

THE WIZARD OF CHRISTMAS TALES



Charles Dickens in 1839, a few years before writing "A Christmas Carol." From the painting by Maclise.



A caricature of Dickens. Mr. George Cruikshank, London, artist and friend of Dickens, did many sketches of the novelist.



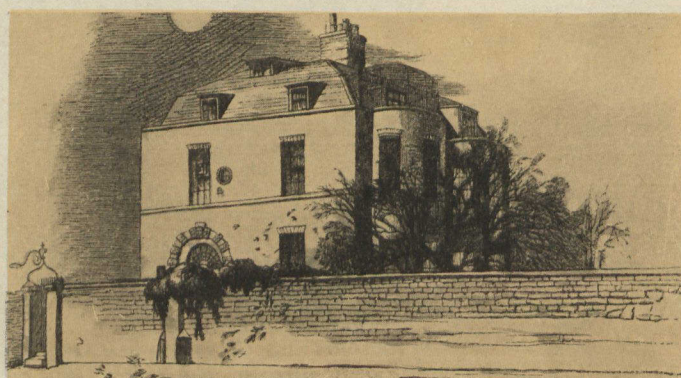
Charles Dickens in 1868. From a photograph taken in New York the last time the novelist visited America.

CHARLES DICKENS TO CANADA.

NO English writer and no Christmas-tale writer anywhere has a better hold on Canadians than Charles Dickens, the wizard of Christmas tales. The characters of Dickens—even though they sometimes approach caricatures—are real people to Canadians, whereas those of Sir Walter Scott are very largely creatures of imagination and romance.

Canada has many a Nicholas Nickleby; here and there a David Copperfield; perhaps a few Oliver Twists and Tiny Tims; quite possibly a few Scrooges.

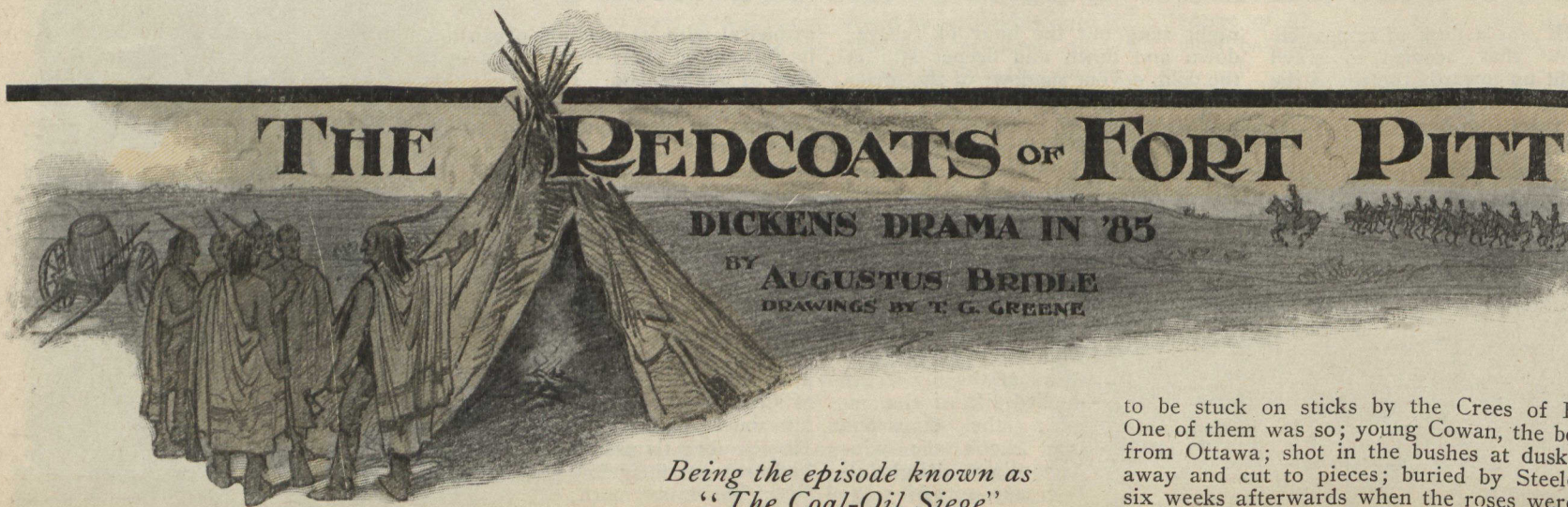
The Christmas stories of Charles Dickens are known to almost every man, woman and child in Canada. His pictures of London streets are familiar to hundreds of people who once lived on stump roads in the bush. The name of



House in which "A Christmas Carol" was written.

