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Seasonal Tales, Far-flung Settings

The Unfamiliar Landscapes of *The Christmas Books* and *Stories* (1843–1867)

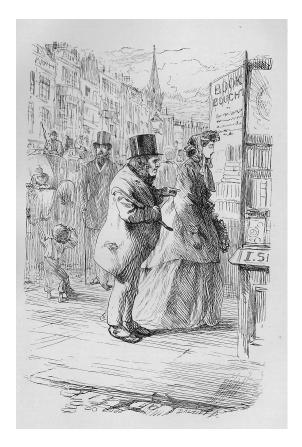


Fig. 1. Marcus Stone, "Bibliomania of the Golden Dustman," Our Mutual Friend, p. 406

The common reader of the latter part of the nineteenth century would likely have associated the fictional productions of Charles Dickens with cityscapes (institutional

edifices, streets, and bridges), particularly with London from the end of the Napoleonic Wars to his death in 1870 – to that reader a quintessentially Dickensian scene would be a London scene such as Marcus Stone's "The Bibliomania of the Golden Dustman" for Book 3, Chapter 5, of Our Mutual Friend (April 1865). However, beginning with The Christmas Books (1843–48), and continuing with their successors collectively known as The Christmas Stories, Dickens often incorporated and occasionally exploited backdrops that were neither specifically urban nor, indeed, English, to lend these seasonal offerings the allure of the unfamiliar and even, as in his principal collaborations with Wilkie Collins, The Perils of Certain English Prisoners (Household Words, 1857) and No Thoroughfare (All the Year Round, 1867), the exotic. The common reader on either side of the Atlantic would probably not have had a common experience of the Christmas Stories, as these appeared complete, with contributions by other writers such as Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell, in Household Words and All the Year Round in Britain, but in America first appeared in a separate volume in the Ticknor and Fields Diamond edition (1867) and subsequently in an 1876 volume of The Household Edition, illustrated by E. A. Abbey.

Dickens detached most of his contributions to several of the Christmas numbers from their original contexts in order to allow these writings to be collected in the Diamond edition of his works, published in the United States at the time of his second American visit.¹

Perhaps the presence of such foreign settings from 1857 onwards reflects the anxieties of Charles Dickens about his own five "Sons of Empire" – Walter (1841–1863), Francis (1844–1886), Alfred (1845–1912), Sydney (1847–1872), and Edward (1852–1902), of whom two – Walter and Sydney –

¹ Deborah A. Thomas, *Dickens and The Short Story* (Philadelphia: U. Pennsylvania Press, 1982), p. 103.

died in India, serving in the military, while still in their twenties. Walter left for India in 1857 at the age of sixteen, and, after seeing action, was promoted to the rank of lieutenant on 18 February 1861. The first of Dickens's sons to die, Walter (his second son but fourth child), expired suddenly on New Year's Eve, of an aneurism of the aorta, although his father did not learn of the young officer's death in Calcutta until 7 February, 1864, Dickens's 52nd birthday. The fifth son, Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens, joined the Royal Navy at the age of fourteen, in 1860, and was buried at sea in 1872 after dying aboard H. M. S. Topaze. Alfred, educated at a military academy, failed to pass the army entrance examination, and emigrated to Australia in 1865, aged nineteen; his brother Edward joined him in 1869, aged seventeen. Francis, having studied in Germany to be a physician, gave up that possible career path, and in 1864, at the age of twenty, began a seven-year term in the Bengal Mounted Police; at the age of thirty, he became a Sub-Inspector in the Canadian Northwest Mounted Police (1874– 1886). (Edward's emigration, of course, post-dates the last of Dickens's Christmas Stories, 1867's No Thoroughfare.) The fact remains that only Dickens's "successful" sons, Henry Fielding (1849–1933) and Charles Culliford (1837– 1896), remained in England. As Grace Moore remarks of Dickens's decision to commit his 'slow' son Walter to a career in the Indian service when the boy was just eight, British society in general had tended to regard "the colonies as a place to get rid of troublesome younger sons."²

While Dickens was, particularly in his journalistic enterprises, very much the commercially-minded mid-Victorian businessman grounded in socio-economic realities, he was also a third-generation Romantic who regarded a foreign setting as an opportunity to defamiliarise his characters and

² Grace Moore, Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), p. 104.

narratives, casting an imaginative shading over the otherwise commonplace. He was occasionally even interested, as were the mainstream Romantics of the preceding generation, in earlier times, as when, for example, in A Christmas Carol as The Spirit of Christmas Past he transports his readers of 1843 back to a simpler time, the semi-rural England that existed before railways and factories. And when in Stave Three the Spirit of Christmas Present conducts Scrooge to the Eddystone Light off the Cornish coast and the "place where Miners live" - indeed, Dickens and Forster had travelled there just that past summer, taking time to inspect the tin mines and experience first-hand the appalling conditions in which the miners, many of them mere children, labored underground – Dickens is compelling his primarily urban readership to consider its roots and to identify themselves with the denizens of the provinces. In the cliff-face fishing village of Steepways, North Devon, which serves as the unusual setting of A Message from the Sea (1860), Dickens reveals that the past is still very much alive, for in such out-of-the-way places "The old pack-saddle, long laid aside in most parts of England as one of the appendages of its infancy, flourished here intact."4 He is also, like the shaper of a magic lantern show, exploiting the picturesque qualities of non-urban settings, broadening the story's action not merely geographically but culturally to include the "other" nation, that disadvantaged nation which Disraeli articulated for those same readers in Sibyl (1845). In the Carol passage from Stave Three, "The Second of the Three Spirits," conjuring up Wordsworth's feelings about the noble peasantry, Dickens implies that those who live

³ Charles Dickens, "Stave 3," *A Christmas Carol; Being a Ghost Story in Prose*, il. John Leech (London: Chapman & Hall, 1843), p. 102.

⁴ Charles Dickens, "Chapter 1: The Village," *A Message from the Sea* (1860), *Christmas Stories from "Household Words" and "All the Year Round*," il. Edgar Dalziel (The Household Edition. Vol. 21. London: Chapman & Hall, 1879. Rpt. 1892), p. 86.

close to nature and far from the great cities of modern Europe are somehow more virtuous and happier than their urban counterparts:

And now, without a word of warning from the Ghost, they stood upon a bleak and desert moor, where monstrous masses of rude stone were cast about, as though it were the burial-place of giants; and water spread itself wheresoever it listed – or would have done so, but for the frost that held it prisoner; and nothing grew but moss and furze, and coarse rank grass. Down in the west the setting sun had left a streak of fiery red, which glared upon the desolation for an instant, like a sullen eye, and frowning lower, lower, lower yet, was lost in the thick gloom of darkest night.

