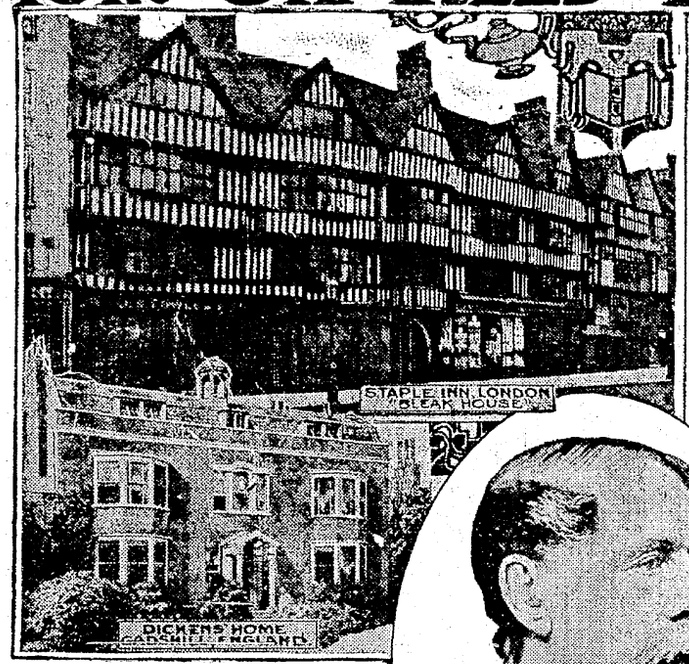
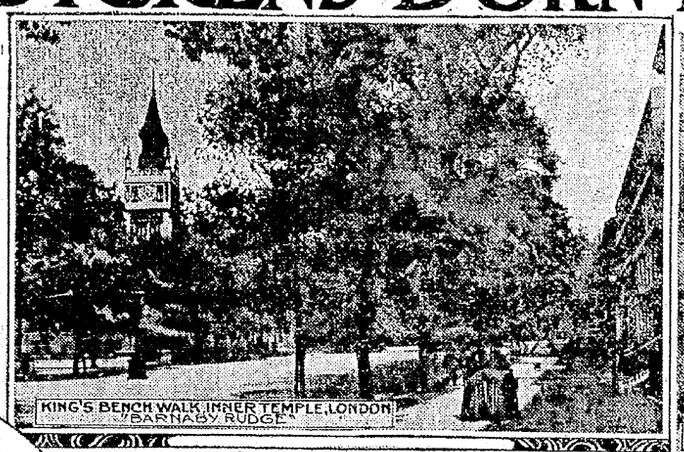
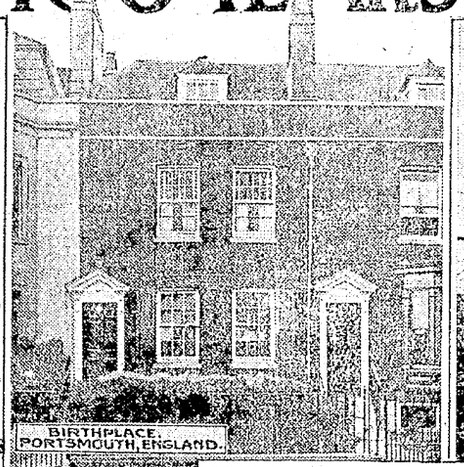
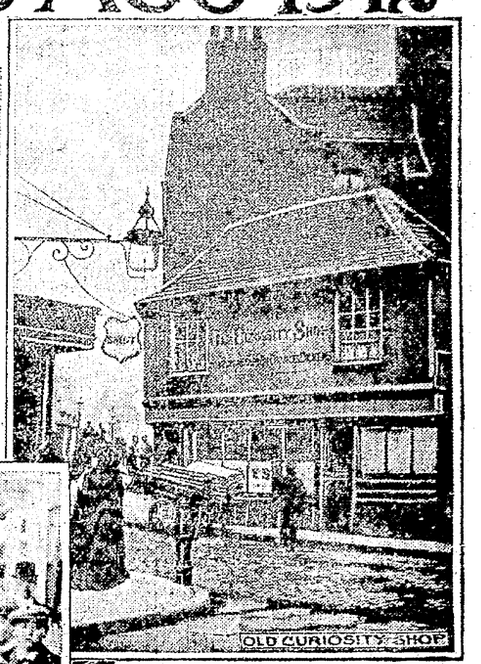
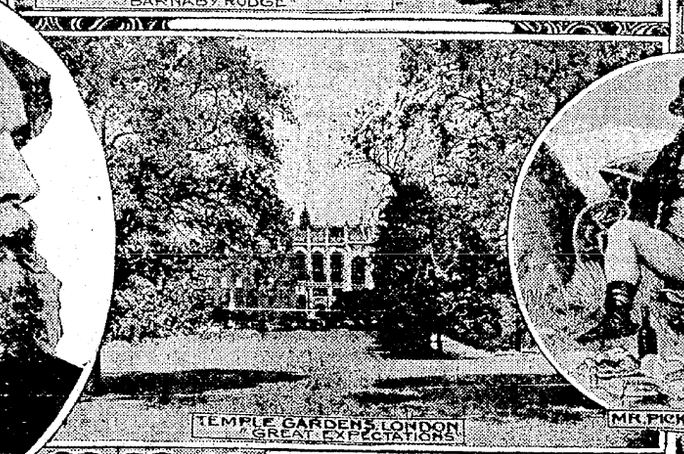
1812-CHARLES DICKENS BORN 100 YEARS AGO-1912











