

Copyrighted Material

COLLINS
CLASSICS



CHARLES DICKENS
A Christmas Carol

Copyrighted Material

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Charles Dickens

COLLINS
CLASSICS

Harper Press
An imprint of HarperCollins *Publishers*
1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF

This edition published 2013

Charles Dickens asserts the moral right to be
identified as the author of this work

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN-13: 978-0-00-735086-5

Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon CR0 4YY

Find out more about HarperCollins and the environment at
www.harpercollins.co.uk/green

Life & Times section © HarperCollins *Publishers* Ltd
Gerard Cheshire asserts his moral rights as author of the Life & Times section
Classic Literature: Words and Phrases adapted from
Collins English Dictionary
Typesetting in Kalix by Palimpsest Book Production Limited,
Falkirk, Stirlingshire

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means,
electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade
or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the
publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that
in which it is published and without a similar condition including
this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

History of Collins

In 1819, Millworker William Collins from Glasgow, Scotland, set up a company for printing and publishing pamphlets, sermons, hymn books and prayer books. That company was Collins and was to mark the birth of HarperCollins Publishers as we know it today. The long tradition of Collins dictionary publishing can be traced back to the first dictionary William published in 1824, *Greek and English Lexicon*. Indeed, from 1840 onwards, he began to produce illustrated dictionaries and even obtained a licence to print and publish the Bible.

Soon after, William published the first Collins novel, *Ready Reckoner*, however it was the time of the Long Depression, where harvests were poor, prices were high, potato crops had failed and violence was erupting in Europe. As a result, many factories across the country were forced to close down and William chose to retire in 1846, partly due to the hardships he was facing.

Aged 30, William's son, William II took over the business. A keen humanitarian with a warm heart and a generous spirit, William II was truly 'Victorian' in his outlook. He introduced new, up-to-date steam presses and published affordable editions of Shakespeare's works and *Pilgrim's Progress*, making them available to the masses for the first time. A new demand for educational books meant that success came with the publication of travel books, scientific books, encyclopaedias and dictionaries. This demand to be educated led to the later publication of atlases and Collins also held the monopoly on scripture writing at the time.

In the 1860s Collins began to expand and diversify and the idea of 'books for the millions' was developed. Affordable editions of classical literature were published and in 1903 Collins introduced 10 titles in their Collins Handy Illustrated Pocket

CHARLES DICKENS

Novels. These proved so popular that a few years later this had increased to an output of 50 volumes, selling nearly half a million in their year of publication. In the same year, The Everyman's Library was also instituted, with the idea of publishing an affordable library of the most important classical works, biographies, religious and philosophical treatments, plays, poems, travel and adventure. This series eclipsed all competition at the time and the introduction of paperback books in the 1950s helped to open that market and marked a high point in the industry.

HarperCollins is and has always been a champion of the classics and the current Collins Classics series follows in this tradition – publishing classical literature that is affordable and available to all. Beautifully packaged, highly collectible and intended to be reread and enjoyed at every opportunity.

Life & Times

About the Author

Charles Dickens was born in Portsmouth, England, but had moved to Kent and then to London by the time he was ten years of age. Not long afterwards, his father was arrested and sent to debtors prison for spending beyond his means. This marked a transition in Dickens' early life from one of carefree childhood to one filled with relative uncertainty. Above all, Dickens began to ferment ideas of social injustice and a need for social reform in pre-Victorian Britain. These ideas would become the staple of his literary cannon.

He was first published in 1833 at the age of 21. By the time of his death, in 1870, he had completed nineteen (and a half) novels. His final work, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was only half completed. All of Dickens novels were first published in serialized form, which was the orthodox method in his day.

While other writers tended to complete their books first and then divide them into chapters for serialization, Dickens preferred to write his chapters as and when required. This lent itself to his success, because it meant that his prose was naturally tailored to the format of monthly instalments. Rather than having hiatuses randomly placed in the overall storyline, according to page counts, Dickens was able to deliberately leave the reader wanting more. In essence he had invented the concept of the literary cliff-hanger. Combined with his enhanced characterizations and fabulist allegory this made for a compelling read, so Dickens became the single most popular author in Victorian Britain.

By his forties, Dickens had taken to touring and giving animated readings of his books to captive audiences, who delighted in his ability to bring his characters to life. This was an extension of the storytelling craft he had learnt as a parent, as he had ten children with his wife Catherine, whom he married in 1836.

