

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

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The Cricket on the Hearth by Charles Dickens & Hall Caine

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**THE CRICKET
ON THE HEARTH
BY CHARLES DICKENS**

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
HALL CAINE

and Illustrations by D. MACLISE, R.A.
and JOHN LEECH



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INTRODUCTION

CHARLES DICKENS

By HALL CAINE

THE face of Charles Dickens was not one which belied his character. The broad forehead surmounted by wavy locks of brown hair, the mouth full and eloquent, the nostrils wide and "breathing," the eyes large, liquid, and lustrous, yet keen and restless, tell the story of an ardent, even passionate, temperament, touched deeply by the sorrows as well as the joys of life. It is the face of a poet first of all and afterwards of a wit. Mrs. Cowden Clarke saw Dickens first at the great Macready dinner, and she says that at that period he chiefly struck her for the remarkably observant power of his wonderful eyes, which cast discursive glances on everything around and seemed to take note of every peculiarity in look, manner, speech, or tone. No spoonful of soup was lifted to his lips unaccompanied by an oddity or whimsicality, no morsel was raised on his fork unseasoned by some droll gesture which he had remarked in some one near. It used to be said of Dickens that he could walk down a crowded street and tell you all there was in it—what the shops were, what the grocer's or the butcher's or the baker's name was, and how many scraps of orange peel lay on the pavement. A friend who knew Dickens late in life says that

long after the vivacity of youth had been toned down, this faculty for observing minor matters remained, and that the novelist never visited his house without provoking him with the suspicion that his ferreting eyes told him exactly why his host didn't wear his watch, and where and when he had bought his last new suit of clothes.

But the lustrous eyes that look out of Dickens' picture were made for higher uses than these. They are the eyes of a poet, and in certain lights they have a look which seems to say that, however much this man may observe, he is more prone to reflect; however much of a realist, he is even more of an idealist.

This is all very true to Dickens' life and character, when we come to think of it. Dickens was the son of a man whose pecuniary embarrassments, easy good-nature, and utter impracticability furnished the hint out of which was evolved the immortal portrait of Wilkins Micawber. The boy's early years were saddened by many privations, and everyone remembers the thrill which passed over England when the first pages of Forster's "Life" made known the hidden secret of a nature that had been incurably injured. All the world knew that Dickens had said, "In my heart of hearts there is a favourite child, and his name is David Copperfield"; but it was now to realise that in depicting under that name the suffering that could be crushed into a child's experience the novelist was laying bare the cruel trials of his own boyish years, about which he could write without resentment or pain, for he knew that all things had in the end worked together to make him what he was.

In a temporary lapse of that complacent hopefulness which encouraged Dickens Senr. to believe that something would "in short turn up," the young Dickens was sent to be a drudge in a blacking warehouse.