

A TALE *of* TWO CITIES

Charles Dickens



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Introduction and Notes by Gillen D'Arcy Wood

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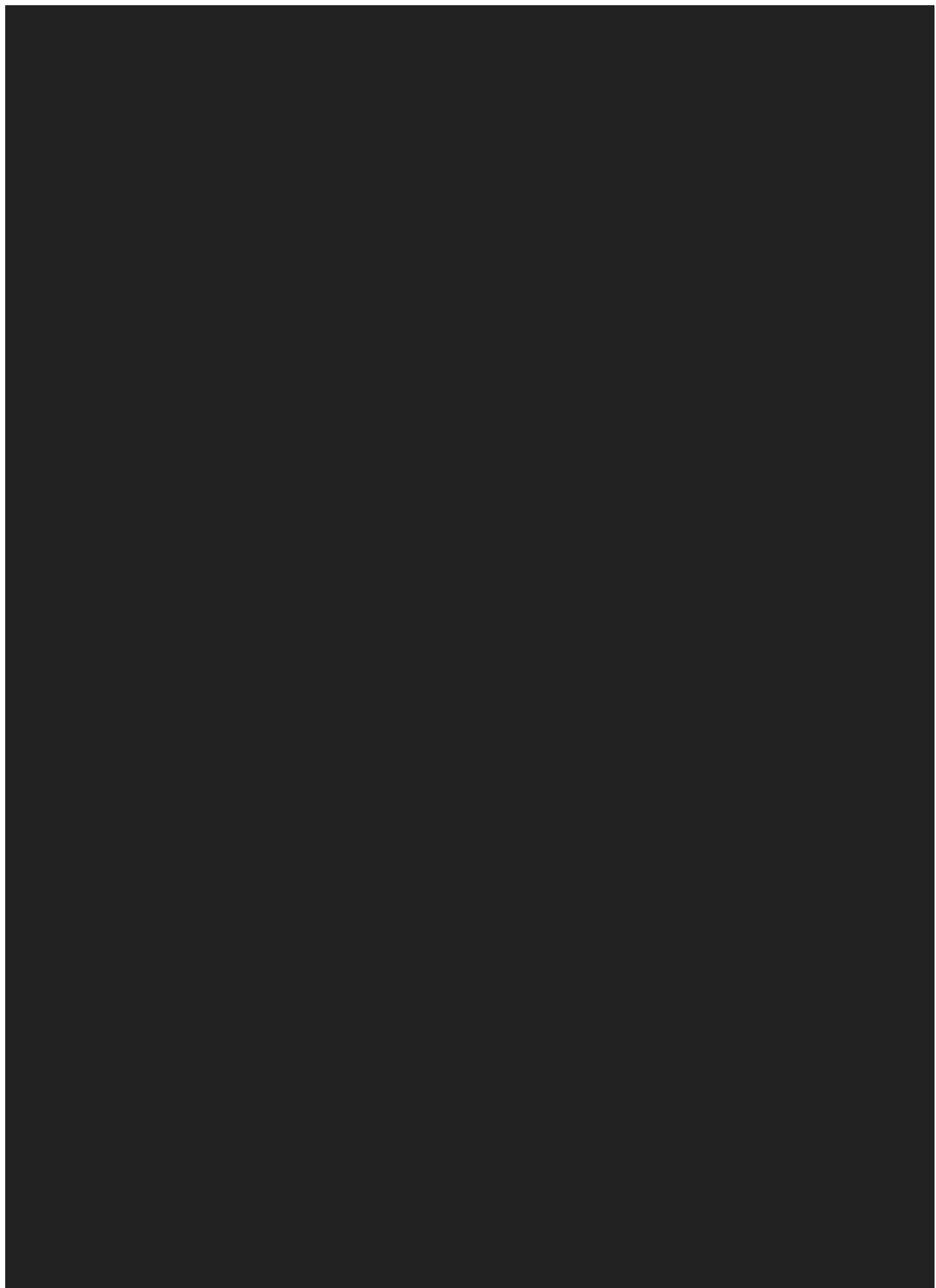


Table of Contents

[FROM THE PAGES OF A TALE OF TWO CITIES](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[CHARLES DICKENS](#)

[THE WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS AND A TALE OF TWO CITIES](#)

[Introduction](#)

[PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION](#)

[BOOK THE FIRST - Recalled to Life](#)

[CHAPTER 1 - The Period](#)

[CHAPTER 2 - The Mail](#)

[CHAPTER 3 - The Night Shadows](#)

[CHAPTER 4 - The Preparation](#)

[CHAPTER 5 - The Wine-shop](#)

[CHAPTER 6 - The Shoemaker](#)

[BOOK THE SECOND - The Golden Thread](#)

[CHAPTER 1 - Five Years Later](#)

[CHAPTER 2 - A Sight](#)

[CHAPTER 3 - A Disappointment](#)

[CHAPTER 4 - Congratulatory](#)

[CHAPTER 5 - The Jackal](#)

