



P E N G U I N  C L A S S I C S

CHARLES DICKENS

A Christmas Carol

and Other Christmas Writings

A CHRISTMAS CAROL AND OTHER CHRISTMAS WRITINGS

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Portsmouth on 7 February 1812, the second of eight children. Dickens's childhood experiences were similar to those depicted in *David Copperfield*. His father, who was a government clerk, was imprisoned for debt and Dickens was briefly sent to work in a blacking warehouse at the age of twelve. He received little formal education, but taught himself shorthand and became a reporter of parliamentary debates for the *Morning Chronicle*. He began to publish sketches in various periodicals, which were subsequently republished as *Sketches by Boz*. *The Pickwick Papers* was published in 1836–7 and after a slow start became a publishing phenomenon and Dickens's characters the centre of a popular cult. Part of the secret of his success was the method of cheap serial publication which Dickens used for all his novels. He began *Oliver Twist* in 1837, followed by *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41). After finishing *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) Dickens set off for America; he went full of enthusiasm for the young republic but, in spite of a triumphant reception, he returned disillusioned. His experiences are recorded in *American Notes* (1842). *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) did not repeat its predecessors' success but this was quickly redressed by the huge popularity of the *Christmas Books*, of which the first, *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1842. During 1844–6 Dickens travelled abroad and he began *Dombey and Son* (1846–8) while in Switzerland. This and *David Copperfield* (1849–50) were more serious in theme and more carefully planned than his early novels. In later works, such as *Bleak House* (1852–3) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), Dickens's social criticism became more radical and his comedy more savage. In 1850 Dickens started the weekly periodical *Household Words*, succeeded in 1859 by *All the Year Round*; in these he published *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860–

61). Dickens's health was failing during the 1860s and the physical strain of the public readings which he began in 1858 hastened his decline, although *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) retained some of his best comedy. His last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was never completed and he died on 9 June 1870. Public grief at his death was considerable and he was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

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With Introduction and Notes by
MICHAEL SLATER

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1

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Contents

[A Dickens Chronology](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Further Reading](#)

[A Note on the Texts](#)

[CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES](#)

[THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON](#)

[A CHRISTMAS EPISODE FROM *MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK*](#)

[A CHRISTMAS CAROL](#)

[THE HAUNTED MAN AND THE GHOST'S BARGAIN](#)

[A CHRISTMAS TREE](#)

[WHAT CHRISTMAS IS, AS WE GROW OLDER](#)

[THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELLERS](#)

[Appendix I: Dickens's Prefaces to Collected Editions of *The Christmas Books*](#)

[Appendix II: Dickens's Descriptive Headlines for *A Christmas Carol* and *The Haunted Man*](#)

[Appendix III: Dickens and *The Arabian Nights*](#)

[Notes](#)

A Dickens Chronology

- 1812** 7 *February* Charles John Huffam Dickens born at Portsmouth, where his father is a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The eldest son in a family of eight, two of whom die in childhood.
- 1817** After previous postings to London and Sheerness and frequent changes of address, John Dickens settles his family in Chatham.
- 1821** Dickens attends local school.
- 1822** Family returns to London.
- 1824** Dickens's father in Marshalsea Debtors' Prison for three months. During this time and afterwards Dickens employed in a blacking warehouse, labelling bottles. Resumes education at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, London, 1825–7.
- 1827** Becomes a solicitor's clerk.
- 1830** Admitted as a reader to the British Museum.
- 1832** Becomes a parliamentary reporter after mastering shorthand. In love with Maria Beadnell, 1830–33. Misses audition as an actor at Covent Garden because of illness.
- 1833** First published story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', in the *Monthly Magazine*. Further stories and sketches in this and other periodicals, 1834–5.
- 1834** Becomes reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*.
- 1835** Engaged to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.
- 1836** *Sketches by Boz*, First and Second Series, published. Marries Catherine Hogarth. Meets John Forster, his literary adviser and future biographer. *The Strange Gentleman*, a farce, and *The Village Coquettes*, a pastoral operetta, professionally performed in London.
- 1837** *The Pickwick Papers* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1836–7). Birth of a son, the first of ten children.

Death of Mary Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law. Edits *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9.

1838 *Oliver Twist* published in three volumes (serialized monthly in *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9). Visits Yorkshire schools of the Dotheboys type.

1839 *Nicholas Nickleby* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1838–9). Moves to 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regents Park, London.

1841 Declines invitation to stand for Parliament. *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* published in separate volumes after appearing in weekly numbers in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840–41. Public dinner in his honour at Edinburgh.

1842 *January–June* First visit to North America, described in *American Notes*, two volumes. Georgina Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law, becomes permanent member of the household.

1843 Speech on the Press to Printers' Pension Society, followed by others on behalf of various causes throughout Dickens's career. *A Christmas Carol* published in December.

1844 *Martin Chuzzlewit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1843–4). Dickens and family leave for Italy, Switzerland and France. Dickens returns to London briefly to read *The Chimes* to friends before its publication in December.

1845 Dickens and family return from Italy. *The Cricket on the Hearth* published at Christmas. Writes autobiographical fragment, ?1845–6, not published until included in Forster's *Life* (three volumes, 1872–4).

1846 Becomes first editor of the *Daily News* but resigns after seventeen issues. *Pictures from Italy* published. Dickens and family in Switzerland and Paris. *The Battle of Life* published at Christmas.

1847 Returns to London. Helps Miss Burdett Coutts to set up, and later to run, a 'Home for Homeless Women'.

1848 *Dombey and Son* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1846–8). Organizes and acts in charity performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man in His Humour* in London and elsewhere. *The Haunted Man* published at Christmas.

- 1850** *Household Words*, a weekly journal ‘Conducted by Charles Dickens’, begins in March and continues until 1859. Dickens makes a speech at first meeting of Metropolitan Sanitary Association. *David Copperfield* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1849–50).
- 1851** Death of Dickens’s father and of infant daughter. Further theatrical activities in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art, including a performance before Queen Victoria. *A Child’s History of England* appears at intervals in *Household Words*, published in three volumes (1852, 1853, 1854). Moves to Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, London.
- 1853** *Bleak House* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1852–3). Dickens gives first public readings for charity (from *A Christmas Carol*).
- 1854** Visits Preston, Lancashire, to observe industrial unrest. *Hard Times* appears weekly in *Household Words* and is published in book form.
- 1855** Speech in support of the Administrative Reform Association. Disillusioning meeting with now married Maria Beadnell.
- 1856** Dickens buys Gad’s Hill Place, near Rochester.
- 1857** *Little Dorrit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1855–7). Dickens acts in Wilkie Collins’s melodrama *The Frozen Deep* and falls in love with the young actress Ellen Ternan. *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, written jointly with Wilkie Collins about a holiday in Cumberland, appears in *Household Words*.
- 1858** Publishes *Reprinted Pieces* (articles from *Household Words*). Separation from his wife followed by statement in *Household Words*. First public readings for his own profit in London, followed by provincial tour. Dickens’s household now largely run by his sister-in-law Georgina.
- 1859** *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal again ‘Conducted by Charles Dickens’, begins. *A Tale of Two Cities*, serialized both in *All the Year Round* and in monthly parts, appears in one volume.
- 1860** Dickens sells London house and moves family to Gad’s Hill.

- 1861** *Great Expectations* published in three volumes after appearing weekly in *All the Year Round* (1860–61). *The Uncommercial Traveller* (papers from *All the Year Round*) appears; expanded edition, 1868. Further public readings, 1861–3.
- 1863** Death of Dickens's mother, and of his son Walter (in India). Reconciled with Thackeray, with whom he had quarrelled, shortly before the latter's death. Publishes 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings' in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.
- 1865** *Our Mutual Friend* published in two volumes (issued in monthly parts, 1864–5). Dickens severely shocked after a serious train accident at Staplehurst, Kent, when returning from France with Ellen Ternan and her mother.
- 1866** Begins another series of readings. Takes a house for Ellen at Slough. 'Mugby Junction' appears in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.
- 1867** Moves Ellen to Peckham. Second journey to America. Gives readings in Boston, New York, Washington and elsewhere, despite increasing ill-health. 'George Silverman's Explanation' appears in *Atlantic Monthly* (then in *All the Year Round*, 1868).
- 1868** Returns to England. Readings now include the sensational 'Sikes and Nancy' from *Oliver Twist*; Dickens's health further undermined.
- 1870** Farewell readings in London. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* issued in six monthly parts, intended to be completed in twelve.
9 June Dies, after stroke, at Gad's Hill, aged fifty-eight. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

Stephen Wall, 2002

Introduction

A favourite anecdote of Dickens biographers is one first recorded by Theodore Watts-Dunton about a London barrow-girl whom he overheard exclaiming on 9 June 1870, 'Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?'¹ This identification of Dickens with the festival of Christmas, so deeply inscribed in the popular culture of the English-speaking world, began when he was still a young man, just over a month short of his thirty-second birthday, but already firmly established as England's favourite novelist. The process had been initiated by the 'Good-Humoured Christmas Chapter' in the tenth monthly number of *Pickwick Papers*, published at the end of December 1836, but it was what Dickens called the 'most prodigious success' ('the greatest, I think, I have ever achieved')² of his first 'Christmas Book', *A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, that clinched the matter. First published on 17 December 1843, this little book had already sold over 5,000 copies by Christmas Eve, and its publishers, Chapman and Hall, were planning the first of many reprints. Since this triumphant debut the *Carol* has never been out of print, being usually available in a number of different editions, and it has become as much part of the furniture of the Anglo-American Christmas as holly, mistletoe, Christmas trees and Christmas crackers. Nor, of course, is it only in its printed form that the *Carol* has had so great an impact on us during the past 160 years; in his *Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* Paul Davis gives us an illuminating survey of the work's rich history as what he calls a 'culture-text', investigating the constant modifications and changes made to Dickens's original text in the various British and American stage and screen adaptations that have proliferated over the years, adaptations that are clearly responsive to changing social conditions and aspirations on both sides of the Atlantic.

What Philip Collins has described as the *Carol's* 'institutional status' in our culture³ helps maintain the popular belief that Dickens virtually invented the English Christmas single-handed. The case is rather that he was hugely influential, primarily as a result of the *Carol's* tremendous and enduring popularity, in ensuring that a certain turn was given to the revival of traditional Christmas festivities that was already well under way in Britain during the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century.⁴ This turn involved emphasizing the concept of Christian charity. A leading article (headed 'The Merriest Christmas to All') in the *Pictorial Times* for 23 December 1843 shows that Dickens was not the only one making this emphasis:

At this joyous season of dinners and laughing faces, it becomes all who are worthy to enjoy such mirth to the full, to think of the poor – of the poor who, without their aid, can have no enjoyment. While the fire blazes on our hearth, and the table is covered so plenteously, let us think of the poor in their chilly hovels with bare tables, and of the yet more wretched objects, houseless wanderers in the open streets...

Such exhortations as this could doubtless be found in many leading articles of the time (it was after all the 'Hungry Forties', a period of widespread economic hardship and social distress), and would have featured in many a Christmastide sermon. *Punch* had, in its first Christmas issue (1841), published an article by Dickens's friend the radical-liberal dramatist and journalist Douglas Jerrold called 'How Mr Chokepear Kept a Merry Christmas', in which a prosperous merchant keeps a 'Christmas of the belly', feasting and frolicking but ignoring all claims of the poor on his charity. Jerrold urges his readers rather to keep 'the Christmas of the heart' and to 'Give – give'. The message is found, too, on the first Christmas card which appeared in the same year as the *Carol*. Designed by John Calcott Horsley, RA, for Henry Cole (later Sir Henry, inaugurator and first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum), it was in triptych style showing in the central scene a prosperous-looking family party pledging the viewer with brimming wine-glasses and, in the side-panels, the charitable acts of 'Clothing the Naked' and

'Feeding the Hungry'. But Dickens's modern fairy-tale of Scrooge and the Cratchits with its strong, but wholly non-sectarian, Christian colouring had an impact no leader-writer or moralizing satirical journalist, no preacher or card-designer could have hoped to achieve (for one thing, leading articles and sermons were not susceptible of being dramatized⁵ for the delight of thousands who could not, or did not, read the papers and who rarely, if ever, heard a sermon). Dickens's self-appointed 'Critic Laureate', Lord Jeffrey, was moved to write to him: 'Blessings on your kind heart...you may be sure you have done more good by this little publication, fostered more kindly feelings, and prompted more positive acts of beneficence, than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom since Christmas 1842.'⁶ The *Carol's* first reviewers similarly emphasized the book's humanity, 'beneficial tendency' and sympathy for those suffering 'the real grinding sorrows of life'. It was, Thackeray declared, 'a national benefit and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness'.⁷

The revival of interest in Christmas traditions that developed among the literati during the 1820s and 1830s was not primarily inspired by zeal for promoting the exercise of Christian charity. It related more to the growth of a taste for the picturesque as well as to Tory nostalgia for the 'good old days' of a more settled state of society, acceptance of hierarchy and supposed class harmony. Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, had commented back in 1807: 'All persons say how differently this season was observed in their fathers' days, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete.'⁸ A year later came Scott's famous evocation, in his introduction to the sixth canto of *Marmion*, of 'olden time' Christmas festivities, centred on the Baron's hall and featuring a boar's head, Christmas pies, yule logs and 'carols roar'd with blithesome din'. This seized the imagination of many among his thousands of readers and was still a potent vision thirty years later when Dickens's much-loved friend Daniel Maclise created his wide-angle history painting *Merry Christmas in the Baron's Hall*⁹

showing the Baron, his family and, in Scott's phrase, 'vassal, tenant, serf and all' celebrating the festival together. Meanwhile, the American writer Washington Irving made a fanciful picture, not without a hint of satire, in his description of Squire Bracebridge's Christmas revels at his ancestral home Bracebridge Hall (in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, 1820) of how an English country gentleman with an antiquarian bent might, with his extended family, servants and guests, still keep up the picturesque seasonal rituals of yesteryear. Dickens, a devoted reader of Irving, was strongly influenced by him in his depiction of the Pickwickians' old-fashioned Christmas merry-making as guests of Old Wardle at Manor Farm in Dingley Dell. Indeed, all this part of *Pickwick* may be seen, like Maclise's painting, as responding to Scott's and Irving's romantic antiquarianism and idealization of the traditional English Christmas as can T. K. Hervey's *The Book of Christmas: Descriptive of the customs, ceremonies, traditions, superstitions, fun, feeling and festivities of the Christmas Season* (1837; illustrated by Robert Seymour, the first illustrator of *Pickwick*). We might note too the appearance in 1831 and 1832 of W. H. Harrison's *The Humourist, a Companion for the Christmas Fireside* and in 1833 of William Sandys's *Selection of Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern*. In all this the emphasis was very much on traditional festivity in a setting overflowing with creature comforts in which servants and dependants joyfully shared.

Dickens's own first literary treatment of Christmas appeared in *Bell's Life in London* on 27 December 1835 as part of a series of sketches entitled 'Scenes and Characters' that the young journalist was contributing to the paper under the pen-name of 'Tibbs'. Its title, 'Christmas Festivities' (changed to 'A Christmas Dinner' when he included it in his earliest *Sketches by Boz* collection a few months later), perhaps led readers to expect an exercise in Washington Irving-type nostalgia. The sketch has a very contemporary ring to it, however. The traditional rituals of 'Old Christmas' are to be found in it but modified to suit the home of a well-to-do London family (the kind of home to which Dickens's parents would have aspired).

The 'olden day' Baron and his Lady have become the genial hosts Uncle and Aunt George, and the 'retainers' are now servants wearing beautiful, new, pink-ribboned caps (but they celebrate Christmas in their own quarters not with the family), the boar's head has become a fine turkey, and the medieval pastimes have become 'a glorious game of blind man's buff'. When, at the beginning of the sketch, Dickens refers to 'people who tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be' he does not mean such praisers of past times as Southey and Scott but those who have suffered personal sorrows, wrongs and misfortunes which this great anniversary occasion must inevitably bring to mind. This theme of dealing, or failing to deal, with painful memories subsequently becomes a leading one in nearly all Dickens's Christmas writings – often associated, as it is here, with the death of a beloved small child. In this sketch Dickens exhorts his readers not to suppress all painful memories as Scrooge will do, nor seek to expunge them as Redlaw the Haunted Man will do, but simply to put them to one side and instead to count their blessings and rejoice in them. A year later in *Pickwick*, however, he is seeing such memories as actually integral to the joys of Christmas:

Many of the hearts that throbbed so gaily then [in the Christmas gatherings of our earlier years], have ceased to beat;...the hands we grasped, have grown cold; the eyes we sought, have hid their lustre in the grave; and yet the old house, the room, the merry voices and smiling faces, the jest, the laugh, the most minute and trivial circumstance connected with those happy meetings, crowd upon our mind at each recurrence of the season, as if the last assemblage had been but yesterday. Happy, happy Christmas that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days...(Pickwick Papers, ch. 28)

This exordium seems to have no more to do with the scenes that follow, the Pickwickians' Christmas revels, than was the case with the exordium of 'Christmas Festivities'. Neither Mr Pickwick and his friends nor Old Wardle and his family seem to have any consciousness of lost dear ones (we may perhaps discount old Mrs Wardle's fondness for invoking the shade of 'the beautiful Lady

Tollinglower deceased’) or, indeed, any memories at all – apart from that contained in Mr Pickwick’s one allusion to sliding on the ice in his younger days. It is as though Dickens had not yet found a way of satisfactorily combining sentiment (the memory theme) and story (Christmas revels).

As to the theme of loving kindness to the poor, that is simply absent from the *Bell’s* sketch and, insofar as it is present at all in the Dingley Dell scenes, it is matter for comedy – the sycophantic ‘poor relations’ are pure figures of fun (in the game of blind man’s buff, for example, they ‘caught the people who they thought would like it; and when the game flagged, got caught themselves’). Interestingly, however, the poor who appear in the inset fireside tale related by Old Wardle are endowed with both dignity and pathos. This tale of Gabriel Grub, the solitary old misanthrope converted by supernatural means to benevolence and belief in human goodness, is Dickens’s first Christmas Story, and the daily heroism of the poor struggling to lead decent and loving family lives is at the very heart of it.

As John Butt was the first to point out, this ‘Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton’ is the prototype for the *Carol*.¹⁰ The Cratchit family and the doomed child are already to be discerned in it, though not yet named and individualized, and old Grub is moved by the visions of their mutual love and endurance of suffering that the goblins compel him to witness. But he has no personal connection with them, his conversion from misanthropy has no consequences for them, nor has it anything to do with the workings of memory. We learn no more of his personal history than we do of Mr Pickwick’s. Some of the main elements of the *Carol* are present in the story but they are still in solution as it were. Dickens’s next step towards the realization of his Christmas masterpiece comes with a passage written in 1840 for his new weekly miscellany *Master Humphrey’s Clock*.

*

Dickens had, by the end of 1839, been writing solidly for four years with ever-increasing success. *Oliver Twist* had succeeded *Pickwick*

and *Nicholas Nickleby* had succeeded *Oliver*, the serialization of each book overlapping with its successor or predecessor. Dickens now wanted some relief and hoped to achieve it by means of this miscellany, to which it was intended that other writers should contribute, though in the end this did not happen. Master Humphrey, the supposed ‘editor’ of the miscellany, is a reclusive old bachelor, a cripple (a sort of grown-up Tiny Tim *avant la lettre*), whose memories of his younger days, though tinged with sadness, predispose him towards a love of humanity. His Christmas Day behaviour seems to be modelled on Leigh Hunt’s 1817 advice in one of his essays on old Christmas customs and the ‘Desirableness of their Revival’ in what he saw as the money-obsessed, utilitarian-minded world of the second and third decades of the nineteenth century: ‘Stir up your firesides, and your smiles, and your walks abroad...every fresh thing done to give joy to a fellow-creature, every festivity set a-going among friends, or servants, or the village...every rub of one’s own hands, and shake of another’s, indoors, – will be so much gain to the spirit and real happiness of the age.’¹¹ It is as a result of walking genially abroad on Christmas Day (something that Dickens himself delighted in doing)¹² that Master Humphrey encounters and rescues another afflicted solitary, the Deaf Gentleman, who seems to be in danger of becoming a prototype Haunted Man as he sits in a deserted tavern coffee-room brooding over lost happiness resulting from some kind of betrayal or desertion by someone he loved. In this little episode Dickens first makes the link between painful memories and Christmas benevolence that thereafter becomes so fundamental to his Christmas writings.

Three and a half more years were to pass before the *Carol* was conceived. Dickens wrote two more novels, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*, made his traumatic tour of the United States, and returned to the twenty-monthly-number format of *Pickwick* and *Nickleby* for his new work, *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The climactic scene of *The Old Curiosity Shop* with its snowy landscape and the beautiful, much-loved dying child (who, unlike Tiny Tim, really ‘DOES die’)

seems to hover on the edge of becoming a Dickens Christmas Story and, indeed, as Malcolm Andrews has shown, 'is transformed into a kind of Nativity'.¹³ Dickens did not write directly about Christmas again, however, until a sudden inspiration in October 1843 precipitated the creation of the *Carol*.

Earlier in the year he, like Elizabeth Barrett and many others, had been appalled by the brutal revelations of the Second Report (Trades and Manufactures) of the Children's Employment Commission set up by Parliament. Barrett published a powerful poem, 'The Cry of the Children', and Dickens, 'perfectly stricken down' by the Report, contemplated bringing out 'a very cheap pamphlet, called "An appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child"'.¹⁴ Speaking at the first annual soirée of the Manchester Athenaeum, an institution which sought to bring culture and 'blameless rational enjoyment' to the working classes, Dickens dwelt on the terrible sights he had seen among the juvenile population in London's jails and doss-houses and stressed the desperate need for educating the poor.¹⁵ This occasion seems to have put into his mind the idea for a story, building on, but also utterly transforming, the old *Pickwick* Christmas Eve tale of Gabriel Grub, which should help to open the hearts of the prosperous and powerful towards the poor and powerless but which should also bring centrally into play the theme of memory that, as we have seen, was always so strongly associated with Christmas for him.

The *Carol* was written at white heat in such 'odd moments of leisure' as Dickens could snatch from his work on the eleventh monthly instalment of *Chuzzlewit*. Describing its composition to his American friend Cornelius Felton, he wrote: 'Charles Dickens wept, and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner, in the composition; and thinking whereof, he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles, many a night when all the sober folks had gone to bed.'¹⁶ The little book's triumphant reception has already been mentioned. It was attractively produced as a Christmas gift book, price five shillings,¹⁷ with salmon-brown covers, gilt lettering, coloured end-papers, gilt

edges and wonderful illustrations by Dickens's friend the *Punch* artist John Leech. Four of these were dropped into the text and four were hand-coloured full-page insets. Catherine Waters has acutely noted that, since an important part of Christmas tradition was fireside story-telling ('Ghost Stories, or more shame for us,' Dickens insists),¹⁸ a publication like the *Carol* has a 'doubled function' in that 'it forms part of the ritual...it is concerned to portray'.¹⁹ Dickens enhances this effect by using a particularly intimate narrative tone as here in the description of Scrooge's encounter with the first of the Spirits: '[he] found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor...as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow'.

The chief interest of the story for us today is centred around the brilliantly named figure of Scrooge, evoking the sense both of 'screw' and of 'gouge'. He is an extraordinary combination of, on the one hand, such mythic creatures as Jack Frost and child-quelling ogres and, on the other, a rusty, surly, mean-spirited old London money-dealer. This figure is one of the most exuberant of Dickens's great grotesques (when Chesterton said that we suspect Scrooge of having secretly given away turkeys all his life, he was, in his own inimitable way, responding to this exuberance).²⁰ But, as Paul Davis has shown, for the *Carol's* earliest readers it was the Cratchit scenes that were 'the emotional center of the tale'.²¹ This should remind us that it was very much a book of its time, the 'Hungry Forties', when the very survival of poor families outside of the workhouse was a precarious matter. There is something defiant about the Cratchits' frugally succulent Christmas dinner, their loving family solidarity and their tender care of Tiny Tim that would have given heart and hope to thousands of struggling families, some of whom actually wrote to Dickens to tell him, 'amid many confidences, about their homes, how the *Carol* had come to be read aloud there, and was to be kept upon a little shelf by itself, and was to do them no end of good'.²²

At the same time, by steering clear of too much topical reference (not having Bob Cratchit tempted to become a Chartist, for

example) Dickens avoided alienating his middle-class readers. True, the *Westminster Review* condemned him, in June 1844, for his ignorance of political economy and the ‘laws’ of supply and demand: ‘Who went without turkey and punch in order that Bob Cratchit might get them – for, unless there were turkeys and punch in surplus, some one must go without – is a disagreeable reflection kept wholly out of sight [by Dickens].’ But this was a predictable reaction from Utilitarian extremists. In general, middle-class readers would have recognized in the horrifying little figures of Ignorance and Want an all-too-true presentation in allegorical terms of the grim truth about the children of the poor that lay behind the somewhat fairy-tale character of Tiny Tim (we notice that Leech depicts Dickens’s symbolic children against a background not of the streets of Scrooge’s London but of grim workhouse-like buildings and ‘dark satanic mills’). In putting his dire warning of potential social catastrophe into the mouth of the Ghost of Christmas Present Dickens is using a rhetoric with which middle-class readers would have been familiar from the fulminations of Dickens’s intellectual hero Carlyle, whose scarifying ‘Condition of England’ diatribe, *Past and Present*, had been published only a few months earlier. In contrast to Carlyle’s fuliginous social pessimism, however, Dickens offered his readers the vision of an alternative, altogether more hopeful, future, imaged in the beneficent cavortings of the reclaimed Scrooge. Desperate as the state of the nation might appear, it was not yet too late for a total change, of course with charity beginning at home among the better-off and spreading outwards from there in ever-widening circles to bring about a kinder, juster society. Even Carlyle himself, for all his criticism of Dickens’s soft-hearted sentimentalism, was not immune to the power of the *Carol*. The descriptions of feasting in the book had ‘so worked on [his] nervous organisation’, Jane Carlyle wrote to her cousin Jeannie Welsh on 23 December, ‘that he has been seized with a perfect *convulsion* of hospitality, and has actually insisted on *improvising two* dinner-parties with only a day between’.²³

The phenomenal popular success of the *Carol* (even though it proved a financial disappointment to Dickens as a result of the high costs involved in its production and the keeping-down of its price) made it inevitable that he should produce a series of successor volumes for the following Christmas and several Christmases after that. He wrote four more 'Christmas Books' (as they were collectively titled when first gathered into one volume for the Cheap Edition of Dickens's works in 1852). All were published in the same format as the *Carol* and illustrated by distinguished artist friends of Dickens, but the expensive hand-coloured plates were dropped. The *Carol's* immediate successor was *The Chimes. A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844), followed by *The Cricket on the Hearth. A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845), *The Battle of Life. A Love Story* (1846), and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain. A Fancy for Christmas-Time* (1848). The non-appearance of a volume for Christmas 1847 stemmed from Dickens's imperative need that autumn to concentrate wholly on his new novel, *Dombey and Son*, then well over half-way through its serialization in twenty monthly parts. He had to put on hold the working-out of the 'very ghostly and wild idea' that he had conceived for the expected Christmas Book²⁴ but this postponement was not done lightly. Dickens was, he wrote to Forster, not only 'very loath to lose the money' but 'still more so to leave any gap at Christmas firesides which I ought to fill',²⁵ thereby signalling his recognition that for the British public he himself had by now become a significant element in the annual celebration.

Dickens's major Christmas theme of home and family love is prominent in all these little books, and the use of the supernatural, that element he deemed so essential for a real Christmas tale, is crucial to them all (except the *Battle*, where its absence is damaging, as Dickens recognized). But it is only the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man* that have Christmas settings and can be said to be actually *about* Christmas. The fiercely political *Chimes* is, as its subtitle proclaims, very much a New Year's book, the pretty fairy-tale *Cricket* also has a New Year's setting and the *Battle*, though it does have one scene

taking place at Christmas time, ranges over different seasons. I have, therefore, included only the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man* in the present collection of Dickens's writings about Christmas.

The Haunted Man not only has a Christmas setting but actually returns to some of the main figures of the *Carol* – the solitary central character somehow dislocated from common humanity, the poor family sustained by mutual love and the terrible apparitions Ignorance and Want, here made flesh (or rather skin and bone) in the person of the unnamed but unforgettable savage street-child. From them Dickens evolves a story about the inter-relationship between memory, especially the memory of wrongs and sorrows, the moral life, social responsibility and the survival of human feelings among the very poor that, in some ways, probes these issues more deeply and painfully than does the *Carol*. Redlaw is a more complex figure than Scrooge, no quasi-ogre but a famous scientist and teacher²⁶ whose life is blighted by memories of the painful past but whose last state is fearfully worse than his first when he opts to be supernaturally released from them. The Tetterby family's devotion to its youngest and weakest member, Little Moloch, is not quite (as the sinister overtones of the comic nickname suggest) the unambiguously heartwarming thing it is in the case of the Cratchits and Tiny Tim. Dickens, too, is out to shame his readers in a much more direct way than in the *Carol* (he will not be quite so confrontational again until the famous address to the reader after the death of Poor Jo at the end of chapter 47 of *Bleak House*). Pointing to the savage child, Redlaw's haunting Phantom admonishes him:

‘There is not a father...by whose side in his daily or his nightly walks, these creatures [such as the savage boy] pass; there is not a mother among all the ranks of loving mothers in this land; there is no one risen from the state of childhood, but shall be responsible in his or her degree for this enormity. There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse. There is no religion upon earth that it would not deny; there is no people upon earth it would not put to shame.’

The Haunted Man was hardly a success in Dickens sales terms but it was better received than *The Battle of Life*, which was generally panned by the critics although, helped by its predecessor's enormous popularity, it sold 23,000 copies on publication day. In *The Haunted Man* critics praised the depiction of Johnny and Little Moloch ('Dickens,' declared the *Atlas* reviewer on 23 December, 'is a dead hand at a baby'), and also that of the savage child, but the work was found in general to be too incoherent and 'metaphysical'. For modern scholars such as Harry Stone its main attraction has been its obvious autobiographical overtones.²⁷ The presence of these overtones is hardly surprising since in the later 1840s Dickens was evidently thinking a great deal about his own past – especially about what Forster calls those 'hard experiences in boyhood' that feature so prominently in the so-called 'Autobiographical Fragment' (written about this time but not published until Forster included extracts from it in his biography). Significantly, the novel on which Dickens began working immediately after *The Haunted Man* was the quasi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*.

By the time Christmas 1849 was drawing near Dickens was well into the writing of *Copperfield* and there was no mention of any Christmas Book. His 1846 experience of writing one whilst also working on a major novel was not something he would have wished to repeat. No doubt he was disgusted also by the host of pseudo-Dickens 'Christmas Books' that now regularly flooded the market each December. In any case, by autumn of 1850 he had ready to his hand a different vehicle by which to convey the expected seasonal salutation to his eager public. Since the end of March he had been editing a weekly journal called *Household Words* and the obvious thing was to devote to Christmas themes the last issue to appear before 25 December. Accordingly, he filled it with a series of articles by various hands with such titles as 'Christmas in Lodgings', 'Christmas in the Navy', 'Christmas Among the London Poor and Sick', and so on. He wrote the first, as it were leading, article himself. This was his superlative 'Christmas Tree' essay, a virtuoso variation on the memory theme. He used the 'pretty German toy', as

he called the decorated tree (referring to its introduction into Britain by Prince Albert in 1841), as a device on which to build this essay in which one notable modern Dickensian has claimed to find 'in little the essence of Dickens's world', a paradoxical blend of delight and terror, reality and deception, 'childhood ringed by mortality', and fancy and gravity.²⁸

Encouraged by the excellent sales of this issue, Dickens determined that the following year there should be a special 'Extra Number for Christmas' of *Household Words*, and so began a tradition which continued for the next sixteen years, being carried over from *Household Words* to its successor, *All The Year Round*, in 1859. Sales of these Christmas numbers were consistently prodigious, reaching a quarter of a million in the 1860s. As with the 1850 issue, Dickens recruited other writers to collaborate with him on these issues. He began in 1851 with a simple linking formula, 'What Christmas Is' (e.g., Harriet Martineau's contribution is entitled 'What Christmas Is in Country Places') and then, when all the individual essays had come in, decided that the number needed 'something with no detail in it, but a tender fancy that shall hit a great many people'.²⁹ The year 1851 was one during which he had lost both his much-loved father and his infant daughter Dora, so it was natural that his favourite Christmas theme of the need to be open to the loving remembrance of lost dear ones should find its fullest expression to date in this essay, 'What Christmas Is as We Grow Older'.

From a simple formula linking the various self-contained stories Dickens moved on in 1852 to the framing device of a 'Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire'. From that, two years later, he developed the idea of a framing narrative into which individual stories would be slotted, thus reverting to the basic scheme of his beloved *Arabian Nights* which he had already tried to make work in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. The first Christmas number in this form was the one for 1854, 'The Seven Poor Travellers', in which the framing narrative is set in Rochester, beloved haunt of Dickens's boyhood, on Christmas Eve. Earlier in the year he had visited Watts's Charity in Rochester High Street and had perhaps reflected

that the chance coming-together of half a dozen wayfarers for a night's lodging would provide an ideal setting for group storytelling, with the character of each traveller being assigned to one of his literary collaborators, who would then invent a story appropriate to that character. In succeeding Christmas numbers Dickens's framing narrative tended to become more elaborate, especially for those numbers in which Wilkie Collins was his chief or even sole collaborator. The immediately succeeding one, 'The Holly Tree Inn' (1855), still had a Christmas Eve setting but more incidentally so than 'The Seven Poor Travellers', and after that the annual frame stories, on which Dickens continued to lavish so much care, ceased to have any relationship to Christmas.

Though Dickens told his contributors that he was not at all concerned that their stories should have any direct reference to Christmas, he did nevertheless want them to 'strike the chord of the season'.³⁰ He defined 'the Christmas spirit' in 'What Christmas Is as We Grow Older' as 'the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness, and forbearance' and we find that these qualities feature prominently in his Christmas Stories, tales that centre around themes of forgiveness, restitution, reconciliation, tenderness, the power of self-sacrificing love even in the most terrible circumstances, the blighting effects of trying to isolate oneself from the rest of humanity, and, always, the vital importance of memory and imagination to the moral health of the individual.³¹ Though no longer writing in the 'whimsical kind of masque' mode of the earlier Christmas Books, one of Dickens's main aims in these special Christmas numbers could still be described in the words of his general preface to the *Carol* and its successors: 'to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land'. From the earliest numbers the idea of a first-person narrator seems to have been central to Dickens's conception of a Christmas number and the mid-1860s saw some of his greatest triumphs in this form: Christopher the waiter in 'Somebody's Luggage', Mrs Lirriper in 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings' and 'Mrs Lirriper's Legacy' and Dr Marigold in 'Dr Marigold's Prescriptions'.

The *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* 'Christmas Stories', as they came to be known collectively,³² naturally helped to perpetuate the public's association of Dickens with Christmas (insofar as the festival featured at all in his later novels, it was, interestingly, in a distinctly non-festive way: witness the young Pip's tormented Christmas dinner in *Great Expectations* and the uninspiring Christmas scene in Cloisterham in *Edwin Drood* that is, apparently, the setting for a particularly horrible murder). But what above all caused the idea of Dickens as the great celebrator of Christmas to continue to flourish were his hugely popular public readings of the *Carol*, at first for charity and then professionally, between 1853 and 1870.³³ Philip Collins describes the *Carol* reading, which Dickens gradually whittled down to a one-and-a-half hour performance, as 'the quintessential Dickens reading...the greatest of platform pieces from his works' and lists no less than 127 performances in all of this particular item. Dickens also drew on some of the later 'Christmas Stories' for his readings repertoire, as well as on some of the novels, but the *Carol* remained one of the two perennial favourites, the other being the trial scene from *Pickwick*. The *Carol* Reading was very much focused on the Cratchit sequences with the family's Christmas dinner as the high point (Fezziwig's ball, the least cut scene from Scrooge's past in the final version of the reading, was also much relished by audiences). Ignorance and Want were soon excised from the reading text – no doubt Dickens felt that they were too much creatures of the 1840s – leaving Tiny Tim as the sole focus for pathos and evidently a very effective one. A great number of testimonies survive extolling the power of Dickens's reading of 'his blessed Christmas gospel', as one American admirer called the *Carol*:³⁴ 'unlike the other Readings,' Collins comments, 'there was about this one an element of a rite, a religious affirmation'.

John Ruskin is not known to have attended a Dickens reading of the *Carol*. Even had he done so, he might not have altered his famous verdict that Christmas for Dickens was nothing more than 'mistletoe and pudding – neither resurrection from the dead, nor

rising of new stars, nor teaching of wise men, nor shepherds'.³⁵ In fact, the star, the angel and the shepherds and the wise men are all present in Dickens's description of the Nativity in his *Life of Our Lord*, written for the private use of his children (it remained unpublished until 1934). Nevertheless, the presentation of Jesus here would probably not have met with Ruskin's approbation. Dickens presents him as very much a human child, the son of Joseph and Mary, who will grow up to be so good that God will love him as his own son 'and he will teach men to love one another'. For Dickens, temperamentally and intellectually averse to theological debate, Jesus was above all the greatest teacher and healer who ever lived. He it was who, as Tiny Tim says, 'made lame beggars walk and blind men see' and the miracles he performed were made possible through the power that God gave him. He was goodness incarnate and for Dickens, admiring reader of Wordsworth as he was, we are closest to being like Jesus when we are children. And it is essential for our moral and spiritual health that we never lose touch with our childhood 'for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself' (*Carol*, p. 89). Dickens wrote to the Reverend David Macrae that his Christmas Books were 'absolutely impossible...to be separated from the exemplification of the Christian virtues and the inculcation of the Christian precepts', adding that in every one of them 'there is an express text preached on, and that text is always taken from the lips of Christ'.³⁶ This would be hard to illustrate, I think, but about the strong Christian colouring to be found in them there can be no doubt, quite apart from specific Scriptural references.³⁷ And at least one notable reader found great spiritual depth in them. Van Gogh told his brother in the spring of 1889 that he had been rereading Dickens's Christmas Books and added, 'There are things in them so profound that one must read them over and over again.'³⁸ Certainly, there is more to them than 'mistletoe and pudding'.

As regards Christmas specifically, Dickens's major theme of its spiritual and moral importance as a time for particularly

remembering our own past and the lives and characters of our lost loved ones links with the deeper one of remembering the life and ministry of Christ, whose birthday it is. Nowhere does he express this more beautifully than in the conclusion to his first fully fledged ‘Christmas Story’, ‘The Seven Poor Travellers’, and it is with this passage, therefore, that I have chosen to end this collection of his Christmas writings.

NOTES

1. ‘Dickens and “Father Christmas”’. A Yule-tide Appeal for the Babes of Famine Street’, *The Nineteenth Century*, vol. 62, July–December 1907, pp. 1014–29. Watts-Dunton describes the girl as representative of ‘thousands and thousands of the London populace who never read a line of Dickens...but who were nevertheless familiar with his name’ and who looked upon him ‘as the spirit of Christmas incarnate; as being, in a word, Father Christmas himself’.
2. M. House, G. Storey et al., eds., *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, vol. 4 (1977), p. 12. (Hereafter referred to as *Pilgrim*.)
3. Philip Collins, ‘1940–1960. Enter the Professionals’, *Dickensian*, 66 (1970), p. 148.
4. See J. A. R. Pimlott, *The Englishman’s Christmas. A Social History*, ed. Ben Pimlott (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1978), chs. 7 and 8. A major new study by David Parker entitled *Christmas and Dickens* is forthcoming. Dr Parker’s findings call for some revision and modification of the currently accepted narrative of the history of the English Christmas. I am grateful to Dr Parker for allowing me a preview of the relevant chapters from his book.
5. Philip Bolton notes in his *Dickens Dramatized* (Boston, Mass.: G. K. Hall & Co., 1987), p. 234, that by mid-February 1844 ‘at

least eight productions' of the *Carol* had appeared on the London stage.

6. J. Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. J. W. T. Ley (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928), Book 4, ch. 2, p. 316; hereafter cited as Forster. Jeffrey seems to be echoing the penultimate paragraph of 'Christmas Festivities' (p. 6, below).
7. The *Britannia*, 23 December 1843; *Fraser's Magazine* 29 (February 1844), pp. 166–9.
8. Robert Southey, *Letters from England*, ed. J. Simmons (London: Cresset Press, 1951), p. 362 (Letter LVIII).
9. Now in the National Gallery of Ireland.
10. John Butt, 'Dickens's Christmas Books' in *Pope, Dickens and Others* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969), p. 134.
11. Quoted by Catherine Waters in her *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 61. Dr Waters's excellent discussion of Dickens's domestication and 'bourgeoisification' (my word not hers, I hasten to add) of the traditional English Christmas is most illuminating.
12. Forster tells us that Dickens 'had a surprising fondness for wandering about in poor neighbourhoods on Christmas-day... watching the dinners preparing or coming in' (Forster, p. 837).
13. See his Introduction to *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 29.
14. *Pilgrim*, vol. 3, p. 459.
15. See K. J. Fielding, ed., *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 47.
16. *Pilgrim*, vol. 4, p. 2.
17. Bearing in mind that Bob Cratchit's, admittedly stingy, wages from Scrooge were fifteen shillings per week, we can understand that the *Carol's* price would have been prohibitive for many potential working-class readers.
18. In 'A Christmas Tree' (see below, p. 241).
19. Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family*, pp. 66, 65.

20. See G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens* (London: Methuen and Co., 1906), ch. 7.
21. Paul Davis, *Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 48.
22. Forster, Book 4, ch. 2, p. 316. In a recently rediscovered essay written for *Tribune* (24 December 1943) George Orwell notes that Dickens's success in convincingly depicting the Cratchits' happiness derives from his understanding that it is a matter of contrasts: 'They are in high spirits because for once in a way they have enough to eat...The steam of the Christmas pudding drifts across a background of pawnshops and sweated labour, and in a double sense the ghost of Scrooge stands beside the dinner table...The Cratchits are able to enjoy Christmas precisely because Christmas only comes once a year.' See *Complete Works of George Orwell*, ed. Peter Davison (London: Secker and Warburg, 1998), vol. 16, p. 39.
23. Jane Carlyle to Jeannie Welsh (28 Dec. 1843), *Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle*, vol. 17, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1990), p. 219. In his *Conversations with Carlyle* (London: Sampson Low & Co., 1892) Charles Gavan Duffy records (p. 75) that Carlyle told him he thought Dickens's 'theory of life' was 'entirely wrong': 'He thought men ought to be buttered up, and the world made soft and accommodating for them, and all sorts of fellows have turkey for their Christmas dinner. Commanding and controlling and punishing them he would give up without any misgivings in order to coax and soothe and delude them into doing right.'
24. *Pilgrim*, vol. 4, p. 614.
25. *Pilgrim*, vol. 5, p. 165.
26. The *Morning Chronicle* found Redlaw 'far more suggestive of the mysterious astrologer of the northern turret of the baronial castle in the year of grace 14–, than of a well-bred and clean-shaven expositor of science in the Nineteenth Century' (25 December 1848).

27. See Harry Stone's 'The Love Pattern in Dickens's Novels' in R. Partlow, ed., *Dickens the Craftsman*, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970).
28. Angus Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970), p. 12.
29. *Pilgrim*, vol. 6, p. 551.
30. *Pilgrim*, vol. 6, p. 809.
31. For an excellent discussion of Dickens's preoccupations in Christmas Stories see ch. 4 ('The Chord of the Christmas Season') in Deborah Thomas's *Dickens and the Short Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).
32. Dickens included 'A Christmas Tree' and his contributions to the Christmas numbers for 1852 and 1853 in *Reprinted Pieces* (1858). He then collected seven more of his Christmas Number contributions in a volume of the American Diamond Edition of his works (1867) and the rest were gradually assembled together over the course of various collected editions and called Christmas Stories. In the case of those stories jointly written with Wilkie Collins only the Dickens portions were included (apart from their last collaboration, *No Thoroughfare*, written for Christmas 1867) and this practice continued in later reprints, so rendering some of the stories unintelligible. See, however, Ruth Glancy's edition of *Christmas Stories* for the Everyman Dickens (London: J. M. Dent, 1996) which includes the Collins portions of the jointly written stories wherever these are needed for the story to be comprehensible.
33. He had given some public readings of the *Carol* earlier, from 1853 onwards, for charity before turning professional in 1858 and reading for his own profit. See P. Collins, *Charles Dickens: the Public Readings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).
34. Edwin Mead, 'About the *Christmas Carol* and Dickens in Boston', *Unity*, December 1832. Quoted by Davis, *Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge*, p. 58.
35. Letter to Charles Eliot Norton (19 June 1870) in *The Library Edition of the Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and A.

- Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–12), vol. 37, p. 7.
36. *Pilgrim*, vol. 9, p. 557.
 37. The best general discussion of Dickens and Christianity is to be found in Dennis Walder's *Dickens and Religion* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981). See also Walder, 'Dickens and the Reverend David Macrae', *The Dickensian*, vol. 81, 1985, pp. 45–51 and ch. 6 ('Faith') in my *Intelligent Person's Guide to Dickens* (London: Duckworth, 1999).
 38. *Further Letters of Vincent Van Gogh to his Brother 1886–1889* (London: Constable, 1929), p. 309.

Further Reading

1. DICKENS'S OWN WRITINGS

Charles Dickens. The Public Readings, ed. Philip Collins (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). Includes Dickens's reading texts of the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man*.

A Christmas Carol. The Public Reading Version. A Facsimile of the Author's Prompt-copy, with Introduction and Notes by Philip Collins (New York: New York Public Library, 1971).

Christmas Stories, ed. Ruth Glancy, The Everyman Dickens (London: J. M. Dent, 1996).

Holiday Romance and Other Writings for Children, ed. Gillian Avery (The Everyman Dickens, London: J. M. Dent, 1995). Includes *The Life of Our Lord*.

Master Humphrey's Clock and Other Stories, ed. Peter Mudford, The Everyman Dickens (London: J. M. Dent, 1997).

The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens, 12 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1965–2002).

Un Albero di Natale ('A Christmas Tree') introduced by Ada Nisbet and illustrated by Mirando Haz (Milan: All'Insegna del Pesce d'Oro, 1981). A reprint of Dickens's essay accompanied by critical articles in Italian and English by divers hands.

2. REFERENCE WORKS

Nicolas Bentley, Michael Slater and Nina Burgis, *The Dickens Index* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

Philip Collins, ed., *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1971). See section on the Christmas Books.

Ruth F. Glancy, ed., *Dickens's Christmas Books, Christmas Stories, and Other Short Fiction. An Annotated Bibliography*, The Garland Dickens Bibliographies (New York: Garland Publishing, 1985).

Paul Schlicke, ed., *The Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

3. BIOGRAPHIES AND CRITICAL STUDIES CONTAINING SIGNIFICANT DISCUSSION RELEVANT TO THIS VOLUME

Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1990).

Julia Briggs, *Night Visitors: the Rise and Fall of the English Ghost Story* (London: Faber, 1977).

G. K. Chesterton, *Charles Dickens*, (London: Methuen and Co., 1906) (chapter on 'Dickens and Christmas').

John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols., 1872–74. In default of a modern critical edition, the edition most generally used for reference is the one edited by J. W. T. Ley, 1 vol. (London: Cecil Palmer, 1928).

Barbara Hardy, *The Moral Art of Dickens* (London: The Athlone Press, 1970). (See especially Section One, ch. 2.)

Humphry House, *The Dickens World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941; Oxford Paperbacks, 1960).

T. A. Jackson, *Charles Dickens: the Progress of a Radical* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1937).

David Parker, 'Dickens and the American Christmas', *Dickens Quarterly* 19: 3 (September 2000), pp. 160–69.

Michael Slater, *Dickens and Women* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983).

Harry Stone, *Dickens and the Invisible World. Fairy Tales, Fantasy and Novel-Making* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979). (See ch. 5, 'The Christmas Books: "Giving Nursery Tales a Higher Form"'.)

Deborah Thomas, *Dickens and the Short Story* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

Dennis Walder, *Dickens and Religion* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1981).

Catherine Waters, *Dickens and the Politics of the Family* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Angus Wilson, *The World of Charles Dickens* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1970).

Edmund Wilson, 'Dickens: the Two Scrooges', in *The Wound and the Bow* (London: W. H. Allen and Co., 1941).

4. STUDIES OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL, THE HAUNTED MAN AND CHRISTMAS STORIES

John Butt, 'Dickens's Christmas Books', in *Pope, Dickens and Others* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1969).

Philip Collins, 'Carol Philosophy, Cheerful Views', *Etudes Anglaises* 23 (1970), pp. 158–67.

Paul Davis, *The Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

The Dickensian 89: 3 (winter 1993). Special issue to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the first publication of the *Carol*. Includes essays by J. Hillis Miller ('The Genres of *A Christmas Carol*', pp. 193–206) and Michael Slater ('The Triumph of Humour: the *Carol* Revisited', pp. 184–92).

Ruth Glancy, 'Dickens and Christmas: His Framed-Tale Themes', *Nineteenth Century Fiction* 35 (1980), pp. 53–72.

Fred Guida, *A Christmas Carol and Its Adaptations. A Critical Examination of Dickens's Story and Its Production on Screen and Television* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2000).

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- S. A. Solberg, ‘ “Text Dropped into the Woodcuts”: Dickens’s Christmas Books’, *Dickens Studies Annual* 8 (1980), pp. 103–18.
- Harry Stone, ‘Dickens’ Artistry in *The Haunted Man*’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 61 (1962), pp. 492–505.
- Harry Stone, ‘The Love Pattern in Dickens’ Novels’, in Robert E. Partlow, ed., *Dickens the Craftsman: Strategies of Presentation* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1970), pp. 1–20. (Autobiographical interpretation of *The Haunted Man*.)
- John Sutherland, ‘How Do the Cratchits Cook Scrooge’s Turkey?’, in his *Who Betrays Elizabeth Bennet? Further Puzzles in Classical Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp. 49–54.
- Kathleen Tillotson, ‘The Middle Years from the *Carol* to *Copperfield*’, in *Dickens Memorial Lectures 1970*, a supplement to *The Dickensian* 65 (1970), pp. 17–19.

A Note on the Texts

The texts of the two Christmas Books included in this volume are those of the first editions. A few printer's errors have been silently corrected and certain Dickensian peculiarities of spelling, e.g. 'recal', 'pannel', have also been emended. Spellings common in the 1840s, e.g. 'honor', and such forms as 'up stairs' and 'a going', which appear consistently throughout the original texts, have been retained; where, however, the original texts feature such spellings and forms only occasionally and elsewhere follow modern usage, the latter has been adopted in this edition.

During the early 1840s Dickens was experimenting with a 'rhetorical' style of punctuation based on speech-rhythms rather than on grammatical sense. This involved especially the lavish use of dashes, colons and semi-colons. It appears in the *Carol* and the two succeeding Christmas Books but was considerably toned down in *The Battle of Life* and *The Haunted Man*. The present edition reproduces the punctuation used in the first printing of the two Books included here.