As well as being a humanistic novelist, Dickens was also a humanitarian in real life. For example, he gave his support to the abolition of slavery in the USA and helped to establish a home of the redemption for 'fallen' women in England, which meant those women who had resorted to crime and prostitution to find their way in life, but

CHARLES DICKENS

had ended up in debtors' prisons, common prisons or workhouses.

A hostel named Urania Cottage was established in London, where these women were given a second chance. They were clothed and fed, provided with education and taught the skills to be able to find domestic employment.

Needless to say, Dickens rubbed shoulders with many extreme characters due to his work with the 'fallen' in society. Due to his celebrity, he also met many people at the other end of the spectrum, so there was no shortage of people upon whom to base his fictitious characters.

In 1865 Dickens was involved in a rail crash at Staplehurst, Kent, in which ten people died and many more were injured. Dickens was not hurt but his efforts to help the injured and dying left him with post traumatic stress disorder for the remaining five years of his life. On that fateful day he had been travelling with his lover, Ellen Ternan. Dickens had separated from his wife in 1858 when Catherine found out about his affair with the younger woman, who was 18 years his junior. He managed to keep Ellen a secret from society by never appearing in public with her and keeping her hidden in houses rented under false names. He knew very well that Victorian society would not have held a favourable view of his domestic arrangements. His infidelity would have caused an absolute scandal, especially as he was viewed as a highly virtuous and moralistic man. Falling in love with another was simply not acceptable behaviour, especially as Queen Victoria had remained steadfastly loyal to the memory of her beloved Prince Albert since his demise in 1861 and would continue to do so until her own death in 1901.

Dickens died of a stroke exactly five years following the rail crash at the age of 58 years old. He wished to be buried in a modest and private manner, but his funeral was a rather grand affair at Westminster Abbey.

The Victorian Era

The work of Charles Dickens is rather unusual in that it has become something of a social document of the Victorian era in Britain. That is because his books are a primary point of reference to anyone wondering about what it was like to have lived at that time.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Consequently, Dickens' imagined Victorian world is largely perceived by many as a real world, filled with exaggerated characters in extreme circumstances. The result is an odd set of paradoxes. For example, the Victorians are generally understood to have been austere and pious in the extreme, but the truth is that they lived in a highly progressive society where people were pushing the boundaries of behaviour and questioning the role of religion.

Dickens' version of Victorian society came from his requirement for idiosyncratic characters to make his stories work more effectively in evoking emotional responses in the reader. It is fair to assume that they were based on the personalities of people he had met, so there was an element of truth, but Dickens' boiled them down to amplify the traits he was most interested in and remove the traits superfluous to literary requirements. In effect, Dickens' Victorian world is a cartoon, where the more mundane, mediocre and prosaic details serve only as a neutral backdrop, while the colourful characters are allowed to distract the attention.

It can be no coincidence that Dickens himself was an accomplished performer. He was the William Shakespeare of the Victorian age, both writing and taking to the stage as a storyteller. This makes it easy to understand why his characters had such pronounced identities, because Dickens would mentally assume different roles whilst story telling, both on paper and when treading the boards.

As any parent or teacher will attest, it is quite necessary to exaggerate characters with gestures and voices while story telling to capture the imagination of the audience and leave no confusion about who is who. This is exactly what Dickens was doing, so that his version of the Victorian world became one of overblown polarity: villains and do-gooders, the devout and the morally fallen, the wealthy and the poor, the beautiful and the ugly, the selfish and the selfless. Those who fall 'somewhere between' truly are the silent majority in Dickensian Britain.

Themes of the Book

A Christmas Carol was published in 1843, a mere six years after Queen Victoria came to the throne. At that time there was a feeling that the moral fibre of society was disintegrating due to a lapse in

CHARLES DICKENS

Christian values. The central character, Ebenezer Scrooge, is a wealthy but mean-fisted curmudgeon of a man and it is clear that Dickens blames his secularism for his disposition.

The plot is quite a simple one, seeing Scrooge visited by three ghosts, who cause him to see the error of his ways and redeem himself in time for Christmas. First he is visited by the ghost of Christmas past, so that he recalls his own childhood Christmases with friends and family. Having been softened by the memories of his youth, he is then visited by the ghost of Christmas present, so that he realises what a joyless skinflint he has become. Finally he is visited by the ghost of Christmas yet to come, allowing him a glimpse of what the future will hold if he doesn't mend his ways.

A central device in the tale is the use of a crippled boy named Timothy Cratchit, the son of Scrooges clerk Robert Cratchit. Scrooge hasn't been paying Robert enough to clothe or feed his family and the third ghost conjures a bleak vision of 'Tiny Tim' dying as a direct result of Scrooges inhumanity to man.

In the event, Timothy doesn't die and Scrooge, overwhelmed with a sense of guilt at his newfound self awareness, becomes a markedly changed man. Over night, he becomes empathetic, compassionate and generous. He switches from misanthrope to philanthropist in a way that could only happen in a Dickens novel.

Nevertheless, *A Christmas Carol* made a considerable impact on Victorian society, not least because it was perceived as a moral instruction at a time when the divide between the haves and the have-nots was considerable. The message was essentially that the well-off should see it as their moral and ethical duty to be benefactors to those subsisting in poverty. Furthermore, they should view Christmas as their annual touchstone, to reflect on their good fortune and see to it that the cold and hungry had something to celebrate.

Indeed, it has been suggested that Dickens played a part in resurrecting Christmas in Britain. Queen Victoria's husband, Prince Albert, also brought new elements to the celebration of Christmas from Germany; namely the Christmas tree and the Christmas card. The consequence was that Christmas became a more focussed and inclusive affair, which suited the Victorian notion that Christian values were a prerequisite to creating and maintaining a civilization with moral fortitude.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

CONTENTS

Preface	xiii
Chapter 1 Marley's Ghost	1
Chapter 2 The First of the Three Spirits	24
Chapter 3 The Second of the Three Spirits	45
Chapter 4 The Last of the Spirits	73
Chapter 5 The End of It	92

CHAPTER 1

Marley's Ghost

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

Mind! I don't mean to say that I know, of my own knowledge, what there is particularly dead about a doornail. 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 doornail.

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.

CHARLES DICKENS

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 solemnized it with an undoubted bargain.

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

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

Oh! but he was a tight-fisted hand at the grindstone, Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping, clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint, from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire; secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster. The cold within him froze his old features, nipped his pointed nose, shrivelled his cheek, stiffened his gait, made his eyes red, his thin lips blue; and spoke out shrewdly in his grating voice. A frosty rime was on his head, and on his eyebrows, and his wiry chin. He carried his own low temperature always about with him; he iced his office in the dog-days; and didn't thaw it one degree at Christmas.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn't know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet, could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often 'came down' handsomely, and Scrooge never did.

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

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

Once upon a time – of all the good days in the year, on Christmas Eve – old Scrooge sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breasts, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stones to warm them. The city clocks had only just gone three, but it was quite dark already: it had not been light all day: and candles were flaring in the windows of the

CHARLES DICKENS

neighbouring offices, like ruddy smears upon the palpable brown air. The fog came pouring in at every chink and keyhole, and was so dense without, that although the court was of the narrowest, the houses opposite were mere phantoms. To see the dingy cloud come drooping down, obscuring everything, one might have thought that Nature lived hard by, and was brewing on a large scale.

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

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

'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 was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

'Christmas a humbug, uncle!' said Scrooge's nephew. 'You 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? You're poor enough.'

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

‘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 with ‘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 you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year older, and 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 with “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 you!’

‘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,

CHARLES DICKENS

charitable, pleasant time: the only time I know of, in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of people below them as if they really were fellow-passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. 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 your situation. You’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 with us tomorrow.’

Scrooge said that he would see him – yes, indeed he did. He went 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?’

*'I am the Ghost of Christmas Present,'
said the Spirit. 'Look upon me!'*

A celebration of Christmas, a tale of redemption and a critique on Victorian society, Dickens' atmospheric novella follows the miserly, penny-pinching Ebenezer Scrooge who views Christmas as 'humbug'. It is only through a series of eerie, life-changing visits from the ghost of his deceased business partner Marley and the spirits of Christmas past, present and future that he begins to see the error of his ways. With heart-rending characters, rich imagery and evocative language, the message of *A Christmas Carol* remains as significant today as when it was first published.

Features

- *Life & Times* – a fascinating insight into the author, their work and the time of publication
- *Glossary of Classic Literature* – useful words and phrases at your fingertips, taken from *Collins English Dictionary*

Cover by e-Digital Design. Cover photograph by iStock Photo / © John Steele



LOVE THIS BOOK? www.bookarmy.com