



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE GERMAN.



HERE was once a soldier who had served his King faithfully for many years, and gained many a badge of honour, which adorned his breast. When peace was declared, he obtained leave of absence and set forth on his travels, his shako on his head, a piece of bread in his knapsack, and a draught of water in his flask. His purse was empty, but his heart was full of faith and hope.

Passing one day through a wood, he heard a sound that bespoke a spring near, and hastened forward intending to rest there and refresh himself in its cool waters. On his way an old man met him, who begged: "Have pity on me, kind soldier, and give me a small piece of bread. I am so exhausted with hunger and fatigue, I can no longer hold myself upright."

The soldier at once opened his knapsack and gave the old man his last piece of bread, although he himself was very hungry. Arrived at the spring, he murmured: "A draught of clear water must this time satisfy both thirst and hunger!" and, after refreshing himself and refilling his flask, he continued

his journey. Soon the sun shone down fiercely, and about mid-day, as he was crossing an open heath, he became very weary; still he toiled bravely on, for at a short distance ahead were a few trees, beneath whose shade he determined to rest and refresh himself with a draught of water from his flask. But ere he reached the longed-for shade an old man met him, who said: "Have pity on me and give me something to drink: I perish with thirst!"

The soldier handed his flask to the old man, who emptied it to the last drop, then, thanking his benefactor, proceeded on his journey.

Hunger and thirst now sorely tormented the poor soldier, and far and near, nor village, nor inn could be seen, nor any living being in the fields through which he passed.

Towards evening, being almost exhausted with hunger and thirst, he plucked a few ears of wheat, rubbed them between his hands, ate the grain, and then lay down to rest before a cross that stood by the wayside.

Suddenly there stood before him the two old men he had met earlier in the day.

"You have fed the hungry," said the first,

"ask therefore a favour from the inexhaustible bounty of Heaven."

"Well," replied the soldier, "if it be allowable, the thing I should like best from the favour of Heaven would be a pipe that always remained full of tobacco, if I smoked it ever so often and even lent it to others to smoke."

The old man handed him a short pipe and disappeared.

"You gave your last drop of water to the thirsty," said the second; "tell me therefore what you desire."

The soldier considered.

"Well," said he, at length, "if Heaven wishes to give me something more, a sack in which I could catch and keep anything I pleased would suit me well enough."

"Here is what you require," said the old man, handing him a sack. "When you wish to use it, say these words:—

'Wonder-sack, open thee!
Then in shall lie
All whom I name to thee,
Safe there to lie!'"

As he finished speaking, he likewise disappeared.

The soldier crossed himself devoutly, and repeated the Paternoster. Then he lit his pipe, hung the sack over his left arm, and went on his way, singing gaily. Hunger, thirst, and fatigue were all forgotten.

Ere nightfall he reached the capital and entered by the gate leading straight to the Jewish quarter, in whose streets shop touched shop. As soon as the sellers saw the stranger, they hastened from their stalls, and crowding round him, began with shrill cries to extol their wares. They pulled at his clothes, urged him to enter their shops, and wrangled among themselves, until the soldier, almost distracted by their clamour, angrily untied the strings of his sack, crying:—

'Wonder-sack, open thee!
Then in shall lie
All whom I name to thee,
Safe there to lie.
Jews, enter!'"

Thereupon the sack opened itself out wide, and immediately all those who pressed round the soldier, dealers, women, and children, fell *head over heels* into the sack; then the cords fastened again of themselves. The soldier shook the sack, threw it over his back, and wandered on, singing. The Jews began to scream and weep, lamented their sad fate, and begged for liberty.

"As soon as I let you out, you will begin anew to torment everyone who passes through," said the soldier.

"No, no; we will never do so any more," screamed they.

The soldier then untied his sack, shook them all out, and went on—intending to see everything in the great capital.

