

## Dickens and Prisons (2)

THIS SECOND SELECTION from the original illustrations to the works of Charles Dickens draws on both his earliest and one of his last books. *Sketches by Boz*, the earliest, contains his celebrated "A Visit to Newgate". Unfortunately George Cruikshank did not illustrate that particular sketch and the picture reproduced here, although relevant to our subject, is not one of his best. The other four pictures are the work of Phiz (H. K. Browne) who, beginning with the *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7) was to continue to illustrate Dickens' work for the next 20 years; *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) being the last novel on which he was employed. The intrusion into the latter half of a comedy like *Pickwick* of some grim prison scenes deserves comment. Even in this, the gayest of his works, Dickens was unable to forget his childhood anguish and humiliation during his father's imprisonment. But there is no oppressive misery about these passages and the material is skilfully woven into the plot. It was Edmund Wilson, the American critic, who first pointed out that during the months of Mr. Pickwick's imprisonment in the Fleet where a good many of the other characters in the story joined him, the whole book "deepens with a new dimension of



Cruikshank's "In the Lock-Up House" (Cursitor Street, Chancery Lane)  
From *Sketches by Boz*



*Phiz's "Mrs. Bardell encounters Mr. Pickwick in the Prison"*  
(The Fleet)

From *Pickwick Papers*



*Phiz's "Discovery of Jingle in the Prison" (The Fleet)*

**From Pickwick Papers**



*Phiz's "Little Dorrit Emerging from the Prison"*  
( *The Marshalsea* )

**From Little Dorrit**

seriousness". Incidentally Sam Weller's comment on the subject of imprisonment is apposite even to-day: "I'll tell you wot it is, Sir; them as is always a idlin' in public houses it don't damage at all, and them as is always a workin' wen they can, it damages too much". The picture from *Little Dorrit* shows her emerging from the gate through which the young Dickens himself passed many times when visiting his family in the Marshalsea. The subject of the next picture, Dr. Manette immured in his Bastille cell, is a profoundly important symbol in *A Tale of Two Cities* which, significantly, Dickens originally intended to entitle *Recalled to Life*. In *Great Expectations*, his last complete novel but one, published in the following year, he was to turn once again for the last time to the subject of imprisonment. The convict Magwitch is a central character; and both Jaggers and Wemmick are frequent visitors to Newgate, accompanied on one occasion by the hero of the novel, Pip. As no illustration is available it may not be inappropriate to conclude with one of Dickens' brilliant word pictures from that novel. It is his description of the recaptured Magwitch being returned aboard the Hulk in the Medway.

"The boat had returned, and his guards were ready, so we followed him to the landing-place made of rough stakes and stones, and saw him put into the boat, which was rowed by a crew of convicts like himself. No one seemed surprised to see him, or interested in seeing him, or glad to see him, or sorry to see him, or spoke a word, except that somebody in the boat growled as if to dogs, 'Give way you!' which was the signal for the dip of the oars. By the light of the torches, we saw the black Hulk lying out a little way from the mud of the shore, like a wicked Noah's Ark. Cribbed and barred and moored by massive rusty chains, the prison-ship seemed in my young eyes to be ironed like the prisoners. We saw the boat go alongside, and we saw him taken up the side and disappear. Then, the ends of the torches were flung hissing into the water, and went out, as if it were all over with him".

In the case of Abel Magwitch this was not, as it happened, the end; but for many like him it was.

It has not been our object in reproducing these pictures to induce complacency. But there have been great changes since the days when Dickens wrote. Some part of the credit for those changes—more considerable perhaps than has been recognised—should go to this man who never forgot even in the days of his greatest success and affluence what it felt like to be one of society's outcasts; and never lost the gift of indignation.

G.H.



*Phiz's "Dr. Manette in his cell"  
(The Bastille)*

From *A Tale of Two Cities*

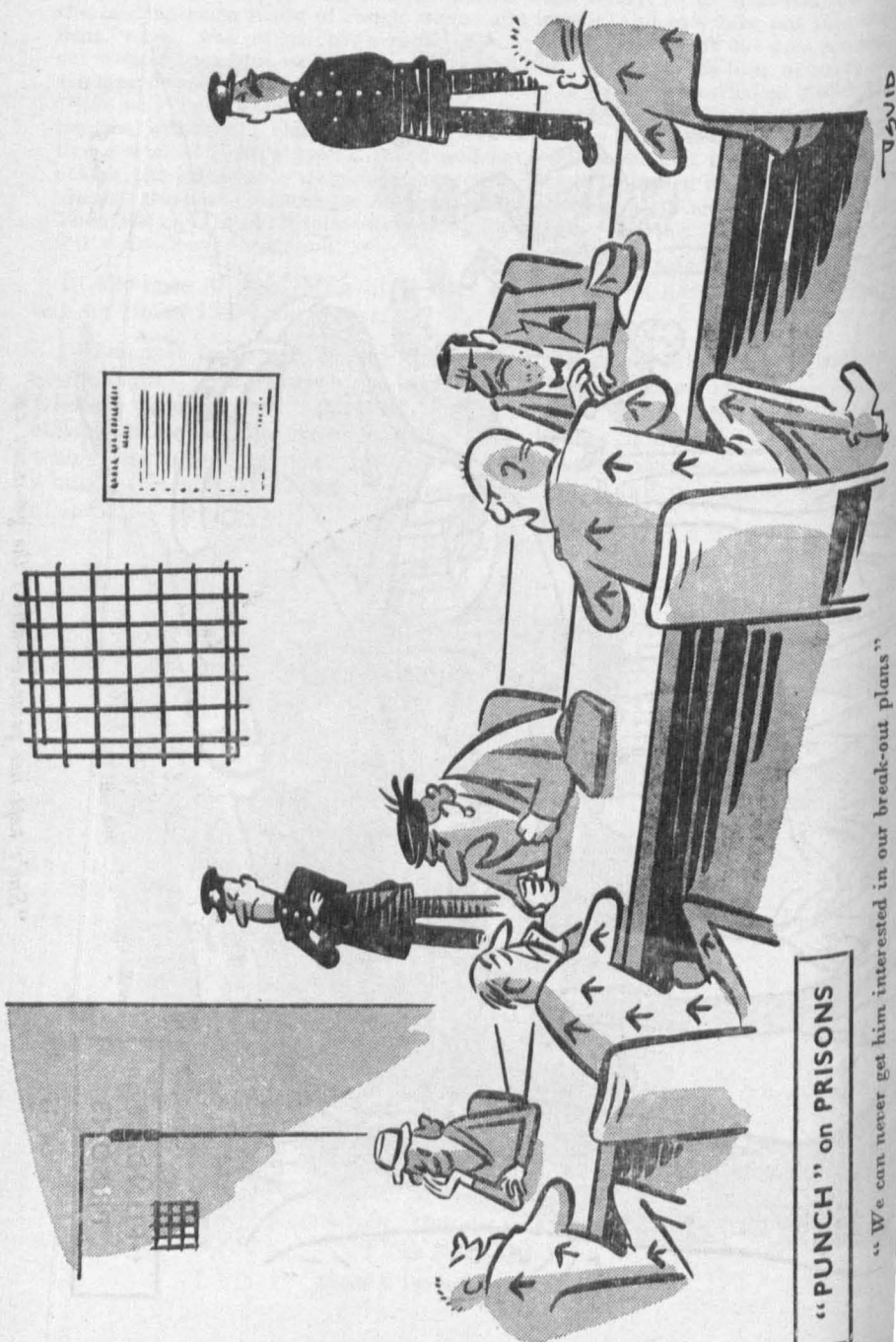




**"PUNCH" on  
PRISONS**

*"She's kept her promise—here's the get-away car."*

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### "PUNCH" on PRISONS

"We can never get him interested in our break-out plans"