The Illustrators of the Christmas Books

JOHN LEECH
RICHARD DOYLE
JOHN TENNIEL
DANIEL MACLISE
EDWIN LANDSEER
CLARKSON STANFIELD
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Chapter 7

JOHN LEECH

But for an accident of timing, John Leech might have become the principal illustrator of all Dickens's works, not just of his Christmas books. Too late with his application to fill Seymour's vacancy on *Pickwick* in 1836, over the next eight years Leech earned recognition in his own right, especially after becoming an artist for *Punch*. His independent reputation enabled him to become a closer intimate of Dickens—for whom he worked because of friendship, not necessity—than would have been possible had he been subordinate to him from the first. Though Leech was more important to the author as a friend than as an illustrator, he nevertheless contributed immeasurably to the success of the Christmas books. There, as elsewhere, he introduced a measure of beauty into his caricatures, lending refinement to a formerly crude genre that too often equated ugliness with evil and grace with weakness. Leech's aesthetic gentility had an effect not only on fellow artists like Browne, but perhaps even on Dickens, whose own characterization grew noticeably more refined from *Martin Chuzzlewit* on—about when Leech began working with him. The artist, in turn, garnered material from Dickens's writing for many of his best *Punch* cartoons. The author's affection for Leech, in contrast to that for his earlier illustrators, like Cruikshank and Cattermole, survived the vicissitudes of literary and theatrical collaboration and lasted to the end of their lives. Indeed, in return for his consistent efforts to please, Leech even elicited from Dickens a professional magnanimity that would have surprised all his artistic predecessors, except, perhaps, Cattermole.

If Leech did not become Dickens's illustrator after the Seymour-Buss period on *Pickwick*, it was not because he did not try. Five times he offered his services to the novelist, and five times was rejected. In the summer of 1836, the young man had just given up the medical career that suited his parents (and the older meaning of his surname—physician) but not his own inclination to earn a living as a comic artist. His medical studies, with their emphasis on anatomical structure and proportion, proved invaluable to Leech who, like all Dickens's early illustrators, drew from memory rather than models; except for a few etching lessons from George Cruikshank, he never had any regular art training. In July, perhaps at Cruikshank's suggestion, Leech applied to the author to illustrate *The Pickwick Papers*. He was either unaware that two fellow artists—his old school friend, William Thackeray, and Hablot Browne—had both applied long since, or else he thought that Browne, who had been hired, might meet the same fate as Robert Buss. Dickens quickly informed him that he was very satisfied with Browne's work for *Pickwick* and had no desire to replace him.

Undaunted, Leech once again approached Dickens at Furnival's Inn in late August to leave a drawing of Tom Smart and the chair, illustrating the Bagman's story then appearing in *Pickwick* (fig. 129). Understanding that the young artist wanted to attract the attention of Chapman and Hall in order to secure their good opinion and possibly even a post on something like their *Library of Fiction*, the author forwarded the sketch to the publishers with a disparaging note. "The chair's not bad, but his notion of the Bedroom is rather more derived, I should be disposed to think, from his own fourth pair back, than my description of the old rambling house" (*PP*, XIV, 182–83). His note to the artist, who "threatened" (in Dickens's words) to call again, was more tactful. Acknowledging that Leech's design was "extremely well conceived and executed," he said he had sent it on to Chapman and Hall, though he thought they were already provided with artists for their *Library*, an enterprise he himself had nothing to do with. He also repeated how pleased he was with Browne's contributions to
Still undaunted, Leech waited four years for another opportunity. In the autumn of 1842 he offered his services yet again to Dickens, who, recently returned from America, was preparing *Martin Chuzzlewit*. This time, however, Dickens confronted no novice convert from medicine but an established artist. As the successful illustrator of the *Ingoldsby Legends*, *Hood's Comic Annual*, and, above all, the new humorous periodical, *Punch*, Leech was now warmly received by Dickens. Indeed, the author always reserved his best treatment for illustrators who had earned fame independently of his own work. He now maintained that he had never forgotten meeting Leech nor lost track of his subsequent progress and expressed pleasure at the idea of employing the artist to illustrate his forthcoming novel. He said he must communicate with Browne, of course, but would let Leech know within the week how matters stood. He expressed the hope that, whatever happened, he would not lose touch with the artist again.

