



LEGENDS OF THE SAINTS

St. Jerome and the Lion and the Donkey¹

Upon a certain day as evening drew on, and the blessed Jerome sat with the brethren, as is the way of the monk, to hear the reading of the lesson and to speak good words, lo of a sudden, limping on three paws and the fourth caught up, came a mighty lion into the cloister. At sight of him a good many of the brethren fled in terror, for human frailty is but timorous. But the blessed Jerome went out to meet him as one greets an incoming guest.

And while the distance between them was shortening, the lion who had no way of speaking, it not being his nature, offered the good father as best he might his wounded paw: and the Saint, calling the brethren, gave instructions that the wounded paw should be bathed, to find why the lion went thus limping. Upon close examination, they found that the paw had been pierced by thorns. Fomentations were applied with all diligence, and the wound speedily healed.

And now, all wildness and savagery laid aside, the lion began to go to and fro among them as peaceable and domestic as any animal about the house. This the blessed Jerome observed, and spoke as follows to the brethren: "Bring your minds to bear upon this, my brethren: what, I ask you, can we find for this lion to do in the way of useful and suitable work, that will not be burdensome to him, and that he can ef-

¹From Helen Waddell, *Beasts and Saints* (Constable, London, 1919).

ficiently accomplish? For I believe of a surety that it was not so much for the healing of his paw that God sent him hither, since He could have cured him without us, as to show us that He is anxious to provide marvellous well for our necessity."

To which the brethren gave concerted and humble response: "Thou knowest, father, that the donkey who brings us our wood from the forest pasture needs some one to look after him, and that we are always in fear that some naughty beast will devour him. Wherefore if it seem to thee good and right, let the charge of our donkey be laid upon the lion, that he may take him out to pasture, and again may bring him home."

And so it was done: the donkey was put in charge of the lion, as his shepherd: together they took the road to the pasture, and wherever the donkey grazed, there was his defender: and a sure defence he was. Nevertheless, at regular hours, that he might refresh himself and the donkey do his appointed task, the lion would come with him home.

And so for long enough it was: till one day, the donkey duly brought to his pasture, the lion felt a great weight of sluggishness come upon him, and he fell asleep. And as he lay sunk in deep slumber, it befell that certain merchants came along that road on their way to Egypt to buy oil. They saw the donkey grazing, they saw that no guardian was at hand, and seized by sudden wicked greed, they caught him and led him away.

In due course the lion roused up, knowing nothing of his loss, and set out to fetch his charge at graze. But when he was not to be

seen in the accustomed pasture, constricted with anxiety and in deep distress the lion went roaring up and down, hither and thither, for the remainder of the day, seeking what he had lost. And at last, when all hope of finding the donkey was gone, he came and stood at the monastery gate.

Conscious of guilt, he no longer dared walk in as of old time with his donkey. The blessed Jerome saw him, and the brethren too, hanging about outside the gate, without the donkey, and long past his usual hour: and they concluded that he had been tempted by hunger to kill his animal. In no mind, therefore, to offer him his wonted ration, "Away with you," said they, "and finish up whatever you have left of the donkey, and fill your greedy belly." And yet even as they spoke, they were doubtful as to whether he had indeed perpetrated this crime or no.

So finally the brethren went out to the pasture whither the lion was wont to bring the animal aforesaid, and up and down they scoured, to see if they could find any trace of the slaughter. No sign of violence was to be seen: and turning home they made haste to bring their report to the blessed Jerome. He heard them, and spoke. "I entreat you, brethren," said he, "that although ye have suffered the loss of the ass, do not, nevertheless, nag at him or make him wretched. Treat him as before, and offer him his food: and let him take the donkey's place, and make a light harness for him so that he can drag home the branches that have fallen in the wood." And it was done.

So the lion did regularly his appointed task, while the time drew on for the merchants to return. Then one day, his work done, he went out, inspired as I believe, brute beast though he was, by some divine prompting, and made his way to the field. Up and down, hither and thither in circles he ran, craving some further light on the fate that had befallen his comrade. And finally, worn out but still anxious, he climbed to a rising above the highway where he might look all round him. A great way off he spied men coming with laden camels, and in front of them walked a donkey. So far off was he that he could not recognize

him. None the less he set out, stepping cautiously, to meet them.

