THE ADVERTISER

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Publishers and Proprietors.

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CHRISTOPHER CRINGER.

A Christmas Story of a Miser and His Turkey.

BY MARGARET G. H. REYNOLDS.

Christopher was a miser.

We all know what that means, for this little planet of ours is prodigal of the animal.

He had the identical tight lips you would expect to see on a man of his type. His nose was generous only in size, for speculation and hard bargaining were written all over it. His small, greedy eyes were always stealing side looks, as if on the alert for unwary game.

In a mean little shanty, standing bare and cheerless on one of the bleak heights of the town, he lived quite alone, with no companion but his money and his thoughts. He had never married, being possessed of a mortal dread of matrimonial expenses; his days were invariably passed in cheating whom he could, and planning how, by "hook or crook," to increase his gains; his evenings in counting the costs and gloating over his possessions, and his nights in dreaming that he was robbed or the bank had failed. No one of his acquaintances ever attempted to ask Cringer for a penny; they would as soon think of scaling the moon as overcoming his shrunken hearted avarice. Strangers might innocently alight on him with a charitable subscription list, and Cringer, bound not to lose the opportunity of saying a good thing for himself, would declare, with the look of a martyr, that he had half the poor of the neighborhood on his hands, not to mention the small fortunes customarily paid in at the church gatherings, whereupon the stranger in question would take his leave, scrupulously refraining from pressing such a charitable soul.

It was coming panic time; never were there promises of a harder winter. The poor went about the street with scared faces, and the rich held fast to their income, and tried to make it do double service.

Stowed away in a miserable attic lived one of Cringer's tenants, a poor widow, with only one child. Her hands were worn thin from the washboard, and her form, once, no doubt, robust and well-shoped, now emaciated, drooping, and covered with scant rags.

Signed the neighbors as she passed. "May the good God look to her needs."

Cringer was this woman's brother, and she his only living relative. Nevertheless, if she failed in promptly paying her rent no more mercy was likely to be shown her than to any other of the struggling tenants. So the sad time came when she began to tremble for consequences. There was no use in looking around the room for anything to sell. Not a bit. A pittance would buy the bed of straw, the broken stool, and the one cup and saucer. As for lamps or oil, those were the luxuries of the sweet long ago.

"Come, Wilhelm," she half wailed, pinning a blanket fragment over the child's shoulders, and lifting him in her arms; "we'll go to Cringer; there's nothing else to be done; and, after I tell him how it is, if he wants to turn us out to die in the snow, why, let him;" adding in an undertone, "I don't know but it would be as well, after all."

Down went her famished form, step after step, descending feebly the dark, narrow stairs, the little hungry child clinging frail and wild to her neck.

Cringer was just sitting down to his gruel when the rap sounded on the door, and echoed with startling clearness through the silent house.

"Save the mark!" said he, "this may be some forward beggars wanting something to eat, which, thanks to my good sense, I have no notion of obliging them with," and scowling his brows together he strode down the stairs and opened the door with an angry jerk.

When he saw his sister and the pinched-visaged little child crouched shivering on the threshold his jaw fell, and threatened never to take its proper shape again, for he half guessed the cause of her visit.

"Well!" he said, in a voice like crackling thorns, "what's the matter now?"

"I can't walk another step, Christopher," panted the freezing sister, "you'll have to help me up stairs. I walked the way against the cutting wind; I shouldn't wonder if I were going to die," and her teeth chattered dolefully as she looked despairingly around her and tried to rise.

"If she dies," thought he, "there'll be the funeral expenses to pay; of course, for appearance sake, if nothing else, I'd have to undergo cost of burial." "Well, get up!" he bawled, "why don't you get up?"

"Christopher, you must carry Wilhelm; I'm all kind of numb and feeble," she said, with a half moan, firmly believing she hadn't another ten minutes to live. On hearing this, Cringer, after delivering a small volley of grumbling epithets, and consigning the child to foreign regions, hoisted it under his arm, meal-bag fashion, and proceeded to push its mother on before him, with a grip that made her beseech of him to be gentle.

The heat of the room wasn't much to boast of, but it revived the mother and child, while Cringer, seemingly utterly indifferent to their presence, sat in dogged silence, his hands over the grate, which contained a few coals, carefully surrounded with ashes to prolong their life.

