Contents

PREFACE TO THE SHORTER SIXTH EDITION xxix
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS xxxiii

Introduction 1
Timeline 15

STORIES OF THE BEGINNING OF THE WORLD 17

The Iroquois Creation Story (version by David Cusick) 17
Pima Stories of the Beginning of the World (versions by J. W. Lloyd) 21
The Story of the Creation 22

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS (1451–1506) 25
From Letter to Luis de Santangel Regarding the First Voyage [February 15, 1493] 26
From Letter to Ferdinand and Isabella Regarding the Fourth Voyage [July 7, 1503] 27

ALVAR NÚÑEZ CABEZA DE VACA (c. 1490–1558) 29
The Relation of Alvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca [Dedication] 30
[The Malhado Way of Life] 31
[Our Life among the Avavares and Arhadaos] 33
[Customs of That Region] 34
[The First Confrontation] 35
[The Falling-Out with Our Countrymen] 35

GARCILASO DE LA VEGA (1539–1616) 37
The Florida of the Inca (1605) 38
Chapter IV. Of the Magnanimity of the Curaca or Cacique Mucoco, to whom the Captive Commeded Himself 38
Chapter V. The Governor Sends for Juan Ortiz 40

JOHN SMITH (1580–1631) 42
The General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles 44
The Third Book. From Chapter 2. What Happened till the First Supply 44
The Fourth Book. [Smith’s Farewell to Virginia] 53
he could never relax among the popular literary men of the 1870s and 1880s who now and then tried to patronize him. In the mid-1880s one poem about a British sailor evoked a headnote that, expanded and reexpansion, was left nearly finished at Melville’s death as Billy Budd, Sailor, his final study of the ambigious claims of authorship and individuality.

Before Melville’s death in 1891, something like a revival of his fame was in progress, especially in England. American newspapers became accustomed to reprinting and briefly commenting on extraordinary items in British periodicals, such as Robert Buchanan’s footnote to Melville’s name in a poetic tribute to Whitman (1885): “I sought everywhere for this Titan, who is still living somewhere in New York. No one seemed to know anything of the one great imaginative writer to stand shoulder to shoulder with Whitman on that continent.” The recurrent imagery—used by Melville as well as journalists—was of burial and possible resurrection. The true Melville revival began with articles on Melville’s centennial in 1919. That revival, one of the most curious phenomena of American literary history, swept Melville from the ranks of the lesser American writers—lesser than James Fenimore Cooper and William Gilmore Sims—to the rarefied company of Shakespeare and a few fellow immortals of world literature so that only Whitman, James, and Faulkner are seen as his American equals. Even during the mass consumption of Melville in the classroom and the spawning of the White Whale in comic books, cartoons, and seafood restaurants, he and his ideas are still to be found, tracing his journeys in the South Seas and Manhattan Island, and visiting his grave in the Bronx, faithfyl to the Melville who speaks to them without the aid of an interpreter. That may be the true sign of the rarest literary immortality.

**Bartleby, the Scrivener**

*A Story of Wall-Street*

I am a rather elderly man. The nature of my avocations for the last thirty years has brought me into more than ordinary contact with what would seem an interesting and somewhat singular set of men, of whom as yet nothing that I know of has ever been written—I mean the law-copyists or scriveners. I have known very many of them, professionally and privately, and if I pleased, could relate divers histories, at which good-humored gentlemen might smile, and sentimental souls might weep. But I waive the biographies of all other scriveners for a few passages in the life of Bartleby, who was a scrivener the strongest I ever saw or heard of. While of other law-copyists I might write the complete life, of Bartleby nothing of that sort can be done. I believe that no materials exist for a full and satisfactory biography of this man. It is an irreparable loss to literature. Bartleby was one of those beings of whom nothing is ascertainable, except from the original sources, and in this case those are very small. What my own astonished eyes saw of Bartleby, that is all I know of him, except, indeed, one vague report which will appear in the sequel.

Ere introducing the scrivener, as he first appeared to me, it is fit I make some mention of myself, my employments, my business, my chambers, and general surroundings; because some such description is indispensable to an adequate understanding of the chief character about to be presented.

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1. The text is from the first printing in the November and December 1853 issues of Putnam’s Monthly Magazine; the first book by Melville to be printed after the disastrous reception of Pierre during the summer and fall of 1852. One work ("The Isle of the Cross") probably the story of Agatha Robinson, a Nantucket woman who displayed patience, endurance, and resignation, was apparently destroyed after being rejected by the Harper.

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2. The narrator is understandably concerned about the abilities of a scrivener, but here he has cause to rejoice, for chancery had kept everyone tied up in tangled litigation. In a poem written around the 1870s, "At the Meridian," Melville says that divided Italy, "Night paralyzed, by clouds mis-guided," was "looked at as a chancery's numbing hand."

3. New York had adopted a "new Constitution" in 1846.

4. Shrewsted from obesity.
Christmas coals; and continued blazing—but, as it were, with a gradual wane—till 6 o'clock, P.M. or thereabouts, after which I saw no more of the proprietor of the face, which gained its meridian with the sun, seemed to set with it, to rise, culminate, and decline the following day, with the like regularity and undiminished glory. There are many singular coincidences I have known in the course of my life, not the least among which was the fact, that exactly when Turkey displayed his fullest beams from his red and radiant countenance, just then, too, at that critical moment, began the daily period when I considered his business capacities as seriously disturbed for the remainder of the twenty-four hours. Not that he was absolutely idle, or averse to business then; far from it. The difficulty was, he was apt to be altogether too energetic. There was a strange, inflated, hurried, flighty recklessness of action about him. He would be incautious in dipping his pen into his inkstand. All his blots upon my documents, were dropped there after twelve o'clock, meridian. Indeed, not only would he be reckless and sadly given to making blots in the afternoon, but some days he went further, and was rather noisy. At such times, too, his face flamed with augmented blazonry, as if canal coal had been heapsed on anthracite. He made an unpleasant racket with his chair; spilled his sand-box; in mending his pens, impatiently split them all to pieces, and threw them on the floor in a sudden passion; stood up and leaned over his table, tossing his papers about in a most indiscernest manner, very sad to behold in an elderly man like him. Nevertheless, as he was in many ways a most valuable person to me, and all the time before twelve o'clock, meridian, was the quickest, steadiest creature too, accomplishing a great deal of work in a style not easy to be matched—for these reasons, I was willing to overlook its eccentricities, though indeed, occasionally, I remonstrated with him. I did this very gently, however, because, though the civilist, say, the blandest and most reverential of men in the morning, yet in the afternoon he was disposed, upon provocation, to be slightly sharp with his tongue. Indeed, now he valued his morning services as I did, and resolved not to lose them; yet, at the same time made uncomfortable by his inflamed ways after twelve o'clock; and being a man of peace, unwilling by my admonitions to call forth unseemly retorts from him. I took upon me, one Saturday noon (he was always worse on Saturdays), to hint to him, very kindly, that perhaps now that he was growing old, it might be well to abridge his labors; in short, he need not come to my chambers after twelve o'clock, but, dinner over, had best go home to his lodgings and rest himself till tea-time. But no; he insisted upon his afternoon devotions. His countenance became intolerably fervid as he oratorically assured me—gesticulating with a long ruler at the other end of the room—that if his services in the morning were useful, how indispensable, then, in the afternoon?

"With submission, sir," said Turkey on this occasion, "I consider myself your right-hand man. In the morning I but marshal and deploy my columns; but in the afternoon I put myself at their head, and gallantly charge the foe, thus—and he made a violent thrust with the ruler.

"But the blots, Turkey," intimated I.

"True,—but, with submission, sir, behold these hairs! I am getting old. Surely, sir, a blot or two of a warm afternoon is not to be severely urged against gray hairs. Old age—even if it blot the page—is honorable. With submission, sir, we both are getting old."

This appeal to my fellow-feeling was hardly to be resisted. At all events, I saw that he would not. So I made up my mind to let him stay, resolving, nevertheless, to see to it, that during the afternoon he had to do with my less important papers.

Nippers, the second on my list, was a whiskered, sallow, and, upon the whole, rather pietistic-looking young man of about five and twenty. I always deemed him the victim of two evil powers—ambition and indigence. The ambition was evinced by a certain impatience of the duties of a mere copyist, an unwarrantable usurpation of strictly professional affairs, such as the original drawing up of legal documents. The indigence seemed betokened in an occasional nervous testiness and grinning irritability, causing the teeth to audibly grind together over mistakes committed in copying; unnecessary malapetitions, hissed, rather than spoken, in the heat of business; and especially by a continual discontent with the height of the table where he worked. Though of a very ingenious mechanical turn, Nippers could never get this table to suit him. He put chips under it, blocks of various sorts, bits of pasteboard, and at last went so far as to attempt an exquisite adjustment by final pieces of folded blotting paper. But no invention would answer. If, for the sake of easing his back, he brought the table lid at a sharp angle well up towards his chin, and wrote there like a man using the steep roof of a Dutch house for his desk—then he declared that it stopped the circulation in his arms. If now he lowered the table to his waistbands, and stooped over it in writing, then there was a sore aching in his back. In short, the truth of the matter was, Nippers knew not what he wanted. Or, if he wanted anything, it was to be rid of a scrivener’s table altogether. Among the manifestations of his diseased ambition was a fondness he had for receiving visits from certain ambiguous-looking fellows in seedy coats, whom he called his clients. Indeed I was aware that not only was he, at times, considerable of a ward politician, but he occasionally did a little business at the justices’ courts, and was not unknown on the steps of the Tombs. 2 I have good reason to believe, however, that one individual who called upon him at my chambers, and who, with a grand air, he insisted was his client, was no other than a dun, 3 and the alleged title-deed, a bill. But with all his failings, and the annoyances he caused me, Nippers, like his compatriot Turkey, was a very useful man to me; wrote a neat, swift hand; and, when he chose, was not deficient in a gentlemanly sort of deportment. Added to this, he always dressed in a gentlemanly sort of way; and so, incidentally, reflected credit upon my chambers. Whereas with respect to Turkey, I had much ado to keep him from being a reproach to me. His clothes were apt to look oily and smell of eating-houses. He wore his pantaloons very loose and baggie in summer. His coats were execrable; his hat not to be handled. But while the hat was a hint of indifference to me, inasmuch as his natural civility and deference, as a dependent Englishman, always led him to doff it the moment he entered the room, yet his coat was another matter. Concerning his coats, I reasoned with him; but with no effect. The truth was, I suppose, that a man with so small an income, could not afford to sport such a lustrous face and a lustrous coat at one and the same time. As Nippers once observed, Turkey’s money went chiefly for red ink. One winter day I presented Turkey with a highly-

5. i.e., Nippers is suspected of arranging bail for prisoners or other such activities that strike the narrator as unseemly if not nefarious.

he mollified me by making an oriental bow, and saying—"With submission, sir, it was generous of me to find you in stationery on my own account."

Now my original business—that of a conveyancer and title hunter—had drawn up of the record of documents of all sorts—was considerably increased by receiving the master's office. There was now great work for scriveners. Not only must I push the clerks already with me, but I must have additional help. In answer to my advertisement, a motionless young man one morning stood upon my office threshold, the door being open, for it was summer. I can see that figure now—palidly neat, pitifully respectable, incurably forlorn.

It was Bartley.

After a few words touching his qualifications, I engaged him, glad to have among my corps of copyists a man of so singularly sedate an aspect, which the fiery one of Nippers, I should have stated before that ground glass folding-doors divided my premises into two parts, one of which was occupied by my scriveners, the other by myself. According to my humor I threw open these doors, or closed them. I resolved to assign Bartley a corner by the folding-doors, but on my side of them, so as to have this quiet man within easy call. In case any trivial thing was to be done. I placed his desk close up to a small side-window in that part of the room, a window which originally had afforded a lateral view of certain grisy back-yards and bricks, but which, owing to subsequent erections, commanded at present no view at all, though it gave some light. Within three feet of the panes was a wall, and the light came down from far above, between two lofty buildings, as from a very small opening in a dome. Still which might entirely isolate Bartley from my sight, though not remove him from my voice. And thus, in a manner, privacy and society were combined. At first Bartley did an extraordinary quantity of writing. As if in paralysing for something to copy, he seemed to gorge himself on my documents. There was no pause for digestion. He ran a day and night line, copying by sunlight and by candle-light. I should have been quite delighted with his application, had he been cheerfully industrious. But he wrote on silently, palely, mechanically.

It is, of course, an indispensable part of a scrivener's business to verify the accuracy of his copy, word by word. Where there are two or more scriveners in an office, they assist each other in this examination. One reading from the copy, the other holding the original. It is a very dull, wearisome, and laggard affair. I can readily imagine that to some sanguine temperaments it would be altogether intolerable. For example, I cannot credit that the mettlesome poet Byron would have contentedly sat down with Bartley to examine a law document of, say, five hundred pages, closely written in a cramped hand.

Now and then, in the haste of business, it had been my habit to assist in comparing some brief document myself, calling Turkey or Nippers for this screen was to avail myself of his services on such trivial occasions. It was on the third day. I think, of his being with me, and before any necessity had arisen for having his own writing examined, that, being much hurried to

7. Driver, transferer.
9. The narrator is playing on the resemblance between this cookie and was wafers used for sealing documents.
complete a small affair I had in hand. I abruptly called to Bartleby. In my haste and natural expectancy of instant compliance, I saw with my head bent over the original on my desk, and my right hand sideways, and somewhat nervously extended with the copy, so that immediately upon emerging from his retreat, Bartleby might snatch it and proceed to business without the least delay.

In this very attitude did I sit when I called to him, rapidly stating what it was I wanted him to do—namely, to examine a small paper with me. Imagine my surprise, nay, my consternation, when without moving from his privacy, Bartleby in a singularly mild, firm voice, replied, "I would prefer not to."

I sat awhile in perfect silence, rallying my stunned faculties. Immediately it occurred to me that my ears had deceived me, or Bartleby had entirely misunderstood my meaning. I repeated my request in the clearest tone I could assume. But in quite as clear a one came the previous reply, "I would prefer not to."

"Prefer not to," echoed I, rising in high excitement, and crossing the room with a stride. "What do you mean? Are you moon-struck? I want you to help me compare this sheet here—take it," and I thrust it towards him.