Now it is said to be the custom in that part of the country that whenever men set out with camels on a long journey, a donkey goes in front, with the camel's halter on its neck, and the camels follow after. And now the merchants came nearer, and he recognized his donkey. With a fierce roar he charged down upon them, making a mighty din, though doing no damage to any. Crazed with terror, as they well might be, they left all they had and took to their heels, the lion meantime roaring terribly and lashing the ground with his tail: and so he drove the affrighted camels, laden as they were, back to the monastery before him.

So when this surprising sight met the brethren's gaze, the donkey pacing in the van, the lion in like fashion marching in the rear, and the laden beasts in the middle, they slipped quietly away to inform the blessed Jerome. He came out, and benevolently bade them to set open the monastery gate, enjoining them to silence. "Take their loads off these our guests," said he, "the camels, I mean, and the donkey, and bathe their feet and give them fodder, and wait to see what God is minded to show His servants."

Then, when all instructions as to the camels had been obeyed, began the lion as of old to go here and there in high feather through the cloister, flattening himself at the feet of each several brother and wagging his tail, as though to ask forgiveness for the crime that he had never committed. Whereupon the brethren, full of remorse for the cruel charge they had brought against him, would say to one another, "Behold our trusty shepherd whom so short a while ago we were upbraiding for a greedy ruffian, and God has deigned to send him to us with such a resounding miracle, to clear his character!" Meantime the blessed Jerome, aware of things to come, spoke to the brethren, saying, "Be prepared, my brethren, in all things that are requisite for refreshment: so that those who are about to be our guests may be received, as is fitting, without embarrassment."

His orders duly obeyed, and the brethren chatting with the blessed Jerome, suddenly

comes a messenger with the news that there are guests without the gate, desirous to see the Father of the community. At this, the already frequently named Father commanded that the doors of the monastery be opened and the visitors brought to him. They, however, in spite of this invitation, came in blushing, and prostrated themselves at the feet of the blessed Jerome, entreating forgiveness for their fault. Gently raising them up, he admonished them to enjoy their own with thanksgiving, but not to encroach on others' goods; and in short to live cautiously, as ever in the presence of God. And this marvellous discourse ended, he bade them accept refreshment, and take again their camels and go their way.

Then with one voice they cried out, "We entreat you, Father, that you will accept, for the lamps in the church and the necessity of the brethren, half of the oil that the camels have brought: because we know and are sure that it was rather to be of service to you than for our own profit that we went down into Egypt to bargain there." To which the blessed Jerome replied, "This that you ask is indeed not right, for it would seem a great hardship that we who ought to have compassion on others and relieve their necessities by our own giving, should bear so heavy on you, taking your property away from you when we are not in need of it."

To which they answer: "Neither this food, nor any of our own property do we touch, unless you first command that what we ask shall be done. And so, as we have said, do you now accept half of the oil that the camels have brought: and we pledge ourselves and our heirs to give to you and those that come after you the measure of oil which is called a hin in each succeeding year."

So therefore, constrained and compelled by the violence of their entreaties, the blessed Jerome commanded that their prayer should be fulfilled. They partook of refreshment, and after receiving both benediction and camels, they returned exultant and jocund to their own people. But that these things were done at Bethlehem, and the fashion of their doing, is confidently related among the inhabitants of that place until this day.

The Truce of the Wolf²

(A Legend of St. Francis of Assisi)

§ In the Latin countries, particularly, the roots of pre-Christian folklore can be seen beneath the Christian legends of the saints. The bargains between beast and man were a recurring theme in folklore, but the same tales told in relation to the concept of Christian love have a special poignancy.

