

THE BREAD OF DISCONTENT.

Once there was a baker who had a very bad, violent temper, and whenever a batch of bread was spoiled he flew into such a rage that his wife and daughters dared not go near him. One day it happened that all his bread was burnt, and on this he stamped and raved with anger. He threw the loaves all about the floor, when one, burnt blacker than the rest, broke in half, and out of it crept a tiny, thin black man, no thicker than an eel, with long arms and legs.

"What are you making all this fuss about, Master Baker?" said he. "If you will give me a home in your oven, I will see to the baking of your bread, and will answer for it that you shall never have so much as a loaf spoiled."

"And pray what sort of bread would it be if you were in the oven and helped to bake it?" said the baker. "I think my customers might not like to eat it."

"On the contrary," said the imp, "they would like it exceedingly. It is true that it would make them rather unhappy, but that will not hurt you, as you need not eat it yourself."

"Why should it make them unhappy?" said the baker. "If it is good bread it will not do any one harm, and if it is bad they will not buy it."

"It will taste very good," replied the imp; "but it will make all who eat it discontented, and they will think themselves very unfortunate, whether they are so or no; but this will not do you any harm, and I promise you that you shall sell as much as you wish."

"Agreed!" said the baker.

So the little imp crept into the oven and curled himself into the darkness behind, and the baker saw no more of him.

But next day he made a great batch of bread, and though he took no heed of the time when he put it in, and drew it out just as he wanted it, it was done quite right—neither too dark nor too light—and the baker was in high good humor.

The first person who tasted the bread was the Chief Justice. He came down to breakfast in high spirits, for he had just heard that an old aunt was dead, and had left him a great deal of money. So he kissed his wife and chucked his daughters under the chin, and told them that he had good news for them. His old aunt had left him twenty thousand pounds in her will. On this his wife clapped her hands for joy, and his daughters ran to him and kissed him, and begged him to let them have some of it. So they all sat down to breakfast in great glee, but no sooner had the Justice tasted the bread than his face fell.

"This is excellent bread," he said, taking a large slice. "I wish

everything else were as good," and he heaved a deep sigh.

"Why?" cried his wife, who had not yet begun to eat. "This morning, I am sure, there is nothing for you to complain of."

"Nay?" said the mayor, "it is very nice to have twenty thousand pounds, but think how much nicer it would have been if it had been thirty. How much more one could have done with that! Or even if it had been twenty-five thousand pounds, or even twenty-one. Twenty-one thousand pounds is a very nice sum of money, but twenty thousand pounds is no good at all. I am not sure that it would not be better not to have had any."

"Nonsense!" cried his wife, who was now eating her breakfast also. "You are very wicked to be so discontented: but one

in their eyes, and felt discontented and unhappy.

The next person to eat the bread was the village doctor. All night long he had been sitting up with a man who had broken his leg, and he had feared lest he should die; but as morning came he saw he would live, so he returned home to his wife in very good spirits, although he was sadly tired. The wife had already had her breakfast, but she had made all ready for her husband, with a loaf of the baker's new bread.

"See, dear husband," she said, here is your breakfast, and some nice bread, quite new, because I know you like it. How glad we ought to be that this poor man is likely to live."

"Yes, indeed," said the doctor; "being up all night is tiring work, but I don't grudge it when I

would be much better if there were no doctors at all:" and he sat and lamented, and nothing his wife could say could cheer him.

In a pretty little cottage near the doctor's house lived a young couple who were newly married, and were as happy as the day is long. Their cottage was covered with roses and filled with pretty things, and they had everything their hearts could desire. This morning they both came down smiling and happy, and the young wife kissed her husband and sang for joy. So they sat down to breakfast, chattering like two birds in a nest; but no sooner had the husband tasted the bread than his face fell, and he was silent for a time. Then he said:

"It is a very terrible thing to think how happy we are, for it cannot last. Something melancholy is sure to happen to us, and till it comes we shall live in dread of it, for we know happiness never lasts, and this is a thought that makes me very sad."

The wife had now also taken some bread.

"What is this you are saying?" she said. "How can you think such dreadful things? I do not like you when you talk like that; and I think it is very hard for me to be married to a man who wants to be unhappy."

"The best thing we can hope for," said the husband, sighing, "is for some great misfortune to befall us; then we should be all right, for we should know then that we knew the worst that could come. As it is, we shall live in suspense all our days."

"Now," cried his wife, "I am indeed unfortunate. What could be worse than to have a husband who does not like being happy? I wish I had married some one else; or, indeed, had no husband at all."

So both began to grumble, and at last to quarrel, and finally both were crying with anger. Not far out of the village was a large, pleasant farm-house, standing among fields, and the farmer was a hale, bright man, with a good wife and pretty children. He was very busy just now getting in the corn, for it was autumn, and he stood among his men, directing them as they worked in the fields. He had not had time to have a proper breakfast before going to work, but his wife sent some out to him with some of the baker's new bread, and he sat down under a tree to eat it. As he did so he looked up at the farm-house, and thought, with pride, that it was the largest farm in all the country round, and that it had belonged to his father, and his grandfather, and his great-grandfather before him.

"'Tis a fine old house, for sure," thought he, as he took a large piece of bread; "'tis so well built and strong." But no sooner had he swallowed a mouthful than his thoughts changed.



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thing I do say; it would have been much nicer if we had had it when we were young and better able to enjoy it. Money is very little use to people at our time of life. It would be really nice if we had had it fifteen years ago. As it is, I can't say I care much for it, and it makes me sad to think we did not get it before."

"Nay," cried the daughters, "in that case how much better it would have been for us to have it instead of you. We are young, and able to enjoy ourselves, and we could have given you a little of it if you'd liked, but we could have been very happy with the rest; as it is, it is no pleasure to us."

So they fell to quarrelling about the money, and by the time breakfast was done they all had tears

know that it does some good," and then he began to eat. "I am not sure, after all, that I have done such a good thing in curing this man. It is true that his broken leg hurt him very much, but perhaps when he is well again he may break his back, and that would be much worse. Perhaps I had better have left him to die. I dare say when he is quite well all kinds of misfortunes will befall him. I had much better have let him alone."

"Why," cried his wife, in surprise, "what are you saying, husband? Are you not a doctor, and is it not your business to cure people? And when you succeed ought you not to be glad?"

"I wish I were not a doctor," said the husband, sighing. "It