The clock ticked lonesomely through the cheerless room, and the gnarled branches of a tree, that seemed to straggle over the dismal roof in sheer pity, tapped peremptorily on the frosty panes.

Cringer looked up startled, and met Gretchen's joyless eyes.

"I can't pay my rent, Christopher," she said at last. "So I've come to tell you that it isn't my fault. I've traveled a many weary journey, my brother, in search of work, but always, always in vain;" and her low voice faltered, and a convulsive sob stifled further utterance.

"There, now, if you're going to bawl," roared the affectionate brother, "I want to see no more of you; if there is anything I hate more than another, it is to see a woman make a cry-baby of herself. It 'pears mighty strange that other folks find enough to do; look at the tenant on the same flat with yourself. *She* pays her rent up fair and square; how is it that she gets along and you can't?"

"She is more fortunate than I am, Christopher, that's all," said Gretchen, rising, the hot tears falling on her thin rags, and now and then making wet, starry spots on the miser's floor. "I thought I would come and tell you any how, that you might know it wasn't my fault. Good-by." And, drawing her thin shawl about her, she took her child once more in her arms, and, eager to escape from a place which held no welcome for her, slowly, sadly moved toward the door.

"You're sure," said Cringer, following her to the threshold with a sudden fear that after all she might die and put him to expense. "You're sure you are all right, eh? That is, you don't feel particularly sick or anything of that sort?"

The sister paused in wonder at this anxiety manifested for her health. Neglected as she had been, it sounded like sweet music to her to be questioned with such apparent solicitude. Nevertheless when she looked at her brother's hard face there was something there, which took the value from his words, and caused her to say, although her limbs were bending beneath her with weakness and her heart seemed icy and lursting:

"I am quite well, Christopher, or I won't press you for the rent at present, but of course you must expect to pay it soon's you can, to help me along with my taxes; good-by; good-by t' ye, Gretchen," and he closed the door upon her with a smile that frightened her, and peeped after her through the windows, and watched the snow fall about her and her child until they disappeared from sight, and then ran his hand nervously through his wiry hair and shambled back to his gruel.

Somehow, as night fell, her large dark eyes, wild with the hollowness of hunger, haunted him, and the little spent Wilhelm's wail seemed to fill the lonely room. He rose from his chair and shook his shoulders and paced the crumbling, jagged apartments restlessly. A long, dark mahogany cupboard stood in one corner, and by way of escaping from his present guilty state of mind he unlocked it, and lifting from its shelf a stingy-looking vial raised it to his mouth, and took from thence a draught of brandy.

"Ah!" he said, as he smacked his lips and laid it down, "that warms me! that rejoices me? but I mustn't grow fond of it; oh, no," shaking his head, "no, no, it costs money."

He was about to close the cupboard again, when his eye, kindling with savory reminiscences, rested on something. It was the skeleton of a leathery old gobbler that had followed him for years, and which, when too aged to walk, he had killed and made a meal of, with a view of lightening his butcher bill. He lifted it now between his fingers, and, after carefully examining it to see there was nothing left to pick, threw it on the hearth, determined when morning came it should help light the fire. Then he locked his cupboard, put the key carefully under his pillow, and sat down before the grate to think of his money, and how much he was out by his sister's unpaid rent bill. Then he began to wonder if she had got home safe, adding aloud, "I've done my share in not pressing her for the rent; she's lucky not to be out on the sidewalk to-night instead of under a warm roof. Yes, it stands to reason, it must be warm; warmer at any rate than outdoors would be, even if she hasn't a fire; well, if she hasn't, that's her look-out I don't see why I bother myself thinking over it. If I never existed she would have to get along without me, I suppose."

In this strain he continued for some time for the purpose of easing his conscience, which never before seemed to start up and approach him as now, when suddenly the air around him appeared to thicken to a black mass, and rising in the midst stood the gobbler, stretching its long skeleton neck, over which a thin life-like skin drew itself until it covered the whole body.

Cringer started and shivered as if something cold had been poured down his back, especially when the gobbler began to bristle with pinfeathers that shone like sharp needles of fire and stalked toward him, flames spouting from his big round eyes.

