CHARLES DICKENS

HAUNTED MAN

A Forgotten Classic
Abridged and Annotated by Dave Swavely

“Swavely’s goal of making Haunted Man more accessible to modern readers is an overwhelming success.”
–Gary L. Colledge, PhD
Author, God and Charles Dickens
A college professor named Redlaw is a good man plagued by bad memories of a traumatic childhood, compounded by a terrible betrayal and loss during his young adulthood. When an ethereal demonic doppelganger of himself appears and offers to wipe away those memories, Redlaw eagerly accepts, and also receives the ability to spread this “gift” to others.

Featuring the breathless suspense, colorful characters, and witty humor that has made Dickens such a beloved author, the story also tackles some of the deepest philosophical and theological questions ever raised in his writings. His answer to “the problem of evil” is of both literary and religious interest.

“Swavely’s goal of making Haunted Man more accessible to modern readers is an overwhelming success.”

—Dr. Gary L. Colledge (PhD, University of St. Andrews, author of God and Charles Dickens)
“George Orwell said of Dickens: ‘He is always preaching a sermon.’ If Orwell is right—and I’m convinced that he is—then one of those ‘sermons’ you’ll want to hear is *Haunted Man*. Dave Swavely’s edition is a delightful little volume and a welcome inaugural entry in Cruciform’s *Forgotten Classics* Series. Swavely’s goal of making *Haunted Man* more accessible to modern readers without eviscerating Dickens’ genius and spirit is an overwhelming success. And the reader will benefit greatly, I believe, from Swavely’s insight and thoughtful reflection in his Introduction and, particularly, his Afterword. Dickens was an intentionally engaged Christian layperson whose work was always firmly grounded in his Christian worldview. Swavely’s *Haunted Man* captures and foregrounds this in an inimitable way and gives us a focused vignette of the faith of this great writer.”

**Dr. Gary L. Colledge** (PhD, University of St. Andrews) is a professor at Moody Bible Institute and author of *God and Charles Dickens: Recovering the Christian Voice of a Classic Author*
“Haunted Man epitomizes the genius of Charles Dickens. As was the case five years earlier with Christmas Carol, he seamlessly weaves a story which speaks directly to the hearts and minds of his readers. The author always wrote with a purpose: by engaging their imaginations he sought to reach their souls. Though not a ‘religious writer,’ his work contains much of the spiritual truth which he held so dear. Dickens had the remarkable gift of taking seemingly abstract Christian teaching and bringing it to life through his fictional characters. Haunted Man is an excellent example of this.”

Dr. Keith Hooper (Doctorate, University of Exeter), is author of Charles Dickens: Faith, Angels and the Poor
Haunted Man

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Introduction to the Abridged Edition

These brief words will not ruin or lessen your enjoyment of the following story in any way (I hate it when they do that!); in fact, they will make you want to read it more and will actually increase its pleasure and profit for you. So please don’t skip this introduction!

An argument can be made that Haunted Man—especially in this edition—is as good as A Christmas Carol, though in a different way of course. In fact, for various reasons, some might actually like this book better. But there is no doubt that the popularity of the latter (a beloved and familiar classic) far exceeds the former (a neglected and forgotten classic, but a classic nonetheless).

Why are so many people familiar with A Christmas Carol, but have never even heard of, let alone read, The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain (Dickens’ original title)? I’d like to suggest several reasons why this later novella has been largely neglected and forgotten, and tell you how this edition attempts to fix every one of those problems. As I do, you’ll get a glimpse of why this book is truly a classic on the level of Dickens’ other great works, and you’ll be prepared to receive more enjoyment and edification as you read it (with no spoilers, like I promised).
WATCH THE LANGUAGE

As online reviews like those on GoodReads reveal, some readers have difficulty with the wording of the original Dickens story. It is common to hear complaints about the unnecessary length of the story and the repetition of certain elements, which may or may not have something to do with a required word count. And as is always the case with Victorian literature, some of the phraseology is simply not very intelligible to readers today.