[CHAPTER 6 - Hundreds of People](#)
[CHAPTER 7 - Monseigneur in Town](#)
[CHAPTER 8 - Monseigneur in the Country](#)
[CHAPTER 9 - The Head](#)
[CHAPTER 10 - Two Promises](#)
[CHAPTER 11 - A Companion Picture](#)
[CHAPTER 12 - The Fellow of Delicacy](#)
[CHAPTER 13 - The Fellow of No Delicacy](#)
[CHAPTER 14 - The Honest Tradesman](#)
[CHAPTER 15 - Knitting](#)
[CHAPTER 16 - Still Knitting](#)
[CHAPTER 17 - One Night](#)
[CHAPTER 18 - Nine Days](#)
[CHAPTER 19 - An Opinion](#)
[CHAPTER 20 - A Plea](#)
[CHAPTER 21 - Echoing Footsteps](#)
[CHAPTER 22 - The Sea Still Rises](#)
[CHAPTER 23 - Fire Rises](#)
[CHAPTER 24 - Drawn to the Loadstone Rock](#)

[BOOK THE THIRD - The Track of a Storm](#)

[CHAPTER 1 - In Secret](#)
[CHAPTER 2 - The Grindstone](#)
[CHAPTER 3 - The Shadow](#)
[CHAPTER 4 - Calm in Storm](#)
[CHAPTER 5 - The Wood-sawyer](#)
[CHAPTER 6 - Triumph](#)
[CHAPTER 7 - A Knock at the Door](#)
[CHAPTER 8 - A Hand at Cards](#)

[CHAPTER 9 - The Game Made](#)

[CHAPTER 10 - The Substance of the Shadow](#)

[CHAPTER 11 - Dusk](#)

[CHAPTER 12 - Darkness](#)

[CHAPTER 13 - Fifty- two](#)

[CHAPTER 14 - The Knitting Done](#)

[CHAPTER 15 - The Footsteps Die Out for Ever](#)

[ENDNOTES](#)

[INSPIRED BY A TALE OF TWO CITIES](#)

[COMMENTS & QUESTIONS](#)

[FOR FURTHER READING](#)

FROM THE PAGES OF A *TALE OF TWO CITIES*

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. (page 7)

Every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. (page 16)

There was a character about Madame Defarge, from which one might have predicated that she did not often make mistakes against herself in any of the reckonings over which she presided. (page 35)

Death is Nature's remedy for all things, and why not Legislation's?
(page 56)

Those were drinking days, and most men drank hard. (page 88)

The leprosy of unreality disfigured every human creature in attendance upon Monseigneur. In the outermost room were half a dozen exceptional people

who had had, for a few years, some vague misgiving in them that things in general were going rather wrong. As a promising way of setting them right, half of the half-dozen had become members of a fantastic sect of Convulsionists, and were even then considering within themselves whether they should foam, rage, roar, and turn cataleptic on the spot. (page 108)

The transition to the sport of window-breaking, and thence to the plundering of public-houses, was easy and natural. (page 157)

“Vengeance and retribution require a long time; it is the rule.”

(page 177)





A TALE OF TWO CITIES

Charles Dickens

With an Introduction and Notes
by Gillen D'Arcy Wood

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Consulting Editorial Director



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Notes, Biography, Chronology, Inspired By, Comments & Questions,
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Introduction, Notes, and For Further Reading

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Note on Charles Dickens, The World of Charles Dickens and *A Tale of Two
Cities*, Inspired by *A Tale of Two Cities*, and Comments & Questions

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CHARLES DICKENS

Born on February 7, 1812, Charles Dickens was the second of eight children in a family burdened with financial troubles. Despite difficult early years, he became the best-selling writer of his time.

In 1824, young Charles was withdrawn from school and forced to work at a boot-blackening factory when his improvident father—in fact, his entire family, except for him—was sent to debtor's prison, where they remained for three months. Once they were released, Charles attended a private school for three years. The young man then became a solicitor's clerk, mastered shorthand, and before long was employed as a Parliamentary reporter. When he was in his early twenties, Dickens began to publish stories and sketches of London life in a variety of periodicals.

It was the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837) that catapulted the twenty-five-year-old author to national renown. Dickens wrote with unequaled speed and often worked on several novels at a time, publishing them first in monthly installments and then as books. His early novels *Oliver Twist* (1837-1838), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1841), and *A Christmas Carol* (1843) solidified his enormous, ongoing popularity. When Dickens was in his late thirties, his social criticism became biting, his humor dark, and his view of poverty darker still. *David Copperfield* (1849-1850), *Bleak House* (1852-1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-1865) are the great works of his masterful and prolific later period.

In 1858 Dickens's twenty-three-year marriage to Catherine Hogarth dissolved when he fell in love with Ellen Ternan, a young actress. The last years of his life were filled with intense activity: writing, managing amateur theatricals, and undertaking several reading tours that reinforced the public's favorable view of his work but took an enormous toll on his health. Working feverishly to the last, Dickens collapsed and died on June 9, 1870, leaving *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* uncompleted.

