

The King's Plan.

A LONG time ago there lived a King who took great delight in teaching his people good habits. One night he put a large stone in the middle of the road near his palace, and then watched to see what the people who passed that way would do.

Early in the morning a sturdy old farmer named Peter came along with his heavy ox-cart loaded with corn. "Oh! these lazy people!" he cried, driving his oxen to one side of the road. "Here is this big stone right in the middle of the road, and nobody will take the trouble to move it." And he went on his way, scolding about the laziness of other people, but never thinking of touching the stone himself. Then came a young soldier, singing a merry song as he walked along. A gay feather was stuck in his hat, and a big sword hung at his side, and he was fond of telling great stories of what he had done in the war. He held his head so high that he did not see the stone, but stumbled over it and fell flat in the dust. This put an end to his merry song; and as he rose to his feet he began to storm at the country people. "Silly drones!" he said, "to have no more sense than to leave a stone like that in the middle of the road!"

Then he passed on, but did not sing any more. An hour later there came down the road six merchants with their goods on pack-horses, going to the fair that was to be held near the village. When they reached the stone the road was so narrow that they could hardly drive their horses between it and the wall. "Did you ever see the like?" they said. "There is that big stone in the road, and not a man in all the country but that is too lazy to move it!"

And so the stone lay for three weeks. It was in everybody's way, and yet everybody left it for somebody else to move. Then the King sent word to all his people to meet together on a certain day near his palace, as he had something to tell them. The day came, and a great crowd of men and women gathered

in the road. Old Peter, the farmer, was there, and so were the merchants and the young soldier. "I hope the King will not find out what a lazy set of people he has around him," said Peter. And then the sound of the horn was heard, and the King was seen coming towards them. He rode up to the stone, got down from his horse, and said: "My friends, it was I who put this stone here three weeks ago. It has been seen by every one of you, and yet everyone has left it just where it was, and scolded his neighbour for not moving it out of the way." Then he stooped down and rolled the stone over. Underneath the stone was a round, hollow place, in which was a small iron box.

The King held up the box so that all the people might see what was written on a piece of paper fastened to it. These were the words: "For him who lifts the stone." He opened the box, turned it upside down, and out fell a beautiful gold ring and twenty bright gold coins. Then everyone wished that he had only thought of moving the stone instead of going around it and finding fault with his neighbour. There are many people still who lose prizes because they think it easier to find fault than to do the work which lies before them.

