

# CHARLES DICKENS--The Christmas Novelist (continued)

## Everything His But Time

Letters No. 21 perhaps will be most interesting to American readers. It is dated at "Baltimore, United States," Twenty-second of March 1852. After apologies for not having written earlier and promises that letters from America for Miss Coutts and the other members of her household have already been purchased, it proceeds:

"The truth is that they give me everything here, but Time. That they never will leave me alone. That I shake hands every day when I am not travelling, with five or six hundred people. That Mr. Dickens and I hold a formal levee in every town we come to, and usually faint away (from fatigue) every day while dressing for dinner—in a word, that we are venting long for Home, and look forward to the seventh day of next June when we sail, please God, from New York—most ardently.

"I have sent you some newspapers, and I hope they have reached you. They gave me a ball at New York, at which three thousand people were present—and a public dinner besides, and another in place Boston—and another in a place called Hartford. Others were projected, literally all through the States, but I gave public notice that I could not accept them.

But I have made an exception in favour of one body of readers at St. Louis—a town in the Far West, on the confines of the Indian territory. I am going there to dinner—it's only two thousand miles from here and start the day after tomorrow.

The next item, written July 2, 1842, announces his return and his gifts. A rocking chair and "some specimens of American Poetry" for Miss Coutts and for Miss Meredith (her companion) an Eagle's feather.

Evidently, the friendship with Miss Coutts began upon her initiative. For the first several of these letters are mere formal notes, regretting inability to accept invitations. But the friendship grew rapidly. It began at the height of Dickens' first popularity, four years after the appearance of "Pickwick Papers," two years after first publication of "Oliver Twist." The correspondence traces the remainder of the author's literary activity. The twelfth communication in the series tells its recipient that he is having a copy of "The Old Curiosity Shop" bound especially for her. In August, 1843, he wrote from Broadstairs, Kent, of his eldest son, "Charley," and he said "I have some idea of writing him a Child's History of England, to the end that he may have tender hearted notions of War and murder, and may not fix his affections on wrong heroes, or see the bright side of Glory's sword and know nothing of the rusty one. If I should carry it out, I shall live in the hope that you will lead it one wet day.

## TINY TIM

Christmas will always remind lovers of Charles Dickens works the intensity of purpose with which the great novelist depicts Yuletide, and the great lover of children he was, in his "Christmas Carol" we have Tiny Tim, the poor crippled son of Bob Cratchit—who "somehow gets, thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me coming home that he hoped the people saw his in church because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant for them to remember upon Christmas Day who made lame beggars walk and blind men see." The home life of the Cratchits, portrayed by Dickens, the joyousness of his children around the Christmas fire, and the seriousness of all faces when the father proposed "A merry Christmas to us all, dears, God bless it." And when all the family re-echoed it, Tiny Tim came in last with his weak voice: "God bless us every one!" And then the master author tells us how "Tiny Tim sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand to his, as if he loved the child and wished to keep him by his side and dreaded that he might be taken from him." Spirit said Scrooge, "Tell me if Tim will live." "I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the future, the child will die."

But Charles Dickens did not let Tiny Tim die, much to the delight of all who read this Christmas Carol.

## LITTLE NELL

It has been stated that several reviewers of the "Old Curiosity Shop" owned to having wept over the death of Little Nell. A story of a strong spirit imprisoned in a frail, lovely body." In Philadelphia, U. S. A., by the side of the statue of Dickens, Little Nell stands as if she were his good genius. The character of Little Nell has been a power for good. "I love little children," said the great author and his creation of Little Nell proves it. Bret Harte, in his poignant verses, draws a vivid picture of a group of miners, tortured and reckless with gold hunger, leaving their drink and gambling to "hear of Little Nell," shows very clearly what her influence has been. And then her death. "She was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for his breath of life, not one who had lived and suffered here and there, and there with some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour. "When I die, put near me something that has loved the light and had the sky above it always." She was dead. Dear gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor slight thing that the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage and the strong heart of its child mistress was mute and motionless for ever.

