

CHARLES DICKENS AT HOME.

(By STEPHEN FISKE.)

Dickens was very happy at Gad's Hill. When a boy, tramping with his father from London to Rochester, he had stopped before the pretty house and exclaimed: "There I shall live when I get to be a man!" The fulfillment of this prophecy seemed to Dickens like the happy ending to one of his own fairy tales. Besides, the place was holy ground to him, for it had been trodden by the feet of Shakespeare and was a resort of Falstaff, Pizarro, Pistol and Bardolph. In the hall, painted parrot read, "This is the house of Sir John Falstaff," and the quotation from Shakespeare's "The Merry Wives of Windsor" follows.

There was only one other residence in all England that Dickens preferred to Gad's Hill. His favorite walk was to Rochester, and he would stand for hours, viewing the ruined castle, repairing it, and peering into the windows and doors, lords and ladies who had lived within its massive walls. One day he said:

"If I could only have this old castle to live in I would rent part of it at my own expense and keep it open to the public on certain days or hours. It would not cost so very much. I have made the calculations. But this is one of my dreams that will never come true."

While Dickens was lecturing in America I obtained an interview with the great novelist, Disraeli, then Premier of Great Britain, and told him this story. He replied promptly and emphatically: "There is nothing in the world that Mr. Dickens cannot have if he wants it. Tell him to forward a formal request to be appointed custodian of Rochester Castle, and he shall receive his commission from Her Majesty, who will be as pleased as I am to accede to his wishes."

Thus, within a year, the dream of Rochester Castle would have been realized had not Dickens died untimely. Gad's Hill is a small, stone parsonage, sweet with flowers. To the left

show no traces of these aids to imagination.

Gad's Hill was only an appanage of the large, adjoining estate of the Earl of Darley, but it carried with it the title of Lord of the Manor, of which Dickens was secretly proud, and the office of Justice of the Peace. But he refused repeated invitations to submerge himself, like Disraeli, in the peerage. The title of which he was most proud was, "Chief," an abbreviation of "Editor-in-Chief," and he was thus addressed by all his intimates.

He would not talk of his own creations, but he frequently referred to those of other authors. On a visit to the Darnley Hall we noticed among the family portraits, dating from the Crusades, that of a golden-haired boy, dressed in black velvet, and lo! a perfect duplicate of that boy, the likeness reproduced after generations, walked into the picture gallery to welcome us.

"What a story that would make for Charles Reade!" exclaimed Dickens enthusiastically; "I shall tell him about it."

Upon a miniature scale, but with ample means, Dickens maintained at Gad's Hill the estate of an old English country house. Miss Georgina Hogarth, his sister-in-law, was his housekeeper. He had an excellent chef. The dinners were very elaborate, with seven courses and a different wine with each course. Almost every day there were distinguished guests, coming from all parts of the world, and often the entire conversation was in French, which Dickens spoke as fluently as his friend Fechter. Choosing the wines for the dinner was an afternoon festival. Seated astride a barrel, in the cool cellar carved from the chalk rock, Dickens told a good story with every bottle selected and fairly revelled in boish humor. The intense vitality of his novels glowed through his personality.

After dinner the guests were invited to taste the bowl of cold punch that Miss Hogarth had prepared in the central hall. Then there was whist or billiards, which Dickens turned into a comedy by a constantly comic commentary upon the play and players. He grumbled to himself, "Well! Bad players always win!" or, "It is very easy to play with one holds all the trumps!"

On my first visit he remarked airily, "I suppose that the aristocratic custom of leaving all the winnings on the table for the servants has been adopted in America?"

"Don't mind him," Miss Hogarth interposed; "he is always like that!"

The housekeeping at Gad's Hill was managed so perfectly that, except at dinner, I never saw a servant there. Miss Hogarth, as methodical as Dickens himself, seemed to do everything.

In London, one morning, I received the following note:

Shipmate, ahoy! How am I to entertain an American who neither eats, drinks, smokes, chews nor swears? Please to man the lifeboat and come at once.