The manuscript of *A Christmas Carol* is in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. A facsimile edition was published by the Folio Press with a preface by Frederick B. Adams in 1970, and another by the Pierpont Morgan Library itself with an introduction by John Mortimer in 1993. A facsimile of Dickens's prompt-copy for the public readings, in the Berg collection, New York, was published in 1971 (see [Further Reading](#) for details). The correct (but never used except by bibliographers) full title with its joking contradiction in terms is the one given on [p. 27](#). The manuscript of *The Haunted Man*, formerly in the Pforzheimer Foundation in New York, is now in private ownership. A copy of the first edition marked up by Dickens for a public reading (in fact, never given) is in the Charles Dickens Museum, London.

The texts of all the other items included in this volume are those of the first printing of each one. In the case of ‘Christmas Festivities’ the text is as printed in *Bell’s Life in London*, 27 December 1835, apart from the paragraphing, and the variants introduced by Dickens when reprinting it as ‘A Christmas Dinner’ in *Sketches by Boz* have been described in the Notes. The same editorial procedures have been applied to these pieces as to the two Christmas Books. No manuscripts of any of them are known to have survived.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustration on [p. 10](#) is by ‘Phiz’ (Hablot K. Browne), who supplied all the original illustrations for *The Pickwick Papers* following the sudden death of Robert Seymour. All the original illustrations for *A Christmas Carol* were done by John Leech. There were four full-page ones (the frontispiece, ‘Mr Fezziwig’s Ball’, and ‘Marley’s Ghost’, ‘Scrooge’s Third Visitor’ and ‘The Last of the Spirits’), all of which were hand-coloured. In this edition these illustrations appear on [pp. 28](#), [46](#), [73](#) and [109](#). The illustrations on [pp. 51](#), [69](#), [93](#) and [117](#) were originally dropped into the text, but are here reproduced as full-page ones. *The Haunted Man* was illustrated by various hands (see [p. 123](#)). None of these illustrations was coloured, but they were all fully integrated with the text of the story. In this edition they are separated out from the text and printed as full-page illustrations.

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

Christmas time! That man must be a misanthrope indeed in whose breast something like a jovial feeling is not roused—in whose mind some pleasant associations are not awakened—by the recurrence of Christmas. There are people who will tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be—that each succeeding Christmas has found some cherished hope or happy prospect of the year before, dimmed or passed away—and that the present only serves to remind them of reduced circumstances and straitened incomes—of the feasts they once bestowed on hollow friends, and of the cold looks that meet them now, in adversity and misfortune. Never heed such dismal reminiscences. There are few men who have lived long enough in the world who cannot call up such thoughts any day in the year. Then do not select the merriest of the three hundred and sixty-five for your doleful recollections, but draw your chair nearer the blazing fire—fill the glass, and send round the song¹—and, if your room be smaller than it was a dozen years ago, or if your glass is filled with reeking punch instead of sparkling wine, put a good face on the matter, and empty it off-hand, and fill another, and troll off² the old ditty you used to sing, and thank God it's no worse. Look on the merry faces of your children as they sit round the fire. One little seat may be empty—one slight form that gladdened the father's heart and roused the mother's pride to look upon, may not be there. Dwell not upon the past—think not that, one short year ago, the fair child now fast resolving into dust sat before you, with the bloom of health upon its cheek, and the gay unconsciousness of infancy in its joyous eye. Reflect upon your present blessings—of which every man has many—not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some. Fill your glass again, with a merry face and a contented heart. Our life on it but your Christmas shall be merry, and your new year a happy one.

Who can be insensible to the outpourings of good feeling, and the honest interchange of affectionate attachment, which abound at this season of the year? A Christmas family party! We know nothing in nature more delightful! There seems a magic in the very name of Christmas. Petty jealousies and discords are forgotten: social feelings are awakened in bosoms to which they have long been strangers; father and son, or brother and sister, who have met and passed with averted gaze, or a look of cold recognition for months before, proffer and return the cordial embrace, and bury their past animosities in their present happiness. Kindly hearts that have yearned towards each other but have been withheld by false notions of pride and self-dignity, are again united, and all is kindness and benevolence! Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through,³ and that the prejudices and passions which deform our better nature were never called into action among those to whom, at least, they should ever be strangers.

The Christmas Family Party that we mean is not a mere assemblage of relations, got up at a week or two's notice, originating this year, having no family precedent in the last, and not likely to be repeated in the next. It is an annual gathering of all the accessible members of the family, young or old, rich or poor, and all the children look forward to it for some two months beforehand in a fever of anticipation. Formerly it was always held at grandpapa's, but grandpapa getting old, and grandmamma getting old too, and rather infirm, they have given up housekeeping, and domesticated themselves with uncle George: so the party always takes place at uncle George's house, but grandmamma sends in most of the good things, and grandpapa always *will* toddle down all the way to Newgate-market⁴ to buy the turkey, which he engages a porter to bring home behind him in triumph, always insisting on the man's being rewarded with a glass of spirits, over and above his hire, to drink "a merry Christmas and a happy new year" to aunt George; as to grandma she is very secret and mysterious for two or three days beforehand, but not sufficiently so to prevent rumours getting afloat that she has purchased a beautiful new cap with pink ribbons for

each of the servants, together with sundry books, and penknives, and pencil-cases for the younger branches – to say nothing of divers secret additions to the order originally given by aunt George at the pastrycook's, such as another dozen of mince pies for the dinner, and a large plum-cake for the children.

On Christmas-eve, grandma is always in excellent spirits, and after employing all the children during the day in stoning the plums, and all that, insists regularly every year on uncle George coming down into the kitchen, taking off his coat, and stirring the pudding for half an hour or so, which uncle George good-humouredly does, to the vociferous delight of the children and servants; and the evening concludes with a glorious game of blind man's buff, in an early stage of which grandpa takes great care to be caught, in order that he may have an opportunity of displaying his dexterity.

On the following morning the old couple, with as many of the children as the pew will hold, go to church in great state, leaving aunt George at home dusting decanters and filling castors, and uncle George carrying bottles into the dining-parlour, and calling for corkscrews, and getting into everybody's way.

When the church-party return to lunch, grandpapa produces a small sprig of mistletoe from his pocket, and tempts the boys to kiss their little cousins under it—a proceeding which affords both the boys and the old gentleman unlimited satisfaction, but which rather outrages grandma's ideas of decorum, until grandpa says that when he was just thirteen years and three months old *he* kissed grandma under a mistletoe too, on which the children clap their hands and laugh very heartily, as do aunt George and uncle George; and grandma looks pleased, and says, with a benevolent smile, that grandpa always was an impudent dog, on which the children laugh very heartily again, and grandpa more heartily than any of them.

But all these diversions are nothing to the subsequent excitement, when grandmamma in a high cap and slate-coloured silk gown, and grandpapa with a beautifully plaited shirt frill and white neckerchief, seat themselves on one side of the drawing-room fire with uncle George's children and little cousins innumerable, seated

in the front, waiting the arrival of the anxiously expected visitors. Suddenly a hackney-coach is heard to stop, and uncle George, who has been looking out of the window, exclaims "Here's Jane!" on which the children rush to the door, and scamper helter-skelter down stairs; and uncle Robert and aunt Jane, and the dear little baby and the nurse, and the whole party, are ushered up stairs amidst tumultuous shouts of "Oh, my!" from the children, and frequently repeated warnings not to hurt baby from the nurse; and grandpapa takes the child, and grandmamma kisses her daughter, and the confusion of this first entry has scarcely subsided, when some other aunts and uncles with more cousins arrive, and the grown-up cousins flirt with each other, and so do the little cousins too for that matter, and nothing is to be heard but a confused din of talking, laughing, and merriment.

A hesitating double knock at the street door, heard during a momentary pause in the conversation, excites a general inquiry of "Who's that?" and two or three children, who have been standing at the window, announce in a low voice, that it's "poor aunt Margaret." Upon which aunt George leaves the room to welcome the new comer, and grandmamma draws herself up rather stiff and stately, for Margaret married a poor man without her consent, and poverty not being a sufficiently weighty punishment for her offence has been discarded by her friends, and debarred the society of her dearest relatives. But Christmas has come round, and the unkind feelings that have struggled against better dispositions during the year, have melted away before its genial influence, like half-formed ice beneath the morning sun. It is not difficult in a moment of angry feeling for a parent to denounce a disobedient child; but to banish her at a period of general good-will and hilarity from the hearth, round which she has sat on so many anniversaries of the same day; expanding by slow degrees from infancy to girlhood, and then bursting, almost imperceptibly, into the high-spirited and beautiful woman, is widely different. The air of conscious rectitude, and cold forgiveness, which the old lady has assumed, sits ill upon her; and when the poor girl is led in by her sister—pale in looks and broken

in spirit—not from poverty, for that she could bear; but from the consciousness of undeserved neglect, and unmerited unkindness—it is easy to see how much of it is assumed. A momentary pause succeeds; the girl breaks suddenly from her sister, and throws herself, sobbing, on her mother's neck. The father steps hastily forward and grasps her husband's hand. Friends crowd round to offer their hearty congratulations, and happiness and harmony again prevail.

As to the dinner, it's perfectly delightful—nothing goes wrong, and everybody is in the very best of spirits, and disposed to please and be pleased. Grandpapa relates a circumstantial account of the purchase of the turkey, with a slight digression relative to the purchase of previous turkeys on former Christmas Days, which grandmamma corroborates in the minutest particular: uncle George tells stories, and carves poultry, and takes wine, and jokes with the children at the side-table, and winks at the cousins that are making love, or being made love to, and exhilarates everybody with his good humour and hospitality; and when at last a stout servant staggers in with a gigantic pudding with a sprig of holly in the top, there is such a laughing, and shouting, and clapping of little chubby hands, and kicking up of fat dumpy legs, as can only be equalled by the applause with which the astonishing feat of pouring lighted brandy into mince pies is received by the younger visitors. Then the dessert!—and the wine!—and the fun! Such beautiful speeches, and *such* songs, from aunt Margaret's husband, who turns out to be such a nice man, and so attentive to grandmamma! Even grandpapa not only sings his annual song with unprecedented vigour, but on being honoured with an unanimous *encore*, according to annual custom; actually comes out with a new one, which nobody but grandmamma ever heard before: and a young scapegrace of a cousin, who has been in some disgrace with the old people for certain heinous sins of omission and commission—neglecting to call, and persisting in drinking Burton ale⁵—astonishes every body into convulsions of laughter by volunteering the most extraordinary comic songs that were ever heard. And thus the evening passes in a strain of rational

good-will and cheerfulness, doing more to awaken the sympathies of every member of the party in behalf of his neighbour, and to perpetuate their good feeling during the ensuing year, than all the homilies that have ever been written, by all the Divines that have ever lived.

There are a hundred associations connected with Christmas which we should very much like to recall to the minds of our readers; there are a hundred comicalities inseparable from the period, on which it would give us equal pleasure to dilate. We have attained our ordinary limits, “however, and cannot better conclude than by wishing each and all of them, individually & collectively, “a merry Christmas and a happy new year”.

TIBBS

THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

In an old abbey town, down in this part of the country, a long, long while ago—so long, that the story must be a true one, because our great grandfathers implicitly believed it—there officiated as sexton and grave-digger in the churchyard, one Gabriel Grub. It by no means follows that because a man is a sexton, and constantly surrounded by emblems of mortality, therefore he should be a morose and melancholy man; your undertakers are the merriest fellows in the world, and I once had the honour of being on intimate terms with a mute, who in private life, and off duty, was as comical and jocose a little fellow as ever chirped out a devil-may-care song, without a hitch in his memory, or drained off a good stiff glass of grog without stopping for breath. But notwithstanding these precedents to the contrary, Gabriel Grub was an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow—a morose and lonely man, who consorted with nobody but himself, and an old wicker bottle which fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket; and who eyed each merry face as it passed him by, with such a deep scowl of malice and ill-humour, as it was difficult to meet without feeling something the worse for.

A little before twilight one Christmas eve, Gabriel shouldered his spade, lighted his lantern, and betook himself towards the old churchyard, for he had got a grave to finish by next morning, and feeling very low he thought it might raise his spirits perhaps, if he went on with his work at once. As he wended his way, up the ancient street, he saw the cheerful light of the blazing fires gleam through the old casements, and heard the loud laugh and the cheerful shouts of those who were assembled around them; he marked the bustling preparations for next day's good cheer, and smelt the numerous savoury odours consequent thereupon, as they

steamed up from the kitchen windows in clouds. All this was gall and wormwood¹ to the heart of Gabriel Grub; and as groups of children, bounded out of the houses, tripped across the road, and were met, before they could knock at the opposite door, by half a dozen curly-headed little rascals who crowded round them as they flocked up stairs to spend the evening in their Christmas games, Gabriel smiled grimly, and clutched the handle of his spade with a firmer grasp, as he thought of measles, scarlet-fever, thrush, hooping-cough, and a good many other sources of consolation beside.

In this happy frame of mind, Gabriel strode along, returning a short, sullen growl to the good-humoured greetings of such of his neighbours as now and then passed him, until he turned into the dark lane which led to the churchyard. Now Gabriel had been looking forward to reaching the dark lane, because it was, generally speaking, a nice gloomy mournful place, into which the townspeople did not much care to go, except in broad day-light, and when the sun was shining; consequently he was not a little indignant to hear a young urchin roaring out some jolly song about a merry Christmas, in this very sanctuary, which had been called Coffin Lane ever since the days of the old abbey, and the time of the shaven-headed monks. As Gabriel walked on, and the voice drew nearer, he found it proceeded from a small boy, who was hurrying along, to join one of the little parties in the old street, and who, partly to keep himself company, and partly to prepare himself for the occasion, was shouting out the song at the highest pitch of his lungs. So Gabriel waited till the boy came up, and then dodged him into a corner, and rapped him over the head with his lantern five or six times, just to teach him to modulate his voice. And as the boy hurried away with his hand to his head, singing quite a different sort of tune, Gabriel Grub chuckled very heartily to himself, and entered the churchyard, locking the gate behind him.

He took off his coat, set down his lantern, and getting into the unfinished grave, worked at it for an hour or so, with right good will. But the earth was hardened with the frost, and it was no very

easy matter to break it up, and shovel it out; and although there was a moon, it was a very young one, and shed little light upon the grave, which was in the shadow of the church. At any other time, these obstacles would have made Gabriel Grub very moody and miserable, but he was so well pleased with having stopped the small boy's singing, that he took little heed of the scanty progress he had made, and looked down into the grave when he had finished work for the night, with grim satisfaction, murmuring as he gathered up his things—

Brave lodgings for one, brave lodgings for one,
A few feet of cold earth, when life is done;
A stone at the head, a stone at the feet,
A rich, juicy meal for the worms to eat;
Rank grass over head, and damp clay around,
Brave lodgings for one, these, in holy ground!

“Ho! ho!” laughed Gabriel Grub, as he sat himself down on a flat tombstone which was a favourite resting place of his; and drew forth his wicker bottle. “A coffin at Christmas—a Christmas Box. Ho! ho! ho!”

“Ho! ho! ho!” repeated a voice which sounded close behind him.

Gabriel paused in some alarm, in the act of raising the wicker bottle to his lips, and looked round. The bottom of the oldest grave about him was not more still and quiet, than the churchyard in the pale moonlight. The cold hoar frost glistened on the tombstones, and sparkled like rows of gems among the stone carvings of the old church. The snow lay hard and crisp upon the ground, and spread over the thickly-strewn mounds of earth, so white and smooth a cover, that it seemed as if corpses lay there, hidden only by their winding sheets. Not the faintest rustle broke the profound tranquillity of the solemn scene. Sound itself appeared to be frozen up, all was so cold and still.

“It was the echoes,” said Gabriel Grub, raising the bottle to his lips again.

“It was *not*,” said a deep voice.



Gabriel started up, and stood rooted to the spot with astonishment and terror; for his eyes rested on a form which made his blood run cold.

Seated on an upright tombstone, close to him, was a strange unearthly figure, whom Gabriel felt at once, was no being of this world. His long fantastic legs which might have reached the ground, were cocked up, and crossed after a quaint, fantastic fashion; his sinewy arms were bare, and his hands rested on his knees. On his short round body he wore a close covering, ornamented with small slashes; and a short cloak dangled at his back; the collar was cut into curious peaks, which served the goblin in lieu of ruff or neckerchief; and his shoes curled up at the toes into long points. On his head he wore a broad-brimmed sugar-loaf hat, garnished with a single feather. The hat was covered with the white frost, and the goblin looked as if he had sat on the same tombstone very comfortably, for two or three hundred years. He was sitting perfectly still; his tongue was put out, as if in derision; and he was grinning at Gabriel Grub with such a grin as only a goblin could call up.

“It was *not* the echoes,” said the goblin.

Gabriel Grub was paralysed, and could make no reply.

“What do you do here on Christmas eve?” said the goblin sternly.

“I came to dig a grave Sir,” stammered Gabriel Grub.

“What man wanders among graves and churchyards on such a night as this?” said the goblin.

“Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!” screamed a wild chorus of voices that seemed to fill the churchyard. Gabriel looked fearfully round—nothing was to be seen.

“What have you got in that bottle?” said the goblin.

“Hollands,² Sir,” replied the sexton, trembling more than ever; for he had bought it of the smugglers, and he thought that perhaps his questioner might be in the excise department of the goblins.

“Who drinks Hollands alone, and in a churchyard, on such a night as this?” said the goblin.

“Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!” exclaimed the wild voices again.

The goblin leered maliciously at the terrified sexton, and then raising his voice, exclaimed—

“And who, then, is our fair and lawful prize?”

To this inquiry the invisible chorus replied, in a strain that sounded like the voices of many choristers singing to the mighty swell of the old church organ—a strain that seemed borne to the sexton’s ears upon a gentle wind, and to die away as its soft breath passed onward—but the burden of the reply was still the same, “Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!”

The goblin grinned a broader grin than before, as he said, “Well, Gabriel, what do you say to this?”

The sexton gasped for breath.

“What do you think of this, Gabriel?” said the goblin, kicking up his feet in the air on either side the tombstone, and looking at the turned-up points with as much complacency as if he had been contemplating the most fashionable pair of Wellingtons in all Bond Street.³

“It’s—it’s—very curious, Sir,” replied the sexton, half dead with fright, “very curious, and very pretty, but I think I’ll go back and

finish my work, Sir, if you please.”

“Work!” said the goblin, “what work?”

“The grave, Sir, making the grave,” stammered the sexton.

“Oh, the grave, eh?” said the goblin, “who makes graves at a time when all other men are merry, and takes a pleasure in it?”

Again the mysterious voices replied, “Gabriel Grub! Gabriel Grub!”

“I’m afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,” said the goblin, thrusting his tongue further into his cheek than ever—and a most astonishing tongue it was—“I’m afraid my friends want you, Gabriel,” said the goblin.

“Under favour, Sir,” replied the horror-struck sexton, “I don’t think they can, Sir; they don’t know me, Sir; I don’t think the gentlemen have ever seen me, Sir.”

“Oh yes they have,” replied the goblin; “we know the man with the sulky face and the grim scowl, that came down the street to-night, throwing his evil looks at the children, and grasping his burying spade the tighter. We know the man that struck the boy in the envious malice of his heart, because the boy could be merry, and he could not. We know him, we know him.”

Here the goblin gave a loud shrill laugh, that the echoes returned twenty fold, and throwing his legs up in the air, stood upon his head, or rather upon the very point of his sugar-loaf hat, on the narrow edge of the tombstone, from whence he threw a summerset with extraordinary agility, right to the sexton’s feet, at which he planted himself in the attitude in which tailors generally sit upon the shop-board.

“I—I—am afraid I must leave you, Sir,” said the sexton, making an effort to move.

“Leave us!” said the goblin, “Gabriel Grub going to leave us. Ho! ho! ho!”

As the goblin laughed, the sexton observed for one instant a brilliant illumination within the windows of the church, as if the whole building were lighted up; it disappeared, the organ pealed forth a lively air, and whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart

of the first one, poured into the churchyard, and began playing at leap-frog with the tombstones, never stopping for an instant to take breath, but overing the highest among them, one after the other, with the most marvellous dexterity. The first goblin was a most astonishing leaper, and none of the others could come near him; even in the extremity of his terror the sexton could not help observing, that while his friends were content to leap over the common-sized gravestones, the first one took the family vaults, iron railings and all, with as much ease as if they had been so many street posts.

At last the game reached to a most exciting pitch; the organ played quicker and quicker, and the goblins leaped faster and faster, coiling themselves up, rolling head over heels upon the ground, and bounding over the tombstones like foot-balls. The sexton's brain whirled round with the rapidity of the motion he beheld, and his legs reeled beneath him, as the spirits flew before his eyes, when the goblin king suddenly darting towards him, laid his hand upon his collar, and sank with him through the earth.

When Gabriel Grub had had time to fetch his breath, which the rapidity of his descent had for the moment taken away, he found himself in what appeared to be a large cavern, surrounded on all sides by crowds of goblins, ugly and grim; in the centre of the room, on an elevated seat, was stationed his friend of the churchyard; and close beside him stood Gabriel Grub himself, without the power of motion.

“Cold to-night,” said the king of the goblins, “very cold. A glass of something warm, here.”

At this command, half a dozen officious goblins, with a perpetual smile upon their faces, whom Gabriel Grub imagined to be courtiers, on that account, hastily disappeared, and presently returned with a goblet of liquid fire, which they presented to the king.

“Ah!” said the goblin, whose cheeks and throat were quite transparent, as he tossed down the flame, “This warms one, indeed: bring a bumper of the same, for Mr. Grub.”

It was in vain for the unfortunate sexton to protest that he was not in the habit of taking anything warm at night; for one of the goblins held him while another poured the blazing liquid down his throat, and the whole assembly screeched with laughter as he coughed and choked, and wiped away the tears which gushed plentifully from his eyes, after swallowing the burning draught.

“And now,” said the king, fantastically poking the taper corner of his sugar-loaf hat into the sexton’s eye, and thereby occasioning him the most exquisite pain—“And now, show the man of misery and gloom a few of the pictures from our own great storehouse.”

As the goblin said this, a thick cloud which obscured the further end of the cavern, rolled gradually away, and disclosed, apparently at a great distance, a small and scantily furnished, but neat and clean apartment. A crowd of little children were gathered round a bright fire, clinging to their mother’s gown, and gambolling round her chair. The mother occasionally rose, and drew aside the window-curtain as if to look for some expected object; a frugal meal was ready spread upon the table, and an elbow chair was placed near the fire. A knock was heard at the door: the mother opened it, and the children crowded round her, and clapped their hands for joy, as their father entered. He was wet and weary, and shook the snow from his garments, as the children crowded round him, and seizing his cloak, hat, stick, and gloves, with busy zeal, ran with them from the room. Then as he sat down to his meal before the fire, the children climbed about his knee, and the mother sat by his side, and all seemed happiness and comfort.

But a change came upon the view, almost imperceptibly. The scene was altered to a small bed-room, where the fairest and youngest child lay dying; the roses had fled from his cheek, and the light from his eye; and even as the sexton looked upon him with an interest he had never felt or known before, he died. His young brothers and sisters crowded round his little bed, and seized his tiny hand, so cold and heavy; but they shrunk back from its touch, and looked with awe on his infant face; for calm and tranquil as it was, and sleeping in rest and peace as the beautiful child seemed to be,

they saw that he was dead, and they knew that he was an angel looking down upon, and blessing them, from a bright and happy Heaven.

Again the light cloud passed across the picture, and again the subject changed. The father and mother were old and helpless now, and the number of those about them was diminished more than half; but content and cheerfulness sat on every face, and beamed in every eye, as they crowded round the fireside, and told and listened to old stories of earlier and bygone days. Slowly and peacefully the father sank into the grave, and, soon after, the sharer of all his cares and troubles followed him to a place of rest and peace. The few, who yet survived them, knelt by their tomb, and watered the green turf which covered it with their tears: then rose and turned away, sadly and mournfully, but not with bitter cries, or despairing lamentations, for they knew that they should one day meet again; and once more they mixed with the busy world, and their content and cheerfulness were restored. The cloud settled upon the picture, and concealed it from the sexton's view.

“What do you think of *that*?” said the goblin, turning his large face towards Gabriel Grub.

Gabriel murmured out something about its being very pretty, and looked somewhat ashamed, as the goblin bent his fiery eyes upon him.

“*You* a miserable man!” said the goblin, in a tone of excessive contempt. “*You!*” He appeared disposed to add more, but indignation choked his utterance, so he lifted up one of his very pliable legs, and flourishing it above his head a little, to insure his aim, administered a good sound kick to Gabriel Grub; immediately after which, all the goblins in waiting crowded round the wretched sexton, and kicked him without mercy, according to the established and invariable custom of courtiers upon earth, who kick whom royalty kicks, and hug whom royalty hugs.

“Show him some more,” said the king of the goblins.

At these words the cloud was again dispelled, and a rich and beautiful landscape was disclosed to view—there is just such

another to this day, within half a mile of the old abbey town. The sun shone from out the clear blue sky, the water sparkled beneath his rays, and the trees looked greener, and the flowers more gay, beneath his cheering influence. The water rippled on, with a pleasant sound, the trees rustled in the light wind that murmured among their leaves, the birds sang upon the boughs, and the lark carolled on high, her welcome to the morning. Yes, it was morning, the bright, balmy morning of summer; the minutest leaf, the smallest blade of grass, was instinct with life. The ant crept forth to her daily toil, the butterfly fluttered and basked in the warm rays of the sun; myriads of insects spread their transparent wings, and revelled in their brief but happy existence. Man walked forth, elated with the scene; and all was brightness and splendour.

“*You* a miserable man!” said the king of the goblins, in a more contemptuous tone than before. And again the king of the goblins gave his leg a flourish; again it descended on the shoulders of the sexton; and again the attendant goblins imitated the example of their chief.

Many a time the cloud went and came, and many a lesson it taught to Gabriel Grub, who although his shoulders smarted with pain from the frequent applications of the goblin’s feet thereunto, looked on with an interest which nothing could diminish. He saw that men who worked hard, and earned their scanty bread with lives of labour, were cheerful and happy; and that to the most ignorant, the sweet face of nature was a never-failing source of cheerfulness and joy. He saw those who had been delicately nurtured, and tenderly brought up, cheerful under privations, and superior to suffering, that would have crushed many of a rougher grain, because they bore within their own bosoms the materials of happiness, contentment, and peace. He saw that women, the tenderest and most fragile of all God’s creatures, were the oftenest superior to sorrow, adversity, and distress; and he saw that it was because they bore in their own hearts an inexhaustible well-spring of affection and devotedness. Above all, he saw that men like himself, who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were

the foulest weeds on the fair surface of the earth; and setting all the good of the world against the evil, he came to the conclusion that it was a very decent and respectable sort of world after all. No sooner had he formed it, than the cloud which had closed over the last picture, seemed to settle on his senses, and lull him to repose. One by one, the goblins faded from his sight, and as the last one disappeared, he sunk to sleep.

The day had broken when Gabriel Grub awoke, and found himself lying at full length on the flat gravestone in the churchyard, with the wicker bottle lying empty by his side, and his coat, spade, and lantern, all well whitened by the last night's frost, scattered on the ground. The stone on which he had first seen the goblin seated, stood bolt upright before him, and the grave at which he had worked, the night before, was not far off. At first he began to doubt the reality of his adventures, but the acute pain in his shoulders when he attempted to rise, assured him that the kicking of the goblins was certainly not ideal. He was staggered again, by observing no traces of footsteps in the snow on which the goblins had played at leap-frog with the gravestones, but he speedily accounted for this circumstance when he remembered that being spirits, they would leave no visible impression behind them. So Gabriel Grub got on his feet as well as he could, for the pain in his back; and brushing the frost off his coat, put it on, and turned his face towards the town.

But he was an altered man, and he could not bear the thought of returning to a place where his repentance would be scoffed at, and his reformation disbelieved. He hesitated for a few moments; and then turned away to wander where he might, and seek his bread elsewhere.

The lantern, the spade, and the wicker bottle, were found that day in the churchyard. There were a great many speculations about the sexton's fate at first, but it was speedily determined that he had been carried away by the goblins; and there were not wanting some very credible witnesses who had distinctly seen him whisked through the air on the back of a chestnut horse blind of one eye,

with the hind quarters of a lion, and the tail of a bear. At length all this was devoutly believed; and the new sexton used to exhibit to the curious for a trifling emolument, a good-sized piece of the church weathercock which had been accidentally kicked off by the aforesaid horse in his aërial flight, and picked up by himself in the churchyard, a year or two afterwards.

Unfortunately these stories were somewhat disturbed by the unlooked-for re-appearance of Gabriel Grub himself, some ten years afterwards, a ragged, contented, rheumatic old man. He told his story to the clergyman, and also to the mayor; and in course of time it began to be received as a matter of history, in which form it has continued down to this very day. The believers in the weathercock tale, having misplaced their confidence once, were not easily prevailed upon to part with it again, so they looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders, touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub's having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat tombstone; and they affected to explain what he supposed he had witnessed in the goblin's cavern, by saying that he had seen the world, and grown wiser. But this opinion, which was by no means a popular one at any time, gradually died off; and be the matter how it may, as Gabriel Grub was afflicted with rheumatism to the end of his days, this story has at least one moral, if it teach no better one—and that is, that if a man turns sulky and drinks by himself at Christmas time, he may make up his mind to be not a bit the better for it, let the spirits be ever so good, or let them be even as many degrees beyond proof, as those which Gabriel Grub saw, in the goblin's cavern.

A CHRISTMAS EPISODE FROM *MASTER HUMPHREY'S CLOCK*

I had walked out to cheer myself with the happiness of others, and in the little tokens of festivity and rejoicing of which the streets and houses present so many upon that day, had lost some hours. Now I stopped to look at a merry party hurrying through the snow on foot to their place of meeting, and now turned back to see a whole coachful of children safely deposited at the welcome house. At one time, I admired how carefully the working-man carried the baby in its gaudy hat and feathers, and how his wife, trudging patiently on behind, forgot even her care of her gay clothes, in exchanging greetings with the child as it crowed and laughed over the father's shoulder; at another, I pleased myself with some passing scene of gallantry or courtship, and was glad to believe that for a season half the world of poverty was gay.

As the day closed in, I still rambled through the streets, feeling a companionship in the bright fires that cast their warm reflection on the windows as I passed, and losing all sense of my own loneliness in imagining the sociality and kind-fellowship that everywhere prevailed. At length I happened to stop before a Tavern and encountering a Bill of Fare in the window, it all at once brought it into my head to wonder what kind of people dined alone in Taverns upon Christmas Day.

Solitary men are accustomed, I suppose, unconsciously to look upon solitude as their own peculiar property. I had sat alone in my room on many, many, anniversaries of this great holiday, and had never regarded it but as one of universal assemblage and rejoicing. I had excepted, and with an aching heart, a crowd of prisoners and beggars, but *these* were not the men for whom the Tavern doors were open. Had they any customers, or was it a mere form? a form no doubt.

Trying to feel quite sure of this I walked away, but before I had gone many paces, I stopped and looked back. There was a provoking air of business in the lamp above the door, which I could not overcome. I began to be afraid there might be many customers— young men perhaps struggling with the world, utter strangers in this great place, whose friends lived at a long distance off, and whose means were too slender to enable them to make the journey. The supposition gave rise to so many distressing little pictures that in preference to carrying them home with me, I determined to encounter the realities. So I turned, and walked in.

I was at once glad and sorry to find that there was only one person in the dining-room; glad to know that there were not more, and sorry to think that he should be there by himself. He did not look so old as I, but like me he was advanced in life, and his hair was nearly white. Though I made more noise in entering and seating myself than was quite necessary, with the view of attracting his attention and saluting him in the good old form of that time of year, he did not raise his head but sat with it resting on his hand, musing over his half-finished meal.

I called for something which would give me an excuse for remaining in the room (I had dined early as my housekeeper was engaged at night to partake of some friend's good cheer) and sat where I could observe without intruding on him. After a time he looked up. He was aware that somebody had entered, but could see very little of me as I sat in the shade and he in the light. He was sad and thoughtful, and I forbore to trouble him by speaking.

Let me believe that it was something better than curiosity which riveted my attention and impelled me strongly towards this gentleman. I never saw so patient and kind a face. He should have been surrounded by friends, and yet here he sat dejected and alone when all men had their friends about them. As often as he roused himself from his reverie he would fall into it again, and it was plain that whatever were the subject of his thoughts they were of a melancholy kind, and would not be controlled.

He was not used to solitude. I was sure of that, for I know by myself that if he had been, his manner would have been different and he would have taken some slight interest in the arrival of another. I could not fail to mark that he had no appetite—that he tried to eat in vain—that time after time the plate was pushed away, and he relapsed into his former posture.

His mind was wandering among old Christmas Days, I thought. Many of them sprung up together, not with a long gap between each but in unbroken succession like days of the week. It was a great change to find himself for the first time (I quite settled that it *was* the first) in an empty silent room with no soul to care for. I could not help following him in imagination through crowds of pleasant faces, and then coming back to that dull place with its bough of mistletoe sickening in the gas, and sprigs of holly parched up already by a Simoom of roast and boiled. The very waiter had gone home, and his representative, a poor lean hungry man, was keeping Christmas in his jacket.

I grew still more interested in my friend. His dinner done, a decanter of wine was placed before him. It remained untouched for a long time, but at length with a quivering hand he filled a glass and raised it to his lips. Some tender wish to which he had been accustomed to give utterance on that day, or some beloved name that he had been used to pledge, trembled upon them at the moment. He put it down very hastily—took it up once more—again put it down—pressed his hand upon his face—yes—and tears stole down his cheeks, I am certain.

Without pausing to consider whether I did right or wrong, I stepped across the room, and sitting down beside him laid my hand gently on his arm.

“My friend,” I said, “forgive me if I beseech you to take comfort and consolation from the lips of an old man. I will not preach to you what I have not practised, indeed. Whatever be your grief, be of a good heart—be of a good heart, pray!”

“I see that you speak earnestly,” he replied, “and kindly I am very sure, but—”

I nodded my head to show that I understood what he would say, for I had already gathered from a certain fixed expression in his face and from the attention with which he watched me while I spoke, that his sense of hearing was destroyed. “There should be a freemasonry between us,” said I, pointing from himself to me to explain my meaning—“if not in our grey hairs, at least in our misfortunes. You see that I am but a poor cripple.”

I have never felt so happy under my affliction since the trying moment of my first becoming conscious of it, as when he took my hand in his with a smile that has lighted my path in life from that day, and we sat down side by side.

This was the beginning of my friendship with the deaf gentleman, and when was ever the slight and easy service of a kind word in season, repaid by such attachment and devotion as he has shown to me!

He produced a little set of tablets¹ and a pencil to facilitate our conversation, on that our first acquaintance, and I well remember how awkward and constrained I was in writing down my share of the dialogue, and how easily he guessed my meaning before I had written half of what I had to say. He told me in a faltering voice that he had not been accustomed to be alone on that day—that it had always been a little festival with him—and seeing that I glanced at his dress in the expectation that he wore mourning, he added hastily that it was not that; if it had been, he thought he could have borne it better. From that time to the present we have never touched upon this after dinner, and to recall with affectionate garrulity every circumstance of our first meeting, we always avoid this one as if by mutual consent.

Meantime we have gone on strengthening in our friendship and regard and forming an attachment which, I trust and believe, will only be interrupted by death, to be renewed in another existence. I scarcely know how we communicate as we do, but he has long since ceased to be deaf to me. He is frequently the companion of my walks, and even in crowded streets replies to my slightest look or gesture as though he could read my thoughts. From the vast number

of objects which pass in rapid succession before our eyes, we frequently select the same for some particular notice or remark, and when one of these little coincidences occurs I cannot describe the pleasure that animates my friend, or the beaming countenance he will preserve for half an hour afterwards at least.

He is a great thinker from living so much within himself, and having a lively imagination has a facility of conceiving and enlarging upon odd ideas which renders him invaluable to our little body, and greatly astonishes our two friends. His powers in this respect, are much assisted by a large pipe which he assures us once belonged to a German Student. Be this as it may, it has undoubtedly a very ancient and mysterious appearance, and is of such capacity that it takes three hours and a half to smoke it out. I have reason to believe that my barber who is the chief authority of a knot of gossips who congregate every evening at a small tobacconist's hard by, has related anecdotes of this pipe and the grim figures that are carved upon its bowl at which all the smokers in the neighbourhood have stood aghast, and I know that my housekeeper while she holds it in high veneration, has a superstitious feeling connected with it which would render her exceedingly unwilling to be left alone in its company after dark.

Whatever sorrow my deaf friend has known, and whatever grief may linger in some secret corner of his heart, he is now a cheerful, placid, happy creature. Misfortune can never have fallen upon such a man but for some good purpose, and when I see its traces in his gentle nature and his earnest feeling, I am the less disposed to murmur at such trials as I may have undergone myself. With regard to the pipe, I have a theory of my own; I cannot help thinking that it is in some manner connected with the event that brought us together, for I remember that it was a long time before he even talked about it; that when he did, he grew reserved and melancholy; and that it was a long time yet before he brought it forth. I have no curiosity, however, upon this subject, for I know that it promotes his tranquillity and comfort, and I need no other inducement to regard it with my utmost favour.

Such is the deaf gentleman. I can call up his figure now, clad in sober grey, and seated in the chimney corner. As he puffs out the smoke from his favourite pipe he casts a look on me brimful of cordiality and friendship, and says all manner of kind and genial things in a cheerful smile; then it is not too much to say that I would gladly part with one of my poor limbs, could he but hear the old clock's voice.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

IN PROSE.

BEING

A Ghost Story of Christmas.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN LEECH.



Mr. Fozzings's Ball.

PREFACE

I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their house pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,

C.D.

December 1843.

CONTENTS

STAVE ONE

MARLEY'S GHOST

STAVE TWO

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

STAVE THREE

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

STAVE FOUR

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

STAVE FIVE

THE END OF IT

STAVE ONE

MARLEY'S GHOST

Marley was dead: to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it: and Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change,¹ for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a door-nail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of ironmongery in the trade. But the wisdom of our ancestors² is in the simile; and my unhallowed hands shall not disturb it, or the Country's done for. You will therefore permit me to repeat, emphatically, that Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

The mention of Marley's funeral brings me back to the point I started from. There is no doubt that Marley was dead. This must be distinctly understood, or nothing wonderful can come of the story I am going to relate. If we were not perfectly convinced that Hamlet's Father died before the play began, there would be nothing more remarkable in his taking a stroll at night, in an easterly wind, upon his own ramparts, than there would be in any other middle-aged gentleman rashly turning out after dark in a breezy spot—say Saint Paul's Churchyard for instance—literally to astonish his son's weak mind.³

Scrooge never painted out Old Marley's name. There it stood, years afterwards, above the warehouse door: Scrooge and Marley. The firm was known as Scrooge and Marley. Sometimes people new to the business called Scrooge Scrooge, and sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names: it was all the same to him.

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days;⁴ and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely,⁵ and Scrooge never did.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with gladsome looks, "My dear Scrooge, how are you? when will you come to see me?" No beggars implored him to bestow a trifle, no children asked him what it was o'clock, no man or woman ever once in all his life inquired the way to such and such a place, of Scrooge. Even the blindmen's dogs appeared to know him; and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways and up courts; and then would wag their tails as though they said, "no eye at all is better than an evil eye, dark master!"

But what did Scrooge care? It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human

sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call “nuts”⁶ to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

The door of Scrooge’s counting-house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk’s fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn’t replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter, and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of a strong imagination, he failed.

“A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!” cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge’s nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

“Bah!” said Scrooge, “Humbug!”

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge’s, that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

“Christmas a humbug, uncle!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “You don’t mean that, I am sure?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? what reason have you to be merry? You’re poor enough.”

“Come, then,” returned the nephew gaily. “What right have you to be dismal? what reason have you to be morose? You’re rich enough.”

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said, “Bah!” again; and followed it up with “Humbug.”

“Don’t be cross, uncle,” said the nephew.

“What else can I be” returned the uncle, “when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge, indignantly, “every idiot who goes about with ‘Merry Christmas,’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!”

“Uncle!” pleaded the nephew.

“Nephew!” returned the uncle, sternly, “keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep it in mine.”

“Keep it!” repeated Scrooge’s nephew. “But you don’t keep it.”

“Let me leave it alone, then,” said Scrooge. “Much good may it do you! Much good it has ever done you!”

“There are many things from which I might have derived good, by which I have not profited, I dare say,” returned the nephew: “Christmas among the rest. But I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time: a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they

really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good; and I say, God bless it!”

The clerk in the tank involuntarily applauded: becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

“Let me hear another sound from *you*” said Scrooge, “and you’ll keep your Christmas by losing your situation. You’re quite a powerful speaker, sir,” he added, turning to his nephew. “I wonder you don’t go into Parliament.”

“Don’t be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us to-morrow.”

Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He went the whole length of the expression, and said that he would see him in that extremity first.⁷

“But why?” cried Scrooge’s nephew. “Why?”

“Why did you get married?” said Scrooge.

“Because I fell in love.”

“Because you fell in love!” growled Scrooge, as if that were the only one thing in the world more ridiculous than a merry Christmas. “Good afternoon!”

“Nay, uncle, but you never came to see me before that happened. Why give it as a reason for not coming now?”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I want nothing from you; I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?”

“Good afternoon,” said Scrooge.

“I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

“And A Happy New Year!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, was warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

“There’s another fellow,” muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: “my clerk, with fifteen shillings a-week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I’ll retire to Bedlam.”⁸

This lunatic, in letting Scrooge’s nephew out, had let two other people in. They were portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold, and now stood, with their hats off, in Scrooge’s office. They had books and papers in their hands, and bowed to him.

“Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe,” said one of the gentlemen, referring to his list. “Have I the pleasure of addressing Mr. Scrooge, or Mr. Marley?”

“Mr. Marley has been dead these seven years,” Scrooge replied. “He died seven years ago, this very night.”

“We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner,” said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word “liberality,” Scrooge frowned, and shook his head, and handed the credentials back.

“At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge,” said the gentleman, taking up a pen, “it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir.”

“Are there no prisons?” asked Scrooge.

“Plenty of prisons,” said the gentleman, laying down the pen again.

“And the Union workhouses?”⁹ demanded Scrooge. “Are they still in operation?”

“They are. Still,” returned the gentleman, “I wish I could say they were not.”

“The Treadmill and the Poor Law are in full vigour, then?” said Scrooge.

“Both very busy, sir.”

“Oh! I was afraid, from what you said at first, that something had occurred to stop them in their useful course,” said Scrooge. “I’m very glad to hear it.”

“Under the impression that they scarcely furnish Christian cheer of mind or body to the multitude,” returned the gentleman, “a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?”

“Nothing!” Scrooge replied.

“You wish to be anonymous?”

“I wish to be left alone,” said Scrooge. “Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas, and I can’t afford to make idle people merry. I help to support the establishments I have mentioned: they cost enough: and those who are badly off must go there.”

“Many can’t go there; and many would rather die.”

“If they would rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.¹⁰ Besides—excuse me—I don’t know that.”

“But you might know it,” observed the gentleman.

“It’s not my business,” Scrooge returned. “It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people’s. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!”

Seeing clearly that it would be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links,¹¹ proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient

tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards, as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there. The cold became intense. In the main street, at the corner of the court, some labourers were repairing the gas-pipes, and had lighted a great fire in a brazier, round which a party of ragged men and boys were gathered: warming their hands and winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp-heat of the windows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, with which it was next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and blood-thirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean wife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier yet, and colder! Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons,¹² then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed and mumbled by the hungry cold as bones are gnawed by dogs, stooped down at Scrooge's keyhole to regale him with a Christmas carol: but at the first sound of—

“God bless you merry gentleman!
May nothing you dismay!”¹³

Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more

congenial frost.

At length the hour of shutting up the counting-house arrived. With an ill-will Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

“You’ll want all day to-morrow, I suppose?” said Scrooge.

“If quite convenient, sir.”

“It’s not convenient,” said Scrooge, “and it’s not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown for it, you’d think yourself ill used, I’ll be bound?”

The clerk smiled faintly.

“And yet,” said Scrooge, “you don’t think *me* ill used, when I pay a day’s wages for no work.”

The clerk observed that it was only once a year.

“A poor excuse for picking a man’s pocket every twenty-fifth of December!” said Scrooge, buttoning his great-coat to the chin. “But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning!”¹⁴

The clerk promised that he would; and Scrooge walked out with a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, with the long ends of his white comforter dangling below his waist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour of its being Christmas-eve, and then ran home to Camden Town¹⁵ as hard as he could pelt, to play at blindman’s-buff.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and having read all the newspapers, and beguiled the rest of the evening with his banker’s-book, went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his deceased partner. They were a gloomy suite of rooms, in a lowering pile of building up a yard, where it had so little business to be, that one could scarcely help fancying it must have run there when it was a young house, playing at hide-and-seek with other houses, and have forgotten the way out again. It was old enough now, and dreary enough, for nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as

offices. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, was fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather¹⁶ sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except that it was very large. It is also a fact, that Scrooge had seen it night and morning during his whole residence in that place; also that Scrooge had as little of what is called fancy about him as any man in the City of London, even including—which is a bold word—the corporation, aldermen, and livery.¹⁷ Let it also be borne in mind that Scrooge had not bestowed one thought on Marley, since his last mention of his seven-years' dead partner that afternoon. And then let any man explain to me, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker, without its undergoing any intermediate process of change: not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard were, but had a dismal light about it, like a bad lobster in a dark cellar. It was not angry or ferocious, but looked at Scrooge as Marley used to look: with ghostly spectacles turned up upon its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by breath or hot-air; and though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, made it horrible; but its horror seemed to be, in spite of the face and beyond its control, rather than a part of its own expression.

As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, would be untrue. But he put his hand upon the key he had relinquished, turned it sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

He *did* pause, with a moment's irresolution, before he shut the door; and he *did* look cautiously behind it first, as if he half-

expected to be terrified with the sight of Marley's pigtail sticking out into the hall. But there was nothing on the back of the door, except the screws and nuts that held the knocker on; so he said "Pooh, pooh!" and closed it with a bang.

The sound resounded through the house like thunder. Every room above, and every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and up the stairs: slowly too: trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young Act of Parliament;¹⁸ but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar¹⁹ towards the wall, and the door towards the balustrades: and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half a dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it was pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.²⁰

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that: darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bed-room, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was not his custom. Thus secured against surprise, he took off his cravat; put on his dressing-gown and

slippers, and his nightcap; and sat down before the fire to take his gruel.

It was a very low fire indeed; nothing on such a bitter night. He was obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels; Pharaoh's daughters, Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod,²¹ and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, with power to shape some picture on its surface from the disjointed fragments of his thoughts, there would have been a copy of old Marley's head on every one.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge; and walked across the room.

After several turns, he sat down again. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was with great astonishment, and with a strange, inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house.

This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. The bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below; as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open with a booming sound, and then he heard the noise much louder, on the floors below; then coming up the stairs; then coming straight towards his door.

"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it."

His colour changed though, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. Upon its coming in, the dying flame leaped up, as though it cried “I know him! Marley’s Ghost!” and fell again.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it was made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent: so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels,²² but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. Though he looked the phantom through and through, and saw it standing before him; though he felt the chilling influence of its death-cold eyes; and marked the very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before: he was still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

“How now!” said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. “What do you want with me?”

“Much!”—Marley’s voice, no doubt about it.

“Who are you?”

“Ask me who I *was*.”

“Who *were* you then?” said Scrooge, raising his voice. “You’re particular—for a shade.” He was going to say “*to* a shade,” but substituted this, as more appropriate.

“In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley.”

“Can you—can you sit down?” asked Scrooge, looking doubtfully at him.

“I can.”

“Do it then.”

Scrooge asked the question, because he didn't know whether a ghost so transparent might find himself in a condition to take a chair; and felt that in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of an embarrassing explanation. But the ghost sat down on the opposite side of the fireplace, as if he were quite used to it.

"You don't believe in me," observed the Ghost.

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"What evidence would you have of my reality, beyond that of your senses?"

"I don't know," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheats. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of an underdone potato. There's more of gravy than of grave about you, whatever you are!"

Scrooge was not much in the habit of cracking jokes, nor did he feel, in his heart, by any means waggish then. The truth is, that he tried to be smart, as a means of distracting his own attention, and keeping down his terror; for the spectre's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit, staring at those fixed, glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, would play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There was something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this was clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, were still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.



Marley's Ghost.

“You see this toothpick?” said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it were only for a second, to divert the vision’s stony gaze from himself.

“I do,” replied the Ghost.

“You are not looking at it,” said Scrooge.

“But I see it,” said the Ghost, “notwithstanding.”

“Well!” returned Scrooge. “I have but to swallow this, and be for the rest of my days persecuted by a legion of goblins, all of my own creation. Humbug, I tell you—humbug!”

At this, the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling in a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear in-doors, its lower jaw dropped down upon its breast!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, and clasped his hands before his face.

“Mercy!” he said. “Dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?”

“Man of the worldly mind!” replied the Ghost, “do you believe in me or not?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I must. But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?”

“It is required of every man,” the Ghost returned, “that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellow-men, and travel far and wide; and if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!”

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

“You are fettered,” said Scrooge, trembling. “Tell me why?”

“I wear the chain I forged in life,” replied the Ghost. “I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you*?”

Scrooge trembled more and more.

“Or would you know,” pursued the Ghost, “the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!”

Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable: but he could see nothing.

“Jacob,” he said, imploringly. “Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob.”

“I have none to give,” the Ghost replied. “It comes from other regions, Ebenezer Scrooge, and is conveyed by other ministers, to other kinds of men. Nor can I tell you what I would. A very little more is all permitted to me. I cannot rest, I cannot stay, I cannot linger anywhere. My spirit never walked beyond our counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and weary journeys lie before me!”

It was a habit with Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost

had said, he did so now, but without lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

“You must have been very slow about it, Jacob,” Scrooge observed, in a business-like manner, though with humility and deference.

“Slow!” the Ghost repeated.

“Seven years dead,” mused Scrooge. “And travelling all the time?”

“The whole time,” said the Ghost. “No rest, no peace. Incessant torture of remorse.”

“You travel fast?” said Scrooge.

“On the wings of the wind,” replied the Ghost.

“You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven years,” said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward²³ would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

“Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed,” cried the phantom, “not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. Not to know that any Christian spirit working kindly in its little sphere, whatever it may be, will find its mortal life too short for its vast means of usefulness. Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life’s opportunity misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!”

“But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,” faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

“Business!” cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. “Mankind was my business. The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!”

It held up its chain at arm’s length, as if that were the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

“At this time of the rolling year,” the spectre said, “I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow-beings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a poor abode? Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted *me!*”

Scrooge was very much dismayed to hear the spectre going on at this rate, and began to quake exceedingly.

“Hear me!” cried the Ghost. “My time is nearly gone.”

“I will,” said Scrooge. “But don’t be hard upon me! Don’t be flowery, Jacob! Pray!”

“How it is that I appear before you in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day.”