By thy yearning for the human
Good in every man and woman,
By each noble deed and word
That thy story books record
And each noble sentiment
Dickens, to the world hath lent,
By the effort thou hast made
Truth and true reform to aid,
By thy hope of man's relief
Finally from want and grief,
By thy never failing trust,
That the God of love is just,
We would meet and welcome thee,
Preacher of humanity.
—W. H. Venable.

Dickens, His Birthplace, His Home and Scenes From His Books

By CHARLES N. LURIE.

MANY years ago Bret Harte, story teller of America, asked in simple, appealing verse the right to place on the grave of Charles Dickens, where "English oak and holly and laurel wreaths entwine," a "spray of western pine" as the tribute of Americans who read Dickens in camp. On Feb. 7, 1912, the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of the greatest English story teller of the nineteenth century, or, indeed, the greatest story teller of any nation and of all time in the estimation of his readers, his grave will be adorned, figuratively and perhaps literally, by English laurel and Canadian maple, Irish shamrock and Scottish thistle, Australian fern and Indian palm as well as by American pine and goldenrod and magnolia.

All the English speaking world as well as other nations which know Dickens through translations and love for him for his humanity will join in the tribute to his memory. Never before has so widespread an interest been manifested in the observance of the centennial of a writer. This is proportioned properly to the extent of the fame of Dickens and to the esteem in which his myriad readers hold him. No other author has so personal a following. To the men and women who read Dickens he is not merely a man who has afforded interest and amusement. He is the man who has created for each individual reader friends and enemies who are not only characters in books and actors in stories, but living personalities, to be recognized in the men and women with whom one comes into daily contact or whom one passes on the street. To the Dickensian it is the most natural thing in the world to hear from the lips of another, "I saw Old Scrooge in the street today," or "Mrs. Robinson introduced me to Mr. Dombey today," or, again, to the Dickensian the stories of real life which one hears or which the newspapers retell are frequently but echoes of those found within the pages of the twenty odd volumes fathered by the English novelist. It is no wonder that the books of Dickens retain their places at the head of the standard "best sellers." They are not merely stories—they are reflections of life.

Dickens, Novelist and Reformer.

America and the British colonies have been preparing to honor the memory of Dickens, the great story teller. England, his own country, knows and reveres him as a reformer and places his philanthropic work on a pedestal with his literary achievements. In its public aspects, at least in England, the character of Dickens presented two faces. He was, of course, primarily and for the less thinking portion of his readers, a story teller who imagined wonderful things and embodied them in lifelike characters. Others knew him as a reformer and lover of mankind, working with fiction as an effective tool, presenting pictures of abuses which cried aloud for redress.

England blushed and felt itself convicted of inhumanity when the pen of Dickens held up for the inspection of mankind the horrors of the English boarding school, the deficiencies of English prisons, the defects of English laws which oppressed the poor man whose only crime was his poverty. It confessed its guilt and cried, "I have sinned," when Dickens pointed out the fault, and it turned with contrition to the remedy of the abuses. It was thus that Dickens gained for himself the name of "the greatest reformer of his time," bestowed on him by some of his English lovers.

