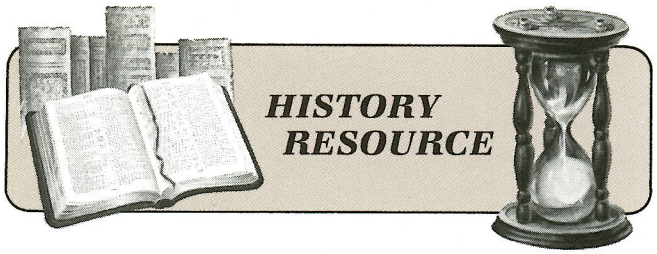
JOSEPH MERRICK

The Man Who Overcame Incredible Obstacles to Self-Acceptance

HEROES OF FAITH



HOW DID A SEVERELY DEFORMED MAN TURN SCREAMS OF SHOCK INTO SMILES OF ACCEPTANCE?

Toby Gowing

Why is this man wearing a face covering and a long cloak? Does this clothing indicate that he has a problem with self-acceptance?

In the grey light of early morning, the vast Liverpool Street Station echoed with the sounds of thousands of Londoners hurrying to work. The air was filled with clouds of smoke and steam from the locomotives, but one arriving passenger that June morning in 1886 was too exhausted to pay any attention to these sights and sounds.

He attracted a great deal of attention himself, however, as he limped slowly across the platform. His whole body was concealed in a long, cape-like cloak. He supported himself with a walking stick held in his left hand. His other arm and hand were hidden by the black cloak. On his feet were huge slippers that looked more like canvas bags than shoes.

On his head was a huge, peaked cap with a short bill. In front of his face and around the back of his head hung a kind of veil. The only way he could see where he was going was through a narrow slit in the front.

His progress through the station was slow, not only because of his limp but also because he did not know where he was going. Besides that, a crowd of curious onlookers was beginning to form. The man realized what was happening. He stopped and stood still, hoping the people would go away.

He was tired and hungry. He just wanted everyone to leave him alone, but they would not. In a voice loud enough for the crowd to hear, a boy said, "Hey, what are you hiding under there?" Someone else replied, "Whatever it is, it sure does stink!" The people laughed. Others shouted similar rude comments.

The man wanted to ask them to leave, but he knew they would not understand him, so he just stood there silently. He turned around to go, but he could not because the crowd was pressing in on all sides as those further back pushed forward trying to get a look at him.

He could sense a familiar feeling of panic beginning to rise up inside him. Then through the slit in the veil he saw someone pushing through the noisy crowd toward him. Realizing it was a policeman, he was not sure whether to feel relieved or to be further alarmed. He did not know what the police would do with him. He had nowhere to go, no money, and no friends or family to help him.

The man heard the policeman telling the people to move along. Holding his breath because of the awful smell, the officer said to him, "Come with me." Then he felt himself being pulled by his left arm. The officer was taking him somewhere. Other policemen had arrived and were trying to disperse the mob.

The man tried to move as fast as he could, but his hip joint hurt terribly unless he walked very slowly. The policeman was determined to get him away from the crowd, however, and he half dragged him into a waiting room and closed the door. The man hobbled into the nearest corner and collapsed into a heap on the floor.

The officer repeatedly asked his name and where he lived, but he could not understand the high-pitched sounds in which the man replied.

His name was Joseph Merrick, but he was known as "the Elephant Man." The long cloak hid a right arm and legs that were severely deformed. The swollen limbs and the rough, grayish skin which covered most of his body made him look more like an animal than a man. The face behind the veil was so severely contorted by masses of bone and huge tumors that women often shrieked in terror or even fainted when they first saw it.

One writer described Mr. Merrick's plight in the strongest terms: "Hideously deformed, malodorous, for the most part maltreated, constantly in pain, lame, fed the merest scraps, exhibited as a grotesque monster at circuses . . . the object of constant expressions of horror and disgust, it might have been expected that 'the Elephant Man' would have grown into a creature detesting all human beings, bitter, awkward, difficult in his relations with others, ungentle, unfeeling, aggressive, and unlovable."

Yet, less than a year after that humiliating morning in the Liverpool Street Station, the Elephant Man was hosting the future king and queen of England!

What can account for this remarkable change? A clue to the answer is in this little poem that the Elephant Man wrote a few months later:

"'Tis true my form is something odd,
But blaming me is blaming God;
Could I create myself anew
I would not fail in pleasing you."

Joseph Merrick had by God's grace learned to apply the principles of self-acceptance. He had the special challenge of accepting severe limitations in three categories of "unchangeables": appearance, physical abilities, and parentage.

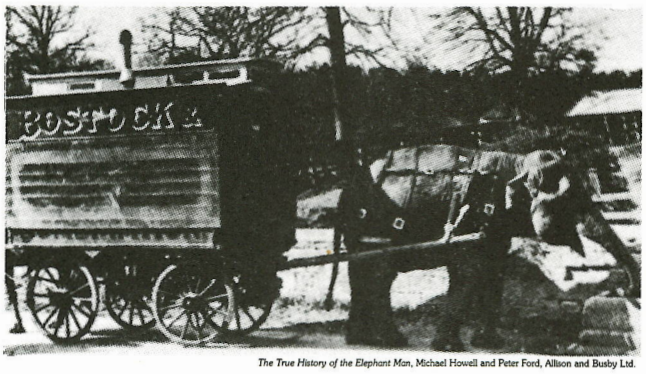
1 *HE LEARNED TO SEE HIS DEFORMITIES NOT AS MISTAKES BUT AS MARKS OF OWNERSHIP.*

As a little boy growing up in the town of Leicester (LES-ter) in central England, Joseph sometimes asked his mother, "Why is my face like this?" She would always pull him up onto her lap and hold him tight as she repeated the story of what happened before he was born.

First, she would tell about the fair. It was held each spring in the Humberstonegate, a wide avenue that ran through the older part of town not far from their little house in the slums. People would come from all the neighboring towns and countryside to buy and sell sheep, cows, and chickens.

Along with stalls for the livestock, there were all kinds of other things to see. For a couple of pennies a fairgoer could watch acrobats performing or gawk at a dwarf or bearded lady or some other human oddity.

One of the biggest attractions at the fair was the menagerie. It had elephants, lions, tigers, camels, baboons, and many other strange creatures that Englishmen of that time seldom saw except in pictures. The elephants were especially popular, and every day at noon they were paraded through the streets of the fair, drawing quite a crowd.



The True History of the Elephant Man, Michael Howell and Peter Ford, Allison and Busby Ltd.

Wombwell's Royal Menagerie was probably Britain's largest traveling collection of wild animals at that time.

Mrs. Merrick would tell Joseph how she had heard his father and his friends talk about the elephant parade. She had never seen the huge beasts for herself, so one day in May of 1862, she decided to go have a look.

Once she arrived at the fair, she began to feel it was not such a good idea. It was just a few months before Joseph was to be born, and the jostling of the crowd made her quite uncomfortable. As the elephants came closer, the people grew more and more excited. The ones farther back on the sidewalk started pushing forward in an effort to get a better view.

Joseph would always shudder when his mother told what happened next. She was having trouble keeping her balance and felt herself being shoved toward the street. Then she fell. She looked up and was terrified to see the lead elephant coming toward her only a few steps away.

Underwood and Underwood

Many people in Leicester, England, had never seen a real live elephant, so a whole parade of them created much excitement.

In a desperate attempt to save herself, she rolled to the side as the elephant lumbered past. A huge grey foot came down right where her head had been only moments before. Some kind people helped her up and took her home. Little Joseph knew that even though his mother had not been hurt, she still would sometimes awaken in the middle of the night, screaming because of the nightmares she had about this experience.

What Mrs. Merrick did not share with her son was the fact that he had been conceived prior to his parents' marriage and that his very existence was a constant reminder to his father of that sin.

Joseph was born on August 5, 1862. Mrs. Merrick was thrilled when the midwife informed her it was a boy. Joseph was proud to be named after his father. His middle name, Carey, was for the well-known Baptist missionary William Carey.

The little boy had seemed quite healthy during his first couple of years. This was a time when the infant mortality rate was much higher than it is today, and Mrs. Merrick was grateful her son did not catch smallpox when an epidemic swept through Leicester.

Then when Joseph was about two years old, his mother noticed a slight swelling under his upper lip. Soon it became a hard lump. It spread to his cheek and began to turn his upper lip inside out. As the growth became larger, Mrs. Merrick noticed that it somewhat resembled an elephant's trunk. She could not keep from wondering about that horrible incident when the elephant almost crushed her.

