The Illustrators of *Our Mutual Friend* and

*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*

MARCUS STONE
CHARLES COLLINS
LUKE FILDERS
Frank Stone's son Marcus was the illustrator of Dickens's last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, published in 1864. It was the first time since *A Tale of Two Cities* five years before that Dickens had had a novel illustrated for its first appearance. Although illustrations were no longer essential, as the common reader was far more literate and sophisticated than his counterpart at the time of *Pickwick* nearly three decades earlier, Dickens continued to want them, partly from habit, partly from a continuing belief in their efficacy (*CP*, 2: 444). However, he wanted them to be done by an artist who would bring new, fresh styles of observation and representation. With young Marcus Stone close at hand, he did not have to look far to find a successor to Hablot Browne. Bound by personal as well as professional obligations, the young artist would accede to Dickens's control while updating the look of his illustrations. The author's choice of Stone was not, as has been suggested, due to his insufficient awareness of new developments in art. But he disliked the doctrinaire standards preached by those better-known representatives of the new aestheticism who had invaded the whole field of book illustration; John Millais, Arthur Hughes, Holman Hunt, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti, for example, would not have been willing to subject themselves either to Dickens's brand of supervision or to the Hogarthian traditions that his prose still perpetuated. For many readers, perhaps, the novelist's more sustained interest in psychological characterization in *Our Mutual Friend*, together with the continued visuality of his prose, rendered Stone's illustrations even more superfluous than Browne's most recent ones. But there is scant basis for the recent assertion that Dickens had lost interest in illustrations generally and in those for *Our Mutual Friend* in particular because Stone did not illustrate in the manner of Browne at his best. On the contrary, Dickens, until the last few numbers, participated as actively as he could in this collaboration, certainly more so than in *A Tale of Two Cities*, for example, and succeeded in eliciting from Stone the new look he had hoped for.

Young Stone was very excited about the chance to work for Dickens, a turning point in his career. As the son of a friend and next-door neighbor, he had known Dickens since he was a young boy. He never forgot the first time he had met the novelist. His hands, dirty from puttering around his father's studio, had nevertheless been warmly clasped by the famous author. When he was twelve years old, a scene from *Bleak House*—the description of little Jo sweeping the entrance to Nemo's burial ground—inspired his first attempt at book illustration. While he was sketching the scene, Stone long remembered, his father entered the room with the author: "Well now, that is very good; you will have to give that to me when it is done," Dickens observed. Marcus accordingly delivered the finished drawing next door to Tavistock House. Dickens was sincerely impressed by his instinctive sense of decorum as well as empathy for the subject. The author paid the boy the further compliment of sending him Browne's proof of the same subject for a keepsake and, later, an inscribed copy of *A Child's History of England* in remembrance of the sketch that the author had "received (and preserved) with great pleasure." No one anticipated, however, that within a decade young Stone would succeed Browne as Dickens's illustrator (fig. 180).

Dickens, fulfilling his promise to do everything in his power to assist Frank Stone's family after his death in 1859, acted in loco parentis to his three children, especially Marcus. He persuaded them to remain at Russell House, despite his own departure from Tavistock House for Gad's Hill in Kent, in 1860, arguing that it would save money in the long run since more people would come to see Marcus's pictures in the place where they were accustomed to see
his father's; and he explained both to Marcus and to the skeptical men sponsoring his membership to the Garrick Club that it had been Frank Stone's intention that his children, some of whom were illegitimate, should live apart from their mother after his death.\footnote{7}

The Stone children were as welcome in Kent as they had been in London.\footnote{8} Marcus, particularly, availed himself of Dickens's hospitality, spending many Christmas and summer holidays at Gad's Hill. The author's children always relished Marcus's company, despite his increasing deafness.\footnote{9} They had remembered with delight his acting in the private performances at "The Smallest Theatre in the World" at Tavistock House; now they prized his skill at drawing portraits (see fig. 187) and celebrated his feats at games in their \textit{Gad's Hill Gazette}.\footnote{10} If they regarded Marcus as a brother, their father treated him as a son.\footnote{11} Indeed, he often seemed to prefer his company to that of his own boys, whose achievements (except for those of Henry Fielding, his youngest son), he found disappointing. Time only strengthened Marcus's conviction that Dickens was the finest man he had ever known as well as the most "formative influence" in his life.\footnote{12}

