

The Chimes of Christmas

OR

It's a Wonderful Life!

A New Christmas Musical

Based on the words of Charles Dickens,
the songs of Gilbert and Sullivan, and Traditional Carols

by

Fraser Charlton

Dramatis Personae

Narrator	SPEAKING
Toby Veck (<i>A ticket porter</i>)	BARITONE
Meg Veck (<i>Toby's daughter</i>)	SOPRANO
Richard (<i>Meg's betrothed</i>)	TENOR
Tugby (<i>Alderman Cute's Porter</i>)	BARITONE
Alderman Cute	BASS
Mr./Miss. Filer (<i>A political economist</i>) ..	BARITONE/'ALTO
Sir Joseph Bowley, MP	BARITONE
Lady Bowley (<i>His wife</i>)	CONTRALTO
Will Fern (<i>A vagrant</i>)	BARITONE
Lillian (<i>Will's niece</i>)/ Spirit of the Bells	SPEAKING
Mrs Chickenstalker (<i>A shopkeeper</i>)	SOPRANO
Great Bell (<i>A goblin</i>)	BARITONE/'ALTO
Doctor	SPEAKING G

There are between 6-10 male parts and 5-8 female parts, as Narrator, Filer, Doctor and Great Bell may be played by either sex, depending on the resources available. It is possible for the parts of Filer, Great Bell, Tugby and Doctor to be played by two actors.

Act I

The Chorus may either be Victorian Carol Singers, perhaps with lanterns and their music in books, or appropriately costumed when they have a particular role. The narrator should be to one side of the stage and may be standing at a lectern or, perhaps, sitting in an armchair with a glass of Madeira. If male, he might dress as Charles Dickens, recalling the author's wildly successful public readings.

Song 1 - Carol¹

Translation of "Kling Glöckchen", Traditional melody

Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!
 Open wide your portal!
 Hear the call immortal!
 Icy wind is blowing,
 Yuletide logs are glowing!
Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!

Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!,
 All good children, hear me,
 There's no need to fear me:
 Many songs I'll sing you,
 Many gifts I'll bring you!
Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!

Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!
 Safe and warm together
 In this freezing weather,
 Hear the Christmas story,
 Tell the tale of glory.
Ring, church bells, ding-a-ling-a-ling!
Ring, church bells, ring!

Narrator High up in the steeple of an old church, far above the light and murmur of the town, dwelt the Chimes. A curious fact about these bells, which few knew, was that they were each haunted by a spirit. These supernatural inhabitants could fly on the wings of sound, as far as the ring of their particular bell could be heard, to witness all that happened to the souls of their parish, only to return as the chime died away. They could not intervene in the affairs of men, but only watch, note and remember – save for one hour per year. When the chime of the bells rang out at Midnight on Christmas Eve, the spirits were free until the 1 o'clock peal – free to teach a lesson to one they had chosen for their special attention. This is a tale of one such Christmas night.

The subject of our story is Toby Veck, a ticket porter who stood all day long outside the church door, waiting for letters and parcels to deliver. They called him Trotty from his pace. He could have walked faster perhaps; most likely; but rob him of his trot, and Toby would have taken to his bed and died.

Song 2 – Solo - Toby

Music – "From rock to rock", The Contrabandista

With hop and skip
And jump and trip,
 I make my way without a slip!
I wait, and not a soul is near,
 My lonely vigil here to cheer.

¹ For alternative Carol ('God rest you merry, Gentlemen'), see Appendix.

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Oh! Why do I
Set out to roam,
Beneath the sky's uncaring dome, the sky's uncaring dome?
Slipping, tripping, air so nipping,
Here in the streets I make my home.
Slipping, tripping, air so nipping,
Here in the streets I make my home.

So here I lurk
In need of work
In thunder and snow and wind and rain;
Fumble, stumble, grumble, tumble,
Up the middle and down again!

But oftentimes
I hear the chimes
To cheer my vigil with their rhymes,
My vigil with their rhymes!

As they swing away,
Clang and cling away,
Hours they ring away -
On they go!
As they swing away,
Clang and cling away,
Hours they ring away -
On they go!

I say to myself,
My dear friend Trot,
This life that I live
I'd rather not -
To stand in the chills
To pay my bills!

But a farmer I'd be, who reaps and digs,
With my sows and my cows and little pigs,
And grapes and plums and pears and figs
And hay that I'll raise in towering rigs!
Giant rigs and little pigs!

My ploughs, my cows, my sows, Ha! Ha!
My ploughs, and my cows, and my sows,
Ha! Ha! And my little, little, little pigs,

My ploughs, my cows, my sows, Ha! Ha!
My ploughs, and my cows, and my sows, Ha! Ha!
And my little, little, little pigs, my rigs, my pigs,
My giant, giant rigs, my pigs, my little, little, little, little pigs!

Toby (*Picking up a newspaper from his spot and reading*) Dear me! I don't know what we poor people are coming to. It seems as if we can't go right, or do right, or be righted. I get so puzzled sometimes that I am not even able to make up my mind whether there is any good at all in us, or whether we are born bad. One way or other, we fill the papers. (*FX: Chime of bells*) Dinner-time, eh! There's nothing more regular in its coming round than dinner-time, and nothing less regular in its coming round than dinner!

Enter MEG, carrying a covered dish.

Meg Why, father, father!

Toby Why, pet, What's to do? I didn't expect you to-day, Meg. It is Christmas Eve – you should be at home!

Meg Neither did I expect to come, father, but here I am! And not alone; not alone! Smell it, father dear, only smell it!

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TOBY takes a sniff at the edge of the basket.

Toby *(Taking a deep sniff)* Ah! Its very nice. It ain't - I suppose it ain't Polonies?

Meg No, no, no - nothing like Polonies!

Toby It's - its mellower than Polonies. It's too decided for Trotters. I'll tell you what it is – it's tripe!

MEG lays out a cloth and lays out his meal. TOBY sits and begins to eat.

Meg Make haste, for there's a hot potato besides, and half a pint of fresh-drawn beer in a bottle.

Just as TOBY starts to eat, the chimes ring out (FX: Chimes).

Toby Amen! *(Doffing his hat)*

Meg Amen to the Bells, father?

Toby They broke in like a grace, my dear. Many's the kind thing they say to me. "Toby Veck, Toby Veck, keep a good heart, Toby!?" A million times? More!

Meg Well, I never! Now, I'll tell you how your dinner came to be brought; and - and something else besides. I had my dinner, father, with - with Richard.

Toby Oh!

Meg And Richard says, father, another year is nearly gone, and where is the use of waiting when it is so unlikely we shall ever be better off than we are now? 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? So I said I'd come and talk to you, father, and I made a little treat and brought it to surprise you.

Enter RICHARD, unobserved.

Richard And see how he leaves it cooling on the step!

Song 3 - Duet – Richard and Meg

Music – "Prithee, pretty maiden", Patience

Richard Prithee, pretty maiden - prithee, tell me true,
 (Hey, but I'm doleful, willow willow waly!)
Have you e'er a lover a-dangling after you?
 Hey willow waly O!
 I would fain discover
 If you have a lover!
 Hey willow waly O!

Meg Gentle sir, my heart is frolicsome and free -
 (Hey, but he's doleful, willow willow waly!)
Nobody I care for comes a-courting me -
 Hey willow waly O!
 Nobody I care for
 Comes a-courting - therefore,
 Hey willow waly O!

Richard Prithee, pretty maiden, will you marry me?
 (Hey, but I'm hopeful, willow willow waly!)
I may say, at once, I'm no man of propertee -
 Hey willow waly O!
 Money, I despise it;
 Many people prize it,
 Hey willow waly O!

Meg Gentle Sir, 'tis true to marry I design -
 (Hey, but he's hopeful, willow willow waly!)
If other hands are barr'd thee, may I offer mine?
 Hey willow waly O!

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I give thee my heart, sir
Never more to part, sir!

