

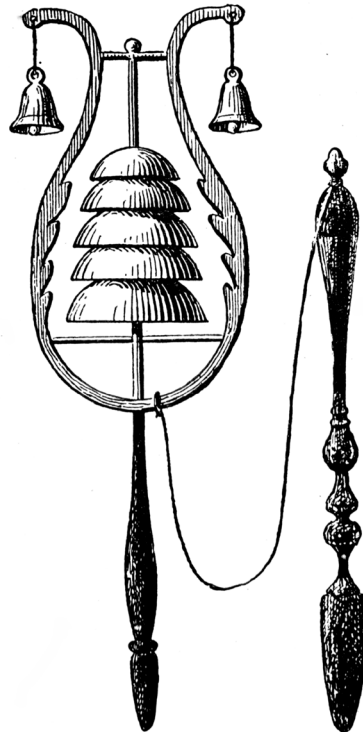
# THE CHIMES, A GOBLIN STORY

BY CHARLES DICKENS

We have all listened at some time or other to the music of the church bells as they ring out their pleasant chimes every quarter of the hour. The chimes we are now to hear about ring also in four quarters, and the story they tell us in ringing the first quarter runs something like this.

There was the quaintest old fellow you could imagine, named Tony Veck, but better known as "Trotty," because he had a funny little way of walking which gave him the appearance of "trotting." He could not go even a little distance without this jumpy style of movement, and as he was employed, whenever he could get a job, in running errands for people in the district of London where the fine old church with the musical chimes stood, perhaps his little trot was useful; it certainly kept him warm in the cold weather.

As poor old Trotty had only the shabbiest of clothes and the leakiest of boots, it was no easy matter for him to keep warm in wintertime. He wore knee-britches and long gaiters, as some old-fashioned folk did seventy or eighty years ago; but all his clothes and had been worn by other people long before they



came to him. His tall hat, for instance, was so crushed that it had long been ready for the dust-heap, and even his little white apron, which indicated that he was a porter, had long ceased to be anything but a rag.

Times were very, very hard with Trotty; but he was a cheerful old soul, honest and always willing to do his best, on any errand he was sent, for the sixpence with which he was usually rewarded. But sixpences were few, and anything but "nimble," one winter when the weather was bad, and even Christmas scarcely seemed to promise better times. Trotty was down in spirits, and things would have gone badly with him but for his daughter Margaret, a bright and cheerful young woman, whose needle helped to keep her and her father in food. Margaret had a sweetheart, Richard, an honest young blacksmith, who wished her to marry him on New Year's Day; but even this good news hardly brightened the spirits of Trotty Veck, as everything at that time seemed to be against him.

Margaret had brought Trotty his dinner, a savory dish of tripe, which he relished greatly and he was eating this on the steps of a gentleman's house, when out came that person,

Alderman Cute, with some friends, who made some very unfeeling remarks about the food of the poor, so that Trotty's heart was down his boots again. The alderman, however, gave him a letter to carry a pompous old person named Sir Joseph Bowley, M.P, and paid him only a sixpence for the errand.

As he trotted off gloomily with the letter, the chimes were pealing from the steeple, and they seemed to say to Trotty, at least he thought so—"Put 'em down! Put 'em down! Good old times! Good old times! Put 'em down! Put 'em down!" So ends the first quarter of "the Chimes."

#### **THE LETTER THAT TONY VECK CARRIED TO SIR JOSEPH BOWLEY**

He thought himself a very remarkable person, this Sir Joseph Bowley, and he and his precious wife pretended to take the greatest interest in poor people; but they were really two self-satisfied humbugs, and were quite without pity for anyone but themselves. It turned out that the letter which Trotty had carried from Alderman Cute was to ask Sir Joseph about a certain Will Fern, who had just come to London from the country village where Lady Bowley carried on her pretentious work among the poor.

Will Fern, with his dead brother's orphan child, was really in London searching for a kind woman who had been a good friend of the girl's mother; he was out of work too, and had applied to alderman Cute for advice and assistance. But as Will had not taken kindly to Lady Bowley's

plans for improving the poor of her village, and had refused to spend his evenings at her class, making buttonholes, her ladyship did not hesitate to think him guilty of any crime, so that Sir Joseph dictated a letter to Alderman Cute advising him to have the rascal locked up.

#### **TROTTY MEETS TWO WEARY WANDERERS AND BECOMES THEIR GOOD FAIRY**

Poor old Trotty was almost dazed by the insolent way in which this good and kindly couple treated him, and also at the tone of the letter he had heard being directed to the alderman so that he cut rather a stupid figure when he was asked to be off with himself and the letter. Still muddled in his mind, as he was trotting back, he ran against a man and a child in the dark streets, and got into conversation with them. To Trotty's surprise the man turned out to be none other than Will Fern searching for the house of Alderman Cute. So, as you may suppose, Trotty told him all he knew, and warned him not to go there on any account, but to come home with him to spend the night.

