ABRAHAM AND THE FIRE-WORSHIPPER.
A Dramatic Parable.

SCENE—The inside of a Tent, in which the
Patriarch ABRAHAM
and a PERSIAN TRAVELLER, a Fire-
Worshipper, are
sitting awhile after supper.

Fire-Worshipper (aside). What have I said, or
done, that by degrees
Mine host hath changed his gracious countenance,
Until he stareth on me, as in wrath!
Have I, 'twixt wake and sleep, lost his wise lore?
Or sit I thus too long, and he himself
Would fain be sleeping? I will speak to that.
(Aloud.) Impute it, O my great and gracious
lord,
Unto my feeble flesh, and not my folly,
If mine old eyelids droop against their will,
And I become as one that hath no sense
Ev'n to the milk and honey of thy words.—
With my lord's leave, and his good servant's help,
My limbs would creep to bed.

Abraham (angrily quitting his seat). In this
tent,
ever.
Thou art a thankless and an impious man.

Fire-W. (rising in astonishment). A thankless
and an impious man! Oh, sir,
My thanks have all but worshipp'd thee.

Abraham. And whom
Forgotten? like the fawning dog I feed.
From the foot-washing to the meal, and now
To this thy cram'm'd and dog-like wish for bed,
I've noted thee; and never hast thou breath'd
One syllable of prayer, or praise, or thanks,
To the great God who made and feedeth all.

Fire-W. Oh, sir, the God I worship is the Fire,
The god of gods; and seeing him not here,
In any symbol, or on any shrine,
I waited till he blessed mine eyes at morn,
Sitting in heaven.

Abraham. Oh, foul idolater!
And darest thou still to breathe in Abraham's
tent?
Forth with thee, wretch: for he that made thy
god,
And all thy tribe, and all the host of heaven,
The invisible and only dreadful God,
Will speak to thee this night, out in the storm,
And try thee in thy foolish god, the Fire,
Which with his fingers he makes lightnings of.
Hark to the rising of his robes, the winds,
And get thee forth, and wait him.
[A violent storm is heard rising.

Fire-W. What! unhoused!
And on a night like this! me, poor old man,
A hundred years of age!

Abraham (urging him away). Not reverencing
The God of ages, thou revoltest reverence.

Fire-W. Thou hadst a father:—think of his
grey hairs,
Houseless, and cuff'd by such a storm as this.

Abraham. God is thy father, and thou own'st
not him.

Fire-W. I have a wife, as aged as myself,
And if she learn my death, she'll not survive it,
No, not a day; she is so used to me;
So propped up by her other feeble self.
I pray thee, strike us not both down.

Abraham (still urging him). God made
Husband and wife, and must be own'd of them,
Else he must needs disown them.

Fire-W. We have children,
One of them, sir, a daughter, who, next week,
Will all day long be going in and out,
Upon the watch for me; she, too, a wife,
And will be soon a mother. Spare, oh spare her!
She's a good creature, and not strong.

Abraham. Mine ears
Are deaf to all things but thy blasphemy,
And to the coming of the Lord and God,
Who will this night condemn thee.

[ABRAHAM pushes him out; and remains
alone, speaking.