BOTH Hey willow waly O!

TOBY stands and offers his hand to RICHARD when a house door opens and CUTE and FILER emerge.

Narrator At that moment, an adjacent house door opened and from it emerged two other figures. One was Mr/Miss Filer, a low-spirited gentleman/lady of middle age, of a meagre habit, and a disconsolate face. The other, Alderman Cute, was a full-sized, sleek, well-conditioned gentleman with a very red face, but having also the appearance of being rather cold about the heart.

Cute What's going on here? Halloo there! Porter! What's that? Your dinner? Bring it here, bring it here.

Toby Yes, sir – there is but one mouthful left. (*Handing the bowl to CUTE*)

Cute Mr/Miss Filer – what do you make of this? (*Shows bowl to FILER*)

Filer This is a description of animal food, Alderman Cute, 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. You snatch your tripe, my friend, out of the mouths of widows and orphans (*During this speech, CUTE eats the remaining tripe*).

Toby I hope not, sir - I'd sooner die of want! (*Aside*) We can't go right or do right - there is no good in us. We are born bad!

Cute Now, you Porter! Don't you ever tell me, or anybody else, my friend, that you haven't always enough to eat, because I know better. I have tasted your tripe, you know, and you can't "chaff" me. (*To FILER*) You see, my friend, there's a great deal of nonsense talked about Want and Starvation - and I intend to Put it Down.

Song 4 – Duet – Cute and Filer

Music – "You understand?", Ruddigore

Cute You understand?
Filer I think I do;
With vigour unshaken
This step shall be taken.
It's neatly planned.
Cute I think so too;
I'll readily bet it
We'll never regret it!
Both For duty, duty must be done;
The rule applies to every one,
So spread the word throughout the town
That we won't shy from Putting it Down!
Filer These paupers who -
Cute Complain of debt -
Yet squander their money
On whisky and honey
We'll teach a-new!
Filer We'll make them sweat!
By fact and by science
We'll force their compliance!
Both For duty, duty must be done;
The rule applies to every one,
So spread the word throughout the town
That we won't shy from Putting it Down!
Cute Is this your daughter, eh? (*Chucking her under chin*) Where's her mother?

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- Toby** Dead. She was called to Heaven when Meg was born.
- Cute** (To RICHARD) And you're making love to her, are you?
- Richard** Yes, and we are going to be married on New Year's Day.
- Filer** Married! Married!! The ignorance of the first principles of political economy on the part of these people! A man may labour all his life for the benefit of such people as those and he can no more hope to persuade 'em that they have no right or business to be married, than he can hope to persuade 'em that they have no earthly right or business to be born.
- Cute** Now, I'm going to give you a word or two of good advice, my girl. After you are married, you'll quarrel with your husband and come to be a distressed wife. 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, I am resolved, to Put all wandering mothers Down. And if you attempt, desperately, and ungratefully 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! So don't try it on!

MEG drops RICHARD'S hand.

- Cute** (To RICHARD) And as for you, you dull dog, what are you thinking of being married for? If I was a fine, young, strapping chap like you, I shouldn't want a draggled wife and a crowd of squalling children crying after you wherever you go! Go along with you and repent. Don't make such a fool of yourself as to get married on New Year's Day!

Song 5 – Duet – Richard and Meg

Music – "Prithee, pretty maiden", Patience

- Meg** For to marry you would very foolish be -
Richard Hey, but I'm doleful - willow waly!
Meg It's equally preposterous for you to marry me -
Richard Hey willow waly O!
- Both** 'Twould be bad as treason
Not to list to reason -
Hey, willow waly O!

Exeunt MEG and RICHARD

- Narrator** They went along. Not arm in arm, or hand in hand; but, she in tears; he, gloomy and down-looking. Were these the hearts that had so lately made old Toby's leap up from its faintness? No, no. The Alderman had Put *them* Down.
- Cute** (To TOBY) As you happen to be here, you shall carry a letter for me. Can you be quick? How old are you?
- Toby** I'm over sixty, sir.
- Filer** O! This man's a great deal past the average age, you know.
- Cute** Here's the letter – and here is sixpence. Excessive tipping is something I intend to Put Down. Now go away quickly. And take care of that daughter of yours. She's much too handsome. The chances are, that she'll come to no good.
- Toby** Wrong every way. Born bad. No business here!

Exeunt Cute & Filer.

- Narrator** As Toby went on his way, he found that the streets were full of motion, and the shops were decked out gaily. Christmas was waited for, with welcomes, presents, and rejoicings. There were books and toys for Christmas, glittering trinkets for Christmas, dresses for Christmas; new inventions to beguile it. Trotty had no portion, to his thinking, in Christmas. His walk, melancholy as it was, brought him, in due time, to the end of his journey. To Bowley Towers, the mansion of Sir Joseph Bowley, Member of Parliament.

The CHORUS here become the servants on Bowley Towers.

Song 6 – Chorus of Servants

Music – "Sir Joseph's barge is seen", HMS Pinafore

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Men Sir Joseph's house is seen,
With its crowd of servants snooty,
We know you'll find us clean
And attentive to our duty.
We work, we work the whole day through,
Until the early hours.
It's only sober men and true
Who toil at Bowley Towers!
We're smart and sober men,
The grandest in our sphere,
In all the servant class
None are so smart as we are.

Ladies Gaily tripping,
Lightly skipping,
Come the servant maidens quipping!

Men Eyes aflame and hears a-flipping,
All the footmen love their quipping.

Ladies Footmen sprightly
Always rightly

Men Welcome ladies so politely.
Ladies who can smile so brightly,
Footmen welcome most politely.

Enter TUGBY, a gentleman of full habit (he will appear again in Act 2)

Tugby I am Tugby, Sir Joseph's Butler. I see you have a letter. Who's it from?

Toby Alderman Cute.

Tugby You're to take it in, yourself. Everything goes straight in, on this day of the year.

Exeunt TUGBY and CHORUS. SIR JOSEPH and LADY BOWLEY are discovered.

Narrator Trotty soon found himself in a spacious library, where, at a table strewn with files and papers, were a stately lady in a bonnet; and an older, and a much statelier gentleman.

Sir Joseph What is this?

Toby Letter from Alderman Cute, Sir.

Sir Joseph Is this all? Have you nothing else, Porter?

Toby No.

Sir Joseph You have no bill or demand upon me, have you? My name is Bowley, Sir Joseph Bowley. Here is a cheque-book. I allow nothing to be carried beyond Christmas. At this season of the year we should think of - of - ourselves. We should feel that every return of this season involves a matter of deep moment between a man and his - and his banker.

Lady B. You are indeed the Poor Man's Friend, Sir Joseph.

Sir Joseph I *am* the Poor Man's Friend. He needn't trouble yourself to think about anything. I will think for him; I know what is good for him. 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 and you may trust to me to be your Friend and Father.

Lady B. (*Sarcastically*) O! You have a thankful family, Sir Joseph!

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

Toby (*Aside*) Ah! Born bad! Nothing melts us.

Song 7 - Duet – Sir Joseph and Lady Bowley

Music – “To help unhappy commoners”, The Gondoliers

Sir Joseph We like to help the common man, and add to his enjoyment,
To find the idle unemployed congenial employment;
Of our attempts we offer you examples illustrative:
The work is hard, and, I may add, is *not* remunerative.

