

THE Lucky Coin

A STORY FOR CHILDREN

From THE DEPARTMENT OF
CONGRUOUS
FERNANDEZ'S
PARADISE



FERNANDEZ

MANY years ago there lived in a hermitage a holy monk. From all the villages around, the people, mostly poor labourers, were in the habit of coming to him on Sundays and festivals to hear him say mass for them. These good people used to bring little offerings of food for the support of the hermit during the week.

One Sunday, after his congregation had departed, the monk perceived a man laden with traps and nets for catching birds, crossing the field before the hermitage. The good monk went out to him.

"Where do you come from?" he inquired; "and what are you going to do, my son?"

"I live some miles from here, good father," he replied, "and I have borrowed a few nets and traps to try to catch some doves to sell, so as to get a little butter for our bread; for with that and a draught of water from the spring my wife and I are satisfied; or else to get some work to do, that I may earn enough for our support, for we have neither bread nor a single farthing to buy it."

The hermit took the man into his

hermitage, and gave him the little offerings of food which had been brought that morning by the villagers, leaving Providence to provide for his own simple wants.

"Brother," he said, "take this for yourself and your wife; and if you want money I will give you some. But you must first tell me which you choose, to earn a single coin honestly, or a hundred dishonestly."

The poor man hesitated, for great was the temptation.

"I will consult with my wife," he said at last, "and return to-morrow to inform you."

With the food in his hands he returned to his miserable home, where he and his wife made an excellent meal, for which they returned thanks to Heaven. They then consulted together about the money, and, though the temptation was great to take the hundred coins, yet, being God-fearing folks, they decided upon taking the one coin honestly acquired, and let alone the hundred.

The man accordingly returned to the hermit, and told him what they had decided.

The good monk gave him two half *reals*.

"Take this money," he said: "and may Heaven prosper you."

Full of joy the man departed. But on the road home, in a solitary spot, he encountered two lads fighting desperately; they were dealing each other terrible blows, and blood was streaming down their faces.

The man rushed up to separate them, but all his efforts only served to make them fiercer.

"Why do you fight like this?" he cried.

"We are fighting for that stone," replied one of the lads; "I saw it first!"

"No, you didn't," replied the other, "it was I, and it belongs to me!" And once more they fell to blows more desperate than before.

The poor man, fearing that the quarrel might end fatally, cried out to them:—

"Here, take each of you one of these coins, and let alone the stone; it is of no value, for it is no bigger than a walnut. And be off with you!"

The lads were glad to take the money, and ran away, thinking themselves lucky to make so good a bargain.

His wife was at the cottage door impatiently awaiting her husband. Great was her disappointment when all he brought her was a stone.

"Well, to be sure!" she cried, after he had recounted what had taken place, "I am disappointed." And, taking the little stone, she threw it into a corner of the room.

"Dear wife," replied the man, "do not take it so to heart. The money was spent in a good work; in making peace between the children of our neighbours."

His wife at length became more reconciled to the loss, considering that after all he had done right to make peace between their neighbours' sons at any cost. Not many minutes after, the parents of the two lads came to thank the man for having separated the boys. They also thanked him for the money he had given to the boys, for they knew he sorely needed it himself. Each of the parents gave him a present for his friendly service; and from that day they always treated him most kindly, and often gave him little jobs to do, so that the poor couple never wanted bread.

