

*Three*

## *Cheerfulness*

ONE AFTERNOON, in a large town in a rainy country, I saw seven or eight vehicles full of children. That morning, they had been taken into the country to play in the fields, but the bad weather had made them return home early in the rain.

And yet they were singing, laughing and waving merrily to the passers-by.

They had kept their cheerfulness in this gloomy weather. If one of them had felt sad, the songs of the others would have cheered him. And for the people hurrying by, who heard the children's laughter, it seemed that the sky had brightened for a moment.

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Amir was a prince of Khorasan, and he lived in a grand style. When he set out to war, three hundred camels would carry the pots and pans and plates for his kitchen.

One day he was taken prisoner by the Caliph Ismail. But misfortune does not exempt a man from hunger. So when Amir saw his chief cook nearby, he asked the good man to prepare him a meal.

The cook had one piece of meat left which he put in a pot on the fire. Then he went to find some vegetables to give a little taste to the stew.

A passing dog sniffed at the meat and put his nose in the pot. Then, feeling the heat of the fire, he drew back sharply. But he was so clumsy that the pot stuck on his head and he ran off in a panic, unable to get rid of it.

Amir burst out laughing at the sight.

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“Why,” demanded the officer on guard, “are you laughing when you have every reason to be sad?”

But Amir showed him the dog streaking away from the camp and said, “I am laughing at the thought that this very morning it took three hundred camels to transport my kitchen and now one dog is enough to carry it all away!”

Amir took pleasure in being cheerful though he took no trouble to bring cheerfulness to others. However, we should give him credit for his light-heartedness. If he was able to joke in the midst of such serious difficulties, is it not in our power to smile in the face of lesser worries?

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In Persia, there was a woman who used to sell honey. She had a very pleasant manner, and customers thronged around her stall. And the poet who tells her story declares that even if she had sold poison, people would still have bought it from her as if it were honey.

A sour-tempered man saw what a great profit she made from her sweet wares and decided to take up the same trade.

So he set up a stall, but behind the rows of honey-pots his face was like vinegar. All those who came near were sullenly treated. And so everyone passed by, leaving him his wares. “Not even a fly ventured on his honey,” says the poet. By evening he had still earned nothing. A woman noticed him and said to her husband, “A bitter face makes bitter honey.”

Did the woman who sold honey smile only to attract customers? Let us rather hope that her cheerfulness came from her good nature. We are not in this world only to buy or sell; we should be here as comrades one to another. The good woman’s customers felt that she was something more than a honey-seller: she was a cheerful citizen of the world.

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In the next story I shall tell you, the joyous spirit bubbles up like water from a beautiful spring. The person it tells of had nothing to do with the desire for custom or gain: he was the famed and glorious Rama.

Rama slew Ravana the ten-headed and twenty-armed demon-king. I have already told you the beginning of the story. It had been the most terrible of all battles. Thousands of monkeys and bears had been killed in the service of Rama, and the corpses of their demon enemies were piled one upon another. Their king lay lifeless on the ground. But how hard it had been to fell him! Time and again Rama had cut off his ten heads and his twenty arms, but they all grew back immediately so that he had to cut them off many times over; they were so numerous that at last it seemed as if the sky was raining down arms and heads.

When the terrible war was ended the monkeys and bears who had been slain were brought back to life, and all stood like a great army awaiting orders.

Glorious Rama whose manner remained simple and calm after the victory, looked kindly upon his faithful friends.

Then Vibhishan, who was to succeed Ravana on the throne, had a chariot-load of jewels and rich robes brought for the warriors who had fought so valiantly.

“Listen, friend Vibhishan,” said Rama, “rise high in the air and scatter your gifts before the army.”

The king did as he was told, and from his chariot in midair strewed glittering jewels and brightly coloured robes.

The monkeys and bears tumbled over one another as they rushed to seize the falling treasures. It was a merry scuffle.

And Rama laughed heartily and his wife, the lady Sita, and his brother Lakshman laughed with him.

For those who are courageous know how to laugh like this. There is nothing more cordial than a good and hearty cheerfulness. And the word ‘cordial’ has the same origin as the word ‘courage’. In difficult moments, the cheerfulness that comes from

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a cordial spirit is truly a kind of courage.

Surely it is not necessary to be always laughing; but liveliness, serenity, good humour are never out of place. And how helpful they are! With them the mother makes the home happy for her children; the nurse hastens the recovery of her patient; the master lightens the task of his servants; the workman inspires the goodwill of his comrades; the traveller helps his companions on their hard journey; the citizen fosters hope in the hearts of his countrymen.

And you, happy boys and girls, is there anything your cheerfulness cannot accomplish?