In Gubbio, seven hundred years ago, the winter had been a hard one. Snow had fallen more than once, and in the deep ravine that separated the two mountains behind the town the bitter, merciless winds had howled and raged day after day. Never in the history of Gubbio had the wolves been so bold and so determined. The citizens, armed with rocks and heavy staves, had risen in the night to drive them away, again and again; but night after night they returned, stealing the sheep and the young kids, raiding the hen-houses, coming boldly inside the great walls that were built to keep them out. Matteo, the baker and the strongest and bravest man in the town, said that their boldness was partly due to leadership.

"There is one great one who fears nothing," he told the anxious padre. "He catches the stones that we throw in his teeth and grinds them to powder. He comes so silently that you do not know he is there until you feel his breath on your shoulder. He is a devil, Padre. He is the Devil himself in a wolf's form."

The padre sighed. "Then we must pray to the saints to deliver us," he answered sadly.

One day, just after the New Year, the two little daughters of Gemma, the laundry woman who lived near the great gate that led out in to the ravine, went outside the gate to cut some dried heather for the donkey's bed. As dusk began to fall Gemma watched anxiously for their return. Finally she sent word to Matteo, who gathered some men about him and, passing through the gate, climbed the hill toward the caves where the wolves dwelt. Just outside the cave they

² From Mary Gould Davis, *The Truce of the Wolf and Other Tales of Old Italy* (Harcourt, Brace, 1931).

saw in the fading light a little red shawl and, farther on, a piece of the blue woolen dress that the older girl had been wearing. The sound of their footsteps brought from the dim shadows of the cave a snarl that made even Matteo start back. He knew that it was hopeless to attack the wolves in their own stronghold. And he knew, too, that it was too late to save the little girls. A shuddering horror swept through the town when the news became known. Mothers forbade their children to go beyond the house door, and every glimpse of Gemma's worn face brought a stab of pain and fear to the hearts of the women of Gubbio.

Late in the winter, when the courage and patience of every citizen was at its breaking-point, Gino, Matteo's eldest son, staggered into the town at dusk supported on either side by one of his companions and bleeding from a great gash in his neck and shoulder. Tired out with his long day in the fields, he had thrown himself down under an olive tree to sleep, and had waked to find the great beast at his throat. The three boys had had a terrible struggle to beat the wolf off. He had resisted them like a mad thing until a well-aimed blow from Alfredo's mattock had driven him limping away. Gino's wound festered, and when—weeks later—he came among them again his right arm hung withered and useless at his side. The evening of the attack, when the day's work was over, a meeting was held in the square of the city. Every one in Gubbio who could walk was there, men and women and children clinging fearfully to their mothers' skirts. Mounting the pedestal of the fountain where all could see him, Matteo made an impassioned speech, reciting again the long list of the crimes of the great wolf, waking in the mind and heart of every one anger and fear and grief.

"We must go to the *podestà* and ask for soldiers," he shouted. "Alone, we have failed to catch and punish this great one. We must forget our pride and ask for outside help. We *must* have peace!"

The crowd murmured in assent, the murmur rising to a sort of roar as Gemma came through the square and sat down on the pedestal at Matteo's feet. Then from the

door of the church where he had been listening the padre came, and the people parted to let him through. He mounted the pedestal beside Matteo, who instantly stepped down, leaving the padre's head and shoulders outlined in the fading light and visible to them all. His slow, silvery voice, the voice that they had listened to and obeyed for so many years, seemed to clear the troubled air and to bring with it an accustomed authority and calm.

"My people," said the padre, "before we send word to the soldiers, before we ask help for Gubbio from the *podestà*, let us seek the advice of Brother Francis of Assisi. You have heard of him. You know what he has done for the troubled ones of his own town and all through Umbria. You know of his power over the beasts. It is said that they understand and even talk to him, and that he is absolutely without fear of even the wildest of them. Let us ask Brother Francis to come here to Gubbio. Let us put our trouble in his hands and abide by his decision."

Matteo shook his head doubtfully, and the padre turned to him with a little pleading gesture.

"It will mean only a little delay, Matteo," he said. "We can send a message to Assisi today. If Brother Francis can do nothing—then we must, of course, send for the soldiers." The padre's words carried great weight with the people. Matteo could see by their faces that they wanted to try his plan. He nodded.

