

**A DAY WITH  
CHARLES DICKENS**

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A day with Charles Dickens by Maurice Clare

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**MAURICE CLARE**

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A decorative border of stylized flowers and leaves surrounds the text. The flowers have long, slender petals and are arranged in a repeating pattern. The leaves are simple, oval shapes with small veins. The entire design is enclosed in a rectangular frame with a decorative inner border.

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*by*  
MAURICE CLARE

LONDON  
HODDER &  
STOUGHTON

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**T** was a glorious June morning in the year 1857. The scarlet geraniums, dear for their brilliance and colour to their master's heart, were in full flamboyance of flower; the syringas were sending wafts of sweetness through the garden: lovely shadows lay beneath the two great cedar trees,—when a smallish, active, brown-bearded man, strongly resembling a sea-captain ashore, came out to survey his little domain, in all its pomp of midsummer, while yet the dew was on it: for there was to him, as he had said, “something incomparably solemn in the still solitude of the morning.”

It is seldom that the man in his maturity may fulfil the half-impossible aspirations of boyhood: but Charles Dickens had done this to the very letter. As a child he had desired this quaint old Georgian house of Gadshill on the Dover Road, with its magnificent views of Cobham Woods, the distant



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Thames, the nearer Medway, the stately contours of Rochester Castle and Cathedral. And now, at forty-five years of age, behold him ensconced as the owner thereof. "A grave red brick house," he had written of it, "which I have added to, and stuck bits upon, in all manner of ways, so that it is as pleasantly irregular, and as violently opposed to all architectural ideas as the most hopeful man could possibly desire."

The bronzed, hardy-looking man, with a "face like steel," as Mrs. Carlyle had termed it, looked eagerly to and fro, casting his eyes of extraordinary brilliancy over the glorious panorama of the landscape and the sunlit splendours of the flowers: then, with the quick light step of a practised pedestrian, he crossed the road in front of the house, by an underground passage, to a shrubbery on the opposite side. Here was the Swiss *châlet* which Fechter had sent him from Paris, and which Dickens had turned into a study. "I have put five mirrors," he told a friend, "in the *châlet* where I write, and they reflect and refract, in all kinds of ways, the leaves that are quivering at the windows, and the great fields of waving corn, and the sail-dotted river. My room is up

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among the branches of the trees ; and the birds and butterflies fly in and out, and the green branches shoot in at the open windows, and the lights and shadows of the clouds seem to come and go with the rest of the company. The scent of the flowers, and indeed of everything that is growing for miles and miles, is most delicious."

The great author ran upstairs and busied himself, with alert movements and dexterous touches, in setting his papers in order for the day's work : for he was the most methodical of men. No writer, it has been said, ever lived, of greater industry and more systematic method. In short, as his daughter Mamie wrote of him, "he was tidy in every way—in his mind, in his handsome and graceful person, in his work, in keeping his writing-table drawers, in his large correspondence, in fact in his whole life." Sometimes, indeed, this propensity to tidiness developed into a fidgetty fussiness of detail,—so that he would entirely re-arrange the whole furniture of some hotel bedroom where he was only staying for the night.

He could not write unless everything was placed exactly ready to his hand in apple-pie order, and unless he had, ranged around and

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before him, that singular variety of objects upon which he wished his eye to rest in any momentary respite from actual work. A little cup full of fresh flowers was invariably one of those objects,—a bronze group of toads duelling—a gilt leaf with a seated rabbit—a huge paper knife—a French statuette of a dog-fancier carrying a multiplicity of little dogs. And, amongst these heterogeneous odds and ends, the most popular and the most widely-read man of his time—perhaps of any time—evolved his intricate plots, and created that unrivalled portrait-gallery, which was and is unique in the annals of literature. Four months after he began to write, he was famous: his career had known no checks, no blights, no returned MSS., no sicknesses of hope deferred. “His literary life was a triumphal procession,” and his characters were already household words. It is hardly possible to understand in this present day, when novels are multiplied into a weariness of the flesh, the feverish excitement and anticipation, the immense furore, which anticipated and hailed the issue of the monthly parts of “Pickwick” and its successors: when Oxford undergraduates raced each other for the mail coach to secure the first copies, and men told each other seriously