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A CHRISTMAS CAROL.

IN PROSE. A SHORT STORY OF CHRISTMAS.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

"I am afraid I have not. Have you 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, and conducted Scrooge, as he called him, to a room which he had never seen before. It was a large, airy room, with a high ceiling, and a large window, through which the sun shone brightly. The room was filled with a variety of people, some of whom Scrooge recognized as his own family, and others whom he had never seen before. They were all dressed in rich, festive attire, and were engaged in various amusements. Scrooge looked on in amazement, wondering how he had come to be in such a place, and how he had come to be surrounded by so many people.

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sight of these poor revellers appeared to interest the Spirit very much, for he stood with Scrooge beside him in a bakers doorway, and taking off the covers as their bearers passed, sprinkled incense on their dinners for their torch. And it was a very uncommon kind of torch, for once or twice when these were angry words between some dinner-carriers who had jostled each other, he shed a few drops of water on them from it, and their good humor was restored directly. For they said, it was a shame to quarrel upon Christmas Day. And so it was. God love it, so it was. In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were about up, and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

crutch, and had his limbs supported by an iron frame.
"Why, where's our Martha?" cried Bob Cratchit, looking around.
"Not coming," said Mrs. Cratchit.
"Not coming?" said Bob with a sudden declination in his high spirits, for he had been Tim's blood horse all the way from church and had come home rampant.
"Not coming home on Christmas Day?"
Martha did not like to see him disappointed, if it were only a 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 wash-house, that he might heat 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 had made lame beggars walk and blind men see."

"A merry Christmas to us all, my dear, 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 wished to keep him by his side and dreaded that he might be taken from him.
"Spirit," said Scrooge, with an interest he had never felt before, "tell me if Tiny Tim will live?"
"I see a vacant seat," replied the Ghost, "in the poor chimney-corner, and a crutch without an owner, carefully preserved. All these shadows remain unaltered in the future, the child will die."
"No, no," said Scrooge. "Oh, no, kind Spirit! say he will be spared."
"If these shadows remain unaltered by the Future, none other of my race," returned the Ghost, "will find him here—What then? If he be like to die, he had better do it, and decrease the surplus population."
Scrooge hung his head to hear his own words, and was overcome by penitence and grief.
"Man," said the Ghost, "if man you be, heart, not head, govern you. That which is bred in the bone, and not that which is bred in the head, will be the man that shall live, and where it is. Will you decide what men shall live, and what men shall die? It may be that in the sight of Heaven, you are more worthless and less fit to live than millions like this poor man's child. Oh God! to hear the insect on the leaf pronouncing on the too much life among his hungry brethren in the dust."
Scrooge bent before the Ghost's rebuke, and trembling cast his eyes upon the ground. But he raised them speedily upon hearing his own name.
"Mr. Scrooge," said Bob; "I'll give you, Mr. Scrooge the Founder of the Feast!"
"The Founder of the Feast indeed," cried Mrs. Cratchit reddening. "I wish I had him here. I'd give him a piece of my mind to feast upon, and I hope he'd have a good appetite for it."
"My dear," said Bob, "the children's Christmas Day."
"It should be Christmas Day I'm sure," said she, "on which one drinks the health of such an odious, stingy, hard, unfeeling man as Mr. Scrooge. You know he is Robert. Nobody knows it better than you do, poor fellow."
"My dear," was Bob's mild answer: "Christmas Day."
"I'll drink his health for your sake and the Day's," said Mrs. Cratchit, not for his long life to him. "A Merry Christmas and a happy New Year. 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 so heartiness in it. Tiny Tim drank it last of all, but he didn't care twopence for the brand, and Scrooge was the Ogre of the family. The mention of his name cast a dark shadow on the party which was not dispelled for half a minute.

