

# Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens is arguably the best novelist in the history of English literature. He was born in 1812, near Portsea where his father was a clerk in the navy pay office. Dickens spent his boyhood reading the novels of Smollett and Fielding. In 1823, Dickens' family moved to London where his father landed in financial difficulties and was sent to prison for debt. Dickens worked at a blacking warehouse when he was merely ten years old.

Coming from a humble background, Dickens worked his way up to success. Some of his articles, known as *Sketches by Boz* appeared in *The Monthly* magazine in 1833. They were brilliantly written and were published in two volumes in 1836. Then appeared *Pickwick Papers* in 1836-1837, which was a great success. Then came *Oliver Twist* in 1837 and *Nicholas Nickleby* in 1838. This led to the immense popularity of Dickens and his novels were in great demand. His famous autobiographical novel *David Copperfield* appeared in 1849. His other famous novels are *Bleak House* (1842), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of two Cities*, *Great Expectations* (1860). Dickens did not live to finish *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, as he died in 1870.

Dickens' writings were characterised by his realism and his love for dreary London streets. He possessed extreme sensibility with which he depicted the sufferings of the poor, their lives and aroused the conscience of the people. Dickens is considered a pioneer of realism in the novel. As a realist he centred his eye on London and Low life. Hugh Walker remarks, "He knew it topographically, industrially, socially within the limits of middle and lower classes. He could penetrate into all obscure nooks. He was familiar with all its strange trades and

with those who followed them- the dustman, the articulator of skeletons, the marine-store dealers...Dickens knew them all better than we know our next door neighbours. It was from this material that he built his books.” His best characters are portraits from life, and the life he knew best was lower class life.

Dickens had a genius for characters. He could portray innumerable kinds of human beings, but he could not analyse the individual. He could vividly describe every detail of manners, appearance, dress and other external details of his characters. Rickett writes, “Despite the broad brush of caricature, despite the over insistence on the externals of his characters, he makes them live; and they live, by virtue of their humanity.”

Dickens is also known for his humour which is “broad, humane and creative.” He is par excellence in creating humorous characters - Mr pickwick, Mrs Gamp, Mr. Micawber and Sam Weller. His humour takes a satiric turn when it exposes the evils of his times. With humour is interwoven his pathos which is often long drawn and shows lack of self-restraint. Dickens’ gentlest, brightest humour, his simplest pathos occur in those unexciting pages which depict the everyday life of poor and homely English folk. As for his style, it can be said that his style is neither polished nor scholarly, but it is clear, rapid and workmanlike, the style of the working journalist.