

REMINISCENCES OF CHARLES DICKENS.



ABOUT the year 1838, my father took a small but charming cottage about three miles from Exeter, the chief city of Devonshire, on a long lease from a Dr. Brown, a retired London physician. It had a large and beautiful garden with a good sized orchard, and was called Shillingford-Cross Cottage, as the old village cross of Catholic days, which was about to be broken up for paving the high road, had been purchased by the Doctor, who was an antiquarian, and having been removed from the village, which was adjacent, had been planted in the middle of the lawn. About midway between our town residence in Exeter and the cottage, was the house of Mr. and Mrs. Dickens, the father and mother of Charles Dickens. It was not long before we were introduced to them by our landlord, Dr. Brown, who was a great friend of theirs; and the introduction so soon ripened into intimacy, that they often came to spend an evening with us, as they had been in the habit of doing in Dr. Brown's time, bringing with them a fine intelligent boy, Charles Dickens' younger, and, I believe, only brother, who was about twenty years his junior. Charles doted upon this boy, and gave him the nickname of "Boz." I was the happy possessor of a faithful dog of the tan terrier-breed, and having been an ardent admirer of Charles Dickens, from the date of his publication of "Sketches by Boz," and the "Pickwick Papers," I had paid him the questionable but by no means uncommon compliment of calling my favorite dog by his *nom de plume*, "Boz." The celebrated novelist was deeply attached to his parents, whom he came down from London to visit, as often as he could get a holiday. On one of these occasions, as he had his little brother on his knee, he told him he was going to write a book, and that he would say it was written by "Boz" so that people might think that his brother was the author of it. The matter-of-fact father, who was listening to this speech, treated it with the greatest contempt, not believing that his son could ever be guilty of such an

unbusinesslike proceeding. One can imagine his surprise, when a few months subsequent to this a magnificently bound presentation copy, which I had often the pleasure of handling, of "Sketches by Boz" was sent by the author to his brother. On one of the frequent occasions when the Dickens family were our visitors at the cottage, my dog was wild with excitement, and was racing among my flower beds, to the no small detriment of my tulips and hyacinths, of which I was justly proud, and I kept calling out, "be quiet Boz, be quiet, or I will have you chained up." To my great surprise the little boy began to cry and went to his mother saying that he wanted to go home, for I was going to lock him up. We had some difficulty in consoling him, as he fully believed that he, the original "Boz" was the one to be fastened up; nor did we succeed until we had the dog an unwilling prisoner. I well remember how amused Charles Dickens was when the story was related to him. * * * My mother was a very attractive specimen of a middle-aged Quaker lady, and was greatly admired by the distinguished author. This was as evident to my mother as anyone else, so that one day I heard her ask him not to introduce her as a character in any of his writings. He promised to obey her, though with some reluctance, as he admitted that he had made a sketch of some of her doings and sayings, in order to connect her with a book he was about to write. I went to live in London in the year 1842, and one of the first visits I made was to my friend Charles Dickens, who resided at that time in a large house near Regent's Park, which he called Devonshire House, perhaps from the fact of his father, mother and brother being resident in that county, which justly bears the title of "the Garden of England." I was introduced to his young wife, whom I found so fascinating, and apparently so fond and proud of her husband, that I was greatly shocked in after years, to hear that they had agreed to separate, on the plea of incompatibility of temper. Though they did not, after their separation, live together, Mr Dickens made a handsome allowance out of his large income to his wife, and their