certainly there seems to be a hiatus of some sort in 1832, which is impossible to explain. We can only conjecture some family difference between Dickens's uncle, who owned the Mirror, and his parents. His father's career does not greatly assist, for, although he was working for the Mirror in August 1828, he left before (and possibly a good while before) 10 February 1831.⁹ Charles probably started with the Mirror after his father left it.

In attempting to resolve the apparent contradictions, Gerald G. Grubb suggested, working by analogy with David Copperfield's career, that Dickens served an 'unofficial apprenticeship' of some sort on the Mirror, an explanation which seems attractive, but is not inescapable. For one thing, it now appears that Dickens was working for the Mirror

9. W.J. Carlton, 'John Dickens, Journalist', pp. 5-8; Morning Herald, 10 February 1831; Mng. Chr., Morning Herald, The Times, True Sun, 27 June 1832. John Dickens worked in the office rather than as a reporter; there is contradiction as to whether he knew shorthand, but he is most unlikely to have attained the high degree of proficiency demanded by the Mirror's verbatim reports: Walter Dexter, ed., Dickens to his Oldest Friend, p. 268; Charles Kent, 'Charles Dickens as a Journalist', p. 362; F.G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: By Pen and Pencil, p. 132; Macdonagh, p. 346; [G. Merle], 'Newspaper Press', pp. 225-26.

with at least some degree of continuity in 1831; for another, Grubb was almost certainly mistaken in reading David's 'experiment on one of our crack speakers in the Commons' as relating to the House of Commons rather than to Doctors' Commons. It is known that Dickens was working in Doctors' Commons in November 1830, and it is difficult to justify pushing back his start with the Mirror to an earlier date.¹⁰ Certainty will never, it would appear, be possible, but if I had to plump for a date when Dickens started work for the Mirror of Parliament, it would be 3 February 1831. That would accord with his 'not yet' formulation, and suggest that Forster was correct over the year and in error only concerning the periodical. Dickens was apparently established on the Mirror with some permanence and responsibility by the end of 1832, and he continued with it until August 1834, when he took up his appointment with the Morning Chronicle.¹¹

To look into the secondary sources concerning this period is to become involved in a veritable tangle of confusion and contradiction. The inconsistencies are impossible to reconcile, but can be explained partly by the overlapping pattern of employment: those that say that Dickens worked on the Mirror before the True Sun, and those that say subsequently, are all correct. The most reliable of the few commentators drawing on first-hand knowledge of this period of Dickens's career has him working on the two concurrently.

10. Grubb, 'Dickens's First Experience as a Parliamentary Reporter', pp. 216, 215; David Copperfield, Chapter 38, p. 465. W.J. Carlton, Charles Dickens, Shorthand Writer, quoted by J.W.T. Ley in Forster, p. 54, n. 68.

11. Pilgrim, I, 10-11 (9 December [1832], to Hartland).

I refer to the article by Charles Kent first published in 1879, which, although not wholly free from error, has the great merit of drawing on the reminiscences of Thomas Beard (1807-91), Dickens's 'oldest friend' and closest colleague on the Morning Chronicle.¹² Kent says that when working on the True Sun, Dickens was in 'the position in effect of a supernumerary, who is liable at any moment to be called upon in the event of an emergency', and thus he was able to work simultaneously on the Mirror. The True Sun was an evening newspaper, and they normally employed fewer full-time reporters than their morning counterparts, but concurrent employment with two independent parliamentary teams seems a priori unlikely, since problems of liaison would arise. This version of events is not confirmed by other secondary sources, notably Forster, from whom it appears that Dickens had at

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12. Charles Kent, 'Charles Dickens as a Journalist', Time, 5 (1881), pp. 361-74, the contents of which appear to be identical with an article of the same title published in Pitman's shorthand in The Journalist, 1 (December 1879), pp. 17-25. Other sources consulted, of varying degrees of reliability, include Alexander Andrews, The History of British Journalism; W.J. Carlton, Charles Dickens: Shorthand Writer; W.J. Carlton, 'John Dickens, Journalist'; W.J. Carlton, '"Boz" and the Beards'; [John Payne Collier], An Old Man's Diary, Forty Years Ago; Walter Dexter, 'Charles Dickens: Journalist'; [J. Hain Friswell], Charles Dickens: A Critical Biography; James Grant, The Great Metropolis; [James Grant], 'Unpublished Incidents in the life of the late Charles Dickens'; James Grant, The Newspaper Press; Gerald G. Grubb, Charles Dickens: Journalist; Gerald G. Grubb, 'Dickens's First Experience as a Parliamentary Reporter'; S.C. Hall, A Book of Memories; S.C. Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life: From 1815 to 1883; Blanchard Jerrold, ed., 'A Day with Charles Dickens'; R. Shelton Mackenzie, Life of Charles Dickens; Pilgrim, I; 'J.H. Siddons' (J.H. Stocqueler), 'Souvenirs of Charles Dickens', repr. John Archer Carter, Jr., 'Memories of "Charley Wag"'; [H.T. Taverner and J.C. Hotten], Charles Dickens: The Story of his Life; William Watkins, Charles Dickens, with Anecdotes and Recollections of his Life.

least enough standing to lead the True Sun reporters in a strike.¹³

The explanation, however, may lie in the peculiar circumstances of the time; the 1832 summer sitting marked the culmination of the long struggle over the Reform Bill, and the centre of attention switched to the House of Lords, whilst the Commons continued to receive full coverage. Also, the True Sun was engaged in a battle with its rival The Sun for supremacy in getting reports to the provinces.¹⁴ There does not appear to be any reference by Dickens himself to the True Sun, which may point to an insignificant connection, or to a reticence which is to be explained by the paper's ultra-radical character, or, quite possibly, both.¹⁵ If it is assumed that he was not working on the True Sun when he wrote to the theatre, it would seem that he was employed by the paper only during the parliamentary sitting which commenced on 7 May 1832. Apparently he left not later than the end of the sitting on 15 August 1832.¹⁶

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13. Kent, p. 363; 'Newspaper Reporting', The Metropolitan; [G. Merle], 'Newspaper Press', pp. 225, 230, 232. Forster, I, iv, 59 -- biographers who suggest that Forster transfers to the True Sun a later strike on the Morning Chronicle are almost certainly mistaken.
14. Mackenzie, pp. 46-47; True Sun, 28 March, 13, 14, 16 April 1832.
15. The most conspicuous omission is in a letter to J.H. Kuenzel, responding to a request for an outline of his early life, Pilgrim, I, 423-24 ([?July 1838]). There is no mention in the letter written to Forster at the end of 1844 (note 3 above), or in the letter of 1856 or the speech of 1865 (note 5 above).
16. Pilgrim, I, 6 ([?July 1832], to Kolle), where 'The Sun is so obscured that I intend living under the planet no longer than Saturday Week next' must be regarded as an intention to leave the True Sun.

To summarise, Dickens was working in Doctors' Commons in November 1830, and had reported with some regularity for the Mirror of Parliament by October 1831; 3 February 1831 seems the most likely starting date. An unexplained interruption occurred from somewhere about the winter of 1831-32, and he was again working in Doctors' Commons in the spring. It is more likely that he started with the True Sun on 7 May 1832 than with its first number on 5 March 1832, and he left it perhaps on 15 August 1832. By December 1832 he was well re-established with the Mirror, and may have worked concurrently during the summer of 1832 on both journals. It thus appears that Dickens's work for the True Sun was briefer in duration and less substantial in character than has usually been assumed, whilst his work for the Mirror began rather earlier than has previously been known definitely. The standard biographies of Dickens would bear out his own observation so far as this period of his life is concerned: 'I have never seen anything about myself in print which has much correctness in it -- any biographical account of myself I mean' -- not that he did a great deal to set the record straight.¹⁷

17. Nonesuch, II, 777 (6 June 1856, to Wilkie Collins).

CHAPTER 2. THE TRUE SUN, 1832, AND RADICALISM.

The previous chapter concluded that the balance of the evidence suggests that Dickens worked on the True Sun between 7 May and 15 August 1832, and not, as has usually been assumed, from its foundation on 5 March 1832. This chapter is based on a reading of the files of the paper from its commencement until the end of 1832, with occasional samplings thereafter. The True Sun was always a radical paper, although it spoke sometimes in confused accents during the earlier part of its existence, taking on a more decided identity about the time that Dickens left. I consider the extent to which his views may be regarded as congruent with the paper's during its early months, and the degree of divergence between them as it became more radical later. The discussion is then expanded into a consideration of Dickens's youthful experience of and attitude to political radicalism in general, including his exposure as a reporter to parliamentary radicalism. I also comment briefly on the attitude to radicalism which lies behind Barnaby Rudge.

The True Sun was an obscure paper, with a circulation in 1832 probably of somewhere under 2,000.¹ It was born of dissension, when one Patrick Grant, proprietor of The Sun,

1. James Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 108.

returning to England after a period spent abroad in order to escape his creditors, found that the managers of that paper declined to return to him what he considered his personal property. He thereupon established the True Sun in rivalry, and published on the front page during the early issues a lengthily self-righteous personal statement, detailing the wrongs which had been done to him. There is uncertainty as to the precise position filled by different individuals on the paper's staff during its brief and erratic existence, but these did include some of the best known names in the field of radical journalism, including several that are familiar to students of Dickens's life. The most obvious example is John Forster, distinctly radical at this stage of his career. John Bell and Laman Blanchard edited the paper until 1836; Leigh Hunt worked for it intermittently, as did Douglas Jerrold, later to be one of the more radically inclined and politically conscious amongst Dickens's acquaintances. These figures were all either certainly or probably working for the True Sun at the same time as Dickens, but his personal contact with them did not begin until later, affording further confirmation of the relative insignificance of his position on the paper.²

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2. Sources consulted include Alexander Andrews, The History of British Journalism, II, 211; The Poetical Works of Laman Blanchard, p. 13; Sister Mary Callista Carr, John Forster: A Literary Biography to 1856, p. 32, n. 1; James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, pp. 11-12; DNB; Forster, pp. xxv, I, iv, 59, I, v, 78; Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 96, 105-06, 108-09; James Grant, The Newspaper Press, I, 340-41; W. Lockey Harle, 'John Forster: a Sketch', p. 51; R.H. Horne, 'John Forster; His Early Life and Friendships', p. 492; F. Knight Hunt, The Fourth Estate, II, 239; [E.V. Kenealy], 'Laman Blanchard', p. 523; [C. Knight], 'The Morning and Evening Papers', p. 625; Pilgrim, I, 138, 192-93, 341, IV, 219;

The True Sun was founded as the excitement over the protracted parliamentary crisis surrounding the Reform Bill was reaching its climax. At the outset the paper's radicalism was generalised, and it did not appeal to any particular class or sectional interest. It reported regularly, and with equal enthusiasm, on meetings of the predominantly middle class National Political Union and of the National Union of the Working Classes, which was one of the forerunners of Chartism.³ There is support from the early issues of the True Sun for the view that class hostility was latent during this period, through concentration on a common aim (although the frequency with which the vocabulary of class was invoked is notable). Working class opinion had been inclined to regard the Reform Bill as irrelevant when it was introduced, but had tended to campaign in its favour once it was rejected in October 1831, in the belief that any inroads which could successfully be made into the Lords' intransigence was worthwhile.⁴ Up until about the time when Dickens left the True Sun, its appeal was to reformers generally, and that marks a significant but temporary stage in the development of radical

Charles Richard Sanders, 'The Correspondence and Friendship of Thomas Carlyle and Leigh Hunt: The Early Years', pp. 446, 451, 454; Charles H. Vivian, 'Dickens, the "True Sun," and Samuel Laman Blanchard'; Charles H. Vivian, 'Radical Journalism in the 1830'S: The True Sun and Weekly True Sun'.

3. E.P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 482.
4. Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, pp. 166-67, 295; J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, pp. 381-82; Joseph Hamburger, James Mill and the Art of Revolution; S. Maccoby, English Radicalism 1832-1852, pp. 32-47; D.J. Rowe, Radicalism in London 1829-1841, pp. 57-58, 72; Thompson, p. 898; D.G. Wright, Democracy and Reform 1815-1885, pp. 40-48.

political thought. In the spring and summer of 1832 the important question was whether you were for or against the Bill, and the label 'reformer' covered with no sense of strain aristocratic Whigs, middle class reformers, working class activists, and the various brands of radicals. If Dickens is indeed to be regarded as a man of 1832, the significance of his first substantial encounter with radical thought may be that it was marked by a quite exceptional and temporary conjunction of otherwise separate and possibly antagonistic movements of opinion.

As part of the general ferment, the True Sun carried accounts of some of the many political meetings which were held. For the most part, coverage of a meeting implied at least general support for the aims of the group concerned, and something of the paper's political identity is indicated by its routine reports of meetings at the Rotunda, established in 1830 by Richard Carlile, and at the Crown and Anchor in the Strand, both of which were recognised homes of ultra-radical agitation.⁵ It is not likely that Dickens was responsible for any of these reports, since there is nothing to suggest that he worked for the True Sun other than as a parliamentary reporter, but he must have been aware of the prevailing atmosphere and tone of confident assurance in the justice and eventual triumph of the reform cause.

The campaign to pass the Reform Bill inevitably featured as the most significant single issue in the early weeks of the True Sun's existence. Its attitude to the monarchy and the aristocracy was somewhat equivocal, partly because

5. Rowe, p. 56; Thompson, p. 843 (concerning the Rotunda).

it was believed (rightly or wrongly) that the King was sympathetic to reform, at least until May, with the Queen regarded as the influential opponent (12, 19 March, 30 April 1832); also it was, of course, the predominantly aristocratic Whigs who were putting the Reform Bill through Parliament.

The True Sun's consistently radical line can be indicated through its attitude on other issues which were discussed up to about the time that Dickens left the paper. These included reducing the number of capital offences (although it is doubtful whether it was against all capital punishment), the practice of hanging the executed body in chains, public executions and flogging in the Army. It welcomed the Factory Bill, commented occasionally on child labour and looked forward to the abolition of slavery in the colonies but with compensation, on the interesting grounds that the slave owners had been encouraged by government. The paper gave very frequent coverage to O'Connell's lengthy pronouncements on Irish affairs, although it was not in favour of a dissolution of the Union. It commended the Extraordinary Black Book, and shared its hostility to the Established Church, a topic on which Dickens's attitude was conspicuously at variance with radical opinion.⁶ On three further topics, to be discussed in Chapter 7, it can be shown that Dickens and the True Sun would have been in agreement; these are Sunday observance, the need for reform of the law in general and the Court of Chancery in particular, and the question of the poor

6. True Sun, 31 May, 26 June, 1 August, 14 August; 17, 20, 21 August; 28 March; 12, 14 June, 5, 7, 10, 25, 30 July, 3, 28, 29 August; 15, 17 March, 25 April; 5, 10, 18 July; 5 April, 25 May; 25, 26 July; 31 March, 7 June 1832.

law -- this last notably, since most reformers, and most members of the middle class of whatever political tendency, were in favour of the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834.

The beginnings of a shift away from the early absence of close class identification can be detected as the Reform Bill finally passed. On 7 June 1832, the True Sun reported and devoted its first leader to 'Dreadful Disturbances in Paris', in terms clearly anticipating and welcoming the possibility of a popular insurrection and assumption of government. The occasion was the funeral of Lamarque, and it is clear enough that for a day or two the True Sun was genuinely excited; although no direct suggestion is made, the reports taken in conjunction with a leader on the King's refusal to sign the Reform Bill in person (also on 7 June) make it impossible to avoid the impression that the paper looked towards and hoped to encourage some similar popular uprising at home.

At this stage the True Sun was not yet consistent in its radicalism. But at some time between June and October 1832 it transformed itself from a broadly radical paper (in our terminology, somewhere nearer the left than the centre) into, in Leigh Hunt's words, 'the most radical of radicals', appealing specifically to a working class readership.⁷ On 20 July 1832 the paper's remark, 'We need not tell the readers that we are not Whigs; we carry our views of Reform further than they do', was in fact stating something which had not been very explicit before, whilst on 30 July it reported

7. Sanders, p. 451 (12 March [1833]).

that a procession of the Political Union of the Working Classes, 'on their way to celebrate the glorious 3 days', 'did us the honour of giving cheers at our office door'.⁸

A note familiar in Dickens's work was sounded on 18 July in a striking expression of contempt for Parliament when describing the fear of cholera in the House of Commons:

Men are now employed in sprinkling chloride of lime, instead of clauses, to cleanse and purify the House. The servants of the state walk nightly about the House with watering-pots, bathing the floor and benches, and making everything as wholesome as possible in the regions of rottenness.

On 31 July, on the resignation of the Speaker, the True Sun sympathized with his position in being condemned to listen to such an amount of nonsense. On the whole, however, these sentiments were aberrations in the True Sun's political philosophy, for elsewhere it took for granted that Parliament was a worthwhile institution in itself.

It is believed that Dickens left the True Sun at about the same time as its increasing radicalism. But it should not be assumed that he did so through dissatisfaction at the direction which it was taking. It is more likely that both events were due to one of the many changes in the proprietorship and editorship, and the first of the paper's recurrent financial crises. The nature of the True Sun's succeeding change of direction will now be briefly sketched in, as an

8. The Political Union of the Working Classes was also referred to on 21 August, and is not a body which I have found mentioned in the literature. It may represent an attempt by the National Union of the Working Classes to avoid the threat of prosecution which had been held over it during November 1831 specifically on account of its claim to be nationally organized. The 'glorious 3 days' refers to the French Revolution of July 1830.

indication of the parameters of radical thought at this time. There are incidental Dickensian echoes in the ironical use of the phrases 'the good old times' (2 August) and 'the wisdom of our ancestors' (18 September), but on the whole the paper's later attitudes go beyond those with which Dickens was associated.

On 14 August 1832 an account of the Grand Reform Festival of the National Political Union reported that at least five-sixths of those present (over fifteen hundred) refused to drink to the King, an item of interest in itself in a specifically middle class body. The True Sun regarded the meeting 'with the greatest delight and confidence', and concluded that if it was still necessary for the middle classes to meet together, it was much more essential for the working classes 'to continue in a strict and inseparable body of union'. On 23 August it asserted that the franchise should be extended before the introduction of the ballot, and took issue with the Morning Chronicle for arguing, in what sounds like an echo of James Mill's view, 'that the enfranchised few could not promote their own civil and political well being, without promoting that of the rest of society'.⁹ On 27 September, the 'Outline of a New Constitution to be submitted to a National Convention' was given -- it is difficult to know how close to the wind of prosecution the paper was sailing with publicity of this type -- and on 16 October it identified itself specifically and exclusively as promoting the interests of the working classes. This was in the context

9. James Mill, 'Essay on Government', pp. 79-82.

of an editorial admission of the paper's financial problems, and was followed by a series of appeals and reports of fund-raising meetings. On 30 October a long and important leader defined the paper's position as a working class publication, and quoted the Poor Man's Guardian to the effect that the True Sun was the 'only daily Paper ever established in England which advocated the interests of the working classes'. The next day the True Sun called for universal suffrage, which is almost certainly to be understood as for males only: I did not note that it ever gave the further consideration which it had said previously was necessary to Henry Hunt's motion to admit women to Parliament (4 August).

To a twentieth century eye, the paper was surprisingly unrealistic as to the practical effects of reform, particularly at the time of the General Election in December. Whigs and Tories 'alike belong to a past order of things' it had announced earlier (5 September), and on 7 December it looked towards a conjunction of Whig and Tory in common cause, against 'the great party, the People'; the next day it expected results which would ensure thorough-going reform in 'all the departments of Church and State' -- an outcome which a few moments' consideration of the lists of candidates would have shown to be impossible. Reaction soon set in: on 11 December the surly comment was that after a Whig reform, a Whig result was to be expected. But eighteen months later, hope was revived, and the message was 'The reign of Whiggism draws rapidly to a close . . . Toryism is an extinct faith . . . The cause of Radicalism advances day by day; and not even "the Reformed Parliament" will be able much longer to

retard the march of sweeping Reform' (26 September 1834). Dickens parts company with this school of thought some way before such pronouncements, which points to his more secure grasp of realistic possibilities.

The sundering of the truce between reformers once the Bill was passed is particularly noticeable in the area of economic affairs. The paper's fiscal policy was that there should be a national bank, by which it meant a people's bank (18 August), and a few days later it announced, prematurely as events turned out, 'The despotism of the Bank of England draws to a close' (23 August). Elsewhere, the True Sun's radicalism became more systematically and securely based on a consistent theoretical framework. Its insistence that symptoms are a manifestation of social causes was more truly radical than is usually the case with Dickens. Thus it was 'grieved to learn' of outbreaks of incendiarism, but held that

Nothing can so fearfully paint the desperate condition of the peasantry. Incendiarism is the last resource of men, who see, in the institutions of society, nothing but the means, which the rich employ, to grind to powder, their poor fellow creatures. (15 November 1832)

Related to this thinking was a more general and developing insistence on the necessary inter-relatedness of all aspects of social and economic policy. The fairly well-marked tendency for the True Sun's leaders to modulate from one topic to another did not always represent a digression on to a favourite hobby-horse by a hard-pressed writer. The leader of 30 October referred to above, which stated the identification with working class interests, also gave the grounds of the paper's opposition to the 'Economists', and its policy

on political economy, landlord absenteeism, free trade, the poor law, and Malthus's theory of population. This tendency represents a further point of contrast with Dickens, where the usual impression is that he regards public policy as a series of at most casually related topics.

Dickens's first exposure to radical ideas did not come about through his association with the True Sun. Instead it would have been absorbed as part of his background, and this aspect will now be briefly explored by way of investigating what exactly Dickens would have understood by radicalism. His experience was restricted specifically to London, and the social composition of the capital gave to radical activity there some distinctive features. Popular agitation in London was often muddled as to its objectives, as is clear from outbreaks of unrest in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The most considerable of these were centred upon some charismatic individual -- John Wilkes, Lord George Gordon, Sir Francis Burdett -- through whom expression was given to the large discontents of a disadvantaged urban population, the 'mob', as it was usually known. The impetus was a general opposition to established authority, sustained by the underlying hostility of the poor towards the rich, in the terms which are more appropriate in this context than class labels. These disorders, together with others -- including the protests against the Corn Bill in 1815, the Spa Fields Riot in 1816 and the disturbances surrounding the Queen Caroline controversy in 1821 -- constituted, it has been said, 'a scarcely broken tradition of anti-authoritarian

manifestations by the London crowd'. Metropolitan unrest was distinctive for the absence of a coherent political programme, beyond the vaguest attachment to such slogans as 'Liberty' and 'No Popery'.¹⁰ That aspect was not markedly altered with the disorders over the rejection of the Reform Bill, which occurred particularly in October 1831 and May 1832.¹¹

Early nineteenth century London was a turbulent city. Dickens would have known this well enough; indeed, he was clearly fascinated by the most tumultuous of these earlier disorders, and it provided the background for his first work to contain a substantial political content. As is well known, Barnaby Rudge (or Gabriel Vardon) should have been his first published novel rather than his fifth: his first agreement concerning it was made whilst he was still working for the Morning Chronicle.¹² The sustaining impulse, and the impetus of the novel itself, derive from Dickens's fascination with Newgate and with the Dionysian forces of wanton destruction. He shows the occasion for the riots to have been unworthy, but he cannot quite decide whether they were of the nature of a spontaneous anarchic outbreak, or instigated by what we might now call politically motivated men.

10. Thompson, p. 661; see also p. 75; David Goodway, London Chartism 1838-1848, pp. 222, 12.

11. Mirror, Newcastle and Londonderry, 11 October 1831, pp. 2940, 2941, Hunt and Lamb, 11 October 1831, pp. 2948-49, various speakers, 12 October 1831, pp. 2986-3002; J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, pp. 97-103, 292-93.

12. Pilgrim, I, 150 ([9] May 1836, to Macrone); John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work, p. 77.

Thus he shows vaguely specified conspirators meeting, not very plausibly, before and after the events described so graphically.¹³ A part of him, the tidy side of his personality, would like to believe that even anarchy is well planned; his deeper, more artistic, understanding is that it is spontaneous and capricious, and the novel holds the two in reasonably fruitful tension. But there is clearly no disposition on Dickens's part to support the riots; if those involved had legitimate grievances, he shows little concern with them.

The events lying behind the novel are, in the broadest sense, political, but Barnaby Rudge is scarcely a political novel. 'No Popery' is seen as an excuse for the riots, rather than the motivation. Such manifestations are scarcely to be dignified with the appellation 'radical', but it seems clear that Dickens continued to associate popular discontent with unrest, disturbance and destruction, as did many of his contemporaries, looking back, as they did, to the French Revolution. It is appropriate that Dickens's other historical novel should deal with that larger outbreak of social mayhem.

The background is of consequence also when considering Dickens's later hostility towards Chartism. His expressions against physical force Chartism were made after the events of 1848, which included rioting (not just on the now famous 10 April) and insurrectionary conspiracies in the London tradi-

13. Barnaby Rudge, Chapter 38, pp. 361-62, Chapter 39, pp. 369, 371, Chapter 59, pp. 534-37.

tion.¹⁴ Dickens expressed himself as sympathetic towards the 'many working men who are Chartists and mean no ill by it', but fulminated against some of the 'amateur' leaders of the movement: the attacks in the Household Narrative on G.W.M. Reynolds and Feargus O'Connor continued long after Chartism had failed, thus 'beating not only a dead but a rapidly decomposing horse'.¹⁵ Vaingloriousness in the leaders of the movement placed them squarely in the ignoble tradition of Lord George Gordon; Dickens's association of radicalism with personal irresponsibility and social disorder is, in the historical circumstances, unsurprising.

I turn now to a consideration of such other slender evidence as is available concerning the young Dickens's political leanings, and in particular his understanding of, and attitude towards, radicalism. Here it will be necessary to consider material from outside his period of employment on the True Sun, but I limit the discussion to the time before his first visit to America at the age of thirty. We have some intriguing suggestions of the directions of his sympathies as a young man in 'The Devil's Walk', which he

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14. 'Judicial Special Pleading', Misc. P., I, 141 (Exr., 23 December 1848); 'A Poor Man's Tale of a Patent', Repr. P., p. 462 (HW, 19 October 1850); Goodway, pp. 12, 25, 27, 68-96, 111-49.
15. Pilgrim, V, 602 (30 August 1849, to Miss Coutts); see also V, 603 (30 August 1849, to Macready); 'Judicial Special Pleading', Misc. P., I, 145; 'The Tooting Farm', Misc. P., I, 159 (Exr., 27 January 1849); 'A Recorder's Charge', ed. K.J. Fielding and A.W.C. Brice, 'Charles Dickens and the Tooting Disaster', p. 238 (Exr., 3 March 1849); 'A Walk in a Workhouse', Repr. P., p. 539 (HW, 25 May 1850). N.C. Peyrouton, 'Dickens and the Chartists', p. 159, and see pp. 154-59 generally.

contributed to Maria Beadnell's album in November 1831. This precedes his work on the True Sun, but must reflect something of Dickens's experience in reporting the Reform Bill debates for the Mirror of Parliament. It was written during the parliamentary recess following the rejection of the measure by the Lords, as is suggested by the first stanza quoted. The lines show Dickens as a moderate supporter of reform and of the Whig government:

To the House of Lords the Devil went straight
To learn the state of Nations,
And with mixed feelings of pleasure and hate
He heard their deliberations;
For he saw a few Nobles rich and proud
War 'gainst the people and Prince,
And he thought with pain tho' he laughed aloud
Of the Wars in Heav'n long since.

. . . .

Then away to Bristol he quickly walked
T'indulge in meditation,
And he gaily laughed as he slowly stalked
O'er a scene of desolation.
He honored the hand that done the deed,
Vowed that an 'Anti' he'd be,
Then back to London he started with speed
His old friend Sir Charles to see.

The Devil was walking up Regent Street
As some other great folks do
When a very old friend he chanced to meet
Whom it pleased him much to view.
Let those describe his great pleasure who can.
On the Member for Preston spying
He took off his hat, for he envied the Man
His pow'r of deceit and lying.¹⁶

'Sir Charles' is Wetherell, Tory Attorney-General until Catholic emancipation, and the most uncompromising opponent of the Reform Bill, with a taste for legal technicalities, a command of language and a capacity for sustained invective which was generally recognised as formidable by his opponents,

16. The Nonesuch Edition: Collected Papers, II, 279-80.

and an undoubted ability to get under the collective skin of the Ministry. Croker's opposition was probably more effective and Peel's more intelligent and considered, but Wetherell's was the most unrelenting and he may have spoken more often on the Reform Bill than any other member, ministers included (O'Connell, with Hibernian exaggeration, claimed that he had heard the same speech from him fourteen times). Other Tories conceded that some changes might be necessary; Wetherell, himself the member for a nomination borough, asserted that he would preserve even Old Sarum from innovation and spoliation.¹⁷ His name was a byword for attachment to the ancient constitution even before the Reform Bill was introduced, and it was with a personal courage beyond the limits of foolhardiness that he travelled to Bristol, where he was Recorder, at the end of October, thereby provoking the worst outbreak of rioting during the Reform Bill period.¹⁸ Although there is, perhaps, some confusion in

17. Mirror, Wetherell and Stanley, 28 July 1831, pp. 909-11, Wrottesley, 5 August 1831, p. 1104, Wetherell and Ebrington, 15 September 1831, pp. 2149-50, Crampton, 21 September 1831, p. 2314, Croker, 4 March 1831, pp. 678-84, 19 July 1831, pp. 684-85, 26 July 1831, pp. 848-49, 5 August 1831, pp. 1090-91, 20 September 1831, pp. 2284-97 (the best speech against the Bill which I read), Peel, 3 March 1831, pp. 644-50, 27 July 1831, pp. 875-78, 3 August 1831, pp. 1011-15, O'Connell, 4 August 1831, p. 1040, Wetherell, 26 July 1831, p. 852, Hawkins, 19 September 1831, p. 2236.

18. Accounts of the reception of Russell's speech on 1 March 1831 outlining the Government's proposals differ; The Times notes that 'Sir Charles Wetherell's "Noes" were particularly audible', and, after his seat of Boroughbridge was named for disfranchisement, 'Great laughter', this being the only such comment. E.L. Woodward, The Age of Reform: 1815-1870, p. 80; Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, pp. 250-53; J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, pp. 305-09.

Dickens's lines, I take it that the meaning is not that he welcomes the riots. But the Devil does welcome them because they bring 'desolation', and he will befriend the Bill's opponents because their obstinacy has provoked the disorder.

The last stanza quoted is perhaps the most interesting. Preston had a very wide 'potwalloper' franchise, and the reference is to Henry 'Orator' Hunt, best remembered as the leading figure at 'Peterloo' in 1819. In 1831 he consistently voted in favour of the Bill whilst maintaining that it did not go far enough and calling for universal suffrage, the ballot and annual parliaments. His amendment to enfranchise all tax-paying householders attracted but a single vote.¹⁹ The animus in Dickens's lines is not very easy to explain, although supporters of the Government charged, I think unfairly, that in voicing any reservations on the Reform Bill Hunt was making common cause with the Tories. No doubt there was more than a touch of egotism, and of repetitiveness, in his contributions; but his claims to speak on behalf of 'the people' were not ill-founded, and indeed they went generally unchallenged. He was well qualified to describe the condition of both agricultural labourers and industrial workers. There was a note of genuine concern and sympathy in his speeches which was unique in Parliament before the Reform Bill, and rare enough thereafter, and which can only be appreciated fully through an extensive reading of the debates. Dickens did not become as familiar with conditions in Preston on his brief visit over twenty years later as Hunt was in

19. Mirror, Hunt, 24 August 1831, pp. 1618-19, 1622.

1831. Hunt had, he said, visited the houses of people who, 'with all their exertion and working fourteen hours a day, could not earn more than five shillings per week', and he went on to describe their wretched living conditions, subsisting on oatmeal broth, clothed in dirty rags, and without the means to obtain firing in winter.²⁰ This came in the course of Hunt's motion to repeal the corn laws, when he was in a minority of six. At other times, he showed himself very sympathetic to the condition of children in factories, contended that magistrates were unjust and arbitrary, espoused the cause of greater economy in public administration, and opposed further Sunday legislation and the 'taxes on knowledge'.²¹ Not even Hunt's regular opposition to late sittings, it seems, could induce Dickens to regard him favourably, and his lines show him as antagonistic towards the only consistent proponent of radical views in Parliament before 1832. They offer confirmation that his work on the True Sun a few months later is not to be taken as evidence of attachment to the ultra-radical principles with which the paper was later to be associated.

It would be a mistake to make too much of this evidence, for to some extent the young reporter is reflecting the attitudes current in Parliament. Thus Hunt was in a very isolated position, and frequently found it difficult to obtain

20. Mirror, Hunt, 15 September 1831, p. 2154; see also 11 February 1831, p. 137, 30 June 1831, pp. 225-26. Hunt's parliamentary character is well summarised by Butler, p. 157.

21. Mirror, Hunt, 26 July 1831, p. 866, 6, 7 October 1831, pp. 2804, 2880-82, 28 September 1830, p. 2490, 2 September 1831, p. 1876, 15 September 1831, p. 2145.

a hearing (coughing was a favourite ploy). A further quotation, this time from 'The Bill of Fare' (also written in 1831), suggests that Dickens was motivated as much by the wish to stand well in the eyes of Maria and her family as by deep political commitment:

Here lies Mr. Beadnell, beyond contradiction,
An excellent man, and a good politician;
His opinions were always sound and sincere,
Come here! ye Reformers, o'er him drop a tear.
Come here, and with me weep at his sudden end,
Ye who're to ballot and freedom a friend.²²

As far as Dickens's own family background is concerned, it is difficult to believe that it was other than more or less apolitical. His recollection of first hearing 'of the existence of a terrible banditti, called "The Radicals," whose principles were, that the Prince Regent wore stays, and that nobody had a right to any salary, and that the army and navy ought to be put down', when he could have been no more than eight, makes clear that this alarming disclosure was made by a young playmate, and not through a home influence.²³ But it would appear that radicalism was viewed favourably in his family circle in the thirties.

Thus in December 1832 Dickens worked as a poll clerk at the General Election for Charles Tennyson at Lambeth (the costs of elections at that time were borne by the candidates), an appointment which probably came about through the influence of Dickens's uncle, J.H. Barrow, proprietor of the Mirror

22. The Nonesuch Edition: Collected Papers, II, 285. Presumably the significance of the emphasis was apparent at the time.

23. 'Dullborough Town', Unc. T., Chapter 12, p. 117. Dickens's age is established by the references to the Prince Regent and Chatham.

of Parliament; two years later John Dickens worked for Tennyson in the next General Election.²⁴ In 1832 Tennyson's pronouncements in the long election campaign show him taking an increasingly radical line, paralleling to a certain extent the development of the True Sun's editorial position during the second half of the year. The paper carried approvingly a report of his victory speech, by which time he was calling for vote by ballot, abolition of the taxes on knowledge, a graduated property tax, household suffrage, triennial parliaments, 'a most extensive Reform' of the Church (including disestablishment if its doctrines were not supported by a majority of the people), reform of the Lords, commencing with the bishops, and reform of the 'sanguinary portions of the criminal code'.²⁵ This would be regarded as a distinctly radical programme, and Dickens's work for Tennyson is of some consequence as an indication of the general direction of his sympathies, although it would be a mistake to assume that it suggests a complete identification.

Tennyson's career reveals much concerning the character of radicalism at this period. He had resigned from the Whig ministry in 1830 ostensibly on the grounds of ill-health, but in fact so as to set about the task of establishing his position as the head of a county family. Although his 'manorial pretensions and dynastic ambitions became the laughing-stock

24. Pilgrim, I, 11; W.J. Carlton, 'Dickens and the Two Tennysons', pp. 173, 174; Walter Dexter, ed., Dickens to his Oldest Friend, p. 267.

25. True Sun, 13 December 1832; see also Maccoby, English Radicalism 1832-1852, pp. 70-73.

of mid-Lincolnshire', it is doubtful whether any inconsistency with his politics would have been felt by contemporaries.²⁶ There is much to show that radicalism and riches were not regarded as incompatible, probably because radicalism was not seen as promoting causes which would benefit the most disadvantaged sections of society at the expense of the well-to-do, but as being more a question of promoting far-reaching reforms in institutions, and reducing unnecessary government expenditure.

Tennyson seems an unlikely associate for Dickens's family, from both a social and a political point of view, but it is worth stressing how very respectable radicalism could be. Tennyson resembled various other radicals, including some of the proprietors of the True Sun, in being distinctly well-heeled, with no sense of incongruity between politics and private circumstances. Also, of course, it was only the propertied classes whose political opinions were regarded as of consequence: property conferred legitimacy. Radicalism, so far from being hostile to the institution of property, saw its acquisition as an acceptable goal, and that attitude extended into working class radicalism also. As the True Sun put it, 'The great object of Reform, is the PRESERVATION OF PROPERTY' (3 December 1832). That precept was safe with Tennyson.

If little encouragement towards radicalism can have been

26. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr., Introduction to The Letters of Alfred Lord Tennyson, Vol. 1, p. xx; see also pp. xvi-xvii. Charles Tennyson was the uncle of the poet, but the two families were on distant terms. For a somewhat more sympathetic account of his activities, see Robert Bernard Martin, Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart, pp. 210-13.

derived by Dickens from this source, the same would be equally true of the other radical members whose parliamentary performances Dickens would have had ample opportunity to study. I have mentioned already the lone example of Henry Hunt in 1831, and will now discuss the greater number of professed radicals who were returned following the General Election held at the end of 1832. Dickens's parliamentary experience coincided fairly closely with the presence of these members, for they fared badly in the General Election in 1837. My remarks relate to the whole of the period up to 1836 when Dickens was a reporter, but are perhaps more applicable to the earlier years.

It is sometimes stated that the radicals exerted an influence out of proportion to their numbers, a proposition which could be contested, certainly so far as short term effects are concerned; that they spoke out of proportion to their numbers is undeniable. This is not a trait likely to endear itself to the reporter, and Dickens's experience could not have acted as an inducement to adopt a systematically radical view of affairs, for the good reason that these members clearly failed to do so themselves. Each had his favourite hobby-horse: the ballot for Grote, education for Roebuck, shorter parliaments for Tennyson, the stamp duty for Bulwer, the currency for Attwood, the pension list for Harvey, economic retrenchment for Hume, and a return to the days of his youth for Cobbett. In economic affairs, a considered programme was lacking although panaceas were plentiful: reform the currency, amend the poor laws, abolish the corn laws, promote emigration, improve education, introduce factory

legislation, establish equality of taxation, abolish sinecures; and there was much debate on the merit of remitting one tax or another, which the Chancellor of the Exchequer was easily able to counter by pointing to the absence of proposals for an alternative. But when Charles Buller, regarded as something of a rising young hope amongst radicals, moved a motion couched in general terms to reduce public expenditure, it was easily resisted on behalf of the Government by Stanley as an 'abstract proposition', and by Althorp, who proposed a bland, anodyne, substitute motion of his own, including, as Buller commented, "'The just principles of a wise economy!'" I do not complain of these words; their only fault, in my mind, is, that they mean nothing'. It is not difficult to imagine the feelings of the parliamentary reporters when the House was eventually counted out at one o'clock in the morning.²⁷

What was clearly missing was a consistent, detailed, reformist programme coherently presented; the radicals could not be regarded as a party, more especially because they conspicuously lacked leadership.²⁸ They might more appropriately be seen as independent reformers -- as Dickens himself might, later in his career, in that his views on a range of topics when taken together resembled no one's but his own. Bulwer wrote in 1833 that 'the ultra Radicals' were 'a motley, confused, jarring, miscellany of irreconcilable theorists!' -- ironically enough, since he rated as a radical

27. Mirror, 30 July 1833, p. 3437.

28. As noted by John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, pp. 202-05.

himself at this time. The verdict of a later historian, writing appropriately on Disraeli, is worth adding:

The Radicals of the 1830s . . . should not be confused with those who bore the same name in the high noon of the Victorian era -- the earnest, thoughtful, hard working and respectable group who looked for leadership to Cobden and Bright. On the contrary, they were an erratic, frivolous, colourful and picturesque collection of independent MPs with no coherent political philosophy and counting as adherents a large quota of cranks and eccentrics of every kind.²⁹

The distinction here illuminates the fact that Dickens did not, I think, identify himself as a radical until the 1840s, with, as Philip Collins has written, 'the implication that this was rather a daring thing to be'. The comments to Forster in 1841, 'By Jove how radical I am getting!' and to Miss Coutts in 1848 to the effect that if he were to become an M.P., 'what a frightful Radical you would think me!' bear the clear implication that two of his closest associates would not have had reason to regard him as a radical previously.³⁰

The remarks of a contemporary commentator suggest a possible professional prejudice against radicals:

The reporters . . . like all parvenus, are aristocrats in disposition, and Tories in politics . . . There is always a bias against radical members, as vulgar, illiterate men, who have no right to command our respect, because they are 'no higher than ourselves.'³¹

It is not surprising in the light of these remarks to find

29. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, II, 287; Robert Blake, Disraeli, pp. 90-91.

30. 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 71; Pilgrim, II, 357 ([13 August 1841]), V, 317 (24 May 1848).

31. 'The Newspapers', The Metropolitan, January 1833, pp. 55-56.

that the few references to radicals in Dickens's early published work are not complimentary. The first occurs in Chapter II of 'The Boarding House', published in the Monthly Magazine in August 1834, and the first of the sketches to be signed 'Boz'. Since it contains a radical, Evenson, and a Tory, Wisbottle, it might be supposed that Dickens was giving some public indication of Boz's political sympathies. But issues as such are not raised; the political labels are used to suggest general tendencies in the characters, but nothing more, and the radical is certainly less likeable than the Tory, being misanthropical and a mischief-maker. This is of interest, for, as outlined in Chapter 5, the Monthly Magazine was a moderate radical journal. Another unprepossessing radical is found in the later sketch 'The Parlour' (later entitled 'The Parlour Orator'), first published in Bell's Life in London on 13 December 1835. Here Dickens intends his 'red-faced man' to be regarded as the type of popular radical propagandists generally: 'Weak-pated dolts they are, and a great deal of mischief they do to their cause, however good', he concludes.³² Again there is no serious attempt at a critique of radical views, but the sketch catches reasonably effectively the flavour of that empty rhetoric substituting for argument to which amateur progressively minded politicians are prone. These two references, minor as they are, do suggest inescapably that, in the mid-thirties, Dickens was antipathetic to radicalism.

32. Sketches by Boz, 'Tales', I, pp. 297, 300, 303-10; 'Characters', V, p. 239.

At the time when Dickens was writing the Sketches, the True Sun continued to pursue an ultra-radical line, as the names of some of those who were associated with it in some capacity in its later years -- William Carpenter, W.J. Fox, Daniel Whittle Harvey and R.H. Horne -- will confirm.³³

The most significant of these figures, as marking the True Sun's direction, is William Carpenter, who shared with Henry Hetherington the responsibility for initiating the agitation against the 'taxes on knowledge'.³⁴ The issue conveniently summarises the distance between Dickens and the True Sun.

The paper had shown itself generally sympathetic on the question from the outset, although it was not until after the passing of the Reform Bill that it became the great radical cause. Reports of prosecutions for selling unstamped papers began to appear, and the issue was taken up in a series of leaders.³⁵ On 22 October 1832 the paper commenced the practice, following the Examiner, of showing its price thus:

Paper Print &c-----3d.	} 7d. Price
Taxes on knowledge-----4d.	

33. Andrews, The History of British Journalism, II, 211, 240-41; H.R. Fox Bourne, English Newspapers: Chapters in the History of Journalism, II, 95; Richard and Edward Garnett, The Life of W.J. Fox, p. 175; Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 112; Grant, The Newspaper Press, I, 342; R.H. Horne, 'John Forster; His Early Life and Friendships', p. 492; Maccoby, p. 413.

34. Maccoby, p. 413; Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class, p. 893. The several changes in the amounts of the various taxes concerned are summarised in Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 16, n. 4, 383, and by Joel H. Wiener, The War of the Unstamped, Chapter 1.

35. True Sun, 5, 7 March, 5, 6, 7, 27 April, 23 May 1832; 16 June, 25 July, 17 August, 5, 10 September, 17 November 1832; 25 July, 18, 30 August, 5, 12, 18, 27 September, 29 October 1832, 9 January 1833.

Patricia Hollis notes that between July 1832 and March 1836 the True Sun 'was the only stamped paper to share the concerns of the unstamped', and she relates this to the public meetings in October 1832 already mentioned, when the working classes were appealed to for financial support, meetings which came under Home Office surveillance. The True Sun became unequivocally the most radical London evening paper, and its office was used as a front for the distribution of unstamped papers, apparently from the autumn of 1835.³⁶ It seems probable that the demise of the True Sun on 23 December 1837 is partly to be attributed to falling circulation following the reduction of the stamp duty to 1d. in September 1836 and the subsequent collapse of the agitation.

The True Sun's commitment is in stark contrast to Dickens's position in the early fifties when he declined to become involved in campaigns to remove the remaining taxes, a reluctance which was, in Philip Collins's words, 'a most un-Radical position to adopt'.³⁷ His attitude was nearer to that of the Morning Chronicle, which had been at best lukewarm on the issue in the thirties, than to the True Sun, or the Examiner.³⁸ It may be that the question still had attaching to it, at least in Dickens's perception, something of the taint of illegality and political extremism deriving

36. Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press, p. 277; see also pp. 191, 193; Rowe, Radicalism in London 1829-1841, pp. 185, 200, n. 14.

37. 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 72; Nonesuch, II, 373 (31 January 1852, to Macready); Henry Vizetelly, Glances Back through Seventy Years, II, 58 (1858 or 1859).

38. Mng. Chr., 22 April, 22 August 1835, 28 January, 10, 11 March, 5 April, 24 May 1836; Wiener, pp. 96-97.

from the earlier agitation -- although the Examiner had been prominent in the campaign with no loss of respectability.

The Examiner was not as radical as the True Sun, and it wrote in 1838 in terms which confirm my earlier remarks on the True Sun's political character:

Mr. Bell, the editor of the True Sun in its best day . . . who has acquired considerable influence with the working classes, denounces Mr. Roebuck, Mr. Hume, and Mr. Grote as sham Radicals, mock Radicals, and little better than Whig aristocrats. Beyond Mr. Bell and Mr. Feargus O'Connor, there is another party who treat as traitors to the people any men who profess to respect the institution of property.³⁹

A little later Macready wrote in his diary, 'Went to dine with Dickens, at whose house I met Procter, Ainsworth, Bell of the True Sun and Forster'.⁴⁰ By this time the paper was defunct, and Dickens's familiarity with a former editor is more likely to have been through Forster's mediation than a direct consequence of his own brief association in its first year. Macready's reference offers a rare example of contact between Dickens and a journalist associated particularly with the True Sun, and the paper's character, as outlined above, goes far, I believe, towards explaining his later silence over his work for it. On the issue of the taxes on knowledge, as with others, the distance between Dickens's public position and that of the True Sun was considerable, although there were some affinities.

The difference is as much a question of tone and character as of policy. The True Sun was a somewhat disreputable,

39. Exr., 4 February 1838.

40. The Diaries of William Charles Macready, I, 455 (29 April 1838).

indeed subversive, publication. It became increasingly radical, working class, republican, and possibly revolutionary, was constantly struggling for survival, and was involved in the illegal distribution of unstamped publications. It was the subject of a series of protracted and highly contentious law suits and was also before the courts for libel, as a result of which three of those responsible for it were jailed. One of those connected with the True Sun had been tried for high treason and another for criminal libel in saying that the King was insane, and O'Connell and sundry Roman Catholic influences -- always suspected of tending to disloyalty if not outright sedition -- were also involved with the paper.⁴¹

Not all of Dickens's early biographers were aware that he had ever been connected with this short-lived, obscure, extremist evening newspaper. One who did mention it, writing in 1858, referred to the True Sun's political character, and added:

The politics of a paper on which a man is engaged must not be identified with his own; -- liberal Mr. Dickens is, as every man of extensive thought and mind must be, as regards social questions, but his politics are not of that class generally understood by the term ultra-liberal.⁴²

41. Vivian, 'Radical Journalism in the 1830's', pp. 225-27; Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 107-08; Andrews, The History of British Journalism, II, 115-16; Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 248; Mirror, 4 July 1834, p. 2614, 23 July 1834, pp. 2914-22.

42. [J. Hain Friswell], Charles Dickens: A Critical Biography, p. 5.

CHAPTER 3. THE MIRROR OF PARLIAMENT, 1831-34, AND
PARLIAMENT.

In this chapter I examine Dickens's period of employment with the Mirror of Parliament, which began perhaps at the start of the 1831 parliamentary session, and continued until he started with the Morning Chronicle in August 1834, with, it seems, an unexplained gap from about the winter of 1831-32 until the spring or summer of 1832. I give an outline of the character and history of the Mirror, and describe the nature of Parliament at this time and Dickens's response to it as revealed in his later remarks, and I consider the consequences of his work as reporter for several aspects of his later career. I then discuss some of the politicians whose parliamentary performances he would have witnessed, and with whom he was later to be associated in some way, and conclude with a consideration of the politicians in his fiction. Most of my remarks concerning Parliament and individual politicians would be equally applicable to the succeeding period when Dickens was working for the Morning Chronicle, and although my illustrations are mostly drawn from the years when he was working on the Mirror, I have made use of other material when it has seemed appropriate.

