

Many of my retrospections through life have been tempered with regret, but the memory of that Christmas dinner is one of the few things I look back on with unmixed feelings. We had Irish stew. My wife said the Cot Fund Ladies' Committee gave it their unanimous vote. Being a dish disliked by everybody, it made the sacrifice more complete. During the meal my wife dwelt on the beautifying effect of self-denial on the character. She said it elevated human nature. I tried to feel elevated. I succeeded sufficiently to ask for some lemon syrup, when the smell of the Simpsons' turkey brought me down with a run. My wife moved pieces of potato about her plate, and said she had never enjoyed a dinner so much in her life. I built a castle with my salt and trenched it with mustard. When the stew had removed itself (our servant refused to cook the dinner or wait table) boiled rice without raisins or jam appeared. I rose.

I said I liked boiled rice without raisins or jam so much that it would be sinful to eat it. I would take a stroll, returning in time for afternoon tea without cake or cream. The fresh air revived me somewhat; it did more—it fired me with a worthy resolve. A feeling that Brown and Scrimger might not be loyal to the Cot Fund was making me unhappy. As a boy Brown did not go to Sunday-school, and I have known Scrimger tell an untruth when I asked him for half-a-crown. I felt it my duty to see that my two

friends did not debase themselves by eating Little Dot's picture book or half her cot.

I must confess it was a shock to me to meet Brown and Scrimger at the corner bound for my house on a similiar errand. Their interference struck me as officious, and I told them so. They wanted to know what the devil I meant letting my wife instigate theirs to turn Christmas into a beastly hash-house washing-day. I reminded them of the beautifying effect of self-denial on the character. Brown said he would bill me for the dinner he meant to have eaten. I pointed out to Scrimger that he had been the means of bestowing lasting happiness on Little Dot. Scrimger said "Damn Little Dot!"

We went into the "Empire" to settle the dispute. What happened after that I can never quite recall. I suppose I became faint or feverish—I forget which, but it doesn't matter. When I got home that night my mother-in-law had been sent for. Much that passed between us is a blank to me, but I recollect pressing her to have some more blankot. She has not been to our house since.

Next morning I made my wife a personal explanation. After some persuasive eloquence on my part, she admitted that the heat and insufficient food might be trying to my naturally delicate constitution. Now, when we want to raise a sum of money by self-denial, we take it out of intended Christmas presents to our relations.

