PENGUIN CLASSICS

CHARLES DICKENS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL
AND OTHER CHRISTMAS WRITINGS

PENGUIN CLASSICS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL AND OTHER CHRISTMAS WRITINGS

CHARLES DICKENS was born at Portsmouth on 7 February 1812, the second of eight children. Dickens's childhood experiences were similar to those depicted in *David Copperfield*. His father, who was a government clerk, was imprisoned for debt and Dickens was briefly sent to work in a blacking warehouse at the age of twelve. He received little formal education, but taught himself shorthand and became a reporter of parliamentary debates for the *Morning Chronicle*. He began to publish sketches in various periodicals, which were subsequently republished as *Sketches by Boz*. *The Pickwick Papers* was published in 1836–7 and after a slow start became a publishing phenomenon and Dickens's characters the centre of a popular cult. Part of the secret of his success was the method of cheap serial publication which Dickens used for all his novels. He began *Oliver Twist* in 1837, followed by *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41). After finishing *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) Dickens set off for America; he went full of enthusiasm for the young republic but, in spite of a triumphant reception, he returned disillusioned. His experiences are recorded in *American Notes* (1842). *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) did not repeat its predecessors' success but this was quickly redressed by the huge popularity of the *Christmas Books*, of which the first, *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1842. During 1844–6 Dickens travelled abroad and he began *Dombey and Son* (1846–8) while in Switzerland. This and *David Copperfield* (1849–50) were more serious in theme and more carefully planned than his early novels. In later works, such as *Bleak House* (1852–3) and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7), Dickens's social criticism became more radical and his comedy more savage. In 1850 Dickens started the weekly periodical *Household Words*, succeeded in 1859 by *All the Year Round*; in these he published *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860–61). Dickens's health was failing during the 1860s and the physical strain of the public readings which he began in 1858 hastened his decline, although *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) retained some of his best

comedy. His last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, was never completed and he died on 9 June 1870. Public grief at his death was considerable and he was buried in the Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey.

MICHAEL SLATER is Emeritus Professor of Victorian Literature at Birkbeck College, University of London, and a past President of both the Dickens Fellowship and the Dickens Society of America. He is also a former editor of *The Dickensian* and has published a number of studies of Dickens, including *Dickens and Women* (1983), and has edited, with John Drew, the four-volume *Dent Uniform Edition of Dickens's Journalism* (1994–2000). His most recent publication is *Douglas Jerrold 1803–1857* (2002).

CHARLES DICKENS

A Christmas Carol and Other Christmas Writings

With Introduction and Notes by
MICHAEL SLATER

PENGUIN BOOKS

PENGUIN BOOKS

Published by the Penguin Group
Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England
Penguin Putnam Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, USA
Penguin Books Australia Ltd, 250 Camberwell Road, Camberwell, Victoria 3124, Australia
Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2
Penguin Books India (P) Ltd, 11 Community Centre, Panchsheel Park, New Delhi – 110 017, India
Penguin Books (NZ) Ltd, Cnr Rosedale and Airborne Roads, Albany, Auckland, New Zealand
Penguin Books (South Africa) (Pty) Ltd, 24 Sturdee Avenue, Rosebank 2196, South Africa

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL, England

www.penguin.com

'Christmas Festivities' first published 1835; 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton'
first published 1836; A Christmas Episode from *Master Humphrey's Clock* first published
1840; *A Christmas Carol in Prose* first published 1843; *The Haunted Man* first published
1848; 'A Christmas Tree' first published 1850; 'What Christmas Is, As We Grow Older' first
published 1851; 'The Seven Poor Travellers' first published 1854
First published 2003
1

EISBN: 978-0-141-93473-0

Contents

A Dickens Chronology

1812 *7 February* Charles John Huffam Dickens born at Portsmouth, where his father is a clerk in the Navy Pay Office. The eldest son in a family of eight, two of whom die in childhood.

1817 After previous postings to London and Sheerness and frequent changes of address, John Dickens settles his family in Chatham.

1821 Dickens attends local school.

1822 Family returns to London.

1824 Dickens's father in Marshalsea Debtors' Prison for three months. During this time and afterwards Dickens employed in a blacking warehouse, labelling bottles. Resumes education at Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, London, 1825–7.

1827 Becomes a solicitor's clerk.

1830 Admitted as a reader to the British Museum.

1832 Becomes a parliamentary reporter after mastering shorthand. In love with Maria Beadnell, 1830–33. Misses audition as an actor at Covent Garden because of illness.

1833 First published story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', in the *Monthly Magazine*. Further stories and sketches in this and other periodicals, 1834–5.