The Village Sewing Circle.
At this juncture Mrs. Brown changed in place out of the window. "I have just finished my story in the paper," said she, voice subsiding. "There is Mrs. Wells coming up the garden path; you shall have her own testimony."
Bonnet and mantle disposed of, and work in hand, the new-comer was prepared for the consultation by an active rehearsal from Mrs. Brown as a portion of her own and her neighbor's recent discourse. Mrs. Wells' entrance had been the signal for the resumption of the several little groups of talkers into a general conversation. Not a few listened anxiously for her sentence upon Mrs. Brown's narrative.
"I am quite prepared to endorse all I said yesterday," returned she as its conclusion, smilingly surveying her auditors. "and I can even say more. Mrs. Brown kindly complimented me yesterday upon the arrangement of my table, and more than one of you praised the trifles in the way of pastry and other refreshments. I contributed to the refreshment table of our last year's fair. The household department of the Magazine was my guide, it is especially devoted to items of interest to housekeepers. You have seen such practical illustrations of the value of its various receipts, that I need scarcely dwell upon it."
"Where did you learn of the existence of your article?" questioned Mrs. Hart.
"I read of it in the Village Paper."
"Oh, we don't take that."
"Not take the Maysville Times? I'm surprised. Why, it's to every one's interest to take the local papers. You got your money's worth of paper, and I should as lief be out of the world as to be without the news. My husband says he sets as much store by them as I do by my Democrat's Monthly. That must have been the reason why Mr. Wells did so much better by his grain and hay than Mr. Hart. You see he had the advantage of knowing how to sell when and where to find a good customer, and all this through the paper, while neighbor Hart, even though he's quite as shrewd at bargaining, had to trust to luck after all. Mr. Wells says he finds so many items of use to him about gardening, and then there are the quotations from the city markets. It won't do to trust to hearsay. You want a reliable source for such information. We watch the paper, and are generally just about right for a very good sale. Just make a trial of it, and if you don't confess that you would have you ever did without it I'll pay the cost of your subscription."
Before any one could reply there was a slight stir at the doorway, and the next moment a chorus of voices welcomed the good shepherd of the Maysville flock among his people.
"What have you there?" said Jenny Kip, the pet and belle par excellence of the village, as, after the greetings were over, the reverend gentleman sat down behind the table and began delivering a usual paper.
"Something that I fancied might be of use, and instruction to you ladies in the purchase of your good work; Democrat's Monthly Magazine." There was a rapid interchange of glances among the needleworkers.
"I thought you disapproved of light reading," ventured Miss Kip, mischievously.
"So I do, except when, like the literary department of this Magazine, it is instructive, entertaining, and calculated to exert a strong moral influence over our minds. This Monthly is a great favorite at the parsonage. I am a regular subscriber, for I scarcely think we could do without it."
"What I presumed might be of special service now, was this department of fashions, about which I know but little; but my wife affirms always contains the most valuable suggestions respecting wearing apparel."
"I have just been testifying to that before you came in," remarked Mrs. Wells.
"And I remember a recommendation from a friend of mine in Greensfield. Her husband is a builder, and she writes me he is lauding the Architectural Department of the Magazine. He considers this feature alone renders it valuable; because its plans and diagrams are good and adaptable. My children hail its appearance quite as gladly as I do. I read aloud to them from its literary portion, because I find its general tone so pure and elevating. I think it a desirable addition to every household in Maysville."
"And I," chimed in the minister. "My boys and girls take special delight in its engravings. It has incited a taste for art among them. I think its neat dress, renders it an ornament for any parlor-table in the village."
"Any one of its peculiarities—its full sized patterns for braids and embroidery sheets, or twelve excellent sheets of Music—is worth far more than the cost of a year's subscription," suggested Mrs. Wells.
"And besides all this each subscriber receives a valuable premium."
"I shall subscribe," exclaimed Mrs. Brown.
"And I," said her neighbor.
The words were echoed from all parts of the room.
"Why not make up a club," suggested the pastor. "and give your orders to Mrs. Wells."
"I should like that very much," resumed the letter. "I will tell you why, frankly. There are great inducements offered for this purpose. For twenty subscribers at three dollars each, while every individual receives a premium. I should like to see the following Scriptural quotation:—
"Grant not the desire of the wicked."

