

True And Untrue

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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Once on a time there were two brothers; one was called True, and the other Untrue. True was always upright and good towards all, but Untrue was bad and full of lies, so that no one could believe what he said. Their mother was a widow, and hadn't much to live on; so when her sons had grown up, she was forced to send them away, that they might earn their bread in the world. Each got a little srip with some food in it, and then they went their way.

Now, when they had walked till evening, they sat down on a windfall in the wood, and took out their scraps, for they were hungry after walking the whole day, and thought a morsel of food would be sweet enough.

'If you're of my mind', said Untrue, 'I think we had better eat out of your srip, so long as there is anything in it, and after that we can take to mine.'

Yes! True was well pleased with this, so they fell to eating, but Untrue got all the best bits, and stuffed himself with them, while True got only the burnt crusts and scraps.

Next morning they broke their fast off True's food, and they dined off it too, and then there was nothing left in his srip. So when they had walked till late at night, and were ready to eat again, True wanted to eat out of his brother's srip, but Untrue said 'No', the food was his, and he had only enough for himself.

'Nay! but you know you ate out of my srip so long as there was anything in it', said True.

'All very fine, I daresay', answered Untrue; 'but if you are such a fool as to let others eat up your food before your face, you must make the best of it; for now all you have to do is to sit here and starve.'

'Very well!' said True, 'you're Untrue by name and untrue by nature; so you have been, and so you will be all your life long.'

Now when Untrue heard this, he flew into a rage, and rushed at his brother, and plucked out both his eyes. 'Now, try if you can see whether folk are untrue or not, you blind buzzard!' and so saying, he ran away and left him.

Poor True! there he went walking along and feeling his way through the thick wood. Blind and alone, he scarce knew which way to turn, when all at once he caught hold of the trunk of a great bushy lime-tree, so he thought he would climb up into it, and sit there till the night was over for fear of the wild beasts.

'When the birds begin to sing', he said to himself, 'then I shall know it is day, and I can try to grope my way farther on.' So he climbed up into the lime-tree. After he had sat there a little time, he heard how some one came and began to make a stir and clatter under the tree, and soon after others came; and when they began to greet one another, he found out it was Bruin the bear, and Greylegs the wolf, and Slyboots the fox, and Longears the hare who had come to keep St. John's eve under the tree. So they began to eat and drink, and be merry; and when they had done eating, they fell to gossiping together. At last the Fox said:

'Shan't we, each of us, tell a little story while we sit here?' Well! the others had nothing against that. It would be good fun, they said, and the Bear began; for you may fancy he was king of the company.

'The king of England', said Bruin, 'has such bad eyesight, he can scarce see a yard before him; but if he only came to this lime-tree in the morning, while the dew is still on the leaves, and took and rubbed his eyes with the dew, he would get back his sight as good as ever.'

'Very true!' said Greylegs. 'The king of England has a deaf and dumb daughter too; but if he only knew what I know, he would soon cure her. Last year she went to the communion. She let a crumb of the bread fall out of her mouth, and a great toad came and swallowed it down; but if they only dug up the chancel floor, they would find the toad sitting right under the altar rails, with the bread still sticking in his throat. If they were to cut the toad open and take and give the bread to the princess, she would be like other folk again as to her speech and hearing.'

'That's all very well', said the Fox; 'but if the king of England knew what I know, he would not be so badly off for water in his palace; for under the great stone, in his palace-yard, is a spring of the clearest water one could wish for, if he only knew to dig for it there.'

'Ah!' said the Hare in a small voice; 'the king of England has the finest orchard in the whole land, but it does not bear so much as a crab, for there lies a heavy gold chain in three turns round the orchard. If he got that dug up, there would not be a garden like it for bearing in all his kingdom.'

'Very true, I dare say', said the Fox; 'but now it's getting very late, and we may as well go home.'

So they all went away together.

After they were gone, True fell asleep as he sat up in the tree; but when the birds began to sing at dawn, he woke up, and took the dew from the leaves, and rubbed his eyes with it, and so got his sight back as good as it was before Untrue plucked his eyes out.

