THE TRUE STORY OF A COAL FIRE. IN THREE CHAPTERS.—CHAPTER I.

ONE winter's evening, when the snow lay as thick as a great feather-bed all over the garden, and was knee-deep in the meadow-hollows, a family circle sat round a huge fire, piled up with blocks of coal of that magnitude and profusion which are only seen at houses in the neighbourhood of a coal-mine. It appeared as if a tram-waggon had been 'backed' into the room, and half its load of great loose coal shot out into the enormous aperture in the wall which lies below the chimney and behind the fire-place in these rural abodes. The red flames soared, and the ale went round.

The master of the house was not exactly a farmer, but one of those country personages who fill up the interval between the thorough farmer and the 'squire who farms his own estate,—a sort of leather-legged, nail-shoed old gentleman, whose elder sons might easily be mistaken for gamekeepers, and the younger for ploughboys, but who on Sundays took care to 'let un see the difference' at church. Their father was therefore never called Farmer Dalton, but old Mr. Dalton, and almost as frequently Billy-Pit Dalton—the coal mine in which he held a share being named the 'William Pitt.' His lands, however, were but a small matter; his chief property was a third share he had in this coal mine, which was some half a mile distant from the house. His eldest son was married, and lived close to the mine, of which he acted as the chartermaster, or contractor with proprietors for the work to be done.

Among the family group that encircled the huge coal fire was one visitor,—a young man from London, the nephew of old Dalton. He had been sent down to this remote coal country by his father, in order to separate him from associates who dissipated his time, and from pursuits and habits that prevented his mind settling to any fixed occupation and course of life. Flashley was a young man of kindly feelings and good natural abilities, both of which, however, were in danger of being spoiled.

Various efforts were made from time to time to amuse the dashing young fellow 'from town.' Sometimes the old gentleman related the wonders of the coal-mines, and the perilous adventures of the miners; and on more than one occasion the curate of the village endeavoured to interest him in the grand history of the early world, and especially of the period of antediluvian forests, and their various transmutations. All in vain. He paid no attention to them. If anything they said made any impression at all, it was solely due to the subtle texture of the human mind, which continually receives much more than it seeks, or has wit enough to desire.

'You don't find the coal countries quite so bright and merry as London town, do ye,

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Flashley?' said old Dalton, with a good-natured smile.

'I can't say I do, uncle,' answered the youth, frankly. 'As to merriment, that is all very well at the present moment, in front of that great family bonfire; but all the rest of the day—' and here Flashley laughed with easy impudence and no small fun; 'the house and garden are in a state of dingy mourning, so are all the roads, and lanes, and hedges,—in fact, the passage of lines of little black waggons to and fro, rumbling full of coals, or rattling by, empty, seems like the chief business of life, and the main purpose for which men came into the world.'

'And so they be!' ejaculated old Dalton, jovially; 'so far as these parts are concerned. You know, Flashley, the world is made up of many parts, and this be the coal part. We be the men born to do the world's work of this sort; and we can't very handsomely pass all our time a-sitting before a shiny fire, and drinking ale,—though, that's good o' nights, after the work's done.'

With this laconic homily, old Billy-Pitt Dalton
rose smiling from his chair, emptied his mug of ale, and, shaking the young man kindly by the hand, trudged off to bed. With much the same sort of smiling 'good night,' the sons all trudged after him. The good dame and her daughter went last. Flashley remained sitting alone in front of the great fire.

He sat in silence for a long time, watching the fire decline into great dark chasms, black holes, and rugged red precipices, with grim smouldering chaotic heaps below.

