



## Dickens-Land, by J. A. Nicklin

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Author: J. A. Nicklin

Illustrator: E. W. Haslehust

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Transcriber's note

Minor punctuation errors have been changed without notice. A printer error has been changed, and it is listed at the end. All other inconsistencies are as in the original.

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[Illustration: CHALK, HOUSE WHERE DICKENS SPENT HIS HONEYMOON]

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DICKENS-LAND

Described by J. A. NICKLIN

Pictured by E. W. HASLEHUST

[Illustration]

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[Illustration]

The central shrine of a literary cult is at least as often its hero's home of adoption as his place of birth. To the Wordsworthian, Cockermouth has but a faint, remote interest in comparison with Grasmere and Rydal Mount. Edinburgh, for all its associations with the life and the genius of Scott, is not as Abbotsford, or as that beloved Border country in which his memory has struck its deepest roots. And so it is with Dickens. The accident of birth attaches his name but slightly to Landport in South-sea. The Dickens pilgrim treads in the most palpable footsteps of "Boz" amongst the landmarks of a Victorian London, too rapidly disappearing, and through the "rich and varied landscape" on either side of the Medway, "covered with cornfields and pastures, with here and there a windmill or a distant church", which Dickens loved from boyhood, peopled with the creatures of his teeming fancy, and chose for his last and most-cherished habitation.

What Abbotsford was to Scott, that, almost, to Dickens in his later years was Gadshill Place. From his study window in the "grave red-brick house" "on his little Kentish freehold"--a house which he had "added to and stuck bits upon in all manner of ways, so that it was as pleasantly irregular and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas as the most hopeful man could possibly desire"--he looked out, so he wrote to a friend, "on as pretty a view as you will find in a long day's English ride.... Cobham Park and Woods are behind the house; the distant Thames is in front; the Medway, with Rochester and its old castle and cathedral, on one side." On every side he could not fail to reach, in those brisk walks with which he sought, too strenuously, perhaps, health and relaxation, some object redolent of childish dreams or mature achievement, of intimate joys and sorrows, of those phantoms of his brain which to him then, as to hundreds of thousands of his readers since, were not less real than the men and women of everyday encounter. On those seven miles between Rochester and Maidstone, which he discovered to be one of the most beautiful walks in England, he might be tempted to strike off at Aylesford for a short stroll to such a pleasant old Elizabethan mansion as Cobtree Hall, the very type, it may be, of Manor Farm, Dingley Dell, or for a longer tramp to Town Malling, from which he may well have borrowed many strokes for the picture of Muggleton, that town of sturdy Kentish cricket. Sometimes he would walk across the marshes to Gravesend, and returning through the village of Chalk, would pause for a retrospective glance at the house where his honeymoon was spent and a good part of *Pickwick* planned. In the latter end of the year, when he could take a short cut through the stubble fields from Higham to the marshes lying further down the Thames, he would often visit the desolate churchyard where little Pip was so terribly frightened by the convict. Or, descending the long slope from Gadshill to Strood, and crossing Rochester Bridge--over the balustrades of which Mr. Pickwick leaned in agreeable reverie when he was accosted by Dismal Jemmy--the author of *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood* would pass from Rochester High Street--where Mr. Pumblechook's seed shop looks across the way at Miss Twinkleton's establishment--into the Vines, to compare once more the impression on his unerring "inward eye" with the actual features of that Restoration House which, under another name, he assigned to Miss Havisham, and so round by Fort Pitt to the Chatham lines. And there--who can doubt?--if he seemed to hear the melancholy wind that whistled through the deserted fields as Mr. Winkle took his reluctant stand, a wretched and desperate duellist, his thoughts would also stray to the busy dockyard town and "a blessed little room" in a plain-looking plaster-fronted house from which dated all his early readings and imaginings.

Between the "very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy" and the strong, self-reliant man whose fame had filled two continents, Gadshill Place was an immediate link. Everyone knows the story which Dickens tells of a vision of his former self meeting him on the road to Canterbury.

"So smooth was the old high road, and so fresh were the horses, and so fast went I, that it was midway between Gravesend and Rochester, and the widening river was bearing the ships, white-sailed or black-smoked, out to sea, when I noticed by the wayside a very queer small boy.

"'Halloa!' said I to the very queer small boy, 'where do you live?'

"'At Chatham,' says he.

"'What do you do there?' say I.

"'I go to school,' says he.

"I took him up in a moment, and we went on. Presently, the very queer small boy says, 'This is Gadshill we are coming to, where Falstaff went out to rob those travellers and ran away.'

"'You know something about Falstaff, eh?' said I.

"'All about him,' said the very queer small boy. 'I am old (I am nine), and I read all sorts of books. But do let us stop at the top of the hill, and look at the house there, if you please!'

"'You admire that house?' said I.

[Illustration: GADSHILL PLACE FROM THE GARDENS]

"'Bless you, sir,' said the very queer small boy, 'when I was not more than half as old as nine, it used to be a treat for me to be brought to look at it. And now I am nine I come by myself to look at it. And ever since I can recollect, my father, seeing me so fond of it, has often said to me, If you were to be very persevering, and were to work hard, you might some day come to live in it. Though that's impossible!' said the very queer small boy, drawing a low breath, and now staring at the house out of window with all his might.

"I was rather amazed to be told this by the very queer small boy; for that house happens to be *my* house, and I have reason to believe that what he said was true."

As the queer small boy in the *Uncommercial Traveller* said, Gadshill Place is at the very top of Falstaff's hill. It stands on the south side of the Dover road;--on the north side, but a little lower down, is "a delightfully oldfashioned inn of the old coaching days", the "Sir John Falstaff";--surrounded by a high wall and screened by a row of limes. The front view, with its wooden and pillared porch, its bays, its dormer windows let into the roof, and its surmounting bell turret and vane, bears much the same appearance as it did to the queer small boy. But amongst the many additions and alterations which Dickens was constantly making, the drawing-room had been enlarged from a smaller existing one, and the conservatory into which it opens was, as he laughingly told his younger daughter, "positively the last improvement at Gadshill"--a jest to prove sadly prophetic, for it was uttered on the Sunday before his death. The little library, too, on the opposite side of the porch from the drawing-room and conservatory, was a converted bedroom. Its aspect is familiar to most Dickens-lovers from Sir Luke Fildes's famous picture of "The Empty Chair". In summer, however, Dickens used to do his work not in the library but in a Swiss chalet, presented to him by Fechter, the great actor, which stood in a shrubbery lying on the other side of the highroad, and entered by a subway that Dickens had excavated for the purpose. The chalet now must be sought in the terrace garden of Cobham Hall. When Dickens sat at his desk in a room of the chalet, "up among the branches of the trees", the five mirrors which he

had put in reflected "the leaves quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river". The birds and butterflies flew in and out, the green branches shot in at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the clouds and the scent of flowers and of everything growing for miles had the same free access. No imaginative artist, whether in words or colour, could have desired a more inspiring environment. The back of the house, looking southward, descends by one flight of steps upon a lawn, where one of the balustrades of the old Rochester Bridge had, when this was demolished, been fitted up as a sundial. The lawn, in turn, communicates with flower and vegetable gardens by another flight of steps. Beyond is "the much-coveted meadow" which Dickens obtained, partly by exchange, from the trustees--not of Watts's Charity, as Forster has stated, but of Sir Joseph Williamson's Free School at Rochester. It was in this field that the villagers from neighbouring Higham played cricket matches, and that, just before Dickens went to America for the last time, he held those quaint footraces for all and sundry, described in one of his letters to Forster. Though the landlord of the Falstaff, from over the way, was allowed to erect a drinking booth, and all the prizes were given in money; though, too, the road from Chatham to Gadshill was like a fair all day, and the crowd consisted mainly of rough labouring men, of soldiers, sailors, and navvies, there was no disorder, not a flag, rope, or stake displaced, and no drunkenness whatever. As striking a tribute, if rightly considered, as ever was exacted by a strong and winning personality! One of those oddities in which Dickens delighted was elicited by a hurdle race for strangers. The man who came in second ran 120 yards and leaped over ten hurdles with a pipe in his mouth and smoking it all the time. "If it hadn't been for your pipe," said the Master of Gadshill Place, clapping him on the shoulder at the winning-post, "you would have been first." "I beg your pardon, sir," he answered, "but if it hadn't been for my pipe, I should have been nowhere."

To the hospitable hearth of Gadshill Place were drawn, by the fame of the "Inimitable Boz", a long succession of brilliant men and women, mostly of the Anglo-Saxon race, whether English or American; and if not in the throngs for which at Abbotsford open house was kept, yet with a frequency which would have made literary work almost impossible for the host without remarkable steadiness of purpose and regularity of habits. For Longfellow and his daughters he "turned out", that they might see all of the surrounding country which could be seen in a short stay, "a couple of postilions in the old red jackets of the old red royal Dover road, and it was like a holiday ride in England fifty years ago".

