“My father must have been a remarkable man,” declared Marcus Stone, like his parent an artist and a Dickens illustrator. In 1824, at the age of twenty-four, Frank Stone bravely quit a secure career in the family textile business in Manchester and made his way to London by painting portraits. Despite his lack of formal training, his appealingly sentimental canvases of lovely ladies and gallant gentlemen attracted attention, and he soon became friendly with many of the most accomplished men of the day. Macready, to whom he was introduced by Cattermole, first thought him a clever artist but a social bore given to tedious argument, but like Thackeray, who met him at Maclise’s studio, sensed that Stone would prove a loyal friend. Dickens concurred, in turn, with each of these judgments. Throughout Stone’s involvement in his amateur theatricals, the author suffered him as a bore, but later, when Stone became his next-door neighbor as well as one of his Christmas book illustrators he came to cherish him for the devoted friend he was. If Dickens’s friendship with Frank Stone was less intimate than with Leech, Maclise, or Stanfield, its development was steadier and its perpetuation through Stone’s son Marcus provided Dickens, in his final years, with ties to his own youth.

It was at the genial gatherings of the Shakespeare Club that Frank Stone—one of its founding members as well as its secretary—got to know the author of Pickwick. Dickens fond recollections of this short-lived group (which lasted only from 1837 to 1839) prompted him to invite Stone to join many of his social and charitable ventures, above all the amateur theatrical company he was forming in the summer of 1845. The artist’s presence among the “splendid strollers” proved a mixed blessing, however. Not content with merely acting, he put himself forward as an expert on period costumes. Dickens soon complained to Maclise, whose knowledge of costumes he did respect, that Stone’s illogical and erroneous criticisms of actors’ dress were more irritating than helpful: “isn’t it a lamentable thing,” he moaned, “that a man should bore one so, and be wrong all the time?” Yet the artist meant well. So when Stone begged Dickens to write him a speech to give at Manchester, to which he was returning for the first time since he had left to take up painting, the author willingly obliged. Dickens felt less obliging, however, when Stone, perhaps frustrated at his failure to have much impact on costumes, tried to widen his histrionic horizons. In addition to roles in the opening Jonson play and its accompanying piece, Comfortable Lodgings, he demanded a part in The Merry Wives of Windsor as soon as it was added to the company’s repertoire. Stone’s eagerness and his twelve-year edge on Dickens made him particularly hard to deny. “In his damnable impracticality and Bardolphian inquiry,” fumed the author, the artist had “settled within himself that Shakespeare, by unconscious predestination, wrote Page expressly for him (Stone) to act, in the year eighteen hundred and forty-seven. For which, may jackasses browse on his father’s grave!”

Indeed, Stone became so preoccupied with his acting that he never did create the “fanciful” something Dickens had requested to illustrate Mrs. Gamp’s Pilgrim’s Progress. Nevertheless, Dickens had Mrs. Gamp flatteringly describe him as “a fine-looking portly gentleman, with a face like an amiable full moon” (CP, 1: 747-48) (fig. 171). The flattery failed to have lasting effect, however. The following season, during rehearsals for Animal Magnetism, Stone complained that the way Dickens forced him to repeat lines twenty times over if he forgot them once gave him kidney congestion. The author was not only unsympathetic but exasperated. Yet, as he earlier had explained to friends, he was compelled to put up with Stone who “as an artist (we are
Indeed, it was as an artist that Stone first earned Dickens's respect, then his gratitude, and finally the affection that characterized their later relationship. If Stone's acting afforded the author scant satisfaction, he derived only pleasure from Stone's engravings of Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray, which were published as extra illustrations for Chapman and Hall's Cheap Edition of *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1848, and from his frontispiece for the Cheap Edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit* in 1849. Indeed, Dickens was so struck by Stone's ability to portray pretty ladies (or female "rococo rustics," as Thackeray called them) that he commissioned him to paint a portrait of Matilda Price, John Browdie's fiancee in *Nickleby*, and to help illustrate his next—and, as it proved, his last—Christmas book.

Stone met with Dickens and Leech, still the main Christmas book illustrator, to discuss the story of *The Haunted Man* in 1848. Predictably, the painter, with his taste for attractive women, was most inspired by Milly Swidger, the redeeming angel in the macabre situation that Redlaw brings on himself by wishing away all memory of the past. The artist made proposed sketches of Milly, ornamenting the dreary college room with holly, assisted by the elderly Philip. Dickens called "CHARMING" the drawing he preferred of Milly standing on the chair rather than the floor (fig. 172), a position that stressed Philip's fragility as did his more notably stooped shoulders. "I cannot tell you how much the little composition and expression please me," the author elaborated; "Do that by all means." In the final print, with its graceful and expressive curves of the old man and the benevolent woman, Stone put a small cap on Milly, who had lost her child, in deference to Dickens's wish that he include that small "matronly" sign (I, 393) (fig. 173).

Dickens, as if making amends for his repressed irritability toward Stone during the theatricals, now overflowed with goodwill. He offered to read the second part of *The Haunted Man* aloud to Stone if the printer's markings made the proofs too difficult to read. He urged him to continue depicting Milly, claiming that he was the only artist who could "really, pictorially, make the little woman whom I love," although he implied that Stone was under no obligation to do so. The artist duly rendered Milly again, this time graciously ministering to the sulky student Edmund Longford, who is temporarily affected by Redlaw's chilling influence (II, 435). Dickens then displayed unusual trust in the older artist. Writing from Brighton, he described a subject for the third part of *The Haunted Man* that would suit Stone perfectly. The Tetterbys, left contentious by a visit from Redlaw, recover their good natures from the moment that Milly, to whom the ghost has given the power of restoring memory and, hence, good humor and humanity, approaches their house. She is, as Dickens explained, "the very spirit of morning, gladness, innocence, hope, love, domesticity, etc. etc. etc." The author, expressing the hope that Stone would portray the scene as effectively as he had the others involving Milly, told him he need not bother sending a preliminary sketch for approval: "I know how pretty she will be with the children in your hands," he explained, "and should be a stupendous jackass if I had any distrust of it." Inspired by Dickens's obvious appreciation for his work, Stone completed, in record time, a scene charming enough to fulfill Dickens's fondest hopes (III, 469).}