"I would prefer not to," said he.

I looked at him steadfastly. His face was keenly composed; his gray eye dimly calm. Not a wrinkle of agitation rippled him. There had been the least uneasiness, anger, impatience or impertinence in his manner; in other words, there had been any thing ordinarily human about him, doubtless I should have violently dismissed him from the premises. But as it was, I should have as soon thought of turning my pale plaster-of-paris bust of Cicero out of doors. I stood gazing at him awhile, as he went on with his own writing, and then reseated myself at my desk. This is very strange, thought I. What had one best do? But my business hurried me. I concluded to forget the matter for the present, reserving it for my future leisure. So calling Nippers from the other room, the paper was speedily examined:

A few days after this, Bartleby concluded four lengthy documents, being quadruplicate of a week's testimony taken before me in my High Court of Chancery. It became necessary to examine them. It was an important suit, and great accuracy was imperative. Having all things arranged I called Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut from the next room, meaning to place the four copies in the hands of my four clerks, while I should read from the original. Accordingly Turkey, Nippers and Ginger Nut had taken their seats in a row, each with his document in hand, when I called to Bartleby to join this interesting group.

"Bartleby! quick, I am waiting."

I heard a slow scrape of his chair legs on the uncarpeted floor, and soon he appeared standing at the entrance of his hermitage.

"What is wanted?" he said mildly.

"The copies, the copies," said I hurriedly. "We are going to examine them.

There—and I held towards him the fourth quadruplicate.

"I would prefer not to," he said, and gently disappeared behind the screen.

For a few moments I was turned into a pillar of salt, standing at the head of my seated column of clerks. Recovering myself, I advanced towards the screen, and demanded the reason for such extraordinary conduct.

"I would prefer not to."

With any other man I should have flown outright into a dreadful passion, scorched all further words, and thrust him ignomiously from my presence, but there was something about Bartleby that not only strangely disarmed reason with him.

"These are your own copies we are about to examine. It is labor saving to use. Every copyist is bound to help examine his copy. Is it not so? Will you prefer not to?"

"Prefer not to," he replied in a flute-like tone. It seemed to me that while I had been addressing him, he carefully revolved every statement that I made: then, at the same time, some paramount consideration prevailed with him to reply as he did.

"You are decided, then, not to comply with my request,—a request made according to common usage and common sense?"

He briefly gave me to understand that on that point my judgment was sound. Yes; his decision was irreversible.

It is not seldom the case that when a man is browbeaten in some unreasonable way, he begins to stagger in his own behalf, all the justice and all the reason is on the other side. Accordingly, I went on with my own; and he threw himself for its support.

"Turkey," said I, "what do you think of this? Am I not right?"

"With submission, sir," said Turkey, with his blandest tone, "I think that you are."

"Nippers," said I, "what do you think of it?"

"I think I should kick him out of the office."

(The reader of nice perceptions will here perceive that, being morning, in ill-tempered ones. Or, to repeat a previous sentence, Nippers's ugly mood was on duty, and Turkey's off.)

"Ginger Nut," said I, willing to enlist the smallest suffrage in my behalf, "what do you think of it?"

"I think, sir, he's a little inny," replied Ginger Nut, with a grin.

"You hear what they say," said I, turning towards the screen, "come forth and do your duty."

But he vouchsafed no reply. I pondered a moment in sore perplexity. But once more business hurried me. I determined again to postpone the consideration of this dilemma to my future leisure. With a little trouble we made Turkey deferentially drop his opinion that this proceeding was quite out of the common; while Nippers, twitching in his chair with a dyspeptic nervousness, ground out between his set teeth occasional hissing maladies against the stubborn nut behind the screen. And for his (Nippers's) part, this
was the first and the last time he would do another man’s business without pay.

Meanwhile Bartleby sat in his hermitage, oblivious to every thing but his own peculiar business there.

Some days passed, the scrivener being employed upon another lengthy work. His late remarkable conduct led me to regard his ways narrowly. I observed that he never went to dinner; indeed that he never went any where. As yet I had never of my personal knowledge known him to be outside of my office. He was a perpetual sentry in the corner. At about eleven o’clock though, in the morning, I noticed that Ginger Nut would advance toward the opening in Bartleby’s screen, as if silently beckoned thither by a gesture invisible to me where I sat. The boy would then leave the office jiggling a few pence, and reappear with a handful of ginger-nuts which he delivered in the hermitage, receiving two of the cakes for his trouble.

He lives, then, on ginger-nuts, thought I; never eats a dinner, properly speaking: he must be a vegetarian then; but no; he never eats even vegetables, he eats nothing but ginger-nuts. My mind then ran on in reveries concerning the probable effects upon the human constitution of living entirely on ginger-nuts. Ginger-nuts are so called because they contain ginger as one of their peculiar constituents, and the final flavoring one. Now what was ginger? A hot, spicy thing. Was Bartleby hot and spicy? Not at all. Ginger, then, had no effect upon Bartleby. Probably he preferred it should have none.

Nothing so aggravates an earnest person as a passive resistance. If the individual so resists be of a not unhumble temper, and the resisting one perfectly harmless in his passivity; then, in the better moods of the former, he will endeavor charitably to construe to his imagination what proves impossible to be solved by his judgment. Even so, for the most part, I regarded Bartleby and his ways. Poor fellow! thought I, he means no mischief; it is plain he intends no insolence; his aspect sufficiently evinces that his eccentricities are involuntary. He is useful to me. I can get along with him. If I turn him away, the chances are he will fall in with some less indulgent employer, and then he will be rudely treated, and perhaps driven forth miserably to starve. Here I can cheaply purchase a delicious self-approval. To befriend Bartleby; to humor him in his strange wilfulness, will cost me little or nothing, while I lay up in my soul what will eventually prove a sweet morsel for my conscience. But this mood was not invariable with me. The passiveness of Bartleby sometimes irritated me. I felt strangely goaded on to encounter him in new opposition, to elicit some angry spark from him answerable to my own. But indeed I might as well have essayed to strike fire with my knuckles against a bit of Windsor soap. But one afternoon the evil impulse in me mastered me, and the following little scene ensued:

“Bartleby,” said I, “when those papers are all copied, I will compare them with you.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“How? Surely you do not mean to persist in that mulish vagary?”

No answer.

I threw open the folding-doors near by, and turning upon Turkey and Nippers, exclaimed in an excited manner—


“He says, a second time, he won’t examine his papers. What do you think of it, Turkey?”

It was afternoon, he it remembered. Turkey sat glowing like a brass boiler, his bald head steaming, his hands reeling among his blotted papers.

“Think of it?” roared Turkey. “I think I’ll just step behind his screen, and black his eyes for him.”

So saying, Turkey rose to his feet and threw his arms into a pugnacious position. He was hurrying away to make good his promise, when I detained him, alarmed at the effect of incautiously rousing Turkey’s combativeness after dinner.

“Sit down, Turkey,” said I, “and hear what Nippers has to say. What do you think of it. Nippers? Would I not be justified in immediately dismissing Bartleby?”

“Excuse me, that is for you to decide, sir. I think his conduct quite unusual, and indeed unjust, as regards Turkey and myself. But it may only be a passing whim.”

“Ah,” exclaimed I, “you have strangely changed your mind then—you speak very gently of him now.”

“All beer,” cried Turkey; “gentleness is effects of beer—Nippers and I dined together to-day. You see how genteel I am, sir. Shall I go and black his eyes?”

“You refer to Bartleby, I suppose. No, not to-day, Turkey,” I replied; “pray, put up your fists.”

I closed the doors, and again advanced towards Bartleby. I felt additional incentives tempting me to my fate. I burned to be rebelled against again. I remembered that Bartleby never left the office.

“Bartleby,” said I, “Ginger Nut is away; just step round to the Post Office, won’t you? (it was but a three minutes’ walk,) and see if there is any thing for me.”

“I would prefer not to.”

“You will not?”

“I prefer not.”

I staggered to my desk, and sat there in a deep study. My blind inactivity returned. Was there any other thing in which I could procure myself to be ignominiously repulsed by this lean, penniless wight?—my hired clerk? What added thing is there, perfectly reasonable, that he will be sure to refuse to do?

“Bartleby!”

No answer.

“Bartleby,” in a louder tone.

No answer.

“Bartleby,” I roared.

Like a very ghost, agreeably to the laws of magical invocation, at the third summons, he appeared at the entrance of his hermitage.

“Go to the next room, and tell Nippers to come to me.”

“I prefer not to,” he respectfully and slowly said, and mildly disappeared.

“Very good, Bartleby,” said I, in a quiet sort of severely severe self-possessed tone, intimating the unalterable purpose of some terrible retribution very close at hand. At the moment I half intended something of the kind. But upon the whole, as it was drawing towards my dinner-hour, I
Bartley, the Scrivener

Now, the utterly unsurprised appearance of Bartley, tenanting my law-chambers of a Sunday morning, with his cadaverously gentlemanly nonchalance, yet withal firm and self-possessed, had such a strange effect upon me, not without sundry twinges of impotent rebellion against the mild effrontery chiefly, which only disarmed me, but unnerved me, as it were. For I consider that one, for the time, is a sort of unnerved when he tranquilly permits his hired clerk to dictate to him, and order him away from his own possibly being done in my office in his shirt sleeves, and in an otherwise diagnose, that was out of the question. It was not to be thought of for a moment that winging? Nay again, whatever might be his eccentricities, Bartley was an eminently decorous person. He would be the last man to sit down to his desk in any state approaching to nudity. Besides, it was Sunday, and there was something about Bartley that forbade the supposition that he would by any secular occupation violate the proprieties of the day.

Nevertheless, my mind was not pacified; and full of a restless curiosity, at last I returned to the door. Without hindrance I inserted my key, opened it, and entered. Bartley was not to be seen. I looked round anxiously, peeped behind his screen; but it was very plain that he was gone. Upon more closely examining the place, I surmised that for an indefinite period Bartley must have aye, dressed, and slept in my office, and that too without plate, mirror, or bed. The cushioned seat of a rickety old sofa in one corner bore the faint impress of a lean, reclining form. Rolled away under his desk. I found a basin, with soap and a ragged towel; in a drawer a few crumbs of ginger-nuts and a morsel of cheese. Yes, thought I, it is evident enough that Bartley has been making his home here, keeping bachelor's hall all by himself. Immediately then the thought came sweeping across me, What miserable friendlessness and loneliness are here revealed! His poverty is great; but his solitude, how horrible! Think of it. Of a Sunday, Wall Street deserted as Petra: and every night of every day it is an emptiness. This building too, which of week-days hums with industry and life, at nightfall echoes with his home; sole occupant of a solitude which he has seen all populous—a sort of innocent and transformed Manlius brooding among the ruins of Carthage! For the first time in my life a feeling of overpowering stinging melancholy seized me. Before, I had never experienced aught but a not-unpleasing sadness. The bond of a common humanity now drew me irresistibly to gloom. A fraternal melancholy! For both I and Bartley were sons of Adam. I remembered the bright silks and sparkling faces I had seen that day, in gale trim, with the pallid copyist, and thought to myself, Ah, happiness courts the light, so we deem the world is gay; but misery hides aloof, so we deem that misery

5. Ancient city whose ruins are in Jordan, on a slope of Mount Hermon.
6. Caius Marius (157-86 B.C.E.), Roman general who returned to power after exile.
there is none. These sad fancies—chimeras, doubtless, of a sick and silly brain—led on to other and more special thoughts, concerning the eccentricities of Bartleby. Presentiments of strange discoveries hovered round me. The scrivener's pale form appeared to me laid out, among uncaring strangers, in its shimmering winding sheet.

Suddenly I was attracted by Bartleby's closed desk, the key in open sight left in the lock.

I mean no mischief, seek the gratification of no heartless curiosity, thought I; besides, the desk is mine, and its contents too, so I will make bold to look within. Every thing was methodically arranged, the papers smoothly placed. The pigeon holes were deep, and removing the files of documents, I groped into their recesses. Presently I felt something there, and dragged it out. It was an old bandanna handkerchief, heavy and knotted. I opened it, and saw it was a saving's bank.

I now recalled all the quiet mysteries which I had noted in the man. I remembered that he never spoke but to answer; that though at intervals he had considerable time to himself, yet I had never seen him reading—no, not even a newspaper; that for long periods he would stand looking out, at his pale window behind the screen, upon the dead brick wall; I was quite sure he never visited any refection or eating house; while his pale face clearly indicated that he never drank beer like Turkey, or tea and coffee even, like other men; that he never went anywhere in particular that I could learn; never went out for a walk, unless indeed that was the case at present; that he had declined telling who he was, or whence he came, or whether he had any relatives in the world; that though so thin and pale, he never complained of ill health. And more than all, I remembered a certain unconscious air of pallid—how shall I call it?—of pallid haughtiness, say, or rather an austere reserve about him, which had positively awed me into my tame compliance with his eccentricities, when I had feared to ask him to do the slightest incidental thing for me, even though I might know, from his long-continued motionlessness, that behind his screen he must be standing in one of those dead-wall reveries of his.

Revolving all these things, and coupling them with the recently discovered fact that he made his office his constant abiding place and home, and not forgetful of his morbid moodiness; revolving all these things, a prudential feeling began to steal over me. My first emotions had been those of pure melancholy and sincerest pity; but just in proportion as the forlornness of Bartleby grew and grew to my imagination, did that same melancholy merge into fear, that pity into repulsion. So true it is, and so terrible too, that up to a certain point the thought or sight of misery enlists our best affections; but, in certain special cases, beyond that point it does not. They err who would assert that invariably this is owing to the inherent selfishness of the human heart. It rather proceeds from a certain hopelessness of remedying excessive and organic ill. To a sensitive being, pity is not seldom pain. And when at last it is perceived that such pity cannot lead to effectual succor, common sense bids the soul be rid of it. What I saw that morning persuaded me that the scrivener was the victim of innate and incurable disorder. I might give alms to his body; but his body did not pain him; it was his soul that suffered, and his soul I could not reach.

I did not accomplish the purpose of going to Trinity Church that morning. Somehow, the things I had seen disqualified me for the time from church-

going. I walked homeward, thinking what I would do with Bartleby. Finally, morning, touching his history, &c., and if he declined to answer them openly twenty dollar bill over and above whatever I might owe him, and tell him his services were no longer required; but that if in any other way I could assist place, wherever that might be, I would willingly help to defray the expenses. Aid, a letter from him would be sure of a reply. The next morning came.