Dickens had always followed and promoted Marcus's artistic progress with great interest. When, in 1859, at the age of nineteen, after an informal training in his father's studio, he had a painting of an armored knight resting under a tree accepted for exhibition by the Royal Academy, Dickens displayed almost as much pride as his father.\footnote{13} But Frank Stone's death in the autumn of the same year left Marcus little time to rest on his laurels. Within a week of the funeral, the author had called Marcus to the attention of prominent publishers as an "admirable draughtsman" with a "most dexterous hand, a charming sense of grace and beauty, and a capital power of observation" who was in every way "modest, punctual, and right."\footnote{14} On Dickens's recommendation, Chapman and Hall asked Marcus to contribute the frontispiece to the Cheap Edition of \textit{Little Dorrit}, though he then had no experience with wood engraving techniques.\footnote{15} In 1862 he received a commission to supply supplementary scenes for the Library Editions of \textit{American Notes}, \textit{Pictures from Italy}, and \textit{A Child's History of England}; and, far more important, he received the assignment to provide the first illustrations for \textit{Great Expectations} for its publication in volume form.\footnote{16} These assignments, like the frontispiece Stone was commissioned to do for the Cheap Edition of \textit{A Tale of Two Cities} in 1864; were the kind that might previously have gone to Browne. Dickens, though Stone worked independently of him, must have liked the results. For by the time \textit{Our Mutual Friend} was announced in 1864, even Browne was able to predict that Stone would be its illustrator.\footnote{17}

Stone always insisted that Dickens decided to drop Browne long before he thought of a successor for him.\footnote{18} Nevertheless, the gifted son of his old friend was an inevitable choice for Dickens to make for professional as well as personal reasons. Stone, who had no ties to the Hogarth-Cruikshank-Browne tradition, would not revert to their outmoded styles, which suited the author's desire for novelty in his work as in his life. Thanks to the commissions procured for him by Dickens, the twenty-four-year-old by that time had become a fairly experienced book illustrator. He was familiar with the wood techniques that were so popular with the new artists of the 1860's and that had displaced the etchings on steel at which Browne excelled. Unlike Dickens's early illustrators, who tended to draw from memory, Stone worked from models, and his naturalistic portrayals of characters suited the academic tastes of the times. Most important, perhaps, of all, Dickens knew that the young man, so indebted to him, would not question his authority. Fully aware of how valuable the association with Dickens would be to his career, however, young Stone would nevertheless bring enthusiasm and freshness to the collaboration, qualities conspicuously lacking in Browne's last illustrations for the novelist.

Both author and artist were gratified when their professional relationship worked out as pleasantly as their social
one. Dickens exercised control with paternal tact and interest. Stone not only accepted direction well but never abused the increasing amount of freedom Dickens allowed him. The author supervised his work closely at first, concerned that the wrapper design set the proper tone for the book. "Give a vague idea, the more vague the better," urged Dickens, who as usual wanted the comprehensive design to suggest but not reveal his complex plot. Despite his own frenetic schedule, Dickens conferred at length with Stone, displaying an unabated interest in every aspect of the cover from subject to layout. He praised the artist's preliminary design, which did not depart sharply either in arrangement or feeling from those by Browne (fig. 181).

Stone had surrounded the title with generalized vignettes from the narrative, and appropriately surmounted it with a wide panorama of the Thames, which figures importantly as both setting and symbol in the narrative (and whose appearance and disappearance in the novel, Swinburne observed, coincided with the "ebb and flow" of the author's genius). With a "business" view to optimum legibility, however, Dickens wanted the first word of the title, OUR, each letter of which Stone had awkwardly placed between the supports of the triple-arched bridge, to be brought out into the open and made as large as MUTUAL FRIEND.

