

The Chimes (1844)

By Charles Dickens (England)

There are not many people-- and as it is desirable
that a story-teller and a story-reader should establish
a mutual understanding as soon as possible, I beg it
Line to be noticed that I confine this observation neither
5 to young people nor to little people, but extend it to
all conditions of people: little and big, young and
old: yet growing up, or already growing down again--
there are not, I say, many people who would care
to sleep in a church. I don't mean at sermon-time in
10 warm weather (when the thing has actually been done,
once or twice), but in the night, and alone. A great
multitude of persons will be violently astonished, I
know, by this position, in the broad bold Day. But it
applies to Night. It must be argued by night. And I
15 will undertake to maintain it successfully on any
gusty winter's night appointed for the purpose, with
any one opponent chosen from the rest, who will meet
me singly in an old churchyard, before an old church
door; and will previously empower me to lock him in,
20 if needful to his satisfaction, until morning.

For the night wind has a dismal trick of wandering
round and round a building of that sort, and moaning
as it goes; and of trying with its unseen hand, the
windows and the doors; and seeking out some
25 crevices by which to enter. And when it has got in; as
one not finding what it seeks, whatever that may be, it
wails and howls to issue forth again; and not content
with stalking through the aisles, and gliding round and
round the pillars, and tempting the deep organ, soars
30 up to the roof, and strives to rend the rafters: then
flings itself despairingly upon the stones below, and
passes, muttering, into the vaults. Anon, it comes up
stealthily, and creeps along the walls, seeming to read,
in whispers, the Inscriptions sacred to the Dead. At
35 some of these, it breaks out shrilly, as with laughter;
and at others, moans and cries as if it were lamenting.
It has a ghostly sound too, lingering within the altar;
where it seems to chant in its wild way, of Wrong and
Murder done, and false Gods worshipped, in defiance
40 of the Tables of the Law, which look so fair and
smooth, but are so flawed and broken. Ugh! Heaven
preserve us, sitting snugly round the fire! It has
an awful voice, that wind at Midnight, singing in a
church!