In that era it was commonly believed, even by doctors, that if a pregnant woman suffered a shock or fright, her baby would be born with some birthmark or deformity. One woman, for example, was sure that the mouse-shaped birthmark on her baby's cheek was the result of such an experience. Once while she was pregnant, a mouse had run across the floor. She had screamed in terror and clapped her hand to her cheek.

In Mrs. Merrick's mind the connection between Joseph's deformity and the elephant incident was so strong that as he grew up, she often told him what had happened that day in the Humberstonegate. The boy accepted the explanation and frequently repeated the story to others.

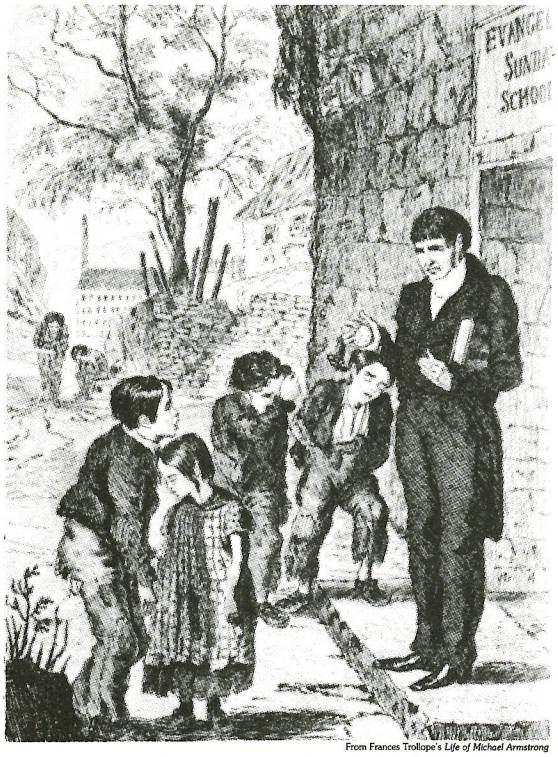
Yet, in seeking to understand and deal with her son's problem, Mrs. Merrick also turned to the Scriptures. To answer little Joseph's question of why, she gently taught him about God's absolute sovereignty and His unfailing love. Her own steadfastness convinced him that God indeed had a purpose for allowing his deformity.

Later, as he read Scripture for himself, Joseph came to understand that his deformity was not just the result of some chance happening. God had carefully planned and precisely dictated all the details of his physical appearance before he was born. As the Psalmist put it: *"My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psalm 139:15–16).*

As Joseph grew bigger his deformity worsened. By the time he was five his right arm and his feet were becoming enlarged. Lumps of bone began to form all over his head. The one on his forehead was especially pronounced. It grew so large that eventually he could hardly see out of one eye. His skin in various places became bumpy and discolored as if it were covered with small warts.

Mrs. Merrick was a good mother and loved her little boy very much. She did everything she could to help him, even consulting doctor after doctor. Sometimes they would give her some lotion to put on his skin, but nothing helped. Joseph's head grew bigger and bigger. One bony mass on the right side became so large that his ear was doubled over on itself. Gradually he came to the point that he could not hear at all with that ear.

All this was not easy for Joseph. He was in pain much of the time, but he knew he could always count on his mother's tender love and care.



From Frances Trollope's *Life of Michael Armstrong*

Mrs. Merrick taught for several years in a Sunday school like this one in Leicester. It is probable that the three Merrick children attended and learned not only Bible stories but arithmetic and reading as well.

One afternoon after school when Joseph was about eight, he came limping into the house crying. "What's the matter? Is your leg hurting you again?" asked his mother. It had not been long since he had injured his hip joint in a fall, but she sensed that something else was wrong because Joseph never complained about pain.

Although it was difficult to make out the words because of his sobs, she gradually understood. He had been playing with the other boys in the street. For years they had called him names and mocked him, but they had reluctantly let him join in their games. Now because of his injury he could not run fast enough to keep up with them. They had angrily chased him away and told him to take his ugly face home.

Joseph never wanted to force himself on anyone or to go where he was not wanted. He began to spend more and more time by himself. Perhaps during these lonely times he began to learn how to fellowship with the Lord.

Then Joseph's brother, who was five, died of scarlet fever. Somehow Joseph felt it was all his fault. His parents were all but overcome with grief. William had been a bright, healthy little boy, and they had cherished very high hopes for him since their older son was a deformed cripple.

As well-meaning relatives and neighbors came to call on the grief-stricken mother and father, some of them must have said things like "What a pity that the good Lord didn't take the cripple and spare poor little William." Even if the words were not spoken, Joseph must have sensed that some folks felt that way about him.

Losing her second son was especially hard on Mrs. Merrick. Her sorrow was so deep that she would go for days without eating. She tried to hide her despair from the children, but before long she developed a deep, racking cough. Finally, she began to run a fever. One day Joseph was sent to get the doctor. He said she had pneumonia.

She died just a few days later—three months before Joseph's eleventh birthday. He felt as if his whole world was falling apart. The person who had loved him most was gone. Joseph's father, always struggling just to put bread on the table, had never paid much attention to him, so now Joseph felt like an orphan.

As a young man Joseph carried a locket containing a tiny portrait of his mother. He often spoke of her with great affection. The effect of her early teaching is clearly seen in the quiet and gentle spirit Joseph demonstrated. He did not "forsake the law" of his mother, and it became an "ornament of grace" to his head. (See Proverbs 1:8–9.)

2 HE LEARNED TO FORGIVE THOSE WHO REJECTED GOD'S DESIGN.

Life was not easy for the Merrick family after Mrs. Merrick died. Arrangements had to be made right away for someone to take care of Joseph and his younger sister. The family moved to a boarding house, and Mr. Merrick hired the landlady to watch the children while he was at work. The landlady was a young widow with two children of her own.

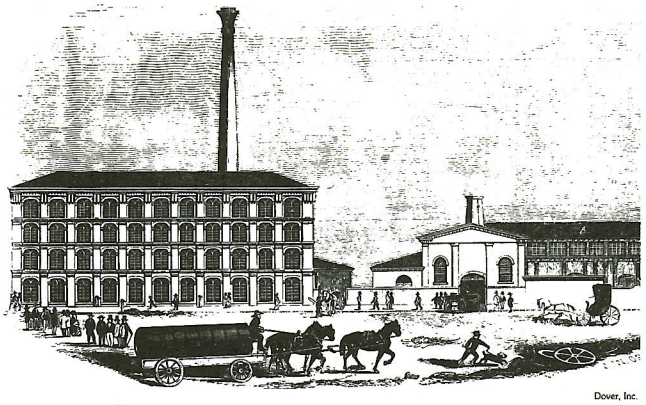
When she and Mr. Merrick were married a year and a half later, Joseph was suddenly faced with having to adjust to a stepmother of whom he would later write: "Henceforth I never had one moment's comfort, . . . together with my deformity, she was the means of making my life a perfect misery."

The new Mrs. Merrick seemed to accept his sister as one of her own, but she constantly scolded Joseph. She took special delight in pointing out his faults to his father. Not surprisingly, her children also teased and mocked the deformed boy mercilessly.

Two or three times when Joseph received more than he could stand of this abuse, he fled to his uncle's house. Uncle Charlie would always listen to the boy's troubles and tell him he could stay there as long as he liked. Then Joseph's father would arrive to take him home.

Joseph was not sure whether Mr. Merrick really cared about him or was just embarrassed that he had left, but the situation did not improve for Joseph at home. In fact, it became worse because his stepmother insisted that he drop out of school to get a job.

His startling appearance as well as his lameness made it difficult to find any employer who would be willing to consider him. Besides, the tumor growing on his cheek was interfering with his speech, and Joseph was having an increasingly difficult time making himself understood. Eventually he managed to find employment at a factory, where he worked all day to earn only a few pennies.



Dover, Inc.

An eighteenth-century factory carried with it a whole new set of challenges for Joseph Merrick.

Nevertheless, that first payday as Joseph made his way home with those few coins in his pocket, he felt elated. He thought maybe now his father and stepmother would not be so critical.

It was already dark when he stepped through the door into the warm kitchen. His father had not come in from work yet, but his stepmother was sitting at the table. "It's about time you got home," she yelled at him. He tried to explain that it was payday and that he had had to wait in a long line to get his pay, but she interrupted. "Where is the money, or have you already wasted it buying sweets in the street?"