1834 Becomes reporter on the *Morning Chronicle*.

1835 Engaged to Catherine Hogarth, daughter of editor of the *Evening Chronicle*.

1836 *Sketches by Boz*, First and Second Series, published. Marries Catherine Hogarth. Meets John Forster, his literary adviser and future biographer. *The Strange Gentleman*, a farce, and *The Village Coquettes*, a pastoral operetta, professionally performed in London.

1837 *The Pickwick Papers* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1836–7). Birth of a son, the first of ten children. Death of Mary Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law. Edits *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9.

1838 *Oliver Twist* published in three volumes (serialized monthly in *Bentley's Miscellany*, 1837–9). Visits Yorkshire schools of the Dotheboys type.

1839 *Nicholas Nickleby* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1838–9). Moves to 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regents Park, London.

1841 Declines invitation to stand for Parliament. *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* published in separate volumes after appearing in weekly numbers in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840–41. Public dinner in his honour at Edinburgh.

1842 *January–June* First visit to North America, described in *American Notes*, two volumes. Georgina Hogarth, Dickens's sister-in-law, becomes permanent member of the household.

1843 Speech on the Press to Printers' Pension Society, followed by others on behalf of various causes throughout Dickens's career. *A Christmas Carol* published in December.

1844 *Martin Chuzzlewit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1843–4). Dickens and family leave for Italy, Switzerland and France. Dickens returns to London briefly to read *The Chimes* to friends before its publication in December.

1845 Dickens and family return from Italy. *The Cricket on the Hearth* published at Christmas. Writes autobiographical fragment, ?1845–6, not published until included in Forster's *Life* (three volumes, 1872–4).

1846 Becomes first editor of the *Daily News* but resigns after seventeen issues. *Pictures from Italy* published. Dickens and family in Switzerland and Paris. *The Battle of Life* published at Christmas.

1847 Returns to London. Helps Miss Burdett Coutts to set up, and later to run, a 'Home for Homeless Women'.

1848 *Dombey and Son* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1846–8). Organizes and acts in charity performances of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Every Man in His Humour* in London and elsewhere. *The Haunted Man* published at Christmas.

1850 *Household Words*, a weekly journal 'Conducted by Charles Dickens', begins in March and continues until 1859. Dickens makes a speech at first meeting of Metropolitan Sanitary Association. *David Copperfield* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1849–50).

1851 Death of Dickens's father and of infant daughter. Further theatrical activities in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art, including a performance before Queen Victoria. *A Child's History of England* appears at intervals in *Household Words*, published in three volumes (1852, 1853, 1854). Moves to Tavistock House, Tavistock Square, London.

1853 *Bleak House* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1852–3). Dickens gives first public readings for charity (from *A Christmas Carol*).

1854 Visits Preston, Lancashire, to observe industrial unrest. *Hard Times* appears weekly in *Household Words* and is published in book form.

1855 Speech in support of the Administrative Reform Association. Disillusioning meeting with now married Maria Beadnell.

1856 Dickens buys Gad's Hill Place, near Rochester.

1857 *Little Dorrit* published in one volume (issued in monthly parts, 1855–7). Dickens acts in Wilkie Collins's melodrama *The Frozen Deep* and falls in love with the young actress Ellen Ternan. *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, written jointly with Wilkie Collins about a holiday in Cumberland, appears in *Household Words*.

1858 Publishes *Reprinted Pieces* (articles from *Household Words*). Separation from his wife followed by statement in *Household Words*. First public readings for his own profit in London, followed by provincial tour. Dickens's household now largely run by his sister-in-law Georgina.

1859 *All the Year Round*, a weekly journal again 'Conducted by Charles Dickens', begins. *A Tale of Two Cities*, serialized both in *All the Year Round* and in monthly parts, appears in one volume.

1860 Dickens sells London house and moves family to Gad's Hill.

1861 *Great Expectations* published in three volumes after appearing weekly in *All the Year Round* (1860–61). *The Uncommercial Traveller* (papers from *All the Year Round*) appears; expanded edition, 1868. Further public readings, 1861–3.

1863 Death of Dickens's mother, and of his son Walter (in India). Reconciled with Thackeray, with whom he had quarrelled, shortly before the latter's death. Publishes 'Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings' in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.

1865 *Our Mutual Friend* published in two volumes (issued in monthly parts, 1864–5). Dickens severely shocked after a serious train accident at Staplehurst, Kent, when returning from France with Ellen Ternan and her mother.

1866 Begins another series of readings. Takes a house for Ellen at Slough. 'Mugby Junction' appears in Christmas number of *All the Year Round*.

