

A Christmas Carol
by
Charles Dickens





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A Christmas Carol Stave One—Marley's Ghost



Marley was dead: to begin with. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, and Scrooge. Scrooge and he were partners for many years. Scrooge never painted out old Marley's name and there it stood above the warehouse door:

SCROOGE AND MARLEY. Sometimes people new to the business called him Scrooge, sometimes Marley, but he answered to both names; it was all the same to him. Tight fisted Scrooge, grasping, covetous, hard as flint; secret and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, his pointed nose, his thin lips blue, and grated his voice. Nobody ever stopped him with a gladsome "How are you"—no beggars implored him, or children ask him what o'clock it was. Even the blind men's dogs appeared to know him and would tug their masters in doorways and up courts. But it was the very thing he liked, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance.

Christmas eve—and old Scrooge sat in his counting house with the door open so that he might keep his eye on his clerk, who, in a dismal little cell beyond was copying letters. It was cold, biting, and the fog poured in through every chink and keyhole. Scrooge had a small fire, but the clerk in his white comforter tried to warm himself at the candle and not being a man of imagination, he failed.

"A Merry Christmas, Uncle!" It was the cheerful voice of Scrooge's nephew; with rapid walking in the fog and frost he was all aglow, ruddy and handsome. "Bah!" said Scrooge—"Humbug!" "Uncle," pleaded the nephew. "Nephew," returned the uncle, "Keep Christmas in your own way, and let me keep Christmas in mine by leaving it alone. Much good it's ever done you!" "There are many things from which I have derived good, Uncle, though it has never put a scrap of gold or silver in my



pocket; but I believe it has done me good and will do me good; and I say, God bless it." The clerk in the cell involuntarily applauded. "Let me hear another sound from YOU," said Scrooge, "And you'll spend Christmas by losing your situation." "Don't be angry, Uncle," said the nephew, "I ask nothing of you; why cannot we be friends?" "Good afternoon," said Scrooge. "I'm sorry with all my heart to find you so resolute—but a Merry Christmas, Uncle, and a happy new year."

The clerk in letting out Scrooge's nephew let in two portly gentlemen, pleasant to behold: "At this festive season, Mr. Scrooge," said one of them, "a few of us are endeavoring to raise a fund to make some provision for the Poor, who suffer greatly at the present time. What shall we put you down for?" "Nothing! Are there no Prisons and Union Workhouses?" demanded Scrooge. "There are. Still," returned the gentleman, "I wish I could say there were not. 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." Seeing clearly that it would be useless, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labors with an improved opinion of himself.

At length the hour of shutting up arrived: "You'll want all day tomorrow, I suppose," said Scrooge, "Be here all the earlier the next morning!" The clerk promised he would; and the office was closed in a twinkling and the clerk ran home as hard as he could pelt.

Scrooge took his melancholy dinner in his usual melancholy tavern and having read all the newspapers, went home to bed. He lived in a gloomy suite of rooms, that had once belonged to his deceased partner, in a lowering pile of buildings up a yard. Nobody lived in it but Scrooge, the other rooms being all let out as offices. Now, it is a fact, that there was nothing at all particular about the knocker on the door, except it was very large. Scrooge had seen it night and morning during his whole residence in that place; then, let any man explain, if he can, how it happened that Scrooge, having his key in the lock, saw in the knocker without its undergoing any process of change, not a knocker, but Marley's face. As Scrooge looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it was a knocker again. To say he was not startled, or that his blood was not conscious of a terrible sensation, would be untrue. But he sturdily turned the key, walked in and lighted his candle. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes, and walking across the hall, he went up the stairs. But before he shut his heavy door, he walked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of Marley's face to desire to do that. Quite satisfied, he took off his cravat and put on his nightcap and sat down before the fire.

