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FAIRY TALES BY DUMAS

FAIRY-TALES

BY

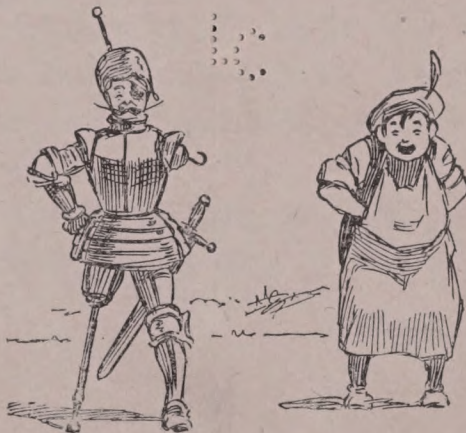
DUMAS

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

HARRY A. SPURR

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ILLUSTRATED



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To Our Readers

THE first of these tales was written for you all, many years ago, by a great French story-teller, whose other books you will perhaps read when you grow up. When he says that "Aramis" wrote it, he means himself, for Aramis is one of the men in his most famous work, "The Three Musketeers."

You will all have seen Pierrots, at the sea-side or in pictures, dressed as you see the hero of this book. He is not a real character, any more than our Punch, but he is a much more lovable one. He is half a clown, half a fairy, who dances wonderfully, sings pretty little songs, and is always light-hearted and amusing. It is not easy to say who first thought of Pierrot, and made him what he is; so the clever French story-teller has made up for himself how Pierrot came to be found (for immortals are not born), and why he gave up his life to amusing children.

I hope these few words will help you to enjoy this fairy tale of the far-off days "When Pierrot was young."

The TRANSLATOR.

Preface

THE public generally has such a distrust of all books attributed to Dumas *père* that a word or two respecting the origin of the four stories in this volume should be added, together with our reasons for choosing them.

Most of the fairy tales published in Dumas's name, in the volumes "L'Histoire d'un Casse-Noisette," "Le Père Gigogne," and "L'Homme aux Contes" are more or less translations from Andersen, Grimm, etc.; and the ones here given may therefore be said to comprise all the stories of that description in which Dumas's genius had an important share.

The first, "La Bouillie de la Comtesse Berthe" was published in 1844, being obviously a result of its author's visit to Rhineland six years previously. In an introduction to the story, Dumas declares that he passed the castle of Wistgaw on his way down the Rhine, and that a fellow-passenger told him the legend, which he afterwards set on paper for the delight of his friends the children. It is possible, however, that he heard it from his friend Gérard de Nerval, who accompanied him during this holiday, and was a great lover of fairy tales. It is he, indeed, who was the "Homme aux Contes," or "Man who tells stories," of the volumes so called, Dumas having written the tales after hearing De Nerval tell them.

This legend has always been a great favourite with French children, and one or two translations were made about fifty or sixty years ago, but of late years the story has been unaccountably neglected.

"La Jeunesse de Pierrot" first appeared in Dumas's paper, "Le Mousquetaire," in 1854, under the title of "Le Roi de Bohême" ("The King of Bohemia"). As will be seen by his own preface to the story, Dumas was fond of inventing all sorts of ways of accounting

P R E F A C E

of one Daniel O'Rourke. The Frenchman has lengthened and elaborated it, and re-told it in his inimitable style; and those who wish to compare the original with the developed story may be referred to T. Crofton Croker's volume of Irish fairy legends. The author of the anecdote is not known; but it is thought to have been borrowed from Ariosto (with the adventures of whose hero Astolpho and his hippogriff, Dumas was well acquainted). The tale is so old as to be new to the children of to-day; and to our thinking it could not be more amusingly told than by that great romancer and lover of children, Alexandre Dumas.

fairy tales by dumas

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WHEN PIERROT WAS YOUNG



"Set to work with such sharp little teeth and an air of delight"

When Pierrot was Young

MY DEAR CHILDREN :

IF your parents say *they* must read this book, tell them that it has been written for *you*, and not for them. If you want to know (for little children always "want to know") who wrote the story, let me tell you that the author is one Aramis. If you want to know the history of Aramis's life, I must answer, you are too young to read it yet. If, lastly, you wish to know for whom he wrote the story, I can tell you: it was told to the children of a lady named Madame de Longueville, during a time of trouble (such as God preserve us from nowadays!) known as "The Fronde."

Now, dear children, may Aramis amuse you as much when he writes, as he amused your fathers and mothers when he plotted, made love, and fought, in company with his three comrades, Athos, Porthos, and D'Artagnan.

Alexandre Dumas.

CHAPTER I — The Woodcutter's Supper

ONCE upon a time, my dear children, there lived in a little corner of Bohemia an old woodcutter and his wife, who dwelt in a miserable hut, in the depths of a forest. They were not rich, indeed, for their only fortune lay in the two gifts which God gives to the poor, — the love of work and two stout arms to work with.

All day, from dawn to dark, you could hear the sound of great blows struck with the hatchet ringing through the woods, and of merry singing that kept time with the strokes. It was the good man at his work.

When night came, he would gather together his day's harvest of wood, and turn his steps homeward, his back bent with the



weight of his spoil. In his little hut he always found a clear and sparkling fire, and his good wife standing over it, smiling welcome to him across the steam of the savoury stew, — a sight which made his heart rejoice greatly.

For many years the pair had passed their days thus, but there came an evening when the woodman did not return at his usual hour.

It was winter-time, — the month of December. The forest, turf and tree, was covered with snow; and the north wind, which raged wildly through the woods, bore along with it clouds of snow, which it had swept from the branches, and which glimmered white as they were borne across the night. One might have fancied them ghosts out of your fairy-tale books, sailing through the black sky to their midnight meeting-place!

Old Marguerite — for that was the good wife's name — was, as you may believe, very anxious. She kept going to the door of the little home, listening with all her ears, searching with all her eyes; but she heard nothing but the wind howling in the treetops, and saw nothing but the snow, which lay white along her good man's path as far as her sight could follow.

She returned to the warm fireside and sank upon a stool. Her heart was so full of fear that the tears fell from her eyes. Seeing her so sad, everything in the little cottage became sad too. The fire, which always sparkled so gaily on the hearth, lost its brightness, and sank little by little to dull cinders; and the little iron pot, which had rumbled so lustily just before, now took to sobbing in plaintive bubbles.

Two long hours passed thus, when suddenly a voice, chanting a chorus, was heard a few paces from the cabin. Marguerite trembled at this accustomed signal of her husband's return, and, rushing to the door, reached it in time to fall into her good man's arms.

“*Bon soir*, my good Marguerite, *bon soir*,” said the woodcutter. “I am a bit late, but you will forgive me when you see what I've found.”

As he spoke, he set down upon the table before his wife's astonished gaze, a pretty wicker cradle, in which lay a little child, so delicately formed, so tiny and so pretty, that the dame's heart was touched at the bare sight of the child.



It was clothed in a long white tunic, with hanging sleeves which seemed like a dove's folded wings; and wide trousers of white stuff — like the coat — left uncovered two neat little feet shod with shoes, red-heeled and rosetted. Round his neck spread a cambric ruff, elegantly crimped; and on his head he wore a pretty hat of white felt, cocked coquettishly over one ear.

Never had the woodcutter seen such a pretty little picture; but what impressed the kindly dame most was the child's strange complexion. It was as white as if its dear little head had been carved in alabaster.

“By Saint Janvier!” cried the good woman, clasping her hands, “how pale he is!”

“That's not to be wondered at,” answered the woodcutter; “he had lain eight days under the snow when I found him.”

“Holy Virgin! eight days under the snow — and you didn't tell me that straight away! Why, the poor thing's frozen!”

And without another word the old wife took the cradle, set it in the chimney corner, and threw a whole faggot on the fire.

The little pot, which was only waiting for this encouragement, began suddenly to tremble, and to froth and bubble so noisily that the little one in the cradle, his nostrils tickled by the savoury smell, began to sniff repeatedly. He licked his lips with his tiny red ribbon of a tongue, and then, to the great astonishment of the old couple, who could scarcely believe their eyes, he sprang from the cradle with a little cry of joy.

My dears, you can guess why, — he had just become aware of the old couple's supper!

