

CHAPTER VI. - POVERTY AND DEATH.

"How little can the rich man know
Of what the poor man feels,
When Want, like some dark dæmon foe,
Nearer and nearer steals!

5 He never tramp'd the weary round,
A stroke of work to gain,
And sicken'd at the dreaded sound
Telling him 'twas in vain.

10 Foot-sore, heart-sore, he never came
Back through the winter's wind,
To a dark cellar, there no flame,
No light, no food, to find.

15 He never saw his darlings lie
Shivering, the flags their bed;
He never heard that maddening cry,
'Daddy, a bit of bread!'"

Manchester Song.

20 John Barton was not far wrong in his idea
that the Messrs. Carson would not be over
much grieved for the consequences of the
fire in their mill. They were well insured; the
machinery lacked the improvements of late
years, and worked but poorly in comparison
with that which might now be procured.
25 Above all, trade was very slack; cottons
could find no market, and goods lay packed
and piled in many a warehouse. The mills
were merely worked to keep the machinery,
human and metal, in some kind of order and
30 readiness for better times. So this was an
excellent opportunity, Messrs. Carson
thought, for refitting their factory with first-rate

improvements, for which the insurance
money would amply pay. They were in no
35 hurry about the business, however. The
weekly drain of wages given for labour,
useless in the present state of the market,
was stopped. The partners had more leisure
than they had known for years; and promised
40 wives and daughters all manner of pleasant
excursions, as soon as the weather should
become more genial. It was a pleasant thing
to be able to lounge over breakfast with a
review or newspaper in hand; to have time
45 for becoming acquainted with agreeable and
accomplished daughters, on whose
education no money had been spared, but
whose fathers, shut up during a long day with
calicoes and accounts, had so seldom had
50 leisure to enjoy their daughters' talents.
There were happy family evenings, now that
the men of business had time for domestic
enjoyments. There is another side to the
picture. There were homes over which
55 Carsons' fire threw a deep, terrible gloom;
the homes of those who would fain work, and
no man gave unto them—the homes of those
to whom leisure was a curse. There, the
family music was hungry wails, when week
60 after week passed by, and there was no work
to be had, and consequently no wages to
pay for the bread the children cried aloud for
in their young impatience of suffering. There
was no breakfast to lounge over; their lounge
65 was taken in bed, to try and keep warmth in
them that bitter March weather, and, by being
quiet, to deaden the gnawing wolf within.
Many a penny that would have gone little
way enough in oatmeal or potatoes, bought
70 opium to still the hungry little ones, and make
them forget their uneasiness in heavy
troubled sleep. It was mother's mercy. The
evil and the good of our nature came out

strongly then. There were desperate fathers;
75 there were bitter-tongued mothers (O God!
what wonder!); there were reckless children;
the very closest bonds of nature were snapt
in that time of trial and distress. There was
Faith such as the rich can never imagine on
80 earth; there was "Love strong as death;" and
self-denial, among rude, coarse men, akin to
that of Sir Philip Sidney's most glorious deed.
The vices of the poor sometimes astound us
here; but when the secrets of all hearts shall
85 be made known, their virtues will astound us
in far greater degree. Of this I am certain.

As the cold bleak spring came on (spring, in
name alone), and consequently as trade
continued dead, other mills shortened hours,
90 turned off hands, and finally stopped work
altogether.

Barton worked short hours; Wilson, of
course, being a hand in Carsons' factory, had
no work at all. But his son, working at an
engineer's, and a steady man, obtained
95 wages enough to maintain all the family in a
careful way. Still it preyed on Wilson's mind
to be so long indebted to his son. He was out
of spirits and depressed. Barton was morose,
100 and soured towards mankind as a body, and
the rich in particular. One evening, when the
clear light at six o'clock contrasted strangely
with the Christmas cold, and when the bitter
wind piped down every entry, and through
105 every cranny, Barton sat brooding over his
stinted fire, and listening for Mary's step, in
unacknowledged trust that her presence
would cheer him. The door was opened, and
Wilson came breathless in.

110 "You've not got a bit o' money by you,
Barton?" asked he.

"Not I; who has now, I'd like to know.
Whatten you want it for?"

115 "I donnot [11] want it for mysel, tho' we've
none to spare. But don ye know Ben
Davenport as worked at Carsons'? He's
down wi' the fever, and ne'er a stick o' fire,
nor a cowl [12] potato in the house."
120 "I han got no money, I tell ye," said Barton.
Wilson looked disappointed. Barton tried not
to be interested, but he could not help it in
spite of his gruffness. He rose, and went to
the cupboard (his wife's pride long ago).
125 There lay the remains of his dinner, hastily
put by ready for supper. Bread, and a slice of
cold fat boiled bacon. He wrapped them in
his handkerchief, put them in the crown of his
hat, and said—"Come, let's be going."
130 "Going—art thou going to work this time o'
day?"
"No, stupid, to be sure not. Going to see the
fellow thou spoke on." So they put on their
hats and set out. On the way Wilson said
135 Davenport was a good fellow, though too
much of the Methodee; that his children were
too young to work, but not too young to be
cold and hungry; that they had sunk lower
and lower, and pawned thing after thing, and
that now they lived in a cellar in Berry Street,
140 off Store Street. Barton growled inarticulate
words of no benevolent import to a large
class of mankind, and so they went along till
they arrived in Berry Street. It was unpaved;
and down the middle a gutter forced its way,
145 every now and then forming pools in the
holes with which the street abounded. Never
was the Old Edinburgh cry of "Gardez l'eau"
more necessary than in this street. As they
passed, women from their doors tossed
150 household slops of every description into the

gutter; they ran into the next pool, which
overflowed and stagnated. Heaps of ashes
were the stepping-stones, on which the
passer-by, who cared in the least for
155 cleanliness, took care not to put his foot. Our
friends were not dainty, but even they picked
their way till they got to some steps leading
down into a small area, where a person
standing would have his head about one foot
160 below the level of the street, and might at the
same time, without the least motion of his
body, touch the window of the cellar and the
damp muddy wall right opposite. You went
down one step even from the foul area into
165 the cellar in which a family of human beings
lived. It was very dark inside. The window-
panes were, many of them, broken and
stuffed with rags, which was reason enough
for the dusky light that pervaded the place
170 even at mid-day. After the account I have
given of the state of the street, no one can be
surprised that on going into the cellar
inhabited by Davenport, the smell was so
foetid as almost to knock the two men down.
175 Quickly recovering themselves, as those
inured to such things do, they began to
penetrate the thick darkness of the place,
and to see three or four little children rolling
on the damp, nay wet, brick floor, through
180 which the stagnant, filthy moisture of the
street oozed up; the fire-place was empty
and black; the wife sat on her husband's lair,
and cried in the dank loneliness.

Source:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/2153/2153-h/2153-h.htm#c6>

Task: Extract the social problems as they
existed in industrial Manchester in Charles
Dickens's time.