Even though I’m a professional writer with a Master’s degree who loves Dickens, I myself had trouble following and staying with the story when I first encountered it, and I wasn’t really blessed and moved by it until a second reading. So in preparing this version, I’ve done my best to help you to understand and enjoy it the first time you read it—or maybe this time if you’ve tried it before—by removing some of the wording that prevented me from appreciating it fully. I took out some sections and language that were unnecessary to the flow of the story and/or difficult to understand because of the century and a half between Dickens and us. I didn’t add anything to the text, but simply removed about four thousand words here and there to make it run cleaner and smoother, like an updated engine in a classic car. I assure you that none of the abridgments change the basic meaning of any part of the story, and my commitment to make no additions or significant subtractions is illustrated by the fact that I even retained Dickens’ odd use of the phrase “D-n you!” at a key moment in the story. (He had guaranteed that there would be no vulgarity in his
writing, so he had to use euphemisms and abbrevia-
tions to communicate certain emotions.)

An important part of the vision of Cruciform
Press has always been to speak plainly and practically
to life issues, even when the discussion involves deep
theological or philosophical ideas. My hope is that we
now have a version of this classic story that still retains
all the genius of Charles Dickens, but makes it more
accessible to modern audiences. (You’ll notice that I’m
implementing the Cruciform vision in this introduc-
tion as well—not trying to impress you as if I were
an erudite professor of literature, but to assist you as a
fellow reader.)

WHO’S WHO

Another reason I had difficulty making it through
Haunted Man in my first reading was that I couldn’t
easily identify and distinguish the main characters in
my mind. So I’ll make it easier for you with a brief
description of each, in the order they appear, which
will hopefully also want to make you read more about
them in the story.

Mr. Redlaw (also referred to as “The Chemist”) is a middle-aged man of good character who has been
successful enough in his field to start his own college
in London, but is haunted by terrible events in his past
like a traumatic childhood in which he was abandoned
by his selfish parents. He had also experienced a tragic
double betrayal in his young manhood, when a close
friend of his broke an engagement with his beloved
sister, who died soon after, and ran off with his fiancé.
So in one short period of his young life, Redlaw had
lost his best friend, his sister, and the woman he loved, all in extremely difficult circumstances. But the title of the book also refers to another kind of “haunting” (or is it just a part of the same?). That one occurs when Redlaw is visited by a ghostly doppelganger of himself, who says that all of his bad memories can be erased.

Mr. William Swidger is an uneducated middle-aged man who is the caretaker (or custodian) at Redlaw’s college, along with his wife Milly and aging father Philip, who previously served as the caretaker. They live on the grounds and provide food and other services for Redlaw (who lives there also) and the students.

Milly Swidger (also referred to as “Mrs. William”) is a nearly angelic embodiment of feminine grace and strength who sacrificially serves her husband, his aging father, the college students, one sick student in particular, and even a homeless little orphan boy she finds on the street and takes into her home. She seems almost too good to be true, until we find out what made her that way at the end of the story.

Philip Swidger is the eighty-seven-year-old “superannuated keeper and custodian” of the college, as his son William calls him. He now requires more care than he can give, but assists his son and daughter-in-law when he can, and is always ready to share memories from his past, both good and bad, which he prays that God will “keep green” in his mind.

The Phantom (also known as “The Spectre” and “The Ghost”) is an ethereal, demonic doppelganger of Redlaw that appears to him while he is alone by the fire and makes him an offer he can’t refuse, but will
wish he had.

The Boy, who had been living on the streets until Milly took him in, is “a baby savage, a young monster, a child who had never been a child, a creature who might live to take the outward form of man, but who, within, would live and perish a mere beast.”

The Tetterby Family lives in the Jerusalem Buildings, a project-like neighborhood of London that Dickens apparently invented, where the father, Adolphus Tetterby Sr., has failed to start a successful business in the corner shop after many tries. He and his much larger wife Sophia share their cramped lodgings with eight young children, the oldest of which (Adolphus Jr.) hawks newspapers at the train station at age ten so the family can (barely) pay their bills. His slightly younger brother Johnny has his own full-time job, straining under the weight of his over-sized baby sister, who is also over-worshiped because she is the first female child in the family, after seven boys.