To fly towards the pot, plunge the big wooden spoon into its depths, draw it out, and carry a mouthful of its contents, all boiling as it was, to his mouth, was the work of a moment. But, oh! no sooner had his lips touched the spoon than the little one flung it down and began to jump round the room, making such droll grimaces that the good man and his wife did not know whether to laugh or cry over him.

The little glutton had burnt his tongue!

Still, the old couple felt relieved to see that in spite of the fact that he was as pale as ever, the little stranger was far from being frozen.



Whilst the little man made all this stir in the room, old Marguerite set about laying supper. The pot was set upon the table; and already the woodcutter, his sleeves tucked up, was preparing to enjoy himself, when our little imp, who was watching all these doings out of the corner of his eye, sprang resolutely upon the table, seated himself before the pot, and clasping it about with his legs, set to work with such sharp little teeth and such an air of delight that this time the old couple, freed from all anxiety on his account, could control themselves no longer. They began to laugh, and so madly, that not having taken the precaution to hold their sides (as one should always do, my dears, on such occasions), the pair fell flat on their backs and rolled here, there, and everywhere about the floor!

When they recovered themselves a quarter of an hour later and rose to their feet, the pot was empty, and the little one was sleeping like a cherub in his cradle.

“What a dear he is!” said the good Marguerite, who was laughing still.

“But he has eaten our supper!” answered the woodman, who became solemn enough at the thought.

And the kindly couple, who had had nothing to eat since morning, went off to bed fasting.

CHAPTER II—*What a Little Child May Bring About*

NEXT day Marguerite was up and about before dawn, eager to go and tell all her gossips in the neighbouring hamlet the story of the little manikin, and how he was discovered.

As they heard her marvellous news the old dames opened their eyes and mouths in wonder, and rivalled one another in their cries of astonishment. In a moment all tongues were set a-clacking, and before the sun was up the story was known in every house for ten leagues around.



Only, as always happens, the tale grew and grew as it spread, until it took the most terrifying form. It was no longer, as it began, merely a child that had eaten the supper of the good folks who took it in: it was a white bear of gigantic size, which had broken into the poor couple's cabin and cruelly devoured them! A little later in the day, the rumour reached the capital of the kingdom itself, and having continued to grow, the white bear had become a monster as big as a mountain, which had swallowed the entire families of twenty woodcutters, hatchets and all, at a gulp.

Therefore the good people of the town took great care not to put their noses out of window as they generally did, to sniff the morning air, but barricaded their houses, took to their beds again, and cowered under the clothes, not daring to breathe, so terrified were they.

And yet it was only a very little child that caused all this terror, — which shows, dear readers, that you should always see a thing pretty closely before being frightened of it.

Now, this very day the King of Bohemia was to ride through the streets of the capital in great pomp, to open the sittings of the Council, according to custom, — which means, my dear children, that His Majesty was to pay the people pretty compliments, and they were to repay him with plenty of money.

It was a very important occasion: the Councillors were to agree to some new taxes, each more absurd than the last, but which, absurd as they were, would bring in plenty of millions.

Furthermore, the King meant to ask for a dowry for his only daughter, now fifteen years of age, and dowries, too, for the little princes and princesses not yet born, but which the King and Queen did not despair of having some day.

Now, for a whole month, from morning till night, the King had shut himself up in his study, and with his gaze fixed on the floor had made unheard-of efforts to learn by heart the famous discourse which the lord Alberti Renardino, his prime minister, had written for the occasion. But he could not fix two words of it in his mind.

“What *am* I to do?” he cried one night, falling exhausted from his throne, out of breath with his vain efforts to learn his lesson.

“Sire, nothing is more simple,” said Renardino, who entered just at this moment, — “see!”



And with a stroke of the pen he cut down the speech to half, and by way of making things even, doubled the taxes.

And now the King, with a large train, set out from the palace, and advanced, as fast as his mule's slow pace would take him, towards the building where the Councillors awaited the royal speech.

At his right came the Queen, lying full length in a litter carried by thirty-two black slaves, the strongest that could be bought. At his left, mounted on a dun-coloured horse, rode Fleur d'Amandier, the heiress to the kingdom, and the most beautiful princess in the world.

In the second rank came a person of high degree, richly clothed in Eastern dress, but ugly enough to frighten you. He was humpbacked and knock-

kneed, and his beard, eyebrows, and hair were so red that one could not look him in the

face without blinking. This was Prince Azor, a great war-

rrior, who was always fighting the Kings his neighbours, and to whom the King of Bohemia, for safety's sake, had betrothed his daughter Fleur d'Amandier, the day before. This vile man had claimed to be present at the Council, so as to frighten the members into voting the dowry for his future wife.

By his side marched Lord Renardino, who laughed slyly to himself as he thought of the heavy taxes with which (thanks to him) the good people of Bohemia were going to be crushed.



"This was Prince Azor"



The procession had not gone a hundred paces before everyone was struck with wonder. The shops were closed, and the streets deserted!

The astonishment was greater still when a herald approached and announced to the King that the Council-chamber was empty.

“By my hump! What does this mean, I’d like to know?” cried Prince Azor, who had seen the Princess’s pretty face break into smiles at the news. “Do they mean to play some trick on me?”

“Yes, what *does* it mean, Lord Renardino?” asked the King. “Why don’t the people gather in the streets as usual, and cry, as they ought to do, ‘Long live the King’?”

The chief minister, who knew nothing of the great news which had alarmed the city, did not know what to say in reply, when suddenly Prince Azor, purple with rage, struck the nobleman on the cheek.

The angry Prince had seen Fleur d’Amandier smile beneath her veil a second time, and was convinced that they were making sport of him.

“King of Bohemia!” he cried, grinding his teeth, “this jest shall cost you dear!” And setting spurs to his horse, he galloped away furiously.

At these words, which contained a threat of war, everyone turned pale except Renardino, who became very red.

Disorder now reigned. The King and all his suite fled towards the palace, crying, “To arms! to arms!” and the thirty-two slaves hastened their flight by leaving the Queen’s litter in the middle of the street. Very luckily Her Majesty, believing herself to be already in the Council-chamber, had fallen peacefully asleep.

Let us sum up the events which had just occurred.

A kingdom was in agitation; a marriage broken off; a declaration of war had been made, and a great Queen left unprotected on the high-road, — all because a poor woodcutter had found a little child in the forest!

Such are the events, my dear children, that rule the fate of Kings and the greatness of empires!



CHAPTER III — *Pierrot's Baptism*

THE scene which we have just described had such an effect on the King that no sooner had he returned to the palace than he put on his coat of mail (which had gone very rusty since the last war) and took to cutting and thrusting ferociously with his sword at a dummy dressed in Eastern fashion, which was supposed to represent Prince Azor.

He had passed his sword a hundred times or so through the figure's body, when an idea suddenly occurred to him. This was to summon Lord Bambolino, the mayor of the town, to appear before him, so that he might know what had become of all the people.

After a most painstaking search from house to house, Bambolino was found at length, hiding under a pile of trusses of straw at the back of a barn, clad in nothing more dignified than a short skirt. Fearing to be devoured by the monster, the poor man had hung round his neck a large leathern collar bristling with spikes such as sheep-dogs wear when in the fields, to protect themselves from wolves.

The mayor was dragged to the foot of the throne and there told his story of the monster and his wicked practices, but the poor man's teeth chattered so that it was hard to tell what he said.

The whole court was ready to fly on hearing his tidings, but the King, who just then felt in the humour to fight, decided to start on the track of the monster that very instant, in spite of the reasonings of Renardino, who protested that it would be much better to settle the matter on friendly terms, and hand over to the monster daily such an allowance of victims as his appetite might need.

"All very well," the King had replied, "but don't forget, my lord, that you, as my Prime Minister, would be the one who would have to arrange matters with the monster."

So on second thoughts that gentleman did not press his point.

Accordingly the King "took the field" straightway, at the head of all his court, and under the protection of as many of his guards



as he could muster. Fleur d'Amandier, who loved sport passionately, joined the procession, and rode her snow-white charger with a charming grace, making him show his paces, whilst the steed himself, proud of his fair burden, strove to win admiration for his mistress and himself.

(All this time the Queen, whom no one had missed since the morning, had slept placidly on in her litter, where the negroes had left it.)