In his study in the late and early months, and his Swiss chalet through the summer, Dickens would write such novels as *Great Expectations*, and the unfinished *Mystery of Edwin Drood*, taking his local colour from spots which lay within the compass of a reasonable walk; and others, such as *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Our Mutual Friend*, to which the circumstances of time and place furnished little or nothing except their influence on his mood. Some of the occasional papers which, in the character of "The Uncommercial Traveller", he furnished to *All the Year Round*, have as much of the *genius loci* as any of his romances. Even to-day the rushing swarm of motor cars has not yet driven from the more secluded nooks of Kent all such idylls of open-air vagabondage as this:--

"I have my eyes upon a piece of Kentish road, bordered on either side by a wood, and having on one hand, between the road dust and the trees, a skirting patch of grass. Wild flowers grow in abundance on this spot, and it lies high and airy, with a distant river stealing steadily away to the ocean, like a man's life. To gain the milestone here, which the moss, primroses, violets, bluebells and wild roses would soon render illegible but for peering travellers pushing them aside with their sticks, you must come up a steep hill, come which way you may. So, all the tramps with carts or caravans--the gipsy tramp, the show tramp, the Cheap Jack--find it impossible to resist the temptations of the place, and all turn the horse loose when they come to it, and boil the pot. Bless the place, I love the ashes of the vagabond fires that have scorched its grass!"

The Kentish road that Dickens thus describes is certainly the Dover Road at Gadshill, from which, of course, there is a steep declivity whether the route is westward to Gravesend or eastwards to Strood and Rochester. In Strood itself Dickens found little to interest him, though the view of Rochester from Strood Hill is an arresting one, with the stately mediævalism of Castle and Cathedral emerging from a kind of haze in which it is hard to distinguish what is smoke-wreath and what a mass of crowding roofs. The Medway, which divides Strood

from the almost indistinguishably overlapping towns of Rochester, Chatham, and Brompton, is crossed by an iron bridge, superseding the old stone structure commemorated in *Pickwick*. Mr. Pickwick's notes on "the four towns" do not require very much modification to apply to their present state.

"The principal productions", he wrote, "appear to be soldiers, sailors, Jews, chalk, shrimps, officers, and dockyard men. The commodities chiefly exposed for sale in the public streets are marine stores, hard-bake, apples, flat-fish, and oysters. The streets present a lively and animated appearance, occasioned chiefly by the conviviality of the military.... The consumption of tobacco in these towns must be very great, and the smell which pervades the streets must be exceedingly delicious to those who are extremely fond of smoking. A superficial traveller might object to the dirt, which is their leading characteristic, but to those who view it as an indication of traffic and commercial prosperity, it is truly gratifying."

[Illustration: ROCHESTER FROM STROOD]

This description is much less true of Rochester than of its three neighbours, and does no justice to the aspects which Dickens himself presented in the Market Town of *Great Expectations*, and the Cloisterham of *Edwin Drood*. Amid the rather sordid encroachments of a modern industrialism, Rochester still keeps something of the air of an old-world country town, and in the precincts of its Cathedral there still broods a cloistral peace. The dominating feature of the town, from whatever side approached, is the massive ruin of the Norman Keep of Bishop Gundulf, the architect also of London's White Tower. Though the blue sky is its only roof, and on the rugged staircase the dark apertures in the walls, where rafters and floors were once, show like gaping sockets from which the ravens and daws have picked out the eyes, it seems to stand with all the immovable strength of some solid rock on which the waves of rebellion or invasion would have dashed and broken. It is easy to believe the saying of Lambarde, in his *Perambulation of Kent*, that "from time to time it had a part in almost every tragedie". But the grimness of its grey walls is relieved by a green mantle of clinging ivy, and though it can no longer be said of the Castle that it is "bathed, though in ruins, with a flush of flowers", the beautiful single pink grows wild on its ramparts.

From the Castle to the "Bull" in the High Street is a transition which seems almost an anachronism. It is but to follow in the traces of the Pickwick Club. The covered gateway, the staircase almost wide enough for a coach and four, the ballroom on the first floor landing, with card-room adjoining, and the bedroom which Mr. Winkle occupied inside Mr. Tupman's--all are there, just as when the club entertained Alfred Jingle to a dinner of soles, a broiled fowl and mushrooms, and Mr. Tupman took him to the ball in Mr. Winkle's coat, borrowed without leave, and Dr. Slammer of the 97th sent his challenge next morning to the owner of the coat. The Guildhall, with its gilt ship for a vane, and its old brick front, supported by Doric stone columns, is not so memorable because Hogarth played hop-sotch in the colonnade during his *Five Days' Peregrination by Land and Water*, as for the day when Pumblechook bundled Pip off to be bound apprentice to Jo before the Justices in the Hall, "a queer place, with higher pews in it than a church ... and with some shining black portraits on the walls". This was the Town Hall, too, which Dickens has told us that he had set up in his childish mind "as the model on which the genie of the lamp built the palace for Aladdin", only to return and recognize with saddened, grown-up eyes--exaggerating the depreciation a little, for the sake of the contrast--"a mere mean little heap of bricks, like a chapel gone demented". Close by the Guildhall is the Town Clock, "supposed to be the finest clock in the world", which, alas! "turned out to be as moon-faced and weak a clock as a man's eyes ever saw".

On the north side of the High Street, not many yards from the Bull, is a Tudor two-storied, stone-built house, with latticed windows and gables. This is the Charity founded by the will of Richard Watts in 1579, to give lodging and entertainment for one night, and fourpence each, to "six poor travellers, not being rogues or proctors". It furnished the theme to the Christmas cycle of stories, *The Seven Poor Travellers*, the narrator, who treats the waifs and strays harboured one Christmas eve at the Charity to roast turkey, plum pudding, and "wassail", bringing up the number to seven, "being", as he says, "a traveller myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be".

Farther up the High Street towards Chatham, about a quarter of a mile from Rochester Bridge, are two sixteenth-century houses, with fronts of carved oak and gables, facing each other across the street. One has figured in both *Great Expectations* and *Edwin Drood*, for it is the house of Mr. Pumblechook, the pompous and egregious corn and seedsman, and of Mr. Sapsea, the auctioneer, still more pompous and egregious. The other--Eastgate House, now converted into a museum--is the "Nun's House", where Miss Twinkleton kept school, and had Rosa Bud and Helen Landless for pupils.

From the hum and traffic of the cheerfully frequented High Street to the calm and hush of the Cathedral precincts entrance is given by Chertsey's or College Yard Gate, which abuts on the High Street about a hundred yards north of the Cathedral. It was this Gate which Sir Luke Fildes sketched, as he has recorded in an interesting letter published in *A Week's Tramp in Dickens-Land*, by W. R. Hughes, for the background of his drawing of "Durdles Cautioning Sapsea". There are, however, two other gatehouses, the "Prior's", a tower over an archway, containing a single room approached by a "postern stair", and "Deanery Gate", a quaint old house adjoining the Cathedral which has ten rooms, some of them beautifully panelled. Its drawing-room on the upper floor bears a strong resemblance to the room--as depicted by Sir Luke Fildes--in which Jasper entertained his nephew and Neville Landless, but the artist believes that he never saw the interior. It is not unlikely that Dickens took some details from each of the gatehouses to make a composite picture of "Mr. Jasper's own gatehouse", which seemed so to stem the tide of life, that while the murmur of the tide was heard beyond, not a wave would pass the archway.

Rochester Cathedral, which overshadows, though in a less insistent and tragic manner, the whole human interest of *Edwin Drood* almost as much as Notre Dame overshadows the human interest in Victor Hugo's romance, preserves some remains of the original Saxon and Norman churches on the site of which it was erected. Its Early English and Decorated Gothic came off lightly from three restorations, but the tower is nineteenth-century vandalism. The Norman west front enshrines in the riches of its sculptured portal, with its five receding arches, figures of the Saviour and his twelve apostles, and on two shafts are carved likenesses of Henry I and his Queen. Freeman has pronounced it to be far the finest example of Norman architecture of its kind. The Chapter House door, a magnificent example of Decorated Gothic, is adorned with effigies representing the Christian and Jewish Churches, which are surrounded by Holy Fathers and Angels who pray for the soul, emblematically represented as a small nude form above them. But it is about the stone-vaulted crypt, where even by daylight "the heavy pillars which support the roof engender masses of black shade", with "lanes of light" between, and about the winding staircase and belfry of the great tower that the spells of the Dickens magic especially cling, and Jasper and Durdles revisit these haunts by the glimpses of the moon as persistently as Quasimodo and the sinister Priest beset with their ghostly presences the belfry of the great Paris minster.

