

## NEVER TIRE OF DOING GOOD

[*From the Spanish of Fernan Caballero.*]

A PEASANT proprietor had two sons. The elder was impressed for military service and sent to America, where he had to remain for many years. On his return he found his father dead and his brother rich in the possession of all the family property. He went, therefore, to his brother's house, and to his question, 'Don't you know me?' he received for reply only a surly 'No.' When he humbly made himself known, his brother told him to go to the granary, and there in the loft he would find an old chest, which was all his father had left him in his will; and with that the uncouth brother turned on his heel and left him without further welcome.

Our traveller, therefore, went up to the loft and found there only an old worm-eaten chest. 'What in the world,' said he to himself, 'can I do with this rotten old box? However, blessed be the will of God! it will perhaps do to make a fire with,' for it was winter and extremely cold. He, therefore, put it on his back and, returning to his lodgings, borrowed an axe, and, as he was chopping it up, he came on a piece of paper which was behind a secret sliding panel at the bottom. He took it up and, reading it, found it to be a receipt for a large sum of money deposited on loan by his father. On presentation the sum was given up to him, so that now he was rich.

Shortly afterwards he was one day going through the town, when he met a woman crying very bitterly; he asked what was the matter, and she answered that her husband was lying very ill indeed, and not only had she no means of buying him necessary food and medicine, but he was even in danger of being carried off to prison on account of a debt that he owed.

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‘ Don’t be alarmed, my good woman,’ said our friend, whose name was Joseph; ‘ they shall not put your husband in prison, nor sell anything he has; I will see to everything; I will pay his debts, bear the cost of his illness, and if he does not get well pay all the funeral expenses.’ He was as good as his word, but unhappily the debt was so great that with the other expenses it absorbed all his means, so that everything he had was spent on this work of mercy. He was so good-natured, however, that he did not particularly mind, but said to himself: ‘ Well, now that I have not even anything to eat, I will go and offer myself for service.’ Thus he went to the town where the Court was, and, since he was a retired soldier, they gave him a post among the scullions in the Royal Palace. As he had a fine military bearing, and was always willing and cheerful, he attracted the notice of the King, and so won his favour that in a short time he was promoted step by step, until he reached the position of first equerry in waiting. Meanwhile, his unnatural brother had been stricken with poverty, and he was obliged to apply for help to Joseph, who, forgetting entirely his churlishness, obtained for him from the King a suitable post in the Royal Palace.

Far from being grateful, however, for this proof of brotherly affection, he was so filled with envy at seeing Joseph’s favour with the King that he resolved on his brother’s destruction. It was not long before he discovered an opportunity. The King had fallen in love with a young and beautiful princess, who went by the name of Princess Bella-Flor, but as His Majesty was old and ugly she was not at all attracted to him, and had, therefore, retired to an almost inaccessible palace in a distant country to evade his advances. The brother, therefore, went and told the King that Joseph knew her whereabouts, and even sent her secret messages, at which the King became enraged and, sum-

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moning Joseph to his presence, commanded him to set out without delay, and if he returned without the beautiful princess he should immediately be hanged before all the populace.

Poor Joseph in great anguish of mind went thereupon to the stables to saddle a horse for his journey, without, however, knowing where he had to go to find the princess. He saw there a white horse, old and in poor condition, who said to him : ' Take me, and you need have no anxiety on your quest.' Joseph was thunderstruck to hear the horse speak thus ; nevertheless, he mounted the animal and rode out with three loaves of bread, which the horse had told him to provide himself with the journey. After they had travelled a considerable distance, they came to an anthill, where the ants were dying of hunger, and the horse said to him : ' Throw down the bread to them, so that they may not be starved to death.' ' But why?' replied Joseph, ' we need this for ourselves.' ' No matter,' repeated the horse, ' one should never tire of doing a kind action.'

They went on further and met with an eagle, who had been caught in a fowler's net. ' Get down,' said the horse, ' and extricate this poor bird from the meshes.' ' But that will take a lot of time,' said Joseph, ' and the night is coming on.' ' No matter,' replied the horse, ' do what I tell you ; one must never tire of doing a kind action.' Further on they presently came to a river and saw on the bank a small fish struggling in its death throes, as it was unable to get back to the water. ' Dismount, please,' said the white horse to Joseph, ' and take up the poor little fish, and throw it back into the water.' ' But we haven't a moment to lose,' objected Joseph. ' There is always plenty of time for a kind act,' retorted the horse ; ' one must never tire of doing good.'

