

THE WONDERFUL PUMP

Not many years ago there lived on a stony, barren New England farm a man and his wife. They were sober, honest people, working hard from early morning until dark to enable them to secure a scanty living from their poor land.

Their house, a small, one-storied building, stood upon the side of a steep hill, and the stones lay so thickly about it that scarce anything green could grow from the ground. At the foot of the hill, a quarter of a mile from the house by the winding path, was a small brook, and the woman was obliged to go there for water and to carry it up the hill to the house. This was a tedious task, and with the other hard work that fell to her share had made her gaunt and bent and lean.

Yet she never complained, but meekly and faithfully performed her duties, doing the housework, carrying the water and helping her husband hoe the scanty crop that grew upon the best part of their land.

One day, as she walked down the path to the brook, her big shoes scattering the pebbles right and left, she noticed a large beetle lying upon its back and struggling hard with its little legs to turnover, that its feet might again touch the ground. But this it could not accomplish; so the woman, who had a kind heart, reached down and gently turned the beetle with her finger. At once it scampered from the path and she went on to the brook.

The next day, as she came for water, she was surprised to see the beetle again lying upon its back and struggling helplessly to turn. Once more the woman stopped and set him upon his feet; and then, as she stooped over the tiny creature, she heard a small voice say:

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much for saving me!"

Half frightened at hearing a beetle speak in her own language, the woman started back and exclaimed:

"La sakes! Surely you can't talk like humans!" Then, recovering from her alarm, she again bent over the beetle, who answered her:

"Why shouldn't I talk, if I have anything to say?"

"'Cause you're a bug," replied the woman.

"That is true; and you saved my life--saved me from my enemies, the sparrows. And this is the second time you have come to my assistance, so I owe you a debt of gratitude. Bugs value their lives as much as human beings, and I am a more important creature than you, in your ignorance, may suppose. But, tell me, why do you come each day to the brook?"

"For water," she answered, staring stupidly down at the talking beetle.

"Isn't it hard work?" the creature inquired.

"Yes; but there's no water on the hill," said she.

"Then dig a well and put a pump in it," replied the beetle.

She shook her head.

"My man tried it once; but there was no water," she said, sadly.

"Try it again," commanded the beetle; "and in return for your kindness to me I will make this promise: if you do not get water from the well you will get that which is more precious to you. I must go now. Do not forget. Dig a well."

And then, without pausing to say good-by, it ran swiftly away and was lost among the stones.

The woman returned to the house much perplexed by what the beetle had said, and when her husband came in from his work she told him the whole story.

The poor man thought deeply for a time, and then declared:

"Wife, there may be truth in what the bug told you. There must be magic in the world yet, if a beetle can speak; and if there is such a thing as magic we may get water from the well. The pump I bought to use in the well which proved to be dry is now lying in the barn, and the only expense in following the talking bug's advice will be the labor of digging the hole. Labor I am used to; so I will dig the well."

Next day he set about it, and dug so far down in the ground that he could hardly reach the top to climb out again; but not a drop of water was found.

"Perhaps you did not dig deep enough," his wife said, when he told her of his failure.

So the following day he made a long ladder, which he put into the hole; and then he dug, and dug, and dug, until the top of the ladder barely reached the top of the hole. But still there was no water.

When the woman next went to the brook with her pail she saw the beetle sitting upon a stone beside her path. So she stopped and said:

"My husband has dug the well; but there is no water."

"Did he put the pump in the well?" asked the beetle.

"No," she answered.

"Then do as I commanded; put in the pump, and if you do not get water I promise you something still more precious."

Saying which, the beetle swiftly slid from the stone and disappeared. The woman went back to the house and told her husband what the bug had said.

"Well," replied the simple fellow, "there can be no harm in trying."

So he got the pump from the barn and placed it in the well, and then he took hold of the handle and began to pump, while his wife stood by to watch what would happen.

No water came, but after a few moments a gold piece dropped from the spout of the pump, and then another, and another, until several handfuls of gold lay in a little heap upon the ground.

The man stopped pumping then and ran to help his wife gather the gold pieces into her apron; but their hands trembled so greatly through excitement and joy that they could scarcely pick up the sparkling coins.

At last she gathered them close to her bosom and together they ran to the house, where they emptied the precious gold upon the table and counted the pieces.

All were stamped with the design of the United States mint and were worth five dollars each. Some were worn and somewhat discolored from use, while others seemed bright and new, as if they had not been much handled. When the value of the pieces was added together they were found to be worth three hundred dollars.

Suddenly the woman spoke.

"Husband, the beetle said truly when he declared we should get something more precious than water from the well. But run at once and take away the handle from the pump, lest anyone should pass this way and discover our secret."

So the man ran to the pump and removed the handle, which he carried to the house and hid underneath the bed.