"Humbug!" said Scrooge as he sat down. As he threw his head back in the chair, his glance happened to rest upon a bell, a disused bell, that hung in the room and communicated with the highest story of the building. It was with great inexplicable dread, that as he looked, he saw this bell begin to swing. It swung so softly in the outset that it scarcely made a sound; but soon it rang out loudly, and so did every bell in the house. This might have lasted half a minute, then the bells ceased as they had begun, together. They were succeeded by a clanking noise, deep down below, as if some person were dragging a heavy chain over the casks in the wine merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses were described as dragging chains. The cellar door flew open with a booming sound. And then he heard the noise coming up the stairs, straight towards his door.



"It's humbug still!" said Scrooge. "I won't believe it." His color changed, when, without a pause, it came on through the heavy door, and passed into the room before his eyes. The same face; Marley in his pigtail, and usual waist-coat. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle, and it was made of cash boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent and though Scrooge looked the phantom through and through, he still was incredulous, and fought against his senses.

"Who are you?" said Scrooge. "Ask me who I was. In life I was your partner, Jacob Marley. You won't believe in me," observed the ghost. "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." At this the Spirit raised a frightful cry and shook his chain with such a dismal and appalling noise, that Scrooge held on tight to his chair, to save himself from falling into a swoon. But how much greater was his horror, when the phantom, taking off the bandage round it's head, it's lower jaw dropped down upon his chest!

Scrooge fell upon his knees, "Mercy!" he said, "dreadful apparition, why do you trouble me?" "It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that if the spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death; it is doomed to wander through the world and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness." Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chains and wrung its shadowy hands. "You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "I wear the

chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost; "I made it link by link, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to you?" "Jacob." Scrooge said imploringly. "Old Jacob Marley, speak comfort to me, Jacob." "I have none to give," the Ghost replied. "At this time of the year," the spectre said, "I suffer most. Why did I walk through crowds of fellow be-

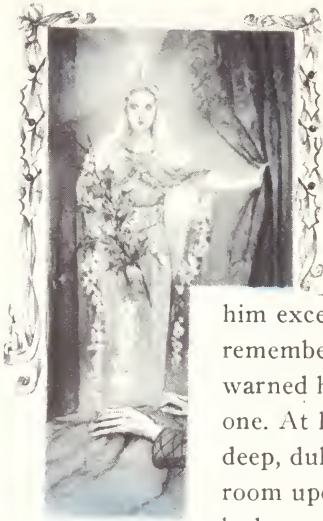


ings with my eyes turned down, and never raise them to that blessed Star which led the Wise Men to a Poor Abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light would have conducted ME!"

"Hear me!" cried the Ghost. "My time is nearly gone. I am here tonight to warn you, that you have yet a chance and a hope of escaping my fate. You will be haunted by Three Spirits. Expect the first tomorrow, when the bell tolls One. Look to see me no more; and look that, for your own sake, you remember what has passed between us."

The apparition walked backward from him; and at every step it took, the window raised itself a little, so that when the spectre reached it, it was wide open. The air was filled with phantoms, wandering in restless haste, and moaning as they went. The spectre, after listening for a moment, joined in the mournful dirge and floated out upon the bleak, dark night.





Stave Two The First of the Three Spirits

Scrooge went to bed and thought, and thought. Marley's ghost bothered him exceedingly. He lay in this stage until he remembered, on a sudden, that the ghost had warned him of a visitation when the bell tolled one. At length it broke upon his listening ear, deep, dull, melancholy. Light flashed up in the room upon the instant, and the curtains of his bed were drawn. Scrooge, starting up into a half recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them. It was a strange figure—like a child; yet not so like a child, as like one, viewed through some supernatural medium which gave it the appearance of having receded from the view, and being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, was white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom was on the skin. It wore a tunic of 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 sprang a bright clear jet of light, by which all this was visible.