For some reason, however, though he had no doubts about Leech's talent, Dickens had second thoughts. He may have recalled the problems of coordinating two illustrators that cropped up throughout *Master Humphrey's Clock*. More likely Browne discouraged this arrangement, for he had recently turned down an offer to join the staff of *Punch*, partly because he disliked competing with Leech. At any rate, two days later, Dickens wrote Leech that there appeared to be “so many mechanical difficulties, complications, entanglements, and impossibilities, in the way” of collaboration that it was simply impractical. Dickens made good his social promise, however, and invited the artist for dinner the following Sunday. Over the following years, Leech dined with the author alone and en famille countless times. His gentility won Kate's affection as well as Dickens's.

Even before *Martin Chuzzlewit* had run its course, however, the author was able to employ the artist after all in 1843. At Dickens's suggestion, most likely, Chapman and Hall commissioned Leech to supply the illustrations for *A Christmas Carol*, a project only partly inspired by *Chuzzlewit*'s disappointing sales. Browne was doubtless too busy illustrating the novel to illustrate the holiday book as well; and Leech, with his graphic talent “for making one glad,” as George du Maurier put it, was especially well suited to the task. His ability to portray both the graceful and the grotesque was needed for the *Carol's* unique blend of the ideal, real, and supernatural.

*A Christmas Carol*, like most of Dickens’s Christmas books and Christmas scenes in his novels, was not explicitly related to the birth of Christ. Indeed, as Ruskin sourly
noted, Dickens's Christmas “meant mistletoe and pudding—neither resurrection from dead, nor rising of new stars, nor teaching of wise men, nor shepherds.”

Dickens himself regarded his holiday stories—which were so popular they created a new genre—as higher forms of nursery tales. His ideal of brotherly love, subsuming that of all religions, was, as he put it, “never out of season” (CB, vii); it proved capable of affecting even the misanthropic Scrooge, just as it had his predecessor in Pickwick, Sexton Grub (PP, 394–403). And indeed, Leech perfectly captured this transcendent but secular spirit in his illustrations for A Christmas Carol.

Certainly the benevolent little book was partly inspired by mercenary concerns. Dickens very much needed money at this time, due to his growing family and the disappointing sales of Martin Chuzzlewit. He was to pay the production costs and Chapman and Hall was to sell the book on commission. Nevertheless, to attract the largest number of purchasers, Dickens wanted the Carol to sell for only five shillings. Yet, in what seems a contradiction of principles, he insisted that it be issued with gilt edges, colored endpapers, a crimson and gold binding, a title page printed in two colors, and eight illustrations—half of them multicolored etchings, the other four black-and-white wood engravings.

The energetic enthusiasm with which Dickens produced A Christmas Carol was in sharp contrast to his agony in the same period over the writing of Chuzzlewit. Leech entered into its spirit more gingerly, however, for the graphic realization of the allegory proved problematic. The colored plates Dickens insisted on caused difficulties from the first. Leech had colored the robe of the Ghost of Christmas Present bright red before he recalled that the text described it as green (Dickens's favorite color). He became far more disturbed when he saw what he considered to be the poor quality of the printed colors in the four colored plates. Leech had indicated on a master print the shades he desired. Then a copier, working from prepared tints, had colored each object separately and uniformly. The result was gay—Scrooge's bright pink chair (I, facing p. 16) and orange trousers (III, facing p. 70), the apple-red cheeks of the dancing Fezziwigs (II, facing p. 30) and the Ghost of Christmas Present (III, facing p. 38) (see fig. 141)—but crude. Leech was dismayed. Dickens sympathetically forwarded his complaints to the publishers, but thought the artist exaggerated the “evil” wrought by the copyst. “You can't think,” he wrote reassuringly, “how much better they will look in a neat book, than you suppose.”

