

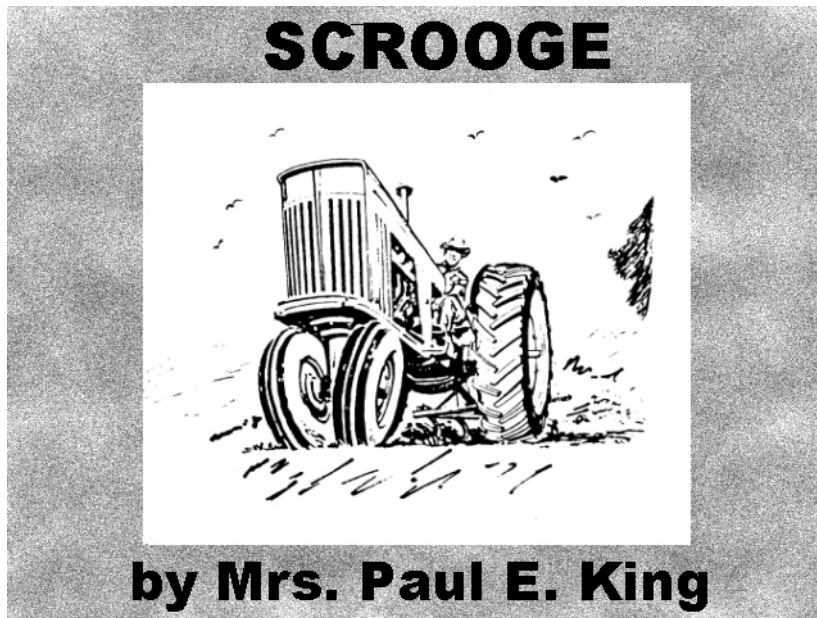
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Digital Edition 10/22/2001  
By Holiness Data Ministry

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The Sunday School Beacon  
August 28, 1988



**SCROOGE**  
**By Mrs. Paul E. King**

I knew him for as long as I could remember, and I liked him from my earliest recollection of him, which was all my life. We were neighbors; our farms joined, land to land. Only the fence divided and separated the land and the two farms. Like I stated previously, I liked Edward George Bronson, alias Mr. Scrooge, alias Mr. T. W., the latter named two initials standing for tight wad. Now I didn't give him a single one of those two aliases; not ever. Had I

done so, my father would have had a sure-enough "board meeting" (with just the two of us) and I would have had difficulty sitting down to eat at the end of the afore-mentioned board meeting. Some of the neighbors who knew Mr. Bronson . . . and I mean knew him . . . gave him those aliases.

Mr. Bronson's farm was quite productive: He milked fifty cows regularly and farmed his almost two hundred acres, which produced mostly corn and wheat. He knew how to farm; yes, he did. Seems he didn't spare on anything that would bring dollars back to him in good measure. No indeed. But other things, well. . . .

I remember the time when Mother sent some homemade noodles and chicken over to him by me. Dad had gone to town to get a part for the tractor and didn't need my help just then, so Mom decided that was God's precise timing for me to run the errand.

I had hoped I could use the three-wheeler that Dad kept for running errands like checking fences, et cetera, et cetera, but Mom forbade it, saying she feared what would happen to the chicken and noodles if I used it. It was too easy to forget one's self and speed away on one of those things, Mom declared. So the errand was made in good old-fashioned homespun style: on foot. My two feet.

I must have complained slightly about having to walk, for Morn said I should be ever so grateful that I had two good legs, and feet with which to run the errand. And I was grateful to God for this great blessing; but I thought that one of my three sisters could surely have done so simple a thing as to take Mom's offering of kindness and neighborly Christian love over to Mr. Bronson. "Not so!" Mom declared emphatically.

Mr. Bronson was a bachelor, never having married, and to Mom it would have been most indiscreet to have sent one of my sisters over to his farm. The "abstain from all appearance of evil" in I Thessalonians 5:22 was adhered to strictly in our family. Mom felt it wasn't put in the Bible merely to fill up space, but that God had inspired the writer to pen it for our benefit and good. And she was right, of course, for the Word states that "... no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:20-21).