“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.” It put out its strong hand as it spoke, and clasped

him gently by the arm. "Rise! And walk with me!" The grasp, though gentle as a woman's hand, was not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made toward the window, clasped its robe. "I am a mortal and liable to fall." Scrooge remonstrated. "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 a country road with fields upon either hand. The city had entirely vanished. The darkness and mist had vanished with it, for it was a clear, cold winter day, with snow upon the ground. "Good heavens!" cried Scrooge, "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!" "You recollect the way?" inquired the Spirit. "Remember it! I could walk it blindfold," cried Scrooge.

They walked along the road; Scrooge recognizing every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, its winding river. Some shaggy ponies now were seen trotting toward 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.

"The school is not quite deserted," said the Ghost. 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. They went, the ghost and Scrooge, across the hall, to a door at the back of the house. It opened before them, and disclosed a long, bare, melancholy room, made barer still by lines of plain deal forms and desks. At one of these a lonely boy was reading near a



feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he had used to be. The Spirit touched him on the arm and Scrooge, looking at the Ghost, and with a mournful shaking of his head, glanced anxiously towards the door. It opened; and a little girl, much younger than the boy, came darting in, and putting her arms about his neck, and often kissing him, addressed him as her "Dear brother." "I have come to bring you home!" said the child, clapping her tiny hands, and bending down to laugh. "Home, for good and all. Home, forever and ever. Father is so much kinder than he used to be and sent me in a coach to bring you. And we're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

Master Scrooge's trunk being tied on to the top of the coach, the children bade the schoolmaster goodbye right willingly; and getting into it, drove gaily down the garden sweep; the quick wheels dashing the hoar-frost and snow from off the dark leaves of the evergreens like spray. "Always a delicate creature, whom a breath might have withered," said the Ghost. "She died a woman," continued 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 "Yes!"

Although they had but that moment left the school behind them, they were now in the busy thoroughfares of the city. The Ghost stopped at a certain warehouse door and asked Scrooge if he knew it. "Know it! I was apprenticed here!" said Scrooge. They went in. An old gentleman in a Welsh wig sat behind a high desk. "Why, it's old Fezziwig! Bless his heart!" Scrooge cried in great excitement. Scrooge's former self, now grown a young man, came briskly in accompanied by his fellow—'Prentice. "Yo Ho, my boys!" cried Fezziwig. "No more work tonight. Christmas Eve, let's have the shutters up." It was done in a minute. Fuel was heaped upon the fire; the floor was swept and watered, the lamps were trimmed, and the warehouse was as snug and warm a ballroom as you would desire to see upon a winter's night. In came a fiddler with a music book, and went

up to the lofty desk, and made an orchestra of it, and tuned like fifty stomach-aches. In came Mrs. Fezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business.

There were dances, and there were forfeits, and there was a cake, and there was a great piece of cold roast. But the great effect of the evening came when the fiddler struck up 'Sir Roger de Coverley'. Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; a positive light appeared to issue from Fezziwig calves. They shone in every part of the dance like moons. When the clock struck eleven, this domestic ball broke up. Mr. and Mrs. Fezziwig took their stations, one on either side of the door, and every person, individually, was wished a "Merry Christmas." 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. It was not until now that he remembered the Ghost and became conscious that it was looking full upon him. He felt the Spirit's glance, and stopped. "What is the matter?" asked the Ghost. Said Scrooge, "I should like to be able to say a word or two to my clerk just now! That's all."

"My time grows short," observed the Spirit. "Quick!" Again Scrooge saw himself. He was older now; a man in the prime of life. His face had begun to wear the signs of care and avarice. He was not alone, but sat by the side of a fair young girl; in whose eyes there were tears. "It matters little," she said softly.

"To you, very little. Another idol has displaced me; a golden one. I have seen your nobler aspirations fall off, one by one, until the master passion, Gain, engrosses you. Our contract is an old one. It was made when we were both poor and content to be so, until,



in good season we could improve our worldly fortune by our patient industry. With a full heart, for the love of him, you once were, I release you." He was about to speak; but with her head turned away from him, she resumed. "May you be happy in the life you have chosen!" She left him and they parted.

