

PREFACE

GOING up Cornhill a year or two ago, on a day when snow was falling, I happened to remember that somewhere about there was the court in which Scrooge, of Dickens's *Christmas Carol*, had his home and business premises, and that coming from his bleak tank of an office one cutting, wintry night Scrooge's clerk, Bob Cratchit, was so carried away by the joyous spirit of the season that he "went down a slide on Cornhill, at the end of a lane of boys, twenty times in honour of its being Christmas Eve ;" and somehow Bob Cratchit became as real to me in that moment as were any of the obvious people swarming on the pavement around me. As a matter of fact, he and his like are much more real than most of us ; for in a few years we shall have passed away like shadows, and our places will have forgotten us, but he will still be going down that slide on Cornhill, as he has been going down it already for exactly seventy years. If any so-called real person, walking audibly in undeniable boots, dared to indulge in a

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