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THE VICTORIAN DOMESTIC REALISTS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University

1970

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL FOREWORD

To prevent the needless proliferation of footnotes, citations for passages from the major works used by this study are included in the text. For example, the reference (I, iii, 21), following a quotation from *The Mill on the Floss*, refers to Book I, Chapter iii, page 21 of that novel. The edition of each work thus cited is indicated below:

- Dickens, Charles. All references are to the respective volumes of *The Oxford Illustrated Dickens*. London: Oxford University Press, 1948-1955.


INTRODUCTION

In the English periodicals of the 1830's, reviewers of contemporary poetry and fiction increasingly called for a literature which would concentrate upon the commonplace and familiar aspects of everyday life. Because the reviewers approved of the detailed representation of household interiors, familial incidents, and domestic affections, often indeed categorizing worthy writers as members of the "Simple" or "Domestic" school, and because not only many of the reviewers but a number of the writers themselves insisted upon the truth and reality of all the domestic sentiments associated with home, the hearth, and the heart, the name which I have chosen to describe this emergent literary trend is Domestic Realism. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the sources and development of Domestic Realism in minor Victorian poets, the literary annuals, and the critics' reviews, and to show the significance of this domestic current for the interpretation of major works of Victorian poetry and fiction up to the early 1870's, including the writings of Tennyson, Dickens, George Eliot, and Thackeray.

It should be mentioned at the outset that while domesticity is the subject of the first four chapters, the
question of realism is not dealt with until Chapter V. However, a preliminary definition is necessary here. Domestic realism is a complex of ideas founded on the Rousseauistic premise that man is essentially good and that he has an innate guide to truth in the teachings of his heart. A person may become corrupted by the world, but this can only happen if he has betrayed his own better nature. This inherited nature is common to all men, and, consequently, the domestic writer should appeal to "the passions and emotions which are common to all, and are therefore sympathized in by all . . . [to] the human nature which makes the whole world kin."¹ The communication between man and man strengthens and develops this goodness, especially in the family where mutual love and affection, in the context of the home, provide an atmosphere of tender moral associations which may greatly nurture the inward being of each family member, and especially that of the children through parental affection. When one leaves to enter the world on his own, he carries within him a reservoir of home memories which are his constant support and moral guardian through the associational links of memory that tie him to the good of the past. However, even if he has had an unhappy home and lacks the beneficent moral associations to support him, his innate moral nature is

¹"Tennyson's Enoch Arden, etc." (anon. rev.), North British Review, XLI (1864), 248.
capable of leading him towards the good, as is the case
with Oliver Twist, David Copperfield, Jane Eyre, and many
another character in Victorian fiction.

Because of the home's potential for good in
creating a suitable moral environment, the domestic real-
ists placed great emphasis on home life, describing the
sympathy and happiness of the family circle by the hearth,
or the details of household management and cooking; any-
thing concerned with the sanctity of the home, even the
most insignificant of daily affairs, came to be treated in
a nearly reverential manner. The result was endless genre
pictures of household interiors, family groupings, and
scenes of, or allusions to, the chief events of life for
the common man, birth, marriage, death, meetings and
partings, birthdays and anniversaries—pictures, in short,
of the most touching situations in family living. Many
such scenes appeared so frequently in domestic literature
that they became what we will call "standard" incidents,
and their conventional nature was occasionally recognized
by the reviewers. A standard deathbed scene or family
grouping was calculated to elicit a sympathetic response,
to soften the reader's heart or even reduce him to tears.
Thus, literature had a moral efficacy which lay in its
ability to move men by reliance on the associations of
daily living and of memory which such scenes stimulated.
This emotional appeal could break down the barriers of
selfishness and reintegrate the reader with his own better nature, the common human affection which made up the Victorian domestic ideal.

There was much more to domestic realism than this, but we can see by this preliminary survey that the domestic philosophy was essentially positive in its outlook, dedicated as it was to furthering the growth of man's inward being and convinced of man's innate goodness. In its general tone, therefore, domestic realism is in concord with the optimism of the 1830's and 1840's and in contrast to the growing philosophical pessimism of the 1850's and 1860's. By 1870 the increasing frustration, anxiety, ennui, and doubt formed a black background for the often tenuous current of domestic realism, and many writers were influenced by the gathering gloom—witness the darkening vision of Dickens' later novels. However, it should be remembered that through the mid-Victorian period, pessimism was the especial possession of a certain portion of the intellectual community and that the popular attitude of the masses was most favorable for the development of domestic realism. The optimistic home esthetic was quintessentially "Victorian" even in the sixties.

Of course domesticity was but one of many currents in the literature of the times, and it should be stated at the outset that in considering Dickens, for instance, as a member of the domestic "school" I only intend to discuss
his frequent employment of domestic themes—his reliance upon what we might call the domestic "substratum" which filled the spirit of the age. To single out these domestic traits in Dickens is not to deny his literary sensationalism or his sociological concerns, just as to isolate the domestic strain in Thackeray is not to deny his more worldly role of satirist and ironist. Nevertheless, since the reviewers frequently saw such major figures in a domestic light and even classed them according to their sentimental propensities, I believe that for present purposes it is justifiable to label them "domestic" writers—doing so in the spirit of a number of their own contemporaries.
CHAPTER I

THE VICTORIAN DOMESTIC IDEAL

Home Versus the World

In one of those intriguing interludes scattered through all his writings, Dickens pauses in *Little Dorrit* to describe the snug little grocery and notions shop of Mrs. Plornish in London's Bleeding Heart Yard. There, amid the squalor and general impoverishment of the surroundings, a curious fiction has been created:

Mrs. Plornish's shop-parlour had been decorated under her own eye, and presented, on the side towards the shop, a little fiction in which Mrs. Plornish unspeakably rejoiced. This poetical heightening of the parlour consisted in the wall being painted to represent the exterior of a thatched cottage; the artist having introduced (in as effective a manner as he found compatible with the highly disproportioned dimensions) the real door and window. The modest sunflower and hollyhock were depicted as flourishing with great luxuriance on this rustic dwelling, while a quantity of dense smoke issuing from the chimney indicated good cheer within, and also, perhaps, that it had not been lately swept. A faithful dog was represented as flying at the legs of the friendly visitor from the threshold; and a circular pigeon-house, enveloped in a cloud of pigeons, arose from behind the garden paling. On the door (when it was shut), appeared the semblance of a brass plate, presenting the inscription Happy Cottage, T. and M. Plornish; the partnership expressing man and wife. No Poetry and no Art ever charmed the imagination more than the union of the two in this counterfeit cottage charmed Mrs. Plornish. It was nothing to her that Plornish had a habit of leaning against it
as he smoked his pipe after work, when his hat
blotted out the pigeon-house and all the pigeons,
when his back swallowed up the dwelling, when his
hands in his pockets uprooted the blooming garden
and laid waste the adjacent country. (II,xiii,
573-74)

Of course Dickens sees through Mrs. Plornish's domestic
dream and parodies it throughout this description by
pointing up the discrepancy between this ideal cottage and
the actual setting and dimensions. But even though Mr.
Plornish's eye is some inches above the level of the gable
bedroom in the thatch, the incongruity fails to daunt
Mrs. Plornish's domestic myth, and to hear her father sing
a song within the cottage is to Mrs. Plornish a perfect
Pastoral, the Golden Age revived. As is so often the case
with Dickens, in addition to the humor of this scene a
significant point is indirectly made. For the vision of
Happy Cottage is really but one form of the Victorian
domestic ideal, that blessed sanctuary of home which the
Victorians revered in their hearts. The domestic ideal
did not require a country cottage, of course, and in Little
Dorrit and Our Mutual Friend, Dickens makes plain that the
traditional pastoral mode is irrelevant in an age of cities.
But even within the metropolis, the home ideal could and
did exist, and it included the ideas of love, warmth,
tenderness, the family affections, the radiant hearth, and
a hundred other associations. These sentiments of home
were often contrasted by Victorian writers with the cruelty
and heartlessness of the world without, and the security of the home thus became one of its most endearing features. Mrs. Plornish's vision symbolizes in part, at least, the dream of independence from rent-paying and the threat of the debtor's prison, the perpetual bane of the dwellers in Bleeding Heart Yard.

Several contemporary observers of the Victorian scene noted this same duality between home and world, and in 1838, some twenty years before the publication of *Little Dorrit*, Bentley's Miscellany published the views of a German commentator, Dr. Francis Kottenkamp, who asserted that the true Englishman was only to be seen in a domestic light, for he was but a shadow of himself in public:

*A love of domestic life is a prominent feature in the character of all northern nations of German origin, but it is more remarkable in the English than in any other. Their climate excludes them from outdoor amusements; the individual pride of their choleric temperament confines their social and familiar intercourse within a narrow circle. In taverns Englishmen sit behind partitions, to avoid contact with unknown persons; in coffee-houses and clubs they are screened by gigantic newspapers; at public amusements (races, etc.) sociability disappears in the crowd. . . . </p>

In contrast to his restrained behavior in public, the Englishman at home, surrounded by his family and softened by the warmth of the domestic hearth, became sociable, and revealed his real self:

*Even the coldest Englishman will become cheerful*

---

1Francis Kottenkamp, "English Comforts," Bentley's Miscellany, III (1838), 167.
and confiding at the fireside; pride will give way to a well-founded self-respect, heightened by hospitality; unfeigned kindness is shown to every one who is received into the circle round the fire, instead of the reserve which custom, fashion, and national character prescribe in social intercourse.  

Some years later, an anonymous writer for the London Quarterly and Holborn Review made a similar distinction between the public and private worlds of Victorian England, suggesting that unfair judgments of Englishmen by foreigners were simply the result of the fact that

... it is next to impossible for a foreigner to witness the real life of the people. ... Our insular reserve bars all access to that inner circle in which alone our real life lies... The life of the Englishman ... is domestic. In public he is but a functionary. If you would see him, in his true and distinctive character, you must visit him at his home. And this is precisely what a foreigner cannot do.  

If the Englishman has in fact a double character, one public and one private, the important point in this statement is that it is in his domestic nature that the Englishman's "real life" lies; it is at home that he assumes "his true and distinctive character." This domestic-as-reality versus world-as-false distinction is important for an understanding of Domestic Realism, as we shall see in the fifth chapter. A domestically oriented essay on "The Hearth," in Chambers's Journal for 1861 echoed this same

2 Ibid., p. 170.

theme, claiming that while England's continental neighbors and American kindred had betrayed their love of the hearth for the interests and pleasures of public life, "We, in Britain, are the only true Fire-worshippers, the only real votaries of the bright blaze, the social circle, the group of kindly faces, from age to infancy, that make the sunshine of the Hearth. And long may it be so!" Such categorical distinctions between American worldliness and English domesticity—like the generalization about the private and public behavior of the typical Britisher—must be taken with a grain of salt. But although such statements may only be half-truths in fact, it is most significant that many contemporary English essayists at least believed this to be true, and returned to the two-worlds idea again and again.

Dickens parodied these generalizations about the two worlds, public and private, of the typical Victorian Englishman in *Great Expectations* when Wemmick takes Pip in hand and leads him home to the former's residence in Walworth. There Pip beholds with amazement Wemmick's application of the axiom that a man's—or at least an Englishman's—home is his castle. The top of Wemmick's little wooden cottage is crenelated and painted to appear like a battery mounted with guns. A drawbridge provides

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4"The Hearth" (anon.), *Chambers's Journal*, 3d. Ser. XV (1861), 374.
access to the house and Wemmick's miniature cannon, fired nightly at nine, adds to the Castle fantasy. But Wemmick is serious about the Castle, and it signifies something more than a mere whim to him, as he reveals to Pip in his account of his food supply:

"—At the back, there's a pig, and there are fowls and rabbits; then I knock together my own little frame, you see, and grow cucumbers; and you'll judge at supper what sort of a salad I can raise. So, sir," said Wemmick, smiling again, but seriously, too, as he shook his head, "if you can suppose the little place besieged, it would hold out a devil of a time in point of provisions." (xxv,195-96)

Wemmick's pride in the Castle thus reflects the typical Englishman's quest for domestic security amid what he considers a hostile world. Still more significant, perhaps, is the fact that Wemmick's personality changes, depending upon whether he is at the office or at home in the Castle. He embodies the dual personality of the Englishman, for while he is friendly and tender in his domestic environment, when he returns to the office he leaves his "Aged Parent" and the Castle behind him and assumes the impenetrable, impersonal, and, for the Domestic Realists, false and unrepresentative mask of the public Britisher:

Our breakfast was as good as the supper, and at half-past eight precisely we started for Little Britain. By degrees, Wemmick got dryer and harder as we went along, and his mouth tightened into a post-office again. At last, when we got to his place of business and he pulled his key from his coat-collar, he looked as unconscious of his Walworth property as if the Castle and the drawbridge
and the arbour and the lake and the fountain and
the Aged, had all been blown into space together
by the last discharge of the Stinger. (xxv,198)

The Domestic Ideal

Let us now leave the public world of the Englishman
behind and, turning from post-office-mouthed Wemmicks,
begin to examine the Victorian domestic sphere. There is
perhaps no more appropriate introduction to that world than
Dickens' Christmas book for 1845, The Cricket on the Hearth:
A Fairy Tale of Home, which, according to The Athenaeum,
"opens with a picture of the domestic ideal" as the
cricket and the kettle vie with one another to see which
can most cheer the Peerybingle household and make it a
place of domestic appeal and welcome. The kettle's song
begins the contest:

With its warm breath gushing forth in a light
cloud which merrily and gracefully ascended a few
feet, then hung about the chimney-corner as its
own domestic Heaven, it trolled its song with that
strong energy of cheerfulness, that its body
hummed and stirred upon the fire . . . .

And here, if you like, the Cricket DID chime
in! with a Chirrup, Chirrup, Chirrup of such
magnitude, by way of chorus; with a voice so
astoundingly disproportionate to its size, as
compared with the kettle; (size! you couldn't see
it!) that if it had then and there burst itself
like an overcharged gun, if it had fallen a victim
on the spot, and chirruped its little body into
fifty pieces, it would have seemed a natural and
inevitable consequence, for which it had expressly
laboured. (i,161-62)

5"The Cricket on the Hearth" (anon. rev.), The
Athenaeum, No. 947 (December 20, 1845), p. 1219.
The symbols of domesticity follow close upon one another in this little tale of home affection; the Cricket becomes an emblem of household love, the kettle represents that great domestic ceremony of tea-making (see Figure 1), and a number of other incidental comforts and domestic affections are enthusiastically presented, such as Dot Peerybingle's filling of her husband's pipe, a ceremony performed with so many quaint quirks and winsome movements that it "was Art, high Art" (i,180). But the foremost domestic symbol in the story is the Peerybingle family itself, united in mutual love and affection despite the disparity in years between the carrier and his young wife:

It was pleasant to see Dot, with her little figure, and her baby in her arms: a very doll of a baby: glancing with a coquettish thoughtfulness at the fire, and inclining her delicate little head just enough on one side to let it rest in an odd, half-natural, half-affected, wholly nestling and agreeable manner, on the great rugged figure of the Carrier. It was pleasant to see him, with his tender awkwardness, endeavouring to adapt his rude support to her slight need, and make his burly middle-age a leaning-staff not inappropriate to her blooming youth. It was pleasant to observe how Tilly Slowboy, waiting in the background for the baby, took special cognizance (though in her earliest teens) of this grouping . . . . (i,164)

Well might Tilly Slowboy note this grouping, for it is a genre picture of the Victorian domestic ideal, with father, mother, and child united in common love. The working out of the plot severely tests this ideal, but our only present concern is that The Cricket on the Hearth gives us one of the finest illustrations of it. As John Peerybingle sits
Fig. 1.—"Preparing Tea" (1861) by Miss J. M. Bowkett
reflecting by the fire, a vision comes before his eyes which contains innumerable forms of home, including a christening, a marriage, a death—the three major events in the domestic world—as well as a sickbed-tending scene and the image of Dot taking possession of the household keys, both of which are also standard domestic incidents:

And as he soberly and thoughtfully puffed at his old pipe; and as the Dutch clock ticked; and as the red fire gleamed; and as the Cricket chirped; the Genius of his Hearth and Home (for such the Cricket was) came out, in fairy shape, into the room, and summoned many forms of Home about him. Dots of all ages, and all sizes, filled the chamber. Dots who were merry children, running on before him gathering flowers in the fields; coy Dots, half shrinking from, half yielding to, the pleading of his own rough image; newly-married Dots, alighting at the door, and taking wonderful possession of the household keys; motherly little Dots, attended by fictitious Slowboys, bearing babies to be christened; matronly Dots, still young and blooming, watching Dots of daughters, as they danced at rustic balls; fat Dots encircled and beset by troops of rosy grandchildren; withered Dots, who leaned on sticks, and tottered as they crept along. Old Carriers, too, appeared, with blind old Boxers lying at their feet; and newer carts with younger drivers ("Peerybingle Brothers" on the tilt); and sick old Carriers, tended by the gentlest hands; and graves of dead and gone old Carriers, green in the churchyard. And as the Cricket showed him all these things—he saw them plainly, though his eyes were fixed upon the fire—the carrier's heart grew light and happy, and he thanked his Household Gods with all his might . . . . (i,180-81)

The central figure of John Peerybingle's vision appropriately is Dot, for the mother is the great unifying link of the family. Fraser's Magazine voiced this idea in an 1842 essay on "Children" which depicted the mother as
the cohesive element in the family, "its bond of union, its magical wand, its great connecting link in the chain of family hopes and attachments." The mother could tie the family together because of the expansive influence of her female nature through which "she breathes into our hearts those sympathies with humanity, and impresses on our nature those perceptions of morality, which form the impassible barrier between the man and the brute." Even the image of one's mother, remembered in after years, was sufficient to have a pervasive moral influence upon her child. Thackeray makes this point in *Pendennis*, for in spite of his mother's weaknesses and her misjudgment of him in the Fanny Bolton episode, the purified image of Helen Pendennis, as she was when she and Pen were reconciled, haunts Pen ever afterwards:

> Ever after, ever after, the tender accents of that voice falteringly sweet at his ear—the looks of the sacred eyes beaming with an affection unutterable—the quiver of the fond lips smiling mournfully—were remembered by the young man. And at his best moments, and at his hours of trial and grief, and at his times of success and well-doing, the mother's face looked down upon him, and blessed him with its gaze of pity and purity, as he saw it that night when she yet lingered with him; and when she seemed, ere she quite left him, an angel, transfigured and glorified with love . . . .

(II, lvii, 666)

The image of David Copperfield's mother has a similar

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6"Children" (anon.), *Fraser's Magazine*, XXVI (1842), 543.

7"The Female Character" (anon.), *Fraser's Magazine*, VII (1833), 601.
sustaining moral effect upon him during his lonely journey in search of his Aunt, Betsey Trotwood, and he tells us after his encounter with the bullying Tinker that "under this difficulty, as under all the other difficulties of my journey, I seemed to be sustained and led on by my fanciful picture of my mother in her youth, before I came into the world" (xiii,188). Perhaps this idea of the purity and beneficence of motherhood was reinforced by her preponderant association with the domestic sphere, the "Castle" rather than the world beyond. As George Eliot expressed it in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, "A loving woman's world lies within the four walls of her own home; and it is only through her husband that she is in any electric communication with the world beyond" (I,vii,97). If the world corrupts, and only men enter the world (with a few fictional exceptions such as Becky Sharp), it is easy to accept Thackeray's conclusion in *Pendennis* that "Women are pure, but not men. Women are unselfish, but not men . . . ." (I,xviii,192)—understanding "women" here to mean women in their ideal, domestic nature. Dickens voiced the Victorian domestic maxim that women on the whole were purer than men in his characterization of Polly Toodle in *Dombey and Son*, for Polly "was a good plain sample of a nature that is ever, in the mass, better, truer, higher, nobler, quicker to feel, and much more constant to retain, all tenderness
and pity, self-denial and devotion, than the nature of men" (iii,27).

Second only to the mother as a unifying and purifying influence in family life was the child, who served as a focus for the domestic affections, and as described in the following selection from Chambers's Journal, radiated goodness of his own: "In the private home, is not a whole new world of emotions and affections called into existence by the presence of a child? . . . it would be a far other and harder world, if children, and all the softening and purifying influences which proceed from them, were withdrawn. Even the coarsest natures are susceptible of these influences." This is emphatically a Victorian, rather than an eighteenth or twentieth century, view of children. Such a sentimental emphasis upon the child was so typical of the Victorian age that it could be treated with light irony by Trollope in Barchester Towers when he shows Eleanor and Mary Bold hovering indulgently over Eleanor's new baby in a regular service of "Baby Worship." George Eliot similarly, in Middlemarch, satirized the excessive domestic attention paid to Celia's baby, thus indirectly indicating the tendency to see the child as an all-absorbing focus for familial love and affection, in brief, as a unifying and purifying domestic agent.

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"Children" (anon.), p. 179.
Indeed, unity or harmony was the central notion of the domestic ideal. The Victorian domestic vision saw the family as an organic unity, a living whole, and any threat to this familial concord was the worst mischance which could happen. The first prerequisite for domestic harmony was the maintenance of the traditional hierarchy of the Victorian household with the father at the apex. An essayist on "Domestic Harmony" in Chambers's Journal stated, late in the century, "It is enough for our purposes here, that if there be not reverence for, submission to, and sympathy with the head of the family, there cannot be domestic harmony." 9 Because of her instinctive belief in submission, David Copperfield's mother is conscience stricken whenever she has a rebellious thought against her tyrant husband, Mr. Murdstone. As she confides to Peggotty, "I ought to be very thankful to him, and very submissive to him even in my thoughts; and when I am not, Peggotty, I worry and condemn myself, and feel doubtful of my own heart, and don't know what to do" (viii,114). If the Victorian woman was naturally submissive, she needed good leadership, and when this failed, as in the case of Mr. Murdstone, the result was domestic tragedy. Though submission did not guarantee true love and harmony in a marriage, any union without it was doomed. Thus a rebellion

9"Domestic Harmony" (anon.), Chambers's Journal, 4th Ser. XVII (1880), 94.
against authority on the part of the wife was a direct attack upon the Victorian domestic ideal. For instance, in *Little Dorrit*, Amy reacts in standard form when she learns from her sister Fanny that Fanny plans to marry Sparkler and dominate him, thus inverting the idea of female submission:

"And as to the question of clever or not clever, I doubt very much whether a clever husband would be suitable to me. I cannot submit. I should not be able to defer to him enough."

"Oh, my dear Fanny!" expostulated Little Dorrit, upon whom a kind of terror had been stealing as she perceived what her sister meant.

"If you loved any one, all this feeling would change. If you loved any one, you would no more be yourself, but you would quite lose and forget yourself in your devotion to him." (II,xiv,590)

The effect of such insubordination by the wife was carried to its logical consequences by Trollope in *Barchester Towers* where the domineering Mrs. Proudie runs the Bishop and Mr. Slope.

In addition to submission, many of the other domestic virtues, which will be discussed in the next section of this chapter, furthered family unity. As the writer on "Domestic Harmony" in *Chambers's Journal* stated, virtues such as "mutual confidence, oneness, and openness are among the constituents of a harmonious household" and are essential to "the harmony of the whole." The same author concludes that "Even the sadder spirits cannot fail

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10 "Domestic Harmony" (anon.), p. 94.
to be more or less joyously excited under the happy influences of a sunshiny household, where by mutual confidence and loving sympathy, all is known, and each member is a link in the chain of domestic harmony." Beyond mutual confidence, sympathy, submission, and the other domestic virtues supporting familial integrity lies love (domestic love, not Byronic or sexually impassioned), the power which in its turn supports them all. For in the final analysis it is love which binds and strengthens the family into a living whole, and without love the archetypal familial pattern of father, mother, and child is tri-partite rather than a single unity. This is the love symbolized by the Cricket on the hearth, the love felt by the Walworth Wemmick for his Aged Parent, the love felt by Jane Eyre for all those about her when she returns from her month-long visit to her dying Aunt Reed at Gateshead and is warmly received at Thornfield Hall:

Little Adele was half wild with delight when she saw me. Mrs. Fairfax received me with her usual plain friendliness. Leah smiled; and even Sophie bid me "bon soir" with glee. This was very pleasant: there is no happiness like that of being loved by your fellow-creatures, and feeling that your presence is an addition to their comfort.

When tea was over and Mrs. Fairfax had taken her knitting, and I had assumed a low seat near her, and Adele, kneeling on the carpet, had nestled close up to me, and a sense of mutual affection seemed to surround us with a ring of golden peace, I uttered a silent prayer that we might not be parted soon . . . . (II,xxii,8)

\[11\] "Domestic Harmony" (anon.), p. 95.
Of course Charlotte Brontë identifies other sorts of love, and Adele and Mrs. Fairfax ultimately are not enough for Jane, but this interlude indicates the unifying influence of domestic love.

Jane's wish that "we might not be parted soon" represented the domestic longing for mutual communication. Partings must come, however, in the course of human life, as Frederick Goodall's painting, "A Letter from Papa" (see Figure 2) indicates. Because the father is absent, the family group is not a real whole. And here we may come to an understanding of a frequent domestic theme, the Victorians' belief that nature, God, and man worked continually to maintain the integrity of the family, to correct any imbalance in its unity or harmony which, left untended, would represent an inversion or corruption of the natural order of life. Thus, after the death of Mr. Nickleby, Nicholas tries to assume the role of father, and his ultimate hope is that some day he, his mother, and his sister may be united again. Similarly, when Mr. Dorrit becomes child-like through his years of confinement in the Marshalsea, nature strikes a balance of sorts, ever working back towards the idea of organic familial wholeness, and Little Dorrit assumes the role of father to Mr. Dorrit, now her child. The same principle operates in Our Mutual Friend in the Lizzie Hexam-Gaffer Hexam and Jenny Wren-Mr. Wren relationships.
Fig. 2.—"A Letter from Papa" (1855) by Frederick Goodall
Tennyson used this familial ideal in *In Memoriam* as an additional means of expressing Hallam's irrecoverable loss. For if Hallam had lived he would have married Tennyson's sister, Emily, and the domestic pattern would have been perpetuated:

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... boys of thine
Had babbled "Uncle" on my knee;
I seem to meet their least desire
To clap their cheeks, to call them mine.
I see their unborn faces shine
Beside the never-lighted fire.
(LXXXIV)
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Tennyson gives Hallam's loss a "domestic" extension, therefore, expressing it in terms of the non-fulfillment of the domestic ideal—children who will never be born, the fire that never will be lighted. By treating Hallam's death as a violation of the Victorian familial ideal, Tennyson adds depth to his sorrow. Tennyson used the same technique more extensively in depicting the tragedy of Enoch Arden, who returns from his seven-year absence on the desert island to discover that Philip, presuming Enoch to be dead, has married his wife Annie, and usurped his place in the domestic hierarchy. The desolate Enoch approaches "the ruddy square of comfortable light" that shines at the back of Philip's house, and looking in through the window from the darkness outside—darkness symbolic of his exclusion from the domestic world—beholds a genre picture of
the happiness he might himself have had:

For cups and silver on the burnish'd board
Sparkled and shone; so genial was the hearth:
And on the right hand of the hearth he saw
Philip, the slighted suitor of old times,
Stout, rosy, with his babe across his knees;
And o'er her second father stoop'd a girl,
A later but a loftier Annie Lee...12

Enoch sees the unanimity of the father, mother, daughter,
and infant son, all the warmth, peace, and happiness he has
longed for so long and which he now knows he will never
regain. The impact of the vision momentarily overwhelms
him, so that he

Stagger'd and shook; holding the branch,
and fear'd
To send abroad a shrill and terrible cry,
Which in one moment, like the blast of doom,
Would shatter all the happiness of the
hearth.13

Enoch's self-sacrifice preserves this picture from destruc-
tion, for he goes away without making his presence known
and dies in solitude to preserve the others' domestic bliss.

It is significant that "Enoch Arden" first appeared in a
volume titled Idyls of the Hearth (later named for the poem
itself). Tennyson spelled "idyls" here with only one "l"
in order to distinguish these poems from the Idylls of the
King, and it is a testament to the appeal of domestic
literature in the Victorian age that these domestic idyls

12 Alfred Tennyson, "Enoch Arden," Poetical Works

13 Ibid., p. 128.
were never surpassed in popularity among the Victorian reading public, even by their Arthurian counterpart.  

The Domestic Virtues

To return to Great Expectations, it will be remembered that acting upon a generous impulse, Pip asks Wemmick whether or not he should help his friend, Herbert Pocket, get started in life by giving him one hundred pounds a year out of the annual income from his own "expectations." Pip is deeply disappointed by Wemmick's answer, which is a decided no, and asks whether that is Wemmick's deliberate opinion:

"That," he returned, "is my deliberate opinion in this office."
"Ah!" said I, pressing him, for I thought I saw near a loophole here: "but would that be your opinion at Walworth?"
"Mr. Pip," he replied with gravity, "Walworth is one place, and this office is another. Much as the Aged is one person, and Mr. Jaggers is another. They must not be confounded together. My Walworth sentiments must be taken at Walworth; none but my official sentiments can be taken in this office."

Pip acts upon this hint and visits Wemmick at Walworth, where he finds the proprietor of the Castle softened by the gentle influences of home, and most willing to aid him in his project of financing Herbert Pocket. The change in Wemmick's personality is an exaggeration, of course, but it is Dickens' satiric and sincere way of pointing out the

Victorian truism that home and its tender associations bring out the best in man and nurture qualities not displayed in the public world. Dickens dramatized this idea more extensively in *Our Mutual Friend* when the barrister Eugene Wrayburn and his friend, Mortimer Lightwood, discuss Eugene's extravagance in refurbishing their set of chambers in the Temple. In a light tone, Mortimer says to Eugene,

"Anyhow, your vagaries have increased the bill."
"Calls the domestic virtues vagaries," exclaimed Eugene, raising his eyes to the ceiling.
"This very complete little kitchen of ours," said Mortimer, "in which nothing will ever be cooked--"
"My dear, dear Mortimer," returned his friend, lazily lifting his head a little to look at him, "how often have I pointed out to you that its moral influence is the important thing?"
"Its moral influence upon this fellow!" exclaimed Lightwood, laughing.
"Do me the favor," said Eugene, getting out of his chair with much gravity, "to come and inspect that feature of our establishment which you so rashly disparage." With that, taking up a candle, he conducted his chum into the fourth room of a set of chambers—a little narrow room—which was very completely and neatly fitted as a kitchen.
"See," said Eugene, "miniature flour-barrel, rolling-pin, spice-box, shelf of brown jars, chopping board, coffee-mill, dresser elegantly furnished with crockery, saucepans and pans, roasting-jack, a charming kettle, an armoury of dish-covers. The moral influence of these objects, in forming the domestic virtues, may have an immense influence upon me; not upon you, for you are a hopeless case, but upon me. In fact, I have an idea that I feel the domestic virtues already forming." (II,vi,284)

Although this is chiefly a comic scene, it has a more serious underlying purpose for Eugene Wrayburn, now that he is in love with Lizzie Hexam, a secret which Mortimer has not yet discovered. The kitchen will probably receive
little use in these bachelor quarters, as Mortimer has been quick to point out, but for Eugene the cooking utensils symbolize his own hidden yearning after that fuller life which his dreamed-for union with Lizzie Hexam would bring. In his own half-comic, half-serious way, then, Eugene is preparing himself for the future of his hopes. And the beneficent atmosphere of the miniature kitchen is, presumably, all that is needed to turn a wayward and sometimes irresponsible bachelor into a steadfast and faithful husband.

For our purposes, however, this passage's real significance is its indirect revelation of the Victorian idea that the home cultivated certain moral associations, the domestic virtues. In particular, Eugene and Mortimer discuss the domestic virtue of earnestness, whose importance was irreverently depreciated by Oscar Wilde much later in the century, as they continue their conversational witticisms:

"Eugene," said he [Mortimer], "if I could find you in earnest for a minute, I would try to say an earnest word to you."
"An earnest word?" repeated Eugene. "The moral influences are beginning to work. Say on."
"Well, I will," returned the other, "though you are not earnest yet."
"In this desire for earnestness," murmured Eugene, with the air of one who was meditating deeply, "I trace the happy influences of the little flour-barrel and the coffee-mill. Gratifying."

Earnestness, however, was but one item in the hierarchy of
Victorian virtues. Foremost of all was the radiant, loving heart; indeed, the Victorians believed that a loving heart could conquer almost any ill, and that it was far more precious than wisdom, as Dickens pointed out in his characterization of Tom Pinch in *Martin Chuzzlewit*:

Tom, Tom! The man in all this world most confident in his sagacity and shrewdness; the man in all this world most proud of his distrust of other men, and having most to show in gold and silver as the gains belonging to his creed; the meekest favourer of that wise doctrine, Every man for himself, and God for us all (there being high wisdom in the thought that the Eternal Majesty of Heaven ever was, or can be, on the side of selfish lust and love!); shall never find, oh, never find, be sure of that, the time come home to him, when all his wisdom is an idiot's folly, weighed against a simple heart! (xxxix,616)

In its emphasis upon the heart, domesticity is essentially anti-intellectual, and it is not sufficient, but the highest praise, for a character to be described as having a good heart, like Dickens' "innocent good gentleman," Twemlow, in *Our Mutual Friend*, who is the "Knight of the Simple Heart" (II,xiv,419; III,xiii,569). According to the home standard, the true nature of woman is loving, regardless of circumstances; for instance, Peggotty tells David Copperfield of the radiant and transcendant love of his mother which was so wide that it enveloped even the Murdstones: "She often talked to them two down-stairs—for she loved them; she couldn't bear not to love any one who was about her—" (ix,132). From this great primary expansive power of love, innate in all men from birth, most of the
remaining domestic virtues derived. To form a brief, rough classification, those virtues directly originating in love, which may be named the "expansive" virtues, were peace, joy, charity, affection, benevolence, forgiveness, understanding, and that especially great Victorian virtue, sympathy. At a second remove, perhaps, from the radiant heart, we may group the "self-denying" virtues, such as the submission of the wife to her husband, the acceptance of responsibility, earnestness, and the powerful mandate of duty. But these secondary virtues were, in the ideal sense, not merely prescriptions of the moral code but the offspring of love as well; thus, George Eliot says of duty in Romola that "that supremely hallowed motive which men call duty ... can have no inward constraining existence save through some form of believing love" (III,1xi,487).

A third group of domestic virtues would contain those innate qualities of character which the domestic environment ideally would nurture, including simplicity, naturalness, openness, manliness, moral purity, and gentleness, the essential constituents of the gentleman.

The domestic ideal also had a distinctive general attitude or tone which is decidedly opposed to the striving of the Byronic variety of romanticism. This pervasive atmosphere, in the tradition of Isaac Watts and Hannah More, may be described as the virtue of contentment or satisfaction with the existing state of things, with one's home, be
it ever so humble, or one's lot in life, be it ever so low. In contrast to the competitiveness, aspiration, and yearning of many other tendencies at work in the Victorian age ("survival of the fittest"; laissez faire; fictional characters such as Heathcliff and Steerforth who are in the Byronic mode), the domestic world is willing to accept the universe as it finds it so long as nothing threatens the integrity of its familial sphere of peace, love, and unity. The familial ideal thus sees the world as essentially a reflection of itself, as a whole which is satisfactory as it is and needs nothing else for its completion. For this reason we may associate with the domestic current of thought the ideas of stability, contentment, and happiness. As we shall see, this attitude results from a form of translation into the domestic sphere of the old idea of cosmological order. Domestic contentment is reflected in the still-life descriptions of interiors, and genre pictures of the domestic scene, which fill the Victorian novel—scenes in which there is a place for everything, and everything seems in its place. The genre picture is usually self-contained; the eye moves from object to object and from person to person, but is not drawn beyond the confines of the setting to romantic vistas of illimitable sunsets or insurmountable peaks or unfathomable depths—rather the eye centers within the picture and is content to stay there.

The domestic virtues (among which we may now
include the idea of "contentment with the existing state of things") played a much larger role in Victorian fiction than might immediately be supposed, and formed, in effect, a hidden language of their own. For example, one variety of the virtue of openness (classed on the preceding pages as an innate virtue of character) is its marital counterpart, mutual confidence (see the quotations from Chambers's Journal, pages 20-21, above). The breakdown of mutual confidence between Rosamond and Lydgate becomes a thread in the plot of Middlemarch, emblematic of their marital failure. Rosamond interferes with Lydgate's plan to sell the house without consulting him, and later she writes on her own initiative to Godwin Lydgate, his uncle, to ask him for a thousand pounds. When Lydgate discovers this latter move, and after his initial anger has subsided, he appeals to Rosamond:

"Can you not see, Rosamond," he began, trying to be simply grave and not bitter, "that nothing can be so fatal as a want of openness and confidence between us? It has happened again and again that I have expressed a decided wish, and you have seemed to assent, yet after that you have secretly disobeyed my wish. In that way I can never know what I have to trust to." (VII, lxv, 487)

Still later, when Rosamond's dinner invitations have all been turned down, Lydgate refuses to tell her why and leaves her to discover the reason for herself:

Certainly Rosamond in this case had equal reason to complain of reserve and want of confidence on his part ... but a deeper-lying consciousness that he was at fault made him
restless, and the silence between them became intolerable to him; it was as if they were both adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other. (VIII,lxxv,554)

Anthony Trollope also endorses the virtue of mutual confidence in that scene in The Warden in which Eleanor Bold asks her father, the Warden, to confide in her, though she already knows that it is the question of his rights to his salary that is troubling him:

Mr. Harding could not well speak now, for the warm tears were running down his cheeks like rain in May, but he held his child close to his heart and squeezed her hand as a lover might; and she kissed his forehead and wet cheeks, and lay upon his bosom, and comforted him as a woman only can do.

And so they comforted each other—and in what sorrow will not such mutual confidence give consolation!—and with a last expression of love they parted and went comparatively happy to their rooms. (x,133-34,137)

Trollope repeats this idea in Barchester Towers in his description of the marital bliss of Mr. Arabin and Eleanor Bold:

He and his wife live together in perfect mutual confidence. There is but one secret in her bosom which he has not shared. He has never yet learned how Mr. Slope had his ears boxed. (liii,557)

Dickens also dealt with mutual confidence in David Copperfield, for it is this virtue in particular which Mr. Micawber has lost through his involvement in the web of intrigue which Uriah Heep has spun about Mr. Wickfield and all others whom he influences. As a result of this betrayal
of mutual confidence between Mr. Micawber and his wife, he is forced to cloak himself in secrecy, guilt, and suspicion. He appears distraught to his friends and untrue to himself, nor can he be at ease with his wife or his family. When Mr. Micawber exposes Heep and reveals the truth, he can finally return to his wife with open arms and a clear conscience:

His house was not far off; and as the street-door opened into the sitting-room, and he bolted in with a precipitation quite his own, we found ourselves at once in the bosom of the family. Mr. Micawber exclaiming "Emma! my life!" rushed into Mrs. Micawber's arms. Mrs. Micawber shrieked, and folded Mr. Micawber in her embrace.

"Emma!" said Mr. Micawber. "The cloud is past from my mind. Mutual confidence, so long preserved between us once, is restored, to know no further interruption. Now welcome poverty!" cried Mr. Micawber, shedding tears. "Welcome misery, welcome houselessness, welcome hunger, rags, tempest, and beggary! Mutual confidence will sustain us to the end!" (lxi,761)

As we shall see in the sixth chapter, Dickens is so prone to invert and parody Victorian standard occasions or sentimental conventions that we may justly suspect him of comically undercutting the virtue of mutual confidence here. It is a sign of the complexity of his style that Dickens can employ a sentimental notion for serious purposes and simultaneously subvert it for comic effect.

The major Victorian novelists emphasized the delineation of virtues such as mutual confidence; George Eliot, in particular, expanded frequently on the virtues of
sympathy and duty, and Dickens' commentary on the domestic virtues and affections is vast in its range—indeed, we often get the impression that specific characters are designed expressly to illustrate allegorically the success or failure of individual virtues such as the simple heart or simplicity (Tom Pinch) and constancy or the perils of inconstancy (Richard Carstone in Bleak House). The presence or absence of the domestic virtues in a person also served as a standard by which to judge him, as in Jane Eyre's estimate of the beautiful Blanche Ingram whom Jane suspects to be the object of Mr. Rochester's affections:

She was very showy, but she was not genuine: she had a fine person, many brilliant attainments; but her mind was poor, her heart barren by nature: nothing bloomed spontaneously on that soil; no unforced natural fruit delighted by its freshness. She was not good; she was not original: she used to repeat sounding phrases from books: she never offered, nor had, an opinion of her own. She advocated a high tone of sentiment; but she did not know the sensations of sympathy and pity; tenderness and truth were not in her. (I,xviii,239)

The distinctions made in this passage confirm that the domestic ideal sought for inner qualities rather than outer appearances or accomplishments. Birth, position, manners, beauty—all of which Blanche Ingram possesses—are excluded from the domestic virtues. Indeed "that love of home from which all domestic virtues spring," as Dickens tells us in The Old Curiosity Shop, is the possession of the poor man as well as the rich, and the ties and associ-
ations with home are perhaps even stronger in the poor:

And let us linger in this place for an instant to remark that if ever household affections and loves are graceful things, they are graceful in the poor. The ties that bind the wealthy and the proud to home may be forged on earth, but those which link the poor man to his humble hearth are of the true metal and bear the stamp of Heaven. The man of high descent may love the halls and lands of his inheritance as a part of himself, as trophies of his birth and power; his associations with them are associations of pride and wealth and triumph; the poor man's attachment to the tenement he holds, which strangers have held before, and may tomorrow occupy again, has a worthier root, struck deep into a purer soil. His household gods are of flesh and blood, with no alloy of silver, gold, or precious stone; he has no property but the affections of his own heart; and when they endear bare floors and walls, despite of rags and toil and scanty meals, that man has his love of home from God, and his rude hut becomes a solemn place. (xxxviii, 281-82)

In the following chapters, we shall expand upon the idea that the domestic virtues represented a development of the goodness or love innately present in every man from birth, whether rich or poor. They were not the exclusive domain of any one group, but, as presented in the current of domestic philosophy running throughout many Victorian novels, were, rather, the common gift of humanity, the fireside culmination of the democratic idea.

**Domestic Order**

One of the great tenets of the domestic writers was that the physical arrangement of a household reflected its moral probity. For the Victorians the presence of physical order in a household was analogical, symbolizing
the integrity, wholesomeness, and domestic virtue of the family, and the due subordination of its members in the family hierarchy. Mrs. Gaskell illustrated the essential moral decency of the poor of Manchester in Mary Barton by describing the attempt in even the humblest dwellings—as long as it remained humanly possible—to maintain standards of order and cleanliness. For instance, Alice Wilson's poor dwelling in a cellar room, with the bare furnishings of a tiny cupboard, a single bed, two chairs, and a third seat formed by setting a board on two old candle-boxes, is nevertheless the perfection of cleanliness, whitewashed, simple, and neat. As the German commentator cited earlier put it, "Disorder is, in the opinion of the English, highly uncomfortable; everything has its fixed, its appointed place."¹⁵ Consequently, whenever a household in Victorian fiction descends into domestic chaos, it is usually a sign of some larger trouble or threat to the domestic ideal. For instance in Adam Bede, George Eliot tells how, following the death of old Thias Bede, and as an evidence of that tragedy, Lisbeth Bede allowed the kitchen and the rest of the house to fall into disorder:

The kitchen had had none of her attention that day; it was soiled with the tread of muddy shoes, and untidy with clothes and other objects out of place. But what at another time would have been intolerable to Lisbeth's habits of order and cleanliness, seemed to her now just what should be: it

was right that things should look strange and disordered and wretched, now the old man had come to his end in this sad way: the kitchen ought not to look as if nothing had happened. (I,x,90)

In this unhappy state of affairs Dinah Morris visits Lisbeth and comforts her. Dinah's first move, significantly, is to persuade Lisbeth "to let the kitchen be made tidy; for Dinah was bent on this, believing that the sense of order and quietude around her [Lisbeth] would help in disposing Lisbeth to join in the prayer she longed to pour forth at her side" (I,x,97). Dinah begins her ministry here, then, not so much as a Methodist preacher as as a visiting household spirit who returns chaos to order, and helps to make the hearts of men whole by first setting their households right. The following morning, Adam Bede hears a light footstep in the kitchen and the sound of a sweeping brush, and for a moment he imagines it to be Hetty, though his illusion is soon dispelled when he encounters Dinah. It takes the entire course of the novel for Adam to recognize that Hetty is unfit for any such domestic duties because she lacks the home sentiments and affections, the capacity for familial, selfless love, which the undertaking of such domestic occupations symbolizes—and only at the end does Adam see Dinah as the true home spirit, the woman he finally marries. These questions will be discussed at length, later. At present we need only note that Dinah proves herself worthy of Adam's love by
showing in her household-ordering capacity that her real value lies in the home, rather than in spreading the gospel. For in the fiftieth chapter, "In the Cottage," Dinah demonstrates her development in the household arts since that earlier visit to the Bede household in the eleventh chapter, which went under the identical domestic title, "In the Cottage":

Often as Dinah had visited Lisbeth during the last eighteen months, she had never slept in the cottage since the night after Thias's death, when, you remember, Lisbeth praised her deft movements, and even gave a modified approval to her porridge. But in that long interval Dinah had made great advances in household cleverness: and this morning, since Seth was there to help, she was bent on bringing everything to a pitch of cleanliness and order that would have satisfied her Aunt Poyser. The cottage was far from that standard at present, for Lisbeth's rheumatism had forced her to give up her old habits of dilettante scouring and polishing.

She laid by the brush and took up the duster; and if you had ever lived in Mrs. Poyser's household, you would know how the duster behaved in Dinah's hand—how it went into every small corner, and on every ledge in and out of sight—how it went again and again round every bar of the chairs, and every leg, and under and over everything that lay on the table . . . (VI,1,409-410)

Dinah's nature has been gradually modified throughout the course of the story, just as Adam's nature has been softened through Hetty's tragedy so that he is less harsh in his judgment of others and is more worthy of marriage. We shall treat of Adam's reformation in Chapter VII; it suffices now to note that Dinah's fitness for assuming the roles of wife and mother is expressed in terms of a common-
place metaphor or analogy—her ability to restore and preserve household order and cleanliness.

Home order is a major theme and means of characterization in several important novels, including *Bleak House*. Early in that novel Dickens introduces the reader to the Jellyby household which is in utter chaos. The children are left to fend for themselves anyhow, for Mrs. Jellyby is completely absorbed in her vision of Borrioboola-Gha to the neglect of her family, and her husband has given up trying to maintain family harmony long ago. Esther Summerson expresses the situation in her remark to Ada Clare that "It must be very good of Mrs. Jellyby to take such pains about a scheme for the benefit of natives—and yet—Peepy and the housekeeping!" (iv,42). On the morning after their arrival at the Jellybys', Esther finds the house in the same chaos as it was in the preceding evening:

Everything was just as we had left it last night, and was evidently intended to remain so. Below-stairs the dinner-cloth had not been taken away, but had been left ready for breakfast. Crumbs, dust, and wastepaper were all over the house. Some pewter-pots and a milk-can hung on the area railings; the door stood open; and we met the cook round the corner coming out of a public house, wiping her mouth. She mentioned, as she passed us, that she had been to see what o'clock it was. (v,46-47)

Throughout her visit Esther makes the best of the situation, telling Peepy and the other Jellyby children stories, washing Peepy, and straightening the household chaos wherever she can, though Mrs. Jellyby looks down on her "for being
so frivolous" (iv, 42). Ada notes Esther's proficiency when she says to her, "You would make a home out of even this house" (iv, 42). But with the Jellybys such effort is futile. Esther relates the moral of this episode to Mr. Jarndyce upon their arrival at Bleak House:

"We rather thought," said I, glancing at Richard and Ada, who entreated me with their eyes to speak, "that perhaps she was a little unmindful of her home."

"We thought that, perhaps," said I, hesitating, "it is right to begin with the obligations of home, sir; and that, perhaps, while those are overlooked and neglected, no other duties can possibly be substituted for them." (vi, 63-64)

This emphasis upon the primacy of the domestic sphere in life embodies the domestic ideal. And a good illustration of that ideal is forthcoming in Bleak House itself, which Dickens describes in detail, leading his readers through one of those marvelous Dickensian interiors filled with little halls and passages, nooks and corners and unexpected places. It is a house of light, warmth, and comfort as well, and in a standard Victorian domestic gesture, Esther is presented with its housekeeping keys, perhaps because she has proven herself so worthy during her sojourn with the incorrigible Jellybys. As Esther enters upon her housekeeping duties, however, she discovers that Bleak House is already ordered perfectly, an order which sharply contrasts with that of the Jellyby household
and helps explain the stopover at the Jellybys' earlier, which now acts as a foil:

Every part of the house was in such order, and every one was so attentive to me, that I had no trouble with my two bunches of keys: though what with trying to remember the contents of each little store-room drawer, and cupboard; and what with making notes on a slate about jams and pickles, and preserves, and bottles, and glass, and china, and a great many other things; and what with being generally a methodical, old-maidish sort of foolish little person; I was so busy that I could not believe it was breakfast-time when I heard the bell ring. Anyway I ran, however, and made tea, as I had already been installed into the responsibility of the teapot; and then, as they were all rather late, and nobody was down yet, I thought I would take a peep at the garden and get a knowledge of that too. (viii,92)

Esther enters forthrightly into her duties and soon Mr. Jarndyce recognizes her capabilities by telling her that she is like the little old woman of the children's rhyme,

"Little old woman, and whither so high?—
To sweep the cobwebs out of the sky."
(viii,97-98)

Mr. Jarndyce's comparison, Esther tells us, "was the beginning of my being called Old Woman, and Little Old Woman, and Cobweb, and Mrs. Shipton, and Mother Hubbard, and Dame Durden" (viii,97-98) and a host of other domestic appellations. In the course of the novel Esther does have a pervasive effect for good, for the Growlery is no longer used, nor is the wind any longer in the east. Indeed, Bleak House may be seen as the triumph of the ordered domestic aesthetic over the chaos of Chancery, that dusty corruption of statutes and laws which has devastated so
many happy homes and which gathers yet one more victim, Richard Carstone, before the end of the novel. The most specific application of Esther's growing virtue and acumen is her instruction of Caddy Jellyby in the domestic arts prior to that unfortunate girl's marriage to Prince Turveydrop. Caddy's life has been deprived of any instruction or even example in home matters, and thus she welcomes Esther's help:

Over and above this, Caddy was very anxious "to learn housekeeping," as she said. Now, Mercy upon us! the idea of her learning housekeeping of a person of my vast experience was such a joke that I laughed, and coloured up, and fell into a comical confusion when she proposed it. However, I said, "Caddy, I am sure you are very welcome to learn anything that you can of me, my dear"; and I showed her all my books and methods, and all my fidgety ways. You would have supposed that I was showing her some wonderful inventions, by her study of them; and if you had seen her, whenever I jingled my housekeeping keys, get up and attend me, certainly you might have thought there never was a greater imposter than I, with a blinder follower than Caddy Jellyby. (xxx,417-18)

With a jingle of that ever-present talisman, the housekeeping keys, Esther initiates Caddy Jellyby into the world of ledgers, books, and methods, in short, into what for Caddy is a relatively new experience, the world of domestic order. But the combined efforts of Caddy and Esther barely suffice to restore some sense of tidiness to the Jellyby household preparatory to Caddy's wedding:

Poor Mr. Jellyby, who very seldom spoke, and almost always sat when he was at home with his head against the wall, became interested when he saw that
Caddy and I were attempting to establish some order among all this waste and ruin, and took off his coat to help. But such wonderful things came tumbling out of the closets when they were opened--bits of mouldy pie, sour bottles, Mrs. Jellyby's caps, letters, tea, forks, odd boots and shoes of children, firewood, wafers, saucepan-lids, damp sugar in odds and ends of paper bags, footstools, blacklead brushes, bread, Mrs. Jellyby's bonnets, books with butter sticking to the binding, guttered candle-ends put out by being turned upside down in broken candlesticks, nutshells, heads and tails of shrimps, dinner-mats, gloves, coffee-grounds, umbrellas—that he looked frightened, and left off again. But he came regularly, every evening, and sat without his coat, with his head against the wall; as though he would have helped us, if he had known how. (xxx,420)

Because of the Victorian preoccupation with household order, cleanliness and submission to the head of the family, this chaotic catalogue, and its helpless observation by the supposed familial leader, Mr. Jellyby, had a comicality and a pathos which touched a Victorian audience. The clutter of items, from children's boots to dinner-mats, which tumbles out of the closet is almost the Victorian equivalent of the ascension of the Goddess Dulness in Book IV of the Dunciad; it represents the dissolution of the domestic ideal, of order, and of paternal sovereignty.

The marriage ceremony, symbolic of union in the family pattern and of the propagation of the home ideal, is attended by an entirely unsympathetic cluster of social zealots, friends of Mrs. Jellyby, who form a curious backdrop to this ceremony:

A party, having less in common with such an occasion, could hardly have been got together by
any ingenuity. Such a mean mission as the domestic mission, was the very last thing to be endured among them; indeed, Miss Wisk informed us, with great indignation, before we sat down to breakfast, that the idea of a woman's mission lying chiefly in the narrow sphere of Home was an outrageous slander on the part of her Tyrant Man. (xxx, 422-23)

Caddy and Prince Turveydrop are married, however, in spite of the impediments, and Esther's knowledge is put to good use in this new home. Dickens contrasts Caddy Jellyby's appreciation of Esther's talents, a little later, with Harold Skimpole's anti-social estimate:

"Now here is Miss Summerson with a fine administrative capacity, and a knowledge of details perfectly surprising. It will sound very strange in Miss Summerson's ears, I dare say, that we know nothing about chops in this house. But we don't; not the least. We can't cook anything whatever. A needle and thread we don't know how to use. We admire people who possess the practical wisdom we want; but we don't quarrel with them. Then why should they quarrel with us? Live, and let live, we say to them. Live upon your practical wisdom, and let us live upon you!" (xliii, 597-98)

Skimpole's Drone philosophy is a satire upon Leigh Hunt and those other romantics, such as Rousseau, whose children were left to tumble up. Dickens is attacking irresponsible parents and, in a broader sense, the general corruption of those opposed to the domestic ideal. Skimpole is but another variety of Mrs. Jellyby. Both are essentially egotistical in their visions, though Skimpole is more hypocritically so, for he assumes a tone of innocence. Esther, in contrast, is conscientious about her responsibilities, and even in her illness and the recuperative rest
at Boythorne's country house subsequent to it, she worries about the neglect of her housekeeping duties. Mr. Jarndyce's letter to her suggests too that only her presence will settle the situation at Bleak House where "the housekeeping was going to rack and ruin" and where "nobody else could manage the keys" (xxxvi, 515). Immediately after her return, Esther, like Dinah in Adam Bede, sets the house to order once more, and it is only "when these arrangements were completed, and everything was in order" (xxxviii, 536) that she feels free to go to London to pay a visit. Mr. Jarndyce's proposal of marriage to Esther is the final proof of the light in which she is held, for he asks her not to become his wife but "the mistress of Bleak House" (xliv, 610). At the end of the novel, Esther marries Dr. Woodcourt rather than Mr. Jarndyce, but the generous guardian gives Esther as a surprise a little Bleak House of her own, fixed up for the young couple in Yorkshire according to her own little tastes and fancies, methods and inventions—a house in which, presumably, Esther will continue to exemplify the domestic ideal.

If Esther's happiness is the outcome of her integrity of spirit, Richard Carstone's tragedy reflects his betrayal of his inner self. Richard fails to maintain the virtue of constancy; he turns from one profession to another, and finally devotes all his energy to the vain study of that entangled monument of Chancery practice,
Jarndyce and Jarndyce. When the case is settled, and Richard learns that the estate has been entirely absorbed in the costs, he has a convulsion and lives just long enough to beg Mr. Jarndyce's forgiveness. His last request is significant:

"I was thinking, sir," resumed Richard, "that there is nothing on earth I would so much like to see as their house—Dame Durden's and Woodcourt's house. If I could be moved there when I begin to recover my strength, I feel as if I should get well there, sooner than anywhere." (lxv,869)

But Richard dies before he can go to the second Bleak House, which now symbolizes the fulfillment he and Ada and their child-to-be might have shared together had it not been for his inconstancy. It should by now be evident that the soul is capable of a certain ordering within itself which when attained reflects itself physically in order and cleanliness. Bleak House is made orderly because Esther is a repository of the domestic virtues in her own nature—not the other way round. Richard Carstone fails to attain a happy home because his inner being has run out of balance—not the other way round. Thus the real problem of order becomes internal rather than external—a question of adhering to the spirit of the domestic virtues rather than to the letter of household management, for the latter will follow if one's heart is in the right place.
The Home Within Us

In his description of Harmony Jail in Our Mutual Friend, Dickens shows the gloomy desuetude which falls upon a house devoid of human life and illustrates the difference between a house and a home:

A certain leanness falls upon houses not sufficiently imbued with human life (as if they were nourished upon it), which was very noticeable here. The staircase, balustrades, and rails, had a spare look—an air of being denuded to the bone—which the panels of the walls and the jambs of the doors and windows also bore. The scanty moveables partook of it; save for the cleanliness of the place, the dust into which they were all resolving would have lain thick on the floors; and those, both in colour and in grain, were worn like old faces that had kept much alone. (I,xv,183)

Human life and human love are what is necessary to bring a house to life and make it into a home. The narrator of the initial parts of The Old Curiosity Shop made the same discovery, for in looking back upon his encounter with Little Nell, he remembers the light of her presence amid the strange and forbidding antiquities in the shop, a presence which filled the shop with life:

But all that night, waking or in my sleep, the same thoughts recurred and the same images retained possession of my brain. I had ever before me the old dark murky rooms—the gaunt suits of mail with their ghostly silent air—the faces all awry, grinning from wood and stone—and alone in the midst of all this lumber and decay and ugly age, the beautiful child in her gentle slumber, smiling through her light and sunny dreams. (I,13-14)

Indeed, Nell's presence has a transfiguring effect upon the curiosity shop, for "the breath of freshness and youth ..."
seemed to rustle through the old dull house and hover round the child" (iii,26). And in earlier times, as Nell tells Mrs. Quilp, when grandfather Trent was cheerful and contented, their life, even amid the relics and mementoes of the past, was a domestic idyll.

The moral of *The Old Curiosity Shop* issues from the drunken lips of Dick Swiveller, but applies, nevertheless, to Trent's blind pursuit of wealth: "We may be good and happy without riches" (ii,17). Trent fails to realize that the real home that he and his granddaughter have found is the one which they have created out of their own hearts, the peace and love and happiness of mutual affection and understanding. The solitude and loneliness of her life never sorrows Nell, but what hurts her heart is seeing Trent "struck down beneath the pressure of some hidden grief" and observing "his wavering and unsettled state" while tracing in his words and looks what seems "the dawning of despondent madness" (ix,68). The supreme irony of the story is that Trent's quest for wealth in order to preserve his granddaughter is what destroys her. The home that they had was their love for each other, and the old curiosity shop was just the place they kept it in. For this reason, Nell has no fear in leaving the old curiosity shop to travel throughout the world—if only this will bring peace of mind and happiness back to grandfather Trent again: "Let us be beggars and be happy ... If you are
poor, let us be poor together, but let me be with you, do let me be with you, do not let me see such change and know not why, or I shall break my heart and die" (ix,71). Communication and mutual confidence are essential to love and the home, and they are all that Nell seeks.

When they leave the old shop, to wander through the world alone together, the pathos of their situation is heightened by the successive images of home which they encounter in their travels—the snug labourers' cottage, the homey inn they stay at, the schoolmaster's dwelling, and Mrs. Jarley's little waxwork wagon home on wheels. But in spite of the pathos of their condition, they have been happier living thus together, and in wholeness of heart, than they were in the old shop when Trent gambled. When Trent returns to gambling again, Nell reminds him of this:

"Have we been worse off," resumed the child, "since you forgot these cares and we have been travelling on together? Have we not been much better and happier without a home to shelter us, than ever we were in that unhappy house, when they were on your mind?" (xxxii,233)

Nell voices here an idea expressed by many Victorian writers; namely, that our real home lies within us, in the love and affections of the heart, and that any place in which this inner nature can find nurture, especially through communication with sympathetic and loving family or friends, can be called "home." Nicholas Nickleby
expresses the same idea to Smike, before taking him home to Mrs. Nickleby and his sister Kate:

"When I talk of homes," pursued Nicholas, "I talk of mine—which is yours of course. If it were defined by any particular four walls and a roof, God knows I should be sufficiently puzzled to say whereabouts it lay; but that is not what I mean. When I speak of home, I speak of the place where, in default of a better, those I love are gathered together; and if that place were a gipsy's tent, or a barn, I should call it by the same good name notwithstanding." (xxxv,443)

Home thus becomes any place in which man's inner being can find sustenance--where a Smike can receive at last the love from which he has been excluded all his life. Nell and Trent had once found their home within their own hearts. The tragedy of The Old Curiosity Shop is Trent's failure to recognize that the resources of men's happiness lie within themselves alone, and his pressing beyond for wealth and security. The old saying applies, then, to the Victorian domestic ideal; home is where the heart is, be that place ever so humble or poor. The Ghost of Christmas Present makes this plain to the unhappy Scrooge as he presents to him the vision of the Cratchit family at Christmas, drawn together in a loving half-circle about the radiant hearth:

They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's. But they were happy ... .

(iii,48-49)

At this point we might make an analogy with the dichotomy of home versus the world, discussed in the first
section of this chapter. Just as the domestic ideal sought a domestic sanctuary from the ruthless materialism and competition of the larger world beyond, it also asserted that a corresponding core of innate goodness existed within the soul of man amid whatever worldly aspirations or signs of selfishness were there. The physical home, therefore, was ideally a means of nurturing man's inner nature, his "home" within himself—and this was to be brought about through familial love and affection and the cultivation of domestic virtues and feelings.

The general movement of the domestic ideal was, then, centripetal rather than centrifugal, towards the heart of man and the domestic center of life within the larger world—rather than outward and beyond, on the wings of imagination, to the far-away and the long-ago, to new and exciting states of feeling and passion, as, for example, was the case with the "Byronic" strain of romanticism (as opposed to the "Wordsworthian" strain). Of course there was a great deal of Byronic yearning and aspiration in Victorian literature, the non-domestic centrifugal movement exemplified best, perhaps, by Heathcliff and Catherine in *Wuthering Heights*. But this is not to deny the centering, centripetal pattern of the domestic current in Victorian literature—it is merely an affirmation of the fact that Heathcliff and Catherine are not a part of that current. The movement of many major Victorian novels was also
centripetal, or towards the domestic ideal, as we shall see in the eighth chapter, and even in *Wuthering Heights* chaos is restored to order at the close as the focus of the novel shifts to the next generation. And the very function of this centripetal current in literature, as envisioned by the Victorian domestic writers, was to recall men to the domestic center of life and to the better nature within themselves.
CHAPTER II

THE EMERGENCE OF DOMESTIC POETRY

The Interregnum

In 1874 the *Argosy* published a three-part series on fiction, including essays on "The Historical Romance," "The Sensation Novel," and "The Domestic Novel." In the last of these, the unidentified author included Samuel Richardson, Fanny Burney, Oliver Goldsmith, Maria Edgeworth, and Jane Austen as members of the domestic tradition and as forerunners of George Eliot, Dickens, Thackeray, and Trollope, among others. In contrast, Horace Walpole and Ann Radcliffe appeared as leaders in "The Sensation Novel," or Gothic tradition. An equivalent distinction for poetry has just been made between the Byronic and Wordsworthian varieties of romanticism. The latter approximated the domestic ideal. Indeed, the domestic current in Victorian poetry may be seen partly as an extension of the domestic and sentimental themes frequent in poets of the "Wordsworthian" branch such as Gray, Cowper, Crabbe, Rogers, Burns, and, of course, Wordsworth himself. In this study the term "romantic" will henceforth be used in a qualified *pro tem* sense to refer to the "Byronic," or "centrifugal"
form of romanticism alone. It is significant that in the early decades of the nineteenth century several critics and minor poets became increasingly dissatisfied with this "Byronic" strain with its "excessive" tendencies—passion, worldliness, egotism, and license. These writers sought, instead, a more placid aesthetic which invited the reader and writer alike to abandon the display of Titanic romantic passions upon a world stage and, as an alternative, to come inside the home to witness the modest, unassertive domestic virtues and household sentiments. For the larger-than-life romantic hero this home-oriented aesthetic substituted the common man, like the friends and loved ones about one's own fireside. The romantic pursuit of the far-away and the long-ago was replaced by the local and unadventurous acceptance of the immediate. The amoral or unrequited grand amour was to give way to marriage and children—following in the "Wordsworthian" strain. The fantastic, the marvelous, and the sublime were to yield to the commonplace experience of everyday living. In this sense the domestic aesthetic was even more conservative than Wordsworthian romanticism, and would have excluded the idealizing aspect of his vision, as in the Mount Snowdon episode, or Wordsworth's tendency to single out particular "spots of time" and glorify them at the expense of the rest of experience.

