

A Christmas Carol

By CHARLES DICKENS (Continued from First Page)

ago. You have laboured on it, since it is a ponderous chain!" Scrooge glanced about him on the floor, in the expectation of finding himself surrounded by some fifty or sixty fathoms of iron cable. "At this time of the rolling year," the spectre said, "my 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. "Hear me!" cried the Ghost, "My time is nearly gone."

STAVE TWO

The First of the Three Spirits When Scrooge awoke, it was dark. Chirp chimed struck twelve. "Why, I'm not possible," said Scrooge, "that I can sleep through a whole day and far into another night. It isn't possible that anything has happened to the sun, and this is twelve a noon!" "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 Scrooge, starting up into a half-recumbent attitude, found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor who drew them.



Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance with Mrs. Fezziwig.



"Tiny Tim upon his shoulder."

Pezziwig, one vast substantial smile. In came the three Miss Fezziwigs, beaming and lovable. In came the six young followers whom he kept they broke. In came all the young men and women employed in the business. In came the housemaid, with her cousin, the baker. In came the cook, with her brother's particular friend, the milkman. In came the boy from over the way, who was suspected of not having beard enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who was proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. In they all came, some shyly, some boldly, some gracefully, some awkwardly. 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 couples always turning up in the wrong place, new couples starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them!

STAVE THREE

The Second of the Three Spirits Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell again upon the stroke of One. Now his bed gave a blaze of ruddy light which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour. Light might be in the room. He got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door. It was his own room. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. Living green filled it that it looked a perfect grove. The crisp leaves of holly, mistletoe, and ivy reflected back the light, as if so many little mirrors had been scattered there; and heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, oranges, and seething bowls of punch. In easy state upon this couch, there sat a jolly Giant. "I am the Ghost of Christmas Present," said the Spirit. "You have never seen the like of me before!" It continued. "Never," Scrooge answered. "Have never walked forth with the younger members of my family; meaning (for I am very young) my elder brothers born in these later years?" pursued the Phantom. "I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "Have you had many brothers, Spirit?" "More than eighteen hundred," said the Ghost. "Spirit," said Scrooge submissively, "conduct me where you will. I went forth last night in compulsion, and I learn a lesson which is working now. Tonight, if you have taught to teach me, let me profit by it."

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. 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, as if he dreaded he might be taken from him. "Spirit," said Scrooge, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live."

"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, the child will die." "No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared." "If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here. What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population." Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words quoted by the Spirit, and he was so affected that he would have given anything to be forgiven for his past sins. "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. On God! to hear his insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brothers in the dust!" Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily, on hearing his own name. "Mr. Scrooge!" said Bob; "I'll give you Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!" "The Founder of the Feast indeed!" cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind." "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!" 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 two-pence for it. Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself looked thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars, as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favour when he came into the receipts of stuffing lasses, fourth one mummery of delight arose all round the board and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two young Cratchits, beat on the table with the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurray!



He always knew where the plump sister was.

hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed tomorrow morning for a good long rest. And now, without a word of warning, the Ghost and Scrooge moved on. A light shone from the window of a hut. A cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. "A place where miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," explained the Spirit. "But they know me, see!" The Spirit did not tarry here, but passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? To sea. They lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the watch; dark, ghastly figures in their several stations; but every man among them hummed a Christmas tune, or had a Christmas thought. It was a great surprise to Scrooge to hear a familiar, hearty laugh. Scrooge recognized it as his own nephew's. He found himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room. It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good humour. Scrooge's niece by marriage, laughed as heartily as he. And their assembled friends roared. "He said that Christmas was a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too!" "He's a comical old fellow," said Scrooge's nephew, "that's the truth; and not so pleasant." "However, I believe 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. "What of that, my dear!" said Scrooge's nephew, "his wealth is of no use to him." "I have no patience with him," observed Scrooge's niece. "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. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner." "Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," said Scrooge's niece. "Well! I'm very glad to hear it," said Scrooge's nephew, "because I haven't great faith in these young housekeepers. What say you, Topper?" Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge's niece's sisters. For he answered that a bachelor had no right to an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge's niece's sister—the plump one with the lace tucker; not the one with the roses—blushed. After a while they played at forfeits; for it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when the mighty Founder was first a child himself. Stop! There was first a game at blindman's bluff. Of course there was. And I no more believe Topper was really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it was a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew; and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The way he went after that plump sister in the lace tucker. 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 endeavouring to seize you, which would have been an affront to your understanding, and would instantly have sided off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it wasn't fair; and it really was not. But when at last he caught her; when, in spite of all her silken rustlings, and her rapid flutterings past him, he got her into a corner, whence there was no escape; then his conduct was the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it was necessary to touch her forehead, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; was vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when another blind man being in office, they were so very confidential together, behind the curtains. There might have been twenty people there, young and old— "Here is a new game," said Scrooge. "One half-hour, Spirit, only one!" It is a Game called Yew and No. Where Scrooge's nephew had to think of something, and the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case was. The brisk fire of questioning to which he was exposed, elicited from him that he was thinking of an animal, a live animal, rather a disagreeable animal, a savage animal, an animal, that growled and grunted some times, and lived in London, and walked about the streets, and wasn't

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