

‘The Two Brothers’ part II transcript

‘The Two Brothers’ is one of the shorthand dictation exercises with a longhand title in the notebooks of Dickens’s shorthand pupil, Arthur Stone, at the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). We have been working on this exercise for some time: in autumn 2021 the Dickens Decoders created a partial transcript for the first page, which was improved by a ‘filling in the gaps’ challenge in early 2022. In May we invited solvers to work on the second page and find out what happened next in this ghost story about ‘two old bachelor brothers’.

The response to this challenge was fantastic, resulting in the transcription of **35 new symbols** and the **first complete transcription of a page** with all the symbols deciphered! These discoveries are credited on our [‘Roll of Honour’](#). Many thanks to everyone who took part!

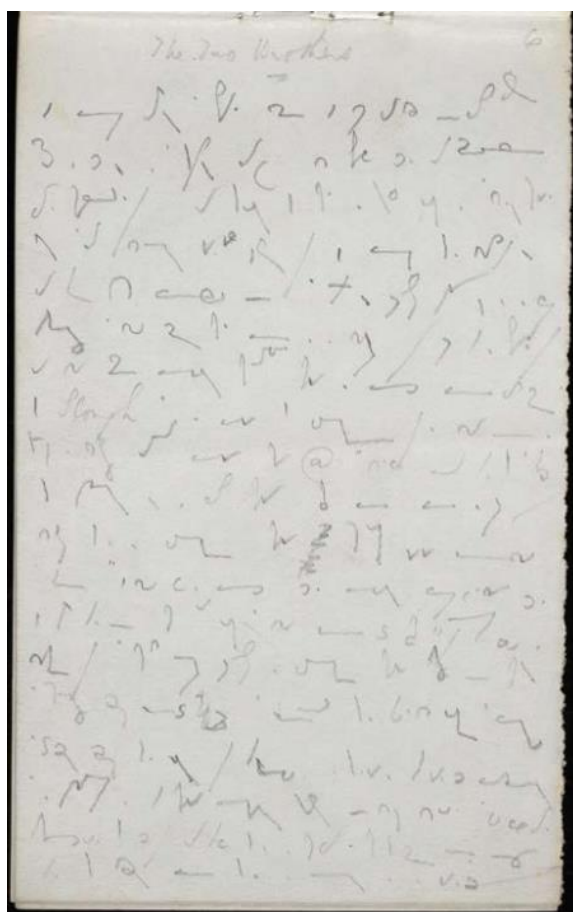


Figure 1: The first page of a shorthand dictation exercise titled ‘The Two Brothers’.
Image © The Free Library of Philadelphia [ref: cdc5890009]

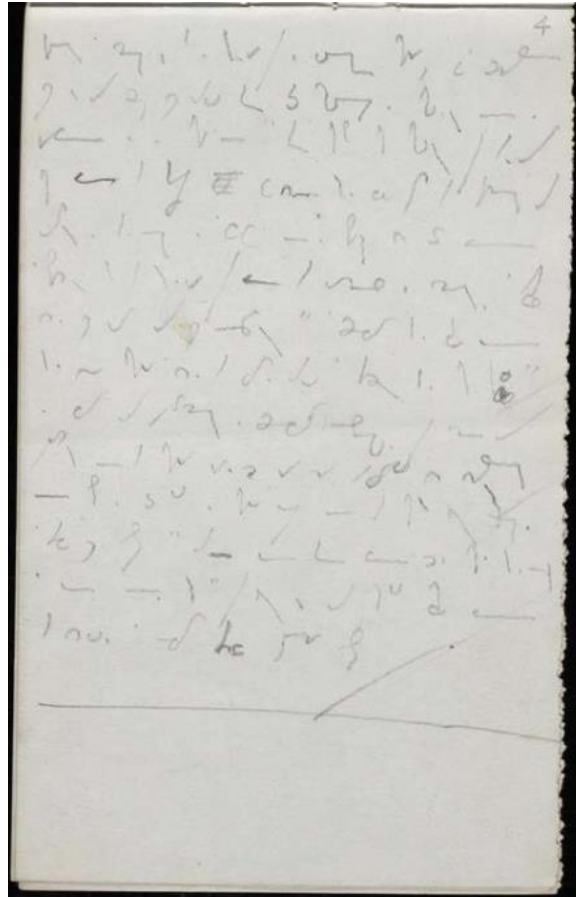


Figure 2: The second page of a shorthand exercise titled 'The Two Brothers' – our focus for the May #SolveItDickens Challenge. Image © The Free Library of Philadelphia [ref: cdc5890009]

We can now put part I and part II together and read 'The Two Brothers' story for the first time in more than 160 years! For part II, we have also provided a line-by-line transcript with the accompanying shorthand below.