In the period roughly between 1820 and 1850,
domestic characteristics emerged in poetry and criticisms of poetry more markedly than ever before. This emergence of domesticity was preceded by, and perhaps made possible by, the death, inactivity, or creative failure of the foremost romantic writers (of both "Byronic" and "Wordsworthian" propensities). Francis Jeffrey, writing in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1828, appropriately employed the monarchical metaphor used by more than one critic of this period to describe that general falling off in romanticism -- or at least of the major romantic writers -- which they named the Interregnum:

Since the death of Lord Byron, there has been no king in Israel; and none of his former competitors now seem inclined to push their pretensions to the vacant throne. Scott, and Moore, and Southey, appear to have nearly renounced verse, and finally taken service with the Muses of prose; -- Crabbe, and Coleridge, and Wordsworth, we fear, are burnt out; -- and Campbell and Rogers repose under their laurels, and, contented each with his own elegant little domain, seem but little disposed either to extend its boundaries, or to add new provinces to their rule.\(^1\)

In 1833, *Fraser's Magazine* also noted the disappearance of the leading romantic writers, and pointed to the ever increasing stage for the display of new talent:

There is, alas! too ample room and verge for new poetical spirits to delight in, now that those masters of song, whose names are familiar to our youthful recollections, are passing away in gradual order to their eternal rest. Byron, Keats, Shelley, Crabbe, and Sir Walter Scott, are no more. Words--

worth is silent, though his eyes wander in daily admiration over scenes which in times of yore were wont to kindle his beating heart into inspiration; Southey cultivates the field of prose, in preference to that of poetry; Coleridge is involved in an eternal maze of metaphysics, and leads a life almost useless to the world, though his genius might illumine nations...2

It may be said, however, that literature abhors a vacuum, and, to resume the royal metaphor, when the true reigning potentates of poetry are no longer on their thrones, a hundred would-be monarchs rush in to try to fill their places. This was the situation in the period from 1825 to 1835, at the beginning of the Interregnum (which was to last until 1850), when poetasters and versifiers of every description tried to push their generally lamentable poetic credentials upon an increasingly satiated public. Leigh Hunt, John Clare, Thomas Lovell Beddoes, Ebenezer Elliott, Thomas Hood, Winthrop Mackworth Praed, Bernard Barton, Felicia Hemans, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, Caroline Elizabeth Norton, Alaric Watts, and a host of other minor romantic and domestic poets, together with hymnodists, Evangelical poets and contributors to the literary annuals, thronged into but miserably failed to fill the vacuum created by the departure of the romantic Titans. Thus in the initial period there was an intermingling of a wide variety of poetic elements and aesthetic tendencies,

2"English Poetry" (anon.), Fraser's Magazine, VII (1833), 211.
romantic, religious, and domestic, all fairly mundane, which were to sift out as the century progressed.

By 1850, domestic poetry, whose influence was somewhat nebulous at the beginning of the Interregnum, had emerged as a significant literary current in its own right. Indeed, one enthusiastic reviewer in *Chambers's Journal* in 1851 proclaimed the end of the Interregnum upon the appearance of Alaric Watts's *Lyrics of the Heart* and Other Poems, a decidedly domestic collection published that same year:

Poetry, like religion, is addressed to all classes of mankind. It has no mysteries but those of the heart, which the learned can no more comprehend than the ignorant. Its sentiment is universal, though its materials are different: the lyrics of Burns, though dealing in unknown images, are as well appreciated in the palace as in the cot. If the purely imaginative school of the present day owes its popularity to anything more than a passing taste, then the world from the Homeric era downwards, has been mistaken in its views of the Catholic nature of poetry. But we venture to think that we are just now in one of those lulls that occur periodically in all the affairs of time, and that by and by we shall again listen to the master touch that makes "the whole world kin." In the meantime, so far as the poetry of the affections is concerned, Rogers must be considered to occupy the vanishing point in the procession of the past, and Alaric Watts to follow, in the present generation, with devout and reverent steps.³

The *Chambers's* critic, whose prejudice is highly domestic, sees "purely imaginative" romanticism as an impermanent or passing phase, and the poetry of the affections or domestic

³"Poetry of the Affections" (anon. rev.), *Chambers's Journal*, N.S. XV (1851), 71. This review treats Alaric Watts's *Lyrics of the Heart*. 
poetry as a traditional force, tracing its descent from classical times. This critic significantly considers the poetry of the affections to be the true literary current, reasserting its validity despite romantic lapses. And his justification for the domestic genre's superiority is its universality, its presentation of states of thought and feeling which are not the property of a select or unusual person, such as the Byronic hero, but which are true for the common man and all mankind.

Another critic, Margaret Oliphant, looking back from the perspective of a decade, also took the early 1850's as the terminal date for the Interregnum:

Poetry has glided out of the intermediary period, during which it is represented as in a kind of interregnum, by volumes of fugitive verses, and has once more taken upon itself, in more stately wise, to put forth works entitled to the grave judgment of its generation, some of which may distinguish that generation to posterity.4

Mrs. Oliphant went on to show that it was domestic poetry which had ended the Interregnum. The works which she felt signaled the investiture of domesticity upon the throne of poetry included Tennyson's "In Memoriam" (1850) and his "Maud" (1855), and Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh" (1856). Of these, it should be noted, the Spasmodic "Maud" was a highly questionable choice, especially since Mrs. Oliphant

was opposing domestic verses to the "excessive" brand of romanticism in earlier productions:

When the throne is vacant, or when the king is lazy, the poetic interregnum maintains itself . . . but a poem which the world willingly receives and acknowledges as such, belongs to a period when the Art is full awake and regnant in its proper sphere, and when the fugitive verses fall into their proper position, soft clouds and floating nebulae about the greater planet. Two or three such poems have lately taken their reigning place, as everybody knows—poems of a character altogether individual and characteristic, and . . . much unlike the last illustrious generation of great poems. . . . Here is no recluse serenely meditating on his hills, no weird Mariner of ghostly romance. These ancestors have tinged the diction and coloured the thoughts of young Arthur Hallam's faithful mourner, of Maud's unreasonable lover, and of Aurora Leigh; but the strain is different. . . . These poems . . . are conclusive proofs, above all others, of our return to the common humanity and the broadest simple use of art.  

Before the Interregnum the "Byronic" and "Wordsworthian" modes of romanticism existed side by side; after the Interregnum only the "Wordsworthian" branch endured. (The eccentric and ephemeral recrudescence of many characteristics of Byron and Shelley in the Spasmodic poets may be discounted.) Of course by far the greatest portion of the period's productions were of a romantic rather than a domestic nature. However, even when dealing with the far-away and the long-ago, this was a relatively tame romanticism, nearer the tranquility of Wordsworth than the passion of Byron. But though this feeble rill of romanticism

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5Ibid.
flowed on unmindful of those critics who were proclaiming a domestic ending to the Interregnum, by 1850 the domestic school had, at least, emerged and made its presence known.

In any event, the domestic movement in Victorian poetry was recognized as a clearly established school in 1849 by Aubrey De Vere in his significant *Edinburgh Review* essay on "Tennyson, Shelley, Keats." Although his categories are somewhat arbitrary, they provide a convenient framework which reveals how at least one contemporary critic divided the immediate poetic scene. The exotic, imaginative school, which dealt with foreign countries and tropical or Mediterranean paradises, he characterized as the Ideal or Southern School. The home-oriented poets who compensated for the cold of their northern location by the warmth of their national sentiment, he characterized as the Northern or National School. De Vere indicated the primary attributes of "excessive" romanticism and commonplace domestic romanticism (domestic realism) with little prejudice towards either extreme. He begins by asserting that:

There has ever existed in our literature, and, to no small degree, in that of other countries, two great schools of poetry, one only of which can properly be called national. It does not depend upon the circumstances of the age alone whether the poet find his materials in the circle of surrounding things, or seek them elsewhere: this will in the main be determined by the constitution of his own moral nature, and the preponderance in it of a vivid sympathy with reality on the one hand, or, on the other, of an ardent aspiration after the
ideal. . . . Even in the best and healthiest periods of national development the human mind will aspire after a region more exalted and pure than it can ever find on earth; even in the most prosaic it will be able to detect something noble in the world of common things. From this double power arise two converse schools of poetry; the one characterized by plastic power and its function of embodying the abstractly great and the ideally beautiful; the other by its reality, its homebred sympathies, its affinities with national history, character, and manners.6

At this point De Vere undertakes a historical survey of these two schools in English literature: the National school emphasized "home-bred affections" and the works of this school, such as those of Shakespeare, appealed to the people, and were filled with sympathies keenly native; among the leaders in the domestic or National school, De Vere includes Chaucer, Shakespeare, Cowper, Burns, Wordsworth, Coleridge—with qualifications—, and Tennyson. The Ideal school, in contrast, emphasized ideal conceptions and included Spenser, Milton, and as modern representatives, Shelley and Keats. For instance, Milton's "religious epic of the World" was produced with "little aid from local sympathies or national traditions"7—that is, it didn't appeal to the people, to the common reader, as the plays of Shakespeare did. The distinction made between Coleridge—again, with qualifications—and


7Ibid., p. 409.
Wordsworth, on the one hand, and Shelley and Keats, on the other, is extremely significant:

The poetic mind of England, on its revival towards the end of the last century, again as of old, manifested itself in the form of two schools which, with much in common, still represented, notwithstanding, the northern and southern hemispheres of our literature. Wordsworth and Coleridge were the chief examples of our national school; though in Coleridge the national frequently passed into a mystical inspiration; Shelley and Keats of the ideal. These were not perhaps the most popular poets of their time; but they were the most characteristic, and they have exercised the most enduring influence.  

The domestic qualities which De Vere attributes to both Wordsworth and Coleridge include "a deep-seated patriotism, a reverence for the hearth, a love of local traditions, an English enjoyment of nature, a humanity . . . ." De Vere then proceeds to class Tennyson in the National, domestic, or Wordsworthian school:

It is remarkable how little place, notwithstanding the ardour of Shelley and Keats, is given in their works, to the affections properly so called. They abound in emotion and passion: in which respect Mr. Tennyson resembles them; but he is not less happy in the delineation of those human affections which depend not on instinct or imagination alone, but which, growing out of the heart, are modified by circumstance and association, and constitute the varied texture of social existence. His poetry is steeped in the charities of life, which he accompanies from the cradle to the grave. He has a Shakespearean enjoyment in whatever is human, and a Shakespearean indulgence in the frailties of humanity; the life which his verse illustrates with a genial cheer or a forlorn pathos, is life in its homely honesty . . . .

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8Ibid., p. 418.  9Ibid., pp. 418-19.  
10Ibid., pp. 430-31.
This passage sums up many characteristics of domesticity, the most important of which, perhaps, is the delineation of those affections common to all men, rather than those emotions and passions which were the exclusive property of the romantic hero.

At the beginning of the Interregnum, however, Tennyson had been criticized for his romanticism, notably by John Wilson (otherwise Christopher North), in an 1832 review of "Tennyson's Poems" in Blackwood's Magazine. (Wilson and the other critics didn't employ the term "romanticism," as such, for it was not yet in the critical vocabulary.) The poet, Wilson noted, should record those universal sympathies and affections common to all men, rather than imaginatively projecting his own exaggerated fancies:

At present he [Tennyson] has small power over the common feelings and thoughts of men. His feebleness is distressing at all times when he makes an appeal to their ordinary sympathies. And the reason is, that he fears to look such sympathies boldly in the face,—and will be—metaphysical. What all the human race see and feel, he seems to think cannot be poetical; he is not aware of the transcendant and eternal grandeur of commonplace and all-time truths, which are the staple of all poetry. All human beings see the same light in heaven and in woman's eyes; and the great poets put it into language which records rather than reveals, spiritualizing while it embodies. They shun not the common sights of earth—witness Wordsworth. 11

The early Tennyson was, of course, highly imaginative and "romantic" so that Wilson's critique was justifiable, at least according to domestic standards. But Tennyson's poems did not bear the brunt of the domestic-oriented critics' attacks alone during those early years of the Interregnum. In the 1820's and 1830's periodical reviewers had become increasingly restless over the abstract and amoral idealism of Shelley, and the egotistical passion of Byron. William Hazlitt, for instance, writing of Shelley in the Edinburgh Review in 1824, had accused him of leaving the real world to pursue unreal "romanticism":

His nature was kind, and his sentiments noble; but in him the range of free inquiry and private judgement amounted to a species of madness. Whatever was new, untried, unheard of, unauthorized, exerted a kind of fascination over his mind. The examples of the world, the opinion of others, instead of acting as a check upon him, served but to impel him forward with double velocity in his wild and hazardous career. Spurning the world of realities, he rushed into the world of nonentities and contingencies, like air into a vacuum. . . . The weight of authority, the sanction of ages, the common consent of mankind, were vouchers only for ignorance, error, and imposture.\(^{12}\)

Herman Merivale, writing in the Edinburgh Review in 1839, voiced similar objections to Shelley's idealism:

The essentially unpoetical character of ideal perfection in a human subject, was ill understood by Shelley. He imagined that whatever satisfied the aspirations of the visionary, must serve for the purpose of the poet; and did not perceive that what Kant calls "the ideal, to which we do not

annex objective reality," is not suitable matter for an art necessarily objective in character, if not in substance.\textsuperscript{13}

Merivale strikes to the core of Shelley's weakness, according to the domestic aesthetic, when he cites "The Revolt of Islam" as an example of Shelley's inability to appeal to "the common sympathies of mankind."\textsuperscript{14} Because he had failed to touch those affections which were the inheritance of all men, witness "the utter want of human interest in all his poems, except 'The Cenci' alone . . . ,"\textsuperscript{15} Shelley had forfeited his right to popular esteem.

Critics writing in the first years of the Interregnum also objected to the excesses of Byron's romanticism. The passionate, brooding, self-indulgent Byronic hero was the antithesis of the democratic domestic aesthetic, which chose to display the feelings of the average man while regarding all unusual displays of emotion with suspicion. The restlessness implicit in Byronism was opposed to the domestic belief in contentment with things as they are and the acceptance of the human lot. Immoral behavior and intellectual questioning were, too, in opposition to domestic standards of moral propriety and common sense level-headedness. In addition, the isolation of the Byronic hero ran counter to the domestic assertion that man

\textsuperscript{13}Herman Merivale, "Shelley's Poetical Works," Edinburgh Review, LXIX (1839), 520-21.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., p. 521. \textsuperscript{15}Ibid., p. 524.
found his fullest development through familial and social communication, with mutual exchanges of sympathy and affection. T. H. Lister's review of Taylor's "Philip Van Artevelde," in the Edinburgh Review in 1843, found Byron lacking in the representation of "human passions, thoughts and actions":

An extensive class of modern writers, at the head of whom we may place Lord Byron, are censurable both for an excess of what is wanting [that is, lacking], and a deficiency of what is true. Writings of this class cannot be said to contribute anything either to our self-knowledge, or to our knowledge of mankind in general. Their representations are striking, not from their likeness, but from their exaggeration; and they have sometimes a dreamy vagueness which seems philosophically profound, when in fact it is only obscure. They excite no thoughts that we can carry with us into the commerce of everyday life; they rather seem to unfit us for it.\(^{16}\)

An 1835 review of Alford's Poems, appearing in the same organ, also noted several domestic objections to Byronism:

This spiritual domination [of Byron, at the universities], however, was one of those tyrannies which has now wellnigh overpast. The young poets, whose common tastes and sympathies seem lately, at Cambridge, to be forming around them a little school, take as little after Byron as after Pope. They do not destroy the affections in the passions; they do not call on us to curse life, but to bless it altogether. Their light is not a concentrated glare, whereby giants are to be shown in attitudes of distorted greatness, forging thunderbolts which are to be hurled afterwards at their own bosoms. . . . The poetry of Byron startled, and always must startle every reader, by its singularity and its power; nevertheless, it has made mere imitators. It appears to have been too individual to become an

element, developing, nourishing, and at last incorporating itself with other minds. It stands, therefore, by itself, a pyramid of black and dazzling marble—proud, monumental, barren . . . . 17

A Westminster Review analysis of Tennyson's Poems in 1842 carried on the current of anti-Byronic criticism and indicated that as the Interregnum progressed that current was swelling to the full:

Poetry every day becomes more human, more true to the common heart of man; Byronism is past as a school, and the taint of factitious and unreal feeling which lies on its master is going far to dethrone him from popular interest. Take up any magazine, and see not only how comparatively high is the general character of its poetry in diction and execution, but how healthy even its commonplace are, how reflective or affectionate or pious, how free from appeals to the baser passions and lower conditions of our nature. 18

During the early years of the Interregnum, works with domestic leanings received lavish praise from the critics, and their unobtrusive literary mode was continually contrasted to romanticism. Francis Jeffrey, writing in the Edinburgh Review in 1819, had taken Rogers' Human Life as a criterion whereby to voice his distaste for the sensationalism of more imaginative productions:

Yet it is not by any means to that which, in ordinary language, is termed the poetry or romance of human life, that the present work is directed. The life which it endeavours to set before us, is

17"The School of the Heart and Other Poems, By Henry Alford, 1835" (anon. rev.), Edinburgh Review, LXII (1836), 299.

not life diversified with strange adventures, embodied in extraordinary characters, or agitated with turbulent passions—not the life of warlike paladins, or desperate lovers or sublime ruffians—or piping shepherds or sentimental savages, or bloody bigots, or preaching pedlars—or conquerors, poets, or any other species of madmen—but the ordinary, practical and amiable life of social, intelligent and affectionate men—such, in short, as multitudes may be seen living every day in this country—for the picture is entirely English—and though not perhaps in the choice of every one, yet open to the judgement, and familiar to the sympathies of all.19

John Wilson used a similar technique in his review of Alford's *The School of the Heart*, in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1836. Wilson took Alford's domestic volume as an occasion for making a few telling blows at romanticism:

Here we have no affected raptures—no fantastic or distorted passions—no simulated sorrows—no carefully got up agonies—no elaborate despair. Natural feelings, pure and high and good, find for the most part appropriate expression, and always expression animated and eloquent . . .20

The bias against romanticism increased among the reviewers as the Interregnum progressed, and was to be met with everywhere by 1835-1840. Indeed, as early as 1835 the *Athenaeum* had foreseen that the Interregnum might well be terminated by the new current of poetry which dealt with commonplace life—rather than by a resurgence of "Byronic" romanticism:

We are not among the desponding laudatores


20 John Wilson, "Alford's School of the Heart," *Blackwood's Magazine*, XXXIX (1836), 578.
temporis acti, panegyrists of the past, who believe that the spirit of poetry is dead, because its voice has all but ceased to be heard among us. We know it to be immortal, though the forms under which it may appear are as various as the avatars of the fabled Indian divinity. To speak in parables, it may be one of the conditions of our age, that the waters of the celestial fountain should flow widely through the humble channels of everyday life, instead of, as of old, gushing forth in solitary places for the gladdening and refreshment of the elect, who made pilgrimages to the haunts of its upspringing. 21

This unidentified reviewer continues, observing that while the present age is too impatient to indulge the "beautiful phantoms" which delighted earlier generations, nevertheless it is finding objects worthy of esteem in the new strain of contemporary and commonplace poetry which "we are sure . . . is working out in our literature." 22

The Literary Annuals, Their Contributors, and Their Influence

The beginning of the Interregnum coincided with the advent of a new form of publication, for the appearance of Ackermann's The Forget-Me-Not in 1822 marked the introduction of the annual into England. An offspring of the German Almanachs and Taschenbücher, The Forget-Me-Not and the annuals which followed it soon divested themselves of any Almanach-like pretensions to informativeness, and settled down to being good, healthy, parlor table-books of

21 "The Poetry of Life by Sarah Stickney" (anon. rev.), The Athenaeum (October, 1835), 774.
22 Ibid.
exclusively literary content—though a generally watered-down, insipid, sentimentalized form of literature. These books often occupied a prominent place in the Victorian drawing-room so that physically, at least, they were a domestic genre, even when the contents were largely imaginative— the far-away, the exotic, the long-ago. The flood of imitators who followed Ackermann's initial success was so great that by 1831 there were over fifty different Christmas and New Year's books of this type each year to choose from. Their variety of appeal was extremely wide, including children's annuals, aristocratic or upper middle-class annuals—at the price of a guinea these were the only class options—annuals on foreign themes such as Rome or Venice and annuals dealing purely with their native England, serious annuals and comic annuals, and annuals in a dozen other categories. A brief selection of titles says much. Representative volumes were *The Gem*, *The Amulet*, *The Comic Offering*, *Heath's Book of Beauty*, *The Children of the Nobility*, *Finden's Tableaux*, *The Keepsake*, *The Drawing-Room Scrap-Book*, the *Legends of Venice*, *The Juvenile Scrap-Book*, and *The Parlour Table-Book*. Every Christmas during the early years of the Interregnum saw the appearance of several new annuals, and often the disappearance of an older series. Some ventures lasted only one season. Others, such as the *Keepsake* (1828-1857), however, endured for decades. In the early 1840's the annuals' vogue
collapsed, and from that time on it was a genre headed steadily for extinction. But during those important early years, especially the decade of the 1830's, the literary annuals had a profound influence upon English literary taste and played an important role in the proliferation of domesticity.

Some idea of the popularity of the annuals can be gained from the fact that major Victorian novelists referred to them decades after the high-water mark of the genre. In _The Mill on the Floss_, Bob Jakin hears that Maggie has lost all the books she used to love so well, through the auction of the Tullivers' household effects. To compensate her for her loss, the generous Bob brings Maggie a superannuated _Keepsake_ as a gift, filled with pictures of gentlemen and ladies, and to this he adds six or seven numbers of a _Portrait Gallery_, in royal octavo (IV,iii,247). George Eliot refers again to the annuals in the _Middlemarch_ scene where Lydgate undercuts Ned Plymdale's gift of the latest _Keepsake_ to Rosamond Vincy. In _Pendennis_ they became the object of Thackeray's satire:

An opportunity for showing his skill [Pen's writing skill] presented itself before very long. That eminent publisher, Mr. Bacon... used to present to the world every year a beautiful gilt volume called the "Spring Annual," edited by Lady Violet Lebas, and numbering amongst its contributors not only the most eminent, but the most fashionable poets of our time. Young Lord Dodo's poems first appeared in this miscellany--the honourable Percy Popjoy, whose chivalrous ballads have obtained him such a reputation--Bedwin Sands'
Eastern Ghazuls, and many more of the works of our young nobles, were first given to the world in the "Spring Annual," which has since shared the fate of other vernal blossoms, and perished out of the world. (I,xxxii,359-60)

Because the great genius of Percy Popjoy has deserted him in composing the verses to accompany one of the plates, Pen is given the opportunity to try his hand and thus gets his literary start, as did many another struggling writer, by contributing to the annuals. Thackeray's satire of the editor (Lady Violet Lebas) and of the contributors (Lord Dodo, the honourable Percy Popjoy) was not uncalled for, for the annuals were notoriously swamped by the dubious productions of the aristocracy. But the annuals also included selections from Scott, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Lamb, Moore, Southey, Landor, Fitzgerald, Tennyson, the Brownings, Thackeray, Dickens--from almost every major contemporary literary figure. Alongside these major figures were to be found countless minor writers of the day, including Alaric Watts, L.E.L. (Letitia Elizabeth Landon), Mrs. Hemans, Caroline Elizabeth Norton, Lady Emmeline Wortley, the Countess of Blessington, Ebenezer Elliott, Thomas Miller, and hundreds of others, poets and poetesses whose romantic propensities were frequently more "Wordsworthian" than "Byronic." If we take the years 1825-1845 as constituting the heart of the Interregnum, we can see that the heyday of the literary annuals closely coincided with the period of the empty throne. And if we look closely
at the contents of the annuals, we can see that they embody the emergence of the domestic current amid the more general romanticism.

For the annuals contained two worlds. They represented, in the first place, the wild, exotic, mysterious world of romanticism, the Ideal school of heroes and heroines, the far-away and the long-ago, the Orient and Venice, ancient Greece and Rome, the Sultan's harem and the Indian Maiden's dream; and the accompanying plates were appropriate, envisioning piled-up clouds, vast mountain ranges with sublime sunsets, decaying castles and gloriously ruined columns, ships passing in magnificent pageantry, storms brooding over precipices, flawlessly beautiful women gazing over balustrades or into pools, and many another idealized image. Looking back from the perspective of some four decades, an unidentified Temple Bar essayist in 1872 emphasized this side of the annuals' contents:

Here and there, on old-fashioned drawing-room tables, especially those of ancient maiden ladies in the country, may still be seen, ranged in prim array, those delightful old Annuals which our grandparents used to present to their children. They are bound in Russia, in plain black leather, in crimson silk, in vellum, or in morocco; on the first page is a circular space surrounded by a design of cupids and flowers. In this you may observe the distinguished autograph of the donor—"To Matilda, from her affectionate Uncle." The volume is entitled 'The Souvenir,' 'The Keepsake,' 'Friendship's Offering,' 'The Annual,' and so on. As for the contents, they are all as much alike as this day's paper is like yesterday's. Verse forms
the staple, verse of a fashion now nearly extinct, such as 'Lines to a Girl Dancing,' 'From the Italian,' 'On a Child Weeping,' 'Stanzas to —— neat, workmanlike, and insipid. With these, like so many literary sandwiches, tales, sketches, and essaylets, not always so remarkable for literary power as for smoothness. The tales are mostly of a romantic order. The writers, innocent of any foreign experience east of the North Foreland, love to transport themselves in fancy to the realms of the rising sun.

"And give you, mixed with western sentimentalism,
Some glimpses of the finest orientalism."

Like Moore, in 'Lalla Rookh,' they delight in palm trees and rose gardens; they linger in the dangerous alcoves of the seraglio, among imprisoned beauties with melting eyes and languishing sighs; their pages are all aglow with Deevs, Fakeers, Brahmins, the Circassians; the scenery is softer than ever human eye has seen, or more rugged and wild than ever a pencil of painter has drawn. So, in the quiet country homes of England, the imaginations of the girls were drawn away from their dull and quiet surroundings to wild and wonderful visions of love and adventure, which might have been dangerous were they not too unreal and unlike any possible earthly life to do them any harm.23

But the annuals contained another and far different world as well, a world largely domestic in character, intensely sentimental though not often realistic as yet, a world of commonplace affections and what we may call "standard" Victorian sentimental situations (the latter will be studied in Chapter VI), but still rarely peopled by living, breathing human beings. On their domestic side, the annuals concentrated on the home and the hearth, on the heart and the household sentiments, on marriage, children,

23 "Thefts From an Old Keepsake" (anon.), Temple Bar, XXXV (1872), 550.
death, familial matters, home remembrances, beloved pets—items both unspectacular and unromantic, for "Byronic" romanticism, though content with passion, generally stops short of marriage, and though content with vistas, prefers not to come indoors.

The Amulet for 1831 is typical in its intermingling of romantic and domestic elements. This volume contains Mrs. Norton's "The English Mother," a domestic and sentimental poem, which almost laughably contrasts with the exotic piece immediately following it, an Arab legend called "The Temper: The Story of Ayoub the Mighty." Other selections of a domestic bias in this volume are a poem with plates called "The Orphans," James Montgomery's essay, "Home, Country, All the World," Charles Swain's sentimental poem "The Village Queen," and Caroline Bowles's "The Poor Man's Death-Bed." These are balanced, on the romantic side, by a poem and plate of "Florence," a story titled "The Indian Mother," and an essay on "Eastern Story-Tellers."

Granting that romantic materials are generally in the majority, let us now look at some of the domestic selections in a further brief sampling of the annuals. The Amulet for 1833 contains Letitia Elizabeth Landon's "The Lute," in which the song of the lute recalls memories of home and infancy. The same volume includes Mary Howitt's "A Brother's Death-Bed," presenting a common sentimental
situation typical of the hundreds of such which inundated the annuals. Similarly, S. C. Hall's "The Emigrant" is a collage of "standard" scenes and sentiments, such as parting from one's native land, thinking of home and friends when far away, the return home of the voyager and subsequent meeting again, a deathbed scene, and a final moral commentary explaining why one should never leave home—or one's native land, at least—in the first place.

The *Forget-Me-Not* for 1837 also furnishes a common sentimental scene in the picture "The Bridal Toilet," which shows the bride dressing for her marriage, and an accompanying poem portraying her thoughts on that greatest of all domestic moments. Indeed, the two most popular subjects in the annuals were by all odds marriage and death, both of which were consistently sentimentalized to extremes.

*Friendship's Offering* for 1835 provided representative domestic contents as well. John Clare's "Our Own Fire-Side" is found there, along with "The Old Bachelor and His Sister," a narrative of the everyday life of an old English bachelor and his sister, including some loving and detailed portraits of the interiors of drawing-rooms, as well as descriptions of manners, habits, and so forth. Sarah Stickney's "The Lonely Heart," in the same volume, shows how the lonely heart yearns for the past amidst the festive board, laughter, revelry, and music of the present:

But oh! my heart is wandering
Back to my father's home,
Back to my sisters at their play,
The meadows in their bloom . . . .
(Stanza IV)

In the same vein, *Friendship's Offering* for 1837 presented Anne S. Bushby's "A Letter From Home," with accompanying picture (see Figure 3) which describes the magic of letters from home to those far away, a magic engendered by awakening domestic memories.

However, returning to the "Byronic" strain, there is one additional and most significant characteristic which we should note. Even amidst the heights of exotic romanticism in the annuals, we have a constant sense that we are reading in a Victorian parlor—there is something tame, watered down, inoffensive, and unsurprising even in the romantic contents of these volumes, as though romanticism had lost some of its original intensity by becoming a household commodity. The power of Byron, the idealism of Shelley, and the sensual vitality of Keats rest unchallenged, and even in depicting the far-away and the long-ago, the annual writers' romanticism has largely degenerated into sentimentalism and pictorialism, pleasant and mild. We see in the annuals, then, not only specifically domestic elements, but a kind of domestication of the "excessive" elements—a limitation of imagination, passion, adventure, and desire to that which could safely be absorbed by young Victorian ladies.

The anti-Byronic bias of the critics, discussed
Fig. 3.—"The Letter From Home," Friendship's Offering (London, 1837), p. 325. Drawn by H. Richter. Engraved by R. Easton.
earlier in this chapter, came to include even the relatively mild romantic portions of the annuals. For instance, in 1840, the *New Monthly Magazine* criticized the *Legends of Venice* for its romanticism, and, in particular, for dealing with the far-away, and the ideal:

The general design of this work is too vague and ideal to be a very happy one; for we live in a day when realities have taken the place of imaginations, even in the least real and most imaginative temperaments. Our Books of Beauty must busy themselves with the real living and breathing beauty about us, or they will fail to attract; the day of "Byron Beauties" is wellnigh gone.24

The *New Monthly Magazine* approved of another annual, *Finden's Tableaux*, because it did conform to domestic standards:

Hitherto its illustrations have been "of imagination all compact";—and moreover of foreign and exotic imaginations—its heroes and heroines, denizens of romance and chivalry—its scenes and imagery those of Cloud-land, or some other such terra incognita;—but this year it is delightfully real, and emphatically English, as becomes the purely English writer who presides over its literary contents. It is devoted, both art and literature, exclusively to English country life,—of which it gives us a dozen scenes, comprising the chief events of the rural year—harvest home—gleaning—milking—hop-gathering—the fair—gipsying, &c.25

Thus there was a call for a still larger emphasis on materials of a domestic character in the annuals as in more serious literature.

24"The Annuals for 1841" (anon. rev.), *New Monthly Magazine*, LX (1840), 558.

25Ibid., p. 557.
But before the annuals had a proper chance to respond, a new literary genre appeared on the scene, the Christmas ghost story, led by Dickens' *A Christmas Carol*, in 1843. Dickens followed his initial venture in this genre with *The Chimes* (1844), *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845), *The Battle of Life* (1846), and *The Haunted Man* (1848).

Whether or not Dickens' entry into this field directly contributed to the decline of the annuals is a difficult question; but his presence at least was felt, as *Fraser's Magazine* indicated in 1851 in an account of the annuals' decline:

> After a few years, however, the rage began to abate. We got weary of looking at oval faces in meretricious headdresses, with long arms hanging over balustrades; and began to desire something else. One by one the Annuals dropt off, and even the Forget-Me-Not itself, in spite of its titular appeal to the contrary, was at last utterly forgotten.

> Then succeeded a new class of Christmas Books, which possessed at least the charm of novelty and the profession of a purpose. Through the machinery of a ghost story, worked up in a quaint way peculiar to himself, Mr. Dickens opened a new vein of pleasures and instruction. The charities of the season were so charmingly invoked in that fantastical little book, and there was so much in it that was both beautiful and wise, that it was no great wonder to find Mr. Dickens speedily reduced to the same predicament as his predecessor of the Fancy Repository. Every man of them had ghosts of his own to exhibit ....

The success of Dickens' Christmas books may have resulted from their greater ability to satisfy the demand of the

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26 "A Gossip About the Christmas Books" (anon.), *Fraser's Magazine*, XLIII (1851), 38.
Victorian reading public for domesticity than the poems and short essays of the annuals. Indeed, it was in fiction that domesticity was to make its greatest showing as the century progressed. Nevertheless, it was earlier, in the literary annuals, that the domestic emergence began, and the pendulum started to swing towards a home-oriented art. By the time of the appearance of *A Christmas Carol*, the taste for domesticity was well established—and, ironically, through the agency of the very annuals which Dickens' more domestic ghost stories may have helped towards extinction, though through their reluctance to renounce their large portion of mildly romantic contents, the annuals may have doomed themselves.

The emergence of domesticity amid more imaginative and exotic varieties of romanticism in the annuals carried over into the poetry of the age at large. In considering examples of poetic domesticity in the nineteenth century, one immediately thinks of Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (the First Part was issued in 1854), of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Aurora Leigh* (1856), and of Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* (1864). (This study will only discuss Tennyson's productions, for economy's sake, and because its chief emphasis is upon fiction, the great Victorian showcase for domesticity.) But in addition to these major figures, there were numerous minor poets, almost all of whom regularly contributed to the annuals, who made a
significant addition to domestic literature. Like the contents of the annuals themselves, these poets' volumes usually contained an intermingling of romantic and domestic elements. Let us sample some of their more domestic productions. Bernard Barton's *Household Verses* (1845), his eighth volume of poems, includes "Fire-Side Verses" and "To a Very Young House-Wife," both distinctively domestic. The latter poem describes the housewife's duties of sewing and cooking together with the more delicate domestic arts of drawing and music. Caroline Anne Bowles's (later, Southey) *Solitary Hours* (1826; 1839), a combination of prose and verse pieces, contains poems representing several "standard" situations such as meeting after long absence ("The Welcome Home—1820") and the lament over parting through death ("To a Dying Infant," "Farewell to My Friends"). A later volume, *The Birth-Day, A Poem in Three Parts* (1836) provides loving and detailed descriptions of gardens and interiors, of tea-drinking and snug comfortable studies with their treasure of books. The "Occasional Verses" appended to *The Birth-Day* in the same volume include "Our Old House Clock," a minor chronicle of home, hearth, tea, and family life, and "To My Old Canary," a verse tribute to a favorite pet typical of this home-oriented literary aesthetic and indicative of the change that the idealistic romanticism of Shelley's "Skylark" and Keats's "Nightingale" has undergone. Although Felicia
Dorothea Hemans' poems are largely romantic, she has strong domestic leanings at times. _The Domestic Affections and Other Poems_ (1812; 1843; 1844) is, as its title indicates, a domestic volume, especially in its title poem which is a comprehensive little survey of the Victorian ideal of home and its associations and ties of peace in the storm of life. In _Songs of the Affections, and Other Poems_ (1830), as in the preceding volume, domestic elements co-exist with their more romantic counterparts. Alaric Alexander Watts's _Lyrics of the Heart_ (1851) was another home-directed production, and the response of _Chambers's Journal_ serves as a good indication of how this domestic-sentimental poetry was received:

> Touched by this magic [of poetry], My Own Fireside are words of power which fill our eyes with delicious tears . . . the flow of time is sanctified by the memories of Ten Years Ago; the first Gray Hair on the brow we love is associated with ideas of imperishable beauty; the Death of the First-born is hallowed to our hearts by its agonies and consolations, and to our fancies by the image of the gentle mother trying to impart the comfort she does not feel. . . . These are the titles of only a few of certain gushes of song that many men of the present day will feel to well up in their hearts in the ordinary circumstances of life; and yet, notwithstanding their being constantly reminded by the various printed selections of English poetry, many of them are ignorant, or at least can only recall the fact after consideration, that they are indebted for them all to Alaric Watts.  

_Ebenezer Elliott's The Village Patriarch_ (1829; 1831) and

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27"Poetry of the Affections" (anon. rev.), _Chambers's Journal_, N.S. XV (1851), 69.
Corn Law Rhymes (1831) were laden with domesticity, especially the latter social-protest poems whose appeal was founded on pathetic family scenes in which the children cry to their parents for bread, and the father starves himself to feed them. In the pattern later adopted by Mrs. Gaskell, Elliott argues against the Corn Laws, not in terms of abstract social justice but by the presentation of human suffering and the impact of general conditions on individual families.

The currents of domesticity may be traced in the poetry of many another minor early and mid-Victorian poet, though we have had space to cite but a few here. While the lesser figures found the best display-case for their productions in the literary annuals, they published numerous individual volumes of their own. Perhaps their combined efforts helped to direct the mainstream of Victorian fiction towards domesticity to some degree. Certainly they contributed a domestic precedent. As a final evidence of the general lachrymosity and sentimentality of this watered-down romanticism and domestic poetry of pathos, I need only mention that in opening volumes by individual poets and volumes of the annuals, I twice had the experience of having pressed flowers or leaves fall brown and crumbling from between the pages into my lap.
The emergence of domesticity in poetry was overshadowed by the simultaneous and far greater acceleration of this theme in fiction in the 1830's and 1840's—Dickens' Christmas books are but one example. We shall study several reasons for this in Chapter V, but for the present let us observe some of the ways in which the domestic aesthetic functioned in the novel. As we saw in the first chapter, the Victorians believed in the beneficial influence of the domestic environment in nurturing the best in every man and in cultivating the domestic affections and virtues. Furthermore, they believed that the moral efficacy of home was the product of mental ties of a positive nature which joined a person's thoughts to the best in his environment, links of thought which endured over the years and which, through the associative fibres of memory, served as one's constant moral guardian and stay. This associational psychology was relied on heavily by the major Victorian writers, and it is therefore important for us here to review its historical background preparatory to a
discussion of the relationship of associationism to the Victorian domestic ideal.

The British doctrine of the association of ideas had its incipient stirrings in Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651) but attained greater stature when Locke published his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1690. David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) and David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749) contributed to the associational doctrine in the first half of the eighteenth century, while Archibald Alison's *Essays on the Nature and Principles of Taste* (1790) is representative of the form this theory took in the latter half of the same century. From the beginning, this psychology was influenced by the empiricism of Hobbes and Locke, who countervailed the existing Newtonian-Cartesian rationalism by asserting that knowledge was entirely derived from sense perception. Distrusting the facile generalizations deduced from the self-evident axioms of universal reason, the associational psychologists turned a critical inductive eye towards the nature of perception, the nature of knowledge, and finally, the nature of the mind. Each philosopher contributed his specialized notions to the general associational theory; for instance, through the complex terminology of vibrations and vibratiuncles Hartley attempted to explain the relationship between the psychological linking of ideas and their physical inter-connection in the medullary substance of the brain. But
whatever their particular emphases might be, they agreed upon the basic notions of associational theory, that knowledge was derived through the assimilation by the brain of the sense perceptions which were transformed into "ideas of sensation" (that is, feelings or simple thoughts) which in their turn were united into intellectual ideas (complex thoughts). The process by which simple ideas were combined into complex ones was association, and there were several basic modes in which the mind tended to thus link its thoughts. One of these was to associate causes with their effects, and vice versa; another was to associate any idea that "resembled" another, with that other. Contiguity in time or space was also a basis for association. For example, a man thinking about Shakespeare's Hamlet might suddenly find himself thinking about the Bible simply because he had seen the two volumes side by side upon his library shelves. Thus much of associational thought-linking was purely adventitious.

Hartley believed that the individual personality was wholly formed by external circumstances and that moral ideas resulted from the interaction between the mind of man and the world, through the associations of pleasure and pain impressed upon the brain by the natural environment (an idea going back to Locke). The assumption of innate ideas or an innate moral sense was discarded. But Hartley's critics argued that there had to be such an
innate faculty and hence a debate soon arose. Through a combination of the Shaftesburyan moral sense with the doctrine of associationism, Scots such as Francis Hutcheson, George Turnbull, and Adam Smith concluded that the mind is no mere passive agent in an empirical process of associational impression, but, rather, it is innately gifted with the ability to guide, form, or mold experience according to its own light.¹ The result was a modified associationism which conceded an area of innate autonomy to the individual psyche, an autonomy to guide and govern the very process of association itself. It is in this latter tradition—though direct influence from the Scottish associationists is an unnecessary assumption—that Wordsworth and the major Victorian writers, insofar as they were associational, must be placed.

Wordsworth's associational affinities are important to our study because of his impact upon the Victorians. In the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads, Wordsworth acknowledged his debt to eighteenth century associationism when he explained that his purpose in writing had been to study the manner in which men associate ideas in a state of excitement. In the Preface he also emphasized the grand elementary principle of pleasure, which guided man's associational preferences and thus served as the chief

source of human knowledge, as Locke had intimated. The *Prelude* implemented the latter idea, though instead of being educated by pleasure and pain, the child is "fostered alike by beauty and by fear." In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth outlined the three levels of association (sensation, simple ideas, complex ideas) which he also treated in *The Prelude*. Childhood, the age of sensation, is filled with "coarser pleasures" and "glad animal movements." Youth is the age of feeling, or simple ideas, and is filled with "aching joys" and "dizzy raptures." And, finally, maturity, the age of thought or of complex ideas formed through the organization of simple ideas, finds "abundant recompense" in—to use the phrase of the "Immortality Ode"—"the years that bring the philosophic mind." However, Wordsworth was opposed to the egotistical or man-centered form of association, "that false secondary power by which we multiply distinctions," the "meddling intellect" which "mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things" and "murder[s] to dissect." The focal point for association should lie in nature, rather than in man, as Wordsworth expressed it in "Lines Written in Early Spring":

To her fair works did Nature link  
The human soul that through me ran;  
And much it grieved my heart to think  
What man has made of man.

Through a nature-centered associationism, the man whose meddling intellect or false association has separated him
from life may be reintegrated with the beautiful and permanent forms of nature, after the true order. Indeed, it soon becomes evident that what Wordsworth wants to do is to reverse the three-rung ladder of association, and return from thought to feeling—the process undergone in the transition from contemplation to emotion in Wordsworth's famous "emotion recollected in tranquillity." For association is essentially a two-way street, and the nature which is parent, nurse, schoolmistress, and guardian to the child soon makes—through association—her "Foster-child" her "Inmate Man," as "shades of the prison house begin to close upon the growing boy." The problem is to reverse this natural process of association, for man to dissociate from himself, and re-associate with the elementary forms of nature once again, to return to nature even though, paradoxically, nature has been pushing him on towards the third associational level of complex thought.

Wordsworth's associationism is so important a part of his poetic thought that a debate has arisen over the specific school of associational psychology to which he belongs. Arthur Beatty, in his William Wordsworth, His Doctrine and Art in Their Historical Relations, and Basil Willey, in The Eighteenth Century Background, have urged that Wordsworth was purely Hartleyan in his associationism, and that for him knowledge was wholly derived from experience. Newton P. Stallknecht, on the other hand, in his
Strange Seas of Thought: Studies in William Wordsworth's Philosophy of Man and Nature, has agreed with Ernest De Selincourt that the purely Hartleyan interpretation of Wordsworth's poetry and psychology has been over-emphasized. For the strict Hartleyan approach neglects Wordsworth's undeniable mysticism, pantheism, and transcendentalism, the "Wisdom and Spirit of the universe" which works not only in nature but in man. Thus the world of nature and the senses is of great efficacy as a reinforcer of those ideas and sentiments already implanted in the human breast, or communicated to the mind of man by the mystic presence that Wordsworth finds in all things. Therefore, although the world nurtures these ideas, it is not the source of them. Stallknecht explains in detail this apparently contradictory combination of associational psychology and transcendentalism; the important conclusion which he draws is that in Wordsworth associationism is subservient to innate goodness, the Divine presence which is working out its plan in both nature and man. Wordsworth thus falls in the pattern of the Scottish innate associationists. More significantly, Victorian domestic associationism continues generally in the Scottish-Wordsworthian pattern, never forgetting the primacy of man's innate powers.

Victorian Associationism

The Victorian most directly influenced by associational psychology, probably, was John Stuart Mill, who was
reared according to a harsh utilitarian application of some of its principles. In his *Autobiography*, Mill notes that his father wrote his own *Analysis of the Mind* which "carried Hartley's mode of explaining the mental phenomena to so much greater length and depth" (iii,48). Indeed, associationism lay at the very root of James Mill's philosophy:

In psychology, his fundamental doctrine was the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal Principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education. Of all his doctrines none was more important than this, or needs more to be insisted on... (iv,75)

In his personal upbringing Mill was made the object of a too rigid and rationalistic application of such principles. But in general the Victorian writers' assimilation of the fundamentals of associationism was loose and informal, unrelated to personal experience, as John Mill's was, and hardly technical enough to be traced straight back to Hartley in particular, as was the case with the elder Mill's work. However, the Victorians lived in an atmosphere of ideas which included a distinct, however diffused, current of associationism, a current which both Darwin and Herbert Spencer were to incorporate in their psychological speculations. Most major Victorian writers touched upon this theme at least once in their careers, and some, like Dickens, returned to it again and again.
A brief essay on "Association," appearing in Chambers's Journal in 1863, treated some of the technical phases of associationism we have just described. It illustrated the principle of contiguity in time and space thus:

Events widely severed are joined and meet together in some familiar scene. Take, for instance, the story of the groom and the eggs. A gentleman was driving, on a moonlight night in September, over a bridge, in a one-horse phaeton. He wore a white coat, and his servant sat behind him. Just beyond the bridge, on the right, was a wind-mill, and on the left, a church. The clock struck eleven. The gentleman turning round suddenly to the groom, said: "John, do you like eggs?" "Yes sir," replied John, touching his hat.

Exactly twelve months afterwards, he was driving the same vehicle over the same bridge at eleven o'clock by moonlight, in a white coat. The clock struck. The gentleman turned round suddenly to the groom, and said "How?" "Poached, sir," replied John, touching his hat.2

The article continued its analysis by describing the principle of association of ideas by resemblance:

The eye and ear annihilate space and time. An unexpected familiar sound transports us in a moment. When we hear the whetting of a scythe, there is a vision of the hayfield, the harvest, or the lawn. If we were to hear it in Piccadilly, we should still see cabs and granite with the outward eye, but swaths of grass or bending barley would be immediately present to the true or inward seeing power. . . . The peal from the steeple rekindles a memory of mixed weddings, victories, and elections. There are, of course, catholic sounds which suggest the same ideas to different minds with approximate certainty. The passing bell has one message to all.3

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2"Association" (anon.), Chambers's Journal, 3d. Ser. XX (1863), 65.
3Ibid.
The most interesting feature of this article, perhaps, is its suggestion that examples of associational thought were abundant in everyday life: "Perhaps no subject offers more metaphysical difficulties, and at the same time finds more incessant illustration in the commonest, most thoughtless life, than that of Association."^4

Certainly the associational idea had penetrated earlier literary criticism and that body of criticism, in turn, had influenced contemporary reviewers. In the 1830's, associationism was being used as a standard of evaluation, as is demonstrated in this passage, by an unidentified reviewer, on Henry Alford's The School of the Heart, which appeared in the Edinburgh Review in 1836:

Imagination is a sort of Fairy, who can teach nothing in a purely didactic form. Put her down to the duties of a school-mistress and she runs away. On the other hand, in a skillful fiction, the most sensitive and independent part of our nature may get ranged on the side of virtue, without our being aware of it. The noblest associations, thus insensibly introduced into the mind, magnetize it anew, and call it out into a fellowship and an existence of a higher order than it previously owned. We come down from it like Moses from the mountain; our faces brighter than before.\textsuperscript{5}

Not only does the author discuss the moral influence of associational psychology in art, but he goes on to make a

\textsuperscript{4}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{5}"The School of the Heart and Other Poems by Henry Alford, 1835" (anon. rev.), \textit{Edinburgh Review}, LXII (1836), 310.
distinction between poetry and art and music. Poetry is superior to the other two forms, he argues, because moral associations may be much more readily conveyed through language than through either of the other media. This insistence upon the superiority of poetry in conveying associations is expressed again in a New Monthly Magazine essay on Landor, appearing in 1836:

The power, the variety, and the rapidly-associating thought, which belong alone to the poetical perceptions, and by a combination of which it is that the eye of the poet is enabled to glance in an instant from heaven to earth, and from earth to heaven,—these are in some sort necessary to him who would understand Mr. Landor's poetry as a whole. That masterly connection of the remotest analogies which is constantly to be met with there, and never with the help of any of those long intermediate processes which are requisite to the perceptions of ordinary readers, demands, for its entire and proper appreciation, the creative, scarcely less than the percipient faculty.6

The critic judges Landor's failure upon the basis of his associational deficiencies, deficiencies in that principle wherein the real strength of poetry should lie:

So subtle a principle of association must frequently refine itself into a fault, and it may happen, at times, with the most docile disciple of Mr. Landor, that he shall recognize nothing but a series of thoughts or feelings, each evidently in some way dependent on the other, but according to some system which he is unable clearly to ascertain. The association, in fact, is liable to spring too hastily from a non-essential quality, rather than from the acknowledged and inseparable aggregate;—as sometimes, we

6"Evidences of Genius for Dramatic Poetry" (anon.), New Monthly Magazine, N.S. XLVIII (1836), 200.
venture to think, and more particularly in his minor poems, from the word rather than the thought it expresses.  

More important, the major Victorian writers indicated their familiarity with the associational idea. In *Middlemarch*, George Eliot used an associational metaphor to explain the confused state of Dorothea's consciousness in her expedition to Rome and the effect of this experience upon her in later years:

Forms pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained throughout her after-years. Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze; and in certain states of dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued to see the vastness of St. Peter's, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina. (II,xx,144)

George Eliot was particularly interested in the relation of association to memory. In *Romola*, for instance, when Baldassarre Calvo finally regains his memory, and thus is prepared to avenge the ingratitude of his adopted son Tito Melema who had left him in slavery, George Eliot expresses the regaining of his past consciousness by the phrase, "the fine fibres of association were active still" (II,xxxviii, 329). George Eliot also touched upon associational theory and memory in *The Mill on the Floss* when she described the

7Ibid.
return of Tom Tulliver to his home for Christmas vacation after his first half-year at Mr. Stelling's school:

But it was worth purchasing, even at the heavy price of the Latin Grammar—the happiness of seeing the bright light in the parlour at home, as the gig passed noiselessly over the snow-covered bridge: the happiness of passing from the cold air to the warmth and the kisses and the smiles of that familiar hearth, where the pattern of the rug and the grate and the fire-irons were "first ideas" that it was no more possible to criticise than the solidity and extension of matter. There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in those scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our own personality: we accepted and loved it as we accepted our sense of existence and our own limbs. Very commonplace, even ugly, that furniture of our early home might look if it were put up to auction; an improved taste in upholstery scorns it; and is not the striving after something better and better in our surroundings, the grand characteristic that distinguishes man from the brute—or, to satisfy a scrupulous accuracy of definition, that distinguishes the British man from the foreign brute? But heaven knows where that striving might lead us, if our affections had not a trick of twining round those old inferior things—if the loves and sanctities of our life had not deep immovable roots in memory. (II,i,134-35)

In saying that the patterns of the rug and the grate and the other images of home were like first ideas which cannot be criticized any more than the solidity and extension of matter, George Eliot recalls the philosophy of Locke who included density and extension along with figure and motion as the primary qualities of matter. The intensity of such first associations, and their subsequent influence upon memory, follows the pattern in which association predominates over judgment, and an object is dearly loved
because it is old and familiar, rather than because of its beauty or usefulness.

The links of memory described by George Eliot were touched on by a number of Victorian writers and essayists, and help to explain the psychological background for Victorian sentimentality with its intimate recollections of childhood memories. An article on the "Keys of Memory," in **Temple Bar** in 1865, illustrated the connection between Victorian childhood-sentimentalism and associational psychology:

> It is pleasant, in visiting old scenes, about which long familiarity has thrown a sacred charm, and close personal intimacy identified in a measure with a portion of our own individual being, after the first gush of tender feeling, which rushes upon us, as though the whole tide of old associations was gathered into one wide wave, to let our eyes quietly wander from one dear spot to another, all eloquent of incident, and so gather up rambling reminiscences of days gone by.⁸

This same writer observes, as was suggested of Wordsworth above, that the innate faculties are in some sense deadened by the associational growth of the individual, yet the primacy of feeling may be recaptured through the associational reintegration of the individual with the past:

> Our natural feelings do not seem always to intensify proportionately with our mental growth and increased experience; but rather, as reason is matured, do our innate passions and affections

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⁸"Keys of Memory" (anon.), **Temple Bar**, XIII (1865), 202.
come more under its control, and are thereby comparatively curbed and weakened. One picture in this sad chamber starts up before my mind, marked deeply and strongly, as it can only be by the most intense feeling. I could scarcely then be called a child, for I was rather more than ten years old, and certainly lads do not like to be taken for children after that age. It was a cold wintry morning, and the snow lay on the ground, and I was starting for school, to be absent some time. Upstairs a dear relative lay very ill, so ill indeed that I knew it was very doubtful if I should ever see her again after I parted from home that morning. And now I must go and bid her "good-bye." The thought was too much for me, and I could not summon courage to go upstairs into her room. Many times I paced round the garden, the snow and crisp gravel crackling under my feet as I went, trying in vain to suppress the strong emotions which almost choked me, and to muster strength enough not to grieve others by giving way to sobs and tears. In looking back upon that scene—which twenty years have left still nearer to me than yesterday—the very walks and trees seem linked by a strange sympathy to the sorrow then endured, as though they too had received the mandate to "weep with those that weep." 

This essayist is an innate sense associationalist after the pattern of Wordsworth. The links of memory recapture a past state of feeling far more intense than that which would be triggered now by the author's less responsive affections under similar circumstances. His only regret is that some of the most beautiful scenes in our memories "should be linked with associations which give occasion, in our revertive glance, for more pain than pleasure." 

An essay on "Childhood" which appeared in Blackwood's Magazine in 1822 expressed what was to become the

9Ibid., p. 208.
10Ibid., p. 211.
more typically Victorian sentimentalization of the earliest years in life, as the author indulges his most sorrowful affections:

Peculiarly, even at that early age a creature of habit—inanimate things were play-fellows to me, a solitary child—clinging fondly to all I knew and loved, and to all early associations, it pained me to miss the most insignificant object I had been long accustomed to behold, and scarcely a leaf or flower dropt from its stalk but I did miss it, and mourn that I should see it no more.\textsuperscript{11}

This melancholy writer goes on to lament the inevitable breaking of old ties which comes in the progress of life, for "by the time we are men and women, what alterations must have taken place in the persons, and things and scenes, all woven together in our hearts, by the powerful charm of early association!"\textsuperscript{12} The sundering of such links had a larger significance, however, for the Victorians, and it at least partly explains the Victorian "standard" situation which usually involves breaking, joining, or recalling associational ties, as we shall see in Chapter VI.

The major Victorian writers at times attempted a colloquial or layman's explanation of the associational process, and of the individual links in the chain. For instance in \textit{Mary Barton}, Mrs. Wilson's associations are explained in detail when she chooses her clothes before

\textsuperscript{11}"Childhood" (anon., by "C."), \textit{Blackwood's Magazine}, XII (1822), 142.
\textsuperscript{12}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 139.
visiting Mary Barton, her future daughter-in-law, shortly after the tragic death of Mary's father, John Barton:

The day brought its burden of duty to Mrs. Wilson. She felt bound by regard, as well as by etiquette, to go and see her future daughter-in-law. And by an old association of ideas (perhaps, of death with churchyards, and churches with Sunday), she thought it necessary to put on her best, and latterly unused clothes, the airing of which on a little clothes-horse before the fire seemed to give her a not unpleasant occupation. (xxxvi, 353)

The associational principle involved, of course, is that of resemblance. The application of the principle of resemblance in the abstract can be misleading, however, as Dickens illustrates in a passage near the beginning of Nicholas Nickleby. The subject is the coach of the Saracen's Head Inn at Snow Hill, and Dickens digresses at length to explain the resultant double association of ideas:

SNOW HILL! What kind of a place can the quiet town's-people who see the words emblazoned, in all the legibility of gilt letters and dark shading, on the north-country coaches, take Snow Hill to be? All people have some undefined and shadowy notion of a place whose name is frequently before their eyes, or often in their ears. What a vast number of random ideas there must be perpetually floating about regarding this same Snow Hill. The name is such a good one. Snow Hill—Snow Hill too, coupled with a Saracen's Head: picturing to us by a double association of ideas something stern and rugged! A bleak desolate tract of country, open to piercing blasts and fierce wintry storms—a dark, cold, gloomy heath, lonely by day, and scarcely to be thought of by honest folks by night—a place which solitary wayfarers shun, and where desperate robbers congregate;—this, or something like this, should be the prevalent notion of Snow Hill in those remote and rustic parts, through which the Saracen's Head, like some grim apparition, rushes each day and night with mysterious and ghost-like
punctuality; holding its swift and headlong course in all weathers, and seeming to bid defiance to the very elements themselves. The reality is rather different. . . . (iv, 29)

The actual location of Snow Hill is not upon a bleak and desolate heath but at the very heart of London, near Newgate, a discrepancy which shows the fallacy of imaginary associationism, even if the actuality is also grim and "by no means to be despised" (iv, 29) as a vision of metropolitan forbiddingness.

Another example in which the principle of resemblance not only works, but does so by reaching back across a span of years, is provided in the Bleak House scene at church in which Esther first encounters Lady Dedlock, her mother, though she does not know her to be so. The linking of thoughts is triggered by Esther's view of Lady Dedlock's face:

And very strangely, there was something quickening within me, associated with the lonely days at my godmother's; yes, away even to the days when I had stood on tiptoe to dress myself at my little glass, after dressing my doll. And this, although I had never seen this lady's face before in all my life--I was quite sure of it--absolutely certain.

It was easy to know that the ceremonious, gouty, grey-haired gentleman, the only other occupant of the great pew, was Sir Leicester Dedlock; and that the lady was Lady Dedlock. But why her face should be, in a confused way, like a broken glass to me, in which I saw scraps of old remembrances; and why I should be so fluttered and troubled (for I was still), by having casually met her eyes; I could not think. (xviii, 250)

Lady Dedlock reminds Esther subconsciously of her godmother, who was Lady Dedlock's sister and Esther's aunt, though
Esther never knew this. The beautiful subtlety of this passage lies in its truth to life, the fact that details of her childhood have for some unknown reason been called to mind though Esther cannot yet recognize why or identify the connection. Then as Esther listens to the reader's voice—for the service has already begun—it suddenly seems to sound like the well-remembered voice of her godmother. At this moment the associational chain is completed, and Esther wonders, "Did Lady Dedlock's face accidentally resemble my godmother's?" (xviii, 250).

A less subtle but more metaphorically vivid explanation of association by resemblance occurs in *Dombey and Son*, when Mr. Toodle explains to his wife how his thoughts led him to apply what he was saying to his wayward son Rob, the Grinder. As is only appropriate for the age of the machine, the metaphor for the thought process has at last become that Victorian symbol of power, the railroad:

"Polly, old 'ooman," said Mr. Toodle, "I don't know as I said it particular along o' Rob, I'm sure. I starts light with Rob only; I comes to a branch; I takes on what I finds there; and a whole train of ideas gets coupled on to him, afore I knows where I am, or where they comes from. What a Junction a man's thoughts is," said Mr. Toodle, "to-be-sure!" (xxxviii, 534)

Here at last we have a literal train-of-thought, and Dickens' explanation of the coupling of ideas by analogy with the coupling of railroad cars is associationally correct, as well as amusing.
Dickens often exploited this comic potential of linking thought, in and for itself. In Our Mutual Friend, the malapropism of Mr. Boffin, who wants Wegg to read to him, is based upon an associational slip:

"But I want some reading--some fine bold reading, some splendid book in a gorging Lord-Mayor's-Show of volumnes" (probably meaning gorgeous, but misled by association of ideas). . . . (I,v,50)

In fact, Dickens created purely associational characters for comic effect. Mrs. Nickleby, in Nicholas Nickleby, is such a figure; her thoughts spring from one point to another in a conversational torrent of words--and the comedy results from the slightness or absurdity of the connections. Sometimes there is none visible at all:

"Kate, my dear," said Mrs. Nickleby; "I don't know how it is, but a fine warm summer day like this, with the birds singing in every direction, always puts me in mind of roast pig, with sage and onion sauce, and made gravy."

"That's a curious association of ideas, is it not, mama?"

"Upon my word, my dear, I don't know," replied Mrs. Nickleby. "Roast pig; let me see." (xli,529)

Mrs. Nickleby proceeds to examine every possible occasion on which she ate roast pig in order to track down the connection. She ends with an explanation which has no associational link in it at all, but her thoughts have wandered so far by this time that she fails to notice her own inconsistency. The result is fine comedy, and no mean psychological insight into this frothy sort of thinking.

Mrs. Flora Finching, daughter of Christopher Casby in Little
Dorrit, is another associational character whose disjointed volubility Dickens employed for comic relief. Dickens used similar comedy in *Dombey and Son* to depict the departure of Rob the Grinder who has quit his job with Captain Cuttle. Rob's feigned sorrow upon parting plays upon the Victorian norm of reverence for old associational ties, and his inversion of the standard of sentimentality results in laughter. Rob left,

... snivelling and sobbing louder as if he were cut to the heart by old associations; then he whined, "Good night, Captain. I leave you without malice!" and then, going out upon the door-step, pulled the little Midshipman's nose as a parting indignity, and went away down the street grinning triumph. (xxxix,549)

Association indeed played a large role in Dickens' writing, ranging from the wandering thoughts of the dozing Mr. Pickwick (xxii,306) to Dickens' criticism of the Americans in *Martin Chuzzlewit* that "all their cares, hopes, joys, affections, virtues, and associations, seemed to be melted down into dollars" (xvi,273). And associationism was especially important for Victorian fiction in that broader sense which included the Proustian remembrances of David Copperfield and Maggie Tulliver, and other examples of strong associational ties with childhood and home.

**Home Associations**

The impact of associationism upon a person can be seen more clearly in the education of John Stuart Mill than
in the life of almost any other Victorian. His unfortunate upbringing served to illustrate the difference between what the Victorians believed to be the true and the false patterns of associational development. After the entire Benthamite superstructure upon which his life had been constructed fell down, and after the realization that the fulfillment of all his social aims would not bring him happiness, and that utility was in itself joyless, Mill turned to analyzing the failure of his plan of instruction:

My course of study had led me to believe, that all mental and moral feelings and qualities, whether of a good or of a bad kind, were the results of association; that we love one thing, and hate another, take pleasure in one sort of action or contemplation, and pain in another sort, through the clinging of pleasurable or painful ideas to those things, from the effect of education or experience. As a corollary from this, I had always heard it maintained by my father, and was myself convinced, that the object of education should be to form the strongest possible associations of the salutary class; associations of pleasure with all things beneficial to the great whole, and of pain with all things hurtful to it. This doctrine appeared inexpungable; but it seemed now to me, on retrospect, that my teachers had occupied themselves but superficially with the means of forming and keeping up these salutary associations. They seemed to have trusted altogether to the old familiar instruments, praise and blame, reward and punishment. Now, I did not doubt that by these means, begun early, and applied unremittingly, intense associations of pain and pleasure, especially of pain, might be created, and might produce desires and aversions capable of lasting undiminished to the end of life. But there must always be something artificial and casual in associations thus produced. The pains and pleasures thus forcibly associated with things, are not connected with them by any natural tie. . . . (v,95-96)

If we take the three levels in associational development to
be sensation, simple ideas (or feelings), and complex ideas (or thought), the mistake of Mill's educators becomes evident. They had neglected the second stage— that of feeling— by giving him reasons for liking this or disliking that instead of allowing the natural impulses of positive or negative feeling to relate him to the objects of the surrounding world. Pain and pleasure, in Mill's case, had been artificially and intellectually implemented (he says, at the beginning of the passage quoted above, "... through the clinging of pleasurable or painful ideas ... "); but he had not been allowed to feel:

**All those to whom I looked up, were of the opinion that the pleasure of sympathy with human beings, and the feelings which made the good of others, and especially of mankind on a large scale, the object of existence, were the greatest and surest sources of happiness. Of the truth of this I was convinced, but to know that a feeling would make me happy if I had it, did not give me the feeling. My education, I thought, had failed to create these feelings in sufficient strength to resist the dissolving influence of analysis, while the whole course of my intellectual cultivation had made precocious and premature analysis the inveterate habit of my mind. (v,97)**

In short, as a young child Mill had found himself being talked to as an intellectual adult when he had scarcely learned to walk, being warned not to do this, encouraged to follow that, praised, blamed, and generally denatured. He had never really been a child, nor had he ever had a true home. The Victorian domestic ideal envisioned the home as a sanctuary for the cultivation of
domestic virtues and affections— that second associational stage which had been so greatly neglected in Mill's upbringing. The true home associations were not intellectual, but, rather, those intimately connected with feeling, and in reverting to childhood memories, the typical Victorian followed the Wordsworthian pattern of reversing the three-rung ladder of association and returning from the complexity of thought to the primacy of remembered feeling in the past, from the meddling intellect to recollected emotion. It was only fitting, therefore, that Mill found in Wordsworth "the very culture of the feelings, which I was in quest of" (v,104). With Wordsworth's poetry as companion and guide, Mill could go back and supplement his starved feelings and affections. But although Mill wished to replenish his emotional life, he did not intend to stay at that level, for, as he himself tells us, "I never turned recreant to intellectual culture, or ceased to consider the power and practice of analysis as an essential condition of individual and of social improvement" (v,101). Mill remained, to the end, basically intellectual. Unlike Wordsworth, he did not want to go back to the primacy of emotion for its own sake and linger there, but rather he relied on the sustaining power of the second associational level of feeling to support him on the third stage of thought and analysis. Mill's response to the death of his wife, Harriet Taylor, is therefore interesting
because it is so unrepresentative of him. After her death, he indulged in emotional associations which ran contrary to his predominant intellectual aloofness, and his behavior became, for a moment at least, that of the typical sentimental Victorian:

Since then I have sought for such alleviation as my state admitted of, by the mode of life which most enabled me to feel her still near me. I bought a cottage as close as possible to the place where she is buried, and there her daughter (my fellow-sufferer and now my chief comfort) and I, live constantly during a great portion of the year. My objects in life are solely those which were hers; my pursuits and occupations those in which she shared, or sympathized, and which are indissolubly associated with her. Her memory is to me a religion. . . . (vii,170)

Dickens vividly illustrated the utilitarian mode of education, to which Mill was subjected, in Hard Times, which opens with the dramatic exhortation of Mr. Gradgrind before the students at his utilitarian model school: "Now, what I want is Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life" (I,i,1). Louisa Gradgrind, at the mercy of her father's ratiocinative indoctrination from childhood, becomes, like Mill, an example of starved feelings and affections. The failure of her home to be a real home in nurturing the sentiments of childhood, results in a neglect of the second stage of associational development, and a contradiction of the Victorian domestic ideal:

When she was a half-a-dozen years younger, Louisa had been overheard to begin a conversation
with her brother one day by saying, "Tom, I wonder"—upon which Mr. Gradgrind, who was the person overhearing, stepped forth into the light and said, "Louisa, never wonder!"