At any rate, and like I said, I went over to our neighbor's house with the delicious noodles. Mr. Bronson was glad to see me; said I was the only one (besides my father) who ever paid any attention to him.

I put the tea kettle on one of the stove burners and while the water heated I dished some of the still-hot noodles out into a deep bowl for him to eat.

"Your mother sure knows how to cook, Tucker!" he exclaimed in true complimentary fashion.

"You can say that again!" I answered quickly.

"These are the best noodles I've ever tasted and eaten and you must tell her so for me."

I was glad he didn't add the "Tucker" to the end of his sentence. In the first place, my name wasn't Tucker; it was Alan. And then, too, I had hoped that none of my friends would ever hear the name; I despised it.

Mr. Bronson had given me the name when I was a little boy. I had thought he was extremely poor and poverty stricken so one Christmas when I went to his house with my father, I tucked a dollar bill (which had been given to me as a gift) into an envelope and told him to get something for himself for Christmas with it. Bronson had smiled politely for me, patted my head, and told me thanks, then called me Tucker. The name had stuck. Always, from then on, Edward George Bronson had called me Tucker.

It was while I was washing the few dishes for him, after he had had his fill of Mother's noodles and chicken, that I casually mentioned how very nice it would be if he could find a good young woman and would get married. "You'd have a cook and a housecleaner and a dishwasher," I stated emphatically, in a tone of voice which I hoped would give impetus to the man's thinking or action.

He sat, looking for all the world like a mummy; almost like he hadn't heard me. If he did, it never showed on his face.

"I'm sure glad I have a mother and three sisters who take care of everything in the house," I added, waxing both bold and eloquent. "When

Dad and my brothers and I come in from the field, we have our meals ready and waiting for us. And the house is always clean and neat and tidy. Besides, it's kinda nice to hear the girls giggle and laugh and whisper secrets to each other. It's a comfortable setup, Mr. Bronson. It would sure be nice for you if. . ."

Well, that did it! The mummified looking neighbor got to his feet and ran his long, slender fingers through his thick hair like you'd plow furrows in a field. Then he said quickly and rather caustically, "Women! They use up too much money for a man! I'm not interested in the least, Tucker. I have all I need in my money."

He sat down then and gave me that "don't-mention-this-to-me-again" look. By the look on his face and the set of his square jaw, I knew it was a closed subject. Once and for all time, closed!

I mentioned the incident to my father that afternoon as we assembled the part on the tractor. Dad only smiled and said, "It's too bad, Alan. Mr. Bronson just doesn't know what he's missing. Money isn't everything, son; a happy home, with a lovely family, is beyond price. I'd rather have my family and be a pauper than to hoard my money and live without either your dear mother or you precious children. We are wealthy, your mother and I; we have God in our hearts and at the center of our lives and then we have you children.

Yes, we are extremely rich . . . in things other than dollars and cents."

I knew Dad was right on target again and my heart felt full, to almost overflowing. I was part of a wonderful family and mine was a rich heritage indeed. What my parents lacked in money they compensated for and made up in tender loving kindness and care. I felt blest of God for the gift of a Christian father and mother, and I wished that some of my friends could have been blest in the same way.

When we got in from the fields that evening, Mother informed us that she had invited our neighbor over for Sunday dinner. This was nothing new; Mother frequently had neighbors in to share our meals. It was, she declared, a fulfillment of the Biblical injunction to be hospitable and thereby opening a wondrous door for witnessing about Christ and His power to save and to cleanse.

Mr. Bronson could be quite congenial if and when he wanted to be, and our Sunday dinner seemed to have evoked just such a spirit from him. One would never have guessed that he was a Scrooge or a tight wad. It was my brother's statement on tithing that "detonated" the bomb.

"Did you know," Jason asked Dad and Morn, "that Rick Green thought tithing was only for adults? By adults, I mean married people," my brother went on to explain. "I was shocked, Dad, to hear him make the statement. He's been coming to church as long as I have and our preacher has told us 'the tithe is the Lord's.' I heard him say it more than once."

