

The Pilgrim Who Dragged His Hind Leg

A SMALL BEETLE was scrambling painfully along a stony path. There were many obstacles in his way, such as straws and other objects difficult to negotiate. It was all very exhausting. He couldn't fly, he was a creeping beetle. Besides, his left hind leg had been crippled since his birth. He was obliged to drag it after him. A very sad case. For beetles don't walk or wander about, they make pilgrimages. There is a big difference.

"Oh, do get out of my way!" cried an impatient bee whose name was Mrs. Buzzer, to the pilgrim, buzzing angrily, "dawdling about the road making yourself a nuisance to respectable ladies on their way to the flower market!"

"Please excuse me," said the beetle who dragged his hind leg, "I am obliged to do it, I am a cripple," and he pointed with his antenna to his shrunken hind leg.

"Oh, dear!" said Mrs. Buzzer compassionately, "that's quite another matter! I didn't notice, I was in a hurry. Nowadays, if one isn't early at the market there's nothing left, competition is so keen! But why do you make pilgrimages? It would be better to stay at home with your bad leg. Why don't you get married? Then you would at least have your meals regularly."

"No, I must make pilgrimages," said the pilgrim, "an old beetle whom I consulted about my infirmity said so. He told me about the religion of the sacred scarab and said I was to look out for the Wheel of Life. A very ancient belief and a great comfort to prior creeping beetles."

"And what do you get out of it?" asked Mrs.

Buzzer. "It's much more sensible to be early at the market."

The little beetle jerked his crippled hind leg under his body so that it couldn't be seen.

"One can get to be a rose-beetle!" he said in a mysterious whisper.

"Is that a paying profession?" inquired Mrs. Buzzer. She was a practical housewife, whose honey pots were quite unsurpassed in the bee world and really quite famous.

"A rose-beetle glitters like liquid gold and is able to fly. He sleeps in the roses and breathes their perfume."

That reminded Mrs. Buzzer of the flower market.

"Well! I really must fly. Competition is so very keen these days. At any rate you have my best wishes."

The pilgrim who dragged his hind leg pilgrimmed on. A cart came along the road.

"This is the Wheel of Life," he thought and hurried towards it.

The wheel went over him. And there was only a formless spot left in the road.

Some time later, in the Sunny South a little rose-beetle crawled out of an egg. The very first thing he did was to feel his left hind leg with his antenna. He didn't know why he did that. His left hind leg was strong and well and gleamed like liquid gold. It was perhaps, if anything, more shiny and more beautiful than his other legs.

The roses flung their perfume, abroad.

The Wheel of Life rolled on. □

—Manfred Kyber

Translated from the German by Olive Harcourt