

HOW ONE TURNED HIS TROUBLE TO SOME ACCOUNT

[29] THERE was a soldier marching along the road—left, right! left, right! He had been to the wars for five years, so that he was very brave, and now he was coming home again. In his knapsack were two farthings, and that was everything that he had in the world. All the same, he had a rich brother at home, and that was something to say.

So on he tramped until he had come to his rich brother's house.

"Good-day, brother," said he, "and how does the old world treat you."

But the rich brother screwed up his face and rubbed his nose, for he was none too glad to see the other. "What!" said he, "and is the Pewter Penny back again?" That was the way that he welcomed the other to his house.

"Tut! tut!" says the brave soldier, "and is not this a pretty way to welcome a brother home to be sure! All that I want is just a crust of bread and a chance to rest the soles of my feet back of the stove a little while."

Oh, well! if that was all that he wanted, he might have his supper and a bed for the night, but he must not ask for any more, and he must jog on in the morning and never come that way again.

Well, as no more broth was to be had from that dish, the soldier said that he would be satisfied with what he could get; so into the house he came.

Over by the fire was a bench, and on the bench was a basket, and in the [30] basket were seven young ducks that waited where it was warm until the rest were hatched. The soldier saw nothing of these; down he sat, and the little young ducks said "peep!" and died all at once. Up jumped the soldier and over went the beer mug that sat by the fire so that the beer ran all around and put out the blaze.

At this the rich brother fell into a mighty rage. "See!" said he, "you never go anywhere but you bring Trouble with you. Out of the house before I make this broom rattle about your ears!"

And so the brave soldier had to go out under the blessed sky again. "Well! well!" said he, "the cream is all sour over yonder for sure and certain! All the same it will better nothing to be in the dumps, so we'll just sing a bit of a song to keep our spirits up." So the soldier began to sing, and by and by he heard that somebody was singing along with him.

"Halloa, comrade!" said he, "who is there?"

"Oh!" said a voice beside him, "it is only Trouble."

"And what are you doing there, Trouble?" said the soldier.

Oh! Trouble was only jogging along with him. They had been friends and comrades for this many a bright day, for when had the soldier ever gone anywhere that Trouble had not gone along with him?

The brave soldier scratched his head. "Yes, yes," says he; "that is all very fine; but there must be an end of the business. See! yonder is one road and here is another; you may go that road and I will go this, for I want no Trouble for a comrade."

"Oh, no!" says Trouble, "I will never leave you now; you and I have been comrades too long for that!"

Very well! the soldier would see about that. They should go to the king, for things had come to a pretty pass if one could not choose one's own comrades in this broad world, but must, willy-nilly, have Trouble always jogging at one's heels.

So off they went—the soldier and Trouble—and by and by they came to the great town and there they found the king.

"Well, and what is the trouble now?" said the king.

Trouble indeed! Why, it was thus and so; here was that same Trouble tramping around at the soldier's heels and would go wherever he went. Now, the soldier would like to know whether one had no right to choose one's own comrades—that was the business that had brought him to the king!

Well, the king thought and thought and puzzled and puzzled, but that [32] nut was too hard for him to crack, so he sent off for all of his wise councillors to see what they had to say about the matter.

So, when they had all come together the king told them that things were thus and so, and thus and so, and now he would like to know what they all thought about it.

Then the wise councillors began to talk and talk, and one said one thing and another another. After a while they fell to arguing with loud voices, and then they grew angry and began talking all at once, and last of all they came to fisticuffs. Then you should have heard what a racket they made! for they buffeted and cuffed one another until the hair flew as thick as dust in the mill.

That was the kind of prank that Trouble played them.

Now the king had a daughter, and the princess was as pretty a lass as one could find were he to hunt for seven summer days. When she heard all the hubbub she came to see what it was about, for that is the way with all of us, and of women folk more than any. And the king told her all about it; how the soldier had come to that town to get rid of Trouble, and how he had done nothing but bring it with him.

"Perhaps," said she, "Trouble might leave him if he were married."

At this the king fell into a mighty fume, for no man likes to have a woman tell him to do thus and so when things are in a pickle. He should like to know what the princess meant by coming and pouring her broth into their pot! If that was her notion she might help the soldier herself. Married he should be, and *she* should be his wife—that was what the king said.

So the soldier and the princess were married, and then the king had them both put into a great chest and thrown into the sea—but there was room in the chest for Trouble, and he went along with them.

Well, they floated on and on and on for a great long time, until, at last, the chest came ashore at a place where three giants lived.

The three giants were sitting on the shore fishing. "See, brothers," said the first of them, "yonder is a great chest washed up on the shore." So they went over to where it was, and then the second giant took it on his shoulder and carried it home. After that they all three sat down to supper.

Just then the soldier's nose began to itch and tickle, so that, for the life of him, he could not help sneezing.

"At-tchew!"—and there it was.

[34] "Hark, brothers!" said the third giant, "yonder is somebody in the chest!"

So the three giants came and opened the chest, and there were the soldier and the princess. Trouble was there too, but the giants saw nothing of him.

They bound the soldier with strong cords so that they might have him to eat for breakfast in the morning.

And now what was to be done with the princess?

"See, brothers," said the first giant, "I am thinking that a wife will about fit my needs. This lass will do as well as any, and, as I found her I will just keep her."