A word or two about this young man. Flashley Dalton had some education, which he fancied was quite enough, and was very ambitious without any definite object. His father had proposed several professions to him, but none of them suited him, chiefly because, to acquire eminence in any of them, so long a time was needed. Besides, none seemed adequate to satisfy his craving for distinction. He looked down rather contemptuously on all ordinary pursuits. The fact was, he ardently desired fame and fortune, but did not like to work for either. One of the greatest injuries his mind had sustained, was from a certain species of 'fast literature,' which the evil spirit of town-life has squirted into the brains of our young men during the last three or four years, whereby he had been taught and encouraged to laugh at everything of serious interest, and to seek to find something ridiculous in all ennobling efforts. If a great thing was done, he endeavoured to prove it a little one; if a profound truth was enunciated, he sought to make it out a lie; to him a new discovery in science was a humbug; a generous effort, a job. If he went to see an exhibition of pictures, it was to sneer at the most original designs; if to see a new tragedy, it was only in the hope of its being damned. If a new work of fiction were admirable, he talked spitefully of it, or with supercilious patronage; and as to a noble poem, he scoffed at all such things with some slang joke at 'high art;' besides, he wrote himself, as many a young blade now attempts to do, instead of beginning with a little study and some decent reading. To Flashley all knowledge was a sort of absurdity; his own arrogant folly seemed so much better a thing. He therefore only read books that were like himself, and encouraged him to grow worse. The literature of indiscriminate and reckless ridicule and burlesque had taught him to have no faith in any sincere thing, no respect for true knowledge; and this had well-nigh destroyed all good in his mind and nature, as it unfortunately has done with too many others of his age at the present day.

After sitting silently in front of the fire for some half an hour, Flashley gradually fell into a sort of soliloquy, partaking in about equal degrees of the grumbling, the self-conceited, the humorous, and the drowsy.

'So, they're all snoring soundly by this time—all the clodpole Billy Pittites. Uncle's a fine old fellow. Very fond of him. As for all the rest!—Wonder why the mine was called the William Pitt? Because it is so black and deep, I suppose. Before my time. Who cares for him now, or for any of the bygones! Why should we care for anybody who went before us? The past ones give place to the fast ones. That's my feather.'

'But a pretty mess I've made of my affairs in London! My father does not know of half my debts. Hardly know of half of them myself. Incontinent contractions. Tavern bills, sixty or seventy pounds—may be a hundred. Tailors? can't calculate. Saloons and night-larks, owing for—don't know how much, besides money paid. Money borrowed, eighty or ninety pounds. Books—forget—say sixpence. Like Falstaff's ha'pennyworth of bread to all that quantity of sack! Think I paid ready money for all the light reading, and young gent's books.'

The fire sank lower and lower, and so did the candles, one of which had just gone out, and began to send up a curdling stream of yellow smoke.

'What a place this is for coals. What a smelly
face Nature wears! From the house upwards, all alike,—dull, dusky, and detestable. Pfeu! Smell of fried mutton fat! Now, then, old Coal-fire, hold up your head. I'm sleepy myself. This house is more like a hearse than a dwelling-place for live stock. The roadway in front of the house is all of coal-dust; the front of the house is like a sweep's, it only wants the dangling sign of his "brush." The window-ledges have a constant layer of black dust over them; so has the top of the porch; so have the chimneypieces inside the house, where all the little china cups and gimp-cracks have a round black circle of coal-dust at the bottom. There is always a dark scum over the water of the jug in my bedroom. How I detest this life among the coals! Where's the great need

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of them? Why don't the stupid old world burn wood? 'The fire had by this time sunk to dull red embers and grey ashes, with large dark chasms around and behind. The shadows on the wall were faint, and shifting with the flickering of the last candle, now dying in the socket. Flashley's eyes were closed, and his arms folded, as he still continued to murmur to himself. Sooth to say, the ale had got into his head.

'Margery, the housemaid, has large black eyes, with dark rings of coal-grime round them. Her hair is also black—her cap like a mourning mop—and she has worn a black patch on one side of her nose since last Friday, when I gave her a handful from the coal-scuttle for comparing me to the lazy young dog that lay asleep before the fire. Margery Daw!—you shall slide down to the lower regions,—on an inclined plane, as the Useful Knowledge books would say.

'Ale is a good thing when it is strong; but a coal-mine is all nonsense. Still, they seem to make money by it, and that's some excuse—some reason for men wasting in work lives which ought to be passed in pleasure. Human time—human—I thought something touched my elbow.

'Human time should not be passed—why there it came again! I must be dreaming.

'Old Billy-Pift Dalton understands brewing. But human time should not be passed in digging and groping, and diving and searching—whether to scrape up coals, or what folks call "knowledge." For the fuel of life burns out soon enough of itself, and, therefore, it should not be wasted over the baser material; because the former is all for one's self, while coal-fuel, and the search after it, is just working for other people. Something did touch my elbow! There's something astir in the room out in the darkness! It was standing at my side!'

