

THE CHIMES

by Charles Dickens

A CHRISTMAS READING FOR THE AUSTRAL-BRITISH SOCIETY

COMPILED BY H. PAYR

First Quarter

THERE ARE NOT MANY PEOPLE – and as it is desirable that a story-teller and a storyreader should establish a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it to be noticed that I confine this observation neither to young people nor to little people, but extend it to all conditions of people: little and big, young and old: yet growing up, or already growing down again – there are not, I say, many people who would care to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in warm weather (when the thing has actually been done, once or twice), but in the night, and alone. For the night-wind has a dismal trick of wandering round and round a building of that sort, and moaning as it goes; and of trying, with its unseen hand, the windows and the doors.

But high up in the steeple of an old church, far above the light and murmur of the town and far below the flying clouds that shadow it, is the wildest and dreariest place at night: and high up in the steeple of an old church, dwelt the Chimes I tell of.

At the foot of the steeple a porter has his place where he is waiting for business.

They called him Trotty from his pace, which meant speed if it didn't make it. He could have walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died. A weak, small, spare old man, he was a very Hercules, this Toby, in his good intentions. He loved to

earn his money. With a shilling or an eighteenpenny message or small parcel in hand, his courage always high, rose higher. Thus, even when he came out of his nook to warm himself on a wet day, Toby trotted. Falling out into the road to look up at the belfry when the Chimes resounded, Toby trotted still.

The last drowsy sound of Twelve o'clock, just struck, was humming like a melodious monster of a Bee, and not by any means a busy bee, all through the steeple.

“Dinner-time, eh!” said Toby, trotting up and down before the church.

“Why, father, father!” said a pleasant voice, hard by.

His daughter Meg is bringing his dinner. At the same time she has come to talk about something very serious.

“Richard says, another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting on from year to year, when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? He says we are poor now, father, and we shall be poor then, but we are young now, and years will make us old before we know it. So Richard says, father; as his work was yesterday made certain for some time to come, and as I love him, and have loved him full three years, will I marry him on New Year’s Day; the best and happiest day, he says, in the whole year, and one that is almost sure to bring good fortune with it.”

“And see how he leaves his dinner cooling on the step!” said another voice.

It was the voice of this same Richard.

At this point, three men come by: Alderman Cute, Mr. Filer, and a third gentleman. They inquire what Trotty is eating.

“This is a description of animal food, Alderman,” said Filer, “the stomach of a cow or a sheep, commonly known to the labouring population of this country, by the name of tripe. Tripe is without an exception the least economical, and the most wasteful article of consumption that the markets of this country can by possibility produce. The loss upon a pound of tripe has been found to be, in the boiling, seven-eighths of a fifth more than the loss upon a pound of any other animal substance whatever. Taking into account the number of animals slaughtered yearly within the bills of mortality alone; and forming a low estimate of the quantity of tripe which the carcasses of those animals, reasonably well butchered, would yield; I find

that the waste on that amount of tripe, if boiled, would victual a garrison of five hundred men for five months of thirty-one days each, and a February over. Divide the amount of tripe before-mentioned, Alderman, by the estimated number of existing widows and orphans, and the result will be one pennyweight of tripe to each. Not a grain is left for that man. Consequently, he's a robber."

Alderman Cute is addressing the young couple. They confess that they are in love and are going to be married.

"You are going to be married, you say," pursued the Alderman. "Very unbecoming and indelicate in one of your sex! But never mind that. After you are married, you'll quarrel with your husband and come to be a distressed wife. You may think not; but you will, because I tell you so. Now, I give you fair warning, that I have made up my mind to Put distressed wives Down. So, don't be brought before me. You'll have children – boys. Those boys will grow up bad, of course, and run wild in the streets, without shoes and stockings. Mind, my young friend! I'll convict 'em summarily, every one, for I am determined to Put boys without shoes and stockings, Down. Perhaps your husband will die young (most likely) and leave you with a baby. Then you'll be turned out of doors, and wander up and down the streets. Now, don't wander near me, my dear, for I am resolved to Put all wandering mothers Down. All young mothers, of all sorts and kinds, it's my determination to Put Down. Don't think to plead illness as an excuse with me; or babies as an excuse with me; for all sick persons and young children (I hope you know the church-service, but I'm afraid not) I am determined to Put Down. And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully, and impiously, and fraudulently attempt, to drown yourself, or hang yourself, I'll have no pity for you, for I have made up my mind to Put all suicide Down! If there is one thing," said the Alderman, with his self-satisfied smile, "on which I can be said to have made up my mind more than on another, it is to Put suicide Down. So don't try it on. That's the phrase, isn't it? Ha, ha! now we understand each other."

