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WYMARK
JACOBS**

THE MONEY BOX

William Wymark Jacobs
The Money Box

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The Money Box / Odd Craft, Part 1.:

Содержание

THE MONEY-BOX

4

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

8

W. W. Jacobs

The Money Box / Odd Craft, Part 1

THE MONEY-BOX

Sailormen are not good 'ands at saving money as a rule, said the night-watchman, as he wistfully toyed with a bad shilling on his watch-chain, though to 'ear 'em talk of saving when they're at sea and there isn't a pub within a thousand miles of 'em, you might think different.

It ain't for the want of trying either with some of 'em, and I've known men do all sorts o' things as soon as they was paid off, with a view to saving. I knew one man as used to keep all but a shilling or two in a belt next to 'is skin so that he couldn't get at it easy, but it was all no good. He was always running short in the most inconvenient places. I've seen 'im wriggle for five minutes right off, with a tramcar conductor standing over 'im and the other people in the tram reading their papers with one eye and watching him with the other.

Ginger Dick and Peter Russet—two men I've spoke of to you afore—tried to save their money once. They'd got so sick and tired of spending it all in p'r'aps a week or ten days arter coming

ashore, and 'aving to go to sea agin sooner than they 'ad intended, that they determined some way or other to 'ave things different.

They was homeward bound on a steamer from Melbourne when they made their minds up; and Isaac Lunn, the oldest fireman aboard—a very steady old teetotaler—gave them a lot of good advice about it. They all wanted to rejoin the ship when she sailed agin, and 'e offered to take a room ashore with them and mind their money, giving 'em what 'e called a moderate amount each day.

They would ha' laughed at any other man, but they knew that old Isaac was as honest as could be and that their money would be safe with 'im, and at last, after a lot of palaver, they wrote out a paper saying as they were willing for 'im to 'ave their money and give it to 'em bit by bit, till they went to sea agin.

Anybody but Ginger Dick and Peter Russet or a fool would ha' known better than to do such a thing, but old Isaac 'ad got such a oily tongue and seemed so fair-minded about wot 'e called moderate drinking that they never thought wot they was letting themselves in for, and when they took their pay—close on sixteen pounds each—they put the odd change in their pockets and 'anded the rest over to him.

The first day they was as pleased as Punch. Old Isaac got a nice, respectable bedroom for them all, and arter they'd 'ad a few drinks they humoured 'im by 'aving a nice 'ot cup o' tea, and then goin' off with 'im to see a magic-lantern performance.

It was called "The Drunkard's Downfall," and it begun with

a young man going into a nice-looking pub and being served by a nice-looking barmaid with a glass of ale. Then it got on to 'arf pints and pints in the next picture, and arter Ginger 'ad seen the lost young man put away six pints in about 'arf a minute, 'e got such a raging thirst on 'im that 'e couldn't sit still, and 'e whispered to Peter Russet to go out with 'im.

"You'll lose the best of it if you go now," ses old Isaac, in a whisper; "in the next picture there's little frogs and devils sitting on the edge of the pot as 'e goes to drink."

"Ginger Dick got up and nodded to Peter."

"Arter that 'e kills 'is mother with a razor," ses old Isaac, pleading with 'im and 'olding on to 'is coat.

Ginger Dick sat down agin, and when the murder was over 'e said it made 'im feel faint, and 'im and Peter Russet went out for a breath of fresh air. They 'ad three at the first place, and then they moved on to another and forgot all about Isaac and the dissolving views until ten o'clock, when Ginger, who 'ad been very liberal to some friends 'e'd made in a pub, found 'e'd spent 'is last penny.

"This comes o' listening to a parcel o' teetotalers," 'e ses, very cross, when 'e found that Peter 'ad spent all 'is money too. "Here we are just beginning the evening and not a farthing in our pockets."

They went off 'ome in a very bad temper. Old Isaac was asleep in 'is bed, and when they woke 'im up and said that they was going to take charge of their money themselves 'e kept dropping off to sleep agin and snoring that 'ard they could scarcely hear

themselves speak. Then Peter tipped Ginger a wink and pointed to Isaac's trousers, which were 'anging over the foot of the bed.

Ginger Dick smiled and took 'em up softly, and Peter Russet smiled too; but 'e wasn't best pleased to see old Isaac a-smiling in 'is sleep, as though 'e was 'aving amusing dreams. All Ginger found was a ha'-penny, a bunch o' keys, and a cough lozenge. In the coat and waistcoat 'e found a few tracks folded up, a broken pen-knife, a ball of string, and some other rubbish. Then 'e set down on the foot o' their bed and made eyes over at Peter.

"Wake 'im up agin," ses Peter, in a temper.

Ginger Dick got up and, leaning over the bed, took old Isaac by the shoulders and shook 'im as if 'e'd been a bottle o' medicine.

"Time to get up, lads?" ses old Isaac, putting one leg out o' bed.

"No, it ain't," ses Ginger, very rough; "we ain't been to bed yet. We want our money back."

Isaac drew 'is leg back into bed agin. "Goo' night," he ses, and fell fast asleep.

"He's shamming, that's wot 'e is," ses Peter Russet. "Let's look for it. It must be in the room somewhere."

They turned the room upside down pretty near, and then Ginger Dick struck a match and looked up the chimney, but all 'e found was that it 'adn't been swept for about twenty years, and wot with temper and soot 'e looked so frightful that Peter was arf afraid of 'im.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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