Flashley made an effort to rise; but instead of doing so, he fell sideways over one arm of the chair, with his arms hanging down. Starting up helplessly from this position, he saw a heavy dwarfed figure with shining eyes, coming out of the darkness of the room! He could not distinguish its outline; but it was elf-like, black, and had a rough rocky skin. It had eyes that shot rays like great diamonds; and through its coal-black naked body, the whole of its veins were discernible, not running with blood, but filled with stagnant gold. Its step was noiseless, yet its weight seemed so immense, that the floor slowly bent beneath it; and, like ice before it breaks, the floor bent more and more as the figure came nearer.

At this alarming sight, Flashley struggled violently to rise. He did so; but instantly reeling half round, dropped into the chair, with his head falling over the back of it. At the same moment the ponderous Elf took one step nearer; and the whole floor sank slowly down, with a long-drawn moan, that ended in a rising and rushing wind, with which Flashley felt himself borne away through the air, fleeter than his fast-fleeting consciousness.

In the progress of generations and cycles—
in that wealth and dispensation of Time ordained by HIM, before whose sight 'one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day'—mere grains of sand running through the glass that regulates the operations of never-ending work—the bodies of all living things, whether animal or vegetable, fulfil their destinies by undergoing a gradual transmutation into other bodies and things of the most opposite kind to their own original being. Original being, accurately to speak, there is none; but we must call that thing original to which some other thing is traced back as to its ultimate point, or starting place, and at which we are obliged to stop, not because it is the end, but because we can go no further; nevertheless, up to that antediluvian period, and during a great part of it, we are moving in the dusky yet demonstrable regions and tracts of substantial facts, and scientific knowledge.

Not daring to unclose his eyes, Flashley gradually returned to consciousness, and heard a voice speaking near to him, yet in tones that seemed like the echoes of some great cavern or deep mine.

'Man lives to-day,' said the voice—and the youth felt it was the black Elfin, with the diamond eyes and golden veins, that was speaking—'man lives to-day, not only for himself and those around him, but also that by his death and decay fresh grass may grow in the fields of future years,—and that sheep may feed, and give food and clothing for the continuous race of man. Even so the food of one generation becomes the stone of another. And the stone shall become a fuel—a poison—or a medicine. Awake, young man!—awake from the stupor of an ignorant and presumptuous youth—and look around you!'

The young man, with no little trepidation, opened his eyes. He found he was alone. The strange being that had just spoken was gone. He ventured to gaze on the scene that surrounded him.

The place in which he found himself seemed to partake, not in distinct proportions, but altogether, so far as this was possible, of a wild forest of strange and enormous trees—a chaotic jungle—a straggling woodland, and a dreary morass or swamp, intersected by a dark river, that appeared to creep towards the sea which embraced a part of the distant horizon with a leaden arm. The moist mound whereon he stood was covered with ferns of various kinds—the comb-fern, the wedge-fern, the tooth-fern, the nerve-fern—and of all sizes, rising from a crumpled crest bursting through the earth, to plants of a foot high, of several feet, and thence up to lofty trees of forty or fifty feet in height, with great stems and branching crowns. The green-stemmed and many-pointed mare's-tail was also conspicuous in number and in magnitude; not merely of two or three feet high, as in the present period of the earth, but large green-jointed trees, shooting up their whisking spires to fourteen or fifteen feet. Thickly springing up in wild and threatening squadrons over the morass, they bent their heads in long rows after rows over the edge of the muddy river, with sullen, motionless, and interminable monotony. Here and there, enormous sombre shrubs oppressed the scene. The collective clumps resembled the inextricable junction of several of our thickest-leaved trees, as though several oaks had agreed to unite their trunks, and make one—the same—several poplars—several limes—though not one of them bearing likeness in trunk or foliage to oak, or beech, or poplar, or lime, or any known tree of present date.

Clumps also were there, of a rank undergrowth, out of which limp bare stems shot up to a great height, covered with a sickly white mealy powder, and terminating, for the most part, in coarse brown swollen heads, or gigantic black fingers, varied with dull red bosses at
the tops of the great stems, broken cups, or red and grey forks and spikes,—a sort of monstrous club-moss and cup-moss, with lichens, coarse water-weeds, and water-grasses at the base.