Of the historic imagination Dickens had little or none. He could not evoke, and never had the faintest desire to evoke, a Past that was divided from the Present by an unbridgeable chasm. Thus Rochester Castle, though he seldom failed to bring his guests to view it, affected him only with a remote sense of antiquity such as he would have experienced, no more and no less, amongst the Pyramids. But he was keenly sensitive to the influences of a Past which still survived and, by the continuity of a corporate life, made an integral part in the Present. The Cathedral life, in which by virtue of their office canons and dean were living relics of antiquity, and as much the contemporaries as the successors of the ecclesiastics who lay crumbling in the crypt, stirred this sense in him as it had been stirred by the ancient Inns of London. Almost the last words that he wrote were a tribute to the beauty of the venerable fane in which, beneath the monument of the founder of that quaint Charity rendered so famous by his story of *The Seven Poor Travellers*, a simple brass records his birth, death, and burial-place, "To connect his memory with the scenes in which his earliest and his latest years were passed, and with the associations of Rochester Cathedral and its neighbourhood which extended over all his life".

[Illustration: RESTORATION HOUSE, ROCHESTER]

In the old cemetery of St. Nicholas' Church, on the north side of the Cathedral, it was Dickens's desire to be buried, and his family would have carried out his wishes had it not been that the burial-ground had been closed for years and no further interments were allowed. On the south side of the Cathedral is the delightfully old-fashioned terrace known as Minor Canon Row--Dickens's name for it is Minor Canon Corner--where the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle kept house with the "china shepherdess" mother. The "Monks' Vineyard" of *Edwin Drood* exists as "The Vines". Here under a group of elms called "The Seven Sisters" Edwin Drood and Rosa sat when they decided to break their engagement, and opposite "The Seven Sisters" is the "Satis House" of *Great Expectations*, where the lonely and embittered Miss Havisham taught Estella the cruel lessons of a ruined life. It is really Restoration House--Satis House is on the site of the mansion of Master Richard Watts, to whose apologies for no better entertainment of his Sovereign, Queen Elizabeth answered "Satis"--and it takes its name from having received the restored Merry Monarch under its roof on his way to London and the throne. Pepys, who was terrified by the steepness of the castle cliff and had no time to stay to service at the Cathedral, when he had been inspecting the defences at Chatham, found something more to his mind in a stroll by Restoration House, and into the Cherry Garden, where he met a silly shopkeeper with a pretty wife, "and did kiss her".

Dickens would often follow this route of Pepys, but in the reverse direction, that is, through the Vines to Chatham and its lines of fortification, where Mr. Pickwick, Mr. Winkle, and Mr. Snodgrass became so hopelessly entangled in the sham fight which they had gone over from Rochester to see. At No. 11 Ordnance Terrace the little Charles Dickens lived from 1817 to 1821, and at No. 18 St. Mary's Place from 1821 to 1823, the financial troubles, which eventually drove the family into the Marshalsea debtors' prison, and Charles himself into the sordid drudgery of the blacking-shop by Hungerford Stairs, having already enforced a migration to a cheaper and meaner house. In Clover Street (then Clover Lane) the little Dickens went to a school kept by a Mr. William Giles, who years afterwards sent to him, when he was halfway through with *Pickwick*, a silver snuff-box inscribed to the "Inimitable Boz". To the Mitre Inn, in the Chatham High Street, where Nelson had many times put up, Dickens was often brought by his father to recite or sing, standing on a table, for the amusement of parties of friends. He speaks of it in the "Holly Tree Inn" as

"The inn where friends used to put up, and where we used to go to see parents, and to have salmon and fowls, and be tipped. It had an ecclesiastical sign--the 'mitre'--and a bar that seemed to be the next best thing to a bishopric, it was so snug. I loved the landlord's youngest daughter to distraction--but let that pass. It was in this inn that I was cried over by my little rosy sister, because I had acquired a black eye in a fight."

When the little Charles Dickens was taken away to London inside the stage-coach Commodore--his kind master on the night before having come flitting in among the packing-cases to give him Goldsmith's *Bee* as a keepsake--he was leaving behind for ever, in the playing-field near Clover Lane and the grounds of Rochester Castle and the green drives of Cobham Park, the untroubled dreams of happy childhood. And though he could not know this, yet, as he sat amongst the damp straw piled up round him in the inside of the coach, he "consumed his sandwiches in solitude and dreariness" and thought life sloppier than he had expected to find it. And in *David Copperfield* he has thrown back into those earlier golden days the shadow of his London privations by bringing the little Copperfield, footsore and tired, toiling towards dusk into Chatham, "which, in that night's aspect is a mere dream of chalk and drawbridges and mastless ships in a muddy river, roofed like Noah's arks". No doubt the terrible old Jew in the marine-stores shop, who rated and frightened David with his "Oh, my eyes and limbs, what do you want? Oh, my lungs and liver, what do you want? Oh--goroo, goroo!"--until the helpless little fellow was obliged to close with an offer of a few pence instead of half a crown for his waistcoat, is the portrait of some actual Jew dealer whom, in one of the back streets of Chatham, the keen eyes of the precocious child, seeming to look at nothing, had curiously watched hovering like a hideous spider on the pounce behind his grime-encrusted window.

It was old associations that led Dickens so often in his walks from Gadshill Place to Chatham. But the neighbourhood which gave him most pleasure, combining as it did with similar associations an exquisite beauty, was, Forster tells us, the sylvan scenery of Cobham Park. The green woods and green shades of



Cobham would recur to his memory even in far-off Lausanne, and the last walk that he ever enjoyed--on the day before his fatal seizure--was through these woods, the charm of which cannot be better defined than in his own description in *Pickwick*:

"A delightful walk it was; for it was a pleasant afternoon in June, and their way lay through a deep and shady wood, cooled by the light wind which gently rustled the thick foliage, and enlivened by the songs of the birds that perched upon the boughs. The ivy and the moss crept in thick clusters over the old trees, and the soft green turf overspread the ground like a silken mat. They emerged upon an open park, with an ancient hall, displaying the quaint and picturesque architecture of Elizabeth's time. Long vistas of stately oaks and elm trees appeared on every side; large herds of deer were cropping the fresh grass; and occasionally a startled hare scoured along the ground with the speed of the shadows thrown by the light clouds, which swept across a sunny landscape like a passing breath of summer."

The mission on which Mr. Pickwick and his two disciples were engaged was, it will be remembered, to convert Mr. Tupman from his resolution to forsake the world in a fit of misanthropy, induced by the faithlessness of Rachel Wardle.

"'If this,' said Mr. Pickwick, looking about him--'If this were the place to which all who are troubled with our friend's complaint came, I fancy their old attachment to this world would very soon return.'"

Mr. Pickwick was right, for when they arrived at the village, and entered that "clean and commodious village alehouse", the "Leather Bottle", they found Mr. Tupman set down at a table "well covered with a roast fowl, bacon, ale, and et ceteras", and "looking as unlike a man who had taken leave of the world as possible".

The "ancient hall" of Cobham consists of two Tudor wings, with a central block designed by Inigo Jones. It has a splendid collection of Old Masters, and a music room which the Prince Regent pronounced to be the finest room in England. In the terrace flower garden at the back of the Hall, it may be mentioned again here, is the Swiss chalet from Gadshill Place, which served Dickens for a study in the summer months. The circuit of Cobham Park is about seven miles, and it is crossed by the "Long Avenue", leading to Rochester, and the "Grand Avenue", which, sloping down from the tenantless Mausoleum, opens into Cobham village. The inn to which Mr. Tupman retired, in disgust with life, still retains the title of the "Leather Bottle", but has mounted for its sign a coloured portrait of Mr. Pickwick addressing the Club in characteristic attitude. It was in Cobham village that Mr. Pickwick made his notable discovery of the stone with the mysterious inscription--an inscription which the envious Blotton maintained was nothing more than BIL STUMPS HIS MARK. Local tradition suggests that Dickens intended the episode for a skit upon archaeological theories about the dolmens known as Kit's Coty House, and that a Strood antiquary keenly resented the satire. However that may be, Kit's Coty House is not at Cobham, but some miles away, near Aylesford. In Cobham church there is perhaps the finest and most complete series of monumental brasses in this country, most of them commemorating the Lords of Cobham.

[Illustration: COBHAM PARK]

Out of the Cobham woods it is not a long walk to the little village of Shorne, where Dickens was fond of sitting on a hot summer afternoon in its pretty, shaded churchyard. This is believed to be the spot which he has described in *Pickwick* as "one of the most peaceful and secluded churchyards in Kent, where wild flowers mingle with the grass, and the soft landscape around forms the fairest spot in the garden of England". A picturesque lane leads into the road from Rochester to Gravesend, on the outskirts of the village of Chalk. Here, in a corner house on the south side of the road, Dickens spent his honeymoon, and many of the earlier chapters of *Pickwick* were written. In February of the following year--1837--Dickens and his wife returned to the same lodgings, shortly after the birth of his eldest son. Chalk church is about a mile from the village. There was formerly above the porch the figure of an old priest in a stooping attitude, holding an upturned jug. Dickens took a strange interest in this quaint carving, and it is said that, whenever he passed it, he took off his

hat or gave it a nod, as to an old acquaintance.