The Mirror of Parliament was founded in 1828 by J.H. Barrow, Dickens's maternal uncle. The original aim was to report Parliament in 'great detail', and the later policy

appears to have been that the record should be as comprehensive as possible. Even so, newspaper reports were often fuller in giving interruptions or responses of agreement and disagreement, and occasionally there is evidence of a lapse in the record, whilst at other times, particularly on the committee stage of bills, such summaries as 'several verbal amendments were then agreed to' appear.¹ Barrow several times expresses his intention to make the Mirror totally impartial, although the main source of finance appears to have been subscription by M.P.'s, and these Members had the right to read the proofs of their speeches and make corrections prior to publication; The Times claimed that the Mirror was 'an authentic record of the speeches which noble lords and hon. members, after a day's reflection, think they ought to have made'.² Also, Barrow's prefaces refer to the work done by Parliament and the measures of reform passed in terms which make it clear that he regards these as real and worthwhile achievements.³

But there is no doubt that the Mirror was the fullest report of Parliament available for the period. Those few historians who are aware of its existence find that it gives

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1. Mirror, Prospectus, January 1828, p. 2; Barrow noted the difficulties in reporting committees of the whole House in his prefaces, June 1831, p. iii, February 1835, p. iv.
 2. The Times, quoted in Arthur Aspinall, 'The Reporting and Publishing of the House of Commons' Debates 1771-1834', p. 248; see also p. 251; Mirror, Prospectus, January 1828, pp. 2, 3, Preface, February 1831, p. iv, June 1831, p. iv, December 1831, pp. iii-iv; Morning Herald, The Times, 10 February 1831; W.J. Carlton, 'Dickens's Literary Mentor', p. 57.
 3. Mirror, Preface, February 1831, p. iv, January 1833, p. iii, February 1835, pp. iv-v.

a better account than Hansard, which was produced from a compilation of newspaper reports at this time. Hansard himself admitted the Mirror's superiority and tributes to its accuracy were paid subsequently by Macaulay, and by Gladstone as late as 1877.⁴ In Barrow's words, the Mirror was a 'gigantic undertaking', and his prefaces bear witness to the sheer amount of hard work involved.⁵ Dickens's employment on the Mirror may have been due in the first instance to his family connection, but it was no easy option, particularly since the 1833 session was unprecedentedly heavy. It appears likely that it was at this period (rather than when he was working for the Morning Chronicle) that he acquired the detailed knowledge of the mechanics of actually producing a journal to which he made reference later.⁶ The Mirror included remarkably full and useful (if occasionally unreliable) indexes in the last volume for each year, extending to over sixty large triple columned pages, and followed by some forty pages giving the important divisions in both Houses,

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4. Mirror, Prospectus, January 1828, pp. 1-2; Aspinall, 'Reporting and Publishing', pp. 254, 255, n. 4; Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, p. 370, n. 92; Carlton, p. 57; H. Donaldson Jordan, 'The Reports of Parliamentary Debates, 1803-1908', p. 438; Pilgrim, I, 10, n. 4; George Watson, The English Ideology, p. 114; Julian Charles Young, A Memoir of Charles Mayne Young, II, 112.
 5. Carlton, p. 59, quoting material in the Royal Literary Fund archives where Barrow says that he worked for an average of sixteen hours a day over the fourteen years of the Mirror's existence; Mirror, Preface, January 1833, p. iv, where Barrow says that he and others had worked for eighteen to twenty hours a day over the course of the session.
 6. Pilgrim, III, 265-66 (11 July 1842, to Lady Holland), IV, 479 ([22 January 1846], to Thomas Beard), where Dickens says of the Daily News, 'I sat at the Stone, and made it up with my own hands'.

and it may be that Dickens aided in the enormous labour of producing these indexes. It is clear that he helped his uncle to some extent in his preparations during the recess and at week-ends, travelling to his home at Worwood for the purpose. As early as December 1832 he wrote concerning 'our arrangements'.⁷

Barrow concluded his January 1833 Preface by noting 'with pride', 'that the MIRROR OF PARLIAMENT, during the last Session, was quoted in Debate, as authority, no less than five times in the House of Lords, and twenty-seven times in the House of Commons'. Later references show that Members took its reliability for granted, and it was generally conceded in the course of a debate in 1834 on a proposal to give the Mirror official recognition. Hansard's highly hostile, and personal, Preface for that year does not raise the issue of accuracy. Barrow's disappointment at the failure of the attempt is evident from his February 1834 Preface, where he claimed that if all those who were in favour of the motion, or shut out, had voted, it would have passed; in fact, it was defeated by 99 votes to 117, a majority of eighteen. A previous attempt to raise the matter had foundered on the obstacle that technically all parliamentary reporting was a breach of privilege; but on the later occasion Members reasonably regarded this as an anachronism, and it is clear that the main concern was the cost to the public purse, at a time when

7. Pilgrim, I, 10 (to Hartland), 33 ([?10 December 1833], to Kolle), 39 ([Spring 1834], to Kolle). Dickens wrote to Stanley's private secretary, 'I am always entirely unemployed during the recess', which appears to be stretching the truth somewhat, Pilgrim, I, 30 (6 June [1833]).

economy was usually regarded as one of the first principles of reform, and the motion failed to obtain Government support for this reason. The failure meant that the intriguing offers by two Members to show that assistance could be given without costing anything were not taken up. It is clear from the discussion that the principal motive for bringing the question forward was financial, for there are references to the possibility of the journal closing if support was not forthcoming.⁸ Dickens's decision to leave the Mirror not long afterwards may well have resembled his departure from the True Sun in that it was prompted by concern as to its future prospects.⁹ In the event the Mirror continued publication until 1840, with a change of format from the original bulky folio volumes to more manageable octavo following the accession of Queen Victoria.¹⁰

One other main reason was given for withholding public support from the Mirror: the belief that no-one would want to read it. Althorp, speaking on behalf of the Government, was, seemingly, unfamiliar with the Mirror, since he observed that a complete report 'would be voluminous to a great

8. Mirror, 12 May 1834, pp. 1644-45; 22 May 1834, pp. 1844-50; Hansard's Parliamentary Debates, 3rd. Series, Vol. XXV (1834), Preface, pp. iii-v.

9. Anxiety as to the Mirror's finances can be detected beneath the prefaces for February 1829, p. 2, February 1830, October 1830 and June 1831, p. iv.

10. More than one of the secondary sources state incorrectly that there was a lapse in publication from January 1837. On Dickens's later employment of Barrow as foreign correspondent to the Daily News, and failure to support Barrow's application to the Royal Literary Fund shortly before his death in 1858, see Carlton, 'Dickens's Literary Mentor', pp. 54, 60-64; K.J. Fielding, 'John Henry Barrow and the Royal Literary Fund'.

extent', a remark echoed by Dickens in commenting sardonically on the Mirror in 1856.¹¹ The question of a full official report had been discussed before and Dickens may have been aware in general terms of the argument expressed earlier by one commentator in contending against such an idea: 'The first consequence would be the incalculable increase of speaking, and the impossibility of the House getting through the business of parliament, even if the session were to last the whole year. Much of this effect has already been produced by the Mirror of Parliament'.¹² Stanley, in speaking on behalf of the Government in the 1834 debate, implied that the speeches of important Members -- such as himself -- were reported without difficulty in the newspapers, which gave the debates 'as fully and as accurately as can be expected by the public, and, in fact, to as great an extent as the public wish for'. Other speakers supported this view, and mentioned the length and repetitiveness of the debates.¹³ The idea of speeches being delivered (often to a thin House) of such little value or consequence that by common consent they were not worth preserving constitutes an irony of which Members seem to have been unaware, but which may not have been lost on the young Dickens: 'words, words, words', echoing

11. Mirror, 22 May 1834, p. 1844; Nonesuch, II, 777 (6 June 1856, to Wilkie Collins).

12. 'Newspaper Reporting', The Metropolitan, pp. 281-82. Peel had spoken against a full report in, or before, 1830: 'Ned Culpepper', 'Place-men, Parliament-men, Penny-a-Liners, And Parliamentary Reporters', p. 291.

13. Mirror, 22 May 1834, pp. 1846, 1845. Wynn commented that the debates on the Repeal of the Union and the East India Charter were 'nearly the same arguments, reiterated over and over again', p. 1848.

Hamlet, summarises his later account of the great deal that is rotten in his view in the 'Haunted House' of Westminster.¹⁴

It was a verbose age, which attached little value to the virtues of brevity or originality. One speaker said, 'The length of a speech is now the test of its excellence'; thus there was almost an unstated assumption that if O'Connell spoke for four hours or so in favour of the repeal of the Union, Spring Rice, in speaking against for six hours, must have made a case which was half as good again.¹⁵ Normally the assurance on rising that a long speech will not follow serves as a signal to the listener or reader that he may expect the worst; indeed, I noticed but one occasion during these years when this conventional disclaimer was followed by one brief, simple, well supported -- and original -- point, and the resumption of his seat by the speaker.¹⁶

The leading example of parliamentary garrulity must be the debates on reform which dominated Parliament from March 1831 to June 1832, totally disrupting the normal time-table whereby the House was in recess from high summer until well into the new year. On this period, with its political uncertainties and popular turbulence, Dickens made no subsequent observations, as far as I am aware, so that the extent of his

14. Misc. P., I, 419 (HW, 23 July 1853).

15. Mirror, Harvey, 29 July 1833, p. 3401, O'Connell, 22 April 1834, pp. 1188-1205, Rice, 23 April 1834, pp. 1213-41, and ending in farce: 'I am placed, Sir, in a situation of some embarrassment; for in the multitude of papers before me, I cannot find the Address which I intended to move'.

16. Such rare self-restraint deserves to be recorded: Mirror, James, 15 May 1834, p. 1757.

attendance at the debates must remain uncertain. To have been a witness to the passing of what, by any account, was a measure of historic importance would by many journalists have been regarded as an event of rare fortune, and one which would have offered ample material for later reminiscence. Dickens, clearly, did not regard the matter in such a light.

That the amount of deliberation was exceptional even by the extended standards of the time was generally appreciated. As early as 9 March 1831 Harvey commented on the impossibility of saying anything new, and Russell observed that the 'seven nights' debate', as it became known, on leave to introduce a bill was 'of greater length than I believe was ever known to have taken place in this House on any subject'; Dickens himself complained of weariness, it seems, at the end of the first week of debate. But this represented the merest preface to the discourse which was to come, as noted by the historians of the measure: 'Probably no measure has been so thoroughly debated in Parliament before or since', largely because 'Closure procedures did not even become an issue in the House of Commons until the 1870s. An opposition which wanted time had merely to take it'. Dickens does not appear to have been reporting Parliament continuously for the whole of the period concerned, but during the months from March to October 1831 (when there are grounds for supposing that he was there with some regularity), Parliament probably spent in excess of five hundred hours in discussing reform.¹⁷ On a

17. *Mirror*, Harvey and Russell, 9 March 1831, pp. 763, 778; *Pilgrim*, I, 2 ([7 March 1831], to Mary Anne Leigh). J.R.M. Butler, *The Passing of the Great Reform Bill*, p. 235; Michael Brock, *The Great Reform Act*, p. 212. Hume

preliminary view, the further amount of time from December 1831 to June 1832 would be somewhere approaching this figure.

This extended consideration increased the prevailing atmosphere of political excitement, as far as both politicians and the general public were concerned, but it is much to be doubted whether the small band of parliamentary reporters saw the matter in the same way. In effect, the crisis was of the nature of a constitutional trial of strength between the two houses of Parliament, and it was protracted not because the arguments were very complex -- basically both sides' positions were very simple -- but as the medium through which an elaborate game of political bluff was played out. It was not important whether, for instance, allegations that partiality was involved in the Government's proposals were aired in Parliament one or fifty times: the outcome was the same. Undoubtedly Dickens's major memories of the debates on the Reform Bill would have been of late nights, exhaustion, and an avalanche of words. To that might be added the indiscipline of the proceedings, particularly once the Bill reached the Committee stage. Opponents complained that supporters did not attend to their arguments properly. Almost certainly there were more Members present paying less attention to the proceedings than was usual, and it was said that the session was the most disorderly ever known.¹⁸

estimated on 27 August 1831, Mirror, p. 1702, that the total time was then 350 hours, which is probably not wide of the mark, but he did not allow for the many hours spent discussing petitions on reform.

18. Mirror, 12 August 1831, pp. 1302, 1304, 17 August 1831, p. 1427, 18 August 1831, pp. 1470, 1472, 24 August 1831,

It seems that matters did not improve with the return of the first reformed Parliament. As one Member commented:

Any stranger who was brought here for the first time, would be astonished at the appearance we present; he would naturally ask, 'Can this be the Assembly which has been the wonder of the world? Are these the master spirits of the age?' I will say this -- that never, in any assembly in which I have mixed, have I seen such behaviour as I have witnessed in this House; -- never have I seen a place which presented such an extraordinary appearance. Members coughing, shouting, talking, lolling about, lying asleep, at full length, on benches, and so forth, instead of attending to the proceedings of the House.

Here there is (I think) no irony in the representation of the imaginary visitor's questions. Dickens's remarks a little later are in similar vein, apart from his concluding comparisons, but present no such interpretative problem:

The body of the House and the side galleries are full of Members; some, with their legs on the back of the opposite seat; some, with theirs stretched out to their utmost length on the floor; some going out, others coming in; all talking, laughing, lounging, coughing, oh-ing, questioning, or groaning; presenting a conglomeration of noise and confusion, to be met with in no other place in existence, not even excepting Smithfield on a market-day, or a cock-pit in its glory.¹⁹

The behaviour of Members was in keeping with the laxity of the debates. Standing Orders were loose and permissive, and the Speaker rarely intervened -- on one of the few

pp. 1630, 1637, 2 September 1831, p. 1889, Hunt, 15 September 1831, p. 2160. Hobhouse replied to charges of inattention, 'I will only say, as Lord North said when he was accused of going to sleep, -- "I wish to God I could . . ."', 3 August 1831, p. 1025.

19. Mirror, Davies, 2 July 1833, p. 2699; 'A Parliamentary Sketch', Sketches by Boz, 'Scenes', XVIII, p. 157. The comparisons to Smithfield and a cock-pit did not appear when the piece was first published (Evg. Chr., 7 March 1835) -- notably, since elsewhere Dickens's textual alterations in the Sketches tend to tone down his original expression.

occasions when he did so, it was to rule that the whole debate was out of order on a technicality, but this was only after it had continued for some time. The House (these problems applied mostly to the Commons) was puzzled as to how best to get through its business, and spent time in discussing how time might be saved, but to no effect.²⁰ One of the problems was that with the franchise severely limited, the right to petition was taken seriously by legislators and populace alike, as the character of the Chartist movement later shows. The Reform crisis was the occasion for a shoal of petitions (Brougham presented eighty on one day), and the expectations generated by the return of the first reformed Parliament meant that the number of both petitions and motions increased considerably, thereby exacerbating the difficulties of getting through the business. Parliament spent several hours every day considering petitions, and it was not at all unusual for impromptu -- and, sometimes, fairly important -- debates to develop.

Debates, indeed, could be held on any occasion: on petitions, on First and Second Reading of bills, on the motion that the Speaker leave the Chair prior to going into Committee, on a motion to make an Instruction to the Committee, on the various clauses of the Bill in Committee, on the Report Stage, on the Third Reading, and on the motion that the Bill do pass. The lack of a formal Question Time meant that

20. Mirror, 16 July 1833, pp. 3032-39; 21 February 1831, p. 374, 5 March 1833, pp. 550-51, 14 March 1833, p. 759, 15 March 1833, p. 774, 13 June 1834, pp. 2201-03, 8 July 1834, pp. 2685-88.

ministers tended to be questioned as to their policy whenever the opportunity presented itself. Parliament was truly what its members often called it, 'a deliberative assembly', with executive and legislative functions secondary. Dickens commented much later on 'The uselessness of arguing with any supporter of a Government or of an Opposition'. A contemporary remarked that Dickens himself 'hates arguments; in fact, he is unable to argue -- a common case with impulsive characters who see the whole truth, and feel it crowding and struggling at once for immediate utterance', which suggests that Dickens might have been temperamentally incapable of appreciating the character of parliamentary discourse, even on the rare occasions when it functioned at its best.²¹

The discourse was, it must be added, sufficiently tiresome, and Dickens remembered it well enough in 1851 to comment in 'A Few Conventionalities' on some of its features.²² In the first chapter of Pickwick, he was remembering the personal altercations he had witnessed in Parliament, and some years later he wrote that 'after the pattern of the real original, our Vestry in playing at Parliament is transcendantly [sic] quarrelsome'; the subsequent description brings out the absurdities to the full, although it would be difficult to say, in the light of similar incidents in Parliament, that he exaggerates.²³ The style of speaking, the rising

21. 'Medicine Men of Civilisation', Unc. T., Chapter 28, p. 287; R.H. Horne, A New Spirit of the Age, I, 75.

22. Misc. P., I, 335-37 (HW, 28 June 1851).

23. 'Our Vestry', Repr. P., p. 577 (HW, 28 August 1852); Mirror, 9 August 1831, pp. 1196-1200 for imputations cast on Lord Durham, settled by deciding that the dif-

to Order, the indirect mode of address, the personal explanations, the allegations of breach of privilege (on which Parliament always made itself quintessentially ridiculous at enormous length), all the conventions of parliamentary rhetoric, must have proved wearisome to a degree to the reporter.

Instances could be multiplied here; but as Dickens remarked later with distaste on Grey's 'style of speaking, his fishy coldness, his uncongenial and unsympathetic politeness, and his insufferable though most gentlemanly artificiality', here is an example of the Prime Minister's style:

I am afraid it will not be in my power to add anything to the argument which has been so ably, so calmly, and at the same time, so powerfully stated by my Noble and Learned Friend; and yet, my Lords, on a question which appears to me to be so important, and with respect to the fate of which so strong an interest is felt by the Members of your Lordships' House, whatever be the side on which they sit, or whatever political opinions they may entertain, I cannot suffer the House to come to a decision without venturing to trouble your Lordships with a few observations.²⁴

That was on the Committee stage of the Church Reform (Ireland) Bill, but it could have been on anything, and in the absurdity of the opening, the sham humility, and the windy periphrastic nothingness it only accentuates a tendency continuously present. Dickens had to take down a great amount of

ference turned on the distinction between a direct statement and a hypothetical one; 5 February 1834, pp. 41-49, 50, 6 February 1834, pp. 55-57, 10 February 1834, pp. 72-82, for an altercation between the normally mild-mannered Althorp and several Irish members which resulted in himself and Sheil being taken into custody by the Serjeant-at-Arms (but not for very long).

24. Pilgrim, IV, 605, ([?15-17 August 1846], to Forster); Charles Kent, 'Charles Dickens as a Journalist', p. 369; Mirror, 25 July 1833, p. 3319.

this type of thing, and the researcher who has read through any quantity of it can only feel for him. Parliament, it is as well to state clearly, was usually boring, and often very boring. In 'Our Bore' Dickens was too sensible to give anything but represented speech.²⁵ The Mirror of Parliament gave itself no alternative to verbatim reports.

In several of the aspects discussed, Dickens's parliamentary service was probably unfortunately timed. Procedures were gradually tightened (notably the speeches on petitions), and the generally brutish manners seem to have improved later. G.M. Young says that 'The manners of Parliament in the thirties seem to have been the worst on record'. Also, the earlier, and greater, part of Dickens's work was in the 'old' Houses of Parliament, with its cramped conditions, bad acoustics, and unwholesome atmosphere relieved only by currents of cold air.²⁶ If it is literally true that Dickens never re-entered Parliament after leaving it for the last time as a reporter (a point on which there is some uncertainty),²⁷ it would seem that his later strictures must relate more to the thirties than to later decades.

25. Repr. P., pp. 581-88 (HW, 9 October 1852).

26. G.M. Young, Victorian England: Portrait of an Age, p. 31; Elie Halévy, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841, p. 65 and n., relates the disorderliness specifically to the radicals in the House; E.L. Woodward notes that the practice of introducing a debate when presenting a petition was abolished later, The Age of Reform, 1815-1870, p. 88, although his dating is inaccurate; Mirror, Trench, 12 August 1831, pp. 1284-85, 11 October 1831, p. 2968.

27. David Copperfield, 'One joyful night . . . noted down the music of the parliamentary bagpipes for the last time, and . . . never heard it since' (Chapter 48, p. 589), and Dickens told Mrs. Fields that he never entered Parliament again (Memories of a Hostess, p.

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Dickens made frequent disparaging references to Parliament in later years. As often, Forster provides the clue, in his remark that, so far as the 'Pickwickian sense' of the House of Commons was concerned, Dickens 'omitted no opportunity of declaring his contempt at every part of his life'.²⁸ That Dickens continued to regard the proceedings as disorderly is suggested by 'On Strike' (1854), where he compares the conduct of the delegates' meeting favourably to Parliament.²⁹ In a recent article it has been suggested that Dickens's 'disillusion with Parliament' developed later than 1849, but this is inaccurate.³⁰ I have quoted already Dickens's reference to the character of the Chamber in 'A Parliamentary Sketch', first published in 1835; there is feeling behind his admonitory 'Take one look around you, and retire!'.³¹ Two years later, after leaving reporting, he can distance himself more, and achieves more of wit and less of feeling in an extended metaphor:

Perhaps the cast of our political pantomime never was richer than at this day. We are particularly

178). But in 'Please to Leave your Umbrella' there is a reference to 'when I went to the Strangers' Gallery of the House of Commons', Misc. P., II, 169 (HW, 1 May 1858), although this piece was not reprinted by Dickens or acknowledged as his. His general attitude is clear enough from a letter to Talfourd: 'A friend of mine -- a man you will say of most extraordinary tastes -- wants to go into the Gallery of the House of Commons next Friday' (Pilgrim, II, 213, 16 February 1841).

28. Forster, I, iv, 64.

29. Misc. P., I, 462, 463 (HW, 11 February 1854).

30. Alec W. Brice and K.J. Fielding, 'A New Article by Dickens: "Demoralisation and Total Abstinence"', p. 16.

31. 'A Parliamentary Sketch', Sketches by Boz, 'Scenes', XVIII, p. 157; to be accurate it should be noted that the exclamation mark was added afterwards.

strong in clowns . . . Night after night will they twist and tumble about, till two, three, and four o'clock in the morning; playing the strangest antics, and giving each other the funniest slaps on the face that can possibly be imagined, without evincing the smallest tokens of fatigue. The strange noises, the confusion, the shouting and roaring, amid which all this is done, too, would put to shame the most turbulent sixpenny gallery that ever yelled through a boxing-night.³²

The continuity of Dickens's attitude is established by noting the similarity of the above passage to remarks made in 1855 to the Administrative Reform Association. Palmerston, who had recently become Prime Minister for the first time, had incautiously referred to a previous meeting held at Drury Lane Theatre as 'private theatricals'. The chance, given Dickens's delight in the theatre, was too good to miss:

I have some slight acquaintance with theatricals, private and public, and I will accept that figure of the noble lord. I will not say that if I wanted to form a company of Her Majesty's servants, I think I should know where to put my hands on 'the comic old gentleman' [roars of laughter]; nor, that if I wanted to get up a pantomime, I fancy I should know what establishment to go to for the tricks and changes [renewed laughter]; also, for a very extensive host of supernumeraries, to trip one another up in that scene of contention with which many of us are familiar . . . The public theatricals which the noble lord is so condescending as to manage, are so intolerably bad, the machinery is so cumbersome, the parts so ill distributed, the company so full of 'walking gentlemen' [laughter], the managers have such large families, and are so bent upon putting those families into what is theatrically called 'first business' -- not because of their aptitude for it, but because they are their families, that we find ourselves obliged to organize an opposition. [Cheers.]³³

32. 'The Pantomime of Life', 'Mudfog and Other Sketches', p. 674 (Bentley's Miscellany, March 1837). Dickens may have been unconsciously remembering a more extended piece in the Examiner in 1835 entitled 'Pantomime and Politics': Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 212-14.

33. Speeches, p. 200 (27 June 1855).

Comments in this vein are first presented as Dickens's considered views in American Notes, where he remarks,

I do not remember having ever fainted away, or having even been moved to tears of joyful pride, at sight of any legislative body. I have borne the House of Commons like a man, and have yielded to no weakness, but slumber, in the House of Lords.³⁴

Earlier in the same work he describes his arrival in Halifax coinciding with

the opening of the Legislative Council and General Assembly, at which ceremonial the forms observed on the commencement of a new Session of Parliament in England were so closely copied, and so gravely presented on a small scale, that it was like looking at Westminster through the wrong end of a telescope. The governor, as her Majesty's representative, delivered what may be called the Speech from the Throne. He said what he had to say manfully and well. The military band outside the building struck up 'God save the Queen' with great vigour before his Excellency had quite finished; the people shouted; the in's rubbed their hands; the out's shook their heads; the Government party said there never was such a good speech; the Opposition declared there never was such a bad one; the Speaker and members of the House of Assembly withdrew from the bar to say a great deal among themselves and do a little; in short, everything went on, and promised to go on, just as it does at home upon the like occasion.³⁵

The qualified note of approbation concerning the Governor's role here was not repeated some time later, when Dickens wrote from England to Macready, then in America, on the Queen's Speech being 'awful and most frightful humbug'.³⁶ Later he commented on 'the stupendous absurdities attendant

34. American Notes, Chapter 8, pp. 165-66. Dickens here masks the nature of his familiarity with Parliament. It is doubtful whether as a reporter he ever had occasion actually to slumber in the Lords.

35. American Notes, Chapter 2, pp. 72-73. This is described by the Penguin editors, amazingly, as an 'idyll' (p. 29).

36. Pilgrim, V, 485-86 (2 February 1849).

on "A message from the Lords" in the House of Commons'.³⁷

In 1844 Dickens wrote to his brother-in-law that he had no respect for Parliament, and a decade later he expressed himself more strongly, writing of 'my hope to have made every man in England feel something of the contempt for the House of Commons that I have. We shall never begin to do anything until the sentiment is universal'.³⁸ In 1841, when at his most politically conscious, he refused an invitation to stand as a Liberal candidate for Reading on grounds of expense.³⁹ Later requests were rejected, Forster tells us, much more decisively: 'it appears to me that the House of Commons and Parliament altogether is become just the dreariest failure and nuisance that ever bothered this much-bothered world'; 'no consideration would induce me to become a member of that extraordinary assembly'; 'nothing would induce me to offer myself as a parliamentary representative of that place, or of any other under the sun'.⁴⁰ It has been assumed that the last such appeal was in 1861, but in fact Dickens received an invitation from Birmingham towards the end of his life, to which he replied (he recalled later), more mildly than previously,

that if anything would induce me to forgo a determination I formed in such wise long ago the being offered the representation of Birmingham in conjunction with Mr. Bright would do so. But that

37. 'Medicine Men of Civilisation', Unc. T., Chapter 28, p. 286.

38. Pilgrim, IV, 65 (7 March 1844, to Henry Austin); Forster, XI, iii, 826.

39. Pilgrim, II, 288 (31 May 1841, to George Lovejoy), and nn., 304 (15 June 1841, to Angus Fletcher).

40. Forster, XI, iii, 827.

my mind was thoroughly made up never to enter the House of Commons, and that I had satisfied myself to rest content with the present sphere of my usefulness and occupation.⁴¹

There is a cluster of hostile references to Parliament in the early fifties. Dickens's comment to the Administrative Reform Association in 1855, 'I have the smallest amount of faith in the House of Commons at present existing', is very much in line with his usual sentiments, although there he went on, unusually, to state some of his objections: that it passes wrong bills easily and good bills with difficulty, that it is more concerned with the forms of debate than with the issues of health, taxation and education, and that it is excessively concerned with Party. In 'Our Vestry' (1852) he had concluded,

In all their debates, they are laudably imitative of the windy and wordy slang of the real original, and of nothing that is better in it. They have headstrong party animosities, without any reference to the merits of questions; they tack a surprising amount of debate to a very little business; they set more store by forms than they do by substances:-- all very like the real original!⁴²

Here and elsewhere, the most frequently repeated complaint is the one I have touched on already, familiar through David Copperfield's comments on his career as a parliamentary reporter, where Dickens is clearly using him as his own mouthpiece.⁴³ When speaking in his own voice, for whatever

41. Letter dated 19 April 1869, repr. under heading 'New Dickens Letter' in unidentified [?Birmingham] newspaper [9 June 1928], clipping pasted inside fly-leaf of Leicester University copy of E. Beresford Chancellor, The London of Charles Dickens. On Dickens's attitude to Bright, see Speeches, p. 406, and K.J. Fielding, 'Edwin Drood and Governor Eyre', p. 1084.

42. Speeches, pp. 201-02 (27 June 1855); Repr. P., p. 580.

43. David Copperfield, Chapter 43, p. 535.

audience, Dickens's view is akin to David's. In A Child's History, Charles I is criticised for attempting to rule without Parliament, and Cromwell's direct action is not wholly applauded, but the stern moral is clear: 'I wish this had been a warning to Parliaments to avoid long speeches, and do more work', echoed later (1854) in a letter:

As to Parliament, it does so little and talks so much that the most interesting ceremony I know of in connection with it was performed (with very little state indeed) by one man, who just cleared it out, locked up the place, and put the keys in his pocket.⁴⁴

In 1859 Dickens wrote that he 'had long since determined not to mix himself up personally in any of the political questions of the day'. A decade later, in his last published piece for All the Year Round, he wrote, hauntingly enough, that 'The life of almost any man possessing great gifts, would be a sad book to himself', unconsciously echoing an entry in Mrs. Fields's diary about him made at roughly the same time.⁴⁵ There is no doubt that, for whatever reason, the overt involvement in current affairs lessened after the separation from Catherine, and as the public readings absorbed a large part of Dickens's energy and attention.⁴⁶ But it should not be assumed that his opinion of Parliament

44. A Child's History of England, Chapter 34, p. 493; see also Chapter 33, pp. 452, 456-57, 468, Chapter 34, pp. 486-87; Nonesuch, II, 537 (25 January 1854, to Robert Rawlinson).

45. Henry Vizetelly, Glances Back through Seventy Years, II, 58; 'Landor's Life', Misc. P., II, 244 (AYR, 24 July 1869); 'wonderful, the flow of spirits C. D. has for a sad man', Mrs. Fields, Diary entry, May 1869, repr. Collins, Is. and Rs., II, 322.

46. Tariq Abdul Hadi Al-Ani, Charles Dickens's Weekly Periodicals, p. 6; Collins, 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 68.

had moderated -- indeed the absence of comment may well be a sign that it remained essentially the same. Thus in 'Arcadian London', first published in 1860, he celebrates his enjoyment of London out of the season. The piece, autumnal in more than one sense, presents a London strangely out of key with the bustle and conviviality one usually associates with Dickens. But there is no doubt as to the feeling behind his comments on Parliament, here connected with another institution frequently made the subject of attack:

my grateful heart expands with the consciousness that there is no adjourned Debate, no ministerial explanation, nobody to give notice of intention to ask the noble Lord at the head of her Majesty's Government five-and-twenty bootless questions in one, no term time with legal argument, no Nisi Prius with eloquent appeal to British Jury; that the air will to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow, remain untouched by this superabundant generating of Talk.⁴⁷

This catalogue of Dickens's complaints against Parliament makes no claim to be exhaustive. The two occasions I have noticed where he makes some slight defence of it are both when he is discussing historical events: I have already mentioned Charles I in A Child's History, and there is some sympathy for the position of M.P.'s and peers when faced by the mob in Barnaby Rudge.⁴⁸ But there is more than enough on the other side to show that Dickens's antipathy was one of his most deeply felt and often expressed convictions. No one who has read very far in the debates which he reported could dispute that his central criticism was amply justified, and yet it is easy sometimes to see it as something of an

47. Unc. T., Chapter 16, p. 165.

48. Barnaby Rudge, Chapter 49, pp. 453-59.

aberration, a minor obsession rather on the fringe of his work as author and his activity in other areas. Such would, I believe, be a mistake; and my suggestion here is that Dickens's years as a parliamentary reporter constituted one of the more significant experiences in the formation of his attitudes, at least as far as public affairs are concerned.

His contempt for Parliament put him at odds with by far the greater part of the opinion of his day, including the editor of the Mirror of Parliament. Confidence in the value of that enterprise must have been considerable before it was undertaken, and the ringing tones of the Prospectus form a complete contrast with Dickens's observations on Parliament:

To England and her Colonies; -- and every other State, where the blessings of such institutions as her's [sic] are rightly estimated; -- the 'MIRROR OF PARLIAMENT' will present a history of the most instructive discussions of those great principles of enlightened government and policy, the practical application of which has raised our country to a moral rank among the nations, -- as commanding as that political rank, which her physical power and grandeur have so long attributed to her.⁴⁹

In suggesting that Forster may well not have been the only model for Podsnap, I do not wish to propose Barrow as an alternative candidate, but only to point to the considerable extent to which belief in the institution of Parliament was current in Dickens's England.

An example of a different character may be given: not the least remarkable aspect of the Chartist movement is the evident unquestioning (and surely naive) belief in the efficacy of a simple measure of parliamentary enfranchisement as

49. Mirror, Prospectus, January 1828, p. 3. The Preface for February 1835 includes a more extended and inflated celebration of the virtues of British institutions, pp. iv-v.

an instrument for securing social reform. Dickens would have disagreed over that, and immediately an important factor in his hostility to Chartism is revealed. Other events such as the support for the Administrative Reform Association, the endorsement of Governor Eyre and the famous late oracular pronouncement on the people governing and The People governed are revealed in their full significance against this background.⁵⁰ Dickens was a practical man, as his activity as editor, theatre director, adviser to Miss Coutts, and so on, amply demonstrates, who saw with varying degrees of clarity what reforms were needed, but always despaired of the means of achieving them. The Circumlocution Office, we might say, would be funny if it were not so serious.

Dickens's six years as parliamentary reporter should always be remembered in considering his stance on public affairs. His conclusions concerning Parliament were very much those of Carlyle, but appear to have been reached independently of him, since they were substantially formulated before his acquaintance with either the man or (conjecturally) his works. But a coincidence of view on a matter which set them so much apart from Victorian society generally must have been important in Dickens's continued reverence for Carlyle, and in that authoritarian tendency which becomes more marked in his later attitudes. It has been remarked recently that, at least in 1849, Dickens was in favour of 'reforms that only Parliament could conceivably set

50. Speeches, pp. 197-208 (27 June 1855); George H. Ford, 'The Governor Eyre Case in England'; Speeches, pp. 407-08 (27 September 1869), 410-12 (6 January 1870).

in train'.⁵¹ What this means is that Dickens was in favour of reforms which we know in practice, and with hindsight, only Parliament could have achieved. No doubt he was level-headed enough to know that also, but it does not make him a supporter of parliamentary government as such. If some other agency had been available to implement reforms, he would have supported it. Dickens's attitude towards Parliament is in total contrast to his high regard for the police, concerning whom, it has been noted, 'In all his stories and articles . . . there is scarcely a breath of criticism'.⁵²

There is nothing to suggest that Dickens ever had any belief in democracy, which was a pejorative term in middle class usage during his lifetime. His remarks on Cromwell have already been quoted; and presumably it was to Cromwell also that he was alluding when he wrote,

I really am serious in thinking . . . that representative government is become altogether a failure with us, that the English gentilities and subserviencies render the people unfit for it, and that the whole thing has broken down since that great seventeenth-century time, and has no hope in it.⁵³

Dickens's distaste extended also to the processes of parliamentary government:

I have seen elections for borough and county, and have never been impelled (no matter which party won) to damage my hat by throwing it up into the air in triumph, or to crack my voice by shouting forth any reference to our Glorious Constitution, to the noble purity of our independent voters, or the unimpeachable integrity of our independent members.⁵⁴

51. Brice and Fielding, 'A New Article by Dickens', p. 16.

52. Humphry House, The Dickens World, p. 202.

53. Forster, XI, iii, 827.

54. American Notes, Chapter 8, p. 166.

This remark relates to his experience as reporter for the Morning Chronicle, when he witnessed several elections fought on the basis of the first Reform Bill, concerning which I comment more fully in the next chapter. The passing of the second Reform Bill near the end of Dickens's life suggested that a further broadening of the franchise would follow eventually. He does not appear to have been much interested in the measure, and his comments following the subsequent return of a Liberal government summarise his feelings: 'I do not think the present Government worse than another, and I think it better than another by the presence of Mr. Gladstone; but it appears to me that our system fails'.⁵⁵

The judgment is a harsh one, but there is no doubt that Dickens would have considered himself well qualified to make it. In his complaints against parliamentary verbosity, he probably had in mind principally the length of speeches and the repetition of points. The debates were repetitive in another respect also, that is, the manner in which topics were discussed continually over a period of years. Public affairs tended to revolve around a few well-tried, almost traditional, issues, and Sir Andrew Agnew's attempts to legislate for the Sabbath were not the only instance of an M.P. bringing a subject forward annually as a matter of routine. General accounts tend to be misleading here, since they present particular topics as becoming important at particular times. Thus the poor law, typically, is presented as an issue which surfaced with the introduction of the Speenhamland system in 1795, and did not become prominent again until

55. Nonesuch, III, 763 (14 February 1870, to Lytton).

the rural unrest of 1830 led to the passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act in 1834. But in speaking on the subject in that year, Grey referred to it as 'this important question which has been under discussion since first I entered Parliament -- now nearly half a century ago'; there had been 'constant discussions and propositions'.⁵⁶

Similarly, the corn laws in most accounts become an issue in 1839 with the founding of the Anti-Corn Law League. But they had been frequently discussed since 1815, and were referred to in 1833 as 'that interminable question'.⁵⁷

During the years when Dickens was reporting Parliament, the issue was raised frequently, both as a topic in its own right and in discussion of other economic questions; it might fairly be termed the King Charles's head of parliamentary debate. David Copperfield was written after the corn laws were at last repealed, and the narrator there comments humorously that 'the price of wheat per bushel . . . has reappeared to annihilate me, all through my life, in connexion with all kinds of subjects'.⁵⁸

The great redundancy of discussion must have been sufficiently wearisome to the reporter, but it has its advantages as far as the present undertaking is concerned. Thus although it is impossible now to determine which debates

56. Mirror, 2 July 1834, p. 2567.

57. Mirror, Knatchbull, 26 April 1833, p. 1477.

58. Chapter 26, p. 332. The context is Mr. Spenlow's defence of Doctors' Commons on the grounds that 'when the price of wheat per bushel had been highest, the Commons had been busiest'.

Dickens attended,⁵⁹ it is safe to conclude that he must have heard something of all the more important and extended ones, that is, during the years when he was working for the Mirror, on the Reform Bill, on Ireland, on the abolition of slavery in the colonies, on the future of the East India Company, on the Poor Law Amendment Act, and on economic affairs generally. The Mirror's team numbered some sixteen or seventeen, more than those used by the newspapers,⁶⁰ and Dickens's presence would have been discontinuous and haphazard, governed by his place on the roster rather than by the importance of the occasion or the quality of the debate. His attendance would have amounted to a random sample of Parliament, more extended than that of many members, and more representative probably than any, in that he attended both Houses, and was equally present when there was a thin house and for the great parliamentary occasions. It could be argued that reporting for the Mirror was a mechanical activity which did not require (and might even be inhibited by) detailed understanding of the issues under discussion, qualities which would have been demanded during Dickens's later period on the Morning Chronicle, where the reporters selected from and condensed the speeches. A fair amount of what Dickens heard must simply have worked its way through him without any great lasting effect.

59. Edgar Johnson gives some colourful detail concerning debates which, he asserts, Dickens attended, but his statements are not supported by his references, Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph, I, 87-88.

60. Kent, 'Charles Dickens as a Journalist', p. 366. The more important newspapers, such as the Morning Chronicle, normally used a team of twelve reporters, as did David Copperfield's employers, Chapter 43, p. 535.

It cannot be denied that there is an air of futility about much of the proceedings, and not just through the interminable repetitiveness already noted: nothing could be more apparent (at least to anyone of an even moderately progressive frame of mind) than the gulf between the great merit of the speeches as such of Roebuck on education or Buckingham on impressment, together with the sense and justice of the cause, and the total ineffectiveness of the means used to secure a remedy in the face of government resistance and inertia.⁶¹ But in Dickens's emphasis upon the shortcomings of Parliament as a legislative and deliberative assembly, he surely under-estimated its achievements elsewhere, notably, during these years, the Blue Books of evidence taken by the many parliamentary committees of inquiry. The setting up of a committee did not, by and large, represent a diversionary or delaying tactic by government; it pointed to an honest attempt to elucidate the facts in order to legislate on the problem, although it cannot be denied that committees were set up too readily: on Ireland (admittedly the extreme case) there had been, between 1801 and 1833, 60 Reports from Select Committees and 114 from Commissioners, a total of 174.⁶²

This considerable area of activity is one of which Dickens would have had little direct knowledge: he would not have attended the committees, and cannot have had time (never mind the inclination) to do more than dip into the voluminous

61. Mirror, 30 July 1833, pp. 3424-30, 3 June 1834, pp. 1990-94; 15 August 1833, pp. 3823-31, 4 March 1834, pp. 477-81.

62. Mirror, Rice, 23 April 1834, p. 1222.

reports, if that. In this respect he would have been worse informed, by and large, than the speakers he reported. Normally, a speaker on a topic which had been made the subject of a Report would have acquainted himself at least superficially with its contents; normally, indeed, familiarity with the Report was assumed, more or less as a parliamentary convention, and its contents were not usually repeated in any detail in the Chamber, although there were complaints sometimes (notably over the evidence gathered by the Commission of Inquiry into the poor laws) that insufficient time had been allowed for perusal.⁶³ On a topic such as the Factory Acts this could lead to a subtle distortion which was harmless enough so far as Members were concerned, but may have been misleading to the reporter who had not read the evidence as to just how horrendous working conditions could be. I touch on the Factory Acts again in Chapter 7.

I will conclude this section by noting that in one area Dickens's parliamentary experience must have had a lastingly beneficial effect -- that is, as public speaker. Agreement on his ability was general amongst his contemporaries.⁶⁴ To the present day reader, however, Dickens's speeches strike one, in general, as unremarkable: competent, moderate, work-

63. 'There it is . . . day after day rising to a column almost rivalling that at the bottom of Waterloo-place . . . Read it! -- the thing is impossible -- I will venture to say that there is not a Member in the House who has read the one hundredth part of it!' -- Mirror, Whalley, 9 May 1834, p. 1621. Grote claimed that he had indeed read all of it, p. 1621.

64. Speeches, pp. xix-xx; Bishop of Oxford, quoted by Lady [Constance] Russell, Swallowfield and its Owners (1901), pp. 304-08, repr. Philip Collins, 'George Russell's Recollections of Dickens' (p. 155); Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life, III, 35.

manlike, but containing nothing very exceptional, and generally lacking in the flights of imagination which were his greatest literary gift, and which burst forth sometimes in the letters amongst much which is pedestrian and everyday.⁶⁵ It is only when Dickens's speeches are measured against the standards of their time that something of their quality emerges. They are deliberately, almost defiantly, non-rhetorical, possessing notably the qualities which parliamentary orations conspicuously lacked, particularly those of brevity, relevance and clarity -- and the greatest of these, Dickens might have added, is clarity. His son records his useful advice to the effect that one should 'speak to the last person visible'; parliamentary speakers were often inaudible, as the newspaper reports frequently note.⁶⁶ There is agreement also as to Dickens's abilities as chairman, the necessary qualities for which are not the same as the public speaker's. George Eliot and Trollope were amongst those who agreed on his capacity, and Dickens's own reported comment is perhaps most relevant: 'when first he took the chair he felt as much confidence as though he had already done the like a hundred times!'⁶⁷ In a sense he had: in these respects he had served a long parliamentary apprenticeship in How Not To Do It.

65. The passage quoted above (p. 55) from a speech on Parliament as pantomime is rather exceptional in this respect; and, as noted, this has a literary antecedent, and was provoked by Palmerston's denigration.

66. Sir Henry F. Dickens, Memories of my Father, p. 26.

67. Charles Kent, Charles Dickens as a Reader (1872), p. 45, repr. Collins, Is. and Rs., I, 96-97; see also I, 96-

For Parliament as an institution, Dickens, we have seen, uniformly expressed himself in terms of contempt. His comments upon individual members are not extensive, but I consider them now, together with some of the members with whom he was subsequently on terms of some intimacy. It is a measure of his rapid rise to success that less than a year after reporting debates in which Talfourd participated he should have dedicated Pickwick to him.⁶⁸ Detail concerning such figures is of more than peripheral interest. Lord Jeffrey, for instance, was Solicitor General for Scotland at this time, although he rarely contributed to the debates. It adds something, again, to our knowledge of Dickens to be aware that Sir Francis Burdett (father to Miss Coutts) went over to the Tories after the passing of the Reform Bill, and that the Morning Chronicle conducted a highly personal campaign against him during the time when Dickens was working for it. The tone was set by the opening, 'It is painful to look on the wreck of a great mind It has been long known that Sir FRANCIS has ceased to be anything but a historical personage', a contention which was not consistent with the length and frequency of the attacks.⁶⁹

104 generally; Speeches, p. xix. Dickens appears to have acted as chairman for the first time in 1843 (Speeches, p. 36).

68. Pilgrim, I, 312-13 (27 September 1837). Dickens earlier wrote fulsomely to Talfourd that 'There is no one to whom every sentiment of respect and admiration (existing long, very long, before I knew you personally) bind me more strongly, than yourself', I, 299-300 (30 August 1837). Talfourd entered Parliament in 1835 and spoke rarely while Dickens was a reporter; Dickens may have reported on some court cases in which he appeared.

69. Mng. Chr., 21, 23, 27, 28, 30 November, 4, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17 December 1835, 4, 22 January 1836.

Burdett was a renegade from radicalism, and I have outlined in the previous chapter the generally lamentable performance put up by the radicals in Parliament. Amongst the reformers in Parliament in the early thirties, the most prominent, in different ways, were O'Connell and Hume, both of whom entered Parliament before 1832. There is inconsistency in Dickens's observations on O'Connell's qualities as a public speaker. He commented to Forster, probably in 1844, that 'O'Connell's speeches are the old thing: fretty, boastful, frothy, waspish at the voices in the crowd, and all that: but with no true greatness', but he said during his second American visit (1867-68) that there had been no-one since O'Connell's time to compare with him as a speaker except Bright.⁷⁰ He was, in fact, a formidable parliamentary performer. The Morning Chronicle supported him fairly consistently, going so far as to state on one occasion that he should have been given ministerial office, although his policy of repealing the legislative Union was not endorsed. It is surprising to find that Dickens is reported as saying that he heard O'Connell speak 'many, many times' about the wrongs of Ireland, and was always 'deeply moved', since throughout his life Dickens had remarkably little to say about the miseries of Ireland, beyond the occasional passing reference.⁷¹ He might serve to illustrate the truth of the

70. Pilgrim, IV, 194 ([?15-16 September 1844], to Forster); Mrs. Fields, Memories of a Hostess, pp. 176-77.

71. Mng. Chr., 7 May 1835; 14 February 1835; 1 September 1834, 9, 10 October, 23 November 1835, 4 January, 19 September 1836; Mrs. Fields, p. 176; W.J. Carlton, 'Dickens reports O'Connell: a legend examined'. In 'The Fine Old English Gentleman', 'In England there shall be dear bread -- in Ireland, sword and brand',

complaint made frequently by O'Connell and other Irish members, that the English had little interest in, or understanding of, Irish affairs.

During Dickens's years as a reporter, Irish questions were discussed more often than any other issue, and it is difficult not to feel that Dickens's apparent indifference is to be related to the great amount of mostly fruitless discussion to which he was exposed. It is possible that Dickens's attitude was coloured also by the views of the parliamentary reporters generally, with whom O'Connell was on consistently bad terms.⁷² In the 'words, words, words' of Westminster already mentioned, 'The Irish accent was very frequently detectible in these dreadful sounds, and Mr. Bull considered it an aggravation of his misery', which I think must remember Dickens's experience in Parliament. Near the end of his life he commented that 'our newspapers go on arguing Irish matters as if the Irish were a reasonable people, in which immense assumption I have not the smallest faith'. The artistic equivalent to this is Dickens's reported reply to the question as to 'how it was that he had never introduced an Irishman as a leading character in any of his works': 'he made it a point never to write about what he did not thoroughly understand, and he was quite unable to under-

where the second half serves to fill up the line rather than to express any deep commitment, Misc. P., II, 469 (Exr., 7 August 1841).

72. Mirror, 18 July 1833, p. 3120, 25 July 1833, pp. 3330-35, 26 July 1833, pp. 3360-63, 29 July 1833, pp. 3397-3405, 30 July 1833, p. 3418, 5 August 1833, p. 3548, 7 August 1833, p. 3608, 6 March 1834, p. 540, concerning O'Connell's complaints of inaccuracy in the parliamentary reporters; Michael Macdonagh, The Reporters' Gallery, pp. 362-76.

stand the Irish character'.⁷³ That seems reasonable enough -- a severe critic might add that it was a pity he did not apply the principle more often -- but the failure even to comment on what was after all the greatest disaster of British governmental policy during Dickens's lifetime is striking, even so. By comparison with the Irish potato famine, the Crimean War, on which Dickens did comment very forcibly, was a minor administrative muddle.

Dickens's adverse memory of Grey as speaker has already been noted. Grey himself, ageing and ready to leave office, often left the Government case in the Lords, once the Reform Bill passed, to be presented by Brougham, concerning whom Dickens was reported to have said:

Brougham in his prime was by far the greatest speaker he ever heard. Nobody rivalled him in sarcasm, in invective, and in spirit-stirring eloquence. He was the man, too, he said, who of all others seemed, when he was speaking, to see the longest way before him.

Philip Collins assumes that this refers to Brougham's 'political vision';⁷⁴ but a reading of his speeches suggests that what Dickens may have had in mind here was more the (admittedly related) ability to see the outlines of the course of his speech before him, and the capacity to take in and allow for the possible implications of his remarks at the same time. The observation, that is, would refer more to

73. 'A Haunted House', Misc. P., I, 419 (HW, 23 July 1853); Nonesuch, III, 747 (24 October 1869, to G.W. Rusden); Frank D. Finlay, quoted by F.G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: By Pen and Pencil, p. 163.

74. Rev. Whitwell Elwin, 'Memoir' to Some XVIII Century Men of Letters (1902), I, 249, quoted in Collins, 'Dickens the Citizen', pp. 64-65, and in Collins, Is. and Rs., I, 114.

Brougham's advocate's ability as public speaker than to his political acumen.

Dickens's views of the abilities of both Grey and Brougham as speakers were minority ones, in differing directions. The diarist Greville rated Grey, in 1830, as 'the most finished orator of his day'.⁷⁵ The usual reaction to Brougham -- with which I would have to agree -- is summed up in the punning phrase 'Vaux et praeterea nihil', and by Peacock in Crotchet Castle, shortly after Brougham became Chancellor: 'He will make a speech of seven hours' duration, and this will be its quintessence: that, seeing the exceeding difficulty of putting salt on the bird's tail, it will be expedient to consider the best method of throwing dust in the bird's eyes'.⁷⁶

Robert L. Patten has noted that in Phiz's original illustration, Pott in Pickwick Papers bore a striking physical resemblance to Brougham, but he does not mention the factor which would have given the identity its point: that is, that Brougham was notoriously a prolific contributor to the press; Melbourne, indeed, made it (at least ostensibly) one of the grounds of his exclusion from the 1835 Ministry.⁷⁷

75. Quoted in J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, p. 286; see also Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, p. 67.

76. The phrase plays on the full title, Baron Brougham and Vaux, and the tag 'Vox et praeterea nihil', 'A voice and nothing more': [G.R. Wythen Baxter], Book of Bastiles (1841), p. 77, quoted in Thomas Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, p. 240, and in Butler, p. 150, n. 1. Peacock, Crotchet Castle, Chapter 18, p. 248, and see also the continuation (Greek nonce words, twitterings from The Birds), and Peacock's notes, pp. 282-83.

77. Robert L. Patten, 'Portraits of Pott: Lord Brougham and The Pickwick Papers'; Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 237, n.

As discussed in the next chapter, Brougham was influential in the counsels of the Morning Chronicle during the early part of Dickens's employment. Direct contact between them at that time is unlikely, but the journalistic activity constitutes a point of affinity, and Dickens may have had a rather more extensive personal acquaintance with him in the forties, particularly, than is evident from the published sources.⁷⁸ If Dickens's 'turns' as reporter gave anything like a representative sample of Parliament during these years, he would have heard more of Brougham's voice than of any other politician (O'Connell might run him close). Unquestionably he would have been aware of Brougham's parliamentary character, and his apparent regard for him was presumably based on his style, which tended fairly strongly towards knockabout, and his mode of expression, where superlatives and exaggeration abound. It may be posited that personality made more of an impact on Dickens than policy; Brougham was associated particularly with the Poor Law Amendment Act, and went out of his way, in moving the Second Reading, to deliver a eulogy on Malthus, who was emphatically not a hero of Dickens's.⁷⁹

If Brougham's endless elaborations were at least nominally always upon the subject under discussion, the same could not be said of another frequent contributor, William Cobbett, who entered the Commons following the Reform Bill. Dickens

2, 317, 236-37, 239, 249, 284, 285-91, 299, 301, 302-03, 304.

