

"laughter akin to tears." Frederick Harrison says, "Charles Dickens was above all things a great humorist, doubtless the greatest of this century." Carlyle applied to him the words first spoken by Dr. Johnson with regard to Garrick the actor, "His death eclipsed the gaiety of nations."—*Adapted from the School Edition of Barnaby Rudge, published by A. & C. Black, London.*

A Friend of Children.

ELEANOR ROBINSON.

This month we celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens. He is one of the greatest of English novelists, and perhaps the very best beloved of them all. Wherever his books are read, and that is all over the world, people are talking and writing and reading about him at this time, with gratitude in their hearts for all the pleasure he has given them.

He had the gift of writing stories so that the characters in them seem alive, and we seem to know them just as we do people whom we have seen and talked with. Once, when he was walking in a crowded street, a lady whom he had never seen before came up and said: "Mr. Dickens, will you do me the honour of shaking hands with me? I should like to touch the hand that has filled my house with many friends." That was a pleasant thing for a writer to hear, was it not? It is no small thing to have given pleasure to a great many people.

Then he had the gift of making people laugh. His first book, "Pickwick Papers," is one of the funniest books that was ever written, and in nearly all his stories, even the sad ones, there are ridiculous people, funny scenes and speeches that we never forget.

He had a very warm, kind heart, and he liked to see everyone about him comfortable and happy. When he saw misery and trouble, and especially when he saw or heard of cruelty or injustice, it made him angry. But he did not stop there. He used his gifts as a writer to try to stop the evil. He knew that people would read his books, because they were so interesting and amusing, so he made use of them to tell his readers about the wrong things that were going on. For instance, he heard that in a certain part of England there were schools where the children were half starved, cruelly punished, and taught nothing; and in "Nicholas Nickleby," he painted such a sad picture of the sufferings of these poor children, and of the wicked-

ness of the masters, that in a few years a great many of these schools had to close up, because no one would send their children to them.

He was very fond of children, and wrote a great deal about them. He loved to make his own children happy, and he used to write little stories and plays, and drew pictures for them, even when he was busiest. His own childhood had been very unhappy. His father was poor, and neither of his parents seem to have cared much for the little boy. He was very quick and intelligent, but they took no pains to have him taught, and when he was only ten, and a delicate little fellow, they moved to London, and he was sent to work in a blacking warehouse, among rough men and big boys. He never could bear to talk of that time, but no doubt the memory of it made him feel more anxious that other children should be happy. One great pleasure he had, even then. In the house at Rochester, where they lived before they came to London, his father had a number of novels, and the child would hide himself away and read and re-read these books, until he almost knew them by heart. During the dreary days in London, he used to go over and over the stories in his head, sometimes pretending to be Robinson Crusoe, or Don Quixote, or some other hero, and so partly forgetting his hardships. He has told us all about this in the early chapters of "David Copperfield," for it is no secret that David is telling what is partly the story of Dickens's own life. If you have never read any of his books, I advise you to begin with this one, even if you read only as far as David's school life in Canterbury. You cannot fail to like the account of his happy days at Yarmouth, in the house that was made of a boat set up on end; his rides in the cart with Mr. Barkis, and his story-telling at night in the dormitory at Mr. Creakles' academy; and best of all, his adventures when he ran away to Dover, and found his queer, kind aunt, Miss Betsy Trotwood, and Mr. Dick, who made the big kites which David helped to fly.

Dickens often wrote of boys at school. David was first at a bad school and then at a good one. It was at the good one, by the way, that he learned to fight properly, and fought with the young butcher. Dotheboy's Hall, in "Nicholas Nickleby," is too horrible a place to call a school. But Paul Dombey was not unhappy at Mr. Blimber's, though he had a tremendous number of hard lessons. Paul never seems to be a very real little boy, to me, nor is "Little Nell," in "The Old Curiosity Shop," like a