"*Si, si, Padre,*" he said almost cheerfully. "We will send for Brother Francis and see what he can do—but in my heart I fear that he can do nothing."

That very night a messenger started across the valley to Assisi, and one day a few weeks later, when spring had unfurled the gray leaves of the olive trees, when the early crocus had spread its mantle of pale lavender over the hills, a little band of brown-clad Brothers made its way up the steep hill that led to the square of Gubbio. The padre was waiting for them at the church door, and when he saw Brother Francis' face, hope leaped like a flame in his heart. Rapidly, omitting nothing, he told the story of the

wolf and his sins, and Brother Francis listened, a little shadow stealing into his serene eyes.

"I understand," he said when the padre had finished. "But if this one wolf truly is the leader and controls the others, then *he* must be made to understand. You have met him with fear and violence. You must meet him without fear, and you must reason with him. You must tell him, without anger, that he is a thief and a murderer."

"But no one of us, or even no group of us, dares to go near enough this wolf to tell him anything!" the padre answered a little ruefully.

Brother Francis smiled. Then he rose and gathered his brown robe about him.

"Then I will tell him," he said quietly.

Matteo, who was standing near with a number of the men of Gubbio, protested.

"You cannot go outside the gate alone, Brother Francis," he said. "If you go, you must take us all with you. The wolf will certainly try to murder you, and only our staves and our stones can save you."

Brother Francis shook his head.

"Your staves and your stones have failed," he answered. "I will try another way now, and I go alone. My brothers may follow at a little distance — if they are not afraid. But no man of Gubbio must come outside the gate while I am on the hillside." And the men fell back before the quiet authority of his voice.

With the group of friars a little way behind him, Brother Francis went up the hill toward the caves. The sun was at its setting, and the near hill was in deep shadow while the one across the ravine was bathed in a light so concentrated, so golden, that in it the budding genestra was like points of living flame. Brother Francis stepped into the shadow and went straight up to the entrance of the first cave. There was a large stone near this entrance, and here Francis sat himself down, gathering his robe about him and turning his face toward the mouth of the cave.

"Brother Wolf," he said, "come out into the light. I would like to see and talk to you."

There was no answer from the cave. But

in its shadow two eyes burned like two tiny green flames. . . . The sun sank lower. The swallows swooping overhead flew in ever narrowing circles and finally came to rest on Francis' arm and shoulder, whistling faintly.

"Be still, little brothers," said Francis softly. And the birds were still.

The friars, grown bolder in the silence, drew nearer, and Brother Leo started toward the mouth of the cave. Instantly there came a snarl, and out of the shadows sprang the great wolf. His eyes burned, his fangs showed white in his gaping red mouth, the short gray hairs stood out in a ruff around his neck. Quickly Francis lifted his hand and made the sign of the Cross. The great beast seemed to pause almost in mid-air; then he sank down beside the cave and laid his head on his crossed paws like a dog, his teeth still bared.

"If you are afraid, Brother Leo," said Francis, "move off behind the trees. There is no place for fear here." Then he turned again to the wolf.

"Brother Wolf," he said, and now the gentleness was gone from his voice and it was clear and resonant, "Brother Wolf, you have done much harm in the city of Gubbio. You have destroyed God's creatures without His leave. And not only have you slain and devoured beasts, you have also dared to kill and to destroy children who are made in the image of God. Therefore you are a murderer and worthy of the gallows, and the hand of every man in the city is against you."

He paused for a moment, and his eyes studied the huge, gaunt figure before him. He saw how every bone showed through the rough gray coat, how the short ears were scarred with many desperate battles. The green eyes were still blazing with hate and suspicion.

"But I, Brother Wolf," Francis went on more gently, "would fain make peace between you and the men of Gubbio. I would make a truce and a contract that you shall injure them no more and that they shall forgive you all your sins."

The wolf lifted his head. For a long time Francis gazed steadily at him. Slowly, slowly the fire died out of the green eyes, and there

remained in them only a great hunger. Francis' face softened. Well he knew what hunger did to beasts — and to men.

