



CORE CLASSICS

ABRIDGED FOR YOUNG READERS

A Christmas Carol

BY CHARLES DICKENS

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A Christmas Carol
in prose
BEING
A Ghost Story of Christmas

by
Charles Dickens

PREFACE

I have endeavored in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an idea, which shall not put my readers out of humor with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly.

Their faithful Friend and Servant,
C. D.

December, 1843

endeavored: made a great effort; tried very hard

Servant: In Dickens's time, "Your servant" was a polite expression commonly used in closing a letter, just as you might close a letter today with "Yours" or "Sincerely yours."

CORE CLASSICS®

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INTRODUCTION

A handful of literary characters are so well known that we use their names to describe certain types of people. A “Pollyanna,” for example, is an extremely (perhaps overly) cheerful and optimistic person. If you say, “He’s a Jekyll and Hyde,” you mean that his behavior swings from one extreme to another. And if you call someone a “Scrooge,” you mean that person is stingy, mean-spirited, and hard-hearted—or, in the much more descriptive words of Scrooge’s inventor, the author Charles Dickens:

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, shriveled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue, and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice.

That hardly seems like a person we’d want to know or remember. And yet, ever since *A Christmas Carol* was first published in December

1843, wherever Christmas is celebrated people have regularly and gladly reacquainted themselves with Scrooge, whether by reading (or rereading) Dickens's story, or seeing one of many adaptations for the stage, or watching their favorite movie or television version. (The Internet Movie Database lists more than a hundred film and TV versions of *A Christmas Carol*, including early silent films, animated cartoons, and a movie musical featuring the Muppets.)

One reason for the story's lasting popularity is that it holds out a promise. Scrooge does not remain a "squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner." By the end of the tale, he becomes "as good a friend, . . . and as good a man, as the good old city knew." The story seems to say, if such a transformation is possible for Scrooge, then no one is beyond redemption—there is hope for us all.

Scrooge isn't the only character that draws us back again and again to *A Christmas Carol*. There's also the Cratchit family, poor in material wealth but rich in love and kindness, with a special care for their sickly little child, Tiny Tim. There's Scrooge's nephew, Fred, good-natured and full of laughter. There are the three spirits—the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Yet to Come—



KERMIT THE FROG AS BOB CRATCHIT (HOLDING TINY TIM),
FROM *THE MUPPET CHRISTMAS CAROL*, ONE OF MANY MOVIE
ADAPTATIONS OF DICKENS'S STORY.

each with a distinctive appearance and personality, including the haunting, chillingly silent presence of the final ghost.

From the start—indeed, on the title page—Dickens lets us know that there will be something unusual about *A Christmas Carol*. The subtitle of the story might seem more appropriate for Halloween: “A Ghost Story of Christmas.” A *ghost story*—and there it is, in the book’s blunt opening sentence: “Marley was dead, to begin with”—hardly a cheerful holiday welcome! A Christmas story that begins with a dead man, who will soon appear as a ghost . . . wait, is this a horror story?

Not at all. The narrator quickly notes that Marley was “dead as a doornail,” and then proceeds to argue with himself about the meaning of that curious phrase—“Mind! I don’t mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. I might have been inclined, myself, to regard a coffin-nail as the deadest piece of hardware.”

This storyteller, we realize, has a quirky sense of humor. So, with delight rather than dread, we are ready to meet Marley’s ghost. And, though we may not yet realize it, we have just met another wonderful character—the storyteller who comes through in the narrative voice of Charles Dickens.

The voice is unmistakable—exuberant, passionate, often humorous, and sometimes charged with moral fervor.

Dickens was still relatively young—thirty-one years old—when he wrote *A Christmas Carol*. He was already a very popular author, famous for many pieces he wrote for newspapers and magazines, as well as three novels: *The Pickwick Papers* (1836), *Oliver Twist* (1837), and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838).

In late 1843, when Dickens began writing *A Christmas Carol*, he was disappointed that his most recent novel was not selling as well as his earlier works. Although disappointed, his mind was ablaze with concerns about the condition of the poor in Great Britain. (See the Appendix to this book, “Dickens and the Poor.”)

Dickens was outraged by the ways in which the rich exploited the poor and were indifferent to their suffering. He planned to publish a pamphlet titled “An Appeal to the People of England, on Behalf of the Poor Man’s Child.” But he quickly changed his mind—instead, as he told a friend, he would write something that would have “twenty thousand times the force.”

That something turned out to be the story we know as *A Christmas Carol*. Dickens wrote it quickly, in about six weeks. Always restless,



A SKETCH OF CHARLES DICKENS IN 1842
(THE YEAR BEFORE HE WROTE *A CHRISTMAS CAROL*)

energetic, and emotional, Dickens was on fire while writing *A Christmas Carol*. He told a friend that as the story took shape in his imagination, he “wept, and laughed, and wept again” while walking “the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles, many a night.”

A Christmas Carol was a much shorter work than the lengthy novels Dickens was best known for. Sometimes called a novella (a short novel), *A Christmas Carol* was published on December 19, 1843, in a single handsome volume. Dickens himself took an active hand in the design of the book. He insisted on a fine-quality reddish-brown cloth binding with gold lettering. A well-known illustrator provided eight drawings, four of which were reproduced in color (a much more time-consuming and costly process back then than it is today). He seems to have wanted the book to look as attractive as a nicely wrapped Christmas present.

His publishers urged him to produce something much plainer and less costly. They were not confident that the book would sell, partly because, back then, the public celebration of Christmas was not as big a deal as it is in much of the world today. The publishers worried, who would want to read a story about Christmas?

Many people, it turned out. The initial printing of six thousand copies sold out in five days. The book was quickly reprinted, and again and again people rushed to buy it. Everyone, it seemed, was talking about “the *Carol*,” or reading it aloud among families, or sharing a copy with neighbors, or going to see one of the many dramatic productions that sprang up in theaters within months of the book’s release.

Despite the immense popularity of *A Christmas Carol*, the book didn’t make Dickens rich. He had insisted that it be priced low at five shillings, which resulted in little profit because the book was so expensive to produce. Even worse, in this time before authors were protected by copyright laws, many printers ran off cheap, unauthorized versions of the book, and from the sales of these copies Dickens received not a cent.

It is sometimes said that Dickens “invented Christmas,” but that is an exaggeration. It is true, however, that *A Christmas Carol* has helped shape a shared sense of a *human* dimension of Christmas that goes hand in hand with its significance as a religious observance. In giving us the gift of this story, Dickens, for many people around the world, also gave an enduring idea of the meaning of Christmas as a beloved, anticipated time of

gathering and celebration marked by feasting, gift-giving, games, and singing and dancing—in short, a time of exceptional generosity and human connectedness. Perhaps it's best expressed in the words of Scrooge's nephew, Fred, who says:

I am sure I have always thought of Christmas time, when it has come round, 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!

STAVE 1

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 for anything he chose to put his hand to. Old Marley was as dead as a doornail.

Chapters as Staves

Picking up on the idea of music in the title of his book—*A Christmas Carol*—Dickens calls each chapter a “stave,” a form of the word *staff*. In music, the notes are written on a staff, made up of five lines and the spaces between them.



clergyman: a Christian priest or religious leader

undertaker: a person whose job is to prepare dead bodies to be buried

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

"Dead as a Doornail"

Scrooge's partner, Jacob Marley, is "dead as a doornail"—an expression used to describe something as completely and absolutely dead. Where did this expression come from?

As far back as the Middle Ages, nails were made by hand. Because this was a difficult process, nails were reused as often as possible.

But the long nail called a doornail could not be reused. When a carpenter hammered a doornail through a wooden door, part of the nail would stick out. The carpenter would bend this part and then hammer it into the door, like the end of a staple. A nail bent like this could not be used again—it was now a "dead" nail—thus, "dead as a doornail."

mind: Used as a verb, "mind" here means take notice, or take (this point) into consideration. In speaking, the phrase is often expressed as "Mind you." [Example: The children were very restless and fidgety; mind you, the rain had kept them from playing outside for days.]

simile: an expression that compares two things, by using "like" or "as" [Example: quiet as a mouse]

unhallowed: not officially blessed

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 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 solemnized 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.

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

sole: single; only

executor: someone responsible for making sure that the actions specified in a dead person's will are carried out correctly

cut up: upset; emotionally shaken

solemnized it with an undoubted bargain: honored the occasion by making a very profitable business deal

distinctly: clearly and definitely

relate: to tell (a story)

warehouse: In Dickens's time, the word "warehouse" was used for a shop or office. [Today, a warehouse is a building where items are stored before they are brought out for sale.]

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, shriveled 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, and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

tight-fisted hand at the grindstone: a stingy, miserly man in his job. To be “tight-fisted” is to be ungenerous, to hold on to your money tightly. To be “at the grindstone” means to be working hard; compare the expression “to keep your nose to the grindstone,” which means to be intensely focused on your work. [A grindstone is a revolving disc used to sharpen knives and other metal objects.]

wrenching: twisting forcefully [The word suggests how Scrooge acts in his business dealings.]

covetous: greedy; eagerly desiring what belongs to others

flint: a hard stone used to light a fire [When you strike steel across flint, it produces sparks.]

gait: a way of walking

shrewdly: in a sharp-witted way

rime: thin layer of frost

dog days: the hottest days of summer

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose.

Nobody ever stopped him in the street to say, with joyful 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 blind men's dogs appeared to know him, and when they saw him coming on, would tug their owners into doorways, and then would wag their tails as though they said, "No eye at all is better than an evil eye!"

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.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy

intent: firmly focused upon

implored: asked urgently; begged

bestow: to give

trifle: small amount

sympathy: caring for and understanding the feelings of others

in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather, and foggy besides. 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 neighboring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense—a dingy cloud drooping down, obscuring everything—that, although the court was very narrow, the houses opposite were mere phantoms.

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,

counting-house: an old term for a place of business (where the money and accounts were kept)

court: a courtyard; an open space surrounded by walls or buildings

gone three: struck three o'clock

ruddy: reddish

palpable: able to be touched or felt

chink: a small gap or narrow opening

dense: thick; closely packed together; hard to see or move through

clerk: an office worker who keeps records and takes care of other paperwork of the business

dismal: dark and dreary

cell: a tiny room

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 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

copying letters: In this time (the mid-1800s) long before the invention of photocopying machines, the task of copying important legal documents had to be done by hand, with pen and ink.

replenish: to fill something up again (in this case, filling the fireplace with coal)

comforter: a long scarf worn around the neck

intimation: hint

humbug: nonsense; empty talk; false and deceptive claims

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, but not an hour richer? 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."

dismal: sad and gloomy

morose: bad-tempered; sulky; gloomy

out upon: away with

indignantly: in a manner showing annoyance or anger in response to something considered insulting, offensive, or unfair

stake: a pointed stick

"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 Christmastime, when it has come round, 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.

"Let me hear another sound from you," said

derived: received or obtained from

people below them: people of lower social class; people with less wealth or status

... **bound on other journeys:** Fred is saying that Christmastime is the only time he knows when people look past their social differences and recognize their common humanity, since we are all mortal, on a shared journey through life.

Scrooge, “and you’ll keep your Christmas by losing your situation!” Turning to his nephew, he added, “You’re quite a powerful speaker, sir. I wonder you don’t go into Parliament.”

“Don’t be angry, uncle. Come! Dine with us tomorrow.”

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.

“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.

situation: job; employment

Parliament: the highest governing body in Britain

that extremity: that extremely distant place—in other words, hell

nay: no

"I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. But I'll keep my Christmas humor 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. 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 my clerk," muttered Scrooge, who overheard him, "with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I'll retire to Bedlam."

The clerk, 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.

resolute: stubbornly determined

Christmas humor: my happy mood in the Christmas season

bestow: to give a gift or some kind of honor

cordially: in a friendly way

shillings: British coins, each equal to twelve pence (pennies). [Bob's salary is very low indeed, hardly enough to support his family.]

retire to Bedlam: check into a hospital for the mentally ill [Bedlam was the name commonly used for the Hospital of St. Mary of Bethlehem in London, which treated the mentally ill. The word "bedlam" is now used to describe a state of noisy confusion.]

portly: heavy; stout

“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 generosity is well represented by his surviving partner,” said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

At the ominous word “generosity,” 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.

credentials: documents that prove someone is qualified or authorized to do something

provision: the providing of something (especially necessities like food and clothing)

destitute: lacking all necessities; having very little food, clothing, and shelter

in want of: greatly lacking; in great need of

"And the workhouses?" 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 vigor, 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 endeavoring 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?"

The Treadmill and the Poor Law: The Treadmill and the Poor Law (along with the debtors' prisons and workhouses that Scrooge has already mentioned) were government practices and policies that, in trying to address the problem of widespread poverty, often hurt poor people more than helped them. See "Dickens and the Poor," pp. 186–190.

in full vigor: at full strength; completely in effect

the multitude: the mass of ordinary people—without special power or wealth or status—who make up most of a society

Want: the condition of being in great need

keenly: sharply; very strongly

Abundance: the condition of having more than enough

put you down for: The gentleman has a small booklet in which he writes down the amount of a promised donation.

“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. It’s not my business. 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 labors with an improved opinion of himself.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slyly down at Scrooge, became

anonymous: unnamed

they cost enough: Scrooge means that he pays taxes (which he resents), part of which support “the establishments” he mentioned, such as the prisons and workhouses.

surplus: excess; more than what is needed or useful

“Decrease the Surplus Population”

If poor people would prefer death to debtors' prison or a workhouse, then that is fine by Scrooge: “If they would rather die,” he says, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population.” In those words, Scrooge is echoing the ideas of Robert Thomas Malthus, an English economist. In 1798, Malthus published the first version of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*. His ideas were still being discussed when Dickens published *A Christmas Carol*.

Malthus argued that the population would always increase faster than the ability of a nation to produce enough food to support the growing number of people. Only such miseries as starvation, disease, and war could prevent excessive population growth. Malthus did not favor providing charity to the poor because, in his grim view of society, suffering and poverty were unavoidable and even necessary to control population growth—in other words, to “decrease the surplus population.”

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 laborers 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

tremulous: trembling; shaky

brazier: a metal can that holds live coals or other fuel, used for heating or cooking

winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The water-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice.

Foggier yet, and colder. Piercing, searching, biting cold. The owner of one scant young nose, gnawed 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!"

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

rapture: extreme joy

water-plug: hydrant

sullenly: in a grouchy, gloomy way

congealed: changed from a liquid to a solid

misanthropic: very unfriendly; antisocial; disliking people

scant: very little in quantity (in other words, a small nose)

regale: entertain; amuse

"God bless you. . .": The young caroler almost gets the words right; the correct opening lines to this famous old hymn are, "God rest ye merry gentlemen / Let nothing you dismay."

congenial: friendly and pleasant

at length: after a while

tacitly: silently; without using words

the fact: that is, the fact that it is time to close the office for the day



THE OWNER OF ONE SCANT YOUNG NOSE STOOPED DOWN AT SCROOGE'S KEYHOLE TO REGALE HIM WITH A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out and put on his hat.

“You’ll want all day tomorrow, I suppose?” said Scrooge.

“If quite convenient, sir.”

“It’s not convenient,” said Scrooge, “and it’s not fair. If I was to cut half-a-crown from your wages 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 greatcoat to the chin. “But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning.”

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 owned no greatcoat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times,

want all day: want to have the whole day off from work

half-a-crown: a British coin (no longer in use) that at the time was worth five shillings

I’ll be bound: an expression meaning I’m certain, I’m sure

greatcoat: overcoat; a long, heavy, warm coat

slide: a long, slippery patch of ice

Cornhill: the name of a major street running through a neighborhood in London with a high hill

in honor of its being Christmas Eve, and then ran home to Camden Town 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 building 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 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.

Camden Town: Now part of London, north of the city's center, this area was, in Dickens's time, a suburb where poor people lived (and where Dickens himself lived as a boy).

pelt: to move quickly; to hurry

blindman's buff: also called blindman's bluff, a game like tag in which a person wearing a blindfold tries to touch the other players

melancholy: sad; glum

tavern: a business that offers food, drink, and sometimes lodging to the public

beguiled: passed the time pleasantly

banker's-book: account book with records of business transactions

chambers: rooms

fancying: imagining

let out: rented

The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, and the yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, had to grope with his hands.

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. 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, 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 on its ghostly forehead. The hair was curiously stirred, as if by

particular: special; distinctive

fancy: imagination

impenetrable: impossible to see through or get through

like a bad lobster: On rotting seafood, certain kinds of bacteria glow dimly.

breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid color, 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 stared at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled 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 the cellars below, appeared to have separate echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes.

livid: a dull purple or dark blue color

relinquished: stopped holding or gripping

irresolution: indecision

resounded: echoed

He fastened the door, and walked across the hall, and slowly up the stairs.

You might have got a hearse up that staircase, and done it easy. There was plenty of width for that, and room to spare. 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 single candle.

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.

Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. A small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel upon the hob. All as they should be.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was

hearse: a large vehicle used for carrying a coffin to a funeral

dressing gown: a long, loose robe, worn informally around the house

grate: a small frame of metal bars that holds fuel (such as coal or wood) in a fireplace

basin: a pan for holding water

gruel: a thin porridge made by boiling oats (or some other grain) in water

hob: a shelf at the back or side of a fireplace on which pans can be placed to keep food warm

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 had to sit close to it before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel. The fireplace was an old one, paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts, and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank 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

cravat: a cloth worn around the neck, like a wide necktie

nightcap: a soft cloth hat worn in bed

quaint: charmingly old-fashioned

the Scriptures: the Bible

disjointed: disconnected; disorderly; confused

disused: no longer in use

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 at first 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 in the 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 color 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.

inexplicable: unexplainable; strange and mystifying

dread: a feeling of fear and worry that something terrible is going to happen

The same face—the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual waistcoat, tights, and boots. 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 cashboxes, 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.

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 texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin; 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.”

waistcoat: vest

ledgers: account books

deeds: legal documents that prove ownership of properties

purses: containers

wrought in: made of

incredulous: unbelieving

How now!: an expression of surprise meaning, What is going on here? What’s the meaning of all this?

caustic: harsh and sarcastic



"IN LIFE I WAS YOUR PARTNER, JACOB MARLEY."

"Who *were* you, then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're particular, for a shade."

"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 if impossible, it might involve 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!"

particular: picky

shade: shadow; ghost

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 specter's voice disturbed the very marrow in his bones.

To sit staring at those fixed glazed eyes would, Scrooge felt, play the very devil with him. There was something very awful, too, in the specter'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 was still agitated as by the hot vapor from an oven.

"You see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, wishing 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!"

waggish: in a joking mood

specter: ghost

play the very devil with him: upset him greatly

infernal: relating to hell or the underworld

agitated: stirred up; tossed about

notwithstanding: nevertheless

have but to: only have to

persecuted: mistreated; tortured

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 took off the bandage round its head, as if it were too warm to wear indoors, and 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?"

"Do you believe in me or not?" replied the Ghost.

"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 fellowmen, 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!"

appalling: terrible; awful; causing great dismay or horror

swoon: faint

apparition: spirit of the dead; ghost

Again the specter 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 labored 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!”

fettered: bound by chains or shackles

girded: tied it around (the body)

coil: a length (of rope, wire, chain, etc.) wound around and around something or someone in a spiral shape

full as heavy: just as heavy

ponderous: massive; very heavy

fathom: a unit of measurement equal to six feet (usually used to measure the depth of water)

imploringly: pleadingly; in a way that sounds like begging

"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!"

"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.

ministers: representatives; persons acting on behalf of someone else or some institution [Here, Marley's ghost implies that the "comfort" Scrooge seeks comes from heavenly angels, not from spirits of Marley's kind.]

mark me: pay close attention

humility: humbleness; modesty

deference: respectful submission to another

mused: thought

incessant: ceaseless; continuous and unending

remorse: guilt; painful regret for one's bad actions

“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 hideously in the dead silence of the night.

“Oh, captive, bound, and double-ironed!” cried the phantom. 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

make amends for: make up for some wrong

faltered: spoke in a hesitating or broken way

common welfare: the good of all people

forbearance: patient forgiveness

benevolence: generous kindness

comprehensive: complete; including everything

were the cause of all its grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the year," the specter 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 specter 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, Jacob!"

"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 tonight 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!"

penance: a hardship undertaken to show sorrow and regret for the wrongs a person has done

procuring: getting; obtaining with some struggle or effort

“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 tomorrow, 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 specter took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor standing and confronting him, with its chain wound over and about its arm.

The apparition walked backward from him,

Thank’ee: Thank ye (you)

countenance: face or expression

shun: avoid

and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the specter 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 specter, 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 was 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 were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar

beckoned: gestured to someone to come nearer

incoherent: confused, muddled, unclear

lamentation: great grief and sorrow

inexpressibly: in a way that is beyond description

self-accusatory: in a manner that strongly blames yourself

dirge: a sad song for the dead

hither and thither: here and there; in various directions

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 doorstep. The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to intervene for good in human matters, and had lost the power forever.

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—whether from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the lateness of the hour—being much in need of repose, he went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

wretched: extremely sad or unfortunate; miserable

intervene: to get involved in (in order to make something better or stop something bad from going on)

enshrouded: concealed; covered

fatigues: tiring experiences

repose: rest

STAVE 2

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 endeavoring to pierce the darkness with his ferret eyes when the chimes of a neighboring 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!

“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.

opaque: not able to be seen through

Striking the Quarter Hours

Scrooge hears the clock in a nearby church striking “the four quarters.” The bell tower that Scrooge hears strikes every quarter hour, playing a melody on the bells. At a quarter past the hour, the bells chime out one quarter of the melody; at half past, half the melody; at three quarters past, three quarters of the melody; and, at “four quarters,” just before striking the hour, the bells play the whole melody before striking a single *dong!* for each hour of the time.

Perhaps the best-known quarter-hour melody is the one called the “Westminster Quarters,” used at the Palace of Westminster in London, where you can find the famous clock tower nicknamed Big Ben.

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.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it.

was obliged to: had to

The more he thought, the more perplexed he was; and the more he endeavored 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 chime 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.

perplexed: puzzled; confused

exceedingly: extremely

resolved: decided firmly

visitation: the appearance of something supernatural

resolution: firm decision upon some course of action

“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

curtains of his bed: long cloth panels surrounding a bed, used for privacy and to keep in warmth

recumbent: lying down

receded: moved farther away

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.

diminished: reduced; made smaller

upper members: arms

tunic: a loose-fitting piece of clothing like a gown, often sleeveless, that extends down to the knees

lustrous: shining

sheen: shiny brightness of a surface

singular: remarkable; extraordinary

emblem: symbol; a picture or object that stands for something else [Here, the "fresh green holly" is an emblem of winter.]

extinguisher: a cone-shaped metal device placed over the flame of a candle in order to put the candle out [This spirit, as Dickens goes on to describe it, has the bright flickering quality of a candle flame, and even carries an extinguisher that it can use as a cap to dim its brightness.]

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.

“No. Your past.”

Scrooge then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

fluctuated: changed irregularly; varied; wavered

distinctness: sharpness and clarity

foretold: predicted

made bold: dared

“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 his robe in supplication.

welfare: well-being

much obliged: very grateful

conducive: helpful in producing a certain outcome

reclamation: reformation; redemption; the act of saving someone from sin or evil

take heed: pay careful attention

in vain: useless; pointless

pedestrian purposes: activities involving walking about

clad: dressed

supplication: the act of pleading or humbly begging

“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 grew up in this place. I was a boy here!”

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch appeared still present to the old man’s sense of feeling. He was conscious of a thousand odors 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.

With an unusual catching in his voice, Scrooge begged the Ghost to lead him where he would.

remonstrated: spoke strongly in objection or complaint

liable to: likely to

vestige: a trace; a small remaining part of something that once existed

"You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit.

"Remember it!" cried Scrooge with fervor; "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 recognizing every gate, and post, and tree. 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 travelers 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

fervor: great warmth of feeling

gigs: two-wheeled horse-drawn carriages

jocund: cheerful; jolly

glisten: shine; sparkle

Merry Christmas, as they parted at crossroads and byways, 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, 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 overrun with grass. Entering the dreary hall and glancing through the open doors of many rooms,

byways: small side roads

several: separate and individual

mansion: a large house

weathercock-surmounted cupola: A weathercock is a weathervane (a freely rotating pointer that shows wind direction) in the shape of a rooster. This one is surmounted—mounted on top of—a cupola (pronounced *KYOO-puh-luh*), a dome or rounded roof on top of a building.

of broken fortunes: having run into bad luck or hard times

fowls: barnyard birds such as chickens, turkeys, or ducks

coach-houses: small buildings where carriages are stored

they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There was a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow with too much getting up by candlelight, 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 benches and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a feeble fire, and Scrooge sat down upon a bench and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

An echo in the house, a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the paneling, a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, a clicking in the fire—all fell upon the heart of Scrooge 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 stood outside

disclosed: revealed (something that was hidden)

despondent: sad and discouraged

poplar: a kind of tree

intent: firmly focused

foreign: from another country

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

“Why, it’s Ali Baba!” Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. “It’s dear old honest Ali Baba! 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 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! Halloo! Hoop! Halloo!”

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.

bridle: straps and other pieces put on the head of a horse
(or donkey) that allow you to lead or guide the animal

ecstasy: extreme happiness

expending: using up

earnestness: seriousness; determination

heightened: more intense than usual

Scrooge's Childhood Reading

As a young schoolboy, Scrooge, “a solitary child, neglected by his friends,” found his friends instead in books. In old Scrooge's memory of his younger self, the characters from some of his favorite stories seem to spring to life. Standing outside the schoolhouse window is a man “in foreign garments,” Ali Baba, the hero of “Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves,” a famous story from *The Arabian Nights* (also known as *The Thousand and One Nights*), a collection of Persian, Indian, and Arabian folktales.

The green and yellow parrot that Scrooge so vividly recalls is from *Robinson Crusoe* by the English author Daniel Defoe. First published in 1719, the novel tells how Crusoe is shipwrecked and cast ashore on an uninhabited island, where he manages to survive through his wits and energy. For many years, Crusoe's only companions are his animals, including a goat and a pet parrot that survived the shipwreck. But then one day he is surprised to see men on the beach, who are about to kill another man they have captured. Crusoe rescues the captive, a native of the region, and names him Friday. Friday serves Crusoe and helps him survive until he is rescued in his twenty-eighth year on the island.

Then, with a rapidity of transition very unlike 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.

rapidity of transition: quickness of change from one condition to another

“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; 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 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!”

despairingly: in a hopeless way

"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 grown up, 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, not at all reluctant to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" In the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master

brimful: filled to the brim (the upper edge of a cup), and so about to overflow

Master: a term like "Mister" but used for a boy or young man

Scrooge with a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands with him. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children willingly bade the schoolmaster goodbye and drove away, the quick wheels dashing the 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 will not deny 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."

condescension: an attitude of looking down on others, showing that you think you are better or smarter than they are

chaise: a carriage pulled by a horse

bade: past tense of *bid*—to bid someone goodbye is to say farewell

withered: dried up; shriveled

Your nephew: Fred (who visited Scrooge in his office and tried to invite him to Christmas dinner—see above, pp. 17-21)

Although they had just 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. The decoration of the shops made it clear 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. “I was apprenticed here!”

They went in. There, an old gentleman in a woolen cap sat behind such a high desk that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling. At the sight of him, 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

thoroughfares: main roads

strife: conflict; angry disagreement

tumult: noisy confusion

apprenticed: employed as an apprentice, as someone who is learning a trade from a more experienced and skilled employer

capacious: roomy

to his forehead, and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, jovial voice, “Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!”

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

“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 tonight. 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.

jovial: jolly and friendly

very much attached to me: cared very much about me

shutters: panels placed over windows [Some shops put shutters over their street-level windows at the end of the business day.]

Jack Robinson: To do something “before a man can say Jack Robinson” is to do it very quickly.

barred ’em and pinned ’em: Some old wooden shutters had a wooden or iron bar that could be used to secure them in place.

“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 item was packed off as if it were dismissed from public life forevermore; the floor was swept, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire; and the warehouse was as snug, and warm, and dry, and bright a ballroom, as you would desire to see upon a winter’s night.

In came a fiddler with a music-book, 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, trying to hide himself

clear away: move the furnishings to clear out the space

chirrup: an expression like “giddyup” meaning, “Let’s move, and quickly!”

trimmed: To “trim” an oil lamp is to adjust the wick to get a bright, even flame.

substantial: great in size or amount

behind the girl from next door. 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 couples 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 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.

There were more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there was cake, and there was negus, 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 to drink. But the great effect of the evening came

twenty couples at once: Twenty pairs of people are dancing to the lively tune played by the fiddler.

porter: a dark beer

negus: a hot drink made with wine, sugar, spices, and lemon juice

roast: roast beef

boiled: a meat cooked by boiling, such as ham or mutton (sheep)

mince pies: A favorite treat of the English at Christmastime, mince pies are small sweet pies filled with mincemeat, a mixture of chopped dried fruit, spices, and suet (fat from beef or mutton).

when the fiddler—the sort of man who knew his business better than you or I could have told it him!—struck up “Sir Roger de Coverley.”

Playing Forfeits

Fezziwig and his guests play a game called “forfeits” (one of many games that Charles Dickens himself enjoyed playing at Christmastime). In forfeits, you and the other players start by giving up a small personal item—for example, a watch, or a handkerchief, or a necktie. To get back your item, you must perform an action assigned to you by the “judge” in the game. For example, the judge might require you to sing a silly song, or hop on one leg, or act like a chicken.

Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with 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 have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance, Fezziwig “cut” so deftly that he

“**Sir Roger de Coverley**”: the title of a popular fiddle tune and the lively folk dance that goes with it

“**cut**”: a dance step in which the dancer leaps up and then quickly moves his feet one in front of the other before coming back down

deftly: precisely and skillfully



FEZZIWIG "CUT" SO DEFTLY THAT HE APPEARED
TO WINK WITH HIS LEGS.

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, one on either side of the door, shook hands with every person individually as he or she went out, and wished him or her a Merry Christmas. Thus the cheerful voices died away, and the two apprentices 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.

domestic: having to do with home and family

corroborated: confirmed

agitation: anxious excitement

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 spoke the wish, and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

pounds: British units of money (like American dollars)

unconsciously: without being aware

burdensome: heavy; demanding and wearying

“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

prime of life: the best years of your life, when you have the greatest potential and vigor

rigid: stiff, hard, unbending

avarice: extreme greed

fair: attractive

mourning dress: a dark-colored dress, usually black, worn to express grief for the death of a loved one [Dickens does not tell us why the woman is in mourning.]

idol: an image or object that people worship or pray to

displaced me: taken my place

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.”

“There is nothing on which the world 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. “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?”

just cause: true reason

rejoined: replied

golden one: The woman is saying that once young Scrooge adored her but now he worships gold—that is, wealth.

professes: claims; states something but without really believing it

severity: harshness; sternness

aspirations: goals you hope to achieve

master-passion: the desire so strong that it rules young Scrooge

Gain: profit; the act of growing richer

engrosses: completely occupies the attention of

retorted: replied in a sharp, angry way

“Our agreement was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until 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. We were one in heart; now 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 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 accept this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said with a struggle, “You think not.”

“I would gladly think otherwise if I could,” she

worldly fortune: material wealth

industry: hard work

release you: The woman is saying that young Scrooge no longer has to honor their engagement; she has freed him of his promise to marry her.

altered: changed

supposition: guess; belief without having certainty



"WE WERE ONE IN HEART; NOW WE ARE TWO."

answered, "Heaven knows! But if you were free today, can even I believe that you would choose a girl with no dowry—you who weigh everything by Gain? Or, choosing her, do I not know that 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.

if you were free: if young Scrooge were not engaged to the woman

dowry: the money and property that a wife brings to a marriage

weigh everything by Gain: consider everything in light of its potential for profit and wealth

"You may have pain in this; the memory of what is past half makes me hope you will. A very, very brief time, and you will gladly dismiss the recollection of it as an unprofitable dream. 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 but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful young girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw her, now a lovely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room was perfectly tumultuous, for there were more children there

relentless: continuing with uninterrupted determination

pinioned: held by the arms

so like that last: so much like the young woman in the previous scene from the past

matron: a married woman (usually of middle age)

tumultuous: extremely loud and confused

than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count. But no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much.

But now a knocking at the door was heard, and the laughing mother was borne towards it, the center 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 defenseless 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 his neck, pummel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight with which every package was received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been

agitated: disturbed; troubled and nervous

borne: carried; transported

flushed: red in the face

boisterous: noisy and rowdy

laden: weighed down by; loaded with

onslaught: fierce attack

porter: a person who carries things (in this case, the man who is helping to deliver the Christmas presents)

scaling: climbing up

despoil; rob; take things away from

pummel: pound on (such as with your fists)

irrepressible: impossible to control or restrain

seen 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 parlor, and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house, where they went to bed.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever when the father, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down with her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such a creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a springtime 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!"

glued on a wooden platter: The "doll's frying-pan" and the pretend turkey that is "glued on a wooden platter" are all tiny objects made to furnish a doll house.

parlor: living room

haggard: worn down and wasted-looking

"How can I?" she laughed, and then added in the same breath, "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!"

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

"Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!"

In the struggle—if it 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. Connecting that light

adversary: opponent in a contest; enemy



THOUGH SCROOGE PRESSED IT DOWN WITH ALL HIS FORCE, HE
COULD NOT HIDE THE LIGHT.

with the Ghost's influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap and 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 had barely time to reel to bed before he sank into a heavy sleep.

reel: stagger; walk in a dizzy way

STAVE 3

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 did not need to be told that the bell was again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the nick of time, for the special purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger sent 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 specter would draw back, he put all of them aside with his own hands; and, lying down again, he established a sharp lookout 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. He was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he was not by any means prepared for nothing; and,

prodigiously: extremely; tremendously

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 center 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. He began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from which 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

consequently: as a result
adjoining: located next to
grove: a small wooded area

many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull 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, great joints of meat, suckling 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, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. 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 entered timidly, and hung his head

hearth: the floor of a fireplace, or the area in front of a fireplace

suckling pigs: young pigs that have been roasted whole to serve at a meal

twelfth-cakes: large fruitcakes made for the celebration of Twelfth Night on the Twelfth Day of Christmas (usually celebrated on the evening before January 6)

seething: boiling and bubbling

Plenty's horn: A curved horn-shaped container overflowing with fruits, vegetables, and other foods, the horn of plenty (also called a cornucopia) is a symbol of abundance.

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 green robe, bordered with white fur. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were 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 demeanor, 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 answered.

dogged: stubborn

genial: cheerful and friendly

unconstrained: not held back or limited

demeanor: way of behaving

scabbard: a covering, usually attached to a belt, for the blade of a sword

sheath: a close-fitting covering for a sword or dagger



"I AM THE GHOST OF CHRISTMAS PRESENT," SAID THE SPIRIT.
"LOOK UPON ME!"

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

"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. Tonight, if you have ought 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, 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. They stood in the city streets

on compulsion: because of being forced to do something

learnt: learned

ought: anything at all

fast: firmly and tightly

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, which was mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below and splitting into artificial little snowstorms.

The sky was gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up with a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen. There was nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and yet was there an air of cheerfulness that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavored to diffuse in vain.

For the people who were shoveling 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, laughing heartily if it went right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poultry sellers' shops were still half open, and the fruit sellers' were radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets

severe: harsh

plumping down: falling down heavily

diffuse: to spread out widely

parapets: low walls along the edges of roofs

facetious: humorous; not to be taken seriously

of chestnuts, shaped like the waistcoats of jolly old gentlemen. There were pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids. There were bunches of grapes, which the shopkeepers benevolently dangled from conspicuous hooks, so 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 oranges and lemons, which, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreated and beseached to be carried home in paper bags and eaten after dinner. The very gold and silver fish, set forth among these choice fruits in a bowl, though members of a dull species, 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,

benevolently: kindly; with goodwill

conspicuous: easily noticed; standing out so as to attract attention

gratis: free; for no charge or payment

filberts: hazelnuts

entreated: pleaded

beseached: begged

but through those gaps such glimpses! It was not alone 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, crashing 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 humor possible.

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 side streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying

subsequently: afterward

bilious: queasy; sick to the stomach

scores: A score is a quantity of twenty.

their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revelers 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 humor 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!

"Is there a peculiar flavor 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."

They went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a

covers: lids of baking pans

bearers: the people carrying their pans of food to the bakers' shop to be cooked

incense: a substance burned for the spicy smell it produces, sometimes used in religious ceremonies

Cooking Dinner at the Bakers' Shops

On the busy city streets on Christmas morning, Scrooge and the Ghost of Christmas Present see many people "carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops." Like the Cratchit family, these people have no ovens where they live. They do most of their cooking over the fire or on the hob of the fireplace, which, in the homes of the poor, would be too small for roasting meat.

So, on Sundays and on Christmas Day, families would take their dinners to the bakers' shops, which had big hot ovens. On these days, the bakers were forbidden by law from baking and selling their own goods, so they ran a side business in which they would cook the dinners (especially meat) that people brought to them. This was the only way in which families like the Cratchits could enjoy a roast goose or turkey for a special Christmas dinner.



FAMILIES BRING HOME THEIR CHRISTMAS DINNERS,
COOKED AT THE BAKER'S SHOP.

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 as 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, 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

notwithstanding: in spite of

accommodate: adjust; adapt

threshold: the entrance to a house or building, or the border of wood or stone at the bottom of a doorway

"Bob": a slang term for the coin called a shilling

twice-turned: having been stitched repeatedly to hide fraying and wear around the neckline, sleeves, and hem of the skirt

brave in ribbons: festively decorated with many ribbons

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 got the corners of his monstrous shirt collar into his mouth. (It was Bob's shirt, conferred upon his son in honor of the day, and Peter, who rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, 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.

make a goodly show for sixpence: look very nice for very little cost

gallantly: stylishly

attired: dressed; clothed

yearned: strongly desired

basking: taking great delight and pleasure in; enjoying the warm glow of (as in "basking in the sun")

sage and onion: used in stuffing the goose

exalted: enthusiastically praised

“What has ever got your precious father then?” said Mrs. Cratchit. “And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha wasn’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

got your precious father: Mrs. Cratchit is asking, “What could be holding up your precious father and making him so late?”

officious: overeager; bossy

zeal: great enthusiasm

clear away: clean up and organize

hanging down before him, and his threadbare 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 decline in his high spirits, for he had been Tim’s racehorse all the way from church. “Not coming upon Christmas Day!”

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

“And how did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs. Cratchit after 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

threadbare: worn and shabby-looking

iron frame: metal braces strapped to his legs



BOB HAD BEEN TIM'S RACEHORSE ALL THE WAY FROM CHURCH.

The Pudding in the Copper

The two young Cratchits take Tiny Tim “into the wash-house” to “hear the pudding singing in the copper.” The pudding is a favorite Christmastime dessert, often called Christmas pudding or plum pudding. To make it, you prepare a batter of flour and suet (hard fat, usually beef fat), and to this you add spices, perhaps some nuts, and pieces of dried fruits—despite the name, no plums—usually raisins or candied orange and lemon peels. Once the mixture is ready, you wrap it in a large cloth and tie the corners together tightly, and then you dip this into boiling water and let it cook for hours.

This method of cooking requires a very big pot of boiling water, too big to fit in the average fireplace. That is why the young Cratchits take Tiny Tim “into the wash-house,” a small building outside, like a shed. In the wash-house sits “the copper,” a large kettle, usually made of iron, mounted in a structure that allows you to build a roaring fire under the kettle. (The lively bubbling of the boiling water is presumably the “singing” sound that Tiny Tim and the two young Cratchits hear.)

For most of the year, the Cratchits and families like them use the copper to boil water for washing, cleaning, and doing laundry. But at Christmastime, they use it to cook the Christmas pudding—which is why Dickens says, a little later in this story, that when the pudding is removed from the copper, there emerges with it “a smell like a washing-day!”

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.”

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. 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 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

made lame beggars walk, and blind men see: These are two of the miracles that the Bible says Jesus performed (see John 5:1–10 and Mark 8:22–26).

compounded: mixed together

ubiquitous: everywhere at once

in high procession: walking in a formal and ceremonial way

bustle: noisy and excited movement

ensued: followed; happened afterward as a result of something

phenomenon—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 vigor; Miss Belinda sweetened up the applesauce; 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 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, 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 flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by

lest: just in case; in order to prevent (something undesirable from happening)

succeeded: followed

eked out: improved by adding things to make up for something that is not quite enough

applesauce 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 eaten 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 backyard and stolen it! 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 pastrycook's next door to each other, with a laundress's next door to that! That was the

sufficient: big enough

steeped in: completely filled up by

to bear witnesses: to stand anyone watching

stolen it: The pudding is boiling in the wash-room outside the house, so, while unlikely, it could be stolen.

Hallo: used mainly as a greeting but also as an exclamation of surprise

pudding! In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed, but smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannonball, so hard and firm, blazing in half of half-a-quartern of ignited brandy, and 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 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

half of half-a-quartern: A quartern is a quarter of a pint, so “half of half-a-quartern” is a small amount indeed.

ignited brandy: A traditional way to serve Christmas pudding is to pour brandy over it or in a pool around it in the serving dish. The brandy has alcohol in it, so when you touch a match to it, it flames.

heresy: a belief or opinion that goes against accepted beliefs (especially religious beliefs)



IN HALF A MINUTE MRS. CRATCHIT ENTERED—FLUSHED,
BUT SMILING PROUDLY—WITH THE PUDDING.

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 cracked 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."

chestnuts on the fire: Roasting chestnuts is a Christmas tradition. When raw, chestnuts taste bitter, but when roasted they have a slightly sweet flavor.

tumblers: drinking glasses without handles

proposed: offered (as in "proposed a toast")

withered: wrinkled (from disease)

"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 kind," 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."

chimney corner: a warm spot near the fireplace

unaltered: unchanged

penitence: sorrow and regret for the wrongs a person has done

adamant: unbreakably hard; completely fixed and unchanging
in opinions and attitudes

forbear: cease

cant: empty talk

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!"

rebuke: expression of sharp disapproval

give you: propose a toast to

Founder of the Feast: Although Scrooge pays Bob very little, that little allows the family to buy food for their humble Christmas dinner, which is why Bob generously acknowledges his employer as "the Founder of the Feast."

odious: hateful

The children drank the toast after her. It was the first of their proceedings which had no heartiness. 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 favor when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha,

twopence [pronounced *TUP-ense*]: two pennies

ogre: in fairy tales, a monster, usually a man-eating giant

dispelled: driven away; removed

baleful: menacing; threatening to do harm; hostile

a situation in his eye: a possible job in mind

full: all of

deliberating: thinking long and hard about

that bewildering income: Dickens is being gently ironic here.

The "five-and-sixpence weekly" that Peter would be paid if he gets the new job is a small salary indeed, but to Peter it seems like great riches.

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 in bed tomorrow morning for a good long rest, tomorrow 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 by-and-by 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 waterproof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside

milliner's: a shop that makes and sells women's hats

a holiday: In Great Britain, the day after Christmas is a public holiday on which many businesses close. The holiday is called Boxing Day, which may refer to the tradition in which employers give their employees, and customers give tradespeople, a "Christmas box," a gift of appreciation.

by-and-by: soon; before long

plaintive: sad in a way that touches the heart

scanty: poor and thin in quality; limited in quantity (not having enough)

of a pawnbroker'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. As Scrooge and the Spirit went along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlors, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cozy 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

pawnbroker's: a business to which you take personal property and exchange it for a loan—if you pay back the loan in a certain time, you can get back your property, and if not, the pawnbroker sells the property

faded: that is, faded from Scrooge's view, as the vision of the Cratchit family gives way to other visions

window-blind: a shade covering a window

lightly off to some near neighbor's house, where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter!

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 floated on, pouring out 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 knew 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, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself, or would have, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and coarse grass. Down in the west the

exulted: rejoiced greatly

lamplighter: a person whose job is to light the gas-fueled streetlamps

moor: an open area of hilly land covered by rough grasses

rude: rough

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 labor 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,



“A PLACE WHERE MINERS LIVE,
WHO LABOR IN THE BOWELS OF THE EARTH.”

desolation: a state of emptiness or widespread destruction

sullen: gloomy and bad-tempered

bowels: deepest parts

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 vigor sank again.

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

Upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, throughout the wild year, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of seaweed clung to its base, and storm-birds rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

blithe: happy; joyous

tarry: linger; remain in a place

league: a distance of about three miles

chafed: wore down by rubbing against

But even here, two men who watched the light had made a fire, which shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. They wished each other Merry Christmas, and one of them—the elder, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard weather, as the figurehead 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, far from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the lookout in the bow, the officers who had the watch—dark, ghostly figures in their separate 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 remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

figurehead: a carved figure at the front of a sailing ship

lighted on: came upon unexpectedly

helmsman: a sailor who steers the ship

bow [rhymes with *cow*]: the forward end of a ship

had the watch: were on duty, performing their tasks to keep the ship operating

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 recognize 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 blessed 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.

While there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humor. 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

abyss: a deep and seemingly bottomless hole (in this case, the ocean depths)

affability: good-humored friendliness

cultivate his acquaintance: make an effort to get to know him

extravagant: extreme; exaggerated

contortions: twists and bends of the body

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.

She was very pretty, with a dimpled face, a ripe little mouth, and the sunniest pair of eyes you ever saw.

“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 doesn’t do any good with it. He doesn’t make himself comfortable with it. He hasn’t the satisfaction of thinking that he is ever going to benefit us with it. Ha, ha, ha!”

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

niece, by marriage: the wife of Scrooge’s nephew, Fred
lustily: heartily; in a strong, energetic way

“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?”

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

“Well! I’m very glad to hear it,” said Scrooge’s nephew. “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, blushed.

“Do go on, Fred,” said Scrooge’s niece, clapping her hands.

Scrooge’s nephew reveled in another laugh, and as it was impossible to keep the infection off, his example was unanimously followed.

consequence: result

competent: capable; having knowledge and skill

whereat: in response to which

unanimously: with the participation of all



"MORE SHAME FOR HIM, FRED!" SAID SCROOGE'S NIECE,
INDIGNANTLY.

"I was only 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 moldy 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 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, he encouraged them in their merriment.

After tea, they had some music, for they were a musical family, especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp, and played among other tunes a

rail at: to complain and criticize in an angry, bitter way

puts him in the vein: makes him inclined to

shook him: emotionally affected him

bass: the lowest male vocal range in singing

simple little air that 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 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.

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.

There was first a game at blindman'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 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

air: a tune or melody

cultivated: sought to develop

a done thing: a previously agreed-upon plan

fire-irons: fireplace tools

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) on purpose, he would have made a feint of endeavoring to seize you 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 from which 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 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 blindman's buff party, but was made comfortable with a large

feint: a pretended movement made to trick or distract someone

sidled off: walked off in a way that tries to avoid being noticed

execrable: very bad [Dickens is of course being humorous here.]

vile: terrible, completely unacceptable

being in office: fulfilling the duties of a certain position (in this case, of playing the "blind man" in the game)

confidential: privately affectionate and cozy together

chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the game of How, When, and Where, 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 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.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him with such favor, 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 is 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

snug: warm and comfortable

How, When, and Where: A word game in which one player leaves the room while the other players choose a word. The player returns to the room and tries to guess the word by asking each of the other players, "How do you like it? When do you like it? Where do you like it?"

beat her sisters hollow: thoroughly defeated her sisters
(in the game)

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."

elicited: brought forth

menagerie: a zoo

was obliged to: had to

universal sentiment: feeling or opinion shared by all

“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!’”

“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 made a toast to them 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.

mulled wine: a traditional winter drink made by heating wine with added fruits and spices

imperceptibly: very gradually, bit by bit, in a way that can barely be noticed

In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, 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 party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair was grey.

"Are spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge.

"My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends tonight."

"Tonight!" cried Scrooge.

"Tonight 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,

almshouse: a house supported by charity in which poor people or old people could live

refuge: shelter; a place that provides protection from dangers and troubles

precepts: principles; rules to live by

“but I see something strange, and not belonging to yourself, protruding from your garment. 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, meager, 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 shriveled 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.

for the flesh: considering how little flesh

abject: utterly wretched, degraded, and hopeless

“Oh, Man!”: The Spirit is calling out to a single man, Scrooge; at the same time, Dickens is demanding that everyone—all mankind—pay attention to what the Spirit is about to show Scrooge.

meager: very thin

prostrate: literally, lying flat on the ground, and figuratively, overwhelmed and helpless

glared: stared in a cold, fierce way

No degradation of humanity, through all the mysteries of wonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.



"THIS BOY IS IGNORANCE. THIS GIRL IS WANT."

degradation: the act of bringing someone down to a miserable, shameful, pathetic condition

dread: causing great fear

Scrooge started back, appalled. He tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be part of a lie so enormous.

“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!”

Ignorance and Want

Ignorance and Want are not so much individual children as symbols of a larger social condition. In presenting them, Charles Dickens makes his most direct appeal to his readers to notice and care about children in poverty.

By “Ignorance,” Dickens does not mean “stupidity” but instead a complete lack of the civilizing influences of education. “Want” does not mean “desire” but instead the miserable condition of being in great need, lacking even the basic necessities.

For information on the experiences that prompted Dickens to create these characters, see the appendix to this book, “Dickens and the Poor,” in particular the discussion of the “Ragged Schools” (page 191).

appalled: shocked; horrified

“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 4

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

gravely: in a serious, solemn way

stately: impressive; majestic

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 though 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 specter 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 so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of businessmen. 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.”

waning: decreasing

encompass: surround

‘Change: A nickname for the Royal Exchange, the financial center of London

“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.

“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.”

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

snuff: a powdered form of tobacco that is inhaled into the nose

pendulous: hanging down loosely

excrescence: an abnormal growth or lump



THIS PLEASANTRY WAS RECEIVED WITH A GENERAL LAUGH.

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.

standing well in their esteem: being respected by them

"How are you?" returned the other.

"Well!" said the first. "Old Scratch has got his own at last, hey?"

"So I am told," returned the second. "Cold, isn't it?"

"Seasonable for Christmas time."

"No. No. 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

Old Scratch: a nickname for the devil

province: focus of responsibility or expertise

latent: not yet developed; unrealized; potential

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. 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 newborn resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, with its outstretched hand. He fancied 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 traveled before, although he recognized

the shadow of himself: the appearance of himself, as an older man, in the visions shown him by the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come [Recall Scrooge's words when he first met the dark Ghost: "You are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but will happen in the time before us."]

render: make

obscure: little known; out of the way

its situation, and its bad repute. The ways were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people ragged, drunken, slipshod. 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.

Here, there was a low-roofed shop 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 scrutinize were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchers of bones. Sitting in among the wares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove made of old bricks, was a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age, who had screened

repute: reputation

slipshod: shabby; messy

cesspools: underground containers full of sewage

disgorged: spewed out; poured forth violently

straggling: spread out in a messy, disorderly way

reeked with: smelled strongly and unpleasantly of

offal: waste products, especially the inner organs and other leftover parts of a butchered animal

refuse [pronounced *REF-yoos*]: scrap; discarded materials

scrutinize: examine closely

unseemly: crude; indecent; in bad taste

sepulchers: burial places; tombs

himself from the cold air without by a frowzy 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!”

without: outside

frowzy: dirty, sloppy, and worn-out looking

slunk: past tense of *slink*, meaning to move in a sneaking, guilty-looking manner

laden: loaded down

charwoman: cleaning woman

the undertaker’s man: the assistant to the undertaker

At the Rag-and-Bone Shop

Dickens takes us into a shop full of “old rags, bottles, bones” and other refuse. Such shops, tucked away on the back streets in the poorest parts of the city, were known as “rag-and-bone” or “rag-and-bottle” shops. What others threw away, these shops would collect and sell—scrap metal, cloth, and glass; the leftover parts of animals that butchers couldn’t sell as meat; broken furniture, battered pots and pans, cracked dishes, old books and newspapers, worn-out boots, and many other discarded and secondhand items. In the 1840s, a London journalist reported what he saw when he visited rag-and-bone shops in London:

The stench in these shops is positively sickening. Here in a small apartment may be a pile of rags, a sack-full of bones, the many varieties of grease and ‘kitchen-stuff,’ corrupting an atmosphere which, even without such accompaniments, would be too close. The windows are often crowded with bottles, which exclude the light; while the floor and shelves are thick with grease and dirt. . . . The front of the house is sometimes one glaring color, blue or red; so that the place may be at once recognized, even by the illiterate, as the ‘red house,’ or the ‘blue house.’ The house I visited was an old one. . . . The fireplace, which apparently had been large, was removed, and the space was occupied with a mass of old iron of every kind. . . . A chest . . . of very old drawers . . . was stuffed, in every drawer, with old horse-shoe nails (valuable for steel manufacturers), and horse and donkey shoes; brass knobs; glass stoppers; small bottles . . . ; broken pieces of brass and copper; small tools . . . ; odd dominoes, . . . keys, and the smaller sort of locks, especially padlocks; in fine, any small thing which could be stowed away in such a place.

“You couldn’t have met in a better place,” said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. “Come into the parlor. Wait till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There ain’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 parlor. Come into the parlor.”

The parlor was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together, and 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’s it matter, 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?”

skreeks: squeaks

flaunting: showing off in a way to make others envious

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

"Very well, then!" cried the woman. "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, the wicked old stiff," 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 judgment," 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 know 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 the man in faded black would not allow this, as he stepped in and produced

gallantry: good manners; courtesy [Dickens is being ironic here, as the man in faded black has rudely butted in ahead of the woman.]

his plunder. It was not extensive. A pencil case, a pair of sleeve buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. They were each 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, I’d repent of being so generous and knock off half-a-crown.”

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

plunder: stolen goods; loot

brooch [rhymes with *coach*]: a small piece of jewelry with a pin on the back, used to fasten a shirt or jacket

appraised: estimated the value of

sugar tongs: a small hinged tool, usually made of silver, used to pick up lumps of sugar

repent: express regret and sorrow for some wrong act

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 can 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.

shan't: shall not

that oil: Joe has probably placed a lantern, fueled by oil, near the items the charwoman has brought to him.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the woman. "I ain'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 threadbare 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 mean, 'wasted 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 ain'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."

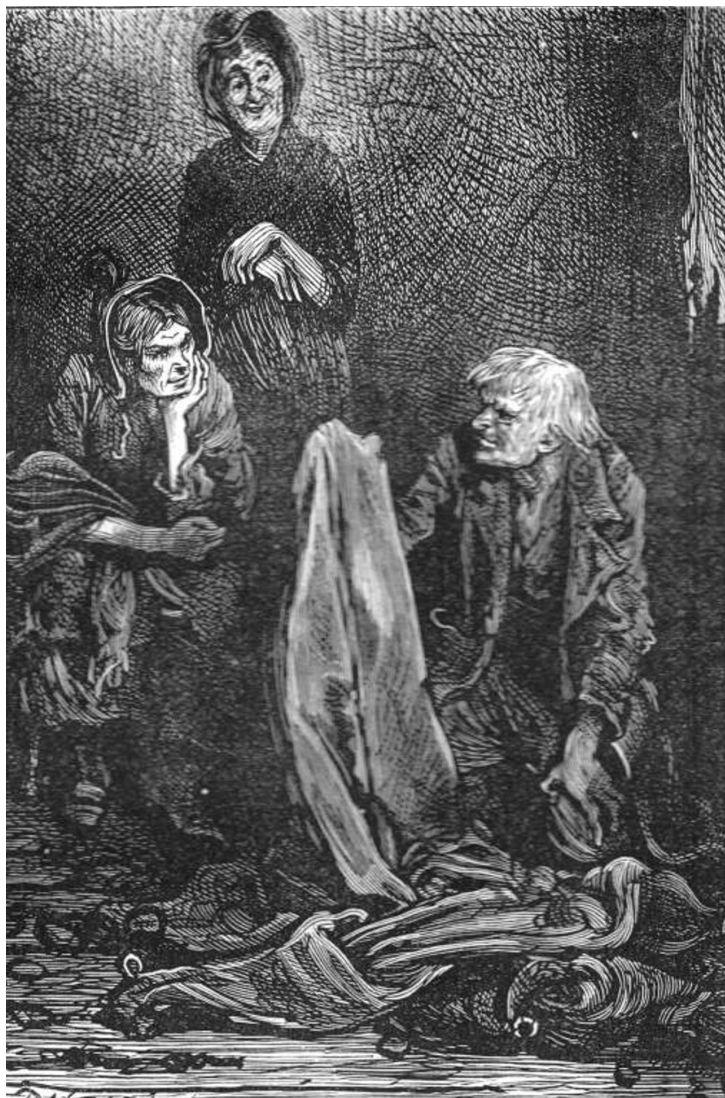
Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. As they sat grouped about their spoil, in the scanty light afforded by the old man's lamp, he viewed them with a detestation and disgust which could hardly have been greater if they had been obscene demons marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same woman, when old Joe produced a flannel bag with money in it. "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!"

calico: a plain cotton cloth

spoil: loot; stolen goods

detestation: intense dislike; hatred



"I HOPE HE DIDN'T DIE OF ANYTHING CATCHING, EH?" SAID OLD JOE.

“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 specter at his side.

recoiled: jerked back

dumb: speechless; silent

bereft: left without anything; deprived of all possessions

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 honored 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!

"Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death"

In the dramatic paragraph that begins "Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death," Dickens sets up a contrast. On one hand, Death brings "terrors" to the body on the bed—the corpse of a man unloved and uncared for. On the other hand, as the rest of the paragraph explains, Death has no such power over someone who was "loved, revered, and honored." Though this person's body may be lifeless, Death can do him no harm, because he lives on through his "good deeds."

(Dickens's use of biblical language—especially the image of the wound from which flows "life immortal"—evokes the Christian belief in Jesus's defeat of the "Shadow" of Death.)

thine: your

altar: a table-like structure used for religious ceremonies

dominion: the lands over which a ruler holds command

revered: deeply respected

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 first 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, "He was kind to me, 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 agonized, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech you!"

hard dealing: driving a hard bargain; pushing to get the most for yourself in a business deal

agonized: in extreme suffering

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 some one, 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 careworn 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 warming 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?”

work with her needle: do some sewing or embroidery

repress: to control; to keep down

“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 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 I told you of last night when I tried to see him and obtain a week’s delay—what the half-drunken woman said to me, which 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 if not, it would be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. We may sleep tonight with light hearts, Caroline!”

relents: changes his mind; shows mercy; gives up some harsh or cruel treatment

debt be transferred: The man who loaned money to Caroline and her husband has died. Now, some other businessman will take over the loan, and they will owe the money to him.

creditor: a person (or business) to whom money is owed

successor: a person who follows or takes over from another

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 forever 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."

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?

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

As Scrooge enters the house of the grieving Cratchit family, he thinks he hears these words spoken by someone: “And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.”

The words prepare us to hear about the child who is no longer with the Cratchit family—Tiny Tim. The words are from one of Charles Dickens’s favorite stories in the Bible (Matthew 18:2 and Mark 9:36). Here is how Dickens told that Bible story:

The Disciples asked him, “Master, who is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven?” Jesus called a little child unto him, and took him in his arms, and stood him among them, and answered, “A child like this. I say unto you that none but those who are as humble as little children shall enter into Heaven. . . . The angels are all children.” Our Savior loved the child, and loved all children. Yes, and all the world. No one ever loved all people so well and so truly as He did.

That passage comes from a book that Dickens wrote for his own young children, *The Life of Our Lord*, which he read aloud to them every Christmas. Dickens wanted these stories to remain private, within his own family, and he insisted that they not be published so long as his children lived. *The Life of Our Lord* was finally published in 1934.

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

“The color hurts my eyes,” she said.

The color? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

color . . . poor Tiny Tim: The color of the fabric that Mrs. Cratchit is sewing is black. She is sewing mourning clothing, as “poor Tiny Tim” has recently died. (Scrooge had asked the Spirit to show him “some tenderness connected with a death,” and the Spirit shows him the tender feelings of the Cratchit family in mourning for Tiny Tim.)

"They're better now again," said Cratchit's wife. "It makes them weak by candlelight, 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 has walked a little slower than he used to, 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 today, 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 upstairs into the room above, which was lighted cheerfully, and hung with Christmas. There was a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of someone 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

industry: hard work

the child: the body of Tiny Tim, yet to be buried

composed himself: made himself calm again

reconciled: To reconcile yourself to something is to accept it, even if it is hard or painful, because you know you cannot change it.

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.' 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 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 someone, 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!

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

setting up for himself: setting up his own household with his new wife (the "someone" he had been "keeping company with")

The Ghost of Christmas Yet To Come conveyed him, as before, into the resorts of businessmen, though at a different time, he thought—indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they were in the Future.

“This,” said Scrooge, “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’s hand was pointed elsewhere.

“The house is there,” 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 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. Walled in by houses, overrun by grass

resorts: places where people regularly go

save that: except that

inexorable: unstoppable and unavoidable

and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life, choked up with too much burying.

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to one. Scrooge 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.

foreshadow: give hints or warning about future events
persevered in: continued doing



SCROOGE READ UPON THE STONE OF THE NEGLECTED GRAVE HIS
OWN NAME: EBENEZER SCROOGE.

“No, Spirit! Oh no, no!”

The finger still was there.

“Spirit!” he cried, tightly clutching at its robe, “hear me! I am not the man I was. 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 kind hand trembled.

“I will honor 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.

intercedes: takes action to help or benefit someone

sponge away: erase

entreaty: urgent pleading

detained: held back

repulsed: pushed back

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 5

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—

make amends: make up for wrongs done

strive: try very hard to do something or achieve some goal

fluttered: nervously excited

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. “I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. 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 going round the fireplace. “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

extravagance: excessive, outrageous actions

giddy: lightheaded and dizzy

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 today!" cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes.

"Eh?" returned the boy, with great wonder.

"What's today, my fine fellow?" said Scrooge.

"Today!" 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

illustrious: notably excellent

checked: stopped; held up

transports: fits of strong emotion

lustiest: most energetic

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."

"You're kidding me!" 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 directions 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!"

Poulterer's: a shop that sells poultry for meat (such as chickens, turkeys, geese, etc.)

buck: high-spirited young man

in earnest: serious and sincere; telling the truth

The boy was off like a shot.

"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!"

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and went downstairs 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.

"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.

recompensed: paid for some service

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-plaster 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-humored 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.

sticking-plaster: bandage

pang: a sudden sharp pain

"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 taken away. "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 favor?"

"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.

farthing: a British coin that in Dickens's time was worth one-fourth of a British penny

munifi—: Scrooge interrupts the gentleman before he can get out the complete word "munificence," which means extreme generosity.

“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.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where is he, my dear?” said Scrooge.

“He’s in the dining room, sir, along with mistress. I’ll show you upstairs, if you please.”

master: In a household that employs servants (see following note), the head of the household (in this case, Fred), who is the employer of the household servants, is called the “master” (and his wife the “mistress”).

girl: When Scrooge knocks at Fred’s door, he is greeted by a “girl” who is employed as a household servant. In Victorian England, even a middle-class household like Fred’s would probably employ one or two household servants, such as a housemaid or laundry woman.

"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.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started!

"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, won-der-ful 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

unanimity: the state of complete agreement and harmony among all members of a group

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.

Scrooge's Transformation

Near the beginning of *A Christmas Carol*, we were told that Scrooge liked “to edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.” Scrooge cut himself off from fellowship, family, and community. Instead, he insisted on seeing people in purely economic terms, as potential sources of profit or loss. It required the spirit of Christmas—actually, three Spirits—to show Scrooge that redemption lies in connection with his community and sympathy with his fellow human beings.

The lessons that the Spirits teach Scrooge cause him to transform from a cold-hearted miser into a generous friend and kind employer. Some readers have complained that Scrooge's conversion is too quick to be realistic. But that is to fail to understand the story for what it is.

In *A Christmas Carol* Dickens did not set out to write a psychologically realistic narrative. The story he wrote is closer to a fable or fairy tale, with elements of fantasy and the supernatural. And as you know from reading fairy tales, we do not ask why or how; rather, we simply accept and delight in a story that reveals some deep emotional truth even as it defies logical explanation.

the Tank: See page 16, where Bob's room in Scrooge's office is described as so small and cramped that it is “a sort of 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, sir, 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 outside for help and a straitjacket.

accustomed: usual

feign: fake; pretend to do or be something

straitjacket: a garment with very long sleeves that can be pinned behind a person's back, used to restrain a violent patient or prisoner

“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 endeavor to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, 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

your affairs: the state of your finances

smoking bishop: a hot punch, popular at Christmastime, made with wine, oranges, sugar, and spices

coal scuttle: a metal container (like a bucket) for carrying and storing coal

master: employer

borough: part of a large town

little heeded them: paid little attention to them

people did not have their fill of laughter. His own heart laughed—and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further interaction with Spirits; 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!*



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Charles Dickens

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on February 7, 1812, in Portsmouth, a coastal city in the south of England. He would grow up to become the most popular English novelist of the nineteenth century and, in the opinion of many, the greatest writer of English literature since William Shakespeare.

He was the son of John and Elizabeth Dickens, and the second of eight children. His father, who worked as a clerk for the Navy, made a good salary, but always spent more than he brought in.

In 1816, the family moved to Chatham, a town southeast of London. Dickens later recalled these as happy years, when he went to school, played games of make-believe with neighboring children, performed lively poems and songs (as encouraged by his father) to amuse the patrons of a local tavern, and fell in love with reading. His favorite books included *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Arabian Nights* (which the child Scrooge also enjoyed in *A Christmas Carol*).

In 1822, the family moved to a poor part of London, and Charles's father fell into debt. Young Charles was no longer sent to school (which cost money)—however, he was regularly sent to the pawnbroker's to exchange household items for money to help the family get by. (In *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens tells us that young Peter Cratchit "might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a pawnbroker's.")

Whatever money Charles brought home from the pawn shop, it wasn't enough. In 1824, when Dickens was a child of twelve, his father was sent to a debtors' prison in London called the Marshalsea. John Dickens, who could at least afford to pay for a private room in the prison, was allowed to have his family join him in the prison. So, Charles's mother and his younger brothers and sisters moved into a cramped room in the Marshalsea a little more than ten feet square. (Later, Dickens wrote a novel called *Little Dorrit*, about a child born and raised in the Marshalsea prison.)

Young Charles, however, did not join his family; instead, he lived in a small attic room nearby with an old family friend. With his family in debtors' prison, Charles, barely twelve years old, was expected to go to work to help pay off the family's debts.

The child was sent by his parents to work at Warren's Blacking, a factory that manufactured black polish for boots and shoes. He visited his family in prison on Sundays. The rest of the week, day after day, hour after hour, he sat in the blacking factory, pasting labels on bottles.

Dickens later recalled that "the blacking warehouse . . . was a crazy, tumbledown old house, . . . and literally overrun with rats. Its . . . rotten floors and staircase, and the old grey rats swarming down in the cellars, and the sound of their squeaking and scuffling coming up the stairs at all times, and the dirt and decay of the place, rise up visibly before me, as if I were there again."

As an adult, Dickens looked back and recalled this time as one of the low points in his life, a time of disappointment, fear, and confusion. Separated from his family, he felt, as he later recalled, "utterly neglected and hopeless." In some pages of autobiographical writing that were not published till after Dickens's death (as part of the first biography of Dickens, written by his friend and literary adviser, John Forster), Dickens looked back on these hard years and said:

autobiographical: dealing with one's own life and experiences



AT THE BLACKING WAREHOUSE, TWELVE-YEAR-OLD CHARLES DICKENS FELT "UTTERLY NEGLECTED AND HOPELESS."

I know I do not exaggerate . . . the scantiness of my resources and the difficulties of my life. I know that if a shilling or so were given me by any one, I spent it in a dinner or a tea. I know that I worked, from morning to night, with common men and boys, a shabby child. I know that I tried, but ineffectually, . . . to make [my money] last the week through . . . I know that I have lounged about the streets, insufficiently and unsatisfactorily fed. I know that, but for the mercy of God, I might easily have been, for any care that was taken of me, a little robber or a little vagabond.

These childhood experiences shaped Dickens's life as a writer. His stories and novels are full of sympathetic accounts of the hard lives of the working class and the sufferings of children of the poor.

When Charles's father received a small inheritance, he managed to settle some of his debts, and the family was released from debtors' prison. Charles continued to work for a while longer at the blacking factory, at his mother's insistence (for which he never forgave her), until he was allowed to return to school.

He did not stay in school long—like many a child in families with little money, he had to start work early to make his own way. As a teenager, he took jobs as a clerk in a law office and a newspaper journalist. Always a keen observer, he began writing essays and

stories that were vividly descriptive and often highly amusing. He published these in various newspapers and magazines under the pen name "Boz." In 1836, the pieces were collected and published as *Sketches by "Boz."* The sketches so delighted the public that a publisher asked Dickens to undertake another project, which eventually became his first novel, published in 1837 as *The Pickwick Papers*. The book made readers laugh and laugh, and made Dickens a celebrated and popular author.

Throughout his career, Dickens first published his novels in serial form—typically, once a month he would issue a few chapters, with illustrations and advertisements, bound in paper covers. After the final installment, all the chapters were collected and published as books with hard covers handsomely wrapped in leather or cloth. While many readers could not afford to buy the complete hardbound volumes, they could afford to pay the small price for each monthly installment.

In 1836, Dickens married Catherine Hogarth, the daughter of the editor of the newspaper where Dickens had worked as a young journalist. Over the years, they had ten children. The marriage became tense and difficult as Dickens increasingly considered himself and his wife to be "unsuited" to each other. But Dickens, a man of extreme energy and emotions, could not have been easy to live with.

With his boundless energy, Dickens quickly followed *The Pickwick Papers* with other serialized novels, including *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. In these books, while Dickens still featured comic characters and episodes to make the public laugh, he also emerged as a social critic and reformer, using his fiction to point out wrongs and injustices. *Oliver Twist*, for example, depicted how children were mistreated in workhouses, while *Nicholas Nickleby* showed the brutal treatment of students in rural Yorkshire schools.

In 1842, Dickens took a five-month tour of the United States, where cheering crowds welcomed him as a celebrity at many public lectures. At first, he was charmed by the free and open manners of the Americans he met. But the charm wore off as he saw evidence of corruption in government, vulgar manners (especially the chewing and spitting of tobacco, which disgusted him), and the evils of slavery. He was also discouraged by the American hostility to an issue that was very important to him—the need for copyright laws. American publishers printed unauthorized versions of Dickens's books, and while they sold very well, none of the money went to Dickens.

Besides writing, Dickens also edited two weekly magazines that published fiction, poetry, and nonfiction by many writers. The magazines often sold best when they featured the latest chapters of whatever novel Dickens himself was working on.

In 1849–1850, Dickens published *David Copperfield*, which he later recalled as his favorite among his novels. Of all his fiction to date, it most closely drew on his personal experiences.

Beginning in the 1850s, Dickens's novels became darker and more serious. In *Bleak House*, he depicted the British legal system as a grinding machine of corruption and injustice. In *Hard Times*, he showed how industrialization crushed the lives of workers, and how the educational system killed the imaginations of students. He set *A Tale of Two Cities*, his first historical novel, during the part of the French Revolution known as “the Terror,” when bloodthirsty crowds gathered to watch the guillotine do its terrible work. He drew again upon his childhood memories in writing what some consider his finest novel, *Great Expectations*.

With boundless energy, Dickens not only wrote constantly but threw himself into many other activities. He loved to host gatherings in which, as one friend recalled, he would talk “like a demon of



CHARLES DICKENS, AROUND THE YEAR 1850

delightfulness.” He loved the theater and once even considered a career as an actor. He enjoyed taking part in amateur theatricals, some for the pleasure of friends and family, and others to raise money for charity. In these productions, Dickens usually took charge, not only acting but also producing, directing, making costumes, and more.

Dickens made use of his theatrical gifts by giving public readings of his own works. People would pack into auditoriums to hear the beloved author read from his books—not just read, but throw himself into an energized dramatic performance, in which he changed his voice and expression to embody the various characters he had created—for example, he pitched his voice high for Tiny Tim and growled for Scrooge. He performed more than a hundred readings of *A Christmas Carol*. He traveled far and wide, pushing himself to the point of near collapse while delivering readings that delighted thousands. Shortly before his death in 1870, Dickens gave his final public reading (which included passages from *A Christmas Carol*). At the conclusion of the reading, when the thunderous applause from the audience finally settled down, the beloved author told the crowd, “From these garish lights I vanish now for evermore, with a heartfelt, grateful, respectful, affectionate farewell.”



PEOPLE WOULD PACK INTO AUDITORIUMS TO HEAR CHARLES
DICKENS READ FROM HIS BOOKS.

APPENDIX

Dickens and the Poor

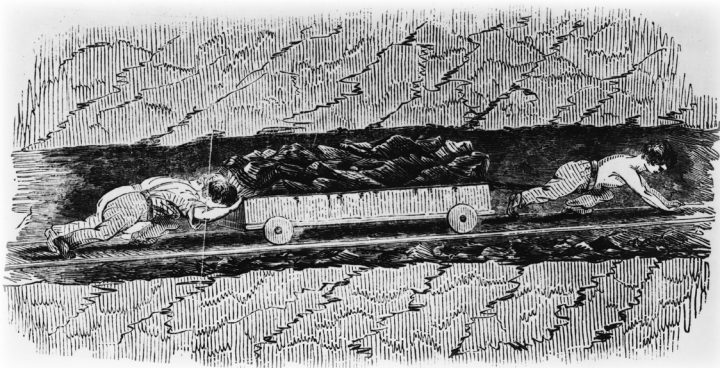
Charles Dickens knew from firsthand experience what it was like to grow up poor. In 1824, when Dickens was a child of twelve, his father was sent to a debtors' prison in London. Charles was expected to work to help pay off the family's debts. He was pulled from school and sent to work in a factory, where, as he later recalled, he felt "utterly neglected and hopeless."

Like many other children of the poor at the time, young Charles found his childhood cut short as he was prematurely thrust into the working class. According to one of Dickens's most respected recent biographers, "*A Christmas Carol* was Dickens's response to the condition of the working class in London."

In the early 1800s, the Industrial Revolution was transforming the lives of working people. Dickens wrote *A Christmas Carol* during the especially hard decade of the 1840s, sometimes called the Hungry Forties. Many thousands died due to the failure of potato crops and the lack of

other basic foods. Many people fled starvation in the British countryside to seek employment in the new factories, where they found poor-paying jobs in dirty, overcrowded cities. Factory owners and businessmen became very wealthy, while most factory workers remained poor as they worked long hours for low pay, often in dangerous conditions.

Early in 1843 (the year he wrote *A Christmas Carol*), Dickens read a government report on child labor. He was, he wrote to a friend, “perfectly stricken down” by the report’s descriptions of young girls who worked sixteen hours a day sewing dresses, and of children only eight years old who dragged coal carts through the narrow passages of underground mines.



DICKENS WAS “PERFECTLY STRICKEN DOWN” BY A REPORT ON CHILD LABOR THAT DESCRIBED CHILDREN DRAGGING COAL CARTS THROUGH THE NARROW PASSAGES OF UNDERGROUND MINES.

Dickens was outraged by the ways in which the rich exploited the working class and were indifferent to their suffering. In *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, wishes Fred a Merry Christmas, Scrooge mutters, "There's my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas." Scrooge thinks it's ridiculous for someone as poor as Bob to be thinking of happiness at Christmastime. But Scrooge gives no thought to the fact that Bob is so poor because he is paid so little. And there are thousands, millions more like Bob—underpaid, overworked, and unnoticed by those with wealth and power.

Prisons, Workhouses, and the Treadmill

Early in *A Christmas Carol*, when two gentlemen ask Scrooge to make a charitable donation to help the poor, Scrooge refuses: "I can't afford to make idle people merry," he says. Scrooge despises the idea of charity for "idle" people—why should he help those who do not help themselves? Scrooge here embodies a too-common attitude—if people are poor, they deserve to be. Scrooge goes on:

"Are there no prisons?" asked Scrooge.

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

"And the workhouses?" 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 vigor, 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."

Scrooge might have been "very glad" to hear about prisons, workhouses, and the treadmill, but Dickens had no sympathy for those who favored these harsh measures as solutions to the problem of poverty.

Debtors' Prisons: In Dickens's time, those who fell into debt and could not pay their bills could be sent to debtors' prison. Whole families lived in these prisons, usually in damp, crowded, dirty rooms. If debtors were imprisoned, they could not work, but they remained imprisoned until they could repay their debts, perhaps through the generosity of some friend or relative, or perhaps by a family member who could work and find a paying job.

Such was the case with young Charles Dickens. His father fell into debt and was sent to a debtors' prison in London called the Marshalsea. The family (who could no longer afford to pay the rent on their house) joined him in prison. But Charles lived in an attic room in the house of a family friend as he worked in a boot-blackening factory to make money to help pay off the family's debts.

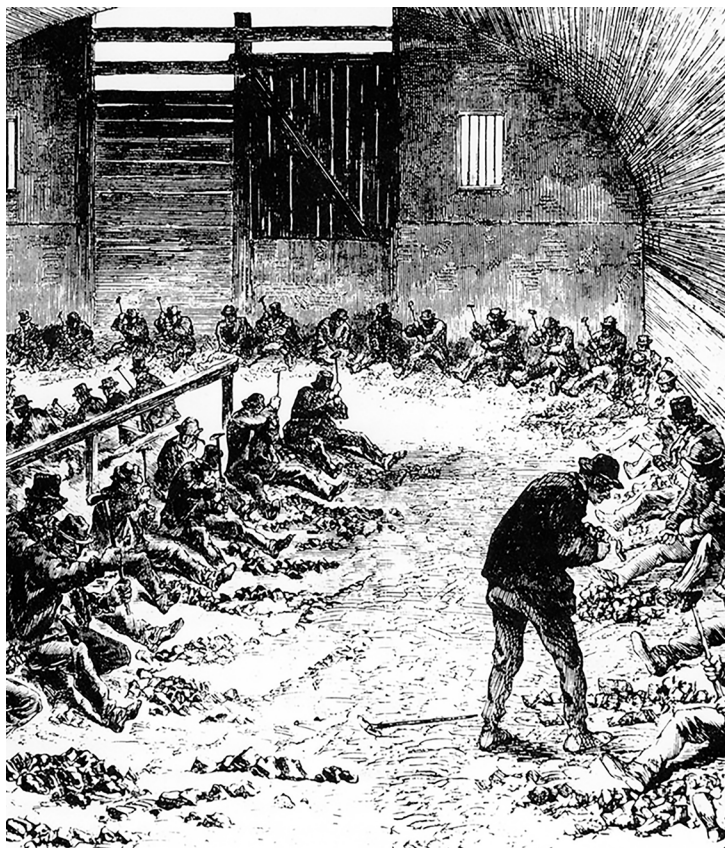
Workhouses and the Poor Law: The Poor Law of 1834 established a network of workhouses across Great Britain. Those who were poor but able to work could expect no financial support from the government except employment in one of these workhouses.

The workhouses provided housing and food for laborers who received pay for their work. But the conditions in the workhouses were terrible, with cramped and dirty rooms, awful food that barely kept people from starving, and pay so low that workers could not earn enough to lift themselves from poverty. The workhouses did not support the poor so much as they took advantage of their desperation and labor.

In the workhouses, children were separated from their families. Their heads were shaved, and they were issued uniforms and put to work.

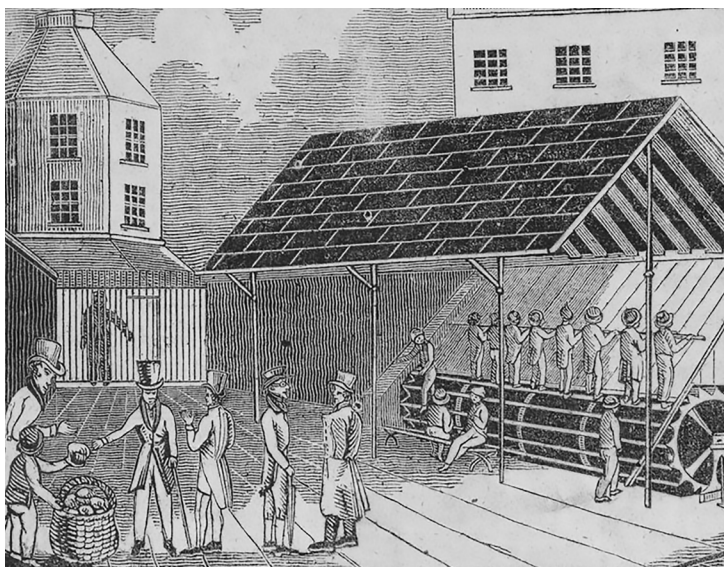
Dickens fiercely opposed the Poor Law and

the system of workhouses, which he depicted in his 1838 novel *Oliver Twist*, about a poor orphan boy raised in a workhouse who escapes to London and falls in among a gang of thieves and pickpockets.



POOR MEN ARE BREAKING STONES AT THIS WORKHOUSE IN
ENGLAND IN THE 1850S.

The Treadmill: Prisoners were sometimes required to do hard labor. In the Brixton Prison in London, some prisoners were put to work on a treadmill, a punishment that in effect turned the prisoners into part of a machine. Holding on to a bar, the prisoners pushed their feet on a long cylindrical wheel. Each step they took powered the movement of underground machinery used for grinding corn.



A TREADMILL AT A PRISON IN LONDON

In *A Christmas Carol*, Scrooge (before he has a change of heart) speaks approvingly of the treadmill and its “useful course.”

Ragged Schools: Ignorance and Want

In the 1840s, children in England were not required to go to school. Families who could afford to pay the required fees sent their children to school, but in crowded cities like London, the children of the very poor remained uneducated. Charles Dickens worried that the city was turning into “a vast hopeless nursery of ignorance, misery, and vice.”

In September 1843, Dickens visited what was known as a Ragged School. Set up in the poorest part of the city, ragged schools were charitable organizations in which volunteers taught classes to poor children. Besides day classes in reading, writing, counting, and Bible study, the schools usually offered evening classes for both children and adults who had spent the day working or begging in the streets. The schools also helped feed and clothe the neediest children.

Shortly after his 1843 visit to the Field Lane Ragged School in London, Dickens wrote to a friend, “I have very seldom seen, in all the strange and dreadful things I have seen in London and elsewhere anything so shocking as the dire neglect of soul and body exhibited in these children.”

Later, a London newspaper printed a letter from Dickens in which he described his visit to the Ragged School. He recalled passing a room of female pupils who were “tolerably quiet.” Then, in another room:

Huddled together on a bench about the room . . . were a crowd of boys, varying from mere infants to young men; sellers of fruit, herbs, lucifer-matches, flints; sleepers under the dry arches of bridges; young thieves and beggars—with nothing natural to youth about them: with nothing frank, ingenuous, or pleasant in their faces; low-browed, vicious, cunning, wicked; abandoned of all help but this; speeding downward to destruction; and UNUTTERABLY IGNORANT.



A RAGGED SCHOOL IN 1850—BOYS ON THE LEFT,
GIRLS ON THE RIGHT.

ingenuous: innocent; childlike

this: this little bit of care and instruction provided by the Ragged School

Despite his distress at what he saw, Dickens urged people to provide funding to support the Ragged School movement. That's because the alternative—increasing poverty, misery, and ignorance—filled him with fear for the future of the nation: “In the prodigious misery and ignorance of the swarming masses of mankind in England,” he wrote, “the seeds of its certain ruin are sown.”

The alarm he felt after visiting the Ragged School emerged a few months later in the pages of *A Christmas Carol*, when Scrooge is horrified to see two children—“yellow, meager, ragged, scowling, wolfish”—emerge from the folds of the robe worn by the Ghost of Christmas Present:

“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!”

“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?”

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