They hardly slept a wink that night, lying awake to think of their good fortune and what they should do with their store of yellow gold. In all their former lives they had never possessed more than a few dollars at a time, and now the cracked teapot was nearly full of gold coins.

The following day was Sunday, and they arose early and ran to see if their treasure was safe. There it lay, heaped snugly within the teapot, and they were so willing to feast their eyes upon it that it was long before the man could leave it to build the fire or the woman to cook the breakfast.

While they ate their simple meal the woman said:

"We will go to church to-day and return thanks for the riches that have come to us so suddenly. And I will give the pastor one of the gold pieces."

"It is well enough to go to church," replied her husband, "and also to return thanks. But in the night I decided how we will spend all our money; so there will be none left for the pastor."

"We can pump more," said the woman.

"Perhaps; and perhaps not," he answered, cautiously. "What we have we can depend upon, but whether or not there be more in the well I cannot say."

"Then go and find out," she returned, "for I am anxious to give something to the pastor, who is a poor man and deserving."

So the man got the pump handle from beneath the bed, and, going to the pump, fitted it in place. Then he set a large wooden bucket under the spout and began to pump. To their joy the gold pieces soon began flowing into the pail, and, seeing it about to run over the brim, the woman brought another pail. But now the stream suddenly stopped, and the man said, cheerfully:

"That is enough for to-day, good wife! We have added greatly to our treasure, and the parson shall have his gold piece. Indeed, I think I shall also put a coin into the contribution box."

Then, because the teapot would hold no more gold, the farmer emptied the pail into the wood-box, covering the money with dried leaves and twigs, that no one might suspect what lay underneath.

Afterward they dressed themselves in their best clothing and started for the church, each taking a bright gold piece from the teapot as a gift to the pastor.

Over the hill and down into the valley beyond they walked, feeling so gay and light-hearted that they did not mind the distance at all. At last they came to the little country church and entered just as the services began.

Being proud of their wealth and of the gifts they had brought for the pastor, they could scarcely wait for the moment when the deacon passed the contribution box. But at last the time came, and the farmer held his hand high over the box and dropped the gold piece so that all the congregation could see what he had given. The woman did likewise, feeling important and happy at being able to give the good parson so much.

The parson, watching from the pulpit, saw the gold drop into the box, and could hardly believe that his eyes did not deceive him. However, when the box was laid upon his desk there were the two gold pieces, and he was so surprised that he nearly forgot his sermon.

When the people were leaving the church at the close of the services the good man stopped the farmer and his wife and asked:

"Where did you get so much gold?"

The woman gladly told him how she had rescued the beetle, and how, in return, they had been rewarded with the wonderful pump. The pastor listened to it all gravely, and when the story was finished he said:

"According to tradition strange things happened in this world ages ago, and now I find that strange things may also happen to-day. For by your tale you have found a beetle that can speak and also has power to bestow upon you great wealth." Then

he looked carefully at the gold pieces and continued: "Either this money is fairy gold or it is genuine metal, stamped at the mint of the United States government. If it is fairy gold it will disappear within 24 hours, and will therefore do no one any good. If it is real money, then your beetle must have robbed some one of the gold and placed it in your well. For all money belongs to someone, and if you have not earned it honestly, but have come by it in the mysterious way you mention, it was surely taken from the persons who owned it, without their consent. Where else could real money come from?"

The farmer and his wife were confused by this statement and looked guiltily at each other, for they were honest people and wished to wrong no one.

"Then you think the beetle stole the money?" asked the woman.

"By his magic powers he probably took it from its rightful owners. Even bugs which can speak have no consciences and cannot tell the difference between right and wrong. With a desire to reward you for your kindness the beetle took from its lawful possessors the money you pumped from the well."

"Perhaps it really is fairy gold," suggested the man. "If so, we must go to the town and spend the money before it disappears."

"That would be wrong," answered the pastor; "for then the merchants would have neither money nor goods. To give them fairy gold would be to rob them."

"What, then, shall we do?" asked the poor woman, wringing her hands with grief and disappointment.

"Go home and wait until to-morrow. If the gold is then in your possession it is real money and not fairy gold. But if it is real money you must try to restore it to its rightful owners. Take, also, these pieces which you have given me, for I cannot accept gold that is not honestly come by."

Sadly the poor people returned to their home, being greatly disturbed by what they had heard. Another sleepless night was passed, and on Monday morning they arose at daylight and ran to see if the gold was still visible.

"It is real money, after all!" cried the man; "for not a single piece has disappeared."

When the woman went to the brook that day she looked for the beetle, and, sure enough, there he sat upon the flat stone.

"Are you happy now?" asked the beetle, as the woman paused before him.

"We are very unhappy," she answered; "for, although you have given us much gold, our good parson says it surely belongs to someone else, and was stolen by you to reward us."