With a view to the narrative, the author thought the inclusion of both the Inspector and the murder reward poster redundant, their significance being sufficiently suggested in the sinister moonlit view of the river. With a view to aesthetics, Dickens wanted the figure of the skeletal dustman, whose face he wished more "droll" and less "horrible," to be relocated on the right-hand side of the cover; the resulting space under the title might be filled with the "capital" scene of the unscrupulous Wegg reading Gibbon to the illiterate Boffin. It was left to the artist, however, somewhat to his surprise, to decide for himself which of Wegg's legs would be the wooden one; Stone chose the left limb. "With these changes, work away," Dickens cheerily concluded his numerous but perceptive and tactful suggestions. He implicitly understood his young friend's predicament in executing for the first time a complex wrapper for a complex narrative as yet largely unwritten. He pronounced Stone's altered wrapper design "excellent" and worried more than the artist himself about how the Dalziels would engrave its delicate lines (see fig. 27). The color of the wrapper was once again green—the author's favorite color—as it had been up to the publication of Bleak House—which seemed to mark Dickens's hopes for renewal in every particular of his present life and work.

Dickens was soon prevented by the demands on his time and dwindling energies from continuing to exercise such close supervision; yet the kinds of latitude he allowed Stone in the course of Our Mutual Friend reflects neither negligence nor indifference, but rather understandable trust, partly necessitated by unavoidable absences. His young friend was so totally dependent on the author's patronage and so free from the pressures that plagued Seymour, the vanity that tormented Cruikshank, and the competing commissions that sometimes impeded the efforts of Browne and the Christmas book artists, that Dickens must have felt he could give him certain procedural freedoms, knowing they would not be abused. Moreover, this attitude may partly reveal the author's recognition that illustrations were more ornamental than integral to Our Mutual Friend. For the first time since Master Humphrey's

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**Fig. 181.** Marcus Stone, Sketch for the Wrapper of Our Mutual Friend. Black ink and wash. 45/16" × 3 7/16" (12.5 × 9.5 cm). By permission of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.
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Clock, wood engravings—now more popular than etchings on steel for illustrated books—were being used for a Dickens novel. Yet the engravings, like the etchings, were not "dropped" into the text, but placed before it, thus foregoing the myriad advantages of placement that had functioned so effectively in the Clock more than two decades earlier. Indeed, the simple, linear frames surrounding many of Stone's scenes—over a quarter of the total—seem to emphasize their separateness from the text (see, for example, I, I, 2 and III, XVI, 697). As Browne doubtless found while illustrating Little Dorrit and A Tale of Two Cities, Stone must have perceived quickly that Dickens's wasteland themes, symbols, and characters throughout Our Mutual Friend were so thoroughly visualized by the pictorial prose that illustrations could do little more than embellish.

Yet certainly Dickens displayed greater involvement in Stone's task than he had since the height of his collaboration with Browne. The young artist found him always "ready to describe down to the minute details the personal characteristics," indeed "the life-history of the creations of his fancy." Following their procedure on Great Expectations, though one unique to Dickens's novels being written and illustrated concurrently, Stone usually selected his own subjects from the revised proofs. The author, however, never completely abrogated his power in this sphere. The artist invariably accepted Dickens's frequent suggestions for subjects, such as those for 'The Bird of Prey Brought Down' (I, XIV, 195), Jenny admonishing her father (II, II, 269) and observing her models (III, II, 492), and Boffin digging up 'The Dutch Bottle' (III, VI, 552). On at least one occasion, Dickens opposed Stone's selection, objecting judiciously to his showing two interiors, each containing two people, in the same number (III, XII, 636 and III, XIV, 658), but it was probably too late for the artist to prepare another scene.

Finally, the author, except when abroad, always inspected Stone's preliminary sketches, pencilling any suggestions in the margin, and always wrote out the titles to be used under the final engravings (see fig. 185). The artist's unquestioning acceptance of his wishes, however, did enable Dickens to waive the right of inspection and approval of the final drawings, which were accordingly dispatched by the artist direct to the engravers.