Very different to the soft and genial landscapes about Cobham is the grey and desolate aspect of another haunt which Dickens loved to frequent. This was the "meshes" around Cooling. In winter, when it was possible to make a short cut across the stubble fields, he would visit Cooling churchyard not less seldom than in summer he would go to sit in the churchyard of Shorne. First, however, he would have to pass through the village of Higham, where, too, was his nearest railway station, though he often preferred to walk over and entrain at Gravesend or Greenhithe. But the pleasant tinkle of harness bells was a familiar sound in the night to the Higham villagers, as the carriage was sent down from Gadshill Place to meet the master or his friends returning from London by the ten o'clock train. Dickens took a kindly and active interest in the affairs of the village, and the last cheque which he ever drew was for his subscription to the Higham Cricket Club.

The flat levels that stretch away from beyond Higham towards the estuary of the Thames are more akin to the characteristics of Essex than of Kent. The hop gardens are dwarfed and stunted, and presently hops, corn, and pasture give place to fields of turnips, which show up like masses of jade on the chocolate-coloured soil. The bleak churchyard of Cooling, overgrown with nettles, lies amongst these desolate reaches, which resound at evening with the shrill, unearthly notes of sea-gulls, plovers, and herons. Beyond the churchyard are the marshes, "a dark, flat wilderness", as Dickens has described it in *Great Expectations*, "intersected with dykes and mounds and gates, with scattered cattle feeding on it"; still farther away is the "low, leaden line" of the river, and the "distant, savage lair", from which the wind comes rushing, is the sea. It was in this churchyard that the conception of the story sprang into life, and there are actually not five but ten little stone lozenges in one row, with three more at the back of them, which suggested to Dickens the five little prematurely cut off brothers of Pip. The grey ruins of Cooling Castle attracted him no less than the grey and weather-beaten churchyard. Besides some crumbling and broken walls there is a gate tower, with an inscription on fourteen copper plates, the writing in black, the ground of white enamel, with a seal and silk cords in their proper colours, which made known to all and sundry the purpose for which Lord Cobham--whose granddaughter married, for one of her five husbands, Sir John Oldcastle, the Lollard martyr--had erected this castle.

"Knoweth that beth and schul be That i am mad in help of the cuntre In knowyng of whych thyng This is chartre and witnessyng."

No forge stands now on the site of Joe Gargery's smithy, where, as the hammer rang on the anvil to the refrain--

"Beat it out, beat it out--Old Clem! With a clink for the stout--Old Clem! Blow the fire, blow the fire--Old Clem! Roaring drier, soaring higher--Old Clem!"--

Pip would see visions of Estella's face in the glowing fire or at the wooden window of the forge, looking in from the darkness of the night, and flitting away. But though the smithy has gone, the "Three Jolly Bargemen", where Joe would smoke his pipe by the kitchen fire on a Saturday night, still survives as the "Three Horseshoes"--the inn to which the secret-looking man who stirred his rum and water with a file, brought Magwitch's two one-pound notes for Pip, and the redoubtable Jagers, the autocrat of the Old Bailey, with his burly form, great head, and huge, cross-examining forefinger announced to Pip his *Great Expectations*. Down the river in the direction of yonder "distant savage lair", from which the wind comes rushing, lie those long reaches, between Kent and Essex, "where the river is broad and solitary, where the waterside inhabitants are very few, and where lone public-houses are scattered here and there"--the lonely riverside on which Pip and Herbert sought a hiding-place for Magwitch until the steamer for Hamburg or the steamer for Rotterdam could be boarded, as she dropped down the tide from the Port of London. Whether on the Kent or the Essex side, the cast of the scenery corresponds with equal closeness to Dickens's description. Slimy stakes stick out of the mud, and slimy stones stick out of the mud, and red landmarks and tide-marks stick out of the mud, and old roofless buildings slip into the mud, and all about is stagnation and mud! The desolate flat marshes look still more weird by reason of the tall pollards that lean over them like spectres. Far

away are the rising grounds, between which and the marshes there appears no sign of life except here and there in the foreground a melancholy gull. The course which the boat bearing the hunted man took from Mill Pond stairs through the crowded shipping of the Pool, past the floating Custom House at Gravesend, and onwards, skirting the little creeks and mudbanks where the Thames widens to the sea--when every sound of the tide flapping heavily at irregular intervals against the shore, and every ripple, were fraught with the terror of pursuit--exemplifies in the most striking way the rapidity and instinctive ease of Dickens's observation. Forster says:--

"To make himself sure of the actual course of a boat in such circumstances, and what possible incidents the adventure might have, Dickens hired a steamer for the day from Blackwall to Southend. Eight or nine friends, and three or four members of his family, were on board, and he seemed to have no care, the whole of that summer day (22nd of May, 1861), except to enjoy their enjoyment and entertain them with his own in shape of a thousand whims and fancies; but his sleepless observation was at work all the time, and nothing had escaped his keen vision on either side of the river."

Scattered amongst the deserted reaches along the riverside may be seen such lonely farmhouses or taverns as suggest the aspect of the alehouse, "not unknown to smuggling adventurers"--for the "owling", that is, the smuggling industry had flourished for centuries in these parts--to which the fugitives were led by a twinkling light in the window up a little cobbled causeway, and where Dickens placed that amphibious creature, "as slimy and smeary as if he had been low-water mark too", who exhibited a bloated pair of shoes "as interesting relics that he had taken from the feet of a drowned seaman washed ashore". This type of the gruesome long-shoremen whom Dickens had encountered in his waterside rambles, as he collected the materials for *Great Expectations*, was afterwards elaborated in the Rogue Riderhood of *Our Mutual Friend*.

"Swamp, mist, and mudbank"--if that is the dominant impression made by the view of the Thames off the Cooling marshes, it is not the only and the invariable impression. Even the bleak churchyard, at the foot of the cold, grey tower, is sometimes strewn by the light and flying gust "with beautiful shadows of clouds and trees". And from the Old Battery, where Joe would smoke his pipe with a far more sagacious air than anywhere else, as Pip strove to initiate him into the mysteries of reading and writing by the aid of a broken slate and a short piece of slate pencil, it is "pleasant and quiet" to watch the vessels standing out to sea with their white sails spread, and the light struck aslant, afar off, upon a cloud or sail or green hillside or silvery water line.

[Illustration: COOLING CHURCH]

To the west of Cooling Castle, beyond wide fields--turnips or cabbages--of the colour of dark-green jade, the Church of Cliffe, with its lichgate, standing out boldly from its ridge of chalk, overlooks a straggling village of old and weather-boarded houses. It would be into the road from Cliffe to Rochester, at a point about half a mile from Cooling, that Uncle Pumblechook's chaise-cart would debouch when he took Mrs. Joe to Rochester market "to assist him in buying such household stuffs and goods as required a woman's judgment".

Between the scenery about Cooling and Cliffe and the scenery of the valley of the Medway from Rochester to Maidstone there is all the difference between a November fog and a brilliant summer's day. At the foot of Rochester Castle, from which the long vista of the valley, lying between two chalk ranges of hills that form the watershed of the Medway, stretches far away to a distant horizon, the Esplanade extends along the east side of the river, and there it was that Edwin Drood and Rosa met for the last time and to speak of their separate plans. For a few miles along the valley the natural beauty of the scene is spoilt by the cement works of Borstal, Cuxton, and Wouldham, and the brickworks of Burham. The piles of clay and chalk, the beehive furnaces, and the chimneys vomiting smoke and flame, almost reproduce the characteristics of the Black Country or of a northern manufacturing district. But, when Burham has been left behind, the bright emerald pastures, the tender green of springing corn or the gold of waving harvests, and the orchards, a dazzling sight in May with the snowy clouds of pear and plum and cherry blooms, and the delicate pink-and-white of the

apple blossom, more than justify the appellation claimed for Kent of the garden of England. Opposite to Cuxton, on the western bank, the village of Snodland stands at the junction of Snodland Brook with the Medway. It has been conjectured that Snodland Weir, a mile or so up the brook, was in Dickens's mind when he described Mr. Crisparkle's pilgrimages to Cloisterham Weir in the cold rimy mornings, and his discovery, first of Edwin Drood's watch in a corner of the weir, and then, after diving again and again, of his shirt-pin "sticking in some mud and ooze" at the bottom. The nearest weir on the Medway is at Allington, seven or eight miles above Rochester, and Cloisterham Weir was but "full two miles" away.