1867 Moves Ellen to Peckham. Second journey to America. Gives readings in Boston, New York, Washington and elsewhere, despite increasing ill-health. 'George Silverman's Explanation' appears in *Atlantic Monthly* (then in *All the Year Round*, 1868).

1868 Returns to England. Readings now include the sensational 'Sikes and Nancy' from *Oliver Twist*; Dickens's health further undermined.

1870 Farewell readings in London. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* issued in six monthly parts, intended to be completed in twelve.

9 June Dies, after stroke, at Gad's Hill, aged fifty-eight. Buried in Westminster Abbey.

Stephen Wall, 2002

Introduction

A favourite anecdote of Dickens biographers is one first recorded by Theodore Watts-Dunton about a London barrow-girl whom he overheard exclaiming on 9 June 1870, 'Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?'[1] This identification of Dickens with the festival of Christmas, so deeply inscribed in the popular culture of the English-speaking world, began when he was still a young man, just over a month short of his thirty-second birthday, but already firmly established as England's favourite novelist. The process had been initiated by the 'Good-Humoured Christmas Chapter' in the tenth monthly number of *Pickwick Papers*, published at the end of December 1836, but it was what Dickens called the 'most prodigious success' ('the greatest, I think, I have ever achieved')[2] of his first 'Christmas Book', *A Christmas Carol. In Prose. Being a Ghost Story of Christmas*, that clinched the matter. First published on 17 December 1843, this little book had already sold over 5,000 copies by Christmas Eve, and its publishers, Chapman and Hall, were planning the first of many reprints. Since this triumphant debut the *Carol* has never been out of print, being usually available in a number of different editions, and it has become as much part of the furniture of the Anglo-American Christmas as holly, mistletoe, Christmas trees and Christmas crackers. Nor, of course, is it only in its printed form that the *Carol* has had so great an impact on us during the past 160 years; in his *Lives and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* Paul Davis gives us an illuminating survey of the work's rich history as what he calls a 'culture-text', investigating the constant modifications and changes made to Dickens's original text in the various British and American stage and screen adaptations that have proliferated over the years, adaptations that are clearly responsive to changing social conditions and aspirations on both sides of the Atlantic.

What Philip Collins has described as the *Carol*'s 'institutional status' in our culture[3] helps maintain the popular belief that Dickens virtually invented the English Christmas single-handed. The case is rather that he

was hugely influential, primarily as a result of the *Carol*'s tremendous and enduring popularity, in ensuring that a certain turn was given to the revival of traditional Christmas festivities that was already well under way in Britain during the third and fourth decades of the nineteenth century.[4] This turn involved emphasizing the concept of Christian charity. A leading article (headed 'The Merriest Christmas to All') in the *Pictorial Times* for 23 December 1843 shows that Dickens was not the only one making this emphasis:

> At this joyous season of dinners and laughing faces, it becomes all who are worthy to enjoy such mirth to the full, to think of the poor – of the poor who, without their aid, can have no enjoyment. While the fire blazes on our hearth, and the table is covered so plenteously, let us think of the poor in their chilly hovels with bare tables, and of the yet more wretched objects, houseless wanderers in the open streets…

Such exhortations as this could doubtless be found in many leading articles of the time (it was after all the 'Hungry Forties', a period of widespread economic hardship and social distress), and would have featured in many a Christmastide sermon. *Punch* had, in its first Christmas issue (1841), published an article by Dickens's friend the radical-liberal dramatist and journalist Douglas Jerrold called 'How Mr Chokepear Kept a Merry Christmas', in which a prosperous merchant keeps a 'Christmas of the belly', feasting and frolicking but ignoring all claims of the poor on his charity. Jerrold urges his readers rather to keep 'the Christmas of the heart' and to 'Give – give'. The message is found, too, on the first Christmas card which appeared in the same year as the *Carol*. Designed by John Calcott Horsley, RA, for Henry Cole (later Sir Henry, inaugurator and first director of the Victoria and Albert Museum), it was in triptych style showing in the central scene a prosperous-looking family party pledging the viewer with brimming wine-glasses and, in the side-panels, the charitable acts of 'Clothing the Naked' and 'Feeding the Hungry'. But Dickens's modern fairy-tale of Scrooge and the Cratchits with its strong, but wholly non-sectarian, Christian colouring had an impact no leader-writer or moralizing satirical journalist, no preacher or card-designer could have hoped to achieve (for one thing, leading articles and sermons were not susceptible of being dramatized[5] for the delight of thousands who could not, or did not, read the papers and who rarely, if ever, heard a sermon). Dickens's self-

appointed 'Critic Laureate', Lord Jeffrey, was moved to write to him: 'Blessings on your kind heart…you may be sure you have done more good by this little publication, fostered more kindly feelings, and prompted more positive acts of beneficence, than can be traced to all the pulpits and confessionals in Christendom since Christmas 1842.'[6] The *Carol*'s first reviewers similarly emphasized the book's humanity, 'beneficial tendency' and sympathy for those suffering 'the real grinding sorrows of life'. It was, Thackeray declared, 'a national benefit and to every man and woman who reads it a personal kindness'.[7]