"What place is this?" asked Scrooge.

"A place where Miners live, who labour in the bowels of the earth," returned the Spirit. "But they know me. See."

A light shone from the window of a hut, and swiftly they advanced towards it. Passing through the wall of mud and stone, they found a cheerful company assembled round a glowing fire. An old, old man and woman, with their children and their children's children, and another generation beyond that, all decked out gaily in their holiday attire. The old man, in a voice that seldom rose above the howling of the wind upon the barren waste, was singing them a Christmas song – it had been a very old song when he was a boy – and from time to time they all joined in the chorus. So surely as they raised their voices, the old man got quite blithe and loud; and so surely as they stopped, his vigour sank again.⁵

The notion that those who live and work amidst spectacular scenery are more virtuous than mere urbanites occurs again with the two lighthouse-keepers who "wished each other Merry Christmas in their can of grog" in a solitary lighthouse set near "a dismal reef of sunken rocks, some league or so from shore, on which the waters chafed and dashed, the wild year through."

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⁵ Charles Dickens, "Stave 3," A Christmas Carol (1843), p. 101–102.

⁶ Ibid., 104.

⁷ Ibid., 103.

These maritime backdrops lend the seasonal stories not merely geographical and class variety, but romantic appeal and even universality. Here, far from the comforts and conveniences of urban civilization, these elemental people of the type that Wordsworth praised know well the spirit of Christmas. The successive Christmas Books and Stories continued to transcend the barriers of class and even of the Victorian era itself by acquainting readers with such lowerclass characters as ticket-porter Trotty Veck and his virtuous daughter Meg in *The Chimes*, the passionate and ethically tried Dorset carrier John Peerybingle in The Cricket on the Hearth (set far away from the metropolis in a sparsely populated village), and Dr. Jeddler and his long-suffering daughters, an eighteenth-century family living in a village on the edge of a Civil War battlefield in The Battle of Life. Dickens even gives a voice to those usually silent in middleclass oriented writing of the period: the "Boots" in The Holly-Tree Inn (Household Words, 1855), the garrulous Mrs. Lirriper of the Extra Christmas Numbers of All the Year Round (1863 and 1864), and the ebullient Doctor Marigold (All the Year Round, 1865) being prime examples. In determining that his middle-class, urban readers should extend their sympathy to people quite unlike themselves outwardly but possessing the same human hopes and fears, Dickens distanced the narrative in space and time from contemporary London in his seasonal offerings from 1843 until 1867. Three such memorable, anti-urban scenes, captured in the text and accompanying illustrations, are these: Clarkson Stanfield's "Will Fern's Cottage" (1844, fig. 2), "Peace" (1846), and "The Lighthouse" (1848, fig. 3). None of these "painterly" images, however, is germane to the action of the three novellas in which they appear (The Chimes, The Battle of Life, and The Haunted Man respectively), and each seems present only to achieve a picturesque effect, establishing

the natural backdrop as a suitable frame for human habitation and labour.

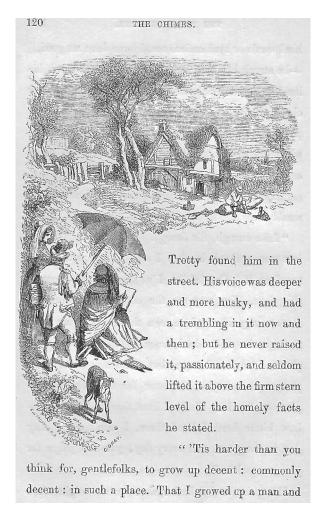


Fig. 2. Clarkson Stanfield, "Will Fern's Cottage," The Chimes, p. 120

However, there is more to "Will Fern's Cottage" in *The Chimes* than first meets the eye, for the intention that lies behind the charming illustration is, in fact, anti-picturesque. As a party of aristocrats approach the Dorset peasant's cottage in search of the picturesque sublime of a thatchedroofed, humble dwelling in a rural setting, the owner of the building (in fact, likely the present beneficiary of a life copyhold), radical Will Fern derides the notion of applying the aesthetic concept of the picturesque to any aspect of the Dorset labourer's life:

Gentlefolks, I've lived many a year in this place. You may see the cottage from the sunk fence over yonder. I've seen the ladies draw it in their books, a hundred times. It looks well in a picter, I've heerd say; but there an't weather in picters, and maybe 'tis fitter for that, than for a place to live in. Well! I lived there. How hard –how bitter hard, I lived there, I won't say. Any day in the year, and every day, you can judge for your own selves.⁸

Will Fern's diatribe about the insensitivity of the "gentle-folks" who make his cottage the object of their sketching expeditions occurs within the context of Lady Bowley's birthday party. Thus, Stanfield's wood-engraving does not realise a moment within the narrative; moreover, although entitled "Will Fern's Cottage," the significant figure is not the hapless peasant sitting in front of his cottage, but the liveried servant holding the sunshade for the genteel sketcher, left in the foreground. The shifting of emphasis establishes the perspective of the cottage that Fern feels is unrealistic because it is based on a panorama rather than a close-up study of the sufferings of the Dorset labourer who resides in the quaint building.

In Clarkson Stanfield's elegant landscape realisation of Fern's cottage and its situation, the aristocratic sketching party has set up its equipment with a good vista of the building, and a liveried servant holds a large parasol to guard the "gentlefolks" from the heat of the Dorset sun, ironically the source of this wheat-producing region's fertility. The disconsolate owner, the Dorset peasant Will Fern himself, sits on a log before his home, completing the Constable-esque scene. In fact, Fern has crashed Lady Bowley's birthday celebration to deconstruct the Romantic idyll of the rustic cottage: what the upper-class lady-sketchers observe of the scene at a distance is very different from his

⁸ Charles Dickens, "Third Quarter," *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells That Rang An Old Year Out and a New Year In*, il. John Leech, Daniel Maclise, Clarkson Stanfield (London: Bradbury and Evans, 16 December 1844), page 119 – prior to the illustration.

lived experience of the peasant's miserable existence "close up," so to speak. Anticipating Ruskin's political attack on this kind of quaint picturesqueness in *Modern Painters*, IV, Dickens, then, is using the rhetorical Fern as a device to work against Stanfield's elegant landscape sketch; the writer shifts our attention away from a clipped and orderly English landscape towards the workers who sustain the land. Taken against the illustration, Fern's voice is antiphonal, striking a note of social realism and Chartist protest against his social superiors' reconfiguring his life as some sort of Wordsworthian or Rouseauean idyll for their own enjoyment. He refuses to permit the aristocratic outsiders to regard him as merely a quaint figure in a picture of traditional country life:

"Now, gentlemen," said Will Fern, holding out his hands, and flushing for an instant in his haggard face, '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 has a nat'ral angry word with that man, when I'm free again. To jail with him! I cuts a stick. 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! 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." ⁹

So much for the validity of the construct of the Noble Savage and the inherent virtue of those who live close to Nature, away from the moral corruption of European cities. In short, in the midst of the Hungry Forties, the Liberal writer enables an actual peasant to deride the notion of a Roman-

⁹ *Ibid.*, "Third Quarter," pages 122-23, immediately after the wood-engraving dropped into the text.

tic landscape and the sublime in nature, as seen in panoramic treatments of woods, valleys, mountains – and even seashores, for his friend the naval veteran Clarkson Stanfield was a noted Victorian painter of Romantic seascapes. Fern's suffering, seen close-up at Lady Bowley's banquet, must give her guests a very different interpretation of the life of the Dorset cottager from that derived from painterly and nostalgic renditions of English cottages such as those of Helen Paterson Allingham (1848-1928), who was coincidentally the illustrator for Hardy's serial run of the pastoral novel Far from the Madding Crowd in the 1874 numbers of the Cornbill. The plight of nineteenth-century agricultural workers was rather the opposite of the bucolic ideal of Constable's landscapes such as The Hay Wain (1821). Seen at a distance in an oil painting that emphasizes the beauty of the English landscape, the rural cottager would seem to the uninitiated to be leading a harmonious and tranquil existence amidst an idealised version of English rural scenes. Seen close up as Fern is seen by Lady Bowley's aristocratic dinner guests, the peasant is hardly quaint, for Fern is a bitter social malcontent who feels himself exploited by amateur artists such as those in Stanfield's drawing. Will Fern's radical, anti-landowner sentiments accord well with a denizen of the region known for govagricultural of the ernmental transportation organizers who became the Tollpuddle Martyrs in 1834. Their attempts at trade and agricultural unionization seem relatively benign to us today, as their seditious behaviour was nothing more than asking members to swear a secret oath as members of the Friendly Society of Agricultural Labourers. In his introduction to the two-volume Penguin edition of Christmas Books, Michael Slater notes that, since Dorset had been much in the news in the early 1840s as a consequence of outbreaks of rick-burning in that county

and the "utmost squalor and poverty" of its peasantry, in proof Dickens altered Fern's native county from Hertfordshire to Dorset. According to Slater, "The *Annual Register* (1844) noted that 102 cases [of rick-burning] were reported during 1843 whereas the average figure for 1838-42 had been only 49. Offenders were savagely punished." In other words, the plight of Will Fern is hardly fictional, but rather "ripped from the headlines" and columns of such journals as *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper*.

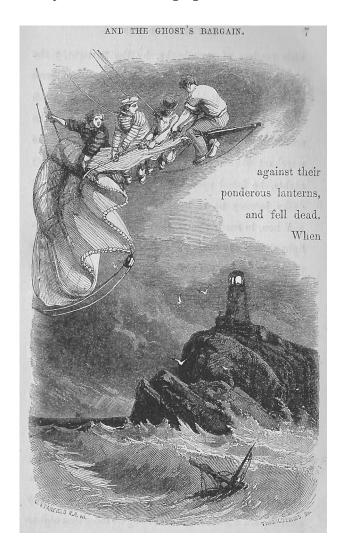


Fig. 3. Clarkson Stanfield, "The Lighthouse," The Haunted Man, p. 7.

¹⁰ Michael Slater, "Notes to *The Chimes*," Charles Dickens's *The Christmas Books*, ed. Michael Slater (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971, rpt. 1978), Vol. One, p. 266.11 *Ibid.*, 265.

Knowing full well the artistic strengths of Clarkson Stanfield as a landscape and seascape painter, Dickens seems to have had this veteran of the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars and subsequently of the merchant marine very much in mind when he wrote these contextualizing passages which work against notions of the sublime in nature. For example, Stanfield's first appearance in The Haunted Man is admirably suited to his own personal history (a guard aboard HMS Namur in the Royal Navy and then a merchant sailor aboard the East Indiaman Warley) and abilities as a painter of seascapes. The passage that Dickens wrote specifically for Stanfield seems to harken back to Scrooge's flight to the Cornish coast in the Carol, but the scene conjured up here is really part of an extended series of temporal clauses ("When. . . when...") that have little to do with the Old College (perhaps University College, London, founded in 1826, as opposed to the recently established Queen's College) where Professor Redlaw lectures, so that its purpose in the narrative is not immediately obvious.

When travellers by land were bitter cold, and looked wearily on gloomy landscapes, rustling and shuddering in the blast. When mariners at sea, outlying upon icy yards, were tossed and swung above the howling ocean dreadfully. When lighthouses, on rocks and headlands, showed solitary and watchful; and benighted seabirds breasted on against their ponderous lanterns, and fell dead.¹²

On the bowsprit of a sailing vessel in Stanfield's embedded illustration entitled "The Lighthouse" (fig. 3), left, four sailors (two of them quite young) struggle to reef in the jibsheet. Beneath them, in the surf, is an anchor. On a rock darkly rising from the breakers, an owl-like lighthouse stands, the small gulls indicating both its size and its distance from the ship (which we must imagine, for only the

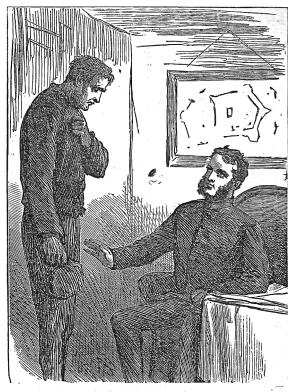
12 Charles Dickens, "Chapter 1: The Gift Bestowed," *The Haunted Man and The Ghost's Bargain*, il. John Leech et al. (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1848), p. 6.

bowsprit and its five supporting stays are visible). The perilous scene is not allegorical, but a visual realisation of a passage at the bottom of the (left) facing page: "When mariners at sea" Perhaps Stanfield's point is that, as opposed to these young sailors who brave the deep for middle-aged merchants or in service of their nation, Redlaw, now middle-aged, has enjoyed a comparatively tranquil existence, despite a mysterious trauma in the past that has embittered him. Dickens moves the shipwrecked sailor from the background of *The Cricket on the Hearth*, for Edward Plummer is little more than a plot contrivance, to the foreground in the Christmas Stories *The Wreck of the 'Golden Mary'* (Household Words, 1856) and A Message from the Sea (All the Year Round, 1860).

