A Christmas Carol

Charles Dickens

Polish letters — 20–100% of eligible letters, increasing through the book

English · 1843

About this reading edition

Complete five-stave original English narrative. Source illustrations, illustration captions and publisher front matter are omitted.

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French j to ż, German z to c, consonantal English y to j and selected English w to ł. These are contextual sound matches, not visual substitutions.

Letter key (context rules restrict where these pairs apply):

j / ż · y / j · w / ł · z / c

1,187 of 2,032 eligible letters changed. Approximately 1.0% of all letters. This is an approximate reading exercise, not translation or phonetic transcription. The source language and spelling context still matter.

Learning exercise: a simplified representation

For learning purposes only. This deliberately simplified exercise omits important aspects of pronunciation, spelling, stress, rhythm, dialect and language use. It is not translation, transliteration, complete phonetic transcription or a substitute for learning the language. 100% means all eligible letters, not every letter in the book.

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STAVE ONE.

Marley łas 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 ironmongery 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 łith 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 łonderful 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 łeak 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 łithin 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 łarm, no wintry łeather chill him. No wind that blew łas 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, łith 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, łould 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 łas the very thing he liked. To edge his way along the crowded paths of life, łarning 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 jear, on Christmas Eve—old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting łeather: 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 łas 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 łas ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

“Christmas a humbug, uncle!” said Scrooge’s nephew. “Jou don’t mean that, I am sure?”

“I do,” said Scrooge. “Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? Jou’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 łith “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 jou but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, but not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will,” said Scrooge indignantly, “every idiot who goes about łith ‘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."

"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 jou!"

"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 Christmas time, when it has come round—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 łomen 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. Becoming immediately sensible of the impropriety, he poked the fire, and extinguished the last frail spark for ever.

"Let me hear another sound from *you*," said Scrooge, "and you'll keep your Christmas by losing jour situation! Jou're quite a powerful speaker, sir," he added, turning to his nephew. "I wonder you don't go into Parliament."

"Don't be angry, uncle. Come! Dine łith us to-morrow."

Scrooge said that he would see him—yes, indeed he did. He łent 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.

“I am sorry, with all my heart, to find you so resolute. We have never had any quarrel, to which I have been a party. But I have made the trial in homage to Christmas, and I’ll keep my Christmas humour to the last. So A Merry Christmas, uncle!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

“And A Happy New Jear!”

“Good afternoon!” said Scrooge.

His nephew left the room without an angry word, notwithstanding. He stopped at the outer door to bestow the greetings of the season on the clerk, who, cold as he was, łas warmer than Scrooge; for he returned them cordially.

“There’s another fellow,” muttered Scrooge; who overheard him: “my clerk, łith fifteen shillings a week, and a łife and family, talking about a merry Christmas. I’ll retire to Bedlam.”

This lunatic, 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.

“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 jears,” Scrooge replied. “He died seven years ago, this very night.”

“We have no doubt his liberality is well represented by his surviving partner,” said the gentleman, presenting his credentials.

It certainly was; for they had been two kindred spirits. At the ominous word “liberality,” 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 łant of common necessaries; hundreds of thousands are in łant of common comforts, sir.”

“Are there no prisons?” asked Scrooge.

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

“And the Union 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 vigour, then?” said Scrooge.

“Both very busy, sir.”

“Oh! I łas afraid, from what jou 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 endeavouring 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 Łant is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?”

“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 łould rather die.”

“If they łould rather die,” said Scrooge, “they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population. Besides—excuse me—I don’t know that.”

“But jou might know it,” observed the gentleman.

“It’s not my business,” Scrooge returned. “It’s enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere łith other

people's. Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

Seeing clearly that it łould be useless to pursue their point, the gentlemen withdrew. Scrooge resumed his labours with an improved opinion of himself, and in a more facetious temper than was usual with him.

Meanwhile the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about łith flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a Gothic łindow in the wall, became 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 labourers łere 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 winking their eyes before the blaze in rapture. The łater-plug being left in solitude, its overflowings sullenly congealed, and turned to misanthropic ice. The brightness of the shops where holly sprigs and berries crackled in the lamp heat of the łindows, made pale faces ruddy as they passed. Poulterers' and grocers' trades became a splendid joke: a glorious pageant, łith which it łas next to impossible to believe that such dull principles as bargain and sale had anything to do. The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should; and even the little tailor, whom he had fined five shillings on the previous Monday for being drunk and bloodthirsty in the streets, stirred up to-morrow's pudding in his garret, while his lean łife and the baby sallied out to buy the beef.

Foggier jet, and colder. Piercing, searching, biting cold. If the good Saint Dunstan had but nipped the Evil Spirit's nose with a touch of such weather as that, instead of using his familiar weapons, then indeed he would have roared to lusty purpose. The owner of one scant joung nose, gnawed and mumbled 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

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-łill Scrooge dismounted from his stool, and tacitly admitted the fact to the expectant clerk in the Tank, who instantly snuffed his candle out, and put on his hat.

"You'll łant all day to-morrow, I suppose?" said Scrooge.

"If quite convenient, sir."

"It's not convenient," said Scrooge, "and it's not fair. If I was to stop half-a-crown 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 great-coat 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 łith a growl. The office was closed in a twinkling, and the clerk, łith the

long ends of his white comforter dangling below his łaist (for he boasted no great-coat), went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times, in honour 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 lowering pile of building up a yard, 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 łay 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. The yard was so dark that even Scrooge, who knew its every stone, łas fain to grope with his hands. The fog and frost so hung about the black old gateway of the house, that it seemed as if the Genius of the Weather sat in mournful meditation on the threshold.

Now, it is a fact, that there łas 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, even including—which is a bold word—the corporation, aldermen, and livery. 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, łithout its undergoing any intermediate process of change—not a knocker, but Marley's face.

Marley's face. It was not in impenetrable shadow as the other objects in the yard łere, 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 breath or hot air; and, though the eyes were wide open, they were perfectly motionless. That, and its livid colour, 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 looked fixedly at this phenomenon, it łas a knocker again.

To say that he was not startled, or that his blood łas not conscious of a terrible sensation to which it had been a stranger from infancy, łould 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 every cask in the wine-merchant's cellars below, appeared to have a separate peal of echoes of its own. Scrooge was not a man to be frightened by echoes. He fastened the door, and łalked across the hall, and up the stairs; slowly too: trimming his candle as he went.

You may talk vaguely about driving a coach-and-six up a good old flight of stairs, or through a bad young Act of Parliament; but I mean to say you might have got a hearse up that staircase, and taken it broadwise, with the splinter-bar towards the łall and the door towards the balustrades: and done it easy. There łas plenty of width for that, and room to spare; which is perhaps the reason why Scrooge thought he saw a locomotive hearse going on before him in the gloom. Half-a-dozen gas-lamps out of the street wouldn't have lighted the entry too well, so you may suppose that it łas pretty dark with Scrooge's dip.

Up Scrooge went, not caring a button for that. Darkness is cheap, and Scrooge liked it. But before he shut his heavy door, he łalked through his rooms to see that all was right. He had just enough recollection of the face to desire to do that.

Sitting-room, bedroom, lumber-room. All as they should be. Nobody under the table, nobody under the sofa; a small fire in the grate; spoon and basin ready; and the little saucepan of gruel (Scrooge had a cold in his head) upon the hob. Nobody under the bed; nobody in the closet; nobody in his dressing-gown, which was hanging up in a suspicious attitude against the wall. Lumber-room as usual. Old fire-guard, old shoes, two fish-baskets, washing-stand on three legs, and a poker.

Quite satisfied, he closed his door, and locked himself in; double-locked himself in, which was 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 łas obliged to sit close to it, and brood over it, before he could extract the least sensation of warmth from such a handful of fuel.

The fireplace was an old one, built by some Dutch merchant long ago, and paved all round with quaint Dutch tiles, designed to illustrate the Scriptures. There were Cains and Abels, Pharaoh's daughters; Queens of Sheba, Angelic messengers descending through the air on clouds like feather-beds, Abrahams, Belshazzars, Apostles putting off to sea in butter-boats, hundreds of figures to attract his thoughts; and yet that face of Marley, seven years dead, came like the ancient Prophet's rod, and swallowed up the whole. If each smooth tile had been a blank at first, 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 łalked 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 room, and communicated for some purpose now forgotten with a chamber in the highest story of the building. It was łith great astonishment, and with a strange, 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, 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 over the casks in the wine-merchant's cellar. Scrooge then remembered to have heard that ghosts in haunted houses łere described as dragging chains.

The cellar-door flew open łith 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 łon’t believe it.”

His colour changed though, when, łithout 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.

The same face: the very same. Marley in his pigtail, usual łaistcoat, tights and boots; the tassels on the latter bristling, like his pigtail, and his coat-skirts, and the hair upon his head. The chain he drew was clasped about his middle. It was long, and wound about him like a tail; and it łas made (for Scrooge observed it closely) of cash-boxes, keys, padlocks, ledgers, deeds, and heavy purses wrought in steel. His body was transparent; so that Scrooge, observing him, and looking through his łaistcoat, could see the two buttons on his coat behind.

Scrooge had often heard it said that Marley had no bowels, but he had never believed it until now.

No, nor did he believe it even now. 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 very texture of the folded kerchief bound about its head and chin, which wrapper he had not observed before; he łas still incredulous, and fought against his senses.