"Spirit!" said Scrooge in a broken voice, "Remove me from this place." "I told you these were the 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! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!" In the struggle, if that could be called a struggle in which the Ghost, with no visible resistance on his own part, was undisturbed by any effort of its adversary, Scrooge was conscious of being exhausted and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, being in his own bedroom where he reeled and sank into a heavy sleep.



Stave Three The Second of the Three Spirits



Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for he lay upon his bed, the very core and center of a blaze of ruddy light which streamed upon it, and which, being only light, was more alarming than a dozen ghosts. He began to think that the source and secret of this ruddy light might be in the adjoining room, from whence it seemed to shine. 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 greens, that it looked a perfect grove, from every part of which, bright gleaming berries glistened, and the crisp leaves of mistletoe, holly and ivy reflected back the light; and such a mightly blaze went roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time or Marley's. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, great joints of meat, long wreaths of sausages, mince pies, plum puddings, apples, juicy oranges and seething bowls of punch that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant, glorious to see; who bore a glowing torch and held it up to shed its light on Scrooge as he came peeking round the door. "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. 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 cheery voice and its joyful air. "You have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit. "Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will." "Touch my robe!" said the Spirit. Scrooge did as he was told and held it fast.

All vanished instantly and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning. 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 the gayest faces.

It was a remarkable quality of the Ghost 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 it was possible he could have done in any lofty hall.

It was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk; for there he went, and 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 sprinklings of his torch. "Is there a peculiar flavor in what you sprinkle from your torch?" asked Scrooge. "There is," said the Spirit. "Does it apply to anybody on this day?" asked Scrooge. "To any kindly given. To a poor one most." "Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge. "Because he needs it most."

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Bob's wife, dressed out but poorly in a twice turned gown, assisted by Belinda Cratchit, second of her daughters, also brave in ribbons. And now two smaller Cratchits, boy and girl, came tearing in, screaming that outside they had smelt the goose, and known it for their own; and basking in luxurious thoughts of sage and onions, these young Cratchits danced about the table. While exalted Master Peter Cratchit, with the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honor of the day) nearly choking him, blew the fire until the slow potatoes bubbling up, knocked loudly at the saucepan lid to be let out and peeled. "Here's Martha, Mother," cried the two young Cratchits. "Why, bless your heart alive, my dear, how late you are!" said Mrs. Cratchit, kissing her daughter, and taking off her shawl and bonnet with officious zeal.



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. "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 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 beg-

gars 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; 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 younger 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 was the rarest of all birds. The two young Cratchits set chairs for everybody, not forgetting themselves, and at last the dishes were set on and grace was said. There never was such a goose. Its tenderness and flavor, size and cheapness, were the themes of universal admiration. Every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, were steeped in sage and onions to the eyebrows! But now, the plates being changed by Miss Belinda, Mrs. Cratchit left the room to take the pudding up and bring it in. In half a minute Mrs. Cratchit entered—flushed and smiling proudly—with the pudding, like a speckled cannonball blazing in a half of a quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight with Christmas holly stuck into the top. Oh, a wonderful pudding! Bob Cratchit said, and he regarded it as the greatest success achieved by Mrs. Cratchit since their marriage.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth was cleared, the hearth swept and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted and considered perfect, apples and oranges were put upon the table, and a shovelful of chestnuts put upon the fire. Then all the Cratchit family drew around the hearth; and at Bob's elbow stood the family display of glass: Two tumblers and a custard cup without a handle. Then Bob proposed: "A Merry Christmas to us all, my dears. God bless us!" which all the family re-echoed.



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

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

"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "Tell me if Tiny Tim will live." "I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die." "No, no," said Scrooge, "Spirit! Say he will be spared!" "If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future," returned the Ghost, "none 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 bent before the Ghost's rebuke.

All the time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round; and by and by, there was a song, about a lost child traveling 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; and their clothes might have known the inside of a pawnbrokers, 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.

