

THE PAGEANT OF DICKENS

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The pageant of Dickens by W. Walter Crotch

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W. WALTER CROTCH

**THE PAGEANT
OF DICKENS**

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CHARLES DICKENS.

Specially engraved for this work by Frank Willis, A.R.E.

THE PAGEANT OF DICKENS

BY

W. WALTER CROTCH

AUTHOR OF "CHARLES DICKENS: SOCIAL REFORMER," ETC., ETC.

With a portrait of Charles Dickens
engraved by FRANK WILLIS, A.R.E.

SECOND AND REVISED EDITION

LONDON

CHAPMAN & HALL, LTD.

1916

TO
MRS. KATE PERUGINI
IN WHOSE FRIENDSHIP AND SYMPATHETIC INTEREST
I HAVE FOUND MY CHIEF ENCOURAGEMENT
THIS SINCERE TRIBUTE TO THE
GENIUS OF HER
FATHER
IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED.

First Edition published December, 1915.

Second Edition published April, 1916.

PREFACE.

THIS volume has been written as a result of the extremely kind reception accorded, alike by the Press and the public, to my former Dickensian work, in which I sought to analyse the social teachings and the political philosophy of the great novelist. Frankly, that book, like this, in its inception, was intended primarily for those who claim to be lovers and disciples of the great "lord of laughter and of tears." I discovered, however, that it possessed a broader appeal and a more widespread interest. Then it occurred to me that for every man who values the teachings of Dickens in regard to the economic problems of our day—and they number many thousands—there must be ten who love to read him for that superb gift of characterisation which has stood unrivalled in our literature since the age of Shakespeare. Hence this book.

To attempt merely to classify Dickens's creations would be futile if not impossible. He had, as somebody once said, "the hunger of humanity," and the range of his characters, covering as they do all sorts and conditions of men and including almost every diversity of class, profession, and occupation, is perhaps the most striking proof of his supreme genius, as it is the principal reason of his unprecedented popularity. Both are in marked contrast to the work of certain of our modern novelists, whose characters are recruited almost exclusively from a single class and whose craftsmanship is exhausted by the manipulation of half a dozen of the most morbid among them.

PREFACE.

With Dickens it is different. There is no novel of his whose every page is not crowded with jostling life and vibrant with reality. To read him, after perusing some of his modern successors is to leave the stuffy atmosphere of the suburban drawing-room for the bustling throng of Oxford Street, or any highway of life where we may come into contact with humanity and feel again the edge of personalities strong enough not to get blunted in the crowd.

So I have taken groups of Dickens's characters and I have tried to lead them past in orderly array—allowing them ever and anon to reveal their human foibles, to break out into exhilarating song or exuberant mirth; to pull at our heart-strings in their sorrow; to show us the gift of healing in their tears.

And as I have proceeded to examine my groups I have been conscious of a great moral purpose underlying them all. They seem to me to postulate not merely a political but an ethical philosophy as well. If not in each individual, certainly in every group, there is an arresting message which even this age would do well not to ignore. To the almost threadbare criticism that some of Dickens's characters strike us as forced, unnatural, and unreal, I answer: So also do some of the men and women whom we pass in the street or chat with in real life. Maybe the limitation is with us, and not with them. Certainly other characters which Dickens has drawn appeal instantly; move us swiftly to unrestrained humour or indignant pity, and keep always some corner of our souls that is their own. "To understand," say the French, "is to forgive," and when I hear some of