It was not an agreeable idea. Scrooge shivered, and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

“That is no light part of my penance,” pursued the Ghost. “I am here to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer.”

“You were always a good friend to me,” said Scrooge. “Thank’ee!”

“You will be haunted,” resumed the Ghost, “by Three Spirits.”

Scrooge’s countenance fell almost as low as the Ghost’s had done.

“Is that the chance and hope you mentioned, Jacob?” he demanded, in a faltering voice.

“It is.”

“I—I think I’d rather not,” said Scrooge.

“Without their visits,” said the Ghost, “you cannot hope to shun the path I tread. Expect the first to-morrow, when the bell tolls one.”

“Couldn’t I take ’em all at once, and have it over, Jacob?” hinted Scrooge.

“Expect the second on the next night at the same hour. The third upon the next night when the last stroke of twelve has ceased to vibrate. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us!”

When it had said these words, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were within two paces of each other, Marley's Ghost held up its hand, warning him to come no nearer. Scrooge stopped.

Not so much in obedience, as in surprise and fear: for on the raising of the hand, he became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge; and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.



Scrooge followed to the window: desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them wore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white waistcoat, with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

Whether these creatures faded into mist, or mist enshrouded them, he could not tell. But they and their spirit voices faded together; and the night became as it had been when he walked home.

Scrooge closed the window, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it with his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the lateness of the hour, much in need of repose; went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE TWO

THE FIRST OF THE THREE SPIRITS

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent window from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring church struck the four quarters. So he listened for the hour.

To his great astonishment the heavy bell went on from six to seven, and from seven to eight, and regularly up to twelve; then stopped. Twelve! It was past two when he went to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve; and stopped.

“Why, it isn’t possible,” said Scrooge, “that I can have slept through a whole day and far into another night. It isn’t possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve at noon!”

The idea being an alarming one, he scrambled out of bed, and groped his way to the window. He was obliged to rub the frost off with the sleeve of his dressing-gown before he could see anything; and could see very little then. All he could make out was, that it was still very foggy and extremely cold, and that there was no noise of people running to and fro, and making a great stir, as there unquestionably would have been if night had beaten off bright day, and taken possession of the world. This was a great relief, because “three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order,” and so forth, would have become a mere United States’ security²⁴ if there were no days to count by.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought. Marley’s Ghost

bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it was all a dream, his mind flew back again, like a strong spring released, to its first position, and presented the same problem to be worked all through, "Was it a dream or not?"

Scrooge lay in this state until the chimes had gone three quarters more, when he remembered, on a sudden, that the Ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. He resolved to lie awake until the hour was passed; and, considering that he could no more go to sleep than go to Heaven, this was perhaps the wisest resolution in his power.

The quarter was so long, that he was more than once convinced he must have sunk into a doze unconsciously, and missed the clock. At length it broke upon his listening ear.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter past," said Scrooge, counting.

"Ding, dong!"

"Half past!" said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"A quarter to it," said Scrooge.

"Ding, dong!"

"The hour itself," said Scrooge, triumphantly, "and nothing else!"

He spoke before the hour bell sounded, which it now did with a deep, dull, hollow, melancholy ONE. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn.

The curtains of his bed were drawn aside, I tell you, by a hand. Not the curtains at his feet, nor the curtains at his back, but those to which his face was addressed. The curtains of his bed were drawn aside; and Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow.

It was a strange figure—like a child: yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium, which gave

him the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold were of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, were, like those upper members, bare. It wore a tunic of the purest white; and round its waist was bound a lustrous belt, the sheen of which was beautiful. It held a branch of fresh green holly in its hand; and, in singular contradiction of that wintry emblem, had its dress trimmed with summer flowers. But the strangest thing about it was, that from the crown of its head there sprung a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible; and which was doubtless the occasion of its using, in its duller moments, a great extinguisher for a cap, which it now held under its arm.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, was *not* its strangest quality. For as its belt sparkled and glittered now in one part and now in another, and what was light one instant, at another time was dark, so the figure itself fluctuated in its distinctness: being now a thing with one arm, now with one leg, now with twenty legs, now a pair of legs without a head, now a head without a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline would be visible in the dense gloom wherein they melted away. And in the very wonder of this, it would be itself again; distinct and clear as ever.

“Are you the Spirit, sir, whose coming was foretold to me?” asked Scrooge.

“I am!”

The voice was soft and gentle. Singularly low, as if instead of being so close beside him, it were at a distance.

“Who, and what are you?” Scrooge demanded.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

“Long Past?” inquired Scrooge: observant of its dwarfish stature.

“No. Your past.”

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

“What!” exclaimed the Ghost, “would you so soon put out, with worldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that you are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!”

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend, or any knowledge of having wilfully “bonneted”²⁵ the Spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

“Your welfare!” said the Ghost.

Scrooge expressed himself much obliged, but could not help thinking that a night of unbroken rest would have been more conducive to that end. The Spirit must have heard him thinking for it said immediately:

“Your reclamation, then. Take heed!”

It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped him gently by the arm.

“Rise! and walk with me!”

It would have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was warm, and the thermometer a long way below freezing; that he was clad but lightly in his slippers, dressing-gown, and nightcap; and that he had a cold upon him at that time. The grasp, though gentle as a woman’s hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped its robe in supplication.

“I am a mortal,” Scrooge remonstrated, “and liable to fall.”

“Bear but a touch of my hand *there*,” said the Spirit, laying it upon his heart, “and you shall be upheld in more than this!”

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and stood upon an open country road, with fields on either hand. The city had entirely vanished. Not a vestige of it was to be seen. The

darkness and the mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

“Good Heaven!” said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. “I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!”

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man’s sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odours floating in the air, each one connected with a thousand thoughts, and hopes, and joys, and cares long, long, forgotten!

“Your lip is trembling,” said the Ghost. “And what is that upon your cheek?”

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

“You recollect the way?” inquired the Spirit.

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge with fervour—“I could walk it blindfold.”

“Strange to have forgotten it for so many years!” observed the Ghost. “Let us go on.”

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting towards them with boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys were in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields were so full of merry music, that the crisp air laughed to hear it.

“These are but shadows of the things that have been,” said the Ghost. “They have no consciousness of us.”

The jocund travellers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why was he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they went past! Why was he filled with gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-ways, for their several homes! What was merry Christmas

to Scrooge? Out upon merry Christmas! What good had it ever done to him?

“The school is not quite deserted,” said the Ghost. “A solitary child, neglected by his friends, is left there still.”

Scrooge said he knew it. And he sobbed.

They left the high-road, by a well remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, with a little weathercock-surmounted cupola on the roof,²⁶ and a bell hanging in it. It was a large house, but one of broken fortunes; for the spacious offices were little used, their walls were damp and mossy, their windows broken, and their gates decayed. Fowls clucked and strutted in the stables; and the coach-houses and sheds were over-run with grass. Nor was it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They went, the Ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed waterspout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty storehouse door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but fell upon the heart of Scrooge²⁷ with a softening influence, and gave a freer passage to his tears.

The Spirit touched him on the arm, and pointed to his younger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: wonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the window,

with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading an ass laden with wood by the bridle.

“Why, it’s Ali Baba!” Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. “It’s dear old honest Ali Baba!²⁸ Yes, yes, I know! One Christmas time, when yonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine,” said Scrooge, “and his wild brother, Orson;²⁹ there they go! And what’s his name, who was put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don’t you see him! And the Sultan’s Groom turned upside-down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I’m glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess!”

To hear Scrooge expending all the earnestness of his nature on such subjects, in a most extraordinary voice between laughing and crying; and to see his heightened and excited face; would have been a surprise to his business friends in the city, indeed.

“There’s the Parrot!” cried Scrooge. “Green body and yellow tail, with a thing like a lettuce growing out of the top of his head; there he is! Poor Robin Crusoe, he called him, when he came home again after sailing round the island. ‘Poor Robin Crusoe, where have you been, Robin Crusoe?’ The man thought he was dreaming, but he wasn’t. It was the Parrot, you know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek!³⁰ Halloa! Hoop! Halloo!”

Then, with a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, “Poor boy!” and cried again.

“I wish,” Scrooge muttered, putting his hand in his pocket, and looking about him, after drying his eyes with his cuff: “but it’s too late now.”

“What is the matter?” asked the Spirit.

“Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There was a boy singing a Christmas Carol at my door last night. I should like to have given him something: that’s all.”

The Ghost smiled thoughtfully, and waved its hand: saying as it did so, “Let us see another Christmas!”

Scrooge's former self grew larger at the words, and the room became a little darker and more dirty. The panels shrunk, the windows cracked; fragments of plaster fell out of the ceiling, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this was brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it was quite correct; that everything had happened so; that there he was, alone again, when all the other boys had gone home for the jolly holidays.

He was not reading now, but walking up and down despairingly. Scrooge looked at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door.

It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear, dear brother."

"I have come to bring you home, dear brother!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "To bring you home, home, home!"

"Home, little Fan?" returned the boy.

"Yes!" said the child, brimful of glee. "Home, for good and all. Home, for ever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be, that home's like Heaven! He spoke so gently to me one dear night when I was going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if you might come home; and he said Yes, you should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And you're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"You are quite a woman, little Fan!" exclaimed the boy.

She clapped her hands and laughed, and tried to touch his head; but being too little, laughed again, and stood on tiptoe to embrace him. Then she began to drag him, in her childish eagerness, towards the door; and he, nothing loth to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw

him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old well of a shivering best-parlour that ever was seen, where the maps upon the wall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the windows were waxy with cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the young people: at the same time, sending out a meagre servant to offer a glass of “something” to the postboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it was the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge’s trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-bye right willingly; and getting into it, drove gaily down the garden-sweep: the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray.

“Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered,” said the Ghost. “But she had a large heart!”

“So she had,” cried Scrooge. “You’re right. I’ll not gainsay it, Spirit. God forbid!”

“She died a woman,” said the Ghost, “and had, as I think, children.”

“One child,” Scrooge returned.

“True,” said the Ghost. “Your nephew!”

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, “Yes.”

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of a city, where shadowy passengers passed and repassed; where shadowy carts and coaches battled for the way, and all the strife and tumult of a real city were. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it was Christmas time again; but it was evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

“Know it!” said Scrooge. “Was I apprenticed here?”

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Welch wig,³¹ sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, Scrooge cried in great excitement:

“Why, it’s old Fezziwig! Bless his heart; it’s Fezziwig alive again!”

Old Fezziwig laid down his pen, and looked up at the clock, which pointed to the hour of seven. He rubbed his hands; adjusted his capacious waistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to his organ of benevolence;³² and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

“Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!”

Scrooge’s former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in, accompanied by his fellow-’prentice.

“Dick Wilkins, to be sure!” said Scrooge to the Ghost. “Bless me, yes. There he is. He was very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!”

“Yo ho, my boys!” said Fezziwig. “No more work to-night. Christmas Eve, Dick. Christmas, Ebenezer! Let’s have the shutters up,” cried old Fezziwig, with a sharp clap of his hands, “before a man can say, Jack Robinson!”

You wouldn’t believe how those two fellows went at it! They charged into the street with the shutters—one, two, three—had ’em up in their places—four, five, six—barred ’em and pinned ’em—seven, eight, nine—and came back before you could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

“Hilli-ho!” cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, with wonderful agility. “Clear away, my lads, and let’s have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!”

Clear away! There was nothing they wouldn’t have cleared away, or couldn’t have cleared away, with old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire;

and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter's night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, and went up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her Mistress. In they all came, one after another; some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly, some pushing, some pulling; in they all came, anyhow and everyhow. Away they all went, twenty couple at once, hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round in various stages of affectionate grouping; old top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them. When this result was brought about, old Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter, especially provided for that purpose. But scorning rest upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter; and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus,³³ and there was a great piece of Cold Roast, and there was a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de

Coverley.”³⁴ Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of work cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled with; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of walking.

But if they had been twice as many: ah, four times: old Fezziwig would have been a match for them, and so would Mrs. Fezziwig. As to *her*, she was worthy to be his partner in every sense of the term. If that’s not high praise, tell me higher, and I’ll use it. A positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig’s calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. You couldn’t have predicted, at any given time, what would become of ’em next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, hold hands with your partner; bow and curtsy; corkscrew; thread-the-needle, and back again to your place; Fezziwig “cut”³⁵—cut so deftly, that he appeared to wink with his legs, and came upon his feet again without a stagger.

When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side the door, and shaking hands with every person individually as he or she went out, wished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two ’prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads were left to their beds; which were under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his wits. His heart and soul were in the scene, and with his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It was not until now, when the bright faces of his former self and Dick were turned from them, that he remembered the Ghost, and became conscious that it was looking full upon him, while the light upon its head burnt very clear.

“A small matter,” said the Ghost, “to make these silly folks so full of gratitude.”

“Small!” echoed Scrooge.

The Spirit signed to him to listen to the two apprentices, who were pouring out their hearts in praise of Fezziwig: and when he had done so, said,

“Why! Is it not? He has spent but a few pounds of your mortal money: three or four, perhaps. Is that so much that he deserves this praise?”

“It isn’t that,” said Scrooge, heated by the remark, and speaking unconsciously like his former, not his latter, self. “It isn’t that, Spirit. He has the power to render us happy or unhappy; to make our service light or burdensome; a pleasure or a toil. Say that his power lies in words and looks; in things so slight and insignificant that it is impossible to add and count ’em up: what then? The happiness he gives, is quite as great as if it cost a fortune.”

He felt the Spirit’s glance, and stopped.

“What is the matter?” asked the Ghost.

“Nothing particular,” said Scrooge.

“Something, I think?” the Ghost insisted.

“No,” said Scrooge, “No. I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That’s all.”

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the wish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

“My time grows short,” observed the Spirit. “Quick!”

This was not addressed to Scrooge, or to any one whom he could see, but it produced an immediate effect. For again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had not the harsh and rigid lines of later years; but it had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. There was an eager, greedy, restless motion in the eye, which showed the passion that had taken root, and where the shadow of the growing tree would fall.

He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there were tears, which sparkled in the light that shone out of the Ghost of Christmas Past.

“It matters little,” she said, softly. “To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; and if it can cheer and comfort you in time to

come, as I would have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.”

“What Idol has displaced you?” he rejoined.

“A golden one.”

“This is the even-handed dealing of the world!” he said. “There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn with such severity as the pursuit of wealth!”

“You fear the world too much,” she answered, gently. “All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off one by one, until the master-passion, Gain, engrosses you. Have I not?”

“What then?” he retorted. “Even if I have grown so much wiser, what then? I am not changed towards you.”

She shook her head.

“Am I?”

“Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, you were another man.”

“I was a boy,” he said impatiently.

“Your own feeling tells you that you were not what you are,” she returned. “I am. That which promised happiness when we were one in heart, is fraught with misery now that we are two. How often and how keenly I have thought of this, I will not say. It is enough that I *have* thought of it, and can release you.”

“Have I ever sought release?”

“In words. No. Never.”

“In what, then?”

“In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. In everything that made my love of any worth or value in your sight. If this had never been between us,” said the girl, looking mildly, but with steadiness, upon him; “tell me, would you seek me out and try to win me now? Ah, no!”

He seemed to yield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said, with a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows! When *I* have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if you were free to-day, to-morrow, yesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, in your very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to your one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that your repentance and regret would surely follow? I do; and I release you. With a full heart, for the love of him you once were."

He was about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed.

"You may—the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will—have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that you awoke. May you be happy in the life you have chosen!"

She left him; and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge, "show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do you delight to torture me?"

"One shadow more!" exclaimed the Ghost.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!"

But the relentless Ghost pinioned him in both his arms, and forced him to observe what happened next.

They were in another scene and place: a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like the last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem,³⁶ they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were

uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the young brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I wouldn't for the wealth of all the world have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I wouldn't have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport, as they did, bold young brood, I couldn't have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And yet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose waves of hair, an inch of which would be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest licence of a child, and yet been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she with laughing face and plundered dress was borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden with Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter! The scaling him with chairs for ladders, to dive into his pockets, despoil him of brown-paper parcels, hold on tight by his cravat, hug him round the neck, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which the development of every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan into his mouth, and was more than suspected of having swallowed a fictitious turkey, glued on a wooden platter! The immense relief of finding this a false alarm! The joy, and gratitude, and ecstasy! They are all indescribable alike. It is enough that by degrees the children and their emotions got out of the

parlour and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

“Belle,” said the husband, turning to his wife with a smile, “I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon.”

“Who was it?”

“Guess!”

“How can I? Tut, don’t I know,” she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. “Mr. Scrooge.”

“Mr. Scrooge it was. I passed his office window; and as it was not shut up, and he had a candle inside, I could scarcely help seeing him. His partner lies upon the point of death, I hear; and there he sat alone. Quite alone in the world, I do believe.”

“Spirit!” said Scrooge in a broken voice, “remove me from this place.”

“I told you these were shadows of the things that have been,” said the Ghost. “That they are what they are, do not blame me!”

“Remove me!” Scrooge exclaimed. “I cannot bear it!”

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him with a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled with it.



“Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

In the struggle, if that can be called a struggle in which the Ghost with no visible resistance on its own part was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge observed that its light was burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that with its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action pressed it down upon its head.

The Spirit dropped beneath it, so that the extinguisher covered its whole form; but though Scrooge pressed it down with all his force, he could not hide the light: which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He was conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE

THE SECOND OF THE THREE SPIRITS

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But, finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to wonder which of his curtains this new spectre would draw back, he put them every one aside with his own hands; and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For he wished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not wish to be taken by surprise and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted with a move or two, and being usually equal to the time-of-day,³⁷ express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss³⁸ to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don't mind calling on you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with a violent fit of trembling. Five minutes, ten minutes, a quarter of an hour went by, yet nothing came. All this time, he lay upon his bed, the very core and centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which being only light,

was more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion,³⁹ without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and would unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room: from whence, on further tracing it, it seemed to shine. This idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

The moment Scrooge's hand was on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes,⁴⁰ and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch, in shape not unlike Plenty's horn, and held it up, high up, to shed its light on Scrooge, as he came peeping round the door.

“Come in!” exclaimed the Ghost. “Come in! and know me better, man!”



Scrooge's third Visitor.

Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before this Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and though the Spirit's eyes were clear and kind, he did not like to meet them.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Present,” said the Spirit. “Look upon me!”

Scrooge reverently did so. It was clothed in one simple deep green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast was bare, as if disdaining to be warded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it wore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there with shining icicles. Its dark brown curls were long and free: free as its genial face, its sparkling eye, its open hand, its cheery voice, its unconstrained demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle was an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

“You have never seen the like of me before!” exclaimed the Spirit.

“Never,” Scrooge made answer to it.

“Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?” pursued the Phantom.

“I don’t think I have,” said Scrooge. “I am afraid I have not. Have you had many brothers, Spirit?”

“More than eighteen hundred,” said the Ghost.

“A tremendous family to provide for!” muttered Scrooge.

The Ghost of Christmas Present rose.

“Spirit,” said Scrooge submissively, “conduct me where you will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is working now. To-night, if you have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.”

“Touch my robe!”

Scrooge did as he was told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, meat, pigs, sausages, oysters, pies, puddings, fruit, and punch, all vanished instantly. So did the room, the fire, the ruddy glow, the hour of night, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the weather was severe) the people made a rough, but brisk and not unpleasant kind of music, in scraping the snow from the pavement in front of their dwellings, and from the tops of their houses:⁴¹ whence it was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting with the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and with the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons; furrows that crossed and re-crossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off, and made intricate channels, hard to trace, in the thick yellow mud and icy water. The

sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shovelling away on the housetops were jovial and full of glee; calling out to one another from the parapets, and now and then exchanging a facetious snowball—better-natured missile far than many a wordy jest—laughing heartily if it went right, and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops were still half open, and the fruiterers' were radiant in their glory. There were great round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars; and winking from their shelves in wanton slyness at the girls as they went by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might water gratis as they passed; there were piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient walks among the woods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins,⁴² squab and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish,⁴³ set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there was something going on; and, to a fish, went gasping round and round their little world in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers'! oh the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee were so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins were so plentiful and rare, the almonds so extremely white, the sticks of cinnamon so long and straight, the other spices so delicious, the candied fruits so caked and spotted with molten sugar as to make the coldest lookers-on feel faint and subsequently bilious. Nor was it that the figs were moist and pulpy, or that the French plums blushed in modest tartness from their highly-decorated boxes, or that everything was good to eat and in its Christmas dress: but the customers were all so hurried and so eager in the hopeful promise of the day, that they tumbled up against each other at the door, clashing their wicker baskets wildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at⁴⁴ if they chose.

But soon the steeples called good people all, to church and chapel, and away they came, flocking through the streets in their best clothes, and with their gayest faces. And at the same time there emerged from scores of bye streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops.⁴⁵ The sight of these poor revellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a baker's doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners from his torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour was restored

directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it was!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers' were shut up; and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Would it apply to any kind of dinner on this day?" asked Scrooge.

"To any kindly given. To a poor one most."

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.

"Because it needs it most."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, "I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You would deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't you?"

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?"⁴⁶ said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."

"I seek!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.

"There are some upon this earth of yours," returned the Spirit, "who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us."

Scrooge promised that he would; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's) that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

And perhaps it was the pleasure the good Spirit had in showing off this power of his, or else it was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit's dwelling with the sprinkling of his torch. Think of that! Bob had but fifteen "Bob" a-week himself; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and yet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and make a goodly show for sixpence; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter Cratchit plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt-collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table, and exalted Master Peter Cratchit to the skies, while he (not proud, although his collars nearly choked him) blew the fire, until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan-lid to be let out and peeled.

“What has ever got your precious father then,” said Mrs. Cratchit. “And your brother, Tiny Tim; and Martha warn’t as late last Christmas Day by half-an-hour!”

“Here’s Martha, mother!” said a girl, appearing as she spoke.

“Here’s Martha, mother!” cried the two young Cratchits. “Hurrah! There’s *such* a goose, Martha!”

“Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!” said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her a dozen times, and taking off her shawl and bonnet for her, with officious zeal.

“We’d a deal of work to finish up last night,” replied the girl, “and had to clear away this morning, mother!”

“Well! Never mind so long as you are come,” said Mrs. Cratchit. “Sit ye down before the fire, my dear, and have a warm, Lord bless ye!”

“No no! There’s father coming,” cried the two young Cratchits, who were everywhere at once. “Hide Martha, hide!”

So Martha hid herself, and in came little Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, hanging down before him; and his thread-bare clothes darned up and brushed, to look seasonable; and Tiny Tim upon his shoulder. Alas for Tiny Tim, he bore a little crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame!

“Why, where’s our Martha?” cried Bob Cratchit looking round.

“Not coming,” said Mrs. Cratchit.

“Not coming!” said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim’s blood horse⁴⁷ all the way from church, and had come home rampant. “Not coming upon Christmas Day!”

Martha didn’t like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits hustled Tiny Tim, and bore him off into the wash-house, that he might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

“And how did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity and Bob had hugged his daughter to his heart’s content.

“As good as gold,” said Bob, “and better. Somehow he gets thoughtful sitting by himself so much, and thinks the strangest things you ever heard. He told me, coming home, that he hoped the people saw him in the church, because he was a cripple, and it might be pleasant to them to remember upon Christmas Day, who made lame beggars walk and blind men see.”⁴⁸

Bob’s voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim was growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch was heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another word was spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they were capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds; a feathered phenomenon, to which a black swan⁴⁹ was a matter of course; and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy (ready beforehand in a little saucepan) hissing hot; Master Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and when the long expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one

murmur of delight arose all round the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never was such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever was such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by the apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family; indeed, as Mrs. Cratchit said with great delight (surveying one small atom of a bone upon the dish), they hadn't ate it all at last! Yet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onion to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room alone—too nervous to bear witnesses—to take the pudding up, and bring it in.

Suppose it should not be done enough! Suppose it should break in turning out! Suppose somebody should have got over the wall of the back-yard, and stolen it, while they were merry with the goose: a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors were supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding was out of the copper. A smell like a washing-day! That was the cloth. A smell like an eating-house, and a pastry cook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the pudding. In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered: flushed, but smiling proudly: with the pudding, like a speckled cannon-ball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top.

Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and calmly too, that he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage. Mrs. Cratchit said that now the weight was off her mind, she would confess she had had her doubts about the quantity of flour. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was at all a small pudding for a large family. It would have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit would have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovel-full of chestnuts on the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew round the hearth, in what Bob Cratchit called a circle, meaning half a one; and at Bob Cratchit's elbow stood the family display of glass; two tumblers, and a custard-cup without a handle.

These held the hot stuff from the jug, however, as well as golden goblets would have done; and Bob served it out with beaming looks, while the chestnuts on the fire sputtered and crackled noisily. Then Bob proposed:

“A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!”

Which all the family re-echoed.

“God bless us every one!” said Tiny Tim, the last of all.

He sat very close to his father's side, upon his little stool. Bob held his withered little hand in his, as if he loved the child, and wished to keep him by his side, and dreaded that he might be taken from him.

“Spirit,” said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, “tell me if Tiny Tim will live.”

“I see a vacant seat,” replied the Ghost, “in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die.”

“No, no,” said Scrooge. “Oh no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared.”

“If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race,” returned the Ghost, “will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.”

Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and was overcome with penitence and grief.

“Man,” said the Ghost, “if man you be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, you are more

worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the Insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!"

Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name.

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!"

"The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."

"My dear," said Bob, "the children; Christmas Day."

"It should be Christmas Day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is, Robert! Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow!"

"My dear," was Bob's mild answer, "Christmas Day."

"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, "not for his. Long life to him! A merry Christmas and a happy new year!—he'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which was not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done with. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who was

a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do, and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie a-bed tomorrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "was much about as tall as Peter"; at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and bye and bye they had a song, about a lost child travelling in the snow, from Tiny Tim; who had a plaintive little voice, and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawn-broker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another, and contented with the time; and when they faded, and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially on Tiny Tim, until the last.

By this time it was getting dark, and snowing pretty heavily; and as Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, with hot plates baking through and through before the fire, and deep red curtains, ready to be drawn, to shut out cold and darkness. There, all the children of the house were running out into the snow to meet their married sisters, brothers, cousins, uncles, aunts, and be the first to greet them. Here, again, were shadows on the window-blind of guests assembling; and there a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbour's house; where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter—artful witches: well they knew it—in a glow!

But if you had judged from the numbers of people on their way to friendly gatherings, you might have thought that no one was at

home to give them welcome when they got there, instead of every house expecting company, and piling up its fires half-chimney high. Blessings on it, how the Ghost exulted! How it bared its breadth of breast, and opened its capacious palm, and floated on, outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright and harmless mirth on everything within its reach! The very lamplighter, who ran on before dotting the dusky street with specks of light, and who was dressed to spend the evening somewhere, laughed out loudly as the Spirit passed: though little kenned the lamplighter that he had any company but Christmas!

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor,⁵⁰ where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed—or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse, rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

“What place is this?” asked Scrooge.

“A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth,” returned the Spirit. “But they know me. See!”

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children’s children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song; it had been a very old song when he was a boy; and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his vigour sang again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped whither? Not to sea? To sea. To

Scrooge's horror, looking back, he saw the last of the land, a frightful range of rocks, behind them; and his ears were deafened by the thundering of water, as it rolled, and roared, and raged among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-weed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the wind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the water—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone wall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them: the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be: struck up a sturdy song that was like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghostly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought, or spoke below his breath to his companion of some bygone Christmas Day, with homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, waking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder word for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It was a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it was to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths were secrets as profound as Death: it was a great surprise to

Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's, and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew with approving affability!

“Ha, ha!” laughed Scrooge's nephew. “Ha, ha, ha!”

If you should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest in a laugh than Scrooge's nephew, all I can say is, I should like to know him too. Introduce him to me, and I'll cultivate his acquaintance.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. When Scrooge's nephew laughed in this way: holding his sides, rolling his head, and twisting his face into the most extravagant contortions: Scrooge's niece, by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out, lustily.

“Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha, ha!”

“He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!” cried Scrooge's nephew. “He believed it too!”

“More shame for him, Fred!” said Scrooge's niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She was very pretty: exceedingly pretty. With a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what you would have called provoking, you know; but satisfactory too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory!

“He's a comical old fellow,” said Scrooge's nephew, “that's the truth: and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.”

“I'm sure he is very rich, Fred,” hinted Scrooge's niece. “At least you always tell *me* so.”

“What of that, my dear!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “His wealth is of no use to him. He don’t do any good with it. He don’t make himself comfortable with it. He hasn’t the satisfaction of thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is ever going to benefit Us with it.”

“I have no patience with him,” observed Scrooge’s niece. Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, and all the other ladies, expressed the same opinion.

“Oh, I have!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “I am sorry for him; I couldn’t be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims! Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won’t come and dine with us. What’s the consequence? He don’t lose much of a dinner.”

“Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner,” interrupted Scrooge’s niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, were clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

“Well! I’m very glad to hear it,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “because I haven’t great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *you* say, Topper?”

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, for he answered that a bachelor was a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge’s niece’s sister—the plump one with the lace tucker:⁵¹ not the one with the roses—blushed.

“Do go on, Fred,” said Scrooge’s niece, clapping her hands. “He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!”

Scrooge’s nephew revelled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it with aromatic vinegar; his example was unanimously followed.

“I was going to say,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is, as I think, that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions

than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying Uncle Scrooge, how are you? If it only puts him in the vein to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, *that's* something; and I think I shook him, yesterday.”

It was their turn to laugh now, at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle, joyously.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they were about, when they sung a Glee or Catch,⁵² I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which had been familiar to the child who fetched Scrooge from the boarding-school, as he had been reminded by the Ghost of Christmas Past. When this strain of music sounded, all the things that Ghost had shown him, came upon his mind; he softened more and more; and thought that if he could have listened to it often, years ago, he might have cultivated the kindnesses of life for his own happiness with his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

But they didn't devote the whole evening to music. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it was a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew; and that the Ghost of

Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker, was an outrage on the credulity of human nature. Knocking down the fire-irons, tumbling over the chairs, bumping against the piano, smothering himself among the curtains, wherever she went, there went he. He always knew where the plump sister was. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If you had fallen up against him, as some of them did, and stood there; he would have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding; and would instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But when at last, he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind-man being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece was not one of the blind-man's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her love to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, beat her sisters hollow: though they were sharp girls too, as Topper could have told you. There might have been twenty people there, young and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for wholly forgetting in the interest he had in what was going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out with his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel,⁵³ warranted not to cut in the eye, was not sharper than Scrooge: blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favour that he begged like a boy to be allowed to stay until the guests departed. But this the Spirit said could not be done.

“Here’s a new game,” said Scrooge. “One half hour, Spirit, only one!”

It was a Game called Yes and No, where Scrooge’s nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal that growled and grunted sometimes, and talked sometimes, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn’t made a show of, and wasn’t led by anybody, and didn’t live in a menagerie, and was never killed in a market, and was not a horse, or an ass, or a cow, or a bull, or a tiger, or a dog, or a pig, or a cat, or a bear. At every fresh question that was put to him, this nephew burst into a fresh roar of laughter; and was so inexpressibly tickled, that he was obliged to get up off the sofa and stamp. At last the plump sister, falling into a similar state, cried out:

“I have found it out! I know what it is, Fred! I know what it is!”

“What is it?” cried Fred.

“It’s your Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!”

Which it certainly was. Admiration was the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to “Is it a bear?” ought to have been “Yes;” inasmuch as an answer in the negative was sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that way.

“He has given us plenty of merriment, I am sure,” said Fred, “and it would be ungrateful not to drink his health. Here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say ‘Uncle Scrooge!’ ”

“Well! Uncle Scrooge!” they cried.

“A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “He wouldn’t take it from me, but may he have it, nevertheless. Uncle Scrooge!”

Uncle Scrooge had imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, and thanked them in an inaudible speech, if the Ghost had given him time. But the whole scene passed off in the breath of the last word spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they went, and many homes they visited, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they were close at home; by struggling men, and they were patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it was rich. In alms-house, hospital, and jail, in misery’s every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority⁵⁴ had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It was a long night, if it were only a night; but Scrooge had his doubts of this, because the Christmas Holidays appeared to be condensed into the space of time they passed together. It was strange, too, that while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew older, clearly older. Scrooge had observed this change, but never spoke of it, until they left a children’s Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was gray.

“Are spirits’ lives so short?” asked Scrooge.

“My life upon this globe, is very brief,” replied the Ghost. “It ends to-night.”

“To-night!” cried Scrooge.

“To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near.”

The chimes were ringing the three quarters past eleven at that moment.

“Forgive me if I am not justified in what I ask,” said Scrooge, looking intently at the Spirit’s robe, “but I see something strange,

and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your skirts. Is it a foot or a claw!”

“It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it,” was the Spirit’s sorrowful reply. “Look here.”

From the foldings of its robe, it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserable. They knelt down at its feet, and clung upon the outside of its garment.

“Oh, Man! look here. Look, look, down here!” exclaimed the Ghost.

They were a boy and girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out, and touched them with its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds. Where angels might have sat enthroned, devils lurked; and glared out menacing. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.



“Spirit! are they yours?” Scrooge could say no more.

“They are Man’s,” said the Spirit, looking down upon them. “And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!” cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. “Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes,⁵⁵ and make it worse. And bide the end!”

“Have they no refuge or resource?” cried Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons?” said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time with his own words. “Are there no workhouses?”

The bell struck twelve.

Scrooge looked about him for the Ghost, and saw it not. As the last stroke ceased to vibrate, he remembered the prediction of old Jacob Marley, and lifting up his eyes, beheld a solemn Phantom, draped and hooded, coming, like a mist along the ground, towards him.

STAVE FOUR

THE LAST OF THE SPIRITS

The Phantom slowly, gravely, silently, approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knee; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery.

It was shrouded in a deep black garment, which concealed its head, its face, its form, and left nothing of it visible save one outstretched hand. But for this it would have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it was surrounded.

He felt that it was tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him with a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

“I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come?” said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

“You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us,” Scrooge pursued. “Is that so, Spirit?”

The upper portion of the garment was contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That was the only answer he received.

Although well used to ghostly company by this time, Scrooge feared the silent shape so much that his legs trembled beneath him, and he found that he could hardly stand when he prepared to follow it. The Spirit paused a moment, as observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge was all the worse for this. It thrilled him with a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud, there were ghostly eyes intently fixed upon him, while he, though

he stretched his own to the utmost, could see nothing but a spectral hand and one great heap of black.

“Ghost of the Future!” he exclaimed, “I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it with a thankful heart. Will you not speak to me?”

It gave him no reply. The hand was pointed straight before them.

“Lead on!” said Scrooge. “Lead on! The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know. Lead on, Spirit!”

The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him. Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, he thought, and carried him along.

They scarcely seemed to enter the city; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompass them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on 'Change, amongst the merchants; who hurried up and down, and chinked the money in their pockets, and conversed in groups, and looked at their watches, and trifled thoughtfully with their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand was pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

“No,” said a great fat man with a monstrous chin, “I don't know much about it, either way. I only know he's dead.”

“When did he die?” inquired another.

“Last night, I believe.”

“Why, what was the matter with him?” asked a third, taking a vast quantity of snuff out of a very large snuff-box. “I thought he'd never die.”

“God knows,” said the first, with a yawn.

“What has he done with his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman with a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

“I haven’t heard,” said the man with the large chin, yawning again. “Left it to his Company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to *me*. That’s all I know.”

This pleasantry was received with a general laugh.

“It’s likely to be a very cheap funeral,” said the same speaker; “for upon my life I don’t know of anybody to go to it. Suppose we make up a party and volunteer?”

“I don’t mind going if a lunch is provided,” observed the gentleman with the excrescence on his nose. “But I must be fed, if I make one.”

Another laugh.

“Well, I am the most disinterested among you, after all,” said the first speaker, “for I never wear black gloves,⁵⁶ and I never eat lunch. But I’ll offer to go, if anybody else will. When I come to think of it, I’m not at all sure that I wasn’t his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!”

Speakers and listeners strolled away, and mixed with other groups. Scrooge knew the men, and looked towards the Spirit for an explanation.

The Phantom glided on into a street. Its finger pointed to two persons meeting. Scrooge listened again, thinking that the explanation might lie here.

He knew these men, also, perfectly. They were men of business: very wealthy, and of great importance. He had made a point always of standing well in their esteem: in a business point of view, that is; strictly in a business point of view.

“How are you?” said one.

“How are you?” returned the other.

“Well!” said the first. “Old Scratch⁵⁷ has got his own at last, hey?”

“So I am told,” returned the second. “Cold, isn’t it?”

“Seasonable for Christmas time. You’re not a skaiter, I suppose?”

“No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!”

Not another word. That was their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge was at first inclined to be surprised that the Spirit should attach importance to conversations apparently so trivial; but feeling assured that they must have some hidden purpose, he set himself to consider what it was likely to be. They could scarcely be supposed to have any bearing on the death of Jacob, his old partner, for that was Past, and this Ghost's province was the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected with himself, to whom he could apply them. But nothing doubting that to whomsoever they applied they had some latent moral for his own improvement, he resolved to treasure up every word he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self would give him the clue he missed, and would render the solution of these riddles easy.

He looked about in that very place for his own image; but another man stood in his accustomed corner, and though the clock pointed to his usual time of day for being there, he saw no likeness of himself among the multitudes that poured in through the Porch. It gave him little surprise, however; for he had been revolving in his mind a change of life, and thought and hoped he saw his new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. Alleys and archways, like so many cesspools, disgorged their offences of smell, and dirt, and life, upon

the straggling streets; and the whole quarter reeked with crime, with filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, were piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, weights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal-stove, made of old bricks, was a gray-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frousy curtaining of miscellaneous tatters, hung upon a line; and smoked his pipe in all the luxury of calm retirement.

Scrooge and the Phantom came into the presence of this man, just as a woman with a heavy bundle slunk into the shop. But she had scarcely entered, when another woman, similarly laden, came in too; and she was closely followed by a man in faded black, who was no less startled by the sight of them, than they had been upon the recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, in which the old man with the pipe had joined them, they all three burst into a laugh.

“Let the charwoman alone to be the first!” cried she who had entered first. “Let the laundress alone to be the second; and let the undertaker’s man alone to be the third. Look here, old Joe, here’s a chance! If we haven’t all three met here without meaning it.”

“You couldn’t have met in a better place,” said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. “Come into the parlour. You were made free of it long ago, you know; and the other two an’t strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an’t such a rusty bit of metal in the place as its own hinges, I believe; and I’m sure there’s no such old bones here, as mine. Ha, ha! We’re all suitable to our calling, we’re well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour.”

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together with an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it was night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

While he did this, the woman who had already spoken threw her bundle on the floor and sat down in a flaunting manner on a stool; crossing her elbows on her knees, and looking with a bold defiance at the other two.

“What odds then! What odds, Mrs. Dilber?” said the woman. “Every person has a right to take care of themselves. *He* always did!”

“That’s true, indeed!” said the laundress. “No man more so.”

“Why then, don’t stand staring as if you was afraid, woman; who’s the wiser? We’re not going to pick holes in each other’s coats, I suppose?”

“No, indeed!” said Mrs. Dilber and the man together. “We should hope not.”

“Very well, then!” cried the woman. “That’s enough. Who’s the worse for the loss of a few things like these? Not a dead man, I suppose.”

“No, indeed,” said Mrs. Dilber, laughing.

“If he wanted to keep ’em after he was dead, a wicked old screw,”⁵⁸ pursued the woman, “why wasn’t he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he was struck with Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.”

“It’s the truest word that ever was spoke,” said Mrs. Dilber. “It’s a judgment on him.”

“I wish it was a little heavier one,” replied the woman; “and it should have been, you may depend upon it, if I could have laid my hands on anything else. Open that bundle, old Joe, and let me know the value of it. Speak out plain. I’m not afraid to be the first, nor afraid for them to see it. We knew pretty well that we were helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It’s no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.”

But the gallantry of her friends would not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced *his* plunder. It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil-case, a pair of sleeve-buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he was disposed to give for each, upon the wall, and added them up into a total when he found there was nothing more to come.

“That’s your account,” said Joe, “and I wouldn’t give another sixpence, if I was to be boiled for not doing it. Who’s next?”

Mrs. Dilber was next. Sheets and towels, a little wearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account was stated on the wall in the same manner.

“I always give too much to ladies. It’s a weakness of mine, and that’s the way I ruin myself,” said old Joe. “That’s your account. If you asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I’d repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown.”

“And now undo *my* bundle, Joe,” said the first woman.

Joe went down on his knees for the greater convenience of opening it, and having unfastened a great many knots, dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff.

“What do you call this?” said Joe. “Bed-curtains!”

“Ah!” returned the woman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. “Bed-curtains!”

“You don’t mean to say you took ’em down, rings and all, with him lying there?” said Joe.

“Yes I do,” replied the woman. “Why not?”

“You were born to make your fortune,” said Joe, “and you’ll certainly do it.”

“I certainly shan’t hold my hand, when I get anything in it by reaching it out, for the sake of such a man as He was, I promise you, Joe,” returned the woman coolly. “Don’t drop that oil upon the blankets, now.”

“His blankets?” asked Joe.

“Whose else’s do you think?” replied the woman. “He isn’t likely to take cold without ’em, I dare say.”

“I hope he didn’t die of anything catching? Eh?” said old Joe, stopping in his work, and looking up.

“Don’t you be afraid of that,” returned the woman. “I an’t so fond of his company that I’d loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! you may look through that shirt till your eyes ache; but you won’t find a hole in it, nor a thread-bare place. It’s the best he had, and a fine one too. They’d have wasted it, if it hadn’t been for me.”

“What do you call wasting of it?” asked old Joe.

“Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure,” replied the woman with a laugh. “Somebody was fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico an’t good enough for such a purpose, it isn’t good enough for anything. It’s quite as becoming to the body. He can’t look uglier than he did in that one.”

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man’s lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself.

“He, ha!” laughed the same woman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag with money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. “This is the end of it, you see! He frightened every one away from him when he was alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!”

“Spirit!” said Scrooge, shuddering from head to foot. “I see, I see. The case of this unhappy man might be my own. My life tends that way, now. Merciful Heaven, what is this!”

He recoiled in terror, for the scene had changed, and now he almost touched a bed: a bare, uncurtained bed: on which, beneath a ragged sheet, there lay a something covered up, which, though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room was very dark, too dark to be observed with any accuracy, though Scrooge glanced round it in obedience to a secret impulse, anxious to know what kind of room it was. A pale light,

rising in the outer air, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand was pointed to the head. The cover was so carelessly adjusted that the slightest raising of it, the motion of a finger upon Scrooge's part, would have disclosed the face. He thought of it, felt how easy it would be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to withdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it with such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured head, thou canst not turn one hair to thy dread purposes, or make one feature odious. It is not that the hand is heavy and will fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand *WAS* open, generous, and true; the heart brave, warm, and tender; and the pulse a man's. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the wound, to sow the world with life immortal!

No voice pronounced these words in Scrooge's ears, and yet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what would be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay, in the dark empty house, with not a man, a woman, or a child, to say that he was kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind word I will be kind to him. A cat was tearing at the door, and there was a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearthstone. What *they* wanted in the room of death, and why they were so restless and disturbed, Scrooge did not dare to think.

"Spirit!" he said, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

Still the Ghost pointed with an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand you," Scrooge returned, "and I would do it, if I could. But I have not the power, Spirit. I have not the power."

Again it seemed to look upon him.

“If there is any person in the town, who feels emotion caused by this man’s death,” said Scrooge quite agonised, “show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!”

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and withdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting someone, and with anxious eagerness; for she walked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the window; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to work with her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock was heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face was care-worn and depressed, though he was young. There was a remarkable expression in it now; a kind of serious delight of which he felt ashamed, and which he struggled to repress.

He sat down to the dinner that had been hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which was not until after a long silence), he appeared embarrassed how to answer.

“Is it good,” she said, “or bad?”—to help him.

“Bad,” he answered.

“We are quite ruined?”

“No. There is hope yet, Caroline.”

“If *he* relents,” she said, amazed, “there is! Nothing is past hope, if such a miracle has happened.”

“He is past relenting,” said her husband. “He is dead.”

She was a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she was thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, with clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and was sorry; but the first was the emotion of her heart.

“What the half-drunken woman whom I told you of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a week’s delay; and

what I thought was a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He was not only very ill, but dying, then.”

“To whom will our debt be transferred?”

“I don’t know. But before that time we shall be ready with the money; and even though we were not, it would be bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep to-night with light hearts, Caroline!”

Yes. Soften it as they would, their hearts were lighter. The children’s faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so little understood, were brighter; and it was a happier house for this man’s death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, was one of pleasure.

“Let me see some tenderness connected with a death,” said Scrooge; “or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, will be for ever present to me.”

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they went along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere was he to be seen. They entered poor Bob Cratchit’s house; the dwelling he had visited before; and found the mother and the children seated round the fire.

Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues in one corner, and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing. But surely they were very quiet!

“ ‘And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.’ ”⁵⁹

Where had Scrooge heard those words? He had not dreamed them. The boy must have read them out, as he and the Spirit crossed the threshold. Why did he not go on?

The mother laid her work upon the table, and put her hand up to her face.

“The colour hurts my eyes,” she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

“They’re better now again,” said Cratchit’s wife. “It makes them weak by candle-light; and I wouldn’t show weak eyes to your father

when he comes home, for the world. It must be near his time.”

“Past it rather,” Peter answered, shutting up his book. “But I think he’s walked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother.”

They were very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

“I have known him walk with—I have known him walk with Tiny Tim upon his shoulder, very fast indeed.”

“And so have I,” cried Peter. “Often.”

“And so have I!” exclaimed another. So had all.

“But he was very light to carry,” she resumed, intent upon her work, “and his father loved him so, that it was no trouble—no trouble. And there is your father at the door!”

She hurried out to meet him; and little Bob in his comforter—he had need of it, poor fellow—came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two young Cratchits got upon his knees and laid, each child a little cheek, against his face, as if they said, “Don’t mind it, father. Don’t be grieved!”

Bob was very cheerful with them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the work upon the table, and praised the industry and speed of Mrs. Cratchit and the girls. They would be done long before Sunday, he said.

“Sunday! You went to-day then, Robert?” said his wife.

“Yes, my dear,” returned Bob. “I wish you could have gone. It would have done you good to see how green a place it is. But you’ll see it often. I promised him that I would walk there on a Sunday. My little, little child!” cried Bob. “My little child!”

He broke down all at once. He couldn’t help it. If he could have helped it, he and his child would have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and went up stairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas.⁶⁰ There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one

having been there, lately. Poor Bob sat down in it, and when he had thought a little and composed himself, he kissed the little face. He was reconciled to what had happened, and went down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness of Mr. Scrooge's nephew, whom he had scarcely seen but once, and who, meeting him in the street that day, and seeing that he looked a little—"just a little down you know" said Bob, inquired what had happened to distress him. "On which," said Bob, "for he is the pleasantest-spoken gentleman you ever heard, I told him. 'I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,' he said, 'and heartily sorry for your good wife.' By the bye, how he ever knew *that* I don't know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that you were a good wife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very well observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for your good wife. If I can be of service to you in any way,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' Now, it wasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind way, that this was quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt with us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

"You would be surer of it, my dear," returned Bob, "if you saw and spoke to him. I shouldn't be at all surprised, mark what I say, if he got Peter a better situation."

"Only hear that, Peter," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"And then," cried one of the girls, "Peter will be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself."

"Get along with you!" retorted Peter, grinning.

"It's just as likely as not," said Bob, "one of these days; though there's plenty of time for that, my dear. But however and whenever we part from one another, I am sure we shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall we—or this first parting that there was among us?"

“Never, father!” cried they all.

“And I know,” said Bob, “I know, my dears, that when we recollect how patient and how mild he was; although he was a little, little child; we shall not quarrel easily among ourselves, and forget poor Tiny Tim in doing it.”

“No, never, father!” they all cried again.

“I am very happy,” said little Bob, “I am very happy!”

Mrs. Cratchit kissed him, his daughters kissed him, the two young Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!

“Spectre,” said Scrooge, “something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?”

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before—though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but went straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

“This court,” said Scrooge, “through which we hurry now, is where my place of occupation is, and has been for a length of time. I see the house. Let me behold what I shall be, in days to come.”

The Spirit stopped; the hand was pointed elsewhere.

“The house is yonder,” Scrooge exclaimed. “Why do you point away?”

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It was an office still, but not his. The furniture was not the same, and the figure in the chair was not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and wondering why and whither he had gone, accompanied it until they reached an iron gate. He paused to look round before entering.

A churchyard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life; choked up with too much burying; fat with repleted appetite. A worthy place!⁶¹

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom was exactly as it had been, but he dreaded that he saw new meaning in its solemn shape.

"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the things that Will be, or are they shadows of things that May be, only?"

Still the Ghost pointed downward to the grave by which it stood.

"Men's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Say it is thus with what you show me!"

The Spirit was immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he went; and following the finger, read upon the stone of the neglected grave his own name, EBENEZER SCROOGE.

"Am *I* that man who lay upon the bed?" he cried, upon his knees.

The finger pointed from the grave to him, and back again.

"No, Spirit! Oh, no, no!"

The finger still was there.

"Spirit!" he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was. I will not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?"

For the first time the hand appeared to shake.

"Good Spirit," he pursued, as down upon the ground he fell before it: "Your nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I yet may change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"



The Last of the Spirits.

The kind hand trembled.

“I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach. Oh, tell me I may sponge away the writing on this stone!”

In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him.

Holding up his hands in a last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrunk, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.

STAVE FIVE

THE END OF IT

Yes! and the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

“I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!” Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. “The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this! I say it on my knees, old Jacob; on my knees!”

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

“They are not torn down,” cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, “they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here: I am here: the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be. I know they will!”

His hands were busy with his garments all this time: turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

“I don’t know what to do!” cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoön⁶² of himself with his stockings. “I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a school-boy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!”

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and was now standing there: perfectly winded.

“There’s the saucepan that the gruel was in!” cried Scrooge, starting off again, and frisking round the fire-place. “There’s the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered! There’s the

corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present, sat! There's the window where I saw the wandering Spirits! It's all right, it's all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!"

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs!

"I don't know what day of the month it is!" said Scrooge. "I don't know how long I've been among the Spirits. I don't know anything. I'm quite a baby. Never mind. I don't care. I'd rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!"

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer, ding, dong, bell. Bell, dong, ding, hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

"What's to-day?" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

"EH?" returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

"What's to-day, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"To-day!" replied the boy. "Why, CHRISTMAS DAY."

"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven't missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer's, in the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they've sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there? Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

“What a delightful boy!” said Scrooge. “It’s a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck!”

“It’s hanging there now,” replied the boy.

“Is it?” said Scrooge. “Go and buy it.”

“Walk-ER!”⁶³ exclaimed the boy.

“No, no,” said Scrooge, “I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell ’em to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I’ll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes, and I’ll give you half-a-crown!”