Then he went straight to the king of England's palace, and begged for work, and got it on the spot. So one day the king came out into the palace-yard, and when he had walked about a bit, he wanted to drink out of his pump; for you must know the day was hot, and the king very thirsty; but when they poured him out a glass, it was so muddy, and nasty, and foul, that the king got quite vexed.

'I don't think there's ever a man in my whole kingdom who has such bad water in his yard as I, and yet I bring it in pipes from far, over hill and dale', cried out the king. 'Like enough, your Majesty', said True; 'but if you would let me have some men to help me to dig up this great stone which lies here in the middle of your yard, you would soon see good water, and plenty of it.'

Well! the king was willing enough; and they had scarcely got the stone well out, and dug under it a while, before a jet of water sprang out high up into the air, as clear and full as if it came out of a conduit, and clearer water was not to be found in all England.

A little while after the king was out in his palace-yard again, and there came a great hawk flying after his chicken, and all the king's men

began to clap their hands and bawl out, 'There he flies!' 'There he flies!' The king caught up his gun and tried to shoot the hawk, but he couldn't see so far, so he fell into great grief.

'Would to Heaven', he said, 'there was any one who could tell me a cure for my eyes; for I think I shall soon go quite blind!'

'I can tell you one soon enough', said True; and then he told the king what he had done to cure his own eyes, and the king set off that very afternoon to the lime-tree, as you may fancy, and his eyes were quite cured as soon as he rubbed them with the dew which was on the leaves in the morning. From that time forth there was no one whom the king held so dear as True, and he had to be with him wherever he went, both at home and abroad.

So one day, as they were walking together in the orchard, the king said, 'I can't tell how it is *that* I can't! there isn't a man in England who spends so much on his orchard as I, and yet I can't get one of the trees to bear so much as a crab.'

'Well! well!' said True; 'if I may have what lies three times twisted round your orchard, and men to dig it up, your orchard will bear well enough.'

Yes! the king was quite willing, so True got men and began to dig, and at last he dug up the whole gold chain. Now True was a rich man; far richer indeed than the king himself, but still the king was well pleased, for his orchard bore so that the boughs of the trees hung down to the ground, and such sweet apples and pears nobody had ever tasted.

Another day too the king and True were walking about, and talking together, when the princess passed them, and the king was quite downcast when he saw her.

'Isn't it a pity, now, that so lovely a princess as mine should want speech and hearing', he said to True.

'Ay, but there is a cure for that', said True.

When the king heard that, he was so glad that he promised him the princess to wife, and half his kingdom into the bargain, if he could get

her right again. So True took a few men, and went into the church, and dug up the toad which sat under the altar-rails. Then he cut open the toad, and took out the bread and gave it to the king's daughter; and from that hour she got back her speech, and could talk like other people.

Now True was to have the princess, and they got ready for the bridal feast, and such a feast had never been seen before; it was the talk of the whole land. Just as they were in the midst of dancing the bridal-dance in came a beggar lad, and begged for a morsel of food, and he was so ragged and wretched that every one crossed themselves when they looked at him; but True knew him at once, and saw that it was Untrue, his brother.

'Do you know me again?' said True.

'Oh! where should such a one as I ever have seen so great a lord', said Untrue.

'Still you *have* seen me before', said True. 'It was I whose eyes you plucked out a year ago this very day. Untrue by name, and untrue by nature; so I said before, and so I say now; but you are still my brother, and so you shall have some food. After that, you may go to the lime-tree where I sat last year; if you hear anything that can do you good, you will be lucky.'

So Untrue did not wait to be told twice. 'If True has got so much good by sitting in the lime-tree, that in one year he has come to be king over half England, what good may not I get', he thought. So he set off and climbed up into the lime-tree. He had not sat there long, before all the beasts came as before, and ate and drank, and kept St. John's eve under the tree. When they had left off eating, the Fox wished that they should begin to tell stories, and Untrue got ready to listen with all his might, till his ears were almost fit to fall off. But Bruin the bear was surly, and growled and said:

'Some one has been chattering about what we said last year, and so now we will hold our tongues about what we know'; and with that the beasts bade one another 'Good-night', and parted, and Untrue was just as wise as he was before, and the reason was, that his name was Untrue, and his nature untrue too.