For if ever...
God came at night-time forth upon the world,  
'Tis now this instant. Hark to the huge winds,  
The cataracts of hail, and rocky thunder,  
Splitting like quarries of the stony clouds,  
Beneath the touching of the foot of God.  
That was God's speaking in the heavens,—that last.  
And inward utterance coming by itself.  
What is it shaketh thus thy servant, Lord,  
Making him fear, that in some loud rebuke  
To this idolator, whom thou abhorrest,  
Terror will slay himself? Lo, the earth quakes  
Beneath my feet, and God is surely here.  
[A dead silence; and then a still small voice.  
The Voice. Abraham!  
Abraham. Where art thou, Lord? and who is it that speaks  
So sweetly in mine ear, to bid me turn  
And dare to face thy presence!  
The Voice. Who but He  
Whose mightiest utterance thou hast yet to learn?  
I was not in the whirlwind, Abraham;  
I was not in the thunder, or the earthquake;  
But I am in the still small voice.  
Where is the stranger whom thou tookest in?  
Abraham. Lord, he denied thee, and I drove him forth.  
The Voice. Then didst thou do what God himself forbore.  
Have I, although he did deny me, borne  
With his injuriousness these hundred years,  
And couldst thou not endure him one sole night,  
And such a night as this?  
Abraham. Lord! I have sinn'd,  
And will go forth, and if he be not dead,  
Will call him back, and tell him of thy mercies  
Both to himself, and me.  
The Voice. Behold, and learn!  
[The Voice retires while it is speaking; and a fold of the  
tent is turned back, disclosing the FIRE-WORSHIPPER,  
who is calmly sleeping, with his head on the back  
of a house-lamb.  
Abraham. O loving God! the lamb itself's his pillow,  
And on his forehead is a balmy dew,  
{Page 13 in the original}  
And in his sleep he smileth. I, meantime,  
Poor and proud fool, with my presumptuous hands,  
Not God's, was dealing judgments on his head,  
Which God himself had cradled!—Oh, methinks  
There's more in this than prophet yet hath known,  
And Faith, some day, will all in Love be shown.

Journal: Household Words, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 12-13

Author(s):
- James Henry Leigh Hunt

Radical journalist, famous as co-founder of The Examiner (1808) and libeller of the Prince of Wales (1813), but also as a talented Romantic essayist, poet, and prolific founder of literary journals, in which capacities he became well-known to Dickens. By the late 1820s Hunt had moderated his Radical zeal and his Romantic enthusiasm was carefully tailored for the middle classes. His essays contributed to the True Sun during Dickens's employment there, published under the signature of "The Townsman" (1833-1834), show him posing as a connoisseur of the London streets, and expounding what he called his 'Townosophy' of aesthetic responses to the city. In his 'Streets of London' sketches (Leigh Hunt's London Journal, 1834-1835), Hunt returned to the theme, proposing 'to go through London, quarter by quarter', noting as many associations of the city's past as possible. These sketches were collected as The Town (1848), a copy of which was in Dickens's library at his death. Even in the 1830s, Dickens was an enthusiastic reader of Hunt, praising his 'faith in all beautiful and excellent things', and humanitarian sentiments, in a letter of July 1838 (Pilgrim Letters I, p. 414), and taking editions of Hunt's Indicator (1819-1821) and Companion (1828) journals with him to Petersham in 1839, as holiday reading. In 1847, Hunt's perennial financial difficulties were partly solved by a Civil List pension of £200, but not before Dickens had decided to organise two theatrical benefits in his behalf. In Dickens's fertile imagination, however, Hunt's charming naïveté of disposition and avowed eschewal of money matters later became transformed into something more sinister in the character of Skimpole in Bleak House (BH 6 et seq.). The parody caused Hunt much distress, which Dickens's later retractions and apologies, culminating in the article 'Leigh Hunt: A Remonstrance' (AYR, 24 December 1859), never successfully assuaged (Forster Life 6.7).


Genre(s):
- Poetry: Narrative

Longer poem (seldom less than 20 lines) that gives 'an account of a series of events ... with the establishing of connections between them' (OED), often featuring regular rhyme and memorable rhythm (authentic and imitation ballads are included within this genre).

Subject(s):
- Civilization—Ancient
‘Abraham and the Fire-Worshipper’ by James Henry Leigh Hunt

*Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 12-13

- Religion; Religion and Culture
- Religion—Christianity—General
- Religion—Judaism

**Citation (MHRA):** Hunt, James Henry Leigh, 'Abraham and the Fire-Worshipper', *Household Words*, I, 30 March 1850, 12-13

**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.