Dad, kind man that he was, and is, and not one to speak evil of any man, said quickly, "Some people don't grasp a truth as readily or quickly as others do, my boy. But isn't it wonderful that, finally, Rick sees the light on giving a tenth of his earnings to the Lord, as the Word admonished us to do?"

I saw our neighbor twist his napkin and fidget with his fork, and when the pressure on his temper valve reached its extremity and he could take no more (even though the statement was not addressed to him nor for him), he sat up straight and tall with his shoulders back against the chair. White with anger, he said, "And why should God get a tenth of my earnings? What did He ever do for me? I earn my wages by hard labor and by the sweat of my brow. Everything I have is mine! Preachers are just out to get people's money. Don't try to tell me I must give the Lord 10% of all my earnings. I'll not do it!" He was gray-white with anger and indignation and his eyes looked like balls of piercing, cold steel.

My father's soft-spoken and kind words contrasted the harshness of the neighbor's. "Kind friend," Dad said, "Everything you and I have has come from God's beneficent hand. And what is a tenth, when the ninth is left to us for our discretionary use? We have a generous-hearted God, Edward: One-tenth for Him, nine-tenths for us! Wouldn't you say that is quite generous of God? Especially since He is the giver of it all?"

Without any lapse of silence whatever, Edward George Bronson lashed out with, "I earned what I have; every single cent of it. And I intend to keep it all. It's mine. Mine! Do you hear?"

"The rich man in the Bible said pretty much the same thing," Dad replied, softly-kind. "But God called him a fool, and that same night, he died, Edward."

Father dropped the subject. Our neighbor left shortly afterward.

A few months later, as Edward George Bronson was working in his big alfalfa field next to our barn, Mother hurried to the barn to tell Father that the hospital was trying to reach our neighbor. It was urgent, she said.

"Run after his tractor, Alan," Dad told me. "You can go faster than I. Tell him to come to the phone immediately."

Mr. Bronson was startled when I gave him the message. And with his long legs, he took huge strides and was soon in our kitchen and on the phone

A brother had died, he told Father as he stopped by the barn where we were readying the baler for baling the alfalfa. "He was my favorite brother," Mr. Bronson added sadly, with tears. "His wife wants me to pick out a suit for him at the morticians. I . . . I'm not sure I can do this," he said sadly. "Do you suppose you could go along? This is a hard thing for me to do." His eyes searched those of my father's.

"I'll go, Edward," Dad said, dropping what he was doing and giving my brothers and me orders to go ahead with the baling.

Some days after the funeral, Mr. Bronson ambled over to our barn. We were doing the evening milking when he came. He looked pale and serious and was extremely sad.

Dad greeted him warmly and told him he'd been praying for him many times throughout the day, in the loss of his brother.

"I can't believe it!" Mr. Bronson declared. "That suit had no pockets in it. Not one! And my brother was buried in it!"

"Edward," my dad said, speaking kindly, "the Bible says, 'Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. . . .' We take nothing with us when we die. Nothing. We leave it all behind."

"Don't talk that way!" Mr. Bronson exclaimed with agitation. "Don't ever mention it! I love my money; it is my god. I've worked hard for everything I have, and I mean to hold on to it with all that is within me."

"But someday you must die, Edward. The Bible states this fact. It is an appointment that each of us must keep someday. Hebrews 9:27 says, 'And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.' Have you made preparation for the life after death?" Dad asked seriously.

"I don't want to think about that," the neighbor declared, walking away sadly. "I'll live for the now; for my accumulated wealth. This is all I care to live for . . . my money." And he hurried out of the barn.

Mr. Bronson died sometime later; died just like he had lived . . . hoarding his money; worshipping his god -- money. He left it all behind, just like Father had told him. And, since there was no will made out, the State fared well.

We may not have been wealthy but I would never have traded places with our neighbor. We were happy and joyful. We discovered the blessedness of giving not only a tenth of our "first fruits" and our earnings but way above and beyond the tenth.., in offerings. Plural! Yes indeed, and of a truth, "It is more blessed to give than to receive." Far more blessed! Try it. Prove it for yourself and you will see. And be a joyful believer, also!

Don't be a Mr. Scrooge alias T. W. -- tight wad!