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A Christmas Carol - The Man and His Book

By David Fitzgerald

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Charles Dickens's book "A Christmas Carol" is probably the most famous of all Christmas stories. In the preface he wrote:

"I have endeavoured in this Ghostly little book, to raise the Ghost of an Idea, which shall not put my readers out of humour with themselves, with each other, with the season, or with me. May it haunt their houses pleasantly, and no one wish to lay it

Their faithful Friend and Servant,
C.D.
December 1843."

Charles Dickens - The Man

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) is considered to be one of the greatest English novelists of the Victorian period. Dickens's works are characterized by attacks on social evils, injustice, and hypocrisy.

Charles John Huffam Dickens, the second of seven children of John and Elizabeth Dickens, was born in Landport on 7th February 1812. His father worked as a clerk at the Navy pay office in Portsmouth. In 1814 Dickens moved to London, and then to Chatham in 1817, for Dickens, the happiest years of his childhood (1817-22) were spent in Chatham, a bustling port on England's southeast coast, where he received some education.

John Dickens had difficulty making ends meet as his family grew. At ten Charles's family moved to Camden Town in London. John Dickens' debts had become so severe that all the household goods were sold. Still unable to satisfy his creditors, John Dickens was arrested and sent to Marshalsea Prison.

Charles, now twelve, was sent to work at Warren's Blacking Factory, where he was paid six shillings (shilling is equal to 1/20th of a pound) a week wrapping shoeblack bottles to help support his family.

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Six months after being sent to Marshalsea, one of John Dickens's relatives died. He was left enough money in the will to pay off his debts and to leave prison. Charles was allowed to quite the job, against his mother's better judgment. This became a sore spot for Charles, that he remembers the rest of his life.

Some of the inheritance was used to educate Charles at a nearby private school, Wellington House Academy. His schooling was again interrupted and ultimately ended when Dickens was forced to return to work at age 15. He found work as a clerk at the firm of Ellis & Blackmore, Charles disliked the work but he did enjoy walking the streets in the evening observing the people of London. He then became a shorthand reporter in the courts, and finally a parliamentary and newspaper reporter.

Looking back on his own childhood, Dickens saw himself as "a very small and not over-particularly-taken-care-of boy." For as I had spoken before, Dickens's childhood was a mixture of both fond and unhappy memories. His childhood poverty and feelings of abandonment, although unknown to his readers until after his death, would be a heavy influence on Dickens' later views on social reform and the world he would create through his fiction.

But even though Dickens family was both large and almost always hard-pressed, Charles Dickens grew into a young man who, through the sheer fertility of his creative genius and an astonishing amount of hard work, transformed himself into the most famous writer of his age.

In the midst of his labors over *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Dickens found time to write the little tale that is unquestionably his most beloved work, "A Christmas Carol". Published on December 17, 1843, this tender fable of spiritual renewal received a rapturous welcome from the public. Readers were moved to tears by the story of the delightfully despicable Scrooge, a heartless old miser who undergoes a miraculous rebirth precisely at Christmas, the only time "in the long calendar of the year, when men and women seem by one consent to open up their hearts freely."

A Christmas Carol - The Book

Millions of readers for over the past hundred and sixty years have enjoyed "A Christmas Carol". The penny pinching, miser Ebenezer Scrooge has become synonymous with a tight wad. Even today a person who hoards his or her money is nicknamed a "Scrooge". Dickens' character was a man whose cold personality equal only to the winters of London, and the comforts or fortunes of other was unimportant to him.

Locking up his office on Christmas Eve, Scrooge heads for his rooms, which once belonged to Jacob Marley, his partner, who died seven years ago. Arriving at his door, the doorknocker is suddenly, transformed into his dead partner's face, staring at him. The vision passes, and Scrooge bolts the door from the inside. Sitting down in front of the dying embers on the hearth, Ebenezer Scrooge is subjected to the second phenomena, the ringing of all the bells in the house. Someone or something is trying to get in touch with his frozen soul.

It turns out it is Jacob Marley who has been trying to contact him. Marley's ghost dragging his chains explain his present condition to the Scrooge; since he himself lived on the same basic principle as does Scrooge, explains what the afterlife is like for one who has never done a good deed to his fellow man.

There is one way out of this misery for Scrooge says Marley, and that is to mend one's ways and cleanse one's conscience. To amplify the message, his old partner explains to Scrooge that three spirits will visit shortly after midnight. Having delivered his message and his warning, Marley goes

away, dragging his chains behind him.

