

February as the twenty-fifth of December. The idea of Christmas as a religious feast never seems to have entered his mind. No where does he make mention of the great mystery accomplished on that day. Of course it might be contended that there is underlying the whole the beautiful motto: Peace on earth to men of good will; but Dickens evidently forgot the time when this divine anthem was first chanted to men. In fact a pagan Christmas, if such were possible, would, in all probability, resemble very much Christmas as described by him—plenty to eat and drink, feasting and merriment galore, but no thought of Providence from whom come all these blessings, no thought of the Divine Infant whose entrance into this world is supposed to be celebrated.

In these *Christmas Stories*, any of the author's characters that are prompted to deeds of charity, are influenced to act not by any religious spirit in them; not even does conscience itself stir them up; they are actuated simply by the ghosts of their bad actions, or of the good actions that they have omitted. Examples to prove this are not wanting. In the very first story—*A Christmas Carol*—we find Scrooge. This cold miserly, old flint-heart "from which no steel had ever struck out generous fire," goes out on a fine Christmas morning to dumb found his acquaintances by a complete change of disposition. Was this transformation due to the awakening of some religious feeling long dormant in his stony heart? No; although Dickens, without injuring his story in any way, might have contrived to have him act from a religious motive still he chose that the ghost of old Marley his partner, who in life had equalled Scrooge in his powers of grasping and grinding, should appear and warn him to change his ways.

The *Christmas Stories* are, however, redeemed by many good qualities, particularly by the excellent character-sketching therein to be found. Dickens excels in such delineation of character. To study the personages in his novels is to study the men and women we find around us in every day life; though if we were to decide between his male and female characters we should certainly declare in favor of the latter. In "The Chimes" we have Meg, the dutiful and affectionate daughter of poor Toby Veck; and nowhere could be found a more perfect picture of the busy, good-natured housewife than in the person of Dot, or a better