Toby knew not whether to be agonised or glad, to see that Meg had turned a deadly white, and dropped her lover's hand.

"And as for you, you dull dog," said the Alderman, turning with even increased cheerfulness and urbanity to the young smith, "what are you

thinking of being married for? What do you want to be married for, you silly fellow? If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I should be ashamed of being milksop enough to pin myself to a woman's apron-strings! Why, she'll be an old woman before you're a middle-aged man! And a pretty figure you'll cut then, with a draggle-tailed wife and a crowd of squalling children crying after you wherever you go!"

O, he knew how to banter the common people, Alderman Cute!

"There! Go along with you," said the Alderman, "and repent."

They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in hand, or interchanging bright glances; but, she in tears; he, gloomy and downlooking. Were these the hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap up from its faintness? No, no. The Alderman (a blessing on his head!) had Put *them* Down.

The Alderman gives Trotty a letter to be delivered to Sir Joseph Bowley in a wealthy part of the town. But Trotty is utterly confused and depressed by what has been said.

The Bells, pealing forth their changes, made the very air spin. Put 'em down, Put 'em down! Facts and Figures, Facts and Figures! Put 'em down, Put 'em down! If they said anything they said this, until the brain of Toby reeled.

He pressed his bewildered head between his hands, as if to keep it from splitting asunder. A well-timed action, as it happened; for finding the letter in one of them, and being by that means reminded of his charge, he fell, mechanically, into his usual trot, and trotted off.

Second Quarter

Trotty takes the letter to Sir Joseph Bowley's house and is shown in to present it to the great man himself. He is in the company of his wife, Lady Bowley.

"I am the Poor Man's Friend," observed Sir Joseph, glancing at the poor man present. "I ask no other title."

"Bless him for a noble gentleman!" thought Trotty.

"I assume a – a paternal character towards my friend. I say, 'My good fellow, I will treat you paternally.'"

Toby listened with great gravity, and began to feel more comfortable.

"Your only business, my good fellow," pursued Sir Joseph, looking abstractedly at Toby; "your only business in life is with me. You needn't trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for you; I know what is good for you; I am your perpetual parent. Now, the design of your creation is – not that you should swill, and guzzle, and associate your enjoyments, brutally, with food;" Toby thought remorsefully of the tripe; "but that you should feel the Dignity of Labour. Live hard and temperately, be respectful, exercise your self-denial, bring up your family on next to nothing, pay your rent as regularly as the clock strikes, be punctual in your dealings; and you may trust to me to be your Friend and Father."

Toby was greatly moved.

"O! You have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!" cried his wife.

"My lady," said Sir Joseph, quite majestically, "Ingratitude is known to be the sin of that class. I expect no other return."

"Ah! Born bad!" thought Toby. "Nothing melts us."

"I do my duty as the Poor Man's Friend and Father," pursued Sir Joseph. "If they become impatient and discontented, and are guilty of insubordinate conduct and blackhearted ingratitude; I am their Friend and Father still."

With that great sentiment, he opened the Alderman's letter; and read it.

"Very polite and attentive, I am sure!" exclaimed Sir Joseph. "My lady, the Alderman does me the favour to inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern put down."

"*Most* agreeable!" replied my Lady Bowley. "The worst man among them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?"

“Why no,” said Sir Joseph, referring to the letter. “Not quite. Very near. Not quite. He came up to London, it seems, to look for employment, and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody. The Alderman observes (very properly) that he is determined to put this sort of thing down.”

“Let him be made an example of, by all means,” returned the lady.

Trotty is commissioned to carry Sir Joseph’s answer back to Alderman Cute. On his way home, he bumps into a man.

“I hope I haven’t hurt you?”