Edmund Denham (also called “the student”) is renting the Tetterbys’ upstairs room. He has been avoiding interaction with his teacher Redlaw for some unknown reason and has missed many classes recently because of a serious illness. But Milly Swidger has been caring for him faithfully, as she does for all the students, along with anyone else who is in need.

George Swidger is Philip’s oldest son, and William’s older brother, who long ago disappeared from his family like the Prodigal to pursue a depraved lifestyle.

Another mysterious figure, who has some connection to Redlaw, Denham, and George, appears later in the story, but I’ll let you discover who that may be.
BAH HUMBUG!

*A Christmas Carol* was a huge hit when it was released in December of 1843, so it became a tradition for Dickens to publish a seasonal novella each year after that. *The Chimes* (1844) and *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845) were very successful and well-reviewed, but then *The Battle of Life* (1846) was less so on both accounts, and Dickens took a break for a year before trying again with *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain* in 1848. By this time it was apparent that “the man who invented Christmas” had grown somewhat tired of repeating the formula of his most famous book, because although *Haunted Man* was marketed as another Christmas story, and contained many references to the holiday, it was not really that kind of story at all. One gets the impression that Dickens had an interesting tale he wanted to tell, and late 1848 just happened to be the best time for him to write and publish it. So he set the story at Christmas time, though it was totally unnecessary to the plot, and added in a number of extraneous yuletide references.

I’ve taken all but one of those references out for this abridged edition, to make it a “book for all seasons,” which it deserves to be. As I said, the story is really not about Christmas—it’s more about the Cross, and some related theological and philosophical issues that a more mature Dickens wanted to explore. And I believe that such weighty themes are obscured in the minds of some readers by an incongruous association with *A Christmas Carol*, or with the holiday season in general.

*A Christmas Carol* works well as a holiday story
because it’s about the principle of “goodwill over greed” that is powerfully illustrated by The Nativity (“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” to be incarnated at Bethlehem). But *Haunted Man* is much more about The Passion (“God so loved the world that he gave his only Son” to be sacrificed at Calvary). It’s about a shocking irony of “theodicy”—the hard-to-swallow and even-harder-to-digest idea that God has a good purpose for allowing evil in our lives.

**DICKENS THE THEOLOGIAN?**

I think that’s another reason why *Haunted Man* is a forgotten classic. Some readers don’t understand—and others won’t accept—the theological and philosophical assumptions behind the plot. They don’t necessarily agree with what Dickens says would happen if we were to lose all memory of past injuries and failures, because they don’t like the idea that God has ordained them and therefore they must be (or at least they find it confusing and hard to grasp). In other words, some readers have probably found it unsettling to discover that this beloved wordsmith believed in the absolute necessity of the Divine plan (including the existence of evil), because in God’s infinite wisdom it could have happened no other way.

Some readers also may not appreciate how Dickens, who is commonly thought of as a nominal believer (at best), clearly implies that the solutions to our “problems with the past” lie in the death of Jesus Christ and the Divine grace we can receive from it. As one commentator writes, *Haunted Man* “contains an explicitly Christian potency that cannot be ignored (or
is ignored for that reason).” ¹

I didn’t remove any of those spiritual ideas from this abridged edition, because Christian readers, who are the primary intended audience, should be very open to them, since they are taught in Scripture. And I hope that even those of you who are not committed Christians will thoughtfully consider them, as Dickens undoubtedly wanted us to do when he wrote the story. May you enjoy this forgotten classic, and please continue on afterward to the Afterword, where spoilers are okay and I can discuss all of this in further detail.

—Dave Swavely
Everybody said he looked like a haunted man.

Who could have seen his hollow cheek; his sunken brilliant eye; his black-attired figure, indefinably grim, although well-knit and well-proportioned; his grizzled hair hanging, like tangled seaweed, about his face—as if he had been, through his whole life, a lonely mark for the chafing and beating of the great deep of humanity—but might have said he looked like a haunted man?