"Prut! how you talk!" said the second giant, "do you think that nobody is to marry in the wide world but you? Who was it brought the lass to the house I should like to know! No; I will marry her myself."

"Stop!" said the third giant. "You are both going too fast on that road. I thought of a wife long before either of you. Who was it found that the lass was in the house, I should like to know!"

And so they talked and talked until they fell to quarrelling, and then to blows. Over they rolled, cuffing and slapping, until each one killed the other two, so that they all lay as dead as fishes. And that was an end of them.

"See, now," said Trouble to the soldier, "who can say that I have done nothing for you? I tell you, comrade, that I am a good friend of yours, and love you as though you were my born brother. Listen! over yonder in the field is a great stone under which the giants have hidden stacks and stacks of money. Go and borrow a cart and two horses, and I will go with you and show you where it is."

Well, you may guess that that was a song that pleased the soldier. Off he went and borrowed a cart and two horses. Then he and Trouble went into the field together, and Trouble showed him where the stone was where the treasure lay.

The soldier rolled the stone over, and there, sure enough, lay bags and bags, all full of gold and silver money.

Down he went into the pit and began bringing up the money and loading it into the cart. After a while he had brought it all but one bag full.

"See, Trouble," said he, "my back is nearly broken with carrying the [35] money. There is still one bag down there yet; go down like a good lad and bring it up for me."

Oh, yes! Trouble would do that much for the soldier, for had they not been comrades for many and one bright, blessed days? Down he went into the pit, and then you may believe that the soldier was not long in rolling the stone into its place. So there was Trouble as tight as a fly in a bottle.

After that the soldier went back home again with great contentment—as I would have done had I ridden home upon a cart full of gold and silver, all of which belonged to me. He had left one bag of money, but then it was worth that much to be rid of Trouble.

After that the soldier built a ship and loaded it with the money. Then he and the princess sailed away to the king's house, for they thought that [36] maybe the king would like them better now that Trouble had left them and money had come.

When the king saw what a great boatload of gold and silver the soldier had brought home with him he was as pleased as pleased could be. He could not make enough of the brave soldier; he called him son, and walked about the streets with him arm in arm, so that the folks might see how fond he was of his son-in-law. Besides that he gave him half of the kingdom to rule over, so that the soldier and the princess lived together as snugly as a couple of mice in the barn when threshing is going on.

Well, one day a neighbor came to the rich brother and said, "Dear! dear! but the world is easy with your brother, the soldier!"

At this the rich brother pricked up his ears. "How is that?" said he—"My brother, the soldier? How comes the world to be easy with him, I should like to know?"

Oh, the neighbor could not tell him that; all that he knew was that the soldier was living over yonder with a princess for his wife, and more gold and silver money than a body could count in a week.

Well, well, this would never do! The rich brother must pick up acquaintance with the soldier again, now that he was rising in the world. So he put on his blue Sunday coat and his best hat, and away he went to the soldier's house.

Well, the soldier was a good-natured fellow, and bore grudges against nobody, so he shook hands with his brother, and they sat down together by the stove. Then the rich brother wanted to know all about everything—how came it that the other was so well off in the world?

Oh, there was no secret about that; it happened thus and so. And then the soldier told all about it. After that the other went home, but there was a great buzzing in his head, I can tell you!

"Now," says he to himself, "I will go over yonder to the giants' house, and will let Trouble out from under the stone. Then he will come here to my brother and will turn things topsy-turvy, and I will get the bag of money that was left there."

So, off he went until he came to the place where Trouble lay under the stone. He rolled the stone over, and—whisk! clip!—out popped Trouble from the hole. "And so you were leaving me here to be starved, were you?" said he.

"Oh, dear friend Trouble! it was not I, it was my brother, the soldier!"

Oh, well, that was all one to Trouble; now that he was out he would [37] stay with the man who let him out, and there was an end of it. "So bring along the bag of gold," says he, "for it is high time that we were going home."

So the rich brother took the bag of gold over his shoulder, and the two went home together; and if anybody was down in the mouth, it was the rich brother.

And now everything went wrong for him, for Trouble dogged his heels wherever he went. At last his patience could hold out no longer, and he began to cudgel his brains to find some way to get rid of the other. So one day he says,

"Come, Trouble, we will go out into the forest this morning and cut some wood."

Well, that suited Trouble as well as anything else, so off they went together, arm in arm. By and by they came to the forest, and there the man cut down a great tree. Then he split open the stump, and drove a wedge into it. So it came dinner-time, and then Trouble and he ate together.

[38] "See now, Trouble," said the man, "they tell me that you can go anywhere in all of the world."

"Yes," said Trouble, "that is so."

"And could you go into that tree that I have split yonder?"

Oh yes; Trouble could do that well enough.

If that was so the man would like to see him do it, that he would.

Oh, Trouble would do that and more, too, for a friend's asking. So he made himself small and smaller, and so crept into the cleft in the log as easily as though he had been a mouse. But, no sooner was he snugly there than the man seized his axe and knocked out the wedge, and there was Trouble as safe as safe could be. He might beg and beg, but no, the man was deaf in that ear. He shouldered his axe and off he went, leaving Trouble where he was.

Dear me! that was a long time ago; or else some busybody must have let Trouble out of that log, for I know very well that he is stumping about the world nowadays.