The company had ridden on for some hours without encountering a soul, when suddenly an old woman, clothed in rags, stepped, as if by magic, out of a clump of underwood which bordered the high-road.

Leaning on a stout white crutch-stick, she hobbled forward to the King, and, stretching out a withered hand, cried in a cracked voice:—

“Charity, kind gentlemen, pray: I am so cold and so hungry!”

“Back, old witch, street-beggar that you are!” cried Renardino.

“Away, or I will have thee thrown into prison!”

But the beldame looked so wretched that the King was moved to pity, and threw her his purse, which was full of gold. At the same time Fleur d'Amandier, unperceived by the courtiers, slipped into the poor woman's hand a splendid collar of pearls which she had just taken from her neck.

“Take that, my good dame,” she said in a low voice, “and come to see me at the palace to-morrow.”

But no sooner had the Princess spoken than the old beggar disappeared, and, strange to say, the King found his purse in his belt once more, and the pearl collar sparkled as brilliantly as ever on the neck of Fleur d'Amandier.

It was only Lord Renardino who had suffered: he searched himself all over for his purse, which he could not find, although he was certain he had brought it with him.

A hundred paces farther on the procession came up with a young shepherd boy, who was placidly playing on his pipe, tending his sheep, whilst the poor creatures sought beneath the snow for a few sparse blades of grass to keep their teeth employed.

“Hi, friend, hi!” cried the King, “can you tell us where we shall find the fierce monster of which we are in search?”



“Sire,” answered the youth, bowing with a grace and ease of manner very unusual in one of his station of life, “Your Majesty has been deceived, like every one else: the ‘monster’ of whom they have told you is not a fierce creature, by any means; it is a little child — harmless enough, surely — who was discovered by a woodcutter in the forest here.”

Then he went on to give the King such an account of the little man, and of the strange pallor of his complexion, — which was whiter than anything else you ever saw, — that His Majesty, who was a great lover of nature, thought he would like to preserve this strange creature in spirits-of-wine.

“My daughter and I are very anxious to see this wonderful little man,” he said cunningly. “Will you guide us to him?”

“I am at your Majesty’s orders,” answered the shepherd, who had blushed cherry red at the mention of the Princess.

The party rode on, led by the young guide, but although he took them by all the short cuts known to the foresters, an hour passed before he stopped at the woodcutter’s hut.

The King dismounted and rapped at the door.

“Who is there?” cried a silvery voice from within.

“It is I, — the King!”

At these magical words the door seemed to open of itself, like that of Ali Baba’s famous cave, and the little man appeared on the threshold, his conical hat in his hand.

You, my dear children, would have taken good care that you did not come face to face with one of the greatest Kings of the the earth. More than one of you, I can guess, would have crept into a corner and hidden your face with your hands, opening your fingers, perhaps, just the tiniest little bit, to see if Kings are made like other people.

But the manikin was not at all like that! He advanced with an exquisite grace, knelt on one knee before the King, and kissed the hem of his robe most respectfully. (I really don’t know *where* he learnt all this.) Then, turning towards Fleur d’Amandier, he saluted her with the utmost gallantry, and offered her his little white hand to help her to dismount.

When this was done, without in the least troubling himself about Renardino, who expected to receive the same attention, he



gracefully invited the King and his daughter to enter and seat themselves.

The woodman and his wife (who had sat down to dinner two hours sooner than usual) were struck dumb at the sight of so many grand folk, and their hearts beat fast with fright.

“Good people,” said the King, “I will make you rich, — ay, rich indeed, — if you will grant me two things: let me take away this little fellow, whom I wish to keep near me, — and give me straightway some of that smoking-hot broth of yours, which smells so good and savoury, for I have been riding all day and am dying of hunger.”

The good man and his wife were so amazed that they could not think of a word to say in reply.

“Sire,” said the little man, “do with me what you will: I am quite at your service, and ready to follow you. I only ask your Majesty to do me the favour of taking with you also these good folk, who have adopted me, and whom I love as much as if I were their own son. As for the broth, pray do not be sparing of it; may I hope that you will grant me the honour, little though I am, of being your waiter?”

“Agreed,” said the King, patting the tiny fellow’s cheek kindly. “You are a sensible lad, and we shall see, later on, what can be done for you.”



“The little man . . . across the back of an old ass.”



So speaking, he and Fleur d'Amandier took the places of the old couple, who could not understand why the King had come so far in order to eat their poor supper.

The meal was a merry one: the King even deigned in his high spirits to make a few jokes, which the little man had the good sense to laugh at.

After supper, every one hastened to prepare for departure, in order that they might reach the palace again before night. The two peasants, whom the King desired to favour, were with some trouble hoisted on the back of Lord Renardino's mule, and sat in the saddle behind him. The little man for his part sprang lightly across the back of an old ass which he had been to fetch from the stable, and who, seeing such a gay gathering, began to bray with all his might, so elated was he to



"The two peasants . . . on the back of Lord Renardino's mule."

find himself in such grand company. There only remained the young shepherd, who was forced to manage as best he could, seated behind the officer of the King's guards.

The procession set out in silence, for it was noticed that the King seemed deep in thought. To tell the truth, he was trying to



think of a name for his new servant, but as usual when he tried to think of anything, he failed.

We will leave the cavalcade on its way back to the city and return to the palace, and to what was taking place there whilst the King was away.

The black slaves, who had taken to flight at the threat uttered by Prince Azor, soon remembered that Renardino would take a keen delight in hanging them for their desertion of the Queen. They hurried back, therefore, to the litter, cautiously raised it once more, and bore it off to the palace. There they set the Queen down gently on a bed covered with gold brocade, and retired into the antechamber, feeling that a great weight had been taken from their shoulders.

Now, you must know, my dear children, that the Queen was very, very fond of little birds: she kept all kinds, of every colour and from every country. When the pretty little captives took their pleasure in their golden-barred cage, and mingled in their play the thousand hues of their plumage, one could fancy that myriads of flowers and precious stones were taking flight; whilst the chorus of joyous warblings and bewildering trills and ripples of sound was enough to send a musician crazy with delight.

But, what will surprise you most — as it did me — was, that the Queen's favourite bird was not a nightingale, nor a bird of Paradise, nor any other songster with sweet throat or golden breast; it was one of those wretched sparrows, those thieves of corn, who live in the country at the expense of the poor peasants. Now, although the Queen was very kind to him, and forgave him all the liberties he took (some of which were too wicked for words), the ungrateful little imp regretted his freedom none the less, and pecked savagely at the bars which kept him captive. That morning the Queen, in her hurry to join the royal procession, had forgotten to close the window of the cage, and, whit! — our sparrow took the lucky chance and flew off into the sky!

Who so grieved as the Queen, when she awoke and found her little pet missing? She searched all the corners of the room, and then, seeing the window open, guessed the truth.

She ran out on the balcony, and began to call the bird by his name, with all the endearing words she could think of, but the



little truant, you may be sure, took good care not to answer. She had been calling to her beloved sparrow a full hour, when the door opened noisily, giving admittance to the King.

“Pierrot! Pierrot!”¹ she cried.

“Pierrot! Pierrot!” echoed the King, jumping for joy. “That’s just what I wanted.”

“Alas, I’ve lost it,” said the Queen, thinking of her pet.

“On the contrary, you’ve *found* it,” answered the King.

The Queen shrugged her shoulders. She thought the King had gone mad.

And that, my dear children, is how our future hero got his name.

CHAPTER IV — “*By the Light of the Moon, oh, Pierrot, my Friend!*”

A MONTH has passed since the day of Pierrot’s baptism. By a miracle which it is impossible to explain, that little man grew up before the eyes of all, and so rapidly that the King, marvelling at the sight, sat for hours every day on his throne, watching his new pet shoot up in stature. Our hero had also found the way to win the good-will of both King and Queen, and had been named Royal Cupbearer, a very ticklish post, which he had filled with wonderful skill and tact. Never had the court of Bohemia been so flourishing: the full rich complexion of their Majesties was a subject for daily congratulation between them both.

There was only one sad person at court. Lord Renardino’s pale face had grown more and more yellow. This was because of his jealousy of our friend Pierrot’s success, for the Minister hated the little man from the bottom of his heart.