Herein lay the spring of the mechanical art and mystery of educating the reason without stooping to the cultivation of the sentiments and affections. Never wonder. By means of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and divisions, settle everything somehow, and never wonder. Bring to me, says McChoakumchild, yonder baby just able to walk, and I will engage that it shall never wonder. (I,viii,49)

After Louisa flees from James Harthouse, who has made overtures to her when they were alone, she returns to her father and accuses him of having neglected to cultivate the innate feelings and sensibilities of her heart and of having unthinkingly thrown her into a loveless marriage with Mr. Bounderby:

"How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, oh, Father, what have you done, with the garden which should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?"

"Father, if you had known, when we were last together here, what even I feared while I strove against it—as it has been my task from infancy to strive against every natural prompting that has arisen in my heart; if you had known that there lingered in my breast sensibilities, affections, weaknesses capable of being cherished into strength, defying all the calculations ever made by man, and no more known to his arithmetic than his Creator is—would you have given me to the husband whom I am now sure that I hate?" (II,xii,216)

Because of this deficiency in the development of her emotional nature, Louisa fails to maintain those fond
associations with home which were the special product of a loving domestic environment. Thus, Dickens writes, as Louisa returns home to visit her dying mother, "Neither, as she approached her old home now, did any of the best influences of old home descend upon her." Instead, "Her remembrances of home and childhood were remembrances of the drying up of every spring and fountain in her young heart as it gushed out" (II.ix,196-97). Dickens' ultimate condemnation of the utilitarian neglect of the affections is that it destroys the human heart, which, as we noted in the first chapter, was the source from which the domestic virtues and innate sentiments came. Bitzer becomes an emblem of the effect which such purely rational, utilitarian education has upon the heart, when at the end of Hard Times Mr. Gradgrind pleads with Bitzer not to turn Tom over to the authorities for having robbed Mr. Bounderby's bank:

"Bitzer," said Mr. Gradgrind, broken down and miserably submissive to him, "have you a heart?"

"The circulation, sir," returned Bitzer, smiling at the oddity of the question, "couldn't be carried on without one. No man, sir, acquainted with the facts established by Harvey relating to the circulation of the blood can doubt that I have a heart."

"Is it accessible," cried Mr. Gradgrind, "to any compassionate influence?"

"It is accessible to Reason, sir," returned the excellent young man, "and to nothing else."

"If this is solely a question of self-interest with you ------" Mr. Gradgrind began.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, sir," returned Bitzer, "but I am sure you know that the
whole social system is a question of self-interest. It's your only hold. We are so constituted. I was brought up in that catechism when I was very young, sir, as you are aware." (III,viii,287-88)

By now Mr. Gradgrind no doubt is painfully conscious of what his system of education has done to people like Bitzer, and, though Louisa recovers with time, to his own daughter.

The emphasis upon the formative influence of early ties with home which we have seen in Mill and in Dickens' *Hard Times* was reflected broadly in the writings of the period. For instance, Herman Merivale, in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1839, criticized the British educational system for failing to compensate for an inadequate home environment. Because of this, Shelley's undisciplined and uneducated affections found no solid foundation to steady him:

Proud as we are, and justly so, of our national education for youth of the higher ranks, it cannot be denied that there is a great deficiency of fit modes of discipline for sensitive, and wayward spirits, such as are often combined with the greatest natural powers. We refer more particularly to those cases (Shelley's we fear, was one of them) in which the young student has not enjoyed the inestimable benefit of a steady and affectionate domestic education;--where the absence, or unkindness, or unfitness, of those who should have watched over the first expansion of the mind, has left the moral principle and the affections uncultivated. The additional experience of every day tends more and more strongly to convince us, that it is to this first training that nine out of ten of the ordinary citizens of the world owe what is really sound and good in their moral development. The lessons there acquired, do not appear to
sink so deep as in fact they do. . . . The boy is thrown, prepared or unprepared, into the bustling world of a public school. . . . He proceeds to the university. . . . Now, when the mind has been in the outset thoroughly formed by home education—we do not mean only by precept and learning, but by the instruction of example and circumstances, and of that strong mutual love which is acquired round the domestic hearth alone—a youth enters this perilous course of discipline under the best safeguard which can be found against its evil tendencies—a safeguard far more strong, as we have said, in reality than in appearance.13

The youth who, like Shelley, enters school or university with "his domestic affections untrained" is susceptible to corruption, "having no other ties or associations of any kind" to restrain him from becoming a leader in "recklessness and daring, and often libertinism."14

Of course one could grow up under adverse circumstances and still remain good, as witness the goodness of Esther Summerson and of Oliver Twist (we shall discuss such characters at the end of this chapter). But so much emphasis was placed upon early home life that the absence of the domestic background requisite for the cultivation of the domestic affections was often accepted as an excuse for unsocial or irregular behavior. In Oliver Twist, when, after the housebreaking episode, Oliver has been bandaged by the doctor and put to bed, Rose Maylie reacts strongly


14Ibid., p. 505.
to the doctor's suggestion that Oliver may be a thief or may have lived and consorted with such men, despite his innocent looks:

"But even if he has been wicked," pursued Rose, "think how young he is; think that he may never have known a mother's love, or the comfort of a home; that ill-usage and blows, or the want of bread, may have driven him to herd with men who have forced him to guilt. Aunt, dear aunt, for mercy's sake think of this, before you let them drag this sick child to prison, which in any case must be the grave of all his chances of amendment. Oh! as you love me, and know that I have never felt the want of parents in your goodness and affection, but that I might have done so, and might have been equally helpless and unprotected with this poor child, have pity upon him before it is too late!" (xxx,217)

Rose, too, was an orphan, and she defends Oliver because she recognizes her own debt to Mrs. Maylie. Nancy, in her first meeting with Rose, reminds her of her good fortune in finding a home:

"Thank Heaven upon your knees, dear lady," cried the girl, "that you had friends to care for and keep you in your childhood, and that you were never in the midst of cold and hunger, and riot and drunkenness, and--and--something worse than all--as I have been from my cradle." (xl,302)

The use of a deficient background as an excuse for irregularities of temper or of behavior was also cited by Dickens in Little Dorrit. After visiting the Foundling Hospital in London, Mr. Meagles suggests that they adopt one of the children to be a maid to their daughter Pet, but he immediately warns his wife that because the orphan child will have missed many of the graces and affections
of home life, they will have to make allowances:

"Let us take one of those same children to be a maid to Pet. We are practical people. So if we should find her temper a little defective, or any of her ways a little wide of ours, we shall know what we have to take into account. We shall know what an immense deduction must be made from all the influences and experiences that have formed us—no parents, no child-brother or sister, no individuality of home, no Glass Slipper or Fairy Godmother. And that's the way we came by Tattycoram." (I, ii, 18)

Tattycoram's unappreciativeness of the home which the Meagles provide for her is, however, something which could not have been anticipated despite her earlier history. For meanness of temper and shallowness of soul are not wholly the product of environmental influences, and a more responsive heart than Tattycoram's would have warmed to the Meagles, as Dickens takes pains to point out.

George Eliot's Hetty Sorrel, like Tattycoram, is shallow in nature and insensitive to the beneficent domestic influences of the Poyser household. Hetty's anti-domesticity, her forgetfulness of the Poyser's kindness to her, while she dreams of an imaginary future in which Captain Donnithorne figures largely, subtly illustrates Hetty's unfitness for domestic life and the responsibilities of being a wife and mother:

Does any sweet or sad memory mingle with this dream of the future—any loving thought of her second parents [the Poyzers]—of the children she had helped to tend—of any youthful companion, any pet animal, any relic of her own childhood even? Not one. There are some plants that have hardly any roots: you may tear them from their native nook
of rock or wall, and just lay them over your ornamental flower-pot, and they blossom none the worse. Hetty could have cast all her past life behind her, and never cared to be reminded of it again. I think she had no feeling at all towards the old house, and did not like the Jacob's Ladder and the long row of hollyhocks in the garden better than other flowers—perhaps not so well. It was wonderful how little she seemed to care about waiting on her uncle, who had been a good father to her: she hardly ever remembered to reach him his pipe at the right time without being told, unless a visitor happened to be there, who would have a better opportunity of seeing her as she walked across the hearth. Hetty did not understand how anybody could be fond of middle-aged people. And as for those tiresome children, Marty and Tommy and Totty, they had been the very nuisance of her life. . . . (I,xv,132)

Hetty's character is clearly defined in terms of the Victorian standard of domesticity which revered memories and associations that tied one to his home and the remembered treasures of the past. Hetty's deficient maternal nature is further demonstrated when George Eliot tells us that she would have been glad to never see a child again, that she disliked taking care of the little lambs which the shepherd brought in during lambing time, and that her aunt had to bribe her to attend to the young poultry, for Hetty was unmoved even by the sight of a round downy chick peeping out from beneath its mother's wing (I,xv,132-33). With this background in mind, the reader is not unprepared for the final proof of Hetty's maternal and domestic unfitness—her unnatural act of abandoning her own baby to die. As Robert Laing expressed it in the Quarterly Review, in all George Eliot's novels "the women without distinct
family history, without pre-occupying and enthralling home
instincts and attachments, are short-lived and broken-
spirited.\(^\text{15}\) Hetty's tragedy came about because "there
were for her no familiar and cherished recollections to
dull and eclipse the splendours of those dangerous and
hazy delights, lying out of her proper world, by which she
was ensnared and destroyed."\(^\text{16}\) Hetty fails, in short,
because she is incapable of forming those domestic links
which the Victorians believed to be the foundation of a
wholesome life and educated affections.

In contrast to Hetty Sorrel, Maggie Tulliver is
sustained by her old home associations and memories.
Indeed, The Mill on the Floss is largely based on memory
and the moral efficacy of mental ties with home:

\begin{quote}
Life did change for Tom and Maggie; and yet
they were not wrong in believing that the thoughts
and loves of these first years would always make
a part of their lives. We could never have loved
the earth so well if we had had no childhood in
it,—if it were not the earth where the same flowers
came up again every spring that we used to gather
with our tiny fingers as we sat lisping to ourselves
on the grass. . . .
The wood I walk in on this mild May day, with
the young yellow-brown foliage of the oaks between
me and the blue sky, the white star-flowers and the
blue-eyed speedwell and the ground ivy at my feet—
what grove of tropic palms, what strange ferns or
splendid broad-petalled blossoms, could ever thrill
such deep and delicate fibres within me as this
home-scene? These familiar flowers, these well-
\end{quote}

\(^{15}\) Robert Laing, "Middlemarch, a Study of Provincial
Life," Quarterly Review, CXXXIV (1873), 346-47.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
remembered bird-notes, this sky, with its fitful brightness, these furrowed and grassy fields, each with a sort of personality given to it by the capacious hedgerows—such things as these are the mother tongue of our imagination, the language that is laden with all the subtle inextricable associations the fleeting hours of our childhood left behind them. (I,v,37-38)

In this passage we also have an example of the antipathy for romanticism which we encountered among the periodical reviewers of poetry—that domestic dissatisfaction with foreign scenes and oriental or tropical splendors lying beyond the average man's experience. But the significant point made here, of course, is that through a happy childhood a fabric of memories may grow to sustain one in after years. Not only the childhood of Tom and Maggie, but that of Mr. Tulliver as well, was spent at the Mill. It is not surprising, then, that Mr. Tulliver chooses to stay on to work for his inveterate enemy, Lawyer Wakem, the Mill's new owner. Like his children, Mr. Tulliver is tied to the Mill by the innumerable and indissoluble associations of memory:

But the strongest influence of all was the love of the old premises where he had run about when he was a boy, just as Tom had done after him. The Tullivers had lived on this spot for generations, and he had sat listening on a low stool on winter evenings while his father had talked of the old half-timbered mill that had been there before the last great floods which damaged it so that his grandfather pulled it down and built the new one. It was when he got able to walk about and look at all the old objects, that he felt the strain of this clinging affection for the old home as part of his life, part of himself. (III,ix,232-33)
Mr. Tulliver loves every detail of the Mill, including its imperfections, "because his growing senses had been fed on them," and he cannot bear to leave his old home "where all his memories centered" (III,ix,233).

Sometimes in the course of life it is necessary to leave the home which has become the focus for one's memories. Tennyson was not as fortunate as Mr. Tulliver, and after his father's death his family moved from Somersby, leaving behind all the old physical associations of the past. In In Memoriam, Tennyson lamented the changes which time would inevitably bring to those objects about which his earlier affections had entwined; these objects, in changing, would in turn become the subjects of the associations and remembrances of others:

Till from the garden and the wild
A fresh association blow,
And year by year the landscape grow
Familiar to the stranger's child;

As year by year the labourer tills
His wonted glebe, or lops the glades;
And year by year our memory fades
From all the circle of the hills.
(CI)

In fiction it is easier to preserve the past than in reality, and Nicholas Nickleby is fortunate enough, at the end of the novel, to repossess his old home and preserve it and its old associations in idyllic Victorian fashion, exactly as they were long ago:

The first act of Nicholas, when he became a rich and prosperous merchant, was to buy his father's old house. As time crept on, and there
came gradually about him a group of lovely children, it was altered and enlarged; but none of the old rooms were ever pulled down, no old tree was ever rooted up, nothing with which there was any association of bygone times was ever removed or changed. (lxv, 830)

The contribution of home associations to the tone of Victorian domestic literature can hardly be overestimated, and an understanding of the intensity with which the Victorians felt these ties can help us to appreciate their literature as they themselves responded to it. Of course, the explicit term "association" need not appear in the description of a scene which is largely associational. For example, one of the episodes in The Warden which a modern reader might overlook contains no specific reference to associationism, yet it is intimately associational in nature. It is the description of Mr. Harding as he sits in his chair contemplating, point by point, all the elements that contributed to the happiness of his past life, domestic details forever altered by the reforming zeal of John Bold which has necessitated Mr. Harding's remove to a new home in the not too distant future. The pathos of this scene is intense because it is an itemization of all the associational ties which link the Warden to the past, and which are now to be irrecoverably broken. So much more important were such ties and memories of home to the Victorians than to their counterparts in either the eighteenth or twentieth centuries, that we may take Dickens as a
spokesman for his age when he said, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*,
that "though home is a name, a word, it is a strong one;
stronger than magician ever spoke, or spirit answered to,
in strongest conjuration" (xxxv, 548).

**The Uses of Memory**

The Victorian domestic writers often depicted the
intimate home associations of their characters whose old
sentiments and memories had long ago become attached to
familiar surroundings. In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, for
instance, George Eliot's description of old Mr. Crewe the
curate at Milby reveals the townspeople's predisposition
to retain what is known, and what is loved because it has
been known so long:

It is true he was not spoken of in terms of
high respect, and old Crewe's stingy housekeeping
was a frequent subject of jesting; but this was a
good old-fashioned characteristic in a parson who
had been part of Milby life for half a century:
it was like the dents and disfigurements in an old
family tankard, which no one else would like to
part with for a smart new piece of plate fresh
from Birmingham. (II, ii, 58-59)

In the same series of clerical scenes, George Eliot again
illustrates this typical domestic affection for what is
familiar, in the person of Mr. Hackit, who loves to ask
Mrs. Patten old questions in order to get the expected
answers in reply (I, i, 145). The well-known, well-loved,
and familiar objects of one's surroundings formed a con-
tinuity in life, and it was disturbing when these associa-
tions were broken or interrupted. Thus in the third of George Eliot's clerical scenes, the lawyer Dempster is upset when he loses Mr. Jerome, one of his oldest clients, over the religious controversy:

... and just as we do not like to part with an old weather-glass from our study, or a two-feet ruler that we have carried in our pocket ever since we began business, so Mr. Dempster did not like having to erase his old client's name from the accustomed drawer in the bureau. Our habitual life is like a wall hung with pictures, which has been shone on by the suns of many years: take one of the pictures away, and it leaves a definite blank space, to which our eyes can never turn without a sensation of discomfort. Nay, the involuntary loss of any familiar object almost always brings a chill as from an evil omen; it seems to be the first finger-shadow of advancing death. (II,x,159-60)

A similar sentiment for his customary life is what keeps Mr. Tulliver on at the Mill, in spite of Lawyer Wakem; for at the Mill "life seemed like a familiar smooth-handled tool that the fingers clutch with loving ease" (III,ix,233). This love for what is known, for the objects in one's surroundings which have endured, is a typically Victorian sentiment and the domestic writers employed this theme frequently.

If we were to wander for a moment, back in time, and enter a Victorian drawing-room, we should find this same sense of the past reflected all about us, and the nature of the Victorian interior can thus reveal much about the Victorian personality. The heavy drapes, to shield the contents of the room from fading, the rich thick oriental
carpets designed to last a half a century or more, the
general heaviness, massiveness, and strength of the furni-
ture, connoting durability and permanence, all contributed
to the preservation of the best in the past. The many
mementoes to be found in such a room, albums of extracted
verse, autograph albums with "sentiments," literary annuals
and keepsakes inscribed with the giver's name, pressed
flowers in books, souvenirs from the grand tour, family
pictures, cameos, lockets, and in a secret corner of the
room, perhaps, programs from past recitals or plays tied
with a neat ribbon and tucked high up on the shelf, while
in the recesses of the desk in the bedroom above a packet
of love-letters lies hidden—all these items signify some-
thing of the respect with which the typical Victorian
viewed the past, and in particular, the past which he
personally had experienced and known. In "Mr. Gilfil's
Love Story," in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, George Eliot
skillfully portrays this attitude towards bygone days and
remembrances by describing the secret chamber which Mr.
Gilfil has preserved, to protect the memory of the young
wife he lost so many years before:

Mr. Gilfil was a bachelor then? That is the
conclusion to which you would probably have come
if you had entered his sitting-room, where the
bare tables, and the large old-fashioned horse-
hair chairs, and the threadbare Turkey carpet
perpetually fumigated with tobacco, seemed to tell
a story of wifeless existence that was contradicted
by no portrait, no piece of embroidery, no faded
bit of pretty triviality, hinting of tapering-
fingers and small feminine ambitions. . . . But there was a chamber in Shepperton Vicarage which told a different story from that bare and cheerless dining-room--a chamber never entered by any one besides Mr. Gilfil and Old Martha the housekeeper. . . . (I,i,143)

The blinds of this secret chamber were always down, to preserve its contents from the fading power of the sun, except once a quarter when Martha entered the room to air and clean it:

It was a touching sight that the daylight streamed in upon, as Martha drew aside the blinds and thick curtains and opened the Gothic casement of the oriel window! On the little dressing-table there was a dainty looking-glass in a carved and gilt frame; bits of wax-candle were still in the branched sockets at the sides, and on one of these branches hung a little black lace kerchief; a faded satin pin-cushion, with the pins rusted in it, a scent-bottle, and a large green fan, lay on the table; and on a dressing-box by the side of the glass was a work-basket, and an unfinished baby-cap, yellow with age, lying in it. Two gowns, of a fashion long forgotten, were hanging on nails against the door, and a pair of tiny red slippers, with a bit of tarnished silver embroidery on them, were standing at the foot of the bed. (I,i,143-44)

This "locked-up chamber in Mr. Gilfil's house" which was "a sort of visible symbol of the secret chamber in his heart" (I,i,145), like the room of her dear departed Albert which Queen Victoria preserved, represented the secret place that existed in the heart of many a Victorian for the mementoes of the long-remembered past. Mr. Casaubon's mother's room, in Middlemarch, similarly retained intact the texture of another age. And Miss Havisham's dark room in Great
Expectations served as a ghostly anti-type of the Victorian ideal of preserving the good of former years.

However, the means par excellence by which the Victorians linked themselves with the precious past, was not by rooms as such, but through keepsakes and mementoes. In *Oliver Twist*, when the desolate Nancy is about to part from Rose Maylie after their secret meeting on London Bridge, Nancy asks Rose for a remembrance of her, for they may never meet again:

"And yet--give me something that you have worn: I should like to have something--no, no, not a ring--your gloves or handkerchief--anything that I can keep, as having belonged to you, sweet lady. There. Bless you! God bless you. Goodnight, goodnight!"

(xlvi,355)

The variety of keepsakes was astonishing. Mr. Toots, in *Dombey and Son*, brings down from Dr. Blimber's school to Florence as a gift, Diogenes, the dog that Paul had liked so well. "I thought you'd like to have him, perhaps, as a sort of keepsake," Mr. Toots tells Florence, and "though Diogenes was as ridiculous a dog as one would meet with on a summer's day . . . he was dearer to Florence, in virtue of that parting remembrance of him, and that request [by Paul] that he might be taken care of, than the most valuable and beautiful of his kind" (xviii,252). In "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," Dorcas, the nursemaid of the adopted Caterina at Cheverel Manor, marries the coachman but leaves behind a more typical Victorian memento: "A little china-
box, bearing the motto 'Though lost to sight, to memory dear,' which Dorcas sent her as a remembrance, was among Caterina's treasures ten years after" (I,iv,194-95). Esther Summerson, in Bleak House, performs a "standard" Victorian gesture, when she keeps the flowers Mr. Woodcourt left for her when he went away by ship: "I had kept Mr. Woodcourt's flowers. When they were withered I had dried them, and put them in a book that I was fond of. Nobody knew this, not even Ada" (xxxvi,504). The mother of Janet Dempster, in "Janet's Repentance," "kept the little worn shoes Janet had first run in, and kissed them day by day when she was away ... a tall girl at school" (II,iv,103). Similarly, young Walter Gay, in Dombey and Son, kept "as a remembrance" (xix,260) the shoes which Good Mrs. Brown had given to Florence, the shoes that had fallen off so often on that adventuresome night. The sentimental Victorians also accumulated souvenirs of travels; the Meagles' collection is a good example of this: "Of articles collected on his [Mr. Meagles'] various expeditions, there was such a vast miscellany that it [the Meagles' house] was like the dwelling of an amiable Corsair" (I,xvi,192). In preparing the house for Pet's marriage to Gowan, a marriage for which the Meagles really have no liking, these souvenirs act as a common bond between the three Meagles, and summon forth the shared experience of their past:

In the arrangement of the house for the great occasion, many little reminders of the old travels
of the father and mother and daughter had to be disturbed, and passed from hand to hand; and sometimes, in the midst of these mute witnesses to the life they had had together, even Pet herself would yield to lamenting and weeping. (I,xxxiv,403-404)

But the keepsake which appeared most frequently in major Victorian fiction (as in life) was probably the locket. Through his discovery, at the dance, of a locket with entwined hair within it, Adam Bede first finds out that Hetty Sorrel has a lover, though he does not yet know him to be Arthur Donnithorne. In "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story," George Eliot explains that Sir Christopher had exchanged locks with his childhood sweetheart, now Lady Asher, when she was a mild-eyed beauty of sixteen. And Caterina, in the same story, keeps two locks of hair, arranged in a fantastic knot, under the glass at the back of a small miniature. In a gesture symbolic of the hopelessness of her romance with Anthony Wybrow, she dashes it across the room against the bare hearthstone (I,xii,269). Thackeray, in Pendennis, tells us that when Laura Bell came to Fairoaks to live, she had about her neck "a locket with hair, which Helen had given, ah how many years ago! to poor Francis, dead and buried" (I,viii,89). But it was Dickens who used the locket-memento most frequently. When Smike confesses to Nicholas Nickleby that he is in love with Nicholas' sister Kate, Nicholas also learns of a romantic gesture on Smike's part:

He had procured a lock of her hair, which hung
at his breast, folded in one or two slight ribbons she had worn. He prayed that, when he was dead, Nicholas would take it off, so that no eyes but his might see it, and that when he was laid in his coffin and about to be placed in the earth, he would hang it round his neck again, that it might rest with him in the grave. (lvi, 763)

Other Dickens characters use the locket to preserve the past. For instance, we learn that Mrs. Steerforth has kept a picture of her son as an infant, together with some of his baby hair, in a locket, which she proudly shows to David (xx, 295). Moreover, one of Dickens' plots is intimately connected with a locket, just as it is intimately connected with the past which that locket represents. For the secret of Oliver Twist's parentage is hidden in the locket which was taken from Oliver's mother when she died, and which Mrs. Bumble eventually sells to the unscrupulous Monks. In the locket were two locks of hair and a plain gold wedding-ring with the word "Agnes" engraved on the inside, more than enough to establish Oliver's true identity, though Monks, in destroying this evidence, thinks that he has hidden the secret of Oliver's parentage for good.

The conclusion which may be drawn from the profusion of Victorian mementoes, and from the Victorian reverence for home memories, ties, and associations, is that the faculty of memory itself played a very significant role in the life of the typical Victorian, a far more serious role, perhaps, than in the life of a representative
eighteenth or twentieth century Englishman. At this point it is important for us to determine what the Victorians understood the faculty of memory to be. George Eliot gives us a keen insight into the function of memory through the incident in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story" in which Caterina regains consciousness after her fainting fit:

It is a wonderful moment, the first time we stand by one who has fainted, and witness the fresh birth of consciousness spreading itself over the blank features, like the rising sunlight on the Alpine summits that lay ghastly and dead under the leaden twilight. A slight shudder, and the frost-bound eyes recover their liquid light; for an instant they show the inward semi-consciousness of an infant's; then, with a little start, they open wider and begin to look; the present is visible, but only as a strange writing, and the interpreter Memory is not yet there. (I,xv,286)

Because memory has not yet returned, Caterina forgets that the reason she fainted is that Anthony Wybrow is dead. More important, the role which George Eliot has assigned to memory in this passage, that of "memory the interpreter," is the role it assumed for the major Victorian domestic writers. For they believed that man interprets the present only in terms of the past, or, more precisely, in terms of his attitude towards the past, that is, according to what he now chooses to remember. A man may look back at either the dark side or the light side of his former experience; the sentimental and optimistic domestic ideal prescribed that he should only look back upon the latter, and that it was the role of memory to preserve the good of the past.
The responsibility of memory in this respect was great, for man's happiness in the present and his hope for the future depended upon the positive bias of his remembrances. Memory thus assumed an ethical and moral function.

Perhaps the best illustration of this principle is given by Dickens through that interlude in Nicholas Nickleby in which, when the travellers have gathered at the inn subsequent to the coach wreck, the grey-haired gentleman entertains Nicholas, Squeers, and the assembled passengers, with his story of "The Five Sisters of York."

At the beginning of the tale, the five sisters are visited by a Benedictine Monk who lives in a near-by Abbey; the Monk criticizes the sisters for wasting precious hours in embroidery, for each is at work upon an embroidery frame. Alice, the youngest of the five, defends their common project:

"Our dear mother," said the maiden; "Heaven rest her soul!"
"Amen!" cried the friar in a deep voice.
"Our dear mother," faltered the fair Alice, "was living when these long tasks began, and bade us, when she should be no more, ply them in all discretion and cheerfulness, in our leisure hours; she said that if in harmless mirth and maidenly pursuits we passed those hours together, they would prove the happiest and most peaceful of our lives, and that if, in later times, we went forth into the world, and mingled with its cares and trials—if, allured by its temptations and dazzled by its glitter, we ever forgot that love and duty which should bind, in holy ties, the children of one loved parent—a glance at the old work of our common girlhood would awaken good thoughts of bygone days, and soften our hearts to affection and love. . . ." (vi,59-60)
As we are soon to learn, this is a treatise upon the uses of memory, and the common pattern which the five sisters weave is representative of the memories they hold in common, memories of the good, domestic experiences which they have shared, prior to their entrance into the larger world. Believing that it is unnatural to live a cloistered life, the sisters refuse the veil which the Monk would have them assume. Angered by their decision to live the secular life of the world, the Father presents his own negative theory of memory in return:

"Stay!" said the monk . . . "and hear from me what these recollections are, which you would cherish above eternity, and awaken—if in mercy they slumbered—by means of idle toys. The memory of earthly things is charged, in after life, with bitter disappointment, affliction, death; with dreary change and wasting sorrow. The time will one day come, when a glance at those meaningless baubles will tear open deep wounds in the hearts of some among you, and strike to your inmost souls. When that hour arrives—and, mark me, come it will—that hour arrives—turn from the world from which you clung to the refuge which you spurned." (vi,61)

Time passes, and when the sisters reunite there are but four of them, for Alice, the youngest sister, who first spoke to the Monk, is dead. The remaining sisters have deep ravages of sorrow upon their faces, for the world has been harsh to them, and three of them have married and been widowed since last they met. The Monk returns and bids them to retire from the world to the cloister, as he had forewarned. But the sisters recover the five frames of embroidery, and looking upon them, and at their old
surroundings, and thinking of their dead sister and her love of life—and of how her young heart had sickened at the thought of the cloister—they refuse the veil a second time. Instead, they have a faithful copy of their old embroidery work executed in five large compartments of stained glass, and made into a cathedral window. One by one they die and are buried there and the sun shines through the window of York Cathedral upon their graves.

The memory of the good in the past has thus preserved the sisters from making the wrong decision, and withdrawing from life. The moral that one should look to the good is brought out in the ensuing commentary on the story by the good-humored gentleman:

"There are shades in all good pictures, but there are lights, too, if we choose to contemplate them," said the gentleman with the merry face.

"To remember happiness which cannot be restored is pain, but of a softened kind. Our recollections are unfortunately mingled with much that we deplore, and with many actions which we bitterly repent; still in the most chequered life I firmly think there are so many little rays of sunshine to look back upon, that I do not believe any mortal (unless he had put himself without the pale of hope) would deliberately drain a goblet of the waters of Lethe, if he had it in his power."

"Possibly you are correct in that belief," said the grey-haired gentleman after a short reflection. "I am inclined to think that you are."

"Why, then," replied the other, "the good in this state of existence preponderates over the bad, let mis-called philosophers tell us what they will. If our affections be tried, our affections are our consolation and comfort; and memory, however sad, is the best and purest link between this world and a better." (vi,65)
The moral is simple: "Take any subject of sorrowful regret, and see with how much pleasure it is associated" (vi,65).
By preserving the best of the past, memory also produced a positive attitude towards the present and future. Furthermore, good memories were for the Victorians man's surest moral guardian, a fact which helps to explain the emphasis placed upon a happy childhood and positive domestic associations. For memory, the interpreter, carried with it the domestic virtues of the past.

Little Nell's departure from the Old Curiosity Shop illustrates the preponderance of the good over the bad in memory which the good-humored gentleman asserted in Nicholas Nickleby. Nell has many reasons for not liking the old shop, but as she prepares for their flight from Quilp the good associations overwhelm the bad ones:

And how different the parting from them [the old rooms] was from any she had expected, and most of all from that which she had oftenest pictured to herself. How could she ever have thought of bidding them farewell in triumph, when the recollections of the many hours she had passed among them rose to her swelling heart, and made her feel the wish a cruelty, lonely and sad though many of those hours had been! She sat down at the window where she had spent so many evenings—darker far than this—and every thought of hope or cheerfulness that had occurred to her in that place came vividly upon her mind, and blotted out its dull and mournful associations in an instant. (xii,95)

A similar retrospective selectivity takes place in Nicholas Nickleby's mind when he looks back upon the trials of his earlier life from the vantage point of later years; for
the cares are largely forgotten, and the remembrance of the
good preponderates:

Many and many a time in after years did Nicholas look back to this period of his life, and tread again the humble quiet homely scenes that rose up as of yore before him. Many and many a time, in the twilight of a summer's evening, or beside the flickering winter's fire—but not so often or so sadly then—would his thoughts wander back to these old days, and dwell with a pleasant sorrow upon every slight remembrance which they brought crowding home. The little room in which they had so often sat long after it was dark, figuring such happy futures; Kate's cheerful voice and merry laugh; how, if she were from home they used to sit and watch for her return, scarcely breaking silence but to say how dull it seemed without her; the glee with which poor Smike would start from the darkened corner where he used to sit, and hurry to admit her; and the tears they often saw upon his face, half wondering to see them too and he so pleased and happy; every little incident, and even slight words and looks of those old days, little heeded then, but well remembered when busy cares and trials were quietly forgotten, came fresh and thick before him many and many a time, and, rustling above the dusty growth of years, came back green boughs of yesterday. (xlix,638)

In Jane Eyre, Charlotte Brontë makes the same point about memory, showing the importance of having a good foundation of memories to support one in life. Mr. Rochester thus hints to Jane Eyre that his own past is troubled, and that he envies her her peace of mind and her pure memory:
"Little girl, a memory without blot or contamination must be an exquisite treasure—an inexhaustible source of pure refreshment: is it not?" (I,xiv,173). Jane, who as usual is more than a little confused by the enigmatic Mr. Roch-
estor, sets forth the standard Victorian domestic philosophy of good memories:

"To speak truth, sir, I don't understand you at all: I cannot keep up the conversation, because it has got out of my depth. Only one thing I know: you said you were not as good as you should like to be, and that you regretted your own imperfections; one thing you can comprehend: you intimated that to have a sullied memory was a perpetual bane. It seems to me, that if you tried hard, you would in time find it possible to become what you yourself would approve; and that if from this day you began with resolution to correct your thoughts and actions, you would in a few years have laid up a new and stainless store of recollections, to which you might revert with pleasure." (I,xiv,175-76)

Of course Jane speaks here without knowledge of Rochester's first wife, of that past which cannot simply be forgotten or locked up in an attic. And the disparity between her optimistic utterance of the conventional domestic view of memory, and the harsh reality of Rochester's past, which has pursued him into the present, indicates the limitations of this benevolent theory of remembrance. Nevertheless, according to the domestic perspective, the memories of past good could have a stabilizing influence upon character, an influence which Rochester seeks, and which, as Jane soon finds out, circumstance has all too long denied him. This ideal of memory as the strongest foundation upon which the soul can stand was reiterated by James Montgomery in The Amulet for 1831:

The pleasures of memory are sometimes, though seldom, more lively than the pleasures of hope, but they are always more defined; and the certainty that we "have been blessed" is something still in
possession, which a wise man would not exchange for the unreal reversion of blessings to come, in the precarious contingencies of life. The farther, too, that we are removed from the time and place of our earliest and sweetest associations, the more they are endeared to us, and the oftener recollected.\footnote{James Montgomery, "Home, Country, All the World," The Amulet (London, 1831), pp. 80-81.}

In The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot gives an example of how the lack of a store of memories to fall back upon can leave one feeling insecure and helpless. After Lawyer Wakem has assumed Mr. Tulliver's debts, Mr. Tulliver has a stroke, and the household items are about to be auctioned off without intervention by the Gleggs or Pullets, Maggie faces her first real crisis:

There is no hopelessness so sad as that of early youth, when the soul is made up of wants, and has no long memories, no superadded life in the life of others; though we who look on think lightly of such premature despair, as if our vision of the future lightened the blind sufferer's present. (III,v,208)

Victorian literature is filled with examples of the power for good which lies in the remembered good of the past, and it could be said that The Mill on the Floss and In Memoriam are partly tributes to this idea. As George Eliot expressed it in Adam Bede, the fond words and loves of former times recalled, may stir "the long-winding fibres of your memory . . . enriching your present with your most precious past" (VI,1,412).
Domestic Moral Associationism

The question now is: What influence could such memories exert upon a person's life, in the immediate present? The Victorian answer was simple. The memories and associations with the domestic sanctuary were moral ties which one carried with him thereafter, and which, in times of crisis or difficulty, could reintegrate him with the best in his past, reassociate him with the primary emotions and domestic virtues, and thus help him to make the proper moral choice. A person thus moved, in the true Wordsworthian fashion, from the complexity of thought to the primacy of feeling, from the perplexities of indecision and moral choice to the instinctive moral sympathy of the heart.

Perhaps no finer example of this process may be found than in Dickens' domestic tale, The Cricket on the Hearth. At the climax of that story, Tackleton shows John Peerybingle what appears to be conclusive proof that John's wife Dot has been unfaithful to him. John takes down his gun from its rack and is about to go into the room of the perfidious stranger whom he has seen consorting with Dot and shoot him. But suddenly the Cricket on the Hearth begins to chirp; "No sound he could have heard, no human voice, not even hers, could so have moved and softened him" (iii,210). The Carrier recoils from the door, and reminded by the Cricket's voice of all the old associations of his
happy home, he finds relief in tears. At this point the Cricket comes out into the room and stands in Fairy shape before the Carrier, summoning up the myriad forms of home, calling forth every domestic association from Dot's and John's long and happy past to plead for Dot's innocence, in spite of appearances and the accusation of Tackleton:

"The hearth she has—how often!—blessed and brightened," said the cricket; "the hearth which, but for her, were only a few stones and bricks and rusty bars, but which has been, through her, the Altar of your Home; on which you have nightly sacrificed some petty passion, selfishness, or care, and offered up the homage of a tranquil mind, a trusting nature, and an overflowing heart; so that the smoke from this poor chimney has gone upward with a better fragrance than the richest shrines in all the gaudy temples of this world!—Upon your own hearth; in its quiet sanctuary; surrounded by its gentle influences and associations; hear her! Hear me! Hear everything that speaks the language of your hearth and home!"

"And pleads for her?" inquired the Carrier.

"All things that speak the language of your hearth and home, must plead for her!" returned the Cricket. "For they speak the truth."

And while the Carrier, with his head upon his hands, continued to sit meditating in his chair, the Presence stood beside him, suggesting his reflections by its power, and presenting them before him, as in a glass or picture. It was not a solitary Presence. From the hearthstone, from the chimney, from the clock, the pipe, the kettle, and the cradle; from the floor, the walls, the ceiling, and the stairs; from the cart without, and the cupboard within, and the household implements; from every thing and every place with which she had ever been familiar, and with which she had ever entwined one recollection of herself in her unhappy husband's mind; Fairies came trooping forth... To do all honour to her image. (iii,210-11)

The Cricket, suggesting John Peerybingle's reflections by its Fairy power, is really a metaphor for the power of home
memories within the mind of the Carrier. And as John remembers Dot plying her needle before the fire, and a hundred other images of the past, the accumulated weight of these imaginative domestic tableaux overwhelms him and keeps him from performing an irredeemable act of violence. In the end Dot is absolved of all blame and the tale ends happily, thanks to the moral power of the Cricket, or of domestic associations.

Domestic moral associationism also works at the crisis of The Mill on the Floss in determining the course of action which Maggie Tulliver follows. For after Maggie and Stephen Guest have run away together and spent the night on board the Dutch trading-vessel, Maggie's conscience is awakened by the memory of those she has left behind. She realizes that she cannot drift down the stream because of the pain she would cause to Philip, who but for Tom would be her husband, and to Lucy, who is informally engaged to Stephen. Stephen thus argues fruitlessly against the ties of the past:

"Maggie! Dearest! If you love me, you are mine. Who can have so great a claim on you as I have? My life is bound up in your love. There is nothing in the past that can annul our right to each other: it is the first time we have either of us loved with our whole heart and soul."

"No—not with my whole heart and soul, Stephen," she said, with timid resolution. "I have never consented to it with my whole mind. There are memories, and affections, and longings after perfect goodness, that have such a strong hold on me;
they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me—repentance."
(VI,xiv,418)

Maggie, like John Peerybingle, is saved at a point of moral crisis by memories of home; "Home—where her mother and brother were—Philip—Lucy—the scene of her very tender cares and trials—was the haven towards which her mind tended—the sanctuary where sacred relics lay—where she would be rescued from more falling" (VI,xiv,420).

Two scenes of central significance in Pendennis are based upon the principle of the regenerative influence of domestic memories. When Pen realizes that he has the potential to be a successful writer, after his first professional endeavor has been well received, his thoughts turn from the vanity and worldliness of London and of his recent manner of life to the purity and sanctity of his home at Fairoaks:

Is it true, thought Pendennis, lying on his bed and gazing at a bright moon without, that lighted up a corner of his dressing-table, and the frame of a little sketch of Fairoaks drawn by Laura, that hung over his drawers—is it true that I am going to earn my bread at last, and with my pen? that I shall impoverish the dear mother no longer; and that I may gain a name and reputation in the world perhaps? . . . Dearest old mother, what a pride will you have, if I can do anything worthy of our name! and you, Laura, you won't scorn me as the worthless idler and spendthrift, when you see that I—when I have achieved a—psha! What an Alnaschar I am because I have made five pounds by my poems, and am engaged to write half-a-dozen articles for a newspaper. He went on with these musings, more happy and hopeful, and in a humbler frame of mind, than he had felt
to be for many a day. He thought over the errors and idleness, and passions, extravagances, disappointments, of his wayward youth: he got up from the bed: threw open the window, and looked out into the night: and then, by some impulse, which he hoped was a good one, he went up and kissed the picture of Fairoaks, and flinging himself down on his knees by the bed, remained for some time in that posture of hope and submission. When he rose, it was with streaming eyes. He had found himself repeating, mechanically, some little words which he had been accustomed to repeat as a child at his mother's side, after the saying of which she would softly take him to his bed and close the curtains round him, hushing him with a benediction. (I,xxxii,379-80)

In such a manner does the domestic impulse reassert itself within the worldly and vain breast of Pendennis, as the associational process once more is reversed and he moves from the complexity of thought, to thoughts of home, to the recollected emotion of childhood, a sequence which reintegrates his sensibilities with the primal affections and domestic virtues of the past.

A second and more important episode of this type occurs at the moral crisis of Pendennis. Arthur has been lounging around the Temple gardens hoping to encounter Fanny Bolton, a meeting which would have grave consequences for them both because Pen is upon the brink of ruining both her and himself. At this high point in the tide of Pen's amorous desires, a vision of home is recalled by the setting about him, and the domestic virtues spring to his aid, causing him to make the correct moral choice, an emphatic "No!":

The bells of the multitudinous City churches
were ringing to evening prayers,—such peaceful Sabbath evenings as this Pen may have remembered in his early days, as he paced with his arm round his mother's waist, on the terrace before the lawn at home. The sun was lighting up the little Brawn, too, as well as the broad Thames, and sinking down majestically behind the Clavering elms, and the tower of the familiar village church. Was it thoughts of these, or the sunset merely, that caused the blush on the young man's face? He beat time on the bench to the chorus of the bells without, flicked the dust off his shining boots with his pocket-handkerchief, and starting up, stamped with his foot and said, "No, by Jove, I'll go home." (II,xlix,566)

Thus although Pen encounters Fanny, accompanied by her mother and the two children, a few moments later, he breaks away from the little party almost immediately and vows to see them no more. A short time after, Pendennis defends to Bows his integrity in his relationship with Fanny, showing how close he had come to disaster:

"I do not mind telling you, sir, that on this Sabbath evening, as the church bells were ringing, I thought of my own home, and of women angelically pure and good, who dwell there; and I was running hither as I met you, that I might avoid the danger which besets me, and ask strength of God Almighty to do my duty." (II,xlix,574)

The moral efficacy of the remembrance of home is also demonstrated in Martin Chuzzlewit, in the scene in which Mary Graham begs young Martin not to be obstinate but to forgive his grandfather and be reconciled with him. The burden of Mary's plea is based upon the softening influence of old memories:

"Martin! If you would but sometimes, in some quiet hour; beside the winter fire; in the summer air; when you hear gentle music, or think of Death,
or Home, or Childhood; if you would at such a season resolve to think, but once a month, or even once a year, of him, or any one who ever wronged you, you would forgive him in your heart, I know!" (xiv, 242)

In young Martin's case, however, the domestic influences are not enough to soften his proud heart, and he must go through the severe trials of Eden, in America, before he is humbled. For where associations, and especially "standard" associations with a so-called "standard" situation (such as Death, or Home, or Childhood), failed to recall a person to the moral path, the Victorian domestic writers depended upon the adversity of the world to educate him to his folly, and thrust him, broken but redeemed, upon the domestic affections and virtues which were the foundation of his moral being.

However, even in the seemingly most irredeemable character, there often lay a core of wholesome memories which potentially could be reached, for as George Eliot wrote of the reprobate Dempster in "Janet's Repentance," "in the man whose childhood has known caresses there is always a fibre of memory that can be touched to gentle issues ..." (II, vii, 122). It was the softening, purifying power of the recollection of early experience which the Victorian domestic writers emphasized most, a power which at its ideal height might reduce the adult wanderer from virtue's path to tears, as was the case with the wayward Pendennis in the first of the two scenes quoted
above. The unidentified writer on "Childhood" in Blackwood's Magazine in 1822, whom we have quoted earlier, similarly noted this particular attribute of childhood memories—that they bring about an actual regeneration of the feelings and the human heart:

Among the happiest visitings of which my mind is at any time sensible, are those reminiscences of childhood, streaming in such vivid beauty across the shadowy pathway of mature life, that frequently the past, the very past, seems recalled into actual existence, and I feel and think, and weep and smile again with the heart of a child; ay—and I would not exchange my sensations at such moments for half the pleasures (so called) that, as we advance in life, froth and sparkle in the mingled cup of our existence. I am sure the frequent recurrence of such feelings is beneficial to the human heart, that it helps to purify, to refine, and spiritualize its worldly and corrupt affections, restoring a sort of youthful elasticity to its nobler powers...18

The purifying and restorative power of domestic memories was often consciously evoked with the hope that the release of tears might resolve the problem at hand. Thus in The Old Curiosity Shop, the schoolmaster tries to comfort old grandfather Trent over the loss of Little Nell by urging him not to flee, but rather to consciously summon up the remembrance of things past:

"Think of her; think of all the sorrows and afflictions you have shared together; of all the trials, and all the peaceful pleasures, you have jointly known."
"I do. I do. I think of nothing else."
"I would have you think of nothing else tonight—of nothing but those things which will soften your

18"Childhood" (anon., by "C."), Blackwood's Magazine, XII (1822), 139.
heart, dear friend, and open it to old affections and old times. It is so that she would speak to you herself, and in her name it is that I speak now..."

"Let us not talk of her in her sleep, but as she used to be when you were journeying together, far away—as she was at home, in the old house from which you fled together,—as she was in the old cheerful time," said the schoolmaster.

(lxxi,536-37)

The softening power of old associations is again illustrated in *Dombey and Son*, by Captain Cuttle's reaction upon seeing the desk where Walter Gay used to work in the counting house of Dombey and Son, long after Walter's ship the *Son and Heir* had been reported lost:

The association of ideas, thus awakened, did the Captain a great deal of good; it softened him in the very height of his anger, and brought the tears to his eyes. (xxxii,468-69)

Not even the overweening presence of Carker, and the anger which he has just engendered within the gentle heart of Captain Cuttle, can withstand the power of the remembrances awakened by the sight of Walter's desk.

The paramount example of this redemptive use of memory, however, is the series of visions called forth before the trembling Scrooge by the Ghost of Christmas Past in *A Christmas Carol*. In the picture of Scrooge as a schoolboy, seated at his old school desk, the associations are perfectly recalled, and the hard-hearted miser is quickly reduced to tears:

At one of these [desks] a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down
upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swing of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears. (ii,27-28)

At this point the question might justly be asked, what happens when one has no happy memories or domestic moral associations to fall back upon? We might consider Arthur Clennam, in *Little Dorrit*. The son of a hard father and mother who weighed, measured, and priced everything, professors of a stern religion that sacrificed all gentle tastes and sympathies, Arthur nevertheless has a central core of tenderness within him which transcends a childhood filled with admonitions and devoid of affection. As a result, Arthur weeps when he is greeted by Flintwinch upon his return home, and comments to himself, "How weak I am... that I could shed tears at this reception!" (I,iii,32). Arthur shortly meets Little Dorrit, who, like himself, has had an unusually harsh childhood, yet has maintained a loving heart. Both have grown up in their respective prisons, but unlike Miss Wade, who sets the theme of the novel in an early chapter by asking incredulously, "Do you mean that a prisoner forgives his prison?" (I,ii,22), Arthur Clennam and Little Dorrit have forgiven theirs. Arthur was a man "who had, deep-rooted in his
nature, a belief in all the gentle and good things his life had been without" (I,xiii,165), and Little Dorrit even maintains an affection for the old prison, remembering the best in her grim experience there. In contrast, Tattycoram spurns the love which the Meagles radiate towards her, and before she leaves them, asks them pointedly, "What did we think she, Tattycoram, might have been if she had been caressed and cared for in her childhood, like her young mistress? As good as her? Ah! Perhaps fifty times as good" (I,xxvii,322-23). Thus Tattycoram's temper gets the better of her remembrances (I,xxvii,327) and she leaves to join that other disenchanted orphan, Miss Wade.

In *Little Dorrit* Dickens thus sets up for our review a series of characters who have had difficult childhood experiences and asks us to compare their reactions to their former "prisons." The conclusion drawn near the end of the novel is that despite an impoverished domestic background, devoid of those ties and associations which bind most men to the enduring good of the domestic ideal, the innate capacity for the good, which is potential within everyone, has the capacity to transcend an adverse environment and forgive it. This point is made explicitly by Mr. Meagles when, shortly after Tattycoram's return, he takes her to the window of the Marshalsea room in which they are standing, and points out to her *Little Dorrit*
as she passes through the prison yard below:

"You see that young lady who was here just now—that little, quiet, fragile figure passing along there, Tatty?"

"I have heard tell, Tatty, that she was once regularly called the child of this place. She was born here, and lived here many years. I can't breathe here. A doleful place to be born and bred in, Tattycoram?"

"Yes, indeed, sir!"

"If she had constantly thought of herself, and settled with herself that everybody visited this place upon her, turned it against her, and cast it at her, she would have led an irritable and probably a useless existence. Yet I have heard tell, Tattycoram, that her young life has been one of active resignation, goodness, and noble service. Shall I tell you what I consider those eyes of hers that were here just now, to have always looked at, to get that expression?"

"Yes, if you please, sir."

"Duty, Tattycoram. Begin it early, and do it well; and there is no antecedent to it, in any origin or station, that will tell against us with the Almighty, or with ourselves."

(II,xxxiii,812-13)

It will be remembered that the domestic virtues discussed in the first chapter fell into the classifications of expansive, self-denying, and innate. We noted that the former two categories, however, derived from the primal power of love, or the simple heart, which for the Victorians was itself an innate virtue, the gift of God to man, a gift which could be developed in the domestic environment, and particularized in the hierarchy of domestic virtues, but whose seeds were Divine. The duty which has saved Little Dorrit is, therefore, as George Eliot expressed it for us earlier, but a form of believing love,
an application of the innate goodness of her loving heart.

The Victorian domestic writers brought out the capacity of such innate powers to transcend adversity time and again. Steerforth's complaint, in *David Copperfield*, "I wish to God I had had a judicious father these last twenty years!" (xxii,322), rings hollow as an excuse in our ears because we remember the goodness of David, who not only had no father, but had a tyrant come to take his place. Similarly, we call to mind Madeline Bray, the mystery girl in *Nicholas Nickleby*, who worked to keep her wretched father comfortable though she was "sustained by no consoling recollections of the past or hopes of the future" (xlvi,599). Oliver Twist, Louisa Gradgrind, Mary Barton, Jane Eyre, and many another Victorian hero and heroine triumphed despite the overwhelming odds of their early years. The conclusion which follows from the lives of these characters is that domestic moral associationism served not as the origin of, but as a supplement to, the seeds of innate goodness common to humanity, in potential form at least, from birth. The uses of memory were to reverse the associational process and reunite men with the good of the past, with the best feelings and associations of their early years. But when these were missing, a person had to go one step further and rely entirely upon the moral center of his being present from birth, the
loving heart and the instinctive belief in good, the home within which we carry about with us, wherever we go.
CHAPTER IV

OUR COMMON HUMANITY

The Democratic Precedent

From the age of Plato and Aristotle down to our own, a recurrent idea in western civilization has been that of an innate capacity for, or tendency towards, good, which is believed to be present within each individual from birth. The unique adaptation of this idea by the Victorians—and its relevance to domestic literature—forms the subject of this chapter. But before we examine this belief we must look at a few of the major figures who had contributed to its tradition.

The Cambridge Platonists of the seventeenth century had endorsed the belief in an innate moral sense, but it was Anthony, Third Earl of Shaftesbury, who, early in the eighteenth century, gave it its greatest impetus. In An Inquiry Concerning Virtue and his celebrated Characteristics, Shaftesbury argued for a benevolent deism in which the innate moral faculty in man, by responding to the natural order and harmony of the universe, issued in deeds of benevolence for their own sake. Through the conversation of figures such as Voltaire and Diderot, Shaftesbury's
philosophy was indirectly communicated to Rousseau and no doubt had a formative influence upon him,\(^1\) for in opposition to the rationalism and materialism of his contemporaries, Rousseau asserted his belief in the innate goodness of "natural" man which only the corrupting influence of society could keep from fruition. Rousseau's idea of "our common humanity," of the democratic equality of the inborn affections, passions, and sentiments of all men everywhere, had the greatest consequences for France and was transmitted to the English romantic writers. For instance, John Wilson ("Christopher North") wrote of Byron and Rousseau, in the _Edinburgh Review_ in 1818, that they both touched the common chords of human nature:

> They have gone down into those depths which every man may sound for himself, though not for another; and they have made disclosures to the world of what they beheld and knew there—disclosures that have commanded and enforced a profound and universal sympathy, by proving that all mankind, the troubled and the untroubled, the lofty and the low, the strongest and the frailest, are linked together by the bonds of a common but inscrutable nature.\(^2\)

The idea of a common core of feeling throughout mankind was passed on from the romantics to the Victorian domestic writers who, however, eliminated the subjective and melancholy bias of Rousseau's and Byron's "centrifugal" emotion,

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\(^1\) Dorothy B. Schlegel, _Shaftesbury and the French Deists_ (Chapel Hill, 1956), p. 103.

following, instead, the Wordsworthian strain of romanticism which was more controlled and integrated. Wordsworth naturally was influenced by Rousseau as well, and in the 1800 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* he demonstrated his belief in the democratic distribution of human feeling by defining the poet as "a man speaking to men," to each fellow human "possessed of that information which may be expected from him, not as a lawyer, a physician, a mariner, an astronomer, or a natural philosopher, but as a Man." The poet thus relies only upon the common sensibilities of all men in order to convey his ideas. "Incidents and situations from common life" were chosen by Wordsworth because "in that condition" of life men's "elementary feelings co-exist[ed] in a state of greater simplicity"—in short, in common life, the common affections of mankind could be more easily represented and reached, for in that state of society "the essential passions of the heart find a better soil ... [and] are less under restraint."

Of course, in addition to the chain of Shaftesbury--Diderot--Rousseau--Wordsworth, there were other, more general forces at work contributing to the idea of a store of innate feelings common to mankind. The rise of Wesleyanism in the eighteenth century had given a great impetus to emotional egalitarianism, for the Methodists completely abandoned the notion of the "elect," announcing the emotional equality of all men, those of simple faith, and the
pure of heart, before God. Yet another force of emotional
democratization was the eighteenth century cult of sensibility, which derived much of its force from Wesley and the emotion of conversion, and, at least among the upper and literate middle classes, indirectly promoted the idea of the common sensibility of mankind. The concept of common human feeling had been additionally stimulated by political democracy, a great force of the age, which was largely premised upon the notion of the equal worth of all men and of their thoughts and feelings, despite the prerogatives of wealth and title. The Englishman might recoil with horror at the bloody implementation of Rousseau's thoughts in France after 1789, but his view of the relationship of one man to another could never be quite the same after repeatedly hearing about the Rights of Man, the Natural Man, Natural Justice, Natural Law, Liberte, Egalite, and Fraternite. The democracy of the inner man was central to the spirit of the age.

Before going on to study the peculiarly Victorian application of the idea of common sensibility or, as they named it, "common humanity," it might be well to ask whether there was not an additional factor which contributed to its predominance, a factor other than the precedents cited earlier. In *The Great Chain of Being*, Arthur O. Lovejoy suggested that the principal attribute of the chain was uniformitarianism, the equal and uniform operation of
the laws of the universe or of nature—the constant universal proportion, continuity, and harmony of the great chain of being itself. This uniformitarian principle had been reinforced by the scientific discoveries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, by the work of men such as Copernicus, Galileo, Bacon, and Newton, which showed the uniform operation of the laws of nature, the order of the universe, and reason, nature's common gift to man whereby he might appreciate this order. Lovejoy, M. H. Abrams, and a number of others have observed that the principal distinction between the age of Reason and the Romantic revolution which followed it is that in the latter the principle of uniformitarianism broke down. Thus Reason and Natural Law were replaced by imagination and organic vitalism, and by the concept of diversitarianism, with a consequent emphasis upon individual emotion and feeling, upon that subjective response to the world by which, as Coleridge would have it, the mind dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates the natural order in order to re-create it. The static universe thus becomes the growing universe; the world of being yields to the world of becoming; and the individual sympathetic and creative imagination replaces the older, uniform faculty of reason.

However, the Victorian idea of "our common humanity," though entirely different from its rationalistic predecessors in all other respects, as a principle or law
of human nature remained uniformitarian, consistent in its operation throughout the species. And it could be argued that the great chain of being never fully dissolved into diversitarianism, though the latter idea was central to certain phases of the romantic movement. H. N. Fairchild has suggested that the uniform principle of reason in human nature was gradually modified, through the influence of people such as Shaftesbury and Rousseau and through the effect of the eighteenth century primitivist and sentimental movements, till reason became common sense and common sense became the common feeling of the romantics. 3 This same principle, by extension, may be seen to surface in the Victorian age, when common feeling became the common humanity of the simple heart. The principle of facultative uniformitarianism is thus maintained consistently, though the faculty subject to common distribution among mankind and uniform operation in its actions is itself vastly modified and changed. Universal reason becomes universal common sense, becomes the instinct or intuition of the Noble Savage or the Natural Man, is transfigured altogether in the form of universal emotion or feeling, and finally enters the Victorian age under the guise of the universal

3For a discussion of these first stages of this transition see: (1) Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background (Boston, 1961), p. 108; and (2) H. N. Fairchild, The Romantic Quest (New York, 1931), pp. 13-14.
heart of man, universal sensibility, common affection, common nature, common humanity.

Our Common Nature

From Mr. Pickwick's "innate good feeling" (xvi,218) to Jane Eyre's "innate sympathy" (I,xiv,174), the idea of man's inherent potential for good permeates much of Victorian literature, and characters are often judged as saints or sinners by this standard. For in the development of man's inner nature towards the good, the Victorian domestic writers found a measuring rod by which they judged actions and men; and he who fell short in this regard was a villain. Dickens summed up this idea near the end of Oliver Twist when he wrote that "without strong affection and humanity of heart, and gratitude to that Being whose code is Mercy, and whose great attribute is Benevolence to all things that breathe, happiness can never be attained" (liii,415).

The closely related idea of the democratic distribution of innate goodness also was expressed repeatedly throughout the Victorian age, in both literature and reviews. Indeed, one characteristic by which we frequently may identify a sample of prose as Victorian is by its often present assumption of responsiveness on the part of the reader, an implicit faith that it is being received sympathetically by the corresponding core of humanity which
makes every man susceptible to an appeal to his affections. The phrase which the Victorians used to convey this notion of a central core of goodness common to mankind is that which serves as the title for this chapter, "our common humanity." This phrase also appears in other, variant forms such as "our common nature," a good example of which appears in the following selection from the essay by James Montgomery in The Amulet for 1831 to which we have referred earlier:

... a man, a Britton, may stand upon his native shore, look from his island-domain upon the world thus constituted, and, by an undefinable sympathy with all that is human, by the ties of our common nature, and, more than these, by the influence of a religion which is not only "glory to God," but "peace upon earth," feel himself a fellow-creature of every being that wears the shape and stamp of man, however varied, exalted, or debased.

Man's common nature consisted simply of those innate feelings and affections summed up before under the domestic virtues. Indeed, the primal expansive power of love and its auxiliary expansive domestic virtue, sympathy, lay at the very core of the idea of man's common humanity. For as we have seen in the preceding excerpt, man's common nature was a basis for sympathetic union between one man and the whole of his fellow humanity.

If common feelings ran throughout mankind, could not the poet direct his art towards them? This was, in

effect, what many Victorian reviewers urged, and it was to become the basic critical tenet of the domestic aesthetic. Indeed, one of the chief objections to poetry during the 1830's and 1840's was that it failed to appeal to the common humanity of its readers. For instance, John Wilson, in reviewing Tennyson's 1830 volume, found fault with the young poet for his romanticism which failed to touch the common affections of mankind. Wilson then proceeded to quote three lines from Scott which he felt did embody this power:

Lives there the man with soul so dead,  
Who never to himself hath said,  
This is my own, my native land?

What less—what more, could any man say? Yet translate these three lines—not omitting others that accompany them equally touching—into any language, living or dead—and they will instantly be felt by all hearts, savage or civilized, to be the most exquisite poetry. Of such power, conscious, as it kindles, of its dominion over men, because of their common humanity, would that there were finer and more frequent examples in the compositions—otherwise often exquisite—of this young poet.5

In the 1842 collection of his poetry, Tennyson paid heed to Wilson's advice, and to his own prophetic poem of 1832, by returning to humanity after his isolation in the Palace of Art. His return was timely, for as the years of the Interregnum went by the Victorian critics called more and more for a poetry which appealed to what they felt to be man's

common humanity. As H. H. Lancaster expressed it in the *North British Review* in 1864, when reviewing Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* volume, poetry

must be based on the passions and emotions which are common to all, and therefore sympathized in by all, on the human nature which makes the whole world kin; and must be confused by no allegories or half-utterances, but set forth with a clearness and distinctness which will bring them at once home to the heart.⁶

We have seen how Wordsworth and the Victorian domestic associationists often wished to reverse the associational process. This quest to penetrate from the complexity of thought to the simplicity of the common core of feeling within men was expressed by Coventry Patmore in the *North British Review* in 1858:

The greatest poetry always finds its main source of sustenance in a few common universal elements, which are to it what the elementary substances are to chemistry. It deals with simple powers. Trust, for example, we would call one of the simple powers of poetry. Doubt, on the contrary, we should call a compound, made up of perplexed thought and uncertain feeling; and, being a compound, it can be divided and destroyed. Now, many tendencies of the time are at war with the simple powers, and are in favour of the compounds.⁷

A number of critics attacked Browning according to this standard for his involuted complexity. But by the "tendencies at war with the simple powers," Patmore here is

⁶H. H. Lancaster, "Tennyson's Enoch Arden, etc.," *North British Review*, XLI (1864), 248.

specifically attacking the Byronic and Shelleyan extravagances of the Spasmodic poets who indulged in uncommon states of thought and feeling so different from the simple human powers the domestic school wished to cultivate—a simplicity well represented at that time by the poems of Patmore and by Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* in particular. In the following passage, Patmore calls for the ideal of common humanity as the focal point of poetry, rather than the eccentricity of the Spasmodists:

Either they [the Spasmodics] seem not to share our ordinary feelings and plain humanities of thought and speech, or they cannot grasp ordinary realities; for the emotion to be sung, or the character to be painted, must have branched off far from the ordinary channel of human affairs, and run into an isolated and particular experience, before it is fitted for their poetic purpose. They refine upon reality till it becomes the faintest shadow, and only attempt to grasp it at the stage in which it cannot be laid hold of.

Now if the poet possesses his manhood in common with the rest of us, shares our thoughts and has feelings in tune, and has truly a genius for transmuting and translating these into poetic forms, he cannot keep too much on broad human grounds. The charm will be in the common human experience being rendered in his subtler light, and coloured in the prism of his own personality. If he have sufficient genius, it is in universal experience that he will find his greatest strength, --out of it he will draw the universal success; if he have not sufficient genius, then all the seeking in the world, or out of it, for that which is remote and uncommon, will be but of little avail in disguising his weakness.8

Patmore goes on to criticize Thomas Lovell Beddoes, whom he associates with the Spasmodics because "He gradually lost

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what hold he had upon the warm, rich world of human life, fed with common human affections, and filled with common human sympathies, in pursuit of unnatural mental anatomy, and in search of those mysteries which death renders up in the dissecting-room.”