Uncouth and terrible as were the forms to the young man's eyes, there were some things not without grace. Large trees, having their entire trunks and boughs elegantly fluted, bearing leaves at regular intervals on each fluting upwards and along every bough, rose up amidst the disordered vegetation. Where the leaves had fallen from the lower part of the trunk, marks were left, like seals, at regular intervals on the flutings.*

* These trees are known in fossil botany as the *Sigilariæ*.

In many places, close to the trees just described, huge tortuous succulent roots protruded from the ground, as if anxious to exchange their darkness and want of air for the light, and for the warm atmosphere, attracted by the strong gases with which it was impregnated.

The *Stigmaria*.

Round the feet of the young man lay inter-tangled bunches and bundles of wood-weeds, river-weeds, and other weeds that seemed to partake equally of the river and the sea; long rank grasses, sword-like, spear-like, or with club-like crowns of seeds, and fungi of hideous shapes, gross, pulpy, like giants' heads, hairy and bearded, and sometimes bursting and sending forth steamy odours that were scarcely to be borne, and which the youth felt to be a deadly poison, but that for the time he, somehow, was endowed with a 'charmed life.'

Spell-bound, he turned from these dismaying sights, to trees that rose, to altitudes of from sixty to eighty feet, having leaves in long rows upon all the boughs, from which they shot forth direct, and without the intervention of any small twigs or other usual connecting medium of foliage. The same course of leaves had existed on the trunk, from which they had fallen as the tree rose up to maturity, and had left scars or scales, like a Mosaic ornament, and a sign of their progressive years.*

* The *Lepidodendron*.

Gazing through and beyond all these lofty trunks, Flashley beheld in the distance a sort of palm-like and pine-like trees, standing against the pale blue sky, which far transcended all the rest in altitude, and seemed indeed, here and there, to rise to a hundred feet above the whole range of other lofty trees! His eyes ached as he stared at them. It was not their altitude alone that caused a painful impression, but the feeling of their unbroken solitude—a loneliness unvisited by a single bird, and with nothing between them and the heavens, to which they seemed to aspire for ever, and in vain.

No flowers on any of the trees and shrubs around him were to be seen—and no fruits. The tone of colour was grave, sullen, melancholy. It was a solitude that seemed to feel itself. Not only no bird was visible, but no quadruped, insect, creeping thing, or other form of animal life. The earth was devoted solely to the production of enormous vegetation.

To complete the pregnant solemnity of the scene, there were no sounds of life or motion in the air; all was silence.

Looking round with a forlorn and overawed yet enquiring face, he discerned something like two keen stars of arrowy light at the foot of a gigantic fern-tree, at some distance from him. The darting rays seemed directed towards him. They were eyes; they could be nothing else! He presently perceived that the rough black elfin figure, with the veins of stagnant gold, was seated there, and that its eyes were fixed upon him!

'The scene amidst which you stand,' said the Elfin in his echo-like voice, and without moving from his seat beneath the tree, 'is the stupendous vegetation of the elder world. The trunks and stems of the antediluvian earth erect their columns, and shoot up their spires towards the
clouds; their dull, coarse foliage overhangs the swamps, and they drink in, at every pore, the floating steam impregnated with the nutriment of prodigies. No animal life do you behold, for none is of this date, nor could it live amidst these potent vapours which feed the vegetation. And yet these vast trees and plants, this richly poisoned atmosphere, this absence of all animal life of man, and beast, and bird, and creeping thing, is all arranged in due order of progression, that man may hereafter live, not merely a savage life, but one civilised and refined, with

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the sense of a soul within—of God in the world, and over it, and all around it—whereof comes man's hope of a future life beyond his presence here. Thus upward, and thus onward ever.

'And all this monstrous vegetation above ground shall be cast down and embedded deep in the dark bowels of the earth, there under the chemical process of ages to become a fuel for future generations of men, yet unborn, who will require it for their advance in civilisation and knowledge. Yes; these huge ferns, these trunks, and stems, and towering fabrics of trees, shall all crash down—sink deep into the earth with all the rank enfolding mass of undergrowth—there to be jammed and mashed up between beds of fiery stone and grit and clay, and covered with oozy mud and sand, till stratum after stratum of varied matter rises above them, and forms a new surface of earth. On this surface the new vegetation of the world will commence, while that of the old lies beneath,—not rotting in vain, nor slumbering uselessly in darkness, but gradually, age after age, undergoing transmutation by the alchemy of Nature, till verdure becometh veriest blackness, and wood is changed to coal.