To think that he was to be of such great service to the poor wanderers completely changed Trotty's spirits, and as soon as he got home he was tremendously busy helping Meg to get supper ready, having bought a rasher of bacon and an ounce of tea with his sixpence, but refusing himself to eat anything, thought he was starving, on the pretence that it was well known to his friends that he never cared, himself, for rashers or tea. "I like to see other people

enjoy them,” said Trotty, speaking very loud to impress the fact upon his guest; “but to me, as food, they’re disagreeable.”

Now the chimes were ringing again, and they seemed to say, “Toby Veck, Toby Veck, the door open wide.” This was strange, and he determined to trot out and see if the door of the church steeple was really open, for he had seldom seen it open before.

### **THE BEGINNING OF TROTTY’S STRANGE ADVENTURES UP THE OLD BELFRY**

Out he slipped without his cap or apron, and sure enough the door was open. In he went, and up and up in the darkness, climbing the steps and then the ladders, until he was among the bells, when a sense of dread and loneliness came upon him all at once, and he fell in a swoon. So ends the second quarter.

When the chimes began to ring Tony awakened, and many wonderful things did he now begin to see. The spirits of the bells were swarming all around him; goblins and fairies and elfin spirits in endless numbers were pouring out in all directions from the chiming bells, until the whole interior of the tower seemed thronged with them. But when the chimes stopped, the elfish figures, one by one, faded into nothingness, and then when the bells hung still Toby noticed for the first time that each bell was itself a strange and mysterious figure with a long beard, and its muffled hand on its goblin mouth.

He did not know what to do, he could not move away, and lo! The bells began to speak to him. They asked him all sorts of strange questions, and accused him of having done them a wrong for thinking that they had ever uttered a harsh note against the poor or had ever sung, “Put ‘em down! Put ‘em down! Good ole times! Gold old time! Put ‘em down! Put ‘em down!” Trotty was really greatly distressed at this, pleading that he had never meant to offend them; and when the strange figures said, “Show him what he calls himself,” he was aghast to see the tower open at his feet, and far below his own body lying dead! A little fairy figure, the Spirit of the Child, now appeared to him, and showed him strange pictures of his own daughter Meg sitting at work in a miserable room with Will Fern’s niece.

Then he heard them talk, Meg weeping bitterly the while, about the cruelty to if their lives. And then he found himself transported to a great festivity at Bowley Hall, where Sir Joseph and his lady were celebrating the birthday of the latter, and he heard that a very rich banker had just shot himself!

### **WHAT TOBY VECK SAW AT LADY BOWLEY’S BIRTHDAY FEAST**

But it was a very jolly banquet for all that, until Will Fern came in and said he had just come from jail, a criminal, as the result of those good people’s love of “putting down” the poor and unfortunate. Will’s appearance caused a great disturbance at Bowley Court, and in the confusion Trotty found himself spirited away to

a miserable garret, where Meg was hard at work, and Richard, the honest smith, in rags, came in to her to tell her that Lillian, Will Fern's niece, would take no help from her; but next came Lillian herself to the garret, where she died of a broken heart. So ends the third quarter.

The Spirit of the Child appears again to Trotty and shows him a very cozy couple in their home. They are Tugby, the fat, lazy porter to Sir Joseph Bowley, who has married Mrs. Anne Chickenstalker, the jolly widow who keeps a "great shop" where Toby owes some money.

He hears them speak of Meg, and of Richard having taken to drink, and—well, altogether poor old Trotty has been having a very bad dream, which is only brought to an end by the dear old chimes ringing a joy-peal for the New Year, and his loving daughter Meg saying to him:

"And whatever you do, father, 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!"

#### THE GREAT CHANGE THAT CAME OVER TROTTY WHEN HE WAKENED

"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; her 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."

#### WHY THE LAST QUARTER OF THE CHIMES WAS A VERY MERRY ONE

And while the merry chimes were ringing little Lillian was wakened up, and in came a number of Richard's chums with a drum and musical instruments to make merry for his approaching wedding on New Year's Day, and in came Mrs. Chickenstalker, who hadn't married grumpy old Tugby at all, and—just think of it—she was the very woman Will Fern was looking for, and her joy at finding little Lillian to adopt as her own child was so great that, for all her heavy weight, she got up and danced with the whole happy company to the awful music of the band.

So that the fourth quarter, at least, was a merry one, and the bells now chimed nothing but joy.