Before Allington can be reached, in ascending the Medway, the river is spanned by an ancient stone bridge, of pointed arches and triangular buttresses, at Aylesford. The ancient Norman church, and the red roofs and crowding gables of the picturesque and historic village, are set in a circle of elm trees, with a background of rising chalk downs beyond. Those who have investigated with perhaps "an excess"--as Wordsworth would say--"of scrupulosity" all the details of Pickwickian topography are inclined to believe that the wooden bridge, upon which the chaise hired by the Club to make the journey from Rochester to Dingley Dell came hopelessly to grief, was Aylesford Bridge, transmuted for the nonce from Kentish ragstone into timber. However that may be, there is a matter of genuine history which has signalized in no common way this old-world village. At this ford, the lowest on the Medway, the Jutes under Hengist and Horsa routed the British in a battle which decided the predominating strain of race in future Men of Kent and Kentish Men: natives of Kent, that is, according as they dwell on the right or left bank of the Medway. A farmhouse with the name of Horsted, at the point farther back where the Rochester to Maidstone road is joined by the road from Chatham, stands, it is believed, on the grave of Horsa. And about a mile and a half north of Aylesford, a grey old cairn, set on a green sward in the midst of a cornfield, is also closely associated with the first great victory won by English people on the soil which they were destined to make their own and distinguish with their name. In his *Short History of the English People* J. R. Green says of this cromlech:--

"It was from a steep knoll on which the grey weather-beaten stones of this monument are reared that the view of their first battlefield would break on the English warriors; and a lane which still leads down from it through peaceful homesteads, would guide them across the ford which has left its name in the little village of Aylesford. The Chronicle of the conquering people tells nothing of the rush that may have carried the ford, or of the fight that went straggling up through the village. It only tells that Horsa fell in the moment of victory, and the flint heap of Horsted, which has long preserved his name, and was held in after-time to mark his grave, is thus the earliest of those monuments of English valour of which Westminster is the last and noblest shrine. The victory of Aylesford did more than give East Kent to the English; it struck the keynote of the whole English conquest of Britain."

This cromlech, known as Kit's Coty House, consists of three upright dolmens of sandstone, with a fourth, much larger, crossing them above horizontally. In a neighbouring field there is another group of stones, scattered in disarray amongst the brushwood, to which, as also to Stonehenge and other so-called "Druidical" remains, there attaches the local superstition that they cannot be counted. It would be pleasanter to believe that the current story, to which reference has already been made, that Dickens was poking fun at the antiquarian's reverence for this hoary relic in his narrative of Mr. Pickwick's "BIL STUMPS" inscription, is altogether erroneous. Certainly it is open to anyone who wishes to be incredulous, for there is as much dissimilarity as possible between the massive cromlech near Aylesford and the small slab that Mr. Pickwick discovered at Cobham.

The most salient feature in the Medway valley between Rochester and Maidstone is the height of Blue Bell, or Upper Bell. Here Dickens, who, as he said, had come to realize that the Rochester to Maidstone road passed through some of the most beautiful scenery in England, would often picnic with his visitors. Undulating slopes of pasture and cornfields, hop gardens, orchards, and woodlands, with many a deep-sunk lane embowered in overarching trees that rise from hedgerow clusters of dog-rose, ivy, and honeysuckle, and with snugly nestling homesteads and quaintly-cowled "oast-houses" sprinkled here and there, sweep across the valley, through which the river winds in sinuous curves, onwards to a long range of hills upon the skyline.

Somewhere in this district Dickens came across the types of the old-fashioned and jovially comfortable home of the English yeoman, represented by his Manor Farm, Dingley Dell, and of the little country town, represented by the Muggleton of *Pickwick*, in which local enthusiasm for cricket was ardent, if the standard of skill was somewhat low. The most plausible identification of the home of Mr. Wardle is with Cobtree Hall, which divides the parishes of Boxley and Allington, and it is probable that the original of Muggleton was Town Malling, which is also known as West Malling.

In the Jubilee Edition of *Pickwick* Mr. Charles Dickens the Younger introduced a woodcut of High Street, Town Malling, with a note to the following effect:--

"Muggleton, perhaps, is only to be taken as a fancy sketch of a small country town; but it is generally supposed, and probably with sufficient accuracy, that, if it is in any degree a portrait of any Kentish town, Town Malling, a great place for cricket in Mr. Pickwick's time, sat for it."

Town Malling does not correspond with the description of Muggleton in its distance from Rochester. It is only seven and a half, instead of fifteen miles, from Rochester. And it is not a corporate town. But:

"Everybody whose genius has a topographical bent knows perfectly well that Muggleton is a corporate town, with a mayor, burgess and freemen, and anybody who has consulted the addresses of the mayor to the freemen, or the freemen to the mayor, or both to the corporation, or all three to Parliament, will learn from thence what they ought to have known before, that Muggleton is an ancient and loyal borough, mingling a zealous advocacy of Christian principles with a devoted attachment to commercial rights; in demonstration whereof, the mayor, corporation, and other inhabitants have presented, at divers times, no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home; sixty-eight in favour of the sale of livings in the Church, and eighty-six for abolishing Sunday trading in the street."

[Illustration: AYLESFORD]

If Town Malling has not had so distinguished a political history as that which Dickens assigned to Muggleton, it has a pretty cricket ground, not far removed from the High Street, and the reputation of having in past years distinguished itself in the local cricket of this district of Kent. It is not difficult to believe, then, that Dumkins and Podder here made their gallant stand for All Muggleton against the Dingley Dellers, and that at the Swan--otherwise the Blue Lion--the *Pickwick* fellowship shared the conviviality of the rival teams, until Mr. Snodgrass's notes of the evening's transactions faded away into a blur in which there was an indistinct reference to "broiled bones" and "cold without". The stately ruins of a Benedictine Abbey, founded by Bishop Gundulf, give to the town an attraction of a severer kind.

From Town Malling to Cobtree Hall, supposing the double identification to be correct, should be a walk of not above two miles "through shady lanes and sequestered footpaths", the delightful scenery of which made Mr. Pickwick feel regret to arrive in the main street of "Muggleton". The distance, however, is in fact something more than two miles as the crow flies. Cobtree Hall is a green-muffled Elizabethan mansion, of red brick, faced with stone, and looks out over an undulating country of orchards and hop fields. It has been altered and enlarged since the days of *Pickwick*, but the kitchen is just such another large, old-fashioned kitchen as befits the Christmas games and wassail that had been kept up at Manor Farm, Dingley Dell, "by old Wardle's forefathers from time immemorial". The dining-room, though modernized, has a massive marble mantelpiece not unsuited to that "capacious chimney up which you could have driven one of the new patent cabs, wheels and all", and in which a blazing fire used to roar every evening, not only when its warmth was grateful, but for a symbol, as it were, of old Wardle's attachment to his fireside. This was the kind of antiquity which made the most direct appeal to Dickens's sentiment and imagination--not a remote and historic antiquity, but the furthest extent of a living link between the Present and the Past. In many an old house of Kentish yeoman or squire Dickens would have seen some such long, dark-panelled room as the best

sitting-room at Manor Farm, with four-branched, massive silver candlesticks in all sorts of recesses and on all kinds of brackets; with samplers and worsted landscapes of ancient date on the walls; with a very old lady in lofty cap and faded silk gown in the chimney corner, where she had sat on her little stool as a girl more than half a century before, and with a hearty, rubicund host presiding over a mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary washhouse copper, in which the hot apples would "hiss and bubble with a rich look and a jolly sound that were perfectly irresistible". Or when the carpet was up, the candles burning brightly, and family, guests, and servants were all ranged in eager lines, longing for the signal to start an old-fashioned country dance as, from a shady bower of holly and evergreens at the upper end of the room, the two best fiddles and only harp of the nearest market town prepared to strike up, it is no wonder that such a lover of unspoilt, natural manners as Boz declared, "If any of the old English yeomen had turned into fairies when they died, it was just the place in which they would have held their revels."

A triangular piece of ground, with a sprinkling of elms about it, is all that is left of the rookery in which Mr. Tupman met with an accident from the unskilful marksmanship of Winkle. At the back of the house is the pond where Mr. Winkle's reputation as a sportsman led him into another catastrophe, and his skating exposed itself as of anything but a graceful and "swan-like" style; where, too, Mr. Pickwick revived the sliding propensities of his boyhood with infinite zest until the ice gave way with a "sharp, smart crack", and Mr. Pickwick's hat, gloves, and handkerchief, floating on the surface, were all of Mr. Pickwick that anyone could see.

Cobtree Hall, it has been mentioned, divides the parishes of Boxley and Allington, the initials of which are carved on a beam in the kitchen that suggests Phiz's plate of "Christmas Eve at Mr. Wardle's". In Aylesford the tomb of the prototype, according to local tradition, of "Mr. Wardle" bears the inscription, "Also to the memory of Mr. W. Spong, late of Cobtree, in the Parish of Boxley, who died November 15th, 1839". Boxley village is near the ancient Pilgrims' Road to Canterbury, and here Alfred Tennyson stayed in 1842. Park House, nearer the Medway, was the home of Edward Lushington, who married Tennyson's sister Cecilia, and in its grounds Tennyson found the setting for the prologue to the "Princess". The "happy faces" of "the multitude, a thousand heads", by which the "sloping pasture" was "sown", under "broad ambrosial aisles of lofty lime", had probably come from Maidstone on the annual jaunt of that town's Mechanics' Institute. The village of Allington stands on the other side of the Medway, though the boundaries of the parish extend beyond the right bank of the river. Allington Castle, which the Medway half-encircles with a sweeping bend, was one of the seven chief castles of Kent. It was here that Sir Thomas Wyatt, the elder, diplomatist, poet, and lover of Anne Boleyn, who with the gallant and ill-fated Surrey "preluded", in a more exact sense than it could be said of Chaucer, "those melodious bursts that fill the spacious times of great Elizabeth", was able to proclaim, in an epistle to "Mine own John Poins":

[Illustration: MAIDSTONE, ALL SAINTS' CHURCH AND THE PALACE]

"I am here in Kent and Christendome, Among the Muses where I read and rhyme".