"You are quite desirous of such a premium as the first to establish the merits of the Magazine here," said several. "In a few short weeks Mrs. Wells' sitting-room shall be a copy of the Magazine."
"How do you like it now, do you like it?" asked the various Maysvillians, as they met after this important event. "It has all the virtues claimed for it. The fashion gossip offers really new and accessible ideas, because they emanate from the actual depot of the metropolitan modes, and are not a revised and garbled version of what is old style. It is, in truth, an actual mirror of fashions."
Soon so said all Maysville, except Miss Jones, who had hitherto been quite successful in palming off her antiquated styles upon the villagers, and who now found her occupation gone.
"What shall I do?" said she, wringing her hands in despair, to a sympathizing general soul, who chanced to be a member of Mrs. Wells' club.
"I cannot say, unless you take Democrat's Monthly Magazine, when you will be likely to find suggestions to help you out of your difficulty, as I most always do in my own case. Miss Jones you had better think of it."
Early one bright Monday morning the good people of Maysville remarked that a marvelous change had come over the millinery and dress-making establishment they had of late almost ignored.
"How beautifully you have fitted up, Miss Jones," said her friend, who had been invited to take a look within.
"I've started anew as a branch of Mrs. Democrat's Emporium of Fashions, the headquarters of Democrat's Monthly. I'm very thankful to you for mentioning the Magazine to me, for you see it has helped me out of my trouble."
"How did you prosper?" asked the same friend, some time later in the month. "dropping in," to see if Miss Jones had been better fitted up.
"Oh, I never did so well! Why I go now with so much satisfaction to myself and every one of my customers, and I have such a variety of beautiful styles that even the ladies from the city, boarding hereabouts, find all their requirements."
"Time flitted swiftly by, and again the sewing circle had met at Widow May's.
"What a vast improvement there has been in our village since we have taken Democrat's Monthly," exclaimed Mrs. Brown during a pause in the conversation. "Mrs. Hart did you take Mrs. Wells' advice and subscribe for the village paper?"
"Yes, and I must say, it was just as she said—Mr. Hart and I have resolved never to do without it again. He thinks it saves him a great deal more than his false notion of economy ever did."
"That is my opinion of the magazine. Besides we are certainly all brighter, and better, and happier, and wiser through its influence. It is the general remark. There is now one thing for which I have a great ambition. That is to make up a club large enough to get as a premium, an organ for the church. I have already written it by applying to some of my friends. I find I have only to show a copy of the Monthly to convince them of its merits. It speaks for itself, and they have so much enthusiasm in their appreciation as to see their names down upon my list immediately. Will any of you like me?"
"Every voice chimed in assent. As women always do when they have a pet project at heart; they went to work with will and energy, and found their task so easy, that in a few days the entire subscription was in its journey to the Publisher of Democrat's Monthly, No. 133 Broadway, New York.

gentleman of the free and easy sort, who plumed themselves on being acquainted with a movement or two, and being usually equal to the time-of-day, express the wide range of their capacity for adventure by observing that they are good for anything from pick-and-tow 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 you to believe that he was ready for a good broad field of strange appearances, and that nothing between a baby and a rhinoceros would have astonished him very much.

scrooge was not by any means prepared for nothing; and, consequently, when the Ball struck One, and no shape appeared, he was taken with 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, was 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; without having the consolation of knowing it. At last, however, he began to think—as you 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 would 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 an idea taking full possession of his mind, he got up softly and shuffled in his slippers to the door.

