

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

Ebenezer Scrooge, Dicken's protagonist, is a miserly and mean-spirited business-man, a "covetous old sinner", who leads a solitary life, obsessed with money. He begrudges his employee any sort of comfort and has no sympathy to the struggles of others — even poverty-stricken children, living a tough and deprived lifestyle.

Scrooge's philosophy of life is summed up at Christmas time: "I wish to be left alone." "I don't make merry myself at Christmas, and I can't afford to make idle people merry." He resents Christmas as a wasted day - a day when "I pay a day's wages for no work". It is a time of "picking a man's pocket". 35

"The door of Scrooge's counting house was open that he might keep his eye upon his clerk, who in a dismal little cell beyond, a sort of tank, was copying letters. Scrooge had a very small fire, but the clerk's fire was so very much smaller that it looked like one coal. But he couldn't replenish it, for Scrooge kept the coal-box in his own room; and so surely as the clerk came in with the shovel, the master predicted that it would be necessary for them to part. Wherefore the clerk put on his white comforter and tried to warm himself at the candle; in which effort, not being a man of strong imagination, he failed.

"A Merry Christmas, Uncle! God save you!" cried a cheerful voice. It was the voice of Scrooge's nephew, who came upon him so quickly that this was the first intimation he had of his approach.

"Bah!" said Scrooge, "Humbug!"

He had so heated himself with rapid walking in the fog and frost, this nephew of Scrooge's that he was all in a glow; his face was ruddy and handsome; his eyes sparkled, and his breath smoked again.

"Christmas a humbug, uncle!" said Scrooge's nephew. "You don't mean that, I am sure?"

"I do," said Scrooge. "Merry Christmas! What right have you to be merry? What reason have you to be merry? You're poor enough."

"Come, then," returned the nephew gaily. "What right have you to be dismal?" What reason have you to be morose? You're rich enough."

Scrooge having no better answer ready on the spur of the moment, said "Bah!" again, and followed it up with "Humbug" ...

"What's Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills 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 in 'em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will," said Scrooge indignantly, "every idiot who goes about with 'Merry Christmas' on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!"

"Uncle!" pleaded the nephew.

"Nephew!" returned the uncle, sternly, "keep Christmas in your own way, but let me keep it in mine."

"Keep it!" repeated Scrooge's nephew. "But you don't keep it." ...

"Much good has it ever done you!" (said Scrooge)



Dickens takes Scrooge on a mystical journey into the barren wasteland of his soul. Firstly, Jacob Marley, his former deceased business partner, haunts him. He is wearing a "heavy chain" — the chain I coiled in life. Marley's chains are a reminder of his ruthless business practices. Dickens critiques Marley's attitude that places greater priority on profit and greed than on care and good-will. (47-48) Marley's greatest regret is that he is ensnared and cannot help those who appear to suffer. He warns Scrooge to be careful of such hostility towards others.

Again the spectre raised a cry, and shook its chain and wrung its shadowy hands.

"You are fettered," said Scrooge, trembling. "Tell me why?"

"I wear the chain I forged in life," replied the Ghost. "I made it link by link, and yard by yard; I girded it on of my own free will, and of my own free will I wrote it. Is its pattern strange to you?"

Scrooge trembled more and more.

"Or would you know," pursued the Ghost, "the weight and length of the strong coil you bear yourself? It was full as heavy and as long as this, seven Christmas Eves ago. You have laboured on it, since. It is a ponderous chain!" (to gird; to invest with strength; power; ponderous: of great weight; heavy; massive.)

Scrooge goes on a journey with the Three Christmas Ghosts - the Ghost of Christmas Past who takes him back to unpleasant memories of his school-life, to the joys of his former fiance, Belle, and to a joyous Christmas party prepared by another employer, Fezziwig. The Ghost of Christmas Present takes him to the sparse Christmas table of his employer, Bob Cratchit and his family. His son, Tiny Tim suffers from malnutrition. He witnesses first-hand the suffering of children, symbolised as Ignorance and Want.

They were a boy and a girl. Yellow, meagre, ragged, scowling, wolfish; but prostrate, too, in their humility. Where graceful youth should have filled their features out ... a stale and shrivelled hand, like that of age, had pinched, and twisted them, and pulled them into shreds.

Scrooge started back, appalled. Having them shown to him in this way, he tried to say they were fine children, but the words choked themselves, rather than be parties to a lie of such enormous magnitude.

"Spirit! Are they yours?" Scrooge could say no more.

"They are Man's," said the Spirit, looking down upon them. "And they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased. Deny it!" cried the Spirit, stretching out its hand towards the city. "Slander those who tell it ye! Admit it for your factious purposes, and make it worse. And bide the end!" (94)

Scrooge's reckoning at the end

"Why bless my soul," cried Fred, "who's that?"

"It's I. Your Uncle Scrooge. I have come to dinner. Will you let me in, Fred?"

Let him in! It is a mercy he didn't shake his arm off. He was at home in five minutes. Nothing could be heartier. His niece looked just the same. So did Topper when he came. So did the plump sister, when she came. So did every one when they came. Wonderful party, wonderful games, wonderful unanimity, wonderful happiness!

But he was early at the office next morning. Oh he was early there. If he could only be there first, and catch be coming late! That was the thing he had set his heart up.

And he did it; yes, he did. The clock struck nine. No Bob .. He was full eighteen minutes and a half, behind his time.

"Hallo!" growled Scrooge, in his accustomed voice as hear as he could feign it. "What do you mean by coming here at this time of day?"

"I am very sorry, sir," said Bob. "I am behind my time."

"You are?" repeated Scrooge. "Yes. I think you are step this way, if you please."

"Now I'll tell you what, my friend," said Scrooge, "I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer. And therefore," he continued leaping from his stool and giving Bob such a dig in the waistcoat that he staggered back into the Tank again: "and therefore I am about to raise your salary!" ... I'll raise your salary, and endeavour to assist your struggling family, and we will discuss your affairs this very afternoon, over a Christmas bowl of smoking bishop. Bob! Make up the fires, and buy another coal-scuttle before you dot another i, Bob Cratchit!" (116)