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- Sir Joseph** To poor man or slattern
No matter the pattern
I give my paternal attention
- Lady B.** Paternal attention
- Sir Joseph** To see me as rather
Their friend and their father
I show such humane condescension!
- Lady B.** Humane condescension!
I'll assist any lady
Whose conduct is shady
Or smacking of doubtful propriety-
- Sir Joseph** Doubtful propriety.
- Lady B.** Should she be 'expecting'
Her steps I'm directing,
To enter a workhouse society.
- Sir Joseph** Workhouse society!
- Sir Joseph** Their excess of drinking
And absence of thinking
And misplaced concern for their neighbour.
- Lady B.** Concern for their neighbour.
- Sir Joseph** I fight by promoting
With biblical quoting
The venerable virtue of labour
- Lady B.** The virtue of labour.
- Lady B.** To villages going
To teach the men sewing -
At which I'm by no means a beginner-
- Duke** She's not a beginner.
- Lady B.** I demonstrate pinking
And buttonhole sinking
And doilies to serve with their dinner-
- Sir Joseph** To serve with their dinner.
- Lady B.** I teach them all singing
For moral upbringing -
And use² by their friends and relations
- Sir Joseph** Their friends and relations
- Lady B.** To pay off their debtors
To honour their betters
And keep them content in their stations!
- Sir j. (significantly).** Content in their stations.
- Both.** We plead for the pauper
We temper his torpor
For work is the holy of holies
The holy of holies
So by our endeavour
They'll learn that forever
- Lady B.** Their only true friends are the Bowleys!
- Sir Joseph** Their friends are the Bowleys!
- Sir Joseph** (*Opening letter*) My lady, the Alderman does me the favour to inquire whether it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern Put Down.
- Lady B.** Most agreeable! The worst man among them! He has been committing a robbery, I hope?
- Sir Joseph** Very near. He came up to London, it seems, to look for employment, and being found at night asleep in a shed, was taken into custody, and carried next morning before the Alderman. The Alderman observes that he is determined to Put this sort of thing Down;

²'Use' as a noun, to rhyme with 'loose', not 'snooze'

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and that if it will be agreeable to me to have Will Fern Put Down, he will be happy to begin with him.

Lady B. Sir Joseph! Make an example of him! It is your duty!

Sir Joseph My dear, take this down. (*Lady B writes*) My dear Sir. I am very much indebted to you for your courtesies in the matter of the man William Fern. He is a turbulent and rebellious spirit. It appears to me that when he comes before you again, his committal for some short term as a Vagabond, would be a service to society, and would be a salutary example in a country where examples are greatly needed. I am, and so forth. (*LADY B finishes the letter and hands it to SIR JOSEPH. To TOBY*). So, my friend, can you lay your hand upon your heart, and say, that you also have made adequate preparations for Christmas?

Toby I am afraid, sir, that I am a - a - little behind-hand with the world. There's a matter of ten or twelve shillings owing to Mrs. Chickenstalker.

Lady B. To Mrs. Chickenstalker?

Toby A shop, madam, in the general line. Also a - a very little money on account of rent. It oughtn't to be owing, I know, but we have been hard put to it, indeed!

Sir Joseph How an old man; a man grown grey; can look Christmas in the face, with his affairs in this condition ... Take the letter. Take the letter!

Toby I heartily wish it was otherwise, sir.

Exeunt Sir Joseph and Lady Bowley as the scene changes.

Narrator Once in the street, poor Trotty pulled his worn old hat down on his head, to hide the grief he felt at getting no hold on his accounts. He discharged himself of his commission, therefore, with all possible speed, and set off trotting homeward.

Song 8 - Carol³

"Old Winter is Come", traditional melody

Old Winter is come with its cold chilling breath
And the leaves are all gone from the trees
All nature seems touched by the finger of death
And the lakes are beginning to freeze
When your minds are annoyed by the wide swelling flood
And your bridges are useful no more
When in plenty you enjoy everything that is good
That's the time to remember the poor

The cold air and snow will in plenty descend
And whiten the prospect around
The keen cutting wind from the north will attend
And cover it over the ground
When the hills and the dales are all candied with white
And the rivers are froze on the shore
When the bright twinkling stars they proclaim the cold night
That's the time to remember the poor

For the times fast a-coming when our Saviour on earth
All the world shall agree with one voice
All nations unite to salute the blest morn
And the whole of then earth shall rejoice
When grim death is deprived of its killing sting
And the grave rules triumphant no more
Saints angels and men hallelujah shall sing
Then the rich must remember the poor

Enter FERN: he and TOBY collide. FERN is with LILLIAN.

Toby I beg your pardon, I'm sure! I hope I haven't hurt you.

³ For alternative Carol ('Good King Wencelas'), see Appendix.

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- Will** No, friend. You have not hurt me. You can tell me, perhaps, where Alderman Cute lives?
- Toby** Close at hand. I'll show you his house with pleasure.
- Will** I was to have gone to him to-morrow, but I'm uneasy under suspicion, and want to clear myself.
- Toby** It's impossible that your name's Fern? Will Fern?
- Will** That's my name!
- Toby** Why then, for Heaven's sake don't go to him! He'll put you down as sure as ever you were born. Don't go to *him*.
- Narrator** (*TOBY and FERN mime their conversation*) When they were shrouded from observation, Trotty told him what he knew, and what character he had received, and all about it. The subject of his history listened to it with a calmness that surprised him.
- Will** It's true enough in the main, but let it be as 'tis. I have gone against his plans; to my misfortune. For myself, I never took with that hand what wasn't my own; and never held it back from work, however hard, or poorly paid. Tan't lawful to be out of sorts, and I am out of sorts, though God knows I'd sooner bear a cheerful spirit if I could.

Song 9 – Solo - Will

Music – “Fair Moon, to thee I sing”, HMS Pinafore

Fair moon, to thee I sing,
Bright regent of the heavens,
Say, why is everything
Either at sixes or at sevens?

I have lived hitherto
A life of honest toil
Beloved by all I knew
A lowly tiller of the soil.

But now, a criminal I'm called,
My efforts to be good are thwarted
Before an Alderman I'm hauled
Then jailed - or possibly transported!

Fair moon, to thee I sing,
Bright regent of the heavens,
Say, why is everything
Either at sixes or at sevens?

- Will** Well! I don't know as this Alderman could hurt *me* much by sending me to jail; but you see - ! (*Points to LILIAN*)
- Toby** She has a beautiful face. Might I inquire if your wife is still with us?
- Will** I never had one. She's Lilian, my brother's child: an orphan. The Poor House would have taken care on her, but I took her instead. 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. However, I'll take your advice, and keep clear of this Justice, and to-morrow will try whether there's better fortune to be met with. Good night. Merry Christmas!
- Toby** Stay! Christmas never can be Merry to me, if we part like this. Come home with me! I'm a poor man, living in a poor place; but I can give you lodging for one night and never miss it.
- Narrator** Off they went. Round the first turning to the right, past the pump, and sharp off up the passage to the left, right opposite the public-house - mind the kidney pieman! Down the Mews and stop at the black door, with "T. Veck, Ticket Porter," written upon a board. (*They enter Toby's house, discovering MEG. LILLIAN rushes into her arms.*)
- Toby** Here we are and here we go! Why don't you come to the fire? (*Pushing them towards it; winking at MEG*) I see, my dear, as I was coming in, half an ounce of tea lying

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somewhere on the stairs; and I'm pretty sure there was a bit of bacon too. As I don't remember where it was exactly, I'll go myself and try to find 'em.

Narrator With this inscrutable artifice, Toby withdrew to purchase the viands he had spoken of, for ready money, at Mrs. Chickenstalker's. (*Exeunt MEG, FERN and LILLIAN. We move to the shop of MRS CHICKENSTALKER*) Entering the premises of this worthy grocer, he is once more struck by her charming cleanliness, her delightful demeanour - and her plump prettiness!

Song 10 – Duet - Toby and Mrs. Chickenstalker

Music – “Welcome joy”, The Sorcerer

TOBY Missus 'C', if I am able,
Now the dining hour is nigh,
Guests are waiting at my table
And provisions I would buy.
Quarter pound of your best bacon,
And a quarter pound of tea;
That amounts, unless mistaken,
To ninepence one halfpenny!

(Aside) Wild with adoration!
Mad with fascination!
To indulge my lamentation
No occasion do I miss!
Goaded to distraction
By maddening inaction,
I find some satisfaction
In apostrophe like this:
"Chickenstalker, charming!
"Chickenstalker, fine!
"Widow, so disarming,
"Angel, oh be mine!"
"So charming! Divine!
"Angel, oh be mine!"

