

The Wooden Bowl

GERMANY



There was a celebration on the day that the old man came to live on the small farm owned by his son and his son's young wife. A fine meal of freshly grown vegetables and home-baked bread was set out on the table. The couple covered a new bed in a small adjoining room with a warm cover and soft pillow. "We hope you will be comfortable here," said the son as he carried his father's few belongings into the room.

"As long as I have family around me," the old man said, wiping a tear from his eye, "I will be happy. Perhaps there is still enough strength in these old limbs to help a bit on your farm. I want to be useful."

"You are welcome to work as you will or rest when you want, Father," said the son.

The next morning, the old man dressed himself in work clothes and went out to the barn to feed the pigs and chickens. He scooped the chicken feed into a wooden bowl and scattered it about the yard. He watched with amusement as the rooster strutted. "Oh, to be young again," he sighed to himself as he rubbed his stiff hands to subdue the pain he felt in his old joints.

Each day the old man did as much as his body would allow, and each night he sat with his son and his son's wife at dinner. He noticed the swelling of his daughter-in-law's belly and eagerly looked forward to the day when his first grandchild would be born.

Days melted into months and, finally, the child arrived. The old man held

his grandson with great tenderness. He recalled his own son's small face as he gazed with wonder at the tiny eyes that stared back at him.

"Be careful how you hold him," said the young wife. "Your hands are trembling."

The old man had noticed it too. The dull pain he felt in his joints had increased each day, and now his hands were betraying him.

"Don't drop him," exclaimed the wife, who worriedly snatched the child away.

After that, the old man's changes came quickly. By the time the small boy could sit up by himself, the old man found it harder to cast the chicken feed from the feeding bowl. His hands could not grip a pitchfork. His son tried to ignore his father's aging.

By the time the grandson could walk, the old man could not stride any longer into the barn. His steps were slow. His back was beginning to stoop. He worked as he could but did not accomplish much. Times were hard and the son had to let most of the farm help go. Now he worked from early hours to sunset along with his wife. The old man tended the little boy but could hardly keep up with him.

One night after a grueling day in the fields, the son and his tired wife sat down to a hastily prepared dinner. The boy sat next to his grandpa as the wife placed a large bowl of porridge on the table. "Times have been better," she sighed. "I am looking forward to the first fresh vegetable crops."

Grandpa tried to ladle some porridge. His hand shook so much that he toppled the bowl onto the dusty floor. "How clumsy!" the wife shouted.

It was more than the old man could bear. He slowly got up and left the table. His son ignored the problem and sat silently as his grumbling wife cleaned up the mess.

Each day the old man's condition worsened. He began to drool. The wife sat him at a small table in the corner, away from the family as they ate.

One night the old man's trembling hand knocked his porcelain eating bowl off his little table. It landed with a crash and broke on the floor. The wife went out to the barn and got the wooden bowl used for chicken feed. She filled it

with food and served the old man another supper. "Now here is one you won't break," she said. Her husband stared into the distance and again said nothing.

One day when the young child was older and had learned to speak, his father and mother found him industriously chipping away with a stone at two chunks of wood. "What are you doing?" the boy's father asked. His son replied, "I am making you each a present!"

"What could it be?" his father asked with delight.

"I am making the wooden chicken-feed bowls I will give you and Mama to eat from when you are old," said the boy.

The boy's words stunned his father. The future loomed before him, and he saw himself old and forgotten.

When his vision cleared, he noticed his frail father sitting alone in the corner. He gathered the old man in his arms and led him to the table and set a place for him with their best dishes. That night as the young boy watched, his father fed the old grandpa tenderly with a silver spoon. He handed his wife a cloth napkin, and she gently wiped the old man's drooling lips.

From that day on, they both treated the old man with the same kindness and respect they hoped to receive from their own son in their elderly years.

*Treat the old with love that is ample.
The very best teacher is a good example.*