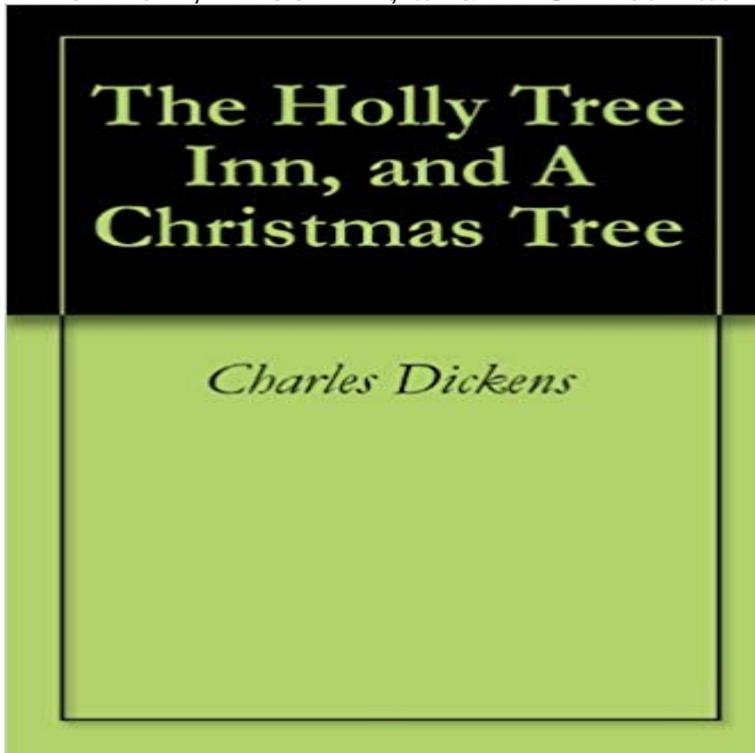


The Holly Tree Inn, and A Christmas Tree



The Christmas storybook was published in 1907. Excerpts from the books Introduction: SINCE his first writing of Christmas in Pickwick, Charles Dickens has forever become associated with that season. No other writer ever succeeded better than he in covering the earth with a mantle of snow. To the hearth he brought the good-will and wholesome cheer of the Christmas Tide, and his Christmas books and short stories, alike, are forceful expressions of our own feelings because, full of life and spirit, humor and pathos, he made the fancies of the season his own. The charity of diffusing good cheer among both rich and poor has never been taught by a more seasonable and thoughtful writer. Dickens was very fond of the old nursery tales and believed he was giving expression to them in a higher form in these Christmas writings. The virtues, manly and social, which he desired to teach, were to him the ghosts and goblins of his childhoods fairy fancies. The more formidable dragons and giants to be conquered were aggressively assembled in the shadow of the hearth. So it is not to be wondered at, that with such source of inspiration these writings should carry to numerous firesides a sense of the obligations of Christmas with its claim upon our better natures. The childhood and early manhood of Dickens were years of great importance with respect to changes wrought in social history, and may be said to mark the parting of the ways between the ages, past and present. His life began when the stage coach was the only means of quick travel, but he lived to cross the Atlantic in a steamship, and his writings are filled with charming and vivid descriptions of these bygone manners and customs, known so well because of his experience as a reporter, in which capacity he travelled extensively and met the celebrated people of his time. He was most successful in casting a charm upon the

wayside inn and because of him the doors are ever open to the weary traveller and the bright light of the fire casts its welcome on the snow. The Holly-Tree Inn, which comprises the main, text of this volume, was written between the creation of *Hard Times* and *Little Dorrit*. It was Dickens's contribution to *Household Words for Christmas*, 1855, and gained great popularity by being included in his readings. Writing from Boston, Dickens states, Another extraordinary success has been *Nickleby and Boots at the Holly-Tree Inn* (appreciated here at Boston, by the by, even more than *Copperfield*), And what wonder when we consider the delightful character of the *Boots* and know the two wholesome, childish children who live in this chapter! From the moment we step out of the coach with the traveller designated as myself on that snowy Christmas Eve, and the waiter whose head became as white as King Lear's in a single moment, replies to our question, What Inn is this? The Holly-Tree, Sir, we follow the magician into its homely atmosphere. Our curiosity is like that of the women of the house, who, that they might get a glimpse of those dear children, were seven deep at the key hole. And this curiosity is not the least abated as, thought after thought, scene after scene relating to old inns, are brought to the travellers hearth. With our mind aglow with visions of Inns their romances and their tragedies we eagerly welcome *A Christmas Tree*, included in this volume. Here is, indeed, a Christmas tree to cheer the souls of all men. For each a gift hangs in its branches; a message in its light, and our imagination is so inspired that all common things become uncommon and enchanted. . . . But, far above, I see the raiser of the dead girl, and the widows son; and God is good! If age be hiding for me in the unseen portions of thy downward growth, O may I, with a grey head, turn a child's heart to that figure yet, and a child's trustfulness and confidence!

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