"You know me, Cringer!" it said, in a tone that would admit of no denial.

"I have the honor, indeed," said Cringer, thinking it best to be polite, whereupon he bowed meekly and rubbed his hands with a ghost of a smile, as he edged stealthily away, with one eye on the door and the other on his visitor.

"That's no go, Cringer; come back and sit just where I found you," said the gobbler.

"Oh, certainly, by all means," trembled poor Christopher, still backing toward the door with a succession of respectful bows that threatened to tumble him. "I would be happy of your company indeed, were it not that business calls me elsewhere, business of *great importance*, upon honor."

At which overture the gobbler poured fourth a wild, ridiculous laugh that caused Cringer to leap in the air with terror and sent mocking echoes resounding through every corner of the thin old shanty, adding, "What's the business? The poor, I suppose? Maybe you're going to will them your gruel. Come, old fellow, get on my back!"

"Your back!" bawled the miser. "I—I think I'll do very well where I am."

At this juncture his barnyard friend took a threatening stride toward him, and bristled all over in a way that made poor Cringer shake in his shoes.

"Is not my back a fine one? I think (here the gobbler rubbed his toe slightly up the side of his nose), I think, if my memory serves me, there was a time when you liked my back very well, eh, boy?"

"Your Honor," faltered the miser, thinking to flatter his old friend by high titles, "your Honor'll admit you were pretty well advanced in years, and likely to die soon. I didn't eat you out of ill-will or anything of that kind, I'll take my oath on't. Of course—" and here he experienced a sudden qualm of the limbs. "I hope, of course, sir, you're not making that out as a reckoning against me?"

"There's reckonings enough made out against you," the gobbler said, significantly. "Ask me no more questions, but do as I bid you. Get on my back."

Cringer was quite certain now that, to use his own expression, "'twas all up with him."

To disobey the all-powerful agent of a defunct gobbler could be influenced by it, he sank on his knees, overcome by the extremity of his feelings, and besought his visitor to take a shilling and call it square, but the latter, before Cringer could recover his breath, straightened up, and, with a fierce plunge, mounted the distracted miser on his back, which, instead of being warm, as it appeared, was ominously cool, and flew with him through the roof, and up into the clouds, from which sleet and snow were thickly falling.

"Well," said the gobbler, taking breath and balancing himself in the air, "how do you feel, Cringer?"

"Oh, what an uncharitable question!" gasped Christopher, convulsed in voice and limb with cold.

"Then you wouldn't like to be without a fire, eh!" and the gobbler lifted his foot and gave Cringer's whisker an insulting pull. It had frozen all around his mouth into bristling icicles.

"Of course I don't like the cold," whined the miser, getting as angry as he dared; "don't you see the state I am in? Is all this torture because I eat you, 'cording to the custom of my country?"

Here he began to tremble with such violent chills that his cocked hat and blouse flew off, until quite shelterless he stood in the blast, and then, seized with new wonder, exclaimed:

"It strikes me your Eminence bears this cold quite stoically!"

"Oh, I don't feel it," said the gobbler, with a complacent look of comfort that caused the miser a pang of envy; "I never wilfully made anyone cold when I lived in your world, you know; that's why!"

"Indeed," said Cringer, with as thoughtful a look as his shivering visage could command, "that is to me a new idea;" but his meditations were soon broken in upon by a sudden flight of the gobbler's, who plunged him through the elements, circled over a range of buildings, and, like a flash, flew down a chimney, through which neither smoke nor heat was emitting. Alighting in the fireplace, he bid Cringer peep through the crack of the fireboard.

"I can't," said Cringer; "everyone of my whiskers are turned into sticks of ice."

"Obey!" reiterated the gobbler, in tones that made Cringer tremble in spite of himself.

"Whose house do you see?"

"Mine, sure enough!" gasped Cringer, growing interested; "my tenant block, as I'm alive."

"Listen awhile, and tell me what you see?"

Cringer pressed his face so close to the fireboard that his sharp nose protruded through the crack, and he had hard work to pull it back again without losing its top.