In the decades following the Christmas Books in his own weekly periodicals every December, Dickens continued to introduce readers to settings and characters well outside their ken, although, in the main, Dickens continued to make his central characters in these framed-tales members of the burgeoning middle classes in A Round of Stories by the Christmas Fire (Household Words, 1852) and its successors. But behind these essentially middle-class tale-tellers and protagonists one often finds Dickensian landscapes that broaden the reader's knowledge and sympathies, so that, for example, in "The Tale of Richard Doubledick" in The Seven Poor Travellers (Household Words, 1854) the author takes his readers back two generations to the battlefields of the Napoleonic Wars upon which Great Britain shaped its destiny economically and socially for the rest of the century. The timing of the story's publication is perhaps its most significant aspect, as appearing at Christmas time 1854 it likely represents Dickens's support of the Anglo-French alliance, despite its singular lack of success in that autumn of coordinating its naval and land-based operations in the opening campaigns of the Crimean War. In A Christ-

13 Ibid.

mas Carol, Dickens as a Radical had obliquely expressed his wish for universal concord in the antique, rusted sheath worn by the Spirit of Christmas Present; in 1854, ironically, as a Liberal still, Dickens was a member of the war party. Although like many other thoughtful observers of the international scene, he was upset over the faulty administration of the Crimean War, he nevertheless believed that its overarching goal of neutralising Czar Nicholas's expansionist aspirations was laudable, as the despot's territorial ambitions constituted a threat to European security: "it is an indubitable fact, I conceive, that Russia must be stopped, and that the future Peace of the World renders War imperative upon us." 14



CAPTAIN TAUNTON AND PRIVATE DOUBLEDICK.

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¹⁴ Charles Dickens, "To W. W. F. De Cerjat, 3 January 1855," The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, The Pilgrim edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), Vol. 7, p. 495.

Fig. 4. Sol Eytinge, Jr., "Captain Taunton and Private Doubledick," The Seven Poor Travellers, p. 316.

Private Richard Doubledick and the concerned senior officer in Dalziel's rather static full-page composite woodblock are not wearing contemporary uniforms, so that the illustrator of the 1877 Household Edition volume is not attempting to make the connection between the story and its original publication context. However, Illustrated Library Edition (1868) illustrator F. A. Fraser, having chosen the same moment as Eytinge in the Diamond Edition of 1867 (fig. 4) and E. G. Dalziel for this illustration, costumes the figures as if they were in mid-nineteenth century service. The moment realized is that when an almost brotherly Captain Taunton, reviewing the young private's record of misdemeanours, upbraids Doubledick, who breaks down in his office at



Fig. 5, F. A. Fraser, "The Seven Poor Travellers," *Christmas Stories* (1868), p. 95.

hearing a voice that echoes that of his own conscience. In his melodramatic rendering of this scene of confession and forgiveness, F. A. Fraser is careful in his delineation of the officer's and private's uniforms ("period-appropriate," if one is thinking of the action of the story as contemporary rather than historical) in "The Seven Poor Travellers" (fig. 5), unconsciously following Sol Eytinge, Jr.'s decision to give Taunton and Doubledick contemporary British uniforms (i. e., the period of the Crimean War). The costuming is hardly a minor detail since it signifies the artist's reading of the story as both Dickens's theme of the necessity for forgiveness for past wrongs and his support for the recent Anglo-

French cooperation in the Coalition to counteract Prussian-Austrian neutrality, which in turn compelled the former adversaries to coordinate their military operations. Public sentiment being mixed about the advisability of aligning French and British interests, Dickens's story emphasized the necessity for laying past antipathies to rest and "moving forward," although he does not directly allude to the common enemy (imperial but Christian Russia) or the common cause (the defense of a non-Christian power, The Sick Man of Europe). Modern readers can be forgiven for missing the story's mid-Victorian political context: war was declared in March 1854, and the ineffectiveness of the allied naval bombardment of Sevastopol in the fall of 1854 had underscored serious problems in the politically-dictated and utterly cumbersome shared command structure. At the very time that Dickens published a story which seems to urge greater cooperation between the superpowers, Lord Aberdeen's ministry was about to fall as a result of the failure of a land-based operation against Sevastopol. In this ill-fated and utterly mismanaged conflict, 23,000 British soldiers perished – and the infamous Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaclava on 25 October 1854 under Lord Cardigan had undermined both the honour and credibility of Britain's much-vaunted military might.

However, no illustrations cued such a reading of the 1854 Extra Christmas Number in *Household Words*. Rather, published in Dickens's unillustrated weekly periodicals, such seasonal offerings appealed only through the text to the sense of the picturesque, and were not issued with illustration until Dickens had made his last such offering, *No Thoroughfare* (1867). Indeed, the successive barrack room and battlefield scenes in the 1854 inset tale in the British Illustrated Library, Household, and Charles Dickens Library Editions construct Britain's nineteenth-century, imperial "manifest destiny" as a predominantly aggressive and masculine enterprise.

Dickens's notions of masculinity and empire-building inform his conception of the role of women in the great imperial enterprise in that in his fiction they consistently play a subordinate role. To *David Copperfield*'s Em'ly Peggotty and Martha we might add Sophy Marigold as one of Dickens's Daughters of Empire. Possibly as a result of the Bhutan War, which concluded with the Treaty of Sinchula on 11 November 1865 (rather than as a result of the Second Opium or "Arrow" War, 1856-60), Dickens even has a "daughter of Empire," Sophy Marigold, accompany her husband, a clerk in a merchant house, to "China" (probably Hong Kong) in the Extra Christmas Number of *All the Year Round* for 1865:

He was a-going out to China as clerk in a merchant's house, which his father had been before him. He was in circumstances to keep a wife, and he wanted her to marry him and go along with him. She persisted, no. . . . she could never disappoint her beloved, good, noble, generous, and I-don't-know-what-all father ¹⁵

She will not be a colonizer, but merely a house-keeper, and in any event must look after her father, just as *David Copperfield*'s Little Em'ly will perform domestic duties for her uncle, Dan'l Peggotty, in Australia. Thus, Dickens's notions of domestic order preclude women being anything other than tenders of the domestic hearth for the builders of Empire. "Dr. Marigold's Prescriptions" do not include a female Cecil Rhodes or Chinese Gordon. American Household Edition illustrator E. A. Abbey, on the other hand, in his illustration for "The Tale of Richard Doubledick" focuses on the home front, the awkward moment when the protagonist, now a thorough veteran of the Napoleonic Wars, must console the grieving mother of his friend and mentor. The il-

¹⁵ Charles Dickens, "Dr. Marigold," il. E. G. Dalziel, *Christmas Stories*, British Household edition (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879), p. 180.

lustration involves her meeting her dead son's noble friend in the vicinity of her

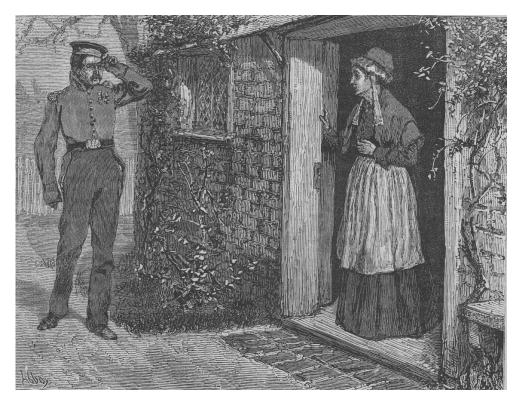


Fig. 6, E. A. Abbey, "She came to the door quickly, and fell upon his neck," Christmas Stories (Harper & Bros., 1876), p. 267.

humble Somersetshire cottage (fig. 6), a female-dominated, "domestic" sphere which sets the stage for the story's final movement of *rapprochement* and forgiveness near Aix at a more stately residence, a chateau belonging to the French officer who shot Captain Doubledick's friend Major Taunton in the Battle of Badajos. The peace-time settings, well removed from London, underscore the necessity for forgiveness, one of the major themes of the original *Christmas Books* and their successors, the *Christmas Stories*.



Fig. 7, E. G. Dalziel, "I am only a common soldier, Sir," said he. "It signifies very little what such a poor brute comes to." Christmas Stories (Chapman & Hall, 1879), frontispiece.

The quintessential Sons of Empire are young soldiers such as callow Ensign Richard Doubledick and the rugged twenty-nine-year-old Royal Marine Private Gill Davis, who in part reflect Dickens's anxieties about his own sons who have left England in the service of Empire. Although Dickens's own travels had taken him to foreign parts - France, Italy, Switzerland, Canada, and the United States – his sons' letters transported him to such outposts of Empire as Lieutenant Walter Dickens's in Calcutta (1857) - Sydney and Frank were yet to enlist, but both eventually also served in India.

Although undoubtedly bewildered by the [treatment of India in] the Great Exhibition, Dickens became increasingly interested in India in the 1850s. Part of his curiosity may be attributed to the fact that his son, Walter – whose career as a cadet in the East India army was decided upon by his father when the boy was eight years old – had recently completed his training at Addiscombe and set sail for India on 20 July 1857. Although his original regiment the 26th Regiment of Bengal Infantry had been disbanded by the time he reached India, Walter was to fight at both Cawnpore and Lucknow during the uprising as a member of the 42nd Highlanders. ¹⁶

Promoted to lieutenant before his eighteenth birthday, Walter died in India just as his brother Frank shipped out to join the Bengal Mounted Police. Knowing that Walter was destined for military service abroad, even three years before the Sepoy Rebellion, Dickens would have had his anxieties about Walter's fate. By his own admission, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* is a defamiliarised and fictionised version of the Sepoy Mutiny, as one may readily see in his letter to Mrs. Watson on 7 December 1857, as he and Wilkie Collins were going to press with the Christmas story:

I have been very busy with the Xmas Number of Household Words, in which I have endeavoured to commemorate the foremost of the great English qualities shewn in India, without laying the scene there, or making any vulgar association with real events or calamities.¹⁷

The writer's description of the initial physical setting of *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners, and Their Treasure in Women, Children, Silver, and Jewels* in the Extra Christmas Number of *Household Words* (which Dickens and Collins wrote collaboratively just after letters arrived from Walter in

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¹⁶ Grace Moore, Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race, and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), p. 104.

¹⁷ Charles Dickens, *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, The Pilgrim edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), Vol. 7, p. 487.

India detailing his battlefield experiences) could be applied to almost any British garrison from Fort York in Ontario to Government Hill at Singapore and Cawnpore in India:

It was a pretty place: in all its arrangements partly South American and partly English, and very agreeable to look at on that account, being like a bit of home that had got chipped off and had floated away to that spot, accommodating itself to circumstances as it drifted along. The huts of the Sambos, to the number of five-and-twenty, perhaps, were down by the beach to the left of the anchorage. On the right was a sort of barrack, with a South American Flag and the Union Jack, flying from the same staff, where the little English colony could all come together, if they saw occasion. It was a walled square of building, with a sort of pleasure-ground inside, and inside that again a sunken block like a powder magazine, with a little square trench round it, and steps down to the door.

Then, as we stood in the shade, she showed us (being as affable as beautiful), how the different families lived in their separate houses, and how there was a general house for stores, and a general reading-room, and a general room for music and dancing, and a room for Church; and how there were other houses on the rising ground called the Signal Hill, where they lived in the hotter weather.¹⁸

¹⁸ Charles Dickens, "Chapter 1: The Island of Silver Store," *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners, and Their Treasure in Women, Silver, and Jewels (Household Words,*7 December 1857), *Christmas Stories from "Household Words*" and "All the Year Round," il. Edgar Dalziel (The Household Edition. Vol. 21. London: Chapman & Hall, 1879. Rpt. 1892), p. 45.

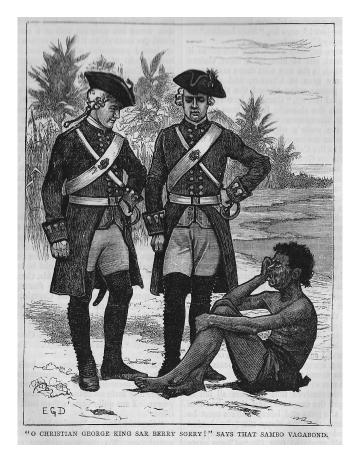


Fig. 8. E. G. Dalziel, "O Christian George King sar berry sorry!" says that sambo vagabond." Christmas Stories (Chapman & Hall, 1879), p. 48.

Whereas Dickens depicts in careful detail this miniature England on the Central American coast, making it by virtue of the presence of families more a fortified village than an armed camp, he leaves the describing of the horrors of captivity in a ruined Mayan city to his collaborator, Wilkie Collins:

We found ourselves, first, under a square portico, supported upon immense flat slabs of stone, which were carved all over, at top and bottom, with death's-heads set in the midst of circles of sculptured flowers. I guessed the length of the portico to be, at the very least, three hundred feet. In the inside wall of it, appeared four high gaping doorways; three of them were entirely choked up by fallen stones: so jammed together, and so girt about by roots and climbing plants, that no force short of a blast of gunpowder, could possibly have dislodged them. The fourth entrance had, at some former time, been kept just clear enough to allow of the passing of one man at once through the gap that had been

made in the fallen stones. Through this, the only passage left into the Palace, or out of it, we followed the Indians into a great hall, nearly one half of which was still covered by the remains of the roof. In the unsheltered half: surrounded by broken stones and with a carved human head, five times the size of life, leaning against it: rose the straight, naked trunk of a beautiful tree that shot up high above the ruins, and dropped its enormous branches from the very top of it, bending down towards us, in curves like plumes of immense green feathers.¹⁹

The immense scale of the devastated city that dwarfs the European captives is in sharp contrast to the more human scale of the reasonable, organised, specifically Christian and family-oriented garrison town; indeed, the only admirable feature of the ruined palace is a natural one, namely, the enormous and picturesque jungle tree. Everything about the place seems designed to intimidate and depress the captives, so that the Collinsian part of the story seems most directly related to the experiences of the English and Anglo-Indian prisoners in the Sepoy Mutiny.

The settings of the illustrations of the story as remediated in the Illustrated Library Edition (1868), the Household Edition (1877), and the Charles Dickens Library Edition (1910) reflect the expanding consciousness of Dickens's readers with respect to the wider world beyond Britain's shores, and made them aware of Britain's place within that larger, imperial landscape, so to speak. Dickens's reaction to the Cawnpore massacre on 27 June and the subsequent murder of captured British women and children in Bibighar may strike the modern reader as xenophobic and racist; clearly he was incensed at such treatment of noncombatants when he wrote to Angela Burdett Coutts on 4 October 1857 that, were he in command of British forces in India, he "should do [his] utmost to exterminate the Race

¹⁹ Wilkie Collins, "Chapter 2: The Prison in the Woods," The Perils of Certain English Prisoners, and Their Treasure in Women, Silver, and Jewels, Household Words, Extra Christmas Number (7 December 1857), vol. 16, p. 22. [The material written by Collins does not appear in later volume editions.]

upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested . . . to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth."²⁰

For readers of the *Christmas Stories* in volume form, whether the Illustrated Library or Household editions,

illustration provides not only a revealing insight into the artists who produce it but into the minds of the public that absorbed it. The illustrator's picture is not always a delineation of how things actually looked or how they might have looked – *but how a mass audience expected things to look*. The visual image is an important index to the expectations and satisfactions of its audience.²¹

For instance, the physical setting of the captivity-and-escape narrative *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* (1857), Dickens's most immediate and somewhat racist reaction to the Sepoy Mutiny, features two prominent locales: the outpost of Empire, the garrison town on the sandy shores of Silver-Store Island (based on Belize) and its nearby antithesis, the Darwinian jungle of the mixed-race pirates on the Honduran mainland opposite, a juxtaposition that anticipates the settings and themes of such Conrad stories as "An Outpost of Progress" (1897) and *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Dalziel's 1877 illustration reconfigures the key elements of the mid-50s story two decades after its initial publication for a readership acutely aware of the burdens of Empire.

In the British Household Edition, Edward Dalziel has provided a single illustration (fig. 8) to encapsulate the chief elements of the story: a "Sambo" (a racist slur, but here signifying a company employee of mixed aboriginal and native or negro background), palm trees and a sandy beach, and two uniformed British officers. Since the reader encounters the text a page before the illustration "O Christian George King sar berry sorry!" says that Sambo vagabond,"

²⁰ Charles Dickens, "*To* Angela Burdett Coutts" (27 June 1857), *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, The Pilgrim edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), Vol. 7, p. 459.

²¹ Henry Pitz, *The Brandywine Tradition* (New York: Weathervane, 1968), p. 238.

the reader of the two-chapter version of the story may well have expected to encounter a subservient Christian George King and two common soldiers of the Royal Marines, Private Gil Davis and Corporal Harry Charker; however, despite the illustrator's accuracy in delineating the officers' uniforms for the period in which the story is set (the 1740s), both Dalziel and Dickens have failed to note that a reference to the Royal Marines in 1744 is an anachronism in that the service was not constituted until 1755, although the marine infantry for the Royal Navy may be traced back to the formation of "the Duke of York and Albany's maritime regiment of Foot" in 1664. However, the nineteenth-century reader would probably not have noticed the error in giving the private and the corporal officer's dress, and might even have expected to see the two soldiers in full-dress uniform, including powdered wigs, sabres, and top-boots - even though the action is set on an island off the coast of South America, surely a tropical rather than a temperate climate (as implied by the palm trees in the background) unsuited to such heavy woolen clothing. Perhaps the picture's elevating the status of the common soldiers Davis and Charker is an aspect of Dalziel's intentionally exaggerating the discrepancy between the Royal Marines (their regimentals implying order, discipline, and European civilization) and the "Sambo," who is semi-clothed, dark-skinned, and (in contrast to the Englishmen's wigs) dark-haired. Whereas they stand at ease, their hands on their weapons, curiously interrogating him, King lies casually on the sand, sourly regarding those above him. The picture therefore redefines Davis as a noble European of aristocratic bearing unbowed by the climate and not actuated by class and racial biases, and Christian George King as the "other": a native of mixed racial origins, grudgingly subservient, scantily dressed (but appropriate to the climate), a Caliban rolling on his back in the sand like a dog as two enlightened European soldiers regard him with genial curiosity rather than contempt. The discrepancy between the common soldiers and the mulatto

is thus a reading of the text that overlooks Davis's classconsciousness and sense of being oppressed by lazy or incompetent social superiors such as Captain Carton, Captain Maryon, and Commissioner Pordage (this latter local official a pompous bureaucrat obsessed with maintaining the dignity of his own position and punctiliously enforcing unworkable regulations). Moreover, the 1877 wood-engraving ennobles Dickens's working-class narrator, transforming him from an illiterate racist and a common soldier into a distinguished officer. By selecting the moment when the "Sambo" is lying on the ground (rather than, for example, trotting along the beach or working alongside the Marines and sailors to save the cargo of the sloop "Christopher Columbus"), Dalziel has also reinscribed Christian George King at this moment in Dickens's opening chapter as a sourfaced, lounging native rather than a devoted employee of the company - a sort of "sepoy," in fact. "In aiding the pirates, the ostensibly faithful native proves to be not only un-Christian, un-aristocratic, and un-English – he is subhuman as well" (Nayder, p. 120), as both text and illustration show even before his betrayal of the colonists.

