

A CHRISTMAS CAROL &  
THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH  
BY  
CHARLES DICKENS

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

As biographical notes on Charles Dickens have already appeared in the READERS LIBRARY editions of *Oliver Twist* and *A Tale of Two Cities*, a few interesting facts about the two stories in the present volume are here given instead of yet another note on the author's life. It may be added that, for these facts, some of them hitherto unpublished, the Editor is indebted to the distinguished Dickensian, Mr. B. W. Matz, and that they may therefore be regarded as authoritative.

The idea of *A Christmas Carol* first occurred to Dickens on a three days' visit to Manchester early in October, 1843. Absorbed by it, he hurried back to London, and, writing at intervals between his work on *Martin Chuzzlewit*, then nearing completion, he finished the "Carol" before the end of November. "To keep the 'Chuzzlewit' going," he wrote to his friend Professor Felton, "and do this little book, the 'Carol,' in the odd times between the parts of it, was, as you may suppose, pretty tight work. But when it was done I broke out like a madman. And if you could have seen me at a children's party at Macready's the other night, going down a country dance with Mrs. M., you would have thought I was a country gentleman of independent property, residing on a tip-top farm, with the wind blowing straight in my face every day."

In the same letter Dickens agreeably reveals how intensely he lived in, and was at one with, the world of his creation. Telling his friend that a copy of the book is on its way to him, he adds, "Over which 'Christmas Carol' Charles Dickens wept and laughed and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner in the composition; and thinking whereof he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles many a night when all the sober folks had gone to bed. Its success is most prodigious, and by every post all manner of strangers write all manner of letters to him about their homes and hearths, and how the same 'Carol' is read aloud there, and kept on a little shelf by



## EDITOR'S NOTE

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itself. It is the greatest success, as I am told, that this ruffian and rascal has ever achieved."

A success it was indeed! The first edition of six thousand (a large issue at that time) sold out on the day of publication, though, financially considered, its sales were not immediately such as to justify Dicken's own expectations. But in a less material way it benefited him enormously—was, as his biographer affirms, the turning point of his career. It brought him a host of new friends who wept and laughed over the book as he had done. When, in later editions, its price was within the means of slender purses, the whole heart of England may be said to have been captured. Dickens read it to enthusiastic audiences on his lecturing tours. How many millions of friends it has since found it would be impossible to say.

*The Cricket on the Hearth* was the third of a series of Christmas stories. The title was suggested by a magazine which had been planned and abandoned owing to pressure of other business. "What do you think of a notion that has occurred to me in connection with our abandoned little weekly?" he wrote to John Forster in 1845. "It would be a delicate and beautiful fancy for a Christmas book, making the Cricket a little household god—silent in the wrong and sorrow of the tale, and loud again when all went well and happy."

The truly "delicate and beautiful fancy" had an even greater success than its predecessors, *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes*. It was not composed, however, with the zest which carried its author along with the "Carol." "I am sick, bothered, and depressed," he wrote. "Visions of Brighton come upon me; and I have a great mind to go there to finish my second part, or to Hampstead. I never was in such bad writing cue as I am this week, in all my life."

Thus originated the two stories which follow. No word of criticism need be expressed as to their merits. In the generous words of the author's great rival, Thackeray, on the "Carol": "Who can listen to objections regarding such a book as this? It seems to me a national benefit and to every man or woman who reads it a personal kindness." A national benefit, a personal kindness, it is!

THE EDITOR.

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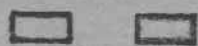
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# A Christmas Carol

## STAVE ONE

### MARLEY'S GHOST

MARLEY was dead, to begin with. There is no doubt whatever about that. The register of his burial was signed by the clergyman, the clerk, the undertaker, and the chief mourner. Scrooge signed it. And Scrooge's name was good upon 'Change, for anything he chose to put his hand to.

Old Marley was as dead as a door-nail.

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

Scrooge knew he was dead? Of course he did. How could it be otherwise? Scrooge and he were partners for I don't know how many years. Scrooge was his sole executor, his sole administrator, his sole

assign, his sole residuary legatee, his sole friend, and sole mourner. And even Scrooge was not so dreadfully cut up by the sad event, but that he was an excellent man of business on the very day of the funeral, and solemnised it with an undoubted bargain.

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

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

Oh! But he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous, old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his



cheek, stiffened his gait; made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

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, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often "came down" handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

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

But what did Scrooge care! It was the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, warning all human sympathy to keep its distance, was what the knowing ones call "nuts" to Scrooge.

Once upon a time—of all the good days in the



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

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

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