"Your parson may be a good man," returned the beetle, with some indignation, "but he certainly is not over wise. Nevertheless, if you do not want the gold I can take it from you as easily as I gave it."

"But we do want it!" cried the woman, fearfully. "That is," she added, "if it is honestly come by."

"It is not stolen," replied the beetle, sulkily, "and now belongs to no one but yourselves. When you saved my life I thought how I might reward you; and, knowing you to be poor, I decided gold would make you happier than anything else.

"You must know," he continued, "that although I appear so small and insignificant, I am really king of all the insects, and my people obey my slightest wish. Living, as they do, close to the ground, the insects often come across gold and other pieces of money which have been lost by men and have fallen into cracks or crevasses or become covered with earth or hidden by grass or weeds. Whenever my people find money in this way they report the fact to me; but I have always let it lie, because it could be of no possible use to an insect.

"However, when I decided to give you gold I knew just where to obtain it without robbing any of your fellow creatures. Thousands of insects were at once sent by me in every direction to bring the pieces of lost gold to his hill. It cost my people several days of hard labor, as you may suppose; but by the time your husband had finished the well the gold began to arrive from all parts of the country, and during the night my subjects dumped it all into the well. So you may use it with a clear conscience, knowing that you wrong no one."

This explanation delighted the woman, and when she returned to the house and reported to her husband what the beetle had said he also was overjoyed.

So they at once took a number of the gold pieces and went to the town to purchase provisions and clothing and many things of which they had long stood in need; but so proud were they of their newly acquired wealth that they took no pains to conceal it. They wanted everyone to know they had money, and so it was no wonder that when some of the wicked men in the village saw the gold they longed to possess it themselves.

"If they spend this money so freely," whispered one to another, "there must be a great store of gold at their home."

"That is true," was the answer. "Let us hasten there before they return and ransack the house."

So they left the village and hurried away to the farm on the hill, where they broke down the door and turned everything topsy turvy until they had discovered the gold in the wood-box and the teapot. It did not take them long to make this into bundles, which they slung upon their backs and carried off, and it was probably because they were in a great hurry that they did not stop to put the house in order again.

Presently the good woman and her husband came up the hill from the village with their arms full of bundles and followed by a crowd of small boys who had been hired to help carry the purchases. Then followed others, youngsters and country louts, attracted by the wealth and prodigality of the pair, who, from simple

curiosity, trailed along behind like the tail of a comet and helped swell the concourse into a triumphal procession. Last of all came Guggins, the shopkeeper, carrying with much tenderness a new silk dress which was to be paid for when they reached the house, all the money they had taken to the village having been lavishly expended.

The farmer, who had formerly been a modest man, was now so swelled with pride that he tipped the rim of his hat over his left ear and smoked a big cigar that was fast making him ill. His wife strutted along beside him like a peacock, enjoying to the full the homage and respect her wealth had won from those who formerly deigned not to notice her, and glancing from time to time at the admiring procession in the rear.

But, alas for their new-born pride! when they reached the farmhouse they found the door broken in, the furniture strewn in all directions and their treasure stolen to the very last gold piece.

The crowd grinned and made slighting remarks of a personal nature, and Guggins, the shopkeeper, demanded in a loud voice the money for the silk dress he had brought.

Then the woman whispered to her husband to run and pump some more gold while she kept the crowd quiet, and he obeyed quickly. But after a few moments he returned with a white face to tell her the pump was dry, and not a gold piece could now be coaxed from the spout.

The procession marched back to the village laughing and jeering at the farmer and his wife, who had pretended to be so rich; and some of the boys were naughty enough to throw stones at the house from the top of the hill. Mr. Guggins carried away his dress after severely scolding the woman for deceiving him, and when the couple at last found themselves alone their pride had turned to humiliation and their joy to bittergrief.

Just before sundown the woman dried her eyes and, having resumed her ordinary attire, went to the brook for water. When she came to the flat stone she saw the King Beetle sitting upon it.

"The well is dry!" she cried out, angrily.

"Yes," answered the beetle, calmly, "you have pumped from it all the gold my people could find."

"But we are now ruined," said the woman, sitting down in the path beginning to weep; "for robbers have stolen from us every penny we possessed."

"I'm sorry," returned the beetle; "but it is your own fault. Had you not made so great a show of your wealth no one would have suspected you possessed a treasure, or thought to rob you. As it is, you have merely lost the gold which others have lost before you. It will probably be lost many times more before the world comes to an end."

"But what are we to do now?" she asked.

"What did you do before I gave you the money?"

"We worked from morning 'til night," said she.

"Then work still remains for you," remarked the beetle, composedly; "no one will ever try to rob you of that, you may be sure!" And he slid from the stone and disappeared for the last time.

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This story should teach us to accept good fortune with humble hearts and to use it with moderation. For, had the farmer and his wife resisted the temptation to display their wealth ostentatiously, they might have retained it to this very day.