The young shepherd whom we have seen serving as the royal guide had been made head groom, and everyone spoke of his fine figure and elegant manners. Every time that Fleur d’Amandier crossed the guard-room to visit her mother’s apartments, she was

¹ “Pierrot,” in French, means “house sparrow.”



saluted by the young courtier. He seemed so modest and yet so happy that the Princess, who did not wish to be behindhand in courtesy, made him a bow as she passed.

And here, as the young groom will play a chief part in our story, it will be as well to tell you, dear readers, that his name was Cœur d'Or.

The woodcutter and his wife had been made caretakers of the palace-gardens, and thanks to Pierrot, received every day the remains of the Royal dessert.

Only the Prince Azor could disturb this happy state of things. The King had sent him a magnificent Embassy, laden with splendid presents, again offering him the Princess's hand; but Azor, still full of anger (to judge by the state of his beard, his hair, and his eyebrows, which bristled more than ever), had locked up the presents in his treasury, and put the Embassy to death. After this wicked deed he wrote with his own hand to the King of Bohemia, warning him that he was about to make war upon him the following spring, — a war so deadly that he should not be happy until he had chopped King, court, and people, as small as mince-meat.

As soon as the first shock caused by this alarming news had passed away, the King took counsel with his ministers, as to the best means of defending his country. He sent immediately for all the great artists of the kingdom, and bade them paint on the city walls great pictures of monsters and wild beasts, such as should strike fear into the hearts of a foe. There were lions, bears, and tigers; and panthers with outstretched claws three miles long, whose jaws opened so wide that one could see down into them, through and through, to the tips of their tails. Then there were crocodiles, which, having no possible excuse for showing their teeth, decided to go about with their mouths gaping, without rhyme or reason; snakes whose immense coils wrapped the city round and round, and whose tails got sadly in their way; and elephants, who marched haughtily to and fro, showing off by carrying mountains on their backs.

In short, it was a menagerie the like of which was never seen; and so terrible did it look that the common folk dared neither go into the city nor out of it, for fear of being devoured.

This clever piece of work once finished, the King held a review



of his troops, and could not help feeling proud as he saw himself at the head of an army of two hundred foot and fifty horse. With such a mighty force he felt he could conquer the world, and he awaited without flinching the coming of Prince Azor.

Now, Pierrot, who, as Cupbearer, waited at the King's table, soon gave way to a feeling of silent admiration for the beautiful, pure face of Fleur d'Amandier; and such pleasure did this cause him that one fine night he felt something quicken in his breast and move gently, like a bird that wakens in its nest. Then, an instant later, it began to beat so quickly and strongly that he was forced to clasp his hand to his side, to stop the wild thing.

"Hold! hold!! hold!!!" he cried more and more loudly, like a man whose astonishment increases every moment. Then, as soon as he had spoken, Pierrot withdrew and spent the night wandering through the palace-gardens, in the moonlight.

I cannot tell you, my dear children, what foolish idea entered poor Pierrot's head, but from that day henceforth he surrounded Fleur d'Amandier with delicate little attentions,—set before her every day a bouquet of flowers freshly gathered from the royal greenhouses, and never failed to look out of the corner of his eye, to see whether the Princess noticed it. He was so full of his own thoughts that he made blunder after blunder at meal-times: sometimes he would let the pepper-castor fall into Renardino's soup; sometimes he would take away that gentleman's serviette before he had begun his meal. Another time he poured the contents of a jug down the Premier's neck, thinking he was filling the royal cup; and lastly, one day at dessert, he spilt full on his Lordship's peruke an enormous plum-pudding, its sauce flaming with rum. This so greatly tickled the King that the servants were forced to loosen the napkin which His Majesty wore tied about his neck, in order that he might laugh freely and without fear of result.

"Laugh on! Laugh on!" muttered Renardino to himself. "They laugh best who laugh last."

And having uttered this threat, he put out the fire which had seized on his wig, and pretended to laugh like the others; but, as you may well believe, it was only "with the tips of his teeth," as they say.

Some days after this a grand ball was given at the court; for



the King, in order to win the good-will of all his people in his quarrel with Prince Azor, had invited all the chief men of the nation to it.

Never had there been such a brilliant gathering. The King and Queen had put on for the occasion their state robes of ermine trimmed with golden bees. In their crowns were set two great diamonds that sparkled like stars, but which were so heavy that their Majesties, their heads sunk into their shoulders, were almost smothered.

When the dancing began, in the dazzling light of the candles and the lustres above, the ball seemed like a vision of fairy-land. There were court-dances, blazing with gold, flowers, and diamonds, and Bohemian national dances, full of grace, vivacity, and elegance.

Pierrot did wonders as a dancer, and again and again the King and Queen, unable to bear them any longer, put their crowns on a stool that they might applaud the little man more at their ease.

When his turn came to dance with Fleur d'Amandier, Pierrot excelled even himself. You should have seen him then, if you would like to know what can be done with two legs, two arms, and a devoted heart! He sprang from one end of the room to the other in a single bound, and returned in a moment with rapid little strides, skipping as lightly and joyously as a bird. You should have seen the pirouettes he made, and how he spun here, twirled there, so rapidly that his form seemed wrapped in a veil of white gauze, till soon it looked no more than a white mist, dim and motionless. He was no longer a man but a cloud! But he had only to stand still, and the cloud disappeared, leaving the little man in his place once more.

The whole assembly was delighted with this novel display; and every time Pierrot whirled himself invisible, or returned to view again, the King never failed to cry, in a voice that was anxious and joyful by turns,—

“Ah, there — he's gone! — Ah, there he is again!”

Excited by his success, our hero resolved to crown his triumphs by a final feat of dancing skill; but as ill-luck would have it, just at the height of his glory, his leg became entangled in Lord Renardino's, and — thump! — there was the haughty Minister stretched



full length on the floor, whilst his wig, which had flown twenty yards away, turned over and over, and shook such great clouds of powder out of its folds as set the whole assembly rubbing their eyes and coughing.

The poor Premier rose to his feet furious, and, darting upon his wig, clapped it on his head again anyhow. Then he caught at Pierrot by one of his coat-buttons, and hissed in his ear, —

“Pretty ma-s-s-sk, you shall ans-s-swer to me for that ins-s-sult!”

“What, was it you?” asked Pierrot, mockingly.

“Ah, you pretend to be surprised!” cried Renardino. “Do you mean to tell me it was not done on purpose?”

“Oh, no,” answered the little man, quickly, “for that would be telling a fib.”

“Insolent imp!”

“Softly, your Excellence, the King is looking at you, and may notice that your wig is all askew.”

The anxious Minister put his hand quickly to his forehead.

“There!” cried Pierrot, stepping back in pretended terror, “not so much dust, please! You want to fight a duel, I suppose?”

“Yes, to the death!”

“Very good. There’s no need to roll your eyes about like that, over such a simple matter. Where shall it be?”

“At the cross-roads, in the Green Forest.”

“Delightful! At what time?”

“To-morrow morning, at eight.”

“I will be there, my lord.”

And Pierrot, with a single pirouette, reached the doorway, where Cœur d’Or stood on guard, with his pike.

No sooner was the little man within reach than the young groom (who had watched Pierrot jealously, as he danced with Fleur d’Amandier) let the iron butt of his heavy weapon fall on the dancer’s foot.

“Come, jump, Pierrot!” he added in a low voice.

The little man bounded as high as the ceiling, uttering a cry of anguish. The applause broke out louder than ever, at this fresh exploit. The King and Queen fell back in their thrones, and so heartily did they laugh that their crowns, falling from their exalted places, bowled down the room like two gorgeous hoops.



Luckily the courtiers were there and ran after them. Let them do it, dear children ; it is their proper work !

After the dancing it was the turn of the music. All the great operatic airs were played by the most famous performers in Bohemia. All the same, the Queen was obliged to pinch her royal spouse more than once, for he nodded as he sat on his gorgeous throne.

When the great men had received the respectful attention which was their due, Fleur d'Amandier rose from her seat and sang, without any need of prayers and beseechings. Oh, how delightful it was to hear that fresh, pure voice, now like the warbler, now like the nightingale, one moment softened to a lingering tenderness that filled all eyes with tears, the next bursting into a thousand joyous notes, that seemed to fill the air with bright falling sparks of melody !