78. Pilgrim, II, 371, 373, 376, 446, 452, III, 570, IV, 660; Speeches, p. 388.

79. Mirror, 21 July 1834, p. 2820.

said that his writings were amongst those which he particularly valued, a remark which has gone generally unheeded, and which might repay further investigation by some researcher willing to plough through something of the great bulk of Cobbett's writings.⁸⁰ It is difficult to believe that Dickens as a reporter reacted sympathetically to him; no one spoke more frequently to less effect, and his contributions, extensive as they were, could be summed up in one sentence: 'I want England to be what it was when I was born' -- clearly an impossible policy, more especially when Cobbett's retrospective view was strongly coloured by the rosy hue of reminiscence, and one which it is difficult to imagine Dickens finding even slightly appealing.⁸¹ Incongruously returned for the manufacturing town of Oldham, occasionally offering some entertainment value in a context where it was normally sadly lacking, but more often simply tiresome, Cobbett was in general old, stupid, vain, ridiculous, prejudiced (his anti-Semitism was considerable) and reactionary. Occasionally the student is assisted by noting the extent of the antipathy to him as a measure of the general acceptance of contrary views -- as with popular education, to which he was implacably hostile (a policy which, as a later speaker observed, 'must certainly be disinterested; for if . . . fully carried out, what would become of the Register?').⁸²

80. J.T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors, pp. 237-38.

81. Mirror, 18 March 1833, p. 810. Cobbett was speaking, with typical inconsequentiality, on the Disturbances (Ireland) Bill. He was born in 1763.

82. Mirror, Cobbett, 13 August 1833, p. 3755, 17 August 1833, p. 3898, 3 June 1834, pp. 1995-96; Evans, 17 August 1833, p. 3898. Cobbett's opposition to popular

The issue upon which Cobbett and Dickens would most obviously have been in agreement was the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. The Morning Chronicle said of Cobbett, 'his absurdity is always relieved by occasional acuteness', and this can be illustrated by reference to this measure. Cobbett put forward what was, in the context of the times, the fairly shrewd argument that members of the Commission of Inquiry 'enter upon their task with the wishes of Ministers impressed upon their minds; and they take very good care not to make a Report which will be disagreeable to their employers'. The necessary common-sense of this was vitiated by the fatal defect of self-importance, as when he asserted that the same Report contained seven libels upon him.⁸³ His opposition to the measure as it passed through Parliament was discontinuous through ill-health. He announced in May 1835 that he would move later for the repeal of the Act, but died before his motion was made. His last parliamentary act was to attack the Poor Law Commission in a debate on Agricultural Distress, when he employed the tactic, reminiscent of Oliver Twist, of reading out the provisions allowed to children in one Union in Sussex.⁸⁴

Poor law apart, the qualities which, to speculate, Dickens might most have admired in Cobbett were his independence and irreverence towards those in high places. His regard

education dated back at least to 1817: Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 10, 11.

83. Mng. Chr., 18 October 1834; Mirror, 25 July 1834, p. 2976 -- the debate this time was supposed to be on the Budget.

84. Mirror, 12 May 1835, pp. 358, 359, 25 May 1835, p. 1065.

cannot have been absorbed from the Morning Chronicle. Cob-
bett had a long-running feud with the paper's editor, whom
he termed 'Dr.' Black, in derision at his standing as a
philosopher. The paper's comments upon him were, by the
standards of the time, temperate, describing him as 'a man
who may not be as base as the conductor of The Times, but
who is equally inconsistent, and the most perverse of human
beings', and, by way of obituary, as 'perhaps the greatest
egotist that ever lived; and as every thing that he did, and
every sentence that he uttered, was important in his own
estimation, he is the most constant theme of his voluminous
writings'.⁸⁵

The question of whether personalities made more of an
impact on Dickens than policies may be further explored
through his sharply contrasting views of Russell and Palmer-
ston, the two politicians who were to be the most prominent
during his lifetime, certainly if duration in office is taken
as the criterion. He never, I think, spoke in other than
contemptuous terms of Palmerston and he always expressed the
highest regard for Russell, whereas Queen Victoria regarded
them without distinction in 1864 as 'those two dreadful old
men'.⁸⁶ But contemporaries distinguished sharply between
them in the thirties, and the seeds of Dickens's attitudes
are to be found, I believe, in that period.

Palmerston was Foreign Secretary in both Grey's and Mel-
bourne's cabinets, but he was not a prominent member of the

85. Mng. Chr., 6 December 1834, 19 June 1835.

86. The Letters of Queen Victoria, Second Series, I, 168
(25 February 1864, to the King of the Belgians).

Government, and his reputation was low in the thirties. He was regarded as a dandy, to which the adjectives 'faded' and 'flippant' were variously added.⁸⁷ Dickens, we may recall, was accused of dandyism at this time, and part of his later distaste for Palmerston may be attributed on a personal level to what might be called (to vary a favourite phrase of his) the repulsion of similarity. Distinct resemblances between them were noted much later in an obituary of Dickens by Sir Arthur Helps.⁸⁸

Direct personal contact between Dickens and Palmerston is, I think, unlikely (contrasting with Russell), and Dickens was probably not well placed to appreciate that Palmerston's more estimable personal qualities developed later in his career. It was said, for instance, that 'There never was a man who was so great a favourite personally with not the reporters only, but with all the gentlemen filling the higher positions on the press, as the late Lord Palmerston', but this may well apply principally to later periods than the thirties.⁸⁹ In accordance with his comparative unimportance at that time, he was rarely mentioned in the Morning Chronicle, although he was occasionally supported against the Tories.⁹⁰ But he was influential behind the scenes, mostly after Dickens left the paper, and one of the sub-editors said

87. Elie Halévy, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841, pp. 70-71; Fraser's Magazine, May 1836, p. 625, The Times, 25 June 1834, quoted in Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 244, 258.

88. Sir Arthur Helps, 'In Memoriam', Macmillan's Magazine, XXII (1870), pp. 236-40, repr. Collins, Is. and Rs., II, 336.

89. James Grant, The Newspaper Press, II, 205-06.

90. Mng. Chr., 8, 17 June 1835, 20 February 1836.

that the proprietor, Easthope, had an 'all but slavish worship' of him. Dickens certainly did not worship Easthope, and there may have been professional reasons behind his dislike of Palmerston, who gave the Morning Chronicle his support when it was in rivalry with the Daily News under Dickens's direction in 1846.⁹¹ Certainly the first remark by Dickens critical of Palmerston which I have noted came later that year, when he described him as a 'Clever man, but I always doubt him and feel afraid of his diplomacy'.⁹² He is not likely to have been impressed by Palmerston's high-handed approach to foreign policy.

Later references were uniformly hostile. I have quoted already from Dickens's remarks on Palmerston as pantomime artist to the Administrative Reform Association. The direct personal attack there is unusual for Dickens, but he was to make others in his journalism during the early months of Palmerston's premiership, which commenced in February 1855. By implication, it is the idea of Palmerston as Prime Minister which Dickens finds particularly deplorable.⁹³ His despair in his later years at the capacity of the political process to solve real problems is to be related to the Crimean War scandal, and to the state of public affairs when, following the resignation of Aberdeen, there was 'only' Palmerston to succeed him, which position he retained, with one

91. Charles Mackay, Through the Long Day, I, 58; Darwin F. Bostick, 'Sir John Easthope and the Morning Chronicle, 1834-1848', pp. 55-57.

92. Pilgrim, IV, 666 (27 November 1846, to Haldimand).

93. 'The Thousand and One Humbugs', I, Misc. P., II, 30 (HW, 21 April 1855); 'The Toady Tree', Misc. P., II, 53 (HW, 26 May 1855).

short interruption, for the next decade.⁹⁴ What is perhaps Dickens's bitterest journalistic piece, 'Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody', was written the next year, in the wake of the unsatisfactory outcome of the parliamentary enquiry into the conduct of the war. Palmerston is alluded to only indirectly, but there is no mistaking the strength of feeling:

I don't want Somebody to sustain, for Parliamentary and Club entertainment, and by the desire of several persons of distinction, the character of a light old gentleman, or a fast old gentleman, or a debating old gentleman, or a dandy old gentleman, or a free-and-easy old gentleman, or a capital old gentleman considering his years. I want Somebody to be clever in doing the business, not clever in evading it.⁹⁵

In correspondence, Dickens continued to be severe upon Palmerston, referring to him in this same year, 1856, as the 'emptiest impostor and most dangerous delusion', and, five years later, as 'a man notoriously of no conviction and no sentiment'.⁹⁶

The charge of lack of seriousness comes across most strongly, and, by implication, it is one from which Dickens would exonerate Russell, although I shall suggest that in his fiction he sometimes subverted the values for which Russell stood. Russell was by far the most important contact which Dickens had with an active politician, and it is worth examining the relationship more closely. Dickens's most

94. Asa Briggs, The Age of Improvement, p. 381, Victorian People, p. 77.

95. Misc. P., II, 118 (HW, 30 August 1856); Briggs, Victorian People, pp. 72-90.

96. Coutts, p. 326 (13 August 1856); Nonesuch, III, 232 (28 August 1861, to Henry Morley). Upon Palmerston becoming Prime Minister, Disraeli referred to him as 'an impostor, utterly exhausted', and Bright called him an 'aged charlatan', Briggs, Victorian People, pp. 77-78.

political novel, A Tale of Two Cities, was 'inscribed' to Russell in 1859, and his eulogy in proposing Russell's health at a public dinner in 1857 was something more than formal: it was, he said, 'his pride and privilege to enroll [him] among his personal friends'. Near the end of his life he was yet more fulsome, and said that 'there is no man in England whom I more respect in his public capacity, whom I love more in his private capacity, or from whom I have received more remarkable proofs of his honour and love of literature'.⁹⁷

Clearly personal factors were important, but it is possible to approach more closely the question of what Dickens might have respected in Russell's political outlook. It is a curiosity of the politics of the period that most of the leading politicians changed their policy, or their party, or both -- true in one way or another of Stanley, Graham, Peel, Disraeli, Aberdeen and Gladstone as well as Palmerston. Inevitably such shiftings laid those concerned open to charges of feebleness of purpose, trimming, and manoeuvring for place. Russell, by contrast, could stand as a model of political principle and consistency; he was, indeed, 'the arch-whig of the nineteenth century'.⁹⁸

It is perhaps easier to say this than to state exactly what a whig was. I explore the question further in the next chapter, and will here merely note that as a whig Russell believed it was the duty, indeed the destiny, of his order to govern. Dickens's satire in Bleak House is highly

97. Speeches, pp. 244-45 (5 May 1857), 388-89 (10 April 1869)

98. Woodward, The Age of Reform, 1815-1870, p. 94; John Prest, Lord John Russell, p. xv.

relevant, and could stand for the relations between Palmerston and Russell over a period of years:

England has been in a dreadful state for some weeks. Lord Coodle would go out, Sir Thomas Doodle wouldn't come in, and there being nobody in Great Britain (to speak of) except Coodle and Doodle, there has been no Government. It is a mercy that the hostile meeting between those two great men, which at one time seemed inevitable, did not come off . . . This stupendous national calamity, however, was averted by Lord Coodle's making the timely discovery, that if in the heat of debate he had said that he scorned and despised the whole ignoble career of Sir Thomas Doodle, he had merely meant to say that party differences should never induce him to withhold from it the tribute of his warmest admiration; while it as opportunely turned out, on the other hand, that Sir Thomas Doodle had in his own bosom expressly booked Lord Coodle to go down to posterity as the mirror of virtue and honour.

The ruling class in Little Dorrit sees public affairs very much in the same terms:

It was agreed that the country (another word for the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) wanted preserving, but how it came to want preserving was not so clear. It was only clear that the question was all about John Barnacle, Augustus Stiltstalking, William Barnacle and Tudor Stiltstalking, Tom, Dick, or Harry Barnacle or Stiltstalking, because there was nobody else but mob.⁹⁹

Russell's attachment to reform was grounded in the questionable contention that it represented the restitution of ancient rights which had been subverted through Tory malpractice. In defending the Government's plan of reform, he explained that 'The principle of this Bill is, to take away the power of nomination, not the influence of property or of character'. The distinction must be a fine one, but it was fundamental to Russell; it could be said that on the Whig

99. Bleak House, Chapter 40, p. 495; Little Dorrit, I, xxvi, 306; Elie Halévy, Victorian Years: 1841-1895, pp. 305-35; Briggs, Victorian People, pp. 37-42; John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work, pp. 187-89.

view the Duke of Bedford exercised the legitimate influence of property whilst the Duke of Newcastle was guilty of unconstitutional nomination and intimidation. Tory intimidation was the charge following one election which Russell lost, reported for the Chronicle by Dickens.¹⁰⁰ Radicals believed that the only remedy was the ballot, but Russell did not agree, and the issue reveals his conservatism. He remained consistently opposed from 1831 until the end of his career (it was much discussed at the time of the Reform Bill but not achieved until 1873, after his retirement), and he spoke against it, when Dickens was working for the Morning Chronicle, in the following unconsciously entertaining terms:

All other authorities are exercised in the light of day, and subject to public opinion . . . Can you, or ought you, to prevent this honest and open exhibition of the free spirit of Englishmen? But we are told that this may still continue for the voters who are independent, while the rest may keep their opinion a secret. Have those who thus argue, considered the consequence? We should then have two classes of voters -- one open, bold, and manly; the other skulking from an avowal of their sentiments, bearing about with them the load of anxious concealment, and afraid to whisper even to their nearest connections the dangerous secret. Will this be an improvement of our institutions?

It is not the sort of issue one would expect to find Dickens much interested in, but he did comment on it later, and made sport with the sort of attitude Russell articulated:

An implement called a ballot box . . . being recommended as efficacious, Mr. Bull suggested to his family the expediency of trying it; but so many of the Members roared out 'Un-English!' and were echoed in such fearful tones, and with such great gnashing of teeth . . . that Mr. Bull (who is in some things of a timid disposition) abandoned the

100. Mirror, 18 April 1831, p. 1500; Mng. Chr., 28 April, 2, 4, 6, 7 May 1835; Pilgrim, I, 58-60.

idea for the time, without at all knowing what the cry meant.¹⁰¹

Here, and in his Bleak House satire, it is difficult to know just how conscious Dickens was that he was ridiculing the values which Russell pre-eminently represented.

During Dickens's years with the Mirror of Parliament Russell held the unsatisfactory post of Paymaster-General, which meant that he was in the Cabinet but had no defined responsibility once the Reform Bill passed. He rarely spoke thereafter, and some Members believed that he was in the Government only in order to muzzle his reforming zeal.¹⁰² His position was very different from April 1835, as Home Secretary and leader of the party in the Commons. The Whigs by now were weakened by defections, and Russell may well have appeared to the onlooker, when set against his colleagues, as the pick of a poor bunch. It appears likely that he was at his best as a parliamentary performer during this comparatively early period: Gladstone was referring specifically to Russell in the years from 1835 to 1841 when he said half a century later that 'no man ever led the House of Commons with a more many-sided activity or a more indomitable pluck'.¹⁰³ But it is difficult to imagine that Dickens was impressed by Russell's stance on policy issues. During the thirties he was associated mostly with constitutional reform and with measures designed to meet the grievances of

101. Mng. Chr., 21 January 1835; 'A Haunted House', Misc. P., I, 422 (HW, 23 July 1853).

102. Mirror, Divett, 18 March 1834, p. 818.

103. The Nineteenth Century (January 1890), p. 40, quoted in Prest, p. 177; see also pp. 90-91.

dissenters, and was also obliged to defend the workings of the Poor Law Amendment Act. Dickens was indifferent to the first, and I point out in Chapter 7 that he was distinctly unsympathetic to the second and hostile to the third.

The political meetings which Dickens is known to have covered for the Morning Chronicle were addressed more frequently by Russell than by any other politician -- a measure of his political eminence during this period as much as of Dickens's primacy amongst the reporters. I quote in the next chapter from Dickens's reminiscence of one of these meetings, and some degree of transference from his enjoyment of such occasions into an enhanced estimation of the speaker may reasonably be conjectured, more especially when Russell's plucky qualities were displayed in facing hostile Tory demonstrations.¹⁰⁴ Reinforcement would come from Dickens's paper, for no politician was supported more consistently or warmly by the Morning Chronicle than Russell during Dickens's term of employment. Thus in the spring of 1835, during the brief Tory ministry, he was commended for his 'usual tact and sound sense'; he 'has nobly fought the battle of freedom in the House of Commons. There is but one opinion as to the wisdom, skill, and manly firmness displayed by his Lordship'. During the ensuing elections, he was defended vigorously against Tory charges of Popery, and his conduct of the Municipal Corporations Bill in July was praised for 'patience, discretion and ability . . . in the face of an Opposition numerous and watching for opportunities of mischief'.¹⁰⁵

104. Mng. Chr., 2 May 1835; Speeches, p. 347 (20 May 1865).

105. Mng. Chr., 17 March, 14 April 1835; 23, 25, 28 April,

I noted no critical comment on Russell during this period in the Chronicle. Dickens's contact with him at that time was of course indirect, but it is almost certain that before very long it became considerably more familiar. One consequence of Dickens's rapid fame was that new social circles quickly became opened to him. Less than two years after he left the Chronicle, Lady Holland was enquiring whether Boz was presentable, and his introduction at the famous Whig salon occurred in August 1838.¹⁰⁶ Holland was Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster in the Whig cabinets from 1830 until his death in 1840, and was regarded (or regarded himself) as custodian of the political legacy of his uncle, Charles James Fox. The Hollands had virtually adopted Lord John Russell as a substitute for their own son, who had proved a disappointment. It would be surprising if Dickens, still well under thirty, and of obscure origins, was not dazzled by moving amongst the exalted company of Cabinet ministers -- 'such high company', as Mr. Meagles put it.¹⁰⁷

There are incidental correspondences between the values of Holland House and those of Dickens: the delight in foreign travel, particularly in France and Italy, and the indifference to Ireland, the tendency to be Broad in Church matters (although in the Hollands' case this shaded perceptibly towards infidelity, and in Russell's towards Erastianism),

12, 15 May 1835; 21 July 1835; see also 22 August 1835, 20 May 1836.

106. Pilgrim, I, 412, n. 2, 415, n. 2.

107. Leslie Mitchell, Holland House, pp. 13, 55, 27; Prest, p. 10; Little Dorrit, I, xxxiv, 398.

combined with hostility to dissent, the support of industrialism and 'progress' generally, and the alarm at Chartism.¹⁰⁸ Russell also strongly supported popular education, and Dickens wrote a long letter to him, which has not survived, about Ragged Schools in 1846. Other references in this year indicate that by then they were on close terms: Dickens told Macready that his 'Hymn of the Wiltshire Labourers' had made a strong impression on Russell, and he wrote to Forster, 'Lord John must be helpless among them', indicating that he made a distinction between Russell and his colleagues. As editor of the Examiner between 1847 and 1856 Forster consistently defended Whig policies and Russell in particular.¹⁰⁹

Later references in Dickens's journalism to Russell are less frequent, but favourable. He commends his part in the 'Papal Aggression' crisis of 1850, and suggests that he would have been the only worthwhile member of Aberdeen's Cabinet, had not all its members been warped by the influence of the chief.¹¹⁰ If, from Dickens's point of view, one side of the unsatisfactory consequences of the Crimean War was the emergence of Palmerston to prominence, the other side was the eclipse of Russell, who resigned twice (from Aberdeen's Cabinet and then from Palmerston's) within the space of six

108. Mitchell, pp. 196, 165, 101-02, 192-93, 169.

109. Prest, pp. 136-37, 256-57; Pilgrim, IV, 572 ([?15-26 June 1846]), 497 (15 February 1846), 609 ([24-25 August 1846]). Sister Mary Callista Carr, John Forster: A Literary Biography to 1856, pp. 448-49; James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, pp. 222-25.

110. 'A Crisis in the Affairs of Mr. John Bull', Misc. P., I, 274-80 (HW, 23 November 1850); 'Mr. Bull's Somnambulist', Misc. P., I, 283-84 (HW, 25 November 1854).

months, and remained out of office until 1859. The only criticism of him from Dickens which I noted came at the end of that year, when Russell was censured for joining Palmerston's second Cabinet after saying he would decline.¹¹¹ But Dickens inscribed A Tale of Two Cities to him in that same year -- appropriately, for the bearing of the moral is distinctly Whiggish. Russell had himself written a history of the French Revolution, and his view, expressed elsewhere, was that 'The vengeance of the people followed close upon the vices of the court'.¹¹²

I will summarise this comparison by noting the apparent importance of the thirties in forming Dickens's lasting attitudes. He was probably unaware that Palmerston's positive qualities, such as they were, took time to develop, which is not to say that he did not have a reasonably clear and well-informed view of him as a public figure. Dickens's personal contact with Russell in later years probably made him unaware that his faults as a politician became more pronounced, and that he was increasingly regarded as tactless, erratic, accident prone, and a difficult colleague who was irked by the sense that he was missing the eminence which his early career had promised.¹¹³ But the over-estimate, if such indeed it was, can be related more readily to Dickens's early parliamentary and personal contact than to matters of policy.

111. 'The Tattlesnivel Bleater', Misc. P., II, 212-14 (HW, 31 December 1859).

112. Lord John Russell, Memoirs of the Affairs of Europe, from the Peace of Utrecht, 2 vols (1824, 1829), I, 48, quoted in Prest, pp. 22-23.

113. Briggs, Victorian People, p. 42; Prest, p. 345.

Dickens's best known contact with a politician during his years as reporter was with Stanley, who sent for the shorthand writer responsible for the accurately reported parts of his lengthy speech on the First Reading of the Suppression of Disturbances (Ireland) Bill, in order that he might take down the whole speech for subsequent publication as a pamphlet. Stanley, transmuted into the 14th Earl of Derby, later became three times Conservative Prime Minister, and he had already joined the Tories when Dickens wrote to him in highly ingratiating terms -- excessive I think even by the standards of the time -- to ask him to accept a copy of the Sketches by Boz, First Series. Dickens's reminiscences of taking down the speech make clear that he had more than occasional contact with Stanley in later years.¹¹⁴

That he was on good terms with other Tories may be further illustrated from the case of another politician who was in Parliament in the thirties, Sir James Emerson Tennent, to whom he inscribed Our Mutual Friend many years later. Tennent's abilities were not highly regarded. He supported the Whigs until the departure of Stanley and Graham in 1834, and was described later by the Morning Chronicle, on the occasion of his presiding at an Orange dinner in Belfast, as 'a man who has tried all principles, and adhered to none, having

114. Pilgrim, I, 126-27; of the two accounts noted there as the fullest, that which appears in Julian Charles Young, A Memoir of Charles Mayne Young, II, 112-13, derives from a meeting with Dickens in 1846, and may well be more reliable as to details than the better known report of Dickens's reminiscence recorded by Mrs. Fields in 1868, repr. Memoirs of a Hostess, pp. 174-76 and in J.T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors, pp. 230-31. Michael Macdonagh gives the concluding section of the speech as reported in five different sources, including the Mirror, The Reporters' Gallery, pp. 351-53.

in the brief space of five years, passed through each change of political life, from the levelling democrat to the unconditional absolutist'. He followed Peel subsequently, and in 1852 was appointed by the Tory government to the extra-parliamentary post of Secretary to the Board of Trade. He held this position until the return of a further Tory administration in 1866, whereupon Disraeli wrote to Derby this devastating judgment of his competence:

He has turned out to be the most inefficient & useless of our public servants: no business in him: no sound information: his dept. in a disgraceful state & himself a mere club gossip & office loungee.

Tennent duly retired shortly thereafter, and was duly awarded a baronetcy. He would clearly have been as much at home in the Circumlocution Office as at one of the Veneerings' dinner parties, but it is doubtful whether Dickens was aware of any irony, much less criticism, in inscribing his last completed novel to him. Whether he, in his turn, recognised in Podsnap anything of his old friend Forster is impossible to say. At any rate Dickens paid him the compliment subsequently of attending his funeral, a mark of approbation which was not bestowed lightly.¹¹⁵

One other Member of Parliament may be mentioned: Sir Edward Bulwer. In the thirties he was an independently minded reformist M.P. who proclaimed himself neither Tory nor Whig, and was one of the first to bring forward the question of the repeal of the stamp duty. He also made effective

115. Mng. Chr., 30 January 1836; DNB, Tennent; Derby Papers, 3 December 1866, quoted by Robert Blake, Disraeli, p. 324; Davies, p. 9; Andrew Sanders, Charles Dickens: Resurrectionist, pp. 39-40.

speeches on behalf of issues which were later to be strongly supported by Dickens: against Sunday legislation, in favour of copyright for authors and against the monopoly enjoyed by the two patent theatres in the 'legitimate' drama.¹¹⁶

These causes, together with Bulwer's and Dickens's 'overlapping liberal sympathies and their common friendships with Forster and Macready' (in the words of the editors of the Pilgrim edition of the letters), and their both frequenting Gore House and Holland House, make it the more remarkable that Dickens remained apparently on fairly distant terms with Bulwer until the foundation of the Guild of Literature and Art in 1850.¹¹⁷ It has gone generally unnoted in Dickens biography that by the time of their greater intimacy, Bulwer had become a Tory. He was in the singular position in the forties of a liberal opposed to free trade, eventually switched parties and was a Conservative M.P. from 1852 to 1866, becoming, in fact, more of a party man than he had ever been as a Liberal. At the time that he gave Dickens his famous advice on the ending of Great Expectations, he had recently left Cabinet office as Secretary for the Colonies with the fall of Derby's second administration (1858-59). He was rewarded with a peerage in 1866, and as Lord Lytton he acted as Chairman at the Farewell Banquet preceding Dickens's second American visit. Near the end of Dickens's life he wrote to Lytton, 'Indeed, I suppose in the main that there

116. Mirror, 1 May 1834, p. 1432, 5 February 1833, p. 32, 22 May 1834, pp. 1831-34, 30 April 1834, p. 1399, 12 March 1833, p. 711.

117. Pilgrim, I, 337, n. 3; The Diaries of William Charles Macready, passim; Sibylla Jane Flower, 'Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer-Lytton', p. 81; Speeches, pp. 138-39.

is very little difference between our opinions', which, making due allowance for friendship, and Dickens's own qualification, is worth noting.¹¹⁸

Dickens's lengthy experience of reporting Parliament did not make him a committed party man, and his political contacts were not restricted to reformers, particularly in his later years. Even in the period up to 1849, we find him dining occasionally with Tories, feeling inclined to praise Peel, and on friendly terms with Morris, manager of The Times, and a convinced Conservative.¹¹⁹ Dickens's own appeal transcended narrow party considerations, seen clearly as early as his visit to Edinburgh in 1841, which was the occasion, in the words of John Wilson ('Christopher North'), the Chairman, for 'a sort of truce' between Whigs and Tories. The plea that it was worth setting aside party differences in a good cause is to be found in Dickens's speeches.¹²⁰ It seems fair to conclude that his experience of the emptiness of conventional party warfare probably made him more ready to respond favourably to individual politicians regardless of party when he found them personally congenial, and as a novelist it is appropriate that he should be more concerned with individuals than with generalities.

This tendency can be seen in Dickens's early 'A Parliamentary Sketch' (actually a cobbling together of two earlier pieces), where discussion of political issues would be out of

118. Nonesuch, III, 763 (14 February 1870).

119. Pilgrim, I, 607, II, 29, 54, IV, 576-77, V, 291.

120. Pilgrim, II, 316-17, n. 8; Speeches, p. 150 (31 August 1852).

place. But even within that limitation, there is a bias in the treatment which is remarkable given Dickens's extensive acquaintance with Parliament. The chamber itself is dismissed in a paragraph, and there is nothing on members as speakers. Dickens is highly selective: he concentrates on those members who are distinctive through some peculiarity of dress or behaviour, and his longest description, the one in which he is clearly the most interested, is that of Nicholas, the butler of Bellamy's. With the exception of a passing reference to Stanley, Dickens makes no mention of the leading politicians of the day; and of the members identified (I believe accurately) by W.J. Carlton, only Hughes Hughes was anything like a regular contributor to the debates.¹²¹

Dickens's treatment of politicians in his fiction is not large, considering the extent of his exposure to them as a young man, and no doubt this reflects his belief in their essential futility. A curious instance of his drawing rather mechanically on his hostility to Parliament occurs in Oliver Twist, when Henry Maylie renounces his political ambitions in order to enter the Church and marry Rose, tainted as she is by the stigma of bastardy. The implication here that illegitimacy would be accepted more readily in ecclesiastical than in political life is surely of questionable reliability, but the detail says much concerning Dickens's attitude to the two institutions, Parliament and the Church.¹²²

121. Sketches by Boz, 'Scenes', XVIII, pp. 152-62; W.J. Carlton, 'Portraits in "A Parliamentary Sketch"'.
122. Oliver Twist, Chapter 36, p. 237, Chapter 51, pp. 356-57.

The first of Dickens's fictional politicians is Cornelius Brook Dingwall in 'Sentiment', first published in June 1834, that is, before Dickens left the Mirror for the Morning Chronicle. He is 'very haughty, solemn, and portentous', with 'a great idea of his own abilities, which must have been a great comfort to him, as no one else had'. He is discovered 'seated in a small library at a table covered with papers, doing nothing, but trying to look busy, playing at shop'.¹²³ Essentially this picture does not change in Dickens's later depictions.

The treatment is extended somewhat in the character of Gregsbury in Nicholas Nickleby, 'a tough, burly, thick-headed gentleman, with a loud voice, a pompous manner, a tolerable command of sentences with no meaning in them, and in short every requisite for a very good member indeed'. He is first seen defying a deputation from his constituency -- the question of whether members could be pledged at an election to their subsequent political conduct was an active one after the passing of the Reform Bill -- and he then outlines to Nicholas the duties which would devolve upon him were he to accept the position of secretary. This would consist mostly of cramming his employer so that he would look well in Parliament and in the local press. Dickens's view of the value of the parliamentary process is clear enough through Gregsbury's summary:

'I should expect him now and then to go through a few figures in the printed tables, and to pick out a few results, so that I might come out pretty well on timber duty questions, and finance questions, and so on; and I should like him to get up a few

123. Sketches by Boz, 'Tales', III, pp. 324, 325.

little arguments about the disastrous effects of a return to cash payments and a metallic currency, with a touch now and then about the exportation of bullion, and the Emperor of Russia, and bank notes, and all that kind of thing, which it's only necessary to talk fluently about, because nobody understands it.'

The only issue which Dickens touches on at all seriously is a personal concern of his own. Gregsbury says that 'if any preposterous bill were brought forward, for giving poor grubbing devils of authors a right to their own property', his policy is that 'you could be as funny as you liked about the authors; because I believe the greater part of them live in lodgings, and are not voters'.¹²⁴

Nicholas's encounter with Gregsbury occupies less than a chapter, but it constitutes Dickens's most extended treatment of a Member of Parliament as such. It forms one of the most incidental of the scenes in this most episodic of novels. The lack of a close organic connection between the shortcomings of Parliament and the ills of society is true on the whole of the later fiction, contrasting notably with the law. It is seen as early as Pickwick, and is most clearly demonstrated in Bleak House, where, however one interprets the part played by Chancery in the novel, its prominence cannot be denied. Parliament in this novel is peripheral by comparison. It is discussed only in conjunction with Sir Leicester Dedlock, a relic of feudalism despite some estimable personal qualities, and the association suggests that both are equally anachronistic and irrelevant, an impression reinforced by Dickens's deliberately choosing to de-personal-

124. Nicholas Nickleby, Chapter 16, pp. 260, 260-64, 266-67, 267.

ize Boodle and Buffy and their coteries. In Hard Times, Gradgrind is M.P. for Coketown, and Parliament is referred to, with variants, as the 'parliamentary cinder-heap', and M.P.'s as 'the national dustmen'. But the thrust of Dickens's satire, and the bearing of his moral, is elsewhere, as it is concerning Veneering in Our Mutual Friend, who becomes an M.P., appropriately enough, for social rather than political reasons.¹²⁵

The memories of Dickens's years in Parliament stayed with him, but it was a long time before he was to use them in his fiction to any extent. David Copperfield follows his creator's career as reporter, but there is no thematic development, and the novel which draws most considerably on Dickens's experience is Little Dorrit. The rhythms of parliamentary rhetoric are exactly caught -- cunningly, too, in Dickens's represented speech:

Then would the noble lord, or right honorable gentleman, in whose department it was to defend the Circumlocution Office . . . come down to that House with a slap upon the table, and meet the honorable gentleman foot to foot. Then would he be there to tell that honorable gentleman . . .

-- and so on. Lord Decimus has a greater command of political cliché:

. . . he was yet to be told, My Lords, that it behoved him as the Minister of this free country, to set bounds to the philanthropy, to cramp the charity, to fetter the public spirit, to contract the enterprise, to damp the independent self-reliance, of its people. The discovery of this Behoving

125. Bleak House, Chapters 12, 28, 40; Hard Times, II, ix, 150 ('parliamentary cinder-heap' and 'national dust-yard'), II, xi, 157 ('national cinder-heap'), II, xii, 164, III, ix, 225 ('national dustmen'); Our Mutual Friend, II, iii.

Machine was the discovery of the political perpetual motion.¹²⁶

Dickens shows himself resourceful in these passages in representing parliamentary garrulity without himself falling into the fault. He also showed that as a reporter he had been, like David Copperfield, and in his favourite theatrical metaphor, 'sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life'. He remembered the details clearly twenty years later, and there is no doubt that they are authentic enough:

And there too was a sprinkling of less distinguished Parliamentary Barnacles, who had not as yet got anything snug, and were going through their probation to prove their worthiness. These Barnacles perched upon staircases and hid in passages, waiting their orders to make houses or not to make houses; and they did all their hearing, and ohing, and cheering, and barking, under directions from the heads of the family; and they put dummy motions on the paper in the way of other men's motions, and they stalled disagreeable subjects off until late in the night and late in the session, and then with virtuous patriotism cried out that it was too late; and they went down into the country, whenever they were sent, and swore that Lord Decimus had revived trade from a swoon and commerce from a fit, and had doubled the harvest of corn, quadrupled the harvest of hay, and prevented no end of gold from flying out of the Bank. Also these Barnacles were dealt, by the heads of the family, like so many cards below the court cards, to public meetings and dinners; where they bore testimony to all sorts of services on the part of their noble and honorable relatives, and buttered the Barnacles on all sorts of toasts. And they stood, under similar orders, at all sorts of elections; and they turned out of their own seats, on the shortest notice and the most unreasonable terms, to let in other men; and they fetched and carried, and toadied and jobbed, and corrupted, and ate heaps of dirt, and were indefatigable in the public service.¹²⁷

The humour slides perceptibly, and, as it were, inevitably

126. Little Dorrit, I, x, 102, I, xxxiv, 395.

127. David Copperfield, Chapter 43, p. 535; Little Dorrit, I, xxxiv, 396.

into contempt. The comparative paucity of politicians and slightness of treatment amongst the profusion of Dickens's fiction is to be attributed mostly to the fact that his view of them remained constant. He always thought them empty windbags, and he did not (unlike them) care to repeat himself any more than he could help by saying so. Gregsbury has a good line in stale parliamentary rhetoric, but a piece published in 1852 and entitled 'Our Honourable Friend' is probably the most considerable legacy of Dickens's parliamentary experience, and, arguably, the most successful.¹²⁸

This account of 'the honourable member for Verbosity -- the best represented place in England' was written during that period in the early fifties when, as noted earlier, Dickens's disparaging references to Parliament occur most frequently, and could be considered to complement the Coodle and Doodle satire quoted earlier. It is his most extended treatment of political language, an hilarious travesty which would undoubtedly be better known if it occurred in one of the novels. It deserves to be read; and since selective quotation could not hope to do it justice, I cannot do better by way of conclusion to this chapter than to commend it to the reader, in the knowledge that it will be found to summarise probably (and appropriately) more concisely, certainly more effectively, and very certainly very much more imaginatively than I could hope to attempt.

128. Repr. P., pp. 560-65 (FW, 31 July 1852).

CHAPTER 4. THE MORNING CHRONICLE, 1834-36, AND WHIGGERY

When Dickens joined the Morning Chronicle in August 1834 he was an obscure parliamentary reporter who had had a few anonymous tales of no great merit published in the Monthly Magazine (he did not adopt the pseudonym 'Boz' until the month he started his new job). When he left, in some dud-geon, in November 1836, his name was 'familiar in their mouths as household words', and, if not yet financially secure, he had at least taken the decisive step towards independence. There is no parallel in his own life -- and few elsewhere -- for such a rapid shift in fortunes and prospects, and this chapter is an attempt to begin to answer the questions as to what sort of paper the Chronicle was, and what Dickens might have absorbed from it.

For the first time, Dickens was now working on a permanent basis for a well established journal. The Chronicle saw the propagation of its views as central to its function, and its editorial character is best understood in terms of its development over a period of time. For this reason I commence with a brief outline of the history of the paper. I then discuss the personality and policy of John Black, editor from 1821 to 1843, who must have been a formative influence of some significance on Dickens, being, indeed, the first of any consequence of which we are aware from outside his family circle. I pass then to an outline of the Chron-

icle's general editorial character during the period when Dickens was working for it, with particular reference to the prevailing tendencies of radicalism and Whiggery. The concluding section discusses the nature of Dickens's work as a reporter, and its lasting consequences for his later career.

Dickens's move from the Mirror of Parliament to the Morning Chronicle represented an appreciable improvement in his status and prospects. The Chronicle had a considerable reputation for reliability in its parliamentary reports, originating in its foundation in 1769 by William 'Memory' Woodfall, editor, printer and sole reporter, who circumvented the ban on taking notes in the gallery through the simple method of not needing any (he used to sit with his eyes shut instead).¹ His successor, Perry, was the first to introduce the system of a relay of reporters, and contrived to surmount the considerable practical difficulties through the agency of Bellamy, wine merchant and doorkeeper to the House of Commons, who had lent money to Perry to enable him to buy the paper.²

Ever since its foundation, the Chronicle was seen as a Whig paper, having for some time a particularly strong assoc-

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1. Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 295; Arthur Aspinall, 'The Reporting and Publishing of the House of Commons' Debates 1771-1834', pp. 237-38, 241-44; H.R. Fox Bourne, English Newspapers, I, 206-08, 192-93, 252-53; [W. Coulson?], 'Newspapers', p. 204; Michael Macdonagh, The Reporters' Gallery, pp. 268-69, 279-88; Mng. Chr., 16 June 1834.
 2. Bourne, I, 261, 265; [Coulson?], pp. 204-05, 207; T.H.S. Escott, Masters of English Journalism, p. 157; C.J. Gratton, The Gallery, p. 66; Macdonagh, p. 282; R. Shelton Mackenzie, Life of Charles Dickens, pp. 51-52; 'Newspaper Reporting', The Metropolitan (1832), pp. 287, 284; 'The Newspapers', The Metropolitan (1833), p. 58.

iation with Charles James Fox.³ The paper was sold to William Clement in 1821, and John Black became editor, a position he retained for over twenty years. Its character during the early part of his tenure was recalled later by John Stuart Mill, who said that it 'became to a considerable extent a vehicle of the opinions of the Utilitarian radicals . . . opinions much in advance of any which had ever before found regular advocacy in the newspaper press'.⁴ What little has been written of Dickens's work for the Chronicle has tended to follow this description, but the chronology does not agree. Mill says specifically that the Chronicle pursued its radical course 'during the next ten years' following the change of ownership in 1821; in fact, the new direction should probably be dated from 1817, when Black assumed considerable editorial responsibility.⁵ Also, Mill's knowledge of the paper dates mostly from the period between January 1823 and January 1824 when he was a regular contributor (thereafter he was principally involved with the Westminster

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3. Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 69, 172, noting that when Fox was in office he gave Perry an appointment in the Pay Office, 281; Arthur Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists at the Beginning of the Nineteenth Century', p. 227; Bourne, I, 279, 343, 354; [A.V. Kirwan], 'Editors and Newspaper Writers of the Last Generation', July 1862, p. 33; Mackenzie, pp. 51-52, 187; 'The Newspapers', pp. 64-65.
 4. John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p. 91; for his favourable assessment of Black see also The Later Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1849-1873, pp. 979-80 (12 December 1864); 'Law of Libel and Liberty of the Press', p. 168.
 5. Mill, Autobiography, p. 91; Alexander Andrews, The History of British Journalism, II, 85; Bourne, I, 363; F. Knight Hunt, The Fourth Estate, II, 110-11; Mackenzie, p. 51; 'Obituary -- John Black Esq.', Gentleman's Magazine, p. 210; DNB, James Mill.

Review, founded in April 1824).⁶ Other accounts of the Chronicle's editorial character in the twenties are inconsistent, ranging from 'redhot Radical' to uniformly Whig, and probably reflect inconsistencies in its pages.⁷ Whig influence continued behind the scenes during this period, apparently without complaint that the paper was becoming unduly radical in its outlook.⁸

There is agreement that the Chronicle was regarded as essentially a Whig journal at least from 1830, when the party at last returned to power.⁹ But it was nonetheless independent of what was still hardly a cohesive political entity. A change in its character, moving it yet further from radicalism, occurred with its purchase, probably in early May 1834, by John Easthope, M.P., and two others. Thereafter the Chronicle became a 'thick and thin' supporter of the Whig

6. J.S. Mill published one piece in the Chronicle in 1825, five in 1828, three in 1834 (two of which were on the poor law), one in 1835 and one in 1837. He contributed with greater frequency in the forties: Ney MacMin, J.R. Hains and James McNab McCrimmon, Bibliography of the Published Writings of John Stuart Mill, pp. 1-10, 40-50, 53ff.; Ann P. Robson and John M. Robson, '"Impetuous eagerness": the young Mill's radical journalism', pp. 60, 76, n. 1. J.S. Mill, Autobiography, pp. 89, 91, 93, 97, 99; Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill, p. 59.

7. 'The Newspapers', p. 63; James Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 41; see also Andrews, II, 85; Bourne, II, 36-37.

8. Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 294-95, 296-97, 298, 301-02, 302-03, 305. 'Obituary -- John Black Esq.' gives details of some notable contributors during this period.

9. Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 236-37; Mirror, Wetherell, 6 July 1831, p. 384; D.J. Rowe, Radicalism in London, 1829-1841 notes that there was much speculation as to the terms of the Reform Bill in 1831, and that 'The Morning Chronicle, a Whig government organ, provided the closest guess', p. 57.

ministry.¹⁰ Thus Easthope wrote to Althorp (Leader of the Government in the Commons) that 'in the conduct of the M[orning] C[hronicle], it should be deemed essential to obtain indisputable evidence of the accuracy of information tending to prejudice any member of the Government before its insertion'.¹¹ It was intended to improve the paper considerably, whilst retaining Black as editor, and Dickens was engaged in August 1834 as part of the programme of expansion.¹²

The precise circumstances behind Easthope's acquisition of the paper are not entirely clear. It is stated sometimes that his specific purpose was to support the Government over the Poor Law Amendment Act.¹³ It is true that this issue was prominent in the period immediately following the purchase, and there is some irony in finding that Dickens's opening came about as a consequence of the paper's strong advocacy of a measure concerning which, as Dickens recalled later in a letter to Forster, he and Black were to be in

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10. J.A. Roebuck, The Stamped Press of London and its Morality, p. 7; Charles Mackay, Through the Long Day, I, 268; see also Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 239; Bourne, II, 87-88; Herodotus Smith, 'The Morning Chronicle', p. 393.
 11. Easthope to Althorp, 29 October 1834, Easthope Papers, quoted in Darwin F. Bostick, 'Sir John Easthope and the Morning Chronicle, 1834-1848', p. 54; emphasis as given, and presumably Easthope's. The occasion was the publication of an article criticising the appointment of Althorp's former tutor as Bishop of Bristol; the Chronicle published a retraction the next day.
 12. Bourne, II, 91; Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 45-46; Mackay, Through the Long Day, I, 54-56.
 13. S.E. Finer, The Life and Times of Sir Edwin Chadwick, pp. 99-100; Herodotus Smith, p. 393; Harriet Martineau, Autobiography, I, 222, 224, as corrected over dating by Thomas Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, pp. 126-28. Aspinall makes no mention of the poor law question (see Ps. and P., p. 101), and neither does Bostick.

fundamental disagreement.¹⁴ The passing of the Poor Law Amendment Act, and the withdrawal of support for the measure by The Times, coincided with the purchase of the Chronicle by Easthope, but it is not certain that it constituted the motivation: it may well be that he would have acquired it anyway.

Dickens thus joined a paper with two overlapping traditions. Its major identity was as a party paper, committed to the Whigs whether in opposition or government, and that character was confirmed and reinforced after August 1834 -- to the extent that Black was expected to call on Melbourne with some regularity, which he seems to have done without complaint.¹⁵ But Black had been editor during its radical phase, and that heritage was not totally exhausted. More than one influence was at work, and more than one editorial voice was heard, and it is only through examining the paper's stance over a range of issues that it becomes possible to delineate at all satisfactorily its precise position on the reformist side of politics.

During the first few months of Easthope's proprietorship, and of Dickens's employment, the paper was heavily influenced by the articles of Brougham, who had contributed to the Chronicle with great fertility as long before as 1807. Durham said in October 1834 that the paper was becoming known

14. Pilgrim, II, 275 ([29 April 1841]).

15. 'Obituary -- John Black Esq.', Gentleman's Magazine, retelling an anecdote that Black was the only person who called on the Prime Minister and forgot whom he was addressing -- but this was not matter for complaint, since everyone else asked for places or favours; Mackay, Forty Years' Recollections, I, 93-94.

as the 'Brough'ming Chronicle'.¹⁶ Easthope, reflecting the Whig leadership, lost confidence in Brougham early in 1835, and thereafter attempted to preserve some sort of balance by allowing the contending Whig politicians to dominate editorial policy in turn, an approach which satisfied no-one, and which did not achieve the desired result of maintaining the paper's independence, as far as public opinion was concerned.¹⁷ Naturally, some Whig leaders were more prominent in the counsels of the Chronicle than others.¹⁸ In 1839, after Dickens's time, the Chronicle went so far as to advocate the ballot, household suffrage, and triennial parliaments.¹⁹ Presumably this was in response to the Chartist movement, but the line of policy was exceptional, and Easthope remained on sufficiently good terms with the Whig leaders to be rewarded for his services with a baronetcy when they went out of office in 1841.²⁰

During Dickens's time with the paper, it was consistent-

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16. Bostick, p. 54; Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 284-87, 288, n. 4, 290. Durham to Parkes, 11 October 1834, quoted in Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 239 -- but the remark may be sour or exaggerated, for Durham and Brougham had famously and publicly quarrelled at this time.
17. Bostick, pp. 55-56; Bourne, II, 88.
18. Durham was fairly influential: Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 257; Bostick, p. 55. Other eminent contributors included Hobhouse, Normanby, Poulett Thomson, Le Marchant (Brougham's secretary), Charles Buller and Lord Holland: Aspinall, Ps. and P., p. 241; Bourne, II, 88, 90.
19. Bostick, p. 55; Bourne, II, 93-94; Richard and Edward Garnett, The Life of W.J. Fox, p. 270; Elie Halévy, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841, p. 315, citing Mng. Chr. 25, 28 March 1839.
20. Herodotus Smith, p. 393; DNB, Easthope. In Bostick's account, Palmerston became the dominant influence during the latter part of Easthope's proprietorship, following the death of Durham in 1840.

ly identified with the Ministry. In 1835 Peel said that it was a government paper and during the next year it was referred to as 'the chief organ of the government . . . thoroughly devoted to its party'; on the reduction of the stamp duty in 1836, the dimensions to which papers were limited were those of the Chronicle and of the Chronicle only.²¹ Roebuck, as a leading parliamentary radical, was in no doubt as to the Chronicle's identity, writing in November 1835 that 'The Treasury sends its missives, and they must be obeyed -- no matter what be the principles advocated -- no matter whether opposed or not to all the principles which the Editor has advocated through life' -- a duel with Black followed.²² But on the whole the Chronicle was probably nearer to the advanced than to the conservative wing of Whiggery, partly because the more patrician Whig leaders tended to regard contact with newspapers as beneath their station; thus there is little mention of Russell in the useful account by Darwin F. Bostick, which is based on the Easthope papers.

Potentially, at least, the influence of Black on Dickens was considerable, both as far as political and journalistic matters are concerned. Dickens's reference to their disagreement over the new Poor Law establishes that there was some discussion of public issues between them. Other contemporaries were far less complimentary than J.S. Mill towards Black's abilities as editor. Brougham's secretary

21. Mng. Chr., 7 September 1835; [C. Knight], 'The Morning and Evening Papers', p. 622; see also Andrews, II, 227-28; Patricia Hollis, The Pauper Press, p. 88, n. 2.

22. Roebuck, p. 7; Bourne, II, 89-90; Charles Mackay, Forty Years' Recollections, I, 89-90.

noted that Black was 'more fit to be a German metaphysician than the editor of a paper . . . The columns of his paper were filled with long dissertations on subjects about which the public was wholly indifferent, but they interested him, and that was sufficient'. Other writers refer to Black's leaders as 'unequal and unsatisfactory, composed of shreds and patches from old pamphlets, books of travels, and agricultural tracts'; they 'had more of the qualities of elaborate essays, than of the dash and liveliness required in a morning paper'.²³

These observations relate principally to the pre-Easthope era, during which the circulation of the Chronicle dwindled perhaps to as little as 1,000. It picked up to 6,000 by 1839, and one of the improvements instituted in 1834 was that Black himself wrote leaders 'comparatively seldom'.²⁴ James Mill had been on intimate terms with Black for several years, and wrote that 'Black, it is true, is easily imposed upon', and further comments bear out the picture of Black as being, despite his irascibility, suggestible and malleable as editor, and rarely in complete control.²⁵

23. Le Marchant's MS journal, quoted in Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 305-06; [A.V. Kirwan], 'Editors and Newspaper Writers of the Last Generation', February 1862, pp. 174-75; Grant, The Newspaper Press, I, 280-81; see also Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 42-43.

24. Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 46. Circulation estimated by Greville, Memoirs, 28 March 1839, quoted in Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 240, 241. Grant estimated that the circulation dropped to 1,500 or 1,600 (The Newspaper Press, I, 281) and had picked up to 5,500 by 1836 (The Great Metropolis, II, 47).

