

The Priest with the Greedy Eyes

By Unknown

In the parish of St. Nicholas there lived a Pope. This Pope's eyes were thoroughly pope-like. He served Nicholas several years, and went on serving until such time as there remained to him nothing either for board or lodging. Then our Pope collected all the church keys, looked at the picture of Nicholas, thumped him, out of spite, over the shoulders with the keys, and went forth from his parish as his eyes led him. And as he walked along the road he suddenly lighted upon an unknown man.

'Hail, good man!' said the stranger to the Pope. 'Whence do you come and whither are you going? Take me with you as a companion.'

Well, they went on together. They walked and walked for several versts, then they grew tired. It was time to seek repose. Now the Pope had a few biscuits in his cassock, and the companion he had picked tip had a couple of small loaves.

'Lets eat your loaves first,' says the Pope, 'and afterwards we'll take to the biscuits, too.'

'Agreed!' replies the stranger. 'We'll eat my loaves, and keep your biscuits for afterwards.'

Well, they ate away at the loaves; each of them ate his fill, but the loaves got no smaller. The Pope grew envious 'Come,' thinks he, 'I'll steal them from him!' After the meal the old man lay down to take a nap, but the Pope kept scheming how to steal the loaves from him. The old man went to sleep. The Pope drew the loaves out of his pocket and began quietly nibbling them at his seat. The old man awoke and felt for his loaves; they were gone

'Where are my loaves?' he exclaimed; 'who has eaten them? was it you, Pope?'

'No, not I, on my word!' replied the Pope.

'Well, so be it,' said the old man.

They gave themselves a shake, and set out again on their journey. They walked and walked; suddenly the road branched off in two different directions. Well, they both went the same way, and so reached a certain country. In that country the King's daughter lay at the point of death, and the King had given notice that to him who should cure his daughter he would give half of his kingdom, and half of his goods and possessions; but if any one undertook to cure her and failed, he should have his head chopped off and hung up on a stake. Well, they arrived, elbowed their way among the people in front of the King's palace, and gave out that they were doctors. The servant came out from the King's palace, and began questioning them:

'Who are you? from what cities, of what families? what do you want?'

'We are doctors,' they replied; 'we can cure the Princess!'

'Oh! if you are doctors, come into the palace.'

So they went into the palace, saw the Princess, and asked the King to supply them with a private apartment, a tub of water, a sharp sword, and a big table. The King supplied them with all these things. Then they shut themselves up in the private apartment, laid the Princess on the big table, cut her into small pieces with the sharp sword, flung them into the tub of water, washed them, and rinsed them. Afterwards they began putting the pieces

together; when the old man breathed on them the different pieces stuck together. When he had put all the pieces together properly, he gave them a final puff of breath: the Princess began to quiver, and then arose alive and well! The King came in person to the door of their room, and cried:

‘In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost!’

‘Amen!’ they replied.

‘Have you cured the Princess?’ asked the King.

‘We’ve cured her,’ say the doctors. ‘Here she is!’

Out went the Princess to the King, alive and well.

Says the King to the doctors: ‘What sort of valuables will you have? would you like gold or silver? Take whatever you please.

Well, they began taking gold and silver. The old man used only a thumb and two fingers, but the Pope seized whole handfuls, and kept on stowing them away in his wallet—shovelling them into it, and then lifting it a bit to see if he was strong enough to carry it.

At last they took their leave of the King and went their way. The old man said to the Pope, ‘We’ll bury this money in the ground, and go and make another cure.’ Well, they walked and walked, and at length they reached another country. In that country, also, the King had a daughter at the point of death, and he had given notice that whoever cured his daughter should have half of his kingdom and of his goods and possessions; but if he failed to cure her he should have his head chopped off and hung up on a stake.’ Then the Evil One afflicted the envious Pope, suggesting to him ‘Why shouldn’t he go and perform the cure by himself, without saying a word to the old man, and so lay hold of all the gold and silver for himself?’ So the Pope walked about in front of the royal gates, forced himself on the notice of the people there, and gave out that he was a doctor. In the same way as before he asked the King for a private room, a tub of water, a large table, and a sharp sword. Shutting himself up in the private room, he laid the Princess on the table, and began chopping her up with the sharp sword; and however much the Princess might scream or squeal, the Pope, without paying any attention to either screaming or squealing, went on chopping and chopping just as if she had been so much beef. And when he had chopped her up into little pieces, he threw them into the tub, washed them, rinsed them, and then put them together bit by bit, exactly as the old man had done, expecting to see all the pieces unite with each other. He breathes on them—but nothing happens! He gives another puff—worse than ever! See, the Pope flings the pieces back again into the water, washes and washes, rinses and rinses, and again puts them together bit by bit. Again he breathes on them—but still nothing comes of it.

‘Woe is me,’ thinks the Pope; ‘here’s a mess!’

Next morning the King arrives and looks—the doctor has had no success at all—he’s only messed the dead body all over with muck!

The King ordered the doctor off to the gallows. Then our Pope besought him, crying—

‘O King! O free to do thy will! Spare me for a little time! I will run for the old man, he will cure the Princess.’

The Pope ran off in search of the old man. He found the old man, and cried:

‘Old man! I am guilty, wretch that I am! The Devil got hold of me. I wanted to cure the King’s daughter all by myself, but I couldn’t. Now they’re going to hang me. Do help me!’

The old man returned with the Pope.

The Pope was taken to the gallows. Says the old man to the Pope:

‘Pope! who ate my loaves?’

‘Not I, on my word! So help me Heaven, not I!’

The Pope was hoisted on to the second step. Says the old man to the Pope

‘Pope! who ate my loaves?’

‘Not I, on my word! So help me Heaven, not I!’

He mounted the third step—and again it was ‘Not I!’ And now his head was actually in the noose—but it’s ‘Not I!’ all the same. Well, there was nothing to be done! Says the old man to the King:

‘O King! O free to do thy will! Permit me to cure the Princess. And if I do not cure her, order another noose to be got ready. A noose for me, and a noose for the Pope!’

Well, the old man put the pieces of the Princess’s body together, bit by bit, and breathed on them—and the Princess stood up alive and well. The King recompensed them both with silver and gold.

‘Let’s go and divide the money, Pope,’ said the old man.

So they went. They divided the money into three heaps. The Pope looked at them, and said:

‘How’s this? There’s only two of us. For whom is this third share?’

‘That,’ says the old man, ‘is for him who ate my loaves.’

‘I ate them, old man,’ cries the Pope; ‘I did really, so help me Heaven!’

‘Then the money is yours,’ says the old man. ‘Take my share too. And now go and serve in your parish faithfully; don’t be greedy, and don’t go hitting Nicholas over the shoulders with the keys.’

Thus spake the old man, and straightway disappeared.