

The shoemaker and the elves

A shoemaker, by no fault of his own, had become so poor that at last he had nothing left but leather for one pair of shoes. So in the evening, he cut out the shoes which he wished to begin to make the next morning. He lay down quietly in his bed, and fell asleep.

In the morning, he was just going to sit down to work, but the two shoes stood quite finished on his table. He took the shoes in his hands to observe them closer, and they were so neatly made that there was not one bad stitch in them, just as if they were intended as a masterpiece.

Soon after, a buyer came in, and as the shoes pleased him so well, he paid more for them than usual, and, with the money, the shoemaker was able to purchase leather for two pairs of shoes. He cut them out at night, and next morning was about to set to work with fresh courage; but when he got up, they were already made, and he sold them and got enough money to buy leather for four pairs of shoes.

The following morning, too, he found the four pairs made; and so it went on constantly, what he cut out in the evening was finished by the morning, so that he soon had his honest independence again, and at last became a wealthy man.

One evening not long before Christmas, when the man had been cutting out, he said to his wife, before going to bed, "Shall we stay up tonight to see who is helping us?" They lit a candle, and then hid themselves in a corner of the room, behind some clothes, and watched.

When it was midnight, two pretty little naked men came, sat down by the shoemaker's table, took all the work which was cut out before them and began to stitch, and sew, and hammer so skilfully and so quickly with their little fingers that the shoemaker could not turn away his eyes for astonishment. They did not stop until all was done, and stood finished on the table, and they ran quickly away.

The next morning the woman said, "The little men have made us rich, and we must help them. They have no clothes and must be cold. I will make them little shirts, and coats, and vests, and trousers, and knit both of them a pair of stockings, and you make them two little pairs of shoes."

That night, they laid their presents all together on the table instead of the cut-out work, and then hid to see how the little men would behave. At midnight they came bounding in, and wanted to get to work at once, but as they did not find any leather cut out, but only the pretty little articles of clothing, they were at first astonished, and then they showed intense delight. They dressed themselves quickly, putting the pretty clothes on, and singing,

"Now we are boys so fine to see,
Why should we longer cobblers be?"

Then they danced and skipped and leapt over chairs and benches. At last they danced out of doors. They never came again, but as long as the shoemaker lived, his business prospered and he was never poor again.