Everyone was affected. The Queen sobbed ; Cœur d'Or, pike in hand, wept like a baby ; and the King, to disguise his feelings, blew his nose so fiercely that next day all the ceilings of the palace had to be repaired.

When silence was restored, the King said to the Queen in a low voice, —

“ I should like to have a little ballad now ! ”

“ What *are* you thinking of, my dear, — a *ballad* ? ”

“ Well, you know, it's the only sort of music that I like ! ”

“ But, Sire ! — ”

“ I want a little ballad, you understand ? I *will* have a little ballad, — or I'll put myself into a temper ! ”

“ Be calm, Sire,” answered the Queen, who treated her husband as if he were a spoilt child. Then, turning to the musical gentlemen, she said, —

“ Gentlemen, the King wishes one of you to sing him a little ballad.”

The great men looked at one another with wide eyes and open mouths, but not one of them moved.

The King began to grow impatient, when Pierrot, scattering the crowd from his path, stepped up to the foot of the throne.

“ Sire,” said he, bowing low, “ I composed yesterday a little ballad in honour of your Majesty. It is called, ‘ In the Light of the Moon ; ’ would you like to hear it ? ”



“I *will* hear it!” said the King, — “and this very minute, too!”

At this Pierrot took his guitar, and sang, leaning his head towards his left shoulder.

I do not know how to describe to you, dear children, the enthusiasm with which this song was received. The King for joy fairly stamped on his throne, and all the court beat time to the chorus with their hands.

For the rest of the night no one spoke of anything else but Pierrot’s song, and the great music-masters slipped out, one after another, to go and compose magnificent variations, arrangements, and elaborations of the tune. At midnight the King and Queen retired to their apartments and to bed, but not to sleep; for, unable to settle to rest, they sat up in bed, both of them, and bellowed forth the famous ballad until late into the night.

CHAPTER V — *The Little Red Fish*

NEXT morning as the city clocks chimed seven, Lord Renardino paced up and down by the cross-roads, in the Green Forest, the place of meeting for the duel. He had brought with him an old General, who had been so much injured in battle that he had only one leg, one eye, and one arm left, — and they were not whole, either. This, however, did not prevent him from being a very jovial fellow, who twisted his moustache, and strutted by stiffly, whenever a pretty lady came near him.

The two friends had marched thus for a couple of hours, when the old soldier stopped to look at his watch.

“A million, million pistols and pikes!” he cried; “it is nine o’clock! Is it possible that your little white-head is n’t coming, after all? I should have liked to know, I confess, whether he carries blood in his veins, or only flour.”

“You shall know soon,” answered the Prime Minister, grinding his teeth with hate, “for I see him yonder, coming.” And he grasped his sword-sheath fiercely.

It was really Pierrot who approached, followed by a kitchen-scullion bearing under his apron two spits which he had taken that



morning from the Royal kitchen, and which were so long that the points trailed on the ground ten yards behind his heels.

When the two parties had bowed to each other, the seconds tossed for choice of weapons.

“Heads!” cried the General, as he spun a coin into the air.

“Tails!” cried the scullion. — “I’ve won!” And putting the General’s coin in his pocket (quite by accident) he added, —

“We have the choice of weapons.”

And taking the two spits he gave one to Renardino and the other to Pierrot.

The two fighters took their places facing each other, and the duel began.

The Prime Minister, who was very clever at fencing, rushed upon his little foe, and thrust full at his breast, twice. But strange to relate, his spit bounced back, like a hammer from an anvil, and sparks flew from Pierrot’s coat.

Renardino stopped amazed, and the other took the chance to give the Minister a violent kick on the shins.

This was another surprise for the Premier, who jumped into the air, with a shout.

“Fiends and flames!” he cried, foaming with rage, and he sprang at Pierrot once more. The little man began to yield ground and use his nimble legs, but never ceased tormenting his enemy.

Poor Renardino was quite lame by now, but the little man ran the greater danger, for in stepping backwards he came at last to a tree, and found himself hemmed in there.

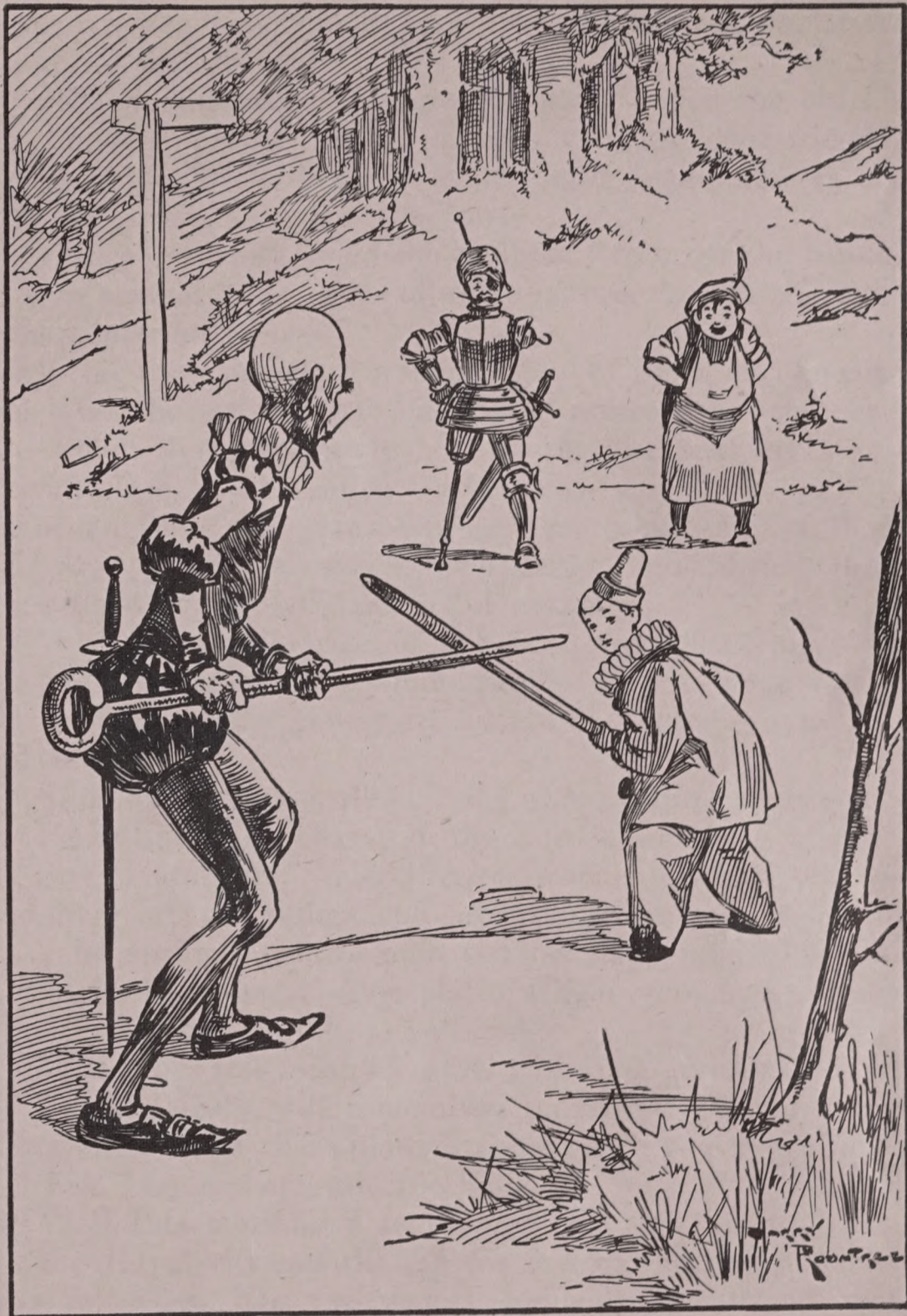
“Ah, now I’ve got you!” cried the Minister, who, seeing that his foe could not escape him, felt a cruel longing to pin him to the tree like a butterfly on a cork.

“Trapped!” he cried, and with a final lunge made a most deadly thrust at Pierrot.