The man against whom he had run; a sun-browned, sinewy, country-looking man, with grizzled hair, and a rough chin; stared at him for a moment, as if he suspected him to be in jest. But, satisfied of his good faith, he answered:

“No, friend. You have not hurt me.”

“Nor the child, I hope?” said Trotty.

“Nor the child,” returned the man. “I thank you kindly.”

As he said so, he glanced at a little girl he carried in his arms asleep, and shaded her face with the long end of the poor handkerchief he wore about his throat.

“You can tell me, perhaps,” said the man with a faint smile, “where Alderman Cute lives.”

It turns out that the man is the very Will Fern that Sir Joseph has been speaking about.

“When work won’t maintain me like a human creetur”, Will Fern said, “when my living is so bad, that I am Hungry, out of doors and in; when I see a whole working life begin that way, go on that way, and end that way, without a chance or change; then I say to the gentlefolks ‘Keep away from me! Let my cottage be. My doors is dark enough without your darkening of ’em more. Don’t look for me to come up into the Park to help the show when there’s a Birthday, or a fine Speechmaking, or what not. Act your Plays and Games without me, and be welcome to ’em, and enjoy ’em. We’ve nowt to do with one another. I’m best let alone!’ – I don’t know as this Alderman could hurt me much by sending me to jail; but without a friend to speak a word for me, he might do it; and you see – !” pointing downward with his finger, at the child.

“She has a beautiful face,” said Trotty.

“Why yes!” replied the other in a low voice, as he gently turned it up with both his hands towards his own, and looked upon it steadfastly. “I’ve thought so, many times.”

He sunk his voice so low, and gazed upon her with an air so stern and strange, that Toby, to divert the current of his thoughts, inquired if his wife were living.

“I never had one,” he returned, shaking his head. “She’s my brother’s child: a orphan. They’d have taken care on her, the Union – eight-and-twenty mile away from where we live – between the four walls of the workhouse; but I took her instead, and she’s lived with me ever since. Her mother had a friend once, in London here. We are trying to find her, and to find work too; but it’s a large place. Never mind. More room for us to walk about in, Lilly!”

Meeting the child’s eyes with a smile which melted Toby more than tears, he shook him by the hand.

“Stay!” cried Trotty, catching at his hand, as he relaxed his grip. “Stay! The New Year never can be happy to me, if I see the child and you go wandering away. Come home with me!”

Lillian, the nine-year old girl, immediately takes to Meg. However, Trotty concludes from the expression on Meg’s face that the marriage with Richard is off. Reading the newspaper his thoughts return to what he has heard that day.

In this mood, he came to an account (and it was not the first he had ever read) of a woman who had laid her desperate hands not only on her own life but on that of her young child. A crime so terrible, and so revolting to his soul, dilated with the love of Meg, that he let the journal drop, and fell back in his chair, appalled!

“Unnatural and cruel!” Toby cried. “Unnatural and cruel! None but people who were bad at heart, born bad, who had no business on the earth, could do such deeds. It’s too true, all I’ve heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. We’re Bad!”

The Chimes took up the words so suddenly – burst out so loud, and clear, and sonorous – that the Bells seemed to strike him in his chair.

And what was that, they said?

“Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Toby Veck, Toby Veck, waiting for you Toby! Come and see us, come and see us, Drag him to us, drag him to us, Haunt and hunt him, haunt and hunt him, Break his slumbers, break his slumbers! Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide Toby, Toby Veck Toby Veck, door open wide Toby – ” then fiercely back to their impetuous strain again, and ringing in the very bricks and plaster on the walls.

He decides to go and see for himself. To his surprise, he finds the church door ajar. He climbs up the narrow staircase.

Higher, Trotty, in his fascination, or in working out the spell upon him, groped his way. By ladders now, and toilsomely, for it was steep, and not too certain holding for the feet.

Up, up, up; and climb and clamber; up, up, up; higher, higher, higher up!

Until, ascending through the floor, and pausing with his head just raised above its beams, he came among the Bells. It was barely possible to make out their great shapes in the gloom; but there they were. Shadowy, and dark, and dumb.

A heavy sense of dread and loneliness fell instantly upon him, as he climbed into this airy nest of stone and metal. His head went round and round. He listened, and then raised a wild “Holloa!”