(Aloud) Quarter pound of your best bacon,
And a quarter pound of tea;
That amounts, unless mistaken,
To ninepence one halfpenny!

MRS C. Sir, I thank you for your order,
Ninepence halfpenny in amount,
As of gold you are no hoarder,
I will put in on account!
Rashers of bacon, most appealing,
Smoked and cured in Butcher Row -
Quarter pound of best Darjeeling,
Quite the finest tea I know!

(Aside) Wild with adoration!
Mad with fascination!
To indulge my lamentation
No occasion do I miss!
Goaded to distraction
By maddening inaction,
I find some satisfaction
In apostrophe like this:
"Toby Veck, immortal,
"Toby Veck, divine,
"Take me to thy portal,
"Loved one, oh be mine!"
"So charming! Divine!
"Loved one, oh be mine!"

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(Aloud) Rashers of bacon, most appealing,
Smoked and cured in Butcher Row-
Quarter pound of best Darjeeling
Quite the finest tea I know!

We return to Toby's house, and he enters to discover MEG, FERN and LILLIAN.

Toby Here they are at last! (*Starting to cook the bacon*) It's a curious circumstance, that I never care, myself, for rashers, nor for tea. I like to see other people enjoy 'em, but to me, as food, they're disagreeable.

Narrator Trotty sniffed the savour of the hissing bacon and suffered the fragrant steam of the tea to curl about his nose, and yet declared that they were both perfectly uninteresting to him. Never did spectators at a city dinner or court banquet find such high delight in seeing others feast as those two did, in looking on that night.

Toby Now, I'll tell you what, the little one, she sleeps with Meg, and Will Fern, you come along with me. It's not much of a place: only a loft; but till this coach-house and stable gets a better let, we live here cheap. Cheer up! Don't give way.

Exeunt, leaving the chairs empty.

Song 11 – Carol⁴

*“Still, still, still” – traditional melody
(see Appendix for alternative carol)*

Still, still, still,
Let Baby sleep its fill.
Maria sings a lullaby sweet
And lays her true heart at Your feet
Still, still, still,
Let Baby sleep its fill.

Sleep, sleep, sleep,
My precious Baby sleep.
The Angels are all music making
By the Manger jubilating
Sleep, sleep, sleep,
My precious Baby sleep.

We, we, we,
We all implore Thee:
Open for us heaven's gate
Let Your Kingdom be our fate.
We, we, we,
We all implore Thee.

Enter TOBY.

Narrator Returning alone, Trotty mended the fire, drew his chair to the warm hearth, took his newspaper from his pocket, and began to read. With an earnest and a sad attention, reading of the crimes and violences of the people, he relapsed into his former low mood.

Toby Unnatural and cruel! It's too true, all I've heard to-day; too just, too full of proof. We're Bad! I'm bad, and just bring misery to those around me. Perhaps it would be better all round if I quitted this world myself!

Narrator (*FX: The Chimes ring out*) 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!

Song 12 – Carol

Music – The Carol of the Bells, Traditional

Come, Toby Veck!
Here, Toby Veck,

⁴ For alternative Carol ('Silent night'), see Appendix.

The Chimes of Christmas

We wait for you
Come, see us do!
Now, Toby Veck,
Wake, Toby Veck
Drag him to us
Don't make a fuss!

Overlaid with the sound of bells chiming, this continues to be sung repeatedly, sotto voce, during the following dialogue. Enter MEG

Toby Meg, do you hear anything?

Meg I hear the Bells, father. Surely they're very loud to-night.

Toby *(To himself)* If the tower-door is really open, what's to hinder me from going up into the steeple and satisfying myself?

Exit MEG. Song 12 ends.

Narrator Trotty was pretty certain as he slipped out quietly into the street that he should find the steeple shut and locked, but what was his astonishment when, coming to the church, he found that the door actually stood ajar! So he went in, feeling his way as he went, like a blind man; for it was very dark. *(The introductory music for the following song begins.)* Up, up, up, and round, and round; higher, higher, higher up! He finally came among the Bells, shadowy, and dark, and dumb, but each containing a figure of the same bulk and stature. *(Enter GREAT BELL.)* Gigantic, grave, and darkly watchful of him, the figure in the Great Bell detached itself and came towards him.

Song 13 – Great Bell, Toby and Chorus

Music – “Sprites of earth and air”, The Sorcerer

Great Bell Sprites of bronze and brass –
Forged in flame and fire –
Goblin souls,
Come here in shoals,
This dreadful deed inspire!
Appear, appear, appear.

Male Voices Good master, we are here!

Great Bell Brethren of the bells–
Leave your silent shade –
Pallid ghosts,
Arise in hosts,
And lend me all your aid.
Appear, appear, appear!

Female Voices Good master, we are here!

Toby (aside) See, see, they assemble,
These fiends of the night
Gracious Heaven! I tremble,
Seek safety in flight!
I must fly to my homely cot,
Where peace and plenty dwell –
Be content with my humble lot
Away from this ghostly hell!
To the joy that home will give,
With wingéd feet I'll fly;
In innocence, there to live –
In innocence there to die!

Chorus of Spirits

Too late – too late
It may not be!

The Chimes of Christmas

That happy fate
Is not for thee!

Chorus, Great Bell and Toby.

Too late – too late,
That may not be!
That happy fate,
Is not for me/thee!

Great Bell

The clock strikes one! (*Chime*) – ‘twill soon be done!
That’s two! (*Chime*) Our hour is near!
That’s three! (*Chime*) There is no time to run!
That’s four! (*Chime*) Suppress your fear!
That’s five! (*Chime*) You cursed you were alive,
That’s six! (*Chime*) And all born bad –
Seven! (*Chime*) Your future we’ll deprive
That’s eight! (*Chime*) Lose what you had!

Great Bell

Number Nine!! (*Chime*)

Chorus

Let us shine!

Great Bell

Number Ten! (*Chime*)

Chorus

Live again!

Great Bell

Number Eleven! (*Chime*)

Chorus

It is heaven!

(*Chime*) It is twelve!

It is twelve – now we are free!

Ha! ha! ha!

TOBY

I must fly to my homely cot,
Where peace and plenty dwell –
Be content with my humble lot
Away from this ghostly hell!

Great Bell

Too late!
Too late – too late,
That may not be!
That happy fate,
Is not for thee!

CHORUS

Set us free!
Set us free!
Ha! ha!
Ha! ha! ha!

Narrator (*Over sounds of church bells this is acted out*) As the bells became to swing, he saw the tower swarming with dwarf phantoms, spirits, elfin creatures of the Bells, leaping, flying, dropping, pouring from the Bells without a pause! He saw them *in* the houses, busy at the sleepers’ beds, he saw them amongst the waking; he saw, everywhere, restless and untiring motion. As he gazed, the Chimes stopped (*Sound of church bells stops*) Instantaneous change! The whole swarm fainted; they died and melted into air, and soon the tower was silent.

Great Bell What visitor is this?

Toby I thought my name was called by the Chimes! I have listened to the Chimes these many years. They have cheered me often.

Great Bell You have done us wrong!

Toby Not meaning it. In my ignorance. Not meaning it!

Great Bell Whoever believes that the poor are born bad, who sides with those who wish to put them down, who feels that he would be better dead, does wrong to Heaven and man, to time and to eternity!

Toby Spare me!

Great Bell Show him what he calls himself!

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

Toby No more a living man! Dead!

Great Bell Dead!

Toby Gracious Heaven! I missed my way and fell down?

The Chimes of Christmas

Great Bell You thought yourself bad, and useless, and wished yourself dead – well, we have granted your wish. You are to learn the fate of your child after your death. Learn from her life, a living truth. Learn from the creature dearest to your heart, how bad the poor are born. Follow them to desperation! The Spirit of the Chimes is your companion. Go! It stands before you!