Without a word, Joseph laid all but one half-penny on the table. She glared at him. "All of it, young man. I'll not have you stealing from me the very first time you're paid!" Joseph had hoped to save a few pennies in order to buy a book he wanted.

"Please, let me . . ." he began, but she screamed, "No!" Joseph dropped the coin on the table and turned to walk into the other room. As he turned, he bumped the coal bucket with his walking stick, and several pieces of coal went rolling across the floor.

"You ox!" bellowed his stepmother. "Now look what you've done!" Joseph mumbled he was sorry and stooped to pick them up. When Mr. Merrick came a few minutes later, the stepmother angrily told him how unhappy she was with Joseph. She ended her complaint with "If that boy of yours is as clumsy at the factory as he is at home, he'll soon be out of a job."

So it went week after week. His stepmother continually visualized failure for him, and his father never offered one word of encouragement. All the while, Joseph's deformity was becoming more severe. His right arm and hand were so enlarged by now that they were practically useless to him.

He worked hard at his job, and the foreman was pleased with the quality of his work, but as the months passed, Joseph produced less than his quota more often than not. After nearly two years at the factory, he had to quit. A long period of unemployment followed. It was during a time when even an able-bodied man might have had trouble finding work, but Joseph persisted in trying to obtain another job.

Being rejected by potential employers, however, was not as painful as the mocking and criticism he had to endure when he got home. Often his stepmother would accuse him of just wasting time rather than looking for work. Sometimes she would give him only half as much food as the others, saying, "Even this is more than you've earned."

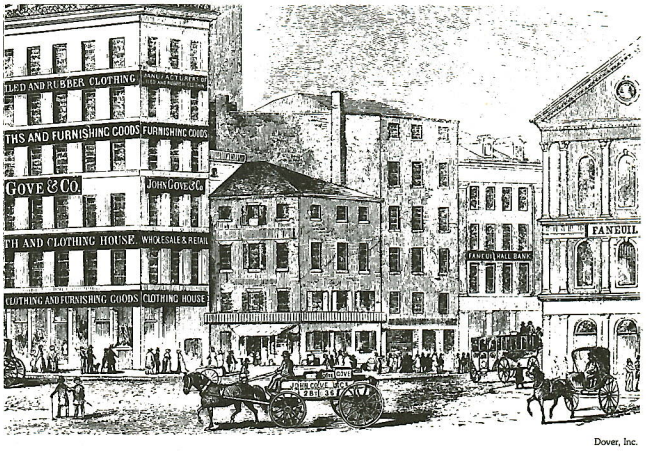
Many days he would stay in the street and go hungry rather than returning home to listen to his stepmother's bitter tirades. When his father finally realized that Joseph was not going to be able to find work, he decided to give the boy an opportunity to earn his keep another way.

Mr. Merrick owned a haberdashery. It was a small store, so he did not need his son to work there, but he had the idea that Joseph could sell goods from house to house. After obtaining a peddler's license for the boy, he prepared a box with a

shoulder strap, filling it with gloves, scarves, and other items from the shop.

Joseph was glad to have something to do, but he soon found that it was not easy to sell the quota of merchandise his father had set. As he limped up and down the streets of Leicester knocking on doors, he discovered that his frightening appearance worked against him even more than when he had gone from shop to shop looking for a job.

By this time the masses of bone on his skull had grown so large that they pulled his facial features out of place. The protrusion of flesh near his mouth made it impossible for him to speak plainly, and most strangers could not understand him.



Dover, Inc.

Joseph was about fifteen when he started peddling things from door to door. Because of his appearance, most people were afraid to do business with him even though he tried to be friendly. He longed to spend the few pennies he earned on things he saw in the store windows as he walked home, but he knew this would infuriate his stepmother.

Often when young Joseph knocked, someone would peek out a window. When they saw who was there, they would refuse to open the door. Even worse, sometimes an unsuspecting maid or housewife would open the door, see his grotesque face, and immediately slam the door without a word. Joseph did not blame them; it was a shock even to him whenever he saw himself in a mirror.

In spite of all this, Joseph managed to sell his quota. Perhaps it was because some people bought things from him out of pity. Some people who did not want to buy would toss a couple of pennies on his tray. He received no encouragement at home, however. He was always made to feel that he had not worked hard enough. He wondered what would happen if he ever came home without having met his quota, but he did not really want to find out.

One evening as it grew dark, Joseph realized he had not sold enough gloves and stockings that day. He was so tired and hungry he did not think he could force his deformed feet to trudge down even one more street. He decided to try, but families were already sitting down for supper. Several people angrily told him to go away.

He started toward home and passed by a food shop. The delicious aroma was too much for him to resist. He went in and bought a piece of meat pie. Now there was even less in his cash box.

After that, he walked even more slowly than usual, but finally he arrived home. He had hardly closed the door before his stepmother came toward him demanding, "Where is the money?" She grabbed the little box from his hand and dumped the coins on the table.

As soon as she saw that he had not sold his quota, she hollered for Mr. Merrick to come to the kitchen. "Look at this! Your worthless boy has been loafing again," she told him. Mr. Merrick glared at Joseph and began to count the money and the merchandise. His anger began to rise as he saw that some of the money was missing.

When Joseph confessed that he had spent a little on something to eat, his father flew into a rage. He took off his wide leather belt and began to beat the boy. Whenever the blows would let up, his wife would urge him on. He did not stop until Joseph was unconscious and bleeding.

When he regained consciousness several hours later, he was lying on the kitchen floor. The household was asleep. Joseph knew he could not stay even one more night in that house. He quietly gathered up his few belongings and slipped out into the darkness.

The year was 1877; Joseph was barely fifteen. His mother was dead. He could not find a job. Now his own father had completely rejected him. He had never felt so alone, but God had not abandoned him. Perhaps during this time Joseph read in his Bible the special promise the Lord gives to orphans: *"A father of the fatherless . . . is God in his holy habitation" (Psalm 68:5).*

Joseph could easily have chosen to be bitter, but through all of these humbling experiences God poured out His grace. The young man accepted it and was able to forgive those who had hurt him deeply. Later someone who knew Joseph wrote that he was "free from any trace of cynicism or resentment, without a grievance [or] an unkind word for anyone."

3 HE LEARNED TO FOCUS ON INNER CHARACTER INSTEAD OF TRYING TO BE "NORMAL" OUTWARDLY.

For awhile Joseph continued trying to sell his wares from door to door, barely making enough money to buy a little food and rent a cot in a cheap lodging house each night. One afternoon as Joseph was wearily making his way from one house to another, he heard a familiar voice calling his name. It was Uncle Charlie.

"Joseph, I've been looking for you for days," he said. "I heard what happened to you at home. Where in the world have you been staying?"

Joseph mumbled the name of the street where the lodging house was located.

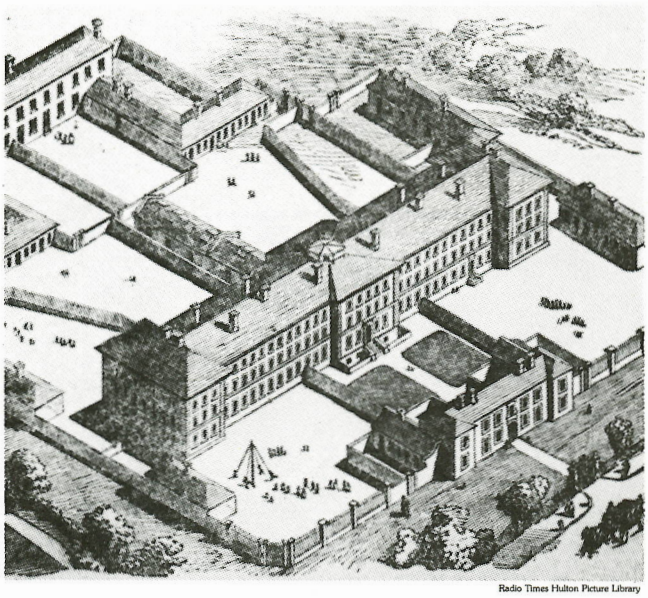
"Oh, no, you can't stay there. Come home with me." He took the boy back to the rooms over his barbershop where he lived with his wife. Three of their four children had died before they were grown. Though they were poor, his uncle and aunt agreed that Joseph could live with them as part of their family. This time Joseph's father did not come looking for him.