"If, Brother Wolf," he went on steadily, "if it pleases you to make and to observe a peace between you and the people of Gubbio, I promise to obtain for you the cost of your maintenance from the men of the city, so that you shall never again go hungry. For well do I know that it is hunger that has driven you to these evil courses. But I beg of you now this grace. I ask your promise, Brother Wolf, that you will never do hurt again either to man or to beast. Will you promise me this?"

The lids drooped over the hungry eyes; the wolf bowed his head and made with his whole body a movement of acquiescence.

"Then, Brother Wolf," said Francis, and now his smile was like light in a dark place, "pledge me this promise, so that I may have full trust in you."

Francis held out his hand, and the great beast, rising, lifted his paw and laid it in the hand stretched out to meet it.

Francis got to his feet. His voice was as clear as a bell.

"I command you, Brother Wolf," he said, "to come now with me, fearing nothing, and we will confirm this peace before the people of Gubbio and in the Name of God."

The sun had sunk below the horizon and the valley was filled with a soft blue dusk as Francis, with the wolf at his side, his narrow gray head pressed against the brown robe, entered the city gate, the little band of friars following them. In the square the people of Gubbio — men and women and children — waited in breathless suspense for the return of the man from Assisi. As he appeared in the great portal with the shadowy form that they dreaded pressing close at his heels, a low murmur of amazement ran through the crowd. Francis passed straight on to the pedestal of the fountain, one hand resting lightly on the wolf's head. His voice, when he spoke, had in it a curious quality — the clear, joyous tone that you hear sometimes in the voice of a happy child.

"Hear me, people of Gubbio," he said. "Brother Wolf, who is here before you, has promised and pledged me his faith to make

peace with you, never to injure you or harm you again in any way whatsoever. For your part you must promise him his daily sustenance in winter and in summer throughout the year. And I am bondsman for him, that he will keep and preserve through all of his life this pact of peace."

Again the murmur ran through the crowd. Matteo, his eyes shining with the wonder of it, cried eagerly, "We promise to feed him always and to keep our part of the pact! Do we not?" he added, turning to the people. And their shout in answer rang back from the mountain side. The wolf stirred uneasily, and Francis lifted the lean head in his hand and looked deep into the puzzled eyes.

"Brother Wolf," he said, "as you have pledged your word to me outside of the city to keep and preserve your promise, I desire that here again before the people of Gubbio you shall renew that pledge, and promise that you will never play me false in the surety that I have given for you."

He dropped the wolf's head and moved a pace away. A breath of doubt swept through the crowd. But Francis' face did not change. For a long moment the wolf hesitated. Then he rose and, taking one step toward Francis, he lifted the gray paw again and laid it in his hand.

At that the tension broke, and joy and wonder and relief swept through the people as a wind sweeps through a field of wheat. A woman on the outskirts of the crowd ran to her home near by and came back with a great copper pot filled with rice and gravy and vegetables which she had prepared for the evening meal. Fearlessly she went to the wolf and put it down in front of him. For an instant he sniffed it suspiciously; then his head disappeared in the pot and they could hear the eager lapping of his tongue. When he had finished every grain and licked the pot to cleanness again, he looked up into the woman's face and — "*Mille grazie, Signora,*" his eyes said. In the crowd a child laughed and clapped his hands.

And from that day the Wolf of Gubbio walked its streets as freely as one of the citizens. Every evening, winter and summer, he called at a house door, and the housewives vied with one another in preparing properly

his evening meal. The children played with him, and often in the sunny noons of spring and autumn he lay stretched like a great dog in the square before the fountain. Strangers, seeing him, would wonder and perhaps be frightened. But the citizens would laugh at their fears. They would say proudly, "He will not hurt you. He is *our* wolf — the Wolf of Gubbio." When, after two peaceful years, he died of old age, they buried him in the garden of the convent. There, year after year, the oleanders stood out their white and crimson blossoms above him and the cypress trees stood like tall, dark candles beside him.