Arriving at Gad's Hill, I found Mr. George Washington Childs, of Philadelphia, beaming with contentment and requiring no other amusement than the pleasure of being with Dickens. At dinner Mr. Childs ate little and drank nothing but water, and Dickens slyly pretended to shudder with horror every time his own glass was filled. Persisting that Mr. Childs was amused, Mr. Dickens asked him to play a game of billiards. Mr. Childs did not play billiards, and Dickens proposed a grand international pool tournament, his son Charles representing England, and Dickens slyly pretended to shudder with horror every time his own glass was filled.

Presently the door opened and Mr. Childs reappeared with his bedroom candle and the two half crowns. In a speech that was so sincere as to be dignified, he said that never before had he been guilty of gambling; that, when he attempted to say his prayers, the two half crowns weighed upon his mind and interfered with his devotions; he must ask Mr. Dickens to take back the money.

Dickens regarded Mr. Childs very gravely. Was this a joke or a too sensitive conscience? The customs of England did not permit him to take back the half crowns, but that he would consent to wager double or quits until the British lion had won. Mr. Childs agreed to this, under protest, and Dickens gave us an audacious wink, which meant, "Put five shillings on his conscience!"



DICKENS CENTENARY

Photograph of Charles Dickens, the English novelist whose 100th anniversary of his birth was celebrated all over the civilized world yesterday. Dickens was born at Portsmouth, England, February 7th, 1812.

of the central hall—which was hung with scenes painted by Stansfeld for amateur performances—were the reception and dining rooms. On the right were the library and billiard room. On a side door was the notice, "This leads to the kitchen; please keep closed."

Plaques, labels and signs were peculiarities of the house. In the sleeping rooms were benches lettered in black, "For trunk," "For portmanteau." Dickens laughed as he explained: "Yes; everything that can be labeled is labeled. I used to be the most careless of men, and had to cure myself as my work increased. Now I am a martinet. Breakfast at 9 sharp; dinner at 7 sharp. Otherwise this is Liberty Hall!"

The room best known to the public in the library, because of the picture of the Flies, called "The Vacant Chair," which has brought tears to many eyes. But, so far as Dickens was concerned, that chair had always been vacant. It was for the accommodation of guests. He never used it, except to write the most casual notes. "I could write works in a library," he exclaimed, "with all those volumes staring at me and muttering, 'What! nobody?'"

The books on the lowest shelf of the library were dummies, with titles selected by such London humorists as Robert Smith, Mark Lemon, Edmund Yates and Andrew Halliday. "Lives of the Poets" was so thin that there was scarcely room for the title on the

to put this into dialogue form." When he changed the heading of an article upon a "Baby Show at Woolwich" to "Woolwich Infants," he wrote "More taking." His cheque was always mailed on the day of publication and was for more money than the exact price per word or page.

On an anniversary of the Henrietta Yachting Club he asked an American correspondent for a more intimate account of the voyage than the report in the London "Times" saying, "Tell us how it felt to be alone on the ocean in December; what you did to pass the time on such a little craft, etc." The article was sent with an apology for being much too long, as the writer had no time to condense it.

"Not a line, not a word must be cut," he replied; "I will give the Henrietta plenty of searoom." He gave the story slight out of the sixteen pages of "All the Year Round," and told me that it had sold thousands of extra copies.

He published serials by other popular novelists—Wilde Collins, Charles Reade, Edmund Yates, Anthony Trollope—and paid for them liberally.

The Dickens-manuscripts were written in blue ink, and this became a fad of what used to be called "the Dickens school of writers." He never mentioned his immortal characters, and turned the conversation immediately to Pecksniff, or Sam Weller, or Mr. Dombey happened to be quoted, I ventured to ask him if he enjoyed his creations as much as his readers did. "Certainly," he said; "I always have the first laugh and the first cry!"