"Bartleby," said I, gently calling to him behind his screen.

"No reply.

"Bartleby," said I, in a still gentler tone, "come here; I am not going to ask you to do anything you would prefer not to do—I simply wish to speak to you."

Upon this he noiselessly slid into view.

"Will you tell me, Bartleby, where you were born?"

"I would prefer not to."

"Will you tell me anything about yourself?"

"I would prefer not to."

"But what reasonable objection can you have to speak to me? I feel friendly towards you."

He did not look at me while I spoke, but kept his glance fixed upon my bust of Cicero, which as I then sat, was directly behind me, some six inches above my head.

"What is your answer, Bartleby?" said I, after waiting a considerable time for a reply, during which his countenance remained immovable, only there was the faintest conceivable tremor of the white attenuated mouth.

"At present I prefer to give no answer," he said, and retired into his hermitage.

It was rather weak in me to confess, but his manner on this occasion nettled me. Not only did there seem to lurk in it a certain calm disdain, but his perverseness seemed ungrateful, considering the undeniable good usage and indulgence he had received from me.

Again I sat ruminating what I should do. Mortified as I was at his behavior, and resolved as I had been to dismiss him when I entered my office, nevertheless I strangely felt something superstitious knocking at my heart, and forbidding me to carry out my purpose, and denouncing me for a villain if I dared to breathe one bitter word against this forlornest of mankind. At last, familiarly drawing my chair behind his screen, I sat down and said: "Bartleby, friend, to comply as far as may be with the usages of this office. Say now you in a day or two you will begin to be a little reasonable—say so, Bartleby."

"At present I would prefer not to be a little reasonable," was his mildly cadaverous reply.

Just then the folding-doors opened, and Nippers approached. He seemed suffering from an unusually bad night's rest, induced by severer indigestion than common. He overheard those final words of Bartleby.

"Prefer not, eh?" gazed Nippers—"I'd prefer him, if I were you, sir,"
addressing me—"I'd prefer him; I'd give him preferences, the stubborn mule! What is it, sir, pray, that he prefers not to do now?"

Bartleby moved not a limb.

"Mr. Nippers," said I, "I'd prefer that you would withdraw for the present."

Somehow, of late I had got into the way of involuntarily using this word "prefer" upon all sorts of not exactly suitable occasions. And I trembled to think that my contact with the scrivener had already and seriously affected me in a mental way. And what further and deeper aberration might it not yet produce? This apprehension had not been without efficacy in determining me to summary means.

As Nippers, looking so very sour and sulky, was departing, Turkey blandly and deferentially approached.

"With submission, sir," said he, "yesterday I was thinking about Bartleby here, and I think that if he would but prefer to take a quart of good ale every day, it would do much towards mending him, and enabling him to assist in examining his papers."

"So you have got the word too," said I, slightly excited.

"With submission, what word, sir," asked Turkey, respectfully crowding himself into the contracted space behind the screen, and by so doing, making me jostle the scrivener. "What word, sir?"

"I would prefer to be left alone here," said Bartleby, as if offended at being mobbed in his privacy.

"That's the word, Turkey," said I—"that's it."

"Oh, prefer? oh yes—queer word. I never use it myself. But, sir, as I was saying, if he would but prefer—"

"Turkey," interrupted I, "you will please withdraw."

"Oh certainly, sir, if you prefer that I should."

As he opened the folding-door to retire, Nippers at his desk caught a glimpse of me, and asked whether I would prefer to have a certain paper copied on blue paper or white. He did not in the least, rationally accent the word prefer. It was plain that it involuntarily rolled from his tongue. I thought to myself, surely I must get rid of a demented man, who already has in some degree turned the tongues, if not the heads of myself and clerks. But I thought prudent not to break the dismission at once.

The next day I noticed that Bartleby did nothing but stand at his window in his dead-wall reverie. Upon asking him why he did not write, he said that he had decided upon doing no more writing.

"Why, how now? what next?" exclaimed I, "do no more writing?"

"No more."

"And what is the reason?"

"Do you not see the reason for yourself," he indifferently replied.

I looked steadfastly at him, and perceived that his eyes looked dull and glazed. Instantly it occurred to me, that his unexampled diligence in copying by his dim window for the first few weeks of his stay with me might have temporarily impaired his vision.

I was touched. I said something in condolence with him. I hinted that of course he did wisely in abstaining from writing for a while; and urged him to embrace that opportunity of taking wholesome exercise in the open air. This, however, he did not do. A few days after this, my other clerks being absent, and being in a great hurry to dispatch certain letters by the mail, I thought that, having nothing else earthly to do, Bartleby would surely be less infllexible than usual, and carry these letters to the post-office. But he blankly declined. So, much to my inconvenience, I went myself. Still added days went by. Whether Bartleby's eyes improved or not, I could not say. To all appearance, I thought they did. But when I asked him if they did, he vouchsafed no answer. At all events, he would do no copying. At last, in reply to my urgings, he informed me that he had permanently given up copying.

"What!" exclaimed I; "suppose your eyes should get entirely well—better than ever before—would you not copy then?"

"I have given up copying," he answered, and slid aside.

He remained as ever, a fixture in my chamber. Nay—if that were possible—he became more of a fixture than before. What was to be done? He would do nothing in the office: why should he stay there? In plain fact, he had now become a millstone to me, not only useless as a necklace, but afflicting to bear. Yet I was sorry for him. I speak less than truth when I say that, on his own account, I occasioned me uneasiness. I should have been more interested in procuring some other abode, but I would not have named a single relative or friend, I would instantly have written, and urged them taking the poor fellow away to some convenient retreat. But he seemed alone, absolutely alone in the universe. A bit of wreck in the mid Atlantic. At length, necessities connected with my business tyrannized over all other considerations. Recently as I could, I told Bartleby that in six days' time he must unconditionally leave the office. I warned him to take measures, in the interval, for procuring some other abode. I offered to assist him in this endeavor, if he himself would but take the first step towards a removal. And when you finally quit me, Bartleby," added I, "I shall see that you go not away entirely unpaid: six days from this hour, remember."

At the expiration of that period, I peeped behind the screen, and lo! Bartleby was there.

I buttoned up my coat, balanced myself, advanced slowly towards him, touched his shoulder, and said, "The time has come; you must quit this place; I am sorry for you; here is money; but you must go."

"I would prefer not," he replied, with his back still towards me.

"You must."

He remained silent.

Now I had an unbounded confidence in this man's common honesty. He had frequently restored to me sixpences and shillings carelessly dropped upon the floor, for I am apt to be very reckless in such shirt-button affairs. The proceeding then which followed will not be deemed extraordinary.

"Bartleby," said I, "I owe you twelve dollars on account; here are thirty-two; the odd twenty are yours. Will you take it?" and I handed the bills towards him.

But he made no motion.

"I will leave them here then," putting them under a weight on the table.