That evening the King heard what had occurred; he ordered the soldier to be summoned, and said:—

"You are a brave soldier, for you have by yourself overcome the whole crowd of Jews. Could you not measure your strength against the demons who have taken possession of my father's kingly castle, and obliged me to abandon it and move into a new palace? If you succeed in scaring them away, I will give you gold in abundance and make you a Duke."

"I know not if I shall succeed, O King, but I will willingly try," replied the soldier; and, taking a lantern, he went straight to the castle, that was quite empty, resolved to pass the night there. Seating himself on an iron settle in the large hall, he placed his light on the table and awaited what should take place.

As midnight struck a frightful noise resounded through the old castle, the doors flew open of themselves, and on the threshold appeared a two-horned demon, who beat time on the floor with his long tail.

"How could you be so bold as to venture hither?" he asked, grimly. "Answer, or I will wring your neck!"

"I am a soldier on my travels," replied our hero, smoking on calmly. "If you wish to wring my neck, at least wait until my pipe is smoked out."

"I will promise you that," said the demon, and seating himself, he waited. Soon he cried, wrathfully:—

"This is too much! Here, give me the pipe, I will smoke it myself. By the name of my master, I will!"

The soldier obediently took the pipe from his mouth and handed it to the demon, who at once began to smoke, drawing in the smoke with all his strength and then letting it stream out through his great, hawked nose. Enormous columns of smoke poured forth from his nostrils and spread in dark clouds through the hall, but the pipe remained full of tobacco.

Then through all the passages of the castle wild noises resounded, the doors flew open, and in streamed thousands of demons, who surrounded the soldier, screaming:—

"Whence came you hither? What want you here?"

When they learned that their colleague had promised to let the soldier live until his pipe

was smoked out, and saw that this did not come to pass, each in turn took the pipe and puffed and smoked, until almost out of breath. Soon the smoke streamed forth from every door and window. The last demon thrust the pipe-stem into his mouth up to the centre,

when they saw the pipe would never be smoked out, and said to the soldier:—

“Give back the word our chief pledged you; we will let you depart alive.”

“I shall remain alive without your gracious permission,” replied the soldier; “but if



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but all of no use, the tobacco burned slowly on, but never decreased.

Meanwhile tumult arose in the capital as the clouds of smoke were seen issuing from the castle; the fire-bells were rung, and the fire-hose brought out to extinguish the supposed fire, so that it might not destroy the town. The demons grew very uneasy

you wish to have back the word, you must promise to quit this castle now and for ever!”

“That we cannot do!” cried the demons. “Concealed in the subterranean vaults is a quantity of unrighteously-acquired treasure, stored up by the late King, who is therefore condemned to leave his grave every night

and visit these cellars, where we torment him. This we must continue to do until someone discovers the treasure and distributes it amongst the poor!"

When the demons had finished speaking, the soldier opened his sack, and said:—

“Wonder-sack, open thee!
Then in shall hie
All whom I name to thee,
Safe there to lie.
Demons, enter!”

The next moment the soldier was alone in the hall, and the demons imprisoned in the sack were lamenting their cruel fate and entreating to be set at liberty. The soldier struck the sack against the wall, then he said:—

“I shall not let you out until you promise to bring all that accursed treasure into this hall, and then leave the castle for ever.”

“Let us out, we promise!”

With a pin the soldier made a hole in the

sack, and through this tiny opening forth shot a little demon like a stone from a sling. Quickly the soldier closed the aperture, and said to the demon, who bowed respectfully before him:—

“Now go and do what I require; directly that is done I will release the others!”

The little demon descended through a crack in the floor to the subterranean vaults, and ere the lapse of an hour half the hall was filled with gold and silver. The soldier then opened the sack, and a whole crowd of bats flew out moaning, and quickly disappeared through the open windows.

Our hero now lay down to sleep until morning, when he went to the King and told him all that had passed. The gold promised

him as reward he begged might be given to the poor; he also declined the title of Duke, and set forth again to wander through the world.