America has forgotten and forgiven the trenchant criticisms which Dickens uttered—hastily, as he afterward confessed—after his first visit to America. Like his later compatriot, Kipling, who has lived to know the depth and strength of American regard for genius after dwelling harshly on our faults, he felt the glow of American friendship, grateful for the stories awaited with such eagerness on this side of the Atlantic when they appeared in monthly or weekly parts. Many American writers of reminiscences of the middle years of the past century have told how the coming of a packet ship from England meant nothing more important to many Americans than the arrival of a new installment of a Dickens story.

The recent sudden death in New York of the eldest surviving son of the novelist, Alfred Tennyson Dickens (godson of the poet laureate) and the comments in the press thereon, revealed to a slight extent the depth of American feeling for Charles Dickens and all connected with him.

The Dickens Fellowship.

Wherever English is read and spoken—which means nowadays virtually the entire globe—the centennial of Dickens has drawn together the admirers of the novelist. But it has remained for England and America to organize the most formal gatherings of Dickensians in commemoration of their master's centennial. Foremost in the movers in the matter have been the members of the Dickens fellowship, an association "to unite those who are interested in Charles Dickens' work and works, to spread Dickensian ideas of love for humanity, to undertake practical philanthropy, to foster the knowledge of Dickens' books and to preserve the buildings and other objects associated with his life and writings." The fellowship met a severe loss a few weeks ago in the sudden death in New York city of H. Snowden Ward, an English authority on Dickens and a delightful lecturer on his life and works. Mr. Ward had come to this country for a series of lectures and was stricken with sudden illness.

One of the recent objects of the labors of the Dickens fellowship has been the aiding in the accumulation of a fund for some descendants of the novelist reformer. This fund was augmented in London a short time ago by a performance described as "an apotheosis of Dickens, whose works provided almost every item. Practically all the best known actors and actresses in London, arrayed as characters from the novels, aided in the performance." It may be remarked here that throughout his life Dickens had a warm interest in theatricals, appearing on the amateur stage and directing companies of amateurs. At one time he thought of becoming a professional player.

The London performance was made up chiefly of Dickens' plays and tableaux, portraying familiar scenes and incidents familiar to all readers of Dickens. There were, among other features, a one act play called "Scrooge," in which the famous miser of "The Christmas Carol" was impersonated by Seymour Hicks, the very well known English actor; an excerpt from "Martin Chuzzlewit;" a humorous scene entitled "Mrs. Sairey Gamp" and the trial of "Bardell versus Pickwick," given by an all star cast. For the tableau the curtain rose on an exact reproduction of a famous picture by Sir Luke Fildes, entitled "The Empty Chair," representing the library of Dickens in his residence at Gadshill. "From the shadow of the room, full of memories, the creations of the master mind were evolved by the 'spirit of inspiration,' impersonated by Miss Ellaline Terriss. Later there entered some of the contemporaries of Dickens—Thackeray, John Forster, Gladstone, Disraeli, Macready and others—about 150 actors and actresses taking part. For the finale the performers grouped themselves around a figure of the novelist," says a press report.

Dickens Costume Ball Suggested.

In a letter to a New York newspaper a woman admirer of Dickens suggested a "Dickens costume ball" as a fitting feature of the centennial observances. She wrote:

"A Shakespearean ball was held in London last year [in connection with the coronation festivities], and it was magnificent in every way. It is proposed to make the Dickens costume ball one of even greater novelty and beauty. The Dolly Vardens, the Little Nells, the Kate Nicklebys, the Lizzie Hexhams, the Captain Cuttles, the Mr. Pecksniffs, the David Copperfields and the hundreds of other dear, familiar characters would render the gathering the most interesting and the most wonderful ever held in New York."

The sentiment found an echo in the hearts and minds of the thousands and hundreds of thousands who have been "brought up" by their English speaking forbears to love Dickens, and also in those who have learned to read him and to know him and his characters, although their ancestors knew no word of English. The New York public library says that in the poorer districts of the city, where books are read, not merely owned—that is, where the public depends upon the public libraries for its supply of Dickens—there is a constant and "perfectly tremendous" demand for his works.