## Some Characters AND Extracts FROM HIS WORK

### LOUISA GRADGRIND

IN "Hard Times," in Louisa Gradgrind, we have a character which almost rivals "Estella." Louisa was never allowed to wonder. Louisa has been bred up upon her father's system of facts, facts, facts. "They is to be banished—fancy, the fairy all the Gradgrinds in the world cannot chase from the garden of Eden of the golden age. We see the dark-eyed creature standing mournfully by the window; her brothers "Adam Smith and Malthus" have gone to a lecture; her small sister, "after manufacturing a good deal of moisture on her face with slate pencil and tears, had fallen asleep over her vulgar tractions." There comes into her arid life the daughter of a clown, Cissy, who has teachers, and she has learned happiness from them. The two children exactly foreshadow their own futures in their early conduct, and we are made to see very beautifully how the touch of nobility in Louisa's thwarted character is strengthened by association with this humble little friend.

### DICKENS IN CAMP

By Francis Brez Harte

Above the pines the moon was slowly drifting.  
The river sang below;  
The dim Sierras, far beyond, up lifting  
Their minarets of snow.

The rearing camp-fire, with rudo humor, painted,  
The ruddy tints of health  
On haggard face and form that drooped and fainted  
In the fierce race for wealth;

Till one arose, and from his pack's scant treasure  
A hoarded volume drew,  
And cards were dropped from hands of listless leisure,  
To hear the tale anew;

And then, while round them shadows gathered faster,  
And as the firelight flicked,  
He read aloud the book wherein the Master  
Had writ of "Little Nell."

Perhaps 'twas boyish fancy,—for the reader  
Was youngest of them all,—  
But, as he read, from clustering pine and cedar  
A silence seemed to fall:

The fire-trees, gathering closed in the shadows,  
Listened in every spray,  
While the whole camp, with "Nell," on English meadows  
Wandered and lost their way.

And so in mountain solitude, over-taken  
As by some spell divine,—  
Their cares dropped from them like the needles shaken  
From out the gusty pine.

That is that camp, and wended all its fire;  
And He who wrought that spell—  
Ah, towering pine and stately Kentish spire,  
Ye have one tale to tell!

That is that camp, but let its fragrant story  
Blend with the breath that thrills  
With hop-vines, incense all the pensive glory  
That fills the Kentish hills.

And on that grave where English oak and holly  
And laurel wreaths entwine,  
Deem it not all a too presumptuous folly,  
This spray of Western pine.

### CHRISTMAS TIME

Charles Dickens will never be out of date and will always be especially remembered at Christmas time. He will never be neglected or forgotten. The millions of his readers at the present time speak for that. In his own measure, he shares with Shakespeare the immortality, not only of great genius but of a world genius. His works will keep his memory green. The name of Charles Dickens is a household word wherever the English language is spoken; but when all this is admitted, it is impossible not to recognize his Christlike compassion, his extraordinary insight, his shining gifts, together with the wit, the humor, the imagination, the pathos and the kindness which he brought to bear on the interpretation of the comedy and the tragedy of the common people he knew so well.—"Lord, keep his memory green!"—A. T. P.

up his Lilliputian shadows and how to make them live, it is over one hundred years since Charles Dickens first saw the light, and hundreds of grown-up heroes have been created and forgotten since. But Little Dorrit, and Morriena and Bella and the rest, they hold a secret—the secret of eternal youth.

### A MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN TWO PICKWICKIANS

MR. Pickwick took up his hat and repaired to the Peacock, but Mr. Winkle had conveyed the intelligence of the fancy ball there, before him.

"Mrs. Pott's going," were the first words with which he saluted his leader.

"Is she?" said Mr. Pickwick.

"Only I object to the tune."

"He is right, he is quite right," said Mr. Pickwick emphatically.

"Yes;—so she is going to wear a white satin gown with gold spangles."

"They'll hardly know what she's meant for; will they?" inquired Mr. Snodgrass.

"Of course they will," replied Mr. Winkle indignantly. "They'll see her here, won't they?"

"True; I forgot that," said Mr. Snodgrass.

"I shall go as a Bandit," interposed Mr. Tupman.

"What!" said Mr. Pickwick with a sudden start.

"As a Bandit," replied Mr. Tupman mildly.