Dickens was correct. Leech's plates were received with as much critical acclaim as the author's text. The Illustrated London News, for example, thought his engravings “taste-fully coloured” and his woodcuts imbued with “the delicacy of fine etchings.” The four colored prints provided a welcome and festive contrast to the black-and-white printed pages. The four uncolored woodcuts displayed suitable mood and expression as well as delicacy of line, whether they portrayed grotesque phantoms (I, 21), impoverished children (III, 57) or mature friends (V, 78). “Who could listen to objections regarding such a book as this?” declared Thackeray, including the illustrations as well as the narrative in his rhetorical question.

Nevertheless, the illustrations precipitated a crisis in Dickens's life. The author discovered he had cleared only £230 on the first printing of the Carol rather than the £1,000 he had expected. No, replied the publishers, denying Forster's charge that they had been negligent, Dickens had given his instructions, and they had faithfully executed them. Certainly Leech was not at fault. Nor had he been overpaid for his efforts; his total recompense for drawing and engraving the plates was just under £50. The hand-painting by others, however, accounted for a disproportionately high proportion of the total expense. The problem was simply that the modest selling price Dickens had insisted upon had insufficiently provided for the cost of such a luxurious format. Eventually, A Christmas Carol did prove profitable. Meanwhile, however, Dickens, financially devastated by the disappointing Chuzzlewit sales and meager Carol profits, in addition to his failure to recover damages from publishers who had pirated his works, broke with Chapman and Hall, and left England to retrench on the Continent.

During his self-imposed exile, Dickens planned another Christmas book, as well as travel notes about Italy and a new novel. He wanted the next holiday production to carry the same kind of message about society that he meant the Carol to have about the individual. As Michael Slater has observed, The Chimes, more directly than his previous works, dramatized his growing conviction that society's problems could not be explained away by blaming them on individual villains like Fagin, Ralph Nickleby, and Montague Tigg, but stemmed from the whole society's self-serving and self-fulfilling attitudes toward the depraved poor and from the blighted prospects it offered them. In further contrast to the Carol, the action of The Chimes was set on New Year's Eve rather than Christmas Eve, and dealt in social and political satire rather than moral allegory. In addition, supernatural elements, which were mainly a benign opportunity for the conversion of Scrooge in A Christmas Carol, became a nightmare for Trotty Veck in The Chimes—one the reader can hardly forget despite the
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The Chimes departed from the Carol in format as well as in spirit and substance. It contained more illustrations, thirteen rather than eight, though none of them were colored. There were not one but four illustrators, all eminent artists who might attract a still wider audience and at least, as Mrs. Leavis suggests, make each purchaser feel he had full value for his money. Leech provided five of the thirteen illustrations; Maclise, Stanfield, and Doyle the rest. The presence of these experienced artists lessened Leech’s burden yet complicated it, for the added variety undermined visual continuity. His portrayal of Trotty Veck as a compact, genial figure with an oversized head (I, 89; II, 100; II, 112), for example, was distinctly at odds with Doyle’s more youthful and conventional representation of him (III, 134).

Moreover, Leech, always eager to please his friend, was also troubled by Dickens’s absence abroad. The efforts of the various illustrators were coordinated by Forster, with whom Leech did not feel completely comfortable. Nevertheless, considering the real and potential obstacles, the collaboration proceeded smoothly, until Dickens returned to London to see The Chimes through the press and read it to his friends. He then noticed the second of Leech’s dual scenes—both integrated within a single illustration, which became a hallmark of the Christmas books, enabling the reader to absorb two actions simultaneously—the print of ‘Richard and Margaret’ for the nightmare Third Quarter of The Chimes (III, 152) (figs. 130 and 131). The artist’s depiction of Margaret in her forlorn garret was suitable, he must have felt, but Richard, striding home,
resembled an elderly behatted nightwatchman, utterly unlike Dickens's disheveled victim of dissipation. The author hastily dispatched a tactful summons: Leech had performed “gallantly” for the new book, but they needed to discuss a “minor” but necessary alteration in one of the wood blocks. After a breakfast meeting with Leech (together with Doyle, one of whose cuts also failed to suit the author), Dickens, with happy appreciation for his own diplomacy, reported to his wife that “with that winning manner which you know of,” he had got the artists to redo their blocks “with the highest good humour.” Whatever his humor, Leech made another sketch (fig. 132) and altered the block overnight. Richard’s bowed unshaven face and unkempt hair now reinforced the despondency of his prematurely bent fine figure (fig. 133). Dickens hastened to assure Leech how gratified he was both by the alteration and by his willing attitude. “I have the greatest diffidence in suggesting any change, however slight, in what you do—you are so ready to make it,” elaborated the author, pleased yet abashed by his friend’s anxiousness to please.