The SPIRIT OF THE BELLS comes forward – it is LILLIAN. During the following song she takes TOBY'S hand and leads him away, off stage before the end of the song.

Narrator The bells began to ring again (*Sound of church bells; the following carol begins quietly under the dialogue, gradually getting louder*), and with them combined the voices of the congregation in the church below, joining in a carol on this most Holy Night. Taking the hand of the Spirit of the Chimes, the walls of the bell tower gradually became transparent and turned to mist, dissolving into nothing. With one last glance at his broken, lifeless body below, Toby set forth to learn the fate of his friends and family after his death.

Song 14 - Carol

Music: Traditional

Hark! how the bells,
Sweet silver bells,
All seem to say,
Throw cares away
Christmas is here,
Bringing good cheer,
To young and old,
Meek and the bold.
Ding dong, ding dong
That is their song
With joyful ring,
All caroling.
One seems to hear
Words of good cheer
From everywhere
Filling the air.
Oh how they pound,
Raising the sound,
O'er hill and dale,
Telling their tale.
Gaily they ring
While people sing
Songs of good cheer,
Christmas is here.
Merry, Merry, Merry, Merry Christmas,
Merry, Merry, Merry, Merry Christmas.
On on they send,
On without end,
Their joyful tone
To every home.
Ding dong ding dong!

End of Act I

Act II

Song 15 – Carol⁵

Sussex Carol, traditional melody

On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring;
On Christmas night all Christians sing,
To hear the news the angels bring:
News of great joy, news of great mirth,
News of our merciful King's birth.

Then why should men on earth be sad,
Since our Redeemer made us glad:
Then why should we on earth be sad,
Since our Redeemer made us glad:
When from our sin He set us free,
All for to gain our liberty.

All out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night;
All out of darkness we have light
Which made the angels sing this night:
“Glory to God and peace to men,
Now and forevermore. Amen.

Enter TOBY, LILLIAN (as the Spirit of the Bells), MEG and RICHARD

Narrator The spirit led Trotty back to his home, where they discover Meg and Richard engaged in what was obviously a difficult interview. A light had seemingly gone out of their eyes, and they could hardly bear to look at one another.

Meg And so, Richard, you wish to postpone our marriage?

Richard I do. The words of the Alderman have struck me very deeply. I am indeed a man of spirit, and I should not take a step that I would soon repent. My future lies open before me, and a wife and children would make no economic sense. I shall go forth and seek my fortune alone – and when I return, laden with riches, why then we shall be wed!

Meg I have also dwelt on what the gentleman said. It is perhaps wicked for two as poor as we to enter matrimony, and doom our children to poverty and crime. And I do it for you, too – I should not hold you back from your destiny.

Richard Then let us part as friends, dear Meg. It shall not be for long, I hope. It will be better this way – and better for our children.

Meg I believe it, too. Farewell, Richard. May God be with you!

Richard And with you, my dear, dear Meg!

Exit MEG.

Richard Goodbye, Meg. My new life will not be one you should wish to share. I must turn over a new leaf, and allow full play to my ambition. I am a young man with expectations. All my old ways must be firmly Put Down!

Song 16 – Solo - Richard

Music – “Away remorse”, Ruddygore

Away, Remorse! Compunction, hence!
Go, Moral Force! Go, Penitence!
To Virtue's plea a long farewell -
Propriety, I ring your knell!
Come guiltiness of deadliest hue!
Come desperate deeds of derring-do!

⁵ For alternative Carol (‘It came upon the midnight clear’), see Appendix.

SONG - Richard

For twenty-five years I've been sober and wary -
My favourite tippie came straight from a dairy -
I kept guinea-pigs and a Belgian canary -
A squirrel, white mice, and a small black-and-tan.
I played on the flute, and I drank lemon squashes -
I wore chamois leather, thick boots, macintoshes,
And things that will someday be known as galoshes,
The type of a highly respectable man!

For the rest of my life I abandon propriety -
Visit the haunts of Bohemian society,
Wax-works, and other resorts of impiety,
Placed by the moralist under a ban.
My ways will be those of a regular satyr,
At carryings-on I must be a first-rater -
Go night after night to a wicked theayter -
It's hard on a highly respectable man!

Well, the man who has spent the first half of his tether,
On all the bad deeds you can bracket together,
Then goes and repents - in his cap it's a feather -
Society pets him as much as it can.
It's a comfort to think, if I now go a cropper,
I sha'n't, on the whole, have done more that's improper
Than he who was once an abandoned tip-topper,
But now is a highly respectable man!

Exit RICHARD.

Narrator The Spirit of the child took his hand, and Trotty was conscious of the passage of many years, when the scene changed to that of Bowley Towers, where Sir Joseph Bowley, Friend and Father of the Poor, held a great festivity at in honour of the natal day of Lady Bowley. And as Lady Bowley had been born on Christmas Day, it was on Christmas Day that this festivity took place.

Song 17 – Carol

Traditional melody

Deck the halls with boughs of holly,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Tis the season to be jolly,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Don we now our gay apparel,
Fa la la, la la la, la la la.
Troll the ancient Yule tide carol,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

See the blazing Yule before us,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Strike the harp and join the chorus.
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Follow me in merry measure,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
While I tell of Yule tide treasure,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

Fast away the old year passes,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Hail the new, ye lads and lasses,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.
Sing we joyous, all together,
Fa la la la la, la la la la.

The Chimes of Christmas

Heedless of the wind and weather,
Fa la la la la, la la la la!

- Narrator** The sight was gay in the extreme. There had been some speeches made; and Lady Bowley's health had been proposed; and Sir Joseph Bowley had made his great speech, and had given as a Toast the Dignity of Labour! Just then, 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. (*Enter WILL*)
- Sir Joseph** What is this! Will Fern! Who gave this man admittance? This is a criminal from prison! Mr./Miss. Filer, sir, *will* you have the goodness -
- Will** A minute! A minute! My Lady, you was born on this day. Get me a minute's leave to speak.
- Lady B.** Let him speak. After all, it is Christmas.
- Will** (*Bowing*) Gentles! You've drunk the Labourer. Look at me!
- Cute** Just come from jail...
- Will** Just come from jail. And neither for the first time, nor the second, nor the third, nor yet the fourth.
- Filer** Four times is distinctly over the average. He ought to be ashamed of himself!
- Will** You see I'm at the worst. Beyond all hurt or harm; beyond your help. Hear the real Truth spoke out for once.
- Sir Joseph** There's not a man here, who would have him for a spokesman.
- Will** Like enough, Sir Joseph. I believe it. Gentles, I've lived many a year in the cottage over yonder. 'Tis harder than you think for, gentles, to grow up decent, commonly decent, in such a place, but I did. Now, gentlemen, 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 eats a rotten apple or a turnip. To jail with him! I begs a trifle on the road. To jail with him! At last, the constable, the keeper - anybody - finds me anywhere, a-doing anything. To jail with him, for he's a vagrant, and a jail-bird known; and jail's the only home he's got.
- Cute** A very good home too!
- Will** Gentles, dealing with other men like me, begin at the right end. Give us, in mercy, better homes when we're a-lying in our cradles; give us better food when we're a-working for our lives; give us kinder laws to bring us back when we're a-going wrong; and don't set jail, jail, jail, afore us, everywhere we turn!

Song 18 – Solo – Will

Music – "Fold your flapping wings", Iolanthe

Fold your flapping wings,
Soaring legislature!
Stoop to little things,
Stoop to human nature!
Never need to roam,
Men so patriotic,
Let's begin at home
Crime is no exotic!
Bitter is your bane
Terrible your trials,
Dingy Drury Lane!
Soapless Seven Dials!

Take a tipsy lout,
Gathered from the gutter.
Hustle him about,
Strap him to a shutter.
What are you but he,

The Chimes of Christmas

Washed at hours stated,
Fed on filagree,
Clothed and educated?
He's a mark of scorn,
You might be another,
If you had been born
Of a tipsy mother.