But the little man had seen it coming, and escaped the blow by jumping over his enemy’s head.

The Premier’s spit went deep into the heart of the tree. Quick, quick as he was, to try to withdraw the blade, Pierrot did not give him the time, but showered kicks upon Lord Renardino from behind.

“Pardon! Pity!” cried the unlucky statesman at last. “I am dead!” and letting go the spit he fell down, exhausted.



“The two fighters took their places facing each other.”



Like a generous foe the little man stopped at once, and held out his hand to the beaten man, who rose, shamefaced, amidst the loud laughter of the seconds.

“ Million millions of pistols and pikes ! ” cried the old General, “ how he has played the drum with you, my poor friend ! You won’t be able to sit down for a fortnight — and that’s very awkward, for a man of state like you ! ”

“ I’ll go on before, ” said the scullion, “ to order the bandages ! ”

After several other quips of a like nature, the four took the road to the palace once more.

All this time the court was in a state of great excitement. The King when he sat down to lunch, had noticed that the service of plate which the Queen gave him on his last birthday, was not in its usual place, and he called loudly for it.

For an hour the gentleman-carvers, cooks and scullions had searched everywhere, moved everything, and turned the whole palace topsy-turvy, but had found nothing.

“ Where is my service of plate ? ” cried the King. “ I *must* have my service of plate, immediately, or I’ll hang you all, one after another, in the courtyard. Here . . . I’ve got it. Call my Cupbearer ! ”

“ Sire, ” ventured a scullion, “ the grand Cupbearer is out. ”

“ Fetch him, then ; living or dead, fetch him ! ”

“ Sire, I am here, ” said Pierrot, who entered at this moment, “ and here are the things you are asking for. ”

As he spoke the little man put his hand under his tunic and brought forth six great silver plates, which were in a terrible state, so thoroughly had they been battered.

“ What does this mean ? ” asked the King, crimson with anger.

“ Your Majesty will remember, ” answered Pierrot, “ that you ordered me to have these plates stamped with your Royal initials. ”

“ Yes, I remember, ” said the King.

“ Well, this morning I took them out with me to leave them with the Royal silversmith, and for fear of robbers I placed them under my coat. On my way I suddenly recollected that your Prime Minister, Lord Renardino, was awaiting me in the Green Forest, to settle an affair of honour. ”

“ A duel ! ” cried the King, “ very good, Pierrot ! — No, no,



I mean — very bad indeed, Sir Cupbearer! You know that there is a Royal edict forbidding our subjects to fight duels.”

“Really, Sire, I did n’t know it.”

“Well, well, I’ll let you off this time, but don’t do it again. Go on with your story.”

“I had n’t a minute to lose,” continued Pierrot, “for it was long past the hour agreed upon; so I hurried back to the palace, took a scullion with me as my second, — and in my haste forgot to put back the plate on the dresser.”

“And so you’ve been fighting with my plate?”

“Alas, yes!” said Pierrot, “and Your Majesty can see that Lord Renardino strikes hard.”

“Oh, the villain!” cried the King, “he shall pay me for this!”

“I’ve settled the score myself,” answered the little man, and he told the story of the duel in full.

The King relished the tale heartily, and hastened to tell it to the Queen, who repeated it — in secret — to the First Maid-of-Honour, who whispered it to the Officer of the Guards, who murmured it in confidence to several of his friends, so that in an hour Lord Renardino’s misfortunes were the talk of the court and the city.

It was even worse for him, when the King signed a paper making Pierrot Prime Minister, and ordering that a new service of plate should be bought — at Renardino’s expense.

“Well done! Well done!” cried the people when they heard the proclamation, and they hurried home to illuminate their houses.

Whilst the whole city rejoiced over his disgrace, the ex-minister was feeling more dead than alive. He had got to the palace, and to bed, with the old General’s help, then he had taken a fever, and at the news of his disgrace, he had “fallen out of the frying pan into the fire,” for it sent him off his head. Sometimes the wretched man thought he saw before him the ghosts of all the poor people he had ruined to enrich himself, — phantoms that bent over his bedside, and whispered low, very low, into his shrinking ear, —

“Give us back what you’ve taken from us! Give us it back!”

Sometimes it was the old beggar-woman that he saw, asking alms with a mocking smile, and showing him the well-filled purse which he had lost, six weeks before.



In vain he sat up in bed, with drawn face, and sunken eyes, to push the ghosts away; his hands touched only the empty air, and a loud, mocking voice cried out from nowhere, —

“Thus do we punish bad men, and wicked hearts!”

The same visions came to him every night: every night he heard the same words — so true is it, my dears, that a conscience once awakened never sleeps.

Some days later the King gave a splendid *fête* at his palace in honour of Pierrot, the new Minister. All the neighbouring Kings were invited with the exception of Prince Azor, who was quietly continuing his preparations for war.

Pierrot was at the height of his happiness. Seated at the table by the side of Fleur d’Amandier he made the most comical jests for her benefit, and only took pleasure in seeing her answering smiles. Nevertheless, a looker-on might have noticed that the beautiful Princess became suddenly serious when, stealing a glance at Cœur d’Or, who was standing behind her chair, she saw him change colour, and gnaw spitefully at the wood of his pike, which was no little damaged accordingly.

After dinner the King took leave of his guests, and proposed to take the Queen for a trip on the lake. They could not have chosen a better time: the sky was clear, the air warm, the water calm. Everywhere the plains were turning green; the trees were finding their voices; — it was a real spring evening.

The Royal family reached the lake-side, and embarked in a little boat which they found moored to the shore.

“You may sit near to us,” said the King to Pierrot, who had kept a respectful distance.

Pierrot did not need to be told twice. He seated himself near the rudder, loosed the rope, and the boat, graceful as a swan that shakes out its wings, opened its sails to the breeze, and launched itself on the waters of the lake, without a sound or ripple to mark its course.

Our illustrious personages had sailed on thus for a half-hour or so, when suddenly the King cried, —

“Reef, reef the sail, my good Pierrot, I see a little fish down there, close to the ship. It is swimming after us, for all the world as if it had something to tell us.”



It was, as the King had said, a pretty red fish, bright and alert, which was beating, beating the water with its little fins, so as to overtake the Royal skiff — and it did not take it long, I assure you, at the rate it was going.

Fleur d'Amandier who saw the fish draw nigh, thought that it was perhaps hungry, and threw it some crumbs from a cake which she held in her hand, saying in the softest possible tones, so as not to frighten the creature, —

“Eat, eat, little fish!”

And the fish sprang out of the water, and wagged its ruddy-brown tail gently, by way of thanks.

At this moment the King said to Pierrot in a low tone, —

“Friend Pierrot, take the net, and be ready to throw it, as soon as I give the word. I have taken a fancy to eat that little red fish for my supper.”

But the little red fish, who had heard every word, kept at a safe distance, and putting his head out of the water, cried out, to the great astonishment of the listeners, who had never known a fish to speak, —

“King of Bohemia, great misfortunes are in store for you, you have enemies who plan your downfall in secret. I had come to-night to save you; but the wicked deed that you have planned against a fish that never did you any harm, tells me that you are no better than other men, and I leave you to your fate. But you, Fleur d'Amandier, so fair and so kind, whatever happens, trust in me; I will watch over you.”

Then, imitating the King's voice, the little fish added, —

“Throw the net, Pierrot!”

Pierrot, who only awaited the word, threw the net into the water. I don't know how it happened, but suddenly the boat capsized and all the crew were struggling for their lives in the water.

Pierrot, who was an excellent swimmer, soon came to the top again. His first thought was to look for Fleur d'Amandier and as he espied a fair form floundering beneath the water, he seized her by the hair and drew her ashore in less time than it takes to tell it.

“Saved! saved!” he cried, jumping for joy. He was dreaming



the most golden day-dreams, and already saw himself the King's son-in-law, when, looking more closely, Pierrot discovered that it was the Queen whom he had rescued.