Hither there comes, in Tennyson's "Queen Mary", to Sir Thomas Wyatt, the younger, his man William, with news of "three thousand men on Penenden heath all calling after you, and your worship's name heard into Maidstone market, and your worship the first man in Kent". And Wyatt sets out to lead a rising which will end on Tower Hill, and setting out, looks back and cries:

"Ah, grey old castle of Allington, green field Beside the brimming Medway, it may chance That I shall never look upon you more".

"The brimming Medway."--the epithet is as just as Tennyson's descriptive epithet almost invariably proves to be. For at Allington the Medway, which from Aylesford Bridge to Allington Lock has dwindled to a narrow stream, swells out into a broad expanse, where many boats can easily move abreast. If the Cloisterham Weir of *Edwin Drood* were really the nearest weir on the Medway to Rochester, then Allington Lock would be the

place. But it has been pointed out on an earlier page that the distances do not tally in the novel and in actuality, and Dickens may have had in mind the weir on Snodland Brook.

The country round Maidstone abounds in the "happy valleys" portrayed in the epilogue to the "Princess", with "grey halls alone among their massive groves", and "here and there a rustic tower Half lost in belts of hop and breadths of wheat". The gyres and loops of the Medway, too, afford through the screen of woodlands and orchards "the shimmering glimpses of a stream". To the credulous enthusiasm of an early eighteenth-century native of Strood, that Anne Pratt who did for English wild flowers what White of Selborne did for English wild birds, "travellers who have beheld in other lands the various scenes of culture--the olive grounds of Spain or Syria, the vineyards of Italy, the cotton plantations of India, or the rose fields of the East--have generally agreed that not one of them all equals in beauty our English hop gardens". To Dickens himself such a panegyric of the Kentish hop gardens would have scarcely seemed exaggeration, but he would have hastened to add the dismal antithesis of the missionary bishop--"Only man is vile". He had barely settled-in at Gadshill Place when he wrote:--

"Hop-picking is going on, and people sleep in the garden, and breathe in at the keyhole of the house door. I have been amazed, before this year, by the number of miserable base wretches, hardly able to crawl, who go hop-picking. I find it is a superstition that the dust of the newly picked hop, falling freshly into the throat, is a cure for consumption. So the poor creatures drag themselves along the roads, and sleep under wet hedges, and get cured soon and finally."

The county town of Kent is situated not only on the Medway, but on the pilgrim road to Canterbury, and of a monastic hospital for pilgrims and other poor travellers there still survive some relics. Overlooking the river stand some fine old houses, and the conspicuous grey square tower of All Saints, built by the proud Archbishop Courtenay, the enemy of Wicliffe, in the fourteenth century. Here is the tomb of Grocyn, that "lord of splendid lore Orient from old Hellas' shore", who was appointed master of the collegiate church in 1506. One of the sixteen palaces that the Archbishops of Canterbury could boast in days gone by is preserved as the local school of science and art, a dedication to public use which commemorates the Jubilee of Queen Victoria in 1887. The Corporation Museum is an even more interesting and beautiful structure. It was Chillington Manor House, a seat of the Cobham family, and, though it has had a new wing annexed to it, it is an exceptionally well preserved and beautiful example of Elizabethan domestic architecture, with its latticed windows, jutting gables, elaborately moulded timber, and pillared chimneys. In the panel of an oak fireplace is a carved head of Dickens, by a local carver named Hughes, who was employed at Gadshill Place. To Maidstone Jail Dickens proposed to carry Sir Luke Fildes, in order that he might make a picture of Jasper in the condemned cell, and do something which would surpass Cruikshank's illustration to *Oliver Twist*, in which Fagin's terror-stricken vigil in the murderer's cell is portrayed.

At Maidstone the southern limit may be considered to have been reached of the district of Kent which can be distinguished as "Dickens-land" in the most intimate sense, as lying within the radius of the novelist's habitual walks and drives from his residence at Gadshill. It does not enter into the scope of this brief essay to describe topographically other parts of Kent. But it will be excusable to glance very slightly at Dickens's associations with Canterbury--though this is the subject of a separate monograph in this series--Broadstairs, Deal, Dover, and the famous London-to-Dover road through Rochester, Chatham, and Canterbury.

[Illustration: JASPER'S GATEWAY]

No one, perhaps, who has ever read *Little Dorrit*, whatever else in the novel may slip the memory, fails to recall the oracular utterance of Mr. F.'s aunt that "There's milestones on the Dover road". To the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities* the colour and atmosphere of the time in which it is set, and of the drama which is to be developed, are given at once by the alarm of the passengers of the Dover coach as they walk up Shooter's Hill to ease the horses, when the furious galloping of a horseman is heard behind them--the supposed highwayman proving to be, however, Jerry Cruncher, messenger at Tellson's Bank by day, and at night an "agricooltural

character" of ghoulish avocations. David Copperfield trudged the Dover road, footsore and hungry, when he left Murdstone and Grinby's blacking warehouse to throw himself on the compassion of Betsy Trotwood, "and got through twenty-three miles on the straight road" to Rochester and Chatham on a certain Sunday. Afterwards, when he had found a home and a protecting providence with his aunt, he met with his "first fall in life" on the Canterbury coach, being asked by the coachman to resign the box seat to a seedy gentleman, who proclaimed that "'Orses and dogs is some men's fancy. They're wittles and drink to me."

"I have always considered this as the first fall I had in life. When I booked my place at the coach office, I had had 'Box Seat' written against the entry, and had given the bookkeeper half a crown. I was got up in a special greatcoat and shawl, expressly to do honour to that distinguished eminence; had glorified myself upon it a good deal; and had felt that I was a credit to the coach. And here, in the very first stage, I was supplanted by a shabby man with a squint, who had no other merit than smelling like a livery stables, and being able to walk across me, more like a fly than a human being, while the horses were at a canter."

Pip, in *Great Expectations*, makes many expeditions to and fro on the Dover road, between Rochester and London, and on one of them, riding outside, has the two convicts, bound for the hulks moored off the marshes, as fellow passengers on the back seat.

At Canterbury it is not possible to establish the identity of Dr. Strong's house--"a grave building in a courtyard, with a learned air about it that seemed very well suited to the stray rooks and jackdaws who came down from the Cathedral towers, and walked with a clerkly bearing on the grass plot"--but Canon Benham has asserted his conviction that Mr. Wickfield's house--where David made the acquaintance of Agnes and of Uriah Heap--is at the corner of Broad Street and Lady Wotton's Green, though it is another residence, by the West Gate, which is represented on the picture postcards.

The Royal Fountain Hotel in St. Margaret's Street (formerly the Watling Street) is recognized as the County Inn at which Mr. Dick used to sleep when he went over to Canterbury to visit David Copperfield at Dr. Strong's school. All the little bills which he contracted there, it will be remembered, were referred to Miss Trotwood before they were paid; a circumstance which caused David to think "that Mr. Dick was only allowed to rattle his money, and not to spend it". A less pretentious establishment, the "little inn" where Mr. Micawber put up on his first visit to Canterbury, and "occupied a little room in it partitioned off from the commercial, and strongly flavoured with tobacco smoke", is probably the Sun Inn in Sun Street. Here Mr. and Mrs. Micawber entertained David to "a beautiful little dinner"--

"Quite an elegant dish of fish; the kidney end of a loin of veal roasted; fried sausage meat; a partridge and a pudding. There was wine, and there was strong ale; and after dinner Mrs. Micawber made us a bowl of hot punch with her own hands."

Local tradition at Broadstairs used to point to Fort House, on the cliff by the Coastguard Station, as the holiday residence at which Dickens wrote most of *Bleak House*. But though it has been rechristened from the title of the novel, by an owner who demolished Dickens's summer home, and built the existing pseudo-Gothic structure on its foundations, no part of *Bleak House* was written at Broadstairs. Dickens, however, for many summers, visited the little town on the curving bay between Margate and Ramsgate; the Albion Hotel, where he notes that "the landlord has delicious hollands", No. 12 (now 31) High Street, and Lawn House, near Fort House, receiving him at different times. At Broadstairs he wrote a portion of *Pickwick*, of *Nicholas Nickleby*, and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, and he also stayed there while engaged on the *American Notes*, *Dombey and Son*, and *David Copperfield*. He forsook it at last, because it had become too noisy, but he has left an agreeable picture of it in *Our Watering Place*; but a passage in a letter to Forster invests it with still gayer colours:

"It is the brightest day you ever saw. The sun is sparkling on the water so that I can hardly bear to look at it. The tide is in, and the fishing boats are dancing like mad. Upon the green-topped cliffs the corn is cut and piled in shocks; and thousands of butterflies are fluttering about, taking the bright little red flags at the



mastheads for flowers, and panting with delight accordingly."