Take a wretched thief,
Through the city sneaking.
Pocket handkerchief
Ever, ever seeking.
What is he but you
Robbed of all your chances,
Picking pockets through
Force of circumstances?
You might be as bad,
As unlucky, rather,
If you'd only had
Fagin for a father!

Narrator (*WILL is hustled off, followed by a general exeunt.*) The room and all the company vanished from his sight and the Spirit of the Bells conveyed to him that more years had passed. (*Enter MRS. CHICKENSTALKER and TUGBY, to sit in front of a roaring fire*) Fat company, rosy-cheeked company, comfortable company who sat before a bright fire. Just beyond them was a little shop, quite crammed and choked with the abundance of its stock. Trotty had small difficulty in recognising Mrs. Chickenstalker and, at length, Tugby, the former porter of Sir Joseph Bowley. He looked involuntarily where the accounts of credit customers were usually kept in chalk. There was no record of his name.

Tugby What sort of a night is it, Anne?

Mrs C. Blowing and sleeting hard and threatening snow. Dark. And very cold.

Tugby I'm glad to think we had muffins. It's a sort of night that's meant for muffins. Likewise crumpets. Also Sally Lunn's.

Mrs C. You're in spirits, Tugby, my dear!

Tugby No, No. Not particular. I'm a little elevated. The muffins came so pat! And there are so many other delicious things we could afford – if we had the inclination.

Song 20 - Duet – Tugby and Mrs. Chickenstalker

Music – “As o'er our penny roll we sing”, The Grand Duke

TUGBY As o'er our buttered toast we sing,
It is not reprehensive
To think what joys our wealth would bring
Were we disposed to do the thing
Upon a scale extensive.
There's rich mock-turtle – thick and clear –
Perhaps we'll have it once a year!
MRS C. You *are* an open-handed dear!
TUGBY Though, mind you, it's expensive.
MRS C. No doubt it *is* expensive.
TUGBY How fleeting are the glutton's joys!
With fish and fowl he lightly toys,
MRS C. And pays for such expensive tricks
Sometimes as much as two-and-six!
TUGBY As two-and-six?
MRS C. As two-and-six!
BOTH Sometimes as much as two-and-six!
TUGBY It gives him no advantage, mind –
For you and he have only dined,

The Chimes of Christmas

And you remain when once it's down
A better man by half-a-crown.
MRS C. By half-a-crown?
TUGBY By half-a-crown!
BOTH Yes, two-and-six is half-a-crown.
Then let us be modestly merry,
And rejoice with a derry down derry.
For to laugh and to sing
No extravagance bring –
It's a joy economical, very!
TUGBY Although as you're of course aware
(I never tried to hide it)
I moisten my insipid fare
With water – which I can't abear –
MRS C. Nor I – I can't abide it.
TUGBY This pleasing fact our souls will cheer,
With more than fifty pounds a year
We *could* indulge in table beer!
MRS C. Get out!
TUGBY We could – I've tried it!
MRS C. Yes, yes, of course you've tried it!
BOTH Oh, he who has an income clear
Of over fifty pounds a year –
TUGBY Can purchase all his fancy loves
Conspicuous hats –
MRS C. Two shilling gloves –
TUGBY Two-shilling gloves?
MRS C. Two-shilling gloves –
BOTH Yes, think of that, two-shilling gloves!
TUGBY Cheap shoes and ties of gaudy hue,
And Waterbury watches, too –
And think that he could buy the lot
Were he a donkey –
MRS C. Which he's *not*!
TUGBY Oh no, he's *not*!
MRS C. Oh no, he's *not*!
BOTH That kind of donkey he is *not*!
Then let us be modestly merry,
And rejoice with a derry down derry.
For to laugh and to sing
Is a rational thing –
It's a joy economical, very!

A tinkling doorbell is heard.

Tugby There's a customer, my love! (*Exit MRS. C.*)
Mrs. C. (*Off stage*) Meg, my dear. Come on in! (*Enter MRS. C. and MEG*) It is Meg Veck, my dear. I knew her father, poor old creetur - he fell down from the steeple walking in his sleep, and killed himself.
Meg Mrs Tugby, old friend, I wish to consult you on a delicate matter. You remember Richard, who was once betrothed to me?
Mrs C. Of course – a fine, handsome, youth – or, at least, he were until he left you.
Meg He has sunk low, very low, it is true – without work, with a home and without hope. He returned to me yesterday and kneeled at my feet, asking me to save him.
Mrs C. Do you still love him, my dear?

The Chimes of Christmas

Meg What he was once to me is buried in a grave, side by side with what I was to him. But I decided to make the trial, in the hope of saving him, and we are to be married this very day. His health is poor, and I fear we may have little time left together, but I must try and redeem him. I wished to ask if your back attic was still vacant?

Mrs C. Indeed it is, my darling girl. Isn't it Tugby?

Tugby It is – for the usual rent, mind you!

Meg Thank you, a thousand times thank you! Might I call him in to hear the good tidings? (*CHICKENSTALKER assents*) Richard, come here – it is all arranged!

Enter RICHARD, who embraces CHICKENSTALKER and then MEG. He looks much older: ill and dissipated.

Richard Heaven bless you, Mr and Mrs Tugby, for such kindness! Share in our happiness.

Tugby (*Aside, to his wife*) Judging by his appearance, I do not anticipate a long lease!

Song 21 - Madrigal – Meg, Richard, Mrs. Chickenstalker and Tugby

Music – “Brightly dawns our wedding day”, The Mikado

Meg Brightly dawns our wedding day;
All Joyous hour, we give thee greeting!
Whither, whither art thou fleeting?
Fickle moment, prithee stay!
Tugby What though mortal joys be hollow?
Mrs C. Pleasures come, if sorrows follow:
All Though the tocsin sound, ere long,
Ding dong! Ding dong!
Yet until the shadows fall
Over one and over all,
Sing a merry madrigal-
Fal-la-fal-la! *etc. (Ending in tears.)*

Meg Let us dry the ready tear,
All Though the hours are surely creeping
Little need for woeful weeping,
Till the sad sundown is near.
Tugby All must sip the cup of sorrow-
Mrs C. I to-day and thou to-morrow;
This the close of every song-
Ding dong! Ding dong!
What, though solemn shadows fall,
Sooner, later, over all?
Sing a merry madrigal-
Fal-la-fal-la! *etc. (Ending in tears.)*

Exit MEG and RICHARD. MRS. C. and TUGBY resume their seats by the fire.

Narrator Trotty was aware of several more years passing. In their accustomed place by their fireside, they receive another visitor (*Enter DOCTOR*).

Doctor This is a bad business up-stairs, Mrs. Tugby, the man can't live. He is Going.

Tugby Then, he must Go, you know, before he's Gone.

Doctor I don't think you can move him. You had better leave him where he is. He can't live long.

Tugby He should have died in the workhouse!

Mrs C. Not that! When I turn them out of house and home, may angels turn me out of Heaven! They came to us a little over a year ago, and he was in a bad way then. 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. How they have lived, I hardly know!

Enter MEG, much changed, carrying a baby.

Meg You needn't discuss whether he shall be removed or not. He has spared you that trouble.

The Chimes of Christmas

Narrator Was she, her father's pride and joy? This haggard, wretched, weeping woman, pressing to her breast an infant? Who can tell how spare, how sickly, and how poor an infant! Who can tell how dear!

Toby She loves it! God be thanked, she loves it! (*During the song, MRS. C., TUGBY and DOCTOR exeunt*)

Song 22 – Carol⁶

“A spotless rose”, traditional melody

A Spotless Rose is growing,
Sprung from a tender root,
Of ancient seers' foreshowing,
Of Jesse promised fruit;
Its fairest bud unfolds to light
Amid the cold, cold winter,
And in the dark midnight.