The boy was off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

“I’ll send it to Bob Cratchit’s!” whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting with a laugh. “He shan’t know who sends it. It’s twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller⁶⁴ never made such a joke as sending it to Bob’s will be!”

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went down stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer’s man. As he stood there, waiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

“I shall love it, as long as I live!” cried Scrooge, patting it with his hand. “I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It’s a wonderful knocker!—Here’s the Turkey. Hallo! Whoop! How are you! Merry Christmas!”

It *was* a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped ’em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

“Why, it’s impossible to carry that to Camden Town,” said Scrooge. “You must have a cab.”

The chuckle with which he said this, and the chuckle with which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle with which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle with which he recompensed the boy, were only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when you don't dance while you are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he would have put a piece of sticking-plaister over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them with the Ghost of Christmas Present; and walking with his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a word, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to you!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those were the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before and said, "Scrooge and Marley's, I believe?" It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

"My dear sir," said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "How do you do? I hope you succeeded yesterday. It was very kind of you. A merry Christmas to you, sir!"

"Mr. Scrooge?"

"Yes," said Scrooge. "That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to you. Allow me to ask your pardon. And will you have the goodness"—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

"Lord bless me!" cried the gentleman, as if his breath were gone. "My dear Mr. Scrooge, are you serious?"

"If you please," said Scrooge. "Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure you. Will you do me that favour?"

"My dear sir," said the other, shaking hands with him. "I don't know what to say to such munifi—"

“Don’t say anything, please,” retorted Scrooge. “Come and see me. Will you come and see me?”

“I will!” cried the old gentleman. And it was clear he meant to do it.

“Thank’ee,” said Scrooge. “I am much obliged to you. I thank you fifty times. Bless you!”

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows; and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk—that anything—could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon, he turned his steps towards his nephew’s house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it:

“Is your master at home, my dear?” said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where is he, my love?” said Scrooge.

“He’s in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I’ll show you up stairs, if you please.”

“Thank’ee. He knows me,” said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. “I’ll go in here, my dear.”

He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

“Fred!” said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner with the footstool, or he wouldn’t have done it, on any account.

“Why bless my soul!” cried Fred, “who’s that?”

“It’s I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?”

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when *he* came. So did the plump sister, when *she* came. So did every one when *they* came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh, he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; yes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He was full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door wide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat was off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy; driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice as near as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I *am* behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please."

"It's only once a year, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down with it; holding him; and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-waistcoat.

"A merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you, for many a

year! I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop,⁶⁵ Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did NOT die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.



He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God bless Us, Every One!

THE HAUNTED MAN

AND

THE GHOST'S BARGAIN.

A Fancy for Christmas-Time.

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.





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ILLUSTRATIONS TO *THE HAUNTED MAN*

<u>Frontispiece</u>	J. Tenniel
<u>Title</u>	J. Tenniel
<u>Illustrated Page to Chapter One</u>	J. Tenniel
<u>The Lighthouse</u>	C. Stanfield, RA
<u>Milly and the Old Man</u>	F. Stone
<u>Redlaw and the Phantom</u>	J. Leech
<u>Redlaw and the Boy</u>	J. Leech
<u>The Tetterbys</u>	J. Leech
<u>Illustrated Double-page to Chapter Two</u>	J. Tenniel
<u>Milly and the Student</u>	F. Stone
<u>The Exterior of the Old College</u>	C. Stanfield, RA
<u>The Boy before the Fire</u>	J. Leech
<u>Illustrated Page to Chapter Three</u>	J. Tenniel
<u>Johnny and Moloch</u>	J. Leech
<u>Milly and the Children</u>	F. Stone
<u>The Christmas Party in the Great Dinner Hall</u>	C. Stanfield, RA



CHAPTER I

THE GIFT BESTOWED

Everybody said so.

Far be it from me to assert that what everybody says must be true. Everybody is, often, as likely to be wrong as right. In the general experience, everybody has been wrong so often, and it has taken in most instances such a weary while to find out how wrong, that the authority is proved to be fallible. Everybody may sometimes be right; “but *that’s* no rule,” as the ghost of Giles Scroggins¹ says in the ballad.

The dread word, GHOST, recalls me.

Everybody said he looked like a haunted man. The extent of my present claim for everybody is, that they were so far right. He did.

Who could have seen his hollow cheek; his sunken brilliant eye; his black-attired figure, indefinitely grim, although well-knit and well-proportioned; his grizzled hair hanging, like tangled sea-weed, about his face,—as if he had been, through his whole life, a lonely mark for the chafing and beating of the great deep of humanity,—but might have said he looked like a haunted man?

Who could have observed his manner, taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never, with a distraught air of reverting to a bygone place and time, or of listening to some old echoes in his mind, but might have said it was the manner of a haunted man?

Who could have heard his voice, slow-speaking, deep, and grave, with a natural fulness and melody in it which he seemed to set himself against and stop, but might have said it was the voice of a haunted man?

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory,—for he was, as the world knew, far and wide, a learned man in chemistry, and a teacher on whose lips and hands a

crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily,—who that had seen him there, upon a winter night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and instruments and books; the shadow of his shaded lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapour;—who that had seen him then, his work done, and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too?

Who might not, by a very easy flight of fancy, have believed that everything about him took this haunted tone, and that he lived on haunted ground?

His dwelling was so solitary and vault-like,—an old, retired part of an ancient endowment for students, once a brave edifice, planted in an open place, but now the obsolete whim of forgotten architects, smoke-age-and-weather-darkened, squeezed on every side by the overgrowing of the great city, and choked, like an old well, with stones and bricks; its small quadrangles, lying down in very pits formed by the streets and buildings, which, in course of time, had been constructed above its heavy chimney stacks; its old trees, insulted by the neighbouring smoke, which deigned to droop so low when it was very feeble and the weather very moody; its grass-plots, struggling with the mildewed earth to be grass, or to win any show of compromise; its silent pavements, unaccustomed to the tread of feet, and even to the observation of eyes, except when a stray face looked down from the upper world, wondering what nook it was; its sundial in a little bricked-up corner, where no sun had straggled for a hundred years, but where, in compensation for the sun's neglect, the snow would lie for weeks when it lay nowhere else, and the black east wind would spin like a huge humming-top, when in all other places it was silent and still.

His dwelling, at its heart and core—within doors—at his fireside—was so lowering and old, so crazy, yet so strong, with its worm-eaten beams of wood in the ceiling, and its sturdy floor shelving downward to the great oak chimney-piece; so environed and hemmed in by the pressure of the town, yet so remote in fashion, age and custom; so quiet, yet so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut,—echoes, not confined to the many low passages and empty rooms, but rumbling and grumbling till they were stifled in the heavy air of the forgotten Crypt where the Norman arches were half-buried in the earth.

You should have seen him in his dwelling about twilight, in the dead winter time.

When the wind was blowing, shrill and shrewd, with the going down of the blurred sun. When it was just so dark, as that the forms of things were indistinct and big, but not wholly lost. When sitters by the fire began to see wild faces and figures, mountains and abysses, ambuscades and armies, in the coals. When people in the streets bent down their heads, and ran before the weather. When those who were obliged to meet it, were stopped at angry corners, stung by wandering snow-flakes alighting on the lashes of their eyes,—which fell too sparingly, and were blown away too quickly, to leave a trace upon the frozen ground. When windows of private houses closed up tight and warm. When lighted gas began to burst forth in the busy and the quiet streets, fast blackening otherwise. When stray pedestrians, shivering along the latter, looked down at the glowing fires in kitchens and sharpened their sharp appetites by sniffing up the fragrance of whole miles of dinners.

When travellers by land were bitter cold, and looked wearily on gloomy landscapes, rustling and shuddering in the blast. When mariners at sea, outlying upon icy yards, were tossed and swung above the howling ocean dreadfully. When lighthouses, on rocks and headlands, showed solitary and watchful; and benighted sea-birds breasted on against their ponderous lanterns, and fell dead. When little readers of story-books, by the firelight, trembled to think of Cassim Baba² cut into quarters, hanging in the Robbers'

Cave, or had some small misgivings that the fierce little old woman with the crutch, who used to start out of the box in the merchant Abudah's bedroom,³ might, one of these nights, be found upon the stairs, in the long, cold, dusky journey up to bed.

When, in rustic places, the last glimmering of daylight died away from the ends of avenues; and the trees, arching overhead, were sullen and black. When, in parks and woods, the high wet fern and sodden moss, and beds of fallen leaves, and trunks of trees, were lost to view, in masses of impenetrable shade. When mists arose from dyke, and fen, and river. When lights in old halls and in cottage windows, were a cheerful sight. When the mill stopped, the wheelwright and the blacksmith shut their workshops, the turnpike-gate closed, the plough and harrow were left lonely in the fields, the labourer and team went home, and the striking of the church-clock had a deeper sound than at noon, and the churchyard wicket would be swung no more that night.

When twilight everywhere released the shadows, prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like mustering swarms of ghosts. When they stood lowering, in corners of rooms, and frowned out from behind half-opened doors. When they had full possession of unoccupied apartments. When they danced upon the floors, and walls, and ceilings of inhabited chambers, while the fire was low, and withdrew like ebbing waters when it sprung into a blaze. When they fantastically mocked the shapes of household objects, making the nurse an ogress, the rocking-horse a monster, the wondering child, half-scared and half-amused, a stranger to itself,—the very tongs upon the hearth, a straddling giant with his arms a-kimbo, evidently smelling the blood of Englishmen, and wanting to grind people's bones to make his bread.⁴

When these shadows brought into the minds of older people, other thoughts, and showed them different images. When they stole from their retreats, in the likeness of forms and faces from the past, from the grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that might have been, and never were, are always wandering.



When he sat, as already mentioned, gazing at the fire. When, as it rose and fell, the shadows went and came. When he took no heed of them, with his bodily eyes; but, let them come or let them go, looked fixedly at the fire. You should have seen him, then.

When the sounds that had arisen with the shadows, and come out of their lurking places at the twilight summons, seemed to make a deeper stillness all about him. When the wind was rumbling in the chimney, and sometimes crooning, sometimes howling, in the house. When the old trees outside were so shaken and beaten, that one querulous old rook, unable to sleep, protested now and then, in a feeble, dozy, high-up “Caw!” When, at intervals, the window trembled, the rusty vane upon the turret-top complained, the clock beneath it recorded that another quarter of an hour was gone, or the fire collapsed and fell in with a rattle.

—When a knock came at his door, in short, as he was sitting so, and roused him.

“Who’s that?” said he. “Come in!”

Surely there had been no figure leaning on the back of his chair; no face looking over it. It is certain that no gliding footstep touched the floor, as he lifted up his head, with a start, and spoke. And yet there was no mirror in the room on whose surface his own form could have cast its shadow for a moment; and Something had passed darkly and gone!

“I’m humbly fearful, sir,” said a fresh-coloured busy man, holding the door open with his foot for the admission of himself and a wooden tray he carried, and letting it go again by very gentle and careful degrees, when he and the tray had got in, lest it should close noisily, “that it’s a good bit past the time to-night. But Mrs. William has been taken off her legs so often——”

“By the wind? Ay! I have heard it rising.”

“—By the wind, sir—that it’s a mercy she got home at all. Oh dear, yes. Yes. It was by the wind, Mr. Redlaw. By the wind.”

He had, by this time, put down the tray for dinner, and was employed in lighting the lamp, and spreading a cloth on the table. From this employment he desisted in a hurry, to stir and feed the fire, and then resumed it; the lamp he had lighted, and the blaze that rose under his hand, so quickly changing the appearance of the room, that it seemed as if the mere coming in of his fresh red face and active manner had made the pleasant alteration.

“Mrs. William is of course subject at any time, sir, to be taken off her balance by the elements. She is not formed superior to *that*.”

“No,” returned Mr. Redlaw good-naturedly, though abruptly.

“No, sir. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Earth; as for example, last Sunday week, when sloppy and greasy, and she going out to tea with her newest sister-in-law, and having a pride in herself, and wishing to appear perfectly spotless though pedestrian. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Air; as being once over-persuaded by a friend to try a swing at Peckham Fair,⁵ which acted on her constitution instantly like a steam-boat. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Fire; as on a false alarm of engines at her mother’s, when she went two mile in her nightcap. Mrs.

William may be taken off her balance by Water; as at Battersea, when rowed into the piers⁶ by her young nephew, Charley Swidger junior, aged twelve, which had no idea of boats whatever. But these are elements. Mrs. William must be taken out of elements for the strength of *her* character to come into play.”

As he stopped for a reply, the reply was “Yes,” in the same tone as before.

“Yes, sir. Oh dear, yes!” said Mr. Swidger, still proceeding with his preparations, and checking them off as he made them. “That’s where it is, sir. That’s what I always say myself, sir. Such a many of us Swidgers!—Pepper. Why there’s my father, sir, superannuated keeper and custodian of this Institution, eigh-ty-seven year old. He’s a Swidger!—Spoon.”

“True, William,” was the patient and abstracted answer, when he stopped again.

“Yes, sir,” said Mr. Swidger. “That’s what I always say, sir. You may call him the trunk of the tree!—Bread. Then you come to his successor, my unworthy self—Salt—and Mrs. William, Swidgers both.—Knife and fork. Then you come to all my brothers and their families, Swidgers, man and woman, boy and girl. Why, what with cousins, uncles, aunts, and relationships of this, that, and t’other degree, and what-not degree, and marriages, and lyings-in, the Swidgers—Tumbler—might take hold of hands, and make a ring round England!”

Receiving no reply at all here, from the thoughtful man whom he addressed, Mr. William approached him nearer, and made a feint of accidentally knocking the table with a decanter, to rouse him. The moment he succeeded, he went on, as if in great alacrity of acquiescence.

“Yes, sir! That’s just what I say myself, sir. Mrs. William and me have often said so. ‘There’s Swidgers enough,’ we say, ‘without *our* voluntary contributions,’—Butter. In fact, sir, my father is a family in himself—Castors—to take care of; and it happens all for the best that we have no child of our own, though it’s made Mrs. William rather quiet-like, too. Quite ready for the fowl and mashed potatoes,

sir? Mrs. William said she'd dish in ten minutes when I left the Lodge?"

"I am quite ready," said the other, waking as from a dream, and walking slowly to and fro.

"Mrs. William has been at it again, sir!" said the keeper, as he stood warming a plate at the fire, and pleasantly shading his face with it. Mr. Redlaw stopped in his walking, and an expression of interest appeared in him.

"What I always say myself, sir. She *will* do it! There's a motherly feeling in Mrs. William's breast that must and will have went."

"What has she done?"

"Why, sir, not satisfied with being a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen that come up from a wariety of parts, to attend your courses of lectures at this ancient foundation—it's surprising how stone-chaney⁷ catches the heat, this frosty weather, to be sure!" Here he turned the plate, and cooled his fingers.

"Well?" said Mr. Redlaw.

"That's just what I say myself, sir," returned Mr. William, speaking over his shoulder, as if in ready and delighted assent. "That's exactly where it is, sir! There ain't one of our students but appears to regard Mrs. William in that light. Every day, right through the course, they puts their heads into the Lodge, one after another, and have all got something to tell her, or something to ask her. 'Swidge' is the appellation by which they speak of Mrs. William in general, among themselves, I'm told; but that's what I say, sir. Better be called ever so far out of your name, if it's done in real liking, than have it made ever so much of, and not cared about! What's a name for? To know a person by. If Mrs. William is known by something better than her name—I allude to Mrs. William's qualities and disposition—never mind her name, though it is Swidger, by rights. Let 'em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge—Lord! London Bridge, Blackfriars, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension—if they like!"

The close of this triumphant oration brought him and the plate to the table, upon which he half laid and half dropped it, with a lively

sense of its being thoroughly heated, just as the subject of his praises entered the room, bearing another tray and a lantern, and followed by a venerable old man with long grey hair.

Mrs. William, like Mr. William, was a simple, innocent-looking person, in whose smooth cheeks the cheerful red of her husband's official waistcoat was very pleasantly repeated. But whereas Mr. William's light hair stood on end all over his head, and seemed to draw his eyes up with it in an excess of bustling readiness for anything, the dark brown hair of Mrs. William was carefully smoothed down, and waved away under a trim tidy cap, in the most exact and quiet manner imaginable. Whereas Mr. William's very trousers hitched themselves up at the ankles, as if it were not in their iron-grey nature to rest without looking about them, Mrs. William's neatly-flowered skirts—red and white, like her own pretty face—were as composed and orderly, as if the very wind that blew so hard out of doors could not disturb one of their folds. Whereas his coat had something of a fly-away and half-off appearance about the collar and breast, her little bodice was so placid and neat, that there should have been protection for her, in it, had she needed any, with the roughest people. Who could have had the heart to make so calm a bosom swell with grief, or throb with fear, or flutter with a thought of shame! To whom would its repose and peace have not appealed against disturbance, like the innocent slumber of a child!

"Punctual, of course, Milly," said her husband, relieving her of the tray, "or it wouldn't be you. Here's Mrs. William, sir!—He looks lonelier than ever to-night," whispering to his wife, as he was taking the tray, "and ghostlier altogether."

Without any show of hurry or noise, or any show of herself even, she was so calm and quiet, Milly set the dishes she had brought upon the table,—Mr. William, after much clattering and running about, having only gained possession of a butter-boat of gravy, which he stood ready to serve.

"What is that the old man has in his arms?" asked Mr. Redlaw, as he sat down to his solitary meal.

"Holly, sir," replied the quiet voice of Milly.

“That’s what I say myself, sir,” interposed Mr. William, striking in with the butter-boat. “Berries is so seasonable to the time of year!—Brown gravy!”

“Another Christmas come, another year gone!” murmured the Chemist, with a gloomy sigh. “More figures in the lengthening sum of recollection that we work and work at to our torment, till Death idly jumbles all together, and rubs all out. So, Philip!” breaking off, and raising his voice, as he addressed the old man, standing apart, with his glistening burden in his arms, from which the quiet Mrs. William took small branches, which she noiselessly trimmed with her scissors, and decorated the room with, while her aged father-in-law looked on much interested in the ceremony.

“My duty to you, sir,” returned the old man. “Should have spoke before, sir, but know your ways, Mr. Redlaw—proud to say—and wait till spoke to! Merry Christmas, sir, and happy New Year, and many of ’em. Have had a pretty many of ’em myself—ha, ha!—and may take the liberty of wishing ’em. I’m eighty-seven!”

“Have you had so many that were merry and happy?” asked the other.

“Ay, sir, ever so many,” returned the old man.



“Is his memory impaired with age? It is to be expected now,” said Mr. Redlaw, turning to the son, and speaking lower.

“Not a morsel of it, sir,” replied Mr. William. “That’s exactly what I say myself, sir. There never was such a memory as my father’s. He’s the most wonderful man in the world. He don’t know what forgetting means. It’s the very observation I’m always making to Mrs. William, sir, if you’ll believe me!”

Mr. Swidger, in his polite desire to seem to acquiesce at all events, delivered this as if there were no iota of contradiction in it, and it were all said in unbounded and unqualified assent.

The Chemist pushed his plate away, and, rising from the table, walked across the room to where the old man stood looking at a little sprig of holly in his hand.

“It recalls the time when many of those years were old and new, then?” he said, observing him attentively, and touching him on the shoulder. “Does it?”

“Oh many, many!” said Philip, half awaking from his reverie. “I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy, was it?” asked the Chemist, in a low voice. “Merry and happy, old man?”

“May-be as high as that, no higher,” said the old man, holding out his hand a little way above the level of his knee, and looking retrospectively at his questioner, “when I first remember ’em! Cold, sunshiny day it was, out a-walking, when some one—it was my mother as sure as you stand there, though I don’t know what her blessed face was like, for she took ill and died that Christmas-time—told me they were food for birds. The pretty little fellow thought—that’s me, you understand—that birds’ eyes were so bright, perhaps, because the berries that they lived on in the winter were so bright. I recollect that. And I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy!” mused the other, bending his dark eyes upon the stooping figure, with a smile of compassion. “Merry and happy—and remember well?”

“Ay, ay, ay!” resumed the old man, catching the last words. “I remember ’em well in my school time, year after year, and all the merry-making that used to come along with them. I was a strong chap then, Mr. Redlaw; and, if you’ll believe me, hadn’t my match at foot-ball within ten mile. Where’s my son William? Hadn’t my match at foot-ball, William, within ten mile!”

“That’s what I always say, father!” returned the son promptly, and with great respect. “You ARE a Swidger, if ever there was one of the family!”

“Dear!” said the old man, shaking his head as he again looked at the holly. “His mother—my son William’s my youngest son—and I, have sat among ’em all, boys and girls, little children and babies, many a year, when the berries like these were not shining half so bright all round us, as their bright faces. Many of ’em are gone; she’s gone; and my son George (our eldest, who was her pride more than all the rest!) is fallen very low: but I can see them, when I look here, alive and healthy, as they used to be in those days; and I can see him, thank God, in his innocence. It’s a blessed thing to me, at eighty-seven.”

The keen look that had been fixed upon him with so much earnestness, had gradually sought the ground.

“When my circumstances got to be not so good as formerly, through not being honestly dealt by, and I first come here to be custodian,” said the old man, “—which was upwards of fifty years ago—where’s my son William? More than half a century ago, William!”

“That’s what I say, father,” replied the son, as promptly and dutifully as before, “that’s exactly where it is. Two times ought’s an ought, and twice five ten, and there’s a hundred of ’em.”

“It was quite a pleasure to know that one of our founders—or more correctly speaking,” said the old man, with a great glory in his subject and his knowledge of it, “one of the learned gentlemen that helped endow us in Queen Elizabeth’s time, for we were founded afore her day—left in his will, among the other bequests he made us, so much to buy holly, for garnishing the walls and windows, come Christmas. There was something homely and friendly in it. Being but strange here, then, and coming at Christmas-time, we took a liking for his very picter that hangs in what used to be, anciently, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted for an annual stipend in money, our great Dinner Hall.—A sedate gentleman in a peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck, and a scroll below him, in old English letters, ‘Lord! keep my memory green!’ You know all about him, Mr. Redlaw?”

“I know the portrait hangs there, Philip.”

“Yes, sure, it’s the second on the right, above the panelling. I was going to say—he has helped to keep *my* memory green, I thank him; for going round the building every year, as I’m a doing now, and freshening up the bare rooms with these branches and berries, freshens up my bare old brain. One year brings back another, and that year another, and those others numbers! At last, it seems to me as if the birth-time of our Lord was the birth-time of all I have ever had affection for, or mourned for, or delighted in—and they’re a pretty many, for I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy,” murmured Redlaw to himself.

The room began to darken strangely.

“So you see, sir,” pursued old Philip, whose hale wintry cheek had warmed into a ruddier glow, and whose blue eyes had brightened, while he spoke, “I have plenty to keep, when I keep this present season. Now, where’s my quiet Mouse? Chattering’s the sin of my time of life, and there’s half the building to do yet, if the cold don’t freeze us first, or the wind don’t blow us away, or the darkness don’t swallow us up.”

The quiet Mouse had brought her calm face to his side, and silently taken his arm, before he finished speaking.

“Come away, my dear,” said the old man. “Mr. Redlaw won’t settle to his dinner, otherwise, till it’s cold as the winter. I hope you’ll excuse me rambling on, sir, and I wish you good night, and, once again, a merry—”

“Stay!” said Mr. Redlaw, resuming his place at the table, more, it would have seemed from his manner, to reassure the old keeper, than in any remembrance of his own appetite. “Spare me another moment, Philip. William, you were going to tell me something to your excellent wife’s honour. It will not be disagreeable to her to hear you praise her. What was it?”

“Why, that’s where it is, you see, sir,” returned Mr. William Swidger, looking towards his wife in considerable embarrassment. “Mrs. William’s got her eye upon me.”

“But you’re not afraid of Mrs. William’s eye?”

“Why, no, sir,” returned Mr. Swidger, “that’s what I say myself. It wasn’t made to be afraid of. It wouldn’t have been made so mild, if that was the intention. But I wouldn’t like to—Milly!—him, you know. Down in the Buildings.”

Mr. William, standing behind the table, and rummaging disconcertedly among the objects upon it, directed persuasive glances at Mrs. William, and secret jerks of his head and thumb at Mr. Redlaw, as alluring her towards him.

“Him, you know, my love,” said Mr. William. “Down in the Buildings. Tell, my dear! You’re the works of Shakspeare in

comparison with myself. Down in the Buildings, you know, my love.—Student.”

“Student?” repeated Mr. Redlaw, raising his head.

“That’s what I say, sir!” cried Mr. William, in the utmost animation of assent. “If it wasn’t the poor student down in the Buildings, why should you wish to hear it from Mrs. William’s lips? Mrs. William, my dear—Buildings.”

“I didn’t know,” said Milly, with a quiet frankness, free from any haste or confusion, “that William had said anything about it, or I wouldn’t have come. I asked him not to. It’s a sick young gentleman, sir—and very poor, I am afraid—who is too ill to go home this holiday-time, and lives, unknown to any one, in but a common kind of lodging for a gentleman, down in Jerusalem Buildings. That’s all, sir.”

“Why have I never heard of him?” said the Chemist, rising hurriedly. “Why has he not made his situation known to me? Sick!—give me my hat and cloak. Poor!—what house?—what number?”

“Oh, you mustn’t go there, sir,” said Milly, leaving her father-in-law, and calmly confronting him with her collected little face and folded hands.

“Not go there?”

“Oh dear, no!” said Milly, shaking her head as at a most manifest and self-evident impossibility. “It couldn’t be thought of!”

“What do you mean? Why not?”

“Why, you see, sir,” said Mr. William Swidger, persuasively and confidentially, “that’s what I say. Depend upon it, the young gentleman would never have made his situation known to one of his own sex. Mrs. William has got into his confidence, but that’s quite different. They all confide in Mrs. William; they all trust *her*. A man, sir, couldn’t have got a whisper out of him; but woman, sir, and Mrs. William combined—!”

“There is good sense and delicacy in what you say, William,” returned Mr. Redlaw, observant of the gentle and composed face at his shoulder. And laying his finger on his lip, he secretly put his purse into her hand.

“Oh dear no, sir!” cried Milly, giving it back again. “Worse and worse! Couldn’t be dreamed of!”

Such a staid matter-of-fact housewife she was, and so unruffled by the momentary haste of this rejection, that, an instant afterwards, she was tidily picking up a few leaves which had strayed from between her scissors and her apron, when she had arranged the holly.

Finding, when she rose from her stooping posture, that Mr. Redlaw was still regarding her with doubt and astonishment, she quietly repeated—looking about, the while, for any other fragments that might have escaped her observation:

“Oh dear no, sir! He said that of all the world he would not be known to you, or receive help from you—though he is a student in your class. I have made no terms of secrecy with you, but I trust to your honour completely.”

“Why did he say so?”

“Indeed I can’t tell, sir,” said Milly, after thinking a little, “because I am not at all clever, you know; and I wanted to be useful to him in making things neat and comfortable about him, and employed myself that way. But I know he is poor, and lonely, and I think he is somehow neglected too.—How dark it is!”

The room had darkened more and more. There was a very heavy gloom and shadow gathering behind the Chemist’s chair.

“What more about him?” he asked.

“He is engaged to be married when he can afford it,” said Milly, “and is studying, I think, to qualify himself to earn a living. I have seen, a long time, that he has studied hard and denied himself much.—How very dark it is!”

“It’s turned colder, too,” said the old man, rubbing his hands. “There’s a chill and dismal feeling in the room. Where’s my son William? William, my boy, turn the lamp, and rouse the fire!”

Milly’s voice resumed, like quiet music very softly played:

“He muttered in his broken sleep yesterday afternoon, after talking to me” (this was to herself) “about some one dead, and some

great wrong done that could never be forgotten; but whether to him or to another person, I don't know. Not *by* him, I am sure."

"And, in short, Mrs. William, you see—which she wouldn't say herself, Mr. Redlaw, if she was to stop here till the new year after this next one—" said Mr. William, coming up to him to speak in his ear, "has done him worlds of good. Bless you, worlds of good! All at home just the same as ever—my father made as snug and comfortable—not a crumb of litter to be found in the house, if you were to offer fifty pound ready money for it—Mrs. William apparently never out of the way—yet Mrs. William backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, up and down, up and down, a mother to him!"

The room turned darker and colder, and the gloom and shadow gathering behind the chair was heavier.

"Not content with this, sir, Mrs. William goes and finds, this very night, when she was coming home (why it's not above a couple of hours ago), a creature more like a young wild beast than a young child, shivering upon a door-step. What does Mrs. William do, but brings it home to dry it, and feed it, and keep it till our old Bounty of food and flannel is given away, on Christmas morning! If it ever felt a fire before, it's as much as ever it did; for it's sitting in the old Lodge chimney, staring at ours as if its ravenous eyes would never shut again. It's sitting there, at least," said Mr. William, correcting himself, on reflection, "unless it's bolted!"

"Heaven keep her happy!" said the Chemist aloud, "and you too, Philip! and you, William. I must consider what to do in this. I may desire to see this student, I'll not detain you longer now. Good night!"

"I thankee, sir, I thankee!" said the old man, "for Mouse, and for my son William, and for myself. Where's my son William? William, you take the lantern and go on first, through them long dark passages, as you did last year and the year afore. Ha, ha! I remember—though I'm eighty-seven! 'Lord keep my memory green!' It's a very good prayer, Mr. Redlaw, that of the learned gentleman in the peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck—hangs up, second

on the right above the panelling, in what used to be, afore our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great Dinner Hall. ‘Lord keep my memory green!’ It’s very good and pious, sir. Amen! Amen!”

As they passed out and shut the heavy door, which, however carefully withheld, fired a long train of thundering reverberations when it shut at last, the room turned darker.

As he fell a-musing in his chair alone, the healthy holly withered on the wall, and dropped—dead branches.

As the gloom and shadow thickened behind him, in that place where it had been gathering so darkly, it took, by slow degrees,—or out of it there came, by some unreal, unsubstantial process, not to be traced by any human sense,—an awful likeness of himself!

Ghastly and cold, colourless in its leaden face and hands, but with his features, and his bright eyes, and his grizzled hair, and dressed in the gloomy shadow of his dress, it came into its terrible appearance of existence, motionless, without a sound. As *he* leaned his arm upon the elbow of his chair, ruminating before the fire, *it* leaned upon the chair-back, close above him, with its appalling copy of his face looking where his face looked, and bearing the expression his face bore.

This, then, was the Something that had passed and gone already. This was the dread companion of the haunted man!

It took, for some moments, no more apparent heed of him, than he of it. The Christmas Waits⁸ were playing somewhere in the distance, and, through his thoughtfulness, he seemed to listen to the music. It seemed to listen too.

At length he spoke; without moving or lifting up his face.

“Here again!” he said.

“Here again!” replied the Phantom.

“I see you in the fire,” said the haunted man; “I hear you in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night.”

The Phantom moved its head, assenting.



“Why do you come, to haunt me thus?”

“I come as I am called,” replied the Ghost.

“No. Unbidden,” exclaimed the Chemist.

“Unbidden be it,” said the Spectre. “It is enough. I am here.”

Hitherto the light of the fire had shone on the two faces—if the dread lineaments behind the chair might be called a face—both addressed towards it, as at first, and neither, looking at the other. But, now, the haunted man turned, suddenly, and stared upon the Ghost. The Ghost, as sudden in its motion, passed to before the chair, and stared on him.

The living man, and the animated image of himself dead, might so have looked, the one upon the other. An awful survey, in a lonely and remote part of an empty old pile of building, on a winter night, with the loud wind going by upon its journey of mystery—whence, or whither, no man knowing since the world began—and the stars, in unimaginable millions, glittering through it, from eternal space, where the world’s bulk is as a grain, and its hoary age is infancy.

“Look upon me!” said the Spectre. “I am he, neglected in my youth, and miserably poor, who strove and suffered, and still strove and suffered, until I hewed out knowledge from the mine where it was buried, and made rugged steps thereof, for my worn feet to rest and rise on.”

“I *am* that man,” returned the Chemist.

“No mother’s self-dying love,” pursued the Phantom, “no father’s counsel, aided *me*. A stranger came into my father’s place when I was but a child, and I was easily an alien from my mother’s heart. My parents, at the best, were of that sort whose care soon ends, and whose duty is soon done; who cast their offspring loose, early, as birds do theirs; and, if they do well, claim the merit; and, if ill, the pity.”

It paused, and seemed to tempt and goad him with its look, and with the manner of its speech, and with its smile.

“I am he,” pursued the Phantom, “who, in this struggle upward, found a friend. I made him—won him—bound him to me! We worked together, side by side. All the love and confidence that in my earlier youth had had no outlet, and found no expression, I bestowed on him.”

“Not all,” said Redlaw, hoarsely.

“No, not all,” returned the Phantom. “I had a sister.”

The haunted man, with his head resting on his hands, replied “I had!” The Phantom, with an evil smile, drew closer to the chair, and resting its chin upon its folded hands, its folded hands upon the back, and looking down into his face with searching eyes, that seemed instinct with fire, went on:

“Such glimpses of the light of home as I had ever known, had streamed from her. How young she was, how fair, how loving! I took her to the first poor roof that I was master of, and made it rich. She came into the darkness of my life, and made it bright.—She is before me!”

“I saw her, in the fire, but now. I hear her in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night,” returned the haunted man.

“*Did* he love her?” said the Phantom, echoing his contemplative tone. “I think he did, once. I am sure he did. Better had she loved him less—less secretly, less dearly, from the shallower depths of a more divided heart!”

“Let me forget it,” said the Chemist, with an angry motion of his hand. “Let me blot it from my memory!”

The Spectre, without stirring, and with its unwinking, cruel eyes still fixed upon his face, went on:

“A dream, like hers, stole upon my own life.”

“It did,” said Redlaw.

“A love, as like hers,” pursued the Phantom, “as my inferior nature might cherish, arose in my own heart. I was too poor to bind its object to my fortune then, by any thread of promise or entreaty. I loved her far too well, to seek to do it. But, more than ever I had striven in my life, I strove to climb! Only an inch gained, brought me something nearer to the height. I toiled up! In the late pauses of my labour at that time,—my sister (sweet companion!) still sharing with me the expiring embers and the cooling hearth,—when day was breaking, what pictures of the future did I see!”

“I saw them, in the fire, but now,” he murmured. “They come back to me in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years.”

“—Pictures of my own domestic life, in after-time, with her who was the inspiration of my toil. Pictures of my sister, made the wife of my dear friend, on equal terms—for he had some inheritance, we none—pictures of our sobered age and mellowed happiness, and of the golden links, extending back so far, that should bind us, and our children, in a radiant garland,” said the Phantom.

“Pictures,” said the haunted man, “that were delusions. Why is it my doom to remember them too well!”

“Delusions,” echoed the Phantom in its changeless voice, and glaring on him with its changeless eyes. “For my friend (in whose breast my confidence was locked as in my own), passing between me and the centre of the system of my hopes and struggles, won her to himself, and shattered my frail universe. My sister, doubly dear,

doubly devoted, doubly cheerful in my home, lived on to see me famous, and my old ambition so rewarded when its spring was broken, and then—”

“Then died,” he interposed. “Died, gentle as ever; happy; and with no concern but for her brother. Peace!”

The Phantom watched him silently.

“Remembered!” said the haunted man, after a pause. “Yes. So well remembered, that even now, when years have passed, and nothing is more idle or more visionary to me than the boyish love so long outlived, I think of it with sympathy, as if it were a younger brother’s or a son’s. Sometimes I even wonder when her heart first inclined to him, and how it had been affected towards me.—Not lightly, once, I think.—But that is nothing. Early unhappiness, a wound from a hand I loved and trusted, and a loss that nothing can replace, outlive such fancies.”

“Thus,” said the Phantom, “I bear within me a Sorrow and a Wrong. Thus I prey upon myself. Thus, memory is my curse; and, if I could forget my sorrow and my wrong, I would!”

“Mocker!” said the Chemist, leaping up, and making, with a wrathful hand, at the throat of his other self. “Why have I always that taunt in my ears?”

“Forbear!” exclaimed the Spectre in an awful voice. “Lay a hand on Me, and die!”

He stopped midway, as if its words had paralysed him, and stood looking on it. It had glided from him; it had its arm raised high in warning; and a smile passed over its unearthly features as it reared its dark figure in triumph.

“If I could forget my sorrow and wrong, I would,” the Ghost repeated. “If I could forget my sorrow and wrong, I would!”

“Evil spirit of myself,” returned the haunted man, in a low, trembling tone, “my life is darkened by that incessant whisper.”

“It is an echo,” said the Phantom.

“If it be an echo of my thoughts—as now, indeed, I know it is,” rejoined the haunted man, “why should I, therefore, be tormented? It is not a selfish thought. I suffer it to range beyond myself. All men

and women have their sorrows,—most of them their wrongs; ingratitude, and sordid jealousy, and interest, besetting all degrees of life. Who would not forget their sorrows and their wrongs?”

“Who would not, truly, and be the happier and better for it?” said the Phantom.

“These revolutions of years, which we commemorate,” proceeded Redlaw, “what do *they* recall! Are there any minds in which they do not re-awaken some sorrow, or some trouble? What is the remembrance of the old man who was here to-night? A tissue of sorrow and trouble.”

“But common natures,” said the Phantom, with its evil smile upon its glassy face, “unenlightened minds, and ordinary spirits, do not feel or reason on these things like men of higher cultivation and profounder thought.”

“Tempter,” answered Redlaw, “whose hollow look and voice I dread more than words can express, and from whom some dim foreshadowing of greater fear is stealing over me while I speak, I hear again an echo of my own mind.”

“Receive it as a proof that I am powerful,” returned the Ghost. “Hear what I offer! Forget the sorrow, wrong, and trouble you have known!”

“Forget them!” he repeated.

“I have the power to cancel their remembrance—to leave but very faint, confused traces of them, that will die out soon,” returned the Spectre. “Say! Is it done?”

“Stay!” cried the haunted man, arresting by a terrified gesture the uplifted hand. “I tremble with distrust and doubt of you; and the dim fear you cast upon me deepens into a nameless horror I can hardly bear.—I would not deprive myself of any kindly recollection, or any sympathy that is good for me, or others. What shall I lose, if I assent to this? What else will pass from my remembrance?”

“No knowledge; no result of study; nothing but the inter-twisted chain of feelings and associations, each in its turn dependent on, and nourished by, the banished recollections. Those will go.”

“Are they so many?” said the haunted man, reflecting in alarm.

“They have been wont to show themselves in the fire, in music, in the wind, in the dead stillness of the night, in the revolving years,” returned the Phantom scornfully.

“In nothing else?”

The Phantom held its peace.

But having stood before him, silent, for a little while, it moved towards the fire; then stopped.

“Decide!” it said, “before the opportunity is lost!”

“A moment! I call Heaven to witness,” said the agitated man, “that I have never been a hater of my kind,—never morose, indifferent, or hard, to anything around me. If, living here alone, I have made too much of all that was and might have been, and too little of what is, the evil, I believe, has fallen on me, and not on others. But, if there were poison in my body, should I not, possessed of antidotes and knowledge how to use them, use them? If there be poison in my mind, and through this fearful shadow I can cast it out, shall I not cast it out?”

“Say,” said the Spectre, “is it done?”

“A moment longer!” he answered hurriedly. “*I would forget it if I could!* Have I thought that, alone, or has it been the thought of thousands upon thousands, generation after generation? All human memory is fraught with sorrow and trouble. My memory is as the memory of other men, but other men have not this choice. Yes, I close the bargain. Yes! I WILL forget my sorrow, wrong, and trouble!”

“Say,” said the Spectre, “is it done?”

“It is!”

“IT IS. And take this with you, man whom I here renounce! The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will. Without recovering yourself the power that you have yielded up, you shall henceforth destroy its like in all whom you approach. Your wisdom has discovered that the memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble is the lot of all mankind, and that mankind would be the happier, in its other memories, without it. Go! Be its benefactor! Freed from such remembrance, from this hour, carry involuntarily the blessing of such freedom with you. Its diffusion is inseparable

and inalienable from you. Go! Be happy in the good you have won, and in the good you do!”

The Phantom, which had held its bloodless hand above him while it spoke, as if in some unholy invocation, or some ban; and which had gradually advanced its eyes so close to his, that he could see how they did not participate in the terrible smile upon its face, but were a fixed, unalterable, steady horror; melted from before him, and was gone.

As he stood rooted to the spot, possessed by fear and wonder, and imagining he heard repeated in melancholy echoes, dying away fainter and fainter, the words, “Destroy its like in all whom you approach!” a shrill cry reached his ears. It came, not from the passages beyond the door, but from another part of the old building, and sounded like the cry of some one in the dark who had lost the way.

He looked confusedly upon his hands and limbs, as if to be assured of his identity, and then shouted in reply, loudly and wildly; for there was a strangeness and terror upon him, as if he too were lost.

The cry responding, and being nearer, he caught up the lamp, and raised a heavy curtain in the wall, by which he was accustomed to pass into and out of the theatre where he lectured,—which adjoined his room. Associated with youth and animation, and a high amphitheatre of faces which his entrance charmed to interest in a moment, it was a ghostly place when all this life was faded out of it, and stared upon him like an emblem of Death.

“Halloa!” he cried. “Halloa! This way! Come to the light!” When, as he held the curtain with one hand, and with the other raised the lamp and tried to pierce the gloom that filled the place, something rushed past him into the room like a wild-cat, and crouched down in a corner.

“What is it?” he said, hastily.

He might have asked “What is it?” even had he seen it well, as presently he did when he stood looking at it, gathered up in its corner.

A bundle of tatters, held together by a hand, in size and form almost an infant's, but, in its greedy, desperate little clutch, a bad old man's. A face rounded and smoothed by some half-dozen years, but pinched and twisted by the experiences of a life. Bright eyes, but not youthful. Naked feet, beautiful in their childish delicacy,—ugly in the blood and dirt that cracked upon them. A baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who, within, would live and perish a mere beast.

Used, already, to be worried and hunted like a beast, the boy crouched down as he was looked at, and looked back again, and interposed his arm to ward off the expected blow.

“I'll bite,” he said, “if you hit me!”

The time had been, and not many minutes since, when such a sight as this would have wrung the Chemist's heart. He looked upon it now, coldly; but, with a heavy effort to remember something—he did not know what—he asked the boy what he did there, and whence he came.

“Where's the woman?” he replied. “I want to find the woman.”

“Who?”

“The woman. Her that brought me here, and set me by the large fire. She was so long gone, that I went to look for her, and lost myself. I don't want you. I want the woman.”

He made a spring, so suddenly, to get away, that the dull sound of his naked feet upon the floor was near the curtain, when Redlaw caught him by his rags.

“Come! you let me go!” muttered the boy, struggling, and clenching his teeth. “I've done nothing to you. Let me go, will you, to the woman!”



“That is not the way. There is a nearer one,” said Redlaw, detaining him, in the same blank effort to remember some association that ought, of right, to bear upon this monstrous object. “What is your name?”

“Got none.”

“Where do you live?”

“Live! What’s that?”

The boy shook his hair from his eyes to look at him for a moment, and then, twisting round his legs and wrestling with him, broke again into his repetition of “You let me go, will you? I want to find the woman.”

The Chemist led him to the door. “This way,” he said, looking at him still confusedly, but with repugnance and avoidance, growing out of his coldness. “I’ll take you to her.”

The sharp eyes in the child’s head, wandering round the room, lighted on the table where the remnants of the dinner were.

“Give me some of that!” he said, covetously.

“Has she not fed you?”

“I shall be hungry again to-morrow, shan’t I? Ain’t I hungry every day?”

Finding himself released, he bounded at the table like some small animal of prey, and hugging to his breast bread and meat, and his own rags, all together, said:

“There! Now take me to the woman!”

As the Chemist, with a new-born dislike to touch him, sternly motioned him to follow, and was going out of the door, he trembled and stopped.

“The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!”

The Phantom’s words were blowing in the wind, and the wind blew chill upon him.

“I’ll not go there, to-night,” he murmured faintly. “I’ll go nowhere to-night. Boy! straight down this long-arched passage, and past the great dark door into the yard,—you will see the fire shining on a window there.”

“The woman’s fire?” inquired the boy.

He nodded, and the naked feet had sprung away. He came back with his lamp, locked his door hastily, and sat down in his chair, covering his face like one who was frightened at himself.

For now he was, indeed, alone. Alone, alone.

CHAPTER II

THE GIFT DIFFUSED

A small man sat in a small parlour, partitioned off from a small shop by a small screen, pasted all over with small scraps of newspapers. In company with the small man, was almost any amount of small children you may please to name—at least it seemed so; they made, in that very limited sphere of action, such an imposing effect, in point of numbers.

Of these small fry, two had, by some strong machinery, been got into bed in a corner, where they might have reposed snugly enough in the sleep of innocence, but for a constitutional propensity to keep awake, and also to scuffle in and out of bed. The immediate occasion of these predatory dashes at the waking world, was the construction of an oyster-shell wall in a corner, by two other youths of tender age; on which fortification the two in bed made harassing descents (like those accursed Picts and Scots who beleaguer the early historical studies of most young Britons), and then withdrew to their own territory.

In addition to the stir attendant on these inroads, and the retorts of the invaded, who pursued hotly, and made lunges at the bed-clothes under which the marauders took refuge, another little boy, in another little bed, contributed his mite of confusion to the family stock, by casting his boots upon the waters;⁹ in other words, by launching these and several small objects, inoffensive in themselves, though of a hard substance considered as missiles, at the disturbers of his repose,—who were not slow to return these compliments.

Besides which, another little boy—the biggest there, but still little—was tottering to and fro, bent on one side, and considerably affected in his knees by the weight of a large baby, which he was supposed, by a fiction that obtains sometimes in sanguine families, to be hushing to sleep. But oh! the inexhaustible regions of

contemplation and watchfulness into which this baby's eyes were then only beginning to compose themselves to stare, over his unconscious shoulder!

It was a very Moloch¹⁰ of a baby, on whose insatiate altar the whole existence of this particular young brother was offered up a daily sacrifice. Its personality may be said to have consisted in its never being quiet, in any one place, for five consecutive minutes, and never going to sleep when required. "Tetterby's baby" was as well known in the neighbourhood as the postman or the pot-boy. It roved from door-step to door-step, in the arms of little Johnny Tetterby, and lagged heavily at the rear of troops of Juveniles who followed the Tumblers or the Monkey, and came up, all on one side, a little too late for everything that was attractive, from Monday morning until Saturday night. Wherever childhood congregated to play, there was little Moloch making Johnny fag and toil. Wherever Johnny desired to stay, little Moloch became fractious, and would not remain. Whenever Johnny wanted to go out, Moloch was asleep, and must be watched. Whenever Johnny wanted to stay at home, Moloch was awake, and must be taken out. Yet Johnny was verily persuaded that it was a faultless baby, without its peer in the realm of England, and was quite content to catch meek glimpses of things in general from behind its skirts, or over its limp flapping bonnet, and to go staggering about with it like a very little porter with a very large parcel, which was not directed to anybody, and could never be delivered anywhere.

The small man who sat in the small parlour, making fruitless attempts to read his newspaper peaceably in the midst of this disturbance, was the father of the family, and the chief of the firm described in the inscription over the little shop front, by the name and title of A. TETTERBY AND CO., NEWSMEN. Indeed, strictly speaking, he was the only personage answering to that designation, as Co. was a mere poetical abstraction, altogether baseless and impersonal.

Tetterby's was the corner shop in Jerusalem Buildings. There was a good show of literature in the window, chiefly consisting of picture-newspapers out of date, and serial pirates, and foot-pads.¹¹

Walking-sticks, likewise, and marbles, were included in the stock in trade. It had once extended into the light confectionery line; but it would seem that those elegancies of life were not in demand about Jerusalem Buildings, for nothing connected with that branch of commerce remained in the window, except a sort of small glass lantern containing a languishing mass of bull's-eyes, which had melted in the summer and congealed in the winter until all hope of ever getting them out, or of eating them without eating the lantern too, was gone for ever. Tetterby's had tried its hand at several things. It had once made a feeble little dart at the toy business; for, in another lantern, there was a heap of minute wax dolls, all sticking together upside down, in the direst confusion, with their feet on one another's heads, and a precipitate of broken arms and legs at the bottom. It had made a move in the millinery direction, which a few dry, wiry bonnet shapes remained in a corner of the window to attest. It had fancied that a living might lie hidden in the tobacco trade, and had stuck up a representation of a native of each of the three integral portions of the British empire, in the act of consuming that fragrant weed; with a poetic legend attached, importing that united in one cause they sat and joked, one chewed tobacco, one took snuff, one smoked: but nothing seemed to have come of it,—except flies. Time had been when it had put a forlorn trust in imitative jewellery, for in one pane of glass there was a card of cheap seals, and another of pencil cases and a mysterious black amulet of inscrutable intention labelled ninepence. But, to that hour, Jerusalem Buildings had bought none of them. In short, Tetterby's had tried so hard to get a livelihood out of Jerusalem Buildings in one way or other, and appeared to have done so indifferently in all, that the best position in the firm was too evidently Co.'s; Co., as a bodiless creation, being untroubled with the vulgar inconveniences of hunger and thirst, being chargeable neither to the poor's-rates¹² nor the assessed taxes, and having no young family to provide for.

Tetterby himself, however, in his little parlour, as already mentioned, having the presence of a young family impressed upon

his mind in a manner too clamorous to be disregarded, or to comport with the quiet perusal of a newspaper, laid down his paper, wheeled, in his distraction, a few times round the parlour, like an undecided carrier-pigeon, made an ineffectual rush at one or two flying little figures in bedgowns that skimmed past him, and then, bearing suddenly down upon the only unoffending member of the family, boxed the ears of little Moloch's nurse.

"You bad boy!" said Mr. Tetterby, "haven't you any feeling for your poor father after the fatigues and anxieties of a hard winter's day, since five o'clock in the morning, but must you wither his rest, and corrode his latest intelligence, with *your* wicious tricks? Isn't it enough, sir, that your brother 'Dolphus is toiling and moiling in the fog and cold, and you rolling in the lap of luxury with a—with a baby, and everythink you can wish for," said Mr. Tetterby, heaping this up as a great climax of blessings, "but must you make a wilderness of home, and maniacs of your parents? Must you, Johnny? Hey?" At each interrogation, Mr. Tetterby made a feint of boxing his ears again, but thought better of it, and held his hand.

"Oh, father!" whimpered Johnny, "when I wasn't doing anything, I'm sure, but taking such care of Sally and getting her to sleep. Oh, father!"

"I wish my little woman would come home!" said Mr. Tetterby, relenting and repenting, "I only wish my little woman would come home! I ain't fit to deal with 'em. They make my head go round, and get the better of me. Oh, Johnny! Isn't it enough that your dear mother has provided you with that sweet sister?" indicating Moloch; "isn't it enough that you were seven boys before, without a ray of gal, and that your dear mother went through what she *did* go through, on purpose that you might all of you have a little sister, but must you so behave yourself as to make my head swim?"

Softening more and more, as his own tender feelings and those of his injured son were worked on, Mr. Tetterby concluded by embracing him, and immediately breaking away to catch one of the real delinquents. A reasonably good start occurring, he succeeded, after a short but smart run, and some rather severe cross-country

work under and over the bedsteads, and in and out among the intricacies of the chairs, in capturing his infant, whom he condignly punished, and bore to bed. This example had a powerful, and apparently, mesmeric influence on him of the boots, who instantly fell into a deep sleep, though he had been, but a moment before, broad awake, and in the highest possible feather. Nor was it lost upon the two young architects, who retired to bed, in an adjoining closet, with great privacy and speed. The comrade of the Intercepted One also shrinking into his nest with similar discretion, Mr. Tetterby, when he paused for breath, found himself unexpectedly in a scene of peace.

“My little woman herself,” said Mr. Tetterby, wiping his flushed face, “could hardly have done it better! I only wish my little woman had had it to do, I do indeed!”

Mr. Tetterby sought upon his screen for a passage appropriate to be impressed upon his children’s minds on the occasion, and read the following.

“ ‘It is an undoubted fact that all remarkable men have had remarkable mothers, and have respected them in after life as their best friends.’ Think of your own remarkable mother, my boys,” said Mr. Tetterby, “and know her value while she is still among you!”

He sat down in his chair by the fire, and composed himself, cross-legged, over his newspaper.

“Let anybody, I don’t care who it is, get out of bed again,” said Tetterby, as a general proclamation, delivered in a very soft-hearted manner, “and astonishment will be the portion of that respected contemporary!”—which expression Mr. Tetterby selected from his screen. “Johnny, my child, take care of your only sister, Sally; for she’s the brightest gem that ever sparkled on your early brow.”

Johnny sat down on a little stool, and devotedly crushed himself beneath the weight of Moloch.

“Ah, what a gift that baby is to you, Johnny!” said his father, “and how thankful you ought to be! ‘It is not generally known,’ Johnny,” he was now referring to the screen again, “ ‘but it is a fact ascertained, by accurate calculations, that the following immense

per-centage of babies never attain to two years old; that is to say—’
”

“Oh, don’t, father, please!” cried Johnny. “I can’t bear it, when I think of Sally.”

Mr. Tetterby desisting, Johnny, with a profounder sense of his trust, wiped his eyes, and hushed his sister.

“Your brother ’Dolphus,” said his father, poking the fire, “is late to-night, Johnny, and will come home like a lump of ice. What’s got your precious mother?”

“Here’s mother, and ’Dolphus too, father!” exclaimed Johnny, “I think.”

“You’re right!” returned his father, listening. “Yes, that’s the footstep of my little woman.”

The process of induction, by which Mr. Tetterby had come to the conclusion that his wife was a little woman, was his own secret. She would have made two editions of himself, very easily. Considered as an individual, she was rather remarkable for being robust and portly; but considered with reference to her husband, her dimensions became magnificent. Nor did they assume a less imposing proportion, when studied with reference to the size of her seven sons, who were but diminutive. In the case of Sally, however, Mrs Tetterby had asserted herself, at last; as nobody knew better than the victim Johnny, who weighed and measured that exacting idol every hour in the day.

Mrs. Tetterby, who had been marketing, and carried a basket, threw back her bonnet and shawl, and sitting down, fatigued, commanded Johnny to bring his sweet charge to her straightway, for a kiss. Johnny having complied, and gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Master Adolphus Tetterby, who had by this time unwound his Torso out of a prismatic comforter, apparently interminable, requested the same favour. Johnny having again complied, and again gone back to his stool, and again crushed himself, Mr. Tetterby, struck by a sudden thought, preferred the same claim on his own parental part. The satisfaction of this third desire completely exhausted the sacrifice, who had hardly breath

enough left to get back to his stool, crush himself again, and pant at his relations.

“Whatever you do, Johnny,” said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking her head, “take care of her, or never look your mother in the face again.”

“Nor your brother,” said Adolphus.

“Nor your father, Johnny,” added Mr. Tetterby.

Johnny, much affected by this conditional renunciation of him, looked down at Moloch’s eyes to see that they were all right, so far, and skilfully patted her back (which was uppermost), and rocked her with his foot.

“Are you wet, ’Dolphus, my boy?” said his father. “Come and take my chair, and dry yourself.”

“No, father, thankee,” said Adolphus, smoothing himself down with his hands. “I an’t very wet, I don’t think. Does my face shine much, father?”

“Well, it *does* look waxy, my boy,” returned Mr. Tetterby.

“It’s the weather, father,” said Adolphus, polishing his cheeks on the worn sleeve of his jacket. “What with rain, and sleet, and wind, and snow, and fog, my face gets quite brought out into a rash sometimes. And shines, it does—oh, don’t it, though!”

Master Adolphus was also in the newspaper line of life, being employed, by a more thriving firm than his father and Co., to vend newspapers at a railway station, where his chubby little person, like a shabbily-disguised Cupid, and his shrill little voice (he was not much more than ten years old), were as well known as the hoarse panting of the locomotives, running in and out. His juvenility might have been at some loss for a harmless outlet, in this early application to traffic, but for a fortunate discovery he made of a means of entertaining himself, and of dividing the long day into stages of interest, without neglecting business. This ingenious invention, remarkable, like many great discoveries, for its simplicity, consisted in varying the first vowel in the word “paper,” and substituting, in its stead, at different periods of the day, all the other vowels in grammatical succession. Thus, before daylight in the

winter-time, he went to and fro, in his little oilskin cap and cape, and his big comforter, piercing the heavy air with his cry of “Morning Pa-per!” which, about an hour before noon, changed to “Morning Pep-per!” which, at about two, changed to “Morn-ing Pip-per!” which, in a couple of hours, changed to “Morning Pop-per!” and so declined with the sun into “Eve-ning Pup-per!” to the great relief and comfort of this young gentleman’s spirits.

Mrs. Tetterby, his lady-mother, who had been sitting with her bonnet and shawl thrown back, as aforesaid, thoughtfully turning her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger, now rose, and divesting herself of her out-of-door attire, began to lay the cloth for supper.

“Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s the way the world goes!”

“Which is the way the world goes, my dear?” asked Mr. Tetterby, looking round.

“Oh, nothing,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

Mr. Tetterby elevated his eyebrows, folded his newspaper afresh, and carried his eyes up it, and down it, and across it, but was wandering in his attention, and not reading it.

Mrs. Tetterby, at the same time, laid the cloth, but rather as if she were punishing the table than preparing the family supper; hitting it unnecessarily hard with the knives and forks, slapping it with the plates, dinting it with the salt-cellar, and coming heavily down upon it with the loaf.

“Ah, dear me, dear me, dear me!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s the way the world goes!”

“My duck,” returned her husband, looking round again, “you said that before. Which is the way the world goes?”

“Oh, nothing!” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“Sophia!” remonstrated her husband, “you said *that* before, too.”

“Well, I’ll say it again if you like,” returned Mrs. Tetterby. “Oh nothing—there! And again if you like, oh nothing—there! And again if you like, oh nothing—now then!”

Mr. Tetterby brought his eye to bear upon the partner of his bosom, and said, in mild astonishment:

“My little woman, what has put you out?”

“I’m sure *I* don’t know,” she retorted. “Don’t ask me. Who said I was put out at all? *I* never did.”

Mr. Tetterby gave up the perusal of his newspaper as a bad job, and, taking a slow walk across the room, with his hands behind him, and his shoulders raised—his gait according perfectly with the resignation of his manner—addressed himself to his two eldest offspring.



“Your supper will be ready in a minute, ‘Dolphus,’” said Mr. Tetterby. “Your mother has been out in the wet, to the cook’s shop, to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do. *You* shall get some supper too, very soon, Johnny. Your mother’s pleased with you, my man, for being so attentive to your precious sister.”

Mrs. Tetterby, without any remark, but with a decided subsidence of her animosity towards the table, finished her preparations, and took, from her ample basket, a substantial slab of hot pease pudding wrapped in paper, and a basin covered with a saucer, which, on

being uncovered, sent forth an odour so agreeable, that the three pairs of eyes in the two beds opened wide and fixed themselves upon the banquet. Mr. Tetterby, without regarding this tacit invitation to be seated, stood repeating slowly, "Yes, yes, your supper will be ready in a minute, 'Dolphus—your mother went out in the wet, to the cook's shop, to buy it. It was very good of your mother so to do"—until Mrs. Tetterby, who had been exhibiting sundry tokens of contrition behind him, caught him round the neck, and wept.

"Oh, 'Dolphus!" said Mrs. Tetterby, "how could I go and behave so?"

This reconciliation affected Adolphus the younger and Johnny to that degree, that they both, as with one accord, raised a dismal cry, which had the effect of immediately shutting up the round eyes in the beds, and utterly routing the two remaining little Tetterbys, just then stealing in from the adjoining closet to see what was going on in the eating way.

"I am sure, 'Dolphus," sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, "coming home, I had no more idea than a child unborn——"

Mr. Tetterby seemed to dislike this figure of speech, and observed, "Say than the baby, my dear."

"—Had no more idea than the baby," said Mrs. Tetterby. —"Johnny, don't look at me, but look at her, or she'll fall out of your lap and be killed, and then you'll die in agonies of a broken heart, and serve you right.—No more idea I hadn't than that darling, of being cross when I came home; but somehow, 'Dolphus——" Mrs. Tetterby paused, and again turned her wedding-ring round and round upon her finger.

"I see!" said Mr. Tetterby. "I understand! My little woman was put out. Hard times, and hard weather, and hard work, make it trying now and then. I see, bless your soul! No wonder! 'Dolf, my man," continued Mr. Tetterby, exploring the basin with a fork, "here's your mother been and bought, at the cook's shop, besides pease pudding, a whole knuckle of a lovely roast leg of pork, with lots of crackling left upon it, and with seasoning gravy and mustard

quite unlimited. Hand in your plate, my boy, and begin while it's simmering."

Master Adolphus, needing no second summons, received his portion with eyes rendered moist by appetite, and withdrawing to his particular stool, fell upon his supper tooth and nail. Johnny was not forgotten, but received his rations on bread, lest he should in a flush of gravy, trickle any on the baby. He was required, for similar reasons, to keep his pudding, when not on active service, in his pocket.

There might have been more pork on the knucklebone,—which knucklebone the carver at the cook's shop had assuredly not forgotten in carving for previous customers—but there was no stint of seasoning, and that is an accessory dreamily suggesting pork, and pleasantly cheating the sense of taste. The pease pudding, too, the gravy and mustard, like the Eastern rose in respect of the nightingale,¹³ if they were not absolutely pork, had lived near it; so, upon the whole, there was the flavour of a middle-sized pig. It was irresistible to the Tetterbys in bed, who, though professing to slumber peacefully, crawled out when unseen by their parents, and silently appealed to their brothers for any gastronomic token of fraternal affection. They, not hard of heart, presenting scraps in return, it resulted that a party of light skirmishers in night-gowns were careering about the parlour all through supper, which harassed Mr. Tetterby exceedingly, and once or twice imposed upon him the necessity of a charge, before which these guerilla troops retired in all directions and in great confusion.

Mrs. Tetterby did not enjoy her supper. There seemed to be something on Mrs. Tetterby's mind. At one time she laughed without reason, and at another time she cried without reason, and at last she laughed and cried together in a manner so very unreasonable that her husband was confounded.

"My little woman," said Mr. Tetterby, "if the world goes that way, it appears to go the wrong way, and to choke you."

"Give me a drop of water," said Mrs. Tetterby, struggling with herself, "and don't speak to me for the present, or take any notice of

me. Don't do it!"

Mr. Tetterby having administered the water, turned suddenly on the unlucky Johnny (who was full of sympathy), and demanded why he was wallowing there, in gluttony and idleness, instead of coming forward with the baby, that the sight of her might revive his mother. Johnny immediately approached, borne down by its weight; but Mrs. Tetterby holding out her hand to signify that she was not in a condition to bear that trying appeal to her feelings, he was interdicted from advancing another inch, on pain of perpetual hatred from all his dearest connections; and accordingly retired to his stool again, and crushed himself as before.

After a pause, Mrs. Tetterby said she was better now, and began to laugh.

"My little woman," said her husband, dubiously, "are you quite sure you're better? Or are you, Sophia, about to break out in a fresh direction?"

"No, 'Dolphus, no," replied his wife. "I'm quite myself." With that, settling her hair, and pressing the palms of her hands upon her eyes, she laughed again.

"What a wicked fool I was, to think so for a moment!" said Mrs. Tetterby. "Come nearer, 'Dolphus, and let me ease my mind, and tell you what I mean. Let me tell you all about it."

Mr. Tetterby bringing his chair closer, Mrs. Tetterby laughed again, gave him a hug, and wiped her eyes.

"You know, 'Dolphus, my dear," said Mrs. Tetterby, "that when I was single, I might have given myself away in several directions. At one time, four after me at once; two of them were sons of Mars."

"We're all sons of Ma's, my dear," said Mr. Tetterby, "jointly with Pa's."

"I don't mean that," replied his wife, "I mean soldiers—serjeants."

"Oh!" said Mr. Tetterby.

"Well, 'Dolphus, I'm sure I never think of such things now, to regret them; and I'm sure I've got as good a husband, and would do as much to prove that I was fond of him, as——"

“As any little woman in the world,” said Mr. Tetterby. “Very good. *Very good.*”

If Mr. Tetterby had been ten feet high, he could not have expressed a gentler consideration for Mrs. Tetterby’s fairy-like stature; and if Mrs. Tetterby had been two feet high, she could not have felt it more appropriately her due.

“But you see, ’Dolphus,” said Mrs. Tetterby, “this being Christmas-time, when all people who can, make holiday, and when all people who have got money, like to spend some, I did, somehow, get a little out of sorts when I was in the streets just now. There were so many things to be sold—such delicious things to eat, such fine things to look at, such delightful things to have—and there was so much calculating and calculating necessary, before I durst lay out a sixpence for the commonest thing; and the basket was so large, and wanted so much in it; and my stock of money was so small, and would go such a little way;—you hate me, don’t you, ’Dolphus?”

“Not quite,” said Mr. Tetterby, “as yet.”

“Well! I’ll tell you the whole truth,” pursued his wife, penitently, “and then perhaps you will. I felt all this, so much, when I was trudging about in the cold, and when I saw a lot of other calculating faces and large baskets trudging about, too, that I began to think whether I mightn’t have done better, and been happier, if—I hadn’t —” the wedding-ring went round again, and Mrs. Tetterby shook her downcast head as she turned it.

“I see,” said her husband quietly; “if you hadn’t married at all, or if you had married somebody else?”

“Yes,” sobbed Mrs. Tetterby. “That’s really what I thought. Do you hate me now, ’Dolphus?”

“Why no,” said Mr. Tetterby, “I don’t find that I do, as yet.”

Mrs. Tetterby gave him a thankful kiss, and went on.

“I begin to hope you won’t, now, ’Dolphus, though I am afraid I haven’t told you the worst. I can’t think what came over me. I don’t know whether I was ill, or mad, or what I was, but I couldn’t call up anything that seemed to bind us to each other, or to reconcile me to my fortune. All the pleasures and enjoyments we had ever had—*they*

seemed so poor and insignificant, I hated them. I could have trodden on them. And I could think of nothing else, except our being poor, and the number of mouths there were at home.”

“Well, well, my dear,” said Mr. Tetterby, shaking her hand encouragingly, “that’s truth after all. We *are* poor, and there *are* a number of mouths at home here.”

“Ah! but, Dolf, Dolf!” cried his wife, laying her hands upon his neck, “my good, kind, patient fellow, when I had been at home a very little while—how different! Oh, Dolf dear, how different it was! I felt as if there was a rush of recollection on me, all at once, that softened my hard heart, and filled it up till it was bursting. All our struggles for a livelihood, all our cares and wants since we have been married, all the times of sickness, all the hours of watching, we have ever had, by one another, or by the children, seemed to speak to me, and say that they had made us one, and that I never might have been, or could have been, or would have been, any other than the wife and mother I am. Then, the cheap enjoyments that I could have trodden on so cruelly, got to be so precious to me—Oh so priceless, and dear!—that I couldn’t bear to think how much I had wronged them; and I said, and say again a hundred times, how could I ever behave so, ’Dolphus, how could I ever have the heart to do it!”

The good woman, quite carried away by her honest tenderness and remorse, was weeping with all her heart, when she started up with a scream, and ran behind her husband. Her cry was so terrified, that the children started from their sleep and from their beds, and clung about her. Nor did her gaze belie her voice, as she pointed to a pale man in a black cloak who had come into the room.

“Look at that man! Look there! What does he want?”

“My dear,” returned her husband, “I’ll ask him if you’ll let me go. What’s the matter? How you shake!”

“I saw him in the street, when I was out just now. He looked at me, and stood near me. I am afraid of him.”

“Afraid of him! Why?”

“I don’t know why—I—stop! husband!” for he was going towards the stranger.

She had one hand pressed upon her forehead, and one upon her breast; and there was a peculiar fluttering all over her, and a hurried unsteady motion in her eyes, as if she had lost something.

“Are you ill, my dear?”

“What is it that is going from me again?” she muttered, in a low voice. “What is this that is going away?”

Then she abruptly answered: “Ill? No, I am quite well,” and stood looking vacantly at the floor.

Her husband, who had not been altogether free from the infection of her fear at first, and whom the present strangeness of her manner did not tend to reassure, addressed himself to the pale visitor in the black cloak, who stood still, and whose eyes were bent upon the ground.

“What may be your pleasure, sir,” he asked, “with us?”

“I fear that my coming in unperceived,” returned the visitor, “has alarmed you; but you were talking and did not hear me.”

“My little woman says—perhaps you heard her say it,” returned Mr. Tetterby, “that it’s not the first time you have alarmed her to-night.”

“I am sorry for it. I remember to have observed her, for a few moments only, in the street. I had no intention of frightening her.”

As he raised his eyes in speaking, she raised hers. It was extraordinary to see what dread she had of him, and with what dread he observed it—and yet how narrowly and closely.

“My name,” he said, “is Redlaw. I come from the old college hard by. A young gentleman who is a student there, lodges in your house, does he not?”

“Mr. Denham?” said Tetterby.

“Yes.”

It was a natural action, and so slight as to be hardly noticeable; but the little man, before speaking again, passed his hand across his forehead, and looked quickly round the room, as though he were

sensible of some change in its atmosphere. The Chemist, instantly transferring to him the look of dread he had directed towards the wife, stepped back, and his face turned paler.

“The gentleman’s room,” said Tetterby, “is up stairs, sir. There’s a more convenient private entrance; but as you have come in here, it will save your going out into the cold, if you’ll take this little staircase,” showing one communicating directly with the parlour, “and go up to him that way, if you wish to see him.”

“Yes, I wish to see him,” said the Chemist. “Can you spare a light?”

The watchfulness of his haggard look, and the inexplicable distrust that darkened it, seemed to trouble Mr. Tetterby. He paused; and looking fixedly at him in return, stood for a minute or so, like a man stupefied, or fascinated.

At length he said, “I’ll light you, sir, if you’ll follow me.”

“No,” replied the Chemist, “I don’t wish to be attended, or announced to him. He does not expect me. I would rather go alone. Please to give me the light, if you can spare it, and I’ll find the way.”

In the quickness of his expression of this desire, and in taking the candle from the newsman, he touched him on the breast. Withdrawing his hand hastily, almost as though he had wounded him by accident (for he did not know in what part of himself his new power resided, or how it was communicated, or how the manner of its reception varied in different persons), he turned and ascended the stair.

But when he reached the top, he stopped and looked down. The wife was standing in the same place, twisting her ring round and round upon her finger. The husband, with his head bent forward on his breast, was musing heavily and sullenly. The children, still clustering about the mother, gazed timidly after the visitor, and nestled together when they saw him looking down.

“Come!” said the father, roughly. “There’s enough of this. Get to bed here!”

“The place is inconvenient and small enough,” the mother added, “without you. Get to bed!”



The whole brood, scared and sad, crept away; little Johnny and the baby lagging last. The mother, glancing contemptuously round the sordid room and tossing from her the fragments of their meal, stopped on the threshold of her task of clearing the table, and sat down, pondering idly and dejectedly. The father betook himself to

the chimney-corner, and impatiently raking the small fire together, bent over it as if he would monopolise it all. They did not interchange a word.

The Chemist, paler than before, stole upward like a thief; looking back upon the change below, and dreading equally to go on or return.

“What have I done!” he said, confusedly. “What am I going to do!”

“To be the benefactor of mankind,” he thought he heard a voice reply.

He looked round, but there was nothing there; and a passage now shutting out the little parlour from his view, he went on, directing his eyes before him at the way he went.

“It is only since last night,” he muttered gloomily, “that I have remained shut up, and yet all things are strange to me. I am strange to myself. I am here, as in a dream. What interest have I in this place, or in any place that I can bring to my remembrance? My mind is going blind!”

There was a door before him, and he knocked at it. Being invited, by a voice within, to enter, he complied.

“Is that my kind nurse?” said the voice. “But I need not ask her. There is no one else to come here.”

It spoke cheerfully, though in a languid tone, and attracted his attention to a young man lying on a couch, drawn before the chimney-piece, with the back towards the door. A meagre scanty stove, pinched and hollowed like a sick man’s cheeks, and bricked into the centre of a hearth that it could scarcely warm, contained the fire, to which his face was turned. Being so near the windy house-top, it wasted quickly, and with a busy sound, and the burning ashes dropped down fast.

“They chink when they shoot out here,” said the student, smiling, “so, according to the gossips, they are not coffins, but purses.¹⁴ I shall be well and rich yet, some day, if it please God, and shall live perhaps to love a daughter Milly, in remembrance of the kindest nature and the gentlest heart in the world.”

He put up his hand as if expecting her to take it, but, being weakened, he lay still, with his face resting on his other hand, and did not turn round.

The Chemist glanced about the room;—at the student's books and papers, piled upon a table in a corner, where they, and his extinguished reading-lamp, now prohibited and put away, told of the attentive hours that had gone before this illness, and perhaps caused it;—at such signs of his old health and freedom, as the out-of-door attire that hung idle on the wall;—at those remembrances of other and less solitary scenes, the little miniatures upon the chimney-piece, and the drawing of home;—at that token of his emulation, perhaps, in some sort, of his personal attachment too, the framed engraving of himself, the looker-on. The time had been, only yesterday, when not one of these objects, in its remotest association of interest with the living figure before him, would have been lost on Redlaw. Now, they were but objects; or, if any gleam of such connexion shot upon him, it perplexed, and not enlightened him, as he stood looking round with a dull wonder.

The student, recalling the thin hand which had remained so long untouched, raised himself on the couch, and turned his head.

“Mr. Redlaw!” he exclaimed, and started up.

Redlaw put out his arm.

“Don't come nearer to me. I will sit here. Remain you, where you are!”

He sat down on a chair near the door, and having glanced at the young man standing leaning with his hand upon the couch, spoke with his eyes averted towards the ground.

“I heard, by an accident, by what accident is no matter, that one of my class was ill and solitary. I received no other description of him, than that he lived in this street. Beginning my inquiries at the first house in it, I have found him.”

“I have been ill, sir,” returned the student, not merely with a modest hesitation, but with a kind of awe of him, “but am greatly better. An attack of fever—of the brain, I believe—has weakened me, but I am much better. I cannot say I have been solitary, in my

illness, or I should forget the ministering hand that has been near me.”

“You are speaking of the keeper’s wife,” said Redlaw.

“Yes.” The student bent his head, as if he rendered her some silent homage.

The Chemist, in whom there was a cold, monotonous apathy, which rendered him more like a marble image on the tomb of the man who had started from his dinner yesterday at the first mention of this student’s case, than the breathing man himself, glanced again at the student leaning with his hand upon the couch, and looked upon the ground, and in the air, as if for light for his blinded mind.

“I remembered your name,” he said, “when it was mentioned to me down stairs, just now; and I recollect your face. We have held but very little personal communication together?”

“Very little.”

“You have retired and withdrawn from me, more than any of the rest, I think?”

The student signified assent.

“And why?” said the Chemist; not with the least expression of interest, but with a moody, wayward kind of curiosity. “Why? How comes it that you have sought to keep especially from me, the knowledge of your remaining here, at this season, when all the rest have dispersed, and of your being ill? I want to know why this is?”

The young man, who had heard him with increasing agitation, raised his downcast eyes to his face, and clasping his hands together, cried with sudden earnestness, and with trembling lips:

“Mr. Redlaw! You have discovered me. You know my secret!”

“Secret?” said the Chemist, harshly. “I know?”

“Yes! Your manner, so different from the interest and sympathy which endear you to so many hearts, your altered voice, the constraint there is in everything you say, and in your looks,” replied the student, “warn me that you know me. That you would conceal it, even now, is but a proof to me (God knows I need none!) of your natural kindness, and of the bar there is between us.”

A vacant and contemptuous laugh was all his answer.

“But, Mr. Redlaw,” said the student, “as a just man, and a good man, think how innocent I am, except in name and descent, of participation in any wrong inflicted on you, or in any sorrow you have borne.”

“Sorrow!” said Redlaw, laughing. “Wrong! What are those to me?”

“For Heaven’s sake,” entreated the shrinking student, “do not let the mere interchange of a few words with me change you like this, sir! Let me pass again from your knowledge and notice. Let me occupy my old reserved and distant place among those whom you instruct. Know me only by the name I have assumed, and not by that of Longford—”

“Longford!” exclaimed the other.

He clasped his head with both his hands, and for a moment turned upon the young man his own intelligent and thoughtful face. But the light passed from it, like the sunbeam of an instant, and it clouded as before.

“The name my mother bears, sir,” faltered the young man, “the name she took, when she might, perhaps, have taken one more honoured. Mr. Redlaw,” hesitating, “I believe I know that history. Where my information halts, my guesses at what is wanting may supply something not remote from the truth. I am the child of a marriage that has not proved itself a well-assorted or a happy one. From infancy, I have heard you spoken of with honour and respect—with something that was almost reverence. I have heard of such devotion, of such fortitude and tenderness, of such rising up against the obstacles which press men down, that my fancy, since I learnt my little lesson from my mother, has shed a lustre on your name. At last, a poor student myself, from whom could I learn but you?”

Redlaw, unmoved, unchanged, and looking at him with a staring frown, answered by no word or sign.

“I cannot say,” pursued the other, “I should try in vain to say, how much it has impressed me, and affected me, to find the gracious traces of the past, in that certain power of winning

gratitude and confidence which is associated among us students (among the humblest of us, most) with Mr. Redlaw's generous name. Our ages and positions are so different, sir, and I am so accustomed to regard you from a distance, that I wonder at my own presumption when I touch, however lightly, on that theme. But to one who—I may say, who felt no common interest in my mother once—it may be something to hear, now that is all past, with what indescribable feelings of affection I have, in my obscurity, regarded him; with what pain and reluctance I have kept aloof from his encouragement, when a word of it would have made me rich; yet how I have left it fit that I should hold my course, content to know him, and to be unknown. Mr. Redlaw," said the student, faintly, "what I would have said, I have said ill, for my strength is strange to me as yet; but for anything unworthy in this fraud of mine, forgive me, and for all the rest forget me!"

The staring frown remained on Redlaw's face, and yielded to no other expression until the student, with these words, advanced towards him, as if to touch his hand, when he drew back and cried to him:

"Don't come nearer to me!"

The young man stopped, shocked by the eagerness of his recoil, and by the sternness of his repulsion; and he passed his hand, thoughtfully, across his forehead.

"The past is past," said the Chemist. "It dies like the brutes. Who talks to me of its traces in my life? He raves or lies! What have I to do with your distempered dreams? If you want money, here it is. I came to offer it; and that is all I came for. There can be nothing else that brings me here," he muttered, holding his head again, with both his hands. "There *can* be nothing else, and yet——"

He had tossed his purse upon the table. As he fell into this dim cogitation with himself, the student took it up, and held it out to him.

"Take it back, sir," he said proudly, though not angrily. "I wish you could take from me, with it, the remembrance of your words and offer."

“You do?” he retorted, with a wild light in his eyes. “You do?”

“I do!”

The Chemist went close to him, for the first time, and took the purse, and turned him by the arm, and looked him in the face.

“There is sorrow and trouble in sickness, is there not?” he demanded with a laugh.

The wondering student answered, “Yes.”

“In its unrest, in its anxiety, in its suspense, in all its train of physical and mental miseries?” said the Chemist, with a wild unearthly exultation. “All best forgotten, are they not?”

The student did not answer, but again passed his hand, confusedly, across his forehead. Redlaw still held him by the sleeve, when Milly’s voice was heard outside.

“I can see very well now,” she said, “thank you, Dolf. Don’t cry, dear. Father and mother will be comfortable again, tomorrow, and home will be comfortable too. A gentleman with him, is there!”

Redlaw released his hold, as he listened.

“I have feared, from the first moment,” he murmured to himself, “to meet her. There is a steady quality of goodness in her, that I dread to influence. I may be the murderer of what is tenderest and best within her bosom.”

She was knocking at the door.

“Shall I dismiss it as an idle foreboding, or still avoid her?” he muttered, looking uneasily around.

She was knocking at the door again.

“Of all the visitors who could come here,” he said, in a hoarse alarmed voice, turning to his companion, “this is the one I should desire most to avoid. Hide me!”

The student opened a frail door in the wall, communicating, where the garret-roof began to slope towards the floor, with a small inner room. Redlaw passed in hastily, and shut it after him.

The student then resumed his place upon the couch, and called to her to enter.

“Dear Mr. Edmund,” said Milly, looking round, “they told me there was a gentleman here.”

“There is no one here but I.”

“There has been some one?”

“Yes, yes, there has been some one.”

She put her little basket on the table, and went up to the back of the couch, as if to take the extended hand—but it was not there. A little surprised, in her quiet way, she leaned over to look at his face, and gently touched him on the brow.

“Are you quite as well to-night? Your head is not so cool as in the afternoon.”

“Tut!” said the student, petulantly, “very little ails me.”

A little more surprise, but no reproach, was expressed in her face, as she withdrew to the other side of the table, and took a small packet of needlework from her basket. But she laid it down again, on second thoughts, and going noiselessly about the room, set everything exactly in its place, and in the neatest order; even to the cushions on the couch, which she touched with so light a hand, that he hardly seemed to know it, as he lay looking at the fire. When all this was done, and she had swept the hearth, she sat down, in her modest little bonnet, to her work, and was quietly busy on it directly.

“It’s the new muslin curtain for the window, Mr. Edmund,” said Milly, stitching away as she talked. “It will look very clean and nice, though it costs very little, and will save your eyes, too, from the light. My William says the room should not be too light just now, when you are recovering so well, or the glare might make you giddy.”

He said nothing; but there was something so fretful and impatient in his change of position, that her quick fingers stopped, and she looked at him anxiously.

“The pillows are not comfortable,” she said, laying down her work and rising. “I will soon put them right.”

“They are very well,” he answered. “Leave them alone, pray. You make so much of everything.”

He raised his head to say this, and looked at her so thanklessly, that, after he had thrown himself down again, she stood timidly pausing. However, she resumed her seat, and her needle, without having directed even a murmuring look towards him, and was soon as busy as before.

“I have been thinking, Mr. Edmund, that *you* have been often thinking of late, when I have been sitting by, how true the saying is, that adversity is a good teacher. Health will be more precious to you, after this illness, than it has ever been. And years hence, when this time of year comes round, and you remember the days when you lay here sick, alone, that the knowledge of your illness might not afflict those who are dearest to you, your home will be doubly dear and doubly blest. Now, isn't that a good, true thing?”



She was too intent upon her work, and too earnest in what she said, and too composed and quiet altogether, to be on the watch for any look he might direct towards her in reply; so the shaft of his ungrateful glance fell harmless, and did not wound her.

“Ah!” said Milly, with her pretty head inclining thoughtfully on one side, as she looked down, following her busy fingers with her eyes. “Even on me—and I am very different from you, Mr. Edmund, for I have no learning, and don't know how to think properly—this view of such things has made a great impression, since you have

been lying ill. When I have seen you so touched by the kindness and attention of the poor people down stairs, I have felt that you thought even that experience some repayment for the loss of health, and I have read in your face, as plain as if it was a book, that but for some trouble and sorrow we should never know half the good there is about us.”

His getting up from the couch, interrupted her, or she was going on to say more.

“We needn’t magnify the merit, Mrs. William,” he rejoined slightly. “The people down stairs will be paid in good time, I dare say, for any little extra service they may have rendered me; and perhaps they anticipate no less. I am much obliged to you, too.”

Her fingers stopped, and she looked at him.

“I can’t be made to feel the more obliged by your exaggerating the case,” he said. “I am sensible that you have been interested in me, and I say I am much obliged to you. What more would you have?”

Her work fell on her lap, as she still looked at him walking to and fro with an intolerant air, and stopping now and then.

“I say again, I am much obliged to you. Why weaken my sense of what is your due in obligation, by preferring enormous claims upon me? Trouble, sorrow, affliction, adversity! One might suppose I had been dying a score of deaths here!”

“Do you believe, Mr. Edmund,” she asked, rising and going nearer to him, “that I spoke of the poor people of the house, with any reference to myself? To me?” laying her hand upon her bosom with a simple and innocent smile of astonishment.

“Oh! I think nothing about it, my good creature,” he returned. “I have had an indisposition, which your solicitude—observe! I say solicitude—makes a great deal more of, than it merits; and it’s over, and we can’t perpetuate it.”

He coldly took a book, and sat down at the table.

She watched him for a little while, until her smile was quite gone, and then, returning to where her basket was, said gently:

“Mr. Edmund, would you rather be alone?”

“There is no reason why I should detain you here,” he replied.

“Except—” said Milly, hesitating, and showing her work.

“Oh! the curtain,” he answered, with a supercilious laugh. “That’s not worth staying for.”

She made up the little packet again, and put it in her basket. Then, standing before him with such an air of patient entreaty that he could not choose but look at her, she said:

“If you should want me, I will come back willingly. When you did want me, I was quite happy to come; there was no merit in it. I think you must be afraid, that, now you are getting well, I may be troublesome to you; but I should not have been, indeed. I should have come no longer than your weakness and confinement lasted. You owe me nothing; but it is right that you should deal as justly by me as if I was a lady—even the very lady that you love; and if you suspect me of meanly making much of the little I have tried to do to comfort your sick room, you do yourself more wrong than ever you can do me. That is why I am sorry. That is why I am very sorry.”

If she had been as passionate as she was quiet, as indignant as she was calm, as angry in her look as she was gentle, as loud of tone as she was low and clear, she might have left no sense of her departure in the room, compared with that which fell upon the lonely student when she went away.

He was gazing drearily upon the place where she had been, when Redlaw came out of his concealment, and came to the door.

“When sickness lays its hand on you again,” he said, looking fiercely back at him, “—may it be soon!—Die here! Rot here!”

“What have you done?” returned the other, catching at his cloak. “What change have you wrought in me? What curse have you brought upon me? Give me back myself!”

“Give me back *myself!*” exclaimed Redlaw like a madman. “I am infected! I am infectious! I am charged with poison for my own mind, and the minds of all mankind. Where I felt interest, compassion, sympathy, I am turning into stone. Selfishness and ingratitude spring up in my blighting footsteps. I am only so much

less base than the wretches whom I make so, that in the moment of their transformation I can hate them.”

As he spoke—the young man still holding to his cloak—he cast him off, and struck him: then, wildly hurried out into the night air where the wind was blowing, the snow falling, the cloud-drift sweeping on, the moon dimly shining; and where, blowing in the wind, falling with the snow, drifting with the clouds, shining in the moonlight, and heavily looming in the darkness, were the Phantom’s words, “The gift that I have given, you shall give again, go where you will!”

Whither he went, he neither knew nor cared, so that he avoided company. The change he felt within him made the busy streets a desert, and himself a desert, and the multitude around him, in their manifold endurances and ways of life, a mighty waste of sand, which the winds tossed into unintelligible heaps and made a ruinous confusion of. Those traces in his breast which the Phantom had told him would “die out soon,” were not, as yet, so far upon their way to death, but that he understood enough of what he was, and what he made of others, to desire to be alone.

This put it in his mind—he suddenly bethought himself, as he was going along, of the boy who had rushed into his room. And then he recollected, that of those with whom he had communicated since the Phantom’s disappearance, that boy alone had shown no sign of being changed.

Monstrous and odious as the wild thing was to him, he determined to seek it out, and prove if this were really so; and also to seek it with another intention, which came into his thoughts at the same time.

So, resolving with some difficulty where he was, he directed his steps back to the old college, and to that part of it where the general porch was, and where, alone, the pavement was worn by the tread of the students’ feet.

The keeper’s house stood just within the iron gates, forming a part of the chief quadrangle. There was a little cloister outside, and from that sheltered place he knew he could look in at the window of

their ordinary room, and see who was within. The iron gates were shut, but his hand was familiar with the fastening, and drawing it back by thrusting in his wrist between the bars, he passed through softly, shut it again, and crept up to the window, crumbling the thin crust of snow with his feet.

The fire, to which he had directed the boy last night, shining brightly through the glass, made an illuminated place upon the ground. Instinctively avoiding this, and going round it, he looked in at the window. At first, he thought that there was no one there, and that the blaze was reddening only the old beams in the ceiling and the dark walls; but peering in more narrowly, he saw the object of his search coiled asleep before it on the floor. He passed quickly to the door, opened it, and went in.

The creature lay in such a fiery heat, that, as the Chemist stooped to rouse him, it scorched his head. So soon as he was touched, the boy, not half awake, clutching his rags together with the instinct of flight upon him, half rolled and half ran into a distant corner of the room, where, heaped upon the ground, he struck his foot out to defend himself.

“Get up!” said the Chemist. “You have not forgotten me?”

“You let me alone!” returned the boy. “This is the woman’s house—not yours.”

The Chemist’s steady eye controlled him somewhat, or inspired him with enough submission to be raised upon his feet, and looked at.

“Who washed them, and put those bandages where they were bruised and cracked?” asked the Chemist, pointing to their altered state.



“The woman did.”

“And is it she who had made you cleaner in the face, too?”

“Yes. The woman.”

Redlaw asked these questions to attract his eyes towards himself, and with the same intent now held him by the chin, and threw his wild hair back, though he loathed to touch him. The boy watched his eyes keenly, as if he thought it needful to his own defence, not knowing what he might do next; and Redlaw could see well, that no change came over him.

“Where are they?” he inquired.

“The woman’s out.”

“I know she is. Where is the old man with the white hair, and his son?”

“The woman’s husband, d’ye mean?” inquired the boy.

“Aye. Where are those two?”

“Out. Something’s the matter, somewhere. They were fetched out in a hurry, and told me to stop here.”

“Come with me,” said the Chemist, “and I’ll give you money.”

“Come where? and how much will you give?”

“I’ll give you more shillings than you ever saw, and bring you back soon. Do you know your way to where you came from?”

“You let me go,” returned the boy, suddenly twisting out of his grasp. “I’m not a going to take you there. Let me be, or I’ll heave some fire at you!”

He was down before it, and ready, with his savage little hand, to pluck the burning coals out.

What the Chemist had felt, in observing the effect of his charmed influence stealing over those with whom he came in contact, was not nearly equal to the cold vague terror with which he saw this baby-monster put it at defiance. It chilled his blood to look on the immoveable impenetrable thing, in the likeness of a child, with its sharp malignant face turned up to his, and its almost infant hand, ready at the bars.

“Listen, boy!” he said. “You shall take me where you please, so that you take me where the people are very miserable or very wicked. I want to do them good, and not to harm them. You shall have money, as I have told you, and I will bring you back. Get up! Come quickly!” He made a hasty step towards the door, afraid of her returning.

“Will you let me walk by myself, and never hold me, nor yet touch me?” said the boy, slowly withdrawing the hand with which he threatened, and beginning to get up.

“I will!”

“And let me go before, behind, or anyways I like?”

“I will!”

“Give me some money first then, and I’ll go.”

The Chemist laid a few shillings, one by one, in his extended hand. To count them was beyond the boy’s knowledge, but he said “one,” every time, and avariciously looked at each as it was given, and at the donor. He had nowhere to put them, out of his hand, but in his mouth; and he put them there.

Redlaw then wrote with his pencil on a leaf of his pocketbook, that the boy was with him; and laying it on the table, signed to him to follow. Keeping his rags together, as usual, the boy complied, and went out with his bare head and his naked feet into the winter night.

Preferring not to depart by the iron gate by which he had entered, where they were in danger of meeting her whom he so anxiously avoided, the Chemist led the way, through some of those

passages among which the boy had lost himself, and by that portion of the building where he lived, to a small door of which he had the key. When they got into the street, he stopped to ask his guide—who instantly retreated from him—if he knew where they were.

The savage thing looked here and there, and at length, nodding his head, pointed in the direction he designed to take. Redlaw going on at once, he followed, something less suspiciously; shifting his money from his mouth into his hand, and back again into his mouth, and stealthily rubbing it bright upon his shreds of dress, as he went along.

Three times, in their progress, they were side by side. Three times they stopped, being side by side. Three times the Chemist glanced down at his face, and shuddered as it forced upon him one reflection.

The first occasion was when they were crossing an old churchyard, and Redlaw stopped among the graves, utterly at a loss how to connect them with any tender, softening, or consolatory thought.

The second was, when the breaking forth of the moon induced him to look up at the Heavens, where he saw her in her glory, surrounded by a host of stars he still knew by the names and histories which human science has appended to them; but where he saw nothing else he had been wont to see, felt nothing he had been wont to feel, in looking up there, on a bright night.

The third was when he stopped to listen to a plaintive strain of music, but could only hear a tune, made manifest to him by the dry mechanism of the instruments and his own ears, with no address to any mystery within him, without a whisper in it of the past, or of the future, powerless upon him as the sound of last year's running water, or the rushing of last year's wind.

At each of these three times, he saw with horror that, in spite of the vast intellectual distance between them, and their being unlike each other in all physical respects, the expression on the boy's face was the expression on his own.

They journeyed on for some time—now through such crowded places, that he often looked over his shoulder thinking he had lost his guide, but generally finding him within his shadow on his other side; now by ways so quiet, that he could have counted his short, quick, naked footsteps coming on behind—until they arrived at a ruinous collection of houses, and the boy touched him and stopped.

“In there!” he said, pointing out one house where there were scattered lights in the windows, and a dim lantern in the doorway, with “Lodgings for Travellers” painted on it.

Redlaw looked about him; from the houses, to the waste piece of ground on which the houses stood, or rather did not altogether tumble down, unfenced, undrained, unlighted, and bordered by a sluggish ditch; from that, to the sloping line of arches, part of some neighbouring viaduct or bridge with which it was surrounded, and which lessened gradually, towards them, until the last but one was a mere kennel for a dog, the last a plundered little heap of bricks; from that, to the child, close to him, cowering and trembling with the cold, and limping on one little foot, while he coiled the other round his leg to warm it, yet staring at all these things with that frightful likeness of expression so apparent in his face, that Redlaw started from him.

“In there!” said the boy, pointing out the house again. “I’ll wait.”

“Will they let me in?” asked Redlaw.

“Say you’re a doctor,” he answered with a nod. “There’s plenty ill here.”

Looking back on his way to the house-door, Redlaw saw him trail himself upon the dust and crawl within the shelter of the smallest arch, as if he were a rat. He had no pity for the thing, but he was afraid of it; and when it looked out of its den at him, he hurried to the house as a retreat.

“Sorrow, wrong, and trouble,” said the Chemist, with a painful effort at some more distinct remembrance, “at least haunt this place, darkly. He can do no harm, who brings forgetfulness of such things here!”

With these words, he pushed the yielding door, and went in.

There was a woman sitting on the stairs, either asleep or forlorn, whose head was bent down on her hands and knees. As it was not easy to pass without treading on her, and as she was perfectly regardless of his near approach, he stopped, and touched her on the shoulder. Looking up, she showed him quite a young face, but one whose bloom and promise were all swept away, as if the haggard winter should unnaturally kill the spring.

With little or no show of concern on his account, she moved nearer to the wall to leave him a wider passage.

“What are you?” said Redlaw, pausing, with his hand upon the broken stair-rail.

“What do you think I am?” she answered, showing him her face again.

He looked upon the ruined Temple of God, so lately made, so soon disfigured; and something, which was not compassion—for the springs in which a true compassion for such miseries has its rise, were dried up in his breast—but which was nearer to it, for the moment, than any feeling that had lately struggled into the darkening, but not yet wholly darkened, night of his mind, mingled a touch of softness with his next words.

“I am come here to give relief, if I can,” he said. “Are you thinking of any wrong?”

She frowned at him, and then laughed; and then her laugh prolonged itself into a shivering sigh, as she dropped her head again, and hid her fingers in her hair.

“Are you thinking of a wrong?” he asked, once more.

“I am thinking of my life,” she said, with a momentary look at him.

He had a perception that she was one of many, and that he saw the type of thousands, when he saw her, drooping at his feet.

“What are your parents?” he demanded.

“I had a good home once. My father was a gardener, far away, in the country.”

“Is he dead?”

“He’s dead to me. All such things are dead to me. You a gentleman, and not know that!” She raised her eyes again, and laughed at him.

“Girl!” said Redlaw, sternly, “before this death, of all such things, was brought about, was there no wrong done to you? In spite of all that you can do, does no remembrance of wrong cleave to you? Are there not times upon times when it is misery to you?”

So little of what was womanly was left in her appearance, that now, when she burst into tears, he stood amazed. But he was more amazed, and much disquieted, to note that in her awakened recollection of this wrong, the first trace of her old humanity and frozen tenderness appeared to show itself.

He drew a little off, and in doing so, observed that her arms were black, her face cut, and her bosom bruised.

“What brutal hand has hurt you so?” he asked.

“My own. I did it myself!” she answered quickly.

“It is impossible.”

“I’ll swear I did! He didn’t touch me. I did it to myself in a passion, and threw myself down here. He wasn’t near me. He never laid a hand upon me!”

In the white determination of her face, confronting him with this untruth, he saw enough of the last perversion and distortion of good surviving in that miserable breast, to be stricken with remorse that he had ever come near her.

“Sorrow, wrong, and trouble!” he muttered, turning his fearful gaze away. “All that connects her with the state from which she has fallen, has those roots! In the name of God, let me go by!”

Afraid to look at her again, afraid to touch her, afraid to think of having sundered the last thread by which she held upon the mercy of Heaven, he gathered his cloak about him, and glided swiftly up the stairs.

Opposite to him, on the landing, was a door, which stood partly open, and which, as he ascended, a man with a candle in his hand, came forward from within to shut. But this man, on seeing him,

drew back, with much emotion in his manner, and, as if by a sudden impulse, mentioned his name aloud.

In the surprise of such a recognition there, he stopped, endeavouring to recollect the wan and startled face. He had no time to consider it, for, to his yet greater amazement, old Philip came out of the room, and took him by the hand.

“Mr. Redlaw,” said the old man, “this is like you, this is like you, sir! you have heard of it, and have come after us to render any help you can. Ah, too late, too late!”

Redlaw, with a bewildered look, submitted to be led into the room. A man lay there, on a truckle-bed, and William Swidger stood at the bedside.

“Too late!” murmured the old man, looking wistfully into the Chemist’s face; and the tears stole down his cheeks.

“That’s what I say, father,” interposed his son in a low voice. “That’s where it is exactly. To keep as quiet as ever we can while he’s a dozing, is the only thing to do. You’re right, father!”

Redlaw paused at the bedside, and looked down on the figure that was stretched upon the mattress. It was that of a man, who should have been in the vigour of his life, but on whom it was not likely the sun would ever shine again. The vices of his forty or fifty years’ career had so branded him, that, in comparison with their effects upon his face, the heavy hand of time upon the old man’s face who watched him, had been merciful and beautifying.

“Who is this?” asked the Chemist, looking round.

“My son George, Mr. Redlaw,” said the old man, wringing his hands. “My eldest son, George, who was more his mother’s pride than all the rest!”

Redlaw’s eyes wandered from the old man’s grey head, as he laid it down upon the bed, to the person who had recognised him, and who had kept aloof, in the remotest corner of the room. He seemed to be about his own age; and although he knew no such hopelessly decayed and broken man as he appeared to be, there was something in the turn of his figure, as he stood with his back towards him, and

now went out at the door, that made him pass his hand uneasily across his brow.

“William,” he said in a gloomy whisper, “who is that man?”

“Why you see, sir,” returned Mr. William, “that’s what I say, myself. Why should a man ever go and gamble, and the like of that, and let himself down inch by inch till he can’t let himself down any lower!”

“Has *he* done so?” asked Redlaw, glancing after him with the same uneasy action as before.

“Just exactly that, sir,” returned William Swidger, “as I’m told. He knows a little about medicine, sir, it seems; and having been wayfaring towards London with my unhappy brother that you see here,” Mr. William passed his coat-sleeve across his eyes, “and being lodging up stairs for the night—what I say, you see, is that strange companions come together here sometimes—he looked in to attend upon him, and came for us at his request. What a mournful spectacle, sir! But that’s where it is. It’s enough to kill my father!”

Redlaw looked up, at these words, and, recalling where he was and with whom, and the spell he carried with him—which his surprise had obscured—retired a little, hurriedly, debating with himself whether to shun the house that moment, or remain.

Yielding to a certain sullen doggedness, which it seemed to be a part of his condition to struggle with, he argued for remaining.

“Was it only yesterday,” he said, “when I observed the memory of this old man to be a tissue of sorrow and trouble, and shall I be afraid, to-night, to shake it? Are such remembrances as I can drive away, so precious to this dying man that I need fear for *him*? No! I’ll stay here.”

But he stayed, in fear and trembling none the less for these words; and, shrouded in his black cloak with his face turned from them, stood away from the bedside, listening to what they said, as if he felt himself a demon in the place.

“Father!” murmured the sick man, rallying a little from his stupor.

“My boy! My son George!” said old Philip.

“You spoke, just now, of my being mother’s favourite, long ago. It’s a dreadful thing to think now, of long ago!”

“No, no, no;” returned the old man. “Think of it. Don’t say it’s dreadful. It’s not dreadful to me, my son.”

“It cuts you to the heart, father.” For the old man’s tears were falling on him.

“Yes, yes,” said Philip, “so it does; but it does me good. It’s a heavy sorrow to think of that time, but it does me good, George. Oh, think of it too, think of it too, and your heart will be softened more and more! Where’s my son William? William, my boy, your mother loved him dearly to the last, and with her latest breath said, ‘Tell him I forgave him, blessed him, and prayed for him.’ Those were her words to me. I have never forgotten them, and I’m eighty-seven!”

“Father!” said the man upon the bed, “I am dying, I know. I am so far gone, that I can hardly speak, even of what my mind most runs on. Is there any hope for me, beyond this bed?”

“There is hope,” returned the old man, “for all who are softened and penitent. There is hope for all such. Oh!” he exclaimed, clasping his hands and looking up, “I was thankful, only yesterday, that I could remember this unhappy son, when he was an innocent child. But what a comfort is it, now, to think that even God himself has that remembrance of him!”

Redlaw spread his hands upon his face, and shrunk, like a murderer.

“Ah!” feebly moaned the man upon the bed. “The waste since then, the waste of life since then!”

“But he was a child once,” said the old man. “He played with children. Before he lay down on his bed at night, and fell into his guiltless rest, he said his prayers at his poor mother’s knee. I have seen him do it, many a time; and seen her lay his head upon her breast, and kiss him. Sorrowful as it was to her, and me, to think of this, when he went so wrong, and when our hopes and plans for him were all broken, this gave him still a hold upon us, that nothing else could have given. Oh, Father, so much better than the fathers upon earth! Oh, Father, so much more afflicted by the errors of thy

children! take this wanderer back! Not as he is, but as he was then, let him cry to thee, as he has so often seemed to cry to us!”

As the old man lifted up his trembling hands, the son, for whom he made the supplication, laid his sinking head against him for support and comfort, as if he were indeed the child of whom he spoke.

When did man ever tremble, as Redlaw trembled, in the silence that ensued! He knew it must come upon them, knew that it was coming fast.

“My time is very short, my breath is shorter,” said the sick man, supporting himself on one arm, and with the other groping in the air, “and I remember there is something on my mind concerning the man who was here just now. Father and William—wait!—is there really anything in black, out there?”

“Yes, yes, it is real,” said his aged father.

“Is it a man?”

“What I say myself, George,” interposed his brother, bending kindly over him. “It’s Mr. Redlaw.”

“I thought I had dreamed of him. Ask him to come here.”

The Chemist, whiter than the dying man, appeared before him. Obedient to the motion of his hand, he sat upon the bed.

“It has been so ripped up, to-night, sir,” said the sick man, laying his hand upon his heart, with a look in which the mute, imploring agony of his condition was concentrated, “by the sight of my poor old father, and the thought of all the trouble I have been the cause of, and all the wrong and sorrow lying at my door, that——”

Was it the extremity to which he had come, or was it the dawning of another change, that made him stop?

“—that what I *can* do right, with my mind running on so much, so fast, I’ll try to do. There was another man here. Did you see him?”

Redlaw could not reply by any word; for when he saw that fatal sign he knew so well now, of the wandering hand upon the forehead, his voice died at his lips. But he made some indication of assent.

“He is penniless, hungry, and destitute. He is completely beaten down, and has no resource at all. Look after him! Lose no time! I know he has it in his mind to kill himself.”

It was working. It was on his face. His face was changing, hardening, deepening in all its shades, and losing all its sorrow.

“Don’t you remember? Don’t you know him?” he pursued.

He shut his face out for a moment, with the hand that again wandered over his forehead, and then it lowered on Redlaw, reckless, ruffianly, and callous.

“Why, d—n you!” he said, scowling round, “what have you been doing to me here! I have lived bold, and I mean to die bold. To the Devil with you!”

And so lay down upon his bed, and put his arms up, over his head and ears, as resolute from that time to keep out all access, and to die in his indifference.

If Redlaw had been struck by lightning, it could not have struck him from the bedside with a more tremendous shock. But the old man, who had left the bed while his son was speaking to him, now returning, avoided it quickly likewise, and with abhorrence.

“Where’s my boy William?” said the old man hurriedly. “William, come away from here. We’ll go home.”

“Home, father!” returned William. “Are you going to leave your own son?”

“Where’s my own son?” replied the old man.

“Where? why, there!”

“That’s no son of mine,” said Philip, trembling with resentment. “No such wretch as that, has any claim on me. My children are pleasant to look at, and they wait upon me, and get my meat and drink ready, and are useful to me. I’ve a right to it! I’m eighty-seven!”

“You’re old enough to be no older,” muttered William, looking at him grudgingly, with his hands in his pockets. “I don’t know what good you are, myself. We could have a deal more pleasure without you.”

“My son, Mr. Redlaw!” said the old man. “My son, too. The boy talking to me of *my* son! Why, what has he ever done to give me any pleasure, I should like to know?”

“I don’t know what you have ever done to give *me* any pleasure,” said William, sulkily.

“Let me think,” said the old man. “For how many Christmas times running, have I sat in my warm place, and never had to come out in the cold night air; and have made good cheer, without being disturbed by any such uncomfortable, wretched sight as him there? Is it twenty, William?”

“Nigher forty, it seems,” he muttered. “Why, when I look at my father, sir, and come to think of it,” addressing Redlaw, with an impatience and irritation that were quite new, “I’m whipped if I can see anything in him, but a calendar of ever so many years of eating, and drinking, and making himself comfortable, over and over again.”

“I—I’m eighty-seven,” said the old man, rambling on, childishly and weakly, “and I don’t know as I ever was much put out by anything. I’m not a going to begin now, because of what he calls my son. He’s not my son. I’ve had a power of pleasant times. I recollect once—no, I don’t—no, it’s broken off. It was something about a game of cricket and a friend of mine, but it’s somehow broken off. I wonder who he was—I suppose I liked him? And I wonder what became of him—I suppose he died? But I don’t know. And I don’t care, neither; I don’t care a bit.”

In his drowsy chuckling, and the shaking of his head, he put his hands into his waistcoat pockets. In one of them he found a bit of holly (left there, probably last night), which he now took out, and looked at.

“Berries, eh?” said the old man. “Ah! It’s a pity they’re not good to eat. I recollect, when I was a little chap about as high as that, and out a walking with—let me see—who was I out a walking with?—no, I don’t remember how that was. I don’t remember as I ever walked with any one particular, or cared for any one, or any one for me. Berries, eh? There’s good cheer when there’s berries. Well; I

ought to have my share of it, and to be waited on, and kept warm and comfortable; for I'm eighty-seven, and a poor old man. I'm eighty-seven. Eighty-seven!"

The drivelling, pitiable manner in which, as he repeated this, he nibbled at the leaves, and spat the morsels out; the cold, uninterested eye with which his youngest son (so changed) regarded him; the determined apathy with which his eldest son lay hardened in his sin; impressed themselves no more on Redlaw's observation,—for he broke his way from the spot to which his feet seemed to have been fixed, and ran out of the house.

His guide came crawling forth from his place of refuge, and was ready for him before he reached the arches.

"Back to the woman's?" he inquired.

"Back, quickly!" answered Redlaw. "Stop nowhere on the way!"

For a short distance the boy went on before; but their return was more like a flight than a walk, and it was as much as his bare feet could do, to keep pace with the Chemist's rapid strides. Shrinking from all who passed, shrouded in his cloak, and keeping it drawn closely about him, as though there were mortal contagion in any fluttering touch of his garments, he made no pause until they reached the door by which they had come out. He unlocked it with his key, went in, accompanied by the boy, and hastened through the dark passages to his own chamber.

The boy watched him as he made the door fast, and withdrew behind the table, when he looked round.

"Come!" he said, "Don't you touch me! You've not brought me here to take my money away."

Redlaw threw some more upon the ground. He flung his body on it immediately, as if to hide it from him, lest the sight of it should tempt him to reclaim it; and not until he saw him seated by his lamp, with his face hidden in his hands, began furtively to pick it up. When he had done so, he crept near the fire, and, sitting down in a great chair before it, took from his breast some broken scraps of food, and fell to munching, and to staring at the blaze, and now and

then to glancing at his shillings, which he kept clenched up in a bunch, in one hand.



“And this,” said Redlaw, gazing on him with increasing repugnance and fear, “is the only one companion I have left on earth.”

How long it was before he was aroused from his contemplation of this creature, whom he dreaded so—whether half an hour, or half the night—he knew not. But the stillness of the room was broken by the boy (whom he had seen listening) starting up, and running towards the door.

“Here’s the woman coming!” he exclaimed.

The Chemist stopped him on his way, at the moment when she knocked.

“Let me go to her, will you?” said the boy.

“Not now,” returned the Chemist. “Stay here. Nobody must pass in or out of the room, now, Who’s that?”

“It’s I, sir,” cried Milly. “Pray, sir, let me in!”

“No! not for the world!” he said.

“Mr. Redlaw, Mr. Redlaw, pray, sir, let me in.”

“What is the matter?” he said, holding the boy.

“The miserable man you saw, is worse, and nothing I can say will wake him from his terrible infatuation. William’s father has turned childish in a moment. William himself is changed. The shock has been too sudden for him; I cannot understand him; he is not like himself. Oh, Mr. Redlaw, pray advise me, help me!”

“No! No! No!” he answered.

“Mr. Redlaw! Dear sir! George has been muttering, in his doze, about the man you saw there, who, he fears, will kill himself.”

“Better he should do it, than come near me!”

“He says, in his wandering, that you know him; that he was your friend once, long ago; that he is the ruined father of a student here—my mind misgives me, of the young gentleman who has been ill. What is to be done? How is he to be followed? How is he to be saved? Mr. Redlaw, pray, oh, pray, advise me! Help me!”

All this time he held the boy, who was half-mad to pass him, and let her in.

“Phantoms! Punishers of impious thoughts!” cried Redlaw, gazing round in anguish. “Look upon me! From the darkness of my mind, let the glimmering of contrition that I know is there, shine up, and show my misery! In the material world, as I have long taught, nothing can be spared; no step or atom in the wondrous structure could be lost, without a blank being made in the great universe. I know, now, that it is the same with good and evil, happiness and sorrow, in the memories of men. Pity me! Relieve me!”

There was no response, but her “Help me, help me, let me in!” and the boy’s struggling to get to her.

“Shadow of myself! Spirit of my darker hours!” cried Redlaw, in distraction. “Come back, and haunt me day and night, but take this gift away! Or, if it must still rest with me, deprive me of the dreadful power of giving it to others. Undo what I have done. Leave me benighted, but restore the day to those whom I have cursed. As I have spared this woman from the first, and as I never will go forth again, but will die here, with no hand to tend me, save this creature’s who is proof against me,—hear me!”

The only reply still was, the boy struggling to get to her, while he held him back; and the cry, increasing in its energy, "Help! let me in. He was your friend once, how shall he be followed, how shall he be saved? They are all changed, there is no one else to help me, pray, pray, let me in!"

CHAPTER III

THE GIFT REVERSED

Night was still heavy in the sky. On open plains, from hill-tops, and from the decks of solitary ships at sea, a distant low-lying line, that promised bye and bye to change to light, was visible in the dim horizon; but its promise was remote and doubtful, and the moon was striving with the night-clouds busily.

The shadows upon Redlaw's mind succeeded thick and fast to one another, and obscured its light as the night-clouds hovered between the moon and earth, and kept the latter veiled in darkness. Fitful and uncertain as the shadows which the night-clouds cast, were their concealments from him, and imperfect revelations to him; and, like the night-clouds still, if the clear light broke forth for a moment, it was only that they might sweep over it, and make the darkness deeper than before.

Without, there was a profound and solemn hush upon the ancient pile of buildings, and its buttresses and angles made dark shapes of mystery upon the ground, which now seemed to retire into the smooth white snow and now seemed to come out of it, as the moon's path was more or less beset. Within, the Chemist's room was indistinct and murky, by the light of the expiring lamp; a ghostly silence had succeeded to the knocking and the voice outside; nothing was audible but, now and then, a low sound among the whitened ashes of the fire, as of its yielding up its last breath. Before it on the ground the boy lay fast asleep. In his chair, the Chemist sat, as he had sat there since the calling at his door had ceased—like a man turned to stone.

At such a time, the Christmas music he had heard before, began to play. He listened to it at first, as he had listened in the churchyard; but presently—it playing still, and being borne towards him on the night-air, in a low, sweet, melancholy strain—he rose,

and stood stretching his hands about him as if there were some friend approaching within his reach, on whom his desolate touch might rest, yet do no harm. As he did this, his face became less fixed and wondering; a gentle trembling came upon him; and at last his eyes filled with tears, and he put his hands before them, and bowed down his head.



His memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble, had not come back to him; he knew that it was not restored; he had no passing belief or hope that it was. But some dumb stir within him made him capable, again, of being moved by what was hidden, afar off, in the music. If it were only that it told him sorrowfully the value of what he had lost, he thanked Heaven for it with a fervent gratitude.

As the last chord died upon his ear, he raised his head to listen to its lingering vibration. Beyond the boy, so that his sleeping figure lay at its feet, the Phantom stood, immoveable and silent, with its eyes upon him.

Ghastly it was, as it had ever been, but not so cruel and relentless in its aspect—or he thought or hoped so, as he looked upon it, trembling. It was not alone, but in its shadowy hand it held another hand.

And whose was that? Was the form that stood beside it indeed Milly's, or but her shade and picture? The quiet head was bent a little, as her manner was, and her eyes were looking down, as if in pity, on the sleeping child. A radiant light fell on her face, but did not touch the Phantom; for, though close beside her, it was dark and colourless as ever.

“Spectre!” said the Chemist, newly troubled as he looked, “I have not been stubborn or presumptuous in respect of her. Oh, do not bring her here. Spare me that!”

“This is but a shadow,” said the Phantom; “when the morning shines, seek out the reality whose image I present before you.”

“Is it my inexorable doom to do so?” cried the Chemist.

“It is,” replied the Phantom.

“To destroy her peace, her goodness; to make her what I am myself, and what I have made of others!”

“I have said, ‘seek her out,’ ” returned the Phantom. “I have said no more.”

“Oh, tell me,” exclaimed Redlaw, catching at the hope which he fancied might lie hidden in the words. “Can I undo what I have done?”

“No,” returned the Phantom.

“I do not ask for restoration to myself,” said Redlaw. “What I abandoned, I abandoned of my own will, and have justly lost. But for those to whom I have transferred the fatal gift; who never sought it; who unknowingly received a curse of which they had no warning, and which they had no power to shun; can I do nothing?”

“Nothing,” said the Phantom.

“If I cannot, can any one?”

The Phantom, standing like a statue, kept his gaze upon him for a while; then turned its head suddenly, and looked upon the shadow

at its side.

“Ah! Can she?” cried Redlaw, still looking upon the shade.

The Phantom released the hand it had retained till now, and softly raised its own with a gesture of dismissal. Upon that, her shadow, still preserving the same attitude, began to move or melt away.

“Stay,” cried Redlaw, with an earnestness to which he could not give enough expression. “For a moment! As an act of mercy! I know that some change fell upon me, when those sounds were in the air just now. Tell me, have I lost the power of harming her? May I go near her without dread? Oh, let her give me any sign of hope!”

The Phantom looked upon the shade as he did—not at him—and gave no answer.

“At least, say this—has she, henceforth, the consciousness of any power to set right what I have done?”

“She has not,” the Phantom answered.

“Has she the power bestowed on her without the consciousness?”

The Phantom answered: “Seek her out.” And her shadow slowly vanished.

They were face to face again, and looking on each other, as intently and awfully as at the time of the bestowal of the gift, across the boy who still lay on the ground between them, at the Phantom’s feet.

“Terrible instructor,” said the Chemist, sinking on his knee before it, in an attitude of supplication, “by whom I was renounced, but by whom I am revisited (in which, and in whose milder aspect, I would fain believe I have a gleam of hope), I will obey without inquiry, praying that the cry I have sent up in the anguish of my soul has been, or will be, heard, in behalf of those whom I have injured beyond human reparation. But there is one thing—”

“You speak to me of what is lying here,” the Phantom interposed, and pointed with its finger to the boy.

“I do,” returned the Chemist. “You know what I would ask. Why has this child alone been proof against my influence, and why, why

have I detected in its thoughts a terrible companionship with mine?"

"This," said the Phantom, pointing to the boy, "is the last, completest illustration of a human creature, utterly bereft of such remembrances as you have yielded up. No softening memory of sorrow, wrong, or trouble enters here, because this wretched mortal from his birth has been abandoned to a worse condition than the beasts, and has, within his knowledge, no one contrast, no humanising touch, to make a grain of such a memory spring up in his hardened breast. All within this desolate creature is barren wilderness. All within the man bereft of what you have resigned, is the same barren wilderness. Woe to such a man! Woe, tenfold, to the nation that shall count its monsters such as this, lying here, by hundreds and by thousands!"

Redlaw shrunk, appalled, from what he heard.

"There is not," said the Phantom, "one of these—not one—but sows a harvest that mankind **MUST** reap. From every seed of evil in this boy, a field of ruin is grown that shall be gathered in, and garnered up, and sown again in many places in the world, until regions are overspread with wickedness enough to raise the waters of another Deluge. Open and unpunished murder in a city's streets would be less guilty in its daily toleration, than one such spectacle as this."

It seemed to look down upon the boy in his sleep. Redlaw, too, looked down upon him with a new emotion.

"There is not a father," said the Phantom, "by whose side in his daily or his nightly walk, these creatures pass; there is not a mother among all the ranks of loving mothers in this land; there is no one risen from the state of childhood, but shall be responsible in his or her degree for this enormity. There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse. There is no religion upon earth that it would not deny; there is no people upon earth it would not put to shame."

The Chemist clasped his hands, and looked, with trembling fear and pity, from the sleeping boy to the Phantom, standing above him

with its finger pointing down.

“Behold, I say,” pursued the Spectre, “the perfect type of what it was your choice to be. Your influence is powerless here, because from this child’s bosom you can banish nothing. His thoughts have been in ‘terrible companionship’ with yours, because you have gone down to his unnatural level. He is the growth of man’s indifference; you are the growth of man’s presumption. The beneficent design of Heaven is, in each case, overthrown, and from the two poles of the immaterial world you come together.”

The Chemist stooped upon the ground beside the boy, and, with the same kind of compassion for him that he now felt for himself, covered him as he slept, and no longer shrunk from him with abhorrence or indifference.

Soon, now, the distant line on the horizon brightened, the darkness faded, the sun rose red and glorious, and the chimney stacks and gables of the ancient building gleamed in the clear air, which turned the smoke and vapour of the city into a cloud of gold. The very sundial in his shady corner, where the wind was used to spin with such un-windy constancy, shook off the finer particles of snow that had accumulated on his dull old face in the night, and looked out at the little white wreaths eddying round and round him. Doubtless some blind groping of the morning made its way down into the forgotten crypt so cold and earthy, where the Norman arches were half buried in the ground, and stirred the dull sap in the lazy vegetation hanging to the walls, and quickened the slow principle of life within the little world of wonderful and delicate creation which existed there, with some faint knowledge that the sun was up.

The Tetterbys were up, and doing. Mr. Tetterby took down the shutters of the shop, and, strip by strip, revealed the treasures of the window to the eyes, so proof against their seductions, of Jerusalem Buildings. Adolphus had been out so long already, that he was halfway on to Morning Pepper. Five small Tetterbys, whose ten round eyes were much inflamed by soap and friction, were in the tortures of a cool wash in the back kitchen; Mrs. Tetterby presiding.

Johnny, who was pushed and hustled through his toilet with great rapidity when Moloch chanced to be in an exacting frame of mind (which was always the case), staggered up and down with his charge before the shop door, under greater difficulties than usual; the weight of Moloch being much increased by a complication of defences against the cold, composed of knitted worsted-work, and forming a complete suit of chain-armour, with a head-piece and blue gaiters.

It was a peculiarity of this baby to be always cutting teeth. Whether they never came, or whether they came and went away again, is not in evidence; but it had certainly cut enough, on the showing of Mrs. Tetterby, to make a handsome dental provision for the sign of the Bull and Mouth. All sorts of objects were impressed for the rubbing of its gums, notwithstanding that it always carried, dangling at its waist (which was immediately under its chin), a bone ring, large enough to have represented the rosary of a young nun. Knife-handles, umbrella-tops, the heads of walking-sticks selected from the stock, the fingers of the family in general, but especially of Johnny, nutmeg-graters, crusts, the handles of doors, and the cool knobs on the tops of pokers, were among the commonest instruments indiscriminately applied for this baby's relief. The amount of electricity that must have been rubbed out of it in a week, is not to be calculated. Still Mrs. Tetterby always said "it was coming through, and then the child would be herself"; and still it never did come through, and the child continued to be somebody else.

The tempers of the little Tetterbys had sadly changed with a few hours. Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby themselves were not more altered than their offspring. Usually they were an unselfish, good-natured, yielding little race, sharing short-commons when it happened (which was pretty often) contentedly and even generously, and taking a great deal of enjoyment out of a very little meat. But they were fighting now, not only for the soap and water, but even for the breakfast which was yet in perspective. The hand of every little Tetterby was against the other little Tetterbys; and even Johnny's

hand—the patient, much-enduring, and devoted Johnny—rose against the baby! Yes. Mrs. Tetterby, going to the door by a mere accident, saw him viciously pick out a weak place in the suit of armour where a slap would tell, and slap that blessed child.



Mrs. Tetterby had him into the parlour, by the collar, in that same flash of time, and repaid him the assault with usury thereto.

“You brute, you murdering little boy,” said Mrs. Tetterby. “Had you the heart to do it?”

“Why don’t her teeth come through, then,” retorted Johnny, in a loud rebellious voice, “instead of bothering me? How would you like it yourself?”

“Like it, sir!” said Mrs. Tetterby, relieving him of his dishonoured load.

“Yes, like it,” said Johnny. “How would you? Not at all. If you was me, you’d go for a soldier. I will, too. There an’t no babies in the army.”

Mr. Tetterby, who had arrived upon the scene of action, rubbed his chin thoughtfully, instead of correcting the rebel, and seemed rather struck by this view of a military life.

“I wish I was in the army myself, if the child’s in the right,” said Mrs. Tetterby, looking at her husband, “for I have no peace of my life here. I’m a slave—a Virginia slave:” some indistinct association with their weak descent on the tobacco trade perhaps suggested this aggravated expression to Mrs. Tetterby. “I never have a holiday, or any pleasure at all, from year’s end to year’s end! Why, Lord bless and save the child,” said Mrs. Tetterby, shaking the baby with an irritability hardly suited to so pious an aspiration, “what’s the matter with her now?”

Not being able to discover, and not rendering the subject much clearer by shaking it, Mrs. Tetterby put the baby away in a cradle, and, folding her arms, sat rocking it angrily with her foot.

“How you stand there, ’Dolphus,” said Mrs. Tetterby to her husband. “Why don’t you do something?”

“Because I don’t care about doing anything,” Mr. Tetterby replied.

“I am sure *I* don’t,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“I’ll take my oath *I* don’t,” said Mr. Tetterby.

A diversion arose here among Johnny and his five younger brothers, who, in preparing the family breakfast table, had fallen to skirmishing for the temporary possession of the loaf, and were buffeting one another with great heartiness; the smallest boy of all, with precocious discretion, hovering outside the knot of combatants, and harassing their legs. Into the midst of this fray, Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby both precipitated themselves with great ardour, as if such ground were the only ground on which they could now agree; and having, with no visible remains of their late soft-heartedness, laid about them without any lenity, and done much execution, resumed their former relative positions.

“You had better read your paper than do nothing at all,” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“What’s there to read in a paper?” returned Mr. Tetterby, with excessive discontent.

“What?” said Mrs. Tetterby. “Police.”

“It’s nothing to me,” said Tetterby. “What do I care what people do, or are done to.”

“Suicides,” suggested Mrs. Tetterby.

“No business of mine,” replied her husband.

“Births, deaths, and marriages, are those nothing to you?” said Mrs. Tetterby.

“If the births were all over for good and all to-day; and the deaths were all to begin to come off to-morrow; I don’t see why it should interest me, till I thought it was a-coming to my turn,” grumbled Tetterby. “As to marriages, I’ve done it myself. I know quite enough about *them*.”

To judge from the dissatisfied expression of her face and manner, Mrs. Tetterby appeared to entertain the same opinions as her husband; but she opposed him, nevertheless, for the gratification of quarrelling with him.

“Oh, you’re a consistent man,” said Mrs. Tetterby, “an’t you? You, with the screen of your own making there, made of nothing else but bits of newspapers, which you sit and read to the children by the half-hour together!”

“Say used to, if you please,” returned her husband. “You won’t find me doing so any more. I’m wiser, now.”

“Bah! wiser, indeed!” said Mrs. Tetterby. “Are you better?”

The question sounded some discordant note in Mr. Tetterby’s breast. He ruminated dejectedly, and passed his hand across and across his forehead.

“Better!” murmured Mr. Tetterby. “I don’t know as any of us are better, or happier either. Better, is it?”

He turned to the screen, and traced about it with his finger, until he found a certain paragraph of which he was in quest.

“This used to be one of the family favourites, I recollect,” said Tetterby, in a forlorn and stupid way, “and used to draw tears from the children, and make ’em good, if there was any little bickering or discontent among ’em, next to the story of the robin redbreasts in the wood. ‘Melancolly case of destitution. Yesterday a small man, with a baby in his arms, and surrounded by half-a-dozen ragged

little ones, of various ages between ten and two, the whole of whom were evidently in a famishing condition, appeared before the worthy magistrate, and made the following recital:—Ha! I don't understand it, I'm sure," said Tetterby; "I don't see what it has got to do with us."

"How old and shabby he looks," said Mrs. Tetterby, watching him. "I never saw such a change in a man. Ah! dear me, dear me, dear me, it was a sacrifice!"

"What was a sacrifice?" her husband sourly inquired.

Mrs. Tetterby shook her head; and without replying in words, raised a complete sea-storm about the baby, by her violent agitation of the cradle.

"If you mean your marriage was a sacrifice, my good woman—" said her husband.

"I *do* mean it," said his wife.

"Why, then I mean to say," pursued Mr. Tetterby, as sulkily and surlily as she, "that there are two sides to that affair; and that *I* was the sacrifice; and that I wish the sacrifice hadn't been accepted."

"I wish it hadn't, Tetterby, with all my heart and soul I do assure you," said his wife. "You can't wish it more than I do, Tetterby."

"I don't know what I saw in her," muttered the newsman, "I'm sure;—certainly, if I saw anything, it's not there now. I was thinking so, last night, after supper, by the fire. She's fat, she's ageing, she won't bear comparison with most other women."

"He's common-looking, he has no air with him, he's small, he's beginning to stoop, and he's getting bald," muttered Mrs. Tetterby.

"I must have been half out of my mind when I did it," muttered Mr. Tetterby.

"My senses must have forsook me. That's the only way in which I can explain it to myself," said Mrs. Tetterby, with elaboration.

In this mood they sat down to breakfast. The little Tetterbys were not habituated to regard that meal in the light of a sedentary occupation, but discussed it as a dance or trot; rather resembling a savage ceremony, in the occasional shrill whoops, and brandishings of bread and butter, with which it was accompanied, as well as in

the intricate filings off into the street and back again, and the hoppings up and down the door steps, which were incidental to the performance. In the present instance, the contentions between these Tetterby children for the milk-and-water jug, common to all, which stood upon the table, presented so lamentable an instance of angry passions risen very high indeed, that it was an outrage on the memory of Doctor Watts.¹⁵ It was not until Mr. Tetterby had driven the whole herd out at the front door, that a moment's peace was secured; and even that was broken by the discovery that Johnny had surreptitiously come back, and was at that instant choking in the jug like a ventriloquist, in his indecent and rapacious haste.

"These children will be the death of me at last!" said Mrs. Tetterby, after banishing the culprit. "And the sooner the better, I think."

"Poor people," said Mr. Tetterby, "ought not to have children at all. They give *us* no pleasure."

He was at that moment taking up the cup which Mrs. Tetterby had rudely pushed towards him, and Mrs. Tetterby was lifting her own cup to her lips, when they both stopped, as if they were transfixed.

"Here! Mother! Father!" cried Johnny, running into the room. "Here's Mrs. William coming down the street!"

And if ever, since the world began, a young boy took a baby from a cradle with the care of an old nurse, and hushed and soothed it tenderly, and tottered away with it cheerfully, Johnny was that boy, and Moloch was that baby, as they went out together!

Mr. Tetterby put down his cup; Mrs. Tetterby put down her cup. Mr. Tetterby rubbed his forehead; Mrs. Tetterby rubbed hers. Mr. Tetterby's face began to smooth and brighten; Mrs. Tetterby's face began to smooth and brighten.

"Why, Lord forgive me," said Mr. Tetterby to himself, "what evil tempers have I been giving way to? What has been the matter here!"

"How could I ever treat him ill again, after all I said and felt last night!" sobbed Mrs. Tetterby, with her apron to her eyes.

“Am I a brute,” said Mr. Tetterby, “or is there any good in me at all? Sophia! My little woman!”

“’Dolphus dear,” returned his wife.

“I—I’ve been in a state of mind,” said Mr. Tetterby, “that I can’t abear to think of, Sophy.”

“Oh! It’s nothing to what I’ve been in, Dolf,” cried his wife in a great burst of grief.

“My Sophia,” said Mr. Tetterby, “don’t take on. I never shall forgive myself. I must have nearly broke your heart, I know.”

“No, Dolf, no. It was me! Me!” cried Mrs. Tetterby.

“My little woman,” said her husband, “don’t. You make me reproach myself dreadful, when you show such a noble spirit. Sophia, my dear, you don’t know what I thought. I showed it bad enough, no doubt; but what I thought, my little woman!”—

“Oh, dear Dolf, don’t! Don’t!” cried his wife.

“Sophia,” said Mr. Tetterby, “I must reveal it. I couldn’t rest in my conscience unless I mentioned it. My little woman—”

“Mrs. William’s very nearly here!” screamed Johnny at the door.

“My little woman, I wondered how,” gasped Mr. Tetterby, supporting himself by his chair, “I wondered how I had ever admired you—I forgot the precious children you have brought about me, and thought you didn’t look as slim as I could wish. I—I never gave a recollection,” said Mr. Tetterby, with severe self-accusation, “to the cares you’ve had as my wife, and along of me and mine, when you might have had hardly any with another man, who got on better and was luckier than me (anybody might have found such a man easily I am sure); and I quarrelled with you for having aged a little in the rough years you’ve lightened for me. Can you believe it, my little woman? I hardly can myself.”

Mrs. Tetterby, in a whirlwind of laughing and crying, caught his face within her hands, and held it there.

“Oh, Dolf!” she cried. “I am so happy that you thought so; I am so grateful that you thought so! For I thought that you were common-looking, Dolf; and so you are, my dear, and may you be the commonest of all sights in my eyes, till you close them with your

own good hands. I thought that you were small; and so you are, and I'll make much of you because you are, and more of you because I love my husband. I thought that you began to stoop; and so you do, and you shall lean on me, and I'll do all I can to keep you up. I thought there was no air about you; but there is and it's the air of home, and that's the purest and the best there is, and GOD bless home once more, and all belonging to it, Dolf!"

"Hurrah! Here's Mrs. William!" cried Johnny.

So she was, and all the children with her; and as she came in, they kissed her, and kissed one another, and kissed the baby, and kissed their father and mother, and then ran back and flocked and danced about her, trooping on with her in triumph.

Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby were not a bit behind-hand in the warmth of their reception. They were as much attracted to her as the children were; they ran towards her, kissed her hands, pressed round her, could not receive her ardently or enthusiastically enough. She came among them like the spirit of all goodness, affection, gentle consideration, love, and domesticity.

"What! are *you* all so glad to see me, too, this bright Christmas morning!" said Milly, clapping her hands in a pleasant wonder. "Oh dear, how delightful this is!"

More shouting from the children, more kissing, more trooping round her, more happiness, more love, more joy, more honour, on all sides, than she could bear.

"Oh dear!" said Milly, "what delicious tears you make me shed. How can I ever have deserved this! What have I done to be so loved?"

"Who can help it!" cried Mr. Tetterby.

"Who can help it!" cried Mrs. Tetterby.

"Who can help it!" echoed the children, in a joyful chorus. And they danced and trooped about her again, and clung to her, and laid their rosy faces against her dress, and kissed and fondled it, and could not fondle it, or her, enough.

"I never was so moved," said Milly, drying her eyes, "as I have been this morning. I must tell you, as soon as I can speak.—Mr.

Redlaw came to me at sunrise, and with a tenderness in his manner, more as if I had been his darling daughter than myself, implored me to go with him to where William's brother George is lying ill. We went together, and all the way along he was so kind, and so subdued, and seemed to put such trust and hope in me, that I could not help crying with pleasure. When we got to the house, we met a woman at the door (somebody had bruised and hurt her, I am afraid) who caught me by the hand, and blessed me as I passed."

"She was right," said Mr. Tetterby. Mrs. Tetterby said she was right. All the children cried out she was right.

"Ah, but there's more than that," said Milly. "When we got up stairs, into the room, the sick man who had lain for hours in a state from which no effort could rouse him, rose up in his bed, and, bursting into tears, stretched out his arms to me, and said that he had led a mis-spent life, but that he was truly repentant now, in his sorrow for the past, which was all as plain to him as a great prospect, from which a dense black cloud had cleared away, and that he entreated me to ask his poor old father for his pardon and his blessing, and to say a prayer beside his bed. And when I did so, Mr. Redlaw joined in it so fervently, and then so thanked and thanked me, and thanked Heaven, that my heart quite overflowed, and I could have done nothing but sob and cry, if the sick man had not begged me to sit down by him,—which made me quiet of course. As I sat there, he held my hand in his until he sunk in a doze; and even then, when I withdrew my hand to leave him to come here (which Mr. Redlaw was very earnest indeed in wishing me to do), his hand felt for mine, so that some one else was obliged to take my place and make believe to give him my hand back. Oh dear, oh dear," said Milly, sobbing. "How thankful and how happy I should feel, and do feel, for all this!"



While she was speaking, Redlaw had come in, and, after pausing for a moment to observe the group of which she was the centre, had silently ascended the stairs. Upon those stairs he now appeared again; remaining there, while the young student passed him, and came running down.

“Kind nurse, gentlest, best of creatures,” he said, falling on his knee to her, and catching at her hand, “forgive my cruel ingratitude!”

“Oh dear, oh dear!” cried Milly innocently, “here’s another of them! Oh dear, here’s somebody else who likes me. What shall I ever do!”

The guileless, simple way in which she said it, and in which she put her hands before her eyes and wept for very happiness, was as touching as it was delightful.

“I was not myself,” he said. “I don’t know what it was—it was some consequence of my disorder perhaps—I was mad. But I am so, no longer. Almost as I speak, I am restored. I heard the children crying out your name, and the shade passed from me at the very sound of it. Oh don’t weep! Dear Milly, if you could read my heart, and only know with what affection and what grateful homage it is glowing, you would not let me see you weep. It is such deep reproach.”

“No, no,” said Milly, “it’s not that. It’s not indeed. It’s joy. It’s wonder that you should think it necessary to ask me to forgive so little, and yet it’s pleasure that you do.”

“And will you come again? and will you finish the little curtain?”

“No,” said Milly, drying her eyes, and shaking her head. “You won’t care for *my* needlework now.”

“Is it forgiving me, to say that?”

She beckoned him aside, and whispered in his ear.

“There is news from your home, Mr. Edmund.”

“News? How?”

“Either your not writing when you were very ill, or the change in your handwriting when you began to be better, created some suspicion of the truth; however that is—but you’re sure you’ll not be the worse for any news, if it’s not bad news?”

“Sure.”

“Then there’s some one come!” said Milly.

“My mother?” asked the student, glancing round involuntarily towards Redlaw, who had come down from the stairs.

“Hush! No,” said Milly.

“It can be no one else.”

“Indeed?” said Milly, “are you sure?”

“It is not——.” Before he could say more, she put her hand upon his mouth.

“Yes it is!” said Milly. “The young lady (she is very like the miniature, Mr. Edmund, but she is prettier) was too unhappy to rest without satisfying her doubts, and came up, last night, with a little servant-maid. As you always dated your letters from the college, she came there; and before I saw Mr. Redlaw this morning, I saw her.—*She* likes me too!” said Milly. “Oh dear, that’s another!”

“This morning! Where is she now?”

“Why, she is now,” said Milly, advancing her lips to his ear, “in my little parlour in the Lodge, and waiting to see you.”

He pressed her hand, and was darting off, but she detained him.

“Mr. Redlaw is much altered, and has told me this morning that his memory is impaired. Be very considerate to him, Mr. Edmund; he needs that from us all.”

The young man assured her, by a look, that her caution was not ill-bestowed; and as he passed the Chemist on his way out, bent respectfully and with an obvious interest before him.

Redlaw returned the salutation courteously and even humbly, and looked after him as he passed on. He drooped his head upon his hand too, as trying to re-awaken something he had lost. But it was gone.

The abiding change that had come upon him since the influence of the music, and the Phantom's reappearance, was, that now he truly felt how much he had lost, and could compassionate his own condition, and contrast it, clearly, with the natural state of those who were around him. In this, an interest in those who were around him was revived, and a meek, submissive sense of his calamity was bred, resembling that which sometimes obtains in age, when its mental powers are weakened, without insensibility or sullenness being added to the list of its infirmities.

He was conscious that, as he redeemed, through Milly, more and more of the evil he had done, and as he was more and more with her, this change ripened itself within him. Therefore, and because of the attachment she inspired him with (but without other hope), he felt that he was quite dependent on her, and that she was his staff in his affliction.

So, when she asked him whether they should go home now, to where the old man and her husband were, and he readily replied “yes”—being anxious in that regard—he put his arm through hers, and walked beside her; not as if he were the wise and learned man to whom the wonders of nature were an open book, and hers were the uninstructed mind, but as if their two positions were reversed, and he knew nothing, and she all.

He saw the children throng about her, and caress her, as he and she went away together thus, out of the house; he heard the ringing of their laughter, and their merry voices; he saw their bright faces,

clustering round him like flowers; he witnessed the renewed contentment and affection of their parents; he breathed the simple air of their poor home, restored to its tranquillity; he thought of the unwholesome blight he had shed upon it, and might, but for her, have been diffusing then; and perhaps it is no wonder that he walked submissively beside her, and drew her gentle bosom nearer to his own.

When they arrived at the Lodge, the old man was sitting in his chair in the chimney-corner, with his eyes fixed on the ground, and his son was leaning against the opposite side of the fire-place, looking at him. As she came in at the door, both started, and turned round towards her, and a radiant change came upon their faces.

“Oh dear, dear, dear, they are pleased to see me like the rest!” cried Milly, clapping her hands in an ecstasy, and stopping short. “Here are two more!”

Pleased to see her! Pleasure was no word for it. She ran into her husband’s arms, thrown wide open to receive her, and he would have been glad to have her there, with her head lying on his shoulder, through the short winter’s day. But the old man couldn’t spare her. He had arms for her too, and he locked her in them.

“Why, where has my quiet Mouse been all this time?” said the old man. “She has been a long while away. I find that it’s impossible for me to get on without Mouse. I—where’s my son William?—I fancy I have been dreaming, William.”

“That’s what I say myself, father,” returned his son. “I have been in an ugly sort of dream, I think.—How are you, father? Are you pretty well?”

“Strong and brave, my boy,” returned the old man.

It was quite a sight to see Mr. William shaking hands with his father, and patting him on the back, and rubbing him gently down with his hand, as if he could not possibly do enough to show an interest in him.

“What a wonderful man you are, father!—How are you, father? Are you really pretty hearty, though?” said William, shaking hands

with him again, and patting him again, and rubbing him gently down again.

“I never was fresher or stouter in my life, my boy.”

“What a wonderful man you are, father! But that’s exactly where it is,” said Mr. William, with enthusiasm. “When I think of all that my father’s gone through, and all the chances and changes, and sorrows and troubles, that have happened to him in the course of his long life, and under which his head has grown grey, and years upon years have gathered on it, I feel as if we couldn’t do enough to honour the old gentleman, and make his old age easy.—How are you, father? Are you really pretty well, though?”

Mr. William might never have left off repeating this inquiry, and shaking hands with him again, and patting him again, and rubbing him down again, if the old man had not espied the Chemist, whom until now he had not seen.

“I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw,” said Philip, “but didn’t know you were here, sir, or should have made less free. It reminds me, Mr. Redlaw, seeing you here on a Christmas morning, of the time when you was a student yourself, and worked so hard that you was backwards and forwards in our Library even at Christmas time. Ha! ha! I’m old enough to remember that; and I remember it right well, I do, though I’m eighty-seven. It was after you left here that my poor wife died. You remember my poor wife, Mr. Redlaw?”

The Chemist answered yes.

“Yes,” said the old man. “She was a dear creetur.—I recollect you come here one Christmas morning with a young lady—I ask your pardon, Mr. Redlaw, but I think it was a sister you was very much attached to?”

The Chemist looked at him, and shook his head. “I had a sister,” he said vacantly. He knew no more.

“One Christmas morning,” pursued the old man, “that you come here with her—and it began to snow, and my wife invited the young lady to walk in, and sit by the fire that is always a burning on Christmas Day in what used to be, before our ten poor gentlemen commuted, our great Dinner Hall. I was there; and I recollect, as I

was stirring up the blaze for the young lady to warm her pretty feet by, she read the scroll out loud, that is underneath that picture. ‘Lord, keep my memory green!’ She and my poor wife fell a talking about it; and it’s a strange thing to think of, now, that they both said (both being so unlike to die) that it was a good prayer, and that it was one they would put up very earnestly, if they were called away young, with reference to those who were dearest to them. ‘My brother,’ says the young lady—‘My husband,’ says my poor wife.—‘Lord, keep his memory of me, green, and do not let me be forgotten!’ ”

Tears more painful, and more bitter than he had ever shed in all his life, coursed down Redlaw’s face. Philip, fully occupied in recalling his story, had not observed him until now, nor Milly’s anxiety that he should not proceed.

“Philip!” said Redlaw, laying his hand upon his arm, “I am a stricken man, on whom the hand of Providence has fallen heavily, although deservedly. You speak to me, my friend, of what I cannot follow; my memory is gone.”

“Merciful Power!” cried the old man.

“I have lost my memory of sorrow, wrong, and trouble,” said the Chemist, “and with that I have lost all, man would remember!”

To see old Philip’s pity for him, to see him wheel his own great chair for him to rest in, and look down upon him with a solemn sense of his bereavement, was to know, in some degree, how precious to old age such recollections are.

The boy came running in, and ran to Milly.

“Here’s the man,” he said, “in the other room. I don’t want *him*.”

“What man does he mean?” asked Mr. William.

“Hush!” said Milly.

Obedient to a sign from her, he and his old father softly withdrew. As they went out, unnoticed, Redlaw beckoned to the boy to come to him.

“I like the woman best,” he answered, holding to her skirts.

“You are right,” said Redlaw, with a faint smile. “But you needn’t fear to come to me. I am gentler than I was. Of all the world, to you, poor child!”

The boy still held back at first; but yielding little by little to her urging, he consented to approach, and even to sit down at his feet. As Redlaw laid his hand upon the shoulder of the child, looking on him with compassion and a fellow-feeling, he put out his other hand to Milly. She stooped down on that side of him, so that she could look into his face, and after silence, said:

“Mr. Redlaw, may I speak to you?”

“Yes,” he answered, fixing his eyes upon her. “Your voice and music are the same to me.”

“May I ask you something?”

“What you will.”

“Do you remember what I said, when I knocked at your door last night? About one who was your friend once, and who stood on the verge of destruction?”

“Yes. I remember,” he said, with some hesitation.

“Do you understand it?”

He smoothed the boy’s hair—looking at her fixedly the while—and shook his head.

“This person,” said Milly, in her clear, soft voice, which her mild eyes, looking at him, made clearer and softer, “I found soon afterwards. I went back to the house, and, with Heaven’s help, traced him. I was not too soon. A very little, and I should have been too late.”

He took his hand from the boy, and laying it on the back of that hand of hers, whose timid and yet earnest touch addressed him no less appealingly than her voice and eyes, looked more intently on her.

“He *is* the father of Mr. Edmund, the young gentleman we saw just now. His real name is Longford.—You recollect the name?”

“I recollect the name.”

“And the man?”

“No, not the man. Did he ever wrong me?”

“Yes!”

“Ah! Then it’s hopeless—hopeless.”

He shook his head, and softly beat upon the hand he held, as though mutely asking her commiseration.

“I did not go to Mr. Edmund last night,” said Milly.—“You will listen to me just the same as if you did remember all?”

“To every syllable you say.”

“Both, because I did not know, then, that this really was his father, and because I was fearful of the effect of such intelligence upon him, after his illness, if it should be. Since I have known who this person is, I have not gone either; but that is for another reason. He has long been separated from his wife and son—has been a stranger to his home almost from this son’s infancy, I learn from him—and has abandoned and deserted what he should have held most dear. In all that time, he has been falling from the state of a gentleman, more and more, until—” she rose up, hastily, and going out for a moment, returned, accompanied by the wreck that Redlaw had beheld last night.

“Do you know me?” asked the Chemist.

“I should be glad,” returned the other, “and that is an unwonted word for me to use, if I could answer no.”

The Chemist looked at the man, standing in self-abasement and degradation before him, and would have looked longer, in an ineffectual struggle for enlightenment, but that Milly resumed her late position by his side, and attracted his attentive gaze to her own face.

“See how low he is sunk, how lost he is!” she whispered, stretching out her arm towards him, without looking from the Chemist’s face. “If you could remember all that is connected with him, do you not think it would move your pity to reflect that one you ever loved (do not let us mind how long ago, or in what belief that he has forfeited), should come to this?”

“I hope it would,” he answered. “I believe it would.”

His eyes wandered to the figure standing near the door, but came back speedily to her, on whom he gazed intently, as if he strove to learn some lesson from every tone of her voice, and every beam of her eyes.

“I have no learning, and you have much,” said Milly: “I am not used to think, and you are always thinking. May I tell you why it seems to me a good thing for us, to remember wrong that has been done us?”

“Yes.”

“That we may forgive it.”

“Pardon me, great Heaven!” said Redlaw, lifting up his eyes, “for having thrown away thine own high attribute!”

“And if,” said Milly, “if your memory should one day be restored, as we will hope and pray it may be, would it not be a blessing to you to recall at once a wrong and its forgiveness?”

He looked at the figure by the door, and fastened his attentive eyes on her again; a ray of clearer light appeared to him to shine into his mind, from her bright face.

“He cannot go to his abandoned home. He does not seek to go there. He knows that he could only carry shame and trouble to those he has so cruelly neglected; and that the best reparation he can make them now, is to avoid them. A very little money carefully bestowed, would remove him to some distant place, where he might live and do no wrong, and make such atonement as is left within his power for the wrong he has done. To the unfortunate lady who is his wife, and to his son, this would be the best and kindest boon that their best friend could give them—one too that they need never know of; and to him, shattered in reputation, mind, and body, it might be salvation.”

He took her head between his hands, and kissed it, and said: “It shall be done. I trust to you to do it for me, now and secretly; and to tell him that I would forgive him, if I were so happy as to know for what.”

As she rose, and turned her beaming face towards the fallen man, implying that her mediation had been successful, he advanced a step, and without raising his eyes, addressed himself to Redlaw.

“You are so generous,” he said, “—you ever were—that you will try to banish your rising sense of retribution in the spectacle that is

before you. I do not try to banish it from myself, Redlaw. If you can, believe me.”

The Chemist entreated Milly, by a gesture, to come nearer to him; and, as he listened, looked in her face, as if to find in it the clue to what he heard.

“I am too decayed a wretch to make professions; I recollect my own career too well, to array any such before you. But from the day on which I made my first step downward, in dealing falsely by you, I have gone down with a certain, steady, doomed progression. That, I say.”

Redlaw, keeping her close at his side, turned his face towards the speaker, and there was sorrow in it. Something like mournful recognition too.

“I might have been another man, my life might have been another life, if I had avoided that first fatal step. I don’t know that it would have been. I claim nothing for the possibility. Your sister is at rest, and better than she could have been with me, if I had continued even what you thought me: even what I once supposed myself to be.”

Redlaw made a hasty motion with his hand, as if he would have put that subject on one side.

“I speak,” the other went on, “like a man taken from the grave. I should have made my own grave, last night, had it not been for this blessed hand.”

“Oh dear, he likes me too!” sobbed Milly, under her breath. “That’s another!”

“I could not have put myself in your way, last night, even for bread. But, to-day, my recollection of what has been between us is so strongly stirred, and is presented to me, I don’t know how, so vividly, that I have dared to come at her suggestion, and to take your bounty, and to thank you for it, and to beg you, Redlaw, in your dying hour, to be as merciful to me in your thoughts, as you are in your deeds.”

He turned towards the door, and stopped a moment on his way forth.

“I hope my son may interest you, for his mother’s sake. I hope he may deserve to do so. Unless my life should be preserved a long time, and I should know that I have not misused your aid, I shall never look upon him more.”

Going out, he raised his eyes to Redlaw for the first time. Redlaw, whose steadfast gaze was fixed upon him, dreamily held out his hand. He returned and touched it—little more—with both his own; and bending down his head, went slowly out.

In the few moments that elapsed, while Milly silently took him to the gate, the Chemist dropped into his chair, and covered his face with his hands. Seeing him thus, when she came back, accompanied by her husband and his father (who were both greatly concerned for him), she avoided disturbing him, or permitting him to be disturbed; and kneeled down near the chair to put some warm clothing on the boy.

“That’s exactly where it is. That’s what I always say, father!” exclaimed her admiring husband. “There’s a motherly feeling in Mrs. William’s breast that must and will have went!”

“Ay, ay,” said the old man; “you’re right. My son William’s right!”

“It happens all for the best, Milly dear, no doubt,” said Mr. William, tenderly, “that we have no children of our own; and yet I sometimes wish you had one to love and cherish. Our little dead child that you built such hopes upon, and that never breathed the breath of life—it has made you quiet-like, Milly.”

“I am very happy in the recollection of it, William dear,” she answered. “I think of it every day.”

“I was afraid you thought of it a good deal.”

“Don’t say, afraid; it is a comfort to me; it speaks to me in so many ways. The innocent thing that never lived on earth, is like an angel to me, William.”

“You are like an angel to father and me,” said Mr. William, softly. “I know that.”

“When I think of all those hopes I built upon it, and the many times I sat and pictured to myself the little smiling face upon my bosom that never lay there, and the sweet eyes turned up to mine

that never opened to the light,” said Milly, “I can feel a greater tenderness, I think, for all the disappointed hopes in which there is no harm. When I see a beautiful child in its fond mother’s arms, I love it all the better, thinking that my child might have been like that, and might have made my heart as proud and happy.”

Redlaw raised his head, and looked towards her.

“All through life, it seems by me,” she continued, “to tell me something. For poor neglected children, my little child pleads as if it were alive, and had a voice I knew, with which to speak to me. When I hear of youth in suffering or shame, I think that my child might have come to that, perhaps, and that God took it from me in His mercy. Even in age and grey hair, such as father’s, it is present: saying that it too might have lived to be old, long and long after you and I were gone, and to have needed the respect and love of younger people.”

Her quiet voice was quieter than ever, as she took her husband’s arm, and laid her head against it.

“Children love me so, that sometimes I half fancy—it’s a silly fancy, William—they have some way I don’t know of, of feeling for my little child, and me, and understanding why their love is precious to me. If I have been quiet since, I have been more happy, William, in a hundred ways. Not least happy, dear, in this—that even when my little child was born and dead but a few days, and I was weak and sorrowful, and could not help grieving a little, the thought arose, that if I tried to lead a good life, I should meet in Heaven a bright creature, who would call me, Mother!”

Redlaw fell upon his knees, with a loud cry.

“O Thou,” he said, “who, through the teaching of pure love, has graciously restored me to the memory which was the memory of Christ upon the cross, and of all the good who perished in His cause, receive my thanks, and bless her!”

Then, he folded her to his heart; and Milly, sobbing more than ever, cried, as she laughed, “He is come back to himself! He likes me very much indeed, too! Oh, dear, dear, dear me, here’s another!”

Then, the student entered, leading by the hand a lovely girl, who was afraid to come. And Redlaw so changed towards him, seeing in him and his youthful choice, the softened shadow of that chastening passage in his own life, to which, as to a shady tree, the dove so long imprisoned in his solitary ark might fly for rest and company, fell upon his neck, entreating them to be his children.

Then, as Christmas is a time in which, of all times in the year, the memory of every remediable sorrow, wrong, and trouble in the world around us, should be active with us, not less than our own experiences, for all good, he laid his hand upon the boy, and, silently calling Him to witness who laid His hand on children in old time, rebuking, in the majesty of His prophetic knowledge, those who kept them from Him,¹⁶ vowed to protect him, teach him, and reclaim him.

Then, he gave his right hand cheerily to Philip, and said that they would that day hold a Christmas dinner in what used to be, before the ten poor gentlemen commuted, their great Dinner Hall; and that they would bid to it as many of that Swidger family, who, his son had told him, were so numerous that they might join hands and make a ring round England, as could be brought together on so short a notice.

And it was that day done. There were so many Swidgers there, grown up and children, that an attempt to state them in round numbers might engender doubts, in the distrustful, of the veracity of this history. Therefore the attempt shall not be made. But there they were, by dozens and scores—and there was good news and good hope there, ready for them, of George, who had been visited again by his father and brother, and by Milly, and again left in a quiet sleep. There, present at the dinner, too, were the Tetterbys, including young Adolphus, who arrived in his prismatic comforter, in good time for the beef. Johnny and the baby were too late, of course, and came in all on one side, the one exhausted, the other in a supposed state of double-tooth; but that was customary, and not alarming.

It was sad to see the child who had no name or lineage, watching the other children as they played, not knowing how to talk with them, or sport with them, and more strange to the ways of childhood than a rough dog. It was sad, though in a different way, to see what an instinctive knowledge the youngest children there, had of his being different from all the rest, and how they made timid approaches to him with soft words and touches, and with little presents, that he might not be unhappy. But he kept by Milly, and began to love her—that was another, as she said!—and, as they all liked her dearly, they were glad of that, and when they saw him peeping at them from behind her chair, they were pleased that he was so close to it.

All this, the Chemist, sitting with the student and his bride that was to be, and Philip, and the rest, saw.

Some people have said since, that he only thought what has been herein set down; others, that he read it in the fire, one winter night about the twilight time; others, that the Ghost was but the representation of his gloomy thoughts, and Milly the embodiment of his better wisdom. *I say nothing.*

—Except this. That as they were assembled in the old Hall, by no other light than that of a great fire (having dined early), the shadows once more stole out of their hiding-places, and danced about the room, showing the children marvellous shapes and faces on the walls, and gradually changing what was real and familiar there, to what was wild and magical. But that there was one thing in the Hall, to which the eyes of Redlaw, and of Milly and her husband, and of the old man, and of the student, and his bride that was to be, were often turned, which the shadows did not obscure or change. Deepened in its gravity by the firelight, and gazing from the darkness of the panelled wall like life, the sedate face in the portrait, with the beard and ruff, looked down at them from under its verdant wreath of holly, as they looked up at it; and, clear and plain below, as if a voice had uttered them, were the words



Lord, Keep my Memory Green.

A CHRISTMAS TREE

I have been looking on, this evening, at a merry company of children assembled round that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree.¹ The tree was planted in the middle of a great round table, and towered high above their heads. It was brilliantly lighted by a multitude of little tapers; and everywhere sparkled and glittered with bright objects. There were rosy-cheeked dolls, hiding behind the green leaves; there were real watches (with movable hands, at least, and an endless capacity of being wound up) dangling from innumerable twigs; there were French-polished tables, chairs, bedsteads, wardrobes, eight-day clocks, and various other articles of domestic furniture (wonderfully made, in tin, at Wolverhampton), perched among the boughs, as if in preparation for some fairy housekeeping; there were jolly, broad-faced little men, much more agreeable in appearance than many real men—and no wonder, for their heads took off, and showed them to be full of sugar-plums; there were fiddles and drums; there were tambourines, books, work-boxes, paint-boxes, sweetmeat-boxes, peep-show boxes, all kinds of boxes; there were trinkets for the elder girls, far brighter than any grown-up gold and jewels; there were baskets and pincushions in all devices; there were guns, swords, and banners; there were witches standing in enchanted rings of pasteboard, to tell fortunes; there were teetotums, humming-tops, needle-cases, pen-wipers, smelling-bottles, conversation-cards,² bouquet-holders; real fruit, made artificially dazzling with gold leaf; imitation apples, pears, and walnuts, crammed with surprises; in short, as a pretty child, before me, delightedly whispered to another pretty child, her bosom friend, “There was everything, and more.” This motley collection of odd objects, clustering on the tree like magic fruit, and flashing back the bright looks directed towards it from every side—some of the diamond-eyes admiring it were hardly on a level with the table, and a few were languishing in timid wonder on the bosoms of pretty

mothers, aunts, and nurses—made a lively realisation of the fancies of childhood; and set me thinking how all the trees that grow and all the things that come into existence on the earth, have their wild adornments at that well-remembered time.

Being now at home again, and alone, the only person in the house awake, my thoughts are drawn back, by a fascination which I do not care to resist, to my own childhood. I begin to consider, what do we all remember best upon the branches of the Christmas Tree of our own young Christmas days, by which we climbed to real life.

Straight, in the middle of the room, cramped in the freedom of its growth by no encircling walls or soon-reached ceiling, a shadowy tree arises; and, looking up into the dreamy brightness of its top—for I observe, in this tree, the singular property that it appears to grow downward towards the earth—I look into my youngest Christmas recollections!

All toys at first, I find. Up yonder, among the green holly and red berries, is the Tumbler with his hands in his pockets, who wouldn't lie down, but whenever he was put upon the floor, persisted in rolling his fat body about, until he rolled himself still, and brought those lobster eyes of his to bear upon me—when I affected to laugh very much, but in my heart of hearts was extremely doubtful of him. Close beside him is that infernal snuff-box, out of which there sprang a demoniacal Counsellor in a black gown, with an obnoxious head of hair, and a red cloth mouth, wide open, who was not to be endured on any terms, but could not be put away either; for he used suddenly, in a highly magnified state, to fly out of Mammoth Snuff-boxes in dreams, when least expected. Nor is the frog with cobbler's wax on his tail, far off; for there was no knowing where he wouldn't jump; and when he flew over the candle, and came upon one's hand with that spotted back—red on a green ground—he was horrible. The cardboard lady in a blue-silk skirt, who was stood up against the candlestick to dance, and whom I see on the same branch, was milder, and was beautiful; but I can't say as much for the larger cardboard man, who used to be hung against the wall and pulled by a string; there was a sinister expression in that nose of his; and

when he got his legs round his neck (which he very often did), he was ghastly, and not a creature to be alone with.

When did that dreadful Mask first look at me? Who put it on, and why was I so frightened that the sight of it is an era in my life? It is not a hideous visage in itself; it is even meant to be droll; why then were its stolid features so intolerable? Surely not because it hid the wearer's face. An apron would have done as much; and though I should have preferred even the apron away, it would not have been absolutely insupportable, like the mask? Was it the immovability of the mask? The doll's face was immovable, but I was not afraid of *her*. Perhaps that fixed and set change coming over a real face, infused into my quickened heart some remote suggestion and dread of the universal change that is to come on every face, and make it still? Nothing reconciled me to it. No drummers, from whom proceeded a melancholy chirping on the turning of a handle; no regiment of soldiers, with a mute band, taken out of a box, and fitted, one by one, upon a stiff and lazy little set of lazy-tongs;³ no old woman, made of wires and a brown-paper composition, cutting up a pie for two small children; could give me permanent comfort, for a long time. Nor was it any satisfaction to be shown the Mask, and see that it was made of paper, or to have it locked up and be assured that no one wore it. The mere recollection of that fixed face, the mere knowledge of its existence anywhere, was sufficient to awake me in the night all perspiration and horror, with "O I know it's coming! O the mask!"

I never wondered what the dear old donkey with the panniers—there he is!—was made of, then! His hide was real to the touch, I recollect. And the great black horse with round red spots all over him—the horse that I could even get upon—I never wondered what had brought him to that strange condition, or thought that such a horse was not commonly seen at Newmarket.⁴ The four horses of no colour, next to him, that went into the waggon of cheeses, and could be taken out and stabled under the piano, appear to have bits of furrippet for their tails, and other bits for their manes, and to stand on pegs instead of legs, but it was not so when they were brought home

for a Christmas present. They were all right, then; neither was their harness unceremoniously nailed into their chests, as appears to be the case now. The tinkling works of the music-cart, I *did* find out, to be made of quill tooth-picks and wire; and I always thought that little tumbler in his shirt sleeves, perpetually swarming up one side of a wooden frame, and coming down, head foremost, on the other, rather a weak-minded person—though good-natured; but the Jacob's Ladder,⁵ next him, made of little squares of red wood, that went flapping and clattering over one another, each developing a different picture, and the whole enlivened by small bells, was a mighty marvel and a great delight.

Ah! The Doll's house!—of which I was not proprietor, but where I visited. I don't admire the Houses of Parliament half so much as that stone-fronted mansion with real glass windows, and door-steps, and a real balcony—greener than I ever see now, except at watering-places; and even they afford but a poor imitation. And though it *did* open all at once, the entire house-front (which was a blow, I admit, as cancelling the fiction of a staircase), it was but to shut it up again, and I could believe. Even open, there were three distinct rooms in it: a sitting-room and bed-room, elegantly furnished, and, best of all, a kitchen, with uncommonly soft fire-irons, a plentiful assortment of diminutive utensils—oh, the warming-pan!—and a tin man-cook in profile, who was always going to fry two fish. What Barmecide justice⁶ have I done to the noble feasts wherein the set of wooden platters figured, each with its own peculiar delicacy, as a ham or turkey, glued tight on to it, and garnished with something green, which I recollect as moss! Could all the Temperance Societies of these later days, united, give me such a tea-drinking as I have had through the means of yonder little set of blue crockery, which really would hold liquid (it ran out of the small wooden cask, I recollect, and tasted of matches), and which made tea, nectar. And if the two legs of the ineffectual little sugar-tongs did tumble over one another, and want purpose, like Punch's hands,⁷ what does it matter? And if I did once shriek out, as a poisoned child, and strike the fashionable company with consternation, by reason of having drunk a little

teaspoon, inadvertently dissolved in too hot tea, I was never the worse for it, except by a powder!

Upon the next branches of the tree, lower down, hard by the green roller and miniature gardening-tools, how thick the books begin to hang. Thin books, in themselves, at first, but many of them, and with deliciously smooth covers of bright red or green. What fat black letters to begin with! “A was an archer, and shot at a frog.”⁸ Of course he was. He was an apple-pie also, and there he is! He was a good many things in his time, was A, and so were most of his friends, except X, who had so little versatility, that I never knew him to get beyond Xerxes or Xantippe—like Y, who was always confined to a Yacht or a Yew Tree; and Z condemned for ever to be a Zebra or a Zany. But, now, the very tree itself changes, and becomes a bean-stalk—the marvellous bean-stalk up which Jack climbed to the Giant’s house! And now, those dreadfully interesting, double-headed giants, with their clubs over their shoulders, begin to stride along the boughs in a perfect throng, dragging knights and ladies home for dinner by the hair of their heads. And Jack—how noble, with his sword of sharpness, and his shoes of swiftness! Again those old meditations come upon me as I gaze up at him; and I debate within myself whether there was more than one Jack (which I am loth to believe possible), or only one genuine original admirable Jack,⁹ who achieved all the recorded exploits.

Good for Christmas time is the ruddy color of the cloak, in which—the tree making a forest of itself for her to trip through, with her basket—Little Red Riding-Hood comes to me one Christmas Eve, to give me information of the cruelty and treachery of that dissembling Wolf who ate her grandmother, without making any impression on his appetite, and then ate her, after making that ferocious joke about his teeth.¹⁰ She was my first love. I felt that if I could have married Little Red Riding-Hood, I should have known perfect bliss. But, it was not to be; and there was nothing for it but to look out the Wolf in the Noah’s Ark there, and put him late in the procession on the table, as a monster who was to be degraded. O the wonderful Noah’s Ark! It was not found seaworthy when put in a washing-tub,

and the animals were crammed in at the roof, and needed to have their legs well shaken down before they could be got in, even there—and then, ten to one but they began to tumble out at the door, which was but imperfectly fastened with a wire latch—but what was *that* against it! Consider the noble fly, a size or two smaller than the elephant: the lady-bird, the butterfly—all triumphs of art! Consider the goose, whose feet were so small, and whose balance was so indifferent, that he usually tumbled forward, and knocked down all the animal creation. Consider Noah and his family, like idiotic tobacco-stoppers; and how the leopard stuck to warm little fingers; and how the tails of the larger animals used gradually to resolve themselves into frayed bits of string!

Hush! Again a forest, and somebody up in a tree—not Robin Hood, not Valentine,¹¹ not the Yellow Dwarf (I have passed him and all Mother Bunch's wonders,¹² without mention), but an Eastern King with a glittering scimitar and turban. By Allah! two Eastern Kings, for I see another, looking over his shoulder! Down upon the grass, at the tree's foot, lies the full length of a coal-black Giant, stretched asleep, with his head in a lady's lap; and near them is a glass box, fastened with four locks of shining steel, in which he keeps the lady prisoner when he is awake. I see the four keys at his girdle now. The lady makes signs to the two kings in the tree, who softly descend. It is the setting-in of the bright Arabian Nights.

Oh, now all common things become uncommon and enchanted to me! All lamps are wonderful; all rings are talismans. Common flower-pots are full of treasure, with a little earth scattered on the top; trees are for Ali Baba to hide in; beef-steaks are to throw down into the Valley of Diamonds, that the precious stones may stick to them, and be carried by the eagles to their nests, whence the traders, with loud cries, will scare them. Tarts are made, according to the recipe of the Vizier's son of Bussorah, who turned pastrycook after he was set down in his drawers at the gate of Damascus; cobblers are all Mustaphas, and in the habit of sewing up people cut into four pieces, to whom they are taken blindfold. Any iron ring let into stone is the entrance to a cave, which only waits for the

magician, and the little fire, and the necromancy, that will make the earth shake. All the dates imported come from the same tree as that unlucky date, with whose shell the merchant knocked out the eye of the genie's invisible son. All olives are of the stock of that fresh fruit, concerning which the Commander of the Faithful overheard the boy conduct the fictitious trial of the fraudulent olive merchant; all apples are akin to the apple purchased (with two others) from the Sultan's gardener, for three sequins, and which the tall black slave stole from the child. All dogs are associated with the dog, really a transformed man, who jumped upon the baker's counter, and put his paw on the piece of bad money. All rice recalls the rice which the awful lady, who was a ghoul, could only peck by grains, because of her nightly feasts in the burial-place. My very rocking-horse,—there he is, with his nostrils turned completely inside-out, indicative of Blood!—should have a peg in his neck, by virtue thereof to fly away with me, as the wooden horse did with the Prince of Persia, in the sight of all his father's Court.

Yes, on every object that I recognise among those upper branches of my Christmas Tree, I see this fairy light! When I wake in bed, at daybreak, on the cold dark winter mornings, the white snow dimly beheld, outside, through the frost on the window-pane, I hear Dinarzade. "Sister, sister, if you are yet awake, I pray you finish the history of the Young King of the Black Islands." Scheherazade replies, "If my lord the Sultan will suffer me to live another day, sister, I will not only finish that, but tell you a more wonderful story yet." Then, the gracious Sultan goes out, giving no orders for the execution, and we all three breathe again.

At this height of my tree I begin to see, cowering among the leaves—it may be born of turkey, or of pudding, or mince pie, or of these many fancies, jumbled with Robinson Crusoe on his desert island, Philip Quarll¹³ among the monkeys, Sandford and Merton with Mr. Barlow,¹⁴ Mother Bunch, and the Mask—or it may be the result of indigestion, assisted by imagination and over-doctoring—a prodigious nightmare. It is so exceedingly indistinct, that I don't know why it's frightful—but I know it is. I can only make out that it

is an immense array of shapeless things, which appear to be planted on a vast exaggeration of the lazy-tongs that used to bear the toy soldiers, and to be slowly coming close to my eyes, and receding to an immeasurable distance. When it comes closest, it is worst. In connection with it, I descry remembrances of winter nights incredibly long; of being sent early to bed, as a punishment for some small offence, and waking in two hours, with a sensation of having been asleep two nights; of the leaden hopelessness of morning ever dawning; and the oppression of a weight of remorse.

And now, I see a wonderful row of little lights rise smoothly out of the ground, before a vast green curtain. Now, a bell rings—a magic bell, which still sounds in my ears unlike all other bells—and music plays, amidst a buzz of voices, and a fragrant smell of orange-peel and oil.¹⁵ Anon, the magic bell commands the music to cease, and the great green curtain rolls itself up majestically, and The Play begins! The devoted dog of Montargis¹⁶ avenges the death of his master, foully murdered in the Forest of Bondy; and a humorous Peasant with a red nose and a very little hat, whom I take from this hour forth to my bosom as a friend (I think he was a Waiter or an Hostler at a village Inn, but many years have passed since he and I have met), remarks that the sassigassity of that dog is indeed surprising; and evermore this jocular conceit will live in my remembrance fresh and unfading, overtopping all possible jokes, unto the end of time. Or now, I learn with bitter tears how poor Jane Shore,¹⁷ dressed all in white, and with her brown hair hanging down, went starving through the streets; or how George Barnwell¹⁸ killed the worthiest uncle that ever man had, and was afterwards so sorry for it that he ought to have been let off. Comes swift to comfort me, the Pantomime¹⁹—stupendous Phenomenon!—when Clowns are shot from loaded mortars into the great chandelier, bright constellation that it is; when Harlequins, covered all over with scales of pure gold, twist and sparkle, like amazing fish; when Pantaloon (whom I deem it no irreverence to compare in my own mind to my grandfather) puts red-hot pokers in his pocket, and cries “Here’s somebody coming!” or taxes the Clown with petty larceny,

by saying “Now, I sawed you do it!” when Everything is capable, with the greatest ease, of being changed into Anything; and “Nothing is, but thinking makes it so.”²⁰ Now, too, I perceive my first experience of the dreary sensation—often to return in afterlife—of being unable, next day, to get back to the dull, settled world; of wanting to live for ever in the bright atmosphere I have quitted; of doting on the little Fairy, with the wand like a celestial Barber’s Pole,²¹ and pining for a Fairy immortality along with her. Ah she comes back, in many shapes, as my eye wanders down the branches of my Christmas Tree, and goes as often, and has never yet stayed by me!

Out of this delight springs the toy-theatre,—there it is, with its familiar proscenium, and ladies in feathers, in the boxes!—and all its attendant occupation with paste and glue, and gum, and water colors, in the getting-up of *The Miller and his Men*, and *Elizabeth*, or *the Exile of Siberia*.²² In spite of a few besetting accidents and failures (particularly an unreasonable disposition in the respectable *Kelmar*, and some others, to become faint in the legs, and double up, at exciting points of the drama), a teeming world of fancies so suggestive and all-embracing, that, far below it on my Christmas Tree, I see dark, dirty, real Theatres in the day-time, adorned with these associations as with the freshest garlands of the rarest flowers, and charming me yet.

But hark! The Waits²³ are playing, and they break my childish sleep! What images do I associate with the Christmas music as I see them set forth on the Christmas Tree? Known before all the others, keeping far apart from all the others, they gather round my little bed. An angel, speaking to a group of shepherds in a field; some travellers, with eyes uplifted, following a star; a baby in a manger; a child in a spacious temple, talking with grave men; a solemn figure, with a mild and beautiful face, raising a dead girl by the hand; again, near a city-gate, calling back the son of a widow, on his bier, to life; a crowd of people looking through the opened roof of a chamber where he sits, and letting down a sick person on a bed, with ropes; the same, in a tempest, walking on the water to a ship;

again, on a sea-shore, teaching a great multitude; again, with a child upon his knee, and other children round; again, restoring sight to the blind, speech to the dumb, hearing to the deaf, health to the sick, strength to the lame, knowledge to the ignorant; again, dying upon a Cross, watched by armed soldiers, a thick darkness coming on, the earth beginning to shake, and only one voice heard. "Forgive them, for they know not what they do!"²⁴

Still, on the lower and maturer branches of the Tree, Christmas associations cluster thick. School-books shut up; Ovid and Virgil²⁵ silenced; the Rule of Three,²⁶ with its cool impertinent enquiries, long disposed of; Terence and Plautus²⁷ acted no more, in an arena of huddled desks and forms, all chipped, and notched, and inked; cricket-bats, stumps, and balls, left higher up, with the smell of trodden grass and the softened noise of shouts in the evening air; the tree is still fresh, still gay. If I no more come home at Christmas-time, there will be girls and boys (thank Heaven!) while the World lasts; and they do! Yonder they dance and play upon the branches of my Tree, God bless them, merrily, and my heart dances and plays too!

And I *do* come home at Christmas. We all do, or we all should. We all come home, or ought to come home, for a short holiday—the longer, the better—from the great boarding-school, where we are for ever working at our arithmetical slates, to take, and give a rest. As to going a-visiting, where can we not go, if we will; where have we not been, when we would; starting our fancy from our Christmas Tree!

Away into the winter prospect. There are many such upon the tree! On, by low-lying misty grounds, through fens and fogs, up long hills, winding dark as caverns between thick plantations, almost shutting out the sparkling stars; so, out on broad heights, until we stop at last, with sudden silence, at an avenue. The gate-bell has a deep, half-awful sound in the frosty air; the gate swings open on its hinges; and, as we drive up to a great house, the glancing lights grow larger in the windows, and the opposing rows of trees seem to fall solemnly back on either side, to give us place. At intervals, all

day, a frightened hare has shot across this whitened turf; or the distant clatter of a herd of deer trampling the hard frost, has, for the minute, crushed the silence too. Their watchful eyes beneath the fern may be shining now, if we could see them, like the icy dewdrops on the leaves; but they are still, and all is still. And so, the lights growing larger, and the trees falling back before us, and closing up again behind us, as if to forbid retreat, we come to the house.

There is probably a smell of roasted chestnuts and other good comfortable things all the time, for we are telling Winter Stories—Ghost Stories, or more shame for us—round the Christmas fire; and we have never stirred, except to draw a little nearer to it. But, no matter for that. We came to the house, and it is an old house, full of great chimneys where wood is burnt on ancient dogs²⁸ upon the hearth, and grim Portraits (some of them with grim Legends, too) lower distrustfully from the oaken panels of the walls. We are a middle-aged nobleman, and we make a generous supper with our host and hostess and their guests—it being Christmas-time, and the old house full of company—and then we go to bed. Our room is a very old room. It is hung with tapestry. We don't like the portrait of a cavalier in green, over the fireplace. There are great black beams in the ceiling, and there is a great black bedstead, supported at the foot by two great black figures, who seem to have come off a couple of tombs in the old Baronial Church in the Park, for our particular accommodation. But, we are not a superstitious nobleman, and we don't mind. Well! we dismiss our servant, lock the door, and sit before the fire in our dressing-gown, musing about a great many things. At length we go to bed. Well! we can't sleep. We toss and tumble, and can't sleep. The embers on the hearth burn fitfully and make the room look ghostly. We can't help peeping out over the counterpane, at the two black figures and the cavalier—that wicked-looking cavalier—in green. In the flickering light, they seem to advance and retire: which, though we are not by any means a superstitious nobleman, is not agreeable. Well! we get nervous—more and more nervous. We say “This is very foolish, but we can't

stand this; we'll pretend to be ill, and knock up somebody." Well! we are just going to do it, when the locked door opens, and there comes in a young woman, deadly pale, and with long fair hair, who glides to the fire, and sits down in the chair we have left there, wringing her hands. Then, we notice that her clothes are wet. Our tongue cleaves to the roof of our mouth, and we can't speak; but, we observe her accurately. Her clothes are wet; her long hair is dabbled with moist mud; she is dressed in the fashion of two hundred years ago; and she has at her girdle a bunch of rusty keys. Well! there she sits, and we can't even faint, we are in such a state about it. Presently she gets up, and tries all the locks in the room with the rusty keys, which won't fit one of them; then, she fixes her eyes on the Portrait of the Cavalier in green, and says, in a low, terrible voice, "The stags know it!" After that, she wrings her hands again, passes the bedside, and goes out at the door. We hurry on our dressing-gown, seize our pistols (we always travel with pistols), and are following, when we find the door locked. We turn the key, look out into the dark gallery; no one there. We wander away, and try to find our servant. Can't be done. We pace the gallery till daybreak; then return to our deserted room, fall asleep, and are awakened by our servant (nothing ever haunts *him*) and the shining sun. Well! we make a wretched breakfast, and all the company say we look queer. After breakfast, we go over the house with our host, and then we take him to the Portrait of the Cavalier in green, and then it all comes out. He was false to a young housekeeper once attached to that family, and famous for her beauty, who drowned herself in a pond, and whose body was discovered, after a long time, because the stags refused to drink of the water. Since which, it has been whispered that she traverses the house at midnight (but goes especially to that room where the Cavalier in green was wont to sleep), trying the old locks with her rusty keys. Well! we tell our host of what we have seen, and a shade comes over his features, and he begs it may be hushed up; and so it is. But, it's all true; and we said so, before we died (we are dead now) to many responsible people.

There is no end to the old houses, with resounding galleries, and dismal state-bedchambers, and haunted wings shut up for many years, through which we may ramble, with an agreeable creeping up our back, and encounter any number of Ghosts, but, (it is worthy of remark perhaps) reducible to a very few general types and classes; for, Ghosts have little originality, and “walk” in a beaten track. Thus, it comes to pass, that a certain room in a certain old hall, where a certain bad Lord, Baronet, Knight, or Gentleman, shot himself, has certain planks in the floor from which the blood *will not* be taken out. You may scrape and scrape, as the present owner has done, or plane and plane, as his father did, or scrub and scrub, as his grandfather did, or burn and burn with strong acids, as his great-grandfather did, but, there the blood will still be—no redder and no paler—no more and no less—always just the same. Thus, in such another house there is a haunted door, that never will keep open; or another door that never will keep shut; or a haunted sound of a spinning-wheel, or a hammer, or a footstep, or a cry, or a sigh, or a horse’s tramp, or the rattling of a chain. Or else, there is a turret-clock, which, at the midnight hour, strikes thirteen when the head of the family is going to die; or a shadowy, immovable black carriage which at such a time is always seen by somebody, waiting near the great gates in the stable-yard. Or thus, it came to pass how Lady Mary went to pay a visit at a large wild house in the Scottish Highlands, and, being fatigued with her long journey, retired to bed early, and innocently said, next morning, at the breakfast-table, “How odd, to have so late a party last night, in this remote place, and not to tell me of it, before I went to bed!” Then, every one asked Lady Mary what she meant? Then, Lady Mary replied, “Why, all night long, the carriages were driving round and round the terrace, underneath my window!” Then, the owner of the house turned pale, and so did his Lady, and Charles Macdoodle of Macdoodle signed to Lady Mary to say no more, and every one was silent. After breakfast, Charles Macdoodle told Lady Mary that it was a tradition in the family that those rumbling carriages on the terrace betokened death. And so it proved, for, two months afterwards, the Lady of the mansion died. And Lady Mary, who was

a Maid of Honour at Court, often told this story to the old Queen Charlotte; by this token that the old King²⁹ always said, "Eh, eh? What, what? Ghosts, Ghosts? No such thing, no such thing!" And never left off saying so, until he went to bed.

Or, a friend of somebody's, whom most of us know, when he was a young man at college, had a particular friend, with whom he made the compact that, if it were possible for the Spirit to return to this earth after its separation from the body, he of the twain who first died, should reappear to the other. In course of time, this compact was forgotten by our friend; the two young men having progressed in life, and taken diverging paths that were wide asunder. But, one night, many years afterwards, our friend, being in the North of England, and staying for the night in an Inn, on the Yorkshire Moors, happened to look out of bed; and there, in the moonlight, leaning on a Bureau near the window, stedfastly regarding him, saw his old College friend! The appearance being solemnly addressed, replied, in a kind of whisper, but very audibly, "Do not come near me. I am dead. I am here to redeem my promise. I come from another world, but may not disclose its secrets!" Then, the whole form becoming paler, melted, as it were, into the moonlight, and faded away.

Or, there was the daughter of the first occupier of the picturesque Elizabethan house, so famous in our neighbourhood. You have heard about her? No! Why, *She* went out one summer evening, at twilight, when she was a beautiful girl, just seventeen years of age, to gather flowers in the garden; and presently came running, terrified, into the hall to her father, saying, "Oh, dear father, I have met myself!" He took her in his arms, and told her it was fancy, but she said "Oh no! I met myself in the broad walk, and I was pale and gathering withered flowers, and I turned my head, and held them up!" And, that night, she died; and a picture of her story was begun, though never finished, and they say it is somewhere in the house to this day, with its face to the wall.

Or, the uncle of my brother's wife was riding home on horseback, one mellow evening at sunset, when, in a green lane close to his

own house, he saw a man, standing before him, in the very centre of the narrow way. "Why does that man in the cloak stand there!" he thought. "Does he want me to ride over him?" But the figure never moved. He felt a strange sensation at seeing it so still, but slackened his trot and rode forward. When he was so close to it, as almost to touch it with his stirrup, his horse shied, and the figure glided up the bank, in a curious, unearthly manner—backward, and without seeming to use its feet—and was gone. The uncle of my brother's wife, exclaiming, "Good Heaven! It's my cousin Harry, from Bombay!" put spurs to his horse, which was suddenly in a profuse sweat, and, wondering at such strange behaviour, dashed round to the front of his house. There, he saw the same figure, just passing in at the long french window of the drawing-room, opening on the ground. He threw his bridle to a servant, and hastened in after it. His sister was sitting there, alone. "Alice, where's my cousin Harry?" "Your cousin Harry, John?" "Yes. From Bombay. I met him in the lane just now, and saw him enter here, this instant." Not a creature had been seen by any one; and in that hour and minute, as it afterwards appeared, this cousin died in India.

Or, it was a certain sensible old maiden lady, who died at ninety-nine, and retained her faculties to the last, who really did see the Orphan Boy; a story which has often been incorrectly told, but, of which the real truth is this—because it is, in fact, a story belonging to our family—and she was a connection of our family. When she was about forty years of age, and still an uncommonly fine woman (her lover died young, which was the reason why she never married, though she had many offers), she went to stay at a place in Kent, which her brother, an India-Merchant, had newly bought. There was a story that this place had once been held in trust, by the guardian of a young boy: who was himself the next heir, and who killed the young boy by harsh and cruel treatment. She knew nothing of that. It has been said that there was a Cage in her bedroom in which the guardian used to put the boy. There was no such thing. There was only a closet. She went to bed, made no alarm whatever in the night, and in the morning said composedly to her maid when she

came in, "Who is the pretty forlorn-looking child who has been peeping out of that closet all night?" The maid replied by giving a loud scream, and instantly decamping. She was surprised; but, she was a woman of remarkable strength of mind, and she dressed herself and went down stairs, and closeted herself with her brother. "Now, Walter," she said, "I have been disturbed all night by a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who has been constantly peeping out of that closet in my room, which I can't open. This is some trick." "I am afraid not, Charlotte," said he, "for it is the legend of the house. It is the Orphan Boy. What did he do?" "He opened the door softly," said she, "and peeped out. Sometimes, he came a step or two into the room. Then, I called to him, to encourage him, and he shrunk, and shuddered, and crept in again, and shut the door." "The closet has no communication, Charlotte," said her brother, "with any other part of the house, and it's nailed up." This was undeniably true, and it took two carpenters a whole forenoon to get it open, for examination. Then, she was satisfied that she had seen the Orphan Boy. But, the wild and terrible part of the story is, that he was also seen by three of her brother's sons, in succession, who all died young. On the occasion of each child being taken ill, he came home in a heat, twelve hours before, and said, Oh, Mamma, he had been playing under a particular oak-tree, in a certain meadow, with a strange boy—a pretty, forlorn-looking boy, who was very timid, and made signs! From fatal experience, the parents came to know that this was the Orphan Boy, and that the course of that child whom he chose for his little playmate was surely run.

Legion is the name of the German castles, where we sit up alone to wait for the Spectre—where we are shown into a room, made comparatively cheerful for our reception—where we glance round at the shadows, thrown on the blank walls by the crackling fire—where we feel very lonely when the village innkeeper and his pretty daughter have retired, after laying down a fresh store of wood upon the hearth, and setting forth on the small table such supper-cheer as a cold roast capon, bread, grapes, and a flask of old Rhine wine—where the reverberating doors close on their retreat, one after

another, like so many peals of sullen thunder—and where, about the small hours of the night, we come into the knowledge of divers supernatural mysteries. Legion is the name of the haunted German students, in whose society we draw yet nearer to the fire, while the schoolboy in the corner opens his eyes wide and round, and flies off the footstool he has chosen for his seat, when the door accidentally blows open. Vast is the crop of such fruit, shining on our Christmas Tree; in blossom, almost at the very top; ripening all down the boughs!

Among the later toys and fancies hanging there—as idle often and less pure—be the images once associated with the sweet old Waits, the softened music in the night, ever unalterable! Encircled by the social thoughts of Christmas time, still let the benignant figure of my childhood stand unchanged! In every cheerful image and suggestion that the season brings, may the bright star that rested above the poor roof, be the star of all the Christian world! A moment's pause, O vanishing tree, of which the lower boughs are dark to me as yet, and let me look once more! I know there are blank spaces on thy branches, where eyes that I have loved, have shone and smiled; from which they are departed. But, far above, I see the raiser of the dead girl, and the Widow's Son; and God is good! If Age be hiding for me in the unseen portion 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!

Now, the tree is decorated with bright merriment, and song, and dance, and cheerfulness. And they are welcome. Innocent and welcome be they ever held, beneath the branches of the Christmas Tree, which cast no gloomy shadow! But, as it sinks into the ground, I hear a whisper going through the leaves. “This, in commemoration of the law of love and kindness, mercy and compassion. This, in remembrance of Me!”³⁰

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS, AS WE GROW OLDER

Time was, with most of us, when Christmas Day encircling all our limited world like a magic ring, left nothing out for us to miss or seek; bound together all our home enjoyments, affections, and hopes; grouped every thing and every one around the Christmas fire; and made the little picture shining in our bright young eyes, complete.

Time came, perhaps, all so soon! when our thoughts over-leaped that narrow boundary; when there was some one (very dear, we thought then, very beautiful, and absolutely perfect) wanting to the fulness of our happiness; when we were wanting too (or we thought so, which did just as well) at the Christmas hearth by which that some one sat; and when we intertwined with every wreath and garland of our life that some one's name.

That was the time for the bright visionary Christmases which have long arisen from us to shew faintly, after summer rain, in the palest edges of the rainbow! That was the time for the beatified enjoyment of the things that were to be, and never were, and yet the things that were so real in our resolute hope that it would be hard to say, now, what realities achieved since, have been stronger!

What! Did that Christmas never really come when we and the priceless pearl who was our young choice were received, after the happiest of totally impossible marriages, by the two united families previously at daggers-drawn on our account? When brothers and sisters in law who had always been rather cool to us before our relationship was effected, perfectly doted on us, and when fathers and mothers overwhelmed us with unlimited incomes? Was that Christmas dinner never really eaten, after which we arose, and generously and eloquently rendered honor to our late rival, present in the company, then and there exchanging friendship and forgiveness, and founding an attachment, not to be surpassed in

Greek or Roman story,¹ which subsisted until death? Has that same rival long ceased to care for that same priceless pearl, and married for money, and become usurious? Above all, do we really know, now, that we should probably have been miserable if we had won and worn the pearl, and that we are better without her?

That Christmas when we had recently achieved so much fame; when we had been carried in triumph somewhere, for doing something great and good; when we had won an honored and ennobled name, and arrived and were received at home in a shower of tears of joy; is it possible that *that* Christmas has not come yet?

And is our life here, at the best, so constituted that, pausing as we advance at such a noticeable mile-stone in the track as this great birthday, we look back on the things that never were, as naturally and full as gravely as on the things that have been and are gone, or have been and still are? If it be so, and so it seems to be, must we come to the conclusion, that life is little better than a dream, and little worth the loves and strivings that we crowd into it?

No! Far be such miscalled philosophy from us, dear Reader, on Christmas Day! Nearer and closer to our hearts be the Christmas spirit, which is the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness, and forbearance! It is in the last virtues especially, that we are, or should be, strengthened by the unaccomplished visions of our youth; for, who shall say that they are not our teachers to deal gently even with the impalpable nothings of the earth!

Therefore, as we grow older, let us be more thankful that the circle of our Christmas associations and of the lessons that they bring, expands! Let us welcome every one of them, and summon them to take their places by the Christmas hearth.

Welcome, old aspirations, glittering creatures of an ardent fancy, to your shelter underneath the holly! We know you, and have not outlived you yet. Welcome, old projects and old loves, however fleeting, to your nooks among the steadier lights that burn around us. Welcome, all that was ever real to our hearts; and for the earnestness that made you real, thanks to Heaven! Do we build no

Christmas castles in the clouds now? Let our thoughts, fluttering like butterflies among these flowers of children, bear witness! Before this boy, there stretches out a Future, brighter than we ever looked on in our old romantic time, but bright with honor and with truth. Around this little head on which the sunny curls lie heaped, the graces sport, as prettily, as airily, as when there was no scythe within the reach of Time to shear away the curls of our first-love. Upon another girl's face near it—placider but smiling bright—a quiet and contented little face, we see Home fairly written. Shining from the word, as rays shine from a star, we see how, when our graves are old, other hopes than ours are young, other hearts than ours are moved; how other ways are smoothed; how other happiness blooms, ripens, and decays—no, not decays, for other homes and other bands of children, not yet in being nor for ages yet to be, arise, and bloom and ripen to the end of all!

Welcome, everything! Welcome, alike what has been, and what never was, and what we hope may be, to your shelter underneath the holly, to your places round the Christmas fire, where what is sits open-hearted! In yonder shadow, do we see obtruding furtively upon the blaze, an enemy's face? By Christmas Day we do forgive him! If the injury he has done us may admit of such companionship, let him come here and take his place. If otherwise, unhappily, let him go hence, assured that we will never injure nor accuse him.

On this day, we shut out Nothing!

“Pause,” says a low voice. “Nothing? Think!”

“On Christmas Day, we will shut out from our fireside, Nothing.”

“Not the shadow of a vast City where the withered leaves are lying deep?” the voice replies. “Not the shadow that darkens the whole globe? Not the shadow of the City of the Dead?”

Not even that. Of all days in the year, we will turn our faces towards that City upon Christmas Day, and from its silent hosts bring those we loved, among us. City of the Dead, in the blessed name wherein we are gathered together at this time, and in the Presence that is here among us according to the promise, we will receive, and not dismiss, thy people who are dear to us!

Yes. We can look upon these children angels² that alight, so solemnly, so beautifully, among the living children by the fire, and can bear to think how they departed from us. Entertaining angels unawares,³ as the Patriarchs did, the playful children are unconscious of their guests; but we can see them—can see a radiant arm around one favorite neck, as if there were a tempting of that child away. Among the celestial figures there is one, a poor misshapen boy on earth,⁴ of a glorious beauty now, of whom his dying mother said it grieved her much to leave him here, alone, for so many years as it was likely would elapse before he came to her—being such a little child. But he went quickly, and was laid upon her breast, and in her hand she leads him.

There was a gallant boy, who fell, far away, upon a burning sand beneath a burning sun, and said, “Tell them at home, with my last love, how much I could have wished to kiss them once, but that I died contented and had done my duty!” Or there was another, over whom they read the words, “Therefore we commit his body to the deep!” and so consigned him to the lonely ocean and sailed on. Or there was another who lay down to his rest in the dark shadow of great forests, and, on earth, awoke no more. O shall they not, from sand and sea and forest, be brought home at such a time!

There was a dear girl⁵—almost a woman—never to be one—who made a mourning Christmas in a house of joy, and went her trackless way to the silent City. Do we recollect her, worn out, faintly whispering what could not be heard, and falling into that last sleep for weariness? O look upon her now! O look upon her beauty, her serenity, her changeless youth, her happiness! The daughter of Jairus⁶ was recalled to life, to die; but she, more blest, has heard the same voice, saying unto her, “Arise for ever!”

We had a friend who was our friend from early days, with whom we often pictured the changes that were to come upon our lives, and merrily imagined how we would speak, and walk, and think, and talk, when we came to be old. His destined habitation in the City of the Dead received him in his prime. Shall he be shut out from our

Christmas remembrance? Would his love have so excluded us? Lost friend, lost child, lost parent, sister, brother, husband, wife, we will not so discard you! You shall hold your cherished places in our Christmas hearts, and by our Christmas fires; and in the season of immortal hope, and on the birthday of immortal mercy, we will shut out Nothing!

The winter sun goes down over town and village; on the sea it makes a rosy path, as if the Sacred tread were fresh upon the water. A few more moments, and it sinks, and night comes on, and lights begin to sparkle in the prospect. On the hill-side beyond the shapelessly-diffused town, and in the quiet keeping of the trees that gird the village-steeple, remembrances are cut in stone, planted in common flowers; growing in grass, entwined with lowly brambles around many a mound of earth. In town and village, there are doors and windows closed against the weather, there are flaming logs heaped high, there are joyful faces, there is healthy music of voices. Be all ungentleness and harm excluded from the temples of the Household Gods, but be those remembrances admitted with tender encouragement! They are of the time and all its comforting and peaceful reassurances; and of the history that reunited even upon earth the living and the dead; and of the broad beneficence and goodness that too many men have tried to tear to narrow shreds.

THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELLERS

THE FIRST

Strictly speaking, there were only six Poor Travellers; but, being a Traveller myself, though an idle one, and being withal as poor as I hope to be, I brought the number up to seven. This word of explanation is due at once, for what says the inscription over the quaint old door?

RICHARD WATTS,¹ Esq.
by his Will, dated 22 Aug. 1579,
founded this Charity
for Six poor Travellers,
who not being ROGUES, or PROCTORS,²
May receive gratis for one Night,
Lodging, Entertainment,
and Four-pence each.

It was in the ancient little city of Rochester in Kent, of all the good days in the year upon a Christmas Eve, that I stood reading this inscription over the quaint old door in question. I had been wandering about the neighbouring Cathedral, and had seen the tomb of Richard Watts, with the effigy of worthy Master Richard starting out of it like a ship's figure-head; and I had felt that I could do no less, as I gave the Verger his fee, than inquire the way to Watts's Charity. The way being very short and very plain, I had come prosperously to the inscription and the quaint old door.

“Now,” said I to myself, as I looked at the knocker, “I know I am not a Proctor; I wonder whether I am a Rogue!”

Upon the whole, though Conscience reproduced two or three pretty faces which might have had smaller attraction for a moral

Goliath than they had had for me, who am but a Tom Thumb³ in that way, I came to the conclusion that I was not a Rogue. So, beginning to regard the establishment as in some sort my property, bequeathed to me and divers co-legatees, share and share alike, by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts, I stepped backward into the road to survey my inheritance.

I found it to be a clean white house, of a staid and venerable air, with the quaint old door already three times mentioned (an arched door), choice little long low lattice-windows, and a roof of three gables. The silent High Street of Rochester is full of gables, with old beams and timbers carved into strange faces. It is oddly garnished with a queer old clock that projects over the pavement out of a grave red brick building,⁴ as if Time carried on business there, and hung out his sign. Sooth to say, he did an active stroke of work in Rochester, in the old days of the Romans, and the Saxons, and the Normans, and down to the times of King John,⁵ when the rugged castle—I will not undertake to say how many hundreds of years old then—was abandoned to the centuries of weather which have so defaced the dark apertures in its walls, that the ruin looks as if the rooks and daws had picked its eyes out.

I was very well pleased, both with my property and its situation. While I was yet surveying it with growing content, I espied at one of the upper lattices which stood open, a decent body, of a wholesome matronly appearance, whose eyes I caught inquiringly addressed to mine. They said so plainly, “Do you wish to see the house?” that I answered aloud, “Yes, if you please.” And within a minute the old door opened, and I bent my head, and went down two steps into the entry.

“This,” said the matronly presence, ushering me into a low room on the right, “is where the Travellers sit by the fire, and cook what bits of suppers they buy with their fourpences.”

“Oh! Then they have no Entertainment?” said I. For, the inscription over the outer door was still running in my head, and I was mentally repeating in a kind of tune, “Lodging, entertainment, and fourpence each.”

“They have a fire provided for ’em,” returned the matron: a mighty civil person, not, as I could make out, overpaid: “and these cooking utensils. And this what’s painted on a board, is the rules for their behaviour. They have their fourpences when they get their tickets from the steward over the way—for I don’t admit ’em myself, they must get their tickets first—and sometimes one buys a rasher of bacon, and another a herring, and another a pound of potatoes, or what not. Sometimes, two or three of ’em will club their fourpences together, and make a supper that way. But, not much of anything is to be got for fourpence, at present, when provisions is so dear.”

“True indeed,” I remarked. I had been looking about the room, admiring its snug fireside at the upper end, its glimpse of the street through the low mullioned window, and its beams overhead. “It is very comfortable,” said I.

“Ill-convenient,” observed the matronly presence.

I liked to hear her say so; for, it showed a commendable anxiety to execute in no niggardly spirit the intentions of Master Richard Watts. But, the room was really so well adapted to its purpose that I protested, quite enthusiastically, against her disparagement.

“Nay, ma’am,” said I, “I am sure it is warm in winter and cool in summer. It has a look of homely welcome and soothing rest. It has a remarkably cosy fireside, the very blink of which, gleaming out into the street upon a winter night, is enough to warm all Rochester’s heart. And as to the convenience of the six Poor Travellers——”

“I don’t mean them,” returned the presence. “I speak of its being an ill-convenience to myself and my daughter having no other room to sit in of a night.”

This was true enough, but there was another quaint room of corresponding dimensions on the opposite side of the entry: so, I stepped across to it, through the open doors of both rooms, and asked what this chamber was for?

“This,” returned the presence, “is the Board Room. Where the gentlemen meet when they come here.”

Let me see. I had counted from the street six upper windows besides these on the ground-story. Making a perplexed calculation in my mind, I rejoined, "Then the six Poor Travellers sleep upstairs?"

My new friend shook her head. "They sleep," she answered, "in two little outer galleries at the back, where their beds has always been, ever since the Charity was founded. It being so very inconvenient to me as things is at present, the gentlemen are going to take off a bit of the back yard and make a slip of a room for 'em there, to sit in before they go to bed."

"And then the six Poor Travellers," said I, "will be entirely out of the house?"

"Entirely out of the house," assented the presence, comfortably smoothing her hands. "Which is considered much better for all parties, and much more convenient."

I had been a little startled, in the cathedral, by the emphasis with which the effigy of Master Richard Watts was bursting out of his tomb; but, I began to think, now, that it might be expected to come across the High Street some stormy night, and make a disturbance here.

Howbeit, I kept my thoughts to myself, and accompanied the presence to the little galleries at the back. I found them, on a tiny scale, like the galleries in old inn-yards; and they were very clean. While I was looking at them, the matron gave me to understand that the prescribed number of Poor Travellers were forthcoming every night from year's end to year's end; and that the beds were always occupied. My questions upon this, and her replies, brought us back to the Board Room so essential to the dignity of "the gentlemen," where she showed me the printed accounts of the Charity hanging up by the window. From them, I gathered that the greater part of the property bequeathed by the Worshipful Master Richard Watts for the maintenance of this foundation, was, at the period of his death, mere marshland; but that, in course of time, it had been reclaimed and built upon, and was very considerably increased in value. I found, too, that about a thirtieth part of the annual revenue was now expended on the purposes commemorated in the

inscription over the door: the rest being handsomely laid out in Chancery,⁶ law expenses, collectorship, receivership, poundage,⁷ and other appendages of management, highly complimentary to the importance of the six Poor Travellers. In short, I made the not entirely new discovery that it may be said of an establishment like this, in dear Old England, as of the fat oyster in the American story,⁸ that it takes a good many men to swallow it whole.

“And pray, ma’am,” said I, sensible that the blankness of my face began to brighten as a thought occurred to me, “could one see these Travellers?”

Well! she returned dubiously; no! “Not to-night, for instance?” said I. Well! she returned more positively; no. Nobody ever asked to see them, and nobody ever did see them.

As I am not easily baulked in a design when I am set upon it, I urged to the good lady that this was Christmas Eve; that Christmas comes but once a year—which is unhappily too true, for when it begins to stay with us the whole year round, we shall make this earth a very different place; that I was possessed by the desire to treat the Travellers to a supper and a temperate glass of hot Wassail;⁹ that the voice of Fame had been heard in the land,¹⁰ declaring my ability to make hot Wassail; that if I were permitted to hold the feast, I should be found conformable to reason, sobriety, and good hours; in a word, that I could be merry and wise¹¹ myself, and had been even known at a pinch to keep others so, although I was decorated with no badge or medal,¹² and was not a Brother, Orator, Apostle, Saint, or Prophet of any denomination whatever. In the end, I prevailed, to my great joy. It was settled that at nine o’clock that night, a Turkey and a piece of Roast Beef should smoke upon the board; and that I, faint and unworthy minister for once of Master Richard Watts, should preside as the Christmas-supper host of the six Poor Travellers.

I went back to my inn, to give the necessary directions for the Turkey and Roast Beef, and, during the remainder of the day, could settle to nothing for thinking of the Poor Travellers. When the wind

blew hard against the windows—it was a cold day, with dark gusts of sleet alternating with periods of wild brightness, as if the year were dying fitfully—I pictured them advancing towards their resting-place along various cold roads, and felt delighted to think how little they foresaw the supper that awaited them. I painted their portraits in my mind, and indulged in little heightening touches. I made them footsore; I made them weary; I made them carry packs and bundles; I made them stop by finger-posts and mile-stones, leaning on their bent sticks and looking wistfully at what was written there; I made them lose their way, and filled their five wits with apprehensions of lying out all night, and being frozen to death. I took up my hat and went out, climbed to the top of the Old Castle, and looked over the windy hills that slope down to the Medway: almost believing that I could descry some of my Travellers in the distance. After it fell dark, and the Cathedral bell was heard in the invisible steeple—quite a bower of frosty rime when I had last seen it—striking five, six, seven; I became so full of my Travellers that I could eat no dinner, and felt constrained to watch them still, in the red coals of my fire. They were all arrived by this time, I thought, had got their tickets, and were gone in.—There, my pleasure was dashed by the reflection that probably some Travellers had come too late and were shut out.

After the Cathedral bell had struck eight, I could smell a delicious savour of Turkey and Roast Beef rising to the window of my adjoining bed-room, which looked down into the inn yard, just where the lights of the kitchen reddened a massive fragment of the Castle Wall. It was high time to make the Wassail now; therefore, I had up the materials (which, together with their proportions and combinations, I must decline to impart, as the only secret of my own I was ever known to keep), and made a glorious jorum. Not in a bowl; for, a bowl anywhere but on a shelf, is a low superstition fraught with cooling and slopping; but, in a brown earthenware pitcher, tenderly suffocated when full, with a coarse cloth. It being now upon the stroke of nine, I set out for Watts's Charity, carrying my brown beauty in my arms. I would trust Ben the waiter with

untold gold; but, there are strings in the human heart which must never be sounded by another, and drinks that I make myself are those strings in mine.