Then taking my hat and cane and going to the door I tranquilly turned and added—"After you have removed your things from these offices, Bartleby, you will of course lock the door—since every one is now gone for the day but you—and if you please, slip your key underneath the mat, so that I may have it in the morning. I shall not see you again; so good-bye to you. If hereafter in your new place of abode I can be of any service to you, do not fail to advise me by letter. Good-bye, Bartleby, and fare you well."

But he answered not a word; like the last column of some ruined temple,
be remained standing mute and solitary in the middle of the otherwise deserted room.

As I walked home in a pensive mood, my vanity got the better of my pity. I could not but highly plume myself on my masterly management in getting rid of Bartleby. Masterly I call it, and such it must appear to any dispassionate thinker. The beauty of my procedure seemed to consist in its perfect quietness. There was no vulgar bullying, no bravoading of any sort, no choleric hectoring, and striding to and fro across the apartment, jerking out veheiment commands for Bartleby to bundle himself off with his beggarly traps. Nothing of the kind. Without loudly bidding Bartleby depart—as an inferior genius might have done—I assumed the ground that depart he must; and upon that assumption built all I had to say. The more I thought over my procedure, the more I was charmed with it. Nevertheless, next morning, upon awakening, I had my doubts,—I had somehow slept off the fumes of vanity. One of the coolest and wisest hours a man has, is just after he awakes in the morning. My procedure seemed as sagacious as ever,—but only in theory. How it would prove in practice—there was the rub. It was truly a beautiful thought to have assumed Bartleby's departure; but, after all, that assumption was simply my own, and none of Bartleby's. The great point was, not whether I had assumed that he would quit me, but whether he would prefer so to do. He was more a man of preferences than assumptions.

After breakfast, I walked down town, arguing the probabilities pro and con. One moment I thought it would prove a miserable failure, and Bartleby would be found all alive at my office as usual; the next moment it seemed certain that I should see his chair empty. And so I kept veering about. At the corner of Broadway and Canal-street, I saw quite an excited group of people standing in earnest conversation.

"I'll take odds he doesn't," said a voice as I passed. "Doesn't go—done!" said I, "put up your money."

I was instinctively putting my hand in my pocket to produce my own, when I remembered that this was an election day. The words I had overheard bore no reference to Bartleby, but to the success or non-success of some candidate for the mayoralty. In my intent frame of mind, I had, as it were, imagined that all Broadway shared in my excitement, and were debating the same question with me. I passed on, very thankful that the uproar of the street screened my momentary absent-mindedness.

As I had intended, I was earlier than usual at my office door. I stood listening for a moment. All was still. He must be gone. I tried the knob. The door was locked. Yes, my procedure had worked to a charm; he indeed must be vanished. Yet a certain melancholy mixed with this; I was almost sorry for my brilliant success. I was fumbling under the door mat for the key, which Bartleby was to have left there for me, when accidentally my knee knocked against a panel, producing a summoning sound, and in response a voice came to me from within—"Not yet; I am occupied."

It was Bartleby.

I was thunderstruck. For an instant I stood like the man who, pipe in mouth, was killed one cloudless afternoon long ago in Virginia, by summer lightning; at his own warm open window he was killed, and remained leaning out there upon the dreamy afternoon, till some one touched him, when he fell.

"Not gone!" I murmured at last. But again obeying that wondrous ascendancy which the inscrutable scrivener had over me, and from which ascendency and out into the street, and while walking round the block, considered what I should next do in this unheard-of perplexity. Turn the man out by an actual thrusting I could not; to drive him away by calling him hard names would not do; calling in the police was an unpleasant idea; and yet, permit him to enjoy his cadaverous triumph over me,—this too I could not think of. What was to be done? or, if nothing could be done, was there any thing further that I could assume in the matter? Yes, as before I had prospectively assumed that Bartleby would depart, so now I might retrospectively assume that he did. In the legitimate carrying out of this assumption, I all, walk straight against him as if he were air. Such a proceeding would in possible that Bartleby could withstand such an application of the doctrine of the resurrection. But upon second thoughts the success of the plan seemed rather dubious. I resolved to argue the matter over with him again.

"Bartleby," said I, entering the office, with a quietly severe expression, "I am seriously displeased. I am pained, Bartleby. I thought better of you. I had imagined you of such a gentlemanly organization, that in any delicate dilemma a slight hint would suffice—in short, an assumption. But it appears you have not even touched that money yet," pointing to it, just where I had left it the evening previous.

He answered nothing.

"Will you, or will you not, quit me?" I now demanded in a sudden passion, advancing close to him.

"I would prefer not to quit you," he replied, gently emphasizing the not.

"What earthly right have you to stay here? Do you pay any rent? Do you pay my taxes? Or is this property yours?"

He answered nothing.

"Are you ready to go on and write now? Are your eyes recovered? Could you copy a small paper for me this morning? or help examine a few lines? or step round to the post-office? In a word, will you do anything at all, to give a coloring to your refusal to depart the premises?"

He silently retired into his hermitage.

I was now in such a state of nervous resentment that I thought it but prudent to check myself at present from further demonstrations. Bartleby and I were alone. I remembered the tragedy of the unfortunate Adams and the still more unfortunate Coit in the solitary office of the latter; and how poor Coit, being dreadfully incensed by Adams,7 and imprudently permitting himself to get wildly excited, was at unawares hurried into his fatal act—an act which certainly no man could possibly deplore more than the actor him-

7. Notorious murder case that occurred while Melville was in the South Seas. In 1841 Samuel Adams, a printer who knew John C. Coit (brother of the inventor of the revolver) at Broadway and Chambers Street in lower Manhattan to collect a debt. Coit murdered Adams with a hatchet and burnt the corpse for shipment to New Orleans.

The body was found, and Coit was soon arrested. Despite his plea of self-defense Coit was convicted the next year, amid considerable publicity, and hanged himself to death just before he was to be hanged. The setting of Bartleby is not far from the scene of the murder.
self. Often it had occurred to me in my ponderings upon the subject, that had that altercation taken place in the public street, or at a private residence, it would not have terminated as it did. It was the circumstance of being alone in a solitary office, up stairs, of a building entirely unhallowed by humanizing domestic associations—an uncarpentered office, doubtless, of a dusty, haggard sort of appearance;—this it must have been, which greatly helped to enhance the irritable desperation of the hapless Colt.

But when this old Adam of resentment rose in me and tempted me concerning Bartleby, I grappled him and threw him. How? Why, simply by recalling the divine injunction: "A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another." Yes, this it was I saved me. Aside from higher considerations, charity often operates as a vastly wise and prudent principle—a great safeguard to its possessor. Men have committed murder for jealousy’s sake, and anger’s sake, and hatred’s sake, and selfishness’ sake, and spiritual pride’s sake; but no man that ever I heard of, ever committed a diabolical murder for sweet charity’s sake. Mere self-interest, then, if no better motive can be adduced, should, especially with high-tempered men, prompt all beings to charity and philanthropy. At any rate, upon the occasion in question, I strove to drown my exasperated feelings towards the scrivener by benevolently constructing his conduct. Poor fellow, poor fellow! thought I, he don’t mean any thing; and besides, he has seen hard times, and ought to be indulged.

