A CHRISTMAS CAROL,
THE END OF IT
Charles John Huffam Dickens was born in England to John Dickens and Elizabeth Barrow. Though Dickens’ paternal grandparents were servants, “their position in the household of a rich landowner was a senior one which gave [Dickens’ father] many advantages, some of which may have been damaging to his future;” essentially, Dickens’ father became acquainted with a life that “made him feel that he himself was a gentleman, occupying a higher social position than he was fated to inhabit.”

Dickens’ father began a career at the Navy Pay Office and was introduced to Elizabeth Barrow through a friend at work. After marrying, the couple had eight children; Charles was the second born, and his childhood appears to have been a happy one. He was initially educated by his mother who, by all accounts, was a lively person and an imaginative storyteller, and though Charles’ father was a committed family man, he was also financially careless. He tried to live a lifestyle that he could not afford, and by 1823, the family finances were in crisis.

A defining moment for Dickens came in 1824 when at age 12 he was sent to work in a factory. His job consisted of sticking labels on bottles of shoe polish. Shortly thereafter, his father was imprisoned for debt. For lack of other options, the rest of the family, except Charles, joined him in prison. With the little money that Charles earned during his long days at work, he was able to rent a room and provide some money to his family. According to his biography in the Literary Encyclopedia:

“There is no doubt that this experience had the most profound effect on Dickens’s character and inner life. The disruption of his family, his expectations of being properly educated, his sense of himself as destined for some kind of respectable job and position in society were all swept aside in the degradation of being reduced to the status of a little labourer.”

During this time, “the seeds of ambition were sown,” and Dickens determined “never to share the fate of his father.” He also developed a deep compassion for others, particularly lost or abandoned children, who were often left to work in the dreadful conditions that he experienced first hand. Furthermore, Dickens would carry into adulthood a disdain for anyone who sacrificed people, particularly the poor, in the pursuit of wealth or power.

Fortunately, after only a few months in prison, Dickens’ father obtained an inheritance and secured his release from prison. Strangely, Dickens’ mother did not immediately remove him from his factory work, and he would never completely forgive her for this. His father’s wishes prevailed, however, and Dickens was able to return to school. But after only two more years of education, Dickens’ family was evicted from their home for unpaid rent. This time, Dickens would enter the workforce permanently at age 15. Luckily, he was able to get a decent job working as a lawyer’s assistant.
clerk, and in his spare time, he learned shorthand, which later secured him a job as a staff reporter for the *Morning Chronicle* newspaper. From this point forward, Dickens’ family would often rely on him for financial support.

On his 18th birthday, Dickens acquired a reader’s ticket to the British Museum, and he began a rigorous program of self-education. He also regularly attended the theater and organized his own amateur productions on the side. This same year he fell in love with Maria Beadnell, but her parents did not approve of him either socially or financially. Consequently, they sent her off to school in Paris. This was another experience that would profoundly impact Dickens’ writing. According to the *Literary Encyclopedia*, “It fuelled his determination to succeed while serving as yet another example of how money, class and power made their way into even the apparent privacy of the emotional life.” Shortly after “losing” Maria, Dickens met and married Catherine Hogarth, and the couple eventually had ten children together.

With time, Dickens’ career as a journalist began to expand into more creative writing. Beginning in 1833, he started to publish short essays in newspapers and magazines under the pseudonym “Boz.” Dickens mainly wrote about lower middle class life in London, and his popular work was first collected and published in 1836 as *Sketches by Boz*. Dickens’ next project, the *Pickwick Papers*, was a comic work “concerning the misadventures of a group of urban middle class gentlemen in attempting country pursuits for which they had no skills.” The work was published in 19 monthly parts from 1836 to 1837 and turned out to be a phenomenal success. It was one of the best sellers in the history of English literature, and it established Dickens as the most popular writer of his time.

From then on, Dickens began actively producing novels. Most of them were serialized in monthly magazines, since this was the common practice of the time, and Dickens had a public who eagerly awaited each installment. Some of the most notable are: *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-1844), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1860-61).

Dickens was also widely regarded for the Christmas stories he produced almost every year from 1843 to 1867. The first, and most popular of these stories was *A Christmas Carol*, reportedly conceived and written in only a few weeks. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, it was “the one great Christmas myth of modern literature.” With time, Dickens’ view of life would come to be described as his “Christmas philosophy,” the idea that the Christmas spirit of kindness and generosity should prevail throughout the year, and Dickens himself came to be intimately associated with Christmas. According to Encyclopedia Britannica:

> “His great attachment to Christmas (in his family life as well as his writings) is indeed significant and has contributed to his popularity. ‘Dickens dead?’ exclaimed a London girl in 1870. ‘Then will Father Christmas die too?’ — a tribute both to his association with Christmas and to the mythological status of the man as well as of his work.”
Dickens’ love for Christmas was probably influenced in part by his affection for children, and in *A Christmas Carol*, he wrote, “For it is good to be children sometimes, and never better than at Christmas, when its mighty Founder was a child himself.”