The public responded to this strident holiday book almost as enthusiastically as they had to its gentler predecessor. Most praised the author in his desire to convert society, as he had Scrooge, by attacking Benthamite indifference and Tory paternalism, as he later would again in *Hard Times*. All apparently agreed that the illustrations were dramatically appropriate and skillfully executed. The text and the prints, especially those by Leech, revealed to many readers for the first time the beauties as well as the sorrows of the poor.

Dickens’s third Christmas book, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, was the first to appear under the sole aegis of his new publishers, Bradbury and Evans. Even before working out the plot of this holiday production, Dickens worried about its format, so important to the work’s success. “I think it is time we determined how the Christmas book shall be illustrated,” Dickens wrote the firm at the end of Septem-
Leech's final illustration contributed more to the narrative's enduring impression of gaiety than Dickens's final paragraph, surely a reflection of his depressed mood: "Even as I listen to them blithely, and turn towards Dot, for one last glimpse of a little figure very pleasant to me, she and the rest have vanished into air, and I am left alone. A Cricket sings upon the Hearth; a broken child's-toy lies upon the ground; and nothing else remains" (III, 277). Indeed, Leech's 'The Dance' (III, 276), infused with what Ruskin called his "loving wit," better conveyed Dickens's conscious intent. Not only are the human characters dancing harmoniously with one another, but so does the dog, Boxer, with the cat (see fig. 163). This unlikely pair was no sentimental afterthought. Leech took pains to make his representation of Boxer consistent with Landseer's earlier one (II, 230) (see fig. 162). In keeping with the merriment, the artist even animated his own famous signature—a leech in a bottle—by adding legs that kick away with joyous abandon. By contrast, Dickens's depressed mood manifested itself not only in his concluding paragraph but in his criticism that the Carrier, whose person is disproportionately large, was not handsome enough. The public, however, had no quarrel with the illustrations, nor with the sentimental text, and to the chagrin of its critics, sales of *The Cricket* soared even beyond those of its Christmas predecessors.

In contrast, the 1846 Christmas book, *The Battle of Life*, contains a minimum of merriment. As the title suggests, the story is not filled with holiday spirit. The plot is improbable—a younger sister runs away from home to effect a marriage between her fiancé and her elder sister—and devoid even of seasonal crutches, set, as it is, in the spring and late fall, though snow falls at the conclusion of Part the Second (II, 349). There were neither supernatural devices nor sociological appeals to reinforce Dickens's characteristic insistence on the value of home and hearth. Moreover, the author's circumstances—his *Daily News* failure, his removal to Switzerland, and the commencement of *Dombey and Son*, his first novel in two years—were not conducive to a mood of festivity and creativity. The pressures of *Dombey*, in particular, made the writing of *The Battle of Life* a battle indeed—one he almost abandoned.

The pictures, always such a crucial element in the Christmas books, were again complicated by Dickens's absence. Forster's coordination of Maclise, Doyle, Stanfield, and Leech was hampered by the author's anxious suggestions from afar as well as by squabbles among the artists. Forster did not receive the first two parts of the manuscript until early October. Even so, the author requested it be withheld from the illustrators until the third part arrived,
“for it is a single-minded story, as it were, and an artist should know the end: which I don’t think very likely, unless he reads it.” This restriction inevitably hamstrung Forster in coordinating artists, engravers, printers, and publishers (and, as shall be seen, would fail to prevent Leech’s being misled). Then, suddenly, at the end of October, Dickens suggested that the costumes in the illustrations be those of Goldsmith’s period. “Whatever you think best, in this as in all things, is best, I am sure,” he added soothingly. Despite the late date, Forster knew he had little choice but to implement this proposal.