According to Patmore, the poet, unlike the Spasmodics and Beddoes, should abide by "all those positive influences which yet live in our human nature" and resisting "the negative and perplexing influences of our peculiar time" he should "bring poetry and the readers of poetry back to nature, by touching that nature which runs through the hearts of all."10

The ideal of common humanity not only appeared in criticism but was influential in literature as well. It helps to explain some points which otherwise might not be appreciated in their full significance by modern readers. For instance, in Bleak House Dickens shows us with pointed irony the chaotic Jellyby household and the neglected Peepy who has his head caught between two of the area railings and who later falls down stairs while his mother sits in a nest of waste paper discussing with Mr. Quale "the Brotherhood of Humanity," giving utterance "to some beautiful sentiments" (iv,41). Again, when Jo is brought in to Mr. George's shooting gallery to die, Dickens tells us that

9Ibid., p. 242.
10Ibid., p. 239.
this poor, begrimed, home-grown savage would have no appeal for Mrs. Jellyby's sympathies because unlike the natives of Borrioboola Gha "he is not softened by distance and unfamiliarity ...." (xlvii, 640-41). This is not to say that the inhabitants of Borrioboola Gha should not merit one's compassion, but, rather, that it is a false charity which excludes one's family and immediately surrounding humanity in favor of idealized, romanticized and exotic foreign objects of sympathy. Thus when Caddy tells Mrs. Jellyby of her engagement to Prince Turveydrop, her mother's indifference to her own daughter once more reveals Mrs. Jellyby's misdirected application of the common humanity ideal:

"You see again, Miss Summerson," observed Mrs. Jellyby, serenely, "what a happiness it is to be so occupied as I am, and to have this necessity for self concentration that I have. Here is Caddy engaged to a dancing-master's son --mixed up with people who have no more sympathy with the destinies of the human race than she herself! This, too, when Mr. Quale, one of the finest philanthropists of our time, has mentioned to me that he was really disposed to be interested in her!"

"Ma, I always hated and detested Mr. Quale!" sobbed Caddy.

"Caddy, Caddy!" returned Mrs. Jellyby, opening another letter with the greatest complacency. "I have no doubt you did. How could you do otherwise, being totally destitute of the sympathies with which he overflows!" (xxiii, 332)

Mrs. Jellyby, at any rate, has all too little of that intimate sympathy which should unite her to her daughter, and which for the Victorians was the real bond in the
fellowship of mankind. Mrs. Jellyby's brand of mistaken philanthropy is epitomized in the persons who attend Caddy's marriage:

The guests were few; but were, as one might expect at Mrs. Jellyby's, all devoted to public interests only. Besides those I have mentioned, there was an extremely dirty lady, with her bonnet all awry, and the ticketed price of her dress still sticking on it, whose neglected home, Caddy told me, was like a filthy wilderness, but whose church was like a fancy fair. A very contentious gentleman, who said it was his mission to be everybody's brother, but who appeared to be on terms of coolness with the whole of his large family, completed the party. (xxx,422)

If one was unable to sympathetically communicate with the fellow men about him, theoretical or romanticized applications of the common humanitarian ideal seemed hypocritical.

George Eliot, too, refers to our common humanity. For example, in "Janet's Repentance" she describes the effect of the entrance of Mr. and Mrs. Jerome's granddaughter, Lizzie, when Mr. Tryan is at their house for tea: "A toddling little girl is a centre of common feeling which makes the most dissimilar people understand each other; and Mr. Tryan looked at Lizzie with that quiet pleasure which is always genuine" (II,viii,140). One of the domestic writers' basic beliefs was the normal instinctive responsiveness of people to the natural common goodness of a child. For this reason Hetty seems deficient when she considers the Poyser children objectionable.

Most of the other major Victorian domestic writers
had recourse to the ideal of common humanity. Even in *Wuthering Heights*, which at first glance might seem entirely beyond the pale of domesticity, the phrase "common humanity" plays a decisive role in defining Heathcliff's character. For when Nelly Dean informs Heathcliff of Catherine's brain fever and collapse, and of Edgar's devoted tending of her throughout this illness, Heathcliff spurns the domestic ideal, and does so using its own moral language:

"Mrs. Linton is now just recovering," I said; "she'll never be like she was, but her life is spared; and if you really have a regard for her, you'll shun crossing her way again: nay, you'll move out of this country entirely; and that you may not regret it, I'll inform you Catherine Linton is as different now from your old friend Catherine Earnshaw, as that young lady is different from me. Her appearance is greatly changed, her character much more so; and the person who is compelled of necessity, to be her companion, will only sustain his affection hereafter by the remembrance of what she once was, by common humanity and a sense of duty!"

"That is quite possible," remarked Heathcliff, forcing himself to seem calm; "quite possible that your master should have nothing but common humanity and a sense of duty to fall back upon. But do you imagine that I shall leave Catherine to his duty and humanity? and can you compare my feelings respecting Catherine to his?" (xiv,169)

From Heathcliff's Byronic viewpoint the simple domestic aesthetic of duty and humanity is entirely inadequate. But from the domestic perspective, for which Nelly Dean is the representative throughout the novel, Heathcliff, by egotistically claiming exclusiveness and superiority of feeling, is denying the common deep responsiveness of all men for
the suffering of their fellows. The phrases "duty" and "humanity" thus work in two directions at once, commenting on the domestic and romantic attitudes simultaneously. Again, when discussing with Nelly Catherine's illness and unsettled state of mind, Heathcliff reveals his scorn for the common humanities and domestic virtues:

"You talk of her being unsettled. How the devil could it be otherwise in her frightful isolation? And that insipid paltry creature attending her from duty and humanity! From pity and charity! He might as well plant an oak in a flower-pot, and expect it to thrive, as imagine he can restore her to vigour in the soil of his shallow cares!" (xiv,176)

According to the domestic standard, Heathcliff is a monstrosity of nature, a defiler of the norms of domestic virtue and familial love. As Isabella indicates in her letter to Nelly Dean shortly after her marriage, Heathcliff has long since ceased to be a man in the domestic acceptation of that term:

"How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? I cannot recognize any sentiment which those around share with me.

The second question I have great interest in; it is this--Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?" (xiii,155)

Isabella's question, "Is Mr. Heathcliff a man?" becomes one of the haunting themes of *Wuthering Heights*, and it grows increasingly evident that Heathcliff, if not the devil himself, is an anti-type of the Victorian domestic ideal. Certainly, in his all-consuming romantic passion he has
transgressed the moral law that the feelings of all men are sacred and that Edgar and Isabella Linton, no less than his beloved Catherine, are his brothers in the common fellowship of mankind.

**The Family of Mankind**

We shall return to specific references to the phrase "common humanity" in a later section of this chapter. At present, however, it is important to see how this concept influenced Dickens' characterization of little Miss Mowcher, the pursy dwarf of about forty-five who figures in *David Copperfield*. After Steerforth has run off with Little Em'ly, Miss Mowcher enters the house of Peggotty where David is at that time; she has a terribly serious expression and wrings her hands in an afflicted manner like a person in pain—then she squeezes her hands upon her heart one over the other. David's surprise at this display of concern on Miss Mowcher's part results in a significant statement of the democracy of human nature:

"I am surprised," I began, "to see you so distressed and serious"—when she interrupted me.

"Yes, it's always so!" she said. "They are all surprised, these inconsiderate young people, fairly and fully grown, to see any natural feeling in a little thing like me! They make a plaything of me, use me for their amusement, throw me away when they're tired, and wonder that I feel more than a toy horse or a wooden soldier! Yes, yes, that's the way. The old way." (xxxii,461)

Miss Mowcher is in reality a "sensitive dwarf" (xxxii,462)
who only masks her true nature and makes a jest of herself in order to support her brother and sister. Miss Mowcher admonishes David to be more discerning in future and "not to associate bodily defects with mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason" (xxxii,464). Thus David is reminded to be aware of the universality of human sensibility despite misleading appearances.

A similar example occurs in Bleak House when Esther, having lost her looks through illness, encounters a child. The innate moral wisdom of the child responds to Esther's inner nature, rather than to her outward beauty or loss thereof. Dickens wrote, too, of Kit Nubbles' generous soul, housed in an uncouth frame, "Thank Heaven that the temples of such spirits are not made with hands, and that they may be more worthily hung with poor patchwork than with purple and fine linen!" (xi,90). Charlotte Bronte also expressed the domestic egalitarian version of nobility when her Jane Eyre pointedly reminds herself that she must not be too condescending in teaching the country children at the village school at Morton:

"I must not forget that these coarsely-clad little peasants are of flesh and blood as good as the scions of gentlest genealogy; and that the germs of native excellence, refinement, intelligence, kind feeling, are as likely to exist in their hearts as in those of the best-born." (II,xxxii,158)

The democracy of natural affections also influenced the Victorian domestic writers' notions of what constituted
a gentleman or a lady. In *Our Mutual Friend*, when it is learned that Eugene Wrayburn has married Lizzie Hexam, Lady Tippins unfeelingly asks of Mortimer Lightwood, "You were at the wedding . . . How was the bride dressed? In rowing costume?" (IV,xvii,816). But when Twemlow is finally asked his opinion of the marriage, the voice of society is silenced, and the true nature of gentility is established:

"I am disposed to think," says he [Twemlow], "that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman . . . If this gentleman's feelings of gratitude, or respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him . . . to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say that when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when them are made the subject of sport and general discussion." (IV,xvii,819-20)

The obvious conclusion which may be drawn from this is that not only do all men have a potential for good, but that its democratic distribution makes all men essentially equal—the only superior person being he who has remained more faithful to his inner nature than his fellows, who has stayed simple, loving, and gentle, so that he truly is a gentle-man, like that Knight of the Simple Heart, Twemlow himself. Thackeray makes the same point in *Vanity Fair* in his vindication of Dobbin as one of those "rare personages," a true gentleman, though Amelia has not recognized his real worth. Dobbin had "very long legs, a yellow face, and a
slight lisp, which at first was rather ridiculous. But his thoughts were just, his brains were fairly good, his life was honest and pure, and his heart was warm and humble" (lxii,601-02). The Victorian domestic ideal came to prescribe an aristocracy, but it was a peerage of the heart, a nobility of the affections and sympathies. This sentiment was confirmed by Mr. Pocket, in Great Expectations, one of whose principles it was that "no man who was not a true gentleman at heart, ever was, since the world began, a true gentleman in manner" (xxii,171). J. R. Vernon, in an essay on "The Grand Old Name of Gentleman," which appeared in the Contemporary Review in 1869, similarly discarded all the external attributes by which one might be inclined to identify a gentleman—breeding, education, manners, familiarity with society, experience with men and foreign countries, and several other qualities. Instead, he chose Captain Cuttle and Mr. Peggotty as examples of real gentlemen, for though they lacked external polish, they had in their characters and hearts the essential stuff of which a gentleman was made.\footnote{J. R. Vernon, "The Grand Old Name of Gentleman," Contemporary Review, XI (1869), 562.} By an analogous application of the democratizing principle of man's common nature, Thackeray demonstrated that, as was the case with Helen Pendennis, the real lady's nobility resided in her inward being: "And by high-bred ladies I don't mean
duchesses and countesses. Be they ever so high in station, they can be but ladies, and no more" (I,ii,15-16).

If all men were originally endowed with the natural seeds of human virtue, though they might later come to abuse or neglect these gifts, it followed, for the Victorian domestic writers, that all men were really brothers, the common growth of a common stock. Indeed, in the spirit of Kingsley and Carlyle, the brotherhood of man became a common Victorian subject. A reviewer of *The Chimes* in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1845 pointed to this theme in Dickens:

Let men be made to think, even day by day, and hour by hour, of the millions of starving wretches, heart-worn, isolated, unrelated, who are yet their fellow-travellers to eternity. We do not know that we should agree with Mr. Dickens' system of Political Economy, if he has one; but he teaches what before all economies it is needful to know, and bring all systems to the proof of--the at once solemn and hearty lesson of human brotherhood.\(^\text{12}\)

Insofar as one person's nature responded to that within his fellows, to that degree did he join in the grander pageant of human thought and feeling and life. An anonymous writer in *Friendship's Offering* for 1837 indicated how one might participate in this community of human feeling when he confessed,

... a favourite amusement of mine ... I mean a trick of speculating, if I may so term it, on the faces of strangers; of forming a little history for every man who attracts my attention for a moment;--surrounding him with a web of fancy,

\(^{12}\)"The Chimes by Mr. Dickens" (anon. rev.), *Edinburgh Review*, LXXXI (1845), 181.
woven indeed, out of air, but still appearing to fit him so nicely, that I can at last hardly persuade myself it is a "baseless fabric." Perhaps the practice is not over wise, but it is entertaining, and does no injury to the heart; which is, indeed, I think, rather a gainer by thus establishing a fellowship with all its kind, and recognizing every man as a brother. It individualizes the crowd; and of all the thousands we daily pass, tells how each is the centre of some little knot of affections . . . .

Sympathetic communication became a major theme in most of George Eliot's writing, and it is the sign of a tragic failure in life when an individual cannot respond to the warmth of fellow-feeling of those about him, as is the case with Hetty Sorrel, in her relationship with Dinah Morris and others, and as is true also of Mr. Casaubon. In "Janet's Repentance," George Eliot wrote that even in hardened hearts, like that of Janet's callous husband Dempster, there almost always remains a core of affection, showing "how hard it is to kill the deep-down fibrous roots of human love and goodness--how the man from whom we make it our pride to shrink, has yet a close brotherhood with us through some of our most sacred feelings" (II,vii,128).

The expansion of one's heart towards his fellow humanity was never better demonstrated than in Dorothea Brooke.

Trollope, too, treated the theme of brotherhood and in The Warden he maintained this idea in the background as a standard by which to judge the eviction of Mr. Harding

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from his post. Trollope's argument is simply that the twelve pensioners have substituted material ambitions for human values, have forgotten that the Warden is their "true and kind friend" (iv, 43), that human fellowship is the most precious gift of all. Laws, statutes, trusts, wills, and all the other machinery which John Bold brings to bear upon the Warden have but little weight in the balance with the Victorian ideal of common feeling and affection.

To forget or deny the inner nature of one's fellows became the mark of the villain in Victorian domestic fiction, for it was also a denial of one's brotherhood with humanity. A case in point is Dickens' description of the desperate waterside character Rogue Riderhood as he leads Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn in search of Jesse Hexam whom he has falsely accused of the murder of John Harmon in order to get the reward of ten thousand pounds. As Riderhood paces relentlessly through the heavy rush of hail that engulfs them, the marks his feet leave in the fast-melting slush are "mere shapeless holes; one might have fancied, following, that the very fashion of humanity had departed from his feet" (I, xii, 156-57). Steerforth is also depicted as capable of villainy because of his indifference to his fellow men. When David asks Steerforth to accompany him in a visit to Mr. Peggotty's, Steerforth answers that it would be "worth a journey . . . to see that
sort of people together, and to make one of 'em." Rosa Dartle then begins to prod Steerforth:

"Oh, but really? Do tell me. Are they, though?" she said.
"Are they what?" said Steerforth.
"That sort of people. Are they really animals and clods, and beings of another order? I want to know so much."
"Why, there's a pretty wide separation between them and us," said Steerforth, with indifference. "They are not to be expected to be as sensitive as we are. Their delicacy is not to be shocked, or hurt very easily. They are wonderfully virtuous, I dare say. Some people contend for that, at least; and I am sure I don't want to contradict them. But they have not very fine natures, and they may be thankful that, like their coarse skins, they are not easily wounded." (xx,294)

Miss Dartle underscores Steerforth's own lack of sensitivity when she tells him in reply, "It's such a delight to know that, when they suffer, they don't feel!" (xx,294). But this is what Steerforth has in fact implied. Later in the novel, Dickens takes up the theme of indifference once again, when he shows that Jack Maldon, like Steerforth, is careless of his fellow humanity. Maldon reveals his shallowness of sympathy in his reaction to a grim report in the newspaper:

"Is there anything in the news to-day?"
inquired the Doctor.
"Nothing at all, sir," replied Mr. Maldon.
"There's an account about the people being hungry and discontented somewhere."
The Doctor looked grave, and said, as though he wished to change the subject, "Then there's no news at all; and no news, they say, is good news."
"There's a long statement in the papers, sir, about a murder," observed Mr. Maldon. "But somebody is always being murdered, and I didn't read it."
A display of indifference to all the actions and passions of mankind was not supposed to be such a distinguished quality at that time, I think, as I have observed it to be considered since. I have known it very fashionable indeed. I have seen it displayed with such success, that I have encountered some fine ladies and gentlemen who might as well have been born caterpillars. Perhaps it impressed me the more then, because it was new to me, but it certainly did not tend to exalt my opinion of, or to strengthen my confidence in, Mr. Jack Maldon. (xxxvi, 525-26)

Human suffering should draw forth the best in a person's sympathetic feelings. Margaret Oliphant, in writing of the horrors of the Crimean War, noted a reaction opposite to that of the indifferent Jack Maldon to human pain: "It is the fiery angel of War which, to our land and generation, has brought this lesson . . . the worth and importance of the common creature man . . . We have returned to our broad common ground of humanity, where we are all brethren."14

If the equal distribution of affections signaled the brotherhood of mankind and pointed up the evil of indifference to this common fund of thought and feeling—one more conclusion may be drawn from this evidence. For instance, at one point in Martin Chuzzlewit, Ruth Pinch prays, pouring out her pure heart "before that Being, from whom such hearts and such affections come . . ." (liii, 825). In other words, the seeds of goodness distributed through--

out the brotherhood of mankind come from a common origin, God the Father, whose relationship to mankind as a whole is that of a father to his common children—the archetypal pattern on a cosmic scale which was repeated by the simple domestic hierarchy within the home. In Bleak House, the irreverent Harold Skimpole comically abused this same idea when he begged the angry baker, "by our common brotherhood" not to come between him and the contemplation of the summer morning, for "we are all children of one great mother, Nature" (xliii, 599). Similarly, in Dombey and Son, Dickens tells us that if the evils of the world could but be removed, then men would "apply themselves, like creatures of one common origin, owing one duty to the Father of one family . . ." (xlvii, 648). The author of the essay on "Childhood" in Blackwood's Magazine in 1822, referred to earlier, confirmed the same idea when he said that the recollection of childhood memories not only softens and purifies the heart but gives one "a meek and child-like sense of entire dependence, no longer indeed on the tender earthly guardians of our helpless infancy, but on our Father which is in Heaven, their Father and ours, in whose sight we are all alike helpless, alike children." A far different and more agonized movement from common feeling to thoughts on the origin of such common feelings formed the

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15 "Childhood" (anon. by "C."), Blackwood's Magazine, XII (1822), 139.
central mode of argument of Tennyson's *In Memoriam*:

I found him [God] not in world or sun,
Or eagle's wing, or insect's eye;
Nor thro' the questions men may try,
The petty cobwebs we have spun:

If e'er when faith had fall'n asleep,
I heard a voice 'believe no more'
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbles in the godless deep;

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd 'I have felt.'

No, like a child in doubt and fear:
But that blind clamour made me wise;
Then was I as a child that cries,
But, crying, knows his father near.
(CXXIV)

The modification of the argument in the last of the preceding stanzas is enlightening. Based upon the outreaching of the heart, the relation between God and man is finally expressed in terms of child and parent.

The parental nomenclature for God, following the age old tradition of the Bible, was unusually predominant in Victorian literature. For example, in *Jane Eyre*, the dying Helen Burns tells Jane that she is going to heaven, and that "You will come to the same region of happiness: be received by the same mighty universal Parent, no doubt, dear Jane" (I, ix, 101-02). And Mrs. Meagles, in *Little Dorrit*, is moved by the choir at the orphanage from which Tattycoram comes, when she thinks of them "appealing from the father none of them has ever known on earth, to the
great Father of us all in Heaven . . ." (I,ii,18). The human-to-divine parental analogy appears again in *Dombey and Son*, when Dickens contrasts Flora Dombey's hard-hearted father with "that higher Father who does not reject his children's love, or spurn their tried and broken hearts . . ." (xliii,605).

A further consequence arises if God the Father is seen as the universal parent. For then man must seek to reunite himself with the source from whom his better nature is derived. Only then has man truly found his way home—for man's real home thus lies in heaven from whence he came. Queen Victoria, who was representative of so much of Victorian thought and temperament, expressed this idea clearly in her account to Earl Canning (written in the royal third person) of the death of the Prince Consort:

> The Queen's precious husband, though wandering occasionally, was conscious till nearly the last, and knew her and kissed her an hour before his spirit fled to its worthy and fit eternal home!  

Harry Maylie uses the same reference to a heavenly home in speaking to Rose Maylie shortly after her recovery from a near-fatal illness in *Oliver Twist*:

> "You had been dying: trembling between earth and heaven. We know that when the young, the beautiful, and good, are visited with sickness, their pure spirits insensibly turn towards their bright home of lasting rest; we know, Heaven help

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us! that the best and fairest of our kind, too often fade in blooming." (xxxv,259-60)

But perhaps the most famous reference to man's final home in all Victorian literature occurs in Tennyson's epitaph for his own soul, which like the great tidal waters of the sea will return whence it came, Crossing the Bar,

When that which drew from out the boundless deep
   Turns again home.

By applying Tennyson's ebb tide analogy we may come to a clearer understanding of "what the waves were saying" to Paul Dombey. For when Paul Dombey dies he is metaphorically carried along with the rushing river on to meet the sea, his final home, from whence all rivers come: "How fast the river runs, between its green banks and the rushes, Floy! But it's very near the sea. I hear the waves! They always said so!" (xvi,225). And what the waves were saying was that the family which Paul never found on earth, the father he never really had, and the common affections which were never nurtured save through Floy, will be compensated for in his eternal home where he will become a part of a family divine.

Subversion of the Language of Morality

The repeated references in Victorian literature to the domestic virtues, such as sympathy and duty, as well as various allusions to man's common nature, constituted a distinct terminology which might be called the language of
morality. However, this vocabulary of the sentiments and affections was employed just as frequently, and perhaps more effectively, in an inverse sense, for purposes of irony or satiric counterpoint. This reversed application of the conventional moral vocabulary was significantly still largely for moral ends, for instance, to label as a villain one who subverted ethical terms or who insincerely uttered moral sentiments. The fact that the Victorian writers could use this terminology thus in a double manner shows both the flexibility of the convention and the complexity of their art.

Perhaps in no other single character in Victorian literature can we find a clearer and more frequent reference to this language than in the Moral Mr. Pecksniff of Dickens' Martin Chuzzlewit. Mr. Pecksniff cannot speak without moralizing, and as he explains to his daughters Mercy and Charity, his use of the word "we" is a form of moral generalization:

"When I say, we, my dear," returned her father, "I mean mankind in general; the human race, considered as a body, and not as individuals. There is nothing personal in morality, my love." (ii,14)

Indeed, Mr. Pecksniff cannot moralize without reference to humanity in general, but he inverts the language to suit his own hypocritical purposes as when, early in Martin Chuzzlewit, he blames the innocent and faithful Tom Pinch
for having seen John Westlock off at the Green Dragon:

"But what can anyone expect from Mr. Pinch!"
cried Charity . . . .

"Ay, ay," returned her father, raising his hand mildly: "it is very well to say what can we expect from Mr. Pinch, but Mr. Pinch is a fellow-creature, my dear; Mr. Pinch is an item in the vast total of humanity, my love; and we have a right, it is our duty, to expect in Mr. Pinch some development of those better qualities, the possession of which in our own persons inspires our humble self-respect. No," continued Mr. Pecksniff. "No! Heaven forbid that I should say, nothing can be expected from any man alive (even the most degraded, which Mr. Pinch is not, no really); but Mr. Pinch has disappointed me: he has hurt me: I think a little worse of him on this account, but not of human nature. Oh no, no!"

(ii,17)

Mr. Pecksniff's inversion of the language of morality constituted a serious infraction of decorum for Victorian readers. As Mr. Pecksniff accompanies his two daughters to London by coach, he once again perverts the ethical vocabulary in his justification of why they should ride comfortably on the inside of the coach while others—who paid less—were forced to ride on the top of the coach and suffer from the cold:

And this, he said, was quite natural, and a very beautiful arrangement; not confined to coaches, but extending itself to many social ramifications. "For" (he observed), "if every one were warm and well-fed, we should lose the satisfaction of admiring the fortitude with which certain conditions of men bear cold and hunger. And if we were no better off than anybody else, what would become of our sense of gratitude; which," said Mr. Pecksniff with tears in his eyes, as he shook his fist at a beggar who wanted to get up behind, "is one of the holiest feelings of our common nature."

(viii,116)
Pecksniff is again linguistically subversive while dismissing Tom Pinch in old Martin Chuzzlewit's presence, saying that he trusts Tom's [supposed] misconduct "may not alter my ideas of humanity" and that "I shall endeavour not to think the worse of my fellow-creatures in general, for what has passed between us. Farewell!" (xxxi,500). A further prime example is the scene in which Jonas Chuzzlewit and Tigg Montague (formerly Montague Tigg) try to persuade Mr. Pecksniff to join them in the Anglo-Bangalee life assurance scheme, which is really just a front to reap profits from unsuspecting investors:

And as often as Mr. Montague repeated his sentiment about building fortunes on the weaknesses of mankind, and added frankly, "We do it!" just as often Mr. Pecksniff repeated "Oh fie! Oh fie, for shame! I am sure you don't. How can you, you know?" laying a greater stress each time on those last words.

Mr. Pecksniff became grave, almost to tears; observing that if Mr. Montague would give him leave, he would drink the health of his young kinsman, Mr. Jonas: congratulating him upon the valuable and distinguished friendship he had formed, but envying him, he would confess, his usefulness to his fellow-creatures. For, if he understood the objects of that Institution with which he was newly and advantageously connected—knowing them but imperfectly—they were calculated to do Good; and for his (Mr. Pecksniff's) part, if he could in any way promote them, he thought he would be able to lay his head upon his pillow every night, with an absolute certainty of going to sleep at once. (xliv,683)

Fellow-humanity, benevolence, the Good, the Victorian domestic-humanist ideal—all have been perverted by the ruthless Pecksniff who cares not how he employs the Victo-
rian language of morality. It is only just that Pecksniff is ultimately ruined by his involvement in this scheme.

Another unscrupulous character who inverts the ethical vocabulary is Sampson Brass in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Brass interrupts his sister, Sally, because he thinks she is about to confess the Quilp-Brass plot which ensnared Kit, to save her own neck:

"Sarah," said Brass, "hold your tongue if you please, and let me speak. Gentlemen, if I could express the pleasure it gives me to see three such men in a happy unity of feeling and concord of sentiment, I think you would hardly believe me. But though I am unfortunate—nay, gentlemen, criminal, if we are to use harsh expressions in a company like this—still I have my feelings like other men. I have heard of a poet, who remarked that feelings were the common lot of all. If he could have been a pig, gentlemen, and have uttered that sentiment, he would still have been immortal."

"If you're not an idiot," said Miss Brass harshly, "hold your peace." (lxvi,496)

Dickens also showed that those who sought charitable aid from others often exploited the moral vocabulary in order to achieve their ends. Among the deluge of letters which descends upon Boffin, the Golden Dustman, in *Our Mutual* Friend, there is one which seeks to reap the benefits of Boffin's new wealth by an appeal laden with the standard moral language:

Dare one who cannot disclose herself to Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, but whose name might startle him were it revealed, solicit the immediate advance of two hundred pounds from unexpected riches exercising their noblest privilege in the trust of a common humanity? (I,xvii,212)

Mr. Montague Tigg compliments young Martin's charity, in
arranging for the payment of the bill of Tigg and Chevy Slime at the Blue Dragon, by similar recourse:

Mr. Pinch complying, at once imparted the intelligence to Mr. Tigg, who shook him warmly by the hand in return, assuring him that his faith in anything and everything was again restored. It was not so much, he said, for the temporary relief of this assistance that he prized it, as for its vindication of the high principle that Nature's Nobs felt with Nature's Nobs, and that true greatness of soul sympathizes with true greatness of soul, all the world over. (vii,106)

Another instance of this sort of inversion for comic and satiric effect is Harold Skimpole's speech, in *Bleak House*, where he seeks to justify his Drone philosophy in terms of the familiar vocabulary. As mentioned before, Skimpole is here relating his conversation with an angry baker who had repossessed two chairs which he had lent him earlier only to find that they have been worn out through long use. The baker's complaints, of course, were entirely in vain:

"'Now, my good man, however our business capacities may vary, we are all children of one great mother, Nature. On this blooming summer morning here you see me' (I was on the sofa) 'with flowers before me, fruit upon the table, the cloudless sky above me, the air full of fragrance, contemplating Nature. I entreat you, by our common brotherhood, not to interpose between me and a subject so sublime, the absurd figure of an angry baker!' But he did," said Mr. Skimpole, raising his laughing eyes in playful astonishment: "he did interpose that ridiculous figure, and he does, and he will again. And therefore I am very glad to get out of his way, and to go home with my friend Jarndyce."
(xliii,599)

Skimpole's irreverently comic bandying about of the language
of morality marks his overweening selfishness which runs counter to the domestic ideal. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens further showed that the families of Bleeding Heart Yard misused their credit at Mrs. Plornish's little shop, concealing the real immorality of their actions beneath the facade of moral terminology:

When Mr. Dorrit had established her [Mrs. Plornish] in the business, the Bleeding Hearts had shown an amount of emotion and a determination to support her in it, that did honour to human nature. Recognizing her claim upon their community, they pledged themselves, with great feeling, to deal with Mrs. Plornish, come what would, and bestow their patronage on no other establishment. Influenced by these noble sentiments, they had even gone out of their way to purchase little luxuries in the grocery and butter line to which they were accustomed . . . .

In short, if the Bleeding Hearts had but paid, the undertaking would have been a complete success . . . . (II,xiii,575-76)

A similar appeal for thoroughly selfish purposes appears in *Nicholas Nickleby*, when Mrs. Crummles tells her husband that Nicholas (whose stage name is Johnson) will not continue to object to canvassing their theatrical patrons for donations to help support the Crummles' theatrical company:

"Mr. Johnson will not persist [in objecting to canvassing], my dear," said Mrs. Crummles, "Think better of him than to suppose it. Gallantry, humanity, all the best feelings of his nature, must be enlisted in this interesting cause."

(xxiv,306)

The humanity which the Bleeding Hearts and Mrs. Crummles rely upon to gain their own ends was also expressed by the phrase "moral sense" which runs throughout
the American sections of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. It is (among other things) the Americans' exclusive claim to the possession of this faculty shared in—ideally, at least—by all men, which condemns them in Dickens' eyes (xvii,289; xvii,291; xxi,341). Dickens repeatedly played upon the idea of an inherent moral sense, as in Mrs. Skewton's perversion of this ideal in *Dombey and Son*. Her incessant protestations against artificiality and her continual self-identification with "Nature" soon reveal her own unnaturalness:

"I assure you, Mr. Dombey, Nature intended me for an Arcadian. I am thrown away in society. Cows are my passion."

"Why are we not more natural? Dear me! With all those yearnings, and gushings, and impulsive throbings that we have planted in our souls, and which are so very charming, why are we not more natural?" (xxi,289; 293)

The artificiality of Mrs. Skewton has misdirected the potential innate goodness within her; consequently, her inversion of the language of morality is filled with the greatest irony. Mrs. Skewton remains subversively true to form in discoursing on the virtue of sympathy, which for the Victorians was equalled only by the loving heart as a means of uniting men in common fellowship. She thus lightly reprimands Major Bagstock:

"The man has no sensitiveness," said Mrs. Skewton, cruelly holding up the hand-screen so as to shut the Major out. "No sympathy. And what do we live for but sympathy! What else is so extremely charming! Without that gleam of sunshine
on our cold, cold earth," said Mrs. Skewton, arranging her lace tucker, and complacently observing the effect of her bare lean arm, looking upward from the wrist, "how could we possibly bear it? In short, obdurate man!" glancing at the Major, round the screen, "I would have my world all heart; and Faith is so excessively charming, that I won't allow you to disturb it, do you hear?" (xxi,294)

Edith Skewton is well aware of her mother's false pretensions to virtue and her misuse of the ethical vocabulary. Indeed, one of the most effective juxtapositions of conflicting personalities in all Dickens' works results from this awareness on the daughter's part. In the scene in which Mrs. Skewton, Major Bagstock, and Edith find themselves together, and in which Mrs. Skewton takes up the conversation, using her false phraseology once again, Edith suddenly pops the balloon by interrupting, "It is surely not worth while, mama ... to observe these forms of speech. We are quite alone. We know each other" (xxvi,373). However, Mrs. Skewton, like Mr. Pecksniff, continues to exploit the language of morality to the end. In particular, she uses an appeal to common feeling to minimize the spat which takes place between Edith and Mr. Dombey, in the presence of Carker:

"My sweetest Edith, and my dearest Dombey, do we not know that any difference between you two ... with the Heart you possess in common, and the excessively charming bond of feeling that there is between you, must be slight and unimportant?" (xxxvi,519)

In this fashion Mrs. Skewton shelters herself with "the
fiction of her innocent belief in their mutual affection, and their adaptation to each other" (xxxvi,520).

George Eliot too played upon the common moral vocabulary to make an ironic point as in "Janet's Repentance" when she presented Mr. Pilgrim and Mr. Pratt, the two leading medical practitioners of Milby, who enjoyed their rivalry with one another:

They had both been long established in Milby, and as each had a sufficient practice, there was no very malignant rivalry between them; on the contrary, they had that sort of friendly contempt for each other which is always conducive to a good understanding between professional men; and when any new surgeon attempted, in an ill-advised hour, to settle himself in the town, it was strikingly demonstrated how slight and trivial are theoretic differences compared with the broad basis of common human feeling. There was the most perfect unanimity between Pratt and Pilgrim in the determination to drive away the obnoxious and too probably unqualified intruder as soon as possible. (IX,ii,61-62)

In Middlemarch, George Eliot showed on a more extensive scale how the domestic virtues, and the language of morality, were hypocritically inverted by the townspeople for their own selfish purposes. After Lydgate and Bulstrode have become suspected in the affair of Raffles' death, this pattern of subversive moralizing is directed at the wives of the former two individuals:

In Middlemarch a wife could not long remain ignorant that the town held a bad opinion of her husband. No feminine intimate might carry her friendship so far as to make a plain statement to the wife of the unpleasant fact known or believed about her husband; but when a woman with her thoughts much at leisure got them suddenly employed
on something grievously disadvantageous to her neighbours, various moral impulses were called into play which tended to stimulate utterance. Candour was one. To be candid, in Middlemarch phraseology, meant, to use an early opportunity of letting your friends know that you did not take a cheerful view of their capacity, their conduct, or their position; and a robust candour never waited to be asked for its opinion. Then, again, there was the love of truth—a wide phrase, but meaning in this relation, a lively objection to seeing a wife look happier than her husband's character warranted, or manifest too much satisfaction in her lot: the poor thing should have some hint given her that if she knew the truth she would have less complacency in her bonnet, and in light dishes for a supper party. Stronger than all, there was the regard for a friend's moral improvement, sometimes called her soul, which was likely to be benefited by remarks tending to gloom, uttered with an accompaniment of pensive staring at the furniture and a manner implying that the speaker would not tell what was on her mind, from regard to the feelings of her hearer. On the whole, one might say that an ardent charity was at work setting the virtuous mind to make a neighbour unhappy for her good.

There were hardly any wives in Middlemarch whose matrimonial misfortunes would in different ways be likely to call forth more of this moral activity than Rosamond and her aunt Bulstrode. (VIII,lxxiv,543)

By now it should be evident that the subversion of the language of morality was one of the major Victorian domestic writers' chief satirical devices. But you cannot play against the norm, you cannot counterpoint the standard, unless you have a norm or standard in the first place. Wilde's inverse humor, late in the century, thus derived its strength from the depth of its normative moral precedent. But Wilde was writing counter to the spirit of the standard, whereas Dickens, George Eliot, and the other
Victorian domestic writers most often used the standard to criticize those who failed to live up to it, or who misused the language of morality. Therefore, when the Podsnaps request the company "of seventeen friends of their souls at dinner," or when Silas Wegg protests to Boffin, "I always was, from a child, too sensitive," or when we learn that Georgiana Podsnap and Mrs. Lammle have "become one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment, in soul" (I.ix,130; I.xv,187; II.iv,256), we may rest assured that it is the individual who is being criticized for his hypocrisy, not the Victorian ethical vocabulary.

**Sympathetic Communication**

As was mentioned earlier, the loving heart and its auxiliary domestic virtue, sympathy, were central to the notion of common humanity. A writer for *Chambers's Journal* in 1848 indicated how sympathy, in particular, functioned in this respect:

> Sympathy may well be considered one of the noblest attributes of man, and seems, as it were, the mark of his Divine origin. All his generous feelings--the readiness to "rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"--have their rise in sympathy--that great bond which unifies the society of mankind, and tends to the good of them all.\(^{17}\)

Sympathy was seen as one of the great links between man and man through its ability to permit one person to enter into

\(^{17}\)"Sympathy and its Eccentricities" (anon.), *Chambers's Journal*, N.S. X (1848), 59.
the feelings of another, for as the Chambers's essayist stated, "from it associations spring, and that deep interest which we take in the passing events in which we ourselves have no concern: it transports us at once into the pitiable situation in which we see others . . . ."18

J. W. Kaye, writing in the Cornhill Magazine in 1862, observed that an increased sympathy with one's fellows was part of the process of growing older:

And through this fuller recognition of the deep human interest that underlies the great expanse of Common-place, increase of years brings us increase of happiness. We enlarge our sympathies as we grow old . . . . I know nothing in the blundering, puppy-blind, self-importance of youth, for which I would give this deeper insight into life—this enlarged love of humanity.19

Yet another reviewer, writing on "George Eliot as a Novelist," in the Westminster Review in 1878, indicated that although "this gift of wide sympathy has been very sparsely given to men," nevertheless "it is the gift of the poet of character—the novelist," writers who, like George Eliot, "have sympathies which are not kept in channels like streams, but which overflow everything like a flood."20

This broad, overwhelming sympathy was what, in terms of the Victorian domestic ideal, constituted the real value of

18_ Ibid._, p. 60.


20 "George Eliot as a Novelist" (anon. rev.), Westminster Review, CX (1878), 111-112.
literature. Through interaction with the writings of a truly sympathetic spirit, the reader's sympathies might also be expanded, bringing him to a better understanding of his fellow humanity. George Eliot brought out this point in a *Westminster Review* article in 1856:

> The greatest benefit we owe to the artist, whether painter, poet, or novelist, is the extension of our sympathies. Appeals founded on generalizations and statistics require a sympathy ready-made, a moral sentiment already in activity; but a picture of human life such as a great artist can give, surprises even the trivial and selfish into that attention to what is apart from themselves, which may be called the raw material of moral sentiment. . . . Art is the nearest thing to life; it is a mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.²¹

In light of this moral function of art it is easy to see why the periodical reviewers clamored for a poetry which would sympathetically portray the common inner nature of man.

More than by the developmental power of sympathetic art, however, it was through the communication of sympathetic feeling, among equals, that one could increase one's range of sensibility, growing beyond selfish thoughts and egotistical desires. For this reason, sympathy was in a very real sense one of the "expansive" domestic virtues. George Eliot demonstrated this amplifying power of sympathy

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in *Adam Bede*, in the letter which Dinah Morris writes to Seth Bede:

"Farewell, dear brother—and yet not farewell. For those children of God whom it has been granted to see each other face to face and to hold communion together and to feel the same spirit working in both, can never more be sundered, though the hills may lie between. For their souls are enlarged for evermore by that union, and they bear one another about in their thoughts continually as it were a new birth of strength.—Your faithful Sister and fellow-worker in Christ, Dinah Morris."

(IV,xxx,278)

The Victorian domestic ideal derived much of its force, no doubt, from the Evangelical emphasis upon sympathetic communication which we see at work here. Hannah More, in a letter to Lady Olivia Sparrow, gave voice to the same belief in the importance of the interaction between men:

I grieve heartily to think how long, how very long it is since we have had any communication together. I have been overdone with cares, and business, and company, to such a degree, as to have put it out of my power to indulge in the high gratification of correspondence in the primary and best sense of the word, which I take it is the responding of the heart in friendship.22

Perhaps no finer illustration of the sympathetic linking together of hearts may be found than the scene in which Nicholas Nickleby first encounters Ned Cherryble. Nicholas has been gazing through the window of the employment agency when he notices the merry rotund old fellow

beside him, and the two soon strike up a conversation. When Ned Cherryble invites the young man to tell him the whole of his history, Nicholas is delighted to unburden his heart before this kind listener—though they have only been acquainted for a few moments:

"Tell me more of your history. Let me hear it all."

There was something so earnest and guileless in the way in which all this was said, and such a complete disregard of all conventional restraints and coldnesses, that Nicholas could not resist it. Among men who have any sound and sterling qualities, there is nothing so contagious as pure openness of heart. Nicholas took the infection instantly, and ran over the main points of his little history without reserve.

It is no disparagement to Nicholas to say, that before he had been closeted with the two brothers ten minutes, he could only wave his hand at every fresh expression of kindness and sympathy, and sob like a little child. (xxxv,450-51; 454)

Nicholas' initial meeting with the two brothers is but an extension of the sympathetic friendship proffered by the first brother.

But sympathy could only touch men if their hearts were open. In *Little Dorrit*, Dickens introduces us to Mrs. Merdle, a counterpart of Mrs. Skewton in *Dombey and Son*. Like Mrs. Skewton, Mrs. Merdle inverts the language of morality, claiming for herself the very qualities which she most lacks: "I am very impressible myself, by nature. The weakest of creatures. My feelings are touched in a moment" (I,xx,239). The opposite actually is true of this lady who had "large unfeeling handsome eyes, and dark
unfeeling handsome hair, and a broad unfeeling handsome bosom . . ." (I,xx,238). But sensitivity of feeling was precisely what was required for sympathetic receptivity. Furthermore, one had to be willing to see others as equals, not claiming superiority of sensibility for one's self.

Mr. Dombey makes the mistake of indulging a proud exclusiveness of feeling when he disdains the sympathy of Mr. Toodle, who is wearing a piece of new crape in mourning for Paul Dombey:

To think of this presumptuous raker among coals and ashes going on before there, with his sign of mourning! To think that he dared to enter, even by a common show like that, into the trial and disappointment of a proud gentleman's secret heart! To think that this lost child, who was to have divided with him his riches, and his projects, and his power, and allied with whom he was to have shut out all the world as with a double door of gold, should have let in such a herd to insult him with their knowledge of his defeated hopes, and their boasts of claiming community of feeling with himself, so far removed: if not of having crept into the place wherein he would have lorded it, alone! (xx,279-80)

The honest sympathy of the warm-hearted Mr. Toodle is thus despised by the isolated, contracted nature of Mr. Dombey.

That a person could soften his heart, especially in time of need, was often a sign of special grace. This expansive movement formed the keynote for The Mill on the Floss. According to the legend of St. Ogg, all the other boatmen questioned the woman clad in rags with a child in her arms who wished to be ferried across the rushing river— they questioned, and told her to wait until morning.
Only Ogg the son of Beorl said to her, "I will ferry thee across; it is enough that thy heart needs it." When the lady stepped ashore she was transfigured into the Blessed Virgin and told him, "Ogg the son of Beorl, thou art blessed in that thou didst not question and wrangle with the heart's need, but wast smitten with pity, and didst straightaway relieve the same" (I,xii,104-05). Similarly, at the end of the novel, the heart of Maggie Tulliver instinctively moves beyond selfishness, and in spite of her brother's injustice to her, she sets out in her boat to rescue him. Maggie does not question the heart's need, but obeys the expansive mandate of common human sympathy. She has been prepared for this final act by her earlier experience; for she returned home after her temporary flight with Stephen because of the ties of her heart with Lucy, Philip, and Tom, whom she could not bear to hurt. In short, led by the bonds of sympathy, Maggie cannot live for herself alone, but like St. Ogg, must reach out to help her fellow humanity, though this involves a sacrifice of self.

If sympathy ideally represented a principle of expansion, through which the soul was educated to recognize its counterpart in others, the neglect of sympathy could only result in isolation, the contraction of man's best instincts into the narrow citadel of self. This was the great moral of Tennyson's "The Palace of Art," in which the soul of the artist builds a lordly pleasure-house wherein
it lives alone, reigning apart, a quiet king, indifferent to mankind. The results of this God-like isolation are nearly fatal, as James Spedding indicated, writing in the Edinburgh Review in 1843:

The sin of self-absolution from human cares and duties, finds its appropriate retribution in the despair which the sense of being cut off from human sympathy, when it once forces itself on the human mind, inevitably brings . . . .

A Westminster Review essay on Tennyson's poems in 1849 affirmed the principle that the individual soul, as in the "Palace of Art," missed the society of its fellows, in which alone it could find nurture:

In "The Palace of Art" the truth that the powers of our being must develop themselves simultaneously, and that as they do we must recognize more and more a community of interest and hope with our fellows, is uttered in words of such deep pathos and wisdom, that all who read must heed, we fancy, and be deeply moved. . . . But to live for this only—to leave love for her fellows—all human sympathies, out; to hedge herself around from all ignorance or sorrow; to believe that herself was sufficient unto herself, neither giving nor asking for sympathy—this is a slight picture of the lady in this poem.

One of the pictures in the gallery within the palace of art provides the answer to the terrible loneliness of the artist's soul; it depicts an English home. The soul fulfills the domestic ideal in the end by returning to human-

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ity, the cottage in the vale. According to the domestic ideal, then, art must incorporate humanity, and the answer given in the final stanza was essentially that which the Victorian domestic writers found for themselves. For after leaving the imaginative, individualistic, and often isolated heights of Byronic and Shelleyan romanticism, they proposed to return to art once again, only this time they brought humanity with them.

Communication became an important theme for the Victorian domestic writers, from the sympathy Paul and Florence Dombey seek from their father to the failure of the shallow-natured Hetty Sorrel to communicate with her fellow creatures even in the "Journey in Despair" and to the inability of Mr. Casaubon to accept pity or love. Tennyson, too, employed this theme as one mode of expressing the loss of Hallam, in In Memoriam. First Tennyson speaks of Hallam:

I wage not any feud with Death
Nor blame I Death because he bare
The use of virtue out of earth:
I know transplanted human worth
Will bloom to profit, otherwhere.

For this alone on Death I wreak
The wrath that garners in my heart;
He put our lives so far apart
We cannot hear each other speak.
(LXXXII)

Hallam's voice echoes Tennyson's sentiments a few stanzas
later when he speaks to Tennyson from beyond the grave:

'I watch thee from the quiet shore;
Thy spirit up to mine can reach;
But in dear words of human speech
We two communicate no more.'
(LXXXV)

To have a friend with whom one felt true communication, from heart to heart, as Tennyson and Hallam had in one another, was the fulfillment of the Victorian common-humanitarian ideal. Therefore, Tennyson intensely felt the loss of this contact, and it was only fitting that he should express the depth of his sorrow for Hallam's death, and their separation, in terms of the diminution of responsive sympathy.

Patterns of Expansion and Contraction

It has been suggested before that one's center of innate sensibility expanded or contracted, depending upon whether or not he communicated with others through the great linking power of sympathy. In this section we will examine some patterns of expansion and contraction and their exposition by major Victorian writers. In no single work of Victorian literature were these principles set forth with more simplicity and directness than in Silas Marner. The Westminster Review summed up the pattern of the tale succinctly:

This simple story tells how Silas Marner is blessed exceedingly when his gold has been stolen from him by the advent of Eppie; how the gold which had dissociated him from the world of human
hearts and human sympathies, and which, while he thought he clutched it, clutched him—was mercifully taken from him, and how a child-angel led him out of the prison of his life, and brought back to him men's care and love and fellowship. 25

The whole of Silas Marner is concerned with the breaking and re-joining of the links of human fellowship. After Silas first lost his faith in humanity through his betrayal by his friend William Dane, he withdrew to the village of Raveloe where he worked alone at his craft of handloom weaver:

Minds that have been unhinged from their old faith and love have perhaps sought this Lethean influence of exile in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no memories. (I,ii,18-19)

In brief, all of Silas' old associations have been severed, the best uses of memory no longer serve to connect him with the past—and his removal to Raveloe separates him from all those he knew. Living alone, knowing nobody in Raveloe, Silas shrinks into himself, no longer drawn forth by communication with his fellow humanity. His is the "unquestioning activity of a spinning insect," and the weaving metaphor captures something of the pattern of his mental associations for "he seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection" (I,ii,21). The result is a violent breach of the communicatory ideal: "He hated the

25"George Eliot as a Novelist" (anon. rev.), Westminster Review, CX (1878), 117.
thought of the past; and there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward the strangers he had come amongst . . ." (I,ii,21).

One day, however, an incident occurs "which seemed to open a possibility of some fellowship with his neighbours" (I,ii,22). In a charitable gesture, Silas uses his knowledge of herbs to prepare a mixture which eases the suffering of the Cobbler's wife, Sally Oates. When the weaver's cottage is beset by petitioners for cures, and he is forced to refuse the requests because of limited knowledge, he is accused of working evil charms out of malice: "Thus it came to pass that his movement of pity towards Sally Oates, which had given him a transitory sense of brotherhood, heightened the repulsion between him and his neighbours, and made his isolation more complete" (I,ii,24-25).

It is not surprising, then, that the lonely weaver, "cut off from faith and love," should substitute the love of gold for the love of his fellow humanity, so that while his guineas rise in the iron pot his life narrows and hardens itself more and more (I,ii,26). However, "even in this stage of withering a little incident happened, which showed that the sap of affection was not all gone" (I,ii,27-28). For when Silas one day accidentally breaks his beloved brown earthenware pot which had been his companion for twelve years, his feelings are deeply touched (I,ii,27-
George Eliot thus portrays the continued vitality of the weaver's domestic affections and we are prepared for his return to humanity, which begins when Dunstan Cass steals his hoard of gold. Discovering that the gold is missing, Silas runs to the village and bursts in upon the company assembled at the Rainbow Inn, initiating a fresh contact with his fellow men which results in a growth of his own sensibilities beyond himself once again:

This strangely novel situation of opening his trouble to his Raveloe neighbours, of sitting in the warmth of a hearth not his own, and feeling the presence of faces and voices which were his nearest promise of help, had doubtless its influence upon Marner, in spite of his passionate preoccupation with his loss. Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth within us any more than without us; there have been many circulations of the sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud. (I,vii,78)

This unlooked-for contact is a turning point in the weaver's life. From this time forth his thoughts and feelings expand rather than contract, and his associations become linked with other people rather than merely with the petty round of his own little cares. Not long after Silas' entry into the Rainbow Inn, he is visited by Dolly Winthrop and her son Aaron, whose presence further links the lonely weaver to human love and sympathy. And now that the old security of his gold is gone, Silas has a slowly dawning awareness that "if any help came to him it must come from without; and there was a slight stirring of expectation at
the sight of his fellow men, a faint consciousness of his dependence on their good will" (I,x,14).

The greatest single force reuniting the weaver with humanity is, of course, the little baby girl of Godfrey Cass which he finds upon his hearth. In a delightful inversion of the Midas myth, the gold seems to have changed into the soft gold curls of the child who becomes his daughter. This transformation also signals the final substitution of human values for materialistic ones. As Eppie grows she becomes a link between the weaver and his fellow humanity, drawing his thoughts in an ever expanding pattern beyond the contracted range within which they had formerly wandered:

. . . as the weeks grew to months, the child created fresh and fresh[er] links between his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into narrower isolation. Unlike the gold which needed nothing, and must be worshipped in close-locked solitude—which was hidden away from daylight, was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones—Eppie was a creature of endless claims and ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living moments; making trial of everything, with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked on her. (I,xiv,178-79)

Eppie therefore has an expansive influence upon the lonely weaver, for "the little child had come to link him once more with the whole world. There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world--from men and women with
parental looks and tones, to the red ladybirds and the round pebbles" (I,xiv,187). The effect of Eppie upon Silas demonstrates the efficacy of interaction between a person and his common humanity. George Eliot's train of domestic references throughout the tale is brought to a focus near the end when she tells us that Silas would not consent to have a grate and an oven added to his conveniences because "he loved the old brick hearth as he had loved his brown pot—and was it not there when he had found Eppie? The gods of the hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith be tolerant of that fetishism, lest it bruise its own roots" (II,xvi,197).

Patterns of expansion and contraction also constitute an important theme in Middlemarch. Mr. Casaubon's scholarly endeavors have made "large drafts on his affections" which have resulted in "a certain blankness of sensibility" (I,x,63). Indeed, his total immersion in The Key to All Mythologies has cut him off from common human life and sympathy so that even his impending marriage to Dorothea Brooke does little to revive his spirits. But his isolation and solitude are the more tragic, according to the Victorian domestic ideal, because "his was that worst loneliness which would shrink from sympathy" (I,x,63). Even the expansive, sympathetic love of Dorothea fails to reach the narrow-souled Casaubon, whose feelings contract
rather than expand to meet those of Dorothea:

What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge.

There is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in a blank absence of interest or sympathy. (II,xx,146)

Yet it is not only the deadness of Mr. Casaubon's knowledge that disappoints Dorothea—it is her inability to express her feelings to him or to evoke a chord of sympathy from him in any way, for "she had begun to see that she had been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from Mr. Casaubon..." (II,xxi,156). Mr. Casaubon's soul goes on "fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking of its wings and never flying."

He cannot communicate with others, even Dorothea, because he has only that "proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egotistic scrupulosity" (III,xxix,206).

No doubt Dorothea's ardent idealism has betrayed her in her marriage choice. Lord Houghton, writing in the Edinburgh Review in 1873, pinpointed the key reason why such a marriage was doomed from the first, namely, that the object of her affections failed, on grounds of common
humanity, to fulfill the needs of Dorothea's own sympathetic nature:

She marries him knowing him to be . . . almost without any exercise of family affection . . . even in the mystical imagination and the self-abnegation of the highest woman we must still take account of the common womanhood, and . . . a woman "even as that" Dorothea, must submit to the conditions of her nature.26

Nevertheless, Dorothea surmounts the hard coldness of her husband and she remains true to her heart to the conclusion of the novel, for even in Mr. Casaubon's moments of greatest unresponsiveness, she never loses love.

After Casaubon's death, Dorothea's expansive nature finally finds a worthy object in Lydgate, who has been implicated, along with Bulstrode, in the death of the disreputable Raffles. While all her neighbors suspect Lydgate, Dorothea undertakes a mission of sympathy and fellowship.

In the first chapter of this study we discussed the domestic virtue of mutual confidence, as well as its breakdown in the marital relationship of Lydgate and Rosamond. Now Dorothea proposes to invite Lydgate to talk over his plans for the hospital with her, for it would give her "the best opportunity in the world . . . to ask his confidence . . . People glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbours." Mr. Farebrother, in reply, makes a slight concession to this

idea, although he suspects Lydgate's involvement in the Raffles affair: "It is true that a woman may venture on some efforts of sympathy which would hardly succeed if we men undertook them," said Mr. Farebrother, almost converted by Dorothea's ardour" (VIII,lxxii,538-39). Indeed, it is only in terms of the domestic ideal of sympathetic communication that we can understand Dorothea's expansive movement towards Lydgate in spite of the circumstantial evidence against him. Dorothea sees Lydgate in the wholeness of his character; she recognizes that essential core of humanity which needs fellowship no matter what he has done; and if she goes a little too far in her unqualified belief in his innocence, it is only a projection of her faith in a germ of affection which remains innocent in all men. Thus it is that Dorothea sets out to aid Lydgate:

She was full of confident hope about this interview with Lydgate, never heeding what was said of his personal reserve; never heeding that she was a very young woman. Nothing could have seemed more irrelevant to Dorothea than insistence on her youth and sex when she was moved to show her human fellowship. (VIII,lxxvi,557)

The effect of Dorothea's appeal to the better part of Lydgate's nature is profound, and for the first time in months Lydgate finds that sympathy and mutual confidence which he has missed for so long in the silvery neutral tones and feminine impassivity of Rosamond:

The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in
their larger, quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. . . . Lydgate did not stay to think she was Quixotic: he gave himself up, for the first time in his life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous sympathy, without any check of proud reserve. And he told her everything . . . . (VIII,lxxvi,558-59)

Throughout the remainder of the novel Dorothea continues to reach out to her common humanity. Even after her inopportune interruption of Rosamond and Ladislaw together, and in spite of her night-long suffering because of what she has witnessed, she returns to explain to Rosamond that Lydgate is innocent. This generous deed is, again, one of sympathetic communication; and it is initiated by a standard genre picture of humanity—not infrequent at moral crises in the Victorian domestic novel—a scene which turns her thoughts beyond herself to the needs and suffering of others. Thus after her night-long vigil she beholds the dawn:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining. (VIII,lxxx,577-78)

The expansive movement of Dorothea's vision from the foreground figures of the man with the bundle and the woman
with the baby to the shepherd with his dog, and, finally
on to the bending sky with its pearly light, reflects the
growth of her thoughts beyond selfishness and towards a
communication with the whole of humanity. The pattern is
identical to the amplification of the Soul's vision in "The
Palace of Art."

Common sympathy is also expressed in the relation­
ship of Mr. and Mrs. Bulstrode. As soon as Mrs. Bulstrode
has gathered from her brother, Mr. Vincy, that her hus­
band's guilt is real, her thoughts move instinctively
towards her husband, for "with one leap of her heart she
was at his side in mournful but unreproaching fellowship
with shame and isolation" (VIII,lxxiv,549). Mrs. Bul­
strode's action is thus pointedly contrary to that of
Rosamond when Lydgate is suspected of guilt; she has
avoided Rosamond's pattern of withdrawal, knowing that
"There is a forsaking which still sits at the same board
and lies on the same couch with the forsaken soul, wither­
ing it the more by unloving proximity" (VIII,lxxiv,550).
Lydgate had earlier recognized that "two creatures who
loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common,
might laugh over their shabby furniture" (VII,lxix,514) or
any other trouble; but the hard, unrelenting Rosamond has
educated him otherwise, and he has "almost learned the
lesson that he must bend himself to her nature, and that
because she came short in her sympathy, he must give the
more" (VIII,1xxv,555). Of the three women in Middlemarch who are called upon to show an active sympathy in their relations with others, Dorothea, Mrs. Bulstrode, and Rosamond, only the last fails to fulfill the Victorian domestic humanitarian ideal.

Patterns of expansion and contraction also play an important part in Thackeray's writings. Perhaps the greatest problem in life, as Thackeray saw it, was the selfishness, egotism, ambition, or misplaced affection of men--their vanity--which kept them in isolation from one another. This walling-in of the individual is outlined in the initial stages of Pendennis:

Thus, O friendly readers, we see how every man in the world has his own private griefs and business, by which he is more cast down or occupied than by the affairs or sorrows of any other person. While Mrs. Pendennis is disquieting herself about losing her son . . . --while the Major's great soul chafes and frets, inwardly vexed as he thinks what great parties are going on in London, and that he might be sunning himself in the glances of Dukes and Duchesses, but for those cursed affairs which keep him in a wretched little country hole--while Pen is tossing between his passion and . . . his longing to see the world--Mr. Smirke has a private care watching at his bedside, and sitting behind him on his pony; and is no more satisfied than the rest of us. How lonely we are in the world! how selfish and secret, everybody!

Ah, sir--a distinct universe walks about under your hat and under mine--all things in nature are different to each--the woman we look at has not the same features, the dish we eat from has not the same taste to the one and the other--you and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands a little more or less near to us. (I,xvi,166-67)
Throughout *Pendennis* the implications in the above statement are elaborated upon, particularly with reference to Warrington and Pen. Warrington observes the pageant of life from a certain philosophical distance; Pen, on the other hand, plunges headlong into the mainstream of life and becomes involved with his fellow men. These alternative attitudes are summed up by Thackeray in the philosophical forty-fourth chapter when he asks, "Which is the most reasonable, and does his duty best? he who stands aloof from the struggle of life, calmly contemplating it, or he who descends to the ground, and takes his part in the contest?" (II, xliiv, 519). Thackeray's sympathies lie with the latter. Pen outlines the domestic position in his own words, and then, in a window scene strikingly similar to that beheld by Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, a vision of humanity appears to bring the moral point forcefully home:

"Many a conscience-stricken mystic flies from it [the world] altogether, and shuts himself out from it within convent walls (real or spiritual), whence he can only look up to the sky, and contemplate the heaven out of which there is no rest, and no good."

"But the earth, where our feet are, is the work of the same Power as the immeasurable blue yonder, in which the future lies into which we would peer. Who ordered toil as the condition of life, ordered weariness, ordered sickness, ordered poverty, failure, success—to this man a foremost place, to the other a nameless struggle with the crowd—to that a shameful fall, or paralysed limb, or sudden accident—to each some work upon the ground he stands on, until he is laid beneath it." While they were talking, the dawn came shining through the windows of the room, and Pen threw them open to receive the fresh morning air. "Look
George," said he; "look and see the sun rise: he sees the labourer on his way a-field; the work-girl plying her poor needle; the lawyer at his desk, perhaps; or the jaded reveller reeling to bed; or the fevered patient tossing on it; or the doctor watching by it, over the throes of the mother for the child that is to be born into the world;--to be born to take his part in the suffering and struggling, the tears and laughter, the crime, remorse, love, folly, sorrow, rest."

(II,xliv,519-20)

Pen's virtue, then, lies in his appreciation of and participation in the epic of humanity he beholds. His is basically an expansive nature, even during the necessary confinement of his bachelor days, and his heart never hardens towards his fellow men, even though he is sometimes a worldling. Thus Pen still delighted

in a visit to the summer theatres across the river; or to the Royal Gardens at Vauxhall, where he was on terms of friendship with the great Simpson, and where he shook the principal comic singer or lovely equestrian of the arena by the hand. And while he could watch the grimaces or the graces of these with a satiric humour that was not deprived of sympathy, he could look on with an eye of kindness at the lookers-on too: at the roystering youth bent upon enjoyment, and here taking it: at the honest parents, with their delighted children laughing and clapping their hands at the show: at the poor outcasts, whose laughter was less innocent though perhaps louder, and who brought their shame and their youth here, to dance and be merry till dawn at least; and to get bread and drown care.

Of this sympathy with all conditions of men Arthur often boasted: he was pleased to possess it: and said that he hoped thus to the last he should retain it. . . . And indeed a man, whose heart is pretty clean, can indulge in this pursuit with an enjoyment that never ceases, and is only perhaps the more keen because it is secret and has a touch of sadness in it; because he is of his mind and humour lonely, and apart though not alone.

(II,xlvi,535)
Perhaps Pen's lonely humor is reinforced by his bachelor status. Indeed, Thackeray's detailed description of the rigors of bachelor existence in the chambers of the law temples, where students labor alone, cut off from human life and domestic sympathy, is unequalled even by Trollope's depiction of the loneliness of Mr. Arabin in his single life in his Oxford rooms (xx,194-95). Pen has domestic consolations, however, especially in the person of Laura, to relieve the monotony of law reading. When Pen falls ill in chambers and is visited by his friends and relatives, Warrington realizes how great his own domestic deprivation has been. For while Laura and Helen are living at the Temple to tend Pen, Warrington absorbs from these two women something of the joys of domestic life which he misses exceedingly once they are gone. No longer is Laura there to sing and play old songs of home at the piano in Mr. Sibwright's chambers while Warrington sits by in rapture. The absence of the mother and daughter leaves him desolate.

Warrington's chances for happiness were ruined, of course, by his early marriage to an ill-bred illiterate older woman. This misalliance has barred him from the joys of family life, for there was no Major Pendennis to set him straight, as was the case with Pen and the Fotheringay. Warrington is sentenced, therefore, to separateness and isolation, to what, according to the Victorian standard, was a contracted pattern of existence, and as he himself
says, "I shall die in that garret most likely, and alone. I nailed myself to that doom in early life" (II, lvii, 663). Pen is more fortunate. And his philosophical sympathy with the spectators at Vauxhall is a sign, even during his bachelor days, that he will flourish in the domestic sphere, an end which he attains in his union with Laura, Thackeray's symbol in Pendennis of the feminine domestic ideal.

The movements of expansion and contraction appeared frequently elsewhere in Victorian fiction. The terrible isolation of Florence Dombey, the yearning of Louisa Gradgrind for communication with Tom or of Lizzie Hexam for friendship with her brother Charlie, the quest of Little Nell for companionship as she haunts in secret the wanderings of the two Misses Edwards, these are but a few of the instances in Dickens of lonely persons seeking the warmth and love of human fellowship. The isolation of Scrooge, who edges his way along the crowded paths of life, "warning all human sympathy to keep its distance" (i, 8) echoes the same theme. Scrooge is led by the Ghosts to vision after vision of domestic harmony from which he is shut out, but which might have been his to enjoy—including an apparition of the girl he was to have married, surrounded by her children, and by her loving husband at their own fireside.

Indeed, Marley's Ghost is forced to walk the earth, as it
informs Scrooge, because Marley failed to communicate with his fellow men, just as Scrooge did:

"It is required of every man," the ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!" (i,19)

We have already discussed the window scenes in Middlemarch and Pendennis, and such visions of humanity, as a motive to expansion and commitment to life, appeared not infrequently elsewhere. Jane Eyre sees a strikingly similar portrait of humanity at a crisis in her life. She has run away from Thornfield after the discovery that Rochester has another living wife has interrupted her own marriage to him. Travelling first by coach, then on foot, she arrives in the vicinity of Whitcross almost overpowered with fatigue, when she hears a church bell chime:

I turned in the direction of the sound, and there, amongst the romantic hills, whose changes and aspect I had ceased to note an hour ago, I saw a hamlet and a spire. All the valley at my right hand was full of pasture-fields, and corn-fields, and wood; and a glittering stream ran zig-zag through the varied shades of green, the mellowing grain, the sombre woodland, the clear and sunny lea. Recalled by the rumbling of wheels to the road before me, I saw a heavily-laden wagon labouring up the hill; and not far beyond were two cows and their drover. Human life and human labour were near. I must struggle on: strive to live and bend to toil like the rest. (II,xxviii,114)

Jane thus gains the strength to continue on her journey, inspired, as were Dorothea and Pen, to enter into human
life and human feeling. She finds a second home as a result, and her spirit is allowed to blossom in its own right under the gentle influence of Moor House.