Joseph was so grateful for his uncle's kindness that he wanted to do his part. Out to the streets he went again with his tray of haberdashery items. Selling was not any easier, but at least he could go to a home at night where he would find some support and concern.

During the next two years the young man's deformity became still worse. Now it was a usual occurrence for a small crowd to gather around him whenever he went out into the streets. Curiosity-seekers would follow him around as he tried to peddle his wares.

In fact, he was creating such a stir that when it came time to renew his peddler's license, the city officials decided it would be better to keep "such a freak" off the streets. Their action deprived him of what seemed to be the only possible way he had to earn a living.

His uncle and aunt were sympathetic, but Joseph knew that he could not continue as a member of their household, especially since his aunt was expecting another child. The only option he saw was to enter the workhouse, and kind Charles Merrick had to agree. He allowed his nephew to stay until after Christmas, but on December 29, 1879, Joseph Merrick was officially enrolled in the Leicester Union Workhouse.



Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

The typical English workhouse in the 1800s was a sprawling, prison-like structure with walls separating the men from the women and the children from the adults.

As Joseph walked into the vast complex of tall brick buildings surrounded by a high wall, he had the feeling that this place was more like a prison than anything else. Over nine hundred destitute men, women, and children lived there. Joseph could tell right away that it was not supposed to be a pleasant place. The officials were afraid that if the inmates became too comfortable, those who could work would not be motivated to leave the workhouse.

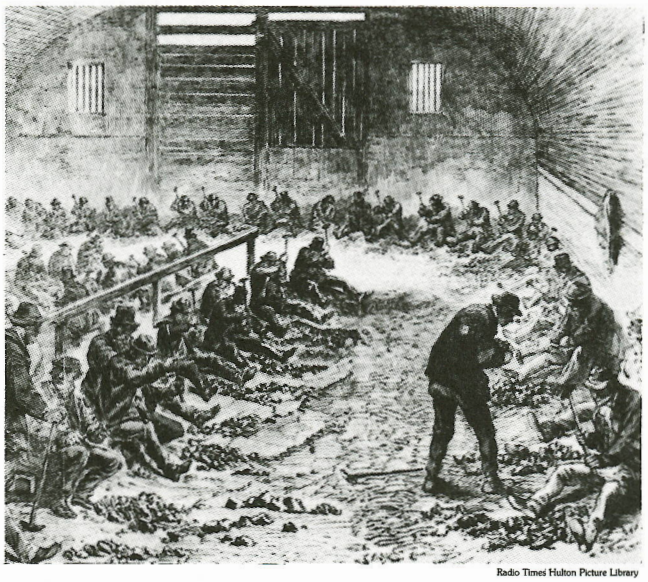
As far as Joseph was concerned, he would gladly have left the next day if he could have found a job. In fact, three months later he did sign himself out of the workhouse. For two days he tried his best to obtain work. Just as before, no one would hire him. More frustrated than ever, he returned to the workhouse. This time he would not be discharged for four years.

Although his basic necessities were provided, he had a horrible existence. He hated the clanging bells that seemed to govern his whole life. The wake-up bell rang at five or six. It rang to summon the inmates to the huge, drafty dining hall, where they all sat at a long table and ate in silence.

The bell rang when the meal was over. It rang to signal that it was time to go to work. It rang at quitting time. Finally it rang at about ten at night as a warning that the gas lights were about to be turned out and the dormitory doors locked.

Everybody was assigned a task. Joseph's job was separating hemp rope into fibers that could be reused. All day long he sat at a table and pounded

with a wooden mallet on old pieces of rope. Then with his fingers he painstakingly pulled apart the individual fibers. Every inmate had a quota. Even though Joseph had only one hand with which to work, his quota was no less than anyone else's.



Radio Times Hulton Picture Library

All the inmates in the workhouse had to work. A common task was breaking large stones into gravel as these men are doing. Those with physical handicaps like Joseph were assigned to somewhat less demanding jobs.

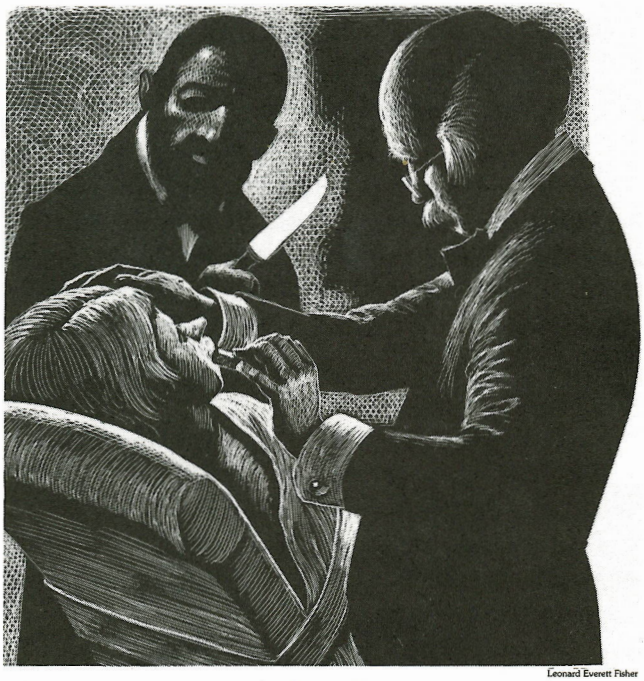
It would have been a hard life anyway, but Joseph's deformity added greatly to his misery. Daily he was subjected to the sneers and crude jokes of other men. At least he could be grateful that the men were segregated from the women even in the dining hall. By this time his face had become so grotesque that it was not unusual for women to scream when they saw him.

Joseph's "elephant trunk," the protruding lump of tissue near his mouth, had continued to grow and was now about eight or nine inches long. He could hardly talk, and it was almost impossible for him to chew his food.

One day during his second year in the workhouse the monotony was broken when an officer came into the workroom and ordered everyone to go to the dining hall. Joseph wondered what was happening. Then he heard the two men who were in line in front of him saying that it must be time for the annual physical all the inmates had to take.

The doctor who examined Joseph told him he would be sent in a few days to the Leicester Infirmary, the county hospital, for surgery. As he pounded hemp that afternoon, Joseph thought about what the doctor had said. Could he dare to hope that these doctors would be able to reconstruct his face? Maybe he would at least be able to eat and talk normally.

Surgery in those days involved a high risk of infection, which often proved to be fatal. Joseph was grateful to escape this complication. Within a few weeks he was back at his worktable. His "trunk" was gone, but he knew that the operation had done little to lessen his disfigurement and nothing to slow the progressive effects of his disease.



Leonard Everett Fisher

Joseph's surgery must have been a frightening experience. Anesthesia was not very effective in those days, and in most hospitals only about half of the patients undergoing surgery survived.

If there was one bright spot in his workhouse life, it was Sundays. He always went to the worship service in the chapel and spent the afternoon reading. He loved to read, and it did not bother him that the only reading material he had was the Bible and books of sermons. Reading God's Word gave him the inner strength he needed to withstand the outward attacks he suffered continually.

Sometime during his fourth year in the workhouse, Joseph began to wonder about the possibility of putting himself on exhibit as a freak. He certainly did not relish the thought of having people stare at him any more than was already happening, but he saw this as a possible means of escape from the workhouse.

Perhaps what made Joseph start thinking along these lines was the opening in September 1883 of the "Palace of Varieties" in Leicester. Owned by Sam Torr, this establishment was a popular new music hall on Wharf Street.

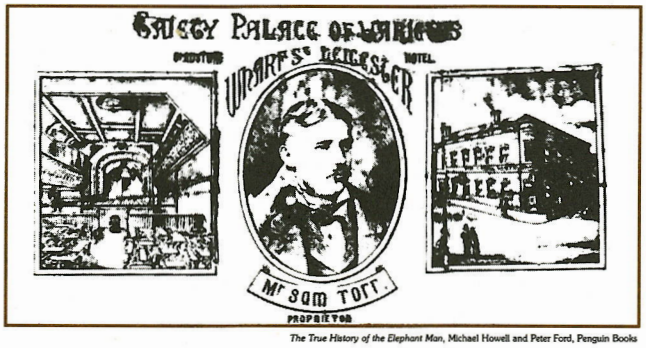
Joseph had heard that Mr. Torr was always looking for "novelties." After agonizing over the decision for months, he finally wrote the showman a letter. To the young man's amazement, Mr. Torr promptly came to the workhouse to pay him a visit. There in the visitors' room he listened with interest to Joseph's story of his mother's encounter with the elephant and how his deformity had developed.