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost it was a great surprise to Scrooge to hear a hearty laugh. It was a much greater surprise to recognize it as his own nephews, and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, with the Spirit standing smiling by his side. "Ha Ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, Ha, Ha!—He said that Christmas was a humbug, and he believed it too! He's a comical old fellow and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offences carry their own punishment, and

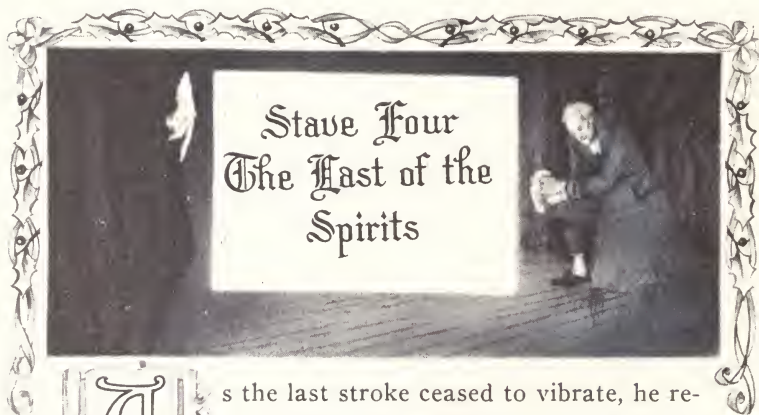
I have nothing to say against him." "I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece; and all the others expressed the same opinion. "I was only going to say," said Scrooge's nephew, "that he may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year and saying 'Uncle Scrooge, how are you?' So here is a glass of mulled wine ready to our hand at the moment; and I say A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man wherever he is." Then Scrooge's nephew laughed in his way: Scrooge's niece laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends being not a bit behindhand, roared out lustily. "Uncle Scroo-o-o-o-ge!"

Uncle Scrooge has imperceptibly become so gay and light of heart, that he would have pledged the unconscious company in return, 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, but always with a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick-beds and they were cheerful; in alms-house, hospital, and jail, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts. It was a long night; it was strange too, but while Scrooge remained unaltered in his outward form, the Ghost grew clearly older. Scrooge observed this change and as the Spirit stood in an open place, he noticed that his hair was gray. "Are Spirits' lives so short?" asked Scrooge. "My life upon this globe is very brief," replied the Ghost. "It ends tonight. Hark! The time is drawing near." The chimes were ringing the three-quarters past the eleven at that period. "Forgive me in what I ask," said Scrooge looking intently at the Spirit's robe, "but I see something strange and not belonging to yourself. Your robe?" From the folding of the Spirit's robe it brought two children; wretched, abject, frightful, miserable. They knelt down at its feet and clung upon the outside of its garment. "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 of 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?” The bells struck twelve. Scrooge looked 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, toward him. The Phantom, slowly gravely, silently approached. When it came near him, Scrooge bent down upon his knees; for in the very air through which this Spirit moved it seemed to scatter gloom and mystery. It was shrouded in deep black garments, 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 separated 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 downward with his hand. 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.

"Ghost of the Future!" he exclaimed, "I fear you more than any Spectre I have seen. But, as I know your purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I was, I am prepared to bear you company. Lead on!" said Scrooge. "The night is waning fast, and it is precious time to me, I know." The Phantom moved away as it had come towards him.

Scrooge followed in the shadow of its dress, which bore him up, and carried him along. They scarcely seemed to enter the City; for the city rather seemed to spring up about them, and encompassed them of its own act. But there they were, in the heart of it; on the Exchange, amongst the merchants who conversed in groups, looked at their watches, and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often. 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." "What has he done with his money?" asked a red-faced gentleman with a nose like the gills of a turkey cock. "I haven't heard," said the man with the large chin, yawning again. "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." Another laugh.

