An Edwardian's View of Dickens and His Illustrators

Gareth Cordery

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HARRY FURNISS (1854–1925) was a well-known if somewhat abrasive figure in English literary, artistic and political circles during the half century either side of 1900. In March 1905, at the invitation of the Dickens Fellowship, he delivered in London's Memorial Hall a platform lecture on Dickens and his illustrators, 'A Sketch of Boz,' illuminated by some sixty magic lantern slides. Over the next two years Furniss toured the provinces with an enlarged version of this lecture.

An Edwardian's View of Dickens and His Illustrators is an edited and annotated transcription of the unpublished manuscript of this engaging lecture, together with the original illustrations, some of which, like the three featured on the front and back covers, are Furniss's own.

Few complete texts of oral lectures have survived and, coming from the pen (and pencil) of a professional book illustrator and keen Dickensian, 'A Sketch of Boz' is an important document in the culture of Edwardian England.

Professor Cordery's substantial introduction discusses how the lecture sheds light on a number of fields: Dickens's reputation and that of his illustrators in the early twentieth century; the cultural significance of the platform lecture; the changing style of illustration and caricature; the commercial and ideological exploitation of Dickens at the turn of the century. He summarizes the main illustrators surveyed by Furniss and includes more than 170 annotations. The book thus engages a variety of readers interested in nineteenth and early twentieth-century British literature and culture.