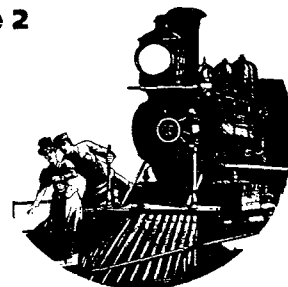


Novel Notes

Issue 2



A Christmas Carol, Stave One

Insider's Report: The Workhouse

by Special Correspondent Oliver Twist

Ain't no place in the world worse than the Workhouse. I know. I stayed there for nine long years. All us children lived in one big room with no heat and with rags for blankets. They made us wear dirty uniforms, and there was barely enough to eat. They sent us out to work like slaves and beat us if they thought we didn't work hard enough.

People say that it used to be even worse—like a prison. I've heard visitors say that if the workhouses are too nice, then we will get lazy and want to stay there. Ha! Twenty-four hours—no, three hours!—in the places I stayed would have cured them forever of that idea. Families—mothers, fathers, children—all had to separate. If you died there and nobody claimed your body, they would sell it to the dissectors!

Me? I finally ran away, but there's more about the Workhouse in *Oliver Twist*, the novel about me written by Mr. Charles Dickens, who, by the way, lived for a while in the Workhouse himself when he was twelve. That was something *he* never forgot.

DON'T BLAME IT ALL ON SCROOGE

The newspapers Scrooge read with his dinner may have been partly to blame for his unfeeling attitude. Some harsh ideas were popular in Victorian England:

- If your family doesn't support you or you don't do useful work, you have no right to food.

- People shouldn't be allowed to have children until they can support them.
- Starvation, disease, and war will result if people are allowed to have as many children as they like.



FOR YOUR READER'S LOG

How much responsibility do people have to help others? Note in your log the different attitudes toward this question that you find in Stave One of *A Christmas Carol*.

The Word PLACE

Victorian Vocabulary

Bedlam—a hospital for the mentally ill (official name: St. Mary of Bethlehem)

the City—financial center; located in oldest part of London
'Change—meeting place for bankers and lawyers in the City; officially, the Royal Exchange
countinghouse—business office

treadmill—a metal step device; prisoners were forced to walk on it for six hours at a time
Union workhouses—publicly supported institutions where the poor, the sick, and the elderly worked for food and shelter

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