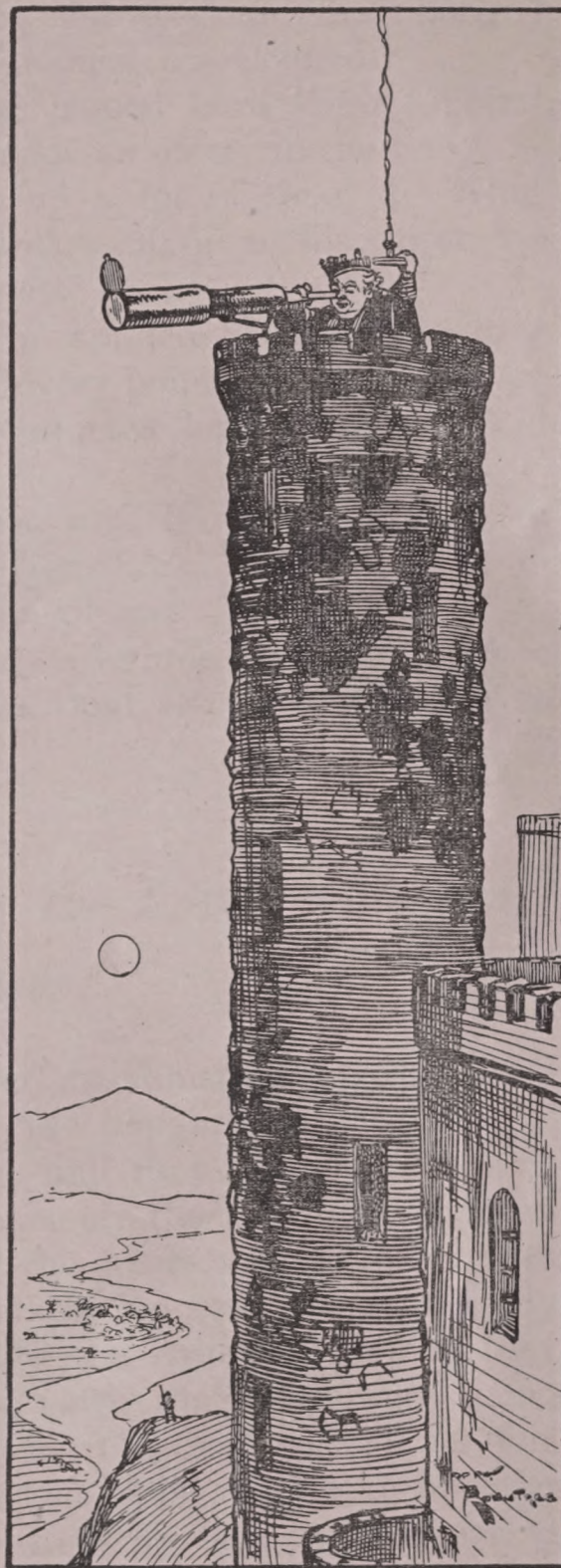
Bitterly disappointed, he was about to plunge once more into the lake, when he saw Cœur d'Or swimming ashore, carefully keeping Fleur d'Amandier's beautiful head above the water as he came along.

"Cœur d'Or! Cœur d'Or here! Is it possible?" he cried. And in his surprise he nearly fell backwards across the swooning Queen, whom he had touched with his foot.

How had the groom found his way there? You are in a hurry to know, I can tell.

He was there, because — because Fleur d'Amandier was there. When you chance to be very ill, or have some great sorrow of the heart, is not your mother always there, before any one else, to help and console you? Yes, that is so, isn't it? Well, that is why Cœur d'Or was on the shores of the lake when the boat upset, and how he came to save the Princess's life.

The King, meanwhile, had been punished for his would-be wickedness. He had been taken in the net thrown out by Pierrot, and after having drunk, very unwillingly, an enormous quantity of water, he managed to get astride the boat's keel, and there he puffed



"Arrived at the top of the tower"



and yelled and yelled and puffed as if he were drowning. And there he would be still, if Cœur d'Or had not come to his rescue.

On their return to the palace the shipwrecked ones changed their clothes, and then the King summoned his Council.

Pierrot already Prime Minister, was named Lord High Admiral of the Kingdom, and Cœur d'Or was made an officer in the army.

After the ceremonies, which took up a lot of time, the King dismissed his court, took his candle and went up to his tower, his face bearing a very thoughtful expression.

Arrived at the top of the tower, he applied his right eye to a telescope and searched the horizon, at every point of the compass.

It was a long task. At last he completed his survey, and said to himself, —

“I've ‘looked out,’ in every sense, and I can see nothing to worry about — absolutely nothing. That little fish is a cunning little creature, and wants to make fun of me.”

So he went downstairs again, with a lighter heart, returned to his bedroom, lay down by his Queen, and slept loud enough to wake the dead.

CHAPTER VI—“*For the Love of Heaven, open the Door!*”

AS soon as he came into power as Minister, Pierrot busied himself with new laws for the happiness of the people, who until then had been so dull they did not know how to bear it. He built an open-air theatre in the market-place, where the fairs were held, and the actors were no other than little marionettes, who walked and talked and acted so wonderfully that the good folk, who could not see the strings by which they were worked, swore by heaven and earth that they were living creatures. He it was who founded the Carnival and all its fun, the Shrove-tide customs, and the masked balls, and (to keep things jolly as long as possible) he made Lent as late in the year as he could.

Never had the kingdom been so contented. All Bohemia was



one holiday, one great shout of laughter; the name of Pierrot was on every lip, and the tune of "By the Light of the Moon" in every throat.

So much popularity began even to overshadow the King's, who was jealous (as a good King ought to be) for the love of his people; but the one who hated Pierrot most was my Lord Renardino, who had now got better of his wounds, and would pace up and down his room, scowling fiercely to himself and planning the most wicked plots. Suddenly his face broke into a horrible smile.

"Ah!" he cried aloud, "I have him now, for sure! He won't escape me, this time!"

And he ran off to the King's room.

"Tap! tap!" he went at the door.

"Come in!" cried the King, — "Oh, it's you, Lord Albert! Pray sit down! — What, you *can* sit down? You're much better, then!"

"Sire, let us not talk of me — it is of you I am thinking," said the other in a terrifying voice. "Great misfortunes are in store for you —"

The King turned pale. He remembered what the little red fish had said, and they were the very same words.

"Well, what is it?" he stammered.

"This," answered Renardino. "Pierrot, your Prime Minister is plotting against you, and plans to come into your study to-night at eight, pretending to talk with you, as is his custom, but in truth, he means to strangle you."

"Strangle me!" cried the King, putting his hand to his throat.

"Nothing less, — strangle you, straightaway," repeated the other curtly. "But don't be alarmed: I will save you. Only, trust the guarding of the palace to me for to-day, and whatever happens, — whatever noise you hear in your ante-chamber to-night, — don't open the door for *anybody*!"

"I'll take good care of that," answered the King.

An hour later Renardino and the captain of the King's guards were pacing up and down the palace-gardens, talking in low voices.

"Strange!" said the Captain. "And you tell me it is by the King's command?"

"Here is the order, written by his own hand."



“Very good, my lord; I shall obey.”

Hidden behind a clump of shrubbery a man was leaning on his spade and listening with all his ears. It was the chief gardener — our old friend the woodcutter.

When the two plotters had turned round the corner of the path and passed out of sight, he found breath.

“Oh, the rogues!” he cried, “the villains, to want to murder my poor little Pierrot! I’ll make haste to warn him.”

And he set off for the palace at full speed.

Night came on, and eight sounded from the great city clock, when Pierrot with a great bundle of papers under his arm, left his own room, humming a tune.

Renardino, who heard him, half-opened his door and watched his victim going down the stairs which led to the King’s study.

“Sing, my fine fellow, sing!” he said to himself, rubbing his hands in glee, — “soon you’ll dance!”

And he closed his door noiselessly.

But no sooner had he reached the foot of the staircase, than Pierrot blew out his candle, and wrapped himself in a cloak which he took from his bundle, and which was the colour of the wall where he stood. Then he stepped aside and hid himself in the shadow by the door of the ante-chamber.

“Now, let’s wait!” he said. And he stood there invisible, and as still as a statue.

The clocks chimed half-past eight — and then nine —

Voices began to whisper in the ante-room.

“It’s nine already” said one; “he won’t come!”

“Ssh!” answered another, “I hear a noise!”

And the voices ceased.

It was quite true. The noise was made by Renardino himself, who crept cautiously out of his room.