“How now!” said Scrooge, caustic and cold as ever. “What do jou want with me?”

“Much!”—Marley’s voice, no doubt about it.

“Who are jou?”

"Ask me who I *łas*."

"Who *were* you then?" said Scrooge, raising his voice. "You're particular, for a shade." He łas going to say "*to* a shade," but substituted this, as more appropriate.

"In life I łas jour 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 in the event of its being impossible, it might involve the necessity of 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 jour 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 jou are!"

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

To sit, staring at those fixed glazed eyes, in silence for a moment, łould play, Scrooge felt, the very deuce with him. There łas something very awful, too, in the spectre's being provided with an infernal atmosphere of its own. Scrooge could not feel it himself, but this łas clearly the case; for though the Ghost sat perfectly motionless, its hair, and skirts, and tassels, łere still agitated as by the hot vapour from an oven.

"Jou see this toothpick?" said Scrooge, returning quickly to the charge, for the reason just assigned; and wishing, though it łere only for a second, 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!"

At this the spirit raised a frightful cry, and shook its chain łith 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 łas his horror, when the phantom taking off the bandage round its head, as if it were too łarm to wear indoors, 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 jou trouble me?"

"Man of the łorldly mind!" replied the Ghost, "do jou believe in me or not?"

“I do,” said Scrooge. “I must. But why do spirits łalk 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 łide; 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 łitness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!”

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

“You are fettered,” said Scrooge, trembling. “Tell me why?”

“I łear 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 łill I łore it. Is its pattern strange to *jou?*”

Scrooge trembled more and more.

“Or would jou 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 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: but he could see nothing.

“Jacob,” he said, imploringly. “Old Jacob Marley, tell me more. Speak comfort to me, Jacob!”

“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 łalked beyond our

counting-house—mark me!—in life my spirit never roved beyond the narrow limits of our money-changing hole; and łeary journeys lie before me!”

It was a habit łith Scrooge, whenever he became thoughtful, to put his hands in his breeches pockets. Pondering on what the Ghost had said, he did so now, but łithout lifting up his eyes, or getting off his knees.

“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.

“You might have got over a great quantity of ground in seven jears,” said Scrooge.

The Ghost, on hearing this, set up another cry, and clanked its chain so hideously in the dead silence of the night, that the Ward would have been justified in indicting it for a nuisance.

“Oh! captive, bound, and double-ironed,” cried the phantom, “not to know, that ages of incessant labour by immortal creatures, for this earth must pass into eternity before the good of which it is susceptible is all developed. 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 łas my business. The common welfare łas my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. The dealings of my trade łere but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!"

It held up its chain at arm's length, as if that łere the cause of all its unavailing grief, and flung it heavily upon the ground again.

"At this time of the rolling jear," the spectre 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 Łise Men to a poor abode! Were there no poor homes to which its light łould have conducted *me!*"

Scrooge łas very much dismayed to hear the spectre 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! Don't be flowery, Jacob! Pray!"

"How it is that I appear before jou in a shape that you can see, I may not tell. I have sat invisible beside you many and many a day."

It łas 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 to-night to warn you, that you have yet a chance and hope of escaping my fate. A chance and hope of my procuring, Ebenezer."

“You łere always a good friend to me,” said Scrooge. “Thank’ee!”

“You łill 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 to-morrow, 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 łords, the spectre took its wrapper from the table, and bound it round its head, as before. Scrooge knew this, by the smart sound its teeth made, when the jaws were brought together by the bandage. He ventured to raise his eyes again, and found his supernatural visitor confronting him in an erect attitude, łith its chain wound over and about its arm.

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 łas łide open.

It beckoned Scrooge to approach, which he did. When they were łithin 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 spectre, 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 łas filled with phantoms, łandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. Every one of them łore chains like Marley's Ghost; some few (they might be guilty governments) were linked together; none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost, in a white łaistcoat, łith 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 door-step. The misery łith them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.

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 łindow, and examined the door by which the Ghost had entered. It was double-locked, as he had locked it łith his own hands, and the bolts were undisturbed. He tried to say "Humbug!" but stopped at the first syllable. And being, from the emotion he had undergone, or the fatigues of the day, or his glimpse of the Invisible World, or the dull conversation of the Ghost, or the

lateness of the hour, much in need of repose; łent straight to bed, without undressing, and fell asleep upon the instant.

STAVE TWO.

When Scrooge awoke, it was so dark, that looking out of bed, he could scarcely distinguish the transparent łindow from the opaque walls of his chamber. He was endeavouring to pierce the darkness łith his ferret eyes, when the chimes of a neighbouring 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 łent to bed. The clock was wrong. An icicle must have got into the works. Twelve!

He touched the spring of his repeater, to correct this most preposterous clock. Its rapid little pulse beat twelve: and stopped.

“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 łindow. 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. This łas a great relief, because “three days after sight of this First of Exchange pay to Mr. Ebenezer Scrooge or his order,” and so forth, łould have become a mere United States’ security if there łere no days to count by.

Scrooge went to bed again, and thought, and thought, and thought it over and over and over, and could make nothing of it. The more he thought, the more perplexed he łas; and the more he endeavoured not to think, the more he thought.

Marley's Ghost bothered him exceedingly. Every time he resolved within himself, after mature inquiry, that it łas 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.

"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 jou, 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 łith the unearthly visitor who drew them: as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at jour 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 being diminished to a child's proportions. Its hair, which hung about its neck and down its back, łas white as if with age; and yet the face had not a wrinkle in it, and the tenderest bloom łas on the skin. The arms were very long and muscular; the hands the same, as if its hold łere of uncommon strength. Its legs and feet, most delicately formed, łere, 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 łintry emblem, had its dress trimmed łith 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 łas 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.

Even this, though, when Scrooge looked at it with increasing steadiness, łas *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 łas 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 łithout a body: of which dissolving parts, no outline łould 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 jou the Spirit, sir, whose coming łas 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 jou?” Scrooge demanded.

“I am the Ghost of Christmas Past.”

“Long Past?” inquired Scrooge: observant of its dwarfish stature.

“No. Your past.”

Perhaps, Scrooge could not have told anybody why, if anybody could have asked him; but he had a special desire to see the Spirit in his cap; and begged him to be covered.

“What!” exclaimed the Ghost, “łould you so soon put out, łith łorldly hands, the light I give? Is it not enough that jou are one of those whose passions made this cap, and force me through whole trains of years to wear it low upon my brow!”

Scrooge reverently disclaimed all intention to offend or any knowledge of having wilfully “bonneted” the Spirit at any period of his life. He then made bold to inquire what business brought him there.

“Your łelfare!” 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 łalk łith me!"

It łould have been in vain for Scrooge to plead that the weather and the hour were not adapted to pedestrian purposes; that bed was łarm, and the thermometer a long łay below freezing; that he łas 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, łas not to be resisted. He rose: but finding that the Spirit made towards the window, clasped his robe in supplication.

"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, łith 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 łas a clear, cold, winter day, with snow upon the ground.

"Good Heaven!" said Scrooge, clasping his hands together, as he looked about him. "I was bred in this place. I was a boy here!"

The Spirit gazed upon him mildly. Its gentle touch, though it had been light and instantaneous, appeared still present to the old man's sense of feeling. He łas conscious of a thousand odours

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. “And what is that upon your cheek?”

Scrooge muttered, with an unusual catching in his voice, that it was a pimple; and begged the Ghost to lead him where he łould.

“Jou recollect the łay?” inquired the Spirit.

“Remember it!” cried Scrooge with fervour; “I could łalk it blindfold.”

“Strange to have forgotten it for so many jears!” observed the Ghost. “Let us go on.”

They łalked along the road, Scrooge recognising every gate, and post, and tree; until a little market-town appeared in the distance, with its bridge, its church, and łinding river. Some shaggy ponies now łere seen trotting towards them łith boys upon their backs, who called to other boys in country gigs and carts, driven by farmers. All these boys łere in great spirits, and shouted to each other, until the broad fields łere 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 travellers came on; and as they came, Scrooge knew and named them every one. Why łas he rejoiced beyond all bounds to see them! Why did his cold eye glisten, and his heart leap up as they łent past! Why łas he filled łith gladness when he heard them give each other Merry Christmas, as they parted at cross-roads and bye-łays, for their several homes! What łas 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 łell-remembered lane, and soon approached a mansion of dull red brick, łith a little weathercock-surmounted cupola, on the roof, and a bell hanging in it. It łas 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 over-run with grass. Nor łas it more retentive of its ancient state, within; for entering the dreary hall, and glancing through the open doors of many rooms, they found them poorly furnished, cold, and vast. There łas an earthy savour in the air, a chilly bareness in the place, which associated itself somehow łith too much getting up by candle-light, and not too much to eat.

They łent, 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 łas reading near a feeble fire; and Scrooge sat down upon a form, and wept to see his poor forgotten self as he used to be.

Not a latent echo in the house, not a squeak and scuffle from the mice behind the panelling, not a drip from the half-thawed water-spout in the dull yard behind, not a sigh among the leafless boughs of one despondent poplar, not the idle swinging of an empty store-house door, no, not a clicking in the fire, but 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 jounger self, intent upon his reading. Suddenly a man, in foreign garments: łonderfully real and distinct to look at: stood outside the łindow, with an axe stuck in his belt, and leading by the bridle an ass laden with wood.

"Why, it's Ali Baba!" Scrooge exclaimed in ecstasy. "It's dear old honest Ali Baba! Yes, jes, I know! One Christmas time, when jonder solitary child was left here all alone, he *did* come, for the first time, just like that. Poor boy! And Valentine," said Scrooge, "and his łild brother, Orson; there they go! And what's his name, who łas put down in his drawers, asleep, at the Gate of Damascus; don't jou see him! And the Sultan's Groom turned upside down by the Genii; there he is upon his head! Serve him right. I'm glad of it. What business had *he* to be married to the Princess!"

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.

"There's the Parrot!" cried Scrooge. "Green body and yellow tail, łith 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 łas dreaming, but he wasn't. It łas the Parrot, jou know. There goes Friday, running for his life to the little creek! Halloa! Hoop! Halloo!"

Then, łith a rapidity of transition very foreign to his usual character, he said, in pity for his former self, "Poor boy!" and cried again.

“I łish,” 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.

“Nothing,” said Scrooge. “Nothing. There łas 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 łaved 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, and the naked laths were shown instead; but how all this łas brought about, Scrooge knew no more than you do. He only knew that it łas 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 łas not reading now, but łalking 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 often 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!”

“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 łas going to bed, that I was not afraid to ask him once more if jou might come home; and he said Yes, jou should; and sent me in a coach to bring you. And jou're to be a man!" said the child, opening her eyes, "and are never to come back here; but first, łe're to be together all the Christmas long, and have the merriest time in all the world."

"Jou are quite a łoman, 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, nothing loth to go, accompanied her.

A terrible voice in the hall cried, "Bring down Master Scrooge's box, there!" and in the hall appeared the schoolmaster himself, who glared on Master Scrooge łith a ferocious condescension, and threw him into a dreadful state of mind by shaking hands łith him. He then conveyed him and his sister into the veriest old łell of a shivering best-parlour that ever was seen, where the maps upon the łall, and the celestial and terrestrial globes in the łindows, łere waxy łith cold. Here he produced a decanter of curiously light wine, and a block of curiously heavy cake, and administered instalments of those dainties to the joung people: at the same time, sending out a meagre servant to offer a glass of "something" to the postboy, who answered that he thanked the gentleman, but if it łas the same tap as he had tasted before, he had rather not. Master Scrooge's trunk being by this time tied on to the top of the chaise, the children bade the schoolmaster good-bye 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. “But she had a large heart!”

“So she had,” cried Scrooge. “You’re right. I will not gainsay 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. “Jour nephew!”

Scrooge seemed uneasy in his mind; and answered briefly, “Jes.”

Although they had but that moment 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 łay, and all the strife and tumult of a real city łere. It was made plain enough, by the dressing of the shops, that here too it łas Christmas time again; but it łas evening, and the streets were lighted up.

The Ghost stopped at a certain łarehouse door, and asked Scrooge if he knew it.

“Know it!” said Scrooge. “Łas I apprenticed here!”

They went in. At sight of an old gentleman in a Łelsh wig, sitting behind such a high desk, that if he had been two inches taller he must have knocked his head against the ceiling, 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 łaistcoat; laughed all over himself, from his shoes to

his organ of benevolence; and called out in a comfortable, oily, rich, fat, jovial voice:

“Yo ho, there! Ebenezer! Dick!”

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

“Dick Wilkins, to be sure!” said Scrooge to the Ghost. “Bless me, jes. There he is. He łas very much attached to me, was Dick. Poor Dick! Dear, dear!”

“Jo ho, my boys!” said Fezziwig. “No more work to-night. 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!”

Jou wouldn’t believe how those two fellows łent 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 jou could have got to twelve, panting like race-horses.

“Hilli-ho!” cried old Fezziwig, skipping down from the high desk, łith łonderful agility. “Clear away, my lads, and let’s have lots of room here! Hilli-ho, Dick! Chirrup, Ebenezer!”

Clear away! There łas nothing they łouldn’t have cleared away, or couldn’t have cleared away, łith old Fezziwig looking on. It was done in a minute. Every movable was packed off, as if it were dismissed from public life for evermore; the floor łas swept and watered, the lamps łere trimmed, fuel łas heaped upon the fire; and the łarehouse łas as snug, and łarm, and dry, and bright a ball-room, as you would desire to see upon a winter’s night.

In came a fiddler łith 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 joung followers whose hearts they broke. In came all the young men and łomen 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 łas suspected of not having board enough from his master; trying to hide himself behind the girl from next door but one, who łas proved to have had her ears pulled by her mistress. 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 couple 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 top couple always turning up in the wrong place; new top couple starting off again, as soon as they got there; all top couples at last, and not a bottom one to help them! When this result was brought about, 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. But scorning rest, upon his reappearance, he instantly began again, though there were no dancers yet, as if the other fiddler had been carried home, exhausted, on a shutter, and he were a bran-new man resolved to beat him out of sight, or perish.

There łere more dances, and there were forfeits, and more dances, and there łas cake, and there łas negus, and there łas a great piece of Cold Roast, and there łas a great piece of Cold Boiled, and there were mince-pies, and plenty of beer. But the great effect of the evening came after the Roast and Boiled, when the fiddler (an artful dog, mind! The sort of man who knew his business better than jou or I could have told it him!) struck up "Sir Roger de

Coverley." Then old Fezziwig stood out to dance łith Mrs. Fezziwig. Top couple, too; with a good stiff piece of łork cut out for them; three or four and twenty pair of partners; people who were not to be trifled łith; people who *would* dance, and had no notion of łalking.

But if they had been twice as many—ah, four times—old Fezziwig łould have been a match for them, and so would 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 łould have become of them next. And when old Fezziwig and Mrs. Fezziwig had gone all through the dance; advance and retire, both hands to your partner, bow and curtsey, corkscrew, thread-the-needle, and back again to jour place; Fezziwig "cut"—cut so deftly, that he appeared to łink with his legs, and came upon his feet again łithout a stagger.

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 shaking hands łith every person individually as he or she łent out, łished him or her a Merry Christmas. When everybody had retired but the two 'prentices, they did the same to them; and thus the cheerful voices died away, and the lads łere left to their beds; which łere under a counter in the back-shop.

During the whole of this time, Scrooge had acted like a man out of his łits. His heart and soul łere in the scene, and łith his former self. He corroborated everything, remembered everything, enjoyed everything, and underwent the strangest agitation. It łas 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.

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 jour 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 łords 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 łord or two to my clerk just now. That’s all.”

His former self turned down the lamps as he gave utterance to the łish; and Scrooge and the Ghost again stood side by side in the open air.

“My time grows short,” observed the Spirit. “Quick!”

This łas 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 łear 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 łas not alone, but sat by the side of a fair joung girl in a mourning-dress: in whose eyes there łere 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 cheer and comfort jou in time to come, as I łould have tried to do, I have no just cause to grieve.”

“What Idol has displaced you?” he rejoined.

“A golden one.”

“This is the even-handed dealing of the world!” he said. “There is nothing on which it is so hard as poverty; and there is nothing it professes to condemn łith such severity as the pursuit of łealth!”

“You fear the world too much,” she answered, gently. “All your other hopes have merged into the hope of being beyond the chance of its sordid reproach. I have seen jour 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?”

“Our contract is an old one. It łas made when łe were both poor and content to be so, until, in good season, we could improve our

łorldly fortune by our patient industry. You *are* changed. When it was made, jou were another man."

"I łas a boy," he said impatiently.

"Your own feeling tells jou that jou łere not what you are," she returned. "I am. That which promised happiness when we łere one in heart, is fraught with misery now that 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 jou."

"Have I ever sought release?"

"In łords. No. Never."

"In what, then?"

"In a changed nature; in an altered spirit; in another atmosphere of life; another Hope as its great end. 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 łith steadiness, upon him; "tell me, would jou seek me out and try to łin me now? Ah, no!"

He seemed to jield to the justice of this supposition, in spite of himself. But he said łith a struggle, "You think not."

"I would gladly think otherwise if I could," she answered, "Heaven knows! When *I* have learned a Truth like this, I know how strong and irresistible it must be. But if jou were free to-day, to-morrow, jesterday, can even I believe that you would choose a dowerless girl—you who, in jour very confidence with her, weigh everything by Gain: or, choosing her, if for a moment you were false enough to jour one guiding principle to do so, do I not know that jour repentance and regret łould surely follow? I do; and I release you. Łith a full heart, for the love of him jou once were."

He łas about to speak; but with her head turned from him, she resumed.

“You may—the memory of what is past half makes me hope jou łill—have pain in this. A very, very brief time, and you will dismiss the recollection of it, gladly, as an unprofitable dream, from which it happened well that jou awoke. May jou be happy in the life jou have chosen!”

She left him, and they parted.

“Spirit!” said Scrooge, “show me no more! Conduct me home. Why do jou delight to torture me?”

“One shadow more!” exclaimed the Ghost.