Holloa! was mournfully protracted by the echoes.

Giddy, confused, and out of breath, and frightened, Toby looked about him vacantly, and sunk down in a swoon.

Third Quarter

Then and not before, did Trotty see in every Bell a bearded figure of the bulk and stature of the Bell. Gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him, as he stood rooted to the ground.

A blast of air – how cold and shrill! – came moaning through the tower. As it died away, the Great Bell, or the Goblin of the Great Bell, spoke.

“Who hears us echo the dull vermin of the earth: the Putters Down of crushed and broken natures, does us wrong. Who turns his back upon the fallen and disfigured of his kind; abandons them as vile – does us wrong. And you have done that wrong!”

“Spare me,” cried Trotty, falling on his knees; “for Mercy’s sake!”

“Learn from your child,” returned the Bell. “Learn from the creature dearest to your heart, how bad the bad are born. The Spirit of the Chimes is your companion. Go! It stands behind you!”

The tower opened at his feet. He looked down, and beheld his own form, lying at the bottom, on the outside: crushed and motionless.

“What!” he cried, shuddering. “I missed my way, and coming on the outside of this tower in the dark, fell down – a year ago?”

“Nine years ago!” replied the figure.

In a poor, mean room; working at the same kind of embroidery which he had often, often seen before her; Meg, his own dear daughter, was presented to his view. Ah! Changed. Changed. The light of the clear eye, how dimmed. The bloom, how faded from the cheek.

She looked up from her work, at a companion. Following her eyes, the old man started back. In the woman grown, he recognised her at a glance. In the long silken hair, he saw the self-same curls; around the lips, the child’s expression lingering still.

“Such work, such work!” said Lilian. “So many hours, so many days, so many long, long nights of hopeless, cheerless, never-ending work – not to heap up riches, not to live grandly or gaily, not to live upon enough, however coarse; but to earn bare bread; to scrape together just enough to toil upon, and want upon, and keep alive in us the consciousness of our hard fate! Oh Meg, Meg!” she raised her voice and twined her arms about

her as she spoke, like one in pain. "How can the cruel world go round, and bear to look upon such lives!"

"Why, Lilly! You! So pretty and so young!"

"Oh Meg! The worst of all, the worst of all! Strike me old, Meg! Wither me, and shrivel me, and free me from the dreadful thoughts that tempt me in my youth!"

Bowley Hall was full of visitors. The red-faced gentleman was there, Mr. Filer was there, the great Alderman Cute was there – Alderman Cute had a sympathetic feeling with great people, and had considerably improved his acquaintance with Sir Joseph Bowley. Trotty's ghost was there, wandering about, poor phantom, drearily.

A slight disturbance at the bottom of the Hall attracted Toby's notice. After some confusion, noise, and opposition, one man broke through the rest, and stood forward by himself. He knew Will Fern as soon as he stepped forth.

"Gentlefolks!" said Will Fern. "Look at me! The time when your kind words or kind actions could have done ME good is gone. 'Tis harder than you think for, gentlefolks, to grow up decent, commonly decent, in such a place. See how your laws are made to trap and hunt us when we're brought to this. I tries to live elsewhere. And I'm a vagabond. To jail with him! I comes back here. I goes a-nutting in your woods, and breaks – who don't? – a limber branch or two. To jail with him! One of your keepers sees me in the broad day, near my own patch of garden, with a gun. To jail with him! I eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! It's twenty mile away; and coming back I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and jail's the only home he's got."

His daughter was again before him, seated at her work. But in a poorer, meaner garret than before; and with no Lilian by her side.

A great part of the evening had worn away, when a knock came at her door. She opened it. A man was on the threshold. A slouching, moody, drunken sloven, wasted by intemperance and vice, and with his matted hair and unshorn beard in wild disorder. Trotty had his wish. He saw Richard.

"Still at work, Margaret? You work late."

“I generally do.”

“So she said. She said you never tired. Not even when you fainted, between work and fasting. But I told you that, the last time I came.”

“You did,” she answered. “And I implored you to tell me nothing more; and you made me a solemn promise, Richard, that you never would.”

“How can I help it, Margaret? What am I to do? She has been to me again!”