"You don't mean to say," said Mr. Pickwick, gazing with solemn sternness at his friend, "you don't mean to say, Mr. Tupman, that it is your intention to put yourself in to a green velvet jacket with a two-inch tail?"

"Such is my intention, sir," replied Mr. Tupman warily. "And why not, sir?"

"Because, sir," said Mr. Pickwick considerably excited, "because you are too old, sir."

"Too old!" exclaimed Mr. Tupman.

"And if any further ground of objection be wanting," continued Mr. Pickwick, "you are too fat, sir."

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, his face suffused with a crimson glow.

"This is an insult," said Mr. Pickwick in the same tone, "it is not that the insult to you, that your appearance in my presence is a green velvet jacket, with a two-inch tail, would be to me."

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, "you're a fellow."

"Sir," said Mr. Pickwick, "you're another."

He whistled, and shouted, and called them by name:  
"Now Dasher! now, Dancer! now, Prancer and Vixen!  
On, Comet! on, Comet! on, Donner and Blitzen!  
To the top of the porch! to the top of the wall!  
As dry leaves that before the wild wind dash away!  
As dry leaves that before the wild wind dash away!"

When they met, with an obstacle mount to the sky;  
So up to the eaves on the coursers they flew,  
With the sleigh full of Toys, and St. Nicholas, too,  
And then, in a twinkling, I heard on the roof  
The prancing and pawing of each little hoof.

As I drew in my head, and was turning around,  
Down the chimney St. Nicholas came with a bound.

He was dressed all in fur, from his head to his foot,  
And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot;  
A bundle of Toys he had slung on his back,  
And he looked like a pedler just opening his pack.  
His eyes—how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry!  
His cheeks were like roses, his

Mr. Tupman advanced a step or two, and glared at Mr. Pickwick. Mr. Pickwick returned the glare, concentrated into a focus by means of his spectacles, and breathed a bold defiance. Mr. Snodgrass and Mr. Winkle looked on, petrified at beholding such a scene between two such men.

"Sir," said Mr. Tupman, after a short pause, speaking in a low deep voice, "you have called me old."

"I reiterate the charge," said Mr. Pickwick.

"And a fellow," said Mr. Pickwick.

"So you are," said Mr. Pickwick.

There was a fearful pause.

"My attachment to your person," said Mr. Tupman, speaking in a voice tremulous with emotion, and tucking up his wrists—meanwhile, "is great—very great—but upon that person I must take summary vengeance."

"Coming on, sir," replied Mr. Pickwick. Stimulated by the exciting nature of the dialogue, the heroic man actually threw himself into a paralytic attitude, confidently supposed by the two bystanders to have been intended as a posture of defence.

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Snodgrass, suddenly recovering the power of speech, of which intense astonishment had previously bereft him, and rushing between the two, at the imminent hazard of receiving an application on the temple from each. "What! Mr. Pickwick, with the eyes of the world upon you! Mr. Tupman! who, is common with us all derives a lustre from his undying name! For shame, gentlemen! for shame!"

The unwonted lines which momentary passion had ruled in Mr. Pickwick's clean and open brow, gradually melted away, as his young friend spoke, like the marks of a black-lead pencil beneath the softening influence of India rubber. His countenance had resumed its usual benignant expression ere he concluded.

"I have been hasty," said Mr. Pickwick, very hasty. Tupman, your hand.

The dark shadow passed from Mr. Tupman's face, as he warmly grasped the hand of his friend.

"I have been hasty too," said he.

"No, no!" interrupted Mr. Pickwick, "the fault was mine. You will wear the green velvet packet?"

"No, no," replied Mr. Tupman.

"To oblige me, you will," resumed Mr. Pickwick.

"Well, well, I will," said Mr. Tupman.

It was accordingly settled that Mr. Tupman, Mr. Winkle and Mr. Snodgrass, should all wear fancy dresses. Thus Mr. Pickwick was

led by the very warmth of his own good feelings to give his consent to a proceeding from which his better judgement would have recoiled.—Pickwick Papers.

### DEATH OF LITTLE NELL

SHE was dead. No sleep so beautiful and calm, so free from trace of pain, so fair to look upon. She seemed a creature fresh from the hand of God, and waiting for the breath of life, not one who had lived and suffered death.