To the characters and the *mise en scène* of his novels, however, Broadstairs appears to have contributed nothing, except that the lady whose aversion to donkeys furnished so strong an idiosyncrasy to Miss Betsy Trotwood's character was a native, not of Dover, as in the novel, but of Broadstairs.

Dover, besides giving a local habitation to David's aunt, is associated with *The Tale of Two Cities*, since it was here that Mr. Lorry made the startling revelation to Miss Manette that her father had been "Recalled to Life". The vignette of eighteenth-century Dover is executed with true Dickensian verve:

[Illustration: CHALK CHURCH]

"The little narrow, crooked town of Dover hid itself away from the beach, and ran its head into the chalk cliffs like a marine ostrich. The beach was a desert of heaps of sea and stones tumbling wildly about, and the sea did what it liked, and what it liked was destruction. It thundered at the town, and thundered at the cliffs, and brought the coast down, madly. The air among the houses was of so strong a piscatory flavour that one might have supposed sick fish went up to be dipped in it, as sick people went down to be dipped in the sea. A little fishing was done in the port, and a quantity of strolling about by night, and looking seaward: particularly at those times when the tide made, and was near flood. Small tradesmen, who did no business whatever, sometimes unaccountably realized large fortunes, and it was remarkable that nobody in the neighbourhood could endure a lamplighter."

It was to Dover that Dickens went when he was labouring with unusual difficulty over *Bleak House*, and lamenting his inability to "grind sparks out of this dull anvil". At Dover, on his Second Series of Readings, he found "the audience with the greatest sense of humour", and "they laughed with such really cordial enjoyment, when Squeers read the boy's letters, that the contagion" was irresistible even to Dickens himself.

Deal, as it was in 1853, is rapidly but vigorously sketched in chapter xlv of *Bleak House*. Esther Summerson arrives from a night journey by coach, eager and anxious to help, if possible, Richard Carstone, the unhappy victim of the fatal chancery lawsuit:

"At last we came into the narrow streets of Deal; and very gloomy they were, upon a raw misty morning. The long flat beach, with its little irregular houses, wooden and brick, and its litter of capstans, and great boats, and sheds, and bare upright poles with tackle and blocks, and loose gravelly waste places overgrown with grass and weeds, wore as dull an appearance as any place I ever saw. The sea was heaving under a thick white fog; and nothing else was moving but a few early rope-makers, who, with the yarn twisted round their bodies, looked as if, tired of their present state of existence, they were twisting themselves into cordage. But when we got into a warm room in an excellent hotel, and sat down, comfortably washed and dressed, to an early breakfast (for it was too late to think of going to bed), Deal began to look more cheerful.... Then the fog began to rise like a curtain; and numbers of ships, that we had had no idea were near, appeared. I don't know how many sail the waiter told us were then lying in the Downs. Some of these vessels were of grand size: one was a large Indiaman, just come home; and when the sun shone through the clouds, making silvery pools in the dark sea, the way in which these ships brightened, and shadowed, and changed, amid a bustle of boats putting off from the shore to them, and from them to the shore, and a general life and motion in themselves and everything around them, was most beautiful."

That Dickens was essentially a "Kentish Man", in spite of the absence of a birth qualification, in spite, too, of his long residence in London, and of his peculiarly intimate knowledge of the byways and nooks and corners of London, ample proof has by this time been given. To this, however, may be added Forster's significant statement that, "Excepting always the haunts and associations of his childhood, Dickens had no particular sentiment of locality, and any special regard for houses he had lived in was not a thing noticeable in him". This was not surprising. The conditions of life in a modern capital under most circumstances, but especially

for anyone who has made many removes, tend to produce the impression that a man's roof-tree only represents the transient shelter of a caravanserai, rather than an abiding habitation on which memory has stamped indelible traces. Nor can even the most extended associations of maturity take the place of the imperishable links forged in the most susceptible years of fresh and sensitive childhood. For Dickens this vital distinction was emphasized both by natural idiosyncrasy and by the pressure of events which shaped his destiny.

"If it should appear," he says, speaking of himself under the mask of David Copperfield, "from anything I may set down in this narrative, that I was a child of close observation, or that as a man I have a strong memory of my childhood, I undoubtedly lay claim to both of these characteristics."

The change from Chatham and Rochester to London was indissolubly connected in his mind with a change in the family fortunes that deprived him of the ordinary advantages and pleasures open to any average boy of even the lower middle classes. It ushered in a period of misery and degradation that he could never recall without acute suffering. The few years of happiness which he enjoyed before he was carried away to London in the stage coach "Commodore", at the age of nine, were divided from a strenuous and successful manhood by so dark a gulf as to concentrate all the powers of recollection upon them with a desperate kind of intensity. It was the realization of a childish ambition conceived in that halcyon era which drew him to Gadshill, and he returned again and again to the contemplation of his earliest dreams and imaginings. He wrote from Gadshill of his old nurse--the original, it can hardly be doubted, of Peggotty:--

"I feel much as I used to do when I was a small child, a few miles off [i.e. at Ordnance Terrace, Chatham], and somebody--*who*, I wonder, and which way did *she* go when she died?--hummed the evening hymn, and I cried on the pillow--either with the remorseful consciousness of having kicked somebody else, or because still somebody else had hurt my feelings in the course of the day".

For the second number of *Household Words*, when he "felt an uneasy sense of there being a want of something tender, which would apply to some universal household knowledge", he composed a little paper about "a child's dream of a star". It was the story of a brother and sister, constant child companions, who used to make friends of a star, watching it together until they knew when and where it would rise, and always bidding it good-night, so that when the sister dies, the lonely brother still connects her with the star, which he then sees opening as a sea of light, and its rays making a shining pathway from earth to heaven. It was his sister Fanny, who had often wandered with him at night in St. Mary's Churchyard, near their home at Chatham, looking up at the stars, and her death, shortly before the paper was written, had revived the fancy of childhood. In *The Uncommercial Traveller* he revisits "Dullborough", and the first discovery he makes is that the station has swallowed up the playing field of the school to which he went during his last two years at Chatham.

[Illustration: SHORNE CHURCH]

"It was gone. The two beautiful hawthorn trees, the hedge, the turf, and all those buttercups and daisies, had given place to the stoniest of jolting roads; while, beyond the station, an ugly dark monster of a tunnel kept its jaws open, as if it had swallowed them and were ravenous for more destruction. The coach that had carried me away, was melodiously called Timpson's Blue-eyed Maid [it was really called the 'Commodore'], and belonged to Timpson, at the coach office up street; the locomotive engine that had brought me back was called severely No. 97, and belonged to S.E.R., and was spitting ashes and hot water over the blighted ground.... Here, in the haymaking time, had I been delivered from the dungeons of Seringapatam, an immense pile (of haycock), by my countrymen, the victorious British (boy next door and his two cousins), and had been recognized with ecstasy by my affianced one (Miss Green), who had come all the way from England (second house in the terrace) to ransom me and marry me."

In playful vein Dickens professes to record his disappointment at failing to receive any recognition from a "native", in the person of a phlegmatic greengrocer, when he revisits Rochester, and revives the associations

of haunts beloved in childhood.

"Nettled by his phlegmatic conduct, I informed him that I had left the town when I was a child. He slowly returned, quite unsoftened, and not without a sarcastic kind of complacency, Had I? Ah! and did I find it had got on tolerably well without me? Such is the difference (I thought when I had left him a few hundred yards behind, and was by so much in a better temper) between going away from a place and remaining in it. I had no right, I reflected, to be angry with the greengrocer for his want of interest; I was nothing to him; whereas he was the town, the cathedral, the bridge, the river, my childhood, and a large slice of my life, to me."

That is one side of the medal, but the other is displayed in *David Copperfield*, when little Mr. Chillip, the doctor, welcomes David back to England:

"'We are not ignorant, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, slowly shaking his little head again, 'down in our part of the country, of your fame. There must be great excitement here, sir,' said Mr. Chillip, tapping himself on the forehead with his forefinger. 'You must find it a trying occupation, sir!'"

A feature of Dickens's literary manner, so insistent that the most superficial reader cannot miss it, is the individual and almost human aspect which a street or a landscape, a house or a room, takes on in his description. A typical example may be selected in Mr. Wickfield's house--

"A very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long, low lattice windows bulging out still farther, and beams with carved heads on the ends bulging out too, so that I fancied the whole house was leaning forward, trying to see who was passing on the narrow pavement below."