The Rose which I am singing,
Whereof Isaiah said,
Is from its sweet root springing
In Mary, purest Maid;
Through God's great love and might
The Blessed Babe she bare us
In a cold, cold winter's night.

Narrator Time passed, and Toby watched his daughter languishing away, in dire and pining want. With the baby in her arms, she wandered here and there, in quest of occupation; did any work for any wretched sum. Through it all, she loved the child still, loved it more and more. But a change fell on the aspect of her love.

Toby But, it is Love, it is Love. She'll never cease to love it. My poor Meg!

Narrator She dressed the child next morning with unusual care and once more tried to find some means of life. It was Christmas Eve. She tried till night, but in vain. It was night when she arrived outside the house she called her home.

MEG knocks on door. Enter TUGBY, standing in the doorway.

Tugby O! You have come back? Don't you think you have lived here long enough without paying any rent? Suppose you provide yourself with another lodging. Come! This is the night before Christmas, and I won't carry ill-blood and quarrellings and disturbances into Christmas Day, to please you nor anybody else. Go along with you.

Exit TUGBY. MEG wanders off in despair.

Toby (*To the Spirit*) I was her father! I was her father! Have mercy on her, and on me! Where does she go? Turn her back!

Narrator In her wasted arms she folded the child, as though she never would resign it more, and sped onward to the River, going down to its dark level. She paused a moment on the brink, before the dreadful plunge that would end the life of two.

Toby (*On his knees – to the SPIRIT*) I have learnt it! Pity my presumption, wickedness, and ignorance, and save her! 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. O, have mercy on my child! (*He runs and holds MEG in his arms*) I know now 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. O Spirits, merciful and good, I am grateful!

Narrator (*FX: Chimes*) 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 Christmas Day: so lustily, so merrily, so happily, so gaily, that they broke the spell that bound him!

⁶ For alternative Carol ('In the bleak midwinter'), see Appendix.

The Chimes of Christmas

As TOBY looks around him, MEG slips from his arms and exits. During the song, he makes his way to his chair in his house, and falls asleep.

Song 23 – Carol⁷

Music – traditional melody

Ding-dong, ding:
Ding-a-dong-a-ding:
Ding-dong, ding-dong:
Ding-a-dong-ding.

Up! good Christen folk, and listen
How the merry church bells ring,
And from steeple
Bid good people
Come adore the new-born King:

Tell the story how from glory
God came down at Christmastide,
Bringing gladness,
Chasing sadness,
Show'ring blessings far and wide.

Born of mother, blest o'er other,
Ex Maria Virgine,
In a stable
('Tis no fable),
Christus natus hodie.

Ding-dong, ding:
Ding-a-dong-a-ding:
Ding-dong, ding-dong:
Ding-a-dong-ding.

Meg 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!

Toby (*Waking*) Meg! My Meg! You are alive!

TOBY gets up to embrace her, but RICHARD enters and stops him.

Richard No! Not even you. Not even you. The first kiss of Meg at Christmas is mine. A happy Christmas, Meg, my darling wife!

Narrator You never in all your life saw anything like Trotty after this. He sat down in his chair and beat his knees and laughed and cried together; he got out of his chair and hugged Meg and Richard, both singly and both at once; he was - that's the truth - beside himself with joy.

Toby And you're still to be married on New Year's day?

Richard We are!

Toby My dears, you cannot know what happiness you give me. If you had doubted it before, doubt no longer - you have my blessing!

Song 24 - Trio – Toby, Meg and Richard

Music - "Never mind the why and wherefore", H.M.S. Pinafore

Richard Never mind the why and wherefore,
Love is everywhere, and therefore,
Though I shouldn't be presuming,
As I'm but a simple swain,
For my income's unassuming,
And my fortune's poor and plain!

⁷ For alternative Carol ('Good Christian men, rejoice'), see Appendix.

The Chimes of Christmas

Richard & Toby Set the merry bells a-ringing,
Rend the air with warbling wild,
(For my hopes I am a-flinging)
(For his hopes he is a-flinging)
On this ticket porter's child!

Richard For a true and lovely daughter –
Meg For a poor and humble daughter –
Toby Though her father's but a porter –
Meg Though he's quite a worthy porter!

All Let the air with joy be laden,
Rend with songs the air above,
For the union of a maiden
With the man who owns her love!

Toby. Never mind the why and wherefore,
Love is everywhere, and therefore,
Though your only close relation (*alluding to himself*)
As a swell could scarcely pass –
Though you occupy a station
In the lower lower class –

Richard & Toby Set the merry bells a-ringing,
Rend the air with warbling wild,
(For my hopes I am a-flinging)
(For his hopes he is a-flinging)
On this ticket porter's child!

Richard For a true and lovely daughter –
Meg For a poor and humble daughter –
Toby Though her father's but a porter –
Meg Though he's quite a worthy porter!

All Let the air with joy be laden,
Rend with songs the air above,
For the union of a maiden
With the man who owns her love!

Meg Never mind the why and wherefore,
Love is everywhere, and therefore,
I admit your benediction
Of our match has played its part;
You have carried firm conviction
To my hesitating heart.

Richard & Toby Set the merry bells a-ringing,
Rend the air with warbling wild,
(For my hopes I am a-flinging)
(For his hopes he is a-flinging)
On this ticket porter's child!

Richard For a true and lovely daughter –
Meg For a poor and humble daughter –
Toby Though her father's but a porter –
Meg Though he's quite a worthy porter!

Meg Let the air with joy be laden,
Toby & Richard Set the merry bells a-ringing,
Meg For the union of a maiden
Richard For my hopes (I am) a-flinging
& Toby his (he is) a-flinging
All Rend with songs the air above,
For the man who owns her love!

Enter LILLIAN and WILL.

Toby Why, here she is! Here's little Lilian! And Uncle Will! O, Uncle Will, the obligations that you've laid me under, by your coming, my good friend!

The Chimes of Christmas

Enter CHORUS and MRS CHICKENSTALKER followed by a man carrying a large pitcher of drink.

- Narrator** Before Will Fern could make the least reply, a band of musicians burst into the room, attended by a lot of neighbours, screaming 'A Merry Christmas one and all', and followed by Mrs Chickenstalker.
- Mrs C.** You are to be married, and not tell me, Meg! So here I am, my dear, I had a little flip made, and brought it with me.
- Toby** Mrs. Tugby! I *should* say, Chickenstalker - Bless your heart and soul! A Merry Christmas! (*Kissing her. She is delighted*). This is William Fern and Lilian.
- Mrs C.** Not Lilian Fern whose mother died in Dorsetshire!
- Will** Yes, the very same!
- Toby** Will Fern! Not the friend you was hoping to find?
- Will** Ay! - and like to prove a'most as good a friend, if that can be, as one I have already found.
- Toby** What a happiness it is, I'm sure, to be so esteemed! How kind and neighbourly you are! A Merry Christmas, one and all! Fill your glasses, everyone – I wish to propose a toast. To my constant companions, my counsellors and my conscience. I give you – the Chimes!
- All** The Chimes!

Song 25 - Carol

Music: Traditional

Note: 4 verses are played, but only 3 verses are sung fully – in the penultimate verse, dialogue is spoken over music, before the 4th verse is sung

Ding dong merrily on high,
In heav'n the bells are ringing:
Ding dong! verily the sky
Is riv'n with angel singing.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

E'en so here below, below,
Let steeple bells be swungen,
And "Io, io, io!"
By priest and people sungen.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

- Narrator** (*Over music*) Had Trotty dreamed? If it be so, O listener, try to bear in mind the stern realities from which these shadows come; and in your sphere endeavour to correct, improve, and soften them. So may your Christmas be a happy one to you, and may each Christmas be happier than the last, and not the meanest of our brethren or sisterhood debarred their rightful share, in what our Great Creator formed them to enjoy. God bless us, everyone!