When the completed manuscript was received, only a month remained for thirteen illustrations to be designed and sketched by four different artists, sent to Switzerland for Dickens’s approval, returned, altered if necessary, drawn onto the block, and printed. Leech promised to lose no time, but he could not say how many illustrations he could produce in a week’s time. “I am so embarrassed by the conditions under which I am to make my share of the drawings that I hardly know what to do at all,” he despaired to Forster. “I cannot tell you how loathe I should be to cause any delay or difficulty in the production of the book or what pain it would give me to cause either Dickens or yourself any annoyance. I confess I am a little out of heart.”

Leech finally contributed three of the thirteen illustrations (though not in the allotted time). Each one, however, compounded his earlier distress. In his first scene, ‘The Parting Breakfast,’ which involved most of the main characters (I, 300), he worried about his portrayal of Clemency Newsome, the faithful servant (and ancestress of Copperfield’s Peggotty). Maclise had already insisted that his own earlier delineation of Clemency, whom he treated like a plumper Dot Peerybingle, be sustained in his colleagues’ representations; but Leech, a master of characterization, protested that he could not “Conscientiously” make Clemency as attractive in the situation that fell to his pencil (I, 296–96). What had impressed Leech about the servant was her comic awkwardness. “Of course I may be wrong in my conception of what Dickens intended,” he explained to Forster, “but I imagine the lady in question a sort of clean ‘Slowboy.’” He worried that readers, ignorant of his obligation to conform to Maclise’s portrayal, would hold him responsible for the inaccurate characterization. Two days later, Forster received the sketch, accompanied by the artist’s apologies for its “glaring” defects and for the clumsy tone of his previous letter. That this sketch was completed at four o’clock in the morning indeed reveals that Leech spared neither time nor comfort to show his regard for both Forster and Dickens. The controversial figure of Clemency, appealingly maternal and appropriately obscure in the background, managed to fill all prerequisites. She did not differ markedly from Maclise’s characterization, or contradict Dickens’s text, or compromise the artist’s own integrity.

In Dickens’s three preceding Christmas books, Leech’s execution of at least half the illustrations had provided some pictorial continuity. In The Battle of Life, however, the illustrations were equally divided among the four artists, which resulted in disparate techniques and, hence, effects. The suitably rough lines of Leech’s portrayal of ‘Snitchey and Cragg’s’ (II, 318), for example, clash with the graceful curves of Maclise’s ‘Secret Interview’ (II, 336) which, in turn, clash with the compacted strokes of Stanfield’s ‘The Nutmeg-Grater’ (III, 353). A further complication was the inevitable alteration of the original drawings by the engraver. At least one observer still finds more Dalziel than Leech in the published prints.

This, however, was the least of the problems with ‘The Night of the Return’ (II, 346) (fig. 134). In this final whole-page illustration for The Battle of Life, as in the others, Leech visually stressed the verbal contrasts between the upper and lower panels: while the dance proceeds in the ballroom in the panel above, a solitary couple, holding hands, are stealing out into the night in the panel below. In the process, he caused precisely the trouble Dickens tried to avoid by giving the artists only the completed text so they would know how the intricate story was resolved. Leech apparently read only as much of the narrative as he thought essential to his purpose. Consequently, he was deceived into thinking, as Dickens intended his readers but not his artists to be, that Marion Jeddler had eloped with Michael Warden when in fact she had only run away to her aunt. Thus he erroneously included Warden in his finished block. The mistake was viewed by Dickens with particular anguish, doubtless compounded by Browne’s recent misrepresentation of Paul and Mrs. Pipechin in Dombey (see fig. 79). “Of course, I need not tell you, my dear fellow,” Dickens cried to Forster, “Warden has no business in the elopement scene. He was never there!”

Yet after the initial shock of this unwelcome surprise, Dickens gave up the idea of suppressing the Leech design for what would have been the second time in their collaboration or even replacing it in future reprints. It was not merely because publication had been expressly delayed for it. More important, he told Forster, he decided to let the print stand to avoid “the pain this might give to our kindhearted Leech”; he also realized that “what is such a monstrous enormity to me, as never having entered my brain, may not so present itself to others.” If ‘The Night of the Return’ wrongs Marion’s innocence, its unaltered
Hot and breathless as the Doctor was, it only made him the more impatient for Alfred's coming.