“Nine o’clock!” he said to himself; “let us see whether the trick has come off.”

He crept down the stairs, stole on tiptoe to the ante-chamber door, and holding his breath, listened intently.

There was perfect silence.

“They’ve certainly killed him,” he said with a chuckle. “So much the better!”



Renardino raised the latch softly, half-opened the door, ventured his head inside — then an arm — then a leg; — and was just going to put in the whole of his body, when Pierrot, darting from his hiding-place, pushed him with all his might into the middle of the room, and closed the door on him.

Then arose a frightful babel of cries and blows and oaths. The soldiers, who had been well paid, meant to earn their money fully.

“Help! Help! Murder!” cried Renardino. “Sire, open the door! Open the door, for the love of Heaven!”

But the King, who had been forewarned, fastened all the bolts, and worked like a nigger to barricade the door.

It would have been all up with the ex-Premier if the Queen, who had been attracted by the noise, had not entered, in her night-dress and with a lighted candle, to see what was the matter. At the sight of her the frightened guards fled at once, and his lordship, covered with bruises and filled with shame, limped away to his own room, whence he could hear Pierrot singing in a high, mocking voice,

“Open the door,
For the love of Heaven!”

CHAPTER VII — “*The April Fish*”

IT was the First of April. The King, who had spent the night looking through the key-hole of his study door, had caught cold — such a cold that next morning he trembled like a leaf, and sneezed enough to break the windows. He was tapping his feet against the floor of his throne, to warm himself, when suddenly he caught sight of someone sitting opposite to him, — a man with a pale, villainous face, who looked across at him, and mimicked his actions.

At the sight of this ghost the poor monarch uttered a cry of terror, and clapped his hand to his sword.

The shade did the same.

Alas, my dear children, the miserable monarch had n't recognised his own face in the glass, and you would have been deceived yourselves, so white had his hair grown in the night, so red were his eyes, so swollen was his nose!



Just at this moment there was a knock at the door.

“Open, sire, it is I,” cried a voice, which the King knew to be Renardino’s.

Walking fearfully backward so as to keep his eye on the phantom, the King pulled the bobbin and opened the door.

“Draw your sword, my lord!” he said in a low voice to the newcomer, as he pointed his own towards the threatening intruder in the mirror, who copied his movement faithfully. “It’s another plotter! Draw!”

A wicked smile hovered about Renardino’s thin lips: he thought the King had gone mad.

“Sire, be calm,” he said, “we are alone!”

“What!” cried the King, “alone! What about that ugly-looking fellow, standing there before me, with a sword in his hand?”

“With all respect, sire — it’s yourself!”

“What! That man with the white hair, red eyes, and violet nose, who sneezes enough to frighten one’s wits away?”

“It is your Majesty, I repeat — and the proof is, that you are sneezing again.”

It was only too true. Another storm was raging in the King’s head, and there was no longer any mistaking the truth.

“Oh, good gracious!” cried the poor King, when the tempest was over, “it was I, then! That face! — those eyes! — that nose!”

And dropping his sword, he covered his face with his hands.

“Lord Albert,” he said presently, in a solemn voice, “whatever happens in future, I forbid you to speak to me of plots.”

There was a moment’s silence. Renardino was bothered. He wished to try another ruse, and did not know how to begin.

“Sire,” he said at last, in a careless tone, and flicking the dust off his coat with the tips of his fingers as he spoke, “do you like turbot?”

“Do I like turbot!” cried the King, whose eyes shone with pleasure. “Ah, my lord, can you ask me!”

“I guessed as much, your Majesty,” answered the other, “for they are going to serve you one for supper. You will enjoy it, no doubt?”

The King was so full of the pleasure this news gave him, that he could only answer by a nod of the head.



“So much the worse!” said Renardino.

“Why so much the worse?”

“Oh, after Your Majesty’s express command, I dare not tell Your Majesty why —”

“Speak, speak, I order you!”

“Well —”

“Well?”

“The turbot is poisoned.”

At these words the King gave a cry of horror and his legs gave way beneath him. But a moment later he recovered himself, and leaning over towards the ex-Premier, he whispered in his ear,—

“I was not master of myself, just now, at first — but — I feared it, all along!”

“What!” cried Renardino taken aback. “You know who has poisoned the turbot?”

“Yes, I know,” said the King, “but don’t speak so loud — he has such a quick ear, he might overhear what we say.”

“Oh, that’s all right, there’s nothing to fear on that score. I have just seen him cross the courtyard, to visit the Queen’s apartments.”

“You’ve s-s-seen him cross the c-c-courtyard?” asked the King, who had suddenly begun to stammer. “And you’re sure it’s he?”

“Himself!”

“The little red fish?”

“The little red fish? No, Sire, no — your Premier, Pierrot.”

“Pierrot!”

“What? Then it was n’t Pierrot you suspected?”

“Oh, yes, yes, yes!” answered the King hurriedly, for he did not wish Renardino to doubt his cleverness. “And yet, after what happened last night in my ante-chamber, I should have thought —”

“That he was dead? Oh, make no mistake, Sire, thanks to the Queen’s orders he still lives.”

“The Queen! And what business has the Queen to meddle with affairs of state?”

“Ah, ah!” said Renardino, with a sneering laugh, “that’s just it! What! Your Majesty does n’t know what is an open secret all through the land of Bohemia? — that the Queen loves Pierrot and wishes to marry him?”



“To marry him?” cried the King. “And what about me?”

“Oh, you, Sire, — you are to have turbot for supper to-night!”

“By my beard!” answered His Majesty, whose natural good sense revolted at the slanders brought by Renardino, “what you tell me is horrible, and I can’t believe it. What proofs have you?”

“Proofs! You ask me for proofs?”

“Certainly.”

“Well, then, listen to me, and answer. Who upset the Royal skiff last week in the lake?”

“Ah, that was Pierrot — I can’t say what isn’t true — it was Pierrot.”

“Very good. But at least he rescued you when you were struggling in the water?”

“You ask me whether he rescued me or not?” answered the King, racking his brains to remember, “no, I think not. But wait — I know now — far from saving me, it was he who threw the net over my head, and if it had n’t been for Cœur d’Or, who happened to be on the spot, I should certainly have been drowned.”

“Then, you see that Pierrot wished to drown you.”

“I don’t say that,” answered the King — “and yet —”

“Yet he threw the net over your head, and threw himself into the water to save the Queen.”

At this artful comparison a cloud passed over the King’s face.

“Ah, you see it all clear enough now!” cried Renardino. “Well, run to the Queen’s rooms, where Pierrot has just gone. Listen at the door for a minute, and you will soon know as much as all the rest of us.”

The King took Renardino at his word, and rushed out of the study.

His Royal partner was at that moment so busy attending to her beloved aviary that she never noticed the King, who slipped in by the private door, and hid himself, as well as he could for his stoutness, behind a thick velvet curtain.

Having filled all the little crystal drinking-bowls with clear water, and baited the golden cords that hung from the roof of the cage with the most appetising dainties, Her Majesty amused herself by watching in silence the swarms of charming birds as they flew here, darted there, carrying away the delicious morsels, happy,



clamorous, and busy as a hive of bees. Suddenly a sharp cry set the Queen trembling.

“It is he!” she cried joyfully, and she ran out upon the balcony to call to the little lost pet, who had of late taken to coming every day to twitter beneath his mistress’s window.

“Come here!” she cried, breaking in her hand a big biscuit and scattering the crumbs upon the balcony. “Come, come, my little Pierrot!”

The King in his hiding-place could not help giving a dull groan as he heard these tender words. The Queen looked round startled, and perceived Pierrot himself, who had just entered and was bowing low before her.

“I have the honour to tell Your Majesty,” he said, “that a fisher has just brought to the palace a magnificent turbot weighing over two hundred pounds.”

“Good, Monsieur Pierrot,” answered Her Majesty. “Send it to the cook and let it be dressed for the King’s supper. You know it is a favourite dish of his.”

Pierrot bowed and retired; the Queen darted out once more upon the balcony, but the little bird had disappeared.

Meanwhile the King had returned to his study in a terrible state of mind.

“My lord,” he said, “I know all; but, by my crown! they shall both die. To spoil such a splendid dish — a turbot that weighs over two hundