

A Beloved Favorite—

A Christmas Carol

By CHARLES DICKENS



Bob Cratchit and Tiny Tim



Marley's Ghost! It came through the heavy door with clanking chains.

SCROOGE! A grasping, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint; 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 in his grating voice. 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.

Once upon a time—on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. A door was open, that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond was copying letters.

"A merry Christmas, uncle! God save you!" suddenly cried a cheerful voice—the voice of Scrooge's nephew, Fred, who had come unawares upon him.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug! Merry Christmas! What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew, gaily. "What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

"What else can I be," returned the uncle, "when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! 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. Much good it has ever done you!"

"There are many things from which I 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—apart from the veneration due to its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—as a good time; a kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time; the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. I believe that it has done me good, and will do me good; and I say, God bless it!"

"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."

"Good afternoon," said Scrooge. "Bah!" His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to exchange the greetings of the season with the clerk, Bob Cratchit.

"There's another fellow," muttered Scrooge, who overheard him: "my clerk, with fifteen shillings a week, and a wife and family, talking about a merry Christmas, I'll retire to Bedlam."

SCROOGE resumed his labors with an improved opinion of himself. That afternoon he turned away two gentlemen soliciting Christmas help for the poor. There were workhouses, what more did the poor want? He drove off a lad who attempted to sing a Christmas carol under his window.

When the hour of shutting up arrived, Scrooge rasped to the expectant clerk: "Christmas is a poor excuse for picking a

was right. Quite satisfied, he locked himself in; put on his dressing-gown and slippers, and his night-cap; and sat down before the fire.

The fireplace was an old one, paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, was in every one!

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

A disused bell, that hung in the room, began to swing and ring. This might have lasted half a minute, or a minute, but it seemed an hour. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain.

"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.

MARLEY'S ghost! Marley in his pig-tail, usual waistcoat, tights and boots. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was made of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, looking through his waistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

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

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

"I don't," said Scrooge.

"Why do you doubt your senses?"

"Because," said Scrooge, "a little thing affects them. A slight disorder of the stomach makes them cheat. 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!"

The spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain with such a dismal and appalling noise that Scrooge fell upon his knees.

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

"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 will be haunted by Three Spirits. Without their visits, you cannot hope to shun the path I tread."

The spectre floated through the closed window.

Scrooge tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being much in need of repose, went straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

When Scrooge awoke, he found himself face to face with an unearthly visitor. It was a strange figure—like a child; yet not so like a child as like an old man, viewed through some supernatural medium.

"Who, and what are you?" Scrooge demanded.

"I am the Ghost of Christmas Past. Your past! Rise! and walk with me!"

As the words were spoken, they passed through the wall, and the years of Scrooge's past rolled back till they were

more work tonight. Christmas Eve! Clear away, my lads, and let's have lots of room here!" It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, fuel was heaped upon the fire.

In came a fiddler and tuned like fifty. In came Mrs. Fezziwig and the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. Away they all went, 20 couples at once; hands half round and back again the other way; down the middle and up again; round and round. Fezziwig, clapping his hands to stop the dance, cried out, "Well done!" and the fiddler plunged his hot face into a pot of porter.

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 of beer.

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 told the Ghost:

"I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now."

They treaded through more of Scrooge's by-gone years until Scrooge cried, in a broken voice:

"Spirit, remove me from this place."

He was conscious of being 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.

A WAKENING in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, he found himself the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed in from the



Scrooge and Bob Cratchit and a bowl of smoking bishop.

adjoining room. He got up and went to the door.

It was his own room. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were so hung with living green, holly, mistletoe and ivy. A mighty blaze went roaring up the chimney. Heaped upon the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, long wreaths of sausages, mince-pies, plum puddings, barrels of oysters, red hot chestnuts, cherry checked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth cakes and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch there sat a jolly Giant.

"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in! and know me better, man! I am the Ghost of Christmas Present!"

He took the feebly submissive Scrooge away on wings of wind to the four-room house of Bob Cratchit, Scrooge's clerk.

There was Cratchit's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons; and she laid the cloth, assisted by Belinda, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons; while Master Peter plunged a fork into the saucepan of potatoes, and getting the corners of his monstrous shirt-collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honor of the day) into his mouth, rejoiced to find himself so gallantly attired, and yearned to show his linen in the fashionable Parks. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside the baker's they had smelt the goose, and known it for their very own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onion, these young Cratchits danced about the table.

And in came Bob, the father, with at least three feet of comforter exclusive of the fringe, 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 around.

"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.

"Not coming!" said Bob. "Not coming upon Christmas Day!"

HIS eldest daughter, Martha, an apprentice maid home for the day, didn't like to see him disappointed, if it were only in joke; so she came out prematurely from behind the closet door, where she had hidden, and ran into his arms, while the two young Cratchits bore off Tiny Tim that he

might hear the pudding singing in the copper.

Bob compounded some hot mixture in a jug with gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter and the two ubiquitous young Cratchits went to fetch the goose, with which they soon returned in high procession.

Such a bustle ensued that you might have thought a goose the rarest of all birds—and in truth it was something very like it in that house. Mrs. Cratchit made the gravy. Peter mashed the potatoes with incredible vigor; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple sauce; the two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and mounting guard upon their posts, crammed spoons into their mouths, lest they should shriek for goose before their turn came to be helped. At last the dishes were set on, and grace was said. It was succeeded by a breathless pause, as Mrs. Cratchit, looking slowly all along the carving-knife, prepared to plunge it in the breast; but when she did, and the long-expected gush of stuffing issued forth, one murmur of delight arose all around the board.

There never was such a goose! Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by applesauce and mashed potatoes, it was a sufficient dinner for the whole family. Everyone had had enough, and the young 'est 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 witness—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, while they were merry with the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid!

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

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. Everybody had something to say about it, but nobody said or thought it was 'at all a small' pudding for a large family.

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

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

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

Which all the family re-echoed.

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

"Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob, raising his glass again. "I'll give you the founder of the feast!"

"The founder of the feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon."

"My dear," said Bob, "Christmas day."

"It should be Christmas day, I am sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, unfeeling man. You know he is, Robert!"

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

They all drank the toast together.



You might have thought the goose to be the rarest of all birds.

Dickens wrote many Christmas stories. He regarded at least one as better than A Christmas Carol. Upon completing The Chimes, he informed a friend, "I believe I have written a tremendous book and knocked 'Carol' out of the field." Readers did not agree; the tale of Scrooge and the Cratchits has remained the most loved of Dickens' tales and a Christmas classic. This is a condensation by Clark Kinnaird. The drawings, with one exception, are those of the original illustrator, John Leach.

man's pocket every twenty-fifth of December! But I suppose you must have the whole day. Be here all the earlier next morning."

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern; and went home to bed. He lived in chambers which had once belonged to his partner, Jacob Marley. Marley was dead as a door nail.

Scrooge, having his key in the lock of the door, saw in the knocker—without its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face. To say that he was not startled, would be untrue. But he turned the key sturdily, walked in, and lighted his candle.

However, before he shut his door, he walked through his rooms to see that all

traversing the scenes of his childhood and young manhood on other Christmas Eves. The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door.

"I was apprenticed here!" Scrooge exclaimed. At sight of an old gentleman he cried in excitement:

"Why, it's old Fezziwig!"

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

"Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!"

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