The revival of interest in Christmas traditions that developed among the literati during the 1820s and 1830s was not primarily inspired by zeal for promoting the exercise of Christian charity. It related more to the growth of a taste for the picturesque as well as to Tory nostalgia for the 'good old days' of a more settled state of society, acceptance of hierarchy and supposed class harmony. Robert Southey, the Poet Laureate, had commented back in 1807: 'All persons say how differently this season was observed in their fathers' days, and speak of old ceremonies and old festivities as things which are obsolete.'[8] A year later came Scott's famous evocation, in his introduction to the sixth canto of *Marmion*, of 'olden time' Christmas festivities, centred on the Baron's hall and featuring a boar's head, Christmas pies, yule logs and 'carols roar'd with blithesome din'. This seized the imagination of many among his thousands of readers and was still a potent vision thirty years later when Dickens's much-loved friend Daniel Maclise created his wide-angle history painting *Merry Christmas in the Baron's Hall*[9] showing the Baron, his family and, in Scott's phrase, 'vassal, tenant, serf and all' celebrating the festival together. Meanwhile, the American writer Washington Irving made a fanciful picture, not without a hint of satire, in his description of Squire Bracebridge's Christmas revels at his ancestral home Bracebridge Hall (in *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, 1820) of how an English country gentleman with an antiquarian bent might, with his extended family, servants and guests, still keep up the picturesque seasonal rituals of yesteryear. Dickens, a devoted reader of Irving, was strongly influenced by him in his depiction of the Pickwickians' old-fashioned Christmas merry-making as guests of Old

Wardle at Manor Farm in Dingley Dell. Indeed, all this part of *Pickwick* may be seen, like Maclise's painting, as responding to Scott's and Irving's romantic antiquarianism and idealization of the traditional English Christmas as can T. K. Hervey's *The Book of Christmas: Descriptive of the customs, ceremonies, traditions, superstitions, fun, feeling and festivities of the Christmas Season* (1837; illustrated by Robert Seymour, the first illustrator of *Pickwick*). We might note too the appearance in 1831 and 1832 of W. H. Harrison's *The Humourist, a Companion for the Christmas Fireside* and in 1833 of William Sandys's *Selection of Christmas Carols, Ancient and Modern*. In all this the emphasis was very much on traditional festivity in a setting overflowing with creature comforts in which servants and dependants joyfully shared.

Dickens's own first literary treatment of Christmas appeared in *Bell's Life in London* on 27 December 1835 as part of a series of sketches entitled 'Scenes and Characters' that the young journalist was contributing to the paper under the pen-name of 'Tibbs'. Its title, 'Christmas Festivities' (changed to 'A Christmas Dinner' when he included it in his earliest *Sketches by Boz* collection a few months later), perhaps led readers to expect an exercise in Washington Irving-type nostalgia. The sketch has a very contemporary ring to it, however. The traditional rituals of 'Old Christmas' are to be found in it but modified to suit the home of a well-to-do London family (the kind of home to which Dickens's parents would have aspired). The 'olden day' Baron and his Lady have become the genial hosts Uncle and Aunt George, and the 'retainers' are now servants wearing beautiful, new, pink-ribboned caps (but they celebrate Christmas in their own quarters not with the family), the boar's head has become a fine turkey, and the medieval pastimes have become 'a glorious game of blind man's buff'. When, at the beginning of the sketch, Dickens refers to 'people who tell you that Christmas is not to them what it used to be' he does not mean such praisers of past times as Southey and Scott but those who have suffered personal sorrows, wrongs and misfortunes which this great anniversary occasion must inevitably bring to mind. This theme of dealing, or failing to deal, with painful memories subsequently becomes a leading one in nearly all Dickens's Christmas writings – often associated, as it is here, with the death of a beloved small child. In this sketch Dickens exhorts

his readers not to suppress all painful memories as Scrooge will do, nor seek to expunge them as Redlaw the Haunted Man will do, but simply to put them to one side and instead to count their blessings and rejoice in them. A year later in *Pickwick*, however, he is seeing such memories as actually integral to the joys of Christmas:

> Many of the hearts that throbbed so gaily then [in the Christmas gatherings of our earlier years], have ceased to beat;…the hands we grasped, have grown cold; the eyes we sought, have hid their lustre in the grave; and yet the old house, the room, the merry voices and smiling faces, the jest, the laugh, the most minute and trivial circumstance connected with those happy meetings, crowd upon our mind at each recurrence of the season, as if the last assemblage had been but yesterday. Happy, happy Christmas that can win us back to the delusions of our childish days…(*Pickwick Papers*, ch. 28)

This exordium seems to have no more to do with the scenes that follow, the Pickwickians' Christmas revels, than was the case with the exordium of 'Christmas Festivities'. Neither Mr Pickwick and his friends nor Old Wardle and his family seem to have any consciousness of lost dear ones (we may perhaps discount old Mrs Wardle's fondness for invoking the shade of 'the beautiful Lady Tollimglower deceased') or, indeed, any memories at all – apart from that contained in Mr Pickwick's one allusion to sliding on the ice in his younger days. It is as though Dickens had not yet found a way of satisfactorily combining sentiment (the memory theme) and story (Christmas revels).

As to the theme of loving kindness to the poor, that is simply absent from the *Bell's* sketch and, insofar as it is present at all in the Dingley Dell scenes, it is matter for comedy – the sycophantic 'poor relations' are pure figures of fun (in the game of blind man's buff, for example, they 'caught the people who they thought would like it; and when the game flagged, got caught themselves'). Interestingly, however, the poor who appear in the inset fireside tale related by Old Wardle are endowed with both dignity and pathos. This tale of Gabriel Grub, the solitary old misanthrope converted by supernatural means to benevolence and belief in human goodness, is Dickens's first Christmas Story, and the daily heroism of the poor struggling to lead decent and loving family lives is at the very heart of it.

As John Butt was the first to point out, this 'Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton' is the prototype for the *Carol*.[10] The Cratchit family and the doomed child are already to be discerned in it, though not yet named and

individualized, and old Grub is moved by the visions of their mutual love and endurance of suffering that the goblins compel him to witness. But he has no personal connection with them, his conversion from misanthropy has no consequences for them, nor has it anything to do with the workings of memory. We learn no more of his personal history than we do of Mr Pickwick's. Some of the main elements of the *Carol* are present in the story but they are still in solution as it were. Dickens's next step towards the realization of his Christmas masterpiece comes with a passage written in 1840 for his new weekly miscellany *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

*

Dickens had, by the end of 1839, been writing solidly for four years with ever-increasing success. *Oliver Twist* had succeeded *Pickwick* and *Nicholas Nickleby* had succeeded *Oliver*, the serialization of each book overlapping with its successor or predecessor. Dickens now wanted some relief and hoped to achieve it by means of this miscellany, to which it was intended that other writers should contribute, though in the end this did not happen. Master Humphrey, the supposed 'editor' of the miscellany, is a reclusive old bachelor, a cripple (a sort of grown-up Tiny Tim *avant la lettre*), whose memories of his younger days, though tinged with sadness, predispose him towards a love of humanity. His Christmas Day behaviour seems to be modelled on Leigh Hunt's 1817 advice in one of his essays on old Christmas customs and the 'Desirableness of their Revival' in what he saw as the money-obsessed, utilitarian-minded world of the second and third decades of the nineteenth century: 'Stir up your firesides, and your smiles, and your walks abroad…every fresh thing done to give joy to a fellow-creature, every festivity set a-going among friends, or servants, or the village…every rub of one's own hands, and shake of another's, in-doors, – will be so much gain to the spirit and real happiness of the age.'[11] It is as a result of walking genially abroad on Christmas Day (something that Dickens himself delighted in doing)[12] that Master Humphrey encounters and rescues another afflicted solitary, the Deaf Gentleman, who seems to be in danger of becoming a prototype Haunted Man as he sits in a deserted tavern coffee-room brooding over lost happiness resulting from some kind of betrayal or desertion by someone he loved. In this little episode Dickens

first makes the link between painful memories and Christmas benevolence that thereafter becomes so fundamental to his Christmas writings.

Three and a half more years were to pass before the *Carol* was conceived. Dickens wrote two more novels, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*, made his traumatic tour of the United States, and returned to the twenty-monthly-number format of *Pickwick* and *Nickleby* for his new work, *Martin Chuzzlewit*. The climactic scene of *The Old Curiosity Shop* with its snowy landscape and the beautiful, much-loved dying child (who, unlike Tiny Tim, really 'DOES die') seems to hover on the edge of becoming a Dickens Christmas Story and, indeed, as Malcolm Andrews has shown, 'is transformed into a kind of Nativity'.[13] Dickens did not write directly about Christmas again, however, until a sudden inspiration in October 1843 precipitated the creation of the *Carol*.