At no point during the course of the novel, however, was Dickens's response to Stone's sketches either enthusiastic or casual in any indiscriminate way. He dispensed judicious amounts of both encouragement and correction to his young protegé. He might praise Stone's sketches for 'Podsnappery' (I, XI, 147) and 'Waiting for Father' (I, XIII, 183), as well as his portrayals of Gaffer lying dead on the windy shore (I, XIV, 195), and of orphan Johnny "fishing" from his front door (I, XVI, 219), but he often found room for improvement. His admiration for the scene of Gaffer lying dead, for example, did not blind him to the fact that Mr. Inspector should not be wearing a constable's attire, and he would not give his unqualified approval for 'Miss Riderhood at Home' (II, XIII, 399) until Rokesmith's false beard looked more disheveled. Finally, the author, accustomed to Hablot Browne's small figures, had trouble getting used to Stone's larger, more anatomically correct ones, but clearly allowed him to follow this currently fashionable perspective.

Although Stone was strong where Browne had been deficient, the reverse was also true. Dickens's most disturbing problem with Stone was his difficulty in representing the novel's grotesque characters who were congenial neither to the artist's personal tastes, which tended towards the romantic, the domestic—in short, the conventional—nor to the academic realism of his peers. The author had to press the artist until he captured the "weird sharpness not without beauty" of Jenny Wren, whose treatment of her father epitomizes the inverted parent-child relations in Dickens's fiction in general and in Our Mutual Friend in particular (II, II, 269) (fig. 182). Similarly he needed to insist that Boffin's eccentric "Progress" through town in his new finery convey "an oddity of a very honest kind" that would prove endearing rather than repulsive to viewers (I, IX, 115). Yet Dickens's heavyhanded titling of the scene of the writhing Headstone, 'Better to be Abel than Cain' (IV, VII, 806), despite Stone's placement of a plainly labeled "Cain and Abel" picture on the wall, suggests his ill and distracted spirits after the frightening railway disaster at Staplehurst rather than any yearning for Browne's iconographical or "dark" brand of illustration. Browne at the peak of his imaginative powers doubtless would have conveyed with greater relish the morbid and grotesque: Jenny and Boffin; the dust heaps and the weir. He would have eked out far more mystery from scenes like 'More Dead than Alive' (II, XIII, 418), and far more picturesque scenes like scenes from Mr. Venus's shop (the prototype for which Stone himself had discovered), and even, perhaps, some humor from the basically grim narrative. Perhaps Dickens, like his society in general, valued these qualities less in his maturity; and certainly the younger illustrator was more reliable than Browne might have been at capturing the myriad moods of the pretty Bella (II, VIII, 345 (fig. 183); II, XIV, 441; IV, XIII, 879 (fig. 184)), delineating the Podsnaps, Veneerings, and Lammles with compassion rather than caricature (I, X, 137 and I, XI, 147), and imparting a sense of reality based on careful study of settings, as Kitton has noted, like the Thames background in the 'Bird of Prey'
Fig. 182. Marcus Stone, 'The Person of the House and the Bad Child.' Our Mutual Friend, no. 6. Wood engraving. 5 5/8 x 3 3/4" (13.7 x 9.4 cm). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

The spirit of cooperation that had characterized the relationship between the author and the artist from the beginning of Our Mutual Friend smoothed the trying period of the novel's conclusion. In June, 1865, the author, along with parts of his manuscript, in eerie keeping with its theme of death and resurrection, miraculously escaped annihilation when a train he was on derailed at Staplehurst, killing and maiming many of its passengers. Exhausted from his heroic rescue exertions and enervated by his own narrow escape from death, the author retired to Gad's Hill. Stone now had to send his sketches to him there and endure the resulting delays; he also had to cope with Dickens's last-minute change in the story—Wrayburn was not originally intended to survive Headstone's attack. Finally, when the shaken author went abroad to recover, Stone was left completely on his own with regard to the last four illustrations; the author could not even inspect his preliminary sketches. On this note of well-placed trust, partly born of necessity, Dickens wound up the final double number of his last complete novel.