I endeavored also immediately to occupy myself, and at the same time to comfort my despondency. I tried to fancy that in the course of the morning, at such time as might prove agreeable to him, Bartleby, of his own free accord, would emerge from his hermitage, and take up some decided line of march in the direction of the door. But no. Half-past twelve o’clock came; Turkey began to glow in the face, overturn his inkstand, and become generally obstreperous; Nippers abated down into quietude and courtesy; Ginger Nut munched his noon apple; and Bartleby remained standing at his window in one of his profoundest dead-wall reveries. Will it be credited? Ought I to acknowledge it? That afternoon I left the office without saying one further word to him.

Some days now passed, during which, at leisure intervals I looked a little into "Edwards on the Will," and "Priestley on Necessity." Under the circumstances, those books induced a salutary feeling. Gradually I slid into the persuasion that these troubles of mine touching the scrivener, had been all predestinated from eternity, and Bartleby was billeted upon me for some mysterious purpose of an all-wise Providence, which it was not for a mere mortal like me to fathom. Yes, Bartleby, stay there behind your screen, thought I; I shall persecute you no more; you are harmless and noiseless as any of those old chairs; in short, I never feel so private as when I know you are here. At least I see it, I feel it; I penetrate to the predestinated purpose of my life. I am content. Others may have loftier parts to enact; but my mission in this world, Bartleby, is to furnish you with office-room for such period as you may see fit to remain.

I believe that this wise and blessed frame of mind would have continued with me, had it not been for the unsolicited and uncharitable remarks obtruded upon me by my professional friends who visited the rooms. But thus it often is, that the constant friction of illiberal minds wears out at last the best resolves of the more generous. Though to be sure, when I reflected upon it, it was not strange that people entering my office should be struck by the peculiar aspect of the unaccountable Bartleby, and be tempted to throw out some sinister observations concerning him. Sometimes an attorney, the scrivener there, would undertake to obtain some sort of precise information from him touching my whereabouts; but without heeding his idle talk, Bartleby would remain standing immovable in the middle of the room. So after contemplating him in that position for a time, the attorney would depart, no wiser than he came.

Also, when a Reference' was going on, and the room full of lawyers and witnesses and business was driving fast; some deeply occupied legal gentleman present, seeing Bartleby wholly unoccupied, would request him to run round to his (the legal gentleman's) office and fetch some papers for him. Thereupon, Bartleby would tranquilly decline, and yet remain idle as before. Then the lawyer would give a great stare, and turn to me. And what could I say? At last I was made aware that all through the circle of my professional acquaintance, a whisper of wonder was running round, having reference to the strange creature I kept at my office. This worried me very much. And as the idea came upon me of his possibly turning out a long-lived man, and keep occupying my chambers, and denying my authority; and perplexing my visitors; and scandalizing my professional reputation; and casting a general gloom over the premises; keeping soul and body together to the last upon his savings (for doubtless he spent but half a dime a day), and in the end perhaps outlive me, and claim possession of my office by right of his perpetual occupancy: as all these dark anticipations crowded upon me more and more, and my friends continually intruded their relentless remarks upon the apparition in my room; a great change was wrought in me. I resolved to gather all my faculties together, and for ever rid me of this intolerable incubus.

Ere revolving any complicated project, however, adapted to this end, I first simply suggested to Bartleby the propriety of his permanent departure. In a calm and serious tone, I recommenced the idea to his careful and mature consideration. But having taken three days to meditate upon it, he apprised me that his original determination remained the same; in short, that he still preferred to abide with me.

What shall I do? I now said to myself, buttoning up my coat to the last button. What shall I do? What ought I to do? What does conscience say I should do with this man, or rather ghost. Rid myself of him, I must; go, he shall. But how? You will not thrust him, the poor, pale, passive mortal,—you will not thrust such a helpless creature out of your door? you will not dishonor yourself by such cruelty? No, I will not, I cannot do that. Rather would I let him live and die here, and then mason up his remains in the wall. What then will you do? For all your coaxing, he will not budge. Bribery he leaves under your own paper-weight on your table; in short, it is quite plain that he prefers to cling to you.

Then something severe, something unusual must be done. What surely...
you will not have him collared by a constable, and commit his innocent pul-
lor to the common jail? And upon what ground could you procure such a
thing to be done?—a vagrant, is he? What! he a vagrant, a wanderer, who
refuses to budge? It is because he will not be a vagrant, then, that you seek
to count him as a vagrant. That is too absurd. No visible means of support:
there I have him. Wrong again: for indubitably he does support himself, and
that is the only unanswerable proof that any man can show of his possessing
the means so to do. No more then. Since he will not quit me, I must quit
him. I will change my offices; I will move elsewhere; and give him fair notice,
that if I find him on my new premises I will then proceed against him as a
common trespasser.
Acting accordingly, next day I thus addressed him: "I find these chambers
too far from the City Hall; the air is unwholesome. In a word, I propose to
remove my offices next week, and shall no longer require your services. I tell
you this now, in order that you may seek another place."
He made no reply, and nothing more was said.
On the appointed day I engaged carts and men, proceeded to my cham-
bers, and having but little furniture, everything was removed in a few hours.
Throughout, the scrivener remained standing behind the screen, which I
directed to be removed the last thing. It was withdrawn; and being folded up
like a huge folio, left him the motionless occupant of a naked room. I stood
in the entry watching him a moment, while something from within me
upbraided me.
I re-entered, with my hand in my pocket—and—and my heart in my
mouth.
"Good-bye, Bartleby; I am going—good-bye, and God some way bless you;
and take that," slipping something in his hand. But it dropped upon the floor,
and then,—strange to say—I tore myself from him whom I had so longed to
be rid of.
Established in my new quarters, for a day or two I kept the door locked,
and started at every footfall in the passages. When I returned to my rooms
after any little absence, I would pause at the threshold for an instant, and
attentively listen, ere applying my key. But these fears were needless. Bar-
tleby never came nigh me.
I thought all was going well, when a perturbed looking stranger visited me,
inquiring whether I was the person who had recently occupied rooms at
No.—Wall-street.
Full of forebodings, I replied that I was.
"Then sir," said the stranger, who proved a lawyer, "you are responsi-
able for the man you left there. He refuses to do any copying; he refuses
to do anything; he says he prefers not to; and he refuses to quit the
premises."
"I am very sorry, sir," said I, with assumed tranquility, but an inward
tremor, "but, really, the man you allude to is nothing to me—he is no relation
or apprentice of mine, that you should hold me responsible for him."
"In mercy's name, who is he?"
"I certainly cannot inform you. I know nothing about him. Formerly I
employed him as a copyist; but he has done nothing for me now for some
time past."
"I shall settle him then,—good morning, sir."