Earlier in the year he, like Elizabeth Barrett and many others, had been appalled by the brutal revelations of the Second Report (Trades and Manufactures) of the Children's Employment Commission set up by Parliament. Barrett published a powerful poem, 'The Cry of the Children', and Dickens, 'perfectly stricken down' by the Report, contemplated bringing out 'a very cheap pamphlet, called "An appeal to the People of England, on behalf of the Poor Man's Child"'.[14] Speaking at the first annual soirée of the Manchester Athenaeum, an institution which sought to bring culture and 'blameless rational enjoyment' to the working classes, Dickens dwelt on the terrible sights he had seen among the juvenile population in London's jails and doss-houses and stressed the desperate need for educating the poor.[15] This occasion seems to have put into his mind the idea for a story, building on, but also utterly transforming, the old *Pickwick* Christmas Eve tale of Gabriel Grub, which should help to open the hearts of the prosperous and powerful towards the poor and powerless but which should also bring centrally into play the theme of memory that, as we have seen, was always so strongly associated with Christmas for him.

The *Carol* was written at white heat in such 'odd moments of leisure' as Dickens could snatch from his work on the eleventh monthly instalment of *Chuzzlewit*. Describing its composition to his American friend Cornelius Felton, he wrote: 'Charles Dickens wept, and laughed, and wept again, and excited himself in a most extraordinary manner, in the composition; and

thinking whereof, he walked about the black streets of London, fifteen and twenty miles, many a night when all the sober folks had gone to bed.'[16] The little book's triumphant reception has already been mentioned. It was attractively produced as a Christmas gift book, price five shillings,[17] with salmon-brown covers, gilt lettering, coloured end-papers, gilt edges and wonderful illustrations by Dickens's friend the *Punch* artist John Leech. Four of these were dropped into the text and four were hand-coloured full-page insets. Catherine Waters has acutely noted that, since an important part of Christmas tradition was fireside story-telling ('Ghost Stories, or more shame for us,' Dickens insists),[18] a publication like the *Carol* has a 'doubled function' in that 'it forms part of the ritual…it is concerned to portray'.[19] Dickens enhances this effect by using a particularly intimate narrative tone as here in the description of Scrooge's encounter with the first of the Spirits: '[he] found himself face to face with the unearthly visitor…as close to it as I am now to you, and I am standing in the spirit at your elbow'.

The chief interest of the story for us today is centred around the brilliantly named figure of Scrooge, evoking the sense both of 'screw' and of 'gouge'. He is an extraordinary combination of, on the one hand, such mythic creatures as Jack Frost and child-quelling ogres and, on the other, a rusty, surly, mean-spirited old London money-dealer. This figure is one of the most exuberant of Dickens's great grotesques (when Chesterton said that we suspect Scrooge of having secretly given away turkeys all his life, he was, in his own inimitable way, responding to this exuberance).[20] But, as Paul Davis has shown, for the *Carol*'s earliest readers it was the Cratchit scenes that were 'the emotional center of the tale'.[21] This should remind us that it was very much a book of its time, the 'Hungry Forties', when the very survival of poor families outside of the workhouse was a precarious matter. There is something defiant about the Cratchits' frugally succulent Christmas dinner, their loving family solidarity and their tender care of Tiny Tim that would have given heart and hope to thousands of struggling families, some of whom actually wrote to Dickens to tell him, 'amid many confidences, about their homes, how the *Carol* had come to be read aloud there, and was to be kept upon a little shelf by itself, and was to do them no end of good'.[22]

At the same time, by steering clear of too much topical reference (not having Bob Cratchit tempted to become a Chartist, for example) Dickens avoided alienating his middle-class readers. True, the *Westminster Review* condemned him, in June 1844, for his ignorance of political economy and the 'laws' of supply and demand: 'Who went without turkey and punch in order that Bob Cratchit might get them – for, unless there were turkeys and punch in surplus, some one must go without – is a disagreeable reflection kept wholly out of sight [by Dickens].' But this was a predictable reaction from Utilitarian extremists. In general, middle-class readers would have recognized in the horrifying little figures of Ignorance and Want an all-too-true presentation in allegorical terms of the grim truth about the children of the poor that lay behind the somewhat fairy-tale character of Tiny Tim (we notice that Leech depicts Dickens's symbolic children against a background not of the streets of Scrooge's London but of grim workhouse-like buildings and 'dark satanic mills'). In putting his dire warning of potential social catastrophe into the mouth of the Ghost of Christmas Present Dickens is using a rhetoric with which middle-class readers would have been familiar from the fulminations of Dickens's intellectual hero Carlyle, whose scarifying 'Condition of England' diatribe, *Past and Present*, had been published only a few months earlier. In contrast to Carlyle's fuliginous social pessimism, however, Dickens offered his readers the vision of an alternative, altogether more hopeful, future, imaged in the beneficent cavortings of the reclaimed Scrooge. Desperate as the state of the nation might appear, it was not yet too late for a total change, of course with charity beginning at home among the better-off and spreading outwards from there in ever-widening circles to bring about a kinder, juster society. Even Carlyle himself, for all his criticism of Dickens's soft-hearted sentimentalism, was not immune to the power of the *Carol*. The descriptions of feasting in the book had 'so worked on [his] nervous organisation', Jane Carlyle wrote to her cousin Jeannie Welsh on 23 December, 'that he has been seized with a perfect *convulsion* of hospitality, and has actually insisted on *improvising two* dinner-parties with only a day between'.[23]