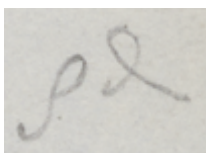
The transcription of the text has led to another exciting discovery. As eagle-eyed solvers **Amy D** and **Elizabeth Agnew** were the first to notice, this story is very similar to one of the ghost stories narrated in Charles Dickens's 'To Be Read at Dusk', first published in [The Keepsake](#) in 1852. In both tales a dying man appears to his brother as an apparition, with the supernatural sighting confirmed on attendance at the deathbed, when the dying brother announces 'you have seen me before, tonight'. The main differences are in the frame story and some of the specifics: in 'Dusk' the story is told by a German courier who is directly involved in the action, the brothers are named, and the locations and some of the details are changed. Why was this story in Dickens's mind in 1859-60? This is another mystery! In light of this discovery, we need to explore the Dickens-Stone teaching and dictation process in more detail.

Part I

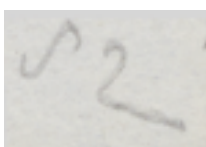
1. I once heard a story when I was living in [**A**]
2. from the mouth of a deceased judge which struck my imagination
3. very forcibly. He told it by the dying light of a wood fire
4. with a high wind roaring outside. I ought to premise that

5. he had been counsel in an action that afterwards shared of the gains
6. attending a will made by one of the wards. This is the story:
7. There were two old bachelor brothers of whom one [**B**]
8. at Slough and the other at London. They were in the
9. habit of visiting each other for a week or so at a time.
10. It happened that the Slough brother, being on one of these
11. visits to the London brother, felt rather unwell
12. said 'I will go home. My old housekeeper¹ me.
13. I shall soon be all right and will then come back. Once again they
14. parted. A few nights afterwards, the London brother being in bed
15. and finding himself uncomfortable and unable to sleep, lighted a candle
16. and composed himself to read. Suddenly the door of his room opened
17. and an appearance of his brother, dressed in white, pale and looking very
18. attentively at him. He spoke to the figure but it made no answer.
19. So it passed on to the end of the room

Missing/uncertain symbols:



Symbol A (Scotland, Slough, South?, and Southsea are among the suggestions put forwards, although we are yet to find a definitive answer)



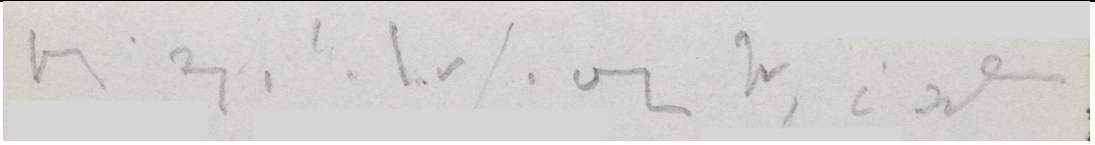
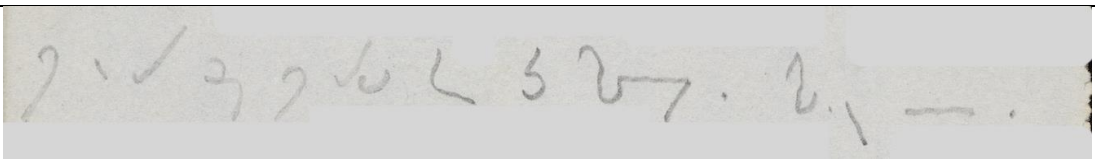
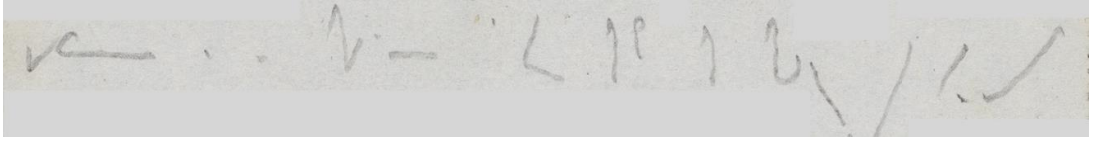
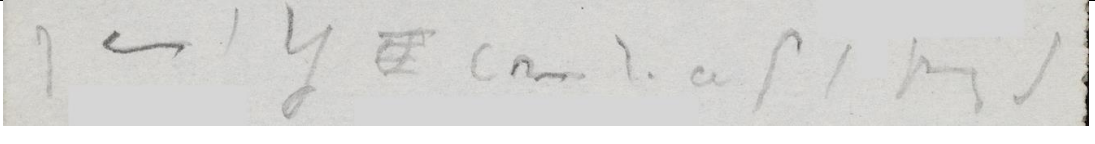