By 1851, Dickens’ interest in amateur theater was revived. He wrote, directed, and acted with his children and friends. Often his productions were intended to raise money for those in need. His theater experience gradually led to public readings of his writing, and he proved to be a master of performance. Dickens’ fame as a public reader grew to nearly equal his reputation as a writer, and from 1858 until his death, he completed a number of wonderfully successful tours. According to Encyclopedia Britannica:

“He was a magnificent performer, and important elements in his art—the oral and dramatic qualities—were demonstrated in these renderings. His insight and skill revealed nuances in the narration and characterization that few readers had noticed.”

One of Dickens most popular readings was *A Christmas Carol* for which audiences would sit captivated for three hours. Altogether Dickens performed about 471 times, and as a result, he wrote much less during the last ten years of his life. However, it seems he had discovered his true passion. He loved to see and delight audiences, and he gloriéd in their admiration. According to Encyclopedia Britannica:

“No important author (at least, according to reviewers, since Homer) and no English author since who has had anything like his stature has devoted so much time and energy to this activity. The only comparable figure is his contemporary, Mark Twain, who acknowledged Dickens as the pioneer.”

Dickens was just as popular in the United States as he was in his native country of England. His reading tour in America (1867-1868) only served to strengthen the admiration of his many fans and increase his reputation. Sadly, Dickens’ active and demanding performance schedule probably contributed to his early death in 1870, but he died as a dearly loved man on both sides of the Atlantic.

Though Dickens’ writing has been attacked for its sentimentality, even the harshest critics acknowledge his talent. For many, “He is second only to Shakespeare as the greatest English writer” of all time. Interestingly, G.K. Chesterton (1874-1936), one of the greatest writers of the next generation in England, so highly regarded Dickens’ work that he wrote prefaces for many of them; these were later collected in *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens* (1911). Dickens’ tombstone in Poet’s Corner of Westminster Abbey, London, succinctly summarizes his life: “He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England’s greatest writers is lost to the world.”
The following excerpt is the final chapter, “The End of It,” of A Christmas Carol. The familiar story begins on Christmas Eve with the bad-tempered Ebenezer Scrooge spending his day, among other things, abusing his clerk, Bob Cratchit (the father of crippled Tiny Tim), rejecting his nephew Fred’s invitation to dinner and coldly sending away men who were raising money for the poor.

That night, the ghost of Scrooge’s late business partner Jacob Marley visits him. Marley expresses his remorse for failing to be more charitable during his life, and he informs Scrooge that other spirits will appear who might offer him a chance for reform. The three spirits who visit Scrooge are: the Ghost of Christmas Past, the Ghost of Christmas Present and the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come.

During the visit of the last spirit, the Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come, Scrooge witnesses his own funeral. Sadly, nobody mourns his death, and people joke about his stinginess. Furthermore, Scrooge learns that young Tiny Tim dies, because his family cannot afford the medical attention that he needs. When Scrooge wakes up, he is a changed man. It is here that the excerpt begins.

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2 Smith, Grahame.
3 Smith, Grahame.
5 Smith, Grahame.
6 Smith, Grahame.
8 Encyclopedia Britannica.
9 Encyclopedia Britannica.
10 Encyclopedia Britannica.
11 Encyclopedia Britannica.
12 Smith, Grahame.
13 Merriman, C.D.
Yes! And the bedpost was his own. The bed was his own, the room was his own. Best and happiest of all, the Time before him was his own, to make amends in!

“I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future!” Scrooge repeated, as he scrambled out of bed. “The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. Oh Jacob Marley! Heaven, and the Christmas Time be praised for this. I say it on my knees, old Jacob, on my knees!”

He was so fluttered and so glowing with his good intentions, that his broken voice would scarcely answer to his call. He had been sobbing violently in his conflict with the Spirit, and his face was wet with tears.

“They are not torn down!” cried Scrooge, folding one of his bed-curtains in his arms, “they are not torn down, rings and all. They are here — I am here — the shadows of the things that would have been, may be dispelled. They will be! I know they will.”

His hands were busy with his garments all this time; turning them inside out, putting them on upside down, tearing them, mislaying them, making them parties to every kind of extravagance.

“I don’t know what to do!” cried Scrooge, laughing and crying in the same breath; and making a perfect Laocoon of himself with his stockings. “I am as light as a feather, I am as happy as an angel, I am as merry as a schoolboy. I am as giddy as a drunken man. A merry Christmas to everybody! A happy New Year to all the world! Hallo here! Whoop! Hallo!”

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

“There’s the saucepan that the gruel was in!” cried Scrooge, starting off again, and frisking round the fireplace. “There’s the door, by which the Ghost of Jacob Marley entered. There’s the corner where the Ghost of Christmas Present sat. There’s the window where I saw the wandering Spirits. It’s all right, it’s all true, it all happened. Ha ha ha!”

Really, for a man who had been out of practice for so many years, it was a splendid laugh, a most illustrious laugh. The father of a long, long line of brilliant laughs.

