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Produced at Criterion Theatre, London, on Monday, Nov. 19th, 1951

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PRESENT

EMLYN WILLIAMS
AS
CHARLES DICKENS

PROGRAMME

1. "MOVING IN SOCIETY"
Scenes from "OUR MUTUAL FRIEND"
(1866)
2. "PAUL" Scenes from "DOMBEY AND SON"
(1848)

Interval of Ten Minutes

3. "MR. BOB SAWYER GIVES A BACHELOR PARTY"
An Episode from "PICKWICK PAPERS"
(1837)
4. "THE SIGNAL-MAN"
A Ghost Story from "CHRISTMAS STORIES"
(1866)

Interval of Ten Minutes

5. "MR. CHOPS" A Story from "CHRISTMAS STORIES"
(1858)
6. "THE FANCY BALL"
An Episode from "A TALE OF TWO CITIES"
(1859)

I.
THE NATURE OF THE PERFORMANCE

On the 27th December, 1853, CHARLES DICKENS (at the height of his fame as a novelist) ventured on something quite new: he gave, in Birmingham, a public 'Reading' of one of his own stories. This turned out to be an historic occasion, opening up an extraordinary second career for the great writer; spread over fifteen years, throughout the United Kingdom and America, the 'Readings' were each more sensationally successful than the last. The word is put into inverted commas because nothing could have been less like a reading than Dickens' solo presentation; he knew every scene by heart, the book before him became merely a symbol, and he gave throughout an untrammelled dramatic performance.

EMLYN WILLIAMS, like many other artistes, discovered Dickens in childhood; and Dickens has been, ever since, his cherished author. It is well known that attempts to transfer the Dickens flavour to the theatre, via a play, can be fraught with insuperable difficulties: for years it has been Emlyn Williams' ambition to share—with a new public—the immense theatrical richness of Dickens through the medium of the 'Solo Performance.'

For nearly a year he has been preparing the performance which is now presented to the public: to whom he makes his bow 'as Charles Dickens giving a Solo Performance of Scenes from the Famous Novels and Stories.'

II.
THE ADAPTATIONS

The scenes have been adapted by Mr. Williams from the books named. To an adaptor in these conditions two courses are open—(a) to take for granted that the audience are thoroughly familiar with the text of the work in question, as Dickens did—rightly, for his audience knew his books as well as he knew them; (b) to adapt under the assumption that the audience know nothing of the book, or have forgotten all they once knew. The latter is the harder way, but Mr. Williams decided that it was the one to take; he felt that if (beforehand, in the adaptation) he could make the performance acceptable to an audience strange to Dickens, then there was a chance of coaxing such an audience to lift down from their bookshelves what they had possibly thought of as a ponderous classic, and to turn its pages for the first time, with the feeling that they were about to explore a wonderful new world.

For the record, Dickens used (over the seventeen years of his 'Readings') sixteen adaptations from his works, as follows:

A Christmas Carol	Mr. Chops
The Trial from Pickwick	The Poor Traveller
David Copperfield	Mrs. Gamp
The Cricket on the Hearth	Boots at the Holly Tree Inn
Nicholas Nickleby	The Barbox Brothers
Bob Sawyer's Party	The Boy at Mugby
The Chimes	Dr. Marigold.
The Story of Little Dombey	Sikes and Nancy ("Oliver Twist")

III.
THE DESK

The piece of furniture at which Emlyn Williams stands, as Charles Dickens, is an exact replica of the 'Reading Desk' which was used by Dickens for his performances. After the celebrated Farewell Reading of March 16th, 1870, he left it to his daughter Kate (Mrs. Perugini), and later it came into the possession of the Dickens House, 48, Doughty Street, W.C.1, where it may now be seen.

The desk was carefully designed by Dickens, after a system of trial and error. For his first public 'Reading' he used a strange contraption—a tall pulpit of red baize, looking not unlike a Punch and Judy show with the top taken off; nothing of Dickens was visible but his head and shoulders' (Kate Field—'Pen Photographs of Dickens' Readings'): a rough contemporary painting of his first desk, as well as of the present one, is in the Dickens House. Dickens quickly realised that his performance would be badly handicapped unless as much of his body as possible could be seen by his audience, and evolved the desk as we see it on the stage: a cunningly simple affair, with a raised rest for the left arm, and a low ledge for the water-glass and the inevitable white gloves—as inevitable as the carnation in the button-hole.

