

Dickens on Business, 1843

[Scrooge, to the gentlemen collecting for the poor:] "**It's enough for a man to understand his own business, and not to interfere with other people's.** Mine occupies me constantly. Good afternoon, gentlemen!"

[to Marley's ghost] "But why do spirits walk the earth, and why do they come to me?"

"It is required of every man," the Ghost returned, "that the spirit within him should walk abroad among his fellowmen, and travel far and wide; and **if that spirit goes not forth in life, it is condemned to do so after death. It is doomed to wander through the world—oh, woe is me!—and witness what it cannot share, but might have shared on earth, and turned to happiness!**" ...

"**You are fettered,**" said Scrooge, trembling. "**Tell me why?**"

"**I wear the chain I forged in life,**" replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wore it. Is its pattern strange to *you?*" Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!" ... "Not to know that no space of regret can make amends for one life's opportunities misused! Yet such was I! Oh! such was I!"

"**But you were always a good man of business, Jacob,**" faltered Scrooge, who now began to apply this to himself.

"**Business!**" cried the Ghost, wringing its hands again. "**Mankind was my business.** The common welfare was my business; charity, mercy, forbearance, and benevolence, were, all, my business. **The dealings of my trade were but a drop of water in the comprehensive ocean of my business!**" ...

[Scrooge] became sensible of confused noises in the air; incoherent sounds of lamentation and regret; wailings inexpressibly sorrowful and self-accusatory. The spectre ... floated out upon the bleak, dark night. **Scrooge followed to the window:** desperate in his curiosity. He looked out.

The air was filled with phantoms, wandering hither and thither in restless haste, and moaning as they went. **Every one of them wore chains** like Marley's Ghost; ... none were free. Many had been personally known to Scrooge in their lives. He had been quite familiar with one old ghost ... with a monstrous iron safe attached to its ankle, who cried piteously at being unable to assist a wretched woman with an infant, whom it saw below, upon a door-step. **The misery with them all was, clearly, that they sought to interfere, for good, in human matters, and had lost the power for ever.**

Charles Dickens left school at age 12 to work in a factory when his father was incarcerated in a debtors' prison. Later he campaigned vigorously for children's rights, education and other social reforms.