

**MR. DICKENS
GOES TO THE PLAY**

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Mr. Dickens goes to the play by Alexander Woollcott

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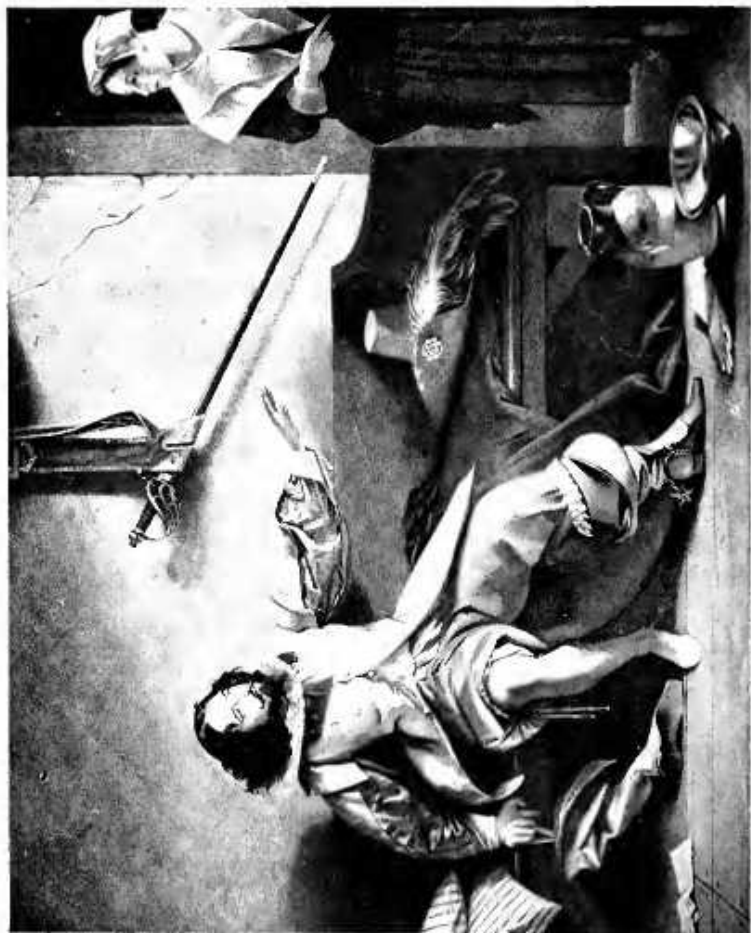
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ALEXANDER WOOLLCOTT

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GOES TO THE PLAY**



Dickens in Full Make-Up
(From the Shaw Collection)

Dickens, Charles

Mr. Dickens Goes to The Play

By
Alexander Woollcott

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Alexander Woolcott

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To
KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

MY DEAR KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN:

Surely it is unnecessary to explain why, of all the books I might possibly provoke, this one must needs especially be dedicated to you—you who rode with Mr. Dickens to Portland long ago and told him why you liked "David Copperfield" best of all and what parts of his novels were rather dull and why your yellow dog was named Pip and how your other dog (who had fought with Pip in your garden) was, inevitably, named Mr. Pocket.

Nor need there be any explaining of a Dickens book compiled by one who was brought up on his stories. Without them I should hardly have had the key to all that my grandfather and my mother were wont to say across the head of this young Brooks of Sheffield. One of the last memories I have of my grandfather is of an autocrat of nearly ninety years, sitting fiercely on the vine-hung verandah of his old house down in Jersey. In his declining years he had relinquished little by little the supervision of his farm and his factory. But he still kept an eye on those hollyhocks of his. And no sooner did he suspect the roaming chickens of having designs on them, than up would go his cane in the

fashion of a war-club and down the steps he would charge, roaring as he went (to summon aid from whatever stray grandchildren might be within earshot): "Janet, Donkeys!"

But I should, perhaps, tell how this fresh gathering of the Dickens material came about. It really happened last Christmas Eve; when, in the early afternoon, I encountered on Fifth Avenue the redoubtable J. M. Kerrigan of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. Kerrigan always has to stop and think when you ask him what country he is in and he has a delightful way of never being committed to any destination. Therefore he was all in readiness when I suggested that we make the round of the studios, he to sing Christmas Waits for our drinks. He sang many old snatches that afternoon.

So it was twilight when, in high good humor, we reached my quarters at last, where I went to work on the tying up of some Christmas parcels and Kerrigan, infected by the spirit of the day, groped instinctively for my set of Dickens on the darkened shelves. I have an indistinct recollection that I caught him looking disappointedly for Micawber in "Dombey and Son." I remember for sure that just when I was lording it over the fellow because he had never made the acquaintance of my friend, Mr. Wopsle, he countered by introducing me to Dullborough Town, which, in all its charm and prophetic humor, had escaped me until that day. Said Kerrigan: