

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  
95 engineer's, and a steady man, obtained  
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.