

THE CHAMPION

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649188932

The champion by Charles Egberd Craddock

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CHARLES EGBERD CRADDOCK

THE CHAMPION



"I CAN'T HIDE IT! I BURNT THE COPY."

THE CHAMPION

BY

CHARLES EGBERT CRADDOCK



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1902

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Published September, 1902.

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CHAPTER I

THE devil was looking out of the window. Yet the traffic in the streets was unchecked. The cable-cars whizzed past with a clanging clamor. Great rumbling vans laden with freight alternated with carriages rolling noiselessly on rubber-tired wheels. The sidewalks were crowded with pedestrians. Men and boys, ladies and little children, boldly came and went over the neighboring crossing, although they could plainly see the devil's head poking out of a high window in the newspaper building and hear the shrill tones of the devil's voice as he discoursed to his friend within.

For in fact this was not the old Enemy of Mankind, but a small imp — commonly known as a printer's devil — who by virtue of

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a beguiling chirp of "Copy!" served as a means of communication between the foreman of the composing-room and the editorial staff.

"That 's wher' they set her up!" he said, pointing to the composing-room in an explanatory way, and with a paw copiously smeared with ink.

There were streaks of this commodity on his face also, although his functions had no concern with it. Still the devil is not the only fiend who dabbles in printer's ink without a call.

His friend, Peter Bateman, a heavy, thick-set boy, with a broad, sullen, flushed face and a lowering eye, cast a glance at the cases visible through the open door from the hall.

"Wher' do the boss do the writin' at?" he asked, in a hoarse, wheezy voice.

The devil tossed his red head. "Boss don't hev ter write none!" he retorted arrogantly. "*Foreman* is what *we* call him — bes' printer in these 'ere Newnited States!"

"But wher' do the feller stay what hes ter write?" persisted Pete.

“Oh, — *him?*” responded the devil, disparagingly. “They puts him in a little ‘rink-tum,’ they call it, all by himself. *He* ain’t much force! He can’t write a word if folks git ter gabblin’ ter him. Why, sometimes when I jes’ say ‘Copee’ ter him, he looks like he will go out of his mind! They hev ter hire a whole passel o’ other fellers ter help him *jes’ do the writin’*. They hev got a double row of desks for a lot of ’em in that long room. They are all orful slow. Sometimes I be kep’ yappin’ ‘Copee’ at ’em all day so I can’t stay abed o’ night — ef I eats toler’ble hearty, — but jes’ keeps jumpin’ out an’ yappin’ ‘Copee’ in my sleep, till my mother gits afeard I’ll fetch the perlice with my noise.”

He grinned at the recollection of these somnolent vagaries. Then in his self-assumed duties as cicerone to his friend, showing the plant of the daily newspaper, as the rooms were nearly deserted at this hour, he duly exhibited the type-setting machine, a comparatively new acquisition in this southwestern city, and not altogether popular in the

composing-room, where much of the work was still done by hand.

"It is a go, of course," said the devil discriminatingly, reflecting the sentiment of his elders, "but I tell you now, this machine ain't in it for speed an' percision with a reg'lar old-fashioned, gilt-edged, greased-lightning compositor like Bob Platt, — that 's our foreman, ye know! That 's the kind o' printer I'm goin' ter be, — ye kin bet yer hat!"

He hesitated and seemed a trifle out of countenance for a moment after he had said this. For when he had first been employed in the office, a raw little country lad, his admiration of the printer's craft had been so great, his ambition so exuberant, his ingenuous emulation so open that he had immediately announced his determination to be some day a champion compositor and stand preëminent at the case! The galley-boys and junior printers, of the variety called "cubs," would have been more or less than human had they failed to improve so promising an opportunity for fun. They guyed him unmercifully, and