“Again!” cried Meg, clasping her hands. “O, does she think of me so often! Has she been again!”

“Twenty times again,” said Richard. “Margaret, she haunts me. She comes behind me in the street, and thrusts it in my hand. Before I can turn my head, her voice is in my ear, saying, ‘Richard, don’t look round. For Heaven’s love, give her this!’ She brings it where I live: she sends it in letters; she taps at the window and lays it on the sill. What *can* I do? Look at it!”

He held out in his hand a little purse, and chinked the money it enclosed.

“Hide it,” said Meg. “Hide it! When she comes again, tell her, Richard, that I love her in my soul. But, that I cannot look upon it!”

“I told her so. But when she came at last, and stood before me, face to face, what could I do?”

“You saw her!” exclaimed Meg. “You saw her! O, Lilian, my sweet girl! O, Lilian, Lilian!”

“I saw her,” he went on to say. “There she stood: trembling! There she was. I heard her say it: ‘Richard, I have fallen very low. Tell her that you looked into my face, and saw the beauty which she used to praise, all gone: all gone: and in its place, a poor, wan, hollow cheek, that she would weep to see. Tell her everything, and take it back, and she will not refuse again. She will not have the heart!’ ”

She shook her head, and motioned an entreaty to him to leave her.

In any mood, in any grief, in any torture of the mind or body, Meg’s work must be done. The Chimes rang half-past twelve; and when they ceased she heard a gentle knocking at the door. Before she could so much as wonder who was there, at that unusual hour, it opened.

She saw the entering figure; screamed its name; cried “Lilian!”

It was swift, and fell upon its knees before her: clinging to her dress.

“Never more, Meg; never more! Here! Here! Close to you, holding to you, feeling your dear breath upon my face!”

“You have come back. My Treasure! We will live together, work together, hope together, die together!”

“Forgive me, Meg! So dear, so dear! Forgive me! I know you do, I see you do, but say so, Meg!”

She said so, with her lips on Lilian’s cheek. And with her arms twined round—she knew it now—a broken heart.

“His blessing on you, dearest love. Kiss me once more! He suffered her to sit beside His feet, and dry them with her hair. O Meg, what Mercy and Compassion!”

As she died, the Spirit of the child returning, innocent and radiant, touched the old man with its hand, and beckoned him away.

Fourth Quarter

Mrs Chickenstalker, the shopkeeper in TroTTY's neighbourhood, is recounting the fate of Meg and Richard.

"I knew him as a handsome, steady, manly, independent youth; I knew her as the sweetest-looking, sweetest-tempered girl, eyes ever saw; I knew her father (poor old creetur, he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself), for the simplest, hardest-working, childsthearted man, that ever drew the breath of life.

"You see they kept company, she and Richard, many years ago. When they were a young and beautiful couple, everything was settled, and they were to have been married on a New Year's Day. But, somehow, Richard got it into his head, through what the gentlemen told him, that he might do better, and that he'd soon repent it, and that she wasn't good enough for him, and that a young man of spirit had no business to be married.

"And the gentlemen frightened her, and made her melancholy, and timid of his deserting her, and of her children coming to the gallows, and of its being wicked to be man and wife, and a good deal more of it. And in short, they lingered and lingered, and their trust in one another was broken, and so at last was the match. But the fault was his. She would have married him, sir, joyfully.

"I think his mind was troubled by their having broke with one another. He took to drinking, idling, bad companions. He lost his looks, his character, his health, his strength, his friends, his work: everything!

"This went on for years and years; he sinking lower and lower; she enduring, poor thing, miseries enough to wear her life away. At last, he was so cast down, and cast out, that no one would employ or notice him; and doors were shut upon him, go where he would. Applying from place to place, and door to door; and coming for the hundredth time to one gentleman who had often and often tried him (he was a good workman to the very end); that gentleman, who knew his history, said, 'I believe you are incorrigible; there is only one person in the world who has a chance of reclaiming you; ask me to trust you no more, until she tries to do it.' Something like that, in his anger and vexation.

“So they were married. He went on better for a short time; but, his habits were too old and strong to be got rid of; he soon fell back a little; and was falling fast back, when his illness came so strong upon him. I think he has always felt for her. There he has been lying, now, these weeks and months. Between him and her baby, she has not been able to do her old work; and by not being able to be regular, she has lost it, even if she could have done it. How they have lived, I hardly know!”