The idea of common humanity had one further application. Mrs. Gaskell, in *Mary Barton*, advocated an expansive sympathetic communication between the masters and the workers as the nearest solution to industry's terrible oppression of the common working man. As Job Legh tells Mr. Carson, the thing that troubled the dead John Barton most was not the want of creature-comforts, not the pain of starvation itself, so much as the fact that those who wore finer clothes, and ate better food, and had more money in their pockets, kept him at arm's length, and cared not whether his heart was sorry or glad; whether he lived or died,—whether he was bound for heaven or hell. It seemed hard to him that a heap of gold should part him and his brother so far asunder. (xxxvii, 363)

Near the end of their conversation, Job Legh shows the Master, Mr. Carson, that the one thing he can do in a state of crisis is to recognize and communicate with the common humanity of his men:

No one knows till they have tried, what power of bearing lies in them, if once they believe that men are caring for their sorrows, and will help if they can. If fellow-creatures can give nought but tears, and brave words, we take our trials straight from God, and we know enough of His love to put ourselves blind into His hands. (xxxvii, 365)

The tragedy of *Mary Barton* is that it takes John Barton's murder of Mr. Carson's son to bring the master and
his workers together on a human, personal level. In the meeting between John Barton and the bereaved father, John comes to the realization that he has hurt not a class of men but another human being essentially like himself; the mourner in front of him is no longer a class enemy, but a suffering, desolate old man:

The eyes of John Barton grew dim with tears. Rich and poor, masters and men, were then brothers in the deep suffering of the heart; for was not this the very anguish he had felt for Tom, in years so long gone by that they seemed like another life! (xxxv,345)

John Barton's deepest regret is that his murder of Carson's son has caused him to forfeit "all right to bind up his brother's wounds," and his severest remorse issues from the sudden knowledge that his blow had not been against a class, but that "he had killed a man, and a brother . . ." (xxv,346).

Mr. Carson's entrance into the impoverished Barton household has not been without its effect on him, in return, for the grinding squalid misery of the Barton dwelling contrasts so strangely with the accustomed comfort of his surroundings that "wonder filled his mind at the reflection of the different lots of the brethren of mankind" (xxxv, 349). From this moment Mr. Carson is a changed man, regarding his workers not as machines but as fellow humans whom he seeks to bind to himself not by money bargains alone but by ties of respect and affection. An article in
the *Times* in 1858 indicated that this humanitarian emphasis in respect to social evils, and the solutions found by Mr. Carson, were widely recognized:

There is great truth in the remark of the late Judge Talfourd that what is wanted to hold together the bursting bonds of the different classes of this country is not kindness, but sympathy. All classes feel this need, the highest as well as the lowest, but if anything has been done in late years to bridge the great gulf that used to separate the rich from the poor, it has been done less in the bestowal of charity and distribution of gratuities than in the expression of a genuine interest in the hopes and fears, the joys and sorrows of the workingman's little sphere.27

Stephen Blackpool's muddled plea to Mr. Bounderby on behalf of the workers, in *Hard Times*, similar to that of Job Legh, emphasizes the necessity for the masters to communicate with their workers in human terms, rather than merely in economic ones (II,v,151). It is Stephen's dying prayer that "aw th' world man on' y coom togethers more, an' get a better unnerstan'in' o' one another, than when I were in 't my own weak seln" (III,vi,273).

Of course, *Hard Times* failed to describe the horrors of English industrialization pictured by Engels and other writers on the English scene, though the Davenport family, in *Mary Barton*, reduced to squalor, filth, and animal brutality by starvation, does give us a glimpse of this.

27"English Hearts and English Hands; or the Railway and the Trencher" (anon. rev.), *The Times*, Jan. 4, 1858, p. 10, column 3.
world. Yet it is interesting to note that outraged commentators on the "condition of England question," such as Carlyle, still saw the solution for this vast socio-economic problem in terms of the revitalization of the inner man. For Carlyle, Laissez-faire, supply-and-demand, the Benthamite gospel of enlightened egotism, cash payment as the sole nexus between master and worker--these would never suffice for human happiness because "man has a soul in him, different from the stomach in any sense of this word . . ." (I,vi,38). In brief, "Midas-eared Mammonism, double-barrelled Dilettantism, and their thousand adjuncts and corollaries, are not the Law by which God Almighty has appointed this his Universe to go" (I,vi,38). God's law, for Carlyle, was that of human brotherhood, and in Past and Present he cited the tragic death by starvation of an Irish widow to prove his point. For having been refused sustenance by several charitable organizations and by her neighbors, the widow took typhus-fever, and before her death, infected her lane with the disease, so that seventeen others followed her to the grave: "But she proves her sisterhood; her typhus fever kills them: they actually were her brothers, though denying it! Had man ever to go lower for proof?" (III,ii,151). Yet it was not merely material aid that Carlyle believed men should have given her: "--Nay, what wouldst thou thyself have us do? cry indignant readers. Nothing, my friends--till you have got
a soul for yourselves again. Till then all things are 'impossible"' (III, ii, 151). In effect, Carlyle ended by urging his fellow Englishmen to return to the principles of common humanity first, rather than attempting mere physical remedies, because he saw that there was no quick and easy cure-all or "Morrison's Pill" for the crisis of the times. The only immediate and humane contribution which the average man could make was to look within his own soul:

Thou shall descend into thy inner man, and see if there be any traces of a soul there; till then there can be nothing done! O brother, we must if possible resuscitate some soul and consciousness in us, exchange our dilettantisms for sincerities, our dead hearts of stone for living hearts of flesh. (I, iv, 30-31)

Each man's natural affections thus revived would further the brotherhood of mankind.

It is evident that for many Victorian writers the social goal of the unanimity of all men could only be achieved by the principle of expansion. What was the result, in contrast, if one concentrated the sum of his affection and love upon a single object, rather than loving all his human brethren? Could such a contracted sympathy have a positive outcome? For Dickens, at least, the answer was decidedly "no." In *David Copperfield* he introduces us to Mr. Wickfield, the lovable doting old father of Agnes, who has focused all his devotion upon his beautiful daughter, to the exclusion of the rest of mankind. When
Mr. Wickfield greets Betsey Trotwood and young David, he reveals the narrowed range of his affection in ushering them in: "'Miss Betsey Trotwood,' said the gentleman, 'pray walk in. I was engaged for a moment, but you'll excuse my being busy. You know my motive. I have but one in life!'" (xv, 219). David soon recognizes the single motive when Agnes enters: "This was his little housekeeper, his daughter Agnes, Mr. Wickfield said. When I heard how he said it, and saw how he held her hand, I guessed what the one motive of his life was" (xv, 223). So great is the love of Mr. Wickfield for Agnes that he becomes obsessed with the fear that he may die and leave her alone or that she may die and he be left isolated. These spectral imaginings distress his happiest hours and prey like a disease upon his mind until the sole means he can find to dissolve his apprehensions is recourse to drink. Only when he learns of Heep's overweening ambitions with respect to Agnes does Mr. Wickfield confess to David the disastrous results of his monomaniacal love:

"Oh, Trotwood, Trotwood!" exclaimed Mr. Wickfield, wringing his hands. "What I have come down to be, since I first saw you in this house! I was on my downward way then, but the dreary, dreary road I have traversed since! Weak indulgence has ruined me. Indulgence in remembrance, and indulgence in forgetfulness. My natural grief for my child's mother turned to disease; my natural love for my child turned to disease. I have infected everything I touched. I have brought misery on what I dearly love, I know--You know! I thought it possible that I could truly love one creature in the world, and not love the rest; I thought it
possible that I could truly mourn for one creature gone out of the world, and not have some part in the grief of all who mourned. Thus the lessons of my life have been perverted! I have preyed on my own morbid coward heart, and it has preyed on me. Sordid in my grief, sordid in my love, sordid in my miserable escape from the darker side of both, oh see the ruin I am, and hate me, shun me!" (xxxix,5 78)

Mr. Wickfield has forgotten general humanity, mistakenly thinking that should he ever be separated from the one object of his life he would be cut off from all human love. The dangers of such a pattern of contracted sympathies are well recognized by Agnes as she reveals to David:

"Oh, Trotwood!" cried Agnes, putting her hands before her face, as her tears started on it, "I almost feel as if I had been Papa's enemy, instead of his loving child. For I know how he has altered in his devotion to me. I know how he has narrowed the circle of his sympathies and duties, in the concentration of his whole mind upon me. I know what a multitude of things he has shut out for my sake, and how his anxious thoughts of me have shadowed his life, and weakened his strength and energy, by turning them always upon one idea. If I could ever set this right! If I could ever work out his restoration, as I have so innocently been the cause of his decline!" (xxv,370)

At the conclusion of the novel, after the death of Dora and David's temporary exile in Europe, David returns to England and learns from his Aunt Betsey that Mr. Wickfield has undergone a profound change, and that he is at last a lover of all his fellow men. As Betsey Trotwood tells David, "You will find her [Agnes'] father a white-haired old man . . . though a better man in all other respects—a reclaimed man. Neither will you find him
measuring all human interests, and joys, and sorrows, with his one poor little inch-rule now" (lx,837).

A similar unnatural contraction of affection is illustrated in old grandfather Trent in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Trent has poured all his love upon one object, little Nell, and his great fear, resembling that of Mr. Wickfield, is that "if I should be forced to leave thee, meanwhile, how have I fitted thee for struggles with the world?" (iii,27). Little Nell, in return, has nothing but affection for her grandfather, "in whose love for her this disease of the brain had been engendered . . ." (xxxi,230). The disease, like that of Mr. Wickfield, is monomaniacal in its focus, as Trent reveals to the stranger-narrator at the beginning of the novel:

"... why, God knows that this one child is the thought and object of my life, and yet he never prospers me--no, never!"

"It is true that in many respects I am the child, and she the grown person--that you have seen already. But waking or sleeping, by night or day, in sickness or health, she is the one object of my care, and if you knew of how much care, you would look on me with different eyes, you would indeed. Ah! it's a weary life for an old man--a weary, weary life--but there is a great end to gain that I keep before me."

(i,6-7; 10)

The force of Trent's love for Nell drives him to gambling, just as Mr. Wickfield's love for Agnes made him take to drink. Trent thus, ironically, loses all that he had wished to save, and Nell finally dies as a result of his diseased, contracted affection for her.
Elsewhere in Dickens' writings tragedy occurs because of the principle of concentrating all one's affection on a single non-human object. Richard Carstone, in *Bleak House*, substitutes material for human values in his monomaniacal belief that Jarndyce and Jarndyce will shortly be settled in his favor. As he tells Esther with regard to the Chancery suit, "Others have only half thrown themselves into it. I devote myself to it. I make it the one object of my life" (xxxvii,527). Soon Richard begins to suspect Mr. Jarndyce of being against him in the suit, and in his narrow-visioned pursuit of wealth he forgets that human relations and the common affections are alone of lasting value. The characters of many another Victorian writer fell into the error of narrowing all of their sympathies upon one non-human object. This was the case with George Eliot's *Silas Marner* (gold) and Mr. Casaubon (mythology).

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Now that we have seen how the principle of expansion, rather than of contraction, was the domestic humanitarian ideal, we can better understand some phases of Victorian narrative technique. The goal of the domestic writers was to communicate as intimately as possible with the fellow-humanity of their readers, so that both reader and writer might be united by the bonds of a mutual sympathy—leading, in turn, to the moral regeneration of the
reader. Such a purpose was best served by a direct, open, expansive narrative approach. Thackeray suggests this in *Vanity Fair* in an aside on the authorial intrusion:

And, as we bring our characters forward, I will ask leave, as a man and a brother, not only to introduce them, but occasionally to step down from the platform, and talk about them: if they are good and kindly, to love them and shake them by the hand; if they are silly, to laugh at them confidentially in the reader's sleeve: if they are wicked and heartless, to abuse them in the strongest terms which politeness admits of. (viii,81)

Thackeray asks leave to speak directly to his readers "as a man and a brother," in short, to appeal to their common humanity, as he so often does in practice—for instance in his vindication of Dobbin as a gentleman. George Eliot's sympathetic intrusions often result from this same communicative urge, as when she cautions the reader not to be too harsh in his judgment of Mr. Casaubon, or to see him merely by the small lights of Mrs. Cadwallader or Sir James Chettam, for he has an equivalent centre of feeling. A reviewer of Dickens also noted in his approach an openness between author and reader, and asked whether pruning and revision of his works might not have been detrimental: "Would the communion between the writer and the public have been what it is now,—something continual, confidential, something like a personal affection?" 28 In summary, the

28 "A Box of Novels" (anon., by "M.A.T."), *Fraser's Magazine*, XXIX (1844), 167.
Victorian authorial intrusion was largely an expansive narrative mode which allowed the writer to reach out directly to his readers. One reason why this practice is offensive in the twentieth century is that we have lost the cultural atmosphere of openness, sympathy, and expansive humanistic communication in which Victorian domestic literature was largely created—have lost, that is, the means of appreciating this sympathetically intrusive form. Twentieth century literature dictates most often a guarded, non-intrusive, self-consciously objective narrative manner. It is not surprising, then, that the Victorians should be slighted on this account. But this does not gainsay the validity of the form which they found could best convey their cherished ideal of our common humanity.
CHAPTER V

DOMESTIC REALISM

The Heroic Precedent

In the second chapter we witnessed the domestic reaction, in poetry, to what was termed the "Byronic" strain of romanticism. In the initial portions of this chapter (before coming to our definition of domestic realism) we shall be examining a similar pattern of response which took place in fiction with respect to several current manifestations of the romantic hero. It is a commonplace of criticism that in nineteenth-century fiction there was a decline of the hero, who was replaced by a bourgeois Everyman very like the members of the audience to which this literature was addressed. Mario Praz, in The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, has outlined this movement, touching upon many of the influences from which the domestic writers withdrew. But because I believe that he has underestimated the extent to which the eclipse of the hero was not merely a decline, but a reaction, I feel that it is justifiable to examine this topic once more.

In thinking of pre-Victorian heroes to whom the domestic writers might have objected, one immediately
remembers Byron's Manfred, Childe Harold, Don Juan, and Conrad, and the other brooding and self-indulgent heroes of Romantic poetry who followed in the footsteps of Chateaubriand's René. While Shelley's Alastor and Keats's Hyperion momentarily come to mind, Byron's creations were by far the most influential of the Romantic school, and later found a brief revival in the productions of the Spasmodic school of poetry, though that school echoed Shelley as well. In 1870, Temple Bar published a three-part series on the novel, categorizing fiction as "Fast," "Sensational," and "Simple." The essay on the "Simple" or domestic novel contrasted the typical romantic or Byronic hero with that of domestic fiction. The "Simple" hero was anything but a rebel:

The two papers which have preceded this one have accustomed us to conquering heroes—tremendous fellows with herculean limbs, killing glances, and withering smiles, and by whose very presence the hearts of women are fluttered, as the Volscians were fluttered at Corioli by the apparition of Coriolanus. The normal state of their heart is that of a volcano apparently quiet, but in reality boiling, burning, and seething within, and periodically inundating its female neighbours with the scorching lava of an unexpected erotic eruption. In the "Simple Novel" the hero is a much less formidable and distinguished personage. It is perhaps a slight drawback to his dignity that he is not unoften a bit of a "spooner"; but then he has the advantage of resembling, in that as in other particulars, the masculine objects of our own experience.

The scene in which the hero proposes and is accepted, or rejected, or told to wait, as the case may be, is marked by the same absence of passion and exaggeration, and the same deference to propriety and human nature. The most natural of all the
Simple Novelists, with a fidelity to nature which is sometimes a little perilous, allows his hero to make a bigger fool of himself at that critical moment even than during other portions of his undazzling career...¹

Perhaps the latter reference is to Arthur Pendennis. At any rate, the hero of the Simple novel is, according to these standards, not really a hero at all, at least not in the Romantic sense. Certainly he is a far cry from Byron's Manfred, who hides a mysterious crime deep within his breast, and his Conrad, the pirate chief of the Aegean Sea in *The Corsair* (1814)—a picture of whose beloved Medora is listed satirically by Thackeray as part of the contents of the romantic Mr. Sibwright's chambers in *Pendennis* (II,lii,602).

The Victorian domestic novelists reacted strongly to the Byronic hero after the pattern of the reviewers of poetry in the periodicals and the poets themselves whom we studied in the second chapter. In particular, they were dismayed at the "grand passion" which contrasted so strikingly with the simple affections universal in the common man. Again, the Byronic hero was anti-social, solitary, living alone unto himself, and thus represented the antithesis of the ideal of man's development through sympathetic communication with others. But most of all,

¹"Our Novels: The Simple School" (anon.), *Temple Bar*, XXIX (1870), 489. The entire three-part series is titled "Our Novels" and the individual divisions' names follow the main title.
the Byronic hero was a challenge to the domestic ideal because of his perpetual dissatisfaction, his restlessness, his endless wanderings in search of a fulfillment he could never attain. Emily Bronte's Heathcliff and Dickens' Steerforth fall in this tradition. In contrast to the centrifugal movement of the Byronic hero, the domestic hero's pattern was centripetal, centering in towards the home where the mind was ever tranquil and at peace. The domestic protagonist, such as David Copperfield, might have to carry out an extensive search for this ideal, but he almost invariably attained it, and once it had been found he was completely content and at rest.

The English domestic writers also distrusted the impassioned heroes of French romance because like their Byronic counterparts they indulged in "excessive" emotion, moreover, emotion of an anti-social, overreaching, revolutionary nature. Robert Laing, writing in the *Quarterly Review* in 1873, brought this out in a comparison of George Eliot and George Sand:

> Her [George Sand's] heroes and heroines are rebels; they combat with or detach themselves violently from the regulated life around them; they break down the various barriers which may interpose between themselves and the subjects of their desires and ambitions; they feel themselves (and their creators mean them to be felt) to be embodiments of central ideas and omnipotent passions, which must and shall prevail; the rocks and walls, against which they shatter themselves, cannot stand for long, but are the last grotesque relics of a departed age.

It was only for a short time that this inspiration, born of the French Revolution, seemed to
become that of English literature. Byron and Shelley are its representatives among us—Byron so thoroughly, that, not only in English but in European literature, he stands acknowledged its chief and most eloquent mouthpiece.²

Many of the succeeding quotations in this section evince the Victorian domestic writers' dissatisfaction with Byronic heroism. But most of these objections to passions like a volcano and undetected crimes within a hero's breast are mingled with references to other, contemporary forces equally vital, though now generally overlooked, which contributed to the idea of the hero in the nineteenth century. One of these was the Newgate novel, a genre which endured until the mid-1840's. In his preface to the third edition of *Oliver Twist* (1841), Dickens made an extremely significant statement, revealing that his purpose in writing the novel had been largely to give a real view of the criminal, as opposed to the commonly received romantic notions of criminality, derived from current Newgate literature:

> I had read of thieves by scores; seductive fellows (amiable for the most part), faultless in dress, plump in pocket, choice in horse-flesh, bold in bearing, fortunate in gallantry, great at a song, a bottle, a pack of cards or dice-box, and fit companions for the bravest. But I had never met (except in Hogarth) with the miserable reality. It appeared to me that to draw a knot of such associates in crime as really did exist; to paint

them in all their deformity . . . would be a service to society.

Here are no canterings on moonlit heaths, no merry-making in the snuggest of all possible caverns, none of the attractions of dress, no embroidery, no lace, no jack-boots, no crimson coats and ruffles, none of the dash and freedom with which "the road" has been time out of mind invested. (xv,xvi)

Throughout his campaign against the romance of the road, Dickens abated not "one hole in the Dodger's coat, or one scrap of curl-paper in Nancy's dishevelled hair" (xvi). And although, as Mario Praz points out, notwithstanding his subsequent criticism, Dickens had employed some of the more sensational devices of the current criminal romance in _Oliver Twist_, nevertheless Dickens' characterizations, here and elsewhere, were decidedly commonplace rather than heroic. In his 1841 preface, Dickens cited Bulwer's _Paul Clifford_ (1830) as the type of fiction to which he objected. _Paul Clifford_, of course, was a prime example of the criminal romance. Unjustly imprisoned, Paul Clifford escapes to become the leader of a band of highwaymen, and soon Paul's love for Lucy Brandon is mingled with adventurous rescues, capture, sentencing, and the final escape of Paul with Lucy to America. Dickens no doubt had other Newgate novels in mind as well, such as Ainsworth's _Jack Sheppard_, the story of the notorious highwayman, which was filled with action and dramatic incident, and included Jonathan Wild, whose portrait was far different from that
of the criminal hero. Dickens returned to this theme in Nicholas Nickleby while discussing true and false forms of charity:

In short, charity must have its romance, as the novelist or playwright must have his. A thief in fustian is a vulgar character, scarcely to be thought of by persons of refinement; but dress him in green velvet, with a high-crowned hat, and change the scene of his operations, from a thickly peopled city to a mountain road, and you shall find in him the very soul of poetry and adventure. (xviii, 215)

The Newgate school was short-lived, however, and as the century progressed a flood of historical romances (several with rogue heroes) came to take their place, including the later productions of Bulwer and Ainsworth, as well as those of G. P. R. James, Captain Marryat, and Charles Kingsley. Early in Vanity Fair, Thackeray pauses, with tongue in cheek, to suggest other ways in which he might have written his novel. One of these modes is highly suggestive of the contemporary vogue of the historical romance:

Or if, on the contrary, we had taken a fancy for the terrible, and made the lover of the new femme de chambre a professional burglar, who bursts into the house with his band, slaughters black Sambo at the feet of his master, and carries off Amelia in her night-dress, not to be let loose again till the third volume, we should easily have constructed a tale of thrilling interest, through the fiery chapters of which readers should hurry, panting. But my readers must hope for no such romance, only a homely story, and must be content with a chapter about Vauxhall, which is so short that it scarcely deserves to be called a chapter at all. (vi, 54-55)
In his identification of *Vanity Fair* as "only a homely story," Thackeray is linking his work with the domestic school, as we shall see he does with just cause, in the eighth chapter. Of more immediate interest, however, is the fact that he is contrasting his own esthetic with the contemporary romantic one.

Like Dickens and Thackeray, George Eliot also had a strong antipathy to the heroic romance. She expressed this dislike in *Scenes of Clerical Life* when she said:

... perhaps I am doing a bold thing to bespeak your sympathy on behalf of a man [Amos Barton] who was so very far from remarkable;--a man whose virtues were not heroic, and who had no undetected crime within his breast; who had not the slightest mystery hanging about him, but was palpably and unmistakably commonplace; who was not even in love, but had had the complaint favourably many years ago. (I,v,66-67)

George Eliot continues her defense of the non-heroic Amos Barton by suggesting to her imagined critics that "so very large a majority of your fellow-countrypeople ... are of this insignificant stamp" (I,v,66-67). Indeed, the average Britons "have probably had no hairbreadth escapes or thrilling adventures; their brains are certainly not pregnant with genius, and their passions have not manifested themselves at all after the fashion of a volcano" (I,v,66-67). The common man is far different. Yet, George Eliot warns, we must note in "their dim and narrow existence ... the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share" (I,v,66-67). Of course here we have
another reference to the ideal of our common humanity, but it is important to observe that George Eliot contrasts this latter domestic standard with the traditional romantic notions of heroism, making pointed allusions to Byronism and, possibly, to the contemporary historical romance as well. In what is perhaps her most important passage descriptive of the domestic literary ideal, appearing in that chapter in Adam Bede "In Which The Story Pauses A Little," George Eliot further defines—and opposes—the hero of the historical romance:

... therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things—men who see beauty in these commonplace things, and delight in showing how kindly the light of heaven falls on them. There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities: I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for those in the foreground of the great multitude, whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy. Neither are picturesque lazzaroni or romantic criminals half so frequent as your common labourer, who gets his own bread, and eats it vulgarly but creditably with his own pocket knife. It is more needful that I should have a fibre of sympathy connecting me with that vulgar citizen who weighs out my sugar in a vilely-assorted cravat and waistcoat, than the handsomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers;—more needful that my heart should swell with loving admiration at some trait of gentle goodness in the faulty people who sit at the same hearth with me . . . . (II,xvii,153-54)

The belief that a "fibre of sympathy" should connect each person with his neighbors, as George Eliot insists in this
passage, constituted the primary objection of the domestic writers to the romantic hero, whether he be the Newgate hero or that of the Ainsworthian historical romance. For drawing attention to outward circumstances and appearances, to "the handsomest rascal in red scarf and green feathers," impeded sympathetic human communication. Furthermore, the reader might become disenchanted with common life and his fellow men after having gazed upon such imaginary and colorful figures. In this context it is easy to appreciate the urgency of George Eliot's appeal for domestic, commonplace art and the well-defined reaction of the major domestic writers to the romantic hero.

The romantic hero was not the exclusive property of English literature, however, and one must look to France for a major contribution in this area. In fact it was against the heroic ideal of the French romance, as much as any hitherto mentioned, that the Victorian domestic writers were reacting. In Pendennis, Thackeray introduces us to the volatile Blanche Amory, who is represented as having been demoralized at an early age not only through her upbringing, but partly also through the reading of French romances, so that she is now false, flighty, selfish, and incapable of real love or the domestic virtues, as these characteristics are embodied in Thackeray's domestic ideal, Laura Bell:

Missy had begun to gush at a very early age. Lamartine was her favorite bard from the period
when she first could feel; and she had subsequent­ly improved her mind by a sedulous study of novels of the great modern authors of the French language. There was not a romance of Balzac and George Sand which the indefatigable little creature had not devoured by the time she was sixteen; and, however little she sympathized with her relatives at home, she had friends, as she said, in the spirit-world, meaning the tender Indiana, the passionate and poetical Lelia, the amiable Trenmor, that high-souled convict, that angel of the galleys,—the fiery Stenio—and other numberless heroes of the French romances. She had been in love with Prince Rodolph and Prince Djalma while she was yet at school, and had settled the divorce question, and the rights of woman, with Indiana, before she had left off pinafores. The impetuous little lady played at love with these imaginary worthies, as a little while before she had played at maternity with her doll. (I,xxiii, 256)

The catalogue of names given here goes a long way towards summarizing the impact of contemporary French literature upon the English domestic writers. Perhaps the only somewhat inappropriate name in the series is that of Balzac, whose lovingly detailed studies of everyday human nature approximated the domestic realist school. However, Balzac's early writings, especially in the Scenes of Parisian Life, were filled with criminal types, as J. W. Croker indicated in a Quarterly Review essay in 1836; for the characters in the Scenes included "an association of conspirators called The Thirteen. This association is formed of villains of all ranks, from the stigmatized felon to the titled dandy..."  

abounded in these stories, and Croker assured his readers "that of about thirty tales which these twelve or fourteen volumes contain, there are not above four or five which are not tainted, impregnated, saturated with every kind of crime, every kind of filth, every kind of meanness, and, we must add, every kind of absurdity and improbability." 4 Here we can see the type of anti-heroic, anti-criminal reaction which was becoming so widespread among Victorian writers.

To return to Blanche Amory's catalogue, Lelia, the convict Trenmor, and the fiery poet Stenio, are characters in George Sand's Lelia (1833); Trenmor is of special interest as a regenerate convict and forerunner of Jean Valjean of Hugo's Les Misérables (1862), which had a tremendous impact as a latter-day French Newgate Novel in its own right. Indiana, of course, is the heroine of George Sand's Indiana (1832), which was soundly condemned by Croker—as were nearly all French romances—for its immorality. Prince Rodolph is no doubt a reference to the Duke Rodolph in Eugene Sue's The Mysteries of Paris (1842-43), a French criminal romance teeming with disguise, mystery, criminals, secrets, schemes, intrigue, fantastic complications of plot, hidden relationships between characters, and all the rest. Duke Rodolph lives in two worlds, haunting the demi-monde, the criminal underground of Paris, and

4Ibid.
attending society balls—the type of improbability which perturbed Dickens. Thackeray also mentions Prince Djalma from Sue's *The Wandering Jew* (1844-45), a romance filled with sensational episodes involving poison, murder, insanity, and other events which outraged the domestic sensibility.

How widespread was such literature in England in the period of 1835-1845, when the domestic movement in Victorian novels was getting under way? Judging from the large number of reviews in English periodicals, one would gather that French criminal romances were available in impressive quantities. Furthermore, the French productions seem to have been consistent in their romantic heroism and their immorality. *Fraser's Magazine* suggested, in 1843, that such works by Frédéric Soulié, Dumas, and other French writers were to be found in England in abundance:

These are hard words. But a hundred years hence (when, of course, the frequenters of the circulating library will be as eager to read the works of Soulié, Dumas, and the rest, as now), a hundred years hence, what a strange opinion the world will have of the French society of today! Did all married people, we may imagine they will ask, break a certain commandment?—They all do in the novels. Was French society composed of murderers, forgers, of children without parents, of men consequently running the daily risk of marrying their grandmothers by mistake; of disguised princes, who lived in the friendship of amiable cut-throats and spotless prostitutes; who gave up the sceptre for the savate, and the stars and pigtails of the court for the chains and wooden shoes of the galleys? All these characteristics are quite common in French novels, and France in the nineteenth century was the politest country
in the world. What must the rest of the world have been? Croker also observed that the adulterous and criminal French novels were readily available in England, for "we have upon our table before us upwards of one hundred novels of this class published within the last five years, and we could have, we believe, increased the number two or three fold . . . ." A slightly earlier Fraser's essay on "French Romances" similarly indicated the large circulation of this domestically subversive genre in England, and justified its reviews of this dubious form on grounds that the present number of French romances was too great to pass unnoticed.

The domestic writers and reviewers naturally objected to the excessive emotionalism of the French productions, but the French preoccupation with adultery formed the supreme threat to the domestic ideal and this immorality was repudiated frequently by English critics, often in specifically domestic language, as was the case with J. Herbert Stack's essay in the Fortnightly Review in 1871.

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6 Croker, "French Novels," p. 106.

7 "French Romances" (anon.), Fraser's Magazine, XXVII (1843), 184.

8 J. Herbert Stack, "Some Recent English Novels," Fortnightly Review, N.S. IX (1871), 734.
Significantly, amorous passion in the form of French liaisons proves consistently fatal for the male in English domestic fiction. Lydgate's infatuation for the French actress Madame Laure issues in the revelation that she did murder her husband after all, which Lydgate discovers just as he is about to propose to her. Rochester's ward, Adele, in *Jane Eyre*, is the daughter of Céline Varens, a French opera-dancer towards whom he had once cherished an unrequited "grand passion." Arthur Pendennis' initial relationship with Blanche Amory—the reader of so many French romances—is itself a French-style romance. Blanche continually spouts French, and has written countless impassioned verses, "Mes Larmes." Pen soon catches the fever, and before long a veritable torrent of letters and verses is passing back and forth between the two, by way of the hollow tree post-office. It takes Pen the whole course of the novel to disengage himself from this and other romantic notions, and to recognize in Laura Bell the domestic ideal.

The reading of romance literature, as in the case of Blanche Amory, is also shown as something to be avoided in *Barchester Towers*. Madeline Stanhope, otherwise known as La Signora Neroni, is like Blanche a heartless trifler with men's affections, and Trollope identifies these characteristics partly with her reading habits:

The "Signora" was not without talent, and not without a certain sort of industry; she was an
indomitable letter writer, and her letters were worth the postage . . . She wrote also a kind of poetry, generally in Italian, and short romances, generally in French. She read much of a desultory sort of literature, and as a modern linguist had really made great proficiency. Such was the lady who had now come to wound the hearts of the men of Barchester. (ix,77)

To read romances was one thing, but to write them as well—this was the ultimate sign of a corrupt nature, and Trollope used this device skilfully to acquaint his readers immediately with La Signora's character. In general it may be said that the Continental brand of romantic love was anathema to the Victorian domestic writers, and certain references in the *Pickwick Papers* can be seen as parodies of the romantic tradition. Indeed, in that novel Mr. Alfred Jingle provides a beautiful parody of the grand amour:

"You have been in Spain, sir?" said Mr. Tupman.  "Lived there--ages."
"Many conquests, sir?" inquired Mr. Tupman.  "Conquests! Thousands. Don Bolaro Fizzgig--Grandee--only daughter--Donna Christina--splendid creature--loved me to distraction--jealous father--high souled daughter--handsome Englishman--Donna Christina in despair--prussic acid--stomach pump in my portmanteau--operation performed--old Bolaro in ecstasies--consent to our union--join hands and flood of tears--romantic story--very." (ii,12)

Dickens could hardly make his point clearer, and it is easy to see why the romance, particularly that of France, posed a great threat for English writers. The works of two French giants, Hugo and Dumas père, would alone have challenged the domestic school. Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris* (1831) was unparalleled for sheer adventure and heroism,
and Alexandre Dumas the father produced an equally resplendent romance in *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844) in which the glamorous Edmund Dantes escapes from the Château D'If, finds the fabulous treasure of Monte-Cristo, awes Paris with his wealth, and takes revenge upon his old enemies who had falsely imprisoned him. The hero of the open road found another world in which to swagger in *The Three Musketeers* (1844), also by Dumas père. The fantastic swordfights of D'Artagnan and his three confrères with Cardinal Richelieu's men, the duels, spying, assignations, and galloping horsemanship of the novel were romantic in the extreme. Thus Ainsworth, Bulwer Lytton, and their English rivals were not alone responsible for the reactions of Dickens, George Eliot, and others on this account.

However, there were other forms of fiction against which the English domestic writers were reacting, notably the Fashionable Novel (known in the early decades of the century as the Silver Fork Novel) which presented the aristocratic and social elite as persons worthy of hero worship. Thackeray, in the comic aside in *Vanity Fair* quoted earlier, also assumed, for purposes of parody, that his novel might have been composed in the Fashionable or "genteel" manner:

Suppose we had laid the scene in Grosvenor Square, with the very same adventures—would not some people have listened? Suppose we had shown how Lord Joseph Sedley fell in love, and the Marquis of Osborne became attached to Lady Amelia,
with the full consent of the Duke, her noble father . . . . (vi,54)

Typical productions of the Fashionable school were Bulwer's Pelham, or The Adventures of a Gentleman (1828), Disraeli's Vivian Grey (1826-27), Mrs. Gore's Women as They Are, or Manners of the Day (1830), Lady Charlotte Bury's The Exclusives (1830), the Countess of Blessington's The Victims of Society (1837), and Disraeli's Coningsby (1844). George Eliot, writing in the Westminster Review in 1856, attacked the unbelievable heroines of the fashionable school:

The heroine is usually an heiress, probably a peeress in her own right, with perhaps a vicious baronet, an amiable duke, and an irresistible younger son of a marquis as lovers in the middle distance, and a crowd of undefined adorers dimly indicated beyond. Her eyes and wit are both dazzling; her nose and her morals are alike free from any tendency to irregularity; she has a superb contralto and a superb intellect; she is perfectly well-dressed and perfectly religious; she dances like a sylph, and reads the Bible in the original tongues. Or it may be that the heroine is not an heiress—that rank and wealth are the only things in which she is deficient; but she infallibly gets into high society, she has the triumph of refusing many matches and securing the best, and she wears some family jewels or other as a sort of crown or righteousness at the end.9

George Eliot's criticism of the Fashionable Novel was not isolated. The three-part series on fiction which Temple Bar published in 1870 focused upon the Fashionable school in its first essay. The anonymous writer begins his

diatribe by asserting that such novels are the repository of "all sorts of human beings, in fine, morally and physically exaggerated and distorted, with fast and false friends, fast and false wives, fast and false everything."\textsuperscript{10} This writer continues, describing the unlimited luxury, the fortunes and prerogatives of aristocratic birth, together with the prospect of marital union with the most desirable of matches—all of which were the lot of the Fashionable hero or heroine. The sensuousness and richness of the descriptions hints that the essay may be directed at Ouida's works, which began to appear in the 1860's and carried the Fashionable theme to its logical and overblown conclusion. How direct an influence the Fashionable heroic prototypes had upon Victorian domestic literature is difficult to determine. But certainly it contributed to the general background of heroic extremism and absurdity against which the major domestic writers revolted.

George Eliot's antipathy to the Fashionable heroes and heroines, as evinced in her essay of 1856, antedates her first venture in fiction, the \textit{Scenes of Clerical Life}, which appeared in 1857. But in the latter novel, filled as it is with anti-heroic passages, George Eliot's criticism is directed not against the Fashionable Novel, but rather against the idealized and priggish clerical heroes

\textsuperscript{10}"Our Novels: The Fast School" (anon.), \textit{Temple Bar}, XXIX (1870), 180.
of the middle-class Evangelical novels, the "White Neckcloth School," which mimicked the Fashionable Novel in a religious guise. Indeed, it was this absurd Evangelical literature which received the brunt of her attack in her 1856 *Westminster Review* essay on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists"—the particular object of criticism being Lady Scott's *The Old Grey Church*. George Eliot describes the Evangelical Hero as follows:

The Orlando of Evangelical literature is the young curate, looked at from the point of view of the middle class, where cambric bands are understood to have as thrilling an effect on the hearts of young ladies as epaulettes have in the classes above and below it. In the ordinary type of these novels, the hero is almost sure to be a young curate, frowned upon, perhaps, by worldly mammas, but carrying captive the hearts of their daughters, who can "never forget that sermon"; tender glances are seized from the pulpit stairs instead of the opera box; tête-à-têtes are seasoned with quotations from Scripture, instead of quotations from the poets; and questions as to the state of the heroine's affections are mingled with anxieties as to the state of her soul. The young curate always has a background of well-dressed and wealthy, if not fashionable society;—for Evangelical silliness is as snobbish as any other kind of silliness ...  

George Eliot went on to suggest that instead of appealing to their readers' class aspirations, the Evangelical novels should come down to earth and attempt to copy the reality of the middle-class clergy "who keep no carriage . . . [and] who even manage to eat their dinner without a silver fork . . . ."  

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12 Ibid., p. 457.
Neck-cloth School" was, of course, her *Scenes of Clerical Life* in which the clergymen, such as the Reverend Amos Barton whom we have encountered before, were by no means aristocratic, mannered, or idealized. Her defense of the Evangelical Mr. Tryan's imperfections illustrates the domestic clerical position:

The blessed work of helping the world forward, happily does not wait to be done by perfect men; and I should imagine that neither Luther nor John Bunyan, for example, would have satisfied the modern demand for an ideal hero, who believes nothing but what is true, feels nothing but what is exalted, and does nothing but what is graceful. The real heroes, of God's making, are quite different. . . . (II,x,164-65)

George Eliot continued her anti-White Neck-cloth Hero campaign in *Adam Bede*, when she explained why it was more needful that her heart should swell with loving admiration at some gentle virtue "in the clergyman of my own parish, who is perhaps rather too corpulent, and in other respects not an Oberlin or a Tillotson, than at the deeds of heroes whom I shall never know except by hearsay, or at the sublimest abstract of clerical graces that was ever conceived by an able novelist" (II,xvii,153-54). Throughout *Adam Bede*, George Eliot held up the rector Mr. Irwine as an example of the everyday, domestic preacher whom she so admired, for he was one of those rare men whom we can only know by "hearing the voice with which they speak to the young and aged about their own hearthstone, and witnessing their thoughtful care for the everyday wants of everyday
companions, who take their kindness as a matter of course, and not as a subject for panegyric" (I,v,60-61). It is interesting to observe that the Temple Bar series on fiction defined the "Simple" (or Domestic) School partly in terms of its unpretentious, domestic clergymen--clergy­men who may have evolved as an answer to their priggish and more heroic Evangelical White Neck-cloth counterparts.

The Anti-Heroic Reaction

The romantic hero was so opposed to the general tenor of domestic realism, in fact constituted so distinct a threat thereto, that the major Victorian domestic writers not only allowed the hero to become eclipsed in their writings, but--as modern critics often fail to point out--waged a uniform, thorough, and consistent campaign against the idea of the hero. The great domestic novelists did not merely indulge in the presentation of non-heroic Everymen; they repeatedly held these commonplace characters up in deliberate contrast to their more grandiose romantic counterparts, as though they had to defend their position. And indeed they did, for as has been suggested the domestic novel by no means carried all before it, as witness the continuing popularity of Scott--who had many romantic heroes--and of his followers in the historical romance, Ainsworth and Bulwer-Lytton, as well as that of all the other forms of heroic and idealizing literature, including
the French. It is from this defensive, anti-heroic stance that Thackeray describes Arthur Pendennis' marriage to Laura, which he does by contrasting the domesticated Pen with his more romantic equivalent:

"And what sort of a husband would this Pendennis be?" many a reader will ask, doubting the happiness of such a marriage and the fortune of Laura. The querists, if they meet her, are referred to that lady herself, who, seeing his faults and wayward moods—seeing and owning that there are men much better than he—loves him always with the most consistent affection. His children or their mother have never heard a harsh word from him; and when his fits of moodiness and solitude are over, welcome him back with a never-failing regard and confidence.

... and, knowing how mean the best of us is, let us give a hand of charity to Arthur Pendennis, with all his faults and shortcomings, who does not claim to be a hero, but only a man and a brother. (II,lxxv,889-90)

Thus ends Pendennis, with a final contrast of the common family man with the more elevated notions of a hero. Similarly, in the final lines of Barchester Towers, Trollope bids farewell to Mr. Harding, making the same anti-heroic distinction:

The Author now leaves him in the hands of his readers; not as a hero, not as a man to be admired and talked of, not as a man who should be toasted at public dinners and spoken of with conventional absurdity as a perfect divine, but as a good man without guile, believing humbly in the religion which he has striven to teach, and guided by the precepts which he has striven to learn. (liii,557)

Thackeray adopted a more deliberately argumentative and contentious attitude in Vanity Fair when he commented
on his sentimental representation of the parting of Amelia Sedley from her old school friends:

All which details, I have no doubt, Jones, who reads this book at his Club, will pronounce to be excessively foolish, trivial, twaddling, and ultra-sentimental. Yes; I can see Jones at this minute (rather flushed with his joint of mutton and half-pint of wine), taking out his pencil and scoring under the words "foolish, twaddling," &c., and adding to them his own remark of "quite true." Well, he is a lofty man of genius, and admires the great and heroic in life and novels; and so had better take warning and go elsewhere. (i,15)

Later, Thackeray takes pains to contrast the domestic heroine, Amelia Sedley, with her romantic heroine counterpart, as though defending his position against an invisible adversary:

... and though very likely, the heroic female character which ladies admire is a more glorious and beautiful object than the kind, fresh, smiling, artless, tender little domestic goddess, whom men are inclined to worship—yet the latter and inferior sort of women must have this consolation —that the men do admire them after all; and that, in spite of all our kind friends' warnings and protests, we go on in our desperate error and folly, and shall to the end of the chapter. (xii, 108)

Thackeray continues his comparisons by showing that "the life of a good young girl who is in the paternal nest as yet, can't have many of those thrilling incidents to which the heroine of romance commonly lays claim" (xii,111), and yet Amelia has graces and charms of her own which all men who reverence a domestic goddess must appreciate. Thackeray's domestic reaction to more romantic notions of heroism reveals that in *Vanity Fair* it was a deliberate
gesture on his part to write "A Novel Without a Hero."

In similar fashion, George Eliot returned to the notion of the hero many times throughout her writings, consciously opposing the more romantic character types while advocating the non-heroes of domestic fiction. Thus in *Adam Bede* she writes:

Yet there is a great deal of family love amongst us. I have a friend or two whose class of features is such that the Apollo curl on the summit of their brows would be decidedly trying; yet to my certain knowledge tender hearts have beaten for them, and their miniatures—flattering, but still not lovely—are kissed in secret by motherly lips. I have seen many an excellent matron, who could never in her best days have been handsome, and yet she had a packet of yellow love-letters in a private drawer, and sweet children showered kisses on her sallow cheeks. And I believe there have been plenty of young heroes, of middle stature and feeble beards, who have felt quite sure they could never love anything more insignificant than a Diana, and yet have found themselves in middle life happily settled with a wife who waddles. Yes! thank God; human feeling is like the mighty rivers that bless the earth: it does not wait for beauty—it flows with resistless force and brings beauty with it. (II,xvii,152)

George Eliot's other statements on heroism are all to the same effect, that the common man is superior to all the received ideas of heroism. Julia Wedgewood, writing in the *Contemporary Review* in 1881, admired her for the "wonderful degree to which she has lighted up the life of commonplace, unheroic humanity," and the same observation was made in one form or another by a number of her critics.

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who contrasted her characters with heroic ones. For instance, W. Lucas Collins, writing in *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1860, observed of *Adam Bede* that "the characters had so little of the grand and the heroic, and the talk was so entirely that of this everyday world."  

Dickens also repeatedly evinced a specifically anti-heroic reaction. In *Little Dorrit*, for example, Arthur Clennam reflects upon the profound influence which Little Dorrit has had on his own life:

"When I first gathered myself together," he thought, "and set something like purpose before my jaded eyes, whom had I before me, toiling on, for a good object's sake, without encouragement, without notice, against ignoble obstacles that would have turned an army of received heroes and heroines? One weak girl!" (II,xxvii,720)

Dickens' consistent championing of the non-hero or, more precisely, the domestic hero-of-the-commonplace, is closely allied to the pattern we have seen in George Eliot. Thus Dickens lauds the long-suffering and faithfulness of Harriet Carker who has always devotedly stood by her outcast brother, Walter Gay's friend:

Yes. This slight, small, patient figure, neatly dressed in homely stuffs, and indicating nothing but the dull household virtues, that have so little in common with the received idea of heroism and greatness . . . --this slight, small, patient figure, leaning on the man still young but worn and grey, is she, his sister, who, of all the world, went over to him in his shame and put

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her hand in his, and with a sweet composure and determination, led him hopefully upon his barren way.

Her pensive form was not long idle at the door. There was daily duty to discharge, and daily work to do—for such commonplace spirits that are not heroic, often work hard with their hands—and Harriet was soon busy with her household tasks. . . . So sordid are the lives of such low natures, who are not only not heroic to their valets and waiting-women, but have neither valets nor waiting-women to be heroic to withal!

The primary concern of George Eliot, Dickens, and many another Victorian novelist with the average citizen was also echoed by Browning's Pippa who reminds us that "All service ranks the same with God . . . there is no last nor first" (Introduction, 190, 195). And in light of the heroic precedent, from the Spasmodics' regeneration of Byronism to the French romance's heroes, we can see the ultimate democratic bent of domestic literature as a distinct reaction, not merely a bourgeois decline.

The Plea of Honesty

We have now surveyed two of the major forces which pointed Victorian literature towards domestic realism. There was the positive impulse to fulfill the ideal of our common humanity. Second, there was the negative reaction, which we have just observed, against the romance and its heroes, both French and English. The 1870 Temple Bar series on the novel described the Victorian response to these forces, which resulted in the domestic genre. Having
noted "how foreign to our English tastes are all kinds of imaginative and descriptive extravagances," the author proceeded to describe the "Simple" (or domestic) novel:

The Simple School of Novels, on the other hand, is a born native of these islands. Fielding, Richardson, Goldsmith, Defoe, Miss Burney, Jane Austen—we claim all these as representatives of the Simple School; and at no time, since stories and storytelling have prevailed amongst us, have there been wanting enough of them to prove and satisfy the national taste. Other schools of fiction come and go, for they are dependent on that shifting variety of conditions to which the most stable of communities is subject; but the Simple School,—the school whose domain is the hearth, whose machinery the affections,—the school which talks to the heart without quickening its beat yet not without moistening the eye,—the school to which home is sacred, and all bad things are available only as contrasts—this we have always with us. There are periods when its reputation is more and periods when it is less satisfactorily maintained; but if it sometimes cannot boast exponents as able as those of its temporary rivals, it always obtains a host of readers and the smiles of approving critics. Let us add that, in the present day, it has no reason to be ashamed of its prophets.15

Another classificatory essay on "The Domestic Novel," in The Argosy in 1874, included Thackeray, Trollope, Dickens, and George Eliot among domestic novelists. However, the Temple Bar study was more significant because it explicitly pointed to the primary characteristic of the domestic school as being what we would call "realism":

The essential virtue and value of the Simple school of Novelists is fidelity to nature, accurate reproduction of the thing seen.

Life, as we know it, is the proper sphere and department of prose fiction. For life, as we do not know but would fain have it, a loftier region, a diviner air, are required. As Owen Meredith says, "the Unknown is life to love, religion, poetry." With prose fiction, the known is the very breath of its nostrils.  

As Robert Gorham Davis has shown, the term "realism" first appeared in English literary criticism in a Westminster Review essay on "Balzac and His Writings" written in 1853. Although it might appear anachronistic to apply the term "realism" to earlier works, such as the Pickwick Papers, Kenneth Graham, Richard Stang, and others have shown that in its early usage, "realism" was a broad term, the equivalent of "truthfulness," "honesty," and "naturalness" which had served all along as signs of critical approbation. Stang also indicates that very few mid-Victorian critics called for that extreme form of realism which was defined strictly as detailism, cataloguing, and factualism. Most often, realism had the wider-ranging, looser sense of that which was "natural" or "true" of "real" life—no mere transcription of surface reality. In addition, the critics universally agreed that "realism"

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16 Ibid., p. 502.
included the reality of common human life (and, by implication, ordinary human feeling). Thus from the first, the idea of "realism" was essentially a warm, humanized reality, a reality which critics and writers alike viewed intimately, not with the cold, distanced, scientifically objective detachment which later became associated with "realism." Graham, Stang, and George H. Ford concur that there was a broad spectrum of critical opinion as to the amount of idealism (ideas, imagination, romanticism, conscious ordering of materials in the novel, etc.) which it was permissible to add to this basic "realism." 19 Graham and Stang also show that almost all critics wished for some degree of idealism to be introduced, and that the degree increased as the century progressed. We will discuss one strain of this idealized realism (i.e., domestic realism) in the next section of this chapter. For the present it is sufficient to note that the Temple Bar critic quoted above had in mind this "broad" idea of the truthfulness or "realism" of the "Simple School."

If "life, as we know it," according to the Temple Bar critic, that is, "life as it really is," forms the proper subject of the novelist, then the writer will present neither complete heroes nor complete villains, but

rather that intermingling of virtues and vices which makes up the common man. George Eliot took this position against the supposed reader who urged her, "Let your most faulty characters always be on the wrong side, and your virtuous ones on the right. Then we shall see at a glance whom we are to condemn, and whom we are to approve" (II,xvii,151):

But, my good friend, what will you do then with your fellow-parishioner who opposes your husband in the vestry?—with your newly-appointed vicar, whose style of preaching you find painfully below that of his regretted predecessor? . . . These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: you can neither straighten their noses, nor brighten their wit, nor rectify their dispositions; and it is these people—among whom your life is passed—that it is needful you should tolerate, pity, and love . . . And I would not, even if I had the choice, be the clever novelist who could create a world so much better than this, in which we get up in the morning to do our daily work, that you would be likely to turn a harder, colder eye on the dusty streets and the common green fields—on the real breathing men and women, who can be chilled by your indifference or injured by your prejudice; who can be cheered and helped onward by your fellow-feeling, your forbearance, your outspoken, brave justice. (II,xvii,151)

"Realism" in fiction thus encourages the reader to view the context of the actual, and to accept his fellow-man. The subject of fiction is "these people—among whom your life is passed," these "real breathing men and women" who are so different from the heroes of the Evangelical, Fashionable, Criminal, and French romantic novels.

George Eliot's prime statement on commonplace realism was cited earlier (see page 236 of this chapter),
the passage in *Adam Bede* in which she urges,

> Therefore let us always have men ready to give the loving pains of a life to the faithful representing of commonplace things—men who see the beauty in these commonplace things . . . .

(II,xvii,153)

There is a slight modification of the domestic aesthetic here, for we are asked not only to look at reality, but to see particularly the inherent value of the common life which surrounds us. This is not to say that domestic writers viewed the commonplace as beautiful—for it must necessarily ever remain commonplace—but rather, they saw "the beauty in these commonplace things." The latter distinction is crucial, for it prevents the confusion of the domestic aesthetic with the idealizing tendencies of romanticism, and with those critics of "realism" who wished to introduce an inordinate amount of "idealism" therein. Domestic "realism," in the present broad use of that term, advocated, then, a positive, selective evaluation of experience in the present corresponding to the positive, selective vision of past experience which we noted earlier to be one of the uses of memory. The function of domestic realism was not so much to change or idealize reality, as to direct the reader to that beauty already present in reality which his untrained vision might otherwise have missed. Robert Browning's *Fra Lippo Lippi* makes this precise point about the power of selective realism, in
his conversation with the nightwatchman:

However, you're my man, you've seen the world—
The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
Changes, surprises—and God made it all!

--For what? Do you feel thankful, aye or no,
For this fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and the sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to? What's it all about?

To be passed over, despised? or dwelt upon,
Wondered at? oh, this last of course!—you say.
But why not do as well as say—paint these
Just as they are, careless what comes of it?
God's works—paint any one, and count it crime
To let a truth slip. Don't object, "His works
Are there already; nature is complete:
Suppose you reproduce her—(which you can't)
There's no advantage! You must beat her, then."

For, don't you mark? we're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see;
And so they are better, painted—better to us,
Which is the same thing. Art was given for that;

God uses us to help each other so,
Lending our minds out. (11,282-306)

By painting, "Just as they are . . . things we have passed/
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see," the artist does
not idealize commonplace reality, but he awakens us to that
beauty which lies within it. Of course Dickens, Eliot, and
Thackeray, among others, were capable on occasion of pre–
senting the wholly ugly and grotesque—a further quality
which a modern definition of realism would incorporate.

But throughout a large portion of their work these writers
were concerned neither with the supremely beautiful nor the
unutterably hideous, but, instead, with the average of
human experience—the commonplace—which they believed had
seeds of goodness and beauty, of human joy and of equally touching human sorrow, mingled with it.

Because of their faith in the essential worth of unadulterated reality, the Victorian domestic writers insisted time and again upon the honesty of the pictures which they presented. In their own eyes, certainly, they saw themselves as "realists"—in the broad usage of the term. Thus George Eliot tells us in Adam Bede that her strongest effort has been to give a faithful account of men and things as they have mirrored themselves in my mind. The mirror is doubtless defective; the outlines will sometimes be disturbed, the reflection faint or confused; but I feel as much bound to tell you as precisely as I can what that reflection is, as if I were in the witness-box narrating my experience on oath. (II,xvii,150)

Again, in Scenes of Clerical Life, George Eliot asks to be judged only by the fidelity of her art to life:

For not having a lofty imagination, as you perceive, and being unable to invent thrilling incidents for your amusement, my only real merit must lie in the truth with which I represent to you the humble experience of ordinary fellow-mortals. I wish to stir your sympathy with commonplace troubles—to win your tears for real sorrow: sorrow such as may live next door to you—such as walks neither in rags nor in velvet, but in very ordinary decent apparel. (I,vii,94)

Along with their general distrust of the excessive tendencies of romanticism, the domestic writers were particularly wary of the faculty of imagination (here understood in the sense of the Coleridgean "fancy") which led to such extravagances. If art was to be real, then it must
disengage itself from the undisciplined power of the imagination, as George Eliot intimated in that crucial chapter from *Adam Bede*, "In Which The Story Pauses A Little":

> Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult. The pencil is conscious of a delightful facility in drawing a griffin—the longer the claws, and the larger the wings, the better; but that marvellous facility which we mistook for genius is apt to forsake us when we want to draw a real unexaggerated lion. Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, even about your own immediate feelings—much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth. (II,xvii,151-52)

Dickens, who was often at odds with his critics on such matters, ever pleaded for the essential honesty of even the most implausible details of his novels. In the 1841 Preface to *Oliver Twist*, for example, he defended his motivation of Nancy:

> It is useless to discuss whether the conduct and character of the girl seems natural or unnatural, probable or improbable, right or wrong. IT IS TRUE . . . It is emphatically God's truth . . . . (p.xvii)

Like most of his domestic contemporaries, Dickens was vitally concerned that his works be received as reflections of the real world, and on this account he defended Krook's death by spontaneous combustion, the complexities of the Harmon case, the existence of Jacob's Island, and other incidents whose validity was subject to question. Thackeray, similarly, prided himself upon his honest representa-
tions, and told his readers abruptly in *Vanity Fair*, "yet, look you, one is bound to speak the truth as far as one knows it, whether one mounts a cap and bells or a shovel hat . . ." (viii,80). Again, in his Preface to *Pendennis*, Thackeray insisted upon his fundamental truthfulness:

> I have found many thousands more readers than I ever looked for. I have no right to say to these, You shall not find fault with my art, or fall asleep over my pages; but I ask you to believe that this person writing strives to tell the truth. If there is not that, there is noth­ ing. (I, p.vii)

There was one department of daily life, however, which no Victorian domestic writer dared to represent frankly—the world of sexual immorality. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray clearly defined the limits of realism for depicting sensual matters when during an aside to the reader he asked whether in his description of Becky Sharp he, as author, had "once forgotten the laws of politeness, and showed the monster's hideous tail above water? No!" (lxiv,617). Although Thackeray was occasionally restive under such moral restraint, he and his fellow domestic "realists" seldom turned towards the depiction of sexual immorality. For the center of the domestic aesthetic was the home, family, children, friends, domestic virtues, moral associations, and the rest—a world which gave little occasion for the detailed representation of vice.
The Real World Within

Among the wide range of connotations which various Victorian critics deemed it possible to attach to the term "realism," there was one in particular which from the viewpoint of strict detailism realists probably seemed to consist chiefly of "idealism"—domestic realism. Perhaps the domestic connotation of the word "real" is best illustrated by David Copperfield's feelings upon returning home from school and finding his mother there and the Murdstones absent:

I took the little baby in my arms when it was awake and nursed it lovingly. When it was asleep again, I crept close by my mother's side, according to my old custom, broken now a long time, and sat with my arms embracing her waist, and my little red cheek on her shoulder, and once more felt her beautiful hair drooping over me—like an angel's wing as I used to think, I recollect—and was very happy indeed.

While I sat thus, looking at the fire, and seeing pictures in the red-hot coals, I almost believed that I had never been away; that Mr. and Miss Murdstone were such pictures, and would vanish when the fire got low; and that there was nothing real in all that I remembered save my mother, Peggotty, and I. (viii,112)

In other words, domestic love is real. The innate virtues, the domestic sentiments and affections, the inner world of the heart, all the associations of home—which were described in the early chapters of this dissertation as the Victorian ideal—these things were for David the real world.

In our first chapter a distinction was made, with
the help of Wemmick, between the world of home and the
greater world beyond—and, by analogy, between the two
worlds within man himself, the inner sphere of the heart
and uncorrupted primal affections and sympathies, and the
more worldly provinces of human thought and vision, in
which the soul was directed outward to encompass temporal
affairs. The warm and happy fire into which David gazes
often is associated, in Dickens' writings, with the former
of these two worlds—with the inner world of love and
affection. Before such a fire Louisa Gradgrind dares to
"wonder" about the domestic joys her utilitarian upbringing
has denied her, and in dreaming over the "hollow down by
the flare" Lizzie Hexam finds her own domestic vision.
Charley Hexam asks his sister what she sees in the burning
coals, and she reveals to him the home-memories that are
engendered there:

"There are you and me, Charley, when father
was away at work and locked us out, for fear we
should set ourselves afire or fall out of window,
sitting on the door-sill, sitting on other door­
steps, sitting on the bank of the river, wandering
about to get through the time. You are rather
heavy to carry, Charley, and I'm often obliged to
rest. Sometimes we are sleepy and fall asleep
together in a corner, sometimes we are very hungry,
sometimes we are a little frightened, but what is
oftenest hard upon us is the cold. You remember,
Charley?"

"I remember," said the boy, pressing her to
him twice or thrice, "that I snuggled under a
little shawl, and it was warm there."

"Sometimes it rains, and we creep under a boat
or the like of that; sometimes it's dark, and we
get among the gaslamps, sitting watching the
people as they go along the streets. At last, up
comes father and takes us home. And home seems such a shelter after out of doors! And father pulls my shoes off, and dries my feet at the fire, and has me to sit by him while he smokes his pipe long after you are abed, and I notice that father's hand is a large hand but never a heavy one when it touches me, and that father's is a rough voice but never an angry one when it speaks to me. So I grow up, and little by little father trusts me, and makes me his companion, and, let him be put out as he may, never once strikes me." (I,iii,28-29)

Lizzie's story of the growth of love between parent and child is touching, and the "hollow down by the flare" becomes a recurrent motif in Our Mutual Friend. For instance, on the night that Lizzie decides that the time has come for Charley to run away to get schooling, she notes a change in the fire:

Very quietly, she placed a chair before the scanty fire, and sat down in it, drawing her shawl about her.
"Charley's hollow down by the flare is not there now. Poor Charley!" (I,vi,71)

The change in the fire is symbolic of the dissolution of the domestic ideal—for after this parting neither her home nor her brother will ever be the same again. It does not take Charley Hexam very long, under the tutelage of Bradley Headstone, to become corrupted by worldly desires and ambitions. Charley soon forgets all the memories of home which Lizzie so cherishes. He loses love for his sister, too, and complains to her that her association with the diminutive dolls' dressmaker, Jenny Wren, and her dissolute father, will reflect unfavorably upon him and blight his
prospects of rising in the world. Lizzie explains that her devotion to Jenny and Jenny's weak, wretched father is the result of sympathy with a lot so like her own in former days, when she watched and cared, as best she could, for Gaffer Hexam. Her loyalty also grows out of her memory of past domestic joys, and her sorrow that she did not do more for her father while he was alive. Charley's answer to his sister is that of a loving heart turned selfish and worldly:

"You are such a dreamer," said the boy, with his former petulance. "It was all very well when we sat before the fire—when we looked into the hollow down by the flare—but we are looking into the real world now."

Lizzie's response merits well our attention, for it provides us, at last, with a full definition of domestic realism:

"Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!" (II,i,228)

Childhood, affection, the domestic hearth, home, the love between parent and child, between brother and sister—all of which are now lost to Lizzie—these were the things which made up the real world for the domestic realists, and all else was but as shadows. Thackeray similarly affirmed the reality of the inner, domestic world, when describing the acting of the Fotheringay in the "Stranger," to the delight of Pen in the audience:

She began her business in a deep sweet voice. Those who know the play of the "Stranger" are aware that the remarks made by the various characters are
not valuable in themselves, either for their sound sense, their novelty of observation, or their poetic fancy.

Nobody ever talked so. If we meet idiots in life, as will happen, it is a great mercy that they do not use such absurdly fine words. The Stranger's talk is all sham, like the book he reads, and the hair he wears, and the bank he sits on, and the diamond ring he makes play with—but, in the midst of the balderdash, there runs that reality of love, children, and forgiveness of wrong, which will be listened to wherever it is preached, and sets all the world sympathising. (I,iv,43-44)

Dickens, in particular, employed the word "real" to signify genuineness of feeling, or fidelity to one's inner nature. Oliver Twist journeys down to the country with the Maylies and, attending church on Sunday, hears some "real" singing:

The poor people were so neat and clean, and knelt so reverently in prayer, that it seemed a pleasure, not a tedious duty, their assembling there together; and though the singing might be rude, it was real, and sounded more musical (to Oliver's ears at least) than any he had ever heard in church before. (xxxii,239)

In this context, "real" signifies sincerity, openness, directness, a song which comes straight from the heart and which represents one's better nature. Dickens uses the word similarly in Our Mutual Friend, in the scene in which Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Lammle flatter Georgiana Podsnap and Fascination Fledgeby at a dinner. Here Mrs. Lammle uses her most persuasive compliments: "You, my dear Georgiana! who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! who are such a relief from the crowd that are all alike! who
are the embodiment of gentleness, simplicity, and reality!" (II,iv,263). This usage of the language of morality is insincere, as we have seen it employed for selfish purposes earlier. But the combination of terms is significant, notwithstanding, for reality is equated with naturalness, unconstraint, gentleness, and simplicity—with the inner, domestic virtues.

It was Coventry Patmore, however, in the essay cited before, who equated realism with the recognition and expression of the best elements of our common humanity:

As realists, we do not forget that it is not in the vulgarity of common things, nor the mediocrity of average characters, nor the familiarity of familiar affairs, nor the everydayness of everyday lives, that poetry consists,—not the commonness of a common man, but those universal powers and passions which he shares with heroes and martyrs, are the true subjects of poetry. 20

Thus realism, in its specialized, domestic meaning, was not merely the representation of everyday life and common activities—though this might be its modern connotation—but, rather, it consisted of the delineation of our common humanity. And only a realist, in this sense of the word, a man who saw the potential for innate good within mankind, and the corresponding beauty in familiar life, was granted the gift of true vision. Dickens expressed this idea in Oliver Twist when he wrote: "Men who look on nature, and

their fellow-men, and cry that all is dark and gloomy, are in the right; but the sombre colours are reflections from their own jaundiced eyes and hearts. The real hues are delicate and need a clearer vision" (xxxiv,254).

