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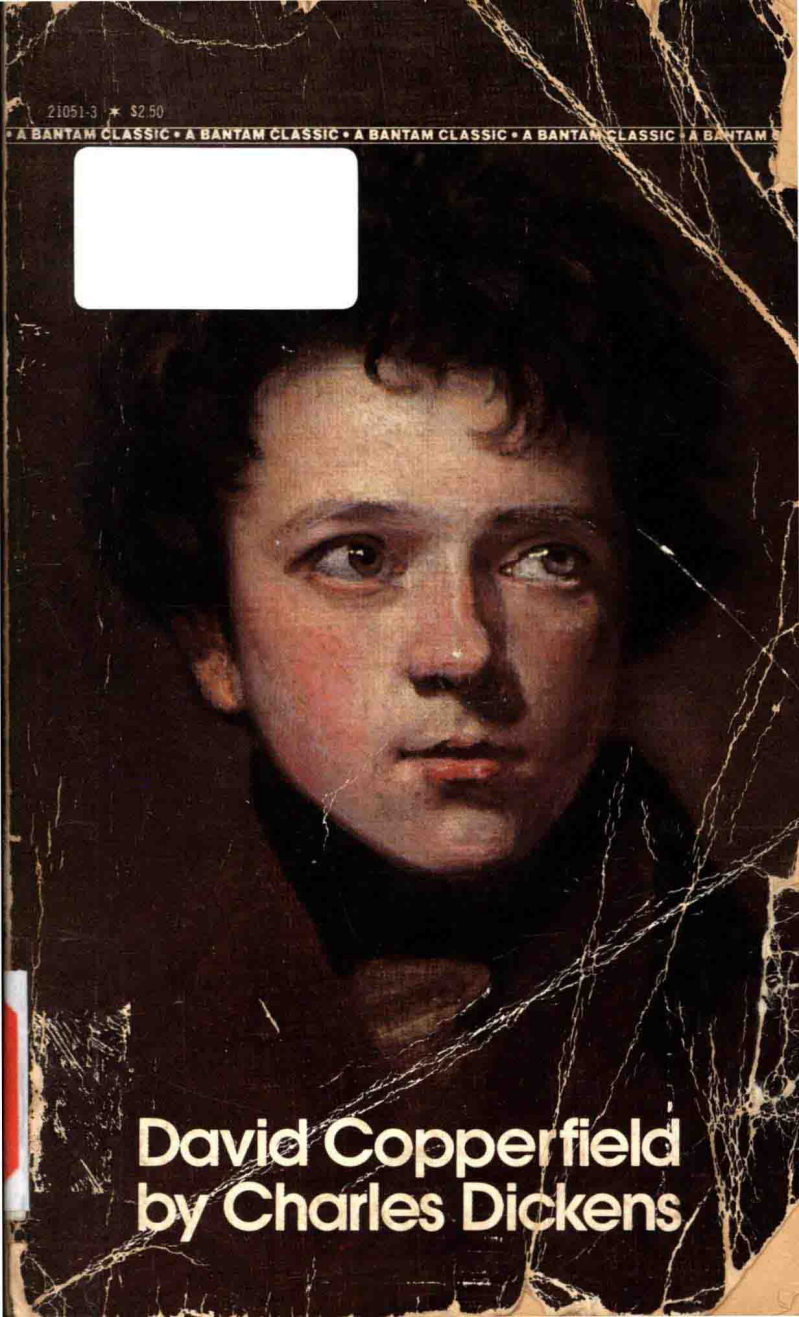

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David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

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David Copperfield
by Charles Dickens

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DAVID COPPERFIELD

A Bantam Book

PRINTING HISTORY

David Copperfield *was first published as a volume in 1850 after having been issued in twenty monthly parts from May 1849 to November 1850.*

This edition contains all the copyright emendations made in the text as revised by the author in 1867 and 1868.

Bantam Classic edition / October 1981

Cover painting, "Portrait of a Young Man," by John Opie. Courtesy of the San Diego Museum of Art.