Her couch was dressed with here and there some winter berries and green leaves, gathered in a spot she had been used to favour. "When I die, put near me something that has loved the light, and had the sky above it always." Those were her words.

She was dead. Dear, gentle, patient, noble Nell was dead. Her little bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child mistress was mute and motionless for ever.

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrows were dead folded in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imagined in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes, the old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed like a dream through haunts of misery and care; at the poor schoolmaster on the summer evening, before the furnace fire upon the cold wet night, at the still bedside of the dying boy, there had been the same mild lovely look.

"It is not," said the schoolmaster, as he bent down to kiss her on the cheek, and saw his tears free vent, "it is not on earth that Heaven's justice ends. Think what it is compared with the world to which her young spirit has winged its early flight; and say, if one deliberate wish expressed in solemn terms above this bed could call her back to life, which of us would utter it?—Old Curiosity Shop

### DOLLY VARDEN.

IN "Barnaby Rudge" we have Dolly Varden, so whimsical and hard to please, all smiles and dimples and pleasant looks, and caring no more for the fifty or sixty young fellows who at that very moment were breaking their hearts to marry her, that if so many oysters had been crossed in love and opened afterwards.

When and where was there such a plump, roquish, comely, bright-eyed creature, bewitching, captivating, mad as a kitten, puss in all the world as Dolly?

How many coachmakers, saddlers, cabinet-makers and processors of other useful arts, had deserted their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers and, most of all, their cousins for the love of her! How many unknown gentlemen—supposed to be of mighty fortunes if not titles—had sought round the corner after dark and terrified Migs, the incorruptible, with eagerness to deliver offers of marriage folded up in love-letters! How many disconsolate fathers and substantial tradesmen had waited on the locksmith for the same purpose, with dismal tales of how their sons had lost their appetites and taken to shut themselves up in dark bedrooms and wandering in desolate suburbs with pale faces, and all because of Dolly Varden's loveliness and cruelty. How many young men, in all previous time of unprecedented steadiness, had turned suddenly wild and wicked for the same reason and in an ecstasy of unrequited love, taken to wrench of door-knockers, and invert the boxes of rheumatic watchmen.

And again, how she had recruited the King's service, both by sea and land, through rendering desperate his loving subjects between the ages of 18 and 25. How many young ladies had publicly professed, with tears in their eyes, that for their sakes she was much too short, too tall, too bold, too cold, too stout, too thin, too fat, too dark—too everything but handsome! How many old ladies, taking counsel together, had thanked heaven their daughters were not like her, and had hoped thought she would come to harm, and had hoped she would come to no good and had wished at the conclusion that she was "going off" in her looks, or had never come on in them and that she was a thorough imposition and a popular mistake.

### DORA AND AGNES

THERE are two characters in the great master's work—one a woman and the other a girl whose human love became, through utter self-abnegation, a thing divine. The woman is Agnes Wickfield, "David Copperfield" and the man Sydney Carton, "Tale of Two Cities."

What a noble and where-withal sweet and tender girl is Agnes. Her love for David Copperfield is

one of that loveliest of all the loves of Dickens. Unrequited for years was that love that she dare not show, so she uses it as an influence for good, ever present with David, ever watching like a good angel over him, restraining, inspiring and unconsciously directing him. Here is one of David's own description of her: "I see her, with her modest, orderly, placid manner, and I hear her beautiful calm voice as I write these words. The influence for all good, which she came to exercise over me at a later time, begins already to despatch upon my breast. I love little Emily and I don't love Agnes—no, not at all in that way—but I feel that there are goodness, peace and truth wherever Agnes is, and that the soft light of the colored window in the church, seen long ago, falls on her always, and on me when I am near her, and on everything around."

The greatest all-conquering love is the love that sacrifices self to the extent of loving a rival, and this Agnes Wickfield did. David had fallen in love with Dora—the Dora who became his child-wife—and Agnes, in the depths of a divine emotion, loves Dora too because David loves her; her love was Agnes's highest happiness and Agnes stifled all feeling but the love and she felt for David, the love that gave but did not seek to everything but its love.

