

FRED: He's a comical old fellow. That's the truth, and not so pleasant as he might be. However, his offenses carry their own punishment, and I have nothing to say against him.

FRED'S WIFE: I'm sure he's very rich, Fred. At least you always tell me so.

FRED: What of that, my dear? His wealth is of no use to him. He doesn't do any good with it. He doesn't even make himself comfortable with it.

FRED'S WIFE: I have no patience with him. *(other ladies express the same opinion)*

FRED: Oh I have! I am sorry for him; I couldn't be angry with him if I tried. Who suffers by his ill whims? Himself, always. Here, he takes it into his head to dislike us, and he won't come and dine with us. What's the consequence? *(letting them know he is teasing)* He doesn't lose much of a dinner. . . .

FRED'S WIFE: Indeed, I think he loses a very good dinner. *(everyone in agreement)*

FRED: Well! I am glad to hear it, because I haven't any faith in these young housekeepers. What do you say, Topper?

TOPPER: I'm afraid I am only a bachelor - a wretched outcast. I have no right to express an opinion on the matter; isn't that true, dear Miss Phoebe?
(he tries to take her hand, she demurs)

FRED'S WIFE: Do go on, Fred. He never finishes what he begins to say!

FRED: *(with a laugh)* it is true, I was only going to say that the consequence of his taking a dislike to us, and not making merry with us, is that he loses some pleasant moments, which could do him no harm. I am sure he loses pleasanter companions than he can find in his own thoughts, either in his moldy old office or his dusty chambers. I

plan to give him the same chance every year, whether he likes it or not, for I pity him. He may rail at Christmas till he dies, but he can't help thinking better of it - I defy him - if he finds me going there, in good temper, year after year, and saying, "Uncle Ebenezer, how are you?" If it only puts him in a mind to leave his poor clerk fifty pounds, that's something. And I think I shook him yesterday.

(laughs happily. All join in. Fred begins to sing Wasail. after a few words the others join in. At the finish of the song all together. . . .)

ALL: Wasail!!

PHOEBE: A game! Blind Man's Buff!

JOHN: I'll shall be the Blind Man first.

ALL: (general agreement)

(Fred blindfolds John. Topper finds John and whispers to him. John nods and transfers the blindfold to Topper. Topper avoids catching anyone buy Phoebe. When he catches her he pretends not to recognize her.)

TOPPER: I know it's a lady. *(kisses her cheek)* That delightful cheek could only belong to Miss Phoebe.

PHOEBE: Truthfully, Topper, you were unable to see, weren't you? *(all laugh)*

JOHN'S WIFE: Another game, Yes and No, Fred. Yes and No.

FRED'S WIFE: Yes, Fred, Yes and No. Give us a subject.

JOHN: Yes, Fred. What shall it be, animal, vegetable or mineral?

FRED: Alright then, my subject is animal.

JOHN'S WIFE: Does it grunt?

FRED: Yes, . . . sometimes.

JOHN: Sometimes. . . ? Does it growl, then, more often than it grunts?

FRED: Yes! More often than not. Growling is really its main form of discourse.

PHOEBE: Does it live in London and walk about the streets?

FRED: (*teasing*) Phoebe, . . . that is two questions at once. Which do you want answered?

TOPPER: Oh come Fred, if the answer to both questions is the same, either affirmative or negative, it really wouldn't be two for the price of one.

FRED: The answers are Yes and Yes.

FRED'S WIFE: Lives in London, Fred? Then may we assume that it is not a savage animal?

FRED: You may not. (*laughing*) My subject is indeed quite savage at times.