Who could have observed his manner, taciturn, thoughtful, gloomy, shadowed by habitual reserve, retiring always and jocund never, with a distraught air of reverting to a bygone place and time, or of listening to some old echoes in his mind, but might have said it was the manner of a haunted man?

Who that had seen him in his inner chamber, part library and part laboratory, for he was, as the world knew, far and wide, a learned man in chemistry, and a teacher on whose lips and hands a crowd of aspiring ears and eyes hung daily; who that had seen him there, upon a winter night, alone, surrounded by his drugs and instruments and books; the shadow of his shaded
lamp a monstrous beetle on the wall, motionless among a crowd of spectral shapes raised there by the flickering of the fire upon the quaint objects around him; some of these phantoms (the reflection of glass vessels that held liquids), trembling at heart like things that knew his power to uncombine them, and to give back their component parts to fire and vapor; who that had seen him then, his work done, and he pondering in his chair before the rusted grate and red flame, moving his thin mouth as if in speech, but silent as the dead, would not have said that the man seemed haunted and the chamber too?

His dwelling was so solitary and vault-like, an old, retired part of an ancient endowment for students, once a brave edifice, planted in an open place, but now the obsolete whim of forgotten architects; smoke-age-and-weather-darkened, squeezed on every side by the overgrowing of the great city, and choked, like an old well, with stones and bricks; its small quadrangles, lying down in very pits formed by the streets and buildings, which, in course of time, had been constructed above its heavy chimney stalks.

His dwelling, at its heart and core—within doors, at his fireside—was so lowering and old, yet so strong, with its worm-eaten beams of wood in the ceiling, and its sturdy floor shelving downward to the great oak chimney-piece; so environed and hemmed in by the pressure of the town yet so remote in fashion, age, and custom; so quiet, yet so thundering with echoes when a distant voice was raised or a door was shut—echoes, not confined to the many low passages and empty rooms, but rumbling and grumbling till they were
stifled in the heavy air of the forgotten Crypt where
the Norman arches were half-buried in the earth.

You should have seen him in his dwelling about
twilight, in the dead winter time.

When the wind was blowing, shrill and shrewd,
with the going down of the blurred sun. When it was
just so dark, as that the forms of things were indis-
tinct and big—but not wholly lost. When sitters by the
fire began to see wild faces and figures, mountains and
abysses, ambuscades and armies, in the coals.

When twilight everywhere released the shadows,
prisoned up all day, that now closed in and gathered like
muster ing swarms of ghosts. When they stood lower-
ing, in corners of rooms, and frowned out from behind
half-opened doors. When they had full possession of
unoccupied apartments. When they danced upon the
floors, and walls, and ceilings of inhabited chambers,
while the fire was low, and withdrew like ebbing waters
when it sprang into a blaze. When they fantastically
mocked the shapes of household objects, making the
nurse an ogress, the rocking-horse a monster, the won-
dering child, half-scared and half-amused, a stranger
to itself—the very tongs upon the hearth, a straddling
giant with his arms akimbo, evidently smelling the
blood of Englishmen, and wanting to grind people’s
bones to make his bread.

When these shadows brought into the minds of
older people, other thoughts, and showed them differ-
ent images. When they stole from their retreats, in the
likenesses of forms and faces from the past, from the
grave, from the deep, deep gulf, where the things that
might have been, and never were, are always wandering.
When he sat, as already mentioned, gazing at the fire. When, as it rose and fell, the shadows went and came. When he took no heed of them, with his bodily eyes; but, let them come or let them go, looked fixedly at the fire. You should have seen him, then.

When the sounds that had arisen with the shadows, and come out of their lurking-places at the twilight summons, seemed to make a deeper stillness all about him. When the wind was rumbling in the chimney, and sometimes crooning, sometimes howling, in the house. When, at intervals, the window trembled, the rusty vane upon the turret-top complained, the clock beneath it recorded that another quarter of an hour was gone, or the fire collapsed and fell in with a rattle.

When a knock came at his door, in short, as he was sitting so, and roused him.

“Who’s that?” said he. “Come in!”

Surely there had been no figure leaning on the back of his chair; no face looking over it. It is certain that no gliding footstep touched the floor, as he lifted up his head, with a start, and spoke. And yet there was no mirror in the room on whose surface his own form could have cast its shadow for a moment; and, Something had passed darkly and gone!

“I’m humbly fearful, sir,” said a fresh-colored busy man, holding the door open with his foot for the admission of himself and a wooden tray he carried, and letting it go again by very gentle and careful degrees, when he and the tray had got in, lest it should close noisily, “that it’s a good bit past the time tonight. But Mrs. William has been taken off her legs so often—”

“By the wind? Ay! I have heard it rising.”
“—By the wind, sir—that it’s a mercy she got home at all. Oh dear, yes. Yes. It was by the wind, Mr. Redlaw. By the wind.”

He had, by this time, put down the tray for dinner, and was employed in lighting the lamp, and spreading a cloth on the table. From this employment he desisted in a hurry, to stir and feed the fire, and then resumed it; the lamp he had lighted, and the blaze that rose under his hand, so quickly changing the appearance of the room, that it seemed as if the mere coming in of his fresh red face and active manner had made the pleasant alteration.

“Mrs. William is of course subject at any time, sir, to be taken off her balance by the elements. She is not formed superior to that.”

“No,” returned Mr. Redlaw good-naturedly, though abruptly.

“No, sir. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Earth; as for example, last Sunday week, when sloppy and greasy, and she going out to tea with her newest sister-in-law, and having a pride in herself, and wishing to appear perfectly spotless though pedestrian. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Air; as being once over-persuaded by a friend to try a swing at Peckham Fair, which acted on her constitution instantly like a steam-boat. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Fire; as on a false alarm of engines at her mother’s, when she went two miles in her nightcap. Mrs. William may be taken off her balance by Water; as at Battersea, when rowed into the piers by her young nephew, Charley Swidger junior, aged twelve, which had no idea of boats whatever. But these are elements.
Mrs. William must be taken out of elements for the strength of her character to come into play.”

As he stopped for a reply, the reply was “Yes,” in the same tone as before.

“Yes, sir. Oh dear, yes!” said Mr. Swidger, still proceeding with his preparations, and checking them off as he made them. “That’s where it is, sir. That’s what I always say myself, sir. Such a many of us Swidgers! Why there’s my father, sir, superannuated keeper and custodian of this Institution, eighty-seven year old. He’s a Swidger!”

“True, William,” was the patient and abstracted answer, when he stopped again.

“In fact, sir, my father is a family in himself to take care of; and it happens all for the best that we have no child of our own, though it’s made Mrs. William rather quiet-like, too. Quite ready for the fowl and mashed potatoes, sir? Mrs. William said she’d dish in ten minutes when I left the Lodge.”

“I am quite ready,” said the other, waking as from a dream, and walking slowly to and fro.

“Mrs. William has been at it again, sir!” said the keeper, as he stood warming a plate at the fire, and pleasantly shading his face with it. Mr. Redlaw stopped in his walking, and an expression of interest appeared in him.

“What I always say myself, sir. She will do it! There’s a motherly feeling in Mrs. William’s breast that must and will have went.”

“What has she done?”

“Why, sir, not satisfied with being a sort of mother to all the young gentlemen that come up from a variety
of parts, to attend your courses of lectures at this ancient foundation—” Here he turned the plate, and cooled his fingers.

“Well?” said Mr. Redlaw.

“That’s just what I say myself, sir,” returned Mr. William, speaking over his shoulder, as if in ready and delighted assent. “That’s exactly where it is, sir! There ain’t one of our students but appears to regard Mrs. William in that light. Every day, right through the course, they puts their heads into the Lodge, one after another, and have all got something to tell her, or something to ask her. ‘Swidge’ is the appellation by which they speak of Mrs. William in general, among themselves, I’m told; but that’s what I say, sir. Better be called ever so far out of your name, if it’s done in real liking, than have it made ever so much of, and not cared about! What’s a name for? To know a person by. If Mrs. William is known by something better than her name—I allude to Mrs. William’s qualities and disposition—never mind her name, though it is Swidger, by rights. Let ’em call her Swidge, Widge, Bridge—Lord! London Bridge, Blackfriars, Chelsea, Putney, Waterloo, or Hammersmith Suspension—if they like.”

The close of this triumphant oration brought him and the plate to the table, upon which he half laid and half dropped it, with a lively sense of its being thoroughly heated, just as the subject of his praises entered the room, bearing another tray and a lantern, and followed by a venerable old man with long grey hair.

Mrs. William, like Mr. William, was a simple, innocent-looking person, in whose smooth cheeks the cheerful red of her husband’s official waistcoat was
very pleasantly repeated. But whereas Mr. William’s light hair stood on end all over his head, and seemed to draw his eyes up with it in an excess of bustling readiness for anything, the dark brown hair of Mrs. William was carefully smoothed down, and waved away under a trim tidy cap, in the most exact and quiet manner imaginable. Whereas Mr. William’s very trousers hitched themselves up at the ankles, as if it were not in their iron-grey nature to rest without looking about them, Mrs. William’s neatly-flowered skirts—red and white, like her own pretty face—were as composed and orderly, as if the very wind that blew so hard out of doors could not disturb one of their folds.

“Punctual, of course, Milly,” said her husband, relieving her of the tray, “or it wouldn’t be you. Here’s Mrs. William, sir!—He looks lonelier than ever to-night,” whispering to his wife, as he was taking the tray, “and ghostlier altogether.”

Without any show of hurry or noise, or any show of herself even, she was so calm and quiet, Milly set the dishes she had brought upon the table—Mr. William, after much clattering and running about, having only gained possession of a butter-boat of gravy, which he stood ready to serve.

“What is that the old man has in his arms?” asked Mr. Redlaw, as he sat down to his solitary meal.

“Holly, sir,” replied the quiet voice of Milly.

“That’s what I say myself, sir,” interposed Mr. William, striking in with the butter-boat. “Berries is so seasonable to the time of year!”

“Another year gone!” murmured the Chemist, with a gloomy sigh. “More figures in the lengthening
sum of recollection that we work and work at to our torment, till Death idly jumbles all together, and rubs all out. So, Philip!” breaking off, and raising his voice as he addressed the old man, standing apart, with his glistening burden in his arms, from which the quiet Mrs. William took small branches, which she noiselessly trimmed with her scissors, and decorated the room with, while her aged father-in-law looked on much interested in the ceremony.

“My duty to you, sir,” returned the old man. “Should have spoke before, sir, but know your ways, Mr. Redlaw—proud to say—and wait till spoke to! Merry Christmas, sir, and Happy New Year, and many of ’em. Have had a pretty many of ’em myself—ha, ha!—and may take the liberty of wishing ’em. I’m eighty-seven!”

“Have you had so many that were merry and happy?” asked the other.

“Ay, sir, ever so many,” returned the old man. “Is his memory impaired with age? It is to be expected now,” said Mr. Redlaw, turning to the son, and speaking lower.

“Not a morsel of it, sir,” replied Mr. William. “That’s exactly what I say myself, sir. There never was such a memory as my father’s. He’s the most wonderful man in the world. He don’t know what forgetting means. It’s the very observation I’m always making to Mrs. William, sir, if you’ll believe me!”

The Chemist pushed his plate away, and, rising from the table, walked across the room to where the old man stood looking at a little sprig of holly in his hand.

“It recalls the time when many of those years were
old and new, then?” he said, observing him attentively, and touching him on the shoulder. “Does it?”

“Ay, ay, ay! It was quite a pleasure to know that one of our founders—or more correctly speaking,” said the old man, with a great glory in his subject and his knowledge of it, “one of the learned gentlemen that helped endow us in Queen Elizabeth’s time, for we were founded afore her day—left in his will, among the other bequests he made us, so much to buy holly, for garnishing the walls and windows. Being but strange here, then, we took a liking for his very picture that hangs in our great Dinner Hall—a sedate gentleman in a peaked beard, with a ruff round his neck, and a scroll below him, in old English letters, ‘Lord! keep my memory green!’ You know all about him, Mr. Redlaw?”