Contemporary reviewers, perhaps sated by illustrations in the numerous graphic magazines that had sprung up in the 1860's, failed to comment either on the absence of Browne's work or on the presence of Stone's in Our Mutual Friend. The artist's naturalistic illustrations, in any case, were not calculated to arouse readers or even to add dramatic interest or commentary independently of the text. Then, too, his drawings do not seem as suited to the engraving process as did those of his predecessor, Browne, or his successor, Fildes. For example, the engraver, given the stiff parallel strokes used in the figures of Fledgeby and Riah and the undifferentiated wash suggesting the sky in the background of Stone's drawing for 'The Garden on the Roof,' apparently was forced to provide varied lines to delineate the two men and some pattern, by means of smoking chimneys, to define the view (II, V, 312); and faced with the sketch for 'Eugene's Bedside' (fig. 185), he could further define the characters' faces—Jenny's cheek or the Reverend Milvey's features—but could do little to further differentiate the various whites of the patient's face, hands, garments, bed coverings, and hangings, and nothing to invigorate the static portrayal of a gripping climax (IV, XI, 849) (fig. 186). Accordingly, Arthur Waugh's assessment of the illustrations is typical: "Whatever the technical quality of Marcus Stone's designs, they do not take hold of the imagination; they are not easily remembered; the characters they portray are not vividly created; the old 'elfin' enchantment is gone." This judgment, characteristic of those who prefer the work of Cruikshank or Browne, may not have been shared by Dickens. Young Stone, while acting the perfect subordinate, had indeed given the author's book an updated look with his more realistic figures. If Dickens was displeased with Stone or with his published illustrations, he never revealed his dissatisfaction—though it must be admitted that his personal fondness for Stone might have inhibited him.

After the publication of Our Mutual Friend Dickens felt drained. In the next years, his readings, editing tasks, and a second trip to America prevented him from beginning another long novel. Marcus Stone, even after his marriage, continued to keep the author company in and out of London, and when he was not available for long periods Dickens missed him greatly. Throughout this decade, when many of the author's friends were dead or dying, Stone enlivened
the present while supplying a link to the author's happier past.

In 1869 Dickens felt ready to undertake The Mystery of Edwin Drood. Stone could not have objected when Dickens asked Charles Collins, his needy son-in-law, to illustrate Drood. When that unlucky artist fell ill, Stone did not step forward to prevent his contemporary, Luke Fildes, from being engaged as a replacement. By this time, in fact, Stone had probably already decided to withdraw from book illustration altogether. Even working with Dickens, the young man had felt hampered by the diminutive scale of his illustrations and by the engraver's poor interpretation of them as well as certain other unspecified "harassing restrictions." His subsequent work for He Knew He Was Right (1868-69) completed his disenchantment, as Trollope seemed so indifferent both to the book and to Stone's efforts on its behalf. Stone preferred to earn what income he needed from his period narrative paintings, which recalled those of his father in their graceful style and idealized sentimental subjects. Indeed, the interchangeable facial expressions and cold tones that Beatrix Potter felt spoiled his paintings might certainly have been at odds—as they nearly were in Our Mutual Friend—with the graphic demands of the more sophisticated characters and their repressed passions in Drood had Stone continued to illustrate Dickens.
Dickens did not live long enough to see Marcus become a fashionable and popular artist, elected to the Royal Academy in 1877. Nor did he ever know that the artist came to regard his illustrations for Dickens as the "immature" productions of his apprentice years.\(^{51}\) Stone always cherished their personal association, however, and appreciated the fact that the author's patronage had procured for him his small niche in the Victorian hall of fame. Without that one substantial push, he might, like the artist sons of Cruikshank, Cattermole, Stanfield, Topham and, to a lesser extent, Browne, have been relegated to their present obscurity.

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Fig. 185. Marcus Stone, Unpublished Sketch for 'Eugene's Bedside.' *Our Mutual Friend*, vol. 2, facing p. 247. Pen, pencil, and wash. 6 3/4" x 4 3/8" (15.9 x 10.3 cm) [sheet]. By permission of the Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Fig. 186. Marcus Stone. 'Eugene's Bedside.' *Our Mutual Friend*, no. 18. Wood engraving. 5 3/4" x 3 1/8" (13.5 x 9.4 cm). By permission of the Houghton Library, Harvard University.