Several contemporary critics understood realism in the domestic sense in which it was employed throughout the preceding quotations. I shall now treat some of the more revealing reviews by these critics one by one, in order further to illustrate the Victorian predisposition to define realism domestically. In 1862, eight years before the three-part series on the novel which has been cited earlier, Temple Bar carried an essay titled "Society's Looking-Glass," which though somewhat hostile to the domestic school, recognized several of the distinctions in realism which we have noted:

When Scott wrote, Society was not adverse to discriminate flattery, and the magical rose-coloured mirror pleased her. Nowadays, however, she is determined to have the looking-glass of fiction simply a looking-glass in which she can secretly examine her own follies, flaws, and beauties. She is content therefore, with the reflection of her superficial features—the externals and "realities" of daily life. Consequently few, if any, of our novelists see farther than the domestic parlour and the drawing-room window . . . they hold the looking-glass in such a manner as to catch the most trivial domestic pictures. Society . . . prefers millinery to metaphysics, photography to poetry, crochet to astronomy. She believes romantic affections, grand passions, to be out of date; she will go into ecstasies in following the details of a little love-affair. She is bored by abstract doctrine, but she can appreciate the sweet lisp-ing sermon of a pet pastor. Thus encouraged, the
novelist sets to work to study the minutiae of character and incident; and the outcry they make in order to please the publisher has been characterized, falsely however, as Realism.\footnote{\textit{Society's Looking-Glass} (anon., by "R.W.B."), Temple Bar, VI (1862), 132.}

This critic continues, employing the word "realist" to describe the domestic school, which he proceeds to characterize as non-heroic:

But the realists have put commonplace experience into language intelligible to a large portion of the general community; and, studious of that minute detail which characterizes the Pre-Raphaelites in Art, . . . they have effected a revolution in modern literature. Society being impersonal, the novel contains no longer a hero and a heroine, but a cluster of heroes and heroines, painted from nature with attention even to the slightest peculiarity of an eyebrow.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 133.}

Soon this writer treads upon more controversial ground, and broaches one of the great questions of Victorian criticism, whether or not Dickens was a realist. He concludes that Dickens "is not a realist in the ordinary acceptation of the term" and that "Dickens has suffered more or less in the estimation of a public which was accustomed to make him an idol" because "the realists won't or can't believe in him, and they have made a great outcry against him."\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 134.} However, it is this writer's defense of Dickens against the criticisms of the "Realists" which is crucial:

\begin{center}
Is it nothing that Dickens is always consistent
\end{center}
as an artist; that he lives in a world of his own, in which the atmosphere and landscape are in perfect keeping with the beings who live and breathe there? A humorist and a poet perceives character where Goodman Dull sees only a face of skin and bone. If Dickens is true to the affections and the sympathies, let him clothe his figures in whatever quaint drapery he chooses. We can pardon him much; for he is master of that touch of nature which makes the whole world kin. 24

In brief, Dickens is a realist insofar as he is true to the inner laws of human nature, to our common humanity, and it does not matter if the characters in whom he embodies such passions and affections are a little irregular or eccentric in their outward seeming—like Miss Mowcher the dwarf in David Copperfield. This writer concludes his observations with a new definition of realism corresponding to his evaluation of Dickens:

Society's Looking-glass is the comparatively truthful reflection of Society herself, and its present flaws and imperfections lie less in itself than in the character of the thing imaged. Let us hope, however, that Love, Sympathy, and Poetry still lurk in some secret corner of the great fair of vanities. Realism, properly so called, is truth, and truth is always beautiful; and Art is a copy of nature, drawn by the human hand, and coloured with the aspirations of the human soul without whose light the great face of the world would be devoid of expression. Without the lofty ideal life, the external life would be meaningless and unintelligible; they are woven together by the fine threads of poetry and religion, and each is so inextricably linked with each, that only the scythe of death can cut them asunder. 25

The argument here is that the inner world of feeling and spirit is inseparable from the surface reality of the world,

24 Ibid., p. 134. 25 Ibid., p. 137.
and that the aspirations of the human soul are as real as any mere external reality. Realistic art, as a copy of nature, must include the reality of the human spirit which is a part of that nature, and without which "the great face of the world would be devoid of expression." The "lofty ideal life" is thus a part of reality, and this critic falls among the majority of those who insisted that some degree of "idealism" was a necessary part of realism.

An article on "Fiction and its Uses," which appeared in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1865, added a significant corollary to the notion of the reality of man's inner world, stating that fiction best presents this hidden sphere of human nature:

> Keep away the terrible folk who visit your sick room in obstreperous boots, sit upon your bed-clothes, exhort you to cheer up, and maintain that you require to be roused; and call some of those gentle, tender people—Ruth Pinch if you will, or Mrs. Pendennis, to sit by you, and tell you about Tom, or darling Arthur. . . . Here is a brave world, where you may walk about, and take your pleasure, and see life. The small and the great are here, kings and counsellors of the earth, and crossing-sweepers, and beggar-maids. And you understand them so thoroughly. Shadows!—they are as real to us as most men and women,—infinitely more real than any faces we see perhaps every day of the year, never getting at the hearts of them . . . .

This critic goes on to suggest that the chief value of fiction is its ability to let the reader see into the real

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26"Fiction and its Uses" (anon. rev.), *Fraser's Magazine*, LXXII (1865), 753.
heart of those about him—a process which is often dif-
cult, and subject to the errors of misjudgment, in real
life. The novel thus educates the sympathies, the drama-
tizing imagination which breathes a soul into one's
fellow-men. In so doing, it makes men more understanding
and tolerant of one another, and contributes to the social
amelioration of mankind:

And here we may take notice of a gain, perhaps
the greatest gain, we can hope to derive from a
novel. This dramatizing imagination of ours has
its uses. Nay without it life could not be a
spiritual thing at all. Stimulated by love, and
reacting upon love, it is the very soul of sym-
pathy. It is the interpreter of man to man.
Every action of our fellow is for us inhuman,
merely mechanical, until we have ourselves put a
soul behind it, until we have played the dramatist,
and become for a moment the man before us ... 
Uninterpreted by this wise, imaginative sympathy,
our alms-deed is only so many pence, and a motion
of the muscles of the face; interpreted, that
motion stands for all of the yearning with which
our heart cries, though our lips are silent, "O
my brother, O my poor sister, I love, I pity you."
This is a case in which no one could miss the
meaning of man to man. But in the multitude of
cases, subtler than this, the habit of ready,
faithful, and charitable interpreting of man and
woman by fellow-man and woman has been, we must
believe, too feebly exercised.27

The novelist provides that culture of the sympathies requi-
site to the interpretation of man to man:

Before men can sympathize, they must be given
the power, and acquire the perceptions of sight.
But what has all this to do with novels? Much,
indeed; for our novelist (but he must be a thor-
oughly good one) will help us here, inasmuch as he
will afford culture to that dramatizing imagination
spoken of above ... .28

27 Ibid.  28 Ibid., p. 754.
Fiction assumes a moral role when understood in these terms. And its mission is to reveal to the reader the real, though oftentimes hidden, life of his common humanity.

This chapter may well conclude with a statement which equates man's inner world with what has earlier been described as the Victorian domestic ideal. G. H. Lewes, writing in the Westminster Review in 1858, succinctly summed up the central tenets of domestic realism:

We may now come to an understanding of the significance of the phrase Idealism in Art. Suppose two men equally gifted with the perceptive powers and technical skill necessary to the accurate representation of a village group, but the one to be gifted, over and above these qualities, with an emotional sensibility which leads him to sympathize intensely with the emotions playing amid that village group. Both will delight in the form of external nature, both will lovingly depict the scene and the scenery; but the second will not be satisfied therewith: his sympathy will lead him to express something of the emotional life of the group; the mother in his picture will not only hold her child in a graceful attitude, she will look at it with a mother's tenderness; the lovers will be tender; the old people venerable. Without once departing from strict reality, he will have thrown a sentiment into this group which every spectator will recognize as poetry. Is he not more real than a Teniers, who, admirable in externals, has little or no sympathy with the internal life, which, however, is as real as the other?29

The "ideal" world within man was, therefore, as real as the one without, and it became the special province of the

29G. H. Lewes, "Realism in Art: Recent German Fiction," Westminster Review, LXX (1858), 494.
Victorian domestic writers to record the better part of both worlds.
CHAPTER VI

THE STANDARD SITUATION AND RESPONSE

Introduction

H. H. Lancaster, in the *North British Review* in 1864, made some observations with respect to Browning which revealed the importance of the "stock passions" for Victorian literature:

In an appreciative and very interesting estimate of Mr. Browning in *Fraser's Magazine* for February 1863, it is observed, with perfect truth, that "he does not care to study the stock passions." And it is precisely in this that we think he errs.

The "stock passions," that is, the plain elements of human nature, are the proper material for the poet. To neglect these for subtle analysis and over-refinement may make delightful and instructive reading, but will not make good poetry. Profound speculation is not, indeed, incompatible with the highest poetry—for has not *Hamlet* been written? But then that speculation must be based on the passions and emotions which are common to all, and therefore sympathized in by all, on the human nature which makes the whole world kin; and must be confused by no allegories or half-utterances, but set forth with a clearness and distinctness which will bring them at once home to the heart.¹

Two of the preceding lines were quoted in the introduction to this dissertation, to define "our common nature," and it

¹H. H. Lancaster, "Tennyson's Enoch Arden, etc.," *North British Review*, XLI (1864), 248.
is interesting that Lancaster equates this nature with the "stock passions."

However, the chief question raised in the above passage was how best to set forth the "stock passions" with "a clearness and distinctness which will bring them at once home to the heart." An answer was suggested by chance in a Westminster Review essay written the same year. This essay asserted that there was at least one common denominator for "every great poet who has permanently touched the heart of the family of man":

This source of poetic power rests on an ultimate fact of our nature. Every man and every woman has an intense interest in the feelings and fortunes of every other man and every other woman. If this interest seems at times dormant, it is because the fortunes and feelings of others are for the most part either wholly unknown, or very imperfectly narrated and obscurely conceived. Tell truly and in detail a veritable history of misery and want, and it melts the hardest and warms into benevolence the coldest and meanest. Tell truly and in detail the circumstances of a generous action, of a lofty thought opportunely expressed, of sustained suffering in a worthy cause, and no eye will be dry, no pulse without a quickening bound. Nay, the very symbols of others' joys, cares and sufferings, the marriage-bell, the funeral trappings, are so actively suggestive of a crowd of feelings profoundly interesting to us, that we are ever laughing or weeping, we know not why, and heaving up and down with the ebb and flow of the mighty ocean of human feeling encompassing us on every side.²

How does one evoke the "stock passions"? The writer may begin by telling "truly and in detail a veritable history

²"Mr. Tennyson's New Poems" (anon. rev.), Westminster Review, LXXXII (1864), 398.
of misery and want . . . of a generous action, of a lofty thought . . . ." But this critic goes one step further. For he suggests that certain "symbols" of human life and feeling, such as the "marriage-bell" or "funeral trappings," have a special ability to concentrate experience and focus our attention upon it, calling forth "a crowd of feelings profoundly interesting to us," so that we find ourselves "laughing or weeping, we know not why . . . ." The "symbols" which this reviewer describes are what we may call "standard" Victorian situations, familiar situations which represented the "stock passions"—and appealed to them as well—by drawing upon the tenderest and strongest associations of the Victorian reader, his associational ties with home, childhood, and family life, his deepest sympathies, his most precious past.

What were the major standard situations? The three most important—two have already been mentioned—were birth, marriage, and death, about which endless sentimentality flowed. Others which could be expected to elicit upsurges of sympathy were familial meetings and partings, homecoming after long absence or farewell before seeking one's fortune, sickbed tending, grave visiting, manifestations of motherhood and friendship, and many another incident from family life. These familiar occurrences were copiously represented not only in contemporary literature, but in the art of the age as well, several examples of which are included
in this chapter. Wilkie, Mulready, Etty, Frith, Ford Madox Brown, and many another Victorian painter depicted these scenes. It should be noted that in literature, as in painting, these emotive incidents derived their power largely through either the breaking off of contact, or the initiating of contact, between soul and soul, between one man and his family or his fellow men. Thus meetings and partings, deaths and reunions, were largely effective through their affirmation or denial of the ideal of sympathetic communication.

The ability to evoke strong feelings instantly was the essence of the standard situation, and in English literature there had been a long precedent of sentimental writing which called for an immediate emotional reaction on the part of the reader. The novels of Richardson, Sterne, McKenzie, and others furthered the sentimental tradition to which Shaftesbury's writings had earlier given much impetus. The sentimental comedies of Steele, and the domestic tragedies of Lillo and Moore were also representative of a number of works calculated to appeal to one's most susceptible affections.

Of course the romantic movement as a whole had encouraged emotionalism, sensibility, and receptivity, but there was another force which greatly contributed to the cult of sympathetic responsiveness that continued from the eighteenth into the nineteenth century, Wesleyan Methodism.
The teaching of John Wesley had released his followers from the predestinating bonds of Calvinism and the Methodists eagerly accepted the doctrine of prevenient grace, that democratically distributed gift from God to all men which endowed them with the power to turn to Him in their need— if they but willed to do it. Since with the sanction of prevenient grace one's salvation lay entirely in the honesty and emotional intensity of the act of turning, or conversion, it was little to be wondered that an emotional revival issued in Wesley's wake, with an unprecedented emphasis upon the simple heart, the resolution of sin through genuine tears, and the spontaneous outpouring of men's deepest feelings of repentance. This revival of spontaneous feeling permeated the Anglican Establishment as well through the Evangelical movement, for as Evangelicalism flourished in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century the older and more Calvinistic Anglican preachers were replaced by younger and more liberal men who brought with them the new wave of Evangelical belief.

From the tales of Hannah More, early in the century, to later Evangelical productions such as Frederic W. Farrar's pathetic story, *Eric, or Little by Little* (1858), Methodist-Evangelical literature was designed to appeal to the hearts of its readers, and, ideally, to convert them. Two major standard situations appeared repeatedly in such
writings, the conversion and the deathbed scene. Though slighted by her most prominent contemporaries, the strictly formal conversion scene did occur repeatedly in the writings of George Eliot. Indeed, *Scenes of Clerical Life* was in the Evangelical tradition, with its share of deathbed scenes and at least one conversion—although it was also, as we have noted, an answer to the standard Evangelical productions with their insufferably idealized clerical heroes. "Janet's Repentance," as its title suggests, is concerned with conversion, and Janet's turning towards the Evangelical Mr. Tryan is the high point of that story. Similarly, in *Romola*, the heroine is converted by Savonarola to a life of duty when he catches up to her just as she is leaving Florence and her devilish husband, Tito Melema. Savonarola's standard argument for submission to the Divine will and a life of selfless service to her suffering fellow humanity is followed by Romola's standard conversion: "Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back!" (II,xl,355). This is not an Evangelical turn-about, but it is in the Evangelical spirit. George Eliot's greatest conversion scene, however, is that in *Adam Bede* in which Dinah Morris, the Methodist lay preacher, goes to Hetty Sorrel in prison and moves that hard-hearted sinner to repentance and tears.

Of course informal conversions were plentiful in Victorian literature, such as that of Scrooge under the softening influence of the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, and the multiple conversions wrought by Browning's Pippa. Professor Buckley cites other instances in his chapter on "The Pattern of Conversion" in The Victorian Temper. That Evangelical fiction had some influence upon this contemporary literary trait appears certain. The immense numbers of productions such as Legh Richmond's The Dairyman's Daughter (1810)—reported to have sold in the hundreds of thousands—and Hesba Stretton's Jessica's First Prayer (1866)—for which sales reached one and one-half million copies—leave little doubt of that. 4

In fact, as Elizabeth Eastlake indicated in the Quarterly Review in 1843, the breadth of the Evangelical propaganda machine was staggering. 5

However, as Elizabeth Eastlake went on to demonstrate, the increase in the number of Evangelical contributors was by no means accompanied by an improvement in the quality of their productions. 6


5 Elizabeth Eastlake, "'The Lady of the Manor'—Evangelical Novels," Quarterly Review, LXXII (1843), 28.

6 Ibid.
Blackwood's Magazine in 1859, also indicated the low esteem in which Evangelical publications were generally held. Furthermore, the major Victorian novelists themselves ridiculed this fiction. Thackeray persistently satirized the Evangelical writers, and The Washerwoman of Hampstead Heath, the longest running-joke in Vanity Fair, is a slash at Hannah More's The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain. George Eliot denounced Lady Scott's The Old Grey Church (1856) in her essay on "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," which appeared in Westminster Review in 1856, shortly before George Eliot was to undertake her own refined exposition of many of the same principles in Scenes of Clerical Life (1857). Thus the major Victorian writers were well aware of the limitations and failings of Methodist-Evangelical literature, though paradoxically allowing it to influence them at the same time, as can most clearly be seen in George Eliot's conversion scenes, and in particularly pathetic death scenes, such as that depicting the death of Jo the crossing sweeper in Bleak House.

The major contribution of Methodism and Evangelicalism, however, was indirect, rather than direct. It lay in its addition to the emotional stimulation of the age, in


8See Vanity Fair: x,91; xxvii,259; xxxiii,323; xxxiii,324-25.
its heightening of men's receptivity to emotional appeals, and in its insistence upon the importance of a capacity for profound, sincere response. Perhaps the Victorian domestic writers could never have depended upon the standard situation to draw forth an immediate and heart-felt echo of sympathy from their readers, had there not been this general emotional precedent, centered on the idea of conversion, which John Wesley and his followers both within and without the Anglican Establishment had contributed.

**Partings and Meetings**

Partings and meetings, of course, are a necessary part of the literature of any age, but the Victorians placed an unusual emphasis upon such incidents, describing them in loving and intimate detail, and emphasizing their human values and associations. Parting, in particular, was one of the most important Victorian standard situations. We encountered examples of this earlier, in the section on the annuals, where the number of poems based on the theme of parting must run into the hundreds. In 1879, fairly late in the Victorian era, *Fraser's Magazine* ran an article, "Of Parting Company," which clearly defined most Victorian associations with this event. The unidentified author depicted life as filled with inevitable partings of company, 9

9"Of Parting Company" (anon. by "A.K.H.B."), *Fraser's Magazine*, N.S. XX (1879), 193.
from family and friends through death and circumstance—such as the necessity of leaving home to seek one's fortune in the world. Partings were an important subject for Victorian painters, too, and George Barnwell's "Parting Words--Fenchurch Street Station" (1859) (see Figure 4) was typical of the genre. W. P. Frith's "The Railway Station" derived much of its interest for Victorian viewers from the little scenes of leave-taking occurring among several groups of figures, prior to the departure of the train. Ford Madox Brown's "The Last of England" portrayed the sorrow of a young couple upon emigrating from England; the young husband and wife look back towards England from the ship, clasping one another's hands for consolation. The illustration, "The Last Turning," which appeared opposite the first page of the Cornhill Magazine for January 1866, was but another representation of the standard Victorian farewell.

Early in the adventures of Arthur Pendennis, Thackeray introduces the reader to a typical literary parting. It is the scene in which Pen leaves home for the University of Oxbridge--the departure of a young man to seek his fortune in the world where he will be separated from the better, more loving hearts in the domestic world which will remain behind him:

A night soon comes, when the mail, with echoing horn and blazing lamps, stops at the lodge gate of Fairoaks, and Pen's trunks and
Fig. 4.--"Parting Words--Fenchurch Street Station" (1859) by F. B. Barnwell
his uncle's are placed on the roof of the carriage, into which the pair presently afterwards enter. Helen and Laura are standing by the evergreens of the shrubbery, their figures lighted up by the coach lamps. The guard cries "Allright!" in another instant the carriage whirls onward; the lights disappear, and Helen's heart and prayers go with them. Her sainted benedictions follow the departing boy. He has left the home-nest in which he has been chafing, and whither, after his very first flight, he returned bleeding and wounded [the Fotheringay affair]; he is eager to go forth again and try his restless wings.

How lonely the house looks without him! The corded trunks and book-boxes are there in his empty study. Laura asks leave to come and sleep in Helen's room; and when she has cried herself to sleep there, the mother goes softly into Pen's vacant chamber, and kneels down by the bed on which the moon is shining, and there prays for her boy, as mothers only know how to plead. He knows that her pure blessings are following him, as he is carried miles away. (I,xvi,180-81)

This is Thackeray the satirist and ironist, the exposér of the foibles and follies of men, caught in his domestic colors. The moonlight bed-praying scene, like the moonlight deathbed scene, highlights and dramatizes the parting involved. As was so often the case with domestic novels, the parting here is from the ideal, domestic world, where loving spirits dwell, and where one must eventually return, as Pen does to Laura, if happiness is to be attained.

The departure of Nicholas Nickleby to Dotheboys School with Mr. Squeers is, similarly, a challenge to the domestic ideal, for the Nickleby family is to be broken up and may not be reunited for some time:

If tears dropped into a trunk were charms to preserve its owner from sorrow and misfortune, Nicholas Nickleby would have commenced his expedi-
tion under most happy auspices. There was so much to be done, and so little time to do it in; so many kind words to be spoken, and such bitter pain in the hearts in which they rose to impede their utterance; that the little preparations for his journey were made mournfully indeed . . . [as they came] nearer and nearer to the close of their slight preparations, Kate grew busier and busier, and wept more silently.

Thus, they lingered on till the hour of separating for the night was past; and then they found that they might as well have given way to their real feelings before, for they could not suppress them, do what they would. So they let them have their own way, and even that was a relief. (v,42)

Nicholas leaves for the Saracen's Head Inn coach-yard early the next morning before his mother and sister are awake; they catch up with him just prior to his coach's departure. Mrs. Nickleby's unabashed farewell embrace of her son, which she performs regardless of the lookers-on, is typical of the standard parting in which the young man goes off alone to seek his fortune in the world.

Forsaking the domestic world to enter the larger and more impersonal world beyond was well illustrated in the domestic tale, "The Wedding," which appeared in The Keepsake for 1832. Emily Lawrenson is forced to leave home because of her health and the parting is difficult because of the strength of old associations. Similarly, in Scenes of Clerical Life, George Eliot represented the pathos of Amos Barton's departure from his old home, after

the death of his wife Milly, a pathos more profound because of "the separation from the loved and familiar, and the chilling entrance on the new and the strange. In every parting there is an image of death" (i,x,121). This last sentence shows the link between the standard incidents of parting and of death. Indeed many of the standard situations were connected in similar fashion. Kit Nubbles' parting from home in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when he goes to work for the Garlands at Abel Cottage, Finchley, also involves a careful delineation of the domestic sentiments which are strained by this leave-taking (xxii,167-68). Another representative parting is that of Pip from Joe and Biddy in *Great Expectations* (xix,151). In leaving home, Pip is, in a sense, leaving innocence behind him—he is deserting the cradle of the domestic affections and virtues for his much hoped-for success, or expectations, in the larger world of the "gentleman," a world less innocent by far, and the scene is all the more touching because Pip realizes all of this.

One of the most frequent parting scenes in Victorian fiction was the departure of the student from school, an episode which, if the student was beloved by his classmates, was often accompanied by exorbitant displays of sentiment. This was the case with the departure of Esther Summerson from the Misses Donny's school, Greenleaf (iii, 21). Esther's friends overwhelm her with parting gifts,
unrestrained weeping, and affectionate farewells, and she thus learns that she has succeeded in keeping her old birthday promise to be "industrious, contented, and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and to win some love to myself if I could" (iii,18). Similarly, Paul Dombey, who has won the affection of his fellow students, and sufferers, at Dr. Blimber's academy, is rewarded upon his departure. For the entire body of students, the complete Blimber family, and all the servants come together in a crowd to bid him farewell, waving, shaking his hand, calling fondly after him. Thackeray also portrayed the school departure; Vanity Fair opens dramatically with the leave-taking of Amelia Sedley and Becky Sharp from Miss Pinkerton's school. Amelia assumes the hues of a saint in light of her schoolmates' sorrow at her leaving, while Becky is immediately characterized as a sinner because "Nobody cried for leaving her" (i,16). Thackeray not only uses the convention to delineate the characters of Becky and Amelia at the outset of the novel, but in addition he pokes fun at the convention itself as he describes "the hysterical yoops of Miss Swartz, the parlour boarder, from her room" (i,16) as she bemoans the departure of her beloved Amelia. Later in the novel, after Becky has stayed with the Sedley family for some time, a second parting scene ensues, this time between Becky and Amelia:

Finally came the parting with Miss Amelia, over
which picture I intend to throw a veil. But after
a scene in which one person was in earnest and the
other a perfect performer—after the tenderest
careses, the most pathetic tears, the smelling-
bottle, and some of the very best feelings of the
heart, had been called into requisition—Rebecca
and Amelia parted, the former vowing to love her
friend for ever and ever and ever. (vi,66)

Becky thus inverts the language of morality and uses the
devices of the domestic ideal—such as sympathetic tears—
throughout Vanity Fair, in order to attain her own ends.
And her inverted application of the Victorian parting,
which should be sincere, is but another witness to her
duplicity.

Another standard form of parting was that of lovers
at the high point of their love or, often, at the earlier
moment when they first realize that each loves and is loved
by the other. Rose and Harry Maylie in Oliver Twist sepa-
rate at their greatest moment of love (xxxvi,266), and
Dorothea and Will Ladislaw, in Middlemarch, are brought to
an awareness of their feeling for one another through three
parting scenes (VI,lv,398-99; VI,lxii,461,464-65; VIII,
lxxxiii,594). Like Thackeray, George Eliot was well aware
of the comic potential in a parting scene, and when Will
Ladislaw lingers in the Middlemarch vicinity on the chance
of having another final interview with Dorothea, she notes
that "a first farewell has pathos in it, but to come back
for a second lends an opening to comedy" (VI,lxii,458).
Nevertheless, Will remains and the second parting reveals
his love to Dorothea. At the third parting Dorothea
exclaims, "Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break"
(VIII,lxxxiii,594), and the two are united at last. In
the same pattern, David and Agnes in David Copperfield and
Pip and Estella in Great Expectations separate towards the
close of their respective novels at the very moment they
know they love one another. Similarly in Adam Bede, Adam
and Dinah Morris separate just as each learns his love is
returned. But after their parting, Dinah overcomes her
doubts about the disruption of Divine love by human love
and in the fifty-fourth chapter, "The Meeting on the Hill"
(a standard Victorian meeting), the two are brought together
again:

"Adam," she said, "it is the Divine will. My
soul is so knit to yours that it is but a divided
life I live without you."

Adam paused and looked into her sincere eyes.
"Then we'll never part any more, Dinah, till
death parts us." And they kissed each other with
a deep joy.

What greater thing is there for two human
souls, than to feel that they are joined for life
--to strengthen each other in all labour, to rest
on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each
other in all pain, to be one with each other in
silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the
last parting? (VI,liv,444)

Only through parting has Dinah realized how closely her
soul is intertwined with Adam's--only by breaking the ties
of association can one gauge their intensity and depth.
When the two meet again, therefore, they can give them-
selves unquestioningly to each other, to be together until
that final parting, death (again, we have that interconnection between situations). In *Nicholas Nickleby*, Smike is forced to leave with Nicholas for Devonshire because of his failing health. Smike, of course, is in love with Kate Nickleby who is now engaged to Frank Cherryble, and because of his secret attachment he cannot bear to wave farewell through the coach window, which office Nicholas kindly performs on his behalf:

"There! She waves her hand again! I have answered it for you—and now they are out of sight. Do not give way so bitterly, dear friend, don't. You will meet them all again."

He whom he thus encouraged, raised his withered hands and clasped them fervently together.

"In heaven. I humbly pray to God, in heaven!"

It sounded like the prayer of a broken heart. (lv, 732-33)

When earthly reunions are impossible to complete, the interconnected cycle of Victorian situations rights the balance, for death, which is but another form of parting, will issue in a final meeting once again, in man's true home which lies beyond the grave.

The sentimental parting became so common a Victorian convention that Dickens used it as a source of comedy at times by working counter to the accepted usage. For example, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Mrs. Todgers' flagrantly affected farewell to Mr. Pecksniff and his daughters, when they depart from her boarding house in London, is a prime source of comic relief:

Nothing could equal the distress of Mrs.
Todgers in parting from the young ladies, except the strong emotions with which she bade adieu to Mr. Pecksniff. Never surely was a pocket-handkerchief taken in and out of a flat reticule so often as Mrs. Todgers' was, as she stood upon the pavement by the coach-door, supported on either side by a commercial gentleman: and by the light of the coach-lamps caught such brief snatches and glimpses of the good man's face, as the constant interposition of Mr. Jinkins allowed. (xi,190)

The fact that the parting came to be parodied or used as a comic device indicates how well the convention was established, for a pattern must first have stabilized itself as a norm before it may be inverted for meaningful comic effect. Dickens again revealed the common acceptance of this convention by humorously inverting it in Nicholas Nickleby. After Nicholas has received Newman Noggs' letter informing him that Kate is at the mercy of masher-suitors like Sir Mulberry Hawk and Lord Verisopht, he and Smike make haste to depart from the little theatrical company at Portsmouth where they have been working, in order to return to London. But they are intercepted by that master Thespian, Mr. Vincent Crummles, whose profuse leave-taking of Nicholas, involving loud protestations of farewell and multiple stage-embraces, makes for delightful comedy (xxx,398-99).

In that earlier scene we have mentioned before, in which Nicholas bids his mother and sister good-by prior to his departure with Squeers, Nicholas speculates on the possibility of his becoming a success in the world, and thus salves the pain of parting by visions of his future
accomplishments and ultimate reunion with his family:

"The pain of parting is nothing to the joy of meeting again. Kate will be a beautiful woman, and I so proud to hear them say so, and mother so happy to be with us once again, and all these sad times forgotten, and---" The picture was too bright a one to bear, and Nicholas, fairly overpowered by it, smiled faintly, and burst into tears. (iii,28)

The Victorian reunion scene which Nicholas envisions, and which at present he is too sad to contemplate, was, of course, the counterpart of the parting scene. And for the pain of breaking ties and associations which accompanied the typical parting, the meeting or reunion substituted the joy of old ties reunited, old associations revived and fast-bound, as in Adam's and Dinah's meeting on the hill.

It will be remembered that in David Copperfield, when David tells Steerforth on their way to Mr. Peggotty's that he must stop off to see Peggotty first, Steerforth answers, "Suppose I deliver you up to be cried over for a couple of hours, Is that long enough? . . . Tell me where to come to; and in two hours I'll produce myself in any state you please, sentimental or comical" (xxi,302-03). Despite his playful and irreverent attitude, Steerforth well defines one of the sacred Victorian sentimental situations and, in fact, the meeting of David and Peggotty after seven years' separation is filled with profound and joyful emotions, sincere in every tear they shed:

She cried, "My darling boy!" and we both burst into tears, and were locked in one another's arms.
What extravagances she committed; what laughing and crying over me; what pride she showed, what joy, what sorrow that she whose pride and joy I might have been, could never hold me in a fond embrace; I have not the heart to tell. I was troubled with no misgivings that it was young in me to respond to her emotions. I had never laughed and cried in all my life, I dare say, not even to her, more freely than I did that morning. (xxi,307)

Another joyous meeting following a long separation takes place towards the end of *David Copperfield* when David returns to England after three years' absence on the continent, subsequent to the death of Dora. David bursts in upon Traddles in his quarters at Gray's Inn by surprise, and the astonished Traddles exclaims "Good God!" and rushes into David's arms; thus with much hugging, laughing, and crying, and shaking of hands across the hearth, the two old friends are reunited (lix,832). A similar though more subdued meeting after long absence takes place in *Vanity Fair* when after being away for years, Major Dobbin returns to meet Amelia. The two old friends verge upon embracing one another, then fall back into self-consciousness, so that even this tender meeting is not enough to awaken Amelia's love for Dobbin. It takes Dobbin's ultimate renunciation of Amelia to make her realize she does love him. This is in accord with the pattern of love-at-parting which we have seen.

Meeting scenes were the fulfillment of the communicatory ideal, and as such, they had special meaning for the
lonely and isolated person. For example, in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Little Nell finds vicarious solace for her own isolation in the meeting of Miss Edwards with her sister, to which Nell is a secret witness. Their reunion is for Nell a symbol of the human fellowship which she seeks, and which she finds in her own imaginative way by rejoicing in the two sisters' friendship and pursuing them in their rambles (xxxii.241). There are several meetings in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, including that in which the mysterious single gentleman reveals himself to Trent as Trent's long-separated younger brother. But the greatest meeting scene in that novel is the one in which Kit Nubbles, newly released from prison, is happily reunited with his family friends at Abel Cottage. Kit rushes into the lighted rooms and finds his mother clinging round his neck, sees the cheerful faces of Barbara's mother, who is still holding the baby, of Mr. and Mrs. Garland, the single gentleman, and Jacob, and the pale and trembling figure of little Barbara who is entirely overcome. Such detailed depiction of family joy at meeting was calculated to summon forth all the best sentiments of the heart, and the final reunion, that of Kit and the pony whisker, provided the culminating touch (lxviii.511-12-13-14).

As was the case with the parting, the fact that the meeting came to be parodied as a comic device indicates how well the convention was established. Mrs. Todgers, in
Martin Chuzzlewit, abuses the standard meeting just as she misused the parting, for when Mr. Pecksniff and his daughters Mercy and Charity come to London and first present themselves at Mrs. Todgers' boarding house, that flattering woman greets Mr. Pecksniff and company in a most amusing fashion (viii,125-26). Another meeting, which is similarly accompanied by a display of false sentiment, constituting an inversion of the convention, is that in The Pickwick Papers in which Sam Weller runs into Job Trotter. Job has just helped his master, Alfred Jingle, to spirit away Miss Wardle from under Mr. Pickwick's nose, and Sam has vowed vengeance upon the two-faced Job just as Mr. Pickwick has declared retribution upon Jingle. Job, who is well aware that Sam has spied him, tries desperately to get away without acknowledging recognition as they pass in the street, and when this devious attempt becomes patently impossible, he falls back on the device of false sentiment in meeting:

"What do I see? Mr. Walker!" [He means Weller.]
"Ah," replied Sam. "You're wery glad to see me, ain't you?"
"Glad!" exclaimed Job Trotter; "oh, Mr. Walker, if you had but known how I have looked forward to this meeting! It is too much, Mr. Walker; I cannot bear it, indeed I cannot." And with these words, Mr. Trotter burst into a regular inundation of tears, and, flinging his arms around those of Mr. Weller, embraced him closely, in an ecstasy of joy.
"Get off!" cried Sam, indignant at this process, and vainly endeavouring to extricate himself from the grasp of his enthusiastic acquaintance. "Get
off, I tell you. What are you crying over me for, you portable ingine?"

"Because I am so glad to see you," replied Job Trotter, gradually releasing Mr. Weller, as the first symptoms of his pugnacity disappeared. "Oh, Mr. Walker, this is too much." (xxiii,317-18)

Job Trotter thus uses the feigned sentimental meeting to protect himself from the enraged Sam Weller, and catch his adversary off guard. The "momentary look of deep slyness in Job Trotter's eye" (xxiii,318) as he inquires after Mr. Pickwick's health confirms his duplicity, and adds to the general comedy. But to appreciate the full comedic effect of this encounter it is necessary to realize that Job Trotter is exploiting to its fullest potential one of the most revered sentimental incidents— inverting it for his own selfish purposes.

**Birth—Marriage—Death**

Birth, marriage, and death became the three most important standard situations in Victorian domestic literature simply because they were the major events in daily life. Marriage and birth, at least, were in keeping with that Wordsworthian branch of romanticism which emphasized commonplace family life, the humble cot, and the glories of childhood. The domestic ideals of marriage and birth were opposed, however, to the Byronic strain of romanticism with its "excessive" passion, for this type of romanticism stopped short of the marriage vow which was a prospect too mundane for its unfettered, sublimely amoral tendencies.
Birth did not receive as much attention as the other two, but was important nevertheless. For example, many a Dickens novel commences with a description of the circumstances under which the leading character entered the world. *Oliver Twist* begins with an account of Oliver's birth, the conditions of which, with his mother's death, the theft of his mother's locket and wedding ring, and his location in the workhouse, have a pervasive effect upon Oliver's history. *David Copperfield* similarly opens with an account of David's birth, and the attendance of the mysterious and eccentric Betsey Trotwood upon that event, as related to David by his mother, determines the course which his young life takes when, in an hour of need, he flees Murdstone and Grinby's establishment to seek sanctuary with his aunt. *Dombey and Son* commences with an inversion of the true ideal of birth, for Mr. Dombey sees the new-born Paul not as a son but as an heir, thus setting the keynote theme for the novel. In addition, Paul's somber christening is a dark antithesis to the true spirit of that ceremony. Esther's narrative in *Bleak House* similarly starts with her account of her dubious birth and her birthday resolution to try to do some good unto others and to win some love in this world. Esther's program to prove her worthiness to be born determines, from the outset, the course of her young life and forms one of the major themes of *Bleak House*. 
Birth also played an important role in *In Memoriam*, which was largely built about the ideas of death, marriage, and birth. The poem begins by mourning the death of Hallam and ends not only with the marriage of Edmund Lushington to Cecilia Tennyson but with the prophecy that Hallam's spirit shall infuse the child of this marriage, and in that child find a new birth. This birth theme complements the earlier image of "the cold baptismal font" (XXIX) which Tennyson used to describe Hallam's loss by showing that he would have neither marriage nor children.

The ceremony of christening received much attention as well in the Victorian novel, from the christening of Little Dorrit in the church near the Marshalsea to that of poor Paul Dombey, described in all its dismal and somber circumstances. However, it was chiefly in connection with marriage and death that birth assumed importance. We shall study this relationship towards the end of this section.

Marriage, of course, loomed large in Victorian literature, so large, indeed, that John Ruskin, writing in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1880, criticized the Victorians for their preoccupation with marriage in fiction.\footnote{John Ruskin, "Fiction—Fair and Foul," *The Nineteenth Century*, VII (1880), 952-53.} Ruskin's protest was directed against a real and widespread practice, for the issue of marriage and a happy household—the ultimate goal of the domestic ideal—dominated many a
Victorian novel. Indeed, it can be asserted that the major Victorian novels, like the comedies of Shakespeare, find their culmination and fulfillment by ending in marriage: Amelia Sedley to Dobbin, Pen to Laura, Eleanor Harding to John Bold and Eleanor Bold to Mr. Arabin, the marriages of George Eliot's Eppie, Dinah, Dorothea, and of Dickens' David Copperfield, Florence Dombey, Nicholas Nickleby, Martin Chuzzlewit, Esther Summerson, Arthur Clennam, and a host of others.

The conclusion of Nicholas Nickleby is typical in this respect, with the marriages of Frank Cheeryble and Kate Nickleby, Nicholas Nickleby and Madeline Bray, and Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy being announced within a few pages. Tim Linkinwater describes marriage in terms of the domestic metaphor, urging Miss La Creevy, "Why shouldn't we make one fireside of it, and marry each other?" instead of "sitting through the long winter evenings by our solitary firesides" (lxiii,815-16). Thus even Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy fit into the family pattern at the end of Nicholas Nickleby, with the additional prospect that they will find compensation for the lack of children of their own in the children-to-be of their friends.

The standard wedding scene is nowhere better represented than in the marriage of David to Dora in David Copperfield. Only a small fraction of it can be described
here, but it indicates the extreme sentimentality of such an occasion. The ceremony, in David's memory, is more or less an incoherent dream:

Of Miss Lavinia, who acts as semi-auxiliary bridesmaid, being the first to cry, and of her doing homage (as I take it) to the memory of Pidger, in sobs; of Miss Clarissa applying a smelling-bottle; of Agnes taking care of Dora; of my aunt endeavouring to represent herself as a model of sternness, with tears rolling down her face; of little Dora trembling very much, and making her responses in faint whispers. (xliii,632)

That this sentimental beginning ends in an unsuccessful marriage says much for the freedom and complexity of Dickens' handling of this convention. Thackeray purposefully undercut the teary marriage of Amelia Sedley to George Osborne in *Vanity Fair* (xxii,207) to indicate that, as was the case with David and Dora, all was not to be well in this union. In fact, the Victorian wedding scene had become so well established that Dickens could entirely reverse it for ironic thematic purposes in the Edith Skewton-Mr. Dombey wedding of *Dombey and Son* (xxxii).

A particularly fine wedding scene appears in the chapter of *Adam Bede*, titled "Marriage Bells," wherein Adam Bede and Dinah Morris are united. At the end of the ceremony, four couples come out of the church: Adam and Dinah, Martin Poyser and Mary Burge, Seth Bede and Mrs. Poyser, and Bartle Massey and Lisbeth Bede. Speaking of the little genre picture of Adam leading Dinah out across the church
porch, George Eliot says, "I envy them all [the Poysers and the other friendly onlookers] the sight they had when the marriage was fairly ended and Adam led Dinah out of church" (VI,lv,445). In *Middlemarch*, the picture Lydgate chooses to criticize in Plymdale's *Keepsake* is of exactly this nature: "Do look at this bridegroom coming out of church: did you ever see such a 'sugared invention'--as the Elizabethans used to say? Did any haberdasher ever look so smirking?" (III,xxvii,199). The other references made by George Eliot to the contents of Plymdale's *Keepsake* indicate that Lydgate has been examining an actual *Keepsake*, though it is the 1832 volume rather than that of 1831 which the chronology calls for (see Figure 5). Lydgate's indifference, nay, distaste, for this scene has ironic overtones. He is soon to be thrust headlong into a marriage with Rosamond Vincy which is the exact opposite of this ideal—we have earlier seen the failure of the domestic virtue, mutual confidence, in this marriage—and it will not be long before Lydgate dreams longingly of a marriage such as that depicted in the little *Keepsake* picture which he has so lightly ridiculed. Thus the wedding has served in a sophisticated double inversion (Lydgate's criticism of the standard and, in retrospect, the standard's criticism of him).

The death scene, of course, received even more attention than birth or marriage. Ruskin, in the essay
Fig. 5.—"The Wedding," The Keepsake (London, 1832), p. 309.
Painted by Miss L. Sharpe. Engraved by Charles Rolls.
mentioned before, praised Scott for his abstinence from the protracted funereal excitement and sentimental final moments which Ruskin saw to be the bane of contemporary literature.\(^{12}\) Ruskin's analysis of the deathbed scene was accurate—the Victorian writers played the elements of suspense and pathos to the hilt, describing every little word and action of the sufferer in their most intimate details, coaxing the reader on to the inevitable moment, by which time he should be prepared to shed copious tears. The death of Paul Dombey is a case in point. Paul has been weakening throughout the first portion of *Dombey and Son*, and his end evokes the culmination of all the pity for him which has gone before, for he converses touchingly with Polly Toodle, Walter Gay, Florence, and Mr. Dombey, as the fast river carries him on to meet the sea. His final speech is the high point of pathos:

"Mama is like you Floy, I know her by the face! But tell them that the print upon the stairs at school is not divine enough. The light about the head is shining on me as I go!" (xvi, 226)

The death of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* was similarly drawn out to great lengths, and it lost nothing by the fact that Nell had already died by the time the rescue party reached her and Trent. Instead of providing the usual painstakingly detailed description of the sufferer's final moments, Dickens created much the same effect by his

\(^{12}\)Ruskin, "Fiction--Fair and Foul," p. 945.
extensive catalogue of Nell's little homely garments, and of Trent's gestures of despair.

Not all readers responded to the sentimental death in the same manner, however, and Madeline House and Graham Storey have shown that some reacted to Nell's demise with anger and indignation rather than with tears. Nevertheless, a significant number of Victorian critics disagreed with Ruskin's criticism of the deathbed scene. An unidentified contributor to the Westminster Review in 1847 wrote that:

The happiest and most perfect of Dickens's sketches is that of "Little Nell," in the story of "Humphrey's Clock." Her death is tragedy of the true sort, that which softens, and yet strengthens and elevates; and we have its counterpart in the death of "Little Dombey," in the new work of this gifted author now issuing in parts through the press.

In brief, as the same writer affirmed, the drawn-out, sentimental death scene was not overdone, but, rather, was true to life itself. For instance, he described Paul Dombey's end as "A simple but affecting narrative; and well told;--one in which every incident is true to nature, and given without any straining after effect." This statement is representative of that large body of Victorian

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14 "The Province of Tragedy--Bulwer and Dickens" (anon., by "H."), Westminster Review, XLVII (1847), 6.

15 Ibid., p. 11.
readers and critics who uncritically accepted the sentimental death as commensurate with reality. The North British Review, in 1847, confirmed this perspective in which all objections to the unreality of a scene were instantly dismissed if that scene produced the requisite degree of pathos:

We might indeed, were we so minded, find some flaws in the beautiful sentimentalism of Paul's death-bed scene; some affectation of style, some little mawkishness of feeling. . . . But we forbear. After all our criticism, the spell of beauty and pathos would remain, and we ourselves, the surly critics, must bow with others to its power.16

Another deathbed scene which received much acclaim was that of Jo the crossing-sweeper in Bleak House. At the end, Jo is laid in Mr. George's shooting gallery and attended by Dr. Allan Woodcourt who, holding Jo's hand, says the Lord's Prayer with him as he dies. The Athenaeum wrote of Jo's death, "The dying scene, with its terrible morals and impetuous protest, Mr. Dickens has nowhere in all his works excelled. The book would live on the strength alone of that one sketch from the swarming life around us."17 The obvious conclusion is that a large number of Victorians unabashedly loved the pathos and

16 "Popular Serial Literature" (anon.), North British Review, VII (1847), 116.
17 "Bleak House" (anon. rev.), The Athenaeum (September 17, 1853), p. 1087. Another critic who concurred in this view was the unidentified author of "A Gossip About New Books" (anon.), Bentley's Miscellany, XXXIV (1853), 374.
sentimentality of the death scene, accepting it as "real." And their reason is equally plain, for the death scene touched man's common humanity and awakened through responsive tears the better part of his nature.

The Lord's Prayer scene—of which Jo's is one example—was one of the more frequent forms in which death was described in Victorian fiction. In *Pendennis*, after Arthur has cleared himself of suspicion in his relations with Fanny Bolton, the mother and son are reconciled once more and they say the Lord's Prayer together. As the last words of the supplication are spoken, Helen's head falls down on her kneeling son's, her arms close round him, and she dies (II,lvii,667). Another Lord's Prayer death takes place in *Mary Barton* when Mr. Carson speaks the Divine words over the repentant John Barton who dies thus, cradled in Mr. Carson's arms (xxxv,351).

The moonlight death scene was also popular in Victorian fiction, and many a character departed this life in the fashion in which Tennyson ultimately did, with "the light of the full moon streaming through the oriel window" full upon him.\(^{18}\) Helen Pendennis' Lord's Prayer death also fell into the moonlight category, for when Laura, responding to Pen's anguished cries, rushes into the room, she finds Pen still on his knees, holding his mother's hand, 

while "Helen's head had sunk back and was quite pale in
the moon" (II,lvii,667). The fictional demise of Frederick
Dorrit, who passed away upon the deathbed of his brother,
William Dorrit, was a moonlight death as well:

It was a moonlight night; but the moon rose
late, being long past full. When it was high in
the peaceful firmament, it shone through half-
closed lattice blinds into the solemn room where
the stumblings and wanderings of a life had so
lately ended. Two quiet figures were within the
room; two figures, equally still and impassive,
equally removed by an untraversable distance from
the teeming earth and all that it contains, though
soon to lie in it.

The two brothers were before their Father;
far beyond the twilight judgements of this world;
high above its mists and obscurities. (II,xix,
651-52)

This scene contains two additional characteristics of
interest. In the first place, it is an example of the sym-
pathetic death—Frederick Dorrit dies because he cannot
bear to think of his brother going on alone without him.
Secondly, the brothers are described as being before their
Father, that religious application of the familial hier-
archy which we have observed before. However, returning
to our immediate purpose, it can be shown that the effect
of the light, be it moonlight, twilight, sunset, or what-
ever, was sedulously described by Victorian recorders of
man's final moments to dramatically heighten the other-
worldly pathos of their scenes. At Mrs. Dombey's death,
"The window stood open, and the twilight was gathered
without," while in Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears," the growing light of morn, as "The casement slowly grows a glimmering square," contrasts with the impending darkness of death. Light also plays its part in the deathbed scene of Milly Barton in *Scenes of Clerical Life*: "The chamber fronted the west; the sun was just setting, and the red light fell full upon the bed where Milly lay with the hand of death visibly upon her" (I, viii, 108-09).

But Milly's death is interesting for another reason. After the usual catalogue of pathetic deathbed details, Milly's last words are recorded: "Music--music--didn't you hear it?" (I, viii, 110-111). These other-worldly words with which Milly dies represent another convention, that of communication with the Heavenly world in one's final moments. We have noted that at the last Paul Dombey had a vision of his mother, and of the light about his Redeemer's head. Similarly, Smike, in Nicholas Nickleby, tells of the world to come before he dies. He speaks of beautiful gardens filled with figures of men, women, and many children, all with light upon their faces, then whispers that it is Eden, and dies (lviii, 763).

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19 This passage would have appeared on (i, 9) of the *Oxford Illustrated Dickens* volume of Dombey and Son had it not been deleted by Dickens while cutting the text to fit the thirty-two page monthly installments. The deletions are included by Edgar Johnson in the Laurel Edition (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1963), i, 38.

We have seen how Frederick Dorrit passes away out of sympathy for the loss of his brother William Dorrit, and such sympathetic deaths appeared in a wide variety of forms in Victorian fiction. For instance, many a faithful dog died a "sympathetic" death with its master. Thus in David Copperfield, Jip dies pathetically at the same moment that Dora passes away (liii,768). Similarly, in Hard Times, the faithful Merrylegs stays with his master, Signor Jupe, till the master dies, then returns to look for Sissy Jupe before sympathetically expiring, himself, in front of Mr. Sleary and the assembled circus performers. The death of Sikes, in Oliver Twist, is accompanied by a grotesque play upon the standard sympathetic death of the faithful dog as the loyal Bull's-Eye sacrifices himself for an unworthy object. Sikes falls from the house parapet, high above Jacob's Island, is caught by the noose which snaps taut, and is hanged in mid-air, swinging lifeless against the wall. Bull's-Eye, who had earlier run away from his murderer-master, remains faithful at the end. Leaping from the parapet with a dismal howl, he aims for the dead master's shoulders, but, missing, dashes his brains out on the rocks below. Another favorite, and partly "sympathetic," form of death was that of dying upon the grave of the beloved. In The Old Curiosity Shop, Trent visits the grave of Little Nell every day, until one day they find him "lying dead upon the stone" (lxxii,546). Following the same pattern,
in *Bleak House* Lady Dedlock attempts to reach the grave of her former lover, Hawdon, and is only prevented from dying upon the grave itself by the gate to the burying-ground. Emily Brontë, in *Wuthering Heights*, worked counter to the convention in the grotesque and tortured sympathetic death of Heathcliff who climbs into the coffin-like cabinet and there, perpetually gazing at something which seems but two yards before him, expires, presumably to be reunited with his beloved Cathy at last.

We have seen, in our study of the standard parting, a few references to the connection between death and parting in life, and this idea was borne out elsewhere. In *A Christmas Carol*, the Ghost of Christmas Future reveals Bob Cratchit's words concerning Tiny Tim, who has already died: "But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we—or this first parting that there was among us?" (iv,68). Dickens also portrayed death as but another form of parting at the end of *Martin Chuzzlewit* where he foretold the future of Tom and Ruth Pinch as the noble organ music, "rolling round ye both, shuts out the grosser prospect of an earthly parting, and uplifts ye both to Heaven!" (liv, 837). In *Little Dorrit*, when Arthur Clennam is left alone after Daniel Doyce's departure for the Continent, Dickens makes this same equation between parting and death by describing Arthur standing alone at his desk "in the lull
consequent on the departure—in that first vacuity which ensues on every separation, foreshadowing the great separation that is always overhanging all mankind . . . " (II, xxii, 675). Dickens is thinking along the same lines in The Old Curiosity Shop when he likens the separations consequent upon the death of friends to, in a way, death itself. Thus, Nell, in grieving for the death of the Schoolmaster's little pupil, "did not perhaps sufficiently consider to what a bright and happy existence those who die young are borne, and how in death they lose the pain of seeing others die around them, bearing to the tomb some strong affection of their hearts (which makes the old die many times in one long life) . . . " (xxvi, 194).

Sorrow at death ideally was not for the soul of the deceased, which was but returning to its final—and original—home, with its true Father. The feeling aroused resulted instead from the break in communication, the severing of the ties of our common humanity, which came from the separation of death, and made those who remained "die many times in one long life." Yet insofar as the soul was entering into a new kingdom, the process undergone was birth as well as death, a birth into a new world. This is what Tennyson meant when he spoke of "the second birth of death" in In Memoriam (XLV), and it was a sentiment shared by Queen Victoria, as she revealed in an entry in her
journal written on the first anniversary of the Prince Consort's death:

14th Dec.-------Oh! this dreadful, dreadful day! At 10 we went into the dear room (all the children but Baby there) and Dr. Stanley most kindly held a little service for us, reading Prayers and some portions of the 14th and 16th Chapters of St. John, and spoke a few and most comforting and beautiful words. The room was full of flowers, and the sun shining in so brightly, emblems of his happiness and glory, which comforted me. I said it seemed like a birthday, and Dr. Stanley answered, "It is a birthday in a new world." Oh! to think of my beginning another year alone!21

Parting--birth--death, the interconnections between standard Victorian situations were manifold, and, in their way, most revealing about the Victorian perspective. One particular linking of this type which appeared frequently was the simultaneous treatment of birth, marriage, and death. Since these were the major events in the life of the average man, any triple reference of this nature was usually extremely important. In Nicholas Nickleby, Ralph Nickleby reveals the utterly villainous and materialistic bent of his character when, after the loss of his £10,000, he exclaims that "births, deaths, marriages, and all the events which are of interest to most men, have (unless they are connected with gain or loss of money) no interest for me" (lvi,739-40). As the novel nears its end, and Ralph prepares for his--through suicide--the sound of a bell

21The Letters of Queen Victoria (Second Series, 2 vols.; New York, 1926), I, 52.
reawakens his thoughts on the three major domestic situations:

The sound of a deep bell came along the wind. One. "Lie on!" cried the usurer, "with your iron tongue! Ring merrily for births that make expectants writhe, and for marriages that are made in hell, and toll ruefully for the dead whose shoes are worn already! Call men to prayers who are godly because not found out, and ring chimes for the coming in of every year that brings this cursed world nearer to its end. No bell or book for me! Throw me on a dunghill, and let me rot there, to infect the air!" (lxii,806)

Similarly, Dickens portrays Pleasant Riderhood, in Our Mutual Friend, as anything but "Pleasant" by her attitude towards these three chief domestic incidents upon which so many Victorians lavished their sympathies:

Show Pleasant Riderhood a Wedding in the street, and she only saw two people taking out a regular license to quarrel and fight. Show her a Christening, and she saw a little heathen personage having a quite superfluous name bestowed upon it, inasmuch as it would be commonly addressed by some abusive epithet; which little personage was not in the least wanted by anybody, and would be shoved and banged out of everybody's way, until it should grow big enough to shove and bang. Show her a Funeral, and she saw an unremunerative ceremony in the nature of a black masquerade, conferring a temporary gentility upon the performers, at an immense expense, and representing the only formal party ever given by the deceased. (II,xii,351)

The attitude of Miss Havisham towards birth, marriage, and death also reveals much about her character. Her life represents a diseased use of memory, according to Victorian standards, for she attempts to preserve the worst of the past—her tragic remembrance of being deserted on her wedding day many years before. The faded bridal dress
and decaying cake, the withered flowers and rotting shoes, every detail of her person and environment, are maintained just as they were at twenty minutes to nine on the day when she learned she had been betrayed by her husband to be. Her life is thus a perversion of the standard marriage and of the ideal of the positive use of memory. Furthermore, Miss Havisham reveals a curious linking of birth, marriage, and death in her eccentric life:

"This is my birthday, Pip."

"On this day of the year, long before you were born, this heap of decay," stabbing with her crutched stick at the pile of cobwebs on the table, but not touching it, "was brought here. It and I have worn away together. The mice have gnawed at it, and sharper teeth than teeth of mice have gnawed at me."

"When the ruin is complete," said she, with a ghastly look, "and when they lay me dead, in my bride's dress on the bride's table--which shall be done, and which will be the finished curse upon him--so much the better if it is done on this day!" (xi, 82-83)

It now becomes clear what Miss Havisham has done. She has inverted the domestic ideal, shutting herself away from her fellow humanity in proud isolation, denying herself the fulfillment which might have come with another marriage, children, a home and love. She has tried to corrupt those about her as well, especially Estella, in such a manner as to unfit them for domestic life, and, finally, the symbol of all this is her twisting of the three major situations in common life for her own self-indulgent purposes.
Although other Victorian writers referred to the birth--marriage--death triad (see In Memoriam, XCIX), Dickens employed it most effectively and nowhere more so than in Little Dorrit, where it symbolizes the inversion of domestic values resulting from life in the Marshalsea. When Mr. Dorrit first enters the Marshalsea, accompanied by his family, he learns from the turnkey that "we've a regular playground o' children here" (I,vi,58-59), that, in short, there is in the prison a domestic counterpart to the greater world without its walls. With Mr. Dorrit's wife and children living in the prison beside him, it soon becomes evident that the Marshalsea represents a type of inversion of the domestic ideal. Before long, Little Dorrit is born within the prison walls, in a ghastly embodiment of the first of the three major domestic situations. As the nurse Mrs. Bangham says, with ironic overtones which she fails to realize:

"And to think of a sweet little cherub being born inside the lock! Now ain't it pretty, ain't that something to carry you through it pleasantly? Why, we ain't had such a thing happen here, my dear, not for I couldn't name the time when." (I,vi,61)

Mr. Dorrit soon thinks nothing of the fact that "his elder children now played regularly about the yard, and everybody knew the baby, and claimed a kind of proprietorship in her" (I,vi,63). His family is living an inverted domestic existence without his knowing it, and
just as he becomes the "Father of the Marshalsea," in a grim parody of the fact that he has failed as the father of his own family, Little Dorrit becomes the "Child of the Marshalsea" (I,vi,65; I,vii,69), a perversion of the true role of a child, and of the true meaning of childhood. The christening of Little Dorrit, in the near-by Saint George's Church, in which the Child of the Marshalsea takes the turnkey for a godfather, is but another form of counterpoint against the standard domestic scene. When Mrs. Dorrit dies, "the children played about the yard as regularly as ever, but in black" (I,vi,64), in a Marshalsea mockery of such ceremonies in the world beyond the prison walls. Thus the third of the three major home situations, death, takes place in the Marshalsea, and Arthur Clennam's wandering thoughts during his night within the prison's Snuggery are also concerned with this perversion of one of the most sacred and sentimental of domestic occurrences, as he speculates on what forms were observed for those who died in prison (I,viii,88-89).

An incident shortly occurs which raises the question whether Amy Dorrit will live and die as well in the prison where she was born. On the night in which Amy and Maggie are locked out of the Marshalsea and sit outside the gate waiting for dawn, the two girls suffer so much from the cold that they make their way to Saint George's Church.
There they are recognized by the sexton who exclaims,

"... we've got your birth in our Register, you know; you're one of our curiosities. ... And we tell people that you have lived there, without so much as a day's or a night's absence, ever since." (I,xiv,176-77)

The kind sexton prepares some cushions by the fire for the two girls, but his final gesture before leaving them for the night is ominous:

"Stop a bit. I must put something under the cushion for your head. Here's a burial volume. Just the thing! We have got Mrs. Bangham in this book. But what makes these books interesting to most people is—not who's in 'em, but who isn't—who's coming, you know, and when. That's the interesting question." (I,xiv,177)

This is the question for Little Dorrit, too—will she die in the Marshalsea and be entered into the book as well? Though the third major situation, death, is at present uncertain, the attentions of young John Chivery, son of a turnkey, bring to the fore the prospect of a Marshalsea marriage for Little Dorrit:

Though too humble before the ruler of his heart to be sanguine, Young John had considered the object of his attachment in all its lights and shades. Following it out to its blissful results, he had descried, without self-condemnation, a fitness in that. Say he became a resident turnkey. She would officially succeed to the chamber she had rented so long. There was a beautiful propriety in that. It looked over the wall if you stood on tip-toe; and, with a trellis-work of scarlet beans and a canary or so, would become a very Arbour. ... with the Arbour above, and the Lodge below; they would glide down the stream of time, in pastoral domestic happiness. Young John drew tears from his eyes by finishing the picture with a tombstone in the adjoining
churchyard, close against the prison wall, bearing the following touching inscription: "Sacred to the Memory of John Chivery, Sixty years Turnkey, and fifty years Head Turnkey, Of the neighbouring Marshalsea, Who departed this life, universally respected, on the thirty-first of December, One thousand eight hundred and eighty-six, Aged eighty-three years. Also of his truly beloved and truly loving wife, Amy, whose maiden name was Dorrit, Who survived his loss not quite forty-eight hours, And who breathed her last in the Marshalsea aforesaid. There she was born, There she lived, There she died." (I,xviii,212)

The falseness of the picture of "pastoral domestic happiness" which young John Chivery has painted is revealed in the last line of his imagined epitaph for Little Dorrit— for if she married him it might truly be said of her,

There she was born
There she lived
There she died.

However, such is not to be Amy Dorrit's lot, for she meets Arthur Clennam, and in their love for each other, and their ultimate marriage, each finally succeeds in escaping from his respective prison in the past, from the corrupt domestic environment in which he was raised. To round out the birth—marriage—death triad, though now in a true domestic sense, Arthur and Amy return to Saint George's Church to be married, and there they find "Little Dorrit's old friend who had given her the Burial Register for a pillow: full of admiration that she should come back to them to be married after all":

"For you see," said Little Dorrit's old friend, "this young lady is one of our curiosities, and has come now to the third volume of our Registers. Her
birth is what I call the first volume; she lay asleep on this very floor, with her pretty head on what I call the second volume; and she's now a-writing her little name as bride, in what I call the third volume." (II,xxxiv,825-826)

Like so many another Victorian domestic novel, Little Dorrit thus ends with a wedding, the fulfillment of the domestic ideal in spite of unpropitious circumstances from the start. And one of the main threads of the story, and the one by which the Marshalsea is judged as a domestic failure, is the triple pattern of birth—marriage—death which held such an important place in the hearts of the Victorian domestic realists.

Related Standard Situations

A number of other standard situations and occasions were related to the three primary ideas of birth, marriage, and death. Christmas was, naturally, connected with the first of these. For the Victorians, Christmas meant a rebirth of the domestic ideal through family reunions, warmth, cheer, the fireside, carol singing, good food, the Yule log and holly, and many other associations. In The Pickwick Papers, Dickens showed that Christmas was particularly a time which revived the sweetest memories of the past (xxviii,374-75). And as Bentley's Miscellany pointed out in 1843, Christmas was the one moment in the year which served to bind up the ravelled threads of association, for at that season, "Nature seems to pause, as if considering
how best to re-unite the separated links of kind domestic feeling (broken by mental and corporeal labour) for the wearied human race." In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge's nephew further defined Christmas in terms of communication and fellow humanity, calling it:

"the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as fellow-passagers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys." (i,10)

Because Christmas was surrounded with these domestic associations, the very mention of the word drew forth a tender response from most Victorians which meant that in literature it attained the status of a standard occasion. Only in light of the Victorian ideal of communication, brotherhood, and old associations revived at Christmas time, can the loss of Hallam—expressed in terms of his absence at Christmas—be fully appreciated:

Again at Christmas did we weave  
The holly round the Christmas hearth;  
The silent snow possess'd the earth,  
And calmly fell our Christmas-eve:

The yule-clog sparkled keen with frost,  
No wing of wind the region swept,  
But over all things brooding slept  
The quiet sense of something lost.  
(LXXVIII)

Another Victorian occasion related to the idea of birth was the New Year and New Year's Day. In Dickens' New

Year's story, The Chimes, Meg Veck tells her father that Richard has asked her to marry him "on New Year's Day; the best and happiest day, he says, in the whole year, and the one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it" (i,92). Meg's eyes are filled with hope at the prospect of marrying Richard and attaining the domestic ideal in spite of crushing poverty, and it is only appropriate that the young couple should undertake this new venture on New Year's Day, a day for new beginnings and new birth. In the course of the story, Trotty Veck thinks that he hears the Chimes in the Old Church calling to him on New Year's Eve, and he climbs up to the steeple where the Goblin of the Great Bell speaks to him, telling him that man should advance towards the good in the New Year, and shows him a vision of what will come--the dissolution of the domestic ideal--if Meg and Richard do not marry and carry forth the New Year's promise of commitment to life.