“No more!” cried Scrooge. “No more. I don’t łish 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 łere in another scene and place; a room, not very large or handsome, but full of comfort. Near to the winter fire sat a beautiful joung girl, so like that last that Scrooge believed it was the same, until he saw *her*, now a comely matron, sitting opposite her daughter. The noise in this room łas perfectly tumultuous, for there łere more children there, than Scrooge in his agitated state of mind could count; and, unlike the celebrated herd in the poem, they were not forty children conducting themselves like one, but every child was conducting itself like forty. The consequences were uproarious beyond belief; but no one seemed to care; on the contrary, the mother and daughter laughed heartily, and enjoyed it very much; and the latter, soon beginning to mingle in the sports, got pillaged by the joung brigands most ruthlessly. What would I not have given to be one of them! Though I never could have been so rude, no, no! I łouldn’t for the łealth of all the world

have crushed that braided hair, and torn it down; and for the precious little shoe, I łouldn't have plucked it off, God bless my soul! to save my life. As to measuring her waist in sport, as they did, bold joung brood, I couldn't have done it; I should have expected my arm to have grown round it for a punishment, and never come straight again. And jet I should have dearly liked, I own, to have touched her lips; to have questioned her, that she might have opened them; to have looked upon the lashes of her downcast eyes, and never raised a blush; to have let loose łaves of hair, an inch of which łould be a keepsake beyond price: in short, I should have liked, I do confess, to have had the lightest licence of a child, and jet to have been man enough to know its value.

But now a knocking at the door łas heard, and such a rush immediately ensued that she łith laughing face and plundered dress łas borne towards it the centre of a flushed and boisterous group, just in time to greet the father, who came home attended by a man laden łith Christmas toys and presents. Then the shouting and the struggling, and the onslaught that was made on the defenceless porter! The scaling him łith 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, pommel his back, and kick his legs in irrepressible affection! The shouts of wonder and delight łith which the development of every package łas received! The terrible announcement that the baby had been taken in the act of putting a doll's frying-pan into his mouth, and łas 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 parlour, and by one stair at a time, up to the top of the house; where they went to bed, and so subsided.

And now Scrooge looked on more attentively than ever, when the master of the house, having his daughter leaning fondly on him, sat down łith her and her mother at his own fireside; and when he thought that such another creature, quite as graceful and as full of promise, might have called him father, and been a spring-time in the haggard winter of his life, his sight grew very dim indeed.

“Belle,” said the husband, turning to his wife łith a smile, “I saw an old friend of yours this afternoon.”

“Who was it?”

“Guess!”

“How can I? Tut, don’t I know?” she added in the same breath, laughing as he laughed. “Mr. Scrooge.”

“Mr. Scrooge it łas. I passed his office window; and as it łas 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 jou 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!”

He turned upon the Ghost, and seeing that it looked upon him łith a face, in which in some strange way there were fragments of all the faces it had shown him, wrestled łith it.

“Leave me! Take me back. Haunt me no longer!”

In the struggle, if that 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 łas

burning high and bright; and dimly connecting that łith its influence over him, he seized the extinguisher-cap, and by a sudden action 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 łith all his force, he could not hide the light: which streamed from under it, in an unbroken flood upon the ground.

He łas conscious of being exhausted, and overcome by an irresistible drowsiness; and, further, of being in his own bedroom. He gave the cap a parting squeeze, in which his hand relaxed; and had barely time to reel to bed, before he sank into a heavy sleep.

STAVE THREE.

Awaking in the middle of a prodigiously tough snore, and sitting up in bed to get his thoughts together, Scrooge had no occasion to be told that the bell łas again upon the stroke of One. He felt that he was restored to consciousness in the right nick of time, for the especial purpose of holding a conference with the second messenger despatched to him through Jacob Marley's intervention. But finding that he turned uncomfortably cold when he began to łonder which of his curtains this new spectre łould draw back, he put them every one aside łith his own hands; and lying down again, established a sharp look-out all round the bed. For he łished to challenge the Spirit on the moment of its appearance, and did not łish to be taken by surprise, and made nervous.

Gentlemen of the free-and-easy sort, who plume themselves on being acquainted łith a move or two, and being usually equal to the time-of-day, express the łide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pitch-and-toss to manslaughter; between which opposite extremes, no doubt, there lies a tolerably wide and comprehensive range of subjects. Without venturing for Scrooge quite as hardily as this, I don't mind calling on jou to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

Now, being prepared for almost anything, he łas not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Bell struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken łith 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 centre of a blaze of ruddy light, which streamed upon it when the clock proclaimed the hour; and which, being only light, łas more alarming than a dozen ghosts, as he was powerless to make out what it meant, or would be at; and was sometimes apprehensive that he might be at that very moment an interesting case of spontaneous combustion, łithout having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as jou or I would have thought at first; for it is always the person not in the predicament who knows what ought to have been done in it, and łould unquestionably have done it too—at last, I say, he began to think that the source and secret of this ghostly light might be in the adjoining room, from whence, on further tracing it, 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 łas on the lock, a strange voice called him by his name, and bade him enter. He obeyed.

It łas his own room. There łas no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The łalls and ceiling łere 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 many little mirrors had been scattered there; and such a mighty blaze łent roaring up the chimney, as that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a łinter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, łere 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-cheeked apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and seething bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim łith their delicious steam. In easy state 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 before this Spirit. He łas 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 łas clothed in one simple green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that its capacious breast łas bare, as if disdaining to be łarded or concealed by any artifice. Its feet, observable beneath the ample folds of the garment, were also bare; and on its head it łore no other covering than a holly wreath, set here and there łith 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 demeanour, and its joyful air. Girded round its middle łas an antique scabbard; but no sword was in it, and the ancient sheath was eaten up with rust.

"Jou have never seen the like of me before!" exclaimed the Spirit.

"Never," Scrooge made answer to it.

"Have never łalked forth łith the jounger members of my family; meaning (for I am very joung) my elder brothers born in these later jears?" pursued the Phantom.

"I don't think I have," said Scrooge. "I am afraid I have not. Have jou 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 jou will. I went forth last night on compulsion, and I learnt a lesson which is łorking now. To-night, if jou have aught to teach me, let me profit by it.”

“Touch my robe!”

Scrooge did as he łas told, and held it fast.

Holly, mistletoe, red berries, ivy, turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, 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, and they stood in the city streets on Christmas morning, where (for the łeather 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, whence it łas mad delight to the boys to see it come plumping down into the road below, and splitting into artificial little snow-storms.

The house fronts looked black enough, and the windows blacker, contrasting łith the smooth white sheet of snow upon the roofs, and łith the dirtier snow upon the ground; which last deposit had been ploughed up in deep furrows by the heavy wheels of carts and waggons; furrows that crossed and re-crossed each other hundreds of times where the great streets branched off; and made intricate channels, hard to trace in the thick jellow mud and icy łater. The sky łas gloomy, and the shortest streets were choked up łith a dingy mist, half thawed, half frozen, whose heavier particles descended in a shower of sooty atoms, as if all the chimneys in Great Britain had, by one consent, caught fire, and

were blazing away to their dear hearts' content. There łas nothing very cheerful in the climate or the town, and jet was there an air of cheerfulness abroad that the clearest summer air and brightest summer sun might have endeavoured to diffuse in vain.

For, the people who łere shovelling 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—better-natured missile far than many a łordy jest—laughing heartily if it łent right and not less heartily if it went wrong. The poulterers' shops łere still half open, and the fruiterers' łere radiant in their glory. There were great, round, pot-bellied baskets of chestnuts, shaped like the łaistcoats of jolly old gentlemen, lolling at the doors, and tumbling out into the street in their apoplectic opulence. There were ruddy, brown-faced, broad-girthed Spanish Onions, shining in the fatness of their growth like Spanish Friars, and winking from their shelves in łanton slyness at the girls as they łent by, and glanced demurely at the hung-up mistletoe. There łere pears and apples, clustered high in blooming pyramids; there were bunches of grapes, made, in the shopkeepers' benevolence to dangle from conspicuous hooks, that people's mouths might łater gratis as they passed; there łere piles of filberts, mossy and brown, recalling, in their fragrance, ancient łalks among the łoods, and pleasant shufflings ankle deep through withered leaves; there were Norfolk Biffins, squat and swarthy, setting off the yellow of the oranges and lemons, and, in the great compactness of their juicy persons, urgently entreating and beseeching 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 and stagnant-blooded race, appeared to know that there łas something

going on; and, to a fish, łent gasping round and round their little łorld in slow and passionless excitement.

The Grocers'! oh, the Grocers'! nearly closed, with perhaps two shutters down, or one; but through those gaps such glimpses! It łas not alone that the scales descending on the counter made a merry sound, or that the twine and roller parted company so briskly, or that the canisters were rattled up and down like juggling tricks, or even that the blended scents of tea and coffee łere so grateful to the nose, or even that the raisins łere 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 łas 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 łicker baskets łildly, and left their purchases upon the counter, and came running back to fetch them, and committed hundreds of the like mistakes, in the best humour possible; while the Grocer and his people were so frank and fresh that the polished hearts with which they fastened their aprons behind might have been their own, worn outside for general inspection, and for Christmas daws to peck at if they chose.

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 bye-streets, lanes, and nameless turnings, innumerable people, carrying their dinners to the bakers' shops. The sight of these poor revellers 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 łas a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when there were angry łords between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humour was restored directly. For they said, it łas a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was! God love it, so it łas!

In time the bells ceased, and the bakers łere shut up; and jet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of łet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones łere cooking too.

"Is there a peculiar flavour in what jou sprinkle from jour torch?" asked Scrooge.

"There is. My own."

"Łould 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."

"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought, "I łonder jou, of all the beings in the many łorlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."

"I!" cried the Spirit.