Mr. Williams wishes to express his appreciation of the help given him by The Dickens Fellowship, the Dickens House, 48, Doughty Street, London, W.C.1. (Open to the public daily—Sundays excepted—from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. and from 2.0 to 5.0 p.m.)

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1.—The public may leave at the end of the performance by all exit doors and such doors must at that time be open. 2.—All gangways, passages and staircases must be kept entirely free from chairs or any other obstructions. 3.—Persons shall not in any circumstances be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any of the other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be strictly limited to the number indicated by the notices exhibited in those positions. 4.—The safety curtain must be lowered and raised in the presence of each audience.

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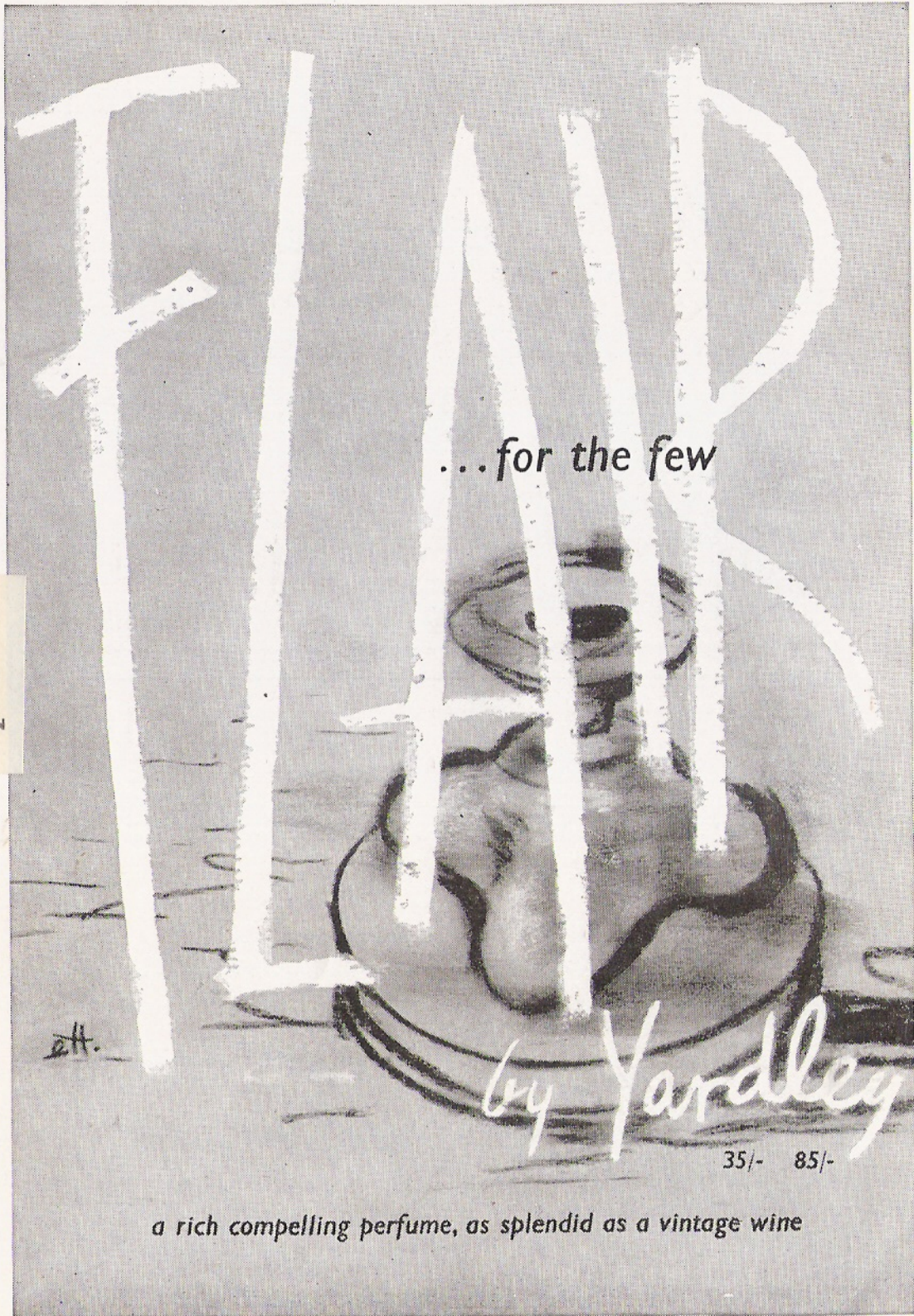


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