Circuling around a cold hearth were a poor woman and three little children, her husband half reclining some distance apart on a meager pallet of straw, his cheek, pale and emaciated, resting on his hand and a look of suffering in his eye that would touch the hardest heart.

"They are every bit as cold as you, Cringer," said the gobbler, drawing his formidable bill uncomfortably near Christopher's nose, as if dying for a peck at it.

"Not quite, your Honor," was the mock apology. "There's no icicles hanging from them."

"They're cold for all that," said his companion, irately.

"As you please, my Lord," accompanied with protestetions of obedience to whatever opinion his gobblership might think proper to venture.

"Listen to what they say," was the next command, delivered with terrible emphasis, and this is what Cringer heard.

"It is a gloomy prospect for us, Marcel," the wife exclaimed in a trembling voice. "I expect every minute to see Cringer after his rent; 'tis due to-day, you know."

"Yes, I know," said the husband, dreamily.

"He has no heart, you know, even for his own poor sister," she went on; "but, oh, freezing and starving here as we are, I would still choose our lot before his; no one to love him in life, no one to mourn him in death—no one to find it possible to speak a word in his praise; the poor trembling at sound of his step, and rejoicing at his departure; the very dogs of the street are shy of him, who has no word of kindness, or no gentle act for either man or beast."

"'Tis sufficient that God sees all, dear," the husband said, taking one of his little children's hands between his and trying to rub some heat into it.

"Riddle me this, pa," said the little one, cheered by the warmth infused into her puny palm. "What is it, come whether at night or morning, is sure to come with a greedy warning?"

"Cringer!" shouted the children, clapping their hands and dancing around, "that's Cringer!" "Now, listen to me, pa," said another; "who is it that, let him come night or day, every one's glad when he goes away?"

"Cringer!" shouted the children again, in clamorous chorus. "Cringer! Oho, Cringer, of course!"

"My turn next," cried another. "Who is it that, when at last he'll die, will make for the worms a stingy pie?"

"Cringer! Cringer! Although if I were a worm" said one, "I think he'd taste awful bitter to me, 'cause that's how he looks."

comfort him, anyway, for his spirit will have found out by that time that 'tis hard to go to heaven without a pass."

"Well, who is to blame but himself?" said the oldest, "he's been making the bolts all his life to bar himself out; 'twould be funny enough if a miser should be let into heaven among all the angels and all the good saints who have labored so hard in this world to get inside the gates of a better."

"Children," said the father, "it is your duty to speak well of the foolish old man."

This remark created a general outburst of laughter.

"Speak well of Cringer!" they all cried in a breath. "Why pa, we couldn't do that unless we made something up;" and immediately they cuddled closer together, and Cringer could see they were still having a delightful time comparing notes as to who could make the best rhyme over him.

In the midst of it all their mother was folding a thin shawl about her, and, after rubbing her blue hands together, took from its place on the mantel a small mirror, and, hiding it under her arm, half whispered, "Oh, provident God, grant I may be enabled to sell this; for *he* dies before my eyes in need of medicine, and my little ones, poor things, famishing! famishing!" Then she hurried away on her errand, the wind flapping her scant rags about her and cutting her limbs with its sharp edge.

"You could prevent that, Cringer," said the gobbler, flying with him still further up the chimney, and bidding him to look once more through the fireboard.

"What d'y see now?" he asked.

Cringer, with falling jaw, shook from head to foot.

"What d'ye see?" screamed the gobbler, fiercely; "answer me."

"Death!" gasped Christopher; "she is dead, and little Wilhelm cold and stiff beside her!"

"Who is dead?" demanded his stern companion.

"My sister; ah! poor Gretchen!" and a hot tear melted the frost from his eyes as he gazed.

"Your own flesh and blood, Cringer; that's pretty hard, eh?" and up chimney again swooped the gobbler into the shrill blast; but, somehow, although he suffered as before, Cringer felt he deserved it, and kept his mouth closed on complaint, when suddenly his companion shook him off his back, and he found himself tumbling through space, flinging out his arms with terror-stricken yells, and trying in vain to catch at something for support, while continually before his eyes floated a beautiful vapor, which gradually developed into a figure with drooping, sorrowful head, and sweet, mournful eyes. Softly it raised its shining finger and pointed to a blank scroll and idle quill, over which it seemed to preside.