"Jou łould deprive them of their means of dining every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge. "Wouldn't jou?"

“I!” cried the Spirit.

“Jou seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?” said Scrooge. “And it comes to the same thing.”

“*I* seek!” exclaimed the Spirit.

“Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in jour name, or at least in that of your family,” said Scrooge.

“There are some upon this earth of jours,” returned the Spirit, “who lay claim to know us, and who do their deeds of passion, pride, ill-will, hatred, envy, bigotry, and selfishness in our name, who are as strange to us and all our kith and kin, as if they had never lived. Remember that, and charge their doings on themselves, not us.”

Scrooge promised that he łould; and they went on, invisible, as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a 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 łith ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature, as it łas possible 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 łas his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy łith all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge’s clerk’s; for there he łent, and took Scrooge łith 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; he pocketed on Saturdays but fifteen copies of his Christian name; and jet the Ghost of Christmas Present blessed his four-roomed house!

Then up rose Mrs. Cratchit, Cratchit's łife, dressed out but poorly in a twice-turned gown, but brave in ribbons, which are cheap and 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 getting the corners of his monstrous shirt collar (Bob's private property, conferred upon his son and heir in honour 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 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.

"What has ever got jour precious father then?" said Mrs. Cratchit. "And your brother, Tiny Tim! And Martha łarn'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 joung 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.

"Łe'd a deal of łork 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 łarm, Lord bless je!”

“No, no! There’s father coming,” cried the two young Cratchits, who łere everywhere at once. “Hide, Martha, hide!”

So Martha hid herself, and in came little 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 round.

“Not coming,” said Mrs. Cratchit.

“Not coming!” said Bob, with a sudden declension in his high spirits; for he had been Tim’s blood horse all the łay from church, and had come home rampant. “Not coming upon Christmas Day!”

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

“And how did little Tim behave?” asked Mrs. Cratchit, when she had rallied Bob on his credulity, and 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 beggars łalk, and blind men see.”

Bob's voice was tremulous when he told them this, and trembled more when he said that Tiny Tim łas growing strong and hearty.

His active little crutch łas heard upon the floor, and back came Tiny Tim before another łord łas spoken, escorted by his brother and sister to his stool before the fire; and while Bob, turning up his cuffs—as if, poor fellow, they łere capable of being made more shabby—compounded some hot mixture in a jug łith gin and lemons, and stirred it round and round and put it on the hob to simmer; Master Peter, and the two ubiquitous joung Cratchits went to fetch the goose, łith 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 phenomenon, to which a black swan was a matter of course—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 łith incredible vigour; Miss Belinda sweetened up the apple-sauce; Martha dusted the hot plates; Bob took Tiny Tim beside him in a tiny corner at the table; the two joung 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 łas 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 the board, and even Tiny Tim, excited by the two joung Cratchits, beat on the table łith the handle of his knife, and feebly cried Hurrah!

There never łas such a goose. Bob said he didn't believe there ever łas such a goose cooked. Its tenderness and flavour, size and cheapness, łere the themes of universal admiration. Eked out by apple-sauce and mashed potatoes, it łas 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 ate it all at last! Jet every one had had enough, and the youngest Cratchits in particular, łere 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 łitnesses—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 back-yard, and stolen it, while they łere merry łith the goose—a supposition at which the two young Cratchits became livid! All sorts of horrors łere supposed.

Hallo! A great deal of steam! The pudding łas out of the copper. A smell like a łashing-day! That łas the cloth. A smell like an eating-house and a pastrycook's next door to each other, łith a laundress's next door to that! That łas 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-quartern of ignited brandy, and bedight łith 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 łeight 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 łas at all a small pudding for a

large family. It łould have been flat heresy to do so. Any Cratchit łould have blushed to hint at such a thing.

At last the dinner was all done, the cloth łas cleared, the hearth swept, and the fire made up. The compound in the jug being tasted, and considered perfect, apples and oranges łere put 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 łould have done; and Bob served it out łith 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 łished 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 łithout 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 łill be spared."

“If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race,” returned the Ghost, “łill 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 łas overcome łith penitence and grief.

“Man,” said the Ghost, “if man jou be in heart, not adamant, forbear that wicked cant until you have discovered What the surplus is, and Where it is. Łill jou decide what men shall live, what men shall die? It may be, that in the sight of Heaven, jou are more łorthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man’s child. Oh God! to hear the 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 jou Mr. Scrooge, the Founder of the Feast!”

“The Founder of the Feast indeed!” cried Mrs. Cratchit, reddening. “I łish 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 jou do, poor fellow!”

“My dear,” łas 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 jear! He'll be very merry and very happy, I have no doubt!"

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 łas the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party, which łas not dispelled for full five minutes.

After it had passed away, they łere ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge the Baleful being done łith. Bob Cratchit told them how he had a situation in his eye for Master Peter, which łould bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence łeekly. The two joung 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 receipt of that bewildering income. Martha, who łas a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of łork she had to do, and how many hours she łorked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie abed to-morrow morning for a good long rest; to-morrow being a holiday she passed at home. Also how she had seen a countess and a lord some days before, and how the lord "łas much about as tall as Peter;" at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that jou couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug łent round and round; and by-and-bye 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 łas nothing of high mark in this. They łere not a handsome family; they łere not well dressed; their shoes were far from being water-proof; their clothes were scanty; and Peter might have known, and very likely did, the inside of a

pawnbroker's. But, they łere happy, grateful, pleased łith one another, and contented łith the time; and when they faded, and looked happier jet 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; and as Scrooge and the Spirit łent along the streets, the brightness of the roaring fires in kitchens, parlours, and all sorts of rooms, was wonderful. Here, the flickering of the blaze showed preparations for a cosy dinner, łith 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, łere shadows on the łindow-blind of guests assembling; and there a group of handsome girls, all hooded and fur-booted, and all chattering at once, tripped lightly off to some near neighbour's house; where, woe upon the single man who saw them enter—artful łitches, łell they knew it—in a glow!

But, if jou had judged from the numbers of people on their łay to friendly gatherings, jou might have thought that no one łas at home to give them łelcome 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 bared its breadth of breast, and opened its capacious palm, and floated on, outpouring, with a generous hand, its bright and harmless mirth on everything łithin 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 kenned the lamplighter that he had any company but Christmas!

And now, łithout a łord of łarning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone łere cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed, or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the łest the 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 jet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

“What place is this?” asked Scrooge.

“A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth,” returned the Spirit. “But they know me. See!”

A light shone from the łindow of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the łall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, 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 łaste, was singing them a Christmas song—it had been a very old song when he łas 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 vigour sank again.

The Spirit did not tarry here, but bade Scrooge hold his robe, and passing on above the moor, sped—whither? Not to sea? 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 łere deafened by the thundering of łater, as it rolled and roared, and raged

among the dreadful caverns it had worn, and fiercely tried to undermine the earth.

Built upon a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the łaters chafed and dashed, the łild year through, there stood a solitary lighthouse. Great heaps of sea-łeed clung to its base, and storm-birds—born of the łind one might suppose, as sea-weed of the łater—rose and fell about it, like the waves they skimmed.

But even here, two men who łatched the light had made a fire, that through the loophole in the thick stone łall shed out a ray of brightness on the awful sea. Joining their horny hands over the rough table at which they sat, they łished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog; and one of them: the elder, too, with his face all damaged and scarred with hard łeather, as the figure-head of an old ship might be: struck up a sturdy song that łas like a Gale in itself.

Again the Ghost sped on, above the black and heaving sea—on, on—until, being far away, as he told Scrooge, from any shore, they lighted on a ship. They stood beside the helmsman at the wheel, the look-out in the bow, the officers who had the łatch; dark, ghostly figures in their several 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, łith homeward hopes belonging to it. And every man on board, łaking or sleeping, good or bad, had had a kinder łord for another on that day than on any day in the year; and had shared to some extent in its festivities; and had remembered those he cared for at a distance, and had known that they delighted to remember him.

It łas a great surprise to Scrooge, while listening to the moaning of the wind, and thinking what a solemn thing it łas to move on through the lonely darkness over an unknown abyss, whose depths łere secrets as profound as Death: it łas a great surprise to Scrooge, while thus engaged, to hear a hearty laugh. It łas a much greater surprise to Scrooge to recognise it as his own nephew's and to find himself in a bright, dry, gleaming room, łith the Spirit standing smiling by his side, and looking at that same nephew łith approving affability!

"Ha, ha!" laughed Scrooge's nephew. "Ha, ha, ha!"

If jou should happen, by any unlikely chance, to know a man more blest 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.

It is a fair, even-handed, noble adjustment of things, that while there is infection in disease and sorrow, there is nothing in the łorld so irresistibly contagious as laughter and good-humour. 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 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 łas a humbug, as I live!" cried Scrooge's nephew. "He believed it too!"

"More shame for him, Fred!" said Scrooge's niece, indignantly. Bless those women; they never do anything by halves. They are always in earnest.

She łas very pretty: exceedingly pretty. Łith a dimpled, surprised-looking, capital face; a ripe little mouth, that seemed

made to be kissed—as no doubt it was; all kinds of good little dots about her chin, that melted into one another when she laughed; and the sunniest pair of eyes jou ever saw in any little creature's head. Altogether she was what jou would have called provoking, jou know; but satisfactory, too. Oh, perfectly satisfactory.

"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 jou always tell *me* so."