“I know the portrait hangs there, Philip.”

“Yes, sure, it’s the second on the right, above the paneling. I was going to say—he has helped to keep my memory green, I thank him; for going round the building every year, as I’m a doing now, and freshening up the bare rooms with these branches and berries, freshens up my bare old brain. One year brings back another, and that year another, and those others numbers! And they’re a pretty many, for I’m eighty-seven!”

“Merry and happy,” murmured Redlaw to himself.

The room began to darken strangely.

“So you see, sir,” pursued old Philip, whose hale wintry cheek had warmed into a ruddier glow, and whose blue eyes had brightened while he spoke, “I have plenty to keep, when I keep this present season. Now, where’s my quiet Mouse? Chattering’s the sin of my time of life, and there’s half the building to do yet,
if the cold don’t freeze us first, or the wind don’t blow
us away, or the darkness don’t swallow us up.”

The quiet Mouse had brought her calm face to
his side, and silently taken his arm, before he finished
speaking.

“Come away, my dear,” said the old man. “Mr.
Redlaw won’t settle to his dinner, otherwise, till it’s
cold as the winter. I hope you’ll excuse me rambling on,
sir, and I wish you good night—”

“Stay!” said Mr. Redlaw, resuming his place at the
table, more, it would have seemed from his manner, to
reassure the old keeper, than in any remembrance of
his own appetite. “Spare me another moment, Philip.
William, you were going to tell me something to your
excellent wife’s honor. It will not be disagreeable to her
to hear you praise her. What was it?”

Mr. William, standing behind the table, and rum-
maging disconcertedly among the objects upon it,
directed persuasive glances at Mrs. William, and secret
jerks of his head and thumb at Mr. Redlaw.

“Him, you know, my love,” said Mr. William.
“Down in the Buildings. Tell, my dear! You’re the works
of Shakespeare in comparison with myself. Down in
the Buildings, you know, my love—Student.”

“Student?” repeated Mr. Redlaw, raising his head.

“That’s what I say, sir!” cried Mr. William, in the
utmost animation of assent. “If it wasn’t the poor
student down in the Buildings, why should you wish
to hear it from Mrs. William’s lips? Mrs. William, my
dear—Buildings.”

“I didn’t know,” said Milly, with a quiet frank-
ness, free from any haste or confusion, “that William
had said anything about it, or I wouldn’t have come. I asked him not to. It’s a sick young gentleman, sir—and very poor, I am afraid—who is too ill to go home this holiday-time, and lives, unknown to any one, in but a common kind of lodging for a gentleman, down in Jerusalem Buildings. That’s all, sir.”

“Why have I never heard of him?” said the Chemist, rising hurriedly. “Why has he not made his situation known to me? Sick! Give me my hat and cloak. Poor! What house? What number?”

“Oh, you mustn’t go there, sir,” said Milly, leaving her father-in-law, and calmly confronting him with her collected little face and folded hands.

“Not go there?”

“Oh dear, no!” said Milly, shaking her head as at a most manifest and self-evident impossibility. “It couldn’t be thought of!”

“What do you mean? Why not?”

“Why, you see, sir,” said Mr. William Swidger, persuasively and confidentially, “that’s what I say. Depend upon it, the young gentleman would never have made his situation known to one of his own sex. Mrs. Williams has got into his confidence, but that’s quite different. They all confide in Mrs. William; they all trust her. A man, sir, couldn’t have got a whisper out of him; but woman, sir, and Mrs. William combined—”

“There is good sense and delicacy in what you say, William,” returned Mr. Redlaw, observant of the gentle and composed face at his shoulder. And laying his finger on his lip, he secretly put his purse into her hand.

“Oh dear no, sir!” cried Milly, giving it back again. “Worse and worse! Couldn’t be dreamed of!”
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