

**A CHRISTMAS CAROL  
AND THE CRICKET ON  
THE HEARTH**

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A Christmas Carol and the Cricket on the Hearth by Charles Dickens

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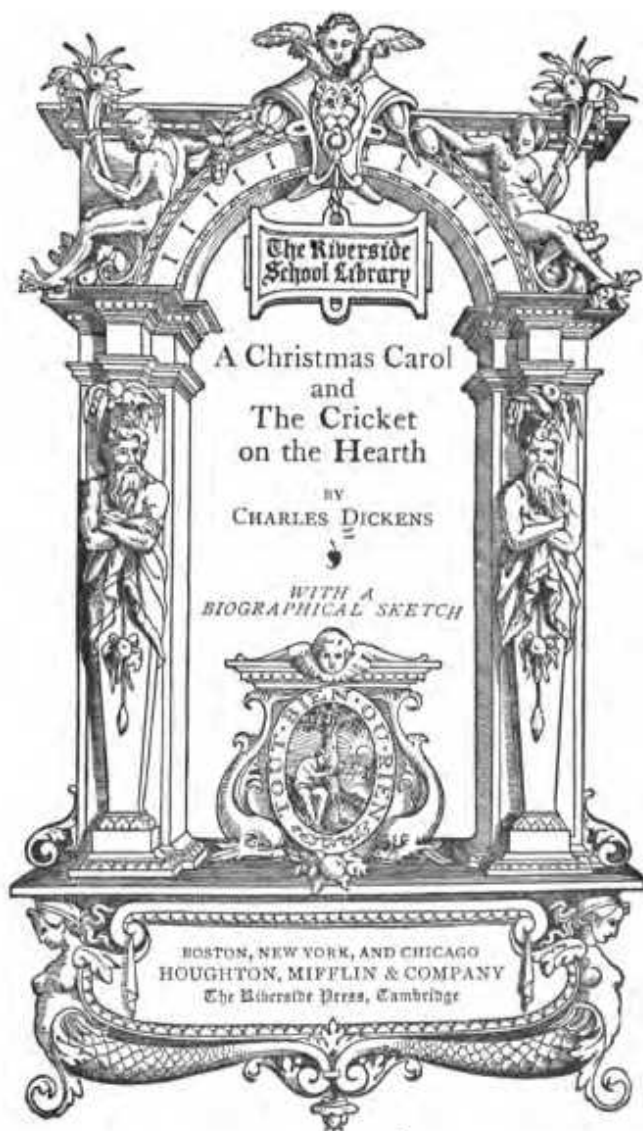
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A Christmas Carol  
and  
The Cricket  
on the Hearth

BY  
CHARLES DICKENS

WITH A  
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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A CHRISTMAS CAROL





## A SKETCH OF THE LIFE OF CHARLES DICKENS.

CHARLES DICKENS, the most popular novelist of his time, and one of the greatest humorists of any age, was born on the 7th of February, 1812, near Portsmouth, England, where his father held a government office. The family, by successive changes, came finally to live at Chatham, where, until he was nine years old, Charles received the most durable of his early impressions. He was a very sickly boy, being subject to violent spasms, which unfitted him for active exercise; but this inability to play gave him the inclination to read, so that at this early period of life his imaginative powers were quickened and developed by some of the masterpieces of English fiction.

The misfortunes into which the improvident habits of his father had plunged his family compelled Charles, before he was ten years old, to earn his living, and he was placed in a blacking-warehouse, in a tumble-down building near the Thames. His duty was to cover with paper the pots of blacking, and to paste on each a printed label; in his after life he was keenly sensitive to what he regarded as the humiliation of this employment. At this time his father was confined in the Marshalsea Prison for Debtors, where Charles often visited him. Amid the low associates of the warehouse and in the degrading scenes of the prison he passed two years, without, however, losing the animal spirits or the capacity of humorous enjoyment, which were to serve him with such magnificent results.

Readers of "David Copperfield" discover more of semi-autobiography in the novel than in any other of Dickens's novels. It is generally understood that the amusing charac-

ter of Micawber is an extravagant caricature of the author's father; in "Little Dorrit," also, Dickens has drawn upon his recollection of these early days.

Following an improvement in the elder Dickens's circumstances, Charles went to school until he was about fifteen years old, and when his father became a reporter in the House of Commons, Charles learned shorthand and was a constant attendant in the reading-room of the British Museum. To him these were the most useful days of his life, for they gave him all the preparation he ever had for the literary labors of forty years. Before entering the reporters' gallery he practiced shorthand in Doctors' Commons and other law courts, and in 1834 began reporting for the "Morning Chronicle." The experience of David Copperfield in learning shorthand is no doubt a heightened picture of the author's own experiment. The duties of a reporter, compelling him to travel from place to place, and to meet all sorts and conditions of men, gave food to his memory and imagination, and supplied him with characters whom he was to bring later upon the scene of his novels. When he finally entered the reporters' gallery he held the first rank among his eighty or ninety associates for accuracy in reporting and speed in transcribing.

But already in the first month of this year, 1834, his first published piece of writing saw the light. A paper which he had dropped stealthily into a letter-box appeared in the "Old Monthly Magazine." He has described the joy and pride with which he saw his article in the glory of print. It was followed by nine others; he began to write sketches for the "Chronicle;" his salary was raised; his articles were talked about, and he was soon to delight the world with the immortal pages of "Pickwick." The sale of this serial gradually increased from four hundred to forty thousand copies, and Dickens was launched upon a literary career which in immediate success and permanent popularity has seen no equal.

In the midst of the labors whose productions are given elsewhere in chronological order, he became the editor of "Household Words," and later of "All the Year Round." He made two visits to America; in the first, in 1842, the crude manners of our immature civilization excited his sense of the ludicrous, which found expression in "American Notes" and "Martin Chuzzlewit," and which grieved a people whose unbounded hospitality he had enjoyed; but this was amply atoned for in the second, more than twenty years later, when he bore willing testimony to the immense development of the Republic in culture as in material prosperity. No American who had met him in this country was refused a hearty welcome in his English home, where he had realized the dream of his youth, and at Gad's Hill Place, near Rochester and Chatham, had become the owner of what when a boy he was told he might possess, "if he were very persevering and were to work hard." But the strain of his American tour had been too great for his already over-taxed system; the practice of reading in public, by which he had added to his fortune, and developed a talent which would have made him a famous actor, bore heavily upon his strength, and after alarming signs of failing health, he passed suddenly away at his home on the 9th of June, 1870, his last work lying unfinished before him. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, amid the tears of the countless thousands who, from the Queen to the miners of "Roaring Camp," had been touched by his pathos, or cheered by his humor.