They left the busy scene, and went into an obscure part of the town where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he knew its bad repute. The whole quarter reeked with crime, filth and misery. Far in this den of infamous resort, there was a low-browed, beetling shop where old iron, rags, bottles, bones and greasy offal were bought. Sitting in among the wares was a gray-haired rascal, nearly seventy years of age. 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 recognition of each other. After a short period of blank astonishment, they all burst into a laugh.

The man in faded black began to produce his plunder. It was not extensive. A seal or two, a pencil case, a pair of sleeve buttons, and a brooch of no great value, were all. The second woman was next. Sheets and towels, two old fashioned silver teaspoons and a few boots. "And now undo my bundle, Joe," said the first woman. Joe dragged out a large and heavy roll of some dark stuff. "Bed curtains!" said Joe. "You don't mean to say you took them down, rings and all with him lying there?" "Yes I do!" said the woman. "Why not? If he wanted to keep them after he was dead, the wicked old screw, why wasn't he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he'd of had somebody to look after him, instead of lying gasping out his last, alone, by himself."

Scrooge listened to this dialogue in horror. It was though they were obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself. "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 Heavens, 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 something covered up, which though it was dumb, announced itself in awful language. A pale light, fell straight upon the bed; and on it, plundered and bereft, unwatched, unwept, uncared for, was the body of this man. "Spirit!" Scrooge cried, "this is a fearful place. In leaving it, I shall not leave its lesson, trust me. Let us go!"

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet. They entered poor Bob Cratchit's house; the dwelling he had visited before; and found the mother and children seated around the fire. Quiet. Very quiet. The noisy little Cratchits were as still as statues and sat looking up at Peter, who had a book before him. The mother and her daughters were engaged in sewing.

“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. The mother laid her work on the table, “Your father will be coming home, it must be near his time.” “Past it rather,” Peter answered, shutting up his book. “But I think he walks 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.” “But he was very light to carry,” she resumed intent upon her work, “And his father loved him so, that it was no trouble. And there is your father at the door!” She hurried out to meet him; and Bob in his comforter, came in. His tea was ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most.

“You went there today, Robert?” asked 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 I would talk 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.

Poor Bob thought a little and composed himself, he kissed his wife. He was reconciled to what had happened and he talked on as though he were quite happy. They all drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother working still. Bob told them of the extraordinary kindness that Mr. Scrooge’s nephew, 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, I told him, ‘I am heartily sorry for it, Mr. Cratchit,’ he said, ‘And heartily sorry for your good wife.’” “I’m sure he’s a good soul!” said Mrs. Cratchit. “You would be sure of it, my dear,” returned Bob, “if you saw and spoke to him.”

Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence was from God!

"Spectre," said Scrooge, "Something informs me that our parting moment is at hand. I know it, but I know not how. Tell me what man that was whom we saw lying dead?" The Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come conveyed him, as before, until they reached an iron gate. A church yard. Here, then, the wretched man whose name he had now to learn, lay underneath the ground. It was a worthy place. Walled in by houses; overrun by grass and weeds, the growth of vegetation's death, not life. The Spirit stood among the graves and pointed down to One.

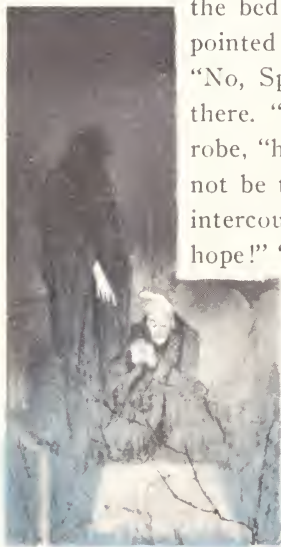
"Before I draw nearer to that stone to which you point," said Scrooge, "answer me one question. Man's courses will foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends will change. Are these the shadows of things that WILL be, or are they the shadows of things that MAY be, only?" 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, the name, EBENEZER SCROOGE. "Am I that man who lay upon