Dickens is known to old-timers on the Canadian prairie; clear out to the fur posts on the Saskatchewan, where in 1885 a son of Charles Dickens was an officer in the North-West Mounted Police. The story which follows below is a picture of one very dramatic episode in the career of that son.

And there is an artist in Canada who well remembers Charles Dickens. Mr. William Cruikshank, R.C.A., is a nephew of the well-known George Cruikshank, whose caricature of Dickens appears on this page; and he frequently met the novelist at his London home; describes him as something of a caricature in dress—velvet coat, braided trousers, and very much of a dandy. Mr. E. S. Williamson, of Toronto, who has the first gold watch ever owned by Charles Dickens, has the finest collection of Dickens reliques in the world.



Being the episode known as "The Coal-Oil Siege"



CHARLES DICKENS very likely heard of Canada when he was in New York and down south, lecturing and getting material for "Martin Chuzzlewit"—that was in 1861 and 1868. But the greatest Christmas-tale writer in the English or any language died fifteen years too soon to get the material for a dramatic story more thrilling and un-

common than any of his own London tragedies. Had he lived to be seventy-three years of age he might have written the story of Francis Jeffrey Dickens on the Saskatchewan—which was in 1885.

As most Canadians know, that was the year of the Rebellion; when the half-breeds rose against the white settler and the Indians thirst-danced and painted and looted and sometimes murdered—largely because they hated the redcoat police. Francis Jeffrey Dickens was an Inspector in charge of the divisional force at Fort Pitt, which was headquarters for a small empire of the lone land dotted with outposts and fur posts and Indian camps. Fort Pitt was the loneliest and most cut-off place in the whole valley of the war. It was a village of

wood inside a stockade; a city of fur; gathering place for trappers and traders; fighting place for Blackfeet and Crees—for it was boundary between. Butler in his "Great Lone Land" vividly describes old Fort Pitt; that was in 1871 when he went over the trails to establish the law two years before the first redcoats set up posts in the land.

Drifting down the Saskatchewan by scow nine years ago, the writer picked up odds and ends of talk about Fort Pitt from here and there a survivor of the siege which was in April, 1885. Indian Agent Mann, of Onion Lake, his wife and family of three were captives in the carts of Big Bear after the surrender of the fort, in command of which was Inspector Dickens. They well remembered Dickens and his thirty redcoats; Big Bear with his two devilish sons, Little Poplar and Wandering Spirit, and his thousand men, women and children. At Mooswa, thirty miles above Pitt, stood the shack of Patsy Carroll, the line-mender and operator. Patsy recalled Dickens with much interest. He himself was one of the redcoats under him. He recalled the coal-oil siege and the scow-drift down the ice-flooded river; for he helped fight the fire and pole the scow six days down from Pitt to Battleford—which also was burned by the Crees of Poundmaker; and God knew into what hands they might fall; but they had to get out of Pitt or leave thirty hearts

to be stuck on sticks by the Crees of Big Bear. One of them was so; young Cowan, the boy recruit from Ottawa; shot in the bushes at dusk, dragged away and cut to pieces; buried by Steele's scouts six weeks afterwards when the roses were budding on the hills above. Drifting down on the scow past the sole surviving shack, our party saw the grave



Birch-Bark Souvenir from Fort Pitt, 1885

of young Cowan; a corral of poles and a wooden slab.

But that again anticipates the story of Dickens at Fort Pitt; the story that the elder Dickens might have written had he lived; that began to be the centre of a vast, ugly stage of drama just after the