

vantages." So we are told he was often "uneasy, shrinking and over-sensitive" in society; and that a too great confidence in himself sometimes laid upon him burdens too grievous to be borne. "In that direction there was in him, at such times, something even hard and aggressive; in his determinations, a something that had almost the tone of fierceness; a something in his nature that made his resolves insuperable, however hasty the opinions on which they had been formed." These manifestations, however, were rare, and did not permanently prejudice a character "as singularly open and generous as it was at all times ardent and impetuous." When they occurred, however, "a stern and even cold isolation of self-reliance was seen side by side with a susceptibility almost feminine, and the most eager craving for sympathy." These apparently incompatible traits of character, appear to us to account, on the one hand, for that seeming want of grateful appreciation with which the Americans accused him; and, on the other, for the complacency with which he devoured popular approbation—unjustly put to the score of mere vanity. Dickens has been charged with eking out his deficiencies of skill as an artist by exaggerations of individual peculiarity. This tendency, however, was really one so natural to him that he could not divest himself of it in private letters to his dearest friends. Even his punctuation was done by wholesale: in one letter, Mr. Forster is treated to half-a-dozen marks of interrogation to a single question; in another, a clause, containing nothing specially wonderful, terminates with no less than thirty notes of admiration. This extravagance, perhaps, for the most part unconscious, heightens the humour of his works; but it often degrades it almost to the level of caricature, and sometimes makes his pathos appear tawdry and artificial. The story of his boyhood is extremely touching, and will be read with intense interest; but his vehement—even boisterous—lamentations over its hardships seem too highly wrought to be satisfactory. When we find that sombre shadow darkening a prosperous manhood, the study of his character seems to belong to the pathology, rather than the natural history, of genius.

It is pleasant to find that Dickens, as a limner of character, painted from the life, and that he dealt out an even measure of poetic justice to all parties. This feature, in the biography, has been pointed to as a proof that he lacked imagination—as if that charge might not, with equal propriety, be advanced against all the great masters of fiction, in prose and poetry. At any rate, we do not think any one will be disposed to revise his estimate of Dickens' powers on that account. It is all very well to speak eulogistically of the man who "makes a story out of his own head," but there is a substratum of realism in human nature which seeks a foundation of fact even in a fictitious narrative. The Cheeryble Brothers, the Marchioness, and the Garland family, are quite as agreeable, now that we know they had an actual living personality as they were before. So it is some satisfaction, on the other hand, to know that Creakle of Salem House had a substantial back, upon which we should like to have applied his own cane, since we now know that he was Mr. Jones of Wellington House Academy. The same may be said of Mrs. Pipchin, for whose portrait sat, "unconsciously," Mrs. Roylance of Camden Town—the precursor, it would seem, of the unfortunate baby-farmer, who

recently met her death, by legal violence, within the precincts of Newgate.

We have dwelt at such length on the early days of the novelist, that we must pass over the record of his literary struggles and triumphs without remark. This may be done the more readily, because, as we have stated, the youth of Dickens was really the great period of interest in his life—at least of so much of it as is narrated in this volume. Moreover, the detailed account of his works can be studied to better advantage in the biography itself. Some remarks have been made on the tender affection Dickens felt for the memory of his sister-in-law, Miss Mary Hogarth. One critic thinks that Mr. Forster ought to have suppressed the references to it in Dickens' letters. We are of a different opinion. It appears to us that the passages objected to throw considerable light upon the character of the man—perhaps we may go so far as to say that they ought to disabuse the public mind of any lingering impression made by a slander, promulgated during his life-time. From first to last, Dickens' nature was, above all things, childlike—in some respects, childish. The traits of character which impress us most in reading his life are those which survived his youth, and not only helped to form, but actually constituted, the man. He loved young people, because he was always young himself—generous, impulsive, cheerful and sympathetic. What he prized in her who was so early taken away, may be gathered from the epitaph he placed upon her tomb:—"Young, beautiful and good, God numbered her among His angels, at the early age of seventeen." A comparison of the subsequent allusions in his letters from America with the closing words of *David Copperfield*, inclines us to the belief that she was the original of *Agnes Wickfield*—the noblest, purest and best of his heroines.

Dickens' first visit to America has been a subject of controversy *ad nauseam*. The biography contains some incidents, as well as some very plain expressions of opinion, not to be found in the *Notes* or even in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Our neighbours did not know the man they had to deal with. He admired such of their good points as were on the surface; but his sense of the ridiculous, abetted by the fearful demon of boredom, soon got the upper-hand. At first all went merrily enough; but by and by a sense of weariness and satiety crept insensibly over him. Everybody is eternally staring at him (p. 324), cheating him in hotel bills (p. 345), criticising his personal appearance in conversation with him (p. 386), and even peering into his state-room while he was washing and his wife in bed (p. 403). It is not surprising that he "does not believe there are on the whole earth besides so many intensified bores as in these United States". He pays a well-deserved tribute to the many sterling qualities of our neighbours, and yet breaks out in his letters in such passages as the following:—"I still reserve my opinion of the national character—just whispering that I tremble for a radical coming here, unless he is a radical in principle, by reason and reflection, and from the sense of right. I fear, that if he were anything else, he would return home a tory" (p. 327); "I don't like the country. I would not live here, on any consideration. It goes against the grain with me—it would with you. I think it impossible, utterly impossible, for any Englishman to live here and be happy," &c. (p. 351). With regard to