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Very soon they reached a castle in the midst of a dense forest, and in the courtyard they saw Princess Bella-Flor throwing corn to her chickens. 'Listen,' said the white horse, 'I am going to do some tricks in order to amuse the princess. She will thereupon say she would like to ride on me a little, to which you must agree. When she is in the saddle I will begin to prance and kick; she will be frightened, and you will then tell her that I am not accustomed to lady riders, and that if she will allow you to mount behind, I shall be immediately pacified. She will consent, and instantly I shall race without stopping until we arrive at the King's palace.' All happened as the horse had said, and it was only when he galloped away at full speed that the princess realised she was being carried captive to the Court. Thereupon, she let fall the basket of corn she held, and it was all scattered on the ground, at which she cried out to her companion to dismount and collect it. 'Don't trouble,' said Joseph 'there are heaps of corn where we are journeying.'

After that, as they were passing a lofty tree, she threw her handkerchief up on the topmost branch and begged Joseph to stop and get it for her. 'Never fear,' replied he, 'there are plenty of handkerchiefs at our journey's end.' Then as they crossed the river she dropped her ring, and told Joseph he must recover it for her, but he replied that there were plenty of rings where they were going.

At length they reached the palace, where the King was delighted when he saw that Joseph had really brought the Princess with him. She, however, was indignant at having been carried away thus by artifice, and at once retired to an hotel where she shut herself up, refusing to receive anyone. The King entreated in vain to be allowed to see her, but finally she said she would grant him an interview if he would restore to her the three objects that had been lost on the

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journey. He, therefore, commanded Joseph to go and fetch them, for, said he, 'You are the only person who knows anything about them, and if you fail in your quest I will order you to be hanged at once.' Poor Joseph was, therefore, in dire straits, and went to confide his hopelessness to the white horse, who told him not to be uneasy, but to jump into the saddle and together they would go and seek for them. They set out thereupon, and soon arrived at the ant-hill. 'Would you wish to have the spilt corn?' enquired the horse. 'It is not a question of wishing,' replied Joseph. 'Well,' said the animal, 'tell your need to the ants, and they will collect it for you, or at least a similar quantity in return for your three loaves.' And thus it came about; in less than no time the grateful insects had collected the quantity of grain and brought it to him. 'You see now,' said the horse, 'how it comes about that whoever does a kind action sooner or later reaps his reward.'

Then they came to the lofty tree, where the princess had thrown her handkerchief, and there it was still on the very topmost branch waving like a flag in the breeze. 'How in the world am I to get that handkerchief down?' exclaimed Joseph. 'I should have to have Jacob's ladder to reach up to it.' 'Never mind,' said the horse, 'address yourself to the eagle yonder, who is the one you rescued from the fowler's nets; he will get it for you.' And so it was, the eagle was delighted, and, taking the handkerchief in his beak, brought it carefully to Joseph.

Then they came to the river, which they found very much swollen and overflowing its banks. 'How in the world,' cried out Joseph, 'am I to find the ring in the depths of that mighty stream, especially as I don't know where the princess threw it?' 'Don't be in the least anxious,' replied his mount. 'Call for the little fish that you saved, and he will get it for you.' And

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so it was; the little fish hastened to do his bidding, and presently came swimming towards him, wagging his tail with delight and carrying the ring in his mouth.

So Joseph returned joyfully with all three to the palace. But when they were taken to the princess she said she would consent to wed the King, but on one condition only, that the soldier who carried her off from her palace should be fried alive in boiling oil. The cruel King consented to this, and ordered that Joseph should be accordingly put into a cauldron of boiling oil. As before, poor Joseph went very sorrowfully to his friend in the stable, and told him all. 'You have no need to be anxious,' said the white horse; 'mount quickly and ride me around the paddock until I am bathed in sweat, then anoint yourself all over with my sweat, and have no fear whatsoever when you are thrown into the cauldron; no harm will come to you.' And so it came about. And when they took him out he was so rejuvenated and so handsome that all the bystanders were struck with admiration, and particularly the princess herself, who straightway fell in love with him. Then the old King, seeing what had happened to Joseph, thought that he himself would become young and beautiful, too, if he did the same, so he jumped into the cauldron, and was immediately frizzled up into a mummy. Then all the people cried out that Joseph should be king in his place, and he was married to Princess Bella-Flor. But the first thing he did was to go round to the stables to thank his friend the white horse.

The horse then told him that he was really the poor man whom he had succoured at the cost of all his fortune, and who, knowing he was in danger, had asked permission of Almighty God to come and help him and repay his kindness, and thus, continued he, 'I kept on telling you, and I repeat it again now, *Never tire of doing good.*'

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