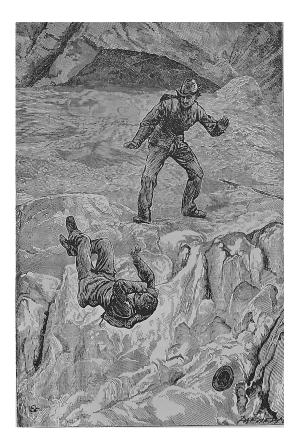


Fig. 9. Charles Green, "No Thoroughfare." *Christmas Stories*, Illustrated Library Edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1868), vol. 2, facing p. 322.

From the ruined Mayan city, debilitating heat, and daunting jungle of the Mosquito Coast in the 1857 collaborative narrative of Collins and Dickens we turn to the Rousseauean splendour and mid-winter savagery of the Simplon Pass, an equally strange but far less benign landscape than that of Central America in the 1857 story that Dickens had actually experienced when hastening back to England in the autumn of 1844 to superintend *The Chimes* through the press. The alpine setting also reflects the experiences of English travellers on the Continent who, in ever-increasing numbers in the 1850s and 1860s, thanks to the rapid spread of railways and the expanding disposable incomes of the Victorian middle classes, were making modern and bourgeois versions of the eighteenth-century, aristocratic Grand Tour – "vacations."

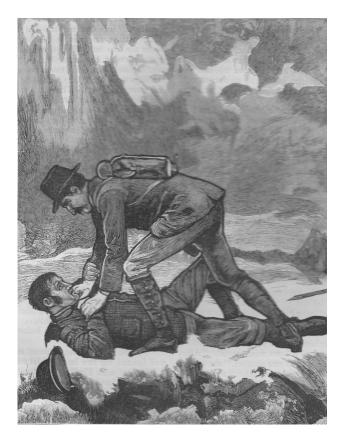


Fig. 10. E. G. Dalziel, "He became roused to the knowledge that Obenreizer had set upon him, and that they were struggling desperately in the snow." Christmas Stories, Illustrated Library Edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879), p. 265.

Again, Dickens employs a fierce natural backdrop as a vehicle for demonstrating British courage, as youthful protagonist George Vendale outwits his foreign adversary, the cunning and physically superior Jules Obenreizer, wearing a markedly un-English hat in Arthur Jules Goodman's 1898 frontispiece (fig. 12), which might be an illustration for the Klondike gold rush, then the subject of English pictorial periodicals such as *The Illustrated London News*.

Although the light was thus dismally shrouded, the prospect was not obscured. Down in the valley of the Rhone behind them, the stream could be traced through all its many windings, oppressively sombre and solemn in its one leaden hue, a colourless waste. Far and high above them, glaciers and suspended avalanches overhung the spots where they must pass, by-and-by; deep and dark below them on their right, were awful precipices and roaring torrents; tremendous mountains arose in every vista. The gigantic landscape, uncheered by a touch of changing light or

a solitary ray of sun, was yet terribly distinct in its ferocity. The hearts of two lonely men might shrink a little, if they had to win their way for miles and hours among a legion of silent and motionless men – mere men like themselves – all looking at them with fixed and frowning front. But how much more, when the legion is of Nature's mightiest works, and the frown may turn to fury in an instant!²²



Fig. 11. Harry Furniss, "The Struggle on the Mountain," *No Thoroughfare, Christmas Stories*, The Charles Dickens Library Edition, Vol. 16, Part 2, facing p. 94.

The impression is one of majesty and desolation, the Alps like the Honduran jungle dwarfing the travelers, the vista terrifying by its immensity, and the antagonist and the harsh environment challenging the hardihood and resourceful-

²² Charles Dickens, Act Three, "On the Mountain," *No Thoroughfare*, *Christmas Stories*, Household Edition (London: Chapman & Hall, 1879), p. 262.

ness of the young Englishman George Vendale. Phrases such as "that tremendous desolation" and "dismal galleries" (p. 263) reinforce the perilous nature of the journey, constantly threatened by the dangers of snow-blindness and avalanche amidst the blizzard called the *Tourmente*.

Not surprisingly, the suspenseful struggle between the Englishman and the devious foreigner set against the perilous natural backdrop has been the subject of illustration in the Illustrated Library, British Household, and Charles Dickens's Library Editions (fig. 9, 10, and 11). Although one certainly receives some sense of these integrated and integral backdrops in Dickens's collaborative novellas, the foregrounding of such diverse locales becomes possible in the illustrated versions of the texts, the illustrations of 1868 probably reflecting little authorial intent but constituting informed interpretations of highly telling moments in the two Christmas stories, F. A. Fraser's "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" and Charles Green's "No Thoroughfare." George Vendale's olive-skinned and markedly non-Anglo-Saxon opponent in the Dalziel series of No Thoroughfare illustrations, a Swiss who has the advantage of having grown up in the perilous region, appears to be in the ascendant in each of these illustrations which offer the reader no clue as to whether Vendale will survive, keeping the reader in suspense by showing the heavier man on top, pressing the hapless Englishman into the snow on the very edge of the precipice. In this Darwinian struggle, albeit far removed from the tropical jungle, Natural Selection would seem to favour the man better adapted to the climate by virtue of experience and race, but, despite his having been drugged, the Englishman, by virtue of his nobler motivation, survives while his assailant (improbably) does not - further testimony, should the late Victorian reader require it, of Great Britain's special place among the nations in the eyes of Providence.



Fig. 12. Arthur Jules Goodman, "Frontispiece," No Thoroughfare (1898).

But beyond these illustrators whom Dickens might have consulted and advised, lie the illustrations of the New Men of the Sixties and their fin de siecle successors, Barnard, Dalziel, and Furniss. Even an artist such as Edward Dalziel, whose first impulse was always to foreground character and minimize the physical setting, recognized the importance to the action of such scenes as the wrestling match on the precipice in the Simplon Pass. For an increasingly sophisticated reading public from the Illustrated Library Edition of 1868 through the Charles Dickens Library Edition of 1910, the landscapes informed not merely their reception of these works of short fiction from the 50s and 60s, but reinforced their view of the world beyond the seas as a British possession, an English-speaking world.