"Soon," it said with a glance of reproach that pierced the miser's heart, "I am Charity! Through your whole life you have not placed it in my power to write on yonder scroll one act to recommend you, and yet I only await your command."

At that moment a loud crash resounded through the shanty, and Cringer found himself in the narrow limits of the coal-box at the hearth, his legs in the air, and his head buried in ashes, into which rather undesirable position he had fallen from his time-honored high-backed arm-chair.

Scrambling to his feet he glared around.

There lay the skeleton of the old gobbler where he had pitched it, and there, sure enough, he was under his own shanty roof.

"Then it was only a dream after all," he faltered, in a voice that could scarcely control a whisper. "Sure enough it was only a dream," he added, shambling over to the window and looking out. "Yes; there's the snow and the sky and the old well and henroost."

Suddenly he staggered back, catching at the old arm-chair for support.

"What if it should be so after all!" he gasped, "and she dead, and the little one stiff and cold beside her, and I, wretched man, the cause of it!"

Snatching his cocked hat and slipping himself into a great shaggy coat, he rushed precipitately from the house, and those who knew his slow, calculating step paused in wonder to look after him as he hurried breathlessly on his way.

Gretchen had managed to gather a few cinders from a neighboring ash barrel, and was hopefully trying to make them glow on the hearth over which little Wilhelm crouched, when Cringer softly opened the door and stood in their midst.

The sister, on seeing him, gave a desolate shriek, and ran toward him with outstretched, gesticulating arms, crying:

"Don't speak! Don't speak! Don't tell me you have changed your mind and are going to deprive us of shelter. Oh, Christopher!" and she flung herself on her knees at his feet, choked with tears and sobs. "Am I not your own sister? Think of our mother looking down from heaven on this act; think of her, if you never have before since her death! For her sake!—for her sake! Look at the cold winds, how they whistle and moan! Oh, Father of Mercy!" and she caught her spent hands above her head, and turned her imploring eyes to heaven, "soften his heart!" Then, hearth, [illegible] to the arms and, holding him under the eyes of Cringer, continued, in the incoherence of agitation: "Why should *he* suffer? Oh, Christopher, let his innocence plead for him; drive *me* forth, if you will, but give my poor babe a resting place!"

Her voice faltered, her face became deadly pale; long-continued suffering here had its climax. She sank into a swoon—helpless, despairing and literally stricken with woe. And Crinker, who all this time had stood before her in a state bordering on stupefaction, on seeing the terror his very presence created, caught her up in his arms, crying out with heart-breaking pathos:

"Ah! poor sister, am I then too late?"

It was many weeks before Gretchen again awoke to consciousness. But when she did at last recover, it was to find herself surrounded with every luxury, and to meet in Christopher a tender-hearted protector, who not only proved a Lord Bountiful to herself and Wilhelm, but to every one of his poor tenants.

"A miracle! A charming miracle, surely!" everybody said; and Cringer looked on and enjoyed the commotion.

One by one the grins of avarice disappeared from his face. His neighbors hailed his genial smile with welcome, and, instead of 'Old Cringer,' he was called, with avowed respect, "Mr. Cringer." His shoulders straightened up as if they had got rid of a disagreeable load; his form grew buoyant and young. His heart, no longer crude and cold, reflected its love and charity in his own candid, happy eyes; and evening after evening, as he sat by his sister's side in the home of comfort he had provided for her and her child, and looked on the joy and contentment in their faces, he had reason to hope that the Angel of Charity no longer mourned over her blank scroll, but was filling him out a passport for a better world.

Louisiana's election took place yesterday and resulted in increased Democratic gains. Republicans North will begin to mistrust after a while the reports of a disruption in the Solid South. The South is solid in its determination to restrict liberty of speech and of the ballot. They have intimidated the negroes from voting against the bull-dozers' wishes, and now announce with much gusto that "many negroes voted the Democratic ticket." The simple fact remains that in spite of Independent movements and open letters from prominent Southern leaders, the South is just as solid to-day as it was three years ago. Any attempt at outvoting the rebel brigadiers on their own soil is entirely useless. What remains for the Republican party to accomplish is to see to it that Democratic attempts to bring sectional methods of political oppression into national affairs shall not be permitted to carry.—*Omaha Bee.*

A Strange Romance.