Several days passed, and I heard nothing more; and though I often felt a
charitable prompting to call at the place and see poor Bartleby, yet a certain
squeamishness of I know not what withheld me.
All is over with him, by this time, thought I at last, when through another
week no further intelligence reached me. But coming to my room the day
after, I found several persons waiting at my door in a high state of nervous
excitement.
"That's the man—here he comes," cried the foremost one, whom I rec-
ognized as the lawyer who had previously called upon me alone.
"You must take him away, sir, at once," cried a portly person among them,
advancing upon me, and whom I knew to be the landlord of No.—Wall-
street. "These gentlemen, my tenants, cannot stand it any longer; Mr. B.—" pointing to the lawyer, "has turned him out of his room, and he now persists
in haunting the building generally, sitting upon the banisters of the stairs by
day, and sleeping in the entry by night. Every body is concerned; clients are
leaving the offices; some fears are entertained of a mob; something you must
do, and that without delay."
Aghast at this torrent, I fell back before it, and would fain have locked
myself in my new quarters. In vain I persisted that Bartleby was nothing to
me—no more than to any one else. In vain—I was the last person known
to have anything to do with him, and they held me to the terrible account.
Fearsful then of being exposed in the papers (as one person present obscurely
threatened) I considered the matter, and at length said, that if the lawyer
would give me a confidential interview with the scrivener, in his (the lawyer's)
own room, I would that afternoon strive my best to rid them of the nuisance
they complained of.
Going up stairs to my old haunt, there was Bartleby silently sitting upon
the banister at the landing.
"What are you doing here, Bartleby?" said I.
"Sitting upon the banister," he mildly replied.
I motioned him into the lawyer's room, who then left us.
"Bartleby," said I, "are you aware that you are the cause of great tribulation
me, by persisting in occupying the entry after being dismissed from the
office?"
"No answer.
"Now one of two things must take place. Either you must do something,
or something must be done to you. Now what sort of business would you
like to engage in? Would you like to re-engage in copying for some one?"
"No; I would prefer not to make any change.
"Would you like a clerkship in a dry-goods store?"
"There is too much confinement about that. No, I would not like a clerk-
ship; but I am not particular."
"Too much confinement," I cried, "why you keep yourself confined all the
time!"
"I would prefer not to take a clerkship," he rejoined, as if to settle that
little item at once.
"How would a bar-tender's business suit you? There is no trying of the
eyesight in that."
"I would not like it at all; though, as I said before, I am not particular."
His unwonted wordiness inspired me. I returned to the charge.
Some of the compassionate and curious bystanders joined the party; and
headed by one of the constables arm in arm with Bartleby, the silent pro-
cession filed its way through all the noise, and heat, and joy of the roaring
thoroughfares at noon.

The same day I received the note I went to the Tombs, or to speak more
properly, the Halls of Justice. Seeking the right officer, I stated the purpose
of my call, and was informed that the individual I described was indeed
within. I then assured the functionary that Bartleby was a perfectly honest
man, and greatly to be accommodated, however unaccountably eccentric. I
in an indulgent confinement as possible till something less harsh might be
decided upon, the alms-house must receive him. I then begged to have an
interview.

Being under no disgraceful charge, and quite serene and harmless in all
his ways, they had permitted him freely to wander about the prison, and
especially in the inclosed grass-platted yards thereof. And so I found him
there, standing all alone in the quietest of the yards, his face towards a high
wall, while all around, from the narrow slits of the jail windows, I thought I
saw peering upon him the eyes of murderers and thieves.

"Bartleby!

"I know you," he said, without looking round,—"and I want nothing to say
to you.

"It was not I that brought you here, Bartleby," said I, keenly pained at his
implied suspicion. "And to you, this should not be so vile a place. Nothing
reproachful attaches to you by being here. And see, it is not so sad a place
as one might think. Look, there is the sky, and here is the grass."

"I know where I am," he replied, but would say nothing more, and so left
him.

As I entered the corridor again, a broad meat-like man, in an apron,
accosted me, and jerking his thumb over his shoulder said—"Is that your
friend?"

"Yes."

"Does he want to starve? If he does, let him live on the prison fare, that's
all." "Who are you?" asked I, not knowing what to make of such an unofficially
speaking person in such a place.

"I am the grub-man. Such gentlemen as have friends here, hire me to
provide them with something good to eat."

"Is this so?" said I, turning to the turnkey.

He said it was.

"Well then," said I, slipping some silver into the grub-man's hands (for so
they called him). "I want you to give particular attention to my friend there;
let him have the best dinner you can get. And you must be as polite to him
as possible."

"Introduce me, will you?" said the grub-man, looking at me with an expres-
sion which seemed to say he was all impatience for an opportunity to give a
specimen of his breeding.

Thinking it would prove of benefit to the scrivener, I acquiesced; and
asking the grub-man his name, went up with him to Bartleby.
"Bartleby, this is Mr. Cutlets; you will find him very useful to you."

"Your servant, sir, your servant," said the grub-man, making a low salutation behind his apron. "Hope you find it pleasant here, sir. — spacious grounds — cool apartments. sir — hope you'll stay with us some time — try to make it agreeable. May Mrs. Cutlets and I have the pleasure of your company to dinner, sir, in Mrs. Cutlets' private room?"

"I prefer not to dine to-day," said Bartleby, turning away. "It would disagree with me; I am unused to dinners." So saying he slowly moved to the other side of the enclosure, and took up a position fronting the dead-wall.

"How's that?" said the grub-man, addressing me with a stare of astonishment. "He's odd, aint he?"

"I think he is a little deranged," said I, sadly.

"Deranged? deranged is it? Well now, upon my word, I thought that friend of yours was a gentleman forger; they are always pale and genteel-like, them forgery. I can't help pity 'em — can't help it, sir. Did you know Monroe Edwards?" he added touchingly, and paused. Then, laying his hand pitifully on my shoulder, sighed, "he died of consumption at Sing-Sing. So you weren't acquainted with Monroe?"

"No, I was never socially acquainted with any forgers. But I cannot stop longer. Look to my friend yonder. You will not lose by it; I will see you again."

Some few days after this, I again obtained admission to the Tombs, and went through the corridors in quest of Bartleby; but without finding him.

"I saw him coming from his cell not long ago," said a turnkey, "may be he's gone to loiter in the yards."

So I went in that direction.

"Are you looking for the silent man?" said another turnkey passing me. "Yonder he lies — sleeping in the yard there. 'Tis not twenty minutes since I saw him lie down."

The yard was entirely quiet. It was not accessible to the common prisoners. The surrounding walls, of amazing thickness; kept off all sounds behind them. The Egyptian character of the masonry weighed upon me with its gloom. But a soft imprisoned turf grew under foot. The heart of the eternal pyramids, it seemed. Wherein, by some strange magic, through the clefts, grass-seed, dropped by birds, had sprung.

Strangely huddled at the base of the wall, his knees drawn up, and lying on his side, his head touching the cold stones, I saw the wasted Bartleby. But nothing stirred. I paused; then went close up to him; stooped over, and saw that his dim eyes were open; otherwise he seemed profoundly sleeping. Something prompted me to touch him. I felt his hand, when a trembling shiver ran up my arm and down my spine to my feet.

The round face of the grub-man peered upon me now. "His dinner is ready. Won't he dine to-day, either? Or does he live without dining?"

"Lives without dining," said I, and closed the eyes.

2. Harpo Greely's Tribune called Col. Monroe Edwards (1808–1847) "the most distinguished financier since the days of Jacob Israel," his trial in New York City (lasting all the second week of June 1842) caused the greatest public excitement since the trial of the murderer, Col. (see E. 7, p. 1103). He was convicted of swindling two firms of twenty-five thousand dollars each through forged letters of credit, sending tempests through the "exchange,就好像 and commission business." He undermined our Security Exchange. Melville was then in the South Sea, but the case was sensational, and his brothers were in New York.

3. Prison at Ostend, New York, not far up the Hudson.