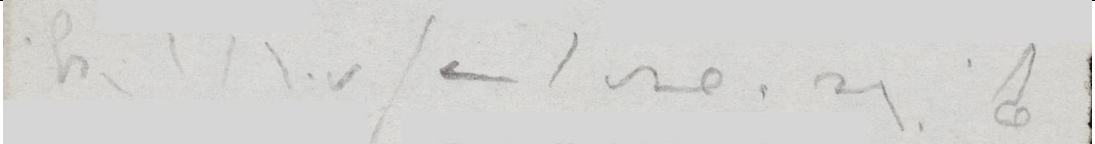
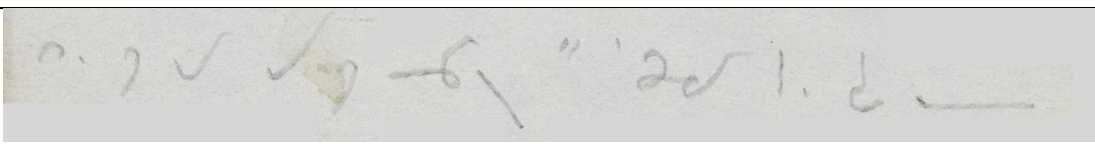
Symbol B (likely to be <rp> <psd> = 'reposed')

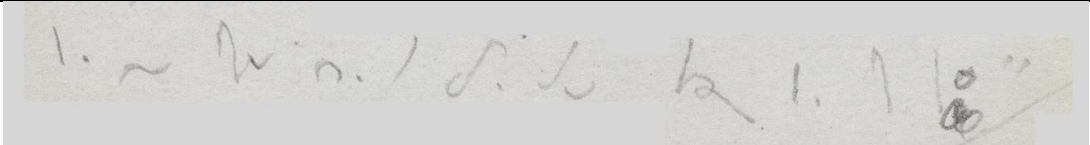
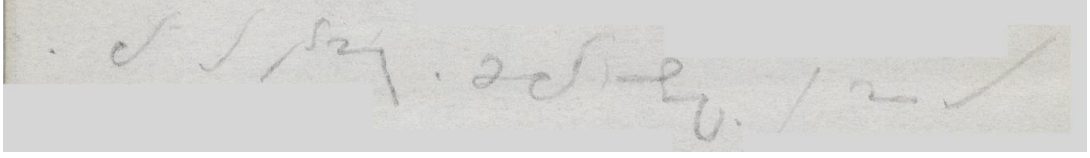
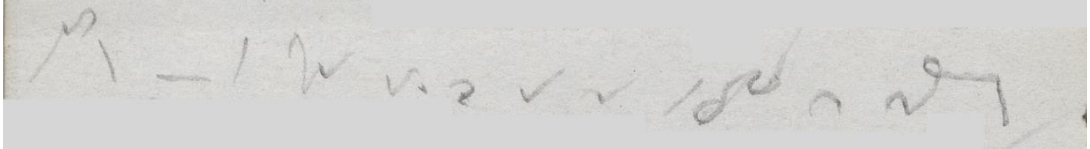
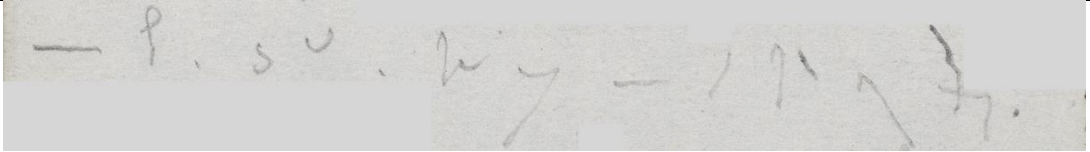
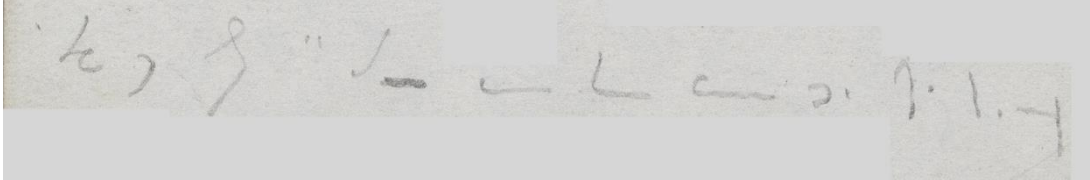
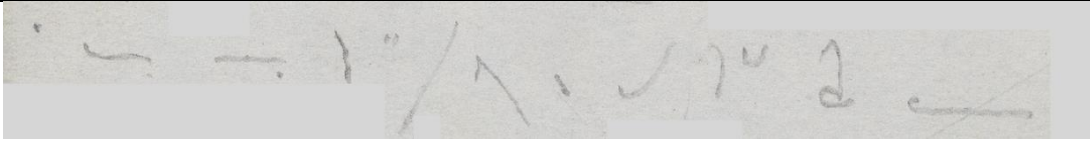
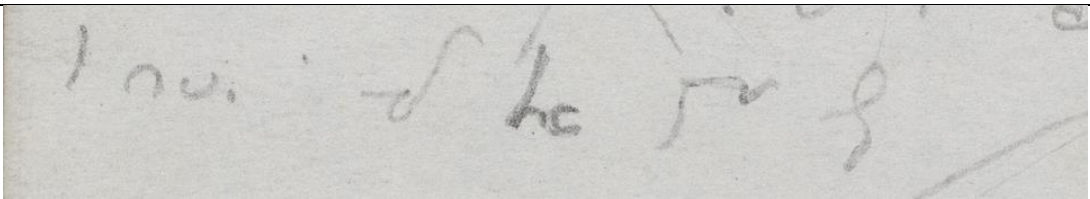
Part II