Today the citizens of Gubbio point proudly to a fresco that is painted in soft, pale colors on the walls of their great Palazzo dei Consoli. There is the little square with the fountain, exactly as it was seven hundred years ago. There are the awed and wondering people — the men and the women and the children. There is St. Francis in his brown robe, and there beside him, his head bowed under the saint's gentle hand, stands the Wolf of Gubbio.

St. Nicholas³

Joy had come to a certain house in Patara. A mother lay smiling on her pillows, a newborn babe lay on the head-nurse's lap, while the household women clustered round to look at him.

"There's a fine boy!" said the head-nurse proudly. "Nothing wanting to him but a name."

"What shall you call him, madam?" asked one of the women.

"His name will be Nicholas," said the mother.

"Well then, little Nicholas, come and have your first bath," said the head-nurse, and she laid the tiny baby in a basin. Cries of astonishment broke from all the women. The new-born child stood upright in the water, and clasping his hands lifted his eyes to heaven.

"Oh madam, look!"

³ From Eleanor Farjeon, *Ten Saints* (Oxford University Press, 1936).

"Do not touch him," said the mother. "It is a miracle."

For two hours the tiny Nicholas stood with his hands clasped in his ecstasy, while the amazed women knelt about the basin, and adored him. It would hardly have surprised them if he had opened his lips and spoken, so sensible were his looks, so wise his eyes. They handled him with awe, bathing and dressing him at last as one who already knew more of holiness than they did. How else, but by divine knowledge, could he tell when Friday was come? Yet that day, when his nurse laid the baby to her breast, he turned away his head and would not suck. Not till the sun went down, and those who had fasted all day sat at their meal, would Nicholas allow a drop to pass his lips — but then he made up vigorously for lost time.

"My little wonder!" cried the nurse, dandling him as is the way of nurses. But few nurses surely had dandled a wonder like this child, who observed the fast-days before his lips could pray, and saw heaven from his bath in the hour he was born.

Nicholas grew up loving all young things. His parents, rich people of Patara in Lycia, were able to give their child more than he needed of toys and sweetmeats, money in his purse, and rich food at table. Sometimes those who have too much cannot see the needs of those who have too little, as though their own gold weighed down their eyelids and kept them shut. But when, like Nicholas, they have tender hearts, they keep their eyes open, and see the difference between rich and poor. When his parents died, he found himself a young man with a fortune which he did not wish to spend on himself.

How then would he spend it?

His friends must have wondered. He did not squander it. There were no signs of extravagance about his house or his person, and what he did with his wealth remained a secret. It is a secret that shall be kept till the end of his story.

But this may be told at once: that Nicholas had no use for his own earthly treasures, and turned his thoughts on the treasure that is in heaven. The ecstasy he had been born in never left him, and he became a servant of God.

His longing then was to see the Holy Land with his own eyes, and he took boat from Lycia to Alexandria, from which great port he would journey to Jerusalem. During the voyage, such a tempest swept sea and sky that the sailors gave up hope. The captain shouted his orders through the storm, and the men did their best to obey, but the ship tossed and strained and seemed as though she must part. All the captain's seamanship was useless. Then in the midst of the tumult a lightning-flash showed Nicholas kneeling at prayer, and his eyes were raised to heaven as though the salt waves that soaked his garments were the scented waters of his first bath.

"We are past praying for, priest!" cried the captain roughly. "Better let me lash you to a mast."

But as he spoke, the wind died down to a sigh, the black sky turned blue, the boiling sea became a sheet of silk, and the lightning vanished in the light of the sun. The sailors shouted for joy, and Nicholas said: "Nothing is ever past praying for."

"Tell us your name, priest," said the wondering captain.

"Nicholas," answered he.

"Remember it, men!" said the captain to his crew, "and if ever we are as near to death again, let us invoke the name of Nicholas."

And sailors did so then, and for centuries after, when Nicholas had joined the ranks of the saints. Many a one who prayed for aid in a storm vowed that he had seen Saint Nicholas himself standing at the ship's helm, his eyes raised to heaven, protecting the vessel and her crew from harm. And on their voyages seamen whittled little ships, and rigged them out trim and proper; and coming safely home, they hung the ships up in the sea-port churches, as a thank-offering to Saint Nicholas, their patron.