*The Haunted Man*, like its three predecessors, fared better with the public than with the reviewers. Stone, the only artist who escaped their hostility, was, in fact, praised at Dickens's expense. "Wrote it not that Milly has been rendered 'palpable to sense' by the pencil of Mr. Frank
Stone, "observed the Athenaeum, who felt that Dickens had uncharacteristically failed to individualize his characters, "we should regard her as a quality rather than a person." Dickens expressed his gratitude for these illustrations by sending the artist a complete set of his works; abashed to discover later that the set he had sent did not include the Christmas books, the author remedied this deficiency shortly after the New Year at a dinner attended by Stone, which commemorated the last of his holiday volumes.

After 1848 Stone continued to take part in Dickens's amateur theatricals, and his presence continued to be a source of some friction. But the author tolerated his idiosyncrasies with better grace. He listened patiently, for example, to a two-hour harangue from Stone interpreting his role in the production of Poole's farce, Turning the Tables, in 1850. When Stone's inadequacies as the Duke in Bulwer-Lytton's Not So Bad as We Seem the following year proved a "millstone" around the company's neck, Dickens rehearsed him privately until he gave the "best" performance of all. The author's newfound tolerance and coaching were rewarded. When the title role in Mr. Nightingale's Diary fell vacant at the last minute, Stone took over with sufficient competence to retain the part in subsequent performances. Dickens did have a tendency to keep mentioning future roles that never materialized, but if Stone was hurt or impatient on that score, he never betrayed his feelings.

After 1861 when they became neighbors, Dickens saw more and more of Stone offstage. After the death of his eight-month-old daughter Dora in April, Dickens sought to
distract himself and his family by searching for quarters that were larger and freer from memories than Devonshire Terrace. The Stones were also moving—out of Tavistock House and into Russell House next door. After inspecting other accommodations and consulting with Henry Austin, his brother-in-law who was an architect and engineer, Dickens decided that Tavistock House would suit him, and he authorized Stone to offer in his behalf up to £1500 for a forty-five-year lease on it.  

The settlement negotiated, the Stones, temporarily homeless, moved into Devonshire Terrace with the Dickens family, who wanted to complete the renovation of their new quarters before moving themselves.  

Dickens, with his customary vigor, threw himself into plans to clear the Stones’ debris, renovate the structure, and decorate the interior. When both families settled down in their separate homes, the author’s continued proximity to the artist facilitated not only the inevitable conferences about gardening, rights-of-way, and taxes, but the innumerable walks, talks, and dinners Dickens always enjoyed with his close friends.  

Dickens’s increased pleasure in Stone’s company, however, was not wholly dictated by convenience. When away during the summer, at Broadstairs, Bonchurch, or Boulogne, the author often solicited the company of the artist, which he deemed “refreshing.” Indeed, once he was certain of Dickens’s affection, Stone became a relaxed and relaxing companion. His onstage pedantry veiled a genuine intellectual earnestness, his nervousness an unusual sensitivity toward others, and he now entered that special category of friends on whom Dickens bestowed playful nicknames. “Pump” (or “Pumpion” or “Old Tone”) avidly read each number of *David Copperfield*, *Bleak House*, and *Little Dorrit* on its publication, and was as eager to hear about the writer’s public readings as to attend his private ones. And “Sparkler,” as Stone called Dickens, not only inspected the new associate’s Academy canvases (apparently even suggesting a title for one of them) but proposed him for membership in the Athenaeum, provided letters of introduction for his Paris visit, lent books from his library, and dutifully read manuscripts submitted by his literary friends.  

As the regard between them deepened, Dickens and Stone grew very fond, as well, of one another’s children. Taking up where Maclise had left off, Stone adorned the walls of Tavistock House with portraits of members of the Dickens family. The author, previously amused by Stone’s inclusion of his pet dog Timber in a canvas for the Royal Academy in 1849, appreciated more the artist’s portrait of his younger brother Alfred, the pretty sketch of his older daughters Mamie and Kate, and was especially moved by Stone’s oil painting of his fifth son Sydney, nicknamed the “Ocean Spectre,” which he felt captured the weirdly attractive look of inquiry in his large eyes.  

Stone, for his part, was gratified by Dickens’s rapport with his own three children. The author was more paternal than neighborly to little Ellen, who occasionally attended his theatrical rehearsals with her mother (and to whom he once offered six pairs of gloves if she could guess before Mamie or Aunt Georgina which part of a story in *All the Year Round* was his); to Arthur (who so resembled Wallis’s portrait of the dead Chesterton that his father wept on seeing it); and to Marcus, Dickens’s particular favorite, who promised to become a better artist than his father.  

Throughout this decade of increasing intimacy with Dickens, Stone was plagued with heart trouble, which prevented him from pursuing his work. When, in November, 1859, the artist died, Dickens made good his promise that he would do everything in his power to help Mrs. Stone, from whom the artist was estranged, and their teenage children: he selected a grave at Highgate; arranged the details of the funeral; notified the newspapers; and immediately afterwards, concerned himself with the future of Stone’s sons as if they were his own. Although the artist had not left his family a substantial estate, from the viewpoint of the bereaved, particularly Marcus, he had left “the splendid inheritance of the friendship of Charles Dickens—a more precious inheritance than the wealth of a millionaire.”