25. James Mill to Place, 25 October 1831, quoted in Graham Wallas, The Life of Francis Place, 1771-1854, p. 274, n. 2; see also James Mill to Brougham, 3 September 1832,

At the same time, he was regarded as personally honourable, bearing indeed 'the only unblemished character in the circle to which he belonged'.²⁶

Little is recorded of Dickens's views of Black, beyond a general high regard. It may be conjectured that he would have respected Black's achievement as auto-didact and have relished his eccentricities. If Dickens had any qualms in embarking so readily on the position of Editor of the Daily News in 1846 (not that he was ever the man to under-value his own abilities), and compared himself, consciously or otherwise, with his old chief, it is probable that he would have found nothing to fear. Certainly he would at least have been clean and tidy (Black's domestic circumstances were a mess -- his private life was as well).²⁷ But in Dickens's remembrance of Black's high regard for his abilities, and his inexperience in the mid-thirties, it is quite possible that he was not as aware as he might have been of Black's shortcomings. Also, he may not have found others so ready as Black did to give extensive direction; and he certainly would have been temperamentally less able to accept guidance, or advice, when it was offered. Dickens was the last man to muddle through.

quoted in Alexander Bain, James Mill, pp. 364, 365; Roebuck, p. 7; Escott, Masters of English Journalism, p. 159. For the friendship between Black and James Mill, see Andrews, The History of British Journalism, II, 85; Bain, pp. 214, 326, 365; H. Herd, The March of Journalism, p. 91; Hunt, The Fourth Estate, II, 111-12; Herodotus Smith, p. 393.

26. Le Marchant's MS journal, quoted in Aspinall, 'The Social Status of Journalists', p. 232.

27. DNB, Black; Escott, p. 158; 'Obituary -- John Black Esq.', p. 211.

Dickens clearly regretted Black's enforced retirement in 1843, an event (sentiment aside) which was probably overdue. A movement to secure him a government position in 1839 had foundered, but some Whigs, including Melbourne, were sufficiently appreciative of his services to subscribe to a testimonial for him. It is not certain that Dickens's more limited objective of a dinner to Black actually took place, although he wrote to George Hogarth of 'my old regard and esteem for Black'. Forster tells us that in the last year of his life Dickens could still refer to 'Dear old Black! my first hearty out-and-out appreciator'.²⁸

The first few months of Dickens's employment on the Morning Chronicle constituted a period of considerable political and journalistic excitement. In November 1834 the King dismissed the Whig ministry on his own initiative and the Chronicle became fluent in its indignation (17 November 1834). The Tories were recalled, made some gains in the ensuing General Election of January 1835 and considered themselves justified in remaining in office until and after Parliament met at the start of February. They eventually resigned on 9 April. The period was one of hiatus so far as legislation was concerned. Political feeling ran high, but the issues were narrowly constitutional and very much expressed in party terms, with very little discussion of items of policy as such. Superficially, these months re-

28. Pilgrim, III, 480 and n. 4, 491; Bostick, pp. 52, 54; 'Obituary -- John Black Esq.', p. 212, noting that Black was obliged to sell his precious, if grubby, collection of second-hand books on his retirement; Pilgrim, III, 514 (20 June 1843, to Hogarth); Forster, I, iv, 65.

sembled Dickens's brief connection with the True Sun at the time of the passing of the Reform Bill in that there was a tendency for the disparate ranks of the reformers to coalesce in the face of a threat which was seen as constitutional as much as political: clearly it was important that the right of the majority in the House of Commons to govern should be asserted even by those reformers who thought that the record of the Whigs in office was lamentable.

Three related themes were sounded by the Chronicle during these months, and they continued to be prominent throughout the period of Dickens's employment: the perfidy of The Times, hostility towards the Tories, and the need for a reform of the House of Lords. The Times, as noted earlier, had abandoned the Whigs when the Poor Law Amendment Act was passed, and it continued to support the Tories during the ensuing events. In strictly commercial terms, this was of considerable benefit to the Chronicle; it was the dismissal of the Whigs which was described later as 'the salvation of "The Chronicle"' (rather than the re-organisation consequent upon the change of ownership), in that there was an appreciable defection of readership from The Times.²⁹ The fortunes of the paper which Dickens joined improved markedly during his period of service, largely through fortuitous circumstances.

The Chronicle claimed on New Year's Day 1835 that its circulation had increased by 3,000 a day during the previous two months. It delighted to dilate upon The Times's

29. Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 47; see also Herodotus Smith, p. 393.

treachery -- 'apostasy' and 'tergiversation' are the period words -- and the favourite ploy was to print extracts from The Times of three or four years back and of recent date side by side in order to expose the change of policy.³⁰ The abuse became vigorous and indeed virulent on occasion; but it went no further than was customary at the time, and Dickens was not necessarily thinking of these two papers, nor did he need to exaggerate, when he created Pott and Slurk.³¹

Dickens participated in the excitement of the period, and to some extent the events shaped the early part of his career with the Chronicle. In the original conclusion to 'Brokers' and Marine Store Shops', the last of his five 'Street Sketches' in the Chronicle, he wrote of his 'hope to have many opportunities -- when the partial absence of matter of pressing and absorbing interest again enables us to occupy a column occasionally -- of laying our pen-and-ink drawings' before his readership (15 December 1834). There is, I think, no irony in his parenthesis here, and he was probably anticipating that he would be expected to cover some of the

30. Mng. Chr., 26, 27 August, 19 September, 19 November, 12 December 1834, 6 January, 16 February, 11 March, 14, 21, 22 April, 30 June, 6, 7, 21 August, 1 September, 19, 31 October, 13, 14 November, 23 December 1835, 6 January, 11 March, 7 May, 17, 25 June, 2 September, 13, 20 October 1836, and elsewhere.

31. Pickwick Papers, Chapters 13, 15, 18, 51, pp. 238, 279, 318-19, 814-24. Some choice examples of the vilification typical of the time are given by Bourne, II, 85-87, 89 and n. 1, E.E. Kellett, 'The Press', pp. 18-19, and Roebuck, pp. 9-11, who quotes, amongst others, 'That squirt of filthy water, the Morning Chronicle' from The Times, and 'The poor old Times, in its imbecile ravings, resembles those unfortunate wretches whose degraded prostitution is fast producing neglect and disgust' from the Chronicle, 15 June 1835 (during Dickens's period of employment).

General Election meetings which were then starting to be held. A few days later 'Boz' became more directly topical with 'The Story without a Beginning', Dickens's first published comment on public affairs and a fairly ambitious attempt at political commentary in the form of a somewhat laboured allegory.³²

The piece is not lacking in quality and ingenuity and deserves to be read; it will bear comparison with Dickens's later efforts in the same vein, written during the early years of Household Words.³³ W.J. Carlton's accompanying interpretation is undoubtedly correct, and establishes that the item contains Dickens's most extended commentary on Irish affairs, slight though it is, and that he shared the Chronicle's political orientation: that is, support of reform candidates and opposition to the Tories.

Dickens soon had the opportunity for more direct expression. On 5 January 1835 the Chronicle carried a report from Sudbury, almost certainly not by Dickens, of 'a riot . . . which shows that the Tories are at their old tricks of intimidation and blackguardism'. On 9 January the paper noted that the Tories had been most successful 'In the eastern counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Essex', as a consequence of bribery and intimidation. Evidently it was now decided, somewhat belatedly, to send Dickens to East Anglia.

32. Mng. Chr., 18 December 1834, repr. W.J. Carlton, '"The Story Without a Beginning": An Unrecorded Contribution by Boz to the Morning Chronicle'.

33. 'A Crisis in the Affairs of Mr. John Bull', Misc. P., I, 274-80 (HW, 23 November 1850); 'A Haunted House', Misc. P., I, 417-23 (HW, 23 July 1853); 'Mr. Bull's Somnambulist', Misc. P., I, 281-86 (HW, 25 November 1854); 'Prince Bull. A Fairy Tale', Repr. P., pp. 544-49 (HW, 17 February 1855); 'The Thousand and One Humbugs', Misc. P., II, 28-48 (HW, 21, 28 April, 5 May 1855).

The first report known to be his, on 10 January, was of the chairing of Smyth and Sanderson, the victorious Tory candidates at Colchester.³⁴ He did his best to follow the paper's line, and called ridicule and irony to his aid. Part of his report read:

Notwithstanding the strong party feeling which had prevailed throughout the election, and the disappointment experienced by the Liberal party in the defeat of the Whig candidate, perfect order was preserved, and no strong manifestation of feeling exhibited. A few boys who were stationed in the principal street, attempted to hiss Sir Henry Smyth, but the formidable disturbance was gallantly quelled by several gentlemen on horseback, who forthwith rode up to the spot, and put as many of the unfortunate offenders into the cage as they happened to catch.

Shortly after twelve o'clock the procession started. It was preceded by a numerous body of gentlemen on horseback; then followed a band of music; then several banners, with such inscriptions as, 'We live to uphold, and will defend our King and Constitution;' -- then there were the Union Jack and the Royal Standard, and then a Crown elevated on a long pole, the general appearance of which forcibly reminded one of May-day. The successful candidates followed, in an open carriage drawn by four grey horses, and a barouch [sic]. These were followed by a stage coach, and the stage coach was followed by the mob, and the procession went round the town and came back again. It will be recollected that Sir Henry Smyth quitted the House of Commons in disgust on the passing of the Catholic Relief Bill. Time, however, has, happily for the Legislature of the country, softened down his recollections of that dreadful measure, and he has fortunately been induced again to solicit a return to Parliament, even after the additional enormity of the Reform Bill.

Dickens's subsequent reports were of county elections, and are objective and non-partisan; indeed the party affiliation of the candidates is not always clear without prior know-

34. *Pilgrim*, I, 52 ([7 January 1835], to Austin), 53 ([11 January 1835], to Beard) establish that Dickens was still in London when the Sudbury report was written, and that he was the reporter at Colchester.

ledge. As was usual, the malpractices occurred particularly in the borough elections, which took place first, and the Chronicle had been slow off the mark in covering them.

There are echoes of the report quoted in 'A Haunted House', written by Dickens in 1853, where the account of an election for the fictional town of Burningshame no doubt draws also on his experience of other elections. Here there is nothing of party spirit, and the tone combines the comicality of Eatanswill with something altogether more acid. The town, says Dickens, was

haunted . . . by two evil spirits . . . who, under the names of an Attorney and a Parliamentary Agent, committed ravages truly diabolical. The first act of this infernal pair was, to throw open all the public-houses, and invite the people of Burningshame to drink themselves raving mad. They then compelled them, with banners, and with instruments of brass, and big drums, idiotically to parade the town, and fall foul of all other banners, instruments of brass, and big drums, that they met . . . Not content with this, they tempted the entire town, got the people to sell their precious souls, put red-hot money into their hands while they were looking another way, made them forswear themselves, set father against son, brother against brother, friend against friend; and made the whole of Burningshame one sty of gluttony, drunkenness, avarice, lying, false-swearing, waste, want, ill-will, contention and depravity.³⁵

Something of Dickens's disillusionment with Parliament has entered here, and this must have been reinforced during the two years when he reported it for the Chronicle. It could fairly be said that it spent more time doing less than in the preceding sessions. Over three months at the start of the 1835 session were occupied in determining that the Tories would not be permitted to continue in government, and in protracted discussions before Melbourne's return to power.

35. 'A Haunted House', Misc. P., I, 421 (HW, 23 July 1853).

The major piece of legislation during what remained of the 1835 session was the Municipal Corporations Act, which was eventually carried after considerable opposition and extensive amendment by the Lords. The 1836 session was scrappy and unsatisfactory, with several measures lost at an advanced stage and after much discussion, either through the opposition of the Lords (such as an attempt to reform the Court of Chancery) or through lack of time (including a bill to abolish imprisonment for debt, which became something of a parliamentary chestnut during Dickens's years as a reporter). Russell was prominent in putting through measures designed to meet the grievances of the dissenters, a cause with which he was particularly associated. A great deal of time was taken up in hearing petitions following the General Election and these were particularly protracted since O'Connell was involved, and the Tories charged that the ministry was being dictated to by the ultra-radical Irish papists.³⁶ During these two years, Irish affairs occupied probably the largest portion of the parliamentary time-table.

The Chronicle supported the Government in its vicissitudes. Its leaders tended to adopt a pragmatic, rather than a doctrinaire, approach to policy, and very often they were couched in excessively general terms. They continued to be long on fulmination against the Tories and the House of Lords, and short on specific remedies to meet particular problems. Nevertheless, complaint was made against the paper

36. On the inefficiency of the system for deciding disputed elections, see Charles Buller, Mirror, 25 February 1836, pp. 322-25. The Tory Annual Register referred to 'democrats and papists' and 'radicals and papists' with equal pejorative intent, 1835, pp. 4, 10.

a few months after Dickens joined in the following terms:

While we recognise the same want of vigour, compression and method by which 'The Chronicle' has for a long time been characterised, we miss the philosophy, the sagacity and the curious reading which were wont to compensate for the defects of execution. There seems to be no unity of purpose, no presiding mind. Antagonistic principles, irreconcilable opinions, jostle each other on every page.³⁷

That will strike an echo for any reader familiar with the discrepancies in Dickens's work, but from my own reading of the Chronicle I would say that the comment exaggerates the lack of unity, although of course a contemporary is the best judge of what was regarded as inconsistent at the time.

Even so, its editorial character is not easily summarised in a sentence. In general, it was at its most conservative on the rights of property (but this is a subject on which a large shift in progressive opinion has occurred between the early nineteenth and the late twentieth centuries). It was at its most radical, and Benthamic, in its insistence that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor (further discussed in Chapter 7), at its most liberal in its advocacy of the rights of dissenters, and at its most timid on subjects of the day on which the Government itself was temporising (often by avoiding editorial comment where it might be expected), such as the stamp duty. But its line on issues considered individually remained consistent to the point, very often, of predictability and repetitiveness. If one cannot outline a comprehensive political, social and economic editorial policy from a reading of the

37. Spectator, 3 January 1835, quoted in Bourne, English Newspapers, II, 88.

Chronicle during the period of over two years when Dickens was working for it, that is mostly because as a newspaper it inevitably dealt primarily, if not solely, with immediate issues (as mentioned earlier, Black's predilection for non-topical rumination was curtailed under Easthope), and so there is a limitation imposed by the accident of what happened to be current at the time. Thus there is little in the Chronicle during these years on trades unions, on education, or on colonialism, although these subjects had been current in immediately preceding years.

Inevitably there is a great deal in the Chronicle which is not very germane to the present undertaking. As some compensation for the distortion inseparable from selection, I will outline the leaders in the paper on one day, 29 July 1835, about halfway through Dickens's term of employment, chosen if not at random at least in an effort to be reasonably representative. The Commons that day had been discussing a proposed bill to give relief to the hand-loom weavers, following the report of a Select Committee, summarised the previous day. The arguments were fairly fully reported on both sides, but the Chronicle had no editorial comment to offer. The problem admittedly was intractable, but the omission is conspicuous, though not atypical: the Government had no policy either. The first leader was on the prospects for the Municipal Corporations Bill in the Lords, with the usual reference to the excessive powers of the Upper House. The second leader was also on a favourite theme, commencing as it did, 'The poor degraded Tory hack -- the self-destroyed and fallen Times . . .', and going on to

allege that the rival paper was inciting the Irish protestants to rebellion, and predictably exposing the contradiction with the previous year's attitude. Next came a contention, contradicting the Tory press, that the decrease in charitable contributions was due to increased prosperity and not to the atmosphere of political agitation and excitement. Fourth was a refutation of the Standard's claim that the Government's Irish measure was atheistical, followed by an exposure of the Recorder of Dublin's intemperate remarks on Government policy, and then a summary of the Paris papers, with a report. Last was a criticism of a circular from the Bishop of Salisbury to the effect that the Church was in danger, described as 'a farrago of utter trash'.

There is something narrow and predictable here, best accounted for, I think, by the weight of responsibility which the Chronicle felt as a partisan for the Government, although that bald statement of its editorial character needs to be qualified. The period saw itself as being peculiarly an age of reform, and an outline of the paper's general political stance is best achieved by discussing its attitude to that question. The Chronicle was quite clear that it was in favour of reform; 'the Reform Bill was necessarily the parent of numberless ameliorations in Church and State', it commented (24 January 1835), and it saw the Municipal Corporations Act as one of the necessary concomitant measures (10 April 1835). (Reform of the Church was equally important -- 7 August 1835.) It was clear as to the benefits to be anticipated:

In Manchester there are as many as three hundred individuals living in hovels without yards attached to them, and with one necessary common to

the whole. Had a municipality, with suitable powers, been in existence, such nuisances would never have been suffered.

This leader referred also to the vile conditions in parts of London, and concluded that

The wonder is how such neighbourhoods are not the constant abodes of pestilence. As it is, you may pass a thousand men before you see one who is not dwarfish and sallow.

These comments strike a Dickensian note, and in general one is impressed to find the Chronicle writing in these terms some few years before Engels and Mrs. Gaskell drew attention to the unsanitary character of Manchester (and over half a century before Engels's study was to be published in English).³⁸ But it has to be added that this leader was exceptional; it appeared only after several days' gloating over the results of the municipal election results ('Leicester is at length delivered from the plague of an oligarchical and tyrannical Corporation, which long grossly misgoverned a populous community . . .', 28 December 1835), and I noted no later editorials which developed these themes. Public health was not an issue in the thirties, not even in working class propaganda, and notwithstanding the cholera outbreak of 1832 -- the lack of awareness can only be ascribed to the indifference consequent upon familiarity. Dickens did not take up the question actively until the late forties, but he was no later than many of his contemporaries; thus Jacob's

38. Mng. Chr., 2 January 1836. Friedrich Engels, The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844 (first American edition 1887, first British edition 1892); Mrs. Gaskell, Mary Barton (first published 1848); John Lucas, 'Engels, Mrs. Gaskell and Manchester', Chapter 2 of The Literature of Change.

Island was not described in Oliver Twist for the purposes of sanitary propaganda, but was used by Dickens very effectively to that end in 1850.³⁹

I noted that the other subject touched on in the quotation, the lack of provision for local government in London, was taken up but once subsequently, when the Chronicle launched itself confidently into hyperbole: 'the crisis of the Corporation [of the City of London] appears to approach, and the British Public are watching with great anxiety the Ministerial measure destined to cleanse this Augean stable and re-organise its defective constitution' (11 February 1836). But no ministerial measure was, in fact, forthcoming, and the Chronicle let the matter drop, offering a good example of its tendency to follow governmental action, rather than attempting to lead it. The issue should have been important to a metropolitan journal, since the Municipal Corporations Act, absurdly enough, excluded the capital. Potentially, at least, the Act effected a revolution elsewhere; Dickens's later strictures upon 'Vestrylization' were justified, but they did apply specifically to London.⁴⁰

One of the Chronicle's more frequent themes, during the period of the municipal elections and at other times, was the need for reformers to act together in order to defeat the

39. Norris F. Pope, Dickens and Charity, pp. 204, 212-34; Alexander Welsh, The City of Dickens, pp. 24-25; Oliver Twist, Chapter 50, pp. 338-39, Preface to the Cheap Edition (1850), pp. 382-84.

40. Speeches, pp. 107, 130 (Metropolitan Sanitary Association, 6 February 1850, 10 May 1851); 'Our Vestry', Repr. P., pp. 574-80 (HW, 28 August 1852); David Owen, The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889, pp. 24, 227, 353-54.

common enemy.⁴¹ The Chronicle's editorial line is best indicated through the limits within which it was confined. In general, it is surprising in turning from the pages of the paper to the accounts by Aspinall and Bostick to discover the extent of governmental influence behind the scenes, even when due allowance is made for the fact that their discussions are concerned solely (or mostly) with that influence. But although the line is independent, I did not note that the paper was ever opposed to ministerial policy, not even in the general and sympathetic terms which might have urged that reform was not proceeding with sufficient expedition; indeed it was inclined to assert that the Government was doing as much as could reasonably be expected in the circumstances.⁴²

But the paper's identification, by and large, was not with the Government but with 'the people' -- an ambiguous term meaning sometimes the entire populace (as in the Evening Chronicle's opening address, which may have been written by George Hogarth), but more often only those who were enfranchised, in which case some people, seemingly, were not really people at all.⁴³ Brougham similarly had equated 'the Peo-

41. Mng. Chr., 17, 18 November, 29, 31 December 1834, 2 January, 11 April, 8 May, 3 June, 21 December 1835, 3, 4 October 1836.

42. Mng. Chr., 2 January, 11 September 1835, 13 February, 8 April, 22 June, 21 November 1836.

43. Mng. Chr., 15 June 1836; Evg. Chr., 31 January 1835; Mng. Chr., 17, 24 September, 1, 18 November, 27, 29 December 1834, 21 January, 10, 24 February, 18, 21, 22 April, 2, 14 May, 5, 7, 17, 21, 22, 24, 28 August, 8, 11 September, 17, 21 December 1835, 9, 25 January, 28 March, 10, 15 June, 29 August, 5 October 1836; see also Leslie Mitchell, Holland House, pp. 63, n. 5, 64. Dickens of course notoriously surrounded 'people' with his own ambiguity much later: Speeches, 407-08, 410-12 (27 September 1869, 6 January 1870).

ple' with 'the middle classes, the wealth and intelligence of the country, the glory of the British name', and the Chronicle also wrote of 'the middle classes . . . those who, from their numbers and property, might be said to be identical with the nation'.⁴⁴ Although the paper utilised the vocabulary of class fairly rarely (contrasting markedly with the True Sun), its identification with the middle classes is reasonably well established.⁴⁵ This again suggests its distance from the ministry, since 'Whig' was as much a class as a political label. Whig politicians were by definition aristocrats (their supporters tended to be called 'Liberals'), and, notoriously, they were 'all cousins' anyway, whereas a Tory could, and did, come from any class. Hence the Chronicle tended to regard itself as a supporter of 'reform', and, sometimes, of 'liberal' measures.⁴⁶

A quotation will serve to link these remarks on the Chronicle's social identification with its persistent theme of hostility to the House of Lords. It became indignant at the mutilation and rejection of Government measures by the Upper House:

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44. Hansard, VIII, 251 (1831), quoted in Asa Briggs, 'The Language of "Class" in Early Nineteenth Century England', p. 55, and in 'Middle-Class Consciousness in English Politics, 1780-1846', p. 69; Mng. Chr., 24 May 1836.
45. Mng. Chr., 3 December 1834, 6 January, 10 February, 3 March, 10, 18 April, 28 August 1835, 24 May, 15 June 1836.
46. Mng. Chr., 1, 18, 25 November, 15, 16, 31 December 1834, 16, 17 February, 9, 14, 21 April, 22 May, 16 July, 7, 14 September, 27 November, 9, 17 December 1835, 23 July 1836. Dickens's report from Colchester of 10 January 1835 quoted above (p. 114) refers to 'the disappointment experienced by the Liberal party in the defeat of the Whig candidate'.

Are some few pauper Lords to tyrannize over twenty-four millions of people? . . . We proclaim it for ourselves and for the industrious, wealthy, and independent classes, whose opinions we speak . . . that the Oligarchy shall not trample on the King or upon his subjects, in the manner they are now daring to put to the test of experiment. They have provoked the contest. If they perish in it, let them understand, if any understanding be left them, that they owe their fall to their own crimes -- to their defiance of the people. (28 August 1835)

The single topic on which the Chronicle commented most frequently -- Ireland always apart -- was the necessity for a reform of the Upper House. Quite probably this reflected ministerial pressure -- the Government, that is, hoped to impress on the Lords that they were fully prepared to take action against them, thereby rendering the action unnecessary. The issue always became prominent in the Chronicle when the Government was having trouble in getting its measures through the Lords.⁴⁷

The subject united all brands of reformers in the thirties, commencing with the Lords' protracted opposition to the Reform Bill. Dickens referred to this in the second stanza of 'The Devil's Walk', contributed to Maria Beadnell's album in November 1831, as quoted already in Chapter 2.⁴⁸ But it is surprising to find that, seemingly, he was not alive to the question subsequently. It is not touched on,

47. Mng. Chr., 16, 26, 27 August, 12, 17 September, 16 October, 1 November 1834, 2 January, 13, 14 May, 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27 August, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 19, 25, 26, 28 September, 3, 13 November 1835, 10, 12, 19, 28 May, 10, 13, 21, 29 June, 22, 29, 31 August 2, 13, 22, 23, 24 September, 5 October 1836, and elsewhere.

48. The Nonesuch Edition: Collected Papers, II, 279-80; p. 25 above.

for instance, in the letter he wrote to Macready from America in which he mentions the exceptions to his preference for England over the New World, although Dickens was on unres-trained terms with Macready, who expressed himself in strong language in his diaries on the powers of the Lords.⁴⁹

Dickens's apparent lack of interest in the subject can be explained by his primary concern with the personal aspect of public issues, his indifference to the means of reform provided that reforms were achieved, and his distaste for Parliament generally. But the answer is unsatisfactory, since one of the great stable features of the British political system has always been that the Lords are less ready for reform than the Commons. Thus reform of the Lords was clearly seen not so much as an end in itself, but as a necessary means of achieving reform in other areas.

The matter becomes clearer when it is translated into the personal terms more appropriate to Dickens as novelist, for he depicts very few of the judges, bishops, elder statesmen and hereditary noblemen who composed the Lords. That is not where his social milieu lay. His most memorable aristocrat, Sir Leicester Dedlock, is of course a Baronet not a peer, and Lord Frederick Verisopht, cited later to support the charge, as Dickens recalled, 'that I have been somewhat unconscious of the merits of the House of Lords', was presumably not a member of the Upper House either. Dickens prob-

49. Pilgrim, III, 156 (22 March 1842), the exceptions being American popular education and provision for the poor, and the English Established Church; The Diaries of William Charles Macready, I, 490 (14 January 1839), and elsewhere.

ably did not feel that the occasion was appropriate to a serious defence to this charge, but what he did say was very much in personal terms, mentioning the peers (Brougham, Lytton, Cockburn, Russell and Houghton) with whom he had been on good terms.⁵⁰ With the House of Lords as an institution he did not deal. The Lords would have been included in Dickens's feelings about Parliament, and he could not but have been aware of the importance which the Chronicle and other reformers attached to the question of their powers, and yet it seems to have made no lasting mark upon him. This is not the only instance of a disproportion between the importance of an issue to Dickens and its significance in the eyes of his contemporaries.

The question of religious affiliation was seen as second in importance only to political attachment and here a disproportion is also in evidence, for the Chronicle was consistently more reformist than Dickens was to show himself later. On one occasion the paper went so far as to doubt the benefit of maintaining an established church in England, and it was very much in favour of disestablishing the Church of Ireland.⁵¹ To the common Tory cry of 'the Church is in danger', the Chronicle replied that indeed it was, through the abuses of sinecures, nepotism, pluralism and excessive temporal endowment.⁵² The political connection was often, but not invari-

50. Speeches, pp. 388-89 (10 April 1869).

51. Mng. Chr., 1 November 1834; 24 October 1834, 26, 28 March 1835, 29 August 1836.

52. Mng. Chr., 13 September, 25, 27 October 1834, 24 January, 6, 10 April, 26 December 1835.

ably made. The Church was associated with the Tories, many clergy were Tory landlords, and the Tories were riddled with corruption: 'the unequally distributed resources of a vast establishment afforded rich pickings for their descendants and offsets, legitimate and illegitimate'.⁵³ The political dimension was also present in the Chronicle's attitude to Roman Catholicism, for it was well aware that the Whig ministry needed the continued support of Irish radicals. On the general question it wavered somewhat, propounding the traditional Protestant view that Catholicism tends to 'shackle the mind', but elsewhere going so far as to extol the Irish priests for their 'substantial service to the cause of freedom and reform'. The contrast with Dickens in Pictures from Italy and A Child's History is considerable.⁵⁴

The Chronicle was liberal concerning the civil claims of dissenters, supporting proposals to enable them to marry in their own premises, and to admit them to university.⁵⁵ On church rates, it was more radical than the Government, contending that dissenters should be exempt.⁵⁶ Dickens's abiding hostility to dissent is too notorious to require illustration, but the Chronicle showed that it was possible for

53. Mng. Chr., 7 August 1835; see also 30 January, 29 April, 4, 6, 8, 14, 19 May, 29 October 1835.

54. Mng. Chr., 6 September 1836; 29 March 1836; see also 7 October 1835, 8 January, 11 February, 13 May 1836. On Dickens and Roman Catholicism see also Pilgrim, IV, 611, 619, 632, 633, 638, V, 20; Forster, IV, v, 349; and further references given by Norris F. Pope, Dickens and Charity, pp. 256-57, n. 50.

55. Mng. Chr., 20 March 1835; 2 August, 22 October 1834, 27 March 1835; see also 12 May 1834, 4 November 1835.

56. Mng. Chr., 18 May, 12 September, 20 October, 21 November 1836.

opposition to its cultural and social tendencies to be balanced with support of dissenters' political dispositions. It remarked on 'the Puritans, to whom, if we are indebted for our liberties, we are also indebted for the gloomy views of life which prevail so much among us'.⁵⁷ Clearly Dickens was much more concerned with the social than the political aspects of the question, which is touched on again in Chapter 7.

On these issues, the Chronicle was distinctly reformist, but it is possible to get closer to its precise identification by noting that it never, I think, regarded itself as 'radical'. The limits beyond which it did not pass are mostly to be inferred from what it did not say, rather than from what it did. The topics which radicals regarded as important are sometimes to be found in the reports of public meetings, particularly at the time of the General Election, but these were not commented upon in the editorial columns.⁵⁸ It rarely covered working class or ultra-radical meetings, again contrasting strongly with the True Sun; and it was considerably distanced, not to say remote, in an incidental reference to 'the population of our manufacturing towns' (15 October 1835). I noted in Chapter 2 that it was lukewarm on the great radical issue of the stamp duty, probably as a consequence of Government influence. It quoted, exceptionally, a report of a movement to re-activate the Birmingham Political Union, and campaign for household suffrage, the ballot, short parliaments, the abolition of the property qualifica-

57. Mng. Chr., 28 March 1836.

58. Mng. Chr., 22, 29 November (Manchester), 3 (Finsbury), 5 (Southwark) December 1834, and elsewhere.

tion for M.P.'s and a 'more equitable system of taxation, especially the repeal of the taxes on knowledge', but made clear its disapproval (18 May 1835). These radical demands contrast notably with the Chronicle's moderate and vaguely expressed programme as outlined in the previous month: reform of the municipal corporations, reform of the Church 'by such a distribution of ecclesiastical property as will add to the respectability and efficiency of the working clergy', attention to the claims of dissenters, 'extensive Reforms' in the law, and reform of the Church in Ireland (10 April 1835).

The Chronicle was no more sympathetic to radical causes in Parliament than it was to extra-parliamentary agitation. It is probably true that the parliamentary radicals were less active during 1835 and 1836 than they had been in the preceding years, when Dickens was working for the Mirror.⁵⁹ In the month after Dickens joined the paper, it commented on 'the absurdity of the clamour still raised by the ultra-Radical party against the Government on the subject of sinecures' (24 September 1834). The question of sinecures and the pension list was one to which radicals such as Hume attached great importance, equating as they did good government with economy, and believing that the Tories were profligate with public money. The Whigs, as usual, equivocated; they had attacked the pension list whilst in opposition, and had turned the Tories out of office on the issue, at least technically, in 1830. But once they were in government they

59. Mng. Chr., 30 June 1836, quoting (exceptionally) the London and Westminster Review.

were unwilling to take drastic action, and were consequently open to an attack such as that mounted by Daniel Whittle Harvey, who was soon to purchase the True Sun, in what I would regard as perhaps the best polemical speech I read from these years.

Harvey contrasted the extravagance of the pension list with the system of control and economy instituted by the new Poor Law, suggesting that Members should 'consider themselves not merely Members of the House of Commons but Poor-law Commissioners employed to look into the management of the great state workhouse [cheers and laughter]'. Russell in reply referred, characteristically enough, to a 'dangerous course', which was 'in direct contradiction' 'to the uniform course which had been taken since the [1688] Revolution'. The previous year the Chronicle had developed a fondness for referring to Tory lords as 'paupers', and Hume now developed the idea by suggesting that they should be given a distinctive dress or badge. But the paper defended the Government for opposing Harvey's motion, and attempted at the same time, rather ingeniously, to castigate the Tories for not being present.⁶⁰

The Chronicle was always at its most conservative on questions connected with property, congratulating the Government for its defence of the constitution in rejecting a scarcely revolutionary motion to divide the property of persons dying intestate equally among the children, rather than by primogeniture, Russell having raised the spectre of the

60. Mng. Chr., 20 April 1836; see also 5, 7, 17, 18, 21, 24, 28 August 1835, 5 October 1836.

French Revolution (13 April 1836). It strongly defended the establishment of the franchise on the basis of property, and maintained that the Tories did not, despite their assertions, represent a majority of the property of the country.⁶¹

According to the Chronicle, 'The Tory Lords are many of them notoriously poor for their station', hence they sought 'to balance the account by dipping into the property of others', and it was scornful of Tory claims that they too could be reformers.⁶² To a twentieth century reader, the insistence that the greater the wealth, the more securely established are a reformer's credentials, seems distinctly odd, if not contradictory; but the theme was often repeated.⁶³

Attachment to reform was regarded as consistent with -- almost, indeed, synonymous with -- respectability and an assured and elevated position in society. Thus reports of reformist public meetings, including those furnished by Dickens, routinely described them as attracting 'a large and respectable attendance', or some similar phrase. Conspicuously, the leaders of the party of reform did not identify themselves with the disadvantaged sections of society; as

61. Mng. Chr., 10 September, 17 October, 1 November, 13 December 1834, 5 January, 1 October 1835, 5 October 1836; 17 January, 18 April, 15 June, 17, 18 August 1835, 21 January 1836.

62. Mng. Chr., 23 August 1836; see also 1, 17, 27 December 1834, 30 January, 16 February, 17 December 1835.

63. Mng. Chr., 17 January, 10 February, 18 April, 19 May, 17 August 1835, 8 July, 23 August 1836. It was, apparently, a matter of pride to Grey 'that his Cabinet . . . boasted between them a greater acreage of land than any that had preceded them', J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, p. 152, citing C.S. Parker, Sir James Graham: Life and Letters (1907), I, 90.

Dickens put it later, in his favourite theatrical metaphor,

A People there are, no doubt -- a certain large number of supernumeraries, who are to be occasionally addressed, and relied upon for shouts and choruses, as on the theatrical stage; but Boodle and Buffy, their followers and families, their heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, are the born first-actors, managers, and leaders, and no others can appear upon the scene for ever and ever.⁶⁴

The Chronicle was highly partisan in its observations on Whigs and Tories, and the counter-charges which could have been levelled against the Whigs had no place in its pages. 'The first Tory was a robber', it asserted; remarks made by Bulwer in 1833 suggest that the first Barnacle was the chief of the Whigs:

But, my Lord Grey! what son -- what brother -- what nephew -- what cousin -- what remote and unconjectured relative in the Genesis of the Greys has not fastened his limpet to the rock of the national expenditure?

The relevance to Little Dorrit needs no stressing, but Bleak House is also suggested:

Everybody on Sir Leicester Dedlock's side of the question, and of his way of thinking, would appear to be his cousin more or less. From my Lord Boodle, through the Duke of Foodle, down to Noodle, Sir Leicester, like a glorious spider, stretches his threads of relationship.⁶⁵

Dickens was too sensible to make a close party identifica-

64. Bleak House, Chapter 12, p. 146.

65. Mng. Chr., 23 August 1836; Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, II, 251-52; Bleak House, Chapter 28, p. 347. Grey defended himself against charges of nepotism on leaving office: 'Of my numerous relations and connexions, some have undoubtedly been placed in situations under Government; but all their situations have been laborious', Mirror, 9 July 1834, p. 2699. For the high positions attained by the 'immediate connexions' of the first Earl Grey in five generations, see Michael Brock, The Great Reform Act, p. 330.

tion. As the Chronicle put it on another occasion, incidentally further illustrating the distinction between 'Whig' and 'Liberal', 'The Whigs may have their party errors in family distributions of patronage; but it is a monstrous piece of impudence in the Tories to throw that in the teeth of the Liberal party' (9 December 1835).

Whig landowners were regarded as being reformers quite properly through self interest. It was not that they could afford to be reformers; instead they needed to be reformers in order to stop the Tories, and, most importantly, because they had the most to lose. The bearings here were highly conservative. The Tory party had recently assumed the name 'Conservative' (calling its opponents 'Destructive'), and the Chronicle was very much inclined to question its right to arrogate the title to itself, alleging that the Tories were actually 'Obstructive' and corruptionists.⁶⁶

The dispute went beyond a mere quibble about terms. Both parties aimed to be conservative, and both were equally concerned to avoid the excesses of the French Revolution, 'an old story which ought to be ever present to our minds', as one speaker on the Reform Bill called it. There was much debate as to whether the Revolution was caused through concession, or the failure to make concession. Wetherell (who had been in France up to 1792) was notably prone to appeal to

66. Mng. Chr., 13, 23 December 1834, 19, 23 February, 12 April, 18, 22 May, 1, 8 June, 7 September, 14 October, 18 December 1835, but on 3 February 1836, on the eve of the opening of Parliament, 'We were not aware of any difference beyond name between Conservatism and Toryism'; 17 November 1834, 10, 24 February, 21 March, 4 May, 6 August, 12 September, 23 October, 19 November 1835, 9, 12 January, 12, 18 May, 23 August 1836.

the historical precedent, describing the Bill as 'jacobinical' and declaring that 'Every large town . . . will be democrat-ised, sans-culottised'.⁶⁷ The obsession is apt now, in the arrogance of hindsight, to seem faintly absurd, if not comic, but there is no doubt that to the parliamentarians of the day the matter was deadly earnest. They did not know that the summoning of a reformed Parliament would not be equivalent to the convening of the States General. 'Democracy' above all things was what was feared by Whig and Tory alike.

Tories believed that if any concessions were made it would be impossible to stop, and rightly pointed out that the new constitution would be as riddled with anomalies as the old. They saw reform as the thin end of the wedge; the Whigs believed that unless the wedge were used a little, recourse would be had to the battering ram. There was much to be said -- a very great deal was said -- for both views. The Whigs lost the argument about the title 'Conservative', but were right to contest it. Whig landowners thought in terms of securing their great estates, not of putting them at risk; 'reform and preserve' was their watchword.⁶⁸ By the

67. Mirror, Wynn, 3 August 1831, p. 1016; Wetherell, 25 August 1831, p. 1649; see also 6 July 1831, pp. 383-86, 11 August 1831, p. 1273, 21 September 1831, pp. 2323-24, Macaulay, 5 July 1831, p. 350, 20 September 1831, pp. 2280-84.

68. Macaulay said, 'Reform that you may preserve', in what has been described as 'The most brilliant speech in defence of the Reform Bill' (2 March 1831), D.G. Wright, Democracy and Reform 1815-1885, pp. 117-18; Grey said, quoting the Duke of Bedford in 1792, '"We wish to reform the Constitution, because we wish to preserve it"', Mirror, 7 October 1831, p. 2872; Russell said, 'We wish to preserve and to reform', Mirror, 21 April 1834, p. 1170, speaking in defence of the established church.

time that Dickens was working for the Chronicle, the question had lost some of its immediacy, but little of its importance; 'Revolutions are not to be sported with', the paper warned, and the inevitable tendency of the Tories' intransigence was to promote them.⁶⁹

The relevance of these remarks to the political moral of A Tale of Two Cities, inscribed as it was to Russell, should be clear. In Chapter 1 it was concluded that it appears unlikely that Dickens became a parliamentary reporter before November 1830, and as Wellington resigned during that month it would mean that the Whigs were in office during the whole of Dickens's reporting career. Their values were dominant. In the preceding chapter I pointed to the extent to which Dickens appears to satirise Whig values, as represented particularly by Russell, in his imaginative work. But when his own acts and attitudes (including his close friendship with Russell) are examined a little more closely, a rather different picture emerges. In general, the conservative reformism of the Chronicle, and of Russell, recalls Dickens's son's observation that he 'was absolutely loyal, and was never in any sense of the word a revolutionary', and his endorsement of Forster's comment that 'his old unaltered wish to better what was bad in English institutions, carried with it no desire to replace them by new ones'. Relevant also is Dickens's explanation of his reformism to Miss Coutts:

The people will not bear for any length of time what they bear now . . . And I want to interpose something between them and their wrath.

69. Mng. Chr., 15 June 1836; see also 29 December 1834, 20 March, 18 May, 6, 10 August, 18 December 1835, 25 January 1836.

For this reason solely, I am a Reformer heart and soul. I have nothing to gain -- everything to lose (for public quiet is my bread).⁷⁰

The sentiment is pure Whiggery. The distinction between a Whig and a radical is not only a question of the greater political distance which a radical would want to go, nor is it a matter of the radical's identification with the interests of the disadvantaged. It is as much to do with the broader question of approach. A radical -- certainly the breed usually denominated 'ultra-radical' -- usually had a consistent philosophy, some idea that there were somewhere doctrines which if applied regularly would yield the answer to political (and hence social and economic) problems.

Whigs had no such beliefs, or illusions. 'I have all my life hated the discussion of abstract principles', said Grey, and he elevated the exercise of applied expediency into his own principle -- 'pragmatism', one might call it (although he did not).⁷¹ Also characteristic was the tendency to regard issues as important only when, and because, they became active through external forces. Whigs were susceptible to a public opinion which they were concerned to propitiate and to forestall. Dickens was yet more inclined to take up a topic only when it impinged itself upon him in some way -- quite justifiably, for he was not a politician, and had no obligation to adopt a view on every public issue.

70. Mng. Chr., 11 December 1834, 6 January, 30 March, 19 May, 2 December 1835; Sir Henry F. Dickens, Memories of my Father, p. 28; Forster, XI, iii, 829; Coutts, p. 298 (11 May 1855).

71. Mirror, 6 June 1834, p. 2078; see also 25 June 1833, p. 2543.

Whigs differed from Tories in that they did believe in reform and they did believe in progress. Dickens did too, and enough has been said to suggest that the temper of his mind, and his preserving instincts, accorded with Whig patterns of thought. I would not wish to push the matter too far; I do not intend to set Dickens up as a hitherto unrecognised Whig fellow-traveller (although it is always pleasing to suggest something new). Dickens's social class would preclude him from actually being a Whig, and 'independent reformer' will do as well as any other label we might care to attach to him ('Liberal' presents its own difficulties). Dickens's attitude to some questions of the day, such as the poor law and the rights of dissenters, was considerably at variance with the Chronicle's editorial line; but if we consider the two political designations most frequently applied to non-Tories in the thirties, as represented respectively by the Morning Chronicle and the True Sun, I think it is clear that Dickens was nearer to being a Whig than a radical.

That is no very remarkable conclusion -- it places Dickens squarely in the centre of the predominant tendency in the political thought of the time, and the question of how much of that was through the direct influence of the Chronicle, and how much was part of what the Chronicle, echoing John Stuart Mill, referred to as 'the "spirit of the age," as the fermentation of opinion is sometimes designated', may still be left open.⁷² The Chronicle was very much the creature of its time, in its belief, not just in the efficacy, but in the

72. Mng. Chr., 12 April 1835; Mill's 'The Spirit of the Age' was first published in the Examiner, January-May 1831.

idea of 'reform', broadly conceived; the significance of the Reform Bill was not so much its provisions concerning the franchise as that it made 'reform' politically, one might almost say socially, respectable and indeed orthodox. Dickens shared this disposition with the Chronicle, although it could be argued that, as with other influences, the experience of these years was slow to mature. In Dickens's work prior to his first visit to America in 1842, a concern with social reform is intermittent and, to an extent, incidental. The limitations in his social perception are seen most clearly in Nicholas Nickleby, where Dotheboys Hall forms an episode which reaches the limits of exposure and development, and the novel inevitably moves elsewhere. There is no organic, coherent treatment, no extended consideration of a range of social issues, much less anything approaching a polemic in favour of a comprehensive reform of society.

By contrast, The Chimes, and, to some extent, A Christmas Carol, do assert that something fundamentally important is at fault in English society. But Dickens's gift was not usually at its happiest when restricted within a small compass, and these works seem to have functioned as essential preludes to -- studies for, almost -- the extended treatment, and comparative unity, of the later novels. Not until Bleak House does Dickens deal with a range of social issues: law reform, public health, poverty, philanthropy, education, the composition of Parliament, the formation of governments, the police, the place of women, and so on. Most of these topics are those with which reformers would concern themselves, and that Dickens was drawing on his experience of the thirties is

suggested by the details which originated specifically in that era.⁷³ Similarly, the central unifying theme, and metaphor, of Little Dorrit, imprisonment for debt, was an issue in the thirties as it was not in the fifties (and of course we know that the biographical seed was sown much further back in Dickens's life), and also the Circumlocution Office is less exclusively derived from the period of the novel than is commonly supposed; and again in this novel Flora Finching serves as a personal representative of the conjunction of the two periods.

Dickens's attachment to the idea of reform, broadly considered, did not survive the experience of the mishandling of the Crimean War. In his allegory 'The Thousand and One Humbugs', he wrote, in 1855,

At length the young and lovely Reefawm (that is to say Light of Reason), the youngest and fairest of all the Sultan's wives, and to whom he had looked with hope to recompense him for his many disappointments, made as bad a Howsa Kummauns as any of the rest. The unfortunate Taxedtaurus took this so much to heart that he fell into a profound melancholy, secluded himself from observation, and for some time was so seldom seen or heard of that many of his great officers of state supposed him to be dead.⁷⁴

'Taxedtaurus (or Fleeced Bull)' stands for the nation, but here could be considered to represent Dickens himself, and the irony of the passage should not cause us to lose sight of the poignancy of the despair which lies beneath it, expressing something approaching to a real loss of belief.

Dickens's similarities to the Chronicle, to summarise,

73. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work, p. 200.

74. Misc. P., II, 30 (HW, 21 April 1855).

are in the lack of a close party identity (but that is more true of Dickens than of the paper) and the wavering between on the one side a reformism which even when it tended towards radicalism was never 'ultra-radical' or working class, and on the other a pragmatic Whiggery which saw reform as the most effective means of guarding against revolution. The Chronicle, and Dickens, occupied the broad middle ground between radicalism and Toryism; and although Dickens (as mentioned in the previous chapter) numbered some Tories amongst his personal acquaintances, he was always opposed to the Tories politically. It is no accident that the years between 1841 and 1846 which saw the only Tory government to be established with a secure majority during Dickens's maturity was also the period when he was both most politically conscious, and most radically inclined.

Dickens was employed by the Chronicle not as a leader writer but as a reporter, and that term would be more appropriate than what we now understand by 'journalist'. In this section I consider the particular qualities which he brought to the task, and the implications for and consequences upon his later career as a writer. He was, of course, aware of the Chronicle's political identity -- indeed it is my argument that to a large measure he shared it. I have mentioned already his report from Colchester in January 1835, and pointed to the similarities in his description of 'Burningshame' (pp. 114-15). Towards the end of 1835, he again found reason to complain against Tory tactics in his report from Kettering of a by-election for Northamptonshire. The

Chronicle had already given its support to the Whig candidate, Hanbury, noting that he had received the support of various named local aristocrats, 'and many other noble and influential landowners of the county' (23 November 1835).

Dickens's report appeared on 16 December, and has never been reprinted (brief extracts appear in the Pilgrim edition of the letters, I, 106-07). The start will, I think, bear quotation in full, not just for his account of a lively election meeting and his exposure of Tory intimidation, but as a piece of descriptive writing in its own right, and by way of introduction to a discussion of his work on the Chronicle in a broader context. It is not the only passage amongst his work for the Chronicle which would be worth rescuing from oblivion:-

Kettering, Tuesday, Dec. 15.--This being the day appointed for the nomination, the town presented an unusual scene of life and bustle at a very early hour. Bands of music paraded the streets, a variety of banners with appropriate inscriptions were displayed, and the friends of both candidates thronged into the town in one continued stream.

The hustings had been erected on the Market-hill, and in the front of them is a tolerably large piece of open ground, on which the crowd began to collect so early as nine o'clock. Ten was the time appointed, and long before that hour a vast intercourse of spectators had assembled before the booth. These people were principally the friends and supporters of Mr. Hanbury, and were all on foot. Perfect order and good humour existed among them, and would no doubt have continued to prevail, but for an outrage of the most disgraceful nature I ever witnessed. Before the arrival of the sheriff, and when the friends of the two candidates had taken their places on the hustings, a large body of horsemen in Mr. Maunsell's interest arrived, with bludgeons and leaded riding or hunting whips, galloped up to the spot, and actually charged the mob, making their way to the hustings amidst every opposition, and bearing down all before them with a degree of ruffianly barbarity, and brutal violence, of which no description could convey an adequate idea. The whole of this cowardly and unmanly proceeding was preconcerted. I heard last night that

it was in contemplation, but could not believe it was really intended.

This body were headed by a person of the name of John George, of Bythorn, who dashed his horse among the defenceless people, with a reckless disregard of lives and limbs, and laid about him in all directions with a thick ash stick. The confusion and disorder thus occasioned were excessive; and when it was at its height, and before a single missile had been thrown by the Buff party, this man George produced from his coat pocket a pistol, and levelled it at a person in the crowd. His hand was arrested by some member of his own party, and a cry of 'Seize him!' 'Carry him off!' 'Constables do your duty!' was immediately raised. The horsemen, however, crowded about him, and screened him from the just indignation of the crowd. A large party of constables and banner-bearers of Mr. Hanbury's rushed forward to seize his horse's bridle, and some person threw, I think, a piece of stick, which struck him on the nose, and fetched a little blood. The man, foaming with passion, again produced the pistol, levelled it, cocked it, and in another instant would, in all probability, have committed murder, had not his arms been forcibly seized and held down by two of his horsemen, who kept him pinioned, and struggling all the while, until the arrival of the sheriff, and the indignation of the crowd and the gentlemen on the hustings induced him to desist. It is worthy of remark that no one speaker on the Conservative side made the slightest allusion to, or expressed any regret for, this disgraceful proceeding. We heard Mr. Maunsell himself appealed to on the hustings. His reply was that the other (the Buff) party had taken the ground first, with the addition of some other words which we were unable to hear.

In further lengthy descriptive passages, Dickens related that more noise and confusion ensued, and that the proposer of Hanbury refused to proceed until George was disarmed, which was eventually achieved; 'It will hardly be credited that the pistol was a double-barrelled one, and was loaded'. At length the meeting proceeded; Hanbury spoke last, and Dickens was seemingly unaware of any sense of anti-climax in noting that 'the few observations made [were] almost inaudible'.

The account no doubt is partisan, but the excitement, and the outlet for moral indignation, make it clear why Dick-

ens welcomed the opportunity to cover public meetings out of London. The disorderliness of the House of Commons was tame and conventional by comparison. His letters to Catherine and to journalistic colleagues contain a good deal of the relish and exhilaration of a challenging undertaking successfully completed.⁷⁵ It was these aspects which he remembered in later reminiscences which are as full descriptions as I know of concerning the actual details of reporting at this time. Dickens recalls his experiences with an affection and liveliness which remained vivid and entertaining even after thirty years had elapsed. He wrote to Forster in the forties as follows:

There never was anybody connected with newspapers, who, in the same space of time, had so much express and post-chaise experience as I. And what gentlemen they were to serve, in such things, at the old Morning Chronicle! Great or small it did not matter. I have had to charge for half-a-dozen break-downs in half-a-dozen times as many miles. I have had to charge for the damage of a great-coat from the drippings of a blazing wax-candle, in writing through the smallest hours of the night in a swift-flying carriage and pair. I have had to charge for all sorts of breakages fifty times in a journey without question, such being the ordinary results of the pace which we went at. I have charged for broken hats, broken luggage, broken chaises, broken harness -- everything but a broken head, which is the only thing they would have grumbled to pay for.