Pray you, dutifully prime
Your matin chime, ye ringers;
May you beautifully rime
Your evetime song, ye singers.
Gloria, Hosanna in excelsis!

The End

Appendix

Alternative Song 1 - Carol

Music: Traditional

God rest you merry, gentlemen
Let nothing you dismay
Remember, Christ, our Saviour
Was born on Christmas day
To save us all from Satan's power
When we were gone astray
O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy

From God our Heavenly Father
A blessed Angel came;
And unto certain Shepherds
Brought tidings of the same:
How that in Bethlehem was born
The Son of God by Name.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy

Now to the Lord sing praises,
All you within this place,
And with true love and brotherhood
Each other now embrace;
This holy tide of Christmas
All other doth deface.
O tidings of comfort and joy,
Comfort and joy
O tidings of comfort and joy

Alternative Song 8 - Carol

Traditional melody

- All** Good King Wenceslas looked out
On the Feast of Stephen
When the snow lay round about
Deep and crisp and even
Brightly shone the moon that night
Though the frost was cruel
When a poor man came in sight
Gathering winter fuel
- Men** “Hither, page, and stand by me,
If thou knowst it, telling
Yonder peasant, who is he?
Where and what his dwelling?”
- Women** “Sire, he lives a good league hence,
Underneath the mountain
Right against the forest fence
By Saint Agnes fountain.”
- Men** “Bring me flesh and bring me wine
Bring me pine logs hither
Thou and I shall see him dine
When we bear them thither.”
- All** Page and monarch, forth they went
Forth they went together

The Chimes of Christmas

Through the rude winds wild lament
And the bitter weather

Women “Sire, the night is darker now
And the wind blows stronger
Fails my heart, I know not how
I can go no longer.”

Men “Mark my footsteps, good my page
Tread thou in them boldly
Thou shall find the winters rage
Freeze thy blood less coldly.”

All In his masters step he trod
Where the snow lay dinted
Heat was in the very sod
Which the Saint had printed
Therefore, Christian men, be sure
Wealth or rank possessing
Ye, who now will bless the poor
Shall yourselves find blessing.

Alternative Song 11 – Carol

“Silent Night”, F. Gruber

Silent night, holy night
All is calm, all is bright
'Round yon virgin Mother and Child
Holy infant so tender and mild
Sleep in heavenly peace

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight!
Glories stream from heaven afar;
Heavenly hosts sing Al-le-lu-ia!
Christ the Savior is born!

Silent night, holy night
Son of God, oh, love's pure light
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With the dawn of redeeming grace
Jesus, Lord at Thy birth

Alternative Song 15 – Carol

Traditional via Arthur Sullivan

It came upon the midnight clear,
That glorious song of old,
From angels bending near the earth,
To touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men
From heavens all gracious King!"
The world in solemn stillness lay
To hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
With peaceful wings unfurled;
And still their heavenly music floats
O'er all the weary world:
Above its sad and lowly plains
They bend on hovering wing,
And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing.

The Chimes of Christmas

For lo! the days are hastening on,
By prophets bards fore-told,
When, with the ever-circling years
Comes round the age of gold;
When peace shall over all the earth
Its ancient splendours fling,
And the whole world give back the song
Which now the angels sing.

Alternative Song 22 – Carol

“In the bleak midwinter”, Music – G. Holst

In the bleak midwinter, frosty wind made moan,
Earth stood hard as iron, water like a stone;
Snow had fallen, snow on snow, snow on snow,
In the bleak midwinter, long ago.

Our God, Heav'n cannot hold Him, nor earth sustain;
Heaven and earth shall flee away when He comes to reign.
In the bleak midwinter a stable place sufficed
The Lord God Almighty, Jesus Christ.

What can I give Him, poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd, I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man, I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give Him: give my heart.

Alternative Song 23 – Carol

“In dulci jubilo”– traditional melody

Good Christian men, rejoice
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Give ye heed to what we say:
Jesus Christ was born today:
Ox and ass before Him bow,
And He is in the manger now.
Christ is born today!

Good Christian men, rejoice,
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Now ye hear of endless bliss:
Jesus Christ was born for this!
He has opened the heav'nly door,
And man is blessed forevermore.
Christ was born for this!

Good Christian men, rejoice
With heart, and soul, and voice;
Now ye need not fear the grave:
Jesus Christ was born to save!
Calls you one, and calls you all,
To gain His everlasting hall:
Christ was born to save!

Author's Note

After the success of 'Humbug!' and its subsequent productions outside of Newcastle, I felt that I should like to write another Christmas musical. Dickens was an obvious choice to make a companion piece – but, of his Christmas Books, only two are really Christmassy – 'The Cricket on the Hearth' and 'The Chimes'. 'The Cricket' was, at one time, more popular than 'A Christmas Carol' – but that did not last beyond the Victorian age, as it now comes across as rather sentimental, and lacks both the satirical edge of the 'Carol' and its supernatural elements. 'The Chimes' is more appealing, with stronger characters as well as magic, although it is set on New Year's Eve and is quite depressing in its latter half.

However, there was something there which I thought could make a good show, particularly once I had realised that it was, in many ways, rather like 'It's a Wonderful Life', in which someone gets to see what would happen if they weren't around – and is there a better Christmas film than that? I also realised that I could move the setting back from New Year to Christmas Eve, to allow the use of Carols again. So, I set to work...

It was much more difficult to adapt than 'A Christmas Carol', although it had the advantage that almost nobody knows it these days! It took me several years (on and off, mostly off) to knock it into shape. Once again, I decided to use a narrator to keep in descriptive passages and make it easier to follow the plot. Although most of the dialogue is straight from Dickens, I changed more words this time, in particular to move the time to Christmas Eve, and to clarify what the Bells could do (and why they did it), as I found this a little obscure in the original. A great deal needed to be cut, and I went through multiple iterations to make it as lean as possible. However, I also added a scene with Mrs Chickenstalker in Act 1, as she is a sort of 'love interest' for Toby. Originally, I kept the subplot about the Adult Lillian falling into prostitution and dying in Act II, but removed it to shorten the show and lighten the mood, which was in danger of being too serious and gloomy. I also tried to choose upbeat, comic songs to provide light relief between the sad scenes – as it is a Christmas show, after all! However, I wished to remain true to Dickens' intentions, and so made sure that his important message was put across as I believe he would have wanted.

The musical sources ended up being quite obscure, with two songs cut from the Savoy Operas finding a place. I was particularly happy to have 'Fold your flapping wings', as not only is the subject matter entirely in keeping with the piece, but also it includes a mention of Fagin! To balance this, I added quite a few well-known songs from 'The Mikado', 'The Gondoliers' and, particularly, 'HMS Pinafore' – from which I couldn't resist using a song which mentions another 'Sir Joseph'!

For the carols, I obviously wished to include as many as possible which referenced bells. Although 'Ding dong merrily' was also in 'Humbug!', it could not be omitted from a show called 'The Chimes'! The opening carol is one of the top 5 Christmas songs in Germany which, as my wife is German, I have sung many times. The existing English translations were poor, so I wrote a new one, and hope to persuade my church to sing it one day, as it is a great tune. I also have 'A spotless rose', which you'll invariably hear on Christmas Eve in Germany but not in the UK, where the tune is more usually sung to the words 'A Great and Mighty Wonder'. One rarely-heard English carol is included that is quite political – 'Old Winter is Come', which I came to know from the CD 'Holy Heathens And The Old Green Man' by Waterson:Carthy. It's a haunting song, and the words are a suitable commentary on the hard-hearted Bowley's. Following comments from someone who read the script in Australia, though, I provided alternatives to the lesser-known Carols, as they do vary in popularity across the Anglosphere.

I hope that all these changes have managed to shape an enjoyable show from a story which isn't an obvious comic operetta, and one that it is full of the true spirit of a Dickensian Christmas, combining laughter with tears, levity with a serious message, old songs and new songs – as well as a chance to give Scrooge a year off!