The themes of birth and rebirth in In Memoriam are largely expressed in terms of the coming of the New Year, and as in The Chimes the bells of the New Year become a central symbol of this new birth as they "Ring out the old, ring in the new" (CVI). Browning's Pippa Passes is also related to New Year's Day, taking place on that day of rebirth and new beginnings. The reawakening of the human spirit on that occasion is symbolized by the multiple conversions brought about by Pippa.
A third important Victorian occasion related to the idea of birth was, of course, the birthday anniversary. Esther Summerson's efforts to overcome the unknown stigma attached to her birth are rewarded by her friends at school who make her birthdays a pleasant occasion henceforth (in contrast to the melancholy birthdays of her childhood):

I passed at Greenleaf six happy, quiet years. I never saw in any face there, thank Heaven, on my birthday, that it would have been better if I had never been born. When the day came round, it brought me so many tokens of affectionate remembrance that my room was beautiful with them from New Year's Day to Christmas. (iii,25-26)

Esther's old birthday prayer to do some good in the world has a pervasive influence upon her subsequent history. And the reason her godmother's admonition that "It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born" (iii,17) had such an effect upon Esther was partly the weight of sentiment the Victorians attached to the idea of being born into the world, and their consequently greater emphasis on the celebration of birthdays. W. P. Frith's delightful representation of the typical Victorian birthday party, "Many Happy Returns of the Day" (1856) (see Figure 6) well illustrated this joyous and respected occasion. Wemmick's attitude towards the approaching eighty-second birthday of the Aged Parent in Great Expectations also demonstrated representative Victorian enthusiasm for this idea:

"He's in wonderful feather. He'll be eighty-
Fig. 6.--"Many Happy Returns of the Day" (1856) by W. P. Frith
two next birthday. I have a notion of firing eighty-two times, if the neighborhood shouldn't complain, and that cannon of mine should prove equal to the pressure. However, this is not London talk." (xxxii,245)

As the last comment of Wemmick revealed, the birthday celebration was particularly a Walworth sentiment—part of the domestic ideal, the family affections, and thus not to be confused with London business. Similarly, the celebration of Hallam's birthday in *In Memoriam* ("It is the day when he was born" [CVII]) was an occasion of domestic import for Tennyson, and Hallam's absence on this anniversary, like his absence at Christmas, was used as a metaphor of unfulfillment to signify the impact of Hallam's loss.

Perhaps the finest exposition—and one of the most detailed—of the birthday is Dickens' description, in *Bleak House*, of the birthday of Mrs. Joseph Bagnet (xlix,666-69). Tim Linkinwater's birthday in *Nicholas Nickleby* also receives extensive elaboration, and the Cheeryble brothers exhibit great enthusiasm over this event. At the birthday dinner, the speech made by Ned Cheeryble reveals a coincidental juncture of the anniversary of Tim's birthday and that of the death of Ned and Charles Cheeryble's mother—one of those curious linkings which we have encountered before:

"Brother Charles, my dear fellow, there is another association connected with this day which must never be forgotten, and never can be forgotten, by you and me. This day, which brought into the world a most faithful and exemplary fellow,
took from it, the kindest and very best of parents to us both. I wish that she could have seen us in our prosperity, and shared it, and had the happiness of knowing how dearly we love her in it, as we did when we were two poor boys; but that was not to be. My dear brother—The Memory of our Mother." (xxxvii,475-76)

A similar conjunction of the standard birthday with death occurs in David Copperfield in the chapter entitled "I Have a Memorable Birthday" (ix). For on that occasion, which David celebrates at school, he is informed by Mrs. Creakle that his mother is dead.

Just as Christmas, New Year's, and the Victorian birthday were connected with the idea of birth, certain other conventional situations were related to marriage. In particular, the ceremony of signing the marriage register, which we have just seen performed by Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam (in the "third volume"), attained the status of a standard situation in its own right. James Charles's painting, "Signing the Marriage Register" (1895) (see Figure 7) reveals the sentimental light in which this ceremony was held by most Victorians. Esther Summerson, in Bleak House, is a witness to such a signing:

I happened to stroll into the little church when a marriage was just concluded, and the young couple had to sign the register.

The bridegroom, to whom the pen was handed first, made a rude cross for his mark; the bride, who came next, did the same. Now, I had known the bride when I was last there, not only as the prettiest girl in the place, but as having quite distinguished herself in the school; and I could not help looking at her with some surprise. She came aside and whispered to me, while tears of
Fig. 7.——"Signing the Marriage Register" (1895) by James Charles.
honest love and admiration stood in her bright eyes, "He's a dear good fellow, miss; but he can't write, yet—he's going to learn of me—and I wouldn't shame him for the world!" (xxxvi,507)

Esther takes this gesture by the bride as a true example of human kindness, just like that of the child who loved her none the less after her illness had ruined her beauty, and drew a soft hand over her face with a sort of pitying protection.

A number of related situations also clustered about the idea of death. One of these was the sickbed-tending scene, a good illustration of which is Alexander Farmer's "An Anxious Hour" (1865) (see Figure 8) in which a mother anxiously waits by her sick child. A fine fictional example is the scene in Adam Bede in which Mr. Irwine begs to be excused by Arthur Donnithorne, who has dropped in for a moment, while he goes upstairs to visit his sickly sister Anne. Mr. Irwine doesn't reveal to Arthur the nature of his mission, merely explaining that there is a little matter he has to attend to for a minute:

The little matter that Mr. Irwine had to attend to took him up the old stone staircase (part of the house was very old), and made him pause before a door at which he knocked gently. "Come in," said a woman's voice, and he entered a room so darkened by blinds and curtains that Miss Kate, the thin middle-aged lady standing by the bedside, would not have had light enough for any other sort of work than the knitting which lay on the little table near her. But at present she was doing what required only the dimmest light—sponging the aching head that lay on the pillow with fresh vinegar. It was a small face, that of
Fig. 8.—"An Anxious Hour" (1865) by Alexander Farmer
the poor sufferer; perhaps it had once been pretty, but now it was worn and sallow. Miss Kate came towards her brother and whispered, "Don't speak to her; she can't bear to be spoken to to-day." Anne's eyes were closed, and her brow contracted as if from intense pain. Mr. Irwine went to the bed-side, and took up one of the delicate hands and kissed it; a slight pressure from the small fingers told him that it was worth while to have come up-stairs for the sake of doing that. He lingered a moment, looking at her, and then turned away and left the room, treading very gently—he had taken off his boots and put on slippers before he came up-stairs. Whoever remembers how many things he has declined to do even for himself, rather than have the trouble of putting on or taking off his boots, will not think this last detail insignificant. (I,v,57-58)

As evidenced by Mr. Irwine's action, sickbed-tending called forth the best in human nature, its most sympathetic and idealistic elements. In The Cricket on the Hearth, Caleb Plummer makes the mistake of telling his blind daughter Bertha that the misanthrope Tackleton is their benefactor, rather than the tyrant he really is. As a result, Bertha erroneously idealizes Tackleton, as she reveals in her desire to tend him, even in sickness (ii,190-91). The impulse to devoted, selfless action which makes up a large part of Bertha's vision of what she would do for the ailing Tackleton is representative of the conventional response to the sickbed.

But it was the impossibility of relieving the sufferer's distress which constituted the great anguish of sickbed-tending. For example, in Oliver Twist, Dickens related that during a critical fever such as Rose Maylie's
the watcher's anguish is heightened by "the desperate anxiety to be doing something to relieve the pain, or lessen the danger" (xxxiii,245-46) when he knows all the while that he cannot. Yet one benefit of sickbed watching was that because a human life lay in the balance, all complexities of thought and feeling were swept away, and human relationships were reduced to their simplest and clearest elements. George Eliot makes this plain in "Janet's Repentance," when Janet tends the sickbed of the dying Dempster. For although Janet has good reason to loathe her husband, in the sick chamber, "where a human being lies prostrate, thrown on the tender mercies of his fellow, the moral relation of man to man is reduced to its utmost clearness and simplicity . . . As we bend over the sick-bed, all the forces of our nature rush towards the channels of pity, of patience, and of love . . ." (II,xxiv, 270-71). In other words, when human life is at stake, man responds to the needs of others because of their common humanity. This is true of the four men in Our Mutual Friend who help the doctor to reanimate the dying Rogue Riderhood, whose wherry has been run down by a foreign steamer. None of the men likes, or even trusts, Riderhood, yet they struggle to save him, because his is "a striving human soul" (III,iii,444).

The humanizing influence of sickness worked in another way as well, humbling the proud and worldly. Thus
in *Great Expectations*, after the trial and death of Magwitch, Pip falls very ill and Joe comes to London to nurse him. When Pip awakens, all his worldly pretensions have been stripped away, and he finds himself on a common level with the true and faithful Joe, who lays his head down on the pillow at Pip's side in his delight at Pip's recovery. The two are thus brought together on a simple level of mutual love once again, for in sickness no man can remain insensitive to a loving heart (lvi, 439, 442). Another example of the ability of sickness to reunite people on basic human grounds appears in *Vanity Fair* when Amelia Sedley tends her ailing father. Before his illness, old Mr. Sedley had blamed Amelia for paying too much attention to her boy and neglecting her parents. But through Amelia's selfless service by his sickbed, and through the levelling power of illness itself, "A secret feud of some years standing was thus healed: and with a tacit reconciliation" (lxii, 586).

The frequency with which sickbed scenes appeared in Victorian fiction is noteworthy. In *Oliver Twist* alone there are three well detailed sickbed incidents involving Oliver, Rose Maylie, and Sikes (xxxv, 260; xii, 79; xxxix, 288). The last of these, in which Sikes strikes the faithful Nancy, even though she is pale and weakened by her ordeal of watching over him, is an inversion of the convention, showing how well the convention itself had become
established by that time. Certainly Sarah Gamp, in Martin Chuzzlewit, and Becky Sharp, in Vanity Fair, also run counter to the standard through their respective abuses of the sickbed. And in light of George Eliot's earlier handling of this convention, Bulstrode's ministrations over the prostrate Raffles in Middlemarch take on an additional grimness.

Other situations were related to death. For instance, weeping over the beloved's grave was a common occurrence in Victorian literature. In Our Mutual Friend, Dickens describes Sloppy weeping over Betty Higden's grave (III.ix,516). Similarly, in Amos Barton, George Eliot depicts Amos Barton's farewell visit to Milly Barton's grave on the starry night before he leaves Shepperton. In his anguish, Amos throws himself upon Milly's grave, clasping it with his arms, sobbing, and kissing the cold turf (I,x,122). Following the same pattern, at the end of Nicholas Nickleby we learn that Smike's grave is not neglected, but is visited by the dutiful and loving children of Nicholas (now married to Madeline Bray) and of Frank Cheeryble (now married to Kate Nickleby):

The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summer-time, garlands of fresh flowers, wreathed by infant hands, rested on the stone; and, when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and
they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin. (lxv,831)

Like so many another standard incident, grave-visiting was so well established as a convention, and one to which the Victorian reading public was particularly responsive, that it could be inverted for special purposes. Thus in Wuthering Heights, Heathcliff transgresses the norms of common humanity by digging down into his beloved Catherine's grave and clasping her corpse to his bosom once again in a startling breach of Victorian sentimental decorum. The incident well illustrates how Heathcliff continually presses beyond the limits of normal living.

The Standard Response

"Standard" situations had distinct complements in several peculiarly Victorian modes of intensified emotional receptivity which we may call "standard" responses. Although the Victorian reader indulged in at least one of these responses, sympathetic tears, in reacting to sentimental literature, we will be dealing in this section rather with the responses of fictional characters, not only to standard situations, but to any event which touched those characters' associations or their common humanity.

It was mentioned earlier that for the Victorians the heart as a faculty was superior to both reason (intellect) and the imagination. One of the chief reasons for this attitude was that the heart was considered man's most
responsive faculty, capable of identifying with any situation (standard, or otherwise), and with one's fellow humanity. William Hazlitt, anticipating the Domestic Realist position, wrote in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1824 that "the levers with which we must work out our regeneration are not the cobwebs of the brain, but the warm, palpitating fibres of the human heart."23 If one of the major means of communication and response was simply the reaching out of the heart, it followed that those unable to thus sympathize would be harshly judged. Trollope illustrated this in *Barchester Towers*:

The great family characteristic of the Stanhopes might probably be said to be heartlessness; but this want of feeling was, in most of them, accompanied by so great an amount of good nature as to make itself but little noticeable to the world. They were so prone to oblige their neighbours that their neighbours failed to perceive how indifferent to them was the happiness and well-being of those around them. The Stanhopes would visit you in your sickness (provided it were not contagious), would bring you oranges, French novels, and the last new bit of scandal, and then hear of your death or your recovery with an equally indifferent composure. (ix,69-70)

According to domestic criteria, the receptive heart was so delicate and sympathetic in its responses that it could easily be overpowered, resulting in the typical Victorian response of the broken heart (what was called, sentimentally or poetically, a broken heart had in fact a

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medical basis). Oliver Twist's mother, we learn, died of "a broken heart" (vi,41), and the Murdstones broke the heart of Mrs. Copperfield by tormenting her through her child, David (xiv,213). Mr. Nickleby, too, died of a broken heart when the speculative bubble he had invested in burst:

"The doctors could attribute it [Mr. Nickleby's death] to no particular disease," said Mrs. Nickleby, shedding tears. "We have too much reason to fear that he died of a broken heart."

"Pooh!" said Ralph, "there's no such thing. I can understand a man's dying of a broken neck, or suffering from a broken arm, or a broken head, or a broken leg, or a broken nose; but a broken heart!—nonsense, it's the cant of the day. If a man can't pay his debts, he dies of a broken heart, and his widow's a martyr."

"Some people, I believe, have no hearts to break," observed Nicholas quietly. (iii,23)

Tennyson also employed the convention of the heart broken over a speculative bubble in "Sea Dreams" (in the Enoch Arden volume). The speculator who got the poor city clerk to invest his twelve years' savings in a Peruvian mine scheme which failed, died, as we learn at the end of the poem, of a broken heart:

"Dead? he? of heart-disease? what heart had he
To die of? dead!"
[The wife answers]: "Ah, dearest, if there be
A devil in man, there is an angel too,
And if he did that wrong you charge him with,
His angel broke his heart."24

24Tennyson, Poetical Works, p. 149.
Dickens inverted the convention of the broken heart to characterize Miss Havisham in one of those revealing confrontations between her and Pip:

"Do you know what I touch here?" she said, laying her hands, one upon the other, on her left side.
"Yes ma'am." (It made me think of the young man.)
"What do I touch?"
"Your heart."
"Broken!"
She uttered the word with an eager look, and with strong emphasis, and with a weird smile that had a kind of boast in it. Afterwards she kept her hands there for a little while, and slowly took them away as if they were heavy. (viii,53)

Later, Miss Havisham says with respect to Pip, whom Estella has called a "common labouring boy!" "-----Well, you can break his heart" (viii,55). Indeed, we soon learn that Miss Havisham has set out to use the beautiful Estella as a tool to break men's hearts, just as her own, supposedly, was broken. In this fashion Miss Havisham twists yet another convention to her own selfish purposes.

Another standard gesture was the handshake or hand-clasp, and an essay on "Hand-Shaking," published in All the Year Round in 1870, was but one of a number of periodical essays on the principal associations of different types of handshakes. According to the Victorian ideal of sympathetic communication, the handshake was but a physical extension and expression of the heart, of one's common humanity, for what a person was, his inward nature, was transmitted through this touch. This was the view of hand-
shaking, handclasping, and hand-pressing to which Tennyson gave such great emphasis in *In Memoriam*:

Dark house, by which once more I stand
Here in the long unlovely street,
Doors, where my heart was used to beat
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasp'd no more . . . .
(VII)

Again and again, Tennyson expresses his sense of Hallam's loss in terms of the absent hand-clasp, which symbolizes the break in their communication. Alfred Rankley's painting, "Old Schoolfellows" (see Figure 9) shows this Victorian gesture as a means of communicating warmth, affection, and gratitude for a gift in time of need. In *Little Dorrit*, Mr. Meagles expressed his affection for Arthur Clennam, and his wish that he, not Gowan, had won Pet's hand; Arthur's sympathetic response is the standard handclasp:

"I feel tonight, my dear fellow, as if you had loved my dead child very tenderly, and had lost her when she was like what Pet is now."
"Thank you!" murmured Clennam, "thank you!"
And pressed his hand. (I,xxviii,337)

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, when Mr. Garland and the single gentleman talk together in the coach, on their mission to find Trent and Nell, the single gentleman relates

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his history up to the point where he returned to seek his brother, and found Trent gone: "The narrator, whose voice had faltered lately, stopped. 'The rest,' said Mr. Garland, pressing his hand, 'I know'" (lxix,526). Thus Mr. Garland's pressure of the hand communicates more sympathy and tacit understanding than could mere words alone. Similarly, in *Barchester Towers*, when Mr. Harding enters the room in which his old friend the bishop is dying, he comforts the bishop's son, Dr. Grantly, who has been praying by his father's bedside, with the silent, emotion-laden language of clasped hands:

Dr. Grantly, however, instantly perceived him, and rose from his knees. As he did so Mr. Harding took both his hands, and pressed them warmly. There was more fellowship between them at that moment than there had ever been before, and it so happened that after circumstances greatly preserved the feeling. As they stood there pressing each other's hands, the tears rolled freely down their cheeks. (i,4)

Conversely, the cold and clammy handshake of Uriah Heep, in *David Copperfield* (xv,225), the damp grip with which Mr. Slope unmercifully bedews those whom he meets, in *Barchester Towers* (v,34-35), and the "cold loose touch" which St. John Rivers impresses upon the fingers of Jane Eyre (xxxiv,226-27)—all are symbolic of a cold or unsympathetic heart, of a contracted, uncommunicative, and selfish nature, and one deficient in common humanity. In contrast, the ideal handclasp was warm and affectionate, the reflection of a loving and sympathetic heart, and served as a
means of communicating men's fellowship and common sensibility. This type of handshake was best described, perhaps, in that symphony of handclasping which takes place among the assembled party in Our Mutual Friend when Mr. Boffin reveals to Bella that he knew Mr. Rokesmith was Harmon and had been acting all the time--after which disclosure all join hands and are reunited.

The most familiar and characteristic Victorian response, of course, was tears. An 1848 Chambers's Journal article on "Tears" clearly defined the great range of situations which could evoke this response:

With regard to the human species, it is not only in the important circumstances and great emergencies of life that tears come uncalled for; they are produced by a thousand sympathetic emotions, so slight and evanescent, that we can hardly trace their nature or their track. A trait of generosity or nobleness of feeling—a picture of hopeless devotion—a scene of humble happiness—a breath of music—a word—a look, associated with our early recollections—all may cause a sudden confusion in the eyes, wanting only opportunity to overflow. A deep tragedy affects us in this way less than a little touch of sentiment occurring in a comedy. Our taste may be gratified by the pictured griefs of princes and heroes, but our tears rise more freely in obedience to some thrill of the chord of our everyday feelings and sympathies. Among tragedies, those are the most successful in touching us which the heart can translate into common language, and remove into the humble sphere of its own affections.26

As this passage well illustrates, tears were a response fully in accord with the domestic realist standard of

26Leitch Ritchie, "Tears," Chambers's Journal, N.S. IX (1848), 305-06.
commonplace life. The "pictured griefs of princes and heroes" were all very well, but the tender associations and poignant moments from familiar life, no matter how trivial or commonplace, could also produce a flow of sympathetic tears. Amelia Sedley, in particular, was prone to weep, and often responded with tears to incidents of daily life; for Thackeray tells us, in his initial description, that:

She had a pair of eyes, which sparkled with the brightest and honestest good-humour, except indeed when they filled with tears, and that was a great deal too often; for the silly thing would cry over a dead canary bird; or over a mouse, that the cat haply had seized upon; or over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid . . . . (i,14-15)

As was mentioned at the outset of this section, many a Victorian reader indulged in the response of tears over a sentimental novel, although, as Madeline House and Graham Storey indicated (see note 13, above), by no means all readers reacted in this way. Certainly this was the effect of such situations upon many of the characters in the novels themselves. For instance, upon leaving his village home in pursuit of his expectations, Pip weeps—and perhaps, by extension, the reader does too—at the imminence of this parting, as he hesitates by the finger-post (xix,151). In Thackeray's description of the first meeting of Amelia and Mrs. Sedley, after Amelia's marriage to George Osborne, he shows how tears issue in response to a standard meeting scene: "How the floodgates were opened and mother and daughter wept, when they were together
embracing each other in this sanctuary, may readily be imagined by every reader who possesses the least sentimental turn" (xxvi,249). Again, Dickens shows how the standard situation of sickness, and recovery therefrom, draws forth Oliver Twist's tears when Oliver first learns that Rose Maylie will survive her illness:

It was almost too much happiness to bear. Oliver felt stunned and stupified by the unexpected intelligence; he could not weep, or speak, or rest. He had scarcely the power of understanding anything that passed, until, after a long ramble in the quiet evening air, a burst of tears came to his relief, and he seemed to awaken, all at once, to a full sense of the joyful change that had occurred, and the almost insupportable load of anguish which had been taken from his breast. (xxxiv,248)

Harry Maylie and Mr. Giles also burst into tears in short succession upon learning of Rose Maylie's recovery.

Tears accompanied the standard conversion as well, even secular ones, such as that of Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*. After the visit of the third ghost, Scrooge awakes to find that he has been crying and that his past hardness of heart has been resolved: "He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears" (v,71).

So well established had the response of tears become that like many another convention it was inverted for comic purposes. A false use of tears for domestic comedy—and in this case, to mark a villain as well—occurs in *The Old Curiosity Shop* when Fred Trent, Little Nell's
brother, describes the process by which he simulates tears on the letters in which he applies to his aunt for money (viii,60). But perhaps the most calculated misuse of tears in major Victorian fiction is that of Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*. Becky uses every device at her command to win over old Miss Crawley, sympathizing with her, tending her sickbed and nursing her, confiding in her, and, above all, deluging her with tears. When old Miss Crawley asks Becky, finally, to name her secret and unrequited attachment—little suspecting that it is Rawdon Crawley—Becky employs her tears to advantage:

"I wish I could [name him], dear madam," Rebecca said in the same tearful tone. "Indeed, indeed, I need it." And she laid her head upon Miss Crawley's shoulder and wept there so naturally that the old lady, surprised into sympathy, embraced her with an almost maternal kindness, uttering many soothing protests of regard and affection for her, vowed that she loved her as a daughter, and would do everything in her power to serve her.

"I can't tell you now," sobbed out Rebecca, "I am very miserable. But oh! love me always—promise you will love me always." And in the midst of mutual tears—for the emotions of the younger woman had awakened the sympathies of the elder—this promise was solemnly given by Miss Crawley, who left her little protegee, blessing her as a dear, artless, tender-hearted, affectionate, incomprehensible creature. (xv,147)

Later in the novel, Becky writes to Miss Briggs, asking her to inform Miss Crawley that she is married to Rawdon Crawley, the old lady's favorite nephew. Becky's letter
is a brilliant example of the selfish use of tears—of the language of morality:

Dearest Miss Briggs, break the news as your delicate sympathy will know how to do it—to my dear, my beloved friend and benefactress. Tell her, ere I went, I shed tears on her dear pillow—that pillow that I have so often soothed in sickness—that I long again to watch—Oh, with what joy shall I return to dear Park Lane! How I tremble for the answer which is to seal my fate! (xvi,155)

Well might Becky tremble, for Miss Crawley yields to an unprecedented tantrum when she discovers the truth, and all Becky's wiles, even the ultimate recourse of tears, have been in vain.

There were other particularly Victorian forms of response to various situations, which we have not yet discussed. The most noteworthy of these was the fainting-fit, to which any Victorian female was conveniently subject at a time of crisis, or in reacting to a situation of unusual emotional stress, such as the parting of lovers, and so forth. Nicholas Nickleby is filled with faintings, performed by Madame Mantalini, Miss Knag, Miss Petowker, and Mrs. Nickleby (xxi,261; xviii,226; xxv,325; xlix,650). Sometimes the fainting is described in detail, as is the case with George Eliot's depiction of Caterina's loss of consciousness in Mr. Gilfil's Love Story which was mentioned in Chapter III. Caterina's blank look on regaining consciousness, it will be remembered, resulted from the fact that the interpreter Memory was not yet there. Again,
the convention had become well enough established to be
the butt of comedy, as in Dickens' *Dombey and Son*, when
Miss Tox faints upon learning from Mrs. Chick—Mr. Dombey's
sister—that Mr. Dombey is to be married to Edith Skewton.
Thus, in spite of the fact that Miss Tox has fainted, Mrs.
Chick wakens her in order to torture her the more:

> But none of that gentle concern which usually
> characterizes the daughters of Eve in their tend­
> ing of each other; none of that freemasonry in
> fainting, by which they are generally bound
> together in a mysterious bond of sisterhood; was
> visible in Mrs. Chick's demeanour. Rather like
> the executioner who restores the victim to sensa­
> tion previous to proceeding with the torture
> . . . did Mrs. Chick administer the smelling-
> bottle, the slapping on the hands, the dashing of
> cold water on the face, and other proved remedies.
> (xxix,415-16)

In conclusion, it seems likely that in their more
serious use of standard situations, and their "straight"
portrayal of standard responses (often to these same
situations), the Victorian domestic writers sought to
create an atmosphere appropriate for emotional response,
to draw the reader beyond himself, beyond egotism and self­
ishness, reassociating him with the best elements of his
common humanity, and the better part of his own inner being.
The standard situation was thus the morally regenerative
equivalent, in the present, of the associational uses of
domestic memories, from the past. Furthermore, by appeal­
ing to the common feelings of men such situations showed
that an ideal inner nature really did exist throughout the
race, for the process of response itself proved this every day. At the same time, with full cognizance of the limitations of the conventions that they were using, and perhaps realizing that not all readers could or wished to be thus moved, the Victorian domestic writers often inverted the standard for irreverent or comic purposes. That they could thus play both ends against the middle is a testament to their skill and to the very real complexity of their art.
CHAPTER VII

THE GROWING GOOD OF THE WORLD

A Positive Philosophy

The three-part Temple Bar series on the novel, which we have referred to before, declared that one of the primary characteristics of the Simple—or domestic—School was "a steady devotion to what is good, and right, and true." It is obvious by now that the philosophy of the domestic writers as a whole was a positive one, founded upon the belief in the essential goodness of the domestic world and the uncorrupted inner man. In this chapter we shall see that the Victorian domestic realists viewed the sympathetic communication between one man and his fellow humanity and the growth of good as a continuing process, carrying on into the future.

Walter E. Houghton and Jerome Buckley, among others, have delineated the currents of nagging doubt, anxiety, ennui, and mal du siecle which became increasingly influential in the latter decades of the century. This mood of

1"Our Novels: The Simple School" (anon.), Temple Bar, XXIX (1870), 492-93.

2Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957); Jerome Hamilton Buckley, The
world-weary pessimism received its best expression in poetry, where Arnold and his contemporaries found themselves "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born." However, it must be remembered that until surprisingly late in the century, doubt and pessimism were primarily indulged in by the intellectual community alone. As Houghton makes clear, the dominant tone of the age was sanguine. Ennui was felt by only a few writers of fiction until late in the century. Thus the positive domestic philosophy of good was an accurate expression or reflection of the governing popular emotional atmosphere of the period. The circumstances were most favorable for the development of domestic realism. It was quintessentially "Victorian."

Dickens set forth his belief in the "good" many times throughout his early writings. One of the most delightful examples is the interpolated "Story of the Goblins Who Stole a Sexton," which forms the twenty-ninth chapter of The Pickwick Papers. It is, in a sense, Dickens' first "Christmas Story," an account of the misanthropic sexton and grave-digger, Gabriel Grub, who prefers to remain alone, uncommunicative and anti-social on Christmas


Eve, cursing the merriment and happiness of those about him. In punishment, Gabriel is transported by goblins on Christmas Eve to a huge underground cavern where he is shown visions from the goblins' great storehouse of magic pictures. The image conjured up before Gabriel's eyes is entirely domestic—just like the domestic scenes he had cursed before. In the vision, Gabriel sees a father welcomed home by his loving wife and children who surround him with domestic attention and affection as his reward for having spent the busy day in that "other" Victorian world. The family is poor but happy. Many another vision is shown to Gabriel Grub, but all to the same purpose—revealing human good and human happiness in spite of adversity. Gabriel learns his lesson, the essential goodness of men:

He saw that those who had been delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations, and superior to suffering that would have crushed many of a rougher grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and most fragile of all God's creatures, were the oftener superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they bore, in their own hearts, an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and devotion. Above all, he saw that men like himself who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair surface of the earth; and setting all of the good of the world against the evil, he came to the conclusion that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all. (xxix, 404)

No sooner does Gabriel come to this conclusion than the
vision disappears, he sinks to sleep, and awakes to find himself back where he had been before the goblins stole him. Gabriel's conversion is complete, and he is thenceforth a changed man. It is noteworthy that this new birth takes place upon Christmas, one of the standard Victorian occasions, a time of new birth and of the recommitment of men to goodness and truth.

Dickens not only asserted the presence of good but went on to maintain that the good of the world was continually growing. This latter theme appeared in his most famous Christmas story, A Christmas Carol, where it formed the burden of Marley's Ghost's complaint to Scrooge:

"Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed," cried the phantom, "not to know that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one's life's opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!" (i,20)

Even throughout his later and darker novels Dickens maintained his belief in the power for good of "any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere," witness Esther Summerson, Little Dorrit, and Lizzie Hexam, among others. When Marley's Ghost exits through the window and the air is filled with phantoms, Dickens points to the moral, that "The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the
power for ever" (i,22). As was the case with Gabriel Grub, the Christmas vision converts Scrooge, bringing about in him a new birth of good appropriate to the season.

The message of increasing good was also illustrated in another ghost story of Dickens, his New Year's tale, The Chimes (1844) which also fell in his earlier and more optimistic period. In that tale, the Goblin of the Great Bell warns Trotty Veck:

"The voice of Time," said the Phantom, "cries to man, Advance! Time is for his advancement and improvement; for his greater worth, his greater happiness, his better life; his progress onward to that goal within its knowledge and its view, and set there, in the period when Time and He began." (iii,123)

Following this moral, the tale has a fitting domestic fulfillment in the marriage of Richard and Meg, who make their commitment to life and the family ideal appropriately on New Year's Day, a time for new beginnings. Their vision is a positive one, looking forward to "a life of happy years" (iv,151-52), despite the mis-directed warnings of Cute and Filer, just as Scrooge, in A Christmas Carol, promised to "honour Christmas in my heart and try to keep it all the year" (iv,70).

In his earlier novels, several of Dickens' characters are direct embodiments of the ideal of good, for example the Cheeryble brothers, Little Nell, Tom Pinch and Mark Tapley. In Nicholas Nickleby, the spokesman for the jolly porters and warehousemen of the Cheeryble firm who
are invited to drink a birthday toast to Tim Linkinwater
pauses to give heartfelt and tremulous thanks to the
Cheerybles for their generosity and goodness:

"What we mean to say is, that there never was
(looking at the butler)—such—(looking at the
cook) noble—excellent—(looking everywhere and
seeing nobody) free, generous spirited masters as
them as has treated us so handsome this day. And
here's thanking of 'em for all their goodness as
is so constancy a diffusing of itself over every­
where, and wishing they may live long and die
happy!" (xxxvii,477)

Indeed, the magnitude of the Cheerybles' goodness over­
whelms Nicholas when he first encounters it, so that he
bursts into tears, for the brothers seem to personify
goodness itself.

The theme of the expansion of good was expressed
in another early novel, The Old Curiosity Shop, for at the
end of that novel Dickens makes a positive philosophical
statement with respect to the marriage of Mr. Abel Garland
Junior (to an unidentified young lady):

But certain it is that in course of time they
were married; and equally certain it is that they
were the happiest of the happy; and no less certain
it is that they deserved to be so. And it is
pleasant to write down that they reared a family;
because any propagation of goodness and benevolence
is no small addition to the aristocracy of nature,
and no small subject of rejoicing for mankind at
large. (lxxiii,550)

Dickens again set forth the idea of the growth of
good in The Old Curiosity Shop, when Nell, visiting the
church graveyard, learns from the sexton that the graves
are frequently visited at first, but that the memory of
those who lie below is soon forgotten so that the graves come to be left untended, with withered flowers upon them. Seeing that Nell is saddened by this, the schoolmaster comforts her:

"Nell, Nell, there may be people busy in the world at this instant, in whose good actions and good thoughts these very graves—neglected as they look to us—are the chief instruments."

"There is nothing," cried her friend, "no, nothing innocent or good, that dies, and is forgotten. Let us hold to that faith, or none. An infant, a prattling child, dying in its cradle, will live again in the better thoughts of those who loved it, and play its part, through them, in the redeeming actions of the world, though its body be burnt to ashes or drowned in the deepest sea. There is not an angel added to the host of Heaven but does its blessed work on earth in those who loved it here. Forgotten! oh, if the good deeds of human creatures could be traced to their source, how beautifully would even death appear; for how much charity, mercy, and purified affection, would be seen to have their growth in dusty graves!"

(liv,406)

Here we have an example of the continuing growth of men's common humanity through the transmission of good to succeeding generations. Dickens returns to this idea in the moral that he draws upon the death of Little Nell:

Oh! it is hard to take to heart the lesson that such deaths will teach, but let no man reject it, for it is one that all must learn, and is a mighty, universal Truth. When Death strikes down the innocent and young, for every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity, and love, to walk the world, and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven. (lxxii,544)
Many other expressions of faith in the continuance and growth of good may be found in Dickens' first few novels. At the end of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, for instance, Tom Pinch explains to Ruth why he is not disappointed that he cannot have Mary Graham for his own true love and must resign her to Martin Chuzzlewit, her betrothed. His extensive speech sets forth Dickens' belief in the possibility of happiness despite the failure of one's personal wishes (1,767-68).

As Dickens' career progressed, however, his vision darkened, and expressions of the philosophy of good became less common. It is not that the early novels are lacking in villains (Squeers, Ralph Nickleby, Sikes, Monks, Quilp) or that the later scoundrels are worse (Uriah Heep, Rigaud, Mrs. Clennam, Rogue Riderhood, Bradley Headstone). However, in Dickens' final productions a greater proportion of space is spent on evil doers and evil doings. Nevertheless, even amidst the bleakness of *Little Dorrit* and *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens maintained his belief in the efficacy of the good. Thus, in his account of the history of old Mr. Harmon, the Boffins, and Harmony Jail, in *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens reiterated his positive belief:

> But the hard wrathful and sordid nature [old Mr. Harmon] that had wrung so much work out of them as could be got in their best days, for as little money as could be paid to hurry on their worst, had never been so warped but that it knew their moral straightness and respected it. In its own despite,
in a constant conflict with itself and them, it had done so. And this is the eternal law. For, Evil often stops short at itself and dies with the doer of it! But Good, never. (I.ix.x11)

So it was that the Jailer of Harmony Jail put the Boffins down in his will, along with his son, John. Similarly, the domestic ideal, though tightly circumscribed by darkness and evil in Dickens' last novels, always manages to reassert itself at the end. This is demonstrated by the domestic unions at the close of Little Dorrit (Little Dorrit and Arthur Clennam) and Our Mutual Friend (Lizzie Hexam and Eugene Wrayburn).

It is interesting to observe that many of Dickens' critics emphasized the "good" presented in his works, reflecting the prevalent spirit of middle-class Victorian optimism through their reviews. Thus in 1851 the Times noted of David Copperfield that "Rising from the perusal of Mr. Dickens' work, you forget that there is evil in the world, and remember only the good." The statement of an anonymous Athenaeum critic of Little Dorrit in 1857 provides another example of the benevolent tone of a domestically-oriented critic:

Little Dorrit is wedded,—and her tale is told. . . . In the thousands of affectionate and happy homes, which her gentleness has made more gentle—in the pleasant scenes which her beauty has made more beautiful—and in the dark places which her love has brightened, like a smile of

4"David Copperfield and Arthur Pendennis" (anon.), The Times, June 11, 1851, p. 8, column 3.
moonlight—she will never pass into oblivion. We shall see her again, often, after many years, and in unlikely corners, as we meet with the long-hoarded sunshine of past summers in granaries, in honey jars, and in ripe old wines. Goodness grows with time. Duty casts its bread on the waters, which is found after many days.  

As late as 1870, Alfred Austin's essay "Charles Dickens," which appeared in *Temple Bar*, pointed to the positive emphasis in Dickens' philosophy:

In a word, he was an ardent believer in the perfectibility of the human species,—in a creed which is essentially generous and, let us devoutly hope, true, though it is not easy for every impartial person to hold it. It is a matter that may still be disputed, and can never be demonstrated either way, and which men therefore accept or reject according to the bluntness or acuteness of their dialectical faculties. To Charles Dickens, no doubt, a belief in human perfectibility was probably so strong that he was unable even to conceive its negation. In that, he was the man of his epoch, and had the spirit-time throbbing within him.  

The number of sanguine, optimistic evaluations of Dickens' novels is large, and indicates that Dickens' readers and critics often valued him most for those sentimental, domestic elements which modern critics have liked the least. And insofar as Dickens continued to provide his readers with that philosophy of good which they desired—doing so even though his general vision of the world was darkening—

5"Little Dorrit By Charles Dickens" (anon. rev.), *The Athenaeum*, No. 1545 (June 6, 1857), p. 722.

he was indeed "the man of his epoch, and had the spirit-
time throbbing within him."

George Eliot also made several optimistic state-
ments with respect to the operation of good in the world.
In *Scenes of Clerical Life*, when the lawyer Dempster is,
for once, not only sober but in a good humor, George Eliot
attributes this unusual display on Dempster's part to the
ever-present power of good, which struggles to express
itself whenever it can:

> ... the greater part of it [Dempster's good
humor] was doubtless due to those stirrings of
the more kindly, healthy sap of human feeling,
by which goodness tries to get the upper hand
in us whenever it seems to have the slightest
chance ... (II,vii,121)

Again, in *Silas Marner*, George Eliot depicts a reaffirma-
tion of belief in the good when Dolly Winthrop tells Silas
her views on his troubled early history. Her conclusion
that there is goodness and truth in the world, though it
may be beyond man's knowledge, grows out of her inner
response to a standard situation, that of sickbed tending.
For while nursing poor Bessy Fawkes and sorrowing that she
cannot do more to help her, Dolly comes to the realization
that her own tenderness of heart is emblematic of a higher,
Divine tenderness at work in the creation. Silas agrees
with Dolly's inductive argument from her own feeling—the
prime argumentative mode of the domestic school:

> "Nay, nay," said Silas, "you're i' the right,
Mrs. Winthrop— you're i' the right. There's good
i' this world--I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and the wickedness. (II,xvi,203)

Thus the weaver of Raveloe is restored to faith, and through the love of Eppie, to happiness.

In the Middlemarch scene at Rome wherein Dorothea is seen gazing at the streak of sunlight on the floor of the Hall of Statues while she contemplates the real prospect of her married life with Casaubon, her inner belief in the good saves her from self-pity:

But in Dorothea's mind there was a current into which all thought and feeling were apt sooner or later to flow—the reaching forward of the whole consciousness towards the fullest truth, the least partial good. There was clearly something better than anger and despondency. (II,xx,151)

Dorothea gives Will Ladislaw an insight into her sustaining philosophy later in the novel:

"But I have a belief of my own, and it comforts me."
"What is that?" said Will, rather jealous of the belief.
"That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with the darkness narrower." (IV,xxxix,287)

Still later, while talking with Lydgate, Dorothea restates her positive yearning towards the good in her definition of the form of Christianity she seeks:

I have always been thinking of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest—I mean
that which takes in the most good of all kinds,
and brings in the most people as sharers in it.
(V,1,363)

The practical good of which Dorothea is capable is
limited as the end of the novel reveals. Hers was a "young
and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an
imperfect social state" in which great feelings and faith
will most often be misunderstood, "For there is no creature
whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly
determined by what lies outside it" (VIII, Finale, 612-13).
However, as was the case with the neglected dead over whose
graves Little Nell sorrows, simply Dorothea's human pres‐
ence will have its cumulative effect for good, "For the
growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric
acts; and that things are not so ill with you or me as they
might have been is half owing to the number who lived
faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs"
(VIII, Finale, 613).

Many another Victorian writer expressed his belief
in the good, as Browning did through his artistic spokesman,
Fra Lippo Lippi, in the poem by that name:

This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good.
(ll.313-314)

Indeed, the domestic standard of good was expressed so fre‐
quently that it became a standard idea in its own right
and, being no more sacrosanct than any other Victorian
sentimental convention, ultimately was inverted for thematic
or comic purposes. Dickens' Mark Tapley, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, functions this way, for through Mark, Dickens extends the Victorian ideal of human goodness to its logical consequences, and the rigidly absolute goodness of Mark produces fine comedy. Similarly, Robert Browning, in one section of *Pippa Passes*, plays against the convention of the transmission of goodness which was so aptly expressed by the Schoolmaster to Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Gottlieb fears that when Jules, the young French sculptor, learns that the other students have duped him into loving a girl he might "hire by the hour" it will brush the bloom off his life. The students, wishing to allay Gottlieb's fears, and fully committed to their hilarious and villainous purpose notwithstanding the outcome, summon Schramm to placate all doubts with a standard description of the good:

1st Stud. Schramm! (Take the pipe out of his mouth, somebody!) Will Jules lose the bloom of his youth? Schramm. Nothing worth keeping is ever lost in this world: look at a blossom—it drops presently, having done its service and lasted its time; but fruits succeed, and where would be the blossom's place could it continue? As well affirm that your eye is no longer in your body, because its earliest favorite, whatever it may have first loved to look on, is dead and done with—as that any affection is lost to the soul when its first object, whatever happened first to satisfy it, is superseded in due course. Keep but ever looking, whether with the body's eye or the mind's, and you will soon find something to look on! Has a man done wondering at women?—there follow men, dead and alive, to wonder at. Has he done wondering at men?—there's God to wonder at; and the faculty of wonder may be, at the same time, old and tired enough with respect
to its first object, and yet young and fresh sufficiently, so far as concerns its novel one. Thus—

1st Stud. Put Schramm's pipe into his mouth again! There, you see! (1,79-104)

After uttering "There, you see!" in triumph, the first student launches into a heated delineation of Jules's vices. Schramm has been summoned forth for this, his only appearance, in order to spout the Victorian "standard" idea of the transmission of good. When he has served his purpose, the students peremptorily shove the pipe into Schramm's mouth again and continue their schemings.

**Growth Through Suffering**

The Victorian domestic writers not only repeatedly expressed their belief in the growth of good, but often went on to specify the modes through which good could come to fruition. One manner in which good could grow was, paradoxically, through suffering. Thus the *North British Review* wrote in 1847 with reference to Florence Dombey, that "there is no school in which the moral and intellectual faculties are so quickly matured as the school of deep affliction." And, in fact, for the domestic school suffering became one of the chief means for man's regeneration. A prime example is the painful experience of Merry Pecksniff in her marriage to Jonas Chuzzlewit. Old Martin  

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had warned Merry not to marry Jonas, but the thoughtless, giddy, selfish girl paid him no heed at the time. After her trial of endurance, and subsequent to Jonas' suicide, Merry speaks once again with Old Martin, revealing that she is not sorry that she has been educated in the rough crucible of adversity:

"How can I hope," she said, "that your interposition would have prevailed with me, when I know how obdurate I was! I never thought at all; I had no thought, no heart, no care to find one; at that time. It has grown out of my trouble. I have felt it in my trouble. I wouldn't recall my trouble, such as it is, and has been—and it is light in comparison with trials which hundreds of good people suffer every day, I know—I wouldn't recall it to-morrow, if I could. It has been my friend, for without it, no one could have changed me. Do not mistrust me because of these tears; I cannot help them. I am grateful for it, in my soul. Indeed I am!" (liv, 828-29)

Young Martin Chuzzlewit also learns his lesson the hard way, with Mark Tapley for example and Eden for his instructor: "Eden was a hard school to learn so hard a lesson in; but there were teachers in the swamp and thicket, and the pestilential air, who had a searching method of their own" (xxxiii, 525). It is uncomfortable but necessary, at times, for man's self to be beaten down, in order to cure him of his egocentric tendencies which only cloud his proper humanity. Young Martin is a better person after his experience in America, as he himself recognizes. Tom Pinch also welcomes any suffering that he incurs through the loss of Mary Graham because "it renders me more sensible of
affection and attachment, and softens me in fifty ways" (1,768).

Other instances of the same theme are scattered elsewhere in Dickens' writings. As we have seen, the moral which Dickens draws upon Nell's death in The Old Curiosity Shop is that "Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes" (lxxii,544). Following a similar line of argument, Mr. Brownlow explains to Oliver Twist that his heart has grown through suffering the loss of loved ones:

"The persons on whom I have bestowed my dearest love, lie deep in their graves; but, although the happiness and delight of my life lie buried there too, I have not made a coffin of my heart, and sealed it up, for ever, on my best affections. Deep affliction has but strengthened and refined them." (xiv,96).

In the same novel, Harry Maylie tells Rose Maylie, upon her recovery from her near fatal sickness, that "I have watched you change almost from death, to life, with eyes that turned blind with their eagerness and deep affection. Do not tell me that you wish I had lost this; for it has softened my heart to all mankind" (xxxv,260). Dickens describes a similar growth through suffering when Pip and Estella meet again, after their years of separation, at the end of Great Expectations. Pip notes of Estella that "What I had never seen before, was the friendly touch of the once insensible hand" (lix,458). As Pip witnesses the tears that drop from Estella's eyes in the moonlight, she reveals
to him the lesson of her life with the brutal Bentley Drummle, that "suffering has been stronger than all other teaching, and has taught me to understand what your heart used to be. I have been bent and broken, but--I hope--into a better shape" (lix,460). Of course, the original ending also pointed the same moral, that "suffering had been stronger than Miss Havisham's teaching . . ." (lix,461).

Thackeray echoed this theme of the beneficent power of sorrow in _Pendennis_. Helen Pendennis is in an agony of doubt and anxiety over the rumors that have reached her—initiated by Mr. Sam Huxter's letter describing Pen's dancing with Fanny at Vauxhall—for she suspects that Pen may have lowered himself morally in this affair. In the interval before Pen clears himself, Thackeray pauses to consider not only the role of Helen's suffering, but that of all sweet and spotless women:

--is it not a pity to see them bowed down or devoured by Grief or Death inexorable--wasting in disease--pining their long pain--or cut off by sudden fate in their prime? We may deserve grief --but why should these be unhappy?--except that we know that Heaven chastens those whom it loves best; being pleased, by repeated trials, to make these pure spirits more pure. (II,li,582)

Tennyson, too, described the growth of good through pain, in _In Memoriam_. Tennyson would not undo his experience because of the change it has wrought in him:

Regret is dead, but love is more
Than in the summers that are flown,
For I myself with these have grown
To something greater than before.
(CXXXI)
In Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra" we find a repetition of this theme, with a religious application—for pain is part of God's plan to mould men, the means by which (borrowing the "Rubaiyat" metaphor) the divine potter shapes his human clay:

Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,
Each sting that bids nor sit nor stand but go!
Be our joys three parts pain!
Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe! (VI)

He fixed thee 'mid this dance
Of plastic circumstance,
This Present, thou, forsooth, wouldst fain arrest:
Machinery just meant
To give thy soul its bent,
Try thee and turn thee forth, sufficiently impressed. (XXVIII)

To complete the analogy, God thus forms man into "Heaven's consummate cup" (XXX) through the trials of life, and the endurance of pain becomes a spiritual fulfillment, while old age is man's crowning glory, the final stage of his moulding by God.

In Mary Barton, Mrs. Gaskell gave these ideas a sociological application. For that novel is largely the story of how the stern, thoughtful mind of the industrialist, Mr. Carson, "submitted to be taught by suffering" (xxxvii,367) through the tragic loss of his son. Having reached one of those "stages in the contemplation and endurance of great sorrow" (xxxvii,366) which enable men to
see beyond themselves, Mr. Carson directs his thoughts outward towards his fellow men and what he can do for them, rather than turning inward and brooding alone in his sorrow, as Mr. Dombey does. Yet it is only through the experience of loss and pain that Mr. Carson is humbled and brought to the realization that the suffering of his fellow men is no different from the pain which he now is experiencing.

Similarly, in The Mill on the Floss, George Eliot shows how the tragedy of Mr. Tulliver's stroke, brought on by lawyer Wakem's assumption of the Tulliver debts, affects the sensibilities of Maggie Tulliver, when Maggie comes to fetch Tom home from the Stellings' school. Mrs. Stelling generously hangs a basket on Maggie's arm so that the children will have something to eat on the way:

Maggie's heart went out towards this woman whom she had never liked, and she kissed her silently. It was the first sign within the poor child of that new sense which is the gift of sorrow— that susceptibility to the bare offices of humanity which raises them into a bond of loving fellowship, as to haggard men among the icebergs the mere presence of an ordinary comrade stirs deep fountains of affection. (II,vii,170)

Sorrow therefore touches one's common humanity, increasing one's sensibility and responsiveness.

Perhaps the finest single instance of growth through suffering in the works of major domestic writers is Adam Bede's experience. The Westminster Review
in 1859 summarized Adam's regeneration:

But though wrong once done can never be undone, and though its consequences can never be effaced, there often grows, thank God! out of the sorrow that wrong induces a hallowing influence, which enlarges our affections, gives depth and tenderness to our sympathies, and fills us with charity towards the errors and weaknesses of our fellows, to whom we seem more nearly related than before, and whose lives and actions we can now estimate more justly. Long after the convulsive suffering occasioned by Captain Donnithorne's sin had subsided into the calm of memory, these effects were visible in Adam Bede . . .

How Adam's pain was gradually transformed into sympathy, how affection and friendship became more precious to him than they used to be, and how he clung more closely to his mother and to Seth, and had unspeakable satisfaction in the sight or imagination of any small addition to their happiness, is beautifully sketched. 8

The earlier Adam Bede was essentially a good man, but there was a hardness in his nature which needed softening. He was a man of industry and integrity, a good solid workman, but he was independent, stern in his demands upon others to live up to his own moral precepts, critical of his father's drunkenness, strict, unyielding, easily angered by his mother's querulousness. George Eliot explained his nature and the process by which it was to be reformed:

Perhaps here lay the secret of the hardness he had accused himself of: he had too little fellow-feeling with the weakness that errs in spite of forseen consequences. Without this

fellow-feeling, how are we to get enough patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the long and changeful journey? And there is but one way in which a strong determined soul can learn it—by getting his heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequences of their error, but their inward suffering. (II,xix,179)

This is precisely what happens to Adam, for through his love for Hetty, and her downfall and suffering, Adam comes himself to experience some of the anguish which his fellow-mortals feel. As a result he is softened, more understanding of the errors and weaknesses of others, and more sympathetic to their feelings. In brief, a growth in Adam's common humanity is effected through the experience of pain, and an informal "conversion" takes place. George Eliot uses the metaphor of baptism to describe the new birth which takes place in Adam's soul, for "Deep unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state" (V,xlii,357). Thus after Hetty's tragedy it seems to Adam that for the first time he has wakened to full consciousness, through pain, of his brotherhood with other men: "Doubtless a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out of that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity" (V,xlii,357). The tenderer nature of Adam appears in George Eliot's depiction of him, back at the cottage, after Hetty's trial and conviction, for he feels a new bond of sympathy for his mother, Seth, and the Poyzers. George
Eliot concludes, "Let us rather be thankful that our sorrow lives in us as an indestructible force, only changing its form, as forces do, and passing from pain into sympathy . . ." (VI, 1, 407).

Although Adam is "aware that common affection and friendship" are "more precious to him than they used to be" (VI, 1, 407-08) he is content merely to work at his trade and does not realize that the influence of his sorrow is preparing other effects within him:

He did not know that the power of loving was all the while gaining new force within him; that the new sensibilities brought by a deep experience were so many fibres by which it was possible, nay, necessary to him, that his nature should intertwine with another. (VI, 1, 407-08)

In light of the growth and development that we have witnessed in Adam it is not surprising that he asks Dinah to marry him at the end of the novel. For now that the elements of self have been beaten down, the ground has been cleared for a new growth of love within him, a love of a domestic rather than a romantic nature, a love requiring a deeper soil and a surer home within Adam's breast in order to take root. It seems to Adam, in retrospect, that, "Tender and deep as his love for Hetty had been . . . his love for Dinah was better and more precious to him; for it was the outgrowth of that fuller life which had come to him from his acquaintance with deep sorrow" (VI, liv, 442).
The notion of growth through suffering, like so many another Victorian shibboleth, did not long stand unscathed. And in *Martin Chuzzlewit* Dickens provided an admirable burlesque of it in the person of Mark Tapley. Mark not only profits from the experience of adversity, but, in a *reductio ad absurdum* of the idea, he has reached the point where he feels so restive in beneficent surroundings that he is continually seeking out the worst possible circumstances in order to prove his powers of jollity. He thus consciously applies the educational principle of pain to keep himself from becoming complacent, and with both eyes wide open, forsakes his pleasant job at the Blue Dragon to accompany Martin to America—a voyage which proves an admirable test before long. When Mark takes the fever at Eden and reaches the low point of his physical powers, he nevertheless maintains his happy disposition and whenever Martin gives him drink or medicine brightens up, exclaiming, "I'm jolly, sir: I'm jolly!" In fact, during certain forlorn stages of this long and lingering illness, Mark, "when too far gone to speak . . . had feebly written 'jolly!' on a slate . . ." (xxxiii,523; 525). The extremity of Mark's quest to test his powers serves a double purpose, for Mark's selflessness contrasts sharply with Martin's egotism, yet simultaneously Mark's excessive and premeditated application of the principle of growth
through suffering provides a sophisticated burlesque of the standard Victorian application of this idea.

**Being and Belief**

There were other modes in which the good could be nurtured. One of these was the idea that the spiritual "presence" of a person could be communicated to other persons and influence them. Dickens sounded this theme frequently. In *Bleak House*, John Jarndyce tells Esther, "You have wrought changes in me, little woman, since the winter day in the stage-coach. First and last you have done me a world of good, since that time" (xliv, 609). And Caddy Jellyby reaffirms Mr. Jarndyce's view, as Esther tells us:

"Caddy had a superstition about me, which had been strengthening in her mind ever since that night long ago, when she had lain asleep with her head in my lap. She almost—I think I may say quite—believed that I did her good whenever I was near her." (1, 680)

In other words, Esther's goodness was communicated not merely by what she said or did, but by what she was.

David Copperfield felt the same way about Agnes Wickfield, even at his very first meeting with her, and ever afterwards associated her modest, orderly, placid manner, her beautiful tranquility, with the radiance of a stained glass window in a church:

... I feel that there are goodness, peace, and truth, wherever Agnes is; and that the soft light of the coloured window in the church, seen long
ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around. (xvi,232)

Later, David describes Agnes as "the better angel of the lives of all who come within her calm, good, self-denying influence" (xviii,268) and praises her "radiant goodness" (xxxix,571). At the conclusion of the novel he tells us, "My lamp burns low, and I have written far into the night; but the dear presence, without which I were nothing, bears me company" (lxiv,877).

However, Agnes is not the only character in David Copperfield whose presence radiates goodness. Mr. Dick and Doctor Strong are both pure of heart as well, and the effect of their being, David intimates, may have far-reaching influence:

As I think of them going up and down before those school-room windows—the Doctor reading with his complacent smile, an occasional flourish of the manuscript, or grave motion of the head; and Mr. Dick listening, enchained by interest, with his poor wits calmly wandering God knows where, upon the wings of hard words—I think of it as one of the pleasantest things, in a quiet way, that I have ever seen. I feel as if they might go on walking to and fro for ever, and the world might somehow be the better for it. As if a thousand things it makes a noise about, were not one-half so good for it, or me. (xvii,252)

George Eliot also frequently alluded to the idea of the communication of good from one's being. She wrote in Scenes of Clerical Life, with respect to Milly Barton, that "You would even perhaps have been rather scandalized if she had descended from the serene dignity of being to the
assiduous unrest of doing" (I,ii,24-25). At the conclusion of Middlemarch, George Eliot tells us that Dorothea contributed to "the growing good of the world," though in a limited sense, because "the effect of her being on those around her was incalculably diffusive" (VIII, Finale, 613). And Will Ladislaw, in an earlier interview with Rosamond Lydgate, paid tribute to the same influence of Dorothea:

"What is it that you gentlemen are thinking of when you are with Mrs. Casaubon?"
"Herself," said Will, not indisposed to provoke the charming Mrs. Lydgate. "When one sees a perfect woman, one never thinks of her attributes— one is conscious of her presence."
(V,xliii,318)

A loving person could have an influence for good not only by means of his radiant "being" but also through his "belief" in his fellow men. In Scenes of Clerical Life George Eliot wrote that "God sees us as we are altogether, not in separate feelings or actions, as our fellow-men see us" (II,xix,21). This is how Dorothea saw Lydgate in his hour of need. Will Ladislaw also felt the influence for good of Dorothea's belief in him, for, as George Eliot expressed it, "There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and purity by their pure belief about us" (VIII,lxxvii,565-66). J. R. Vernon, writing in the Contemporary Review in 1869, defined the "gentleman" in terms of his ability to look for the best in others while dismissing suspicions of hidden wrong: "Thus,
in a world of extreme littleness and meanness, especially in the imputing of motives and in low suspicions, you are, in the society of the Gentleman, raised into a higher atmosphere; you breathe freer." 9 This is the effect of Dorothea's love, for the unsuspicious simplicity of her nature, "holding up an ideal for others in her believing conception of them," formed "one of the great powers of her womanhood," and from the first, Will Ladislaw felt that "in her mind he had found his highest estimate" (VIII, lxxvii, 565-66).

One of the best examples of how a fellow human's faith in one can have a redemptive influence is the effect that Lizzie Hexam's has on Bella Wilfer. Bella is prone to undervalue her potential for good; for instance, she says to Sophronia Lammle, "I don't mind telling you, Sophronia, that I am convinced I have no heart, as people call it; and that I think that sort of thing is nonsense" (III, v, 470). When Bella tells John Rokesmith that she fears fortune is spoiling Mr. Boffin, the Secretary answers that he is delighted to discover that fortune at least is not spoiling her. Bella's reply, again, is self-deprecat­ing:

"Oh, don't speak of me," said Bella, giving herself an impatient little slap with her glove. "You don't know me as well as-------"

'As you know yourself?' suggested the Secretary, finding that she stopped. 'Do you know yourself?'

'I know quite enough of myself,' said Bella, with a charming air of being inclined to give herself up as a bad job, 'and I don't improve upon acquaintance.' (III.ix,521)

However, Bella does not know her true self, as her moment of hesitation suggests even to her. It is only through her conversation with Lizzie Hexam that she discovers her real nature, for Lizzie has an unwavering belief in the absolute goodness of Bella:

'I used to see pictures in the fire,' said Lizzie, playfully, 'to please my brother. Shall I tell you what I see down there where the fire is glowing? . . . A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted.' (III.ix,529)

The heart, naturally, belongs to Bella, and Lizzie has once again penetrated to the real world of man's inner nature. In her conversation with Mr. Rokesmith, just after this interview, Bella reveals the impact which it has had upon her:

"Can you believe, Mr. Rokesmith," said Bella, "that I feel as if whole years had passed since I went into Lizzie Hexam's cottage? . . . I don't mean that I feel as if a great space of time had gone by, but that I feel as if much had happened—to myself, you know."

"For good, I hope?"

"I hope so," said Bella.

"You are cold; I felt you tremble. Pray let me put this wrapper of mine about you." (III.ix, 530)

Perhaps it is not the cold alone, but a regenerative shudder, that passes through Bella's frame, symbolic of her
conversion through Lizzie's positive vision of the good within her. For the growth of good was promoted not only by the radiant "being" of a loving heart, not only by sympathetic communication with one's common humanity, not only by domestic moral associations or by "standard" situations (in literature) intended to develop sensitivity to that humanity. It was also nurtured whenever a person expressed his sustained belief in the innate capacity for good within one of his brethren, a belief which could uphold that individual despite the mistaken opinions of others or even his own self-doubt—as is the case with Bella Wilfer. Through such faith, the increase of good was furthered, and the ideal of our common nature was not only clarified in the present as real and good but was given continuity and extension into future time.
CHAPTER VIII

THE SEARCH FOR HOME

The Romantic Error

The chief means of preserving and furthering the good, for the Domestic Realists, naturally was the home. It is not surprising, therefore, since home with its associations of peace, order, unity, and communication, was the ideal of common life, that many a Victorian domestic novel became essentially a quest for this ideal. In the major Victorian domestic novels there is usually a complication of the plot which obstructs access to the home ideal—a twisting, inversion, subversion, or disordering of the domestic standard—and the chief problem of the novel is to set things to rights again, to find the home that has been lost (Nicholas Nickleby) or the value of which has been misjudged (Pendennis) or that the leading character never had (Jane Eyre). In this chapter we shall be examining this pattern in a number of novels.

One of the ways to attain a happy home was, of course, to marry and establish one for oneself. Choosing a proper companion became crucial in this respect, and many a Victorian fictional character had to go through a period
of trial and error before finally finding a marriage partner who was stable, earnest, loving, and orderly—one who was thoroughly domestic. The impediment to this domestic union was usually a highly imaginative infatuation with a flighty, unsettled, and selfish beauty who, whatever her other attractions might be, was certainly lacking in the domestic virtues. This type of "romantic error" thus leaned towards the Byronic strain of romanticism with its passion and aspiration, its yearning imagination and beguiled fancy. This is not to say that it was Byronic, but it at least tended that way, as compared to commonplace domestic love, which fell in that Wordsworthian tradition which we have excluded from our use of the term "romanticism" throughout this study.

_David Copperfield_ contains at least two instances of the romantic error: little Emily and Steerforth, and David and Dora. David's history vacillates back and forth between experiences of the domestic ideal and of its dissolution. An instance of the latter occurs when Peggotty takes David away while his mother marries Mr. Murdstone. David is leaving his old home, in a sense forever, for with Mr. Murdstone for his step-father it will not be the same again: "It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever" (ii,26). When David returns, he finds the chilling
Mr. Murdstone standing always between him and his mother, and yearns for a word "of welcome home, of reassurance to me that it was home" (iv, 46-47) from his step-father, a word which he never receives. With the arrival of Miss Murdstone, the domestic ideal is completely undermined, for that heartless and domineering woman takes possession of the housekeeping keys, symbolic of her total takeover of the domestic sphere which Mrs. Copperfield should control. She keeps the keys in her own little jail all day, and under her pillow at night. The protests of David's mother at this usurpation of her domestic rights are quickly thwarted, and David is sent off to school at Salem House. The dissolution of the familial ideal for David is indicated by his speculating, about the boys who run after the coach as it leaves from Yarmouth, "whether their fathers were alive, and whether they were happy at home" (v, 70).

The domestic ideal's deterioration is balanced, however, by other temporary restorations of it. Mr. Peggotty's ship-house serves for a time as a domestic sanctuary for David, and its painstakingly described interior, with its snugness, order, warmth, and comfort, is an embodiment of the domestic standard. When David is permitted to leave Salem House for the holidays, he arrives home at a moment when the Murdstones are out, and for that one precious evening, David, his mother, and Peggotty, find
a home in one another again (viii,110). When David later
flees the establishment of Murdstone and Grinby, he is
brought into contact with the domestic environment once
more, at his aunt Betsey Trotwood's cottage near Dover.
The room into which David is first taken at his aunt's is,
like Mr. Peggotty's boat, another clean, tidy, well-ordered
example of the domestic ideal:

The room was as neat as Janet or my aunt. As
I laid down my pen, a moment since, to think of
it, the air from the sea came blowing in again,
mixed with the perfume of the flowers; and I saw
the old-fashioned furniture brightly rubbed and
polished, my aunt's inviolable chair and table by
the round green fan in the bow-window, the drugget-
covered carpet, the cat, the kettle-holder, the two
canaries, the old china, the punch-bowl full of
dried rose-leaves, the tall press guarding all
sorts of bottles and pots, and, wonderfully out of
keeping with the rest, my dusty self upon the sofa,
taking note of everything. (xiii,194)

It is interesting to observe that Betsey Trotwood's living-
room is like a still-life painting. The details are not
suggestive of anything beyond themselves, and they do not
lead the eye beyond the confines of the picture. Instead,
the eye moves lovingly from object to object, centering
upon each in turn, satisfied with that object for its own
sake. This loving attention to detail is characteristic of
the domestic school, and helps to establish the idea of
harmony, order, stability, and peace—in short, the idea of
the integrity and essential goodness of the commonplace
domestic world. The Wickfield household, to which Betsey
Trotwood soon introduces David, is still another embodiment
of domesticity, perfect in its retirement, cleanliness, and order. When Agnes enters the Wickfield drawing room, David notes, "She had a little basket-trifle hanging at her side, with keys in it; and she looked as staid and discreet a housekeeper as the old house could have" (xv,223). And when David associates Agnes with the tranquil brightness of a stained-glass window in a church, in the good, calm, peaceful influence she sheds about her continually, he should realize that like her home and the housekeeping keys she carries, she is herself an emblem of the domestic ideal—the type of girl one should seek in marriage. By a union with such a girl he could right all earlier domestic losses.

But David fails to fully appreciate Agnes. Instead, he is caught up in a series of giddy, romantic infatuations, the first of which is his amorous passion for Miss Shepherd, a boarder at the nearby Misses Nettingalls' establishment (xviii,265-66). At the age of seventeen, David falls in love with the eldest Miss Larkins, who is about thirty, goes home from one particular dance in a state of unspeakable bliss, and waltzes in his imagination all night long. The culmination of David's romantic infatuations is his attachment to Dora Spenlow, an entirely non-domestic case of love at first sight: "All was over in a moment. I had fulfilled my destiny. I was a captive and a slave. I loved Dora Spenlow to distraction!" (xxvi,390). Dora is everything to David, and he enters into a fairyland romance
world where nothing is real save Dora, seen in a succession
of lovely visions.

