

SINOPSIS

John Peerybingle, a Carrier, and his much younger wife, Mary, are as happy as a couple as possible although the venomous old Tackleton, who himself is about to marry young May Fielding, throws suspicion on Mary's sincerity. This suspicion appears to be disastrously verified when an eccentric old stranger takes up his abode with the Peerybingle and is discovered one day by John, metamorphosed into a bright young man by the removal of his wig, in intimate conversation with Mary. By the fairy influence of the Cricket on the hearth John is brought to the decision to pardon the stranger. But there turns out to be no occasion for forgiveness, for the bright young man is an old friend, the lover of May Fielding, believed dead, who was turned up just in time to prevent her marrying Tackleton. Among the other characters are Caleb Plummer the toy-makers and his blind daughter Bertha; and Tilly Slowboy, Mary's loving and incompetent nursemaid.



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Charles Dickens was born in Landport, Portsmouth, on February 7th, 1812. He made a crucial contribution to the development of nineteenth century fantastic fiction in Great Britain: first, as a writer and later as an editorial sponsor. He produced the best known of all literary ghost stories, *A Christmas Carol* (1843), and in this and the other Christmas Books that he wrote in the 1840's he spurned the use of supernatural as an instrument of horrific stimulation, making it instead an agent of moral renewal.

Dickens' fascination with the supernatural apparently began in childhood. In 1817, when he was five years old, he was delivered into the charge of a thirteen-year-old nursemaid named Mary Weller, who had a supply of horrific tales with which to startle his imagination. Dickens was later insist that his childhood reading had been an enormous influence on the formation of his character, and he regarded this early experience of fiction as the wellspring of his own creativity. He was readily enough drawn into the world of printed fantasy, given the unusual and unfortunate situations of his upbringing: when he was twelve years old he was sent to work as an odd-job boy in a blacking factory while his mother took the younger children to live in the Marshalsea Prison, where his father was

imprisoned for debt, his formal schooling was thus delayed and finally curtailed when he was articled as a solicitor's clerk in 1827.

Dickens always felt that the influence of fairy tales and romances upon his character had been utterly kind in opening the windows of his imagination. He died in Gads Hill Palace, near Rochester, on June 9th, 1870.