The phenomenal popular success of the *Carol* (even though it proved a financial disappointment to Dickens as a result of the high costs involved in

its production and the keeping-down of its price) made it inevitable that he should produce a series of successor volumes for the following Christmas and several Christmases after that. He wrote four more 'Christmas Books' (as they were collectively titled when first gathered into one volume for the Cheap Edition of Dickens's works in 1852). All were published in the same format as the *Carol* and illustrated by distinguished artist friends of Dickens, but the expensive hand-coloured plates were dropped. The *Carol's* immediate successor was *The Chimes*. *A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844), followed by *The Cricket on the Hearth. A Fairy Tale of Home* (1845), *The Battle of Life. A Love Story* (1846), and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain*. *A Fancy for Christmas-Time* (1848). The non-appearance of a volume for Christmas 1847 stemmed from Dickens's imperative need that autumn to concentrate wholly on his new novel, *Dombey and Son*, then well over half-way through its serialization in twenty monthly parts. He had to put on hold the working-out of the 'very ghostly and wild idea' that he had conceived for the expected Christmas Book[24] but this postponement was not done lightly. Dickens was, he wrote to Forster, not only 'very loath to lose the money' but 'still more so to leave any gap at Christmas firesides which I ought to fill',[25] thereby signalling his recognition that for the British public he himself had by now become a significant element in the annual celebration.

Dickens's major Christmas theme of home and family love is prominent in all these little books, and the use of the supernatural, that element he deemed so essential for a real Christmas tale, is crucial to them all (except the *Battle*, where its absence is damaging, as Dickens recognized). But it is only the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man* that have Christmas settings and can be said to be actually *about* Christmas. The fiercely political *Chimes* is, as its subtitle proclaims, very much a New Year's book, the pretty fairy-tale *Cricket* also has a New Year's setting and the *Battle*, though it does have one scene taking place at Christmas time, ranges over different seasons. I have, therefore, included only the *Carol* and *The Haunted Man* in the present collection of Dickens's writings about Christmas.

The Haunted Man not only has a Christmas setting but actually returns to some of the main figures of the *Carol* – the solitary central character somehow dislocated from common humanity, the poor family sustained by

mutual love and the terrible apparitions Ignorance and Want, here made flesh (or rather skin and bone) in the person of the unnamed but unforgettable savage street-child. From them Dickens evolves a story about the inter-relationship between memory, especially the memory of wrongs and sorrows, the moral life, social responsibility and the survival of human feelings among the very poor that, in some ways, probes these issues more deeply and painfully than does the *Carol*. Redlaw is a more complex figure than Scrooge, no quasi-ogre but a famous scientist and teacher[26] whose life is blighted by memories of the painful past but whose last state is fearfully worse than his first when he opts to be supernaturally released from them. The Tetterby family's devotion to its youngest and weakest member, Little Moloch, is not quite (as the sinister overtones of the comic nickname suggest) the unambiguously heartwarming thing it is in the case of the Cratchits and Tiny Tim. Dickens, too, is out to shame his readers in a much more direct way than in the *Carol* (he will not be quite so confrontational again until the famous address to the reader after the death of Poor Jo at the end of chapter 47 of *Bleak House*). Pointing to the savage child, Redlaw's haunting Phantom admonishes him:

> 'There is not a father…by whose side in his daily or his nightly walks, these creatures [such as the savage boy] pass; there is not a mother among all the ranks of loving mothers in this land; there is no one risen from the state of childhood, but shall be responsible in his or her degree for this enormity. There is not a country throughout the earth on which it would not bring a curse. There is no religion upon earth that it would not deny; there is no people upon earth it would not put to shame.'