But after their marriage, when their circumstances
are straitened by his aunt's financial disaster, David
discovers that Dora is lacking in those domestic virtues
of earnestness and steadfastness which he so greatly needs
to support him—and which Agnes has in such abundance. For
though David suggests that they may have to work hard and
economize, Dora cannot bear to face this real problem, and
parries it continually: "Oh, yes; but I don't want to hear
any more about crusts!" said Dora. "And Jip must have a
mutton-chop every day at twelve, or he'll die!" (xxxvii, 540-41). David asks Miss Mills, a short time later,
whether she thinks it was practical of him to suggest to
Dora the study of accounts, housekeeping, and the Cookery
Book, and Miss Mills flatly answers that it was not.
Finding no support or sympathy from Dora, David ends up
being made to feel "like a sort of Monster who had got into
a Fairy's bower" (xxxvii, 543). He gives Dora the Cookery
Book, after all, "But the cookery-book made Dora's head
ache, and the figures made her cry. They wouldn't add up,
she said. So she rubbed them out, and drew little nosegays
and likenesses of me and Jip all over the tablets" (xli, 604-05). The result of Dora's domestic incapacity is
inevitable, and David's household is soon plagued with
servants who run things to their own tastes, who steal and
cheat and even pawn the Copperfields' possessions. When Traddles visits the young married couple for dinner, the major current running through the evening is domestic chaos—the ultimate undermining of the home ideal, and the antithesis of Agnes' wonderful orderliness. Thus it is that David is forced to accept "our scrambling household arrangements" (xli, 646) and, in a chapter titled "Domestic," these are described at greater length. The principal theme is disorder, and the insubordination of the servants. The Copperfields' page, for example, was given to arguing with the cook, and appeared "to have lived in a hail of saucepan-lids" (xlvin, 691). Like the Jellyby servants in Bleak House and those of the Pocket household in Great Expectations, the overweening Copperfield servants serve as symbols of domestic disorder.

Aunt Betsey has recognized David's romantic error all along. She acts not only as David's fairy godmother, as recent critics have observed, but as his domestic godmother. At the outset of the novel she had stated her intention to be the godmother of the expected "Betsey" in order that there might "be no trifling with her affections" (i, 7) unlike her own mistreatment by her handsome, younger husband. Betsey Trotwood also suspects that Mr. Copperfield may have mistakenly made a purely romantic attachment in marrying Mrs. Copperfield, and takes the opportunity of her interview with the expectant mother to interrogate her
as to her domestic capacity—for keeping house and regulating the housekeeping books. She leaves convinced that Mrs. Copperfield is not a "wax doll" but later implies that Dora Spenlow is. In a pointed series of questions Betsey Trotwood asks David if Dora is not "silly" or "light headed." After a remonstrance on David's part, Aunt Betsey fulfills her role of domestic guardian-godmother by coming out more directly:

"Ah, Trot!" said my aunt, shaking her head, and smiling gravely, "blind, blind, blind!"
"Some one that I know, Trot," my aunt pursued, after a pause, "though of a very pliant disposition, has an earnestness of affection in him that reminds me of poor Baby. Earnestness is what that somebody must look for, to sustain him and improve him, Trot. Deep, downright, faithful earnestness."
"If you only knew the earnestness of Dora, aunt!" I cried. (xxxv,504)

After Dora's death, David realizes that he had thrown away the treasure of Agnes' love, and he concludes that "I had always felt my weakness, in comparison with her constancy and fortitude" (lviii,818). In brief, he had always cherished "a fancy as if Agnes were one of the elements of my natural home" (xxxiv,491) because she provided that stabilizing influence, that earnestness, which he so badly needed (xxxv,519). But he should long ago have recognized Agnes for what she really was. For after Aunt Betsey has been financially ruined and comes to live with David at his London lodgings, Agnes visits both aunt and nephew there. When David steps out to mail a letter, Agnes goes quietly
to work and recreates the orderly, still-life setting of Aunt Betsey's cottage living-room as he first saw it:

Wherever Agnes was, some agreeable token of her noiseless presence seemed inseparable from the place. When I came back, I found my aunt's birds hanging, just as they had hung so long in the parlour window of the cottage; and my easy chair imitating my aunt's much easier chair in its position at the open window; and even the round green fan, which my aunt had brought away with her, screwed on to the windowsill. I knew who had done all this, by its seeming to have quietly done itself; and I should have known in a moment who had arranged my neglected books in the old order of my school days, even if I had supposed Agnes to be miles away, instead of seeing her busy with them, and smiling at the disorder into which they had fallen. (xxxv,515)

Just as Dinah Morris restores order to the Bede household, in Adam Bede, Agnes restores order to David's rooms, a true sign, as it was with Dinah, of Agnes' domestic nature and worth.

At the conclusion of the novel, when David returns to England after a three years' absence and visits Agnes Wickfield once again, the great theme associated with her is that of serenity, peace, and, above all, domestic order —for the staid old house which forms a background to her is the same "as to its cleanliness and order ... as it had been when I first saw it" (lx,838) and Agnes has restored everything to where it used to be in the old happy time; even the basket-trifle full of keys, still hanging at her side, "seems to jingle a kind of old tune!" (lx,840). The emblem of domesticity, the housekeeping keys, thus
appears once more, and in a fitting culmination to the novel, David is married to the domestic spirit he has so long overlooked, and in whom he finds the home which he has sought so long, as the window-vision at the end of the novel indicates:

We stood together at the same old-fashioned window at night, when the moon was shining; Agnes with her quiet eyes raised up to it; I following her glance. Long miles of road then opened out before my mind; and, toiling on, I saw a ragged way-worn boy forsaken and neglected, who should come to call even the heart now beating against mine, his own. (lxii,863)

The romantic error was a central theme of Dickens' Great Expectations also, as once again the folly of pursuing romantic phantoms is presented in terms of what it does to the domestic ideal. After his first experience at Miss Havisham's, Pip returns home to find his innocent vision of home has been irredeemably spoiled, as he thinks how common Estella would consider Joe. By calling Pip "a common labouring-boy" (viii,55), Estella has sown seeds of pride and ambition in him sufficient to draw Pip away from the commonplace which makes up the domestic ideal. This is a calculated scheme on Miss Havisham's part to attach Pip's feelings to an unattainable object—Estella—to draw him from his old contented life into an existence of romantic aspiration, and, ultimately, to break his heart as hers, supposedly, was broken. From the first, her plan succeeds only too well; as Pip tells us, "It is a miserable thing to feel ashamed of home" (xiv,100).
It was earlier indicated that one of the prime characteristics of the domestic ideal was contentment with things as they are rather than a fanciful yearning after what might be. In his quest to become a gentleman to be worthy of Estella and his pursuit of his expectations, Pip is really forsaking the domestic ideal, for rather than being happy in his apprenticeship with "plain contented Joe" he confesses the out-reaching spirit of "restless aspiring discontented me" (xiv,101). In his conversation with Biddy he reveals that he might have been content to settle down and marry her save that he found himself going on ever "dissatisfied and uncomfortable, and--what would it signify to me, being coarse and common, if nobody had told me so!" (xvii,121). Pip's curse, then, as one additional interpretation of the title of the novel suggests, is his "Great Expectations," the far-ranging aspiration of his thoughts.

When Pip encounters Herbert Pocket again, in London, Herbert takes him home shortly thereafter to the Pocket household, which serves as a sub-plot amplification of the main plot theme of Pip's desire to become a gentleman. Upon arriving at Hammersmith, Pip observes that "Mr. and Mrs. Pocket's children were not growing up or being brought up, but were tumbling up" (xxii,175). The reason for this soon becomes evident, for the children are relegated to the nurses, Flopson and Millers, who are indifferent rather
than concerned, while Mrs. Pocket takes no responsibility whatsoever, spending her time reading in a book on the English nobility. Mrs. Pocket, in brief, has neglected her domestic duties in order to pursue her fantasies about her rightful place among the nobility, and should serve, perhaps, as a warning to Pip who has just forsaken his own home to pursue his dream of becoming a gentleman.

As has been suggested, Pip is encouraged to abandon his home and follow romantic dreams by his contact with the inverse-world of Miss Havisham, where birth, marriage, and death, the three great family occasions, are perverted, and the domestic ideal is entirely corrupted, even to the shutting out of the natural light of day from Miss Havisham's solitary chambers. The unattainable Estella, designed expressly to break men's hearts, also represents a corruption of the domestic ideal, in which the loving heart, sympathetic communication, and, ultimately, marriage, are men's proper goals.

Pip is not insensitive to the change which his own nature has undergone since that first day when he met Estella, and he suspects that the domestic ideal has slowly been losing its power over him: "As I had grown accustomed to my expectations, I had insensibly begun to notice their effect upon myself and those around me... Many a time of an evening, when I sat alone looking at the fire, I thought, after all, there was no fire like the old forge
fire and the kitchen fire at home" (xxxiv,258). After the standard sickbed-tending scene in which Joe takes care of Pip following Magwitch's death, and Joe and Pip are brought together as equals once again, Pip decides to follow Joe home with the intention of asking Biddy to marry him after all. His journey is symbolic of his desire to return to the domestic ideal:

The June weather was delicious. The sky was blue, the larks were soaring high over the green corn, I thought all that countryside more beautiful and peaceful by far than I had ever known it to be yet. Many pleasant pictures of the life that I would lead there, and of the change for the better that would come over my character when I had a guiding spirit at my side whose simple faith and clear home-wisdom I had proved, beguiled my way. They awakened a tender emotion in me; for, my heart was softened by my return, and such a change had come to pass, that I felt like one who was toiling home barefoot from distant travel, and whose wanderings had lasted many years. (lviii,452-53)

However, when Pip arrives, he learns that Joe and Biddy have just been married. Pip is overwhelmed by this news, but recovers quickly, and congratulates them both. In particular, he hopes that they will have children to love, and perhaps that some little fellow will sit by the chimney corner who will remind them of Pip, though not being ungrateful as he had been (lviii,454-55). This picture imagined by Pip is fulfilled when, after eleven years' absence, he lays his hand softly on the latch of the old kitchen door and looks in unseen:

There, smoking his pipe in the old place by
the kitchen firelight, as hale and strong as ever, though a little grey, sat Joe; and there, fenced into the corner with Joe's leg, and sitting on my own little stool looking at the fire, was-------- I again!

"We giv' him the name of Pip for your sake, dear old chap," said Joe, delighted when I took another stool by the child's side (but I did not rumple his hair), "and we hoped he might grow a little bit like you, and we think he do."

(lix,457)

Thus the story has come full circle, and Pip's namesake now sits in the chimney corner. When Pip takes another stool by the child's side it is emblematic, perhaps, of the fact that Pip has learned the lesson of the fireside at last—that happiness is to be had at home, in the domestic world and its affections, or nowhere. When he meets Estella at the end of the novel, she has been humbled and her heart softened through suffering, and the two of them, recognizing the romantic error—which has been swept away together with the dark walls and winding passageways of Miss Havisham's house—are finally united in a true, domestic love, as Pip feels the responsive, friendly touch of her once insensible hand.

The course of Arthur Pendennis' life is similar to that of Pip, for Arthur, too, forsakes his home to seek his fortune in the world he so admires. It will be remembered that Pen's coach departure from home for Oxbridge, after the Fotheringay affair has been settled by Major Pendennis, is a standard parting. It also represents Pen's farewell to the domestic world and Helen's ultimate loss of her
boy: "Her sainted benedictions follow the departing boy. He has left the home-nest in which he has been chafing..." (I,xvi,180). Like young David Copperfield, Pen goes through a series of romantic infatuations—the Fotheringay, Fanny Bolton, Blanche Amory—before recognizing the true domestic spirit, Laura Bell, who has been at his side from the first, like David's Agnes Wickfield. The moral of the novel is, simply, the vanity of persisting in the romantic error when the ultimate quest of every man in the world is for home:

Are you not awe-stricken, you friendly reader... to think how you are the same You, whom in childhood you remember, before the voyage of life began! It has been prosperous, and you are riding into port, the people huzzaing and the guns saluting,—and the lucky captain bows from the ship's side, and there is a care under the star on his breast which nobody knows of: or you are wrecked, and lashed, hopeless, to a solitary spar out at sea:—the sinking man and the successful one are thinking each about home, very likely, and remembering the time when they were children; alone on the hopeless spar, drowning out of sight; alone in the midst of the crowd applauding you.
(II,lix,695)

When Pen learns that Blanche Amory has jilted him for Harry Foker and that he is free to marry Laura, the domestic ideal is fulfilled; and Pen has found his proper home at last:

"I have seen her. She has engaged herself to Harry Foker—and—and NOW, Laura?"
The hand gives a pressure—the eyes beam a reply—the quivering lips answer, though speechless. Pen's head sinks down in the girl's lap, as he sobs out, "Come and bless us, dear mother!" and arms as tender as Helen's once more enfold him.
In this juncture it is that Lady Rockminster comes in . . . . (II, lxxiv, 857)

Thackeray cannot resist this final irreverent juxtaposition. Here, at the high point of the novel, when Helen's wish that Pen and Laura marry has finally been fulfilled, and Pen has seen the true domestic worth of Laura as opposed to Blanche and his other loves, Thackeray introduces that "other" world of chance and circumstance, interruption and misapprehension, in the form of Lady Rockminster who comes in and is aghast to find Pen with his head in Laura's lap.

*Vanity Fair* is also a story of the success--at last--of domestic love, in spite of the misleading romantic error. Amelia Sedley is a "tender little domestic goddess" (xii, 108) whose simplicity, gentleness, and other domestic qualities attract all men to her (xxvii, 255), and similarly Thackeray considers Major Dobbin to be admirably suited for domestic life, for the Major is a true gentleman, manly, generous, constant, and of a good and loving heart, as even Becky acknowledges (lxvi, 648).

The story of Amelia's progress towards domestic happiness is related by Thackeray in terms of the bird-and-nest metaphor which he uses throughout *Vanity Fair*, with Amelia as the bird and the nest representing home, or the domestic ideal. Thus, early in the novel, Thackeray writes of Amelia that "the life of a good young girl who is in the
paternal nest as yet, can't have many of those thrilling
incidents to which the heroine of romance commonly lays
claim" (xii,111). Thackeray continues the metaphor to
show how Amelia's love for George Osborne is of the
nestling, domestic kind: "... she went fluttering to
Lieutenant George Osborne's heart as if it was the only
natural home for her to nestle in" (xiii,118). Of course
Amelia is mistaken in her judgment of George's character,
and George is to die in battle shortly thereafter, so that
she loses this supposed "nest." At the conclusion of the
novel, when Dobbin has finally won Amelia, the bird meta-
phor is completed: "He has got the prize he has been
trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last.
There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and
cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched flut-
tering wings" (lxvii,660).

The major complication of the plot of _Vanity Fair_
is that Amelia fails to recognize the true worth of Dobbin
and through a corruption of the uses of memory, which were
ideally supposed to preserve only the best of the past,
remains attached to her false, romantic conception of the
man who had been unfaithful in his love to her a week
before he died upon the plains of Waterloo. In the third
chapter we saw that the Victorians held onto the past
through a variety of keepsakes and mementoes; one of these
was the miniature portrait, and Amelia's portrait of the
dead George Osborne becomes a shrine at which she worships.

As Mrs. Sedley remarks to Mrs. Clapp:

> It is evident that the major is over head and ears in love with her: and yet, whenever I so much as hint at it, she turns red and begins to cry, and goes and sits upstairs with her miniature. I'm sick of that miniature. (xxxviii,382)

Later in the novel, after Dobbin's departure, Thackeray shows increasing distaste for the miniature portrait of George:

> All the poor, all the humble, all honest folks, all good men who knew him, loved that kind-hearted and simple gentleman.
> As for Emmy, had she not done her duty? She had her picture of George for a consolation. (lxvi,650)

Thackeray often directly contrasted the vanity of the world with the standard of the Victorian domestic ideal, and vanity then came to represent whatever stood between man and the attainment of the simple, commonplace truths of love, home-life, and affection. Thackeray defines vanity in this sense when he discusses the lot of Rose Dawson, the daughter of the ironmonger at Mudbury, who sold herself to Sir Pitt Crawley merely for the sake of a title and wealth. Rose gives up the prospect of a happy domestic life with Peter Butt, and comes to live a brutalized existence with the old Baronet:

> Oh, Vanity Fair--Vanity Fair! This might have been, but for you, a cheery lass; Peter Butt and Rose a happy man and wife, in a snug farm, with a hearty family, and an honest portion of pleasures, cares, hopes, and struggles:--but a title and a coach and four are toys more precious than happiness in Vanity Fair . . . . (ix,83)
When Rose dies, Thackeray comments, "Her heart was dead long before her body. She had sold it to become Sir Pitt Crawley's wife. Mothers and daughters are making the same bargain every day in Vanity Fair" (xiv,140).

Like the triumph of Pendennis, the triumph of Vanity Fair is that vanity is overcome at last, that the pursuit of the romantic error stands no longer between Amelia and Dobbin, between good-hearted human beings and their domestic happiness. The romantic error was a barrier which many another major Victorian novelist put between his characters and their ultimate domestic fulfillment. George Eliot, for example, illustrates in Middlemarch how Dorothea must progress through the stage of romantic vision and misplaced affection before attaining real love; and in Adam Bede, Adam must lose himself in the maze of his romantic fancy for Hetty, before he is capable of a deep and lasting attachment, to the domestic Dinah Morris.

Inversion and Compensation

The romantic error was but one of a number of plot-complicating devices used to obstruct access to the domestic ideal. Various patterns of inversion of the true domestic order were relied on by domestic writers as well. Inversion plays a major role in Martin Chuzzlewit as may be seen in the chapter ironically titled "Family Affection." This chapter describes the conspiratorial meeting at Mr.
Pecksniff's house of the various members of the Chuzzlewit family who have grudgingly come together only because they feel they cannot succeed alone. Their object is to get old Martin Chuzzlewit away from his nurse-companion, Mary Graham, who they feel has gained too much influence over him. Since the ties between the parties are strained at the outset, it is not surprising that the meeting breaks up in discord, representing the antithesis of the familial ideal.

Mr. Pecksniff, naturally, is a prime example of the hypocritical inversion of the household norm for selfish purposes. We have noted how he twists the language of morality for his own ends, and he does so again in his proposal to expel the innocent Martin from his house, for Mr. Pecksniff meditates "on the one great virtuous purpose before him, of casting out that ingrate and deceiver, whose presence yet troubled his domestic hearth, and was a sacrilege upon the altars of his household gods" (xi,190). But the foregoing example of hypocrisy is nothing in comparison with Mr. Pecksniff's plot to ensnare Jonas Chuzzlewit into a marriage with his daughter, Cherry. After the death of old Anthony Chuzzlewit, Jonas and Mr. Pecksniff journey to Mr. Pecksniff's house. Mr. Pecksniff proposes to Jonas that they arrive unannounced so as to take the girls by surprise—in brief, in order that Jonas may see them in their "natural" state. Jonas does not realize that
Mr. Pecksniff has forewarned the girls of their arrival, and that the domestic genre picture which he glimpses through the kitchen window has been carefully prepared:

The prudent Cherry—staff and scrip, and treasure of her doting father—there she sits, at a little table white as driven snow, before the kitchen fire, making up accounts! See the neat maiden, as with pen in hand, and calculating look addressed towards the ceiling, and bunch of keys within a little basket at her side, she checks the housekeeping expenditure! From flat-iron, dish-cover, and warming-pan; from pot and kettle, face of brass footman, and black-leaded stove; bright faces of approbation wink and glow upon her. The very onions dangling from the beam, mantle and shine like cherubs' cheeks. Something of the influence of those vegetables sinks into Mr. Pecksniff's nature. He weeps. (xx,332)

As Dickens tells us, "They were not expected. Oh dear, no!" (xx,330). Mr. Pecksniff's unscrupulous domestic inversion is a minor masterpiece.

At the beginning of the story, Tom Pinch has long been the unwitting vassal of Mr. Pecksniff, and has been denied a home of his own. One of the main threads of the plot consists of Tom's discovery of Mr. Pecksniff's hypocrisy, his departure from that insidious moralizer, and, finally, his installment in a fitting domestic environment. When Tom sets out to pick up Mr. Pecksniff's new pupil, young Martin, near the beginning of the novel, Dickens interrupts in his own person to wish Tom the domestic reward he merits:

Who, as thou drivest off, a happy man, and noddest with a grateful lovingness to Pecksniff
in his nightcap at his chamber-window, would not
cry: "Heaven speed thee, Tom, and send that
thou wert going off for ever to some quiet home
where thou mightest live at peace, and sorrow
should not touch thee!" (v,64)

Later, Tom and Ruth Pinch flee their respective masters
and establish a residence at Islington. An extensive
account of the household delights shared by the brother
and sister follows, including Ruth's management of the
housekeeping keys and a hundred other domestic details,
even to the cooking of a beef-steak pudding for Tom which
much of the thirty-ninth chapter is devoted to describing.
Tom and Ruth thus attain the domestic ideal which has so
long been denied them, and the inverse world of Mr. Peck­
sniff is righted in the new home they have found. And
though Tom remains a bachelor at the end we are assured he
will be included in the domestic happiness of his sister
and friends. Young Martin's selfishness is overcome through
his experience in America which effects a redemptive growth
through suffering in him and makes him worthy of Mary
Graham and the domestic ideal. Thus both main strands of
the plot work towards domestic fulfillment, the inverting
power of moral hypocrisy and selfishness is overcome at
last, and the search for home is happily ended.

The quest for the domestic ideal was also impeded
by an inversion of that ideal in Dombey and Son. Neither
Paul nor Florence Dombey ever really had a father in Mr.
Dombey, and after Paul's death and Mr. Dombey's subsequent
withdrawal from his daughter, life is even more lonely for Florence than before. In her solitude, Florence often looks out the window at the family—a father and four daughters—who have moved into the house opposite. Like Flora, the children have no mother, but unlike her, they have a father who loves them dearly, and who provides that domestic environment which she, too, might have had, in spite of her mother's death, if Mr. Dombey had only been more loving (xviii,247-48). When Florence visits the Skettles, the unnamed aunt tells her orphaned niece, "Your misfortune is a lighter one than Florence's; for not an orphan in the wide world can be so deserted as the child who is outcast from a living parent's love" (xxiv,346). While at the Skettles', Florence sets out to consciously study the habits of the other children, in order to learn how they had won parental affection, but finds that "They had won their household places long ago, and did not stand without, as she did, with a bar across the door" (xxiv,347).

However, Florence is well worthy of domestic fulfillment, as she evidences by assisting Captain Cuttle with domestic dexterity:

The Captain's delight and wonder at the quiet housewifery of Florence in assisting to clear the table, arrange the parlour, and sweep up the hearth . . . were gradually raised to that degree, that at last he could not choose but do nothing himself, and stand looking at her as if she were some Fairy, daintily performing these offices for him; the red rim on his forehead glowing again, in his unspeakable admiration. (xlix,683)
Florence thus shows her domestic worth, and in her marriage to Walter Gay she fulfills the prophecy made by Walter so long ago: "What a home some happy man would find in such a heart one day" (xix,264). As they walk through the city streets together, the riches that the storekeepers uncover with the morning are nothing to them, for they are "thinking of no other riches, and no prouder home, than they have now in one another" (lvii,806).

The original inversion of the natural domestic order has been partially righted—with respect to Florence. But at the conclusion of *Dombey and Son*, a reconciliation takes place, and Mr. Dombey is included, through Florence's wide-reaching forgiveness, in the domestic ideal. Florence returns from her journey and appeals to her father thus:

"Papa, love, I am a mother. I have a child who will soon call Walter by the name which I call you. When it was born, and when I knew how much I loved it, I knew what I had done in leaving you. Forgive me, dear papa! oh say God bless me, and my little child!" (lix,844)

From the perspective of years later, at the close of the story, we see Mr. Dombey, Florence, and Florence's two children, Paul and Florence, by the sea-side. Dickens' point is simply that a sort of recompense has been made by Mr. Dombey's real affection for these representatives of his own Paul and Florence:

The white-haired gentleman walks with the little boy, talks with him, helps him in his play, attends upon him, watches him, as if he were the object of his life.

..................................................
But no one, except Florence, knows the measure of the white-haired gentleman's affection for the girl. That story never goes about. The child herself almost wonders at a certain secrecy he keeps in it. He hoards her in his heart. He cannot bear to see a cloud upon her face. He cannot bear to see her sit apart. He fancies that she feels a slight, when there is none. He steals away to look at her, in her sleep. It pleases him to have her come, and wake him in the morning. He is fondest of her and most loving to her, when there is no creature by. (lxii, 878)

The familial unity, balance, and order of the domestic ideal have thus been restored, and the earlier imbalances are now compensated for, in a way, along the lines of the idea of natural compensation voiced by J. W. Kaye in an essay, "On Growing Old," which appeared in the Cornhill Magazine in 1862:

It is a very pleasant thought that life is made up of compensations. All Nature teaches this one grand lesson. There is seed-time, and there is summer. There is harvest, and there is winter. When autumn comes upon us—when the roses have long since gone, and the leaves on the trees are sere and yellow—are we to regret that it is no longer summer and that the greenery has departed? Have not the rich tints of the autumnal foliage peculiar beauties of their own? As time takes away, so it gives; as it empties, so it replenishes. There is a process of restoration and compensation ever at work in the physical world; and is it not so also in the moral? You have lost a parent, but you have gained a child. Do you not see revived in your daughter the calm, clear brow, and the sweet, mild eyes of your mother, as you last saw her, when a little child? You must not expect to enjoy at the same time the beatitudes of the Past and of the Present. But I am afraid that there are some whose nature it is rather to deplore what they have lost, than to rejoice in what they have gained. They say that "the beautiful has vanished, and returns not"; instead of believing in the great
truth that it is continually recreating and renewing itself.¹

The doctrine of compensation was founded on the belief, which Kaye states a few pages later, that "One of the lessons which we learn by growing old is that all things work together not for evil, but for good."² As applied to the domestic ideal, the philosophy of compensation meant simply a belief that nature tried to restore, balance, repair, or compensate for any loss or imbalance, especially an irregularity or inversion, of the domestic order. Such a righting of domestic wrongs takes place in Dombey and Son, though at a late date, for as Kaye suggested, "You must not expect to enjoy at the same time the beatitudes of the Past and of the Present." It is significant that though this final grouping of Mr. Dombey, Florence, and Florence's children is beside the sea, neither the children nor the adults are concerned with what the waves are saying. This is not to deny the validity of the birth into a better world which comes with death--but it is indicative of the fact that the domestic ideal has been fulfilled, for the characters are content with things as they are, and do not need to look beyond the confines of their present existence which is complete in itself.

²Ibid., p. 505.
We have already seen that in *Little Dorrit* the world of the Marshalsea represented an inversion of the domestic ideal and of the three major standard situations of birth, marriage, and death. But other forms of inversion work in that novel to complicate the progress of the characters towards the natural order of things. After his wife's death, Mr. Dorrit becomes even more helpless and apathetic than before, and Amy, the Child of the Marshalsea, takes on a new relation towards the Father of the Marshalsea. Little Dorrit becomes, in effect, "the head of the fallen family" for she knew that "a man so broken as to be the Father of the Marshalsea, could be no father to his own children" (I,vii,72). Amy thus assumes the role of protectress or parent, and her father acts out his own character in becoming the child. This inversion of the domestic relationship between parent and child is repeated in Little Dorrit's role with respect to Maggie, who despite her large size and twenty-eight years of age calls Amy, "Little mother, little mother!" (I,ix,100). Dickens confirms this dependency of Maggie's when he describes "the little mother attended by her big child" (I,ix,103).

It would seem, however, that in spite of the disrupting pattern of inversion, a form of compensation takes place in the characters' relationships to one another. For instance, though Amy Dorrit is forced to assume the role of the parent in caring for her childish father, by
doing so the family whole is maintained—unity and family affection are preserved. It is an inverse relationship, but nature has somehow managed to compensate for the weakness of the one in the strength of the other.

The great irony of Little Dorrit is that it is Mr. Dorrit's accession of wealth and his release from the Marshalsea that create a barrier between himself and his daughter, and destroy the domestic order which has been established. Because of his new wealth and position, Mr. Dorrit forbids Amy to attend upon him, for it is unfitting for a lady to assume the functions of a valet. Consequently the servants intervene between Amy and Mr. Dorrit, and their old close personal relationship is pushed into the background. For the Victorian domestic realists, the real world was the inner world of the heart, and through love and compensation such a real world had been created between Amy and Mr. Dorrit in the old Marshalsea. But now that the ideal of family unity and communication has been dissolved, the pageant of Europe which passes before Amy's eyes is hollow, for "the more surprising the scenes, the more they resembled the unreality of her own inner life . . ." (II,iii,463). Europe seems "—all a dream—only the old mean Marshalsea a reality" (II,iii,464) and Lizzie Hexam's exclamation to her brother in Our Mutual Friend, "Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!" (II,i,228) also applies here. For while dreaming over the
canals of Venice, Little Dorrit yearns for "the old room, and the old inmates, and the old visitors: all lasting realities that had never changed" (II,iii,467).

In her letter to Arthur Clennam, Amy reveals that she believes her father to be secretly suffering from the same homesickness that she feels, and that "even in the midst of all the servants and attendants, he is deserted and in want of me" (II,iv,470). When Mr. Dorrit returns from England, after his entertainment by Mr. Merdle and the marriage of Fanny to Sparkler, Mr. Dorrit goes wearily up the grand staircase of his mansion and comes unawares upon a little genre scene, depicting the domestic ideal as they once knew it, in its compensated form, in the Marshalsea. Through the draped doorway Mr. Dorrit sees Amy working at her embroidery at a little table and his brother with his chair drawn up to the hearth for coziness:

Allowing for the great difference in the still-life of the picture, the figures were much the same as of old; his brother being sufficiently like himself to represent himself, for a moment in the composition. So had he sat many a night, over a coal fire far away; so had she sat, devoted to him. Yet surely there was nothing to be jealous of in the old miserable poverty. Whence, then, the pang in his heart? (II,xix,638-39)

Although he does not yet even admit it to himself, the pang in his heart is caused by the strength of old domestic associations. When Amy brings him his supper the same evening, and sits by his side, tending him, for the first time since they left the Marshalsea, the power of these old
associations asserts itself. One part of his nature is thus drawn back towards the domestic ideal, even while his other and more ambitious side would still maintain appearances in the world:

She was afraid to look at him much, after the offence he had taken; but she noticed two occasions in the course of his meal, when he all of a sudden looked at her, and looked about him, as if the association were so strong that he needed assurance from his sense of sight that they were not in the old prison-room. Both times, he put his hand to his head as if he missed his old black cap—though it had been ignominiously given away in the Marshalsea, and had never got free to that hour, but still hovered about the yards on the head of his successor.

[In later days:] She always remembered that when he looked about him under the strong influence of the old association, he tried to keep it out of her mind, and perhaps out of his own too, by immediately expatiating on the great riches and great company that had encompassed him in his absence, and on the lofty position he and his family had to sustain. (II,xiv,641-42)

The "two undercurrents" which Amy discerns in Mr. Dorrit's words represent the two worlds of Victorian England which we discussed in the first chapter. The strong associative ties with the past which the genre picture of Amy and his brother has awakened in his memory strain Mr. Dorrit's mind, for he is unwilling to relinquish either world, yet he cannot live in both. At the farewell dinner for Mrs. Merdle, shortly thereafter, Mr. Dorrit is overcome by his old associations and, thinking himself to be still in the Marshalsea, calls for his friend, the turnkey Bob, and addresses the assembled ladies and gentlemen as Father
of the Marshalsea. He is taken home by Amy, and sinking into his earlier state of dependence upon her, as in the old Marshalsea days, dies not as a gentleman of the world, but as his former self, compensated for, yet essentially domestic.

The theme of domestic inversion appears in *Our Mutual Friend* as well. Like her father, the domestic cherub Rumpty Wilfer, Bella Wilfer has a loving heart and the potential to succeed in the domestic sphere. In fact, Dickens specifically identifies her as a "Home Goddess" (II,xiii,374). However, an inversion of the domestic pattern occurs when Bella refuses John Rokesmith's proposal of marriage because she is ambitious and wishes to marry wealth. She thus denies the better part of her nature for material ends. But after witnessing what gold has done to the Golden Dustman, Mr. Boffin, making him hard-hearted and miserly, Bella renounces worldly wealth and returns home, proving, as John tells her father, "what a heart she has!" (III,xvi,607). The scene in which Rumpty, John, and Bella steal away to Greenwich where John and Bella are married is an entirely delightful domestic idyll, calculated to appeal to the sympathetic Victorian reader by providing him with a standard sentimental wedding picture. Shortly thereafter, John and Bella move into "the charmingest of dolls' houses" on Blackheath where they live in marital bliss, and where Bella finds true happiness in the occupations of her own
home. Dickens takes great pains to describe Bella's advancement in the household arts, especially her struggles with a sage but erratic volume entitled "The Complete British Family Housewife" (IV,v,681-82). Bella fits into the domestic pattern so well that John tells her, "you have a bright cheerful spirit . . . You are like a light in the house" (IV,v,683). Bella soon finds that she is to have a baby, which completes the domestic idyll.

Bella later learns how Mr. Boffin feigned miserliness to convert her to the domestic ideal. As Boffin had said from the beginning, "She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt . . . by circumstances, but that's only on the surface, and I lay my life . . . that she's the true golden gold at heart" (IV,xiii,772). Every night, after his display of miserliness has been completed for the day, Mr. Boffin confides to Mrs. Boffin, "She'll come through it, the true golden gold" (IV,xiii,773). It soon becomes apparent that the "Golden Dustman" has been acting as a sort of domestic miser or Midas, reversing the pattern of the Midas of old by changing Bella's monetary values into human ones. The Midas of legend turned his daughter into gold; Mr. Boffin has used his miserly pose to convert his "daughter's" mercenary tendencies into the true gold of human love, for he has seen her domestic potential, the "true golden gold" of Bella's heart, which transcends any wealth the world could ever offer. The reverse-Midas theme
is also central to *Silas Marner* in which the miser Marner's hoard of gold is converted into the soft warm curls and loving presence of the infant Eppie who becomes his daughter. In both novels the reverse-Midas theme signifies the restoration of materialistic hearts to the domestic ideal.

At the end of *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin look in upon Bella who is nursing her baby in the nursery "garnished as with rainbows" on an upper floor of the mansion:

"It looks as if the old man's spirit had found rest at last; don't it?" said Mrs. Boffin.
"Yes, old lady."
"And as if his money had turned bright again, after a long, long rust in the dark, and was at last beginning to sparkle in the sunlight?"
"Yes, old lady."
"And it makes a pretty and a promising picture; don't it?"
"Yes, old lady."

(IV, xiii, 778)

The pot of gold at the end of the rainbow—or in the nursery garnished with rainbows, at least—the true end of the Harmon wealth, is the Victorian domestic ideal. And in the attainment of this ideal, the inverse world of old John Harmon is set to rights, the vast dust heaps, emblematic of false worldly wealth, are cleared away, and a form of compensation takes place, for "It looks as if the old man's spirit had found rest at last ..." (IV, xiii, 778).

There are other instances of compensation in *Our Mutual Friend*. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, early in the novel, decide to try to adopt a child to replace, in a sense, the
little John Harmon who has been lost—and they eventually
do adopt Sloppy after Betty Higden's Johnny dies. This
pattern is similar to that in *Little Dorrit* where the
Meagles adopted Tattycoram partly, at least, to replace the
child they lost, Pet's sister. Another form of compensa-
tion in *Our Mutual Friend*, which approximates the reversed
father-and-daughter roles of Little Dorrit and Mr. Dorrit
in *Little Dorrit*, is the relationship of Jenny Wren and her
derelict father, whom she calls her poor "child" (II,ii,
240). Much to the discomfiture of Charley Hexam, who feels
his sister's association with the dolls' dressmaker and her
drunkard father reflects disadvantageously upon him, Lizzie
maintains her friendship with the Wrens. But Lizzie's
reason for doing so is that she sees in the dolls' dress-
maker her own relationship to her father, now dead:

"This poor ailing creature has come to be what
she is, surrounded by drunken people from her
cradle—if she ever had one, Charley."
"I don't see what you have to do with her, for
all that," said the boy.
"Don't you Charley?"
The boy looked doggedly at the river. They
were at Millbank, and the river rolled on their
left. His sister gently touched him on the shoul-
der, and pointed to it.
"Any compensation—restitution—never mind the
word—you know my meaning. Father's grave."
(II,i,227)

Lizzie's only thought is that she might have been able to
help her father more than she did, and in taking care of
Jenny Wren, Lizzie believes that a sort of compensation may
work its way out. In the past she was not able to com-
pletely right the imbalances in her old home life, but she feels that by giving her best effort in the present, the spirit of the domestic ideal will be attained.

The Home They Never Had

For many a Victorian fictional character who had never had a home, the domestic quest was a most earnest pursuit of a deeply longed-for ideal. Mr. Brownlow's house represents the first real image of home that Oliver Twist has ever encountered, and throughout *Oliver Twist*, Oliver is constantly attaining a home-like sanctuary, only to be snatched away to the barren existence of the London underworld. While Oliver recovers his strength at Mr. Brownlow's house, he is attended by Mrs. Bedwin, who serves as a mother figure, and finds a kind guardian and father figure in Mr. Brownlow. Above all, the Brownlow household represents the domestic ideal of order, peace, and security, which Oliver has missed for so long:

They were happy days, those of Oliver's recovery. Everything was so quiet, and neat, and orderly, everybody so kind and gentle; that after the noise and turbulence in the midst of which he had always lived, it seemed like Heaven itself. (xiv, 94)

With the maternal Mrs. Bedwin weeping over him at his recovery, Oliver is in a state of bliss indeed.

One of the most comic and yet most brutal reversals in all Dickens' writings occurs when Nancy, seeing Oliver
passing in the street, inverts the language of morality in order to force his return to Fagin:

[Oliver was returning Mr. Brownlow's books] when he was startled by a young woman screaming out very loud, "Oh, my dear brother!" And he had hardly looked up to see what the matter was, when he was stopped by having a pair of arms thrown tight round his neck.

"Oh my gracious!" said the young woman, "I've found him! Oh! Oliver! Oliver! Oh you naughty boy, to make me suffer such distress on your account! Come home, dear, come."

"What's the matter, ma'am?" inquired one of the women.

"Oh, ma'am," replied the young woman, "he ran away, near a month ago, from his parents, who are hard-working and respectable people; and went and joined a set of thieves and bad characters; and almost broke his poor mother's heart."

"Young wretch!" said one woman.

"Go home, do, you little brute," said the other.

"I am not," replied Oliver, greatly alarmed. "I don't know her. I haven't any sister, or father and mother either. I'm an orphan; I live at Pentonville." (xv,107)

By this ingenious mis-application of the domestic standard, Nancy falsely appeals to the onlookers' sympathies while holding onto Oliver long enough for Sikes to capture him. Significantly, Nancy pretends to be taking Oliver home, when, in reality, she is doing the opposite.

Nancy regrets her betrayal of Oliver when she first comes to a realization of what she has done, as she tells Sikes: "I wish I had been struck dead in the street ... before I had lent a hand in bringing him here. He's a thief, a liar, a devil, all that's bad, from this night forth" (xvi,116). In particular, Nancy is remorseful
because she realizes that she has subverted Oliver's chances for domestic happiness, a happiness she herself longs for, as she reveals in her conversation with Sikes when she says that "the cold wet, dirty streets are my home; and you're the wretch that drove me to them long ago, and that'll keep me there, day and night, till I die!" (xvi,116). The underworld life is again contrasted with the domestic standard when Nancy meets Mr. Brownlow and Rose Maylie on London Bridge, and terminates their interview by saying:

"I must go home."
"Home!" repeated the young lady, with great stress upon the word.
"Home, lady," rejoined the girl. "To such a home as I have raised for myself with the work of my whole life. Let us part. I shall be watched or seen. Go! Go!" (xlvi,354)

Oliver triumphs in the end by finding not only a home but a family as well. For he discovers that Rose Maylie is actually his aunt, and Rose discovers that she is not illegitimate after all. The two orphans embrace one another with joyful tears upon this mutual recognition: "A father, sister, and mother, were gained, and lost, in that one moment. Joy and grief were mingled in the cup; but there were no bitter tears ..." (li,401). They learn who their parents were, only to find that they are dead, but in each other they have gained a family neither knew before.

Jane Eyre, too, never had a real home, but spent
her early years living in a form of bondage to her aunt Reed. Her early school experience was no better, and even at Thornfield she has no security and looks upon Mr. Rochester as beyond her reach. But when she flees from Rochester, after learning that he already has a wife, she stumbles upon the residence of St. John, Diana, and Mary Rivers, which proves a real home for her at last. The coincidental events that furnish Oliver Twist with a ready-made aunt, or "sister," in Rose Maylie, are equalled only by the coincidence which draws Jane to the home of the three Rivers, who turn out to be her cousins: "Glorious discovery to a lonely wretch! This was wealth indeed!—wealth to the heart!—a mine of pure genial affections" (II,xxxiii,194). When St. John Rivers shows surprise at Jane's enthusiasm upon her learning of this relationship, Jane rebukes him by referring to her domestic longing: "It may be of no moment to you; you have three sisters, and don't care for a cousin; but I had nobody; and now three relations . . . are born into my world full grown. I say again, I am glad!" (II,xxxiii,194). Later, Jane leaves the school at Morton, where she has been teaching, in order to prepare Moor House for the Christmas homecoming of her three new-found relatives. Jane's explanation of her plan to St. John reveals the domestic yearning she has had for years:

"My first aim will be to clean down (do you
comprehend the full force of the expression?) to clean down Moor House from chamber to cellar; my next to rub it up with beeswax, oil, and an indefinite number of cloths, till it glitters again; my third, to arrange every chair, table, bed, carpet, with mathematical precision; afterwards I shall go near to ruin you in coals and peat to keep up good fires in every room; and lastly, the two days proceeding that on which your sisters are expected, will be devoted by Hannah and me to such a beating of eggs, sorting of currants, grating of spices, compounding of Christmas cakes, chopping up of materials for mince-pies, and solemnising of other culinary rites, as words can convey but an inadequate notion of to the uninitiated like you."

(II,xxxiv,200-201)

St. John reacts negatively to this enthusiastic domestic picture of what Jane would do for her cousins, telling her that he hopes she "will look a little higher than domestic endearments and household joys" (II,xxxiv,201), in future. Later St. John urges Jane to "try to restrain the disproportionate fervour with which you throw yourself into common-place home pleasures" (II,xxxiv,202). Nevertheless, Jane proceeds with her plan undaunted and enthusiastically re-establishes that primary domestic trait, order, after having turned the house topsy-turvy: "And really after a day or two of confusion worse confounded, it was delightful, by degrees, to invoke order from the chaos ourselves had made" (II,xxxiv,202). St. John is the first to arrive at Moor House and inspect Jane's domestic efforts, and Jane, disturbed by his seeming indifference, inquires whether "the alterations had disturbed some old associations he valued" (II,xxxiv,203). St. John replies, "Not at all;
he had, on the contrary, remarked that I had scrupulously respected every association" (II,xxxiv,203). Jane had, indeed. In fact the most revealing sign of Jane's domestic awareness is her sensitivity to her cousins' old associations, for she had left the ordinary sitting-room and bedrooms much as they were, knowing that Diana and Mary "would derive more pleasure from seeing again the old homely tables, and chairs, and beds, than from the spectacle of the smartest innovations" (II,xxiv,202).

Jane soon learns that it is not the disruption of old associations that has made St. John sullen, but, rather, his missionary zeal causes him to question the worth of such domestic endeavors. Furthermore, Jane recognizes that St. John lacks the capacity to respond to the commonplace domestic world: "... I began to feel he had spoken the truth of himself, when he said he was hard and cold. The humanities and amenities of life had no attraction for him--its peaceful enjoyments no charm. Literally, he lived only to aspire--... he would never rest; nor approve of others resting round him" (II,xxxiv,204). St. John's tendency is to reach out beyond the norm of everyday existence, to seek other spheres of action, the centrifugal pattern which we have seen earlier to be the antithesis of the domestic ideal. In light of these facts, Jane tells us, "I comprehended all at once that he would hardly make a good husband" (II,xxxiv,204). In his
restless striving, St. John has much in common with the
Byronic strain of romanticism, and with the romantic hero,
but he lacks the gentleness of heart, the common humanity,
which alone would qualify him for domestic life:

I saw he was of the material from which nature
hews her heroes—Christian and Pagan—her law­
givers, her statesmen, her conquerors: a steadfast
bulwark for great interests to rest upon; but, at
the fireside, too often a cold cumbersome column,
gloomy and out of place.

"This parlour is not his sphere," I reflected:
"the Himalayan ridge, or Caffre bush, even the
plague-cursed Guinea Coast swamp, would suit him
better. Well may he eschew the calm of domestic
life; it is not his element: there his faculties
stagnate—they cannot develop or appear to advan­
tage. It is in scenes of strife and danger—where
courage is proved, and energy exercised, and
fortitude tasked—that he will speak and move, the
leader and superior. A merry child would have the
advantage of him on this hearth. He is right to
choose a missionary's career—I see it now."
(II,xxxiv,204)

It is not surprising that Jane refuses to marry St. John,
for she now recognizes that such a marriage would only be
an enslavement. By this point it becomes evident, too,
that Charlotte Brontë has been making some deliberate con­
trasts throughout Jane Eyre. The aristocratic and beauti­
ful but unfeeling and shallow Blanche Ingram has been
compared to the sympathetic Jane Eyre, and Rochester made
his choice in proposing to the latter. Now Charlotte
Brontë has deliberately contrasted St. John Rivers and
Rochester, and Jane chooses the latter. Significantly,
Jane makes her decision recognizing the fullness of Roch­
ester's nature, and his capacity for domestic love (as well
as romantic), in contrast to St. John. When Jane leaves Moor House to return to Thornfield, she tells us that "I felt like the messenger-pigeon flying home" (II, xxxvi, 244). Thornfield has burned to the ground, but this does not gainsay the fact that Jane's true home is to be found in the love of Rochester, whom she marries, in the domestic resolution of the novel.

Like Jane Eyre, Mr. Arabin, in Barchester Towers, has never had the fulfillment of a family and home of his own, and one theme of that novel is devoted to describing how Mr. Arabin triumphs over Mr. Slope and Bertie Stanhope to win Eleanor Bold's hand. Similarly, the story of Silas Marner may be viewed as a quest for the domestic ideal, for the home which Silas never had. In these and other instances of the domestic quest, the domestic novel provided the hoped-for resolution.

The Last Chapter

If the major problem which the Victorian domestic novel typically set out to overcome was some form of disturbance to the domestic order, once that problem had been solved, all that remained was for the characters to assume their respective positions within the domestic ideal. Usually this meant that the leading characters married at the end of the novel and lived in uninterrupted domestic happiness thereafter. Marriage—that is, the marriage of
true minds, not an arranged marriage—was indeed the universal bourne towards which the major domestic novels tended. Pen and Laura and Amelia and Dobbin round out Pendennis and Vanity Fair, respectively, by their marriages. Jane Eyre and Mr. Rochester marry at the conclusion of Jane Eyre. Mr. Arabin and Eleanor Bold marry at the end of Barchester Towers—and Eleanor's marriage to John Bold, at the end of The Warden, earlier, lent a final happy note to that tale. Mary Barton finishes with the standard familial resolution, in which Mary Barton and Jem Wilson are married, and Margaret Legh and Will Wilson shortly will be. At the end of Adam Bede, Adam marries Dinah Morris, while Silas Marner concludes with the marriage of Eppie and Aaron Winthrop and at the close of Middlemarch Fred Vincy weds Mary Garth and Dorothea is united to Will Ladislaw. Almost without exception, Dickens' novels conclude in marriage. Harry Maylie marries Rose Maylie; Nicholas Nickleby marries Madeline Bray and Frank Cheeryble marries Kate Nickleby; Kit marries Barbara and Dick Swiveller marries the "Marchioness"; Ruth Pinch marries John Westlock and Martin Chuzzlewit marries Mary Graham; Florence Dombey marries Walter Gay; David Copperfield marries Agnes Wickfield; Esther marries Allan Woodcourt; Amy Dorrit marries Arthur Clennam, and so forth.

The practice of marrying and domesticating the major characters at the close of a novel had become so
standardized that by 1867 the American periodical *Every Saturday*, in an article dealing with contemporary American and British fiction including Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and George Eliot's *Mill on the Floss*, could criticize the popular "Endings of Novels" as hackneyed. After noting that of late the public has demanded more and more conventional endings in fiction, the author proceeds:

... this taste for literary sugar-plums has been of late years pampered with to such an extent, that a reaction from it has become a consummation devoutly to be wished.

The endings of nineteen novels out of twenty have long been identical ... the curtain falls before a happy group of remaining characters, standing in tasteful postures and bowing their farewells, with the hero and heroine kissing in the centre, and the conventional rose-light shed across the whole scene.³

Notwithstanding such critical disapproval, the majority of Victorian domestic writers customarily indulged in the standard marital and familial grouping of characters at the end of a novel. Trollope discussed this theme near the conclusion of *Barchester Towers*:

The end of a novel, like the end of a children's dinner party, must be made up of sweetmeats and sugar-plums. There is now nothing else to be told but the gala doings of Mr. Arabin's marriage, nothing more to be described than the wedding-dresses, no further dialogue to be recorded than that which took place between the archdeacon who married them, and Mr. Arabin and Eleanor who were married. (liii, 553)

Although there may be some light self-parody in this

³"Endings of Novels" (anon.), *Every Saturday* [Boston], III (1867), 760-61.
passage, the domestic standard is strictly adhered to and the sympathetic reader is provided with his heart's desire. Similarly, Thackeray, at the conclusion of *Vanity Fair*, shows how the Victorian novelist was expected to wrap up the third volume of his triple-decker with a domestic close:

The vessel is in port. He has got the prize he has been trying for all his life. The bird has come in at last. There it is with its head on his shoulder, billing and cooing close up to his heart, with soft outstretched fluttering wings. This is what he has asked for every day and hour for eighteen years. This is what he pined after. Here it is—the summit, the end—the last page of the third volume. Good-bye, colonel—God bless you, honest William!—Farewell, dear Amelia—grow green again, tender young parasite, round the rugged old oak to which you cling! (lxvii, 660-61)

At this point, *Vanity Fair* is concluded for all practical purposes, and what follows is the typical Victorian afterword in which Thackeray goes on to tell of the lives of his characters in later years, fitting the deserving solidly into the family pattern, and excluding those who do not deserve a domestic reward, such as Jos Sedley and Becky Sharp, from such happiness. In fact, the afterword was as much a part of the standard fictional ending as marriage, for the Victorian domestic writers saw marriage, which was the goal of fiction, not only as the end of single life but as the beginning of the familial ideal. In a typical linking of standard situations marriage was thus another form of birth—the birth of the domestic life. George Eliot justifies her afterword on her
characters' lives on this basis, in the concluding overview chapter of *Middlemarch*:

Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know what befell them in the after-years? For the fragment of a life, however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers may find their long-waited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand retrieval.

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic—the gradual conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in common. (VIII, Finale, 607-08)

With this purpose in mind, George Eliot goes on to tell of the future lives of her major characters, and how they prospered or failed according to the domestic standard. For example, the marriage of Fred Vincy and Mary Garth is a triumph in spite of Fred's unpromising early adventures and we are told that Fred remained unswervingly faithful to Mary and their curly-headed children, even relinquishing his beloved cross-country horsemanship because of the consequences an injury would have upon his family. Indeed, Fred often felt sorry for other men "who could not have Mary for their wife" (VIII, Finale, 607-08). George Eliot finishes this portrait by carrying it still further into the future:

On inquiry it might possibly be found that
Fred and Mary still inhabit Stone Court— that the creeping plants still cast the foam of their blossoms over the fine stone-wall into the field where the walnut-trees stand in stately row— and that on sunny days the two lovers who were first engaged with the umbrella-ring may be seen in white-haired placidity at the open window from which Mary Garth, in the days of Peter Featherstone, had often been ordered to look out for Mr. Lydgate. (VIII, Finale, 608-09)

In contrast to this picture of domestic happiness, the view of the future of Lydgate and Rosamond is grim, showing their marriage to be a failure. But Dorothea and Will Ladislaw are fully incorporated into the domestic ideal, and the birth of Dorothea's baby effects an immediate reconciliation between her and her uncle. At the close, we are told that the children of Dorothea and Celia often played together, a fitting final portrait of domestic harmony.

Among the most significant characteristics of the Victorian domestic afterword was the incorporation of any character worthy of the family ideal in a family of some sort, even though he himself remained unmarried. At the end of "Janet's Repentance," for instance, Janet is brought into a typical concluding genre picture of the family ideal, wherein the leading character is surrounded by children and his future happiness is predicted:

Janet is living still. Her black hair is grey, and her step is no longer buoyant; but the sweetness of her smile remains, the love is not gone from her eyes; and strangers sometimes ask, Who is that noble-looking elderly woman that walks about
holding a little boy's hand? The little boy is the son of Janet's adopted daughter, and Janet in her old age has children about her knees, and loving young arms round her neck. (II,xxviii, 316-17)

Similarly, the once lonely and isolated weaver of Raveloe, having proven himself worthy of the domestic ideal and of his adopted daughter's love, is also included in the family pattern at the close of Silas Marner. Thus Eppie tells Silas, with respect to her approaching marriage to Aaron Winthrop: "But you'll never be alone again, Father ... And he wants us all to live together ... and he'd be as good as a son to you--that was what he said" (II,xvi,208-09).

At the beginning of his career, in the Pickwick Papers, Dickens humorously feigned reluctance in conforming to the convention of the afterword in fiction:

It is the fate of most men who mingle with the world, and attain even the prime of life, to make many real friends, and lose them in the course of nature. It is the fate of all authors or chroniclers to create imaginary friends, and lose them in the course of art. Nor is this the full extent of their misfortunes; for they are required to furnish an account of them besides.

In compliance with this custom--unquestionably a bad one--we subjoin a few biographical words, in relation to the party at Mr. Pickwick's assembled. (lvii,799-800)

Dickens went on, nevertheless, to give the reader a full account of the future lives of Mr. and Mrs. Winkle, Mr. and Mrs. Snodgrass, Mr. Tupman, Mr. Bob Sawyer, Mrs. Bardell, Sam Weller and Mary, and, finally, Mr. Pickwick himself.
In his later productions Dickens consistently adhered to the convention and sometimes, as in Dombey and Son, the moral message and emotional impact of the novel were brought home largely through the final afterview, taken from the vantage point of later years.

One reason why Dickens found the afterview invaluable probably was that suggested by George Eliot, that only through viewing the characters' later lives can we see the implementation and fulfillment of the domestic ideal which marriage merely begins. Dickens, too, relied on the afterword to demonstrate that worthy single characters would be included in a family of some sort. At the end of Oliver Twist, for example, the marriage of Rose and Harry Maylie, like that of Eppie and Aaron, does not exclude Mrs. Maylie, who is incorporated into the new home (l iii, 412). And at the end of Nicholas Nickleby, the single Newman Noggs is placed within the domestic hierarchy:

There was one gray-haired quiet harmless gentleman, who, winter and summer, lived in a little cottage hard by Nicholas's house, and, when he was not there, assumed the superintendence of affairs. His chief pleasure and delight was in the children, with whom he was a child himself, and master of the revels. The little people could do nothing without dear Newman Noggs. (lxv, 831)

It will be remembered that at the conclusion of Martin Chuzzlewit Tom Pinch does not marry, for Martin wins the hand of Mary Graham. Nevertheless, as Dickens emphasizes in the afterword, Tom is brought into the family pattern,
surrounded by children who adore him, for he has shown himself worthy of domestic life (liv,837). Similarly, Mr. Dombey, who had blighted the young lives of Paul and Florence, finds forgiveness in the end, and in Dickens' emotion-laden afterword, he is seen together with Florence's children, young Florence and Paul, with whom he is united in familial concord—for he, too, has been incorporated in the domestic ideal. The final pattern at the close of Hard Times is also constructed so as to include Louisa Gradgrind, who delights in the children of Sissy Jupe and finds domestic happiness with them, though she never marries herself (III,ix,298-99). Many another otherwise isolated and lonely figure found lasting happiness at the end of a Victorian domestic novel by being drawn into the warm family circle of his fellows.

Perhaps as fine an example as can be found of the Victorian domestic ideal in an afterword is Dickens' description of the domestic bliss of Rose Maylie at the conclusion of Oliver Twist:

I would fain linger yet with a few of those among whom I have so long moved, and share their happiness by endeavouring to depict it. I would show Rose Maylie in all the bloom and grace of early womanhood, shedding on her secluded path in life soft and gentle light, that fell on all who trod it with her, and shone into their hearts. I would paint her the life and joy of the fireside circle and lively summer group; I would follow her through the sultry fields at noon, and hear the low tones of her sweet voice in the moonlit evening walk; I would watch her in all her goodness and
charity abroad, and the smiling and untiring discharge of domestic duties at home; I would paint her and her dead sister's child [Oliver] happy in their love for one another, and passing whole hours together in picturing the friends whom they had so sadly lost; I would summon before me, once again, those joyous little faces that clustered round her knee, and listen to their merry prattle; I would recall the tones of that clear laugh, and conjure up the sympathetic tear that glistened in the soft blue eye. These, and a thousand looks and smiles, and turns of thought and speech—I would fain recall them every one. (liii,414-15)

It is little wonder, then, in light of the fact that the ending of the novel was the culmination of the domestic aesthetic (as here), that the last chapter was anticipated with great sentimental expectancy, as R. B. Martineau's painting, "The Last Chapter" (1863) (see Figure 10) reveals. Thackeray indicated in *Vanity Fair* that Amelia Sedley "would cry . . . over the end of a novel, were it ever so stupid" (i,15), and no doubt the final moments had great emotional impact upon the typical Victorian reader.

The reason for this impact may be explained through a brief aside with respect to Mr. Pecksniff. After entering into the Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company fraud scheme with Tigg Montague and Jonas Chuzzlewit, Mr. Pecksniff walks out of the Blue Dragon and contemplates the stars at midnight with Mrs. Lupin:

"Behold the wonders of the firmament, Mrs. Lupin! How glorious is the scene! When I look up at those shining orbs, I think that each of them is winking to the other to take notice of the vanity of men's pursuits. My fellow-men!" cried Mr. Pecksniff, shaking his head in pity; "you are much mistaken; my wormy relatives, you
Fig. 10.—"The Last Chapter" (1863) by R. B. Martineau
are much deceived! The stars are perfectly contented (I suppose so) in their several spheres. Why are not you? Oh! do not strive and struggle to enrich yourselves, or to get the better of each other, my deluded friends, but look up there, with me!" (xli, 684)

This is the culmination of Mr. Pecksniff's hypocrisy, for he has just attempted to climb over his fellow men though unwittingly he has overreached himself. The result is Mr. Pecksniff's own undoing. But the ideal which he abuses in the passage just quoted, the ideal of universal order, of the contentment of each man with his own sphere in life, was, of course, central to the Victorian belief that domestic fulfillment was all that any man needed for happiness. This centripetal, ordered, contented ideal was what the Victorian domestic novel attained at its close, when the leading characters had assumed their positions in the familial hierarchy, and had been bound into an organic familial whole. Because unity and the communication of love and sympathy that accompanied such a coming-together had been attained, the emotional impact for the Victorian reader was great. The search for home was over.

All of the preceding leads to some final ideas about the Victorian domestic novel which we might develop through an analogy with the literature of an earlier age. Elizabethan drama, particularly the plays of Shakespeare, can be helpfully studied with respect to the Elizabethan Natural Order, a concept best expressed by Ulysses' speech
on degree in *Troilus and Cressida*, and developed at length by E. M. W. Tillyard in *The Elizabethan World Picture* (1944). The genres of comedy and tragedy may also be understood in light of the Elizabethan concept of natural order. A Shakespearean comedy, such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, may be seen as a slight and lighthearted disruption of the natural order, through the quarrelings of Titania and Oberon, the forced flight of the young lovers, and the plot-complicating devices of mistaken identity, invisibility, and so forth. The problem of the comedy is to regain the Natural Order once again, which of course is finally accomplished, and consummated with the multiple marriages at the end of this—and most Shakespearean—comedy. A play which follows this pattern is a comedy because, unlike the case with tragedy, during the inversion no real destruction is done, no permanent wrong is performed which cannot be set to rights with but little discomfort or loss. And since order is maintained or regained at the conclusion, and all parties are left as happy as or happier than before, a comedy becomes, in effect, a reassertion of the natural order, and of the mystery, wonder, and joy of being a man amidst so miraculous a scheme.

We have seen that in the main body of the Victorian domestic novel, too, a disruption or inversion of the Victorian "Natural Domestic Order," if we so may call it, took place, through the romantic error, or some other cause.
The working-out of the novel was towards regaining an order which had been lost, or, often, an order which the individuals concerned had never experienced at all. In the Victorian domestic novel, this order was consistently attained. Even Tom and Maggie Tulliver are united at last, though in death; and although Little Nell dies in The Old Curiosity Shop, Dickens uses the cosmic metaphor of the stars in their spheres, which we have just seen mistreated by Mr. Pecksniff, to indicate that Nell's pure spirit will find its place in an order beyond that of this world (xlii,311; lxx,531). Since the Victorian domestic realists consistently ended their novels with the looked-for attainment of the "Natural Domestic Order," as a genre Victorian domestic fiction may be regarded as a comedy rather than tragedy--comedy in the sense that it reaffirms the idea of order, the domestic hierarchy, the continuing good of the world, the attainability of the Victorian domestic ideal.
CONCLUSION

The Victorian domestic writers had come a long way from the materialistic dictum of the eighteenth century's Moll Flanders, that "With money in one's purse one is at home anywhere." Yet their sentimental ideal of the hearth contrasted sharply with the ubiquitous harshness of their age at large: the creation of a new landless working class; the brutal birth-pangs of the industrial revolution in swollen, diseased, and filthy cities; the heartless utilitarian economics of laissez-faire and the periodic threat of starvation to the working classes; the usurping machine which seemed to enslave men as well as free them; the grim realities of the Crimean War and the Indian Mutiny; the overthrow of Fundamentalism by the German Higher Criticism; startling archaeological, geological, and biological discoveries culminating with Darwin. In a sense, it seems paradoxical that while the evolutionists make assertions about apes, Dickens and George Eliot are delineating the domestic virtues—that while the Crystal Palace visibly proclaims the triumph of Progress and of man's reasoning faculties as harnessed in technology, the

\footnote{Daniel Defoe, \textit{Moll Flanders} (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 155.}

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sentimental Victorians, like Carroll's Alice, are in danger of drowning in a pool of their own tears.

It could be argued that the Victorians used the "real" world of the heart and sentiments as a retreat from uncomfortable doubts, as a final proof that God was in his Heaven and all was right with the world. For example, a reviewer of Arnold's "The Forsaken Merman," in Fraser's Magazine for 1849, found the healthy pathos of the poem filled with "'godly doctrine, and profitable for these days,' when the heresy of 'Religion versus God' is creeping on more subtly than ever: by which we mean the setting up forms of worship and systems of soul-saving in opposition to the common instincts and affections of humanity, divine, because truly human . . . ."  

The reviewer concludes that "no man can write true poetry, that is true nature, without striking on some eternal key in harmony with the deepest laws of the universe."  

But sentiment as an explicit proof of God was the exception rather than the rule—the two worlds of intellectual doubt and heart-felt trust rarely even touched one another. Perhaps this was, in turn, because to a certain degree the novel, at least, was a sheltered genre; like the children's tale it had to follow a certain prescribed form which excluded religious doubt.

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2 "Recent Poetry and Recent Verse" (anon. rev.), Fraser's Magazine, XXXIX (1849), 578.

3 Ibid.
and demanded a happy ending; otherwise it was no longer acceptable as a household genre for grown-up children, the sentimental Victorians themselves.

Yet the answer to the seeming Victorian paradox of faith in an age of disbelief may partly lie with ourselves, as well as with them. Each age tends to judge its predecessors in terms of its own interests and preoccupations. In this, the twentieth century is no exception. Our concern with the Victorians' intellectuality, their religious anxieties, their moral position, their scientific and social concerns is necessary and just; the preponderant emphasis which we have given to this "outer world" of Victorian life, however, may partly reflect our own intellectuality—and our own doubt. At a critical juncture in Middlemarch, George Eliot asks us not to judge Mr. Casaubon by Mrs. Cadwallader's contempt for a neighboring clergyman's alleged greatness of soul, or Sir James Chettam's poor opinion of his rival's legs. Instead, she suggests that "we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest, what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or capacity . . ." (I,x,62). The Victorian domestic writers, whose lachrymosity and sentimentalism have been similarly adjudged by the outside estimates of the twentieth century, merit inward consideration as well.

The speculative reader may by now have wondered how
Thomas Hardy fits into the domestic pattern. He does not. Of course the domestic ideal had been punctured earlier by the fiction of Meredith and others. But *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, and *Jude the Obscure*, finalize the marital-familial ideal and lead us into what by domestic standards is the twentieth century novel. Hardy wrote about individuals rather than about families, individuals who are doomed never to attain domestic happiness. And by using Hardy as a point of contrast we may come to understand one of the major distinctions between fiction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the earlier age, the basic unit of society was not seen to be the single person, who was incomplete and attained fulfillment only by becoming part of an organic whole greater than himself, the family. In twentieth century fiction, the individual often reigns supreme, independent, isolated, and alone, beyond all familial considerations, while the family is no greater than the sum of its parts, a loosely linked assemblage of discrete personalities. Like most generalizations, there are notable exceptions to this one— but I believe the distinction is consistent enough to merit our attention. A similar transition appears in Victorian poetry, witness Meredith's "Modern Love," in the sixteenth section of which the husband speaks to his wife those forbidding words signaling the end of the
domestic ideal: "'Ah yes! / Love dies!' I said: I never thought it less."

Although we may depreciate the domestic aesthetic for its sentimentalism, it at least serves as one additional key to the Victorian sensibility, though even for the Victorians the domestic ideal never attained its full potentiality. As George Eliot expressed it in *Middlemarch*: "That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity" (II,xx,144).