Having thus broached a forbidden subject, Dickens was induced to show me the original manuscripts of some of his novels and to explain his method of composition. There were no interlinations, after thoughts, changes of expression, as in Balzac's manuscripts. If a word or phrase were altered the change was made after, not above, the first text, nor on the margin. He said that, when he had selected and named a hero, he would jot down memoranda about him: "Shall he be rich?" "The about him in chancery?" "An old aunt or uncle?" In this, as in everything else, he was methodical. But his works

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Dickens left no memoranda from which the plot of his uncompleted novel, "The Mystery of Edwin Drood," could be discovered. But, before writing his novel, he told me of a plot which he was considering. Pointing to a building on the banks of the Thames, he said: "That is our Poor House. A well-to-do overseer put his father into that house, under an assumed name. The old man revealed his identity to the board of managers, and they sent him back to his father, whom they threatened to prosecute for fraud. Angry, mean and alarmed, the overseer put his father into a buggy and drove into the river, here at this spot. His intention evidently was to drown his father and pretend there had been an accident. But the father clung to him and both were drowned. The overseer had taken out insurance policies upon his own life and that of his father, and distant relatives applied for the money. The insurance company refused to pay. Litigation ensued, and the court decided that the policy upon the father was void, because he had been deliberately murdered, but the policy upon the son must be paid, because he had not intended to commit suicide. There are hundreds of such ready-made plots in British jurisprudence."

Thrift is a blessing, if men steal it not.—Shakespeare.

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AMUSEMENTS

"The Cow and the Moon."—Tonight, Chas. A. Sellen's big musical extravaganza "The Cow and the Moon" will be offered here at the Academy of Music this afternoon and tonight, and suffice to say, the attraction will prove a popular one.

Mr. Sellen sent "The Cat and the Fiddle" to this city several years ago, and it will be remembered that it proved a satisfactory offering.

"The Cow and the Moon" is said to be even better than "The Cat and the Fiddle," and this season's production will surpass last season's in every way.

There has been a large advance sale for both performances.

"The Smart Set."

Seats will go on sale Monday morning for "The Smart Set," that well known colored organization which will be seen here next Wednesday afternoon and night at the Academy of Music.

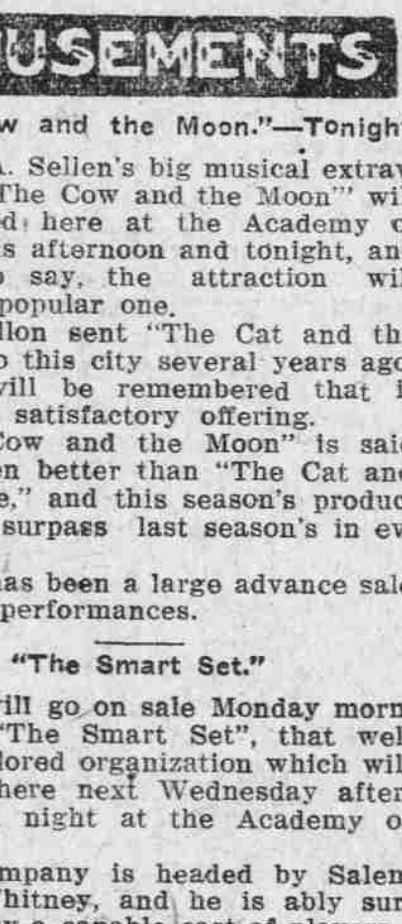
The company is headed by Salem "Tutt" Whitney, and he is ably surrounded by a capable cast of players.

For Husbands and Wives.

With the real stamp of success comes Henrietta Crossman and her company direct from New York in "The Real Thing," the comedy that has been playing at the Maxine Elliott Theatre for months.

"The Real Thing" is the kind of play that will please everybody. There is a laugh for every minute of the two hours and a half and a theme that is appealing to all.

Miss Crossman for the first time in her career has with her two children in the cast who are not only really children, but who are clever, in fact, perfect little artists. The cast is the same as that which played in New York City for so many months and the play comes with a reputation of the best that has been seen in years.



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