And children, who have cause to love him as much as sailors had, took Saint Nicholas for their patron too. He had a way of coming to know the needs of the young. Their pleasures were his care; so too were their pains.

It happened once in Myra, when Nicholas had become Bishop of that city, that three boys wandered into a wood on the outskirts,

and came at night to an inn. They knocked, and the Innkeeper came at once to the door. He beamed in a friendly way, and rubbed his hands. "Well, children, what may you be doing here? What do you want so late?"

"We have missed our way, Innkeeper. May we come in and sleep?"

"By all means, children, and you shall sleep without dreaming."

There is nothing to be said for this Innkeeper. He lived by robbing those who put up at his hostel. When the boys were asleep he searched their clothes, and pocketed what he found. It was not much, but the clothes themselves were worth something. And then he looked on the three boys and sighed: "They are as pink and tender as sucking-pigs! What a pity that they are not sucking-pigs! What delicious pickled pork those three would make."

No sooner thought than done. By morning the three little boys were lying in pickle in the salting-tub; and truly they slept without dreaming.

Not so the Bishop of Myra. Nicholas, lying abed in his great palace, had a dream which made him sit up in sorrow and wrath. He had seen in his vision everything that had happened, and could not rest until he had discovered if it was true. That day he wandered in the forest arrayed in his mitre and robes, and at nightfall he came to the inn, and knew it for the one he had seen in his dream. He knocked; and the Innkeeper opened, the man in the vision. He beamed on Nicholas, and rubbed his hands.

"Well, Bishop, here's an honour, to be sure! What can I do for your worship?"

"I have missed my way in the forest, Innkeeper. Can I come in and sup?"

The Innkeeper bowed him in, and gave him a seat. "What does your Worship fancy? A slice of ham? a cut of beef? or veal?"

"None of these, Innkeeper," answered Nicholas. "I have a fancy for the pork in the pickle-tub over there."

The Innkeeper glanced uneasily at his guest.

"Well, what's the matter?" asked Saint Nicholas. "Is the pork not yet salted enough?"

The Innkeeper turned white.

"Perhaps," said the Saint, "you only put it in pickle last night?"

The Innkeeper shook in his shoes so hard that he fell on the ground with his face in his hands.

"Mercy! mercy!" he wailed. "I confess! Have mercy!"

"We'll see about that," said Saint Nicholas. He crossed the room, raised his eyes to heaven, and made the sign of the Cross over the tub. The scum on the brine shivered a little, and three little sleepy-heads rose and peeped over the brim.

"Oh!" yawned the first child, "how well I have slept!"

The second stretched his arms. "Me too, without dreaming!"

"I dreamed," said the third child, rubbing his eyes. "I dreamed I was in Paradise."

The Innkeeper on the ground beat his breast, and wept.

Was there anything to be said for the Innkeeper? Yes, after all. Nothing is ever past praying for. Saint Nicholas knelt down with the three little boys, and put up a prayer to heaven. And even the Innkeeper was pardoned his sins, and was the better for it. He never pickled his customers again.

No wonder the Day of St. Nicholas became the children's festival. But his protection of the three little pickles is not the whole why and wherefore of that. The time has come to give away his secret, and tell in what way he liked to spend his riches when he was a young man in Patara.

There was in that city a poor nobleman who had three young daughters, so beautiful that many a youth would have sought them in marriage — but alas! they had no dowries. And without a dowry no girl, however fair, could hope for marriage in those days. So poor was the father that he had not been able to lay by a single silver piece for his eldest daughter; so poor that the time came when he knew not how to feed his children any longer. He saw no way between letting them starve, or selling them in the market, one by one, as slaves to rich men; and his heart was full of woe for the fate in store for them. As for the young maidens, they knew why their father sighed and turned pale when he looked at them. They dared

not speak of it to him, but among themselves they whispered the names of certain youths whom they loved, and must not think of.