The Haunted Man was hardly a success in Dickens sales terms but it was better received than *The Battle of Life*, which was generally panned by the critics although, helped by its predecessor's enormous popularity, it sold 23,000 copies on publication day. In *The Haunted Man* critics praised the depiction of Johnny and Little Moloch ('Dickens,' declared the *Atlas* reviewer on 23 December, 'is a dead hand at a baby'), and also that of the savage child, but the work was found in general to be too incoherent and 'metaphysical'. For modern scholars such as Harry Stone its main attraction has been its obvious autobiographical overtones.[27] The presence of these overtones is hardly surprising since in the later 1840s Dickens was evidently thinking a great deal about his own past – especially about what Forster calls those 'hard experiences in boyhood' that feature so

prominently in the so-called ‘Autobiographical Fragment’ (written about this time but not published until Forster included extracts from it in his biography). Significantly, the novel on which Dickens began working immediately after *The Haunted Man* was the quasi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*.

By the time Christmas 1849 was drawing near Dickens was well into the writing of *Copperfield* and there was no mention of any Christmas Book. His 1846 experience of writing one whilst also working on a major novel was not something he would have wished to repeat. No doubt he was disgusted also by the host of pseudo-Dickens ‘Christmas Books’ that now regularly flooded the market each December. In any case, by autumn of 1850 he had ready to his hand a different vehicle by which to convey the expected seasonal salutation to his eager public. Since the end of March he had been editing a weekly journal called *Household Words* and the obvious thing was to devote to Christmas themes the last issue to appear before 25 December. Accordingly, he filled it with a series of articles by various hands with such titles as ‘Christmas in Lodgings’, ‘Christmas in the Navy’, ‘Christmas Among the London Poor and Sick’, and so on. He wrote the first, as it were leading, article himself. This was his superlative ‘Christmas Tree’ essay, a virtuoso variation on the memory theme. He used the ‘pretty German toy’, as he called the decorated tree (referring to its introduction into Britain by Prince Albert in 1841), as a device on which to build this essay in which one notable modern Dickensian has claimed to find ‘in little the essence of Dickens’s world’, a paradoxical blend of delight and terror, reality and deception, ‘childhood ringed by mortality’, and fancy and gravity.[28]

Encouraged by the excellent sales of this issue, Dickens determined that the following year there should be a special ‘Extra Number for Christmas’ of *Household Words*, and so began a tradition which continued for the next sixteen years, being carried over from *Household Words* to its successor, *All The Year Round*, in 1859. Sales of these Christmas numbers were consistently prodigious, reaching a quarter of a million in the 1860s. As with the 1850 issue, Dickens recruited other writers to collaborate with him on these issues. He began in 1851 with a simple linking formula, ‘What

Christmas Is' (e.g., Harriet Martineau's contribution is entitled 'What Christmas Is in Country Places') and then, when all the individual essays had come in, decided that the number needed 'something with no detail in it, but a tender fancy that shall hit a great many people'.[29] The year 1851 was one during which he had lost both his much-loved father and his infant daughter Dora, so it was natural that his favourite Christmas theme of the need to be open to the loving remembrance of lost dear ones should find its fullest expression to date in this essay, 'What Christmas Is as We Grow Older'.

From a simple formula linking the various self-contained stories Dickens moved on in 1852 to the framing device of a 'Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire'. From that, two years later, he developed the idea of a framing narrative into which individual stories would be slotted, thus reverting to the basic scheme of his beloved *Arabian Nights* which he had already tried to make work in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. The first Christmas number in this form was the one for 1854, 'The Seven Poor Travellers', in which the framing narrative is set in Rochester, beloved haunt of Dickens's boyhood, on Christmas Eve. Earlier in the year he had visited Watts's Charity in Rochester High Street and had perhaps reflected that the chance coming-together of half a dozen wayfarers for a night's lodging would provide an ideal setting for group story-telling, with the character of each traveller being assigned to one of his literary collaborators, who would then invent a story appropriate to that character. In succeeding Christmas numbers Dickens's framing narrative tended to become more elaborate, especially for those numbers in which Wilkie Collins was his chief or even sole collaborator. The immediately succeeding one, 'The Holly Tree Inn' (1855), still had a Christmas Eve setting but more incidentally so than 'The Seven Poor Travellers', and after that the annual frame stories, on which Dickens continued to lavish so much care, ceased to have any relationship to Christmas.

Though Dickens told his contributors that he was not at all concerned that their stories should have any direct reference to Christmas, he did nevertheless want them to 'strike the chord of the season'.[30] He defined 'the Christmas spirit' in 'What Christmas Is as We Grow Older' as 'the spirit of active usefulness, perseverance, cheerful discharge of duty, kindness, and