Richard dies. Meg finds it harder and harder to sustain herself and her baby daughter.

Again Trotty heard the voices saying, “Follow her!” He turned towards his guide, and saw it rising from him, passing through the air.

“Follow her!” it said. And vanished.

He hovered round her. He set his father’s hope and trust on the frail baby; watched her every look upon it as she held it in her arms; and cried a thousand times, “She loves it! God be thanked, she loves it!”

He saw the day come, and the night again. All this time, she was in want: languishing away, in dire and pining want. With the baby in her arms, she wandered here and there, in quest of occupation; and with its thin face lying in her lap, and looking up in hers, did any work for any wretched sum; a day and night of labour for as many farthings as there were figures on the dial. If she had quarrelled with it; if she had neglected it; if she had looked upon it with a moment’s hate; if, in the frenzy of an instant, she had struck it! No. His comfort was, She loved it always.

Eventually, returning to her lodgings on New’s Year Eve, she is refused entry.

In her own scanty shawl, she wrapped the baby warm. With her fevered hands, she smoothed its limbs, composed its face, arranged its mean attire. In her wasted arms she folded it, as though she never would resign it more. And with her dry lips, kissed it in a final pang, and last long agony of Love.

Putting its tiny hand up to her neck, and holding it there, within her dress, next to her distracted heart, she set its sleeping face against her: closely, steadily, against her: and sped onward to the River.

He tried to touch her as she passed him, going down to its dark level: but, the wild distempered form, the fierce and terrible love, the desperation that had left all human check or hold behind, swept by him like the wind.

He followed her. She paused a moment on the brink, before the dreadful plunge. He fell down on his knees, and in a shriek addressed the figures in the Bells now hovering above them.

“I have learnt it!” cried the old man. “From the creature dearest to my heart! O, save her, save her!”

He could wind his fingers in her dress; could hold it! As the words escaped his lips, he felt his sense of touch return, and knew that he detained her.

“Have mercy on her!” he exclaimed, “Think what her misery must have been! Heaven meant her to be good. There is no loving mother on the earth who might not come to this, if such a life had gone before.”

She was in his arms. He held her now. His strength was like a giant’s.

“I see the Spirit of the Chimes among you!” cried the old man. “I know that we must trust and hope, and neither doubt ourselves, nor doubt the good in one another. I have learnt it from the creature dearest to my heart.”

He might have said more; but, the Bells, the old familiar Bells, his own dear, constant, steady friends, the Chimes, began to ring the joy-peals for a New Year: so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gaily, that he leapt upon his feet, and broke the spell that bound him.

“And whatever you do, father,” said Meg, “don’t eat tripe again without asking some doctor whether it’s likely to agree with you; for how you *have* been going on, Good gracious!”

She was working with her needle, at the little table by the fire; dressing her simple gown with ribbons for her wedding. So quietly happy, so blooming and youthful, so full of beautiful promise, that he uttered a great cry as if it were an Angel in his house; then flew to clasp her in his arms.

But, he caught his feet in the newspaper, which had fallen on the hearth; and somebody came rushing in between them.

“No!” cried the voice of this same somebody; a generous and jolly voice it was! “Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg in the New Year is mine. Mine! I have been waiting outside the house, this hour, to hear the Bells and claim it. Meg, my precious prize, a happy year! A life of happy years, my darling wife!”

And Richard smothered her with kisses.

You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. I don't care where you have lived or what you have seen; you never in all your life saw anything at all approaching him! He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and cried; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed; he sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg; he got out of his chair and hugged Richard; he got out of his chair and hugged them both at once; he kept running up to Meg, and squeezing her fresh face between his hands and kissing it, going from her backwards not to lose sight of it, and running up again like a figure in a magic lantern; and whatever he did, he was constantly sitting himself down in his chair, and never stopping in it for one single moment; being – that's the truth – beside himself with joy.

“And to-morrow's your wedding-day, my pet!” cried Trotty. “Your real, happy wedding-day!”

“To-day!” cried Richard, shaking hands with him. “To-day. The Chimes are ringing in the New Year. Hear them!”