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presence testifies to the sensitive strength of Dickens's affection for Leech. The gesture was an especially magnanimous one at this time, when the author was so hypercritical of any shortcomings in the work of his illustrators.

Readers did not comment on Leech's error until Forster called attention to it after the death of both artist and author. Although Dickens praised Leech's illustrations along with all the others at the time, he later maintained that all of them "shocked me more or less," perhaps overaffected by the poor critical reception of The Battle. Indeed, it could be argued that the varied styles of the illustrations complicated rather than reinforced the narrative, whose plot was not as smoothly integrated as those of the earlier Christmas books, particularly the Carol. From conception to execution to critical reception, this fourth holiday production was indeed a spiritless affair.

The following year, Dickens began The Haunted Man. He structured this story around the idea of memory, a theme of all the Christmas books as well as a preoccupation rooted in his own past. Immersed in Dombey and Son, however, he was unable to complete the work in time for Christmas, 1847. In 1848 Dickens returned to the book. As Slater points out, he reutilized the same narrative ingredients that had made up the Carol, The Chimes, and The Cricket: an explicit Christmas setting, replete with allusions to Christ and God; scenes of ideal family happiness; a powerful embodiment of society's perpetuated wrongs in the Caliban-like boy; and even a beneficent change of heart of the main character, Redlaw, by a supernatural agent. He could not recapture the joyous geniality of the earlier Christmas books, however, and The Haunted Man turned out to be a baffling mixture of intensity and eccentricity as it dramatized the point that painful memories are inextricable from good ones, and make men mutually compassionate.

Leech agreed to provide five of its sixteen illustrations. For the sake of friendship, he continued to tolerate strains of collaboration with other illustrators—strains that, after The Battle of Life, had led to the departure of Maclise and Doyle as regular Christmas book illustrators and their replacement by Frank Stone and John Tenniel. In return, Dickens did everything possible to make the principal illustrator of his holiday books feel appreciated, and to relieve the pressures on him. He sent Leech part one of his completed manuscript and thanked him profusely for his good opinion of it. Although saying he supposed that the artist would want to illustrate 'The Tetterbys' and 'The Boy before the Fire' in part two, he promised that any other subject that interested him would "do" equally well. When Dickens needed a break from work, he made sure the artist took one too. "All work and no play make Jack (Leech) a dull boy," Dickens prefaced his "propositician" for a day's walk along the Brighton beach; such respite, he hoped, would enable Leech to "smash the haunted man, out of hand." Even when haste became mandatory, Dickens lightened Leech's burden. "The time being so very pressing, and you so pressed," the author "(acting, I hope, as you would have me)" requested Stanfield to execute the concluding dinner scene—a serious scene that required more time than Leech had available. Dickens went on to assure Leech that he trusted there would be plenty of other comic subjects he preferred for him to portray in connection with the Tetterbys.

Such unusual authorial consideration paid off aesthet-
ically. Leech produced some of his finest work for this cheerless holiday tale; indeed, as Mrs. Leavis has remarked, the illustrations alone must have accounted for its sales. The very looseness of Leech's lines in his pictures of Johnny coping with baby Moloch at home (II, 422) and abroad (III, 361) reinforces the good humor. Similarly the dark, close strokes with which he portrays Redlaw both with the Phantom (I, 401) and with the wild boy (I, 408) perfectly capture the requisite sense of strangeness, and the way he positions the child before the fireplace (III, 451) not only recalls Redlaw's posture there in Tenniel's frontispiece (380) as well as his own earlier portrayal (I, 401), but visually reinforces Dickens's linkage of the civilized man and the wild boy. The illustrations here display more clearly than their predecessors Leech's versatility as well as his sensitivity.