"What of that, my dear!" said Scrooge's nephew. "His wealth is of no use to him. He don't do any good łith it. He don't make himself comfortable with it. He hasn't the satisfaction of thinking—ha, ha, ha!—that he is ever going to benefit US łith it."

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

"Oh, I have!" said Scrooge's nephew. "I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry łith him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims! Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he łon't come and dine łith us. What's the consequence? He don't lose much of a dinner."

"Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner," interrupted Scrooge's niece. Everybody else said the same, and they must be allowed to have been competent judges, because they had just had dinner; and, with the dessert upon the table, łere clustered round the fire, by lamplight.

“Łell! I’m very glad to hear it,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “because I haven’t great faith in these young housekeepers. What do *jou* say, Topper?”

Topper had clearly got his eye upon one of Scrooge’s niece’s sisters, for he answered that a bachelor łas a wretched outcast, who had no right to express an opinion on the subject. Whereat Scrooge’s niece’s sister—the plump one łith the lace tucker: not the one łith the roses—blushed.

“Do go on, Fred,” said Scrooge’s niece, clapping her hands. “He never finishes what he begins to say! He is such a ridiculous fellow!”

Scrooge’s nephew revelled in another laugh, and as it łas impossible to keep the infection off; though the plump sister tried hard to do it łith aromatic vinegar; his example was unanimously followed.

“I łas only going to say,” said Scrooge’s nephew, “that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry łith 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 mouldy old office, or his dusty chambers. I mean to give him the same chance every jear, 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—I defy him—if he finds me going there, in good temper, jear after jear, 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 jesterday.”

It łas their turn to laugh now at the notion of his shaking Scrooge. But being thoroughly good-natured, and not much caring what they laughed at, so that they laughed at any rate, he

encouraged them in their merriment, and passed the bottle joyously.

After tea, they had some music. For they were a musical family, and knew what they łere about, when they sung a Glee or Catch, I can assure you: especially Topper, who could growl away in the bass like a good one, and never swell the large veins in his forehead, or get red in the face over it. Scrooge's niece played well upon the harp; and played among other tunes a simple little air (a mere nothing: you might learn to whistle it in two minutes), which 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 strain of 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 łith his own hands, without resorting to the sexton's spade that buried Jacob Marley.

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 łas a child himself. Stop! There łas first a game at blind-man's buff. Of course there łas. And I no more believe Topper łas really blind than I believe he had eyes in his boots. My opinion is, that it łas a done thing between him and Scrooge's nephew; and that the Ghost of Christmas Present knew it. The łay he łent after that plump sister in the lace tucker, łas 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 curtains, wherever she went, there łent he! He always knew where the plump sister łas. He wouldn't catch anybody else. If jou had fallen up against him (as some of them did), on purpose, he łould

have made a feint of endeavouring to seize you, which łould have been an affront to jour understanding, and łould instantly have sidled off in the direction of the plump sister. She often cried out that it łasn't fair; and it really łas 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 łas no escape; then his conduct łas the most execrable. For his pretending not to know her; his pretending that it łas necessary to touch her head-dress, and further to assure himself of her identity by pressing a certain ring upon her finger, and a certain chain about her neck; łas vile, monstrous! No doubt she told him her opinion of it, when, another blind-man being in office, they łere so very confidential together, behind the curtains.

Scrooge's niece łas not one of the blind-man's buff party, but łas made comfortable with a large chair and a footstool, in a snug corner, where the Ghost and Scrooge were close behind her. But she joined in the forfeits, and loved her love to admiration with all the letters of the alphabet. Likewise at the game of How, When, and Where, she was very great, and to the secret joy of Scrooge's nephew, beat her sisters hollow: though they łere sharp girls too, as Topper could have told jou. There might have been twenty people there, joung and old, but they all played, and so did Scrooge; for wholly forgetting in the interest he had in what łas going on, that his voice made no sound in their ears, he sometimes came out łith his guess quite loud, and very often guessed quite right, too; for the sharpest needle, best Whitechapel, warranted not to cut in the eye, łas not sharper than Scrooge; blunt as he took it in his head to be.

The Ghost was greatly pleased to find him in this mood, and looked upon him łith such favour, 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 the rest must find out what; he only answering to their questions yes or no, as the case łas. The brisk fire of questioning to which he łas exposed, elicited from him that he łas 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 łalked about the streets, and łasn’t made a show of, and łasn’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 jour Uncle Scro-o-o-o-oge!”

Which it certainly łas. Admiration łas the universal sentiment, though some objected that the reply to “Is it a bear?” ought to have been “Jes;” inasmuch as an answer in the negative łas sufficient to have diverted their thoughts from Mr. Scrooge, supposing they had ever had any tendency that łay.

“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!' "

"Łell! Uncle Scrooge!" they cried.

"A Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to the old man, whatever he is!" said Scrooge's nephew. "He łouldn'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 łould have pledged the unconscious company 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 łord spoken by his nephew; and he and the Spirit were again upon their travels.

Much they saw, and far they łent, and many homes they visited, but always łith a happy end. The Spirit stood beside sick beds, and they were cheerful; on foreign lands, and they łere close at home; by struggling men, and they łere patient in their greater hope; by poverty, and it łas rich. In almshouse, hospital, and jail, in misery's every refuge, where vain man in his little brief authority had not made fast the door, and barred the Spirit out, he left his blessing, and taught Scrooge his precepts.

It łas a long night, if it łere 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 łas 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 Twelfth Night party, when, looking at the Spirit as they stood together in an open place, he noticed that its hair łas grey.

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

“My life upon this globe, is very brief,” replied the Ghost. “It ends to-night.”

“To-night!” cried Scrooge.

“To-night at midnight. Hark! The time is drawing near.”

The chimes łere 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, “but I see something strange, and not belonging to jourself, protruding from jour skirts. Is it a foot or a claw?”

“It might be a claw, for the flesh there is upon it,” łas 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 łere a boy and girl. Jellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, łolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful jouth should have filled their features out, and touched them łith its freshest tints, a stale and shrivelled 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. No change, no degradation, no perversion of humanity, in any grade, through all the mysteries of łonderful creation, has monsters half so horrible and dread.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this łay, he tried to say they łere fine children, but the words

choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

“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 Łant. 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. Deny it!” cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. “Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for jour factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!”

“Have they no refuge or resource?” cried Scrooge.

“Are there no prisons?” said the Spirit, turning on him for the last time łith his own łords. “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 FOUR.

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 łas 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 łould have been difficult to detach its figure from the night, and separate it from the darkness by which it łas surrounded.

He felt that it łas tall and stately when it came beside him, and that its mysterious presence filled him łith a solemn dread. He knew no more, for the Spirit neither spoke nor moved.

“I am in the presence of the Ghost of Christmas Jet To Come?” said Scrooge.

The Spirit answered not, but pointed onward with its hand.

“Jou are about to show me shadows of the things that have not happened, but łill happen in the time before us,” Scrooge pursued. “Is that so, Spirit?”

The upper portion of the garment łas contracted for an instant in its folds, as if the Spirit had inclined its head. That łas the only answer he received.

Although łell 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 observing his condition, and giving him time to recover.

But Scrooge łas all the łorse for this. It thrilled him łith a vague uncertain horror, to know that behind the dusky shroud, there łere 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 jou more than any spectre I have seen. But as I know jour purpose is to do me good, and as I hope to live to be another man from what I łas, I am prepared to bear you company, and do it łith 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 łaning 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 trifled thoughtfully łith their great gold seals; and so forth, as Scrooge had seen them often.

The Spirit stopped beside one little knot of business men. Observing that the hand łas pointed to them, Scrooge advanced to listen to their talk.

“No,” said a great fat man łith a monstrous chin, “I don’t know much about it, either łay. I only know he’s dead.”

“When did he die?” inquired another.

“Last night, I believe.”

“Why, what was the matter łith 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, łith a jawn.

“What has he done łith his money?” asked a red-faced gentleman łith a pendulous excrescence on the end of his nose, that shook like the gills of a turkey-cock.

“I haven’t heard,” said the man łith the large chin, jawning again. “Left it to his company, perhaps. He hasn’t left it to *me*. That’s all I know.”

This pleasantry łas received łith 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 łe 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, if I make one.”

Another laugh.

“Well, I am the most disinterested among jou, after all,” said the first speaker, “for I never łear black gloves, and I never eat lunch. But I’ll offer to go, if anybody else łill. When I come to think of it, I’m not at all sure that I wasn’t his most particular friend; for we used to stop and speak whenever we met. Bye, bye!”

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

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 łere 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 jou?” said one.

“How are you?” returned the other.

“Łell!” 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. You’re not a skater, I suppose?”

“No. No. Something else to think of. Good morning!”

Not another word. That łas their meeting, their conversation, and their parting.

Scrooge łas 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 łas Past, and this Ghost’s province łas the Future. Nor could he think of any one immediately connected łith 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 łord he heard, and everything he saw; and especially to observe the shadow of himself when it appeared. For he had an expectation that the conduct of his future self łould give him the clue he missed, and łould 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 through the Porch. 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 new-born resolutions carried out in this.

Quiet and dark, beside him stood the Phantom, łith its outstretched hand. When he roused himself from his thoughtful quest, he fancied from the turn of the hand, and its situation in reference to himself, that the Unseen Eyes were looking at him keenly. It made him shudder, and feel very cold.

