

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Three Gifts**

Once upon a time there was a poor linen weaver who was visited by three rich students, and when they saw that the man was very poor they gave him a hundred pounds for his housekeeping. The linen weaver was very pleased with this gift and thought to use it well, but first he wanted to feast his eyes on the shining pounds a while longer, so he did not tell his wife – who had not been home at the time – anything about his good fortune, and he hid the money away where no one thinks to look for money, that is to say, among the rags.



One day, when he was away from home, a rag-and-bone man called, and his wife sold him the entire stock for a few pence. Great was the heartache when the linen weaver came home and his wife delightedly showed him the trifling money she had made from the rags.

A year later, the three students came again, hoping to find the linen weaver in good circumstances, but they found him even poorer than before, and he lamented his misfortune to them. With an exhortation to be more careful, the students gave him a hundred pounds once again. Now, he thought he was acting very wisely when he again said nothing to his wife



and put the money in the dustpan. And everything fell out exactly as on the previous occasion: the wife exchanged the ashes with an ash-collector for a few pieces of soap just when her husband was absent again, delivering to some customer the linen he had ordered. When

he returned and found out about the deal with the ashes, he became so enraged that he gave her back a good dusting.

A year later, the students came for the third time, found the linen weaver reduced to rags, and throwing a lump of lead before his feet, they told him: "What use are pearls to a hungry swine? Giving money to a simpleton like you would be even more stupid than you are yourself. We're never coming back to you again." With this they went very angrily away, and the linen weaver lifted the lump of lead up from the floor and laid it on the window-sill. Soon afterwards his neighbour, who was a fisherman, came in, gave him good-day and said, "Dear neighbour, do you by any chance have a lump of lead, or anything else heavy, which I could use for my net? I have nothing of the kind left." So the linen weaver gave him the lump of lead, and the neighbour thanked him very kindly and said: "The first big fish that I catch, it shall be yours by way of reward." "No, really – I didn't give you it for that", said the satisfied linen weaver.

Soon afterwards the neighbour did indeed bring a fine fish, a four- to five-pounder, and the linen weaver was obliged to accept it. He slaughtered the fish straight away, and there it had a large stone in its stomach. This stone also the linen weaver laid on the window-sill. In the evening, when it grew dark, the stone began to shine; and the darker it became, the brighter shone the stone, just like a light. "That's a cheap lamp," said the linen weaver to his wife. "Aren't you going to sell it for a song, like you gave away the two hundred pounds?" And he placed the stone so that it lit up the whole room.

On the following evening, a gentleman was riding past the house when he caught sight of the shining stone, so he dismounted and walked into the room, took a look at the stone, and offered ten pounds for it. The weaver said, "This stone is not for sale!" "Not even for twenty pounds?" asked the gentleman. "Not even," replied the linen weaver. But the other kept on bidding and bidding until he offered a thousand pounds, for the stone was a precious diamond and worth much more than that. Then the weaver shook on it, and he became the richest man in the village. But his wife had the last word, saying: "You see, husband! If I hadn't given the money away twice! At the end of the day, you owe it all to *me*!"