Mr. Torr could see at once that Joseph had real possibilities as a freak show attraction. He also knew that such a show could stay only about a week in one spot before moving on. He told Joseph he would check into the prospects of negotiating with several other showmen he knew in other towns.

Within a week or so he was back to inform Joseph that everything was ready. "Come down to my office as soon as you can get yourself out of this place," he told Joseph. So one Sunday morning in late August 1884, Joseph Merrick exchanged his inmate's uniform for his own clothes and left the workhouse for good.

4 HE LEARNED TO SHOW DEFERENCE EVEN TO THOSE WHO MOCKED AND RIDICULED HIM.

During the next couple of weeks, Mr. Torr and one of the other agents coached Joseph for his first public appearance. It was decided that he would be billed as "The Elephant Man, Half-a-Man and Half-an-Elephant." Joseph must have winced inwardly at the thought of broadcasting the nickname with which he had long been taunted, but he agreed that it would catch the public's curiosity better than anything else they could design.



The True History of the Elephant Man, Michael Howell and Peter Ford, Penguin Books

An old advertisement for the music hall operated by Sam Torr shows the stage where Joseph was first exhibited as "The Elephant Man."

From *The Era*, 26 Oct. 1901

Tom Norman

That autumn "The Elephant Man" was exhibited in several towns around Leicester. It was too late in the season to start on the carnival circuit, so the agents sent Joseph down to London, where a showman named Tom Norman was to make arrangements for exhibitions around the great metropolis. It was a lonely life with few comforts. Joseph's ghastly appearance made him unwelcome at hotels, so he usually had to sleep in a show wagon.

It was probably Mr. Norman who made the disguise for him to wear when he went out in public. The strange-looking clothes attracted almost as much attention as the deformities themselves.

The London Hospital Medical College Museum

Joseph's cap with its heavy veil is still on display at a museum in London.

This outfit included a peaked cap with a short bill. Joseph's head was now so enlarged with bony masses that it measured 36 inches around, so the cap had to be huge. From it hung a thick veil which hid Joseph's face and head. The veil had a horizontal oblong opening in the front just large enough for him to look out with his one good eye. There was also a big cape or cloak which completely covered his twisted form all the way to the ground. To hide his misshapen feet, he wore a pair of bag-like slippers.

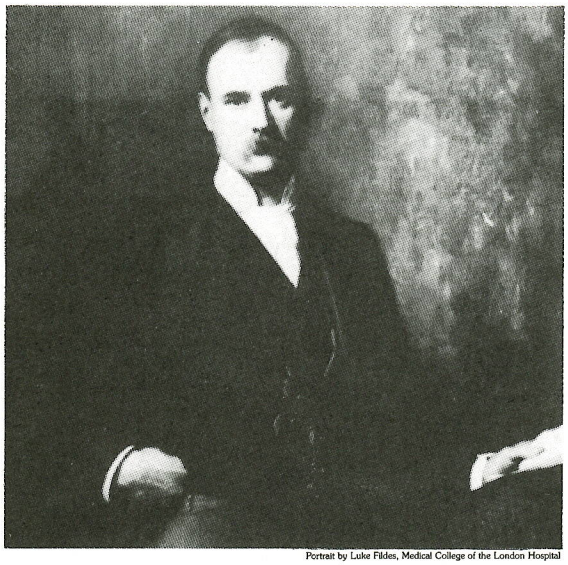
In the beginning, Joseph did not like the idea of hiding his face, but the more he thought about it, he realized that in this way he could avoid offending or scaring people.

The first place where Tom Norman put Joseph on exhibit was a vacant shop he had rented on Whitechapel Road in the middle of the city's East End slum district. A large canvas banner was stretched across the front window of the shop. On it had been painted in garish colors a caricature of a man changing into an elephant. Big, bold letters announced: "The Elephant Man—Great Freak of Nature, Half-a-Man and Half-an-Elephant!" The shop was located across the street from the famous London Hospital, often called simply "The London." A medical college was attached to the hospital.

The London Hospital Medical College

The 690-bed London Hospital was said to be the finest in the whole British Empire at that time.

A brilliant young surgeon named Frederick Treves practiced at the hospital and taught at the college. Although he was only thirty-one years old, Dr. Treves had just that year been promoted from assistant surgeon to full surgeon. He was greatly respected by his colleagues and students.



Portrait by Luke Fildes, Medical College of the London Hospital

Sir Frederick Treves became famous a few years later as the surgeon who removed the appendix of Edward VII on the eve of his coronation as King.

Another doctor who knew that Dr. Treves was particularly interested in rare diseases made it a point to tell him about the freak show across the street. The next day the surgeon took time out of his busy schedule to see for himself. What he saw made such an impression that he had vivid memories of it even forty years later.

Dr. Treves began his description of his first encounter with the Elephant Man with these words: "The far end of the shop . . . was cut off by a curtain or rather by a red tablecloth suspended from a cord by a few rings. The room was cold and dank, for it was the month of November. . . .

"The showman pulled back the curtain and revealed a bent figure crouching on a stool and covered by a brown blanket. In front of it, on a tripod, was a large brick heated by a Bunsen burner. Over this the creature was huddled to warm itself. It never moved when the curtain was drawn back. Locked up in an empty shop and lit by the faint blue light of the gas jet, this hunched-up figure was the embodiment of loneliness. . . ."

"Stand up!" Mr. Norman commanded harshly. His tone of voice sounded as if he were talking to a dog, but this was just part of the showman's attempt to convince the audience that this was truly a man who was half animal.

Robert Geary

As he came closer, the doctor noted that the Elephant Man gave off a very strong, foul smell. The stench was so nauseating that even the doctor had to put a handkerchief to his nose.

As Joseph stood slowly, the blanket slid off his shoulders and fell to the dusty floor. He was wearing neither shirt nor shoes. Dr. Treves saw that Joseph's

chest and back were practically covered with thick folds of rough, warty skin. The contorted features of the face and the massive head with its lumpy outgrowths of bone shocked the surgeon.

In all his years of medical practice in a large city hospital, he had seen many cases of both congenital deformity and injury-caused disfigurement, but when he first saw the Elephant Man he was taken aback. He wrote later: "There stood revealed the most disgusting specimen of humanity that I have ever seen." After a few moments the doctor was able to put aside his emotions and begin making clinical observations. He first realized that the painting outside had led him to expect a much larger creature than the 5-foot-2-inch figure he now saw before him. Joseph seemed even shorter because of the way his spine was twisted.

Dr. Treves noted that Joseph's right arm was enlarged to several times the size of his left. His left arm, in fact, appeared small and delicate. The fingers of his right hand were like "thick, tuberous roots," while the thumb was large and bulbous.

The British Medical Journal, December 11, 1886

The most striking feature was his head. It was as big around as his waist. The doctor was amazed by the huge bony mass projecting from his forehead and the "bag of spongy, fungous-looking skin" hanging from the back of his head.

He described the outgrowth of bone from Joseph's upper jaw: "It protruded from the mouth like a pink stump, turning the upper lip inside out and making the mouth a mere slobbering aperture." A sickening odor came evidently from the pendulous folds of skin that covered his body.

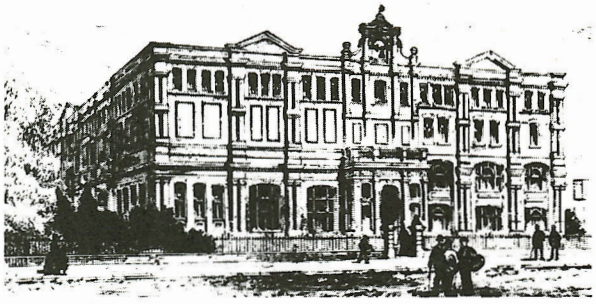
When Mr. Norman first brought the well-dressed gentleman into the shop, Joseph must have wondered why he was interested enough in a freak to pay extra for a "private showing" like this. He listened closely when the doctor began asking Mr. Norman many questions.

Finally Dr. Treves said, "I am a surgeon at the London Hospital across the street, and I would like to examine your Elephant Man more closely. Could you have him at my office at ten tomorrow morning?"