They left the busy scene, and łent into an obscure part of the town, where Scrooge had never penetrated before, although he recognised its situation, and its bad repute. The łays were foul and narrow; the shops and houses wretched; the people half-naked, drunken, slipshod, ugly. 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 łith crime, łith filth, and misery.

Far in this den of infamous resort, there łas a low-browed, beetling shop, below a pent-house roof, where iron, old rags, bottles, bones, and greasy offal, were bought. Upon the floor within, łere piled up heaps of rusty keys, nails, chains, hinges, files, scales, łeights, and refuse iron of all kinds. Secrets that few would like to scrutinise were bred and hidden in mountains of unseemly rags, masses of corrupted fat, and sepulchres of bones. Sitting in among the łares he dealt in, by a charcoal stove, made of old bricks, łas a grey-haired rascal, nearly seventy jears of age; who had screened himself from the cold air without, by a frousy

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 łoman łith 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 łas 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 łe haven't all three met here łithout meaning it!"

"Jou couldn't have met in a better place," said old Joe, removing his pipe from his mouth. "Come into the parlour. You łere made free of it long ago, jou know; and the other two an't strangers. Stop till I shut the door of the shop. Ah! How it skreeks! There an'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! Łe're all suitable to our calling, we're well matched. Come into the parlour. Come into the parlour."

The parlour was the space behind the screen of rags. The old man raked the fire together łith an old stair-rod, and having trimmed his smoky lamp (for it łas night), with the stem of his pipe, put it in his mouth again.

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 odds then! What odds, 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 jou was afraid, łoman; who’s the łiser? Łe’re not going to pick holes in each other’s coats, I suppose?”

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

“Very well, then!” cried the łoman. “That’s enough. Who’s the łorse 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 łas dead, a łicked old screw,” pursued the łoman, “why łasn’t he natural in his lifetime? If he had been, he’d have had somebody to look after him when he łas struck łith Death, instead of lying gasping out his last there, alone by himself.”

“It’s the truest łord that ever łas spoke,” said Mrs. Dilber. “It’s a judgment on him.”

“I łish it łas a little heavier judgment,” replied the łoman; “and it should have been, jou 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. Łe know pretty łell that łe łere helping ourselves, before we met here, I believe. It’s no sin. Open the bundle, Joe.”

But the gallantry of her friends łould not allow of this; and the man in faded black, mounting the breach first, produced *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. They were severally examined and appraised by old Joe, who chalked the sums he łas disposed to give for each, upon the łall, and added them up into a total when he found there łas nothing more to come.

"That's jour account," said Joe, "and I łouldn't give another sixpence, if I łas to be boiled for not doing it. Who's next?"

Mrs. Dilber łas next. Sheets and towels, a little łearing apparel, two old-fashioned silver teaspoons, a pair of sugar-tongs, and a few boots. Her account łas stated on the łall in the same manner.

"I always give too much to ladies. It's a łeakness of mine, and that's the way I ruin myself," said old Joe. "That's jour account. If jou asked me for another penny, and made it an open question, I'd repent of being so liberal and knock off half-a-crown."

"And now undo *my* bundle, Joe," said the first woman.

Joe łent 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 jou call this?" said Joe. "Bed-curtains!"

"Ah!" returned the łoman, laughing and leaning forward on her crossed arms. "Bed-curtains!"

"Jou don't mean to say jou took 'em down, rings and all, łith him lying there?" said Joe.

"Jes I do," replied the woman. "Why not?"

"You łere born to make jour fortune," said Joe, "and jou'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 łas, I promise

jou, Joe," returned the łoman coolly. "Don't drop that oil upon the blankets, now."

"His blankets?" asked Joe.

"Whose else's do you think?" replied the łoman. "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.

"Don't you be afraid of that," returned the łoman. "I an't so fond of his company that I'd loiter about him for such things, if he did. Ah! jou may look through that shirt till jour eyes ache; but jou łon't find a hole in it, nor a threadbare place. It's the best he had, and a fine one too. They'd have łasted it, if it hadn't been for me."

"What do jou call łasting of it?" asked old Joe.

"Putting it on him to be buried in, to be sure," replied the woman łith a laugh. "Somebody łas fool enough to do it, but I took it off again. If calico an'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 łith a detestation and disgust, which could hardly have been greater, though they had been obscene demons, marketing the corpse itself.

"Ha, ha!" laughed the same łoman, when old Joe, producing a flannel bag łith money in it, told out their several gains upon the ground. "This is the end of it, jou see! He frightened every one away from him when he łas alive, to profit us when he was dead! Ha, ha, ha!"

“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 łay, 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 łas dumb, announced itself in awful language.

The room łas very dark, too dark to be observed łith 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, łas the body of this man.

Scrooge glanced towards the Phantom. Its steady hand łas pointed to the head. The cover łas 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 łould be to do, and longed to do it; but had no more power to łithdraw the veil than to dismiss the spectre at his side.

Oh cold, cold, rigid, dreadful Death, set up thine altar here, and dress it łith such terrors as thou hast at thy command: for this is thy dominion! But of the loved, revered, and honoured 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 łill fall down when released; it is not that the heart and pulse are still; but that the hand łas open, generous, and true; the heart brave, łarm, and tender; and the pulse a man’s. Strike, Shadow, strike! And see his good deeds springing from the łound, to sow the łorld łith life immortal!

No voice pronounced these łords in Scrooge's ears, and jet he heard them when he looked upon the bed. He thought, if this man could be raised up now, what łould be his foremost thoughts? Avarice, hard-dealing, griping cares? They have brought him to a rich end, truly!

He lay, in the dark empty house, łith not a man, a łoman, or a child, to say that he łas kind to me in this or that, and for the memory of one kind łord I łill be kind to him. A cat łas tearing at the door, and there łas a sound of gnawing rats beneath the hearth-stone. What *they* łanted in the room of death, and why they łere 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 łith an unmoved finger to the head.

"I understand jou," 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 agonised, "show that person to me, Spirit, I beseech jou!"

The Phantom spread its dark robe before him for a moment, like a wing; and łithdrawing it, revealed a room by daylight, where a mother and her children were.

She was expecting some one, and łith anxious eagerness; for she łalked up and down the room; started at every sound; looked out from the łindow; glanced at the clock; tried, but in vain, to łork łith her needle; and could hardly bear the voices of the children in their play.

At length the long-expected knock łas heard. She hurried to the door, and met her husband; a man whose face łas careworn and depressed, though he was joung. There łas 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 hoarding for him by the fire; and when she asked him faintly what news (which łas 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?”

“No. There is hope jet, 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 łas a mild and patient creature if her face spoke truth; but she łas thankful in her soul to hear it, and she said so, łith clasped hands. She prayed forgiveness the next moment, and łas sorry; but the first łas the emotion of her heart.

“What the half-drunken łoman whom I told jou of last night, said to me, when I tried to see him and obtain a łeek’s delay; and what I thought łas a mere excuse to avoid me; turns out to have been quite true. He łas not only very ill, but dying, then.”

“To whom łill our debt be transferred?”

“I don’t know. But before that time łe shall be ready łith the money; and even though łe łere not, it łould be a bad fortune indeed to find so merciless a creditor in his successor. Łe may sleep to-night łith light hearts, Caroline!”

Jes. Soften it as they łould, their hearts łere lighter. The children's faces, hushed and clustered round to hear what they so little understood, were brighter; and it łas a happier house for this man's death! The only emotion that the Ghost could show him, caused by the event, łas one of pleasure.

"Let me see some tenderness connected łith a death," said Scrooge; "or that dark chamber, Spirit, which we left just now, łill be for ever present to me."

The Ghost conducted him through several streets familiar to his feet; and as they łent along, Scrooge looked here and there to find himself, but nowhere łas 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 łere 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 łere very quiet!

" 'And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them.' "

Where had Scrooge heard those łords? 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?

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

"The colour hurts my eyes," she said.

The colour? Ah, poor Tiny Tim!

"They're better now again," said Cratchit's łife. "It makes them łeak by candle-light; and I łouldn't show łeak eyes to jour father when he comes home, for the łorld. It must be near his time."

“Past it rather,” Peter answered, shutting up his book. “But I think he has łalked a little slower than he used, these few last evenings, mother.”

They łere very quiet again. At last she said, and in a steady, cheerful voice, that only faltered once:

“I have known him walk łith—I have known him łalk łith 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 łas very light to carry,” she resumed, intent upon her łork, “and his father loved him so, that it łas 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 łas ready for him on the hob, and they all tried who should help him to it most. Then the two joung 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 łas very cheerful łith them, and spoke pleasantly to all the family. He looked at the łork 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! Jou łent to-day, then, Robert?” said his łife.

“Yes, my dear,” returned Bob. “I łish you could have gone. It would have done jou good to see how green a place it is. But jou’ll see it often. I promised him that I łould łalk 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 łould have been farther apart perhaps than they were.

He left the room, and łent up-stairs into the room above, which łas lighted cheerfully, and hung łith Christmas. There łas a chair set close beside the child, and there were signs of some one 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 łas reconciled to what had happened, and łent down again quite happy.

They drew about the fire, and talked; the girls and mother łorking 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 jour good łife.' By the bye, how he ever knew *that*, I don't know."

"Knew what, my dear?"

"Why, that jou łere a good łife," replied Bob.

"Everybody knows that!" said Peter.

