

on his table. SCROOGE goes into the office. The door is imaginary—when it opens or closes, DICKENS rings a small bell. SCROOGE goes to inner office. BOB follows with a coal scuttle.)

SCROOGE. Coal, sir? You want *more* coal? I saw one lump in the grate. That's quite enough. Begone.

(Shivering, BOB returns to his office. SCROOGE hangs up his coat and hat. Scrooge's nephew FRED bursts in. He is a ruddy, robust, energetic, young man; well dressed.)

FRED. Merry Christmas, Bob.

BOB. Thank you, Mr. Fred.

 **FRED** (*goes into inner office*). A merry Christmas, Uncle. God save you.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug.

FRED. Christmas a humbug, Uncle? You don't mean that.

SCROOGE. I do. Merry Christmas! What reason have you to be merry? What right? You're poor enough—

FRED. What right have you to be dismal? What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough.

SCROOGE. Bah. Humbug!

FRED. Don't be cross, Uncle.

SCROOGE. What else can I be when I live in a world of fools? What's Christmas time to you but a time for buying presents without money? A time for finding yourself a year older and not an hour richer? A time for balancing your books and having every item for twelve months, written in red ink? If I could work my will, every idiot who goes about with "Merry Christmas!" on

his lips should be boiled in his own pudding and buried with a stake of holly in his heart.

FRED (*amused*). Uncle!

SCROOGE (*definitely not amused—a sneer*). Nephew! Keep Christmas in your way and let me keep it in mine. (*He turns away with a ledger.*)

FRED (*following him*). Keep it? But you don't keep it.

SCROOGE. Permit me to leave it alone, then. And take a lesson. Much good Christmas has ever done you.

FRED. There are many good things from which I haven't profited, I daresay. Christmas is among the best. I have always thought of Christmas—apart from its sacred name and origin, if anything belonging to it can be apart from that—I have always thought it, I say, as a good time. A kind, forgiving, charitable, pleasant time. The only time I know when men and women seem to open their shut-up hearts freely, and to think of each other as if they were fellow passengers to the grave, and not another race of creatures bound on other journeys. And therefore, Uncle, though it has never put gold or silver in my pocket, I believe that it *has* done me good, and *will* do me good, and for the sake of Christmas, and my mother, I say God bless it. (*BOB, who has stopped poking at the grate to listen, applauds.*)

SCROOGE. Let me hear another sound from you and you'll keep Christmas by losing your situation. (*BOB pokes the grate furiously.*)

FRED. Don't be angry, Uncle. Come dine with us tomorrow.

SCROOGE. Sir, I will see you—get this clear—I will see you in hell first. (*BOB drops the poker.*)


FRED. But why? We have never had any quarrel to which I've been a party.

SCROOGE (*almost blurts a reply, then quickly recovers*).
Good afternoon, sir.

FRED. I am sorry to find you feeling this way. But I made this effort in homage to Christmas, and I'll keep my Christmas humor to the last. So—(*A beat to "wind up"—then the hard ball:*) A MERRY CHRISTMAS, Uncle!

SCROOGE (*explodes*). Good afternoon.

FRED (*dodging SCROOGE's cane*). And a happy New Year.

 SCROOGE. GOOD AFTERNOON! (*FRED darts into outer office. He and BOB exchange boisterous "Merry Christmas!" greetings, which puts SCROOGE in a fury.*) Look at Cratchit. A clerk earning fifteen shillings a week—with the burden of a wife and family in Camden Town—and he talks about a merry Christmas. They should lock him up in the mental hospital.