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CHARLES DICKENS

was born in a little house in Landport, Portsea, England, on February 7, 1812. The second of eight children, he grew up in a family frequently beset by financial insecurity. At the age of eleven, Dickens was taken out of school and sent to work in a London blacking warehouse, where his job was to paste labels on bottles for six shillings a week. His father, John Dickens, was a warmhearted but improvident man. When he was condemned to Marshalsea Prison for unpaid debts, he unwisely agreed that Charles should stay in lodgings and continue working while the rest of the family joined him in the jail. This three-month separation caused Charles much pain; his experiences as a child alone in a huge city—cold, isolated, with barely enough to eat—haunted him for the rest of his life.

When the family fortunes improved, Charles went back to school, after which he became an office boy, a freelance reporter and finally an author. With *Pickwick Papers* (1836–7) he achieved immediate fame; in a few years he was easily the most popular and respected writer of his time. It has been estimated that one out of every ten persons in Victorian England was a Dickens reader. *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41) were huge successes. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) was less so, but Dickens followed it with his unforgettable *A Christmas Carol* (1843). *Bleak House* (1852–3), *Hard Times* (1854) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7) reveal his deepening concern for the injustices of British society. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860–1) and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) complete his major works.

Dickens's marriage to Catherine Hogarth produced ten children but ended in separation in 1858. In that year he began a series of exhausting public readings; his health gradually declined. After putting in a full day's work at his home in Gads Hill, Kent, on June 8, 1870, Dickens suffered a stroke, and he died on the following day.

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THE PERSONAL HISTORY
EXPERIENCE AND OBSERVATION
OF
DAVID COPPERFIELD
THE YOUNGER
OF BLUNDERSTONE ROOKERY
WHICH HE NEVER MEANT TO BE
PUBLISHED ON ANY ACCOUNT

(*This is the title which appeared on the wrapper of the first edition of* David Copperfield.)

Affectionately Inscribed

to

The Hon. Mr. and Mrs. Richard Watson

of

Rockingham, Northamptonshire

Preface to the First Edition

I DO not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from this Book, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it, is so recent and strong; and my mind is so divided between pleasure and regret—pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions—that I am in danger of wearying the reader whom I love, with personal confidences, and private emotions.

Besides which, all that I could say of the Story, to any purpose, I have endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of a two-years' imaginative task; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. Yet, I have nothing else to tell; unless, indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still) that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I have believed it in the writing.

Instead of looking back, therefore, I will look forward. I cannot close this Volume more agreeably to myself, than with a hopeful glance towards the time when I shall again put forth my two green leaves once a month, and with a faithful remembrance of the genial sun and showers that have fallen on these leaves of David Copperfield, and made me happy.

LONDON *October, 1850*

Preface to the 'Charles Dickens' Edition

I REMARKED in the original Preface to this Book, that I did not find it easy to get sufficiently far away from it, in the first sensations of having finished it, to refer to it with the composure which this formal heading would seem to require. My interest in it was so recent and strong, and my mind was so divided between pleasure and regret—pleasure in the achievement of a long design, regret in the separation from many companions—that I was in danger of wearying the reader with personal confidences and private emotions.

Besides which, all that I could have said of the Story to any purpose, I had endeavoured to say in it.

It would concern the reader little, perhaps, to know how sorrowfully the pen is laid down at the close of a two-years' imaginative task; or how an Author feels as if he were dismissing some portion of himself into the shadowy world, when a crowd of the creatures of his brain are going from him for ever. Yet, I had nothing else to tell; unless, indeed, I were to confess (which might be of less moment still), that no one can ever believe this Narrative, in the reading, more than I believed it in the writing.

So true are these avowals at the present day, that I can now only take the reader into one confidence more. Of all my books, I like this the best. It will be easily believed that I am a fond parent to every child of my fancy, and that no one can ever love that family as dearly as I love them. But, like many fond parents, I have in my heart of hearts a favourite child. And his name is DAVID COPPERFIELD.

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