Strangely, Scrooge manages to fall asleep, but is awakened when the clock strikes midnight. Soon after the Ghost of Christmas Past, an apparition with a child's face visits him long, white hair, and a full-grown body. It makes Scrooge an offer he can't refuse: to go on a sentimental journey to his own past.

Riding through time and space effortlessly, they arrive in time to see the small boy Ebenezer, a lonesome child with books for his only friends. Lost love, lost comradeship, and lost chances for happiness are shown in rapid succession, and then the exhausted Scrooge is dropped off at home, where he dozes off.

Next follows the Ghost of Christmas Present shows Ebenezer the merrymaking of ordinary people. They spy on Bob Cratchit, who makes the most of his meager resources in the bosom of his little family, carrying his son Tim, who is weak of health, and lighting the meager meal with his inner warmth and generosity, demonstrated when he proposes a toast to his mean employer, though not appreciated by his wife.

The last ghost, Christmas of the Future, arrives, to show him the emptiness of a non-spiritual life. A peek into the future shows thieves plundering his belongings. He even gets a glimpse of himself, lying dead, and retreats in horror. The final blow is dealt to his now weakened soul when he learns that Tim Cratchit has died.

The vision of himself dead, his own neglected grave, all this prompts Ebenezer to beg for mercy. Waking as from a nightmare, he finds that only one night has passed and it is now Christmas morning, Scrooge thanks Jacob Marley's ghost for this second chance, and he really changes. He gets a huge turkey for the Cratchit family, makes large contributions to the poor, and turns up at his nephew's a changed man, filled with the merry spirit of Christmas.

The spirits of Christmas had served their purpose, and Jacob Marley had done his good deed. For the rest of his life, Ebenezer Scrooge was a good generous man, living the spirit of Christmas.

Chick here for more books by Charles Dickens

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Christmas Books

By Mitch Jelly

Christmas Cook Books:

Christmas books with feasts and parties are a wonderful family tradition, and of course for these events you need Christmas treats. With a small or large gathering of friends and family for a mingle served with Christmas Cookies book or a sit down Cozy Country Cookbook dinner, there are recipes that will have your friends coming back for more. These are a few of my favorite Christmas cookbooks. They have ideas for sitting the tables, trays, and decorations for large or small events or just for your family to let them know how special they are. In some of these books there is a section with stories written by people from all over that tell of their holiday memories or traditions, which can inspire others to begin their own new traditions.

A Special Place for Santa:

This is an excellent book that tells the origin and story of Santa Claus and his role at Christmas time. Many Christian parents have been concerned with the commercialization of Christmas and view Santa as its agent, which could take away from the celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ. This book helps to tie the two together, by starting when Nicholas was a Bishop in Turkey to becoming a saint to his transformation to Santa Claus. This book is a wonderful way to remind your children of the importance of Christmas and to help them not to just want to receive gifts but also to give gifts which will warm their hearts for many years to come.

Twas the Night Before Christmas:

This was first published as a poem in 1823, it was submitted anonymously to the Sentinel paper. It was loved so much that it was reprinted many times. But it wasn't until 1844 that Clement Moore took credit for the poem. The poem is a story about a man who is awakened by the sound of Santa landing on his roof. He sneaks down and watches Santa go about his work of filling the stockings and putting presents under the tree. When Santa sees the man he smiles and nods and then up the chimney he goes. As Santa flies away he cries out Happy Christmas to all. In recent times the ending was changed to Merry Christmas.

How the Grinch Stole Christmas:

This is a classic children's book written by Dr. Seuss in 1957. We don't know the history of the Grinch, but we join the story with him living in a cave near the town of Whoville. The Grinch seems to like quiet and solitude and hates Christmas time because the residents of Whoville celebrate it so loudly. So to put an end to the celebrations he steals the gifts and decorations, only to find that Christmas stills comes. Upon his heart growing to a much larger size he returns all the gifts and decorations and is welcomed in Whoville.

A Christmas Carol:

A Christmas Carol was the first of the five Christmas books written by Charles Dickens, it was published in 1843 and became a great success. The story has been done in plays and movies over the

years and it has become a tradition to read or watch a rendition of it at Christmas time. It deals with themes which were dear to the heart of Dickens, poverty and social injustice. At its heart the story is a morality tale about Scrooge and the profound change he goes through in one night, from an old miser who hates everything but money, to a warm, charitable gentleman who keeps the spirit of Christmas in his heart throughout the whole year.

Mitch Jelly has written for Christmas Decorations and Gifts for several years.

<http://www.christmas-decorations-gifts-store.com>. Christmas Decorations & Gifts also has a great selection of Christmas Books

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