1. turned and went out at the door. The London brother's immediate impression
2. was that his mind was ill, had some fullness of blood in the
3. region of the brain and had best be bled. So/As he
4. put on his dressing gown to call up his servant., He/he
5. heard the sound of a carriage in the street which came over
6. and stopped at his door. On his opening the window and asking
7. who was there, he was answered 'A messenger to take you
8. to your brother who is very ill (and) supposed to be dying.'
9. Of course, he accompanied the messenger instantly. When he
10. arrived in his brother's room, there were several people present.
11. On sight of them all, the brother rose in his bed with difficulty
12. and spoke these words: 'John, you have seen me before tonight
13. and you know it !' With that, he fell back on
14. his pillow and never spoke another word.

¹ No shorthand symbol between 'housekeeper' and 'me'.

SOLUTION

Line no.	
p.2, line 1	
	turned and went out at the door. The London brother's immediate impression
p.2, line 2	
	was that his mind was ill, had some fullness and blood in the
p.2, line 3	
	region of the brain and had best be bled. So/As* he
p.2, line 4	
	put on his dressing gown to call up his servant., He/he*
p.2, line 5	
	heard the sound of a carriage in the street, which came over
p.2, line 6	
	and stopped at his door. On his opening the window and asking
p.2, line 7	
	who was there, he was answered: " A messenger to take you

p.2, line 8	
	to your brother who is very ill (and)* supposed to be dying " .
p.2, line 9	
	Of course he accompanied the messenger instantly. When he
p.2, line 10	
	arrived in his brother's room , there were several people present .
p.2, line 11	
	On sight of them all , the brother rose in his bed with difficulty
p.2, line 12	
	and spoke these words : " John, you have seen me before tonight
p.2, line 13	
	and you know it " . After/With that, he fell back on
p.2, line 14	
	his pillow and never spoke another word .

Professor Bowles's notes on the transcription

- line 1 4th + 5th symbols symbol (vertical lines that looks like the symbol for a <t>) stand for 'out' and 'at' respectively; the symbol that looks like a Roman letter <i> stands for 'immediate'
- line 2 'fullness of blood' was used as a medical expression in the mid-19th century to explain the cause of headaches and other ailments
- line 3 'bled' refers to the common Victorian practice of withdrawing blood from patients to cure illnesses (bloodletting)
- line 3/4 asterisks show ambiguous grammar in this sentence; the penultimate symbol in line 3 looks like <s> + dot = 'so', but this would require a full stop after 'servant'. The fact that there is no line marking a full stop in the shorthand means that we either put one in and make two sentences or we make one continuous sentence by viewing the dot as a mistake and reinterpreting the <s> symbol as standing for <as> (i.e without a dot)
- line 5 two tricky phrasal verbs in this line; my view is that:
- 'carriage IN the street' sounds better than "carriage ON the street"
 - 'carriage ... came OVER and stopped' is better than 'came ON and stopped'
- line 6 'opening THE window' and 'opening A window' both okay
- line 8 the grammar of the sentence needs 'and' but there is no dot marking it
- line 11 the first symbol makes more sense as 'on' rather than 'in'
- line 12 I originally read the brother's first words as 'I know you have seen me ...' but I think it must be 'John, you have seen me', which mirrors the words of 'To Be Read At Dusk' using 'John' rather than 'James' (which is interesting)