Dickens dealt with the problems of memory more directly in his confidential account to Forster in 1847 and more artistically in David Copperfield, his next novel in 1849. The Haunted Man was a necessary if crude fictional exploration. Although the short work enjoyed commercial, if not critical, success, its "Christening dinner," attended by Leech at the beginning of the new year, proved to be the last rites for Dickens's holiday books. He thereafter often began Christmas stories, but allowed subordinates to finish them; he published them in special seasonal numbers of Household Words and All the Year Round, but never again had one illustrated. Gradually, however, Dickens lost heart for the idealized aspects of Christmas that he, as much as Prince Albert, had perpetuated. Commencing a new series of All the Year Round in 1868, he determined to abolish even the special Christmas number on the grounds that extensive imitation was making it tiresome (CP, 2, 3). No longer capable of viewing the holiday season as a festive family celebration, as he had at the time of The Pickwick Papers, Dickens made it an occasion for fear in Great Expectations and for fatality in The Mystery of Edwin Drood.

Dickens's friendship with Leech did not weaken, however, after the conclusion of the Christmas books. On the contrary, it deepened as the two men shared experiences with Punch, as well as in amateur theatricals, and on family holidays. The author readily conceded that it was not Leech's illustrations for his own work but those for Punch that made him so famous, and indeed, the ubiquitous comic magazine, in which most of his work circulated, made Leech one of the best-known artists of his day. Through him, Dickens became friendly with Mark Lemon, the editor of Punch, and many of its staff members, including William Thackeray and Gilbert à Beckett, Seymour's former editor. Dickens was often invited to the exclusive dinners at which the weekly cartoons were decided; nevertheless, the magazine rejected the only contribution he ever offered it—a criticism of the foul suburban water supply that Punch thought better criticized in pictures.

It is testimony, however, to the familiarity of the populace not only with Dickens's work, but also with its illustrations, that the satirical artists publishing in Punch were so fond of borrowing Dickens's characters for their cartoons. Leech, in particular, adapted for Punch not only his own Dickens illustrations but those of Cruikshank and Browne as well. Henry Brougham, for example, made a fine Oliver "asking for more," the first Dickensian subject to appear in Punch, and a volatile Miss Mowcher during Copperfield's appearance; the exiled Louis Philippe perfectly travestied the condemned Fagin; soon after the publication of The Cricket on the Hearth, Sir Robert Peel figured as "A Political Tilly Slow-boy" holding "Cobden's baby" while Lord John Russell appeared as Johnny Tetterby minding his "Financial Reform" infant; and Mrs. Gamp was one of Leech's pet satiric vehicles. Indeed Dickens, in his humorous account of the northern tour of his theatrical company, has the midwife call Leech an "owdacious" wretch after hearing him say he had "draw'd her several times—in Punch" (which, she explains, she never touches "because of the lemon!") (CP, I, 743).

Dickens ranked Leech, along with Cruikshank, among the best caricaturists of all time. He agreed with Ruskin, William Rossetti, and Henry James that Leech, in gently satirizing contemporary politics and society, in contrast to the bludgeoning manner of earlier caricaturists, had rendered a great service to English popular art. In 1848, when Leech published twelve of his Punch cartoons as a series entitled The Rising Generation, Dickens, at Forster's request, readily wrote one of his rare art criticisms for The Examiner (CP, I, 190–93). He felt the principal illustrator of his Christmas books merited special praise for being the first English comic artist to consider beauty compatible with satire. Indeed, as Steig observes, Leech undoubtedly influenced Dickens in his own movement in Chuzzlewit, Dombey, and Copperfield away from the tradition—exemplified by Rowlandson and Gillray and modified by Cruikshank and Browne—that equated humor and evil with ugliness, and toward more realism and refinement. The Royal Academy, however, the final arbiter of Victorian taste in art, continued to hold popular black-and-white artists in contempt, and excluded Leech, as well as Cruikshank, from its membership. Inquired Dickens sarcastically: "Will no Member and Associates be found upon its books, one of these days, the labours of whose oils and
Leech was among the many members of *Punch* enlisted by Dickens when he founded his amateur theatrical troupe in 1845. Although the artist sympathized with its charitable objectives, his participation was not wholehearted. He clearly preferred exercising his "bage vice" [bass voice], as Mrs. Gamp called it (*CP*, I, 743) in performing melancholy songs like "King Death" for his intimates, to acting before strangers. Yet when he played Master Matthew in *Every Man in His Humour*—a part he retained in many performances subsequent to its opening on September 20, 1845—Leech was praised for his fine performance by such knowledgeable theater lovers as William Macready and Robert Browning. He tried to share Dickens's enthusiasm for costumes, rehearsals, and profits, and even made a spirited crude sketch of the author during his renowned impersonation of Captain Bobadil. Nevertheless, by 1848 friends watching him act the role of Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* perceived "a ring of impatience in his voice, a kind of 'Oh, I wish this was all over!' attitude." Finally, although he superbly acted the part of the marquis in the next play on the program, *Animal Magnetism*, his nonchalance had so disturbed the company during rehearsals that Dickens had insisted he either get his part perfectly or drop out altogether. Essentially, it seems, Leech continued to participate in the theatricals out of affection for Dickens, rather than for the drama.