One night the poor nobleman stood cooling his brow at his open window, thinking, as the moon sailed out of a cloud, that she was no fairer than his eldest daughter, whom to-morrow he must part with. By no other means could he save her from death, yet the means would shame both his honour and hers. While he leaned in his casement, blurring the moonlight with his tears, a heavy round object sailed into the room, and fell clinking and chinking at his feet. Stooping, the poor man picked up a plump moneybag, and he could hardly believe his eyes when he untied the string and a stream of gold pieces poured out. He counted it eagerly in little piles. He had not seen so much money for years. There was enough to dower one maiden handsomely, and he thanked heaven that now he could save his eldest daughter from shame. When morning broke he told her the glad news, and instead of going to the slave-market, the young thing ran joyously to the bazaar, to buy a silken veil, a bangle, and sweetmeats. That evening the youth she had named came to her father's house, the sweetmeats were eaten, and the lovers were betrothed.

But after dark the nobleman's heart was sore for his second daughter, who was as lovely as the starry sky he looked on through his window. For to-morrow she must go to the slave-market, since miracles surely do not happen twice. Yet this one did! He had scarcely formed the thought when a second fat round moneybag flew like a ball through the window, and it contained a dower of gold equal to that of the first. The nobleman ran out of the house too late to catch sight of the giver. Next day he told his second child to put off her sorrow, and buy herself a silken veil like her sister's. She returned from the bazaar with perfume as well, and a jar of fruits in syrup, and before the day ended she also was betrothed to the youth she wished to wed.

When evening fell the father was less unhappy than before, for what had happened twice might happen thrice; and this time he was determined to discover the unknown

purse-thrower, and thank him. For he could not doubt that the good fortune of her sisters would fall to his youngest daughter, who was as sweet as the flowers that scented the night.

A little before the time was due, the nobleman stole forth and hid himself in an angle of the house; and before long a cloaked figure crept to the window, clutching in one hand a bursting money-bag. But as he aimed it at the open casement, the father came out of hiding and seized his cloak — and was amazed to see that it covered young Nicholas, the richest man in Patara. The grateful father fell on his knees, and kissed the hem of the cloak. "Nicholas, servant of God, why seek to hide yourself?"

"It is the way I prefer," said Nicholas.

"But then, your generosity will never be known!"

"Why should it be?" Nicholas seemed distressed that the mystery in which he had wrapped himself had been revealed, even to this one man. "Promise me, friend," he said, "that you will tell nobody."

"At least I must tell my children."

"The children least of all," said Nicholas. "If I choose to make young things happy by giving them presents, that is my business."

"And you won't come in and let them thank you in person?"

"I would rather they did not see me," said Nicholas. "Pray keep me dark, good sir!"

The father promised. Next day the youngest girl went to the bazaar and bought a silken veil, a necklace, and almond cakes. And she too was betrothed by evenfall.

But secrets have a way of leaking out. No doubt the three happy girls hung round their father's neck, and teased him with questions.

"Who, father, who? Who gave me my purse of gold?"

"Who, father, who? Who gave me my silken veil?"

"Dear father, who? Who gave me my handsome husband?"

"Who gave us the sweets, the fruit, the scent, and the trinkets? Who? Who? Who?" they cried, like little owls. And perhaps at last, their indulgent father whispered:

"Well! if you promise not to say a word —"

And no doubt they promised; and no doubt they told. No doubt all the girls and boys in Patara wondered whether Nicholas would come to them too one night with presents. No doubt, if their parents wished to surprise them, they hid sweetmeats in their slippers while they slept, and in the morning the children shouted to each other: "Oh look, look, look what Nicholas has brought me!" No doubt they took to leaving their shoes outside their doors, for the generous one who preferred not to be seen. No doubt, from Patara in Lycia long ago, the custom spread through Asia Minor, and crept over the border into Europe, and sailed oversea to distant continents.

And it reached the present time, when little shoes were changed for little stockings, because stockings hold quite twice as much as shoes, and one ought not to limit dear Saint Nicholas, who loves above all to be generous in secret.