As the two men talked about the arrangements for the next day, Joseph went back and sat down. As he tried to warm himself over the feeble flame, he must have felt a spark of hope stirring within him. Perhaps this doctor could do something to help him; perhaps he could make him look like a normal person.

Dr. Treves walked over to where Joseph sat and gave him a small piece of cardboard. "Here, Merrick," he said. "This is my card. You will need to present it tomorrow morning at the gate so they will let you in." Then he left the shop.

The next morning Mr. Norman and Joseph, wearing his cap and long cloak, got into a cab. It would have been only a short walk to the medical college, but Mr. Norman did not want the sight of Joseph in his disguise to draw a mob and attract the attention of the police.



The London Hospital Medical College

Dr. Treves' study was located in the London Hospital Medical College building.

Joseph was ushered into Dr. Treves' private study. The tall, athletic-looking surgeon greeted him warmly and invited him to take off his cap and cloak. On seeing the grotesque face again, the doctor instinctively drew back. He quickly recovered his composure, however, and began to question the young man about his background and the history of his disease. As was the case with most people who did not know Joseph well, Dr. Treves had a very difficult time understanding his speech.

He soon gave up the effort and started the physical examination. With precision and great detail

Dr. Treves inspected and measured every part of Joseph's deformed figure. The dimensions themselves were bizarre. The circumference of his head was 36 inches. His right wrist measured a full 12 inches around, and his largest finger 5 inches. After the doctor had cataloged every abnormality he could find, he was still not sure what disease Joseph actually had. As far as he knew, it was something that had never before been described in medical literature.

In regard to the Elephant Man's personality, Dr. Treves said he was "shy, confused, not a little frightened and evidently much cowed." Because of Joseph's unintelligible speech the doctor actually assumed that he had been mentally retarded from birth. The doctor thought it better for Joseph if he *were* retarded. To possess the intelligence to fully understand his own predicament, Dr. Treves reasoned, would be almost unbearable.

With the idea in mind that he might publish the facts of Joseph Merrick's condition as a case study in a medical journal, Dr. Treves had photographs made at this time. He also made arrangements with Tom Norman to "exhibit" Joseph at a meeting of the Pathological Society of London a few days later. None of the physicians who attended was able to diagnose the disorder any more precisely than had Dr. Treves. They could say only that it was a congenital deformity.

Transactions of the Pathological Society of London, Vol. 36, 1885

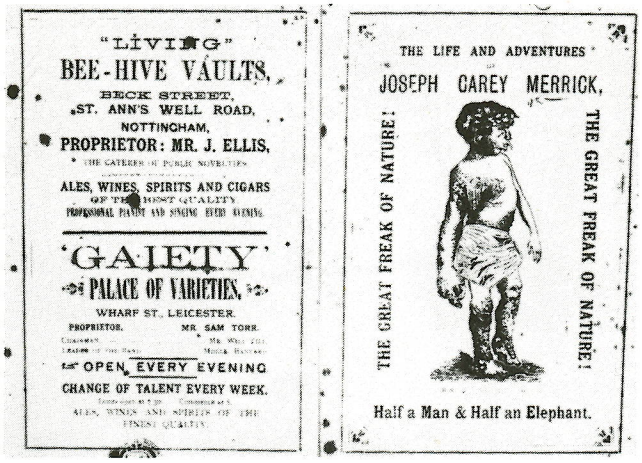
Dr. Treves used photographs along with verbal descriptions to communicate the severity of Joseph's condition.

Doctors have since learned that Joseph suffered from a disorder of the nervous system called *neurofibromatosis* (NOOR-oh-fie-broe-muh-TOE-sis). Although it is a relatively common disease, most cases are not as severe as his. It is incurable, but surgery can help remedy the effects of it in some cases.

Joseph was deeply disappointed as he realized that in spite of Dr. Treves' compassion, the surgeon could do nothing to improve his condition. Once again reminded that the Creator was in control, Joseph did not allow his disappointment to become bitterness.

After the night of the Pathological Society meeting, Dr. Treves lost contact with Joseph. That same week he noticed that the freak show on Whitechapel Road had been closed by the police. He assumed he would never see the deformed young man again, but he did proceed with his plans to publish an article. It appeared in the 1885 edition of the society's journal along with engravings made from the photographs.

Very little is known for certain about what happened to Joseph during the next year and a half. Probably Mr. Norman took him back to Leicester for the winter. In Leicester a small pamphlet entitled *The Life and Adventures of Joseph Carey Merrick* was printed to be sold to people attending the freak shows.



British Library

The drawing on the front cover of the pamphlet containing Joseph's story was based on the photographs taken at the London Hospital. On the back cover were advertisements for the music halls owned by two of Joseph's managers.

It is likely that Mr. Torr and the other agents continued to exhibit Joseph at music halls in various towns in central England. With the coming of spring they began traveling to the many fairs held around the country, but they could never stay in one place very long.

Though it was not a comfortable or easy life, Joseph was able to begin saving some money. The

showmen gave him a certain percentage of what they earned, and he probably received a little from the sale of the pamphlet. In several months' time he had put aside about fifty pounds. This nest egg would have been sufficient for his livelihood for at least a year.

However, it was becoming increasingly difficult for the showmen to run the traveling freak show. The police and local magistrates were tightening their control on that type of operation to the point that it was no longer very profitable. The showmen did not abandon Joseph but attempted to make other arrangements for him.

Someone had the idea of sending him to tour the countries across the English Channel. They thought there would be fewer restrictions there than in England. So Joseph set out for the Continent with an Austrian man serving as his manager.

The tour was a failure from the beginning. They had problems with the police in practically every town. This struggle continued for several months until they arrived in Brussels, Belgium, during June of 1886. Once again their show was closed by order of the local authorities. The next morning Joseph woke up late. Sunshine was streaming in the windows of the cheap hotel room he and the manager were sharing to keep expenses low. He noticed that the other man was not there. Looking slowly around the room, he saw that all the man's clothes and belongings were gone, too. He suspected that he had been abandoned. It did not take long for him to discover that his savings of fifty pounds had disappeared as well.

Alone and penniless in a strange city, Joseph almost panicked until he reminded himself that God would take care of him in this distressing situation. He could hardly make himself understood in England, much less in a foreign country where he did not know the language, but somehow he managed to pawn the few possessions he had left in order to buy a ticket back to London.

First, he took a train to the coast. It was a miserable trip. Other passengers tried to shoo him away. People on the platform gaped at the windows at every stop, but leaving the traincar was even worse. A crowd would gather, and people would start speaking harshly to him. Joseph could only guess what they were saying, but he felt sorry for them because he knew that their rejection of him meant they had trouble accepting God's design for themselves.

Robert Geary

Getting off the train at Ostend, Joseph was almost immediately surrounded by a flock of street urchins. Taunting and jeering, they tried to lift up his cloak and pull off his cap.

When he finally reached the ferry, the captain refused to let him board the vessel. Perhaps he was afraid Joseph had a contagious disease or would hurt the other passengers. The poor lonely man wandered back into the terminal, having no alternative but to sit and wait and pray.

As he sat in a corner hoping no one would bother him, Joseph saw through the slit in his veil that a man wearing a suit was coming toward him. He was afraid the man was going to tell him he could not sit there.

Joseph lifted his head in amazement when he heard the gentleman speaking to him in English. "Do you need help?" the man asked in a kind voice. Joseph was able to make him understand what had happened and where he wanted to go.

The man advised him to take another train to Antwerp instead. There he could catch a boat to England. He helped Joseph purchase the appropriate tickets, perhaps even paying part of the fare himself. So Joseph set off again, somewhat encouraged by the man's kindness.

The next evening Joseph embarked from Antwerp on the 150-mile trip across the North Sea. He spent most of the night huddled in a dark corner on the deck trying to avoid the other passengers. The last leg of the journey was the early morning train ride from the port of Harwich into the city of London.

Joseph was too upset to sleep. As the gray countryside slipped by outside his window, he cried out to God in his spirit. He did not know where to go or what to do next. He had no money and probably had not eaten in days. Exhausted physically and spiritually, he had no one to whom he could turn. The only place he could go was back to that hated Leicester workhouse, which was nearly a hundred miles away, and he had no way to get there even if he did decide to go.

Joseph arrived at the Liverpool Street Station at about seven in the morning. What happened when he got off the train was what almost always happened to Joseph in public places, except that this time he had lost his will to hobble away and hide. People stared and pointed. A crowd began to gather. The murmured comments turned into catcalls and jeers. Before long the police arrived.