'Then man is born, appearing on the earth only when the earth is ready to receive him, and minister to his wants. At first he useth wood for his fuel; but as his knowledge expands and deepens he penetrates far below the surface, and there finds forests of fuel almost inexhaustible, made ready for his various needs and arts. And when, in far-off ages, these vast stores become exhausted, others will be discovered not only of the same date, but which have been since accumulated; for the same process of transmutation is constantly going on. Thus present time always works for future ages.

'Slowly as moves the current in my veins,—the Elfin rose up as he said this—veins which seem to your eye to contain a stagnant gold, but whose metallic current, in its appointed period of years, performs each several circulation within me,—yea, slowly as this, or any other invisible progression, move these mighty forest trees towards their downward course, to rise again in coals,—in fire,—and thence ascend to air. Yes, this invisible motion is as certain withal, as that immediate action which mortal nature best can comprehend.'

As the Elfin uttered these last words, the great trees around sank with crashing slant one over the other!—then came rushing, like a sudden tempest, down upon the earth; and the young man was overwhelmed with the foliage, and instantly lost all further consciousness.

The traveller who has journeyed for many days across the fertile levels and shining flats of Holland, must often have betheught him that all this was surging ocean, but a few years ago; in like manner, by an inverse process, the voyager up the Mississippi or Missouri rivers, or the wayfarer for many days through the apparently interminable and dense forests of North America, might look forward to a period when all these masses of vegetation would become coal, if left to be dealt with by the regular process of nature.

The rapid advances of civilisation into these wooded solitudes may prevent the transmutation to which they were otherwise destined; and the same may be said of the forests even on many of the vast tracts, as yet scarcely trodden
by the foot of man, in New Zealand and Australia; but many other giant forest tracts exist in unknown regions, which are destined to follow the law of transmutation, and secretly become a carbonic fuel for future discovery.

But what does young Flashley now behold? He is aroused from his trance, and is again conscious of surrounding objects. He is seated, so that he cannot move, on a little wooden bench beneath a low wooden shed, such as labourers 'knock up' by way of temporary shelter in the vicinity of some great works. Great works are evidently in hand all around him.

Labourers with pick-axes and spades came hurrying to the spot, and began to dig a circular hole of some seven feet in diameter. Then came others with a great wooden roller on a stand, with a thick rope, like a well-rope, wound round it; and fixing this across the top of the hole, they let down a basket, ever and anon, and brought it up filled with earth and stones. It was evident that they were employed in sinking a shaft.

They worked away at a prodigious rate, the descending baskets continually taking down men with pickaxes and spades; and next with carpenter's tools and circular pieces of wood-work, with which they made an inner frame round the sides of the shaft below. Bricklayers, with hods of bricks, were next let down in the baskets, and with the support of the circular frame beneath, they rapidly cased the inside of the shaft with brickwork up to the top. More and deeper digging out then took place—more wooden frame-work below, with more brickwork round the sides, and gradually sinking lower and lower. This was continued again and again, till suddenly loud cries from below announced some new event. The diggers had arrived at springs—water was gushing in upon them!

Up came the rope and basket with three men standing up inside and holding on the rope, and two men and a boy clinging round rope and basket, and round each other as they best could, and with no small peril to all. Leaping, scrambling, or hugging to the side, they relieved the basket, which rapidly ran down again to bring up others.

Meanwhile came labourers heavily trotting beneath the weight of pumps and pump-gear; and they rigged up the pump, and as soon as

all the men and boys were out of the shaft, up came the water pouring in a thick volume, now mud-coloured, now clay-coloured, and now grey and chalky. At length the volume became less and less, and soon there was no more. Down again went basket after basket, with men or boys in them. Flashley shuddered, as something within him seemed to say 'Your turn will come!' Up came the clay, and the sand, and the gravel, and the chalk as before; and soon a mixture of several earths and stones. Thus did they toil and toil below and above, winding up and winding down, till at last a shout of success was heard faintly echoing from the deep pit beneath, and presently up came a basket full of broken limestone, and grit, and red sandstone—and coals!