Mrs. Fields recalled clearly Dickens's account during his second American visit of his reporting experiences:

At dinner he gave us a marvellous description of his life as a reporter . . . Often and often he has gone by post-chaise to Edinburgh, heard a speech or a part of it (having instructions, whatever happened, to leave the place at a certain hour, the next reporter taking up his work where he must leave it), and has driven all the way back to Lon-

75. Pilgrim, I, 53, 58-60, 90-93, 100-01, 105-10.

don, a bag of sovereigns on one side of his body and a bag of slips of paper on the other, writing, writing desperately all the way by the light of a small lamp. At each station a man on horseback would stand ready to seize the sheets already prepared and ride with them to London. Often and often this work would make him deadly sick and he would have to plunge his head out of the window to relieve himself; still the writing went steadily forward on very little slips of paper which he held before him, just resting his body on the front of the window underneath the lamp. As the station was reached, a sudden plunge into the pocket of sovereigns would pay the postboys, another behind him would render up the completed pages, and a third into the pocket on the other side would give him the fresh paper to carry forward the inexorable, unremitting work.

Dickens's most extended public reminiscence was in a speech to the Newspaper Press Fund in 1865:

I have pursued the calling of a reporter under circumstances of which many of my brethren at home in England here, many of my modern successors, can form no adequate conception. I have often transcribed for the printer from my shorthand notes, important public speeches in which the strictest accuracy was required, and a mistake in which would have been to a young man severely compromising, writing on the palm of my hand, by the light of a dark lantern, in a post chaise and four, galloping through a wild country, all through the dead of night, at the then surprising rate of fifteen miles an hour. The very last time I was at Exeter, I strolled into the Castle Yard there to identify, for the amusement of a friend, the spot on which I once 'took', as we used to call it, an election speech of my noble friend Lord Russell, in the midst of a lively fight maintained by all the vagabonds in that division of the county, and under such a pelting rain, that I remember two good-natured colleagues, who chanced to be at leisure, held a pocket handkerchief over my notebook after the manner of a state canopy in an ecclesiastical procession. [Laughter.] . . . I have been, in my time, belated on miry by-roads, towards the small hours, in a wheelless carriage, with exhausted horses and drunken postboys, and have got back in time for publication, to be received with never-forgotten compliments by the late Mr. Black, coming in the broadest of Scotch from the broadest of hearts I ever knew. [Hear, hear.]⁷⁶

76. Pilgrim, IV, 460-61 (to Forster, [1845]); Mrs. Fields, Memories of a Hostess, pp. 173-74; Speeches, p. 347.

There is, inevitably, a certain amount of heightening for effect in these descriptions. I doubt whether Dickens was sent to Edinburgh very often (although his first assignment did take him there), and it is questionable from what is known of the arrangements made on other occasions whether there were so many waiting men on horseback as he suggested in the second account quoted, which clearly remembers Dickens's own words; and the report of the meeting at Exeter describes the rain quite graphically, and Russell's difficulties in making himself heard, but makes no mention of fighting (2 May 1835). There is inevitable distortion also through the fact that, reasonably enough, Dickens describes the exceptional incidents in his life as reporter. During the large part of the year when Parliament was not sitting the work load overall, I suspect, was relatively light. There was not a continuous sequence of important dramatic events to be reported.

What greatly assists the process of retrospective enhancement is that Dickens is very much describing an earlier period to his audiences, since his work as reporter preceded the railway age, and the advent of the telegraph.⁷⁷ It seems likely that the experience of these years contributed largely to the nostalgia for the coaching days which is popularly attributed to Dickens, and which has little basis in his work beyond Pickwick Papers (which must have derived its appeal for later readers through being already out of date)

77. Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life, III, 155-56. In Dombey and Son, Members of Parliament, 'went down into the north' by train, 'and sent on messages before by the electric telegraph, to say that they were coming', Chapter 15, p. 218 (February 1847).

and a rather unsuccessful effort to capture the feel of coach travel in Martin Chuzzlewit. The representations of railway travel are more convincing, and in 'A Flight' Dickens also compared the railway favourably with the inconveniences of the diligence. Dickens no doubt shared with the narrator of 'The Holly-Tree' the memory of 'stage-coaches; which I occasionally find myself, in common with some other people, affecting to lament now, but which everybody dreaded as a very serious penance then'. By the time he wrote A Tale of Two Cities, the romance had entirely faded, and the stress there is on the impediments to progress created by mud and other difficulties.⁷⁸

The most extended treatment came later, with 'An Old Stage-Coaching House', first published in 1863. Here the description is of decay, and the dominant tone is of elegy; but it is not suggested that anything of any lasting value has been lost. Yet the imaginative hold of the idea of coaching remained strong, and manifested itself in the special displays which Dickens put on at Gad's Hill for American guests, playing the part of the head of a tourist board who feels obliged to manufacture anachronistic attractions for his visitors.⁷⁹ This harmless activity was a legacy, if

78. Martin Chuzzlewit, Chapter 36, pp. 558-64; 'A Flight', Repr. P., p. 482 (HW, 30 August 1851); Dombey and Son, Chapter 55, pp. 735-39; 'Railway Dreaming', Misc. P., II, 103-10 (HW, 10 May 1856); 'The Holly-Tree', Christmas Stories, pp. 98-99; A Tale of Two Cities, I, ii, 37-42.

79. Unc. T., Chapter 24, pp. 241-49; Nonesuch, III, 657 (7 July 1868, to James T. Fields); George Dolby, Charles Dickens as I Knew Him (1885), repr. Collins, Is. and Rs., II, 283.

an indirect one, from his days as a reporter, and the idea of Dickens as a spokesman for the lost joys of coaching, while inaccurate on a mundane level, does have a certain validity as a reflection of an imaginative commitment.

There were other legacies, too, as is suggested by a further account, by J.T. Fields, of Dickens's recollections of these days:

[He] would frequently relate to me, if prompted, stories of his youthful days, when he was toiling on The London Morning Chronicle, passing sleepless hours as a reporter on the road in a post-chaise, driving day and night from point to point to take down the speeches of Shiel or O'Connell . . . Those were his days of severe training, when in rain and sleet and cold he dashed along, scarcely able to keep the blinding mud out of his tired eyes; and he imputed much of his ability for steady hard work to his practice as a reporter, kept at his grinding business.⁸⁰

In speaking at the Banquet in his honour given by the New York Press in 1868, Dickens remarked that 'To the wholesome training of severe newspaper work, when I was a very young man, I constantly refer my first successes'. David Copperfield had made the same point at greater length, when writing of his determination to succeed as a reporter:

I will only add, to what I have already written of my perseverance at this time of my life, and of a patient and continuous energy which then began to be matured within me, and which I know to be the strong part of my character, if it have any strength at all, that there, on looking back, I find the source of my success. I have been very fortunate in worldly matters; many men have worked much harder, and not succeeded half so well; but I never could have done what I have done, without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one object at a time, no matter how quickly its successor should come upon its heels, which I then formed . . . My meaning simply is, that whatever I

80. James T. Fields, Yesterdays with Authors, p. 230.

have tried to do in life, I have tried with all my heart to do well; that whatever I have devoted myself to, I have devoted myself to completely; that, in great aims and in small, I have always been thoroughly in earnest. I have never believed it possible that any natural or improved ability can claim immunity from the companionship of the steady, plain, hard-working qualities, and hope to gain its end. There is no such thing as such fulfilment on this earth. Some happy talent, and some fortunate opportunity, may form the two sides of the ladder on which some men mount, but the rounds of that ladder must be made of stuff to stand wear and tear; and there is no substitute for thorough-going, ardent, and sincere earnestness. Never to put one hand to anything, on which I could throw my whole self; and never to affect depreciation of my work, whatever it was; I find, now, to have been my golden rules.

The earnestness (to adopt a word) of this makes it, I believe, more self-revelatory of Dickens than the famous passage in which David describes the difficulties of learning shorthand, which is clearly written for effect. It is sometimes objected that we are told very little about how it is that David becomes a successful writer of fiction, and his creator was also sparing of accounts of his creative processes. This passage is important in this respect, and the identification between David and Dickens does not rest solely on the concluding remark quoted recalling the criticism of Thackeray's attitude to his own work which Dickens was unable to keep out of his obituary notice of him.⁸¹ Dickens, for all his hostility to dissenters, did believe in and certainly practised the puritan virtues of diligence and application, and it was, of course, their deficiencies in these qualities which so distressed him in his sons, 'My boys with a curse of limpness

81. Speeches, p. 379 (18 April 1869); David Copperfield, Chapter 42, pp. 517-18, Chapter 38, pp. 465-66; 'In Memoriam: W.M. Thackeray', Misc. P., I, 51-55 (p. 52).

on them', as he wrote feelingly to Wills.⁸²

Dickens, then, would have related his later success to his newspaper work. What the passage from Copperfield omits is sheer native ability. Dickens did recognise the quality in himself; writing with characteristic immodesty (not that, as Philip Collins is wont to remark, he had much to be modest about), he said,

I left the reputation behind me of being the best and most rapid reporter ever known . . . I could do anything in that way under any sort of circumstances, and often did. (I dare say I am at this present writing the best shorthand writer in the world.)

The concluding claim here is clearly unprovable, and excessive twenty years after Dickens left the profession, but agreement as to his outstanding abilities as a reporter was general amongst his contemporaries. He remained to some extent a reporter at heart, and it was made matter for complaint when he was in America that he preferred to dine with members of the press rather than with people in official positions.⁸³

The fellow feeling which Dickens expressed in speeches to newspaper men was genuine enough. To one such meeting he said in 1865 that

To this present year of my life, when I sit in this hall, or where not, hearing a dull speech -- the phenomenon does occur -- I sometimes beguile the tedium of the moment by mentally following the speaker in the old way; and sometimes, if you can believe me, I even find my hand going on the table cloth, taking an imaginary note of it all.

82. 6 June 1867, quoted in Arthur A. Adrian, Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle, p. 220; Norris F. Pope, Dickens and Charity, p. 94.

83. Nonesuch, II, 777 (6 June 1856, to Wilkie Collins); Pilgrim, III, 113, n. 3.

Forster adds to this, 'The latter I have known him do frequently. It was indeed a quite ordinary habit with him'.⁸⁴ There are records of Dickens teaching shorthand to his son Henry Fielding and others, and this must have been towards the end of his life.⁸⁵ Despite this continuing facility, there is, so far as I know, but one surviving item by Dickens in which shorthand is used.⁸⁶ His editors have problems enough, and have cause to be thankful that the number plans, for instance, were always written in orthodox script. But it is curious that Dickens did not use what had developed, in Henry's account, almost into a private script on other occasions, such as the very private note giving the code which should indicate to Wills whether Ellen Ternan should follow him to America -- almost as if he did not wish to set later cryptographers too stiff a puzzle.⁸⁷

The testimony on Dickens's ability as reporter focuses on the mechanical facility in the taking and transcribing of notes. The most notable evidence is from J.H. Barrow, his uncle and employer on the Mirror of Parliament, who described him as 'the best reporter in the Gallery', and from Thomas Beard, whose 'There never was such a reporter' comes from the colleague who usually accompanied Dickens on what were regarded as the most important of the Chronicle's coverage

84. Speeches, p. 348 (20 May 1865); Forster, I, iv, 62.

85. Henry F. Dickens, Memories of my Father, p. 27, and the facsimile of some of Dickens's notes, opposite p. 28; Henry was twenty-one when Dickens died. G.A. Sala, Charles Dickens, p. 35; Observer, 12 June 1870, p. 6.

86. Pilgrim, I, 283, Dickens's copy of a letter to Bentley, 14 July 1837.

87. Ada Nisbet, Dickens and Ellen Ternan, p. 54.

of public meetings. To Charles Mackay, Dickens was 'universally considered the rapidest and most accurate shorthand-writer in the gallery'.⁸⁸ G.A. Sala testified similarly that

All of his contemporaries in the gallery whom I have ever known -- and I have known many -- have concurred in stating that he was the quickest, the readiest, the aptest, and the most faithful stenographer of his time.

Sala also usefully pointed to the lasting effect of Dickens's years as a reporter:

He must have been a wonderful listener. He has 'reported,' so to speak, the utterances of the meanest of mankind with the same nervous and textual truth with which, long years before, he reported the speeches of statesmen . . . There can be little doubt that his early training in listening and transcribing was of infinite service to him in enabling him to develop the utterances of his in-born genius in a clear, concise, and perspicuous style.

This is suggestive, and perhaps more so than Sala realised. Dickens did have, of course, a peculiarly acute gift for imagining what he referred to as the children of his fancy.⁸⁹ But to become a successful artist he needed also to be able to transcribe accurately his imaginary conceptions, and his newspaper work must have been useful in this respect.

It must have been responsible also for developing the rapidity and sharpness of the mental processes which enabled

88. Barrow quoted in Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life, III, 37; Charles Kent, 'Charles Dickens as a Journalist', p. 363, repeating Beard's remark quoted by Forster as 'There never was such a short-hand writer', I, iii, 49; Charles Mackay, quoted in Kent, p. 371. For other testimony as to Dickens's ability see Grant, The Newspaper Press, I, 296, 298; Mackenzie, Life of Charles Dickens, pp. 47-48; Observer, 12 June 1870, p. 6.

89. Sala, pp. 34-36; David Copperfield, Preface to the Charles Dickens Edition, p. 752; and possibly elsewhere.

Dickens to accomplish so much in later life with such apparent (if sometimes assumed) ease. Otherwise the qualities developed would have differed somewhat on the two journals for which he worked. On the Mirror he would have needed great concentration, quickness and accuracy and, very possibly, the ability to supplement from memory when manual dexterity proved momentarily unequal to a rapid speaker; on the Chronicle the requirements most needed would have been the ability to select and condense intelligently, and, within limits, to render intelligible and grammatical the meandering and confused. As Dickens put it,

I would venture to remind you . . . how much we, the public, owe to the reporters, if it were only for their skill in the two great successes of condensation and rejection. [Laughter and loud cheering.] Consider what our sufferings, under an Imperial Parliament however popularly constituted, under however glorious a constitution, would be if the reporters could not skip. [Much laughter.] ⁹⁰

A note of qualification enters the accounts of Dickens as reporter in the remarks of W.H. Russell, himself, of course, the most outstanding journalist of his day, who said that 'Dickens was not a good editor; he was the best reporter in London, and as a journalist he was nothing more'.⁹¹ The distinction here between reporter and journalist is important; and although I think that as a journalist Dickens was more successful than this comment suggests (witness several

90. Speeches, p. 345 (20 May 1865).

91. John Black Atkins, Life of Sir William Howard Russell (1911), I, 58, quoted in Collins, 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 68. Russell proposed Dickens's health on the occasion of his most extended reminiscence of his days as a reporter (quoted above, p. 144), but avoided the subject, preferring to praise Dickens's literary work and his devotion 'to the cause of philanthropy', Speeches, p. 348.

of the Sketches by Boz and the Uncommercial Traveller pieces), it was probably in other directions than those which Russell would have regarded as important. Dickens's bias, that is, is towards the quirky, the exceptional and the personal, rather than towards the significant account and discussion of great public events. His reminiscences of his reporting experiences, quoted above, are wholly devoid of any description of the political content and significance of the events covered. Lord John Russell, quite probably, would have remembered the meeting at Exeter, but not on account of the rain or the behaviour of the crowd, but because he lost the election, to the embarrassment of the Government. Dickens's interest, rightly from a professional point of view, was in the logistics of the operation of getting the report back to London as expeditiously as possible, and he did not stay in Devon for the actual poll.⁹²

Although Dickens's reports show that he was committed to the Chronicle's editorial line where this was appropriate, his position as reporter meant that essentially he was a detached observer. The reporters were detached in another sense also, that is, in their indeterminate social status, as noted by one commentator in 1832:

The greatest and most extraordinary anomaly in society is the condition of the reporters. It would puzzle all the heralds of the college to find in the kingdom any class, order, or condition of men bearing the slightest affinity to them.

Their functions are of the most important in society. They are the filters through which all the intellect and information of the country must

92. Pilgrim, I, 58-59 ([2 May 1835], to Beard). The election was held through the curious requirement that a Member of the Commons was obliged to resign and fight a by-election on being appointed a minister.

pass . . . Talent and a high degree of education, are essential to their duties; they must be men of integrity and of gentlemanly feeling, for their responsibility is great, and their functions often require a delicate discernment, and a nice sense of propriety. Notwithstanding this, no class of men is so little regarded -- none so completely out of the pale of respectable society -- none so impoverished, or so subject to mortifications, insult, and gross impositions.

There is much to confirm that reporters, and editors even, were held generally in low esteem.⁹³ Even within the small body of parliamentary reporters, Dickens would have been further set apart by his youth, background, education and lack of prospects.

In an obituary notice, James Grant recalled that as a parliamentary reporter Dickens 'was exceedingly reserved in his manners', becoming intimate only with Thomas Beard. The remarks of another commentator, in 1830, suggest that he must have been conscious of his deficiencies and uncertain prospects:

A reporter of the Chronicle or Times, must be a clever man . . . To the mechanical dexterity of the short-hand writer he must unite quickness of ear, and extensive, if not profound learning. He must possess classical and historical information in the widest sense of the words; and he must have at least a general knowledge of all the subjects brought under parliamentary discussion . . . Many of the reporters, indeed, do not, of course, possess these qualifications . . . [A] reporter having never more than sufficient for his comfortable support, is extremely likely to go to the parish when age or infirmity renders him unserviceable. There

93. 'Newspaper Reporting', The Metropolitan (1832), p. 284; see also pp. 286, 288; Aspinall, Ps. and P., pp. 198-99, 237, n. 2, 317, 469; Aspinall, 'Social Status of Journalists', pp. 218, 222; Gratton, The Gallery, p. 67; Halévy, The Triumph of Reform, p. 18; Kellett, 'The Press', pp. 12-13; [Kirwan], 'Editors and Newspaper Writers of the Last Generation', February 1862, p. 183, May 1862, pp. 597-98; Roebuck, The Stamped Press of London and its Morality, p. 3; 'Journalism', Westminster Review (1833), pp. 195-96.

have been instances of this; but they are rare; for fortunately there are but few old reporters. The occupation is for the most part adopted merely as a temporary assistance by men engaged in some other pursuit. The reporters of the Times and the Chronicle are, with scarcely an exception, law students.⁹⁴

Dickens's association with the law had been considerably more lowly in character than this, first as a solicitor's clerk and then as a free-lance reporter. Unlike David Copperfield, he had no Aunt Betsey ready with the necessary premium to enable him to become an articled clerk, and Dickens's fiction in this particular can be seen as part wish fulfilment and part smudging of the biographical record. In both 'Doctors' Commons' and 'A Parliamentary Sketch' he is careful at the outset to establish the persona of the casual interested visitor, something he does not bother with when he reports on low life.⁹⁵ It may be conjectured that his consciousness of his disadvantages even amongst the lowly body of the parliamentary reporters would have contributed to the reticence concerning his past which became habitual, and also it would have sharpened his will to succeed. Most notably, his isolation and his detached, observing, position must have reinforced tendencies already strong in him, being inherited from his mother, and it must have functioned as excellent training

94. [James Grant], Morning Advertiser, 13 June 1870, confirmed by Forster, I, iv, 62; 'Ned Culpepper', 'Placemen, Parliament-men, Penny-a-Liners, And Parliamentary Reporters', p. 293. On reporters' education and legal backgrounds see also Aspinall, 'The Reporting and Publishing of the House of Commons' Debates', pp. 250, 251, n. 2; Aspinall, 'Social Status of Journalists', p. 230; Gratton, pp. 115, 132-33; Kent, p. 365; [G. Merle], 'Newspaper Press', p. 225.

95. Sketches by Boz, 'Scenes', VIII, p. 86, XVIII, p. 152.

for a novelist.⁹⁶

As we have seen, Dickens was proud to proclaim himself a reporter by training, but that was not until the end of his life (and he never, so far as I know, mentioned his humble work in Doctors' Commons).⁹⁷ By that time the prejudice against those connected with the press had eased; Arthur Aspinall concludes of the earlier period that 'on the whole, newspaper writers were assessed at their proper value'.⁹⁸ One reason for the low estimation at that time was the reliance of the newspapers on reports furnished by the much abused 'penny-a-liners'. The distance between them and the established reporters was maintained jealously by the latter, who considered the former to be the dregs of the profession.⁹⁹ Dickens denied later with some heat the suggestion that he ever wrote accounts of police office proceedings, this being one sphere particularly associated with penny-a-liners. Earlier he had written that 'the old Bow Street Police' were 'hand-in-glove with the penny-a-liners of that time', making clear his equally low opinion of both.¹⁰⁰ One

96. Michael Slater, Dickens and Women, pp. 5-6, quoting Mrs. Davey, 'The Parents of Charles Dickens', Lippincott's Magazine, XIII (1874), pp. 772-74, repr. also in Collins, Is. and Rs., I, 129-31.

97. Speeches, pp. 245 (5 November 1857), 347-48 (20 May 1865), 379 (18 April 1868).

98. 'The Social Status of Journalists', p. 227.

99. 'Culpepper', p. 294; Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 282-324; [Merle], pp. 223, 234-35; 'Newspaper Reporting', pp. 279-80; 'The Newspapers', The Metropolitan (1833), pp. 56-58; 'Journalism', pp. 199-200; Sir John R. Robinson, Fifty Years of Fleet Street, p. 241.

100. Nonesuch, III, 148 (26 January 1860); 'The Detective Police', Repr. P., p. 485 (HW, 27 July 1850).

account of no great reliability has Dickens writing penny-a-line reports when he was no more than fourteen.¹⁰¹ It has also been suggested that some reports which appeared in January 1834 in both The Times and the Morning Chronicle may have been written by Dickens.¹⁰² But the content of these pieces is no more than typical, and could be multiplied many times from the press of the period. Also, simultaneous publication is a mark of the penny-a-line, that is, freelance reporter.

The accounts, I am prepared to say, are not by Dickens. But the tentative ascription on internal evidence alone is plausible enough, for the stylistic affinities are conspicuous. James Grant's description makes it reasonable to suggest that Dickens absorbed a fair amount from this source:

A successful penny-a-liner must be somewhat of an artist. He must contrive, by some means or other, to throw a certain amount of interest around the beginning of his copy otherwise it has little chance of attracting the Sub-Editor's attention; and failing in that, he is sure to throw the copy at once aside.

But to insure even moderate success in his calling, the 'liner' must also deal largely in the sensational. If not sensational, indeed, he is nothing. He must write with as much seeming earnestness as if his whole mental and moral nature was absorbed in his subject. In this respect he must play the actor; and some of the penny-a-liners of the present day are, in that respect, great masters in their art.

There is another qualification which is indispensable to the character of a true penny-a-liner. I refer to an aptitude for verbose writing. He must, practically at least, reject as a heresy in

101. S.C. Hall, Retrospect of a Long Life, I, 111, II, 157 -- a rambling account written over fifty years after the period in question, and the author notes, almost with pride, 'I write almost entirely from memory -- I have kept no journal of any kind', p. v.

102. Talbot Penner, 'Dickens: An Early Influence'.

his calling the truth of the saying that 'brevity is the soul of wit.' Instead of condensing, it is his duty to lengthen. Words are the things he worships.¹⁰³

John Dickens dabbled in journalism and it is surprising in the light of this account that Mr. Micawber never tried his hand as a reporter -- an omission which can only be attributed to his creator's determination that he should not become successful.

Dickens, by contrast, was always successful, and his abilities as a reporter seem to have been highly regarded from the start of his employment with the Chronicle in August 1834.¹⁰⁴ By the end of that year he had covered some of the most important political meetings of the day, and had published a political satire, several theatre reviews, and the series of five 'Street Sketches'. Charles Mackay recalled, many years later, Black's opinion of Dickens's capacity as follows:

It was part of my duty as sub-editor to confer with Mr. Hogarth and Mr. Black on the employment of the Parliamentary reporters during the recess, when Parliament was not in session, and to utilize their services in the general work of the paper, -- such as attendance at public meetings, reviews of books, or notices of new plays at the theatres. Mr. Black desired to spare Mr. Dickens as much as possible from all work of this kind, having the highest opinion of his original genius, and a consequent dislike to employ him on what he considered the very inferior work of criticism. 'Any fool,' he said, in his usual broad Scotch, 'can pass judgment, more or less just or unjust, on a book or a play -- but "Boz" can do better things; he can create works for other people to criticize. Besides, he has never been a great reader of books

103. Grant, The Newspaper Press, II, 268-69.

104. Dickens wrote to Wilkie Collins, 'my faculty for descriptive writing was seized upon the moment I joined the Morning Chronicle', Nonesuch, II, 777 (6 June 1856).

or plays, and knows but little of them, but has spent his time in studying life. Keep "Boz" in reserve for great occasions. He will aye be ready for them.¹⁰⁵

These remarks have been quoted, fairly often, to illustrate Black's sagacity, but I am bound to say that I find them baffling. I am at a loss to know what the 'great occasions' were for which Dickens was to be reserved, the normal assignments for a reporter having already been excluded; and the procedure of holding back the star reporter seems to be at odds with everything one might expect as to the practical organisation, never mind the economics, of utilising a team. Black can hardly have thought that Dickens should have been excused everyday reporting work so that he might concentrate on the Sketches and, later, Pickwick, and there is no sign that he did so, notably when the First Series of the collected Sketches was being prepared for the press.¹⁰⁶

The remarks are at odds too with the recollections of other journalists, and of Dickens himself, as quoted earlier and confirmed by the highly characteristic letter to Easthope in which he severs relations with his employer and complains that his prodigious efforts have been insufficiently rewarded.¹⁰⁷ They also seem to me to be inconsistent with Mackay's succeeding remarks:

105. Quoted in F.G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: By Pen and Pencil, p. 134.

106. Black commended 'A Visit to Newgate', but Dickens was embarrassed by being twice obliged to cancel appointments with Cruikshank through being sent on assignments at short notice, and Hogarth read the proofs since Dickens was again away: Pilgrim, I, 98, 89, 96, 100, 108.

107. Pilgrim, I, 195-97 ([18 November 1836], to Easthope).

The great occasions for reporting speeches in the recess were far rarer in that remote day than they are now, but whenever they occurred, Dickens and his friend Thomas Beard (the two best reporters of the time) were invariably employed by the Chronicle, especially if the Chronicle desired, as it always did, to beat all competitors, and especially its great and very real rival the Times in the priority of its intelligence and in the fulness and accuracy of its reports. And 'Boz' and Beard were never found lacking in zeal or ability -- or success.¹⁰⁸

Dickens's career as writer developed concurrently with his work as reporter, and the last words quoted here -- 'zeal', 'ability', 'success' would serve well to describe his qualities and achievements in both spheres. The Chronicle was more prominent in the world of journalism than the Mirror of Parliament or the True Sun; as with David Copperfield, the habit of success, the determination to strive and to achieve, was as much the legacy of Dickens's work for the paper as the absorption of the ideas and attitudes to be found in its columns, current as these mostly were in the thought of the time.

108. Kitton, p. 134.

CHAPTER 5. DICKENS AS CONTRIBUTOR, 1833-38.

In this chapter I review briefly the heterogeneous assembly of periodicals to which Dickens contributed in his earliest years, leaving aside those publications, the subjects of earlier chapters, on which he was employed. Two related questions are involved here. First, can any conclusions be drawn from Dickens's choices of outlet for his work as to his own attitudes? Secondly, what might he have absorbed from his connections, slight though they were? Here I am proceeding on the assumption that he would at least be familiar with the character of the journals in which his work was appearing, and this constitutes a potentially useful source, given the scarcity of our information as to the influences to which he was exposed in these early years.

Dickens's account of 'stealthily' depositing his first sketch, and later finding it 'in all the glory of print' has often been repeated.¹ The character of the periodical concerned has received less attention. Dickens never acquired much of a collection of rejection slips, and it may be assumed that this was his first attempt at publication. The journal's full title, Monthly Magazine, or, British Register of Politics, Literature, Art, Science and Belles-Lettres gives a reasonably accurate, if inflated, delineation of its

1. Pickwick Papers, Preface to Cheap Edition (1847), p. 44.

character. The contents were various, a miscellany of topical comment, travel pieces, long reviews, historical accounts and anecdotes, essays, original stories, and so on. Dickens's contributions were spread over a period in excess of a year (December 1833 to February 1835), during which time the Monthly's circulation was declining and it passed through the hands of a series of publishers.² There is evidence of anxiety and uncertainty of direction in conflicting editorial announcements in January and December 1834, wherein it was stated that henceforth the journal would become respectively more literary and more political.³

The Monthly Magazine was also proud to remind its readers in these announcements of its history as a liberal journal. Its political character could be summarised by saying that it was somewhere between the True Sun and the Morning Chronicle, that is, radical rather than Whig, but emphatically not ultra-radical. It commended the True Sun in November 1832, but supported Thomas Attwood subsequently, and defended him against the denigration to which the True Sun subjected him. It found the ultra-radicals unrealistic in their promotion of the working classes, to whom it could not give 'credit for the wisdom or temper, or self-renunciation, requisite in adjusting the differences between themselves and

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2. W.J. Carlton, '"Captain Holland" Identified', p. 74; F.J. Harvey Darton, Dickens: Positively the First Appearance, pp. 9-12; Walter Dexter, 'The Genesis of Sketches by Boz', pp. 105-06; James Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 308-09.
 3. Mly. Mag., XVII (January 1834), p. 2, XIX (December 1834), unnumbered page, opposite 589. The January announcement is given at some length by Carlton, pp. 74-75, but erroneously dated February 1834.

their oppressors'. The radical, it believed, was also to be distinguished from the ultra-radical in his abhorrence of destruction and incendiarism. This doctrine was taken to the length of believing that in the circumstances a Whig ministry was to be preferred to a radical one, not just because the radicals lacked leadership, but also because a radical administration would be subject to undue influence from the ultras.⁴

The Monthly's belief in orthodox political activity was further defined by its proclaiming the excellence of the British constitution in terms which would have gratified Mr. Podsnap many years later. It was duly embarrassed when the King summarily dismissed the Whigs in November 1834, and was also clearly in difficulties when it found the Whig ministry to be irresolute and vacillating, and unduly obsequious to the predominantly Tory Lords.⁵ But it was unable to suggest any alternative, and could only urge the Whigs, weakly, to 'make just and timely concession to the wants of the age, without waiting to be forced to surrender what they can make a grace of bestowing', remarks which conveniently summarise the Whig approach to government.⁶

This dilemma of a moderate radicalism which sees ultra-

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4. Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), pp. 35-36; see also Darton, pp. 46-47; 'Ultra Radicalism', Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), pp. 28-44 (pp. 42-43, 41, 36-39, 32-33, 43-44); XVI (September 1833), p. 248.
 5. Mly. Mag., XVI (July 1833), p. 141, XVIII (November 1834), p. 470; XIX (December 1834), pp. 589-94; XV (May 1833), p. 583, XVI (September 1833), p. 241, XVII (January 1834), pp. 6-7, 9, XVII (February 1834), pp. 113-17.
 6. Mly. Mag., XVIII (August 1834), p. 125.

radicalism as actually more dangerous than the conservatism of either Whigs or Tories helps to illuminate Dickens's political position. So too does the Monthly's claim to have enrolled 'talents that have long been devoted to publications in strong political opposition to our own', thereby constituting 'a great and profitable inroad upon the bigotry of party spirit'.⁷ But the journal continued to comment on public affairs from a reformist point of view, although they rarely featured very prominently. As a monthly, it could not be as topical as the Chronicle, and it lacked the prestige and weight of the great established reviews, the Quarterly, the Edinburgh and the Westminster. It resembled rather Bentley's Miscellany with some politics added.

The general character of the Monthly Magazine serves as a useful index to Dickens's outlook on journalism, and his attitudes, as does its position on particular issues. I will summarise here by noting that, as further discussed in Chapter 7, it was very hostile to trades unions, believed that magistrates exercised excessive powers, and was critical of some aspects of the Poor Law Amendment Act. It spoke in confused terms of the doctrines of political economy, examined further in Chapter 8. Its support for the Established Church was surprisingly strong; of dissenting ministers it commented, 'we deem their general intellectual inferiority to the established clergy to be beyond dispute'. 'The cause of Dissenters', it asserted, was 'interesting . . . only to the extent in which they . . . have laboured,

7. Mlv. Mag., XVII (January 1834), p. 2.

and still do labour, under political exclusion. General religious merits no dissenting sect has, to render it preferable to the established sect'. If the journal was less liberal than most reformist opinion on dissent, it was decidedly advanced on colonialism, holding that the government of the East India Company had been 'a system of tyranny, rapacity, cruelty, extortion, extravagance, and waste, [which] ought in these enlightened days of reform to be swept at once from the earth'. These sentiments were stronger even than those of the few parliamentary critics of British government overseas, who tended to speak in terms of 'improvement'.⁸

Dickens would not have shared this last attitude, but the Monthly's position on other issues when taken in combination mean that it was, in effect, closer to Dickens's overall political thought than any other of the publications with which I am concerned, including the Morning Chronicle. It is, to put it no higher, interesting to reach this conclusion of the periodical to which Dickens offered his first pieces, and it is worth adding that, for a while at least, Dickens remained on terms of some intimacy with the editor, J.B. Holland, sending him money in Paris in 1838. Forster remembered Holland for his 'ardent liberalism'.⁹

Dickens's contributions to the Monthly Magazine ceased in February 1835, and he then wrote the 'Sketches of London'

8. Mly. Mag., N.S., I (January 1835), pp. 74-75, XV (May 1833), p. 514; Mirror, Buxton, 1 July 1834, p. 2562, Buckingham, 13 June 1833, pp. 2303-08.

9. Forster, I, v, 64; Pilgrim, I, 133 ([19 February 1836], to Macrone), 182 ([?15 October 1836], to Beard), 183 ([?19 October 1836], to Macrone), 434 ([?17 September 1838], to Mitton); Carlton, pp. 75-77.

for the Evening Chronicle. Between September 1835 and January 1836 he wrote twelve sketches for a weekly paper, Bell's Life in London and Sporting Chronicle. Forster commented that, apart from Thomas Beard,

the only other associate of these early reporting days to whom I heard [Dickens] refer with special regard, was the late Mr. Vincent Dowling, many years editor of Bell's Life, with whom he did not continue much personal intercourse, but of whose character as well as talents he had formed a very high opinion.¹⁰

This regard is surprising; the periodical's full title gives a reasonable indication of its character, and James Grant noted that 'Its most prominent feature is its Sporting Intelligence . . . [It is] a general umpire throughout the Kingdom, in all matters of a sporting nature'.¹¹ Typically, at least one of its four pages was entirely devoted to sport, and the connection with Dickens, whose sporting capacity (walking apart) was about on a level with Mr. Winkle's, is unexpected.

Bell's Life had its political stance, but this was not, perhaps, of great importance. A listing of hunting appointments was always liable to take up more space than public affairs, although the parliamentary report took first place when Parliament re-assembled. During the time when Dickens was a contributor, it added its voice to the call for a reform of the House of Lords.¹² James Grant was, I think, near the mark in regarding it as 'moderately Liberal in its

10. Forster, I, v, 62; there is no indication of social intercourse with Dowling in Pilgrim.

11. The Great Metropolis, II, 134.

12. Bell's Life in London, 8, 15 November 1835, 7 February 1836; 1 November, 13 December 1835.

politics. It is not a party paper: it takes its stand on entirely independent ground'. Another contemporary pertinently observed that Bell's Life 'advocates the popular cause. But then the Tory sportsman who reads it cares nothing for politics'.¹³ It seems safe to conclude that Dickens was attached to it less through its character or policies than for more worldly reasons; Bell's Life, it was noted later, 'had a large circulation, and paid contributors liberally'.¹⁴

Such considerations were clearly paramount too in Dickens's later decision to contribute to the Carlton Chronicle. He wrote that he had agreed to write sketches, 'once a fortnight, as they will be very short, and the terms long; the Carlton club being as liberal as need be'. His contributions were but two in number, with an interval of six weeks between them which was due to a hiatus in publication.¹⁵ Dickens's second sketch appeared (17 September 1836) under the journal's extended title The Carlton Chronicle and National Conservative Journal of Politics, Literature, Science and Arts. As elsewhere, this sufficiently indicated its character, which was identified as Tory from the first number, 11 June 1836.

The Carlton Chronicle included a fair amount on current

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13. The Great Metropolis, II, 135; 'The Newspaper Press of London, No. V -- Bell's Life in London', The London Journal, 19 April 1845, quoted in Richard Maxwell, 'Dickens, the Two Chronicles, and the Publication of Sketches by Boz', p. 22.
 14. R. Shelton Mackenzie, Life of Charles Dickens, p. 52. James Grant said (1837) that its circulation was the second largest of any paper in the kingdom, II, 134.
 15. Pilgrim, I, 160 ([3 August 1836], to Macrone); Duane DeVries, Dickens's Apprentice Years, pp. 152, 158-66.

affairs, and more reviews than original contributions. Although Dickens's sketches appeared at a time (August and September 1836) when his reputation was growing, he was clearly in no way concerned that this periodical was unremittently hostile to all brands of reform. Pott and Slurk, too, had a hand in its editorials:

[T]he English people have endured from the Whig government, through the successive stages of its decline, more insulting domination combined with puerile incompetency, than ever before outraged a high-souled and free-spirited nation. It now becomes an imperative question whether we are still to submit to the feeble intellects and factious purposes of so contemptible a class of politicians.

The Morning Chronicle was described in like vein as 'the most vituperative, stupid, and utterly ridiculous of any of the morning journals now assisting the Whigs in their downward course', which makes it the more remarkable that Dickens contributed to both publications, within a short space of time, as 'Boz'.¹⁶ Probably he was less concerned with the Carlton Chronicle's political complexion than with the fact that his other works received uniformly favourable reviews there.¹⁷

The statement sometimes made that all the journals to which Dickens contributed were reformist is emphatically not true. From the True Sun to the Carlton Chronicle is about as far, politically, as it would be possible to go, even though both were opposed to the Poor Law Amendment Act. A

16. Carlton Chronicle, 23 July 1836, pp. 97, 99.

17. Carlton Chronicle, 11 June 1836, p. 10 (Pickwick, III), 2 July 1836, p. 57 (Pickwick, IV), 23 July 1836, pp. 104-05 ('Sunday Under Three Heads' -- not known as Boz's), 6 August 1836, pp. 141, 140 (Pickwick, V), 1 October 1836, p. 206 (The Strange Gentleman).

sympathetic interpretation would suggest that Dickens was interested in spreading his appeal, and influence, as widely as possible amongst all classes of society. Even so, his reputation as a liberal, or a reformer, is tarnished by his even contemplating contributing to the Carlton Chronicle; it must be concluded that he was not necessarily greatly concerned with the party political colour of the journals in which his work appeared, although the matter loomed large in the consciousness of his contemporaries.

So far I have dealt with the journals in which Dickens's sketches appeared. His association with the remaining publication to be discussed was substantially different both in its character and duration, and, arguably, in its lasting effect. Dickens's first known contribution to the Examiner was made in December 1837, and, by my count, some forty-two pieces have been identified as certainly, and a further twelve as possibly, his in the years down to 1851 (one definite ascription is a collaboration, as are several of those regarded as tentative).¹⁸ Full consideration of Dickens's connection with the Examiner lies outside my present scope,

18. Misc. P., I, 77-81 is not Dickens's: W.J. Carlton, 'Charles Dickens or Forster? Some King Lear Criticisms Re-Examined'. Misc. P., I, 82-177 (20 articles), II, 467-73 (3 poems); Philip Collins, A Dickens Bibliography, 821, summarising attributions in Pilgrim, I (1837-39) (8 articles); Pilgrim, I, 459-60 (one collaboration, 1838); Pilgrim, II, 103 (1840) (one article); Pilgrim, III, 399, 401, 562, 582 (1842-43) (3 articles certainly and one possibly by Dickens); Pilgrim, V, 710-11 (1848-49) (6 articles certainly and 8 possibly by Dickens, and not included in Misc. P.); Alec W.C. Brice, Dickens and the 'Examiner': Some Newly Identified Essays (3 articles probably by Dickens in 1850-51).

just as a full review of his contributions will be greatly assisted upon the eventual publication of the complete edition of Dickens's known journalism which is so badly needed. Here I am mostly concerned with the Examiner in the late thirties.

In the original version of 'The Boarding House', Even-son, the unprepossessing radical, enters the room carrying the Examiner, a detail which was omitted later.¹⁹ Slight though the point is, it suggests a disposition on Dickens's part to satirise the Examiner's values. His later extensive association with the journal is to be ascribed principally to personal factors, notably his friendship with John Forster, a regular contributor to the Examiner since 1833, 'editor in all but name' from the mid forties, and officially editor from November 1847.²⁰ It has been noted that the group to which Dickens read The Chimes in 1844 (made famous through Maclise's much reproduced sketch) was particularly strong in those who were connected with the Examiner -- Douglas Jerrold, Laman Blanchard, W.J. Fox, Carlyle and Forster.²¹ It is of consequence also that Dickens's earlier contributions were reviews, whereas the later ones, during Forster's editorship, were topical comment; the transition is marked by the three rhymed squibs which Dickens sent to Forster upon the accession of the Tories to office in 1841.²²

19. Mly. Mag., XVIII (August 1834), p. 181; John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work, p. 59.

20. James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, p. 221.

21. K.J. Fielding, 'Re-reading The Examiner, 1832-55', p. 24.

22. Forster, II, xii, 190-92; Misc. P., II, 467-73 (Exr., 7, 14, 21 August 1841).

The Examiner's long tradition of political radicalism dated back to its foundation by Leigh and John Hunt, and their imprisonment in 1812 for attacking the Prince Regent. Albany Fonblanque was editor and chief contributor from 1830. The Examiner, in John Stuart Mill's words, was 'the principal representative, in the newspaper press, of radical opinions', but he relates this specifically to the period of Grey's ministry (1830-34).²³ There is no doubt that it moved closer to the Whigs towards the end of the thirties, around the time when Dickens first contributed to it. It remained perhaps nearer to the Westminster Review than the Morning Chronicle, but it sometimes took issue with the former, and Mill's relations with Fonblanque were virtually sundered.²⁴ In the previous chapter, I outlined the manner in which the Chronicle, formerly regarded as radical, and, to some extent, Benthamite, moved decisively towards the Whigs at about the time when Dickens became associated with it. A similar pattern occurred with the Examiner, a coincidence which probably tells us something about the character of the period. The Whig influences to which Dickens was exposed were thereby reinforced, although in this case the publication was never to be regarded as a Whig party organ, and there was no change of ownership to mark, and explain, a decided shift of policy.

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23. E.B. de Fonblanque, 'Memoir of Albany Fonblanque', Preface to The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, pp. 23-25, 27; James R. Thompson, Leigh Hunt, pp. 79-81. John Stuart Mill, Autobiography, p. 179.
24. Exr., 8 January 1837, pp. 17-18, 4 February 1838, pp. 65, 66; E.B. de Fonblanque, pp. 30-31, 35; The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1812-1848, pp. 369-71 (30 January 1838), 372-77 (3, 6, 7 February 1838).

Fonblanque's line was always independent, as in his support of the repeal of the corn laws against popular agitation.²⁵ He agreed that the Whigs did not go far enough, but maintained that they must be supported, and was scornful of the idea of the radicals forming a ministry.²⁶

It would be easy to make too much of the shift in policy, which seems to denote a growing feeling that the work of reform was, however slowly, being achieved, although it has been explained in personal terms by Fonblanque's excessive regard for Melbourne, whose ministry he seems to have found superior to Grey's, whilst clearly preferring the advanced Whiggery of Durham to both.²⁷ In 1857, paralleling Dickens in the same year, Fonblanque eulogised Russell, although the Examiner had sometimes been critical of him in the thirties, on account of his opposition to further reform.²⁸

The Examiner was not free of the repetitiveness typical of the age, and the two great themes in the late thirties were the ballot and the Lords -- on the latter it commented,

25. Exr., 18 March 1838, p. 161, 9 December 1838, p. 769, 30 December 1838, p. 817.

26. Exr., 5 February 1837, p. 81, 29 October 1837, p. 690, 4 February 1838, p. 65.

27. Fonblanque, Life and Labours, pp. 426-28 (1840); The Diaries of William Charles Macready, II, 44 (9 February 1840), 64 (21 June 1840), 72 (2 August 1840); H.R. Fox Bourne, English Newspapers, II, 125; Exr., 16 April 1837, p. 243. E.B. de Fonblanque, p. 34; Exr., 2 July 1837, p. 417, 16 July 1837, p. 449, 29 October 1837, p. 688, 21 October 1838, p. 657, 23 December 1838, p. 801.

28. Speeches, pp. 244-45 (5 May 1857); Fonblanque, Life and Labours, pp. 276-77; Exr., 26 November 1837, p. 753, 10 December 1837, p. 785, 6 August 1837, p. 498, 18 June 1837, p. 385; Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 187-94 (1835), 257-64 (1835).

Whiggishly, 'The English are averse to abrupt and sweeping innovations'.²⁹ It suffered also from another pervasive vice, that of being too much concerned with generalities, the mechanics of institutions and the dispositions and strengths of parties, at the expense of particular items of social and economic policy. It identified itself with the middle class, holding that universal suffrage could only follow upon universal education.³⁰ It was a strong supporter of the Poor Law Amendment Act (with some reservations); elsewhere the Examiner was sympathetic to, but distanced from, the claims of the poor, remarking in 1841, 'When we see the treatment of the poor, nothing appears to us so wonderful as the existence of virtue amongst them', an observation akin to Dickens's attitude in the late forties, particularly. The journal resembled him also in its hostility to Sunday legislation and its insistence on the importance of popular education, but contrasted with him in its lack of reverence towards the Church of England.³¹

The Examiner regularly featured items on 'Justices' Justice', and demonstrated that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. Fonblanque was astute in laying bare unrevealed truths, as when he enquired why, if

29. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 246 (1835).

30. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., pp. xvi-xvii; Exr., 10 December 1837, p. 785, 13 May 1838, p. 291, 2 September 1838, p. 545; Fonblanque, Life and Labours, pp. 159-60 (1842).

31. Fonblanque, Life and Labours, p. 345 (1841); Exr., 11 June 1837, p. 369, 17 June 1838, p. 369; Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 311-16 (1836), I, 296-300 (1829), II, 168-70 (1831), III, 118-25 (1834), I, 65-67 (1827), II, 273-81 (1832).

it was right to have a law against the poor drinking too much, there should not be another against the rich eating too much, adding, 'In all the meddling it is easy to trace the class which legislates. If laws were made by the poor, we should have committees sitting to inquire into the increase of gallantry and gaming, and all the profligacies of fashion'.³²

It is worth examining Fonblanque's method a little more closely, since there are potentially fruitful comparisons to be made with Dickens's journalism. Fonblanque was outstanding in his ability to expose the fallacies in an opposing argument, either through the ingenious corollary or through the use of the reductio ad absurdum. His painstakingly acquired education is in evidence here, and although it sometimes led him into over-loading his copy with literary allusions, the extended illustrative metaphors are often surprisingly effective. Whimsical, deft, 'Playful when most in earnest, never so convincing as when provoking laughter', his reputation as 'the wittiest journalist of his day' was amply justified.³³ He succeeded in achieving that rarest and most enviable of qualities, lightness of touch, in an age which was remarkable for its moral earnestness on the one hand and the extravagance of its abuse on the other. Fonblanque had little of the latter quality either; his writing is remarkable for its lack of malice, and the Examiner, it was said in 1837, 'has the rare good fortune of

32. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 85-88 (1834).

33. E.B. de Fonblanque, p. 68; Pilgrim, I, 205, n. 1.

being popular, even among the party [the Tories] to whom it is most inveterately opposed'. Its integrity was commended by another writer who found the bulk of the press sadly lacking in the quality.³⁴

A couple of examples must suffice to illustrate Fonblanque's sometimes exquisite wit. Under the heading 'The Wealth of the Church Explained', he wrote that the bishops were very well aware of the Biblical precept that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven; their wealth was deliberately and worthily self-sacrificing: they were keeping the people poor to ensure their salvation, whilst giving up their own chance.³⁵ Hypocrisy was also the target in his comments on the death of George IV:

Shutters before the shop-windows denoted the extremity of the national grief. Persons appeared to comport themselves much as usual, and to the windows of the shops, not the windows of the soul, was left the expression of the deepest sorrow. The bereavement was mourned by wooden representatives of sadness. Considering the newspaper accounts of the state of the popular sentiment, the manner in which the public commanded its feelings, and repressed any signs of murmuring at the decree of Providence, is especially worthy of admiration.

The reader is so disarmed by this that he would find it difficult to object when Fonblanque then proceeds to lay bare the deficiencies in the late King's character in a manner appropriate for the heir to the Hunts' abuse of the same man as Prince Regent. Fonblanque rated honesty higher than the

34. Grant, The Great Metropolis, II, 117; 'The Newspapers', The Metropolitan (1833), pp. 63-64.

35. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., I, 65-67 (1827).

impulse to be partisan, as demonstrated in his later obituary judgment of William IV as 'a man of very confined understanding, and of very defective education, but thoroughly disposed to do his best, to the extent of views dim, prejudiced, or erroneous, as they might happen to be. His intellect was not worthy of his intentions', remarks which incidentally recall Dickens's balanced summary of Sir Leicester Dedlock's character.³⁶

The best of Fonblanque's large output is unusual in that it can be read with real pleasure today. In this respect he stands in relation to the mass of the journalism of the period as does the work of Edgar Rosenberg to much modern Dickens criticism. An attentive reader would conclude that it is possible to be entertaining as well as topical, and a lasting influence on Dickens may be posited here. But he never, to my mind, managed the combination of qualities so well as Fonblanque, and it may be useful to enquire into why this should be so, given Dickens's eminently justified reputation as a humourist.

Dickens was not principally concerned with public issues. He comes upon an abuse as if it is a surprise; his outrage is considerable and genuine, but it is that of a man whose involvement is spasmodic and erratic. Once he has worked out his indignation -- which may take a good while -- he tends to lose interest. Fonblanque's ease is the comfortable, relaxed self-assurance of the man continuously concerned with public issues, who knows his ground and is secure in his

36. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., II, 15-16 (1830); Exr., 25 June 1837, p. 401; Bleak House, Chapter 2, p. 12.

conviction that the course of history is on his side.³⁷ Dickens, as was to be demonstrated in 1846, lacked the comprehensive political grasp to edit a national newspaper. Fonblanque edited the Examiner for many years, and often wrote the major part of it himself as well as contributing prolifically to other publications. As a commentator on affairs he possessed all the advantages which Dickens lacked, with the exception of a wide public -- for the Examiner never had a large circulation, and Fonblanque ultimately achieved only a fraction of Dickens's readership, or influence. John Stuart Mill, writing when still on warm terms with Fonblanque, suggests that Fonblanque mis-judged his market to an extent which would have been impossible to a man whose finger was as sensitive to the pulse of the public as Dickens:

F's allusions, expression, stile [sic], all the garb of his thoughts, is intelligible, or at least impressive, only to persons of literary, one might say almost classical education, & most of them are not radicals.³⁸

That is suggestive criticism from a man well qualified to make it. One might say that Fonblanque wrote to please himself, Dickens wrote to please others. The cast of Fonblanque's mind was different from Dickens's. Fonblanque, typically, drew upon Aesop, whose works are fables, as a source; Dickens on the Arabian Nights, which are tales. Fonblanque always knew where he stood with regard to public issues, but the appeal of his work fades as it loses its

37. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., pp. xiv-xv.