“I don’t know what day of the month it is,” said Scrooge. “I don’t know how long I’ve been among the Spirits. I don’t know anything. I’m quite a baby. Never mind. I don’t care. I’d rather be a baby. Hallo! Whoop! Hallo here!”

He was checked in his transports by the churches ringing out the lustiest peals he had ever heard. Clash, clang, hammer; ding, dong, bell! Bell, dong, ding; hammer, clang, clash! Oh, glorious, glorious!

Running to the window, he opened it, and put out his head. No fog, no mist; clear, bright, jovial, stirring, cold; cold, piping for the blood to dance to; Golden sunlight; Heavenly sky; sweet fresh air; merry bells. Oh, glorious. Glorious!

“What’s to-day?” cried Scrooge, calling downward to a boy in Sunday clothes, who perhaps had loitered in to look about him.

“Eh?” returned the boy, with all his might of wonder.

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

“To-day?” replied the boy. “Why, Christmas Day.”
"It's Christmas Day!" said Scrooge to himself. "I haven’t missed it. The Spirits have done it all in one night. They can do anything they like. Of course they can. Of course they can. Hallo, my fine fellow!"

"Hallo!" returned the boy.

"Do you know the Poulterer’s, in the next street but one, at the corner?" Scrooge inquired.

"I should hope I did," replied the lad.

"An intelligent boy!" said Scrooge. "A remarkable boy! Do you know whether they’ve sold the prize Turkey that was hanging up there — Not the little prize Turkey: the big one?"

"What, the one as big as me?" returned the boy.

"What a delightful boy!" said Scrooge. "It’s a pleasure to talk to him. Yes, my buck."

"It’s hanging there now," replied the boy.

"Is it?" said Scrooge. "Go and buy it."

"Walk-ER!" exclaimed the boy.

"No, no," said Scrooge, "I am in earnest. Go and buy it, and tell them to bring it here, that I may give them the direction where to take it. Come back with the man, and I’ll give you a shilling. Come back with him in less than five minutes and I’ll give you half-a-crown."

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

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

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

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

It was a Turkey! He never could have stood upon his legs, that bird. He would have snapped them short off in a minute, like sticks of sealing-wax.

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

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

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

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

He had not gone far, when coming on towards him he beheld the portly gentleman, who had walked into his counting-house the day before, and said, “Scrooge and Marley’s, I believe.” [This man was attempting to raise money for the poor but was cruelly sent away by Scrooge.] It sent a pang across his heart to think how this old gentleman would look upon him when they met; but he knew what path lay straight before him, and he took it.

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

“Mr Scrooge?”

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

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

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

“My dear sir,” said the other, shaking hands with him. “I don’t know what to say to such munificence.”

“Don’t say anything please,” retorted Scrooge. “Come and see me. Will you come and see me?”

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

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

He went to church, and walked about the streets, and watched the people hurrying to and fro, and patted children on the head, and questioned beggars, and looked down into the kitchens of houses, and up to the windows, and found that everything could yield him pleasure. He had never dreamed that any walk — that anything — could give him so much happiness. In the afternoon he turned his steps towards his nephew’s house.

He passed the door a dozen times, before he had the courage to go up and knock. But he made a dash, and did it.

“Is your master at home, my dear?” said Scrooge to the girl. Nice girl. Very.

“Yes, sir.”

“Where is he, my love?” said Scrooge.

“He’s in the dining-room, sir, along with mistress. I’ll show you up-stairs, if you please.”

“Thank you. He knows me,” said Scrooge, with his hand already on the dining-room lock. “I’ll go in here, my dear.”
He turned it gently, and sidled his face in, round the door. They were looking at the table (which was spread out in great array); for these young housekeepers are always nervous on such points, and like to see that everything is right.

"Fred!" said Scrooge.

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

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

"It’s I. Your uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn’t shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, won-der-ful happiness! But he was early at the office next morning. Oh he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch Bob Cratchit coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart upon.

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

His hat was off, before he opened the door, his comforter too. He was on his stool in a jiffy, driving away with his pen, as if he were trying to overtake nine o’clock.

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

“I’m very sorry, sir,” said Bob. “I am behind my time.”

“You are?” repeated Scrooge. “Yes. I think you are. Step this way, if you please.”

“It’s only once a year, sir,” pleaded Bob, appearing from the tank. “It shall not be repeated. I was making rather merry yesterday, sir.”

“Now, I’ll tell you what, my friend,” said Scrooge, “I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore,” he continued, leaping from his stool, and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the tank again — “and therefore I am about to raise your salary.”

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

“A merry Christmas, Bob,” said Scrooge, with an earnestness that could not be mistaken, as he clapped him on the back. “A merrier Christmas, Bob, my good fellow, than I have given you for many a year. I’ll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop, Bob. Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!”

Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did not die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some
people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed, and that was quite enough for him.

He had no further intercourse with Spirits, but lived upon the Total Abstinence Principle, ever afterwards; and it was always said of him, that he knew how to keep Christmas well, if any man alive possessed the knowledge. May that be truly said of us, and all of us! And so, as Tiny Tim observed, God Bless Us, Every One!