The bobbies quickly escorted the foul-smelling, cloaked figure into the third-class waiting room and held the doors shut against the curious mob, but they could make no sense out of the strange, high-pitched sounds that came from behind the gray flannel veil. Finally, Joseph fumbled in a pocket with his good hand and brought out a small, dirty piece of cardboard.

One of the policemen took it and studied the faded print. It proved to be the card of someone who worked at the London Hospital, which was not far away. A messenger was dispatched right away to see if the gentleman could come and assist the police in their dilemma.

Liverpool Street was still filled with the traffic of people going to work as Dr. Treves hurried to the train station that morning.

Within half an hour, Dr. Frederick Treves was pushing his way through the crowd outside the waiting room door. He had been wondering all the way to the station about the strange situation in which the police needed his help, but as soon as he entered the room the familiar stench told him that the figure huddled in the corner was the Elephant Man. One look also told him that Joseph Merrick was at the end of his physical resources and desperately needed someone to take care of him.

After speaking briefly with the police, Dr. Treves agreed to take Joseph with him. A couple of officers helped the young man hobble out of the station and clamber into a hansom. The surgeon climbed in after him, and off they went. On the way to the hospital Joseph felt so relieved at finding someone who was willing to help him that he fell fast asleep.

Because Joseph's disorder was incurable, there was no medical treatment the London Hospital could offer. He could not be admitted to a ward as a regular patient but would have to be put in one of the private rooms, which were normally reserved for people with infectious diseases. Yet, he had to be helped.

When they arrived at the hospital, Dr. Treves gave orders for the new patient to be bathed, fed, and put to bed in a small room in the hospital attic. Joseph was very grateful for everything that was done for him.

The next morning Joseph could hear the nurses bringing the breakfast trays to the wards on the floor below. Then the door to his little room swung open. The nurse looked up cheerfully from the tray she was carrying and was about to say, "Good morning." When she saw Joseph's face, he realized that no one had warned her about his appearance.

Joseph cringed as a look of horror swept across the nurse's face and the dishes and silverware crashed to the floor. She turned and ran screaming down the corridor. Joseph felt bad—not because she had hurt his feelings but because his face had frightened her.

During the next few days Dr. Treves took time to give Joseph another thorough physical examination. What he found only confirmed what he had suspected since the moment he saw Joseph in the train station: his condition was worse than when he had first examined him.

The True History of the Elephant Man, Michael Howell and Peter Ford, Penguin Books

When Joseph was admitted to the London Hospital in June 1886, his condition was much worse.

When Dr. Treves compared his original photographs to the way Joseph looked now, it was easy to see that the disease had intensified. Parts of his body which had been free of tumors were now covered with ugly skin growths. His feet were more swollen, and he had developed bronchitis and a slight heart condition.

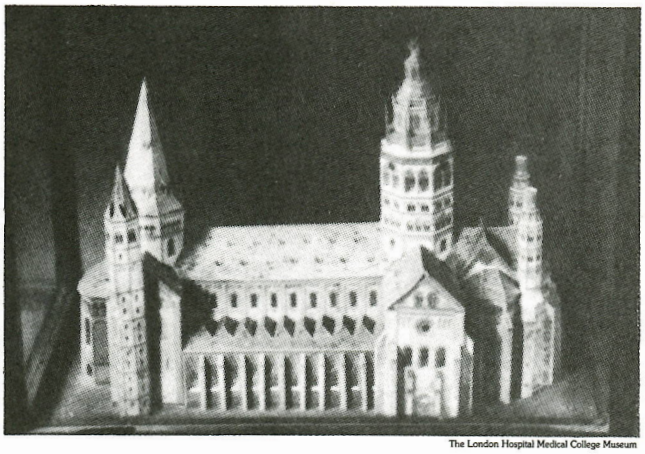
5 HE LEARNED TO EXPRESS GRATEFULNESS IN ACTIONS EVEN WHEN HE COULD NOT IN WORDS.

After a few days of rest and good food, Joseph was feeling much better. His recent experiences, however, had left him very nervous and fearful. He was especially anxious about strangers coming into his room and seeing him for the first time. Just a knock on the door would cause him to start trembling.

Gradually Joseph began to calm down. As the faces of the doctors and nurses became more familiar to him, he started trying to be friendly to them. They soon discovered that if he bathed once or twice a day, the horrible odor from his skin was barely noticeable. Dr. Treves became more accustomed to Joseph's strange, high-pitched speech and soon was able to understand most of what he said.

Almost everyone who came to know Joseph was impressed with his gentle personality and the sincere gratitude he expressed for what was being done for him. He soon made friends with his nurses. They sometimes brought him model kits from the toy store, and Joseph would spend hours putting together the little cardboard buildings.

Because he could use only his left hand, the nurses often had to help him. As soon as he finished one of these models, he would give it to one of the hospital staff to show his appreciation. Later he spent several months constructing an intricate cardboard model of the cathedral he could see from the window of his home.



The London Hospital Medical College Museum

Joseph expressed his deep gratitude to the famous actress Madge Kendal, who had sent him many gifts, by painstakingly designing and building this detailed scale model of a church, which he then presented to her.

By the time winter came, Joseph's presence in the hospital was beginning to be a problem. Officially he should never have been admitted, and certainly he could not stay on indefinitely. The doctors were not actually treating his disease, and he was occupying space that was needed for regular patients. No one was in favor of putting him back out on the street to fend for himself, but something had to be done.

Joseph knew his situation was precarious. Having been forced by circumstances to leave every home he had ever known, he dreaded the day when Dr. Treves would tell him he had to leave the London Hospital.

On several occasions the chief surgeon had spoken of the Elephant Man's case to the hospital administrator, Mr. F. C. Carr Gomm. Mr. Carr Gomm had agreed to try to find a place for Joseph at another institution. Some weeks later he reported to Dr. Treves that the Royal Hospital for Incurables would not accept him as a patient. He later received the same reply from other hospitals.

At that point Mr. Carr Gomm took the unprecedented step of appealing to the British public on Joseph's behalf. He wrote a letter to the editor of *The London Times*. His account of this "most exceptional case" was published on December 4, 1886. It began: "There is now, in a little room off one of our attic wards, a man named Joseph Merrick, aged about twenty-seven, a native of Leicester, so dreadful a sight that he is unable even to come out by daylight to the garden. He has been called 'The Elephant Man' on account of his

terrible deformity. I will not shock your readers with any detailed description of his infirmities. . . ."

The letter went on to explain how Joseph came to be in the hospital and why he could not stay there. "Terrible though his appearance is, so terrible indeed that women and nervous persons fly in terror from the sight of him . . . yet he is superior in intelligence, can read and write, is quiet, gentle, not to say even refined in his mind."

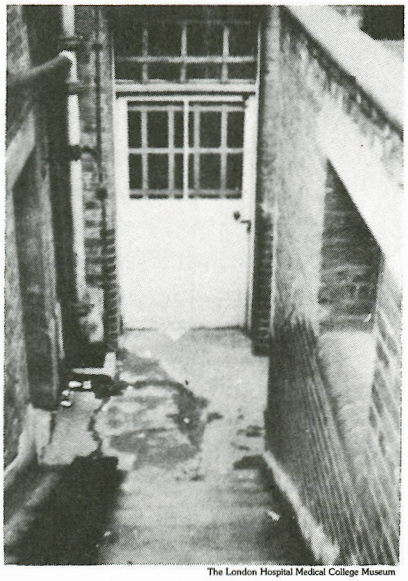
He closed by asking the readers to suggest a fitting place for Joseph and to contribute to his financial support. The response was immediate and generous. As other newspapers carried the appeal, even more people began sending money to help pay Joseph's expenses. One man even offered to give fifty pounds annually for Joseph to be allowed to stay at The London.

Over two hundred pounds was received in just the first week. As donations continued to pour in, the hospital governing board officially decided that Joseph could continue to live at the hospital. Plans were then made to remodel a couple of rooms into a small private apartment for Joseph.

Tucked away in the basement of the east wing were two storerooms, with a small window looking out on what was known as Bedstead Square, a large, sunny courtyard where workmen repaired and repainted the big iron bedsteads. The larger room had a fireplace and was used as a bedroom/sitting room. The other room was turned into a bathroom. Joseph was delighted with his new home. It was far enough removed from the flow of hospital activities to give Joseph the privacy he greatly desired.