In the nineteenth-century illustrated editions, the story of the morally upright young Englishman, George Vendale, and the devious, middle-aged foreigner, Jules Obenreizer,

has consistently been the subject of illustration, in particular, the scene involving the alpine struggle between the young protagonist and the duplicitous Obenreizer. Although Sol Eytinge, Jr., in the Diamond Edition (1867-68) had no opportunity to provide an illustration for this last Christmas story (because it had yet to be published in periodical form when he was commissioned to illustrate the Diamond Edition in 1867), apparently the first American edition to include an illustration for the Collins-Dickens Christmas Stories Comprising "No Thoroughfare" and "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices" was that published in Boston by William F. Gill and Company in 1876. This volume has a particularly dramatic rendering of this same lifeand-death struggle for possession of the proofs of Obenreizer's forgery in which (somewhat inaccurately) the burly Obenreizer is in the act of pushing Vendale off the ledge -"Frontispiece. The Death Struggle on the Brink of the Abyss." The frontispiece for the 1898 Chapman and Hall volume bears a marked resemblance to this American illustration, suggesting that Arthur Jules Goodman, a popular fin de siecle American book and magazine illustrator, had actually seen the 1876 lithograph. All visual representations depict the virtuous Vendale as the underdog in the life-anddeath struggle that pits contrasting values against one another in this affirmation of Anglo-Saxon racial superiority for a transatlantic readership that believed in the imperial destiny of the English-speaking peoples.

Embedded in these post-Dickens versions of the seasonal short stories, shorn of the complementary pieces composed by Dickens's stable of periodical writers, the illustrations underscore the intersection of an English world view and un-English settings in the Americas and Europe in which Dickens's fictional sons of Empire such as Gil Davis and George Vendale triumph over their foreign environments and adversaries – and return home emotionally enriched by their experiences abroad. Sadly, three of Dickens's own Sons of Empire – Walter, Sydney, and Francis – never returned home: Lieutenant Walter Landor Dickens, deeply in debt, died of an aneurysm in India at the age of 22; Lieutenant Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens, RN, again suffering from financial difficulties, died at the age of 25, and was buried at sea in the Indian Ocean; Inspector Francis Jeffrey Dickens died of a heart attack at Moline, Illinois, at the age of 42. The other nonfictional Son of Empire, Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens or simply "Plorn" (1852-1902), served in the legislature of New South Wales.

Útdráttur

Árstíðasögur, fjarlæg sögusvið: framandi landslag í *The Christmas Books* og *Stories* (1843–1867)

Nútímalesendur enskra bókmennta hneigjast til að líta á mikinn rithöfund sem fulltrúa heimsborgarinnar Lundúna: Charles Dickens. Frá árinu 1840 fékk Dickens hins vegar æ meiri áhuga á útlöndum og sögustöðum fjarri Lundúnum: fyrst þegar hann ferðaðist til Bandaríkjanna og Ítalíu og síðar þegar synir hans komust til þroska og gátu lagt Stóra-Bretlandi lið í málefnum heimsveldisins. Upphafið var Jólabækurnar (1843–48) og þróunin hélt áfram með síðari bókum sem eru þekktar undir nafninu *Jólasögur*; í sögum sínum nýtti Dickens sér stundum bakgrunn sem tengdist hvorki borgum né Englandi sérstaklega í því skyni að ljá sögusviðinu yfirbragð hins ókunna og jafnvel framandlega. Þetta kom m.a. fram í samstarfi hans við Wilkie Collins, The Perils of Certain English Prisoners (Household Words, 1857) og No Thoroughfare (All the Year Round, 1867). Kannski endurspegla þessir erlendu sögustaðir frá árinu 1857 og síðar þær áhyggjur sem Charles Dickens hafði af sínum eigin fimm "sonum heimsveldisins" – Walter, Francis, Alfred, Sydney og Edward (tveir þeirra létust í herbjónustu á Indlandi, enn á þrítugsaldri). Þar að auki skóku ytri pólitískir, félagslegir og hernaðarlegir atburðir um miðja 19. öld trú Englendinga á eigin getu til að stjórna víðáttumiklu heimsveldi og hafa betur í samkeppninni við önnur voldug Evrópuríki, t.d. Krímstríðið og Sepoy-uppreisnin; þetta endurspeglast í "jólasögunum" sem ritaðar voru fyrir mjög breiðan lesendahóp, fólk sem las Household Words og All the Year Round. Í myndskreyttum útgáfum (sem að sjálfsögðu endurspegla ekki endilega upphaflegar fyrirætlanir höfundar) var síðar lögð áhersla á sögusvið í fjarlægum löndum; ýmist bæta þær við söguefni Dickens eða ðlaga jólasöguformið að þörfum lesenda á síðasta þriðjungi nítjándu aldar í Englandi og Ameríku.

Lykilorð: synir Charles Dickens, Sepoy-uppreisnin, Krímstríðið, jólabækur, jólasögur

ABSTRACT

Seasonal Tales, Far-flung Settings: The Unfamiliar Landscapes of *The Christmas Books* and *Stories* (1843–1867)

Modern readers of literature in English tend to identify a single great novelist with London as a world city: Charles Dickens. However, from the 1840s onward, as he entered his middle period, Dickens became more interested in foreign shores and settings far removed from London: first, as he travelled abroad, to America and Italy, and then as his sons matured into young men who would assist Great Britain in the business of Empire. Beginning with *The Christ*mas Books (1843–48), and continuing with their successors collectively known as The Christmas Stories, Dickens often incorporated and occasionally exploited backdrops that were neither specifically urban nor, indeed, English, to lend these seasonal offerings the allure of the unfamiliar and even, as in his principal collaborations with Wilkie Collins, The Perils of Certain English Prisoners (Household Words, 1857) and No Thoroughfare (All the Year Round, 1867), the exotic. Perhaps the presence of such foreign settings from 1857 onwards reflects the anxieties of Charles Dickens about his own five "Sons of Empire" – Walter, Francis, Alfred, Sydney, and Edward (of whom two died in India, serving in the military, while still in their twenties). Moreover, external political, social, and military events at mid-century that shook the confidence of the English in their ability to manage a far-flung empire and to compete successfully with the other great European powers - the Crimean War and the Sepoy Mutiny, in particular – are reflected in his "somethings for Christmas" directed at his broadest reading public, the consumers of Household Words and All the Year Round. Later, illustrated editions (which, of course, do not necessarily reflect the author's original intentions) emphasize these settings beyond the seas, sometimes merely complementing Dickens's story in volume form, but sometimes adjusting the seasonal tale for readers in the last third of the nineteenth century in England and America.

Key-words: Charles Dickens's sons, Sepoy Mutiny, Crimean War, Christmas Books, Christmas Stories

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