THE WORLD OF CHARLES DICKENS AND A TALE OF TWO CITIES

- 1811** Jane Austen publishes *Sense and Sensibility*, arguably the first modern English novel.
- 1812** Charles John Huffam Dickens is born at Portsmouth to John and Elizabeth (née Barrow) Dickens. The government orders a group of Luddites, an organized band of laborers opposed to the industrialized machinery that threatens to replace them, to be shot down.
- 1817** The Dickens family moves to Chatham, in Kent. Charles begins reading the books in his father's library; his favorites include the works of Miguel de Cervantes, Daniel Defoe, Henry Fielding, and Tobias Smollett.
- 1822** The Dickens family moves again, this time to Camden, in North London. Charles quickly and fastidiously learns the landscape of London, an invaluable resource for his later writing.
- 1824** Charles is sent to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, a manufacturer of boot-blackening. His father is arrested for debt and imprisoned for three months, and while the rest of the family

stays with John Dickens in prison, Charles lodges elsewhere and continues pasting labels onto bottles of blacking at Warren's.

- 1825** John Dickens retires on a naval pension, and Charles attends Wellington House Academy, a private school where he wins a prize in Latin.
- 1827** He becomes a clerk in a solicitor's office.
- 1829** After learning shorthand, he establishes himself as a reporter for the law courts, Parliament, and various London news papers. He meets Maria Beadnell and falls in love with her.
- 1831** Dickens joins the journalistic staff of the *Mirror of Parliament*; he transcribes speeches by the members of Parliament on such topics as factory conditions, penal reform, education reform, the Poor Law Commission, and the First Reform Bill of 1832.
- 1833** After four arduous years, Dickens's affair with Beadnell dissolves in the face of her family's disapproval. He publishes his first story, "A Dinner at Poplar Walk," in the *Monthly Magazine*. The British Parliament passes the Factory Act, which regulates child labor and forces children to attend school until age thirteen.

- 1834** Dickens becomes a journalist for the *Morning Chronicle*, a job that requires frequent travel and attendance at political meetings. He continues to publish stories and sketches in periodicals. The Poor Law Amendment Act ends out-of-door relief (aid given to the poor in their own homes) and compels those in need of assistance to enter workhouses, where conditions are very harsh.
- 1835** Dickens becomes engaged to Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of George Hogarth, editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.
- 1836** Dickens writes in several different genres and achieves significant literary success. Adopting the pseudonym “Boz,” based on his pronunciation as a young child of Moses as “Boses,” Dickens publishes in volume form *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of his earlier writings. He marries Catherine Hogarth; the couple eventually will have ten children. Dickens becomes intensely and unceasingly prolific, continuing to write feverishly throughout his life. He begins *The Pickwick Papers*, his first novel, which sets the precedent of serialization that he will follow for nearly all of his novels. He meets his future biographer John Forster.
- 1837** Victoria is crowned queen. Dickens becomes the editor of *Bentley’s Miscellany* and begins publishing installments of his novel *Oliver Twist* in the journal.
- 1838** *Oliver Twist* is published in three volumes, while the serial publication in *Bentley’s* continues. The novel is extremely popular,

and three dramatic versions are produced in London theaters in the winter of 1838-1839.

1839 *Nicholas Nickleby* is published. Because of tension with Richard Bentley, Dickens resigns his editorship and devotes himself fully to writing. The Dickens family moves to Devonshire Terrace.

1840 Dickens establishes his own weekly miscellany, *Master*

Humphrey's Clock, and writes all the content himself. After eighteen months, sales fall off, and he is forced to abandon the periodical. To generate capital, he quickly begins serial publication of *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

1841 Dickens publishes *Barnaby Rudge*. He publicly denounces the child-labor laws and abysmal factory conditions of the times; he lambastes the Tories, who oppose humane labor laws.

1842 Accompanied by Catherine, an exhausted Dickens travels to America, where he is lionized. His popularity there falters upon the publication of *American Notes*, a chronicle that records his negative reactions to the United States.

1843 Dickens publishes the most famous and best-loved of his annual Christmas books, *A Christmas Carol*, which had taken him only a

matter of weeks to write.

- 1844** The Dickens family relocates to Genoa, Italy, where they remain for a year.
- 1846** Dickens signs on as the first editor of the *Daily News* but soon leaves because of disagreements with the publishers. The family moves to Switzerland, then Paris, and remains abroad for six months.
- 1847** Upon his return to London, Dickens helps Miss Angela Burdett Coutts start a home for reformed prostitutes, which he later runs. William Makepeace Thackeray begins publishing *Vanity Fair* in monthly parts.
- 1848** *Dombey and Son*, published in one volume, heralds Dickens's more mature and decidedly dark period, which over the next two decades yields such major works as *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1853), *Hard Times* (1854), *Little Dorrit* (1857), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1861), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1865). Dickens begins to run a private theater, in which he acts and performs for charity. His company of amateurs includes painter Augustus Egg, who depicts scenes from novels by Sir Walter Scott, Thackeray, and other writers.
- 1850** Realism becomes a conscious agenda among artists working in media such as painting, literature, and theater. Dickens es