In an addendum to an article about his case in *The British Medical Journal*, Joseph later wrote the following: "I should like to say a few words of thanks to all those that came forward with help and sympathy after my case was made known by Mr. Carr Gomm in the public press. . . . I have a nice bright room, made cheerful with flowers, books, and pictures. I am very comfortable, and I may say as happy as my condition will allow me to be."

The only problem with his new living quarters was that he had a hard time believing he would really be allowed to stay there. One day when Dr. Treves came for his daily visit, Joseph looked at him with timid eyes and asked, "Where are you going to move me to next?" The doctor gently explained to him, as he had many times before, that this was his home and no one was going to move him to another place against his wishes.



The London Hospital Medical College Museum

The entrance to Joseph Merrick's rooms at the London Hospital looks like this now. The apartment is no longer in use.

6 HE LEARNED TO SMILE WITH HIS SPIRIT EVEN WHEN HE COULD NOT WITH HIS FACE.

Once Dr. Treves had done what he could to provide physical comforts for the Elephant Man, he began to be concerned about his social development. He observed that Joseph was still very nervous about meeting strangers, especially women. This was understandable because he had had practically no contact with women for the past seven years.

With the publicity generated by Mr. Carr Gomm's letter to the *Times*, a number of people requested permission to visit Joseph in the hospital. Up until this time, only men had come.

One day during his daily chat with Joseph, the surgeon casually mentioned that he had a friend, a lady, who wanted to meet Joseph. At first the Elephant Man was silent. He could not imagine why a lady would want to come see him.

Dr. Treves explained, "Well, I've told her a lot about you. She knows that you love to read. She does, too. How about next Thursday afternoon?"

Joseph agreed somewhat hesitantly. He was afraid his face would scare her. The doctor told Joseph not to worry.

Since women were repulsed by his face more than men, Dr. Treves had felt it was especially important that Joseph have the opportunity to relate to women (other than his nurses) who would treat

him as a human being rather than as an animal. After carefully considering whom he might ask to go visit Joseph, Dr. Treves had finally decided to ask Mrs. Maturin, a young, attractive widow.

"He just needs a lady to smile at him," the doctor had explained, "to look him in the face and not turn away in disgust. Do you think you could do that?" Mrs. Maturin was ready to accept the challenge, fully understanding how important this was to Joseph's feelings about himself.

That Thursday afternoon, Joseph sat in front of the fireplace, waiting anxiously. He heard footsteps on the stairs outside his door, but it was only one person. Then he recognized Dr. Treves' quiet knock. "Ah, Joseph," said the doctor, "if you're all ready for your visitor, I'll bring her down."

"I think so," said Joseph. He was wearing the new suit they had had specially tailored to fit his enlarged right arm and twisted torso. Dr. Treves stepped briskly over to Joseph and straightened his tie a bit. "You look great," he said. "I'll get Mrs. Maturin."

The London Hospital Medical College Museum

Joseph always wore his "Sunday best" to receive visitors.

As they entered the room, the doctor watched the young woman closely to see if her face would register any negative reaction to what she saw. It did not. She smiled gracefully, stepped over to Joseph to shake his hand, and said, "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. Merrick."

Joseph, however, was too overcome with emotion to speak. All at once he began to sob, and Dr. Treves had to usher Mrs. Maturin out. Shortly afterward Joseph confessed to the surgeon that, as far as he could remember, it was the first time a female stranger had ever smiled at him, much less taken his hand.

It is not certain whether Mrs. Maturin ever called on the Elephant Man again, but her brief and awkward visit that day marked a turning point for Joseph. Her genuine acceptance of him renewed his confidence in his ability to relate to others in spite of his handicaps.

After that many women, as well as men, came to visit. Among them were some of London's celebrities. It even became fashionable among the duchesses and countesses to be able to say they had met the Elephant Man.

At first Joseph was hesitant about receiving strangers as guests, but gradually he became more relaxed and confident in his role as host. After a time he even began striking up conversations with the workmen outside his window in Bedstead Square.

When Dr. Treves had first examined Joseph, he observed that Joseph's face was incapable of smiling or otherwise expressing emotion. It reminded him of "a block of gnarled wood." Now he was amazed to see how Joseph could communicate a smiling spirit. This was possible because the Elephant Man had come to the point of thanking God rather than blaming Him for his condition. Since he had stopped focusing on his unchangeable defects, the people he met soon did, too.

As Joseph learned more about the world, there was one thing he wanted to experience for himself. He told Dr. Treves that he would like to spend some time in the country. This wish seemed quite impossible to fulfill, but through the generosity of one of Joseph's new friends it became a reality.

One of the wealthy ladies who sometimes visited him offered to let him stay in a cottage on her rural estate outside Northampton. For six wonderful weeks Joseph had the freedom to wander through the woods and meadows. His frequent letters to Dr. Treves always included an enthusiastic account of some woodland creature he had seen and a sampling of the wildflowers he had picked and carefully pressed between the pages of a book.

Each summer for three years he was able to spend part of the summer there. He always returned from his holiday refreshed but glad to be back home at The London.

Dr. Treves was amazed at how joyful and contented Joseph had become now that he was no longer the object of scorn and ridicule. Several times he commented to the doctor, "I am happy every hour of the day." Because his mouth was so deformed, Joseph could not whistle or sing to express his inner joy, but often when the doctor would come into his room unannounced, he would find the young man "beating time on the pillow to some tune that was ringing in his head."

One day in May of 1887, Joseph was feeling more excited than usual about the visitors he was to receive that afternoon. He had put on his newly pressed suit and polished his huge orthopedic shoes until they shone. Everything in his little apartment had been cleaned and carefully arranged. He sat in his armchair and tried to rehearse what he would say when the guests arrived. He could not remember a word of what he had planned to say.

No wonder the Elephant Man felt a little nervous. His visitors that day were to be the Prince and Princess of Wales! Any Englishman would have considered it an honor to meet the future king and queen of his country, but for someone who had been an outcast for most of his life it must have been almost incredible.

Princess Alexandra officially opened the new Nurses' Home at the London Hospital on May 21, 1887. Later she and her husband visited Joseph.

Princess Alexandra sat in a chair next to Joseph so they could talk. She could not understand his high, flute-like speech, so Dr. Treves interpreted. Prince Edward walked over to the mantle and examined the photographs and souvenirs, all special gifts Joseph had received from his many visitors.

As they were leaving, the Princess expressed the desire to visit again, and she did so several times in the next three years. Every December she sent Joseph not one, but three or four beautiful Christmas cards. Prince Edward also sent gifts from time to time.

If Joseph had the habit of reading the chapter of Proverbs corresponding to the day of the month, one verse from his reading the next day would have really caught his attention: *"He that loveth pureness of heart, for the grace of his lips the king shall be his friend" (Proverbs 22:11).* His lips had no grace physically, but he communicated a gracious spirit because of his pure motives and forgiving attitude.

By 1890 Joseph's condition was rapidly deteriorating. The debilitating effects of his disease were increasingly obvious to his doctor-friend. Now the only way he could sleep was in a sitting position, propped up by pillows with his huge head resting on his knees. Whenever he would lie down, the weight of his head would make him feel pressure on his throat as though he was suffocating. Several times he mentioned his desire to sleep lying down.

As his physical weakness increased, Joseph seemed to gain spiritual strength. He had become good friends with the hospital chaplain. They often had long talks about spiritual matters. The Bible and the prayer book, which he had always loved to read, became even more precious to him.

The chaplain had made special arrangements so Joseph could attend worship services in the hospital chapel. He sat in the vestry where no one could see him, but by opening the door a couple of inches he could hear everything. He particularly enjoyed the hymn-singing.

On Easter Sunday, 1890, Joseph attended services in both the morning and the evening. The resurrection hymns must have reminded him of that great promise to Christ's followers: *". . . We shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption . . ." (I Corinthians 15:52–53).*

Before the week was over, Joseph Merrick had laid aside his corruptible body. That Friday morning when his nurse checked on him, he had been reading in bed and seemed fine. Another nurse brought his lunch tray at 1:30.

When one of the doctors came to check on him at 3 o'clock, he saw the food was untouched. Joseph was dead. Apparently he had decided to try to sleep lying on his back. His head was so heavy that it sank into the pillow, causing dislocation of vertebrae in the neck. Death was quick and painless.

PROJECT

Discuss how this story has helped you thank God for unchangeable features you previously may have resented.

Date completed _____ *Evaluation* _____