Flashley now observed a great turmoil above, but all with definite intention, and preparations for new and larger works. A steam-engine was fitted up in a small brick edifice at a hundred yards distance, from which came a strong rope that passed over a large drum or broad wheel. The rope was then extended to the shaft, over the top of which a small iron wheel was erected; and over this they carried the rope, which was to take down men and bring up coals. A larger measure than the basket, called a corve, was fastened to this rope by chains, and up and down it went bringing great heaps of coals to the surface. After a time, wood-work and iron-work of various kinds were sent down, and sledges and trucks with little wheels; and then broad belts were put round horses, by means of which they were raised, kicking and capering wildly in the air, and staring with horrified eye-balls into the
black abyss, down which they were lowered, every limb trembling, and their ears sharpened up to a single hair.

At this sight Flashley's ears began to prick and tingle in sympathy, for he felt that he should not much longer remain a mere spectator of these descents into the lower regions of the earth.

And now corve after corve full of coals rose in regular succession from the mine, and tramroads were laid down, upon which little black waggons constantly ran to and fro, carrying away the coals from the pit's mouth. While all this had been going on, a second shaft was sunk at no great distance; but no coals were seen to issue from it. It was for air, and ventilation of the mine.

The men sometimes went down standing up in the corve, but generally each man sat in the loop of a short chain which he hooked on to the rope; and, in this way, six or seven went swinging down together in a bunch; sometimes ten or twelve in a bunch; and now and then, by some using longer chains than the others, in a double bunch, amounting to as many as twenty, men and boys.

A voice, which seemed to come from beneath the earth, but which poor Flashley recollected too well as that of the Elfin who had carried him so recently into the antediluvian forests and swamps, now called him by his name, with a familiarity that made him shudder. Instantly he found himself borne away from the wooden shed, and placed on the brink of the first shaft. A strange apparatus, composed of a chain with a loop at bottom, and an iron umbrella over head, was now attached to the rope by three chains. It had very much the look of some novel instrument of torture. Into this loop Flashley's legs were placed in a sitting posture.

"Straddle your legs!" cried an old black-visaged miner, as the young man was swung off from the brink, and suspended over the profound abyss below. Not obeying, and, indeed, not instantly understanding the uncouth injunction, Flashley had omitted the 'straddling;' in consequence of which the chain loop clipped him close around, and pinched his legs together with a force that would have made him utter a cry, but for the paramount terror of his position. Down he went. Round and round went the shaft-wheel above—faster and faster—and lower and lower he sank from the light of day between the dark circular walls of the shaft.

At first the motion was manifestly rapid. It took away his breath. It became more rapid. He gave himself up for lost. But presently the motion became more smooth, and more steady—then quite steady, so that he thought he was by no means descending rapidly. Presently, again, he fancied he was not descending at all—but stationary—or, rather, ascending. It was difficult to think otherwise. The current of air rising from below, meeting his swiftly descending body, gave him this impression.

He now saw a dim light moving below. It became stronger, and almost immediately after he saw three half-naked demons of the mine, as he thought, who stood ready to receive him.

For the first time he ventured to cast a forlorn look upwards. He beheld the iron umbrella with a light from beneath flashing upon it. Again, he turned his eyes below. He was close down upon the demons. One of them held a lamp up to his face as he descended among them. Whereupon these three demons all uttered a jovial laugh, and welcomed him.

"Oh, where am I?" exclaimed Flashley, in utter dismay.

"At the first "workings" of the Billy-Pitt Mine!" shouted a voice. "Steady the chains!"

