

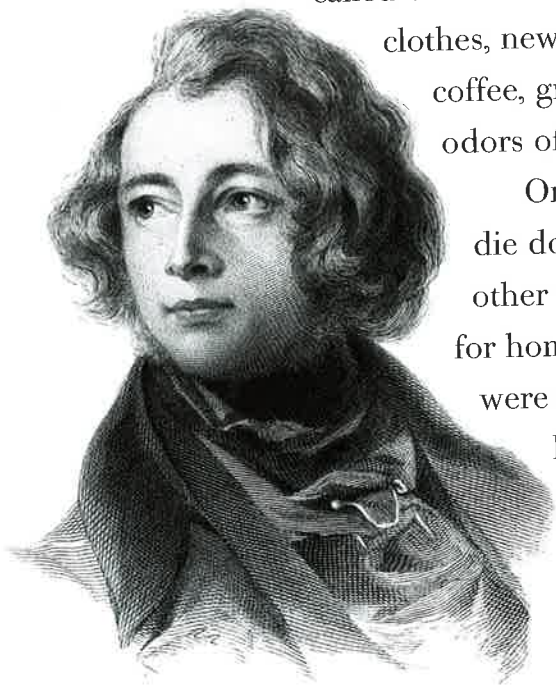
The Man in the Shadows

IN THE YEAR 1835, London was full of energy. Every day the city's dirt and cobblestone streets filled with traffic early in the morning. Stray dogs nipped at the heels of the horses or donkeys pulling carts, carriages, and coaches that vied for space with the sheep and pigs being herded to market. People were everywhere. They roamed the street markets in search of bargains. Some visited shops or stopped into

Well known to Dickens was London's giant Smithfield Market, shown here in 1855. Dickens was critical of the market's location in the heart of the city because of its filth and noise.



saloons to enjoy a pint of ale or glass of gin. Sidewalk gamblers lured customers into card games. Musicians, acrobats, jugglers, and actors performed, hoping for tips from passersby. Peddlers called out their offerings of fried oysters, fresh flowers, old clothes, newspapers, or meat pies. The aromas of hot coffee, grilled meat, and fried bread mixed with the odors of people, horses, tobacco, and coal tar.



Shown here at age twenty-seven, Dickens was a careful observer of people. He had a special interest in children and put them in all of his stories.

Only when it began to get dark did the noise die down. The peddlers left. Tailors, butchers, and other shopkeepers locked their doors and headed for home. Soon, only taverns and eating houses were still open, adding a faint glow to the dim light provided by streetlamps. Many streets had no light, and the dozens of lanes and alleyways that threaded off them were pitch black.

It was down these lanes and alleys that the poor lived, crowded into dingy, dirty tenements. The poorest of the poor—those who had so far managed to stay out of the despicable workhouses that were their last resort—lived on the streets. Most sought out dark spots, feeling safest when they could not be seen.

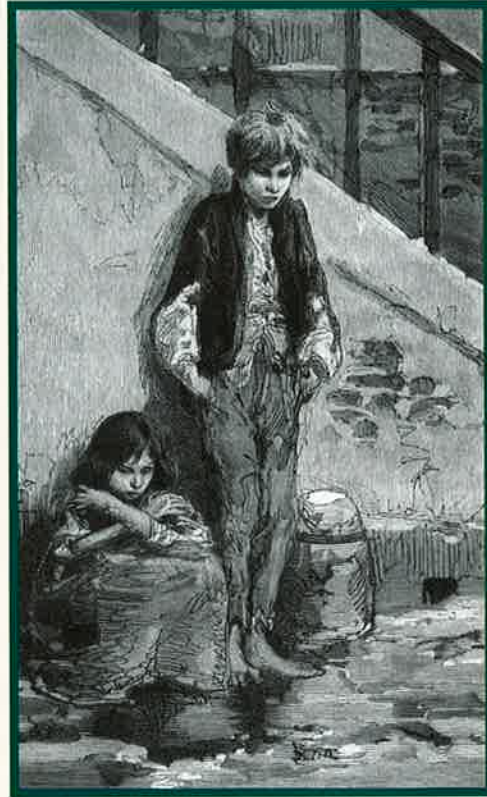
A slender young man, stylishly dressed and wearing a proper coat and hat, often walked the city at night. He knew the poor were there in the shadows. Once he had been a child with nothing. His world had fallen apart when his father was arrested for debt and put in prison. He had been separated

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from his family and forced to work long hours in a damp, dismal warehouse to support himself. Sometimes he had been cold and hungry and so full of misery that he could not picture his own future.

But now he walked because he enjoyed it. He moved at a brisk pace for hours at a time, thinking through problems bothering him with his work, but also paying careful attention to what was going on around him and to the people he saw. Occasionally he stopped to write in a notebook. During his late-evening walks in the poorer districts of the city, he regularly came across homeless people who were dressed in rags and huddled together for warmth. Seeing children in this condition was especially upsetting, and fueled his anger at society's indifference toward them. He vowed to use his own knowledge of wretched poverty to shame the powerful into action.

Back at his writing desk, his pen on fire, he worked on the sketches and stories that would force others to see what he saw, and feel what he had felt. People were noticing. They watched for his name, and when they saw the byline *Charles Dickens*, they started to read.



Though seemingly invisible to the upper classes, poor children were everywhere in London. Dickens was acutely aware of them and highly sensitive to their suffering.