The meeting of Agnes and Dora is one of the finest pictures Dickens ever gave us. David wants Agnes to see his adorable sweet heart and to witness the devotion of him and his Dora and, with a smile, Agnes builds the pile that is to consume the sacrifice. David follows Agnes and takes her to Dora:

"At first Dora wouldn't come at all, and then she pleaded for five minutes by my watch. When at length she put her arm through mine, to be taken to the drawing room, her charming little face was flushed and had never been so pretty, but when she went into the room and it turned to see her, she was ten thousand times prattier than Dora was afraid of Agnes. She had told me that she knew Agnes was 'too clever.' But when she saw her looking at once so cheerful and so earnest and so thoughtful and so good, she gave a faint little cry of pleased surprise and put her affectionate arms round Agnes and laid her innocent cheek against her face. I was very happy. I was never pleased as when I saw those two sit down together side by side, as when I saw my little darling looking up so naturally to those cordial eyes; as when I saw the beautiful regard which Agnes cast upon her—the gentle cheerfulness of Agnes went to all their hearts. Her quiet interest in everything that interested Dora—her pleasant way when Dora was ashamed to come over to the usual seat by me, her modest grace and ease eliciting a crowd of blushing little marks of confidence from Dora, seemed to make our circle quite complete."

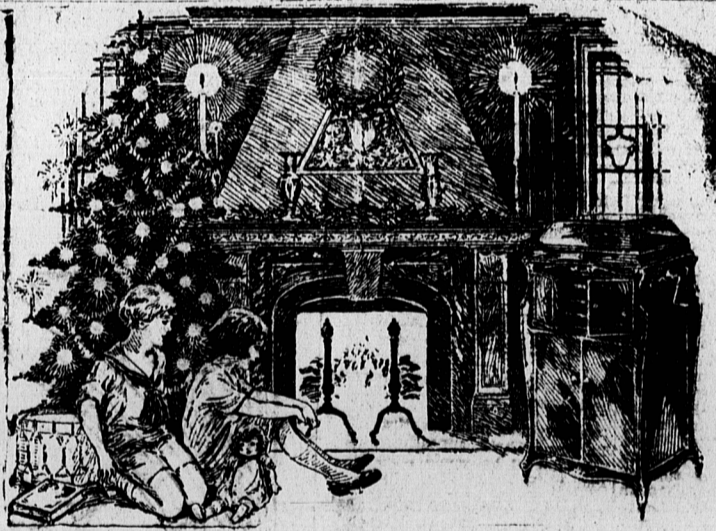
And then we read that Agnes carries her devotion so far as to hold the trembling hand of Dora as the marriage ceremony is gone through and is the last to kiss the bride, but Dickens leaves to the imagination of the reader the feelings of Agnes when she retires to her room, the struggle of self with love and the final sorrowful ecstasy of love triumphant. A few brief years and David's child-wife passes away; but Agnes is with her the last. The sweet good influence of Agnes has always been with David, and the love he had denied her at last awoke in the bravest man. They met, and Agnes is just leaving him. "Agnes! stay a moment. She was going away but I detained her. I clasped my arm about her waist—New thoughts and hopes were whirling through my mind, and all the colors of my life were changing."

"Dearest Agnes! whom I so respect and honor—whom I so devotedly love—when I came here tonight I thought that nothing could have wrested this confession from me. . . . But Agnes, if I have indeed any new born hope that I may call you something more than sister, widely different from sister?—How tears fall fast, but they were dry. Like those who had lately shot, and I saw my hope brighten in them."

"Sister weeping, but not sadly—joyfully! and clasped in my arms as she had never been, as I had thought she never was to be!"

And then David pours out his whole heart to her, and Agnes replies: "I am so bliss! my heart is so overcharged, but there is one thing I must say—I have loved you all my life."

In talking leave of Agnes Wickfield—probably the best of all Dickens' characters—I will quote the novelists last paragraph of his favorite book: "O Agnes, O my soul! So may thy face be by me when I close my eyes; if I am so bliss! when realities are melting from me like the shadows which I now dismiss, still find thee near me, pointing upward."



The Night before Christmas