Not long afterwards, it happened that the King's Ambassador

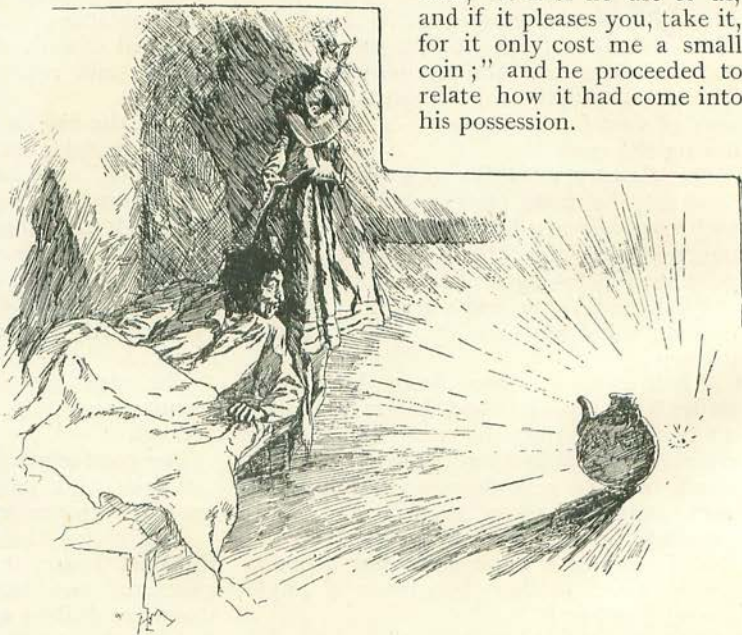
passed that way, with a great retinue of officials, secretaries, and servitors, and it fell out that, night coming on, the Ambassador decided upon taking up his quarters in the village.

The village inns were small, and could not afford accommodation for so large a retinue, and the various cottagers were asked to take in one or more of the servants. Among those who gave lodgings to the retinue were our good couple, who took in a lodger, for whom they were paid handsomely. The wife quickly prepared a clean, tidy bed, and did her best to make things comfortable.

The guest, being tired, was soon fast asleep. Towards morning he awoke, and was surprised to see the chamber bathed in a resplendent light. Knowing well that the people of the house could not afford a lamp or candles, he arose to find out whence proceeded this unusual brilliancy. Great was his astonishment to find that it proceeded from a small stone in the corner of the room, which, as the sun struck on it, sent out rays of vivid light. He took up the stone, and, believing it to be of great value, took it to the Ambassador.

When the nobleman examined the stone, he admired it greatly, and desired its owner to be sent for in order to learn all particulars about it.

"Please your Excellency," said the poor man, "it is of no use to us, and if it pleases you, take it, for it only cost me a small coin;" and he proceeded to relate how it had come into his possession.



"IT SENT OUT RAYS OF VIVID LIGHT."

The Ambassador drew forth a heavy bag of money, and, taking out a handful of gold pieces, gave them to the man.

"My good man," he said, "since you offer me the stone, I accept it gladly; but as I am leaving the kingdom, and my expenses are very heavy, I cannot give you all that it is worth. If it please Heaven, I will return this way, and I will pay you then."

The poor man did not like to accept so much gold for what he judged to be a worthless stone; but on the nobleman's entreaty he took the money, and ran back to his wife, full of joy at his good fortune. Both husband and wife then went at once to the hermit to recount to him all that had taken place, and to offer him a tenth of the money. This he refused to take, but bade them return to the village and distribute it in alms to the poor. They returned to the village accordingly, and did as the monk had bidden them. They also gave part of the money to the parents of the lads who had fought so desperately for the possession of the stone. The rest the man spent in purchasing a piece of land.

This little plot of ground proved very

fertile, and whatever he planted produced a hundredfold. His trees were borne down by the weight of the fruit, which always fetched a good price.

Years passed ere the Ambassador returned from the foreign country, where he had gained high honours and wealth. On passing the village again where he had obtained the stone, he inquired for the good man, and was told how he had prospered with the money he had given him, and was now a person of importance.

On arriving at the Court of his sovereign he recounted to the King all that had taken place. The King was greatly pleased with the history of the honestly earned coin, and had the stone valued by the first jewellers of the kingdom, who all pronounced it to be a singularly valuable gem. A large sum was given to the Ambassador

for it, and he was loaded with distinctions and honours. The nobleman, wishing to show his gratitude for the honours conferred on him, sent handsome presents to the good man and his wife.

And so it came to pass that they, who had been honest, were now prosperous as well.



"ON THE NOBLEMAN'S ENTREATY HE TOOK THE MONEY."