

The Blessing

By
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[In the following little story, an extract from the beautiful and wholesome writings of folk life in Norway, by Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson,—the greatest author and poet of the Scandinavian people in modern times—is a picture we recognize. It is life as we see it everywhere—the man who has acquired wealth, who has become arrogant, proud and selfish because of his worldly possessions, who has become boastful of his prominence and his riches, whose prosperity has made him overbearing, unkind and snobbish, the man who enjoys life the most when he can humiliate others through the power of his position and the wealth that is at his disposal—the picture of the man who traded his soul for worldly treasure. As Bjørnson sees him, he must lose his most valued treasures before he can find his soul and reflect that something in human life that reflects God. —Editor's Note.]

ONE DAY Thord Oversaas, the leading man in the parish, entered the parson's study with an extremely serious and important air.

"I have come," he announced, "to arrange for my son's christening."

"What is the name to be?" asked the parson.

"Finn," after my father."

"Who are the sponsors?"

Thord named them; they were prominent persons in the place, and his relatives.

"Anything else?" inquired the minister.

After a moment's pause, the farmer said: "I should like my boy to have a special christening all to himself."

"Then it will have to be on a week day."

"On Saturday next, I thought, at 12 o'clock." "Very well," assented the parson. "Anything else?"

"Nothing else," said the farmer, taking up his cap as if to go.

The parson rose from his seat, went across to Thord and grasped his hand.

"I think there is yet this," he said, earnestly and impressively, "to wish that God may make your child a blessing to you."

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Sixteen years had come and gone. Again Thord stood in the parson's study.

"You look very well, Thord," remarked the clergyman, for the years had left scarcely any mark upon the hale and hearty farmer.

"Well, you see, I have no worries," replied Thord; "nothing to trouble me."

There was a slight pause. Then the parson said: "What can I do for you this evening?"

"I have come about my son, who is to be confirmed tomorrow," replied Thord.

"Ah, he is a bright boy."

"I thought that I would not pay the parson until I knew what number my son is going to get in the church."

"He will be number one."

"Well, since you have told me that, here are ten daler for the parson." Have you anything more to say?" inquired the parson.

"Nothing more," replied Thord, and went his way.

* * *

Eight years passed, and then one day the parson heard a commotion outside his study door. The door was thrown open, and in walked Thord, accompanied by a little group of friends.

"I have come," said the farmer, as he returned

the clergyman's greeting, "to request you to publish my son's banns. He is about to marry Karen Storlien, the daughter of my friend Gudmund, here present."

"The wealthiest girl in the parish," commented the parson.

"So they say," said Thord, as he pushed up his hair with his hand.

The parson looked thoughtfully, but said nothing further until he had entered the names in the books and witnessed the men's signatures.

The farmer laid three daler upon the table.

"The fee is only one daler," said the parson.

"I know that," answered Thord, "but Finn is my only child, and I am both able and willing to do what is handsome by him."

As the parson took up the money he said: "This is now the third time, Thord, you have come here on your son's behalf." "Yes," replied the farmer, "and now I shall not be back in his behalf anymore."

He went out followed by his friends.

* * *

A fortnight after this third visit to the parson, on a calm, fine day, father and son were crossing the lake to Storlien. As they rowed they talked of the approaching wedding.

"The thwart beneath me is not steady," said the young man, and he rose to put it right. At this moment the bottom board upon which he stood slipped and he fell into the lake.

"Catch hold of this oar!" cried the father.

But the son had made only two strokes towards it when he was seized with cramps. "Stay a moment!" exclaimed Thord, "I will come to you."

And he rowed with all his might.

But Finn fell back, gave one intense look at his father, then sank out of sight.

Thord could not believe that his son had really drowned. He held the boat still, keeping his eyes fixed upon the spot where Finn had disappeared, expecting him to come up again.

A few bubbles appeared upon the surface of the water, then some more, then a single one, which burst. After that the lake was smooth as a mirror.

For three days and nights the unhappy father rowed around the spot, without food or sleep. He was dragging the lake. On the morning of the third day he found what he sought, and bore it across the hills to his desolate home.

* * *

"You are out late," said the parson.

"Yes, I come late—late!" returned the other, as he sat down.

The clergyman seated himself also. There was a long silence.

"Here," said Thord at last, "is something which I desire to give to the poor—as a legacy in my son's name." As he spoke he rose, placed some money upon the table, then sat down again.

The parson counted the currency.

"This is a large sum," he remarked.

"It is half the price of my farm which I sold today," said Thord quietly.

Again there was silence. Then the parson said,

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