38. The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1812-1848, p. 201 (22 December 1833, to Carlyle).

topicality. Dickens, it could be said, was often confused or unsure, but this uncertainty is realised through the medium of his fiction, which, though prominent in elements of the fable, lacks the single interpretation which fable yields. But that is more than compensated for by a complexity, a denseness and a richness quite beyond the scope of day-to-day journalism, however brilliant or assured. Hence, when all of Dickens's many activities are considered, including his twenty year stint as editor, it still remains true that, as Philip Collins is wont sagely to remark, 'the novels are the thing'. If Fonblanque was the better journalist, Dickens was incomparably the greater writer. Thus his works have survived, whilst Fonblanque (like his close associate Forster) is now considered, as at present, only as a figure on the margin of greater men.

CHAPTER 6. JOURNALISM AND SKETCHES, 1833-36.

In preceding chapters I have discussed the periodicals with which Dickens was associated as a young man. This chapter represents a shift in emphasis, for the most important aspect of these years is not Dickens's activity as reporter, but the publication of his first pieces of creative work. Accordingly I now consider the Sketches by Boz in some detail, developing the discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 of the periodicals in which they appeared, and attempting to answer the question as to what were the consequences of the fact that these 'first sprightly runnings of his genius' were all written whilst Dickens was working as a journalist.¹ They are, in fact, the most considerable of his literary achievements during this period; even if all his contributions to the Chronicle could be rescued, and setting aside the straight reports of speakers, I believe that the Sketches taken as a whole would be found to be more substantial in original material, both as to quality and quantity. Dickens's work in the two areas proceeded in parallel, and although there are connections between them, there are significant differences too.

When Dickens said, to repeat a quotation, that 'To the

1. Forster, I, v, 76.

wholesome training of severe newspaper work, when I was a very young man, I constantly refer my first successes', he was probably thinking of the discipline imposed on him, as mentioned in Chapter 4.² But he may well also have had in mind the success specifically of the Sketches by Boz, and of the several changes in character which they passed through in the period of approaching three years (longer than for any of the novels) during which they were written. The Sketches are diverse in their character and quality, but we should hesitate before we ascribe that too readily to the fact that Dickens's profession was elsewhere and his original writing was a spare-time activity. The novels rarely received his undivided attention, most notably, of course, in that throughout his last two decades he was occupied in the admittedly cognate, but nonetheless very different, enterprise of editing his own weekly magazine.³ The weaknesses and irregularities in the Sketches are to be seen mostly as the consequences of inexperience.

A reading of the Sketches in the order of their original publication makes clear the extent of Dickens's indebtedness to his experience as reporter in the transition which he made during these years into a successful novelist. The most

2. Speeches, p. 379 (18 April 1869).

3. On this, A.W. Ward speculated interestingly that 'It may . . . be that the criticism which as editor of Household Words Dickens was now in the habit of judiciously applying to the fictions of others, unconsciously affected his own methods and processes. Certain it is that from this point of view Bleak House may be said to begin a new series among his works of fiction', remarks which are also notable for their time in the apparent estimation of Dickens's later work: Dickens (1882), p. 111.

helpful approach is to consider the pieces in their several series, regarding the early Monthly Magazine sketches as one such, since they were so regarded by Dickens, and share distinctive features in common.⁴ Although there was a little chronological overlap between the series, Dickens's overall development becomes clearer through this approach; so too does the fact that each of the series has a somewhat different character. This was noted half a century ago by F.J. Harvey Darton, who described the three largest groups thus: 'the "sketches" for the "Monthly Magazine" were in the form of fiction; those for the "Evening Chronicle" were descriptive impressions, and those for "Bell's Life" a kind of descriptive fiction'.⁵ To a certain extent these differences reflect the character of the journals, but they are indicative of Dickens's growing maturity also.

The most important distinction is between the purely factual, descriptive pieces and the wholly or substantially fictional ones. This may seem difficult to maintain, since in the sketches in the first category Dickens will often include the representational, the typical, even the imaginary, whilst those in the second category are very securely based in observed, tangible reality. Nonetheless, the distinction holds without difficulty for all but a few of the Bell's Life in London series. The question is one of intent: either Dickens is describing a piece of life, or he is telling a

4. Pilgrim, I, 32, 33 ([3 December 1833], [?10 December 1833], to Kolle). In the discussion I give in the text the original series together with the section and chapter number in collected editions of the Sketches.

5. 'Dickens the Beginner: 1833-1836', p. 65.

story, and very often the first sentence will be sufficient to alert us as to which type of piece we are reading. Finally by way of categorisation, Dickens's own later arrangement into 'Our Parish', 'Scenes', 'Characters' and 'Tales' is also useful. The Table summarises these various categories, and functions, in effect, as a condensed chronological analysis.

<u>Dates</u>	<u>Series, Journal</u>	<u>Our P.</u>	<u>Scenes</u>		<u>Chars.</u>		<u>Tales</u>	<u>Total</u>
		<u>F</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>D</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>F</u>	
Dec 33-Oct 34	<u>Mly. Mag.</u>	-	-	-	-	-	7	7
7/6/34	<u>Bell's Weekly</u>	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
26/9/34-15/12/34	<u>Street Sketches,</u> <u>Mng. Chr.</u>	-	4	-	1	-	-	5
Jan-Feb 35	<u>Mly. Mag.</u>	-	-	-	-	-	2	2
31/1/35-20/8/35	<u>Sks. of London,</u> <u>Evg. Chr.</u>	6	13	-	1	-	-	20
27/9/35-17/1/36	<u>Scenes & Chars.,</u> <u>Bell's Life</u>	-	2	1	3	6	-	12
6/2/36	<u>Sks. by Boz,</u> <u>1st Series</u>	-	1	-	-	-	2	3
18/3/36	<u>Mng. Chr.</u>	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Mar, May 36	<u>Lib. of Fiction</u>	-	1	-	-	-	1	2
6/8, 17/9/36	<u>Carlton Chronicle</u>	-	1	-	1	-	-	2
24/9/36-26/10/36	<u>Sks. by Boz, N.S.,</u> <u>Mng. Chr.</u>	-	4	-	-	-	-	4
17/12/36	<u>Sks. by Boz,</u> <u>2nd Series</u>	-	-	-	-	-	1	1
Totals		7	26	1	6	6	14	60

Note. D = Descriptive
F = Fictional

In his Preface to the collected Sketches Dickens wrote,

I am conscious of their often being extremely crude and ill-considered, and bearing obvious marks of haste and inexperience; particularly in that section of the present volume which is comprised under the general head of Tales.⁶

In his arrangement he placed the 'Tales' last because he considered (rightly, in my view) that they were poor; and he put the equally fictional 'Our Parish' sequence first not just because it formed a series (it does not have a great deal of continuity, in point of fact), but also because (again rightly) he regarded his fiction as his most considerable achievement.

The pieces which Dickens published in the Monthly Magazine between December 1833 and October 1834, together with the single sketch published in Bell's Weekly Magazine, are all fictional, and comprise eight of the fourteen 'Tales' as eventually arranged. Their weaknesses are considerable. Perhaps the most disabling is an uncertainty of focus particularly in 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk' (later 'Mr. Minns and his Cousin', 'Tales', II), 'Horatio Sparkins' ('Tales', V), 'The Bloomsbury Christening' ('Tales ', XI), in the first chapter of 'The Boarding House', and between the two chapters of that sketch ('Tales', I). Related to this fault is a tendency to proliferation and irrelevant discursiveness, and an insecure sense of structure, for instance in the second chapter of 'The Boarding House', which has too many characters, and in 'The Steam Excursion' ('Tales', VII). Dickens was never at his happiest when pursuing a single story line, but he needed

6. Sketches by Boz, p. xiii.

to learn how to do so before he could embark upon the many layered complexity of his long novels. The situations, again, in these earliest pieces are conventional and stagey: used to good effect in 'Mrs. Joseph Porter' ('Tales', IX) on the appropriate theme of private theatricals (but there the incidents consist of a catalogue rather than an accumulation), but at its worst in 'The Boarding House' and 'Sentiment', ('Tales', III), and becoming mechanical, obvious and unoriginal in 'The Bloomsbury Christening'. That sketch and 'Mr. Minns and his Cousin' both use a middle-aged misanthropical bachelor as the central character (not what might be expected from the young Dickens), and 'Horatio Sparkins' and 'The Boarding House' both use ageing unmarried daughters. Of the characters in these sketches taken together is Sylvère Monod's criticism particularly true; Dickens, he says, 'has denied [them] his sympathy . . . Instead of attempting to attach himself to his characters so as to endear them to us, Dickens aims at appearing superior to them'.⁷

That much said, Dickens's contributions would nonetheless bear favourable comparison, by and large, with others appearing in the Monthly Magazine at the same time. His facetiousness is to be preferred to the desperate dreadfulness elsewhere of attempts to be comical in a style which might be called 'jocular Augustan', where the writer actually mis-uses his Latinate vocabulary (Dickens only over-uses words, a much less heinous stylistic sin, and one which a writer can grow out of). Again, although Dickens's pieces

7. Dickens the Novelist, p. 55.

quite often seem to point to a sour and jaundiced view of human affairs, that is to be preferred to -- and may even represent a reaction against -- the factitious sentimentality to be found elsewhere in this periodical.⁸

Bearing in mind this unpromising context, it is not easy to see in which direction Dickens might have developed successfully as a writer from these earliest pieces. Their faults appear to be irretrievable, and the only redeeming feature is in their documentary fidelity, their study, that is, in Forster's words, writing of the Sketches as a whole, 'of a sort of life between the middle class and the low, which, having few attractions for bookish observers, was quite unhacknied ground'.⁹ Dickens found a social milieu early -- it was of course the one he knew best -- but he was as yet too inexperienced to treat it in fictional terms.

The first consequence of his move to the Chronicle was, I think, an important one: it gave him the opportunity to write. Most of his work was straightforward literal reporting. Where he was able to write more creatively, as in the descriptive openings he sometimes added to his reports of political meetings, and in his theatre reviews, there are signs that he often delighted in including his own touches. There are some reports, however, which are unexceptional to a degree, and which would never be suspected as his without

8. Mlv. Mag., XV (January 1833), pp. 17-27, XV (February 1833), pp. 166-72, XVII (February 1834), pp. 171-80.

9. Forster, I, v, 77. The subtle implication here that Dickens was not 'bookish' is typical of Forster, writing, as usual, between the lines as well as on them.

some external evidence. What was important was that writing, and publication, now became an everyday activity, not an extraordinary one for which he needed to make a special effort; and that, I think, was helpful since it is largely true of the Sketches (and of later work, too), that the harder Dickens tried, the worse his quality became. To an appreciable extent, the most unfortunate aspects of the straining after effect diminish once he joined the Chronicle. The changes in the character of the sketches thereafter are too great to be attributed solely to mere coincidence; but they can be related to differences consequent upon the new mode of publication.

When Dickens began to write for the Chronicle, fiction was, presumably, deemed inappropriate. Also, his length was circumscribed, something to which he makes mildly complaining reference in some of the tail pieces which were omitted when the sketches were collected, but which operated beneficially on him.¹⁰ He was obliged to decide on a subject and keep to it, and the discipline was wholesome. 'Sketch' -- used in the title of the first two series in the Chronicle -- is accurate for these pieces. They are snippets, small, sharply observed accounts of some particular aspect of London

10. 'Sketches of London', IV ('The Parish'), Evg. Chr., 28 February 1835, passage reprinted by Richard Maxwell, 'Dickens, the Two Chronicles and the Publication of Sketches by Boz', p. 26; V ('The House'), Evg. Chr., 7 March 1835; IX ('Greenwich Fair'), Evg. Chr., 16 April 1835, passage reprinted by Thomas Hatton and Arthur H. Cleaver, A Bibliography of The Periodical Works of Charles Dickens, p. 97; X ('Thoughts about People'), Evg. Chr., 23 April 1835; XIV ('Our Parish', later 'Our Parish', III), Evg. Chr., 18 June 1835, passage reprinted by Hatton and Cleaver, pp. 97-98; XV ('The Pawnbroker's Shop'), Evg. Chr., 30 June 1835.

life. But from the first they go beyond that: in 'Omni-buses' ('Scenes', XVI), the first of all, the dialogue is typical, but heightened, and at the same time consistent with the theme. The scene of the mother and son in 'The Old Bailey' ('Street Sketches', III, later entitled 'Criminal Courts', 'Scenes', XXIV) is a vignette and achieves, in two paragraphs, almost the intensity of a Joycean epiphany. The condemned prisoner looks forward to Fagin and the boy witness to the Artful Dodger -- he is not so well drawn as that distillation of the young Cockney, but is perhaps more accurate. It would be impossible to object to these characters that Dickens has denied them his sympathy.

Now that he was writing in a national newspaper with a well-established reputation, Dickens, I believe, felt a certain sense of responsibility. If we ask what were his purposes when writing the pieces, I think the answer is to make London, low life, unfamiliar London, become real to his readers. It is very notable that in the Sketches as a whole Dickens deliberately limits himself to the metropolis; his first two series titles were 'Street Sketches' and 'Sketches of London', and the next, 'Scenes and Characters', was published in a journal called Bell's Life in London. 'Early Coaches' ('Sketches of London', III, 'Scenes', XV) nicely encapsulates the tendency. The piece deals with the bustle of getting ready, the misery of an early rising, the aspect of London streets in the early morning, and the preparations for departure -- and then ends just as the coach leaves. Dickens loses imaginative interest at that point, and although his work as reporter gave him the opportunity for a fair

amount of travel, and, as we have seen, he enjoyed the excitement, he chose not to make use of this experience in the Sketches. 'The Great Winglebury Duel' ('Tales', VIII) is set, with facetious precision, 'exactly forty-two miles and three-quarters from Hyde Park corner' (p. 404); but the whole point about 'The Tuggses at Ramsgate' is that they clearly remain Cockneys, and elsewhere we may get as far as Gravesend, but only on an excursion from the capital ('The River', 'Scenes', X).

I suggested in Chapter 4 that Dickens concluded the 'Street Sketches' in December 1834 because of the impending General Election. The period around the end of 1834 and early 1835 represented a decisive juncture for his literary future. He published the two parts of 'Passage in the Life of Mr. Watkins Tottle' ('Tales', X) in the Monthly Magazine in January and February 1835. In December the Monthly had announced a new series to begin in January 1835, 'wherein the political situation of the country will be more fully and carefully discussed than hitherto . . . [W]e feel convinced that our subscribers will gladly sacrifice a few pages of merely amusing matter'. Dickens may have read this announcement with some alarm; at any rate, he concluded the second chapter of 'Watkins Tottle' by declaring that, prior to his disappearance, his central character 'left a variety of papers in the hands of his landlady . . . which that lady has determined to publish', arranged, of course, by Boz.¹¹ This early example of the tiresome machinery to which he remained

11. Mly. Mag., XIX (December 1834), unnumbered page opposite 589, N.S., I (February 1835), p. 137.

so strangely addicted may represent an attempt to secure his place in the face of the intended change in the Monthly's character. In any event, his promise, or threat, was not fulfilled, for whatever reason, but the reversion to the Monthly with 'Watkins Tottle' after the short series of 'Street Sketches' suggests that Dickens's ambitions still lay in the direction of relatively extended fictional sketches. The piece is similar to the earlier sketches in the same journal, with the notable exception that for the first time a digression justifies itself by being integrated into the main body of the story. This occurs when various characters relate differing aspects of the effects of imprisonment for debt. As we might expect from this subject, Dickens's imaginative sympathy becomes involved; he is learning how to mine his personal experience for artistic effect.

But as if to compensate for this success, Dickens includes two other digressions which could be removed entire with advantage. He still had a great deal to learn about writing fiction, and I think it might fairly be said that if any one event during these years was the making of him, it was George Hogarth's invitation, in January 1835, to write a sketch for the first number of the Evening Chronicle. This offer secured to Dickens an outlet, and it had important consequences for the style and character of his pieces too. My conclusion contrasts sharply with that reached recently by Richard Maxwell in his discussion of the differences between the Morning and the Evening Chronicle, but I think he makes rather too much of the evidence, as commentators will.¹²

12. Pilgrim, I, 54-55; Maxwell, pp. 24-28.

Dickens's reply to Hogarth's suggestion makes clear that it was he who floated the idea that he should undertake a new series. There is nothing to suggest that he regards publication in the Evening Chronicle as being inferior to the morning paper; his chief concern is to determine whether he might receive an increase in his salary. Maxwell is right to point to the limited provincial circulation of the evening paper; but, as he also notes (I think for the first time), all the 'Sketches of London' were reprinted in the Morning Chronicle. The interval, admittedly, varied, but as the first, 'Hackney-Coach Stands', appeared after just three days, it appears that Dickens knew that they would be reprinted when he agreed to write them. The new arrangement, that is, represented an extension of his potential readership, and not a contraction.

The proprietors of the Chronicle seem to have regarded the matter in this light also. Many years later Charles Mackay recalled that they

were desirous that the Evening Chronicle should not be a mere abridgment and re-issue of the Morning Chronicle, but that it should contain, in addition to the news of the afternoon, some original article or articles of a political or literary character of a nature to attract public attention.

Mackay continued that Dickens was thereupon applied to.¹³

In fact, his sketches were the only items of any substance I found in the Evening Chronicle which were not reprinted and abridged from the morning paper. This subsidiary character, incidentally, diminishes the role of George Hogarth as editor; if Dickens took the conventional road to success by

13. Forty Years' Recollections, I, 78.

marrying the boss's daughter, he was a boss in a curiously subordinate position, who must have made use of scissors and paste a good deal more than the editorial pen or the blue pencil.

The earliest of the 'Sketches of London' would bear out the suggestion that Dickens felt his responsibility as contributor to the new undertaking, and the immediate consequences were unhappy. Both 'Hackney Coach Stands' and 'Gin Shops' ('Sketches of London', I, II, 'Scenes', VII, XXII) begin in Dickens's facetious style, with several poor opening paragraphs where he is attempting to be lively and only succeeding in being tiresome. The earlier of the 'Sketches of London' share with the 'Street Sketches' the feature that they are factual and not fictional, and the social setting moves down a notch or two from the Monthly Magazine pieces. We do not doubt that we are being offered accurate documentary reporting, and that whilst Dickens is aware of the susceptibilities of his readers, he does not make too many concessions to them, for instance in 'Gin Shops': 'The filthy and miserable appearance of this part of London can hardly be imagined by those (and there are many such) who have not witnessed it' (p. 184). This piece relies on the fidelity of its detailed observation, and the dialogue is integrated in such a way that it becomes part of the description. The last paragraph is powerful in its restraint, which becomes a virtue, and Dickens's social concern becomes apparent for the first time. It is a notably environmentalist view, and all of Dickens's later concern with the issues of sanitary reform, drunkenness, and housing, are here anticipated.

Similarly, in 'The Pawnbroker's Shop' ('Sketches of London', XV, 'Scenes', XXIII), Dickens observes, 'The subject may appear, at first sight, to be anything but an inviting one, but we . . . hope that . . . it will present nothing to disgust even the most fastidious reader'. He continues that 'There are grades in pawning as in everything else, and distinctions must be observed even in poverty' (p. 188). The theme is developed through various typical customers: the woman with the brute of a husband, the mother and daughter, the prostitute and the hag. The subject modulates into the position of women, and Dickens never did it better.

I do not know just how original the Sketches were.¹⁴ But I can say that there is nothing else like them in the Chronicle during the period when Dickens was working for it,

14. Suggestions for models or precursors known to me are the essays of Leigh Hunt, referred to by James R. Thompson, Leigh Hunt, p. 98, quoting Ernest A. Baker, History of the English Novel (1936), III, 243, and by Fredric S. Schwarzbach, 'Sketches by Boz: Fiction for the Metropolis', p. 17 (and see Pilgrim, I, 137 for contemporary attribution to Hunt); the 'Full Lengths' of Douglas Jerrold, published in the Monthly Magazine in 1826, mentioned by Richard M. Kelly, The Best of Mr. Punch, pp. 18-19. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson comment on the novelty of the Sketches, mention affinities with works by John Wight illustrated by Cruikshank, Dickens at Work, p. 49, n. 6, and add that they seem most akin to John Poole's Sketches and Recollections (1835), p. 37, elaborated elsewhere by Kathleen Tillotson in 'Dickens and a Story by John Poole' and by Duane DeVries, Dickens's Apprentice Years: The Making of a Novelist, pp. 170-77; Harvey Peter Sucksmith notes the similarities between tales in Blackwood's Magazine and three of the sketches, and reprints passages showing close verbal parallels in one instance: 'The Secret of Immediacy: Dickens' Debt to the Tale of Terror in Blackwood's', pp. 149, 155-57. Virgil Grillo states, 'British periodicals in 1833-34 have very few stories of middle-class people living in contemporary London or even England . . . Dickens seems to have re-discovered the British scene as a fitting subject for short fiction', Charles Dickens' Sketches by Boz, p. 15.

and at their best they transcend the Chronicle's narrow obsession with party political antagonisms; from time to time Dickens's contributions suggest a genuine, if unsystematic, concern with social issues which is not to be found elsewhere in the paper's columns. One early commentator was clear as to the lasting journalistic effects of Dickens's earliest pieces:

The whole art of descriptive reporting, which has no doubt produced a large amount of trashy writing, but has also been of real service in arousing a public interest in neglected corners of our social life, was, if not actually set on foot, at any rate reinvigorated and vitalised by him.¹⁵

Chesterton suggested the effects on Dickens's own achievements: 'All his novels are outgrowths of the original notion of taking notes, splendid and inspired notes, of what happens in the streets'.¹⁶ The remark is characteristic of the writer in two respects: it is an exaggeration, but it has a great deal of truth in it.

The history of the Sketches can partly be seen as the continued attraction of Dickens back to the idea of writing fiction, and away from his purely documentary pieces. At the end of February 1835, in 'The Parish' ('Sketches of London', IV, 'Our Parish', I), he achieved far greater success than in the proliferating 'Tales' of the Monthly Magazine by limiting himself to one subject and being more concerned with suggestive significance than with plot. Some weeks later, Dickens took the idea further with the 'Our Parish' sequence.

15. Ward, Dickens, pp. 221-22.

16. Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens, pp. 117-18.

The quality is rather weak, and although the pieces have as much integration as Cranford, say, there is not a great deal to hold them together, even so. The best is probably 'The Election for Beadle' ('Sketches of London', XVI, 'Our Parish', IV), where some Dickensian life is successfully injected into a fictional description with a basis in fact.

These pieces start with particular characters and develop from there. The other sketches in the two early Chronicle series all became eventually collected as 'Scenes', with but two exceptions, 'Shabby Genteel People' ('Street Sketches', IV, 'Characters', X) and 'Thoughts about People' ('Sketches of London', X, 'Characters', I), but these are amongst the most successful of the pieces, and both contain unusually good openings. 'Thoughts about People' begins thus: 'It is strange with how little notice, good, bad, or indifferent, a man may live and die in London . . . There is a numerous class of people in this great metropolis who seem not to possess a single friend, and whom nobody appears to care for' (p. 215). There follows a good description of a monotonous existence, of a type which would be difficult to incorporate into a novel.

It is not clear why Dickens stopped the series in the Evening Chronicle, but I believe that practical and artistic considerations were involved. He had a liking for a unit of twenty, and there is no sign of a quarrel at this time with the Chronicle (much less with Hogarth).¹⁷ There was prob-

17. The long novels, of course, were published in twenty monthly parts; and Dickens started a 'New Series' of All the Year Round after twenty volumes, for no good reason beyond the fact that it gave him the chance to drop the Christmas Number.

ably mutual consent; Dickens, it seems, had agreed to supply a sketch a week in return for an increased salary, and though he had not been doing badly, he had fallen behind that schedule.¹⁸ His use of a new pseudonym, 'Tibbs', for the series which he started in Bell's Life in London after a lapse of five weeks or so demands an explanation. Several suggest themselves: that he did not want his superiors at the Chronicle to know that he was working elsewhere seems to be the most plausible.¹⁹ Also relevant in some way may be the fact that Bell's Life was owned by William Clement, proprietor of the Morning Chronicle until its purchase by Easthope.

But the new name may also register an intention on Dickens's part to modify his artistic approach, and from this point of view the change in outlet was probably as important as the move to the Chronicle. Analysis of the series shows that there was a movement from 'Scenes' to 'Characters' (despite the series title, 'Scenes and Characters'), and a corresponding shift from the factual to the fictional, with some uncertainty in this regard in one or two cases. The Chronicle was proving too limited; Dickens did not regard fiction as inappropriate in a miscellaneous weekly journal.

There is a fair amount of diversity in the series of twelve sketches in Bell's Life. The first piece, 'Seven Dials' ('Scenes', V), is in the vein of the Chronicle sket-

18. Pilgrim, I, 54-55 (20 January [1835], to George Hogarth), 196 ([18 November 1836], to Easthope). The number of weeks from the publication of the first sketch until the twentieth was almost thirty.

19. 'Tibbs' was the name of the landlady in 'The Boarding House', the second chapter of which was the first item to be signed 'Boz', in the Monthly Magazine of August 1834, just before Dickens joined the Chronicle.

ches, and is concerned with 'groups of people, whose appearance and dwellings would fill any mind but a regular Londoner's with astonishment' (p. 70). Thereafter a shift occurs, and the succeeding sketches are fictional, although not included by Dickens amongst the 'Tales', apparently because he reserved that category for the longer (and weaker) pieces. The style becomes experimental, too, in the deft, breathless narration and represented speech of 'Miss Evans and the Eagle' (No. 2, 'Characters', IV), somewhat less effectively in 'The Dancing Academy' (No. 3, 'Characters', IX), and to unfortunate effect with the constant conjunctions of 'Making a Night of It' (No. 4, 'Characters', XI). These pieces are more ambitious in their form than the Chronicle sketches; there is also a moral, warning, cautionary note intended, which becomes more marked in the later 'Love and Oysters' (No. 5, later re-titled 'The Misplaced Attachment of Mr. John Dounce', 'Characters', III) and 'The Vocal Dressmaker' (No. 7), where the fictional intent is stated in the later title 'The Mistaken Milliner. A Tale of Ambition' ('Characters', VIII).

It is characteristic of all these sketches that they have an unhappy outcome; 'Tibbs', it seems, is definitely a misanthrope, and the admonitory note is continued in the essentially factual 'The Prisoners' Van' (No. 8, 'Characters', XII). Typical again of these pieces, and of 'The Parlour' (No. 9, later 'The Parlour Orator', 'Characters', V), is the absence of humour, and it is a welcome surprise to find in 'Christmas Festivities' (No. 10, later 'A Christmas Dinner', 'Characters', II), that the tone of later Dickensian Christ-

mases is already present: 'Christmas has come round, and the unkind feelings that have struggled against better dispositions during the year, have melted away before its genial influence, like half-formed ice beneath the morning sun' (p. 223). The same appears to be true of the author; one of his characteristic notes is found thus early, and to me it seems to be Dickens at his best. The sketch is also generalised and essentially factual; the succeeding 'The New Year' (No. 11, 'Characters', III), is fictional, and lacking in the generosity of the Christmas sketch. The last of this series, 'The Streets at Night' ('Scenes', II) is essentially an effective piece of descriptive reporting, with some introduced characters; Dickens's modes are becoming mixed.

Dickens is feeling his way towards his method in these pieces, through the integration of description and imagination. Characters who are to be understood as being in some sense typical or representative are introduced into an urban landscape which is particularised, and accurately drawn from his keen observation. It took him a good while to achieve a fiction which is a heightened, refined, more expressive version of fact, and which thereby comments on or illuminates reality. By the standards of the time, the Bell's Life series would have been out of place in a newspaper -- which is not to deny that it contains a good deal of accurate, solid, reliable description which one would look for in vain in the columns of the Chronicle.

A further extension of aim is evident in the sketches which were written specifically for the collected Sketches by Boz, First Series (February 1836), suggesting a greater ambi-

tion than could easily be contained within the column or so which was Dickens's limit when writing for a journal. 'A Visit to Newgate' ('Scenes', XXV) sees him as what we might now call an investigative reporter, a species of journalistic activity which could not be accommodated in the periodicals to which he was contributing, but which anticipates one major strand in his later journalism. But the sketch, for all its apparent fidelity, really takes wing towards the end, as Dickens's imagination becomes involved in the description of the feelings of the condemned man. It is the culmination towards which the whole sketch tends, and it could have been written, seemingly, without Dickens visiting Newgate at all -- except that he never would have written it without the powerful stimulus to the imagination which the visit gave him. The circumstance suggests a great deal as to the method of the fiction. 'The Black Veil' is in similar territory; but it is a 'Tale' (VI), and follows the rule that they are weaker than the other pieces. Dickens's imagination, earlier revealed as misanthropic, is now shown to have its distinctly black side.

The sketches first published during the remainder of 1836 are but ten in number. The several changes in the periodicals in which the pieces first appeared are indicative of restlessness and uncertainty following the successful publication of Dickens's first book, his work on Pickwick, and a number of other literary enterprises.²⁰ 'The Tuggses at Ramsgate' (Library of Fiction, No. 1, 'Tales', IV) was pub-

20. See Appendix.

lished on the same day as the first number of Pickwick, and by the same publishers. It is perhaps the more satisfactory of the two. It shows Dickens reasonably in command of a long story, and controlling his occasional digressions, and there is a more successful integration of theme and character than previously. I find it perhaps the most successful overall of all the sketches collected subsequently as 'Tales'. The theme of the genteel aspirations of the family coming into riches can be seen as a trial run for the Dorrits, whilst the Waterses, Dickens's first confidence tricksters, anticipate the Lammles. The humour is forced and heavy-handed at times, and the ending is theatrical, but designedly and appropriately so.

Dickens's energies were directed principally into Pickwick thereafter. I mentioned in Chapter 5 that the publication of two pieces in the Carlton Chronicle was probably due primarily to financial considerations, and these must have weighed heavily also in the decision to commence a 'New Series' of 'Sketches By Boz' in the Morning Chronicle in the autumn, after a false start in March.²¹ Ostensibly these sketches revert to the earlier Chronicle format of relatively brief descriptions of some aspect of London, with no evident intention to relate a story. But the first of the series, 'Meditations in Monmouth Street' ('Scenes', VI) goes a good way beyond this, and has become, deservedly, probably the best known of all the sketches. It functions as an account of Dickens's fictional method, starting with the factual and

21. Pilgrim, I, 160 ([3 August 1836], to Macrone), 196 ([18 November 1836], to Easthope); Appendix.

imaginatively embroidering upon it, and we see demonstrated the importance of character as the raw material out of which the fiction is built. Dickens, we might say, is still wrestling with the question as to how he can best use his observation artistically.

The social setting of 'Meditations in Monmouth Street' resembles earlier pieces. A note of nostalgia and regret enters more considerably into its immediate successor, 'Scotland Yard' ('Scenes', IV): 'We marked the advance of civilisation, and beheld it with a sigh' (p. 66), laments Dickens, in a tone far removed from the geniality we usually associate with him. The mood of these pieces seems to look forward to the gentle melancholy which is dominant in the Uncommercial Traveller series many years later. Boz shows himself aware of the inevitability of change, but there is no marked sense that it has been beneficial, despite the satire on the coal-heavers' conservatism. This represents a considerable contrast with the Whiggish assumption of the inevitability of progress typical of the Chronicle, and of Dickens himself at most times. Thus in the third of these sketches, 'Doctors' Commons' ('Scenes', VIII), he comments ironically on 'the beautiful spirit of these ancient ecclesiastical laws, the kind and neighbourly feelings they are calculated to awaken, and the strong attachment to religious institutions which they cannot fail to engender' (p. 89). The difference between these two chronologically adjacent sketches points to the fact that Dickens's effects and his moral thrust tend to be local in their character: there is no single unifying philosophy holding the whole together.

The last of the 'New Series' in the Chronicle, 'Vauxhall-Gardens by Day' ('Scenes', XIV), is an integration of description, topicality and imaginary conversation, and as such it may stand as model for the method Dickens had gradually evolved since writing the earliest pieces. The history of the Sketches can be seen as the history of Boz's search for the best form for his pieces, and for the most appropriate outlet, and the several shifts in direction reveal him, I think, as a self-aware artist, continually experimenting and always prepared to try some new direction. The Chronicle gave him the all-important impetus towards concentrating on documentary fidelity, but he was not satisfied to limit himself within the restraints -- of length, of subject matter and of genre -- which publication there imposed on him. 'The Drunkard's Death', the last sketch of all, written for the Second Series of the collected Sketches (December 1836; 'Tales', XII), shows a further extension of aim by way of an integration of concern with an important social problem -- drunkenness -- into a bleak and melancholy urban setting, realised through the melodramatic account of the degeneration of one individual. This last sketch illustrates the point that appreciation of the quality and achievement of the Sketches has, I believe, been inhibited by uncertainty as to their nature, whether they are to be seen as Dickens's earliest attempts at fiction, or as looking towards his later, not inconsiderable, activity as journalist. I have attempted to indicate something of their importance in both respects.

The last sketch for the Chronicle, 'Vauxhall-Gardens by

Day', concludes, appropriately enough, with a gentle satire on newspaper reports. Dickens gave his notice soon afterwards, and wrote no further sketches for the paper, although his employer evidently felt that he ought to, in view of their financial arrangements. This provoked a highly diverting valedictory letter from Dickens, in effect the first of his quarrels with his publishers, in which his sense of grievance was fuelled by resentment and the conviction that he had not been valued at his true worth.²² He felt the self-confidence necessary to lecture his employer on the feelings of a gentleman because he was assured of a regular income as editor of Bentley's Miscellany, although it was of greater long-term consequence that his first novel had already become successful.

To turn from the Sketches by Boz to the Pickwick Papers, even to those earlier instalments which were concomitant with the last of the Sketches, and which are often supposed to show a jejeune Dickens still feeling his way, is to turn from the accomplished, sharply observed pieces of a clever young writer to a work in which, in Steven Marcus's fine phrase, Dickens 'achieved transcendence'.²³ In most respects, it is easier to discuss the Sketches than Pickwick, for I do not think that anything in Dickens's previous career, including his journalism, could be said to anticipate, much less explain, the extraordinary achievement of his first novel. The greatest contrast with the Sketches is in the narrative

22. Pilgrim, I, 195-97 ([18 November 1836], to Easthope).

23. Dickens: from Pickwick to Dombey, p. 17.

tone: Dickens has learnt, probably through the comparative failure of his earliest efforts, that he must achieve a rapport with his public, he must, that is, seek to take the reader into his confidence. That way the reader will want to go on reading, and the writer will be forgiven many faults and shortcomings. Dickens, not yet twenty-five, was more than ready to abandon the anonymity of reporting and the pseudonymity of the Sketches by Boz, and to embark upon what has well been called 'his lifelong love-affair with his reading public'.²⁴ And there, on the brink of perhaps the most spectacularly successful career in the history of English literature, I consign him, so to speak, to the care of others.

24. Butt and Tillotson, p. 75.

CHAPTER 7. ISSUES.

The previous chapters have been concerned with the journals with which Dickens was associated during a fairly short span of time as a young man. It has seemed advisable, in the interests of space, to concentrate on this unfamiliar material, rather than expand the discussion to any great extent into a consideration of the implications for the remainder of Dickens's career. The focus for the most part has been restricted because -- as mentioned in my preface -- the great body of the journalistic discourse of the period is narrowly political, and party political at that. It may be objected that the approach is inappropriate to Dickens; and it may further be maintained that the only possible justification for any concern with Dickens's early activities is to be found in the facts of his quite extraordinary subsequent career.

The preceding chapter attempted to meet the second of these points by analysing the Sketches through the publications in which they first appeared. The present chapter addresses itself to the first point, and attempts to broaden the discussion further, through a comparative study of some topics prominent in the thirties which are relevant to Dickens's own interests. It is worth saying, by way of preface, how very much this excludes; Dean Inge observed that 'the

number of great subjects in which Dickens took no interest whatever is amazing'.¹ It might be added that the comment would only be made of someone who did have a wide range of interests; even so, by far the greater part of the material under survey is in no way germane to the enquiry. The outstanding example is foreign affairs; Dickens is reported as saying 'that he never thought about them till the Revolution of 1848'² -- which should not be taken to mean that he did think about them much subsequently. A chapter might be included contrasting the generally enlightened atmosphere of the debates on the abolition of slavery in 1833 with Dickens's thoroughly illiberal later comments on the native character, but the main point would need to be that there was a considerable shift in public opinion between the thirties and later decades.³

But if Dickens was little interested in some typical ruling class interests, or obsessions, the converse is equally true. In the previous chapter I suggested that the Sketches by Boz contain, irregularly and unsystematically, something nearer to a comprehensive social policy than is to be found

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1. Quoted by Bernard Shaw, Preface to Great Expectations, p. 55.
 2. John Black Atkins, Life of Sir William Howard Russell (1911), I, 58, quoted in Philip Collins, 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 68.
 3. Mirror, Stanley, 14 May 1833, p. 1779; 'The Niger Expedition', Misc. P., I, 117-35 (Exr., 19 August 1848); 'Some Account of an Extraordinary Traveller', Misc. P., I, 225 (HW, 20 April 1850); 'The Noble Savage', Repr. P., pp. 467-73 (HW, 11 June 1853); 'The Lost Arctic Voyagers', Misc. P., I, 502 (HW, 2 December 1854); Nonesuch, II, 889 (4 October 1857, to Miss Coutts); Douglas A. Lorimer, Colour, Class and the Victorians, passim.

elsewhere in the pages of the Morning Chronicle. The comparison would hold equally well of the debates in Parliament. My remarks in Chapter 2 on Henry Hunt's unique voice in 1831 as advocate for 'the people' are relevant here. Social issues were discussed in Parliament from time to time, in a typically English, unsystematic, pragmatic way, but the abiding impression is that such questions as poverty, homelessness, the over-employment of factory children and the under-employment of agricultural labourers were not only remote from the experience of parliamentary speakers but remote from their sympathies also. By and large Dickens, with his generous compassion for deprivation when it presented itself to him, would stand up well to the comparison.

Most of the topics to be discussed in this chapter will be found to be related in some way to the question of poverty, or to the relations between rich and poor. It is necessary to remind oneself how much social stratification was taken for granted, and also the extent to which the idea of parliamentary responsibility for the problems of society needed to be argued. Perhaps the best speeches which I read from these years were those by Roebuck in 1833 and 1834, in which he advocated a national system of education, but his remarks sometimes take on a surprisingly conservative colouring, as when he observed that 'The object of education ought not to be to lift men out of their sphere, but to make them happy in it'. Despite Dickens's lifelong interest in the subject of education, it is not very easy to know how far he might have agreed; thus in one speech in 1844 he referred to 'the just right of every man . . . to aspire, and to have some

means of aspiring, to be a better and a wiser man', but later, 'Differences of wealth, of rank, of intellect, we know there must be, and we respect them'. It was not a very large step from Roebuck's comment to Melbourne's use of language which is now found only in parody and satire. Education, he said, should not 'be such as to give the lower orders opinions above their stations'; instead it should 'inculcate the necessity of their confining themselves to the situation in which Providence has placed them'.⁴ A Whig home secretary could be a very complacent person.

The legislative enactment of most consequence for the question of poverty is clearly the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, by far the most important piece of social legislation to pass through Parliament during Dickens's years as a reporter. It is difficult to exaggerate the significance of the subject, since the poor law in the nineteenth century might fairly be regarded as the fundamental social question, the one on which all others depended. Dickens wrote some six months after the passing of the Act, in words which were later to form the opening of his first published volume, 'How much is conveyed in those two short words -- "The Parish!"'.⁵ The resonance here testifies to an interest in the subject of the poor law which was to surface intermittently over the following thirty years, just as several of the other Sketches

4. Mirror, Roebuck, 3 June 1834, p. 1991, and see 30 July 1833, pp. 3424-30, 3 June 1834, pp. 1990-94 generally; Speeches, pp. 53, 56 (26 February 1844, to Mechanics' Institution, Liverpool); Humphry House, The Dickens World, p. 153; Mirror, Melbourne, 20 June 1834, p. 2324.

5. Evg. Chr., 28 February 1835; Sketches by Boz, 'Our Parish', I, p. 1.

anticipate a lasting concern with the question, indeed the whole ethos, of poverty, broadly considered. The discussion on the poor law should provide a test case for the question of how significant were the parliamentary debates which Dickens heard in the formation of his lasting attitudes.

As is well known, the Poor Law Amendment Act passed through Parliament in 1834 with large majorities, but this did not curtail the amount of discussion, and it is safe to conclude that Dickens would have heard sufficient to make him acquainted with the broad outlines of the Bill, with the arguments of its supporters, and with some of the grounds of such limited opposition as was articulated. But the basis of his concern differed sharply from contemporary discussion, just as the actual points at issue were not in parallel with those which later commentators have usually regarded as significant. On the whole, a reading of the debates, and of later discussion of the Bill, serves to establish the originality, as well as the limited focus, of Dickens's approach to the question of poor relief.

The range of journalistic response to the new poor law can be studied through the publications with which Dickens was associated. The Morning Chronicle is of greatest interest here. It strongly supported the new Act, describing it towards the end of Dickens's period of employment as 'the very sheet-anchor of the country'. As mentioned in Chapter 4, Dickens's opening on the Chronicle came about through a change of ownership which had support of the new measure as a principal motive, and Dickens recalled later that he and Black quarrelled over it, although unfortunately he did not

specify what the grounds of their disagreement were.⁶ The Chronicle had been in favour of the Bill before Dickens joined, but in no very decided manner: I noted just one leader on the topic during April 1834, whereas the change of ownership is signalled by a series of long leaders during May and thereafter, when abuse of The Times, which replied in kind, became almost more important than upholding the principles of the Bill.⁷ This acrimony was fading when Dickens began work for the paper in August, at about the time that the new Act passed into law, but the occasional resurgence is to be found thereafter. The Chronicle was in a strong position, tactically, through the vagueness of the Act as to the principles upon which poor relief was henceforth to be administered. It rejected The Times's charges that stringency in allowing outdoor relief was resulting in hardship, and was able to cite the sufficiently imprecise wording of Clause 54 of the Bill, under which, it pointed out, guardians and vestries were empowered, indeed required, to give relief, 'in cases of sudden and urgent necessity . . . whether the applicant for relief be settled in the PARISH where he shall apply for relief OR NOT. O! cruel bill! O! headless and heartless Commissioners! O! sentimental Times!'.⁸

6. Mng. Chr., 28 July 1836; Pilgrim, II, 275 ([29 April 1841], to Forster).

7. Mng. Chr., 18 April, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15, 20, 21 May 1834. But Anthony Brundage notes that the respective positions of the Chronicle and The Times were established as early as 25 February, The Making of the New Poor Law, pp. 42, 44.

8. Mng. Chr., 13 September 1834.

The other periodicals considered were less committed than the Chronicle. The Monthly Magazine, as usual, was moderate, but followed Parliament in viewing the subject exclusively as it related to the agricultural labourer, and believed that the new law would have the desired effect. It also voiced the principal ground of opposition, that the powers of the Poor Law Commission were too extensive.⁹ The new Act was under attack in 1837, and the Examiner was not then prepared to identify itself too closely with it. It welcomed the reduction in the rates, and believed that the law had worked well in general, but held later that 'severer arrangements, however salutary, should have been introduced more gradually'.¹⁰ Earlier it had been more enthusiastic, as is suggested by the surely crass comments of John Forster on Oliver Twist, confirming as they do the Webbs' comment on 'less-eligibility': 'we note a constant tendency to think of it as applicable to all recipients of relief'. Forster wrote that

in the first two or three chapters of this history an unwarrantable and unworthy use is made of certain bugbears of popular prejudice and vulgar cant connected with the new poor law which we are surprised to see such a writer as Mr. Dickens resorting to. The attempt to elevate the pauper in our sympathies at the cost of the struggling labourer -- to leave rate-payers lean with their work and hunger, so that the pauper may be stuffed to the proper extent of comfort -- which all these allusions in Oliver's case would seem to tend to -- is a system of curious philanthropy which we confess we cannot understand.¹¹

9. Mly. Mag., XVII (June 1834), pp. 560, 564, 566, XVIII (October 1834), p. 421.

10. Exr., 5 March 1837, p. 147, 13 November 1836, p. 723, 21 May 1837, p. 322.

11. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Local Government:

Opposition to the Act came from the ends of the political spectrum. The Tory Carlton Chronicle was hostile, finding that the object was to make poverty a crime and to reduce the poor to a coarser food, and quoted Cobbett, who had expressed similar views.¹² In 1832 the True Sun asserted that the support of the poor was a burden on the land, and that the land was, in effect, mortgaged to them, a contention which was articulated later in Parliament by Daniel Whittle Harvey, and described by the horrified Russell as leading to 'the destruction of all property -- the dissolution of all society -- and the entire extinction of all order in the community'. Even so, such ideas were held by some Tory opponents of the Act. The Morning Chronicle believed that Tories and ultra-radicals were making common cause on the subject, but maintained that 'little practical benefit can be derived from considering the question as one of positive right', a conclusion with which Dickens would have agreed.¹³ It is otherwise difficult to identify him with any of this journalistic response, just as it is difficult to equate his

English Poor Law History: Part II: The Last Hundred Years, I, 316; Exr., 10 September 1837, p. 581, attributed to Forster by Kathleen Tillotson, Oliver Twist, p. 398, and by James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, p. 293. A reading of other early reviews (summarised by Tillotson, pp. 398-99) does not reveal anything else on this level of obtuseness; in the context of the times, the notice rates Forster as radical (but not ultra-radical) rather than Tory.

12. Carlton Chronicle, 10 December 1836; Mirror, Cobbett, 27 May 1834, p. 1928.
13. True Sun, 22 March, 25 April 1832; Mirror, Harvey and Russell, 1 March 1833, p. 496, Harvey, 2 May 1833, p. 1569; Mng. Chr., 10 November 1836; Ursula Henriques, 'How Cruel was the Victorian Poor Law?', p. 370; Michael E. Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Agitation', p. 80.

hostility with any of the organised opposition to the Act.

Contemporary discussion is remarkable in the first instance for its concern, to the point of obsession, with the able-bodied but pauperised agricultural labourer. This involved a considerable distortion, since only a minority of paupers were able-bodied males; most were children, or disabled in some way, or elderly, leading, in the Webbs' words, to 'disastrous errors in proportion' in the 1834 Report of the Commission of Inquiry.¹⁴ It was Dickens's genius to focus upon some of these neglected areas, just as his true individuality emerges when his hostility is compared with that of other opponents of the new law. Disparate though these groups were, for the most part they shared an opposition to the establishment and powers of the new central Commission, 'the baneful coercion of government hirelings', as the Leicester Journal picturesquely (and inaccurately -- the powers of coercion were very limited) described it in 1838.¹⁵

By contrast, the logic of Dickens's position later pointed to more central control and direction of poor law administration -- but, of course, of the right sort -- rather than less. Thus it is clear that he would not have been in sympathy with the metropolitan opposition to the new poor law which developed early in 1837, based as it was on hostility

14. Webb, The Last Hundred Years, I, 88; Michael E. Rose, The Relief of Poverty, pp. 12, 35. The distortion is itself responsible for the lack of firm data; Henriques estimates that children constituted nearly half of the workhouse population, p. 366, and the Webbs that seven-eighths of the destitute were non-able bodied, The Old Poor Law, p. 259.

15. Quoted by Derek Fraser, The New Poor Law in the Nineteenth Century, p. 19.

by the vestries (for whom he never had a good word) to the powers of the Poor Law Commission. But he must have been aware of this agitation; indeed his own parish of St. Pancras won an important legal victory against the Commissioners just as the first number of Oliver Twist was being published.¹⁶ Such opposition could by no means be interpreted as a popular movement; but again Dickens is not to be identified with the considerable hostility to the Amendment Act in areas of the industrial north, grounded as it was on the reasonable contention that the Act was framed to meet a particular problem in the agricultural areas, and was inapplicable elsewhere.¹⁷ Nor is Dickens to be associated with those Tory opponents who regretted the curtailment of the powers of the magistrates, for (as is argued later in this chapter) he shared the radicals' traditional low opinion of the quality of the magistracy.

If Dickens is to be identified with any opponent of the Bill, it would have to be with the ever egregious Cobbett, but with the riders that Cobbett was (understandably) principally concerned with the agricultural labourer, and that

16. Brundage, pp. 154-56, citing The King v. the Poor Law Commissioners for England and Wales, 30 January 1837, Law Journal Reports, N.S., VI, 114-18; D.J. Rowe, Radicalism in London 1829-1841, p. 157, on St. Pancras in 1837. On the subsequent long history of antagonism between 'this ever contentious parish' and the poor law authorities, David Owen, The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889, pp. 296-99. On London opposition generally in 1837, Brundage, pp. 54-59; Nicholas C. Edsall, The anti-Poor Law Movement 1834-44, pp. 134, 137. The Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners in England and Wales comments on the distinctive features of provision in the capital, pp. 9, 13-14.

17. Edsall, passim; Rose, 'The Anti-Poor Law Agitation', pp. 82-83, 89; Rose, The Relief of Poverty, pp. 10-11.

he too was opposed to a central Commission. He resembled Dickens in that however muddled his thinking, his heart was undoubtedly in the right place: 'Want of morality, profligacy, and crimes of almost every description, proceed from poverty', he declared, and in a splendidly irreverent contribution to the debate on the changes in the bastardy laws, he said that

if a clause like this should pass, there ought in ordinary justice -- in common decency, -- to be an investigation whether there be bastards on the Pension List . . . Are we to bestow our charity upon brilliant bastards? . . . and are we to punish the poor people whom we rob for the support of those bastards, for having bastards themselves?¹⁸

The changes in the bastardy laws provoked probably more discussion in Parliament than any other poor law issue. Under the Bill, the enactments whereby a pregnant woman could 'swear' her child to an alleged father were replaced by a new provision which made the mother solely responsible. There was much discussion of the changes in both Houses, with the Commons being mostly concerned with the probable consequences for the rates, and the Lords with public morality.¹⁹ It is likely that readers of the opening chapters of Oliver Twist would have recognised this background, but what is striking is the originality of Dickens's approach.

18. Mirror, 9 June 1834, p. 2125, 18 June 1834, pp. 2274-75.

19. On the procedure concerning bastardy under the old poor law, see Ursula Henriques, 'Bastardy and the New Poor Law', pp. 103-12; Webb, The Old Poor Law, pp. 308-13, although the first is too ready to accept the largely anecdotal evidence of the Commission of Inquiry at its own valuation. The notable debate in the Lords between Phillpotts (father of fourteen), opposing the changes, and Blomfield, who had chaired the Commission of Inquiry, became known as 'the battle of the Bishops': Brundage, pp. 71-72; Henriques, 'Bastardy . . .', p. 113.