"Why to a poor one most?" asked Scrooge.
"Because it needs it most."
"Spirit," said Scrooge, after a moment's thought: "I wonder you, of all the beings in the many worlds about us, should desire to cramp these people's opportunities of innocent enjoyment."
"I do," cried the Spirit.
"You would deprive them of their means of doing every seventh day, often the only day on which they can be said to dine at all," said Scrooge; "wouldn't you?"
"I!" cried the Spirit.
"You seek to close these places on the Seventh Day?" said Scrooge. "And it comes to the same thing."
"Forgive me if I am wrong. It has been done in your name, or at least in that of your family," said Scrooge.
"There are some upon this earth of yours," 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 would, and they went on, invisible as they had been before, into the suburbs of the town. It was a remarkable quality of the Ghosts (which Scrooge had observed at the baker's), that notwithstanding his gigantic size, he could accommodate himself to any place with ease; and that he stood beneath a low roof quite as gracefully and like a supernatural creature as it was 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 was his own kind, generous, hearty nature, and his sympathy with all poor men, that led him straight to Scrooge's clerk's; for there he went, and took Scrooge with him, holding to his robe; and on the threshold of the door the Spirit smiled, and stopped to bless Bob Cratchit dwelling with the sprinklings 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 yet the ghost of Christmas present blessed his four-roomed house!

After it had passed away, they were ten times merrier than before, from the mere relief of Scrooge—the Relief being done with a situation in his eye for Master Peter which would bring in, if obtained, full five-and-sixpence weekly. The two young Cratchits laughed tremendously at the idea of Peter's being a man of business; and Peter himself thoughtfully at the fire from between his collars as if he were deliberating what particular investments he should favor when he came into the receipt of that bewildering income. Martha was a poor apprentice at a milliner's, then told them what kind of work she had to do and how many hours she worked at a stretch, and how she meant to lie a-bed to-morrow morning for a good long nap, 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 was much about as tall as Peter; at which Peter pulled up his collars so high that you couldn't have seen his head if you had been there. All this time the chestnuts and the jug went round and round, and bye-and-bye they had a song about a lost child traveling in the snow, from Tiny Tim who had a plaintive little voice and sang it very well indeed.

There was nothing of high mark in this. They were not a handsome family; they were not well dressed; their shoes were very scanty, and Peter might have known and very likely did, the inside of a pawbroker's. But they were happy, grateful, pleased with one another and contented with the time; and when they faded and looked happier yet in the bright sprinklings of the Spirit's torch at parting, Scrooge had his eye upon them, and especially upon Tiny Tim until the last.

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It was his own room. There was no doubt about that. But it had undergone a surprising transformation. The walls and ceiling were hung with living green, that it looked a perfect grove; in 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 blazing wall of ruddy light and gold, that dull petrification of a hearth had never known in Scrooge's time, or Marley's, or for many and many a winter season gone. Heaped up on the floor, to form a kind of throne, were turkeys, geese, game, poultry, brawn, great joints of meat, sucking-pigs, plum-puddings, barrels of oysters, red-hot chestnuts, cherry-apples, juicy oranges, luscious pears, immense twelfth-cakes, and something bowls of punch, that made the chamber dim with their delicious steam. In a state upon this couch there sat a jolly (though 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.

And so it was. God love it, so it was. In time the bells ceased, and the bakers were about up, and yet there was a genial shadowing forth of all these dinners and the progress of their cooking, in the thawed blotch of wet above each baker's oven; where the pavement smoked as if its stones were cooking too.

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"Come in!" exclaimed the Ghost. "Come in and know me better, man!"
Scrooge entered timidly, and hung his head before the Spirit. He was not the dogged Scrooge he had been; and it took 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 was clothed in one simple deep green robe, or mantle, bordered with white fur. This garment hung so loosely on the figure, that it concealed every form and line of the body; and his face was so pale, and his eyes were so dim, that he looked like a shadow, or a withered branch of some tree, that had been cut down and left to rot upon the ground.

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"I don't think I have," said Scrooge.

ATLANTA, Ga., Dec. 19, 1898. To all our friends and associates who have been so kind as to write to me during the past few months, I beg to say that I have received your kind letters and am glad to hear from you. I have been very busy since I left you, but I have not forgotten you. I have been very busy since I left you, but I have not forgotten you. I have been very busy since I left you, but I have not forgotten you.

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