The Travellers were all assembled, the cloth was laid, and Ben had brought a great billet of wood, and had laid it artfully on the top of the fire, so that a touch or two of the poker after supper should make a roaring blaze. Having deposited my brown beauty in a red nook of the hearth inside the fender, where she soon began to sing like an ethereal cricket, diffusing at the same time odours as of ripe vineyards, spice forests, and orange groves—I say, having stationed my beauty in a place of security and improvement, I introduced myself to my guests by shaking hands all round, and giving them a hearty welcome.

I found the party to be thus composed. Firstly, myself. Secondly, a very decent man indeed, with his right arm in a sling; who had a certain clean, agreeable smell of wood about him, from which I judged him to have something to do with shipbuilding. Thirdly, a little sailor-boy, a mere child, with a profusion of rich dark brown hair, and deep womanly-looking eyes. Fourthly, a shabby-genteel personage in a threadbare black suit, and apparently in very bad circumstances, with a dry suspicious look; the absent buttons on his waistcoat eked out with red tape; and a bundle of extraordinarily tattered papers sticking out of an inner breast-pocket. Fifthly, a foreigner by birth, but an Englishman in speech, who carried his pipe in the band of his hat, and lost not time in telling me, in an easy, simple, engaging way, that he was a watchmaker from Geneva, and travelled all about the continent, mostly on foot, working as a journeyman, and seeing new countries—possibly (I thought) also smuggling a watch or so, now and then. Sixthly, a little widow, who had been very pretty and was still very young, but whose beauty had been wrecked in some great misfortune, and whose manner was remarkably timid, scared, and solitary. Seventhly and lastly, a Traveller of a kind familiar to my boyhood, but now almost obsolete: a Book-Pedlar: who had a quantity of Pamphlets and Numbers¹³ with him, and who presently boasted

that he could repeat more verses in an evening, than he could sell in a twelvemonth.

All these I have mentioned, in the order in which they sat at table. I presided, and the matronly presence faced me. We were not long in taking our places, for the supper had arrived with me, in the following procession.

Myself with the pitcher.
Ben with Beer.
Inattentive Boy with hot plates. | Inattentive Boy with hot plates.
THE TURKEY.
Female carrying sauces to be heated on the spot.
THE BEEF.
Man with Tray on his head, containing Vegetables and Sundries.
Volunteer hostler from Hotel, grinning,
And rendering no assistance.

As we passed along the High-street, Comet-like, we left a long tail of fragrance behind us which caused the public to stop, sniffing in wonder. We had previously left at the corner of the inn-yard, a wall-eyed young man connected with the Fly department,¹⁴ and well accustomed to the sound of a railway whistle which Ben always carries in his pocket: whose instructions were, so soon as he should hear the whistle blown, to dash into the kitchen, seize the hot plum-pudding and mince pies, and speed with them to Watts's Charity: where they would be received (he was further instructed) by the sauce-female, who would be provided with brandy in a blue state of combustion.

All these arrangements were executed in the most exact and punctual manner. I never saw a finer turkey, finer beef, or greater prodigality of sauce and gravy; and my Travellers did wonderful justice to everything set before them. It made my heart rejoice, to observe how their wind-and-frost hardened faces, softened in the clatter of plates and knives and forks, and mellowed in the fire and supper heat. While their hats and caps, and wrappers, hanging up; a few small bundles on the ground in a corner; and, in another corner,

three or four old walking sticks, worn down at the end to mere fringe; linked this snug interior with the bleak outside in a golden chain.

When supper was done, and my brown beauty had been elevated on the table, there was a general requisition to me, to “take the corner;” which suggested to me, comfortably enough, how much my friends here made of a fire—for when had *I* ever thought so highly of the corner, since the days when I connected it with Jack Horner?¹⁵ However, as I declined, Ben, whose touch on all convivial instruments is perfect, drew the table apart, and instructing my Travellers to open right and left on either side of me, and form round the fire, closed up the centre with myself and my chair, and preserved the order we had kept at table. He had already, in a tranquil manner, boxed the ears of the inattentive boys until they had been by imperceptible degrees boxed out of the room; and he now rapidly skirmished the sauce-female into the High Street, disappeared, and softly closed the door.

This was the time for bringing the poker to bear on the billet of wood. I tapped it three times, like an enchanted talisman, and a brilliant host of merrymakers burst out of it, and sported off by the chimney—rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance,¹⁶ and never coming down again. Meanwhile, by their sparkling light which threw our lamp into the shade, I filled the glasses, and gave my Travellers, CHRISTMAS!—CHRISTMAS Eve, my friends, when the Shepherds, who were Poor Travellers too in their way, heard the Angels sing, “On earth, peace. Goodwill towards men!”¹⁷

I don’t know who was the first among us to think that we ought to take hands as we sat, in deference to the toast, or whether any one of us anticipated the others, but at any rate we all did it. We then drank to the memory of the good Master Richard Watts. And I wish his Ghost may never have had worse usage under that roof, than it had from us!

It was the witching time for Story-telling. “Our whole life, Travellers,” said I, “is a story more or less intelligible—generally

less; but, we shall read it by a clearer light when it is ended. I for one, am so divided this night between fact and fiction, that I scarce know which is which. Shall we beguile the time by telling stories, in our order as we sit here?"

They all answered, Yes, provided I would begin. I had little to tell them, but I was bound by my own proposal. Therefore, after looking for a while at the spiral column of smoke wreathing up from my brown beauty, through which I could have almost sworn I saw the effigy of Master Richard Watts less startled than usual; I fired away.

• • •

THE ROAD

The stories being all finished, and the Wassail too, we broke up as the Cathedral-bell struck Twelve. I did not take leave of my Travellers that night; for, it had come into my head to reappear in conjunction with some hot coffee, at seven in the morning.

As I passed along the High Street, I heard the Waits¹⁸ at a distance, and struck off to find them. They were playing near one of the old gates of the City, at the corner of a wonderfully quaint row of red-brick tenements, which the clarionet obligingly informed me were inhabited by the Minor-Canons.¹⁹ They had odd little porches over the doors, like sounding-boards over old pulpits; and I thought I should like to see one of the Minor-Canons come out upon his top step, and favour us with a little Christmas discourse about the poor scholars of Rochester: taking for his text the words of his Master, relative to the devouring of Widows' houses.²⁰

The clarionet was so communicative, and my inclinations were (as they generally are), of so vagabond a tendency, that I accompanied the Waits across an open green called the Vines, and assisted—in the French sense²¹—at the performance of two waltzes, two polkas, and three Irish melodies, before I thought of my inn any more. However, I returned to it then, and found a fiddle in the

kitchen, and Ben, the wall-eyed young man, and two chambermaids, circling round the great deal table with the utmost animation.

I had a very bad night. It cannot have been owing to the turkey, or the beef—and the Wassail is out of the question—but, in every endeavour that I made to get to sleep, I failed most dismally. Now, I was at Badajos with a fiddle; now, haunted by the widow's murdered sister. Now, I was riding on a little blind girl, to save my native town from sack and ruin. Now, I was expostulating with the dead mother of the unconscious little sailor-boy; now, dealing in diamonds in Sky Fair; now, for life or death, hiding mince-pies under bed-room carpets.²² For all this, I was never asleep; and, in whatsoever unreasonable direction my mind rambled, the effigy of Master Richard Watts perpetually embarrassed it.

In a word, I only got out of the worshipful Master Richard Watts's way, by getting out of bed in the dark at six o'clock, and tumbling as my custom is, into all the cold water that could be accumulated for the purpose. The outer air was dull and cold enough in the street, when I came down there; and the one candle in our supper-room at Watts's Charity looked as pale in the burning, as if it had had a bad night too. But, my Travellers had all slept soundly, and they took to the hot coffee, and the piles of bread and butter which Ben had arranged like deals in a timber-yard, as kindly as I could desire.

While it was yet scarcely daylight, we all came out into the street together, and there shook hands. The widow took the little sailor towards Chatham, where he was to find a steam boat for Sheerness; the lawyer, with an extremely knowing look, went his own way, without committing himself by announcing his intentions; two more struck off by the cathedral and old castle for Maidstone; and the book-pedlar accompanied me over the bridge. As for me, I was going to walk, by Cobham Woods, as far upon my way to London as I fancied.

When I came to the stile and footpath by which I was to diverge from the main-road, I bade farewell to my last remaining Poor Traveller, and pursued my way alone. And now, the mists began to

rise in the most beautiful manner, and the sun to shine; and as I went on through the bracing air, seeing the hoar-frost sparkle everywhere, I felt as if all Nature shared in the joy of the great Birthday.

Going through the woods, the softness of my tread upon the mossy ground and among the brown leaves, enhanced the Christmas sacredness by which I felt surrounded. As the whitened stems environed me, I thought how the Founder of the time had never raised his benignant hand, save to bless and heal, except in the case of one unconscious tree.²³ By Cobham Hall,²⁴ I came to the village, and the churchyard where the dead had been quietly buried, “in the sure and certain hope”²⁵ which Christmas time inspired. What children could I see at play, and not be loving of, recalling who had loved them! No garden that I passed, was out of unison with the day, for I remembered that the tomb was in a garden, and that “she, supposing him to be the gardener;” had said, “Sir, if thou have borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away.”²⁶ In time, the distant river with the ships, came full in view, and with it pictures of the poor fishermen mending their nets, who arose and followed him—of the teaching of the people from a ship pushed off a little way from shore, by reason of the multitude—of a majestic figure walking on the water,²⁷ in the loneliness of night. My very shadow on the ground was eloquent of Christmas; for, did not the people lay their sick²⁸ where the mere shadows of the men who had heard and seen him, might fall as they passed along?

Thus, Christmas begirt me, far and near, until I had come to Blackheath, and had walked down the long vista of gnarled old trees in Greenwich Park,²⁹ and was being steam-rattled, through the mists now closing in once more, towards the lights of London. Brightly they shone, but not so brightly as my own fire and the brighter faces around it, when we came together to celebrate the day. And there I told of worthy Master Richard Watts, and of my supper with the Six Poor Travellers who were neither Rogues nor

Proctors, and from that hour to this, I have never seen one of them again.

Appendix I

Dickens's Prefaces to Collected Editions of *The Christmas Books*

PREFACE TO THE FIRST CHEAP EDITION

I have included my little Christmas Books in this cheap edition, complying with a desire that has been repeatedly expressed to me, and hoping that they may prove generally acceptable in so accessible a form.

The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I never attempted great elaboration of detail in the working out of character within such limits, believing that it could not succeed. My purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque which the good humour of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land. I have the happiness of believing that I did not wholly miss it.

London,
September, 1852.

PREFACE TO THE 'CHARLES DICKENS' EDITION

The narrow space within which it was necessary to confine these Christmas Stories when they were originally published, rendered their construction a matter of some difficulty, and almost necessitated what is peculiar in their machinery. I could not attempt great elaboration of detail, in the working out of character within

such limits. My chief purpose was, in a whimsical kind of masque which the good humour of the season justified, to awaken some loving and forbearing thoughts, never out of season in a Christian land.

Appendix II

Dickens's Descriptive Headlines for *A Christmas Carol* and *The Haunted Man*

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

STAVE ONE

Out upon Merry Christmas!
God bless you, merry gentleman!
Scrooge's Fireside
The Ghost
The Ghost's departure

STAVE TWO

Another unearthly Visitor
Scrooge's School-Days
The Fezziwig Ball
Scrooge's old Love
Expecting a Third Visitor

STAVE THREE

Christmas Shops
At Bob Cratchit's
Tiny Tim and Mr. Scrooge
Over Land and Sea
Games at Forfeits
Ignorance and Want

STAVE FOUR

A Death has occurred
Ghoules
Poor Tiny Tim!
The name of the dead man

STAVE FIVE

A delightful Boy
Scrooge reclaimed by Christmas

THE HAUNTED MAN

CHAPTER I

Ghostly Surroundings
Mr. and Mrs. William
Lord! Keep my memory green!
The Poor Student
Morbid remembrance
The compact

CHAPTER II

Small people in a small parlour
Mr. Tetterby's remonstrance
Mrs. Tetterby is put out
Mrs. Tetterby recovers her temper
Infected Air
Her Son
The contagion spreads
A dreadful gift
All good imagination gone
Influence of Sorrow, Wrong, and Trouble
The gift beside a Death-Bed

Only one companion left

CHAPTER III

Seek her out

Young Moloch

The shadow on Mr. and Mrs. Tetterby

Mrs. William arrives

A far better gift

A Good Prayer

The better gift contagious too

Christian Chemistry

Appendix III

Dickens and *The Arabian Nights*

The Arabian Nights is a collection of popular tales, full of marvels, set in the Middle East, India and China, some dating from as far back as the eighth century of the Christian era. They first reached England via the French translation of Antoine Galland in 1704–8 and their great popularity led to the appearance of many translations during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including Jonathan Scott's scholarly six-volume edition of 1811, which may have been the one acquired by John Dickens and read so avidly by his son as a child. All his life Dickens retained a great love of these stories and his writings contain numerous allusions to them, such as those to the story of Ali Baba in the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man*. The passage in 'A Christmas Tree' in which he recalls the stories in such loving detail is the greatest of his tributes to this work which retained such a strong hold over his imagination.

The Introduction to, or 'setting in', as Dickens calls it, of the *Nights* relates how King Schariar and his brother, the King of Great Tartary, renounce their kingdoms in despair after discovering the gross infidelity of their wives. Convinced they are the unhappiest of beings, they are fleeing away to foreign parts when they are forced to take refuge in a tree by the appearance of a huge and hideous black Genie carrying a beautiful captive lady in a glass box. Addressing her as his 'charming mistress' whom he carried off on her wedding day and has loved ever since, he releases her and lies down to sleep with his head in her lap. She sees the two kings in the tree and forces them to descend, in spite of their terror, by threatening to wake the Genie and ordering him to kill them. She lays the Genie's head softly on the ground and then compels Schariar and his brother to make love to her (translated as 'she made a very urgent proposal to them'), afterwards showing them

tokens to prove that she has had very many previous such encounters, constantly outwitting the jealous Genie. The two kings, seeing the Genie is even more betrayed than they have been, decide to return to Schariar's kingdom with an infallible plan for him to avoid being cuckolded in future. Each day he marries a young virgin and has her executed the following morning. To put an end to the misery thereby caused to his people, his Grand Vizier's beautiful daughter Scheherezade persuades her father to agree to her becoming Schariar's next bride. Scheherezade is a superlative storyteller and arranges for her sister Dinarzarde to accompany her and to prompt her to tell story after story 'to beguile the waking hours of our night'. The King's curiosity to know how each story ends (Scheherezade always breaks off her narrative at some crucial point when she sees the approach of dawn) makes him constantly defer her execution. Dickens's *Arabian Nights* references in the present volume are sourced below (I refer always to *Arabian Nights' Entertainment*, World's Classics Edition, ed. Robert L. Mack, 1995, which is based on Galland's text as first rendered into English by an anonymous translator between 1706 and 1721).

Ali Baba: Ali Baba, the woodcutter hero of the story of 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves', becomes fabulously wealthy as a result of accidentally discovering how to gain access to the robbers' cave using the magic password 'Open Sesame'. His brother Cassim Baba also gains access to the cave but forgets the password, so cannot get out. The robbers find him and cut him into four quarters which they hang at the entrance to the cave as a warning to others. To conceal what has happened to him and thus to conceal also the secret of the cave, Ali Baba and his family remove the mutilated corpse and bring the cobbler Mustapha to it blindfolded to sew it together again so that they can pretend Cassim died a natural death.

apple purchased...from the Sultan's gardener, the: In 'The Story of the Three Apples' a man buys three apples from the Sultan's gardener for his sick wife. Their child secretly takes one but it is then stolen from him by a black slave. Surprised in possession of it by the

man, the slave claims he was given the apple by his mistress as a love-token, whereupon the man returns home and kills his wife, subsequently learning the truth from his child.

Barmecide justice: In 'The History of the Barber's Sixth Brother' one of the princes of the Barmecide clan in Baghdad entertains a beggar to an apparently lavish feast which is, in fact, merely an illusion.

Cassim Baba: See Ali Baba.

cobblers are all Mustaphas: See Ali Baba.

date, that unlucky: In 'The Story of the Merchant and the Genie' a merchant is threatened with instant death by a Genie for unwittingly killing the Genie's invisible son with a carelessly thrown date shell.

dog, really a transformed man, the: See *lady, who was a ghoul*.

Eastern King with a glittering scimitar: See introductory note above.

fraudulent olive merchant, the: Refers to 'The Story of Ali Cogia, A Merchant of Bagdad', one of the adventures experienced by the legendary Caliph Haroun Alraschid, 'Commander of the Faithful', when roaming at night in disguise about his city of Bagdad.

horse, the wooden: The incident Dickens recalls occurs in 'The Story of the Enchanted Horse'.

iron ring let into stone, any: In 'The Story of Aladdin and the Wonderful Lamp' an African magician, pretending to be Aladdin's uncle, kindles a fire and utters a spell which makes the earth shake, revealing a stone with a ring attached to it (a brass ring in Mack's edition). Aladdin obeys the magician's instruction to pull up the stone and descend into the fabulous treasure-cave below in quest of the lamp that is the only thing the magician wants him to bring out.

lady, who was a ghoul: This is the wife of the hero of the 'The Story of Sidi Nonman'. When Sidi discovers her true nature, she transforms him into a dog and tries to kill him. He escapes, however, and performs the feat in the baker's shop described by Dickens.

Sultan's Groom turned upside-down by the Genii, the: See Vizier's son of Bussorah.

What's his name, who was put down...at the Gate of Damascus: See Vizier's son of Bussorah.

Valley of the Diamonds, the: From the story of the Second Voyage of Sinbad the Sailor. The valley floor is covered with diamonds but also infested with poisonous serpents so traders resort to the method Dickens describes to get hold of the diamonds.

Vizier's son of Bussorah, the: Referring to 'The Story of Nouredin Ali, and Bedreddin Ali'. Two brothers, Schemseddin Mohammed and Nouredin Ali, joint Viziers of Cairo, quarrel and Nouredin departs to the city of Bussorah (modern El-Basrah; 'Balsora' in Mack's edition), where he prospers and begets a son, Hassan. After his death Hassan's life is in danger but his beauty, as he lies sleeping on his father's tomb, attracts a genie and a fairy. They decide he is worthy to be wedded to the also very beautiful daughter of the Vizier of Cairo, who is about to be married to an ugly hump-backed groom of the Sultan's, the Sultan being enraged against her father. They transport Hassan to Cairo, where at the bridal ceremony he displaces the hump-back, who is compelled by the genie and the fairy to remain upside down all night. At dawn, however, the fairy takes up the sleeping Hassan, 'in his shirt and drawers', and deposits him at the gates of Damascus. He is thought mad because he insists that he was the previous night in Cairo and he takes refuge from 'the rabble' in the shop of a pastry-cook who adopts him and teaches him the trade.

Notes

T. W. Hill, Honorary Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship 1914–19 and Honorary Treasurer 1932–47, compiled an excellent set of annotations to Dickens's major works, most of which were published in *The Dickensian* between 1942 and 1953. His notes on *The Christmas Books* were not published, however, but left to *The Dickensian*. I drew on them for the annotation of my Penguin English Library edition of the *Christmas Books* (1971), much of which is incorporated in the Notes below. I am also indebted in places to the explanatory notes provided by Sally Ledger for the Everyman Dickens *Christmas Books* (1999) and by Ruth Glancy for the Everyman Library *Christmas Stories* (1996).

CHRISTMAS FESTIVITIES

First published in *Bell's Life in London*, 27 December 1835, tenth in a series of twelve 'Scenes and Characters' written under the pen-name 'Tibbs'; retitled 'A Christmas Dinner', collected in *Sketches by Boz* (2 vols., 1836) where it stands as the last item in vol. 1. Dickens made a few changes of punctuation when preparing the text for volume publication, generally, but not consistently, expanding 'grandma' and 'grandpa' to 'grandmamma' and 'grandpapa', introducing more paragraphing (which I have adopted), and omitting the last paragraph.

1. *send round the song*: Join in singing a catch or round song.
2. *troll off*: Sing merrily or blithely.
3. *Would that Christmas lasted the whole year through*: Dickens added a parenthesis '(as it ought)' to this sentence in the Cheap Edition of *Sketches by Boz*, 1850.

4. *Newgate-market*: Central London meat market adjacent to Newgate Prison; closed in 1869 when its function was taken over by the Central Meat Markets, Smithfield.
5. *Burton ale*: A famous pale ale brewed at Burton-upon-Trent, Staffordshire.
6. *our ordinary limits*: I.e. one whole newspaper column.

THE STORY OF THE GOBLINS WHO STOLE A SEXTON

Originally published in the tenth monthly number of *Pickwick Papers* (December 1836), where it is related by Old Wardle to his family and guests seated around the fire. In the first edition of the novel, therefore, the whole story is enclosed in double quotation marks and dialogue within the story in single ones. As the story stands alone in this edition, however, I have used only double quotation marks for the dialogue consistently with procedure in all the other items.

1. *gall and wormwood*: From Lamentations 3:19: ‘remembering mine affliction and my misery, the wormwood and the gall’.
2. *Hollands*: Dutch gin.
3. *Wellingtons in Bond Street*: Wellingtons were a kind of riding-boot named after the Duke of Wellington; Bond Street is a fashionable shopping street in London’s West End.

A CHRISTMAS EPISODE FROM *MASTER HUMPHREY’S CLOCK*

This episode occurs in the second weekly number of *Master Humphrey’s Clock* (11 April 1840). Having introduced himself and his old house in the City to the reader and expatiated on his delight in the world of the imagination, which is so fully shared by his ‘dear, deaf friend’, Master Humphrey exclaims: ‘how often have I cause to bless the day that brought us two together! Of all days in

the year I rejoice to think that it should have been Christmas Day, with which from childhood we associate something friendly, hearty and sincere.’ The extract printed here follows on immediately after this.

1. *a little set of tablets*: a sheaf of stiffened papers for making notes on.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

1. *'Change*: The Royal Exchange in the City of London, which functioned as a trading centre from 1570 to 1939.
2. *the wisdom of our ancestors*: A catch-phrase much favoured by Tory politicians and always mocked by Dickens. Later, when he had some dummy book-backs made for his study at Tavistock House, the titles included a set called *The Wisdom of Our Ancestors* with individual volumes labelled *Ignorance, Superstition, The Block, The Stake, The Rack, Dirt, Disease*.
3. *to astonish his son's weak mind*: The *Carol* manuscript shows that Dickens originally continued here as follows: ‘Perhaps you think Hamlet’s intellects were strong. I doubt it. If you could have such a son tomorrow, depend upon it, you would find him a poser. He would be a most impracticable fellow to deal with, and however creditable he might be to his family, he would prove a special incumbrance in his lifetime, trust me.’ This passage was presumably cut at proof stage.
4. *dog-days*: The period 3 July–11 August, when the dog-star Sirius rises with the sun, supposedly the hottest days of the year.
5. *‘came down’ handsomely*: (Slang) gave money generously.
6. *‘nuts’*: (Slang) something very agreeable.
7. *see him in that extremity first*: Euphemism for ‘see him damned’.
8. *Bedlam*: Common abbreviation for the Hospital of St Mary of Bethlehem, founded in London in the fourteenth century and dedicated to the care of lunatics; it was moved in 1812 to a

purpose-built building in Lambeth, now the home of the Imperial War Museum.

9. *the Union workhouses*: The Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, the working of which Dickens fiercely attacked in *Oliver Twist*, divided England and Wales into twenty-one districts, in each of which a commissioner was empowered to form 'poor law unions' by grouping parishes together for administrative purposes and to build workhouses for the reception of the destitute.
10. *decrease the surplus population*: Fears about over-population had been haunting England since the publication of the Reverend Thomas Malthus's *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. Malthus made it clear whom he regarded as 'surplus' when he wrote in the second edition of his work: 'A man who is born into a world already possessed, if he cannot get subsistence from his parents, on whom he has a just demand, and if society do not want his labour, has no claim of *right* to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature's mighty feast there is no cover for him. She tells him to be gone...' (Malthus, *Essay on the Principle of Population. New edition... enlarged*, London: J. Johnson, 1803).
11. *links*: Torches made from tow and pitch used for lighting people about the streets.
12. *St Dunstan...his familiar weapons*: In his *Child's History of England* (1851–3) Dickens relates the legend of Dunstan (924–88), referred to here as follows: '[Dunstan] was an ingenious smith, and worked at a forge in a little cell...he used to tell the most extraordinary lies about demons and spirits who, he said, came there to persecute him. For instance, he related that one day while he was at work, the devil looked in at a little window, and tried to tempt him to a life of pleasure; whereupon, having his pincers in the fire, red hot, he seized the devil by the nose and put him to such pain, that his bellowings were heard for miles and miles...'
13. *God bless you merry gentleman!/May nothing you dismay!:* Dickens significantly alters the words of the traditional carol. The original

words are ‘God rest ye merry, gentlemen/Let nothing you dismay’.

14. *next morning*: 26 December, known in the UK as Boxing Day from the fact that it was the day on which people traditionally gave presents of money or ‘Christmas boxes’ to servants or tradesmen, was treated as a normal working day until it was made a Bank Holiday by Act of Parliament in 1871.
15. *Cornhill...Camden Town*: Cornhill is one of the main thoroughfares in the City of London. Camden Town, between two and three miles north-west of Cornhill, was in 1843 home to many City clerks and their families (the Dickens family located themselves there on their return to London in 1822).
16. *Genius of the Weather*: In Classical mythology ‘Genius’ was the name used for a spirit presiding over a particular person, place or thing.
17. *the corporation, aldermen and livery*: the Corporation is the governing body of the City of London, the senior members of which are called Aldermen; Liverymen were members of one of the ancient Guilds of London.
18. *driving a coach-and-six...through a bad young Act of Parliament*: Daniel O’Connor, the Irish MP who campaigned for Home Rule for Ireland, once boasted that he could drive a coach drawn by six horses through a loosely worded Act.
19. *splinter-bar*: Cross-bar which is fixed to the head of the shaft to which the traces are attached.
20. *dip*: A tallow candle.
21. *like the ancient Prophet’s rod*: An allusion to the Book of Exodus 7:12, which describes how Aaron’s rod, transformed into a serpent, swallowed up the serpents similarly produced by Pharaoh’s magicians.
22. *that Marley had no bowels*: Dickens puns on the literal meaning of the word and the biblically derived one meaning mercy or tenderness (the emotions being supposedly located in the bowels).
23. *the Ward*: A night watchman who patrolled the streets of London until the institution of the Metropolitan Police in 1829.

24. *a mere United States' security*: During the early 1830s some American states (not the Federal Government) borrowed lavishly from foreign capitalists, especially English ones, to finance such public works as railway and canal building. The financial crisis of 1837 forced many states to repudiate their debts, a proceeding vehemently reprobated in the English press.
25. *'bonneted'*: To 'bonnet' someone is to pull their hat down over their face, a favourite piece of street horseplay among Victorian louts.
26. *mansion of dull red brick, with a little...cupola on the roof*: Dickens's description fits Gad's Hill Place, the Queen Anne house near Rochester he used to admire on childhood walks with his father and which he was to buy in 1856.
27. *Not a latent echo in the house...but fell upon the heart of Scrooge*: In her lecture 'The Middle Years: from the *Carol* to *Copperfield*' (*Dickens Memorial Lectures*, The Dickens Fellowship, 1970) Kathleen Tillotson notes of this description, 'The whole impression, and half the details, come from Tennyson's "Mariana"'.
28. *Ali Baba*: The woodcutter hero of the *Arabian Nights* story 'Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves'. For this and Scrooge's subsequent references to the Sultan's Groom, etc., see [Appendix III](#).
29. *Valentine...and his wild brother, Orson*: The old French romance about two royal brothers born in a forest to their banished mother first appeared in England in the sixteenth century and was one of the traditional nursery tales that Dickens loved to recall. One brother, Orson, was carried off by a bear and reared as a wild man in the woods whilst Valentine was brought up as a knight in the French king's court.
30. *There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek*: Dickens also recalls this episode from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* in his essay 'Nurse's Stories' (1860), collected in *The Uncommercial Traveller*: 'No face is ever reflected in the waters of the little creek which Friday swam across when pursued by his two brother cannibals with sharpened stomachs.'

31. *Welch wig*: a cap made of knitted worsted.
32. *organ of benevolence*: a term borrowed from the popular Victorian pseudo-science of phrenology, the basic premise of which was that intellectual and moral character could be gauged from the shape of the skull which phrenologists divided into some forty sections or 'organs', each one being the seat of a mental or moral faculty. The 'organ of benevolence' was located at the top of the forehead.
33. *negus*: Wine and hot water sweetened and flavoured with lemon and spice; named after its inventor, Colonel Negus (died 1732).
34. '*Sir Roger de Coverley*': An English country-dance named after a character in Addison's *Spectator*; 'a longways figure dance for large groups, in which the jumble that often occurs affords great cause for mirth' (W. G. Raffe, *Dictionary of the Dance*, 1964). From about 1840 this became standardized as a dance for no more than six couples, but Dickens is evidently referring to an older version for any number of couples who stand facing each other with a lane between them; the top couple repeats the figure as many times as there are couples to dance with, progressing one place down the line with each repeat. The leading couple is therefore dancing continuously while the others get rests; twenty-three repeats of the music means that the Fezziwigs will be dancing for between fifteen and twenty minutes, hence 'a good stiff piece of work cut out for them'. (I am grateful to Ian Cutts for expert assistance with this note.)
35. '*cut*': 'To spring from the ground and, while in the air, to twiddle the feet one in front of the other alternately, with great rapidity' (*Oxford English Dictionary*).
36. *the celebrated herd in the poem*: Alluding to Wordsworth's poem 'Written in March' in which occur the lines: 'The cattle are grazing,/Their heads never raising;/There are forty feeding like one!'
37. *acquainted with a move or two...equal to the time-of-day*: Nineteenth-century slang expressions equivalent to our modern 'streetwise'.

38. *pitch-and-toss*: Street gambling game in which coins are pitched at a target and the player whose coin lands nearest to it has the right then to toss all the coins in the air and claim all those that fall face upwards.
39. *spontaneous combustion*: This was a medical myth widely received in the early nineteenth century, the idea being that the chemical elements of the human body could become so corrupted that the victim could suddenly perish in a self-generated conflagration. Dickens's causing a character to die in this way in *Bleak House* embroiled him in controversy with George Henry Lewes.
40. *twelfth-cakes*: large rich cakes, frosted and decorated with icing-sugar figures, made to be eaten on Twelfth Night (6 January), traditionally the last day of the Christmas festivities.
41. *from the tops of their houses*: London terrace houses had central gutters in which the snow would accumulate. When it melted the resultant water could leak into rooms beneath, so prudent householders would have it shovelled away into the street below, thereby causing a hazard to pedestrians.
42. *Norfolk Biffins*: Norfolk cooking-apples, rusty red in colour.
43. *gold and silver fish*: Live carp were commonly sold in glass bowls by grocers and street-sellers in the nineteenth century.
44. *for Christmas daws to peck at*: Alluding to Iago's phrase in *Othello*, Act 1, scene 1: '...I will wear my heart upon my sleeve/For daws to peck at.'
45. *carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops*: On Sundays and on Christmas Day when bakers were not allowed to bake bread but needed to keep their ovens hot, people would take their joints of meat, pies, etc., to the bake-houses to be cooked.
46. *to close these places on the Seventh Day*: Between 1832 and 1837 Sir Andrew Agnew (1793–1849) made repeated attempts to introduce a Sunday Observance Bill in the House of Commons. This bill would not only have closed the bakeries on Sundays but would also have prohibited many of the people's recreations while leaving the wealthier classes unaffected. In June 1836, writing as 'Timothy Sparks', Dickens had attacked Agnew in a pamphlet

called *Sunday Under Three Heads. As it is; As Sabbath Bills would make it; As it might be made*. In it he describes a working man emerging from a bakery on Sunday:

with the reeking dish, in which a diminutive joint of mutton simmers above a vast heap of half-browned potatoes...the dinner is borne into the house amidst a shouting of small voices, and jumping of fat legs, which would fill Sir Andrew Agnew with astonishment; as well it might, seeing that Baronets, generally speaking, eat pretty comfortable dinners all the week through, and cannot be expected to understand what people feel, who only have a meat dinner on one day out of every seven.

47. *blood horse*: A thoroughbred racehorse.
48. *who made lame beggars walk and blind men see*: Referring to the miracles of healing performed by Christ as recorded in the Gospels – see, for example, Luke 7:22.
49. *a black swan*: Referring to l. 165 of Juvenal’s Sixth Satire, well known to Victorian schoolboys, ‘Rara avis in terris, nigroque simillima cygno’ (‘A bird rarely seen on earth, like a black swan’). Bob Cratchit would probably have belonged to a ‘goose club’, run by a local butcher or publican, paying in small amounts from his meagre wages for a number of weeks before Christmas in order to meet the exceptional expense of a goose dinner.
50. *bleak and desert moor*: Dickens is here recalling his trip to Cornwall with Forster and other friends in October/November 1842 during which they had gone ‘down into the depths of Mines’ (Pilgrim, 3, 414).
51. *tucker*: a detachable yoke of lace, linen, etc. worn over the breast.
52. *Glee or Catch*: a glee is an unaccompanied part-song for three or more voices; a catch is a round song for unaccompanied voices.
53. *best Whitechapel*: The working-class east London suburb of Whitechapel became a centre for metalwork trades in medieval times, one of the things for which it was particularly noted being the manufacture of needles.
54. *in his little brief authority*: Alluding to *Measure for Measure*, Act 2, scene 2: ‘...man, proud man!/Dress’d in a little brief authority/...

Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven/As make the angels weep.'

55. *your factious purposes*: A glance at something that always enraged Dickens, the delay in the reform of provision for public education because of sectarian disputes about the nature of the religious instruction to be provided.
56. *black gloves*: These items were always provided for mourners at middle-class funerals.
57. *Old Scratch*: Formerly a nickname for the devil (from Old Norse *skratta*, a goblin).
58. *a wicked old screw*: 'Screw' was nineteenth-century slang for a miser or skinflint.
59. '*And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them*': See Matthew 18:2.
60. *hung with Christmas*: Decorated with holly and mistletoe.
61. *A worthy place*: Dickens here glances at a major London scandal of the day, the over-full city churchyards. He was to return powerfully to the subject in chapter 11 of *Bleak House* (1852).
62. *Laocoön*: The Trojan priest who vainly attempted to dissuade his countrymen from dragging the fatal wooden horse into Troy. The goddess Athene, protectress of the Greeks, caused two huge serpents to emerge from the sea and entwine themselves around Laocoön and his two sons crushing them all to death. Dickens had doubtless seen images of the famous Classical sculpture in the Vatican depicting this event.
63. *Walk-ER*: A Victorian cockney expression indicating bemused incredulity.
64. *Joe Miller*: *Joe Miller's Jests* was first published in 1739, the name being taken from that of a Drury Lane actor who had a reputation as a humorist.
65. *bishop*: Bishop is made by pouring heated red wine over bitter oranges and then adding sugar and spices; the resulting liquor is purple, the colour of a bishop's cassock, hence the name.

THE HAUNTED MAN AND THE GHOST'S BARGAIN

1. *Giles Scroggins*: Hill observes, 'The full implications of this allusion can best be seen by an abridgment of the old ballad':

Giles Scroggins courted Molly Brown,
The fairest wench in all the town...
Fate's scissors cut poor Giles's thread
So they could not be marri-ed...
A figure tall her sight engross'd
It cried, 'I be Scroggins's ghost...
O Molly you must go with I'...
Says she, 'I am not dead, you fool.'
Says ghost, says he, 'Vy, that's no rule.'

2. *Cassim Baba*: From the *Arabian Nights* – see [Appendix III](#).
3. *the merchant Abudah's bedroom*: Referring to the first tale, 'The Talisman of Oromanes' in *Tales of the Genii* (1764), purportedly 'translated from the Persian by Sir Charles Morell, formerly Ambassador from the British Settlements in India to the Great Mogul' but actually written by the Rev. James Ridley (1736–65):

no sooner was the Merchant retired within the walls of his chamber than a little box, which no art might remove from its place, advanced without help into the centre of the chamber, and, opening, discovered to his sight the form of a diminutive old hag, who, with crutches, hopped forward to Abudah, and every night addressed him in the following terms:—'O Abudah – why delayest thou to search out the talisman of Oromanes?... Till you are possessed of that valuable treasure, O Abudah, my presence shall nightly remind you of your idleness, and my chest remain for ever in the chambers of your repose.'

Having said this, the hag retired into her box, shaking her crutches, and with an hideous yell, closed herself in, and left the unfortunate Merchant on a bed of doubt and anxiety for the rest of the night.

4. *to grind people's bones to make his bread*: Referring to the traditional English fairy-tale of Jack the Giant Killer in which the

giant Blunderbore exclaims, 'Fee fi fo fum/I smell the blood of an Englishman./Be he alive or be he dead,/I'll grind his bones to make my bread!'

5. *Peckham Fair*: Held in the Peckham High Road, in south London, until 1827 when it was abolished as a nuisance.
6. *rowed into the piers*: The original Battersea Bridge was a wooden structure built 1771–2. Shooting the arches was dangerous and boats were often wrecked by colliding with one of the piers; the present bridge dates from 1886–90.
7. *stone-chaney*: Stone china, hard, dense pottery ware made from mixed clay and flint.
8. *Waits*: Bands of singers and musicians who go around the streets or country lanes at night playing and singing carols in return for gratuities.
9. *casting his boots upon the waters*: Cf. *Ecclesiastes* 11.1: 'Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days'.
10. *Moloch*: Mentioned in the Bible as the God of the Ammonites who sacrificed children to him; represented by Milton as one of Satan's chief henchmen in *Paradise Lost*.
11. *serial pirates, and footpads*: A reference to such publications as *The Penny Pickwick* or *Oliver Twiss*, cheap plagiarisms of Dickens's serial novels which he was unable to put a stop to on account of the inadequate copyright laws.
12. *poor's-rates*: A local tax levied to finance the area workhouse and other provision for the poor.
13. *like the Eastern rose in respect of the nightingale*: Hill believes this to be an allusion to the song of Zelica, heroine of 'The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan', the first tale in Thomas Moore's *Lalla Rookh* (1817):

There's a bower of roses by Bendemeer's stream
And the nightingales sing round it all the day
long;
In the time of my childhood 'twas like a sweet
dream
To sit in the roses and hear the bird's song.

14. *not coffins, but purses*: A variant of the superstition recorded by R. Chambers in his *Book of Days*: ‘Coffins out of the fire are hollow oblong cinders spirted from it, and are a sign of coming death...If the cinder...is round, it is a purse and means prosperity’; see I. Opie and M. Tatem, *A Dictionary of Superstitions*, 1989, s.v. Cinders. (Opie and Tatem also cite a version of this superstition in which a morsel of coal leaping from the fire on to the hearth is a coffin if it does not crack, a purse if it does. I am grateful to Professor Angus Easson for directing me to this source.)
15. *an outrage on the memory of Doctor Watts*: No. 17 of Isaac Watts’s *Divine Songs for Children* (1715) is entitled ‘Love between Brothers and Sisters’ and contains the lines: ‘But, children, you should never let/Such angry passions rise;/Your little hands were never made/To tear each other’s eyes.’
16. *rebuking...those who kept them from Him*: See Matthew 19:14.

A CHRISTMAS TREE

First published in *Household Words*, 21 December 1850; included by Dickens in *Reprinted Pieces* (Library Edition, 1858) and now usually grouped with *Christmas Stories*.

1. *that pretty German toy, a Christmas Tree*: The Christmas tree was introduced into England from his native Germany by Prince Albert in 1841, when it featured in the Royal Family’s Christmas festivities at Windsor Castle.
2. *conversation-cards*: Cards on which a sentence (question or answer, etc.) is printed or written, for use in games.
3. *lazy-tongs*: Several pairs of levers crossing and pivoted at the centre like scissors so that the movement of the first pair is communicated to the last one, which has ends like tongs; the tongs were used for picking up small objects at a distance.
4. *Newmarket*: A town in Suffolk famous as a centre for horse-racing since the early seventeenth century.

5. *Jacob's Ladder*: A child's toy named after the ladder seen in a dream by Jacob in the Bible (Genesis 28: 10–19).
6. *Barmecide justice*: See [Appendix III](#) for an explanation of Dickens's detailed allusions to the *Arabian Nights*.
7. *want purpose, like Punch's hands*: The hands of the puppet Punch were ornamental only, the stick with which he belaboured the other puppets being tucked beneath his arm.
8. 'A was an archer and shot at a frog': The beginning of a popular nursery rhyme intended to help children learn the alphabet.
9. *the marvellous bean-stalk...only one genuine original admirable Jack*: Dickens here recalls the old fairy-tale of Jack and the Beanstalk, in which the hero climbs a magic beanstalk and slays a giant who lives at the top of it, and mingles it with the quite distinct folk-tale of Jack the Giant-killer, featuring two-headed giants and captive ladies tied up by their hair, preferring to believe that the same Jack is the hero of both stories.
10. *ferocious joke about his teeth*: In the Perrault fairy-story (1697) Little Red Riding-Hood, mistaking the wolf for her grandmother because he has got into her bed and dressed in her night-cap, says, 'Grandmama, what big teeth you have!', to which the Wolf replies before leaping upon her, 'All the better to eat you with, my dear!'
11. *Valentine*: See note 29 to *A Christmas Carol*.
12. *Yellow Dwarf...Mother Bunch's wonders*: The Yellow Dwarf is the villainous protagonist of a fairy-story first published in France by the Comtesse d'Aulnoy in 1698 and translated into English by 1721. Mother Bunch was a sixteenth-century London ale-wife renowned as a story-teller; she was later credited with the authorship of many collections of stories and fairy-tales, including those written by Madame d'Aulnoy. A pantomime called *Mother Bunch and the Yellow Dwarf* first produced at Astley's Amphitheatre in 1807 proved lastingly popular.
13. *Philip Quarll*: Hero of a novel called *The Hermit*, written in imitation of *Robinson Crusoe* (1727).

14. *Mr. Barlow*: In *The History of Sandford and Merton, A Work Intended for the Use of Children* (1783–89) by Thomas Day a snobbish rich boy called Tommy Merton is brought to better behaviour by the example of Harry Sandford, a farmer's boy, and both children learn morality through a series of didactic stories related to them by their tutor, the sententious Mr Barlow, the local clergyman. Dickens comically recalls Mr Barlow as a blighting influence on his childhood in an essay in *The Uncommercial Traveller*.
15. *orange-peel and oil*: Oranges were a favourite form of refreshment for theatre audiences from the time of Nell Gwynne onwards; until the arrival of gas, footlights consisted of a row of oil lamps.
16. *dog of Montargis*: An English adaptation of Pixerecourt's melodrama *Le Chien de Montargis* was first produced in London in 1814 and became perennially popular. Set in the fourteenth century, the play shows how the murderer of one Aubrey de Montdidier was hunted down by his victim's faithful dog.
17. *Jane Shore*: The mistress of Edward IV, accused of witchcraft by his successor Richard III and made to do public penance in a white sheet; Dickens is here referring to the penitence scene in Nicholas Rowe's popular drama *Jane Shore* (first produced in 1714).
18. *George Barnwell*: The protagonist of George Lillo's play *The London Merchant, or the History of George Barnwell* (1731), a hugely popular piece well into the nineteenth century. Barnwell is seduced by a prostitute, Sarah Millwood, into robbing his master and murdering his wealthy uncle; both Barnwell and Millwood end on the gallows.
19. *Pantomime*: English pantomime borrowed the *dramatis personae* of the Italian *Commedia dell'Arte*: the athletic, brightly dressed Harlequin, his beloved Columbine, her obstructive old father Pantaloon and the scapegoat servant-figure of Clown. Harlequin possesses a magic wand which can transform people, things and whole scenes into something quite different.

20. 'Nothing is, but thinking makes it so': Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 2, scene 2.
21. *Barber's Pole*: The red and white striped pole used as a sign for barbers' shops.
22. *The Miller and his Men and Elizabeth, or the Exile of Siberia*: *The Miller and his Men* is a famous melodrama by Isaac Pocock first produced in 1813 and a favourite for toy theatres. Kelmar, the outwardly respectable miller, is in fact the secret leader of a band of robbers. The play ends with him and his men and the mill all being blown up in spectacular fashion. *Elizabeth, or the Exiles of Siberia* (Dickens's 'Exile' is incorrect) is a toy-theatre drama based on a story by the French author Marie Cottin (written 1806) about the daughter of a Russian nobleman who has been exiled to Siberia making her way to the throne of the Tsar in St Petersburg and obtaining his release.
23. *Waits*: See note 8 to *The Haunted Man*.
24. 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do!': Christ's words upon the Cross (Luke 23:34).
25. *Ovid and Virgil*: Roman poets whose work was prescribed reading (in the original Latin) for nineteenth-century schoolboys.
26. *the Rule of Three*: The method for finding the fourth term of a proportion when three are given.
27. *Terence and Plautus*: Roman writers of comedies.
28. *dogs*: Firedogs, a pair of decorative metal stands made to support logs in an open fireplace.
29. *old Queen Charlotte...the old King*: Queen Charlotte was the consort of George III, who was notorious for the kind of repetitiveness demonstrated here.
30. *This, in remembrance of Me*: Christ's words at the Last Supper (Luke 22:19).

WHAT CHRISTMAS IS, AS WE GROW OLDER

First published as the leading article in the Extra Christmas Number of *Household Words* for 1851.

1. *in Greek or Roman story*: Referring to such Classical legends as that of the two devoted friends Damon and Pythias, who visited Syracuse together. Pythias was condemned to death on a baseless charge by Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, but was given leave to return home and settle his affairs, after Damon had pledged his own life as surety for his friend's return. When Pythias did duly return, Dionysus, deeply impressed by the friends' mutual devotion, pardoned him.
2. *these children angels*: Dickens's infant daughter Dora died on 14 April 1851.
3. *entertaining angels unawares*: The phrase comes from Hebrews 13:2, where St Paul is referring to the visit Abraham received from three men who were, in fact, angels (Genesis, 18:3).
4. *a poor mis-shapen boy on earth*: Dickens's crippled nephew, Harry, the son of his much-loved sister Fanny Burnett, who had died in September 1848; Harry died in January 1849.
5. *a dear girl*: Mary Hogarth, younger sister of Catherine, Dickens's wife, who died very suddenly aged seventeen in Dickens's house on 7 May 1837. Dickens adored her and cherished her memory for the rest of his life.
6. *the daughter of Jairus*: For this miracle of Christ see Mark 5:22–43.

THE SEVEN POOR TRAVELLERS

First published as the Extra Christmas Number of *Household Words* for 1854.

1. *Richard Watts*: Watts (1529–79) was a leading citizen of Rochester in Kent who established the charity described in this Christmas Number. The charity ceased to operate in 1947, though the building remains and is now a museum.

2. *Proctors*: In Elizabethan times this was the name given to people who were licensed to beg for alms on behalf of those who, like lepers, were forbidden to beg themselves; because they were often dishonest, they were held in low esteem.
3. *Goliath...Tom Thumb*: Goliath was the Philistine giant defeated by David (1 Samuel 17); Tom Thumb is the diminutive folk-tale hero, no bigger than a man's thumb.
4. *a queer old clock that projects...out of a grave red brick building*: This clock, which Dickens also describes in 'Dullborough Town' in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, still projects from the old Corn Exchange building.
5. *King John*: King of England 1199–1216; his reign saw considerable civil strife over the legitimacy of his claim to the throne. He recaptured Rochester Castle from his rebellious barons in 1215, after a fierce siege and bombardment.
6. *Chancery*: That part of the English judicial system that deals with, among others, disputes concerning wills, trusts, etc.
7. *poundage*: Commission or fee of so much per pound sterling paid to agents dealing with property, acting for trusts, etc.
8. *the American story*: Probably referring to the story of a man struggling to eat a very large oyster who is told by the waiter that he is the fourth man to try to swallow it.
9. *Wassail*: A Christmas and New Year drink made of ale or wine heated and mixed with sugar and nutmeg (Dickens's recipe also seems to have included orange peel).
10. *the voice of Fame had been heard in the land*: Adapted from the Song of Solomon 2:12: 'The voice of the turtle is heard in our land'.
11. *merry and wise*: Referring to an old song beginning 'It is good to be merry and wise,/It is good to be honest and true'.
12. *no badge or medal*: Dickens is making a side-swipe at one of his perennial *bêtes noires*, Temperance and Total Abstinence Societies that distributed badges to their members and prizes in the form of medals to particularly meritorious abstainers.

13. *Numbers*: Instalments of books issued as cheap paperback reprints. In his Preface to the Cheap Edition of *Pickwick Papers* (1847) Dickens mentions his 'dim recollection of certain interminable novels in that form, which used, some five-and-twenty years ago, to be carried about the country by pedlars'.
14. *Fly department*: A fly was a light, double-seated, one-horse carriage; inns would commonly have such vehicles for hire.
15. *Jack Horner*: The boy in the nursery-rhyme who 'sat in the corner,/Eating a Christmas pie'.
16. *rushing up the middle in a fiery country dance*: See note 34 to *A Christmas Carol*.
17. 'On earth, peace. Goodwill towards men!': See Luke 2:14.
18. *Waits*: See note 8 to *The Haunted Man*.
19. *Minor-Canons*: Clergy attached to a cathedral who are not members of the governing body but who assist in the service.
20. *the devouring of Widows' houses*: See Mark 12:40, where Christ accuses the scribes of pride and rapacity. Dickens is alluding here to a recent scandal resulting from the Headmaster of Rochester Grammar School, the Rev. Robert Whiston, accusing the Cathedral Chapter of mismanaging School funds (see P. Collins, 'Dickens and the Whiston Case', *The Dickensian*, vol. 58, 1962, pp. 47–9).
21. *assisted – in the French sense*: The French *assister à* means to be present at.
22. *at Badajos with a fiddle...mince-pies under bed-room carpets*: These references are to incidents occurring in the seven stories told by the Travellers in this Christmas number.
23. *one unconscious tree*: For Christ's cursing of the barren fig tree see Mark 11:13–21.
24. *Cobham Hall*: Elizabethan mansion, seat of the Earl of Darnley, in the village of Cobham near Rochester.
25. 'in the sure and certain hope': From the Burial Service in *The Book of Common Prayer*.
26. 'Sir, if thou have borne him hence...and I will take him away': When Mary Magdalene went to visit the tomb of Christ after the

Crucifixion she encountered a figure whom she supposed to be a gardener but who was, in fact, the risen Christ (John 20:15).

27. *walking on the water*: See John 6:16–19.

28. *the people lay their sick*: See Acts 5:15.

29. *Greenwich Park*: An area of undulating land south of the Thames laid out as a park by Le Nôtre in the late seventeenth century.