One early parliamentary speaker referred to 'The orphan children, hitherto entirely neglected'. The point went unheeded. The physical conditions in which children were kept in the workhouse were mentioned a mere handful of times during the debates as a whole, and throughout the discussions of the bastardy clauses, extensive though they were, the situation of the child itself (much less an orphan such as Oliver) received no attention.²⁰ Dickens's artistic and humanitarian instincts coalesced here: it is useful for a novelist that his hero should be parentless and his origins unknown, and Dickens was working securely within established tradition -- he was, of course, familiar with Tom Jones, to look no further (although Fielding was quite incapable of the bungling ineptitude with which the plot of Oliver is resolved). But to focus on the condition of the child within the institution constituted a real stroke of genius, as original as it was forceful. In one respect, indeed, Oliver's regime was more liberal than it might have been, for from 1835 to 1842 it was ordained by the Poor Law Commissioners that all workhouse inmates, including children, should take their meals in silence -- a rule which, had Mr. Bumble (and Dickens) but known it, would have saved him a great deal of trouble, and deprived our culture of one of its great mythic moments (everyone, so to speak, knows that Oliver Twist asked for more).²¹

20. Mirror, Halcomb, 27 June 1833, p. 2596; see also p. 2597, Slaney, 17 April 1834, p. 1097, Scrope, 9 June 1834, p. 2133, 10 June 1834, p. 2138, Halcomb, 10 June 1834, p. 2140

21. Sidney and Beatrice Webb, English Poor Law Policy, p. 73; Oliver Twist, Chapter 2, p. 11.

In these early scenes, Dickens is not concerned with the details as such of the Poor Law Amendment Act. He was misleading only in describing these chapters as a 'glance at the new poor Law Bill', for all the scenes he describes both before and after Oliver's time with Mrs. Mann could have occurred either before or after 1834, regardless of whether his parish had received the attention of the Commission.²²

Neither workhouse nor the 'board' which occasioned Oliver such terror was an innovation of the 1834 Act, and the Poor Law Commission chose not to exercise its power to control apprenticeships.²³ What Dickens registered was a significant change in the public atmosphere, which extended into those parishes which had not been brought under the aegis of the Commission.²⁴ He was not concerned with the legislation, and saw clearly that it made no difference to Oliver whether he was formally under the control of the new poor law or the old; what mattered was the disposition of those with whom he came into contact.

A reading of the debates and discussions on the poor law in the thirties increases, substantially, appreciation of Dickens's approach, even while it diminishes to some extent respect for his understanding of the issues. It marks out also the independence of his thought, placing him in opposi-

22. Pilgrim, I, 231 ([28 January 1837], to Thomas Beard).

23. Norman Longmate, The Workhouse, p. 78; Second Annual Report of the Poor Law Commissioners, pp. 9, 21; Third Annual Report, p. 151; Webb, English Poor Law Policy, p. 45. Webb, The Old Poor Law, gives details of parish apprenticeship before 1834, pp. 196-211.

24. Mng. Chr., 20 October 1834, 9 July 1835.

tion to most moderately progressive opinion, and aligning him with some Tories, at least, for whom it was 'an integral part of their aristocratic principles that government had a responsibility to take care of the worthy poor'.²⁵ One cannot legislate for a change of heart, and Dickens believed that that was what was most needed. Posterity would agree with him on the whole, and his statements on poverty are apt to appear now as commonplaces. It is only when Dickens's outlook is set beside the petty-minded penny-pinching punitive-ness of many of his contemporaries that his true quality and originality emerges. His greatest responses to poverty -- Oliver, Jo in Bleak House, several of his journalistic pieces -- could be read as a protest against the irrelevance of most of the parliamentary discussion which he heard in 1834, where the principal points debated were the constitutionality of a central Commission, the minutiae of the laws of settlement, the proposed changes to the bastardy laws, and the weighty question of the right of access of dissenting ministers to the workhouse. It could be said that these are not subjects which would have lent themselves to fictional purposes, although such a consideration would not have deterred Harriet Martineau, for instance. For whatever reason -- and the artistic and the human surely again coalesce here -- these were not the aspects of the poor law question which Dickens believed to be most worthy of attention.

25. Frank W. Fetter, 'Economic Controversy in the British Reviews, 1802-1850', p. 430.

During Dickens's period of employment with the Morning Chronicle, the issue of the poor law was mostly dormant. The main value of the paper from late 1834 through to late 1836 on the subject lies not so much in the leaders as in the reports of metropolitan magistrates' court proceedings, more especially because these were not directly influenced by the editorial line. The subject of magistrates is worthy of some consideration, for we shall find that their behaviour deserved a more complex response than it received from Dickens, and also that his response was firmly grounded in a well-established journalistic tradition.

Traditionally, magistrates had often been sympathetic to cases of destitution, and had taken the part of the poor against heartless and parsimonious parish officers. Their concern was by no means extinguished with the passing of the new Act. The Globe commented that 'the metropolis has been most distinguished for abuse of the Bill from the Bench'. Occasions are recorded when magistrates put their hands in their own pockets, following their unavailing urging of claimants' merits on unsympathetic parish officers.²⁶ It was mostly on the grounds of their past excessive generosity

26. The Globe, quoted in Mng. Chr., 12 November 1834. Mng. Chr., 14 February 1835 (Mansion House), 10 March 1835 (Mansion House), 11 April 1835 (Mansion House), 15 April 1835 (Marlborough Street). For other instances where magistrates were conspicuously more sympathetic than parish officers: 8, 15 October 1834 (Bow Street), 30 October, 4 November 1834 (Mansion House), 11 November 1834 (Bow Street), 1 January 1835 (Guildhall, where Dickens's later butt Sir Peter Laurie refused to sanction the apprenticing of a girl of about twelve because she could not read or write), 27 January 1835 (Marlborough Street), 13 February 1835 (Mansion House), 29 October 1835 (Mansion House), 18 December 1835 (Marlborough Street).

that the Chronicle editorially supported the curtailment of magistrates' powers.²⁷ But with the passing of the new Act, magistrates felt themselves to be powerless -- often to a greater extent than necessary, for, as the Chronicle noted, undoubtedly accurately, 'Every police report, even in London, is full of cases originating in a misconception of the provisions of the Act'.²⁸ Dickens shows little imaginative awareness of these complexities: the magistrates in Oliver are admittedly somewhat more humane than Bumble and the Board, but they make up for that in stupidity and gullibility. Dickens, indeed, 'generally assumed that magistrates were guilty unless proved innocent', and, at least until Creakle in Copperfield, it is their harshness and lack of humane sympathy which he depicted.²⁹

Two related themes were frequently sounded in the progressively inclined publications: the inadequacies of magistrates, and the charge that there was one law for the rich and another for the poor. In 1832 the True Sun commented that Justices of the Peace and others were 'frequently unmindful' of, and even hostile to, the recreations and amusements of the people. In the same year, the Chronicle wrote that 'We have during the last ten or twelve years exposed times out of number, the monstrous hardship of the law of

27. Mng. Chr., 5, 12 May, 20 September, 6 October 1834, 28 July 1836.

28. Mng. Chr., 20 October 1834. There is irony in noting that Chadwick, usually thought of as an exponent of undiluted rigour, issued circulars urging that sudden changes should not be made, Mng. Chr., 12 September, 14 November 1834.

29. Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime, p. 188; see also p. 193.

England towards the poor', and what were, perhaps, the most radical sentiments which I read in the Chronicle were on this subject. It contrasted the different standards applied to the Dorchester labourers, whose ignorance 'was not allowed to excuse them or to mitigate their sentence', and those found guilty of election bribery, where 'the very frequency and notoriety of the offence is made an apology for them'. The moral was drawn the next day: 'in England a rich man is a respectable man, and what respectable men do must of course be respectable'. Consequently different standards were applied to similar circumstances: a rich man could block the street with carriages at his assembly, whilst a poor street singer was instantly arrested.³⁰

The Monthly Magazine could be nicely ironical on the subject of the treatment of the poor on occasion:

Of all the crimes which disgrace the metropolis, nothing stands out with so glaring a front as poverty! -- the perpetrators are positively irreclaimable. Notwithstanding the repeated magisterial denunciations, the guilty wretches still haunt our streets; they seem to exult in their depravity . . . The offences of these daring violators of the laws are as follows:--Suspiciously sleeping at night without a shelter; the felonious asking of alms; and the heinous disposition to wander, rather than starve at home . . . [O]ur friends the police magistrates are taking efficient means to rid us of these depraved creatures. They are packed all off to prison with thieves and cut-throats, so that when they get out they will have acquired sufficient experience to be able to gain their living industriously.³¹

The Examiner regularly carried a feature 'Justices' Just-

30. True Sun, 19 April 1832; Mng. Chr., 16 June 1832; 29, 30 June 1835; see also 23 October 1834, 1, 2, 11 July 1835, 13, 18 January, 16, 18 February, 23 April, 17 June 1836.

31. Mly. Mag., XVI (November 1833), pp. 589-90; see also XVI (October 1833), p. 465.

ice', exposing the latest example of magisterial tyranny, an idea which was suggested to Fonblanque by Bentham. On 10 September 1837, a long review of Oliver Twist as published to date was followed immediately by the comment, 'Meanwhile we have had some exquisite illustrations of justices' justice, and a life-like sketch of the notorious Mr. Fang'. Details of Laing's high-handedness in dealing with an itinerant flute-player were then given; this early identification appears to be previously unnoted.³² I would not say from my own reading of the reports that Laing was any worse than the average magistrate of the day. The motifs which recur most frequently in the Examiner pieces are the fixing of bail at high amounts for those who cannot afford it, the regarding as high spirited misdemeanours in young gentry activities which are visited harshly on the poor, the sentencing the poor to fines which they cannot pay, and the absurdity of awarding a small fine when this is accompanied by large costs.³³

Dickens made an early excursion into this tradition in his account in the 'Second Annual Meeting of the Mudfog Association' of the amusements of young members of the nobility. The description, assisted by Cruikshank's illustration, is sufficient to raise a wan smile in the reader, for

32. E.B. de Fonblanque, 'Memoir of Albany Fonblanque', Preface to The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, pp. 18-19; Exr., 10 September 1837, p. 582 (cf. Pilgrim, I, 267-68, n. 2).

33. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., II, 168-69 (1831), III, 118-25 (1834); Exr., 30 October 1836, p. 691, 18 December 1836, p. 809, 30 April 1837, p. 275, 2 July 1837, p. 418, 16 July 1837, p. 451, 3 September 1837, p. 572, 5 August 1838, pp. 482, 483; Fonblanque, Life and Labours, pp. 341-43 (1841), 371 (1849).

which he is thankful, in view of the context. The general idea appeared again the next year in the lengthy outline which Dickens sent to Forster of his plans for a new miscellany. The only proposal concerning public affairs was

a series of satirical papers purporting to be translated from some Savage Chronicles, [which would] describe the administration of justice in some country that never existed, and record the proceedings of its wise men. The object of this series . . . would be to keep a special look-out upon the magistrates in town and country, and never to leave those worthies alone.³⁴

Nothing came of this, perhaps because, as we have seen, there was nothing original in the idea of exposing the magistrates, although Dickens's characteristically fanciful treatment would have been more novel.

On this issue, then, Dickens followed rather automatically his journalistic heritage, although there was rather more to be said on behalf of magistrates than Fonblanque, notably, would allow. Undoubtedly they often exercised an amount of discretion which, by today's standards, would be considered objectionably wide. They thought of themselves, literally enough, as 'Justices of the Peace': their first duty was to maintain public order, and the cumulative impression is that their approach was often to consider whether the case before them was one where the law might appropriately be applied. This was not always a bad thing; but their arbitrariness could easily become capricious, if not to say despotic. The central complaint of one law for the rich and another for the poor was amply justified.

34. 'Mudfog and other Sketches', pp. 659-64 (Bentley's Miscellany, September 1838); Pilgrim, I, 564 ([14 July 1839]).

Allegations of partiality were prominent also in the discussions on Sunday legislation which coincided as an active parliamentary cause with Dickens's work in Parliament. As is well known, bills to enforce what was referred to as 'the Better Observance of the Sabbath' ('the Bitter Observance', the Examiner called it) were regularly introduced during this period, and as regularly defeated, although not without coming close to success on more than one occasion. Dickens's pseudonymous pamphlet 'Sunday Under Three Heads' of June 1836 is his only sustained piece of journalism to derive directly from his experience as a parliamentary reporter. On this issue alone he felt sufficiently strongly to express himself in a published polemic -- not the poor law, or imprisonment for debt, or Chancery, or capital punishment, topical though these were. The circumstance is not very easy to explain, but invites some discussion also of a related theme which has often been remarked upon, Dickens's antipathy to dissent and to dissenting ministers in particular.

It is no surprise that Dickens was unsympathetic towards Sabbatarianism. It has been noted that he 'inherited an almost unavoidable professional mistrust of gospel Christians owing to evangelical attacks on the novel (and on the theatre)'. His newspaper work would have reinforced this; as the Chronicle put it in commenting on the Sunday issue, 'it becomes a delicate question how far journalists ought to inquire into the mode in which individuals pass that day'. Relevant also is Dickens's feeling account of being stuck as a reporter on a wet Sunday in Chelmsford with but one book

to hand, and that a worthless one.³⁵

The motivation behind the 'Three Heads' pamphlet cannot entirely be attributed to the parliamentary occasion, since it did not appear until the latest Bill had been defeated, and by that time it was sufficiently clear, I think, that no such attempt would be successful. The closest had been in 1834, when a watered-down Bill had failed to pass by a whisker. Since then, many members had been inclined to treat the subject with levity, and although bills had passed their preliminary stages, that was usually in thin houses, and there is a prevailing sense that there was always adequate residual opposition to ensure defeat eventually.³⁶

Dickens's pamphlet was following rather than attempting to lead public opinion, and the major thrust of the argument is of comprehensive unoriginality. That the bills bore more heavily on the poor than the rich was the standard criticism, and could be amply illustrated from the parliamentary debates and the pages of the Morning Chronicle, and other sources.³⁷

35. Norris F. Pope, Dickens and Charity, p. 247; Mng. Chr., 12 February 1835; Pilgrim, I, 53-54 ([11 January 1835], to Thomas Beard).

36. Mirror, 30 April 1834, p. 1398, 21 May 1834, pp. 1815-17, 26 June 1834, pp. 2445-49, 18 July 1834, pp. 2807-11; Mng. Chr., 26 March, 21 May 1835, 20 April, 19 May 1836. Pope's admirable account of the resurgence of the issue in the fifties is in error in saying that Agnew did not get a bill past the Second Reading until 1837, p. 51.

37. Mirror, Hunt, 2 September 1831, p. 1876, Roebuck, 16 May 1833, pp. 1824-25, Ridley, 16 May 1833, p. 1826, Bernal, 9 July 1833, p. 2867, Roebuck, 11 March 1834, p. 651, Bulwer, 30 April 1834, p. 1399, Roebuck, 30 April 1834, p. 1403, O'Connell, 30 April 1834, p. 1412, various speakers, 15 May 1834, p. 1734, Beaumont, 18 July 1834, p. 2809; Mng. Chr., Warburton, 26 March 1835, Peel, 21 May 1835, 13 June 1835, Roebuck's amendments, 22 April

The other standard criticism was that legislation was unnecessary since Sundays were already sufficiently gloomy (the adjective was often used), and there was no need to go further. Rice's nervously and absurdly exaggerated caution to a suggestion that the British Museum should open on Sundays reflected public sentiment: 'his own individual abstract opinion was not opposed to such a proposition being acted upon to a certain extent, but he did not see how that could be done without interfering with the observance of the Sabbath by the parties employed on the establishment'. The Chronicle published 'a letter from several foreign gentlemen on the subject of Sir ANDREW AGNEW's Bill', and added, grimly, 'They seem to think that it is impossible for the Scotch Baronet to add to the disagreeableness of an English Sunday. They are mistaken. They have never been in Scotland. . .',³⁸

But there was, in fact, rather more to be said for Sunday legislation than its opponents allowed. Not all the very large number of petitions which Parliament received came from zealous fanatical killjoys. There were two main arguments for legislation: the first, that it was necessary to ensure that everyone, the poor particularly, were able to enjoy a day of rest tended to get swamped by the second, that it was proper that the Lord's Day should be properly observed.

1836, Barclay, 19 May 1836; Fonblanque, 7 Admins., III, 311-16 (1836); Exr., 11 June 1837, p. 369, 17 June 1838, p. 369; Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, I, 330.

38. Mng. Chr., Rice, 31 May 1836; 14 May 1836; see also Mirror, Potter, 29 March 1833, p. 1095, Bulwer, 30 April 1834, p. 1399, Brougham, 15 May 1834, p. 1732, O'Connell, 18 July 1834, p. 2808; Mng. Chr., 30 April, 3 May 1836.

But the first was a strong argument. Even the Chadbandian unctiousness of the most high-minded of evangelicals could be given a twist which might have made the argument attractive to advocates of the rights of the poor:

[T]he Sabbath . . . was designed to be a day of rest, a day for instruction, for meditation, and the exercise of charity. It was ordained for the benefit of man in a physical, a moral, and religious point of view: and as the highest authority requires that it should be kept holy, I think it is important that the barriers should not be broken down, under pretence of affording recreation to the poor. When the impression is once made, that it is of no consequence how you observe the Sabbath, and that it is right and proper to engage in various sports and games, I am afraid that the political economist will advocate the expediency of the poor working on that day, in order to enable our manufacturers to sustain a foreign trade.³⁹

As often, Dickens's tendency to see one side of a question makes him more effective as a propagandist than reliable as a historian. His pamphlet assumes that a day off is available to all. The idyllic picture of the poor collecting their cooked dinners from the local bake-house does not consider the bakers themselves, who worked long hours in bad conditions: later in the century Marx said that they rarely reached the age of 42, and their later campaigns for 'the abolition of night and Sabbath working' were supported by 'the zealous Sabbatarian, Lord Robert Grosvenor'.⁴⁰

39. Mirror, Brotherton, 18 July 1834, p. 2809; see also Warburton, 19 February 1833, p. 313, Bishop of London, 22 March 1833, p. 926, Mosley, 30 April 1834, p. 1398, Plumptre, 30 April 1834, p. 1410, Wynford, 15 May 1834, p. 1735; Mng. Chr., 21 May 1835, Hardy, 30 April 1836, Report of meeting at Exeter Hall of Society for Preserving the Due Observance of the Sabbath.

40. David Goodway, London Chartism 1838-1848, pp. 213-14, 297, n. 369, citing Karl Marx, Capital (Everyman edn., 2 vols, 1957), I, 251-54.

To some extent, Dickens's pamphlet is in the manner of an extended version of his early sketches. His argument demands attention because it is built upon his sharp observation, although there is a certain amount of idealization in his picture of the poor on Sunday. The polemical purpose is kept mostly in the background, and the discussion is a skilful, temperate, imaginative embroidery of the traditional arguments against Sunday legislation. The Dedication to the Bishop of London is usually described as 'caustic', but I cannot find that it is so. It is not wholly free from irony, admittedly, but the general bearing is to commend the work to the Bishop and to ask him to read it, in the genuine belief that he is not sufficiently familiar with the habits and feelings of the poor.

The tone of the pamphlet is controlled and reasonable apart from one obtrusive paragraph where a dissenting chapel, 'a stronghold of intolerant zeal and ignorant enthusiasm', is described. There is a vein of hysteria running beneath the passage which seems to go beyond the account of the hysteria of the congregation -- as if the writer is exorcising some private demon of his own. It is difficult not to connect this with Dickens's much later account of being dragged, regularly it seems, to hear a dissenting preacher at some unstated early age, although it has been persuasively argued by Valentine Cunningham that that account is largely imaginary. He has also amply illustrated that Dickens's continually hostile and one-sided depiction of dissent is both securely based in, and a major contributor to, an abiding

literary and journalistic tradition.⁴¹ Norris Pope has shown that Dickens's pamphlet 'ignores the fact that the organized sabbatarian campaign was very much the work of the Establishment evangelicals', and is thereby 'markedly unfair to dissenters'.⁴²

Dickens's hostility to dissent is of consequence here in three respects. First, it was at odds with the more liberal outlook which was starting to prevail in the thirties. Also, the belief that reform of the Church of England was overdue was not limited to extremist, ultra-radical clamour, but could be illustrated, for instance, from the pages of the Morning Chronicle, and from the Examiner, where Fonblanque made merry with the Church's excessive temporal endowments.⁴³ Anglicanism was popularly associated with Toryism and reaction, particularly after the Reform Bill was rejected through the votes of the bishops in the Lords in October 1831.⁴⁴ Lastly, dissenters were prominent in reformist issues, such as the anti-slavery movement, this being

part of a broader moral crusade which combined a number of widely supported causes that appealed to some of the middle classes, and especially to those belonging to the various Dissenting denominations. These good causes included free trade, temperance, peace, parliamentary reform, foreign and home missions, anti-church establishment, and women's rights

41. 'Sunday Under Three Heads', p. 641; Unc. T., Chapter 9, pp. 83-84; Valentine Cunningham, Everywhere Spoken Against, pp. 192-93, 35-36, Chapter VIII, passim.

42. Pope, pp. 58, 60.

43. Mng. Chr., 13 September, 25, 27 October 1834, 24 January, 6, 10 April, 26 December 1835; Fonblanque, 7 Admins., I, 65-67 (1827), II, 273-81 (1832).

44. Mng. Chr., 30 January, 29 April, 4, 6, 8, 14, 19 May, 7 August, 29 October 1835.

-- a list which sufficiently suggests the limitations to Dickens's reformism. The dissenters, in short, were 'inevitably reformers almost to a man'; 'Nonconformity was radical per se'.⁴⁵ Certainly it was quite possible for an Anglican to be a reformer -- one need look no further than Lord John Russell, but he was (up to a point) a prominent advocate of dissenters' claims. To be a reformer who was actively hostile to dissent was more unusual, and it seems that the source for Dickens's antipathy is to be sought for in his psyche, and in his identification with journalists and artists, rather than in the climate of political opinion of the time.

It is no accident that the most implacable opponents of Sabbatarianism, Roebuck particularly, were also opposed to factory legislation. The subject came before Parliament in the thirties, and supporters of legislation appeared to be gradually winning the humanitarian argument. Some speakers tellingly compared the hours of work of slaves in the West Indies (to be reduced to forty-five a week under the apprenticeship clauses of the Bill to abolish slavery) with those of English factory children (proposed to be limited to sixty).⁴⁶ Dickens glanced at the comparison in Pickwick, where the inhabitants of Muggleton 'have presented at divers times, no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions

45. Douglas A. Lorimer, Colour, Class and the Victorians, p. 115; Richard and Edward Garnett, The Life of W.J. Fox, p. 37; Cunningham, p. 91.

46. Mirror, Lennard, 3 April 1833, p. 1197, Fryer, 18 July 1833, p. 3126; Mng. Chr., Ashley, 10 May 1836.

against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home'. He similarly referred in 1838, a dozen years before creating *Borrioboola-Gha*, to those who 'could see, with the naked eye, most marvellous horrors on West India plantations, while they could discern nothing whatever in the interior of Manchester cotton mills'.⁴⁷

These are isolated comments. Dickens's later failure to deal with the question of factory conditions in his fiction and his journalism is a story of promise unfulfilled which begins with his intention to 'strike the heaviest blow in my power for these unfortunate creatures' at the end of 1838, following a visit to Manchester, and extends over more than four years.⁴⁸ But the only attributed comment on the issue appears to be a passage in *American Notes*, where a factory at Lowell, Massachusetts is compared with those in England, very much to the advantage of America. Two pieces by Dickens in the *Morning Chronicle*, also in 1842, were anonymous: a powerful, and apparently unsolicited, letter on the Mines and Collieries Bill which Ashley was then attempting to steer through Parliament, and (at his own request) a review of a pamphlet by Lord Londonderry, leading mine owner and opponent of the Bill -- a most disappointing production this, pointing out the deficiencies in the noble author's grammar and style, and hardly focussing on the issues at

47. *Pickwick Papers*, Chapter 7, p. 161; 'Mudfog and other Sketches', p. 662 (*Bentley's Miscellany*, September 1838).

48. *Pilgrim*, I, 484 (29 December 1838, to Fitzgerald); see also John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* pp. 177-78, n. 1.

all.⁴⁹ A few months later, Dickens was writing to Southwood Smith that it was 'almost a Cruelty to limit, even the dreadful hours and ways of Labour . . . I scarcely know how we can step between them, and one weekly farthing', a comment which represents an extraordinary turn-round after his earlier contact with Smith.⁵⁰

The question which arises is whether the several debates on factory legislation which Dickens may have heard can shed any light on the apparent reversal of his attitude. One speaker came close to anticipating Dickens's 1843 conclusion in arguing against increasing the minimum age at which children might be employed:

he thought it was a false humanity which would subject the children to the misery and starvation to which they must be reduced if the proposal . . . were acceded to. The effect of it would be to throw 35,000 children out of employment.

The Morning Chronicle accepted this argument at least as far as twelve and thirteen year olds were concerned.⁵¹ Another speaker argued from political economy, claiming that Ashley's Bill

will have the effect of reducing the productive industry of the cotton manufacturers one-sixth part . . . The only consequence of this Bill will be, the reduction in the labour, and, of course, the wages, of the people employed in our manufac-

49. American Notes, Chapter 4, pp. 114-15, 118-19; Pilgrim, III, 278-85 (25 July 1842, to Morning Chronicle), 309 (15 August 1842, to Black); The Nonesuch Edition: Collected Papers, I, 13-19.

50. Pilgrim, III, 435 (1 February 1843), and see II, 164-65 (15 December 1840), III, 459, 461 (6, 10 March 1843). See also II, 317 ([30 June 1841], to Forster), II, 346 ([31 July 1841], to Forster), 353-54 (8 August 1841, to Napier), 405 (21 October 1841, to Napier).

51. Mng. Chr., Bolling, 10 May 1836, 12 May 1836.

tories. It will be depriving the whole of the manufacturing population of the country of a portion of their wages; and it will have the effect of materially lessening the productive industry of the country.⁵²

It may be conjectured that Dickens was influenced by such arguments as this, although Fielden was able to answer it from the informed position of a manufacturer, and in strictly economical terms, observing that

If our manufactures were reduced one-sixth in quantity, the price would necessarily rise in consequence, the supply being diminished to that extent; and were the price to rise in proportion to such diminution, then there would be no necessity for any reduction whatever in wages.

In 1831 a day of rest was advocated on similar grounds, but the argument was unusual. Another speaker in 1833 said that reducing hours would merely have the effect of spreading the labour more evenly. At present, workers were turned off when there were no orders; if the hours were reduced, they would do the same amount of work in twelve months as was now done in eight or nine.⁵³

I discuss the standing of political economy more fully in the next chapter, but will here note the considerable genuine uncertainty as to the practical consequences of restrictive legislation, as voiced by Russell on behalf of the Government, amongst others. The forebodings of one speaker were only a more extreme expression of fears which were general:

The suspension of our manufactures for a single week would, in all probability, entail upon us

52. Mirror, Wood, 3 April 1833, pp. 1199-1200.

53. Mirror, Fielden, 18 July 1833, p. 3131, Torrens, 2 September 1831, p. 1876, Wilbraham, 18 July 1833, p. 3123.

such a crisis as . . . would drive us back into a state of immediate misery, if not of ultimate barbarism.⁵⁴

Philip Collins has commented on the absence in Dickens's fiction of 'the particularly striking, and eminently dramatizable, scandal of child-labor'.⁵⁵ As far as child labour in factories is concerned, the failure is to be ascribed to unfamiliarity: the subject did not engage Dickens's imagination, and hence his mind was open to such arguments against interference as those which have been outlined, spurious though some of them may have been.

The conclusion may seem questionable when what is now perhaps the best known biographical fact about Dickens is considered, that is, that he was himself engaged as a child worker for a brief but traumatic period. One point should be noted here: it has become usual to refer to the 'blacking factory', but both Dickens himself and Forster describe it exclusively as a 'warehouse'.⁵⁶ There is a difference; when Dickens wanted to find out something about factories, he travelled out of London to do so.

If the condition of working people was beginning to be regarded with some sympathy in the early thirties, the same could not be said of working class organisations, particular-

54. Mirror, Hyett, 5 July 1833, p. 2801, Russell, 3 April 1833, p. 1205.

55. 'Dickens and Industrialism', p. 657; George Orwell also noted the omission: 'Charles Dickens', pp. 459-60.

56. Forster, I, ii, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 34, 35. David Copperfield's work for Murdstone and Grinby was also in a warehouse, Chapter 11, pp. 132, 133, 135.

ly trades unions: 'combinations' was the sufficiently damning term. It is worth noting by way of preface that Dickens had his own experience of the relations between employer and employed during these years. Forster writes of having shared, as a young man, in the difficulties of the True Sun, which included a general strike of the reporters. He first saw Dickens at that time, and learnt his name, which 'was coupled with the fact which gave it interest even then, that "young Dickens" had been spokesman for the recalcitrant reporters, and conducted their case triumphantly'. Later, when working for the Chronicle, Dickens again acted, or offered to act, as spokesman, in a dispute with Easthope over the terms of engagement for a new parliamentary session -- a demonstration of self assurance in a young man when dealing with the wealthy proprietor of a leading London newspaper.⁵⁷ The outcome is not known, and quite possibly the revolt fizzled out, but the circumstances are of interest; as Darton put it, 'It may be remembered that the "Tolpuddle Martyrs" . . . were transported in 1834 for a far less definite "conspiracy."' But in 1836 the black-coats were not yet in the Labour movement'.⁵⁸ Dickens's parts in these two disputes are early examples of his abrasiveness when his own rights, as he saw them, were threatened. It is doubtful whether he would have

57. Forster, I, iv, 59; Pilgrim, I, 122-23 ([2 February 1836], to Beard). Some biographers have contended that there was only one dispute, and that Forster got the details wrong. But he was not associated with the Morning Chronicle, and the widely differing details make it reasonably safe to conclude that there were two separate incidents.

58. F.J. Harvey Darton, 'Dickens the Beginner: 1833-1836', p. 67.

been aware of any connection with the subject of trade unionism, or with the Dorchester labourers, sanctified later as the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'.

Trade union matters were discussed fairly frequently whilst Dickens was working for the Mirror of Parliament, for it was at this time that Robert Owen organised his Grand National Consolidated Trades Union. It is difficult to be clear as to just how much of a threat this was seen to represent. One speaker in the Lords referred to 'a very alarming crisis', but by and large Parliament in 1833 and 1834 tended to regard the unions as noises off, and rather remote and irrelevant noises at that, thereby supporting the contention made recently that the importance of the whole development, and the size of the membership, has been greatly exaggerated, and that it was the Dorchester convictions which stirred popular feeling.⁵⁹ It is notable that both Parliament and the moderate Monthly Magazine were unremittingly hostile to the Dorchester labourers in 1834, despite grave doubts as to the legality of their convictions. The Morning Chronicle the next year was more understanding, and there was little opposition when Russell announced mitigation of the sentences, but by that time Owen's Union had collapsed, and a more sympathetic atmosphere prevailed.⁶⁰ Trade union affairs were in fact little discussed in the Chronicle during the period when Dickens was working for it.

59. Mirror, Londonderry, 28 April 1834, p. 1314; David Goodway, London Chartism 1838-1848, p. 10.

60. Mirror, 26 March 1834, pp. 1003-06, 18 April 1834, pp. 1118-22; Mly. Mag., XVIII (April 1834), p. 347, XVIII (May 1834), p. 544; Mng. Chr., 26, 29 June 1835, 4 March 1836.

But something of the antagonism of 1834 appears, speculatively, to have remained with Dickens, and to have fuelled his treatment of the 'Prentice Knights in Barnaby Rudge -- we should again recall here that he was thinking about that novel as early as 1836, although it has been pointed out that there was a later source in the violent strike of the Glasgow cotton spinners in 1837 and the ensuing Select Committee. The secrecy, tawdry ritual and mumbo-jumbo ceremonial in Barnaby are particularly reminiscent of the Dorchester convictions. The reader is, I think, shocked by the gratuitously cruel fate which Dickens reserves for Sim Tappertit, which would be more appropriate, in the world of novelistic poetic justice, for someone who had represented a real threat -- which Sim, posturing popinjay that he is, clearly does not. Something of the inconsistency and uncertainty of respectable reactions in 1834 is present here, I believe: the unions, or guild in this case, are both futile and potentially highly dangerous.⁶¹

These apparently contradictory attitudes can be traced in the parliamentary debates. Objections to unions were on three grounds. The first was that there was something objectionable in itself in the very idea of union, or 'combination'. The second, related objection, often made, was that unions exercised a tyrannical power over their own members, and were led (in Brougham's words) by 'a set of idle, good-

61. Patrick Brantlinger, 'The Case against Trade Unions in Early Victorian Fiction', pp. 37-38; Barnaby Rudge, Chapter 8, pp. 112-18, Chapter 18, pp. 197-99, Chapter 27, pp. 265-66, Chapter 71, p. 647, Chapter the Last, pp. 733-34.

for-nothing agitators'. This note is present in Hard Times, and in Dickens's later strictures upon Chartist leaders (to which I have referred in Chapter 2), and in the article 'Railway Strikes' (1851), where he says that the railway drivers should not strike, as they are threatening to do; they have been led astray by others, who 'are, sometimes, not workmen at all, but designing persons, who have, for their own base purposes, inmeshed the workmen in a system of tyranny and oppression'.⁶²

The third objection to unions in the thirties was common ground amongst all shades of opinion, extending even to those few radicals who spoke in defence of unions, and it is the one which would now be most unfamiliar. It was that the aims of unions were futile, since it was impossible for strikes to raise wages. The underlying, and unstated, belief here was in the Wages Fund Theory, as formulated first by Ricardo and popularised by McCulloch -- the belief, that is, that 'if any group of workers obtained advances in wages through collective pressure it could only be at the expense of the legitimate reward of other workers'.⁶³

It is not very clear whether Dickens accepted this position. In 'On Strike' (1854), which is often used as back-

62. Mirror, Brougham, 28 April 1834, p. 1315; Young, 13 March 1834, p. 716; 'Railway Strikes', Misc. P., I, 312 (HW, 11 January 1851); 'Judicial Special Pleading', Misc. P., I, 145 (Exr., 23 December 1848); 'The Tooting Farm', Misc. P., I, 159 (Exr., 27 January 1849); 'A Walk in a Workhouse', Repr. P., p. 539 (HW, 25 May 1850).

63. Henry Pelling, A History of British Trade Unionism, p. 55; see also Webb, English Poor Law History: Part II: The Last Hundred Years, I, 22-23 and n. 1. Mirror, Hume, 13 March 1834, p. 713, Roebuck, 13 March 1834, p. 718, 18 April 1834, p. 1121.

ground to discussion of Hard Times, he showed himself more sympathetic to workers than in the earlier 'Railway Strikes', regarding the strike as a mistake but 'generally an honest one, and . . . sustained by the good that is in them, and not by the evil'. Two years later he appears to have softened further, since he said, but not in public, that strikes are not always necessarily wrong.⁶⁴

If this represents a developing inclination to regard the activities of trades' unions with at least qualified disfavour, we need not be surprised that the shift of feeling took so long. It is difficult to think of another important social question (even including the Poor Law Amendment Act) on which such a large body of opinion went totally unrepresented in Parliament as the unions. That is not very surprising, given the social composition of Parliament, and it is probably more instructive to note the response of the Monthly Magazine. Moderately reformist, its virulence and animus against the unions was far in excess of its comments on any other topic, and was totally lacking in any degree of objectivity or impartiality, much less the attempt to see matters from the workers' point of view. In this publication trades' unions were again seen, with unconscious inconsistency, both as threat, 'spreading themselves over the face of the country like a miasma, paralyzing the energies of commerce, and destroying its very vitality', and as futile, since 'Combinations amongst workmen cannot raise the market price of labour; their natural tendency being rather to de-

64. 'On Strike', Misc. P., I, 464 (HW, 11 February 1854); Nonesuch, II, 721-22 (6 January 1856, to W.H. Wills).

preciate it'.⁶⁵

Perhaps the most notable feature of what amounted to an intense but short-lived campaign in the Monthly was a piece entitled 'The Meeting of the Delegates', purporting to be the account of a gathering in Leicester (clearly regarded as the last word in revolutionary fervour), and published, as chance would have it, immediately following one of Dickens's sketches. The article described a number of men, ignorant, vain and self-important, starting a new union. The rhetoric of one named Dick the player (another coincidence) is worth quoting:

Englishmen, and fellow-countrymen! the time has at length arrived when we are to be slaves eternally, or for ever free; already has the muttering thunder of public opinion pealed through the hollow concave of echoing custom, and the scythe-winged lightning-glare of whirlwind-treading liberty has flashed desolation on the nodding turrets of a castle-girded aristocracy!

The rhythm of this is suggestive of Dickens's well known union agitator of twenty years later, but with the difference that while it is difficult to imagine any of the Monthly's readers regarding this as a serious representation of, or argument against, trades unions (although I could be wrong about that), it is only too evident that Dickens regards his creation of Slackbridge as valid in both respects.⁶⁶

The Monthly Magazine was also highly critical of Robert Owen, affording a point of comparison with the True Sun,

65. Mly. Mag., XVIII (April 1834), p. 345; XVIII (May 1834), p. 462.

66. 'The Meeting of the Delegates', Mly. Mag., XVIII (May 1834), pp. 493-500 (p. 497), 'The Boarding House [I]', pp. 481-93; Hard Times, II, iv, 105-10, III, iv, 187-88.

which gave his meetings fairly full coverage, and was commended by him in turn. The Owenite New Moral World asked later, 'Who can more ably develop the vital truth, that circumstances make, or mar, the man, than the inimitable Dickens?'.⁶⁷ Owen was of course prominent in labour affairs in the thirties, and a brief discussion of his general thought is in order here, since much of it is remarkably and unexpectedly close to Dickens's, especially in the novelist's earlier period.

The temporary conjunction of Owenism with working class and socialist movements in the years from 1829 to 1834 was only possible at a time of muted class hostility. Owen held 'that class antagonism was irrational and irrelevant, since each class was the victim of its own ideology'. This belief, contrasting sharply with what we understand by socialist thought today, is a frequent later theme with Dickens, appearing in the insistence that although the classes are different, their 'interests must be understood to be identical or must be destroyed'.⁶⁸ Owen's 'doctrine of circumstances' was closely related to the stress placed on the importance of education, a concern which became active with Dickens later. In economic affairs, the philanthropic origins of Owenism,

67. Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), pp. 45-48, XVI (September 1833), pp. 268-69; True Sun, 12 November 1832; New Moral World, 18 July 1840, quoted in Pilgrim, II, 100, n. 1.

68. J.F.C. Harrison, Robert Owen and the Owenites in Britain and America, pp. 80-81; 'On Strike', Misc. P., I, 466 (HW, 11 February 1854); see also 'To Working Men', Misc. P., I, 486 (HW, 7 October 1854); Speeches, pp. 167 (30 December 1853), 203 (27 June 1855); Countts, pp. 272-73 (26 October 1854), 299 (15 May 1855); Collins, Is. and Rs., II, 331, 335-36.

together with the poor law context of much of his early thought, and the hostility to the doctrines of orthodox political economy, all represent points of identity with Dickens. An unexpected affinity arises from the essential nature of Owenism, that is, fundamentally millennial, and only secondarily, and temporarily, socialist. In the words of J.F.C. Harrison (to whom this summary is heavily indebted), it was a world view which 'reduced all complicated issues to a simple clear-cut choice between good and evil', which could hardly be more apt as a description of Dickens's earlier novels particularly, even though the opposition is presented there in terms of character rather than issues. There is no conscious contradiction with the environmentalism which is also continuously present in Dickens's work. When he examines his characters' childhood, he sees clearly that early experience is formative, but his evil characters do not receive the benefit of such an analysis and it is difficult to believe that Quilp or Gride or Fagin, or, to take a much later example, Rigaud, ever had a childhood at all. Analogous contradictions were present in Owenism also, notably in the belief in phrenology.⁶⁹

Philip Collins has already demolished the notion that Dickens could be regarded in any way as a disciple of Owen,⁷⁰ and even the very characteristic dualism has a more obvious source in the clearly delineated characters of the popular

69. Harrison, pp. 22-23; 101; see also pp. 79, 140-42, 252, 11-42, 68-69, 135-240, 86-87, 239-40; True Sun, 24, 26 28 April 1832.

70. 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 75, citing Pilgrim, II, 451-52 (27 December 1841, to Owen).

theatre. Also, Dickens's essential level-headedness is a good way from the fundamentally millenarian cast of Owen's general thought. What we have here is not a direct debt; it is not likely that Dickens knew much about Owen, and he probably (as the saying goes) cared less. But there are correspondences sufficiently extensive as to suggest a common reliance on a general pool of ideas, one which Dickens could share unconsciously with Owen with no sense of strain whilst also adhering to respectable society's aversion to the ideas and values which Owen represented.

My remarks on labour questions can be summarised by saying that the exceptional developments of 1834 would not have been a good base on which to develop an understanding of the arguments in favour of trade unionism; nor was Parliament, given its class composition, a likely forum in which to find such arguments propounded. As with factory conditions, geographical remoteness was superimposed upon class divisions. A few speakers such as Fielden had first-hand knowledge, but most members genuinely needed the help of committees of enquiry. They were familiar with their own home areas, and of necessity with London, but rarely acquainted with urban conditions elsewhere. Dickens was affected similarly. He needed to make special fact-finding visits before he could attempt to deal with the issues of factory conditions and trades unions, and it is not surprising if the results were inadequate. His imagination rarely left London or Chatham, even when, like the events in his novels, he travelled to other areas, and his personal experience of manufacturing districts was far less, for instance, than of France or Italy, certainly if duration of exposure be taken

as the criterion. On industrial relations he is as unsatisfactory a guide as Members of Parliament, and he was probably unaware of how unreliable and unrepresentative they were, or of the extent to which he absorbed his dispositions from them.

My remaining topic sorts uncomfortably with the remainder of the chapter, for it is connected only indirectly with the theme of the rich and the poor, but it was of lasting significance for Dickens. The general atmosphere of reformist energy which prevailed after 1832 was most important concerning reforms in the law, which to some extent had been anticipated by the measures effected by Peel when Home Secretary from 1828 to 1830. It is an area where the Morning Chronicle showed itself at its most Benthamic, and its approach to questions concerned with the law was often close to the Examiner's. Fonblanque was a contributor to the Chronicle, and as early as 1828 he had written that 'The law of England is the most intricate labyrinth ever yet achieved for the perplexity of the understanding'. Later he complained that the law was not properly promulgated; the lower orders were made aware of which offences were capital by hanging them. The Morning Chronicle was not respectful of 'musty' law processes, and Dickens retained a strong belief that reform was overdue of what might be termed the nonsense of the law, commenting in American Notes, 'I am by no means a wholesale admirer of our legal solemnities, many of which impress me as being exceedingly ludicrous'.⁷¹

71. Fonblanque, 7 Admins., I, 187 (1828), II, 207-14 (1832); Mng. Chr., 8 February 1836; American Notes, Chapter 3,

On one related issue a close connection can be made between Dickens's early career and a prominent theme in his later fiction: reform of the Court of Chancery. It has become generally recognised that Bleak House was not original in pointing to the great delays, and that Dickens was here following rather than leading public opinion.⁷² But what has been appreciated less often is that there was a long history of complaint and discussion as early in Dickens's career as the thirties. One lawyer commented that 'the evils belong to the system, and have not been produced by this Chancellor or that Chancellor. Neither are they new; they were matter of complaint in the reign of Henry VIII -- they have ever since continued'. The Monthly Magazine summarised the career of Eldon, Lord Chancellor for over a quarter of a century down to 1827, in these words:

Had his lordship become incarnated with the spirit of delay, and all its attendant mischiefs, he could not have afforded greater scope for complaint. The newspapers and reviews denounced his procrastinating propensity -- motion after motion was made in the House of Commons upon the subject -- long, interesting, and warm debates took place for several successive sessions -- committees were appointed, but his lordship continued his course unaltered; and up to the moment of his retiring from his functions, the arrears, both in Chancery and the Lords, had most frightfully accumulated.⁷³

p. 105; see also 'Murderous Extremes', Misc. P., II, 126-27 (HW, 3 January 1857).

72. Butt and Tillotson, Dickens at Work, pp. 183-87. Macready noted that the Chancery suit on his grandfather's will, begun in 1811/12, was recently terminated in March 1840; £20,000 was contested, and his father's share eventually amounted to £37/11/-, he having spent '£200 or £300' in the proceedings (Diaries of William Charles Macready, II, 51).

73. Mirror, Lynch, 16 May 1834, p. 1793; Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), p. 109.

In the Commons Althorp remarked that 'an allusion is hardly ever made in this House on the subject of delay without the Court of Chancery being quoted as an illustration', and Brougham commented that 'the words "Court of Chancery"' called to mind 'as it were instinctively . . . the idea of expense and vexation'. As the newly installed Chancellor, he was determined to tackle the problem:

but, such is the nature of those evils, -- so great is their tendency to push out their shoots . . . that scarcely has a Judge entered upon the work of pruning or excision, before he feels himself entangled and overwhelmed in the attempt to remove them . . . I feel that I am on the point -- if I delay but an instant -- of becoming a fixture rooted to the soil.

He was aware that others had wanted to undertake the reform of Chancery previously; Eldon, for instance:

but he waited too long; he stayed till he became affected by the element of the Court of Chancery; he found the adhesiveness of the soil too strong for him; and he became so entangled in those roots and ramifications . . . as to prevent the success of any after effort.⁷⁴

It is just possible that Dickens was unconsciously echoing these remarks later. The first words of the Chancellor in Bleak House are to call on 'Mr. Tangle', who 'knows more of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody. He is famous for it -- supposed never to have read anything else since he left school'. Clearly Brougham's image of a noxious weed was a potent one (more so than the famous fog, indeed, which, even in London, in the middle of the nineteenth century, is at its worst only in November), and the general relevance of his remarks to Vholes, and to Richard Carstone and Miss Flite,

74. Mirror, Althorp, 20 July 1831, p. 710, Brougham, 22 February 1831, pp. 408, 413.

does not need stressing. Other speakers found alternative metaphors, regarding Chancery as a 'bottomless pit' and an 'Augean stable'.⁷⁵

In 1833, the Commons again discussed the problem when considering Thelusson's Estate Bill -- itself a good illustration of Parliament's tendency to spend a large amount of time on individual cases. Thelusson had died in 1797, and the estate had been in contention ever since. One Act of Parliament had already been passed on the subject. Daniel Whittle Harvey (later to become editor of the True Sun, and a lawyer) strikingly anticipated Bleak House:

we know that not only the men with their occasional half guinea, but nearly all the profession, who are engaged in this matter, pro or con, rise, as the keys of the pianoforte do when touched by the fingers, when 'Thelusson's' cause is to come on. At that magic name you call up all the Court of Chancery.

In the novel,

Eighteen of Mr. Tangle's learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers in a pianoforte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity.⁷⁶

Condemnation in 1833 was general:

when one reads such a statement as this, one cannot deny that some immediate change in the system of the Court of Chancery is indispensably necessary. I find here various items -- monies paid for law expenses -- the total of which amounts to no less a sum than 178,827¹!

This was notable coming as it did from Peel, whose usual cautious response to suggestions for reform was on the lines

75. Bleak House, Chapter 1, p. 9; Mirror, Macaulay, 5 July 1831, p. 349, Ebrington, 10 October 1831, p. 2908.

76. Mirror, Harvey, 31 July 1833, p. 3440; Bleak House, Chapter 1, p. 9.

of 'the time is not ripe, we should not act precipitately', and so on. Other speakers were less inhibited:

I have too often seen the frauds which are committed not only by the officers of the Court, but I had almost said by everybody connected with Chancery business; and I well know how their money is made.

And, perhaps most strikingly, the Solicitor General:

The lawyers, it seems, have sweated this property, of 9,000¹ a-year, for some years past, for their profit.⁷⁷

Bleak House seems bland in comparison with this chorus of parliamentary condemnation, although it is typical of Dickens that he turns there from the legal issues and concentrates on the human consequences of the shortcomings of the system: Richard Carstone, Gridley, Miss Flite. In using a Chancery case as the framework for his novel, Dickens was striking a familiar, even traditional, chord, one which would have been instantly familiar to his readers. He must have been chagrined to find that the facts were actually disputed.⁷⁸ It would clearly be too much to claim that Bleak House is a prime example of Dickens's experience in the thirties bearing important artistic fruit twenty years later, for the reason that Chancery was such a well-worn topic, as its presence in Pickwick readily testifies.⁷⁹

On other issues surveyed here, to summarise, Dickens went

77. Mirror, 31 July 1833: Peel, p. 3441, Taylor, p. 3442, Solicitor General, p. 3440.

78. Bleak House, Preface, p. 3; Nonesuch, II, 481 (7 August 1853, to W.H. Wills).

79. Pickwick Papers, Chapter 31, pp. 510-11, where Watty and Lowten are equivalent to Bleak House in miniature, Chapter 42, pp. 684-87, Chapter 44, pp. 709-12, 717-19.

his own way on the poor law, and on dissent, but followed in the broad stream of progressive thinking in his attitude to the magistracy, and in his hostility to Sunday legislation. He was not well placed to appreciate the arguments in favour of factory legislation, or the inadequacies in the ruling class position on trades unions. It could be said that he adopted the ideas with which he came into contact, unless he saw good reason to do otherwise -- a conclusion which is not surprising, but which suggests that we always need to consider a particular topic individually (as Dickens did), and not make an assumption as to where he might stand on the basis either of what might be expected from his position on other issues, or of a supposed party allegiance.

CHAPTER 8. ISMS.