It was the outcome of an acute nervous sensibility, amounting at times to an almost neurotic irritability, such as peeps out from his confession that the shape of Earl Grey's head, when he was a Parliamentary reporter in the Gallery, "was misery to me and weighed down my youth". This peculiarity of temperament had established itself when, a little delicate and highly strung child, he used to transfer the scenes and happenings of the novels to which he stole away from the other boys at their play, into the setting of his own existence, and "every barn in the neighbourhood, every stone in the church, and every foot of the churchyard, had some association of its own connected with these books, and stood for some locality made famous in them".

There has seldom, perhaps, been such an absence of complexity in genius of a high order as there was in Dickens's character. But though there was no complexity, there were two very different aspects--acute sensibility was not incompatible with a virile and buoyant spirit. And so Dickens's associations with the country which he loved best and knew most intimately were, on the one side, those of a dreamy childhood, on the other, of a lusty zest in outdoor life and the rustic jollity of an old-world "Merry England". The sports and revels of Manor Farm, Dingley Dell, have all the exuberance of Lever's Irish novels. Dickens must have often taken part in merry-makings such as he describes, on flying visits that are not recorded in Forster, before he sat down to write about them during his honeymoon at Chalk. As the Master of Gadshill, his lithe, upright figure, clad in loose-fitting garments, and rather dilapidated shoes, was a familiar sight to all the country neighbours, as he swung along the shady lanes, banked high with hedges that were full of violets, purple and white, ferns, and lichens, and mosses. Often he would call at the old-fashioned "Crispin and Crispianus", on the north side of the London road just out of Strood, for a glass of ale, or a little cold brandy and water, and sit in the corner of the settle opposite the fireplace, looking at nothing but seeing everything. In the chapter on "Tramps" in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, he imagines himself to be the travelling clockmaker, who sees to something wrong with the bell of the turret stable clock up at Cobham Hall, and after being regaled in the enormous servants' hall with beef and bread, and powerful ale, sets off through the woods till the town lights appear right in front, and lies for the night at the ancient sign of Crispin and Crispianus. The floating population of the roads,--the travelling showman, the cheap jack, the harvest and hopping tramps, the young fellows who trudge along barefoot, their boots slung over their shoulders, their shabby bundles under their arms, their sticks newly cut from some roadside wood, and the truculently humorous tramp, who tells the

Beadle: "Why, blow your little town! who wants to be in it? Wot does your dirty little town mean by comin' and stickin' itself in the road to anywhere?"--all are closely scanned and noted, as they mount or descend Strood Hill in perennial procession. Dickens was himself a sturdy and inveterate pedestrian. When he suffered from insomnia he would think nothing of rising in the middle of the night and taking a thirty miles' spin before breakfast.

[Illustration: THE LEATHER BOTTLE, COBHAM]

"Coming in just now," he wrote in his third year at Gadshill, "after twelve miles in the rain, I was so wet that I have had to change and get my feet into warm water before I could do anything."

In February, 1865, he wrote:

"I got frost-bitten by walking continually in the snow, and getting wet in the feet daily. My boots hardened and softened, hardened and softened, my left foot swelled, and I still forced the boot on; sat in it to write, half the day; walked in it through the snow, the other half; forced the boot on again next morning; sat and walked again; and being accustomed to all sorts of changes in my feet, took no heed. At length, going out as usual, I fell lame on the walk, and had to limp home dead lame, through the snow, for the last three miles--to the remarkable terror, by the way, of the two big dogs."

It is hardly necessary to say that Dickens never so absorbed the local spirit and genius of that part of rural England which he knew and loved best as the Brontës absorbed the spirit of the Yorkshire moorlands, or Mr. Hardy the spirit of Wessex, or Mr. Eden Phillpotts the spirit of Dartmoor, or Sir A. Quiller-Couch the spirit of the "Delectable Duchy". He was too busy and preoccupied a man for this, and had too much of his life and work behind him, when he made his permanent home in "Dickens-land". And Gadshill was too near to the bustle and stir of Chatham to furnish a purely idyllic environment or entirely unsophisticated rusticity. But it is not unduly fanciful to discover the influence of Kentish scenery, with its bright, clear atmosphere, its undulating slopes of green woodland and green hop fields, pink-and-white orchards, and golden harvests--the prettiest though not the most beautiful scenery in England--upon his conception of a typical

"English home--grey twilight pour'd On dewy pastures, dewy trees, Softer than sleep--all things in order stored, A haunt of ancient Peace".

Though no local name is attached to it, and no local tradition identifies it with any particular spot, there is no difficulty in fixing in the very heart of "Dickens-land" the picture upon which the "Battle of Life" is opened: the joyous dance of two girls, "quite unconstrained and careless", "in one little orchard attached to an old stone house with a honeysuckle porch", "while some half-dozen peasant women standing on ladders, gathering the apples from the trees, stopped in their work to look down, and share their enjoyment".

"As they danced among the orchard trees, and down the groves of stems and back again, and twirled each other lightly round and round, the influence of their airy motion seemed to spread and spread, in the sunlighted scene, like an expanding circle in the water. Their streaming hair and fluttering skirts, the elastic grass beneath their feet, the boughs that rustled in the morning air--the flushing leaves, their speckled shadows on the soft green ground--the balmy wind that swept along the landscape, glad to turn the distant windmill, cheerily--everything between the two girls, and the man and team at plough upon the ridge of land, where they showed against the sky as if they were the last things in the world--seemed dancing too."

Something, too, of the love of good cheer, quaint old Christmas customs, of junketings in ancient farmhouse kitchens and the parlours of ancient hostleries, which has made Dickens the early Victorian apostle of Yuletide "wassail", can be derived from his having "powlert up and down" in a county abounding with comfortable manor houses and cosy inns. It is a ripe and mellow tradition of good cheer, that is quite distinct from the bovine stolidity of a harvest home in George Eliot's Loamshire or the crude animalism of Meredith's

Gaffer Gammon. For Kent, even from the time of Cæsar's Commentaries, has been "the civil'st place of all the isle".

That is the aspect of Dickens's country on the one side--the side which, some years before he established himself at Gadshill, he mapped out, already knowing it intimately, to show to Forster in a brief excursion:

"You will come down booked for Maidstone (I will meet you at Paddock-wood), and we will go thither in company over a most beautiful little line of railroad. The eight miles walk from Maidstone to Rochester, and a visit to the Druidical altar on the wayside, are charming. This could be accomplished on the Tuesday; and Wednesday we might look about us at Chatham, coming home by Cobham on Thursday."

The other side--the dreary marshes lying between the Medway and the Thames, a dark, flat wilderness intersected by dykes and mounds and gates--had associations not less intimate. In *David Copperfield* Dickens transferred the dreams and the events of his childhood to an alien setting. In *Great Expectations* he invents a fictitious story in harmony with scenes in which he delighted to retrace his childish memories. Again, the amphibian creatures which he lightly sketches in *Great Expectations*, and more elaborately in *Our Mutual Friend*, had first impressed themselves on his imagination as he rambled, a tiny, eager-eyed boy, about the dockyards and waterside alleys of Chatham, or made trips to Sheerness with "Mr. Micawber", that is to say, his father, in the Navy Pay yacht, though he long afterwards pursued his studies of them more exhaustively at Wapping and the Isle of Dogs, and in expeditions with the Thames police. It was from a walk with Leech through Chatham by-streets that he gathered the hint of Charley Hexam and his father, for *Our Mutual Friend*, from the sight of "the uneducated father in fustian and the educated boy in spectacles".

But when Dickens took Rochester once more for the background of a story in *Edwin Drood* there seems, to us in our knowledge of the event, something almost ominous. It suggests Waller's famous simile of the stag that returns to die where it was roused. Dickens's last visit to the town was to stimulate his imagination for the conference between Datchery and the Princess Puffer at the entrance to the "Monks' Vineyard". On the last day of his life he was busy, in the chalet in the garden at Gadshill Place, embodying the fancies which he had gathered and fused on that last visit. On the last page which he was to write he endeavoured to record--for the last time--his sense of the atmosphere of the old city.

"A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with the lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields--or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole of the cultivated island in its yielding time--penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm, and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings."

On the eve of that last day he had more than once expressed his satisfaction at having finally abandoned all intention of exchanging Gadshill for London. He had done this still more impressively a few days before.

"While he lived, he said, he should wish his name to be more and more associated with the place; and he had a notion that when he died, he should like to lie in the little graveyard belonging to the Cathedral at the foot of the Castle wall."

Half of his wish had to go unfulfilled; the other half has been realized in a different but a profounder sense than that in which it is conceived. While he lives, in the creations of his humour and pathos, airy things of fun and frolic, tenderness and tears, his name is more and more associated "with the scenes"--to borrow the words of the memorial tablet in Rochester Cathedral--"in which his earliest and his latest years were passed", scenes that "from the associations ... which extended over all his life" have the best right to be known as "Dickens-land".

*Printed by Blackie & Son, Ltd., Glasgow*

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Transcriber's note

The following changes have been made to the text:

Page 19: "by an unbridgable chasm" changed to "by an unbridgeable chasm".

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