The chains were steadied, and in a moment Flashley felt himself launched into a new abyss, down which he descended in utter darkness, and in utter silence, except from the rushing of the air-currents, and the occasional grating of the iron umbrella against the sides of the shaft.
‘The True Story of a Coal Fire [i]’ by Richard H. Horne

_Household Words, Volume I_, Magazine No. 2, 6 April 1850, Pages: 26-31

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**Author(s):**

- Richard H. Horne

Author. Student at Royal Military College, Sandhurst: withdrawn at end of probationary year for having, according to official record, "failed to pass probation" (Blainey, _The Farthing Poet_, p. 9). Thereafter served some months in Mexican navy. Began literary career as periodical contributor and journalist; contributed to more than fifty periodicals—British, Australian, and American. Editor, 1836-1837, of _Monthly Repository_. In 1833 published his first book, _Exposition of the False Medium and Barriers Excluding Men of Genius from the Public_; later prose writings included _The Poor Artist_, 1850; _The Dreamer and the Worker_, 1851; some books for children. Wrote poetic dramas: _Cosmo de' Medici_, 1837; _The Death of Marlowe_, 1837; and others. Best known to his contemporaries as author of _Orion_, "the farthing epic", 1843. With assistance of Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Bell, wrote _A New Spirit of the Age_, 1844. Thought his genius unappreciated in England; went to Australia, 1852. There obtained some Government employment; wrote _Australian Facts and Prospects_ and a lyrical drama, _Prometheus, the Fire-Bringer_. Returned to England, 1869. In 1874 granted Civil List pension of £50 a year "In recognition of his contributions to literature"; pension later augmented to £100 (Colles, _Literature and the Pension List_).

Horne became acquainted with Dickens in the late 1830s; the two men were for some years good friends. Horne played a role in Dickens's presentation of _Not So Bad As We Seem_; he and his wife were at times Dickens’s guests at Devonshire Terrace and at Broadstairs. Horne presented to Dickens a copy of his plays _The Death of Marlowe_ and _Judas Iscariot_, and also of his _Ballad Romances_ (Stonehouse, _Catalogue_). Dickens expressed generous admiration of some of Horne's prose writings and poems, gave Horne helpful advice on proposed publications, and attempted to interest publishers in bringing out some of his books. Horne contributed to _Bentley’s Miscellany_ under Dickens’s editorship and was engaged by Dickens as reporter for the _Daily News_. In 1862 Dickens wrote a letter in strong support of Horne's application for aid from the Royal Literary Fund (Fielding, "Charles Dickens and R. H. Home", _English_, Spring 1952). When Horne returned from Australia, however, Dickens refused to see him or to correspond with him, indignant at Horne's having contributed little to the support of his wife during his Australian years. Horne, commenting later on the talk about him and his "self-divorced wife" stated that he had refrained from making a public pronouncement on the matter: " ... I have never followed the bad example of Dickens in parading my private grievances" (draft of letter to Meredith, August 1 1875, _Letters from George Meredith_, pp. 10-11).

In _A New Spirit of the Age_, Horne devoted a long chapter to Dickens, analysing his strengths and weaknesses as a novelist. In later years, he wrote of Dickens in various periodical articles that recounted his recollections of famous contemporaries. His mentions of Dickens and his reference to Georgina Hogarth in "John Forster: His Early Life and Friendships", _Temple Bar_,

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DJO: Dickens Journals Online (http://www.djo.org.uk)
April 1876, incensed Miss Hogarth (Adrian, *Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle*, pp. 231-33).

Horne was at work on articles for *H.W.* some weeks before the first number of the periodical appeared. On May 18 1850, he was engaged for a three-month period as assistant to Wills. His duties were the writing of original material and the revising of contributed items. In mid-August, when this engagement was about to terminate, a sharp disagreement arose between Dickens and Wills concerning Horne's work. Wills stated that Horne was not giving five guineas' worth of service for his five-guinea weekly salary (Lehmann, ed., *Charles Dickens As Editor*, pp. 35-36). Dickens took the attitude that the criticism emanated from Wills's dislike of Horne, and, after conferring with Horne by letter, assured Wills that Horne was "willing and anxious" to render him assistance "in any way in which you will allow yourself to be assisted" (August 27 1850). In March of the following year, Wills returned to the charge. Dickens's letter to Horne, March 18, 1851, is in reply to a letter in which Horne, obviously, had discussed the matter. Dickens's suggestion was that Horne "continue on the old terms, for at least another month". To mid-May of that year, the Office Book records no payment to Horne for individual items, indicating that to that date he continued a member of the staff.