That "truth is stranger than fiction" is once more amply exemplified by the following curious narrative, which reaches the *Nazione* from its correspondent at Lucca: "Some years ago a native of Casamaggiore emigrated to America, leaving behind him his wife and two children. Shortly after his arrival in the states, where he promptly found lucrative employment, he sent 100 lire to the priest of his native place to be by him conveyed to his family. A few months later this remittance was followed by a second of 1,000 lire; and at subsequent periods other sums were forwarded in the same manner to the total amount of 25,000 lire, or £1,000. The priest, however, to whom all this was transmitted, put it in his own pocket. One day, having come to the conclusion that he had derived sufficient profit from his agency, he sent for the woman and informed her, with many consolatary reflections, that her husband was dead. About the same time he wrote to the emigrant, stating that the latter's wife and children had succumed to an epidemic which had all but depopulated Casamaggiore, and inclosed in this letter an official certificate of their death and burial. It appears that after a while the emigrant, believing himself to be a widower, married again. He prospered in business, became a wealthy man, and a few months ago determined to revisit the place of his birth. In due time he arrived with his second wife and family at Casamaggoire, where he took up his quarters in the principal inn. Strolling out to look up some of his acquaintances, a little beggar boy followed him, importuning him for alms. Something in the child's appearance arrested his attention. He asked the boy his name, and found his own son. Further inquiry soon elicited the fact that his wife and two children were living, but in the most abject poverty and distress. The reverend embezzler, when confronted with his victims, offered to refund the twenty-five thousand lire, but the affair had come to the knowledge of the police authorities, who refused to permit any compromise, and arrested the holy man, against whom proceedings have been taken by the state. Meanwhile, his unfortunate exparishioner finds himself saddled with two living wives and families, between whose claims upon his affections, speaking, nothing to choose either way."—*London Telegraph.*

Sweet Things.

The interest which has, within the last few years, been awakened in the cultivation of the sorghum cane will doubtless receive a new impulse from the proceedings of the Cane Growers' Convention, which has just finished its session in St. Louis. The reports from various localities where experiments have been made were so startling in the figures which they presented that our farmers will do well to study a few of the facts in relation to the growth and present condition of the industry.

The sorghum cane was introduced into the United States in 1856. Owing to a lack of knowledge of the proper process necessary to produce sugar, little besides molasses was extracted from the stalk prior to 1876. In 1870, 6,750,000 gallons of syrup were produced and in 1870 more than 17,000,000 gallons, of which 10,000,000 gallons were manufactured in the States of Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, Kentucky and Missouri. Within the last few years, only, attention has been directed to the saccharine qualities of the syrup, and a most excellent article of sugar has resulted from the operations of a number of cane-growers. One establishment last year at Crystal Lake, Illinois, has made 45,000 pounds of fine sugar marketable at a price equal to that of the best golden cane. The great trouble under which the cane-growers labor is the inadequate knowledge possessed by the manufacturers of the best processes for crystalizing the sugar. The convention called upon Congress to make an appropriation to establish schools of instruction in the growing of the cane and the manufacture of the sugar. The soil and climate of Nebraska are well adapted to sorghum cane culture, and it is hoped some enterprising farmers will follow the example of the Minnesota, Wisconsin and Illinois farmers, who have made the sorghum cane a profitable article of production. A sorghum sugar factory in Omaha would doubtless stimulate sorghum cane culture. No branch of industry will, in our opinion, promise better returns on the capital invested.—*Bee.*

"Pity He Drinks!"

It is a customary thing among a certain class of noodles, whenever they see some worthless fellow going to the dogs from drink, to say: "What a pity he drinks! If he would only leave whisky alone he would be a great man!"

Now this is simply rubbish! Many a fool has got a reputation for genius by becoming a drunkard, who, if he remained sober, would be recognized for what he is—a man of as little mental power as moral restraint.

The safest and surest measure of intellectuality is the power it gives to the man of brains to govern himself and control his passions. He that gives a loose rein to his passions and follows his appetites to degradation, gives the best possible evidence of a weak and feeble brain.