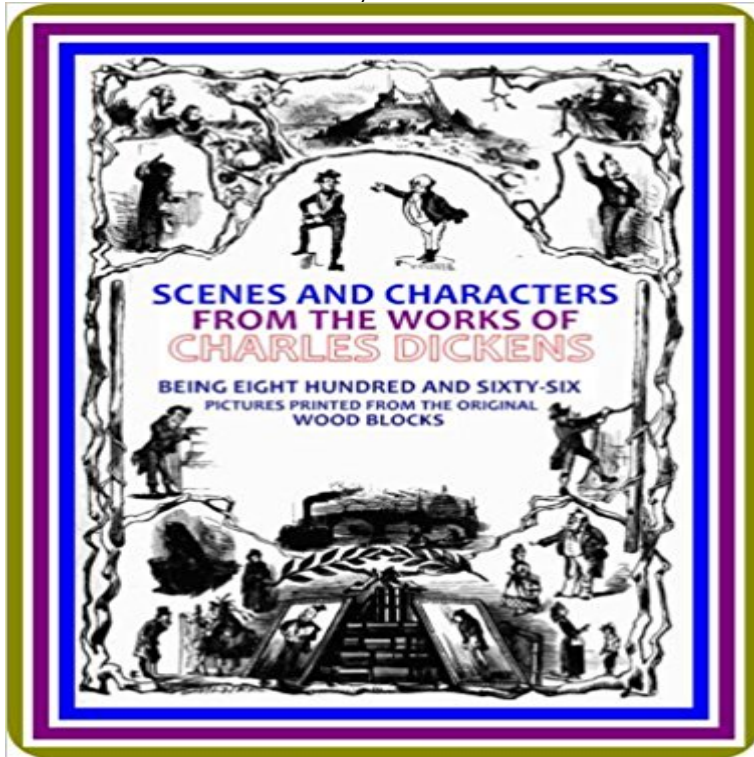


Scenes and Characters from the Works of Charles Dickens / Being Eight Hundred and Sixty-six Pictures Printed From the Original Wood Blocks



THERE is one question upon which the critics and lovers of Dickens seem never able to get into agreement, and that is the question of the original illustrations to his works. To the thorough-going enthusiast Phiz and Dickens seem inseparable, and no edition which does not contain the old, familiar grotesques of Hablot Brownes imagination, or, in the earlier volume, the equally abnormal lineaments portrayed by Cruikshank or Seymour, would be deemed worthy of a place upon his bookshelf. But a younger generation is growing up, for whom the time-honoured pictures have not the charm of long association, and among them it is common to hear the complaint that the natural humour and pathos of the authors best works are spoiled to modern fancy by the violent caricatures of the illustrator. Let us abolish these pictures altogether, they say: and illustrate the books with pretty conventionalities by more fashionable artists. At the opposite pole stands yet another group of critics the Superior People who have made up their minds that Dickens himself was a caricaturist, and that therefore the early illustrations, even if they do a little emphasise his exaggerations, are only conceived in fitting harmony with a world of fancy which drowns itself in excesses of the grotesque. Among so many doctors, and all so emphatic, who shall decide? It is, at any rate, no easy task. It happens, however, that there does exist a series of Dickens illustrations, now in some danger of being unduly neglected, in which the artists were wonderfully happy in preserving the original features of Phiz and Cruikshanks interpretations, while they toned down the more extravagant details and brought imagination into closer harmony with reality. These were the illustrations to the square-shaped Household Edition, published in 1870, just after the great novelists death and now reissued in this Dickens picture-book, in

the hope that those who love the stories may like to possess in separate form what is, perhaps, the best pictorial accompaniment that the novels ever received. At the time of its first publication, the Household Edition enjoyed an enormous success. At the moment the name of Dickens was on every ones lips, and the fact that this splendidly illustrated reprint was issued in penny numbers and sixpenny parts placed it within reach of even the most humbly stocked purse. Its sale was stupendous, and the familiar green-covered pamphlets percolated through every town and village where the English tongue is spoken. The original copies may still be met with, under many a country timbered roof, carefully treasured as one of the most cherished household possessions.

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