Between that date and the date of his leaving for Australia (June 1852), Horne contributed to *H.W.* about as many items as he had written for the periodical during the year that he was a staff member; he continued his connection with *H.W.* also in other ways. It was through his agency that an occasional item not of his writing arrived at the editorial office, and it was to him that payment was made for several contributions not of his writing among them, some poems by Meredith and by Ollier. In addition, the record of his name in the Office Book jointly with that of Miss Tomkins for one poem, and jointly with that of Meredith for another, indicates that he revised the two poems. In what capacity he served as reviser whether as the friend of the two contributors or, at the request of Wills, as a former staff member—is not clear.

Before Horne left for Australia, Dickens entered on an engagement with him whereby Horne was to write for *H.W.* articles connected with his voyage and his gold mining experiences. The arrangement proved unsatisfactory.

Dickens valued Horne as a writer for *H.W.* He hoped that Horne, on ceasing to be a staff member, would continue as contributor, promising him that "the rate of remuneration shall be higher in your case" (March 18, 1851). (It was not). Of the four articles assigned in the Office Book jointly to Horne and Dickens, three Dickens merely revised or added material to. "One Man in a Dockyard", however, was an actual collaboration; the two writers made an excursion to Chatham to gather material for the article, and each wrote part of the article. Among Horne's articles that Dickens particularly liked was "The Hippopotamus" (to Wills, July 12 1850); Horne's suggestion of snails as the subject for a paper Dickens thought admirable (to Horne, April 6 1852). "Household Christmas Carols", "The Great Peace-Maker", and "The Camera Obscura" he called to F. M. Evans's attention (April 10 1852) as "remarkable poems".

Some of Horne's contributions Dickens did not care for, among them, apparently, "The New Zealand Zauberflûte", which seems to be the "New Zealand sketch" that he mentioned to Wills (August 10 1850) as weighing "frightfully" on his mind. In a letter to Wills, December 29 1852, Dickens dismissed one of Horne's poems as "very indifferent"; no poem assigned to Horne
appeared in *H.W* after the date of the letter. The tedious "Digger's Diary", which Horne sent from Australia, Dickens was obliged to cut "to shreds" to make usable to the periodical (to Horne, March 2 1853).

Dickens's reference, by title or otherwise, to some twelve *H.W* items as by Horne confirms the Office Book ascription of those items; Horne's comment (*Australian Facts and Prospects*, p. 89n) that he had undertaken for *H.W* "to go through the Dust-heaps, the Dead-meat Markets and Horse-slaughterers' Yard of Smithfield, and the Gunpowder Mills at Hounslow" confirms his authorship of another four: "Dust", "The Cattle-Road to Ruin" —by implication also "The Smithfield Bull"—and "Gunpowder". A diary entry recorded in *The Life of Richard Owen*, I, 61, mentions Horne as author of "the 'Zoological Meeting', i.e., 'Zoological Sessions'.

Ten of Horne's *H.W* contributions were reprinted in whole or part in *Harper's*, five of them acknowledged to *H.W*, and one—"London Sparrows"—credited to Dickens. Three of his contributions were included in the Putnam volumes of selections from *H.W*: *Horne and Social Philosophy*, 1st and 2nd series. H. B. Forman, in 1871, printed for private distribution "The Great Peace-Maker", stating that it had not been publicly claimed by Horne, but that at the time of its appearance "there was no doubt in literary circles as to the authorship".

Author: Anne Lohrli; © University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

**Genre(s):**

- **Prose: Report**
  A 'more or less detailed description of any event ... intended for publication'; an 'account given ... on some particular matter, esp. after investigation' (OED) involving e.g. fieldwork, first-hand experience, original research.

- **Prose: Serial Fiction**
  Fictional narrative 'published in successive instalments' (OED) of a periodical, i.e. involving publication in anything more than a single instalment.

- **Cross-genre**
  A cross-genre or hybrid-genre article is one which is deemed to purposefully blend rhetorical and stylistic features and incorporate iconography from more than one pre-existent genres. Depending on the genres crossed, this can also be referred to as: creative non-fiction, witness literature, 'Gonzo' journalism, immersion journalism, narrative non-fiction. The blurring of boundaries is frequently defined as 'New' (hence the slightly puzzling recurrence of the term 'New Journalism' to describe approaches to periodical writing in the late 19th-century, mid-20th and early 21st centuries, as clearly it was alive and flourishing in Dickens's Wellington Street offices from 1850 onwards).

**Subject(s):**

- Work; Work and Family; Occupations; Professions; Wages