

The Modern Scrooge of Scrooge and Marley

He sat opposite to me in a London restaurant. He was a little old man with a pointed nose, thin lips, white hair, and grizzled, wiry bristles on lips and chin.

He was thin and shrivelled, but his cheeks were puffy, his meagre body was paunchy. He ate with unpleasing gusto a heavy dinner of several courses; he drank an expensive wine, and when he had finished his dinner he selected two of the most expensive cigars on the cigar-waiter's wagon.

It was then that the little old man,

smiling with after-dinner amiability, opened conversation in a thin, grating voice:

"Nasty, clammy night," he squeaked. "Nothing like a good dinner to keep the fog cut. Will you take a cigar with me?"

It is embarrassing to be offered a cigar by a stranger at a restaurant table; it is still more embarrassing to refuse it. I lit the cigar with an awkward impromptu that I felt it wrong to smoke such a brand in war time.

"War time. Humbug!" snapped the

old man. "I'm sick of all this talk about 'war time.' We are told to do without this, to do without that. I can understand people economising who have got to economise. I haven't! I don't mind telling you (the old man chuckled gleefully) that I am one of the people who have not been hit by the war. If it wasn't for that villainous, unjust, excess-profits tax I should have made a devilish good thing out of my turnover. But I've done well enough. So what reason have I to be stingy?"

"But the point is," I resumed, "that there is only a certain amount of food coming into the country; not enough, in fact, to go round. Ships are scarce, freights are mountainous, transport and dock labour are insufficient, food prices are rising and rising."

"Let 'em rise," cackled the old man cheerfully, "as far as I am concerned, I can still afford to pay them."

"Yes, you can," I answered, "but millions cannot. And every big dinner one man eats means a scanty dinner or a dear dinner, for perhaps ten poorer men."

"Bah! Humbug!" he snapped. "You have been taken in by this crusade of the war economists. What won't they stop next? The latest cry is against Christmas Day."

"No, not against Christmas Day," I corrected, "but against the huge Christmas dinner. People can surely keep Christmas happily without eating more than they want (I began to warm up.) I am not a prig, nor a wet blanket, nor a 'Scrooge' (the old man started and looked at me narrowly). I love Christmas Day and I intend to keep Christmas Day, war or no war. But I am jolly glad to find a patriotic excuse (the old man sneered) to escape Christmas dinner. It bored me when I was a boy; it bores me even more now I am grown up. It isn't even English. The orgy known as the 'Christmas dinner' was introduced into this country."

"Go on; when?" sneered the old man.

"About sixty years ago—from Germany! It is a pagan German was-sail, sir, suited to the German's love of the table. It is a blotch on the symbolism of the holiest day in our calendar. People can feast together, reunite in family happiness, keep Christmas merrily and lovingly without—"

"I don't want to hear any more," cried the old man. "It doesn't influence me. I'm going to keep my Christmas as usual. I've given my Christmas orders to the tradesmen already. There may be a scarcity this year (he leered,) so I'm coming in early before the prices rise. I've ordered a 23lb. turkey, a big Melton Mowbray pork pie, a—"

"Don't give me the list," I interposed. "It would bore me. Moreover, I believe that you are speaking in jest."

"I am not joking," said the old man.



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"I don't care what people think of my opinions. There is my card, sir," he ended angrily.

He pushed a card across the table. It read:

EBENEZER SCROOGE.
Scrooge and Marley.

"You are Scrooge!" I said in amazement.

"Not the Scrooge you mean," he answered, fixed me with his red eyes. "I am his son. And I carry on my father's traditions."

"No. That you don't," I said wrathfully. "He was bad enough in his meanness. You are worse in your extravagance. I'm not so sure that you don't do more harm than your father did."

The old man glowered at me for a minute and did not reply. Then his thin, weakened face suddenly altered. He looked pitiful, haunted. "Yes," he said huskily. "I suppose I am as bad as he was. It's in the blood. There's a kink in us Scrooges. We are doomed to go counter to the rest of the world and the good of the world. Just as my father was mean and avaricious in those happier days when a man only brought harm and suffering to those around him by his meanness—so am I wasteful and extravagant in these days when a man brings harm and suffering to his fellows by wastefulness and extravagance. That's why I shall keep Christmas wrongly, as in a different way my father kept it wrongly. I am the new Scrooge. I am no better than the old Scrooge. I have as little love for my fellows."

"Let me be Tiny Tim and reform you," I smiled.

The old man grunted something, called the waiter, paid his bill, spoke to me a harsh "Good night, sir," and went out into the night and fog.

Homes Instead of Orphanages NEW YORK SCHEME.

The New York Charities Department will begin early next month to place orphaned and other dependent children under the age of 8 years in families of their own religious faith instead of in private institutions. A Children's Home Bureau has been organized for this purpose.

Commissioner Kingsbury said yesterday: "I have secured a contribution of approximately \$150,000 from philanthropic citizens interested in the proposition for which the Department of Charities is standing—namely that a real home with a real mother in it, however humble that home may be, is a better place for a child than the best managed orphan asylum in the country."

"This plan is the plan of the White House conference of 1909, approved by every religious denomination there represented, Catholic, Jews and Protestants. It also was suggested some years ago by the Mayor and Comptroller. The keynote of the White House conference was expressed in President Roosevelt's message to Congress of February 15, 1909, in these words: 'Home life is the highest and finest product of civilization. Children should not be deprived of it except for urgent and compelling reasons.'

"Since that time progressive States all over the land have translated into action the programme adopted at the White House. The City and State of New York have gradually moved forward in the wrong direction, increasing the number of children committed to institutions, enlarging congregate institutions in taking the child from the home in order to fill up these institutions."

"The new Children's Home Bureau of the Department of Charities now proposes to place in families, paying board when necessary, the children who become public charges just above the age of 2, including as large a proportion as possible of those between the ages of 2 and 7 inclusive. The entire administrative expense of this work will be borne by private funds. No pains will be spared in the careful selection of homes, and all children will be subjected to a most painstaking examination in an effort to fit the individual child in the individual home. In placing children in foster homes the department will see to it that they are placed with families of their own faith."

Vander—I thought your limousine was painted.

Asterwal—So it was but it has to be painted again. I ordered it done in neutral colors, and the idiotic workmen painted it red white and blue.

THE HOMELY POTATO.

To clean a vinegar cruet fill the cruet with finely chopped potato skin, cork tightly and let it stand in a warm place three days; then turn the skins out and rinse the cruet with warm water and borax.

To clean rusty knives, use a raw potato dipped in brick dust.

Potato parings dried in the oven are good to kindle fires, as they light easily.

To clean carpets grate a raw potato and rub over the surface of the carpet and finish off with a clean cloth wrung out in warm water.

To clean dresses grate two raw potatoes into a pint of cold water, strain through a sieve, add another pint of

water and let it settle. Dip a sponge into the water and rub the soiled garment carefully, afterward rinsing with clean water.

To make light bread mash a boiled potato and add to the flour.

For corned beef hash chop a raw potato and add to the meat.

To clean mud spots from silk, after washing thoroughly rub soiled places with a raw potato.

To cleanse hands from vegetable stains, rub with a slice of raw potato.

"It must injure a sleight of hand artist to explain his tricks."

"Not at all. Now take the latest expose in high finances."

"What of it?"

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