Unlike his relationships with Cruikshank, Browne, and Cattermole, Dickens's intimacy with Leech survived the trials of both literary and theatrical collaboration. In fact Leech was universally beloved. Everyone who knew him found the tall, slim, dark-haired artist attractive (fig. 135), his manner an engaging blend of gentility, melancholy, and wit, and his hospitality tasteful and elegant; even the government he so often caricatured assisted his family not only during his lifetime but after his death. Dickens treasured him as a friend all his life. The two had much in common. As young men, both had witnessed the collapse of their family fortunes and subsequently retrieved them by their own talents, only to be subjected to constant demands on their resources from poor relations, especially their Micawber-like fathers. Neither forgot his past, though both showed great gusto in enjoying the present. Whether he was walking, inspecting schools, attending the theater and concerts, watching a hanging, traveling in the countryside or on the Continent, or even being sketched by the artist (fig. 136), Dickens found Leech the ideal companion.

The bonds between the two men were shared by their families. Holidays spent together, however, though their friendship survived, were a definite strain on their nerves even after 1849, when everything seemed to conspire against them. In February of that year, for example, just as the two families settled into their Brighton lodgings, their landlord and his daughter went mad; and that summer on the Isle of Wight (Leech commemorated one of their picnics in *Punch*), the artist was knocked to the ground by a huge wave and suffered many days of sleepless agony, from which he apparently was rescued by Dickens's use of mesmerism. Understandably, the two families, despite their continued closeness, spent few subsequent summer holidays in each other's company. Even after Dickens's separation from his wife in 1858, which temporarily strained the author's intercourse with the artist, whom he suspected of latent sympathy with Catherine, Leech continued to demonstrate his fondness for the author's children. Although there were no more Christmas parties at which the artist danced the polka with Dickens's oldest daughters,
he did maintain his practice of taking Sydney, a sailor, to dinner and the theater whenever his ship was in port.70

After 1859, Dickens did not see his old friend as often. “While my readings are in hand concurrently with a Story,” he explained to the artist, “I can scarcely make sure of any holiday,” but afterwards “then—as we say—Yoiks!”80 Furthermore, Leech—who, like Browne, contributed to *Once a Week*, the rival to the author’s periodical *All the Year Round*81—was less sociable. Always nervous and frail, he was now suffering from acutely sensitive hearing (as did Anthony Trollope and Marcel Proust), and he was in debt, besides, from too much lending and his own extravagance. His friends urged him to visit America, but he felt unable to leave London on account of his work for *Punch*—though by this time John Tenniel actually was doing most of it.82 His friends then tried to make his London life more bearable by urging Parliamentary legislation against street noises, which were indeed reaching intolerable proportions; and Dickens, himself driven from Broadstairs by the din of street musicians, assigned his son-in-law Charles Collins a piece on the subject for *All the Year Round* that pleased Leech.83 By the spring of 1864, Dickens thought Leech’s health much improved. Nevertheless, on November 4 of that year, he joined Cruikshank, Browne, and young Marcus Stone, among others invited to the funeral he had helped Mrs. Leech to arrange.84 “This death of poor Leech has put me out woefully,” he wrote Forster, explaining his temporary inability to work on *Our Mutual Friend*.85 For, indeed, he shared wholeheartedly the sentiment of their mutual friend Thackeray: “Leech is the sort of man who appears once in a century.”86