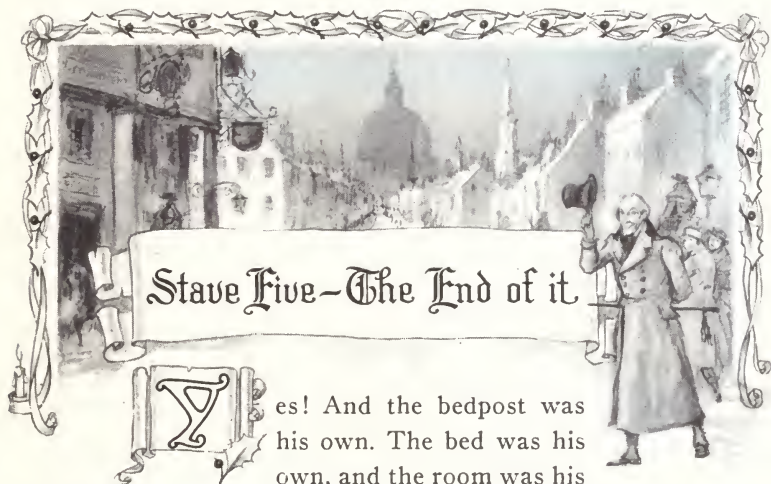
the bed?" he cried, upon his knees. The finger pointed from the grave to him and back again. "No, Spirit! Oh no, no!" The finger still was there. "Spirit," he cried, tight clutching at its robe, "hear me! I am not the man I was, I will not be the man I must have been, but for this intercourse. Why show me this, if I am past all hope?" "Good Spirit," he pursued as dawn upon

the ground he fell before it; "your kind nature intercedes for me and pities me. Assure me that I may yet change these shadows you have shown me, by an altered life!"

The Spirit's hand trembled, "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and keep it all the year. I will live in the



Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall thrive within me. Oh, tell me that I may sponge away the writing on this stone!" In his agony, he caught the spectral hand. It sought to free itself, but he was strong in his entreaty, and detained it. The Spirit, stronger yet, repulsed him. Holding up his hands in one last prayer to have his fate reversed, he saw an alteration in the Phantom's hood and dress. It shrank, collapsed, and dwindled down into a bedpost.



Yes! And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, and 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, and 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 had been sobbing violently in his conflict of the spirit and his face was wet with tears. Running to the window, he opened it and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring cold; 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, "What's today, my fine fellow?" "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 in one night. "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 sold the prize turkey that was hanging there? 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. "Go and buy it," said Scrooge, "And tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man and I'll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I'll give you a half a crown!" 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." He went downstairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer's man. Here's the turkey. "Hello again! Merry Christmas!" The chuckle with which he recompensed the boy was only to be exceeded by the chuckle with which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

He dressed himself in all "his best" and at last got out into the streets. The people were by this time pouring forth; Scrooge regarded everyone with a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, 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 years. 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?" "My dear Sir," said Scrooge, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. "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. "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. "Thank 'ee." said Scrooge. "I am much obliged to 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 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 nephews house; he passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it: "Is your master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very. "Yes, Sir. He is in the dining room, Sir, I'll show you upstairs, if you please." "Thank 'ee again. 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. "Why bless my soul!" said 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. Everyone came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning, 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; Bob was full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. "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?" "It's only once a year, Sir," pleaded Bob. "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 door again: "And therefore, I am about to raise your salary!" Bob trembled, and got almost out

of the door. He had a momentary idea of calling to the people in the court for help, and a strait-waistcoat.

"A Merry Christmas, Bob!" said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. "A Merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year! Make up the fires, and buy another coal scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!"

Scrooge was better than his word. And to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he became as good a friend, and as good a man, as the good old city knew. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe for good, at which some people did not have their full of laughter in the outset; his own heart laughed: that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with spirits; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well. May that be truly said of all of us!

And so, as Tiny Tim observed, GOD BLESS US EVERY ONE



