WORK! AN ANECDOTE.

A CAVALRY OFFICER of large fortune, who had distinguished himself in several actions, having been quartered for a long time in a foreign city, gradually fell into a life of extreme and incessant dissipation. He soon found himself so indisposed to any active military service, that even the ordinary routine became irksome and unbearable. He accordingly solicited and obtained leave of absence from his regiment for six months. But, instead of immediately engaging in some occupation of mind and body, as a curative process for his morbid condition, he hastened to London, and gave himself up entirely to greater luxuries than ever, and plunged into every kind of sensuality. The consequence was a disgust of life and all its healthy offices. He became unable to read half a page of a book, or to write the shortest note; mounting his horse was too much trouble; to lounge down the street was a hateful effort. His appetite failed, or everything disagreed with him; and he could seldom sleep. Existence became an intolerable burden; he therefore determined on suicide.

With this intention he loaded his pistols, and, influenced by early associations, dressed himself in his regimental frock-coat and crimson sash, and entered St. James's Park a little before sunrise. He felt as if he was mounting guard for the last time; listened to each sound, and looked with miserable affection across the misty green towards the Horse Guards, faintly seen in the distance.

A few minutes after the officer had entered the park, there passed through the same gate a poor mechanic, who leisurely followed in the same direction. He was a gaunt, half-famished looking man, and walked with a sad air, his eyes bent thoughtfully on the ground, and his large bony hands dangling at his sides.

The officer, absorbed in the act he meditated, walked on without being aware of the presence of another person. Arriving about the middle of a wide open space, he suddenly stopped, and drawing forth both pistols, exclaimed: 'Oh, most unfortunate and most wretched man that I am! Wealth, station, honour, prospects, are of no avail! Existence has become a heavy torment to me! I have not strength—I have not courage to endure or face it a moment longer!'

With these words he cocked the pistols, and was raising both of them to his head, when his arms were seized from behind, and the pistols twisted out of his fingers. He reeled round, and beheld the gaunt scarecrow of a man who had followed him.

'What are you?' stammered the officer, with a painful air; 'How dare you to step between me and death?'

'I am a poor hungry mechanic,' answered the man, 'one who works from fourteen to sixteen hours a day, and yet finds it hard to earn a living. My wife is dead—my daughter was tempted away from me—and I am a lone man. As I have nobody to live for, and have become quite tired of my life, I came out this morning, intending to drown myself. But as the fresh air of the park came over my face, the sickness of life gave way to shame at my own want of strength and courage, and I determined to walk onwards and live my allotted time. But what are you? Have you encountered cannon-balls and death in all shapes, and now want the strength and courage to meet the curse of idleness?'

The officer was moving off with some confused words, but the mechanic took him by the arm, and threatening to hand him over to the police if he resisted, led him drooping away.

This mechanic's work was that of a turner, and he lived in a dark cellar, where he toiled at his lathe from morning to night. Hearing that the officer had amused himself with a little turnery in his youth, the poor artisan proposed to take him down into his workshop. The officer offered him money, and was anxious to escape; but the mechanic refused it, and persisted.

He accordingly took the morbid gentleman
down into his dark cellar, and set him to work at
his lathe. The officer began very languidly, and
soon rose to depart. Whereupon, the mechanic
forced him down again on the hard bench, and
swore that if he did not do an hour's work for
him, in return for saving his life, he would in-
stantly consign him to a policeman, and de-
nounce him for attempting to commit suicide.
At this threat the officer was so confounded,
that he at once consented to do the work.

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When the hour was over, the mechanic in-
sisted on a second hour, in consequence of the
slowness of the work—it had not been a fair
hour's labour. In vain the officer protested, was
angry, and exhausted—had the heartburn—
pains in his back and limbs—and declared it-
would kill him. The mechanic was inexorable.
'If it does kill you, said he, 'then you will only be
where you would have been if I had not stopped
you.' So the officer was compelled to continue
his work with an inflamed face, and the perspi-
ration pouring down over his cheeks and chin.

At last he could proceed no longer, come what
would of it, and sank back in the arms of his per-
secuting preserver. The mechanic now placed
before him his own breakfast, composed of a
twopenny loaf of brown bread, and a pint of
small beer; the whole of which the officer dis-
pensed of in no time, and then sent out for more.

Before the boy who was despatched on this er-
rand returned, a little conversation had ensued;
and as the officer rose to go, he smilingly placed
his purse, with his card, in the hands of the me-
chanic. The poor ragged man received them
with all the composure of a physician, and with
a sort of dry, grim humour which appeared pe-
culiar to him, and the only relief of his otherwise
rough and rigid character, made sombre by the
constant shadows and troubles of life.

But the moment he read the name on the
card, all the hard lines in his deeply-marked
face underwent a sudden contortion. Thrusting
back the purse and card into the officer's hand,
he seized him with a fierce grip by one arm—
hurried him, wondering, up the dark broken
stairs, along the narrow passage—then pushed
him out at the door!

'You are the fine gentleman who tempted my
daughter away!' said he.

'I—your daughter!' exclaimed the officer.

'Yes, my daughter; Ellen Brentwood!' said the
mechanic. 'Are there so many men's daughters
in the list, that you forget her name?'

'I implore you,' said the officer, 'to take this
purse. Pray take this purse! If you will not ac-
cept it for yourself, I entreat you to send it to
her!'

'Go and buy a lathe with it,' said the me-
chanic. 'Work, man! and repent of your past
life!'

So saying, he closed the door in the offi-
cer's face, and descended the stairs to his daily
labour.
Article: ‘Work! An Anecdote’ by Richard H. Horne

Journal: Household Words, Volume I, Magazine No. 2, 6 April 1850, Pages: 35-36

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. Though 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 (Collès, 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,
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 Zauberflöte", 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: Short Fiction
  Fictional narrative published in a single instalment, e.g. a short story, 'with a fully developed theme' (OED), or which is simply self-contained.

Subject(s):
- Social classes; Class distinctions; Aristocracy (Social Class); Aristocracy (Social Class)—Fiction; Middle Class; Working Class; Servants;

Citation (MHRA): Horne, Richard H., 'Work! An Anecdote', *Household Words*, I, 6 April 1850, 35-36

N.B. The layout of prose articles exported to PDF follows the two-column format of the original, but does **NOT** preserve the original line breaks. The layout of poems exported to PDF follows the original line breaks, but does **NOT** attempt to replicate the original indentation or stanza structure. For all these features please refer to the facsimile pages on DJO.