I have said little in previous pages concerning the movements of opinion which are often supposed to have been prominent in the thirties, and to have shaped the reforming spirit which was undoubtedly characteristic of the age, most notably Benthamism, Malthusianism and political economy. The omission, which will now be rectified, has been deliberate, because it is very easy to exaggerate the importance of such philosophies on the generally pragmatic, non-doctrinaire inclinations of the articulate and ruling classes. The discussion of Whiggery in Chapter 4 is relevant here, and from my reading of the parliamentary debates, particularly, I would argue that John Stuart Mill's perception was accurate when he wrote, feelingly, in 1831:

Any man who has eyes and ears shall be judge whether . . . a person who has never studied politics . . . or political economy systematically, regards himself as any-way precluded thereby from promulgating with the most unbounded assurance the crudest opinions, and taxing men who have made those sciences the occupation of a laborious life, with the most contemptible ignorance and imbecility. It is rather the person who has studied the subject systematically that is disqualified. He is a theorist: and the word which expresses the highest and noblest effort of human intelligence is turned into a bye-word of derision. People pride themselves upon taking a 'plain, matter-of-fact' view of society.¹

1. John Stuart Mill, The Spirit of the Age, p. 21 (Exr., 23 January 1831).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Bulwer in 1833, and he went on to discuss the case of the recently deceased Bentham:

Through a long life the great Bentham struggled against the neglect of the British public -- in vain he was consulted by foreign states -- in vain he was extolled by philosophers, and pillaged by lawyers. He was an innovator, who wrote against received customs of thinking, and that was sufficient to prevent his being read. Even now, when so many quote his name as if they had his works by heart, how few have ever opened them.²

Little has changed concerning that last comment in a century and a half. In general I find myself in agreement with the contention that Bentham's influence has been exaggerated, through the work of Dicey and Halévy, and even where it seems most in evidence it can still be questioned: thus Anthony Brundage has argued persuasively that 'the New Poor Law was nonrevolutionary and owed little to Bentham'.³

Humphry House has stated that 'Dickens only mentioned Bentham once in all his written work', that being an incidental reference in the last novel, Edwin Drood.⁴ His name appears only slightly more frequently in the sources under review. The True Sun, however, was enthusiastic; by way of confirmation of Bulwer's remarks as quoted above, it saw him

2. Edward Bulwer-Lytton, England and the English, I, 62.

3. Anthony Brundage, The Making of the New Poor Law, p. 182, and see also pp. 14, 181-83; but it has been suggested that the Poor Law Commission's early workhouse designs were derived from the Panopticon, although rarely used since old buildings were normally utilised: Thomas Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, p. 46. See also G. Kitson Clark, The Making of Victorian England, pp. 19-20; George Watson, The English Ideology, pp. 11-12, 38-39, 227.

4. The Dickens World, p. 38; The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Chapter 16, p. 144.

as a prophet without honour in his own country, by whose system, 'alone, one day, and that no distant one, mankind will suffer themselves to be ruled'. He had 'devoted his long and blameless life . . . to the extension of principles, which in their adoption, are calculated to elevate and dignify our nature'. The report of Bentham's death, coinciding with the final passing of the Reform Bill, saw that measure as peculiarly his legacy, and the application of his principle of utility as even more fruitful in politics than in jurisprudence.⁵

Bentham's name was rarely mentioned in Parliament. The only references I noted in the Reform Bill debates were uncomplimentary, one speaker referring to 'a knot of Benthamites and Westminster philosophers, a set of men claiming to interfere with, though justly meriting the contempt and scorn of the whole world -- of a school, the very pest of human society'. My guess would have to be that this represented the majority sentiment. There were occasional approving references from radicals later, but with a notable absence from discussions on the criminal code.⁶ To the ever moder-

5. True Sun, 26 March 1832; 15 May 1832; 7 June 1832.

6. Mirror, Gurney, 15 July 1831, p. 601; see also Praed, 8 March 1831, p. 748; Hume, 7 February 1833, p. 91 (as 'that venerable, and, I hope, venerated man', on the reluctance of governments to lower taxes 'unless the people call upon and force them to do so'); Roebuck, 22 April 1833, p. 1354 (on the imprisonment of Richard Carlile, allegedly for holding opinions including that quoted by Hume above), rebutted by Hardy, p. 1355; O'Connell, 25 April 1833, p. 1460 (quoting 'the great mind' of 'the illustrious Bentham' on the ballot -- but it would be inappropriate to describe O'Connell as a Benthamite); Brougham, 17 June 1833, p. 2351 (on taxing law proceedings, and going on to contradict himself); Hume, 7 March 1834, p. 596 (Bentham's Book of Fallacies shows Graham's

ate Monthly Magazine, Bentham was 'possessed of commanding talents' for codification but 'was too full of prejudices to take high grade in moral or political philosophy'. The Morning Chronicle's obituary was not greatly enthusiastic, its principal point being the difficulties of preparing his work for publication, although it reprinted a warmer notice from the Globe the next day which was particularly approving of his work in jurisprudence.⁷

I noted but a handful of direct allusions to Bentham in the Chronicle during the period of over two years when Dickens was working for it; the last such reference gave a long extract from the Scotsman, welcoming the news that Bentham's works were to be published, but finding him 'a shallow moralist', poor in practical politics, where his 'one idea' needed to be modified, since 'the sources of pleasure are not identical with different men'.⁸ Of course, influence is not simply a matter of direct reference, and the Chronicle's editorial voice was not always consistent. No doubt in the many columns of unrelieved small print I overlooked some allusions and misunderstood the significance of others; but when due allowance is made, the Chronicle, on internal evi-

speech to have been 'a mere string of fallacies'); Hill, 22 May 1834, p. 1839 (quoted below, p. 270).

7. Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), p. 42; Mng. Chr., 7, 8 June 1832.
8. Mng. Chr., 27 October 1836; see also 6 April 1835 (on the temporalities of the church); 11 May 1835 (on popular control of the magistracy); 16 September 1835 (on the constitution); 8 October 1835 (on the necessity for a second legislative Chamber); 11 January 1836 (as 'a commentator on BLACKSTONE'); 29 June 1836 (incidental reference by a correspondent).

dence, would definitely have to be designated 'ministerialist' and not 'Benthamite' -- and, as outlined in Chapter 4, that was the way contemporaries saw it too.

The questioning spirit of Bentham was more continuously present in the Examiner, edited as it was by Fonblanque, and with a tradition dating back to the Regency period, when, under Leigh Hunt, it became one of Bentham's earliest supporters.⁹ But even here a qualification must be entered, for I have mentioned in Chapter 5 that the Examiner was becoming more Whiggish in the late thirties. Thus although Fonblanque named a son, unenviably, 'Bentham' in 1830, and the Examiner continued to refer to Bentham himself with respect, and to quote him with some frequency, it was definitely becoming distanced from the philosophic radicals as represented by the Westminster Review by the time that Dickens first contributed to its pages.¹⁰

In addition to Fonblanque, Dickens certainly knew others who had known Bentham: Chadwick, Bowring (slightly), and, most intimately, Southwood Smith, to whom Bentham paid the possibly unique compliment of the bequest of his body. Forster probably never met Bentham, but the importance here of

9. James R. Thompson, Leigh Hunt, p. 84; Carl R. Woodring, 'Introduction', Lawrence Huston Houtchens and Carolyn Washburn Houtchens, eds., Leigh Hunt's Political and Occasional Essays, pp. 40-41.

10. E.B. de Fonblanque, 'Memoir of Albany Fonblanque', in The Life and Labours of Albany Fonblanque, pp. 45, 20-21, 30-31, 35; The Earlier Letters of John Stuart Mill, 1812-1848, pp. 369-71 (30 January 1838), 372-77 (3, 6, 7 February 1838); Exr., 16 April 1837, long quotation from London and Westminster Review suggesting that Fonblanque has become more of a ministerialist than a reformer.

Dickens's best friend should not be under-estimated, distinctly radical as he was in the thirties, a regular contributor to the Examiner some time before Dickens, and, at least at the time of the Reform Bill crisis, 'always discussing politics'. Also, John Macrone, publisher of the Sketches by Boz, published the London and Westminster Review in 1836-37.¹¹

But these do not amount to Benthamite influences acting systematically on Dickens at a philosophical, or intellectual, level, as a comparison of the significance of Bentham in the development of John Stuart Mill will readily suggest. Instead they are dilute, diffuse and indirect; and the general importance of Bentham on the thought of the period is not easy to assess. An incidental, but illuminating, difficulty in this area is the word 'utility', which was current in the vocabulary of contemporary political discourse. It is often difficult to tell whether such usage is derived, however weakly, from Bentham, or whether it is an instance of the word having an independent life of its own, as synonymous with 'usefulness' and shading into 'public policy'.¹²

What is pointed to here is that Bentham's importance, on Dickens as on others, was a general one, and indeed it has been suggested that 'Benthamism remains one of the prevalent modes of thought among intellectuals and politicians in Eng-

11. Mrs. Forster to Whitwell Elwin, 18 December 1879, quoted in James A. Davies, John Forster: A Literary Life, p. 10; Pilgrim, I, 81, n. 1.

12. Thus, in the Chronicle, 'making utility the test of all our establishments' appears Benthamic, but, a few days later, 'paramount considerations of national utility' does not, 21 August, 2 September 1835.

land even today'.¹³ Certainly it is difficult to imagine a government or a political party, at least in Britain, which would not proclaim that it is in favour of the greatest happiness of the greatest number (possibly they order these things differently elsewhere). Presumably the Benthamite would not wish to counter the claim that 'People must be amused' -- but whether that establishes the inadequacy of Dickens's satire, or that his target was not Bentham at all, is not easy to say.¹⁴ Utilitarianism, indeed, can seem little more than an elaborated truism, which makes it the more difficult to clarify its precise importance.

There is no doubt that both in a narrow party sense, and more broadly, Toryism and Whiggery were the predominate tendencies in the political, cultural and intellectual life of the early nineteenth century, rather than what has sometimes been called 'the utilitarian temper'. A telling point here is that the circulation of the Westminster Review was never more than a fraction of that of the Quarterly or the Edinburgh or Blackwood's.¹⁵ Dickens of course was nearest to the Whig Edinburgh, through Jeffrey and Russell and Sidney Smith, without ever making his promised contribution.¹⁶ The Westminster Review was the organ of a sect (and as such its

13. James Steintrager, Bentham, p. 13 (quoting the late Sir Dennis Brogan); see also J.R.M. Butler, The Passing of the Great Reform Bill, pp. 42-43.

14. Hard Times, III, viii, 222.

15. R.G. Cox, 'The Reviews and Magazines', pp. 189, 191-92.

16. 'Curious Misprint in the "Edinburgh Review"', Misc. P., II, 147 (HW, 1 August 1857); Philip Collins, 'Dickens and the Edinburgh Review'.

members would have had a high take-up rate of the party paper); the other great influential reviews articulated mainstream opinion.

That perhaps puts the matter too strongly, for there is no doubt that Bentham's influence extended beyond those who might be regarded as Benthamites. His importance was, in John Stuart Mill's words, as 'the great questioner of things established', and his contribution was to the quite rapid development of a new way of looking at the institutions of society which followed the passing of the Reform Bill (and his own death), and which had been little anticipated in the preceding years.¹⁷ This new atmosphere was becoming established just as Dickens started his work in Parliament. The idea of reform became not only accepted but the norm, and it was possible to be a reformer, even an ardent reformer, whilst remaining securely within the pale of respectability. In this very general sense Dickens was a Benthamite; and so were most of his countrymen. But that is not to say that Bentham was responsible for the prevailing habit of mind.

Bentham's influence was undoubtedly greatest in the area where his work was most extensive -- legal reform. The tradition was stronger in the Examiner than the Chronicle, and filtered through to Dickens from these sources. But even when he strikes a Benthamic note, it may not be maintained for long, for instance in his reference to the 'dreadful old clap-trap' of 'an Englishman's respect for the Law', where his argument develops into some injudicious remarks on

17. John Stuart Mill, 'Bentham', p. 78.

the merits of taking direct action, and not waiting upon forms.¹⁸ His thought and Bentham's coalesce more nearly in the passage in American Notes where he compares favourably the relative simplicity of American law courts to 'the paraphernalia of Westminster Hall' and 'our legal solemnities'. Superficially allied to Benthamism is Dickens's concern with prisons, as also amply demonstrated in American Notes; but there are so many other references that we would begin to suspect that the obsession had its roots in some personal factor even if we knew nothing about Dickens's life. The widely divergent motivations of the imaginative artist and the philosopher are illustrated through this coincidence of interest. On one occasion in American Notes Dickens describes a jail where the system of constant surveillance is reminiscent of the Panopticon -- but he had quite possibly never heard of this pet project of Bentham's, the one to which he devoted many years of his life.¹⁹

Humphry House suggested, in the context of a discussion of Hard Times, that Dickens 'did not understand enough of any philosophy even to be able to guy it successfully'.²⁰ As far as Benthamism is concerned, he would not have been alone in that, but it is possible to get a little closer to the question of how he might have regarded the philosophical base of Bentham's system. It seems likely that if he had ever

18. 'Murderous Extremes', Misc. P., II, 127 (HW, 3 January 1857).

19. American Notes, Chapter 3, pp. 103; 105; 102-03; Mackay, A History of the English Poor Law, p. 44; Steintrager, pp. 58, 78-82.

20. The Dickens World, p. 205.

come to grips with the concept of the felicific calculus, he would have rejected it, at least as a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive, device. To quote again from the American Notes:

Is it the interest of any man to steal, to game, to waste his health and mental faculties by drunkenness, to lie, forswear himself, indulge hatred, seek desperate revenge, or do murder? No. All these are roads to ruin. And why, then, do men tread them? Because such inclinations are among the vicious qualities of mankind.

This is much closer to Dostoyevsky than to Bentham, and indeed the view may be one which the novelist finds dictated to him by his vocation. It means, of course, that Bentham, sometimes seen as a desiccated calculating machine (not an original phrase), had a much more optimistic, affirmative, even joyous and naive, view of human nature than Dickens, whose bleaker vision is latent often in his fiction, and articulated occasionally -- the Landlady of the Break of Day is a famous example. Dickens continued to hold his view at a conscious level; some twenty years after publishing American Notes he wrote to W.H. Wills concerning the Manchester School's 'pig-headed reliance on men's not going to war against their interest. As if the vices and passions of men had not been running counter to their interests since the Creation of the World!'²¹ Jeremy Bentham could never have invented Jonas Chuzzlewit or Bradley Headstone.

The last quotation serves also to introduce the second main topic to be explored in this chapter, that of political

21. American Notes, Chapter 17, p. 271; Little Dorrit, I, xi, 120-22; Nonesuch, III, 321 (25 November 1862).

economy. Here the comment that 'The old canard that equated Benthamism with individualism or laissez-faire is of course no longer accepted' does not seem to have filtered through to what has sardonically been called 'Eng. Lit. History', at least if discussion of Hard Times is any guide. Thus the Editors of the Norton Critical Edition write that 'Theoretically . . . Bentham and his followers were committed to the economic point of view of Adam Smith, that man is a self-seeking creature who thrives best when no one interferes to regulate his activities'.²² George Watson would insist that the comment is a grotesque parody of 'classical' economics, and it is clear that formally Benthamism implied neither laissez-faire economics nor state intervention. There has been much discussion of the question which ultimately I find largely empty since Bentham was not greatly concerned with economic affairs.²³ Certainly in the eighteen thirties the

22. William O. Aydelotte, 'The Conservative and Radical Interpretations of Early Victorian Social Legislation', p. 228; John Vincent, 'Literary Victorians', p. 384; Hard Times, p. 315. See also George Watson, The English Ideology, p. 227.

23. Watson, pp. 67-70, 80-84. For the debate concerning Bentham and laissez-faire, and on utilitarianism generally, I have also consulted Bentham's Political Thought, ed. Bhikhu Parekh; J. Bartlet Brebner, 'Laissez Faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-Century Britain'; Elie Halévy, The Triumph of Reform: 1830-1841, p. 322; Elie Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism; Robert Lekachman, A History of Economic Ideas, Chapter 5; Oliver MacDonagh, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal'; Henry Parris, 'The Nineteenth-Century Revolution in Government: A Reappraisal Reappraised'; David Roberts, 'Jeremy Bentham and the Victorian Administrative State'; Harold J. Schultz, ed., English Liberalism and the State; Pedro Schwartz, 'Jeremy Bentham's Brave New World' (broadcast talk); Steintrager, Chapter III; Arthur J. Taylor, Laissez-faire and State Intervention in Nineteenth-century Britain; Jacob Viner, 'Bentham and J.S. Mill: The Utilitarian Background'.

True Sun was able to combine with no sense of strain enthusiasm for Bentham with great hostility to free trade and political economy.²⁴

Discussion of Bentham and laissez-faire is misplaced more grievously in that it exaggerates the importance of both. George Watson has argued that the view that 'laissez-faire' economics were dominant in the early nineteenth century is a myth, and my own reading would confirm that the term, Frenchified as it is, was not current, and that the attitude was not prevalent.²⁵ In John Stuart Mill's Principles of Political Economy discussion of the idea forms the last chapter (of eleven) in the last book (of five). That suggests its importance relative to the subject of political economy, the standing of which as a discipline is worthy of some consideration. It is a topic on which Dickens was to hold definite views.

The Monthly Magazine wavered in its attitude. It was critical of Harriet Martineau for denying 'that every thing born in a state has a right to support from the State', but later it upheld the value of the study of political economy. Later again it was bitterly critical of those political economists 'who, when told of misery and distress -- of crime and wide-spreading immorality, existing in many rural and manufacturing districts, admit the fact, but bristle up with

24. True Sun, 17 March, 4, 20, 25 April, 31 August, 20, 24, 30 October, 6, 13 November, 24 December 1832.

25. Watson states that the term 'laissez-faire' does not appear in the published works of Adam Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, McCulloch, Bentham or Nassau Senior, or in the parliamentary debates on free trade in 1846, pp. 69, 68, n. 1; and see Chapter 5 generally.

indignation, and accuse the poor creatures of imprudence, and throw the entire onus of blame upon their own shoulders'. This article, entitled 'The Rights of the Poor', is adjacent to Dickens's concern as manifested in, for instance, The Chimes, but the terms of the discussion are unusual for the period.²⁶

The view that political economy was regarded as a received body of doctrine cannot be sustained from the sources consulted. Ultra-radicals were predictably hostile to it, as they were to the Poor Law Amendment Act; O'Connor called political economy a 'black art', and it was abominated by Harvey. The True Sun declared that free trade constituted a fraud upon the labouring classes, since it 'lessens the value of native labour, and by consequence, its reward', and is thus 'of advantage, only to those who do not labour'.²⁷ But members of the ruling class were equally antagonistic, if for different reasons. A supporter of the Reform Bill considered that 'one of the reasons why political economy has fallen into such disrepute is, because the lucubrations of the closet and the lessons of theory have not been justified by the test of experience'.²⁸ The continuance of the corn laws despite persistent attack until 1846 is evidence of the strong resistance to political economy during the earlier

26. Mly. Mag., XV (January 1833), p. 60; XVII (May 1834), pp. 457-70; XVIII (July 1834), p. 81.

27. Mirror, O'Connor, 6 March 1834, p. 556; Harvey, 2 May 1833, p. 1569; True Sun, 24 December 1832.

28. Mirror, Vernon, 5 July 1831, p. 337; see also 2 May 1833, p. 1573, 6 March 1834, p. 541; Mng. Chr., 7 July 1835, 25 March, 28 April 1836.

period. Graham, speaking for the Government in 1834, contended that revision of the corn laws (abolition was not proposed) would lead to 'the annihilation of the immense body of agricultural labourers'; indeed, it 'would be the destruction of the State itself'.²⁹

Extravagance of expression was also to be found on the other side of the question. Dickens reported a 'Great Public Meeting' at Birmingham in December 1834, when one speaker described the corn laws as 'the most unjust, the most iniquitous, the most arbitrary, and the most oppressive measure to which a nation was ever exposed'. Dickens was probably the reporter of 'A very respectable meeting' the following week at Southwark where the corn laws were denounced yet more vehemently, as 'the sin of sins', 'a fruitful and fertile source of evil', 'a tax on the blessings of Providence, and a species of practical blasphemy against the Giver of all good'.³⁰ But editorially the Chronicle spoke with more than one voice, attacking the corn laws when discussing them in the abstract, but finding practical difficulties when considering actual legislation.³¹

What these various remarks suggest is that Dickens's understanding of the precepts of political economy, and his contact with the principles of free trade, would have been irregular and unsystematic prior to his brief editorship of

29. Mirror, 6 March 1834, pp. 549, 556. Graham had so far modified his opinion by 1846 as to be amongst those who followed Peel.

30. Mng. Chr., 1, 5 December 1834; Pilgrim, I, 46, 49.

31. Mng. Chr., 15 October, 20 November 1835, 25 April, 8 April 1836.

the Daily News in 1846. By that time repeal of the corn laws had become inevitable, and it was equally inevitable that someone of Dickens's class should be opposed to them, even if, so to speak, he knew little about the subject.

J.T. Danson wrote, many years later, from the informed position of leader writer for the Daily News on such questions, and remembered Dickens's editorship in these terms: 'of political Economy, or of political finance, he knew nothing', adding that although Dickens had general ideas, he 'never would discuss any topic properly within the limits of my department'.³²

The view, unflattering as it is, can be supported from one of Dickens's articles on the Drouet scandal not long afterwards, where he writes, with conspicuously inadequate vagueness, of 'the toiling multitudes, on whom social irregularities impossible to be avoided, and complicated commercial circumstances difficult to be explained to them, pressed heavily'.³³ Also, the Daily News was founded as a liberal paper, to propagate the values of free trade and individualism, whereas Dickens's thinking in the late forties was moving in the direction of the need for greater governmental action, in marked distinction to 'the chronic, cheese-paring, tax-cutting compulsion of Victorian Liberals'.³⁴

Two remarks to Forster, one on each side of the Daily

32. 'Charles Dickens as I knew him' (January 1895), ed. K.J. Fielding, 'Dickens as J.T. Danson knew him', pp. 156, 157.

33. 'The Tooting Farm', Misc. P., I, 159 (Exr., 27 January 1849).

34. David Owen, The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889, p. 96.

News episode, establish Dickens's hostility to political economy. When revisions to The Chimes were under consideration, Forster was told to 'bear in mind that the Westminster Review considered Scrooge's presentation of the turkey to Bob Cratchit as grossly incompatible with political economy' (a joke might be suspected had not the Pilgrim editors diligently searched out the source). Later Dickens commented on 'the genteel politico-economical principle that a surplus population must and ought to starve', but was, I think, rather wide of the mark in ascribing this to the failure to promote emigration, for this was one of the few practical nostrums which political economists had to offer.³⁵

John Hollingshead confirmed that Dickens 'had very little sympathy with political economy', but noted, in acknowledgment of Dickens's business acumen, that 'political economy, if it governed nothing else in Wellington Street, certainly governed (and very properly, too) the business conduct of the journal'.³⁶ Dickens himself made several relatively considered remarks concerning political economy in the fifties, but they are always expressed in general terms, affording confirmation of Danson's claim that he was unable to comment on particular issues. Charles Knight wrote guardedly, during Dickens's lifetime, that 'I have sometimes thought that he bore too hardly upon those who held that the great truths of political economy . . . were not an insufficient

35. Pilgrim, IV, 209 ([?1-2 November 1844]) and n. 4, 609 ([24, 25 August 1846]); R.K. Webb, The British Working Class Reader, p. 110.

36. John Hollingshead, My Lifetime, I, 72, 116.

foundation for the improvement of society', and printed a letter from Dickens explaining Hard Times:

My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else -- the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time -- the men who, through long years to come, will do more to damage the really useful truths of political economy, than I could do (if I tried) in my whole life . . .

He then goes on to give two examples, which are concerned only with facile illustrations of the misuse of averages. The criticism of political economy is insufficient, much as, in Humphry House's words, 'the satire of Mr. Gradgrind is comparatively ineffective; for Dickens . . . is only attacking the excessive emphasis on statistics; . . . and he seems to have no uneasiness about whether such satire is adequate or important'.³⁷

Dickens's letter was prompted by Knight's fear 'that he would set me down as a cold-hearted political economist'. He had reason for his apprehension, presumably unknown to Dickens, for in 1830, in 'a justly famous passage', he had explained to workers the course prescribed by political economy when times were indeed hard:

When there is too much labour in the market, and wages are too low, do not combine to raise the wages; do not combine with the vain hope of compelling the employer to pay more for labour than there are funds for maintenance of labour; but go out of the market . . . You have in too many cases, nothing but your labour for your support. We say to you, get something else; acquire something to fall back upon. When there is a glut of labour go at once out of the market; become yourselves capitalists.

It is as well to have one example of this type before us (and

37. Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life (1864-65), III, 187, 188; House, The Dickens World, p. 208.

Harriet Martineau's Tales differ only in their nastier moral tone), before considering one or two of Dickens's comments on political economy, which, if never profound, are still some distance from this level of 'singular infelicity' (to quote the Quarterly Review).³⁸

In 'On Strike' (1854) Dickens writes that 'political economy is a mere skeleton unless it has a little human covering and filling out, a little human bloom upon it, and a little human warmth in it'. In this piece the argument seems insufficient, probably through Dickens's unsuccessful attempt to be oracular in the face of his antagonist's questioning in the opening pages, which reads very like evasion. The same point is argued in 1856 with greater force in concluding Dickens's powerful exposure of the inadequacies of the poor law, 'A Nightly Scene in London', which shows that, however insecure his qualifications as a theoretician, his instincts remained sure:

I know that the unreasonable disciples of a reasonable school, demented disciples who push arithmetic and political economy beyond all bounds of sense (not to speak of such a weakness as humanity), and hold them to be all-sufficient for every case, can easily prove that such things ought to be, and that no man has any business to mind them. Without disparaging those indispensable sciences in their sanity, I utterly renounce and abominate them in their insanity; and I address people with a respect for the spirit of the New Testament, who do mind such things, and who think them infamous in our streets.³⁹

38. Knight, III, 187; Webb, p. 119, quoting Charles Knight, Results of Machinery . . . (1830) and Quarterly Review, XLVI (January 1832), pp. 381-86.

39. 'On Strike', Misc. P., I, 466 (HW, 11 February 1854), and see also p. 454; 'A Nightly Scene in London', Misc. P., II, 91 (HW, 26 January 1856).

Dickens, it seems clear, attempted to maintain a middle course between the committed supporters of political economy and its ardent opponents. His attitude could be variously regarded as facile, hazy, evasive or astute. Almost certainly it was unusual: as on other issues, he was his own man. The subject was, it has been suggested, 'probably the most clear-cut intellectual issue between the two classes' (that is, the middle and working classes), and it is not too surprising if Dickens, with a readership that crossed class barriers, was reluctant to take up a position which would have placed him in direct opposition to either side.⁴⁰ We do not find him, for instance, supporting the views of working class opponents such as the Poor Man's Guardian: 'political economy means nothing more or less than this -- Give up the whole produce of your labour -- fill everybody's cupboard but your own -- and then starve quietly!' But he is yet further distanced from those supporters by whom 'political economy was put forward as a science and accepted as such, often with the implication that it was as completely established and as unchangeable as the conclusions of Newton'.⁴¹

Dickens's background in the thirties, when the pretensions of political economy were not generally conceded, might lead to the supposition that he was not fully aware of the large claims which were made, except that the terms of his remarks suggest that this was exactly the point which he was

40. Webb, p. 100.

41. Poor Man's Guardian, 7 January 1832, quoted by R.K. Webb, Harriet Martineau: A Radical Victorian, pp. 103-04; Webb, The British Working Class Reader, p. 98.

disputing. It marks him as more shrewd than many of his contemporaries in his approach to social questions; his later comment to the effect that he believed in phrenology, palm-reading and physiognomy, 'though all these sciences demand rare qualities in the student' is in the same vein (he might have added mesmerism), dubious though these other Victorian activities now appear.⁴²

If Dickens never developed a philosophic commitment to a political ideology, he was in good company. To Lord John Russell, 'political economy is an awful thing', and, later, 'I am disposed to say, "Let us first be Englishmen, and then economists"'. Althorp believed that any system of poor laws or of private charity was in contravention of 'the strict principles of political economy', which did not prevent him from introducing the Poor Law Amendment Act.⁴³ The low standing of political economy in the thirties is confirmed by Brougham's speech when moving the Second Reading of the poor law Bill in the Lords. He referred, in remarks which echo my opening quotation from Mill, to 'the outcry set up against the Report as a thing framed by theorists and visionaries, and to sum up all in one word of vituperation, political economists; that is the grand word of reproach'.⁴⁴ The remark was typical only of the speaker, whose days in office

42. Unc. T., Chapter 33, p. 333.

43. Russell, Essays on Life and Character, p. 125, English Constitution, p. 295, both quoted in Spencer Walpole, The Life of Lord John Russell, I, 366; Mirror, Althorp, 17 April 1834, p. 1091.

44. Mirror, 21 July 1834, p. 2823.

were numbered. Far-reaching as the Poor Law Amendment Act might seem, one assistant commissioner later believed it to represent only half measures. The major impediment to thorough-going reform, he declared, was

the peculiar character of the English people. Of all nations which have been remarkable in the history of the world, they have manifested the most singular backwardness in carrying out principles to their remote legitimate consequences. They always stop short, and rest content with realizing a moderate practical good, leaving it to men whom they call theorists to point out greater advantages within their reach.⁴⁵

When Grey observed, to repeat a quotation from Chapter 4, 'I have all my life hated the discussion of abstract principles', he spoke for many beyond his own administration. Parliamentary speakers of both parties consistently abjured what was variously referred to as 'political philosophy', 'abstract philosophy', 'philosophers of the present day', 'abstract principles', an 'abstract proposition', 'speculative theories', 'speculative humanity', and the 'doctrinaire', a list which makes no claim to be exhaustive.⁴⁶ To disclaim ideology was the orthodox parliamentary ideology.

But precedent was appealed to fairly often, as were certain recognised authorities. In the view of one speaker this was done too readily:

45. Edward Twistleton to the Poor Law Commission, 4 November 1839, quoted in Brundage, The Making of the New Poor Law, p. 179.

46. Mirror, Grey, 6 June 1834, p. 2078 (see above, p. 136), Matthias Attwood, 22 April 1833, p. 1357, Graham, 6 March 1834, p. 550, Suffield, 25 June 1833, p. 2541, Stanley, 30 July 1833, p. 3433, Ripon, 25 June 1833, p. 2533, Cobbett, 17 August 1833, p. 3898, Richards, 6 March 1834, p. 557.

What a small fraction of the community must it be which draws its opinions from Locke, or Paley, or Burke, or Bentham, or any of the great political writers of this or of other countries; nay how few are there even among ourselves, who can boast of having made politics a severe and systematic study? We round our periods with great names; but we draw our opinions from humbler sources.⁴⁷

In fact, this exaggerates the extent to which great names were invoked. Of those mentioned, the only one which was cited with any degree of regularity was that of Burke, particularly on constitutional subjects. I make no claim to having conducted an exhaustive search, but in a period of over two years, I did not note that Locke was mentioned at all, and Paley once or twice at most; I have referred already to the paucity of references to Bentham. Adam Smith was mentioned occasionally, sometimes in surprising contexts (once in defence of the corn laws), and Malthus was appealed to remarkably rarely, sometimes being omitted in contexts where his name might have been expected. Ricardo was cited on economic affairs occasionally, and Huskisson rather more readily.⁴⁸ In other words, the authorities most often men-

47. Mirror, Hill, 22 May 1834, p. 1839.

48. Mirror, on Burke: Brougham, 12 August 1833, p. 3692, Davies, 15 May 1834, p. 1750, the Attorney General, 12 June 1834, p. 2190 (and elsewhere); on Adam Smith: Spring Rice, 21 May 1833, p. 1900 (as 'the great father of economical science'), Buller, 30 July 1833, p. 3435, Richards, 6 March 1834, p. 557; concerning Malthus: not mentioned by Graham, 6 March 1834, p. 550, by Darlington, 7 March 1834, p. 576, eulogised by Brougham, 21 July 1834, p. 2820, denigrated by Cobbett, 11 August 1834, p. 3354, as the inspirer of Carlile's Every Woman's Book, 'which for the last six or seven years has been openly exposed for sale' recommending 'the infamous and disgusting practice' of birth control; on Ricardo: Warburton, 2 July 1834, p. 2580, Baring, 7 July 1834, p. 2667; on Huskisson: Clay, 6 March 1834, p. 560, 5 June 1834, p. 2052, Sandford, 19 June 1834, p. 2304 (and elsewhere).

tioned in Parliament (and these but rarely) were those who had been parliamentarians: Burke and Huskisson (and also Ricardo). But such reference, where it occurred, was incidental, casual and unsystematic; rarely indeed did it represent the application of a consistent ideology. Dickens's lack of formal training in the theory and practice of ideas paralleled that of the leaders of society whom he reported, and such sources as they used were, for the most part, as accessible to him as they were to them. There is also remarkably little evidence of the classical education which, presumably, most parliamentarians had enjoyed, or suffered.

When Dickens wrote his amusing plea for moderation rather than zeal, 'Whole Hogs', he was neither bold nor original, although it is typical of his method that he there satirises excess through his own exaggeration. The later 'Frauds on the Fairies' is less successful, through a failure of control -- Dickens does not stick to a few well-chosen targets.⁴⁹ The thrust of the irony here is against an ideologically committed fiction, although Dickens would not have seen the matter in these terms, and it could be argued that the idea is at odds with his practice. It is the refusal to adhere to a systematic philosophy which is important, and probably a necessary condition for the creation of some of the greatest works of imaginative literature in the language. Dickens's fiction is enormously superior to Harriet Martineau's in purely literary qualities, never mind the extent to

49. 'Whole Hogs', Misc. P., I, 346-52 (HW, 23 August 1851); 'Frauds on the Fairies', Misc. P., I, 435-42 (HW, 1 October 1853).

which their respective ideas have found general acceptance. His plain, no-nonsense, common-sense approach is derived from within a securely established tradition of non-theoretical pragmatism. It aligned him, probably to a greater extent than he realised, with prevailing ruling class inclinations and practices, a tradition which he well summarised himself in a letter in 1844: 'Isms! Oh Heaven for a world without an ism'.⁵⁰

50. Pilgrim, IV, 114 (27 April 1844, to Mrs. Talfourd).

CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION.

In my first chapters I attempted to convey something of the character of the periodicals with which Dickens was associated in his early adulthood, and drew attention to the ways in which his attitudes diverged from theirs. He was not an ultra-radical like the True Sun, or an apologist for the government like the Morning Chronicle, and, although he shared something of the broad Whiggery of the latter, he was never a party man, or a supporter of the aristocracy. In some respects he was close to the Examiner, but he did not share either that journal's consistent and principled opposition to the 'taxes on knowledge', or its support of the Poor Law Amendment Act -- but neither is he to be identified with the various factions opposed to that measure. On the whole Dickens seems to be closest to the Monthly Magazine, which published his first sketches, even to the extent that public affairs were secondary to literature in its pages.

As with Carlyle, affinities between Dickens and these several journals are not difficult to discern; direct influence is less easy to establish, as William Oddie was aware in studying the relationship between the nineteenth century's foremost sage and greatest novelist. He observed that Dickens's 'response to his age was such that the vitality of his novels does not compellingly need to be explained by any

other frame of reference than that supplied by his own direct experience of his world', and he rightly determined on a circumspect approach.¹ All contextual studies are (at least potentially) helpful, and understanding of Dickens is undoubtedly enlarged through the materials which are the subject of the present survey, if only because they speak to us so directly with, at any rate, a part of the authentic voice of the time. Dickens's imagination lived in the past, and the early thirties were, in important respects, different from the mid-Victorian era when his greatest novels were written.

But there is a further value to be derived from an awareness of the character of these publications: it might be argued that an amalgam of them goes a fair way towards delineating Dickens's position on public affairs, and a case could be made out for suggesting that the proportions would need to be broadly in line with the extent of his involvement -- a good deal more of the Whiggery of the Chronicle than of the ultra-radicalism of the True Sun, not forgetting a dash of Toryism from the Carlton Chronicle, and bearing in mind that he contributed to the moderately reformist Monthly Magazine for over a year. For good measure, the liberalism of the Daily News in 1846 would need to be remembered. Two exceptions would be necessary: Dickens's contributions to the sporting paper Bell's Life in London would have to be seen as aberration founded on cupidity, and he emphatically did not share the premiss upon which the Mirror of Parliament

1. William Oddie, Dickens and Carlyle: The Question of Influence, p. 3.

was sustained, that the reporting of Parliament was in itself a worthwhile activity. Taken together, these various periodicals represent a spread of opinion which should not be under-estimated.

But there are limitations too. These years represented Dickens's first systematic exposure to the expression of opinion on public affairs, and it is impressive, on the whole, to find how far he later achieved and maintained an independence of view on such social issues as the poor law, crime, and education. On some questions -- the magistracy, Sunday legislation and Chancery -- he was less original, and followed the broad stream of reformist opinion. In other areas, notably labour questions, the relations between the classes, and the position of the Established Church, it is arguable that there was an unconscious absorption of influence such that Dickens was unaware that there were widely held views which were significantly under-represented in the parliamentary debates and in the Morning Chronicle.

On these issues, and more generally, there is a conformity, an orthodoxy of approach, behind Dickens's expressed opinions which is not to be found in some of his contemporaries. Philip Collins has pointed out that, unlike such broadly representative (if individual) and politically conscious figures as Bright, Cobden, and John Stuart Mill, 'Dickens never put, or found, himself, as they sometimes did, out on a limb, at odds with the great majority of their fellow-countrymen'.² This comparison with Dickens would

2. 'Dickens the Citizen', p. 73.

hold equally good of Carlyle, Jerrold and Fonblanque, from amongst the more politically aware of his personal acquaintance. It might reasonably be said that because Dickens did not care to put himself in opposition to mainstream opinion, for whatever reason, that does not mean that he did not hold, privately, strong views. No doubt on many issues he did, and expressed himself forcefully too; and yet one cannot find, for instance, amongst his letters or known anonymous journalism the considerable exasperation with the Whigs in the mid-thirties which bursts forth from time to time in the diaries of Macready, who also commented that Dickens's 'views on politics and religion seem very much to square with mine'.³ But Macready did not work on a Whig newspaper for over two years.

The direct literary legacy of the period with which I have been concerned is not large, and probably constitutes one reason for the comparative neglect of this stage of Dickens's life in research. No journalist or editor plays a significant part in any of the novels, and Dickens never directly utilised his knowledge -- which must have been considerable -- of the aspect and workings of a newspaper office. Again, there is little apparent awareness of the press as a public institution. Pott and Slurk are good fun, and so too are the New York Sewer and the New York Rowdy Journal, but these latter are part of Dickens's satire on America rather than a serious examination of the capacity of the

3. The Diaries of William Charles Macready, II, 75 (20 August 1840); see also I, 148, 223, 236.

press to mould public opinion.⁴

Dickens's five years or so as a reporter must have made him extensively, if indirectly, familiar with politicians, but in the fiction they are consigned to the side-lines, where he would have liked to see their real life counterparts. George Watson summarises: 'Parliament had been part of his life . . . But it was not a part of his imagination. Neither David Copperfield nor the Pip of Great Expectations thinks of trying to enter the Commons, as young men do in Disraeli and Trollope'.⁵ To this should be added that David's ambitions are identical with Dickens's in that he thinks only in terms of leaving Parliament, never to return.

The obvious comparisons with Dickens's comparative neglect of Parliament and politicians are the law and his varied gallery of lawyers, more especially because his view of the baneful consequences of the activities of politicians and lawyers was much on a par. His period of employment in solicitors' offices was considerably less in duration than as a reporter, but it entered much more deeply into the great storehouse of material available for subsequent use. It could be speculated that Dickens's first experiences of work (the blacking warehouse always apart) had a freshness and novelty which was denied to the later period as a reporter. Also, he decided he did not like working in the law and soon left it, whereas he remained as a reporter long after he knew that there were some aspects of the employment -- the pro-

4. Martin Chuzzlewit, Chapter 16, pp. 255-66.

5. George Watson, The English Ideology, p. 140.

longed exposure to politicians, notably -- which he detested. Boredom and antipathy do not make good bases for imaginative re-creation.

I suggested in my Preface that in order to determine whether, and to what extent, Dickens was influenced by the attitudes current in the period under review, it was first necessary to explore what those attitudes were. The idea of the value of reform is the most important legacy, an idea established with the passing of the great Reform Bill which gives to the period its most familiar appellation. Undoubtedly Dickens shared with his epoch the twin beliefs in the value and the possibility of reform. But if we attempt to translate that disposition into particular issues, it becomes difficult to discern a clear pattern. If, for instance, we take the topics of the eight chapters in the useful collection edited by J.T. Ward under the title Popular Movements c. 1830-1850, we find, simplifying, that Dickens was hostile to two (trade unionism and chartism), equivocal on one (the factory movement), indifferent to two (parliamentary reform and Irish agitation) and broadly sympathetic to three (repeal of the corn laws, but not fervently, public health, more determinedly, and opposition to the poor law, but on his own terms). No doubt other issues might be added, on both sides: thus his illiberalism on religious affairs could be balanced against his favourable disposition to education, but when considered all round we do not have here the consistent outlook of the committed principled reformer. On the whole, we have a more useful index of his class identity than of his political leanings. Taken overall, Dickens would qualify

for the favourite term of political approbation of the age: 'independent'.

Dickens's career as parliamentary reporter came at a critical juncture in English public life, and, up to a point, in the development of political and social thinking. He was unimpressed, it seems, by the debates on the Reform Bill, but it is arguable that he was influenced by the prevailing atmosphere more deeply and lastingly than he appreciated. A new way of approaching political and social issues was becoming current, which can perhaps best be summarised as the replacement of a static by a dynamic model of society. Carlyle's early works, notably 'Signs of the Times', written as soon as 1829, are relevant here. It is perhaps true that the debates on the Reform Bill were the last occasion on which it was possible to use the phrase 'the wisdom of our ancestors' neither defensively, nor self-consciously, nor with irony or the contempt which Dickens expressed in the forties for the cognate term, 'the good old times'.⁶

Tories charged that the Reform Bill was founded on the love of change for its own sake, and claimed that as Britain was the most successful society the world had ever seen, the case for innovation had not been made out. The argument was countered by a member of the House of Lords, himself the owner of a borough but a supporter of the Bill. Change, he said, was a grievance, and his feelings as a man of habit were all against it. But, he added, turning back on himself,

6. Pilgrim, III, 481 (3 May 1843, to Jerrold), IV, 601 ([9, 10 August 1846], to Forster). The dummy book-backs are also highly relevant: F.G. Kitton, Charles Dickens: By Pen and Pencil, Supplement, pp. 34-36.

What is the benefit of experience if there is to be no change in the mind? Why we should always remain the same foolish things we were when we were babies. Everything else changes; then why not institutions? . . . To contend against change is to contend against the great necessary principle of existence.⁷

These comments were more reflective than was usual in parliamentary speakers, but to realise that they were made five years before the creation of the timeless certainties of Pickwick is to appreciate again that Dickens was rarely in advance of his age. The dynamic power of social change scarcely enters his fiction before Dombey and Son.

The question of the interplay, the reciprocal relationship, between Dickens and his society remains important. Of the issues mentioned earlier, public health appears to be the one where Dickens's concern was perhaps deepest, and where he might be regarded as the most reliable social commentator. But it must be added for its relevance to the present study that the topic was not prominent in the thirties. Also, a recent historian has maintained that prevailing ideas as to the insalubriousness of Victorian London are a distortion if it is compared with its Continental counterparts, and suggested that 'Dickens reinforced the false perception by imposing his brilliant but perverse vision of London on the consciousness of his contemporaries and of posterity'.⁸

I have touched on the importance of London when Dickens's ideas on public issues are considered, and this statement is a sobering one. Dickens no doubt will continue to be the

7. Mirror, Radnor, 5 October 1831, p. 2752.

8. David Olsen, 'Introduction', David Owen, The Government of Victorian London, 1855-1889, p. 12.

most familiar interpreter of his epoch, but he was not a social historian -- the discipline did not exist. The comment quoted suggests that we can only fully understand him through a greater awareness of the society which he exposed so brilliantly, at times, but of which he was himself a part, sharing, inevitably, in its fundamental assumptions and dispositions. My own understanding of Dickens has, I am sure, been enhanced quite substantially through the sometimes wearisome task of reading through the publications with which he was associated as a young man. Whether I have managed to convey something of this successfully to the reader I must now leave others to judge.

APPENDIX.

The article which follows was accepted for publication by the Editor of the Dickensian in September 1979. No information is forthcoming at the present time of writing as to the expected date of publication.

THE FIRST PUBLICATION OF 'OUR NEXT DOOR NEIGHBOURS'.

Occasional discoveries of the original publication of Dickens's early Sketches by Boz have been made from time to time, and another item can now be added. On 18 March 1836, under the heading 'Sketches by "Boz." -- New Series', the Morning Chronicle published 'No. 1 -- Our Next Door Neighbours', and the piece was repeated in the Evening Chronicle of the same day. This publication has not previously been noted, apparently, although other sketches have been located in much more obscure journals.¹ Dickens was still working

1. The fullest list appears to be in Duane DeVries, Dickens's Apprentice Years: The Making of a Novelist (Hassocks, Sussex and New York, 1976), pp. 147-53, which includes the pieces first published in Sketches by Boz, First and Second Series, and one further item ('Hackney Cabs and Their Drivers') not noted in Appendix F of The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens, Volume I, 1820-1839, edited by Madeline House and Graham Storey (Oxford, 1965), pp. 692-94. Further references to the letters in the text are to this edition, cited as 'Pilgrim'.

for the Morning Chronicle at this time, and the sketch appears to be an abortive start to the 'Sketches by Boz, New Series', the heading used for four different pieces which appeared in the Chronicle later in the year.

The discovery of the sketch can be related to a letter written probably in April 1836 to John Easthope; with benefit of hindsight, Dickens's reference to 'the new series I commenced' can be seen to give a clue to the sketch's publication in the Chronicle. It is not clear why there were no immediate successors, although the piece did appear at a particularly interesting point in Dickens's career. It was probably the first to be written after the publication of the first edition of Sketches by Boz, First Series, and the first after the inception of Pickwick Papers. At about this time he was particularly busy even by his own standards, reporting long parliamentary sittings, and working on Sunday Under Three Heads, The Strange Gentleman and The Village Coquettes; he also made contracts which were to remain unfulfilled with Macrone (9 May), Tegg (11 August) and Bentley (22 August).² The correspondence starts to take on a different character around the summer of 1836, and it is not surprising to find some uncertainty of direction concerning the Sketches as the rocket of his reputation was launched. Possibly Dickens was seeking the best market for his talents: the conclusion of the series in Bell's Life in London in January 1836 was fol-

2. DeVries, pp. 135-36, citing for the agreements Pilgrim I, 150, 163, 648-49 respectively. Mary Hogarth wrote on 15 May that Dickens 'is . . . made up to by all the literary Gentleman [sic], and has more to do in that way than he can well manage' (Pilgrim, I, 689).

lowed by this single odd sketch in the Chronicle, two sketches in Chapman and Hall's Library of Fiction in March and May, and a further two in August and September in what might seem the unlikely location of the Carlton Chronicle. Finally, Dickens re-started 'Sketches by Boz, New Series' in the Morning Chronicle of 24 September, only for this series to be cut short after the fourth sketch on 26 October 1836 when he left the paper.

'Our Next Door Neighbours' has continued to occupy an odd position amongst the Sketches by Boz. It was included as a separate piece in the single volume of the Second Series (December 1836); but in all subsequent collected editions, as 'Our Next-Door Neighbour', it was placed seventh and last of the opening sequence 'Our Parish'. The first six of these sketches had appeared together similarly at the beginning of the First Series of the Sketches (February 1836), and had been regarded as a linked sequence since their original publication in the Evening Chronicle as part of the 'Sketches of London'. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson referred to 'Our Next-Door Neighbour' as 'rather incongruously tacked on' to 'Our Parish', a view which has been challenged recently by Julian W. Breslow, who sees the piece as a focus of many of the characteristics demonstrated by the narrator earlier in 'Our Parish', particularly his capacity to learn from experience.³ But the sketch as it appeared in the Chronicle lends support for Butt and Tillot-

3. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London, 1957), p. 56; Julian W. Breslow, 'The Narrator in Sketches by Boz', ELH, 44 (1977), 127-49 (pp. 129-31, 149).

son's view. In a passage at the end of the 'Our Parish' piece in the Evening Chronicle on 18 June 1835, Boz had announced his intention of 'publishing a parochial sketch alternately with one coming more immediately under our first heading', and this pattern was followed until 20 August, when the 'Our Parish' sketch ended as usual with 'To be continued'. But in the event this was the last of the series, and if Dickens had regarded 'Our Next Door Neighbours' as part of 'Our Parish' when it was first published, it seems highly likely that he would again have used the heading, and probable that he would have introduced the sketch by some connecting remarks referring back to the earlier pieces, and drawing attention to the fulfilment of his promise.⁴ No such link appeared, and the later positioning of the piece must be regarded as a subsequent decision that it would go as well there as anywhere else, although it is difficult to feel that Dickens was right, particularly in view of the clumsiness of the first quarter or so of the sketch.

Textually, the original publication offers several variants from the sketch as it appeared later in the Second Series. I noted some ten verbal alterations, in addition to a number of changes in the punctuation. None of these are of great significance, and in the absence of a full critical edition of the Sketches, and as there were a number of subsequent changes from the first volume publication to the later editions which are the basis of texts in normal

4. The passage at the end of the piece for 18 June 1835 was deleted subsequently, as were connective passages at the end of the first of the series (28 February 1835) and the start of the second (19 May 1835).

use, I see no value in recording these first changes here. Mostly they are intended to polish the writing in one way or another, and they are sufficient in number and type to confirm later authorial revision.

Discovery of the piece reduces to four the number of sketches not known to have appeared prior to volume publication in Sketches by Boz, First and Second Series. Dickens mentioned 'A Visit to Newgate' in a letter to Macrone possibly written on 27 October 1835 which makes clear that he did not contemplate publishing it prior to its appearance in the first volume of the First Series. 'The Great Winglebury Duel' is referred to in the same letter (Pilgrim, I, 83) as due for publication in the Monthly Magazine for December 1835, but did not appear there; the Pilgrim editors suggest this may have been because Dickens had decided to dramatize it as The Strange Gentleman. 'The Black Veil' appeared in the second volume of the First Series, and is mentioned in a letter to Macrone written perhaps on 30 December 1835, which establishes that the publisher had not read it until about the same time as the printing of the first volume (Pilgrim, I, 114). Finally, a letter to the printer, T.C. Hansard, confirms that 'The Drunkard's Death' was specifically written to complete the single volume of the Second Series (Pilgrim, I, 208). It is possible that 'The Great Winglebury Duel' may yet be found in some obscure location, but on the whole it appears unlikely that further discoveries of this nature remain to be made.

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ABSTRACT

I Wallow in Words: Dickens, Journalism and Public Affairs, 1831-1838 by Graham Mott.

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The primary materials on which the thesis is based are the files of the periodicals for which Dickens worked, or to which he contributed, as a young man: the True Sun, the Mirror of Parliament, the Morning Chronicle, the Monthly Magazine, Bell's Life in London, the Carlton Chronicle, and the Examiner. Bentley's Miscellany is omitted, for reasons stated in the Preface.

The first chapter attempts to untangle the vexed question of exactly when Dickens was working for the True Sun and the Mirror of Parliament. Chapters 2 to 5 outline the political and other tendencies of the various publications, and discuss the particular approaches to public issues associated with radicalism and Whiggery. Dickens worked as a parliamentary reporter for some five years during the period under survey; consideration is given to his lasting attitude to Parliament, and to the questions of what he might have absorbed from these publications and the nature of his work as a general reporter for the Morning Chronicle.

Chapter 6 discusses the Sketches by Boz in the light of the preceding consideration of the journals in which they first appeared. The remaining chapters focus upon some of the public issues which were prominent, and examine the extent to which Dickens may have come into contact with some current philosophies. An Appendix gives details of the first publication of one of his sketches, believed to be hitherto unnoted.