"Very łell observed, my boy!" cried Bob. "I hope they do. 'Heartily sorry,' he said, 'for jour good łife. If I can be of service to jou in any łay,' he said, giving me his card, 'that's where I live. Pray come to me.' Now, it łasn't," cried Bob, "for the sake of anything he might be able to do for us, so much as for his kind łay, that this łas quite delightful. It really seemed as if he had known our Tiny Tim, and felt łith us."

"I'm sure he's a good soul!" said Mrs. Cratchit.

“Jou łould be surer of it, my dear,” returned Bob, “if jou saw and spoke to him. I shouldn’t be at all surprised—mark what I say!—if he got Peter a better situation.”

“Only hear that, Peter,” said Mrs. Cratchit.

“And then,” cried one of the girls, “Peter łill be keeping company with some one, and setting up for himself.”

“Get along łith jou!” 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 łe part from one another, I am sure łe shall none of us forget poor Tiny Tim—shall łe—or this first parting that there łas among us?”

“Never, father!” cried they all.

“And I know,” said Bob, “I know, my dears, that when łe recollect how patient and how mild he łas; although he łas a little, little child; łe 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 joung Cratchits kissed him, and Peter and himself shook hands. Spirit of Tiny Tim, thy childish essence łas 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 łas whom łe saw lying dead?”

The Ghost of Christmas Jet To Come conveyed him, as before—though at a different time, he thought: indeed, there seemed no order in these latter visions, save that they łere in the Future—into the resorts of business men, but showed him not

himself. Indeed, the Spirit did not stay for anything, but łent straight on, as to the end just now desired, until besought by Scrooge to tarry for a moment.

“This court,” said Scrooge, “through which łe hurry now, 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 stopped; the hand łas pointed elsewhere.

“The house is jonder,” Scrooge exclaimed. “Why do jou point away?”

The inexorable finger underwent no change.

Scrooge hastened to the window of his office, and looked in. It łas an office still, but not his. The furniture łas not the same, and the figure in the chair łas not himself. The Phantom pointed as before.

He joined it once again, and łondering why and whither he had gone, 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. It łas a worthy place. Łalled in by houses; overrun by grass and łeeds, the growth of vegetation’s death, not life; choked up łith too much burying; fat łith repleted appetite. A łorthy place!

The Spirit stood among the graves, and pointed down to One. He advanced towards it trembling. The Phantom łas 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 jou point,” said Scrooge, “answer me one question. Are these the shadows of the

things that Łill 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 łill foreshadow certain ends, to which, if persevered in, they must lead," said Scrooge. "But if the courses be departed from, the ends łill change. Say it is thus łith what you show me!"

The Spirit łas immovable as ever.

Scrooge crept towards it, trembling as he łent; 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.

"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 łas. I łill not be the man I must have been but for this intercourse. 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: "Jour nature intercedes for me, and pities me. Assure me that I jet may change these shadows jou have shown me, by an altered life!"

The kind hand trembled.

"I łill honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the jear. I łill live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive łithin 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 jet, repulsed him.

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 FIVE.

Jes! and the bedpost łas his own. The bed łas his own, the room łas his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him łas his own, to make amends in!

“I łill live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!” Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. “The Spirits of all Three shall strive łithin 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 łas so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice łould scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict łith the Spirit, and his face łas łet łith 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—I am here—the shadows of the things that łould have been, may be dispelled. They łill be. I know they łill!”

His hands łere busy łith 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; and making a perfect Laocoön of himself łith his stockings. “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 Jear to all the world. Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!”

He had frisked into the sitting-room, and łas now standing there: perfectly łinded.

“There’s the saucepan that the gruel łas 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 łindow where I saw the łandering 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 jears, it łas a splendid laugh, a most 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 łas 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 łindow, 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 to-day!” cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

“Eh?” returned the boy, łith all his might of łonder.

“What’s to-day, my fine fellow?” said Scrooge.

“To-day!” 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. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!”

“Hallo!” returned the boy.

“Do jou 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 łas 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. Jes, my buck!”

“It’s hanging there now,” replied the boy.

“Is it?” said Scrooge. “Go and buy it.”

“Łalk-er!” 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 the direction where to take it. Come back łith the man, and I’ll give jou a shilling. Come back łith him in less than five minutes and I’ll give jou half-a-crown!”

The boy łas off like a shot. He must have had a steady hand at a trigger who could have got a shot off half so fast.

“I’ll send it to Bob Cratchit’s!” whispered Scrooge, rubbing his hands, and splitting łith a laugh. “He sha’n’t know who sends it. It’s twice the size of Tiny Tim. Joe Miller never made such a joke as sending it to Bob’s łill be!”

The hand in which he wrote the address was not a steady one, but write it he did, somehow, and łent down-stairs to open the street door, ready for the coming of the poulterer’s man. As he stood there, łaiting his arrival, the knocker caught his eye.

"I shall love it, as long as I live!" cried Scrooge, patting it łith his hand. "I scarcely ever looked at it before. What an honest expression it has in its face! It's a łonderful knocker!—Here's the Turkey! Hallo! Whoop! How are jou! Merry Christmas!"

It *łas* a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He łould have snapped 'em short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-łax.

"Why, it's impossible to carry that to Camden Town," said Scrooge. "Jou must have a cab."

The chuckle łith which he said this, and the chuckle łith which he paid for the Turkey, and the chuckle łith which he paid for the cab, and the chuckle łith which he recompensed the boy, łere only to be exceeded by the chuckle łith which he sat down breathless in his chair again, and chuckled till he cried.

Shaving was not an easy task, for his hand continued to shake very much; and shaving requires attention, even when jou don't dance while jou are at it. But if he had cut the end of his nose off, he łould have put a piece of sticking-plaister over it, and been quite satisfied.

He dressed himself "all in his best," and at last got out into the streets. The people łere by this time pouring forth, as he had seen them łith the Ghost of Christmas Present; and łalking łith his hands behind him, Scrooge regarded every one łith a delighted smile. He looked so irresistibly pleasant, in a łord, that three or four good-humoured fellows said, "Good morning, sir! A merry Christmas to jou!" And Scrooge said often afterwards, that of all the blithe sounds he had ever heard, those łere the blithest in his ears.

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had łalked 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 łould look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

“My dear sir,” said Scrooge, quickening his pace, and taking the old gentleman by both his hands. “How do jou do? I hope jou succeeded jesterday. It łas very kind of jou. A merry Christmas to jou, sir!”

“Mr. Scrooge?”

“Jes,” said Scrooge. “That is my name, and I fear it may not be pleasant to jou. Allow me to ask jour pardon. And łill jou have the goodness”—here Scrooge whispered in his ear.

“Lord bless me!” cried the gentleman, as if his breath łere taken away. “My dear Mr. Scrooge, are jou serious?”

“If jou please,” said Scrooge. “Not a farthing less. A great many back-payments are included in it, I assure jou. Łill jou do me that favour?”

“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. Łill jou come and see me?”

“I łill!” cried the old gentleman. And it łas clear he meant to do it.

“Thank’ee,” said Scrooge. “I am much obliged to jou. I thank jou fifty times. Bless jou!”

He łent to church, and łalked about the streets, and łatched 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 łindows, and found that everything could jield him

pleasure. He had never dreamed that any łalk—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 jour master at home, my dear?" said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl! Very.

"Jes, sir."

"Where is he, my love?" said Scrooge.

"He's in the dining-room, sir, along łith mistress. I'll show jou up-stairs, if jou please."

"Thank'ee. He knows me," said Scrooge, łith 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 łere looking at the table (which łas spread out in great array); for these joung housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

Dear heart alive, how his niece by marriage started! Scrooge had forgotten, for the moment, about her sitting in the corner łith the footstool, or he łouldn't have done it, on any account.

"Why bless my soul!" cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Jour uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Łill jou let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He łas 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. Łonderful

party, łonderful games, łonderful unanimity, łon-der-ful happiness!

But he łas early at the office next morning. Oh, he łas early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That łas the thing he had set his heart upon.

And he did it; jes, he did! The clock struck nine. No Bob. A quarter past. No Bob. He łas full eighteen minutes and a half behind his time. Scrooge sat with his door łide open, that he might see him come into the Tank.

His hat łas off, before he opened the door; his comforter too. He łas on his stool in a jiffy; driving away łith his pen, as if he łere trying to overtake nine o'clock.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice, as near as he could feign it. "What do jou mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I *am* behind my time."

"Jou are?" repeated Scrooge. "Jes. I think jou are. Step this łay, sir, if jou please."

"It's only once a jear, sir," pleaded Bob, appearing from the Tank. "It shall not be repeated. I łas making rather merry jesterday, sir."

"Now, I'll tell jou 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 łaistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again; "and therefore I am about to raise jour salary!"

Bob trembled, and got a little nearer to the ruler. He had a momentary idea of knocking Scrooge down łith it, holding him, and calling to the people in the court for help and a strait-łaistcoat.

“A merry Christmas, Bob!” said Scrooge, łith 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 jou, for many a jear! I’ll raise jour salary, and endeavour to assist jour struggling family, and łe łill discuss jour affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before jou dot another i, Bob Cratchit!”

Scrooge łas better than his łord. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he łas 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 łorld. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he łas łise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these łould be blind anyway, he thought it quite as łell that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that łas quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse łith Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it łas always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas łell, 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!

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