Over the centuries since the Christian Faith benignly invaded Europe, the Western Culture has been heavily influenced by the transforming love that the Gospel of Christ has imparted to every avenue of that culture – even such literature as that of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Leo Tolstoi, and, especially, the writings of Charles Dickens. These stories were once a large part of the curriculum of English and European literature taught in our elementary schools. Such writing translated the love of our Lord into the imaginations of our youth and made them more compassionate and caring citizens of free countries.

Below is one such story by Charles Dickens. This story, entitled THE BLIND TOY MAKER, is an example of such character-building literature. It was first written in 1845 and published in THE CRICKET ON THE HEART, in 1861 in a 55-volume collection. Though written for children, this story presents a lesson in love and hardship from which each of us, regardless of age, can gather gems of divine compassion. (J. Ogles)

The Blind Toy Maker
by Charles Dickens

CALEB PLUMMER and his blind daughter lived alone in a little cracked nutshell of a house. They were toy-makers, and their house was stuck like a toadstool on to the premises of Messrs. Gruff & Tackleton, the Toy Merchants for whom they worked,—the latter of whom was himself both Gruff and Tackleton in one.

I am saying that Caleb and his blind daughter lived here. I should say Caleb did, his daughter lived in an enchanted palace, which her father's love had created for her. She did not know that the ceilings were cracked, the plaster tumbling down, and the

wood work rotten; that everything was old and ugly and poverty-stricken about her and that her father was a grey-haired stooping old man, and the master for whom they worked a hard and brutal taskmaster;—oh, dear no, she fancied a pretty, cosy, compact little home full of tokens of a kind master's care, a smart, brisk, gallant-looking father, and a handsome and noble-looking Toy Merchant who was an angel of goodness.

This was all Caleb's doings. When his blind daughter was a baby he had determined in his great love and pity for her, that her deprivation should be turned into a blessing, and her life as happy as he could make it. And she was happy; everything about her she saw with her father's eyes, in the rainbow-coloured light with which it was his care and pleasure to invest it.

Bertha sat busily at work, making a doll's frock, whilst Caleb bent over the opposite side of the table painting a doll's house.

"You were out in the rain last night in your beautiful new great-coat," said Bertha.

"Yes, in my beautiful new great-coat," answered Caleb, glancing to where a roughly made garment of sack-cloth was hung up to dry.

"How glad I am you bought it, father."

"And of such a tailor! quite a fashionable tailor, a bright blue cloth, with bright buttons; it's a deal too good a coat for me."

"Too good!" cried the blind girl, stopping to laugh and clap her hands—"as if anything was too good for my handsome father, with his smiling face, and black hair, and his straight figure."

Caleb began to sing a rollicking song.

"What, you are singing, are you?" growled a gruff voice, as Mr. Tackleton put his head in at the door. "I can't afford to sing, I hope you can afford to work too.

Hardly time for both, I should say." "You don't see how the master is winking at me," whispered Caleb in his daughter's ear—"such a joke, pretending to scold, you know."

The blind girl laughed and nodded, and taking Mr. Tackleton's reluctant hand, kissed it gently.

"What is the idiot doing?" grumbled the Toy Merchant, pulling his hand roughly away.

"I am thanking you for the beautiful little tree," replied Bertha, bringing forward a tiny rose-tree in blossom, which Caleb had made her believe was her master's gift, though he himself had gone without a meal or two to buy it.

"Here's Bedlam broke loose. What does the idiot mean?" snarled Mr. Tackleton; and giving Caleb some rough orders, he departed without the politeness of a farewell.

"If you could only have seen him winking at me all the time, pretending to be so rough to escape thanking," exclaimed Caleb, when the door was shut.

Now a very sad and curious thing had happened. Caleb, in his love for Bertha, had so successfully deceived her as to the real character of Mr. Tackleton, that she had fallen in love, not with her master, but with what she imagined him to be, and was happy in an innocent belief in his affection for her; but one day she accidently heard he was going to be married, and could not hide from her father the pain and bewilderment she felt at the news.

"Bertha, my dear," said Caleb at length, "I have a confession to make to you; hear me kindly though I have been cruel to you."

"You cruel to me!" cried Bertha, turning her sightless face towards him.

"Not meaning it, my child! and I never suspected it till the other day. I have concealed things from you which would have given pain, I have invented things to please you, and have surrounded you with fancies."

"But living people are not fancies, father, you cannot change them."

"I have done so, my child, God forgive me! Bertha, the man who is married to-day is a hard master to us both, ugly in his looks and in his nature, and hard and heartless as he can be."

"Oh heavens! how blind I have been, how could you father, and I so helpless!"

Poor Caleb hung his head. "Answer me father," said Bertha. "What is my home like?"

"A poor place, Bertha, a very poor and bare place! indeed as little able to keep out wind and weather as my sackcloth coat."

"And the presents that I took such care of, that came at my wish, and were so dearly welcome?" Caleb did not answer. "I see, I understand," said Bertha, "and now I am looking at you, at my kind, loving compassionate father, tell me what is he like?"

"An old man, my child, thin, bent, grey-haired, worn-out with hard work and sorrow, a weak, foolish, deceitful old man."

The blind girl threw herself on her knees before him, and took his grey head in her arms. "It is my sight, it is my sight restored," she cried. "I have been blind, but now I see, I have never till now truly seen my father. Father, there is not a grey hair on your head that shall be forgotten in my prayers and thanks to Heaven."

"My Bertha!" sobbed Caleb, "and the brisk smart father in the blue coat—he's gone, my child."

"Dearest father, no, he's not gone, nothing is gone. I have been happy and contented, but I shall be happier and more contented still, now that I know what you are. I am not blind, father, any longer."

CREDIT: Dickens, Charles. The Cricket on the Hearth. A Fairy Tale of Home. Christmas Stories. Illustrated by F. O. C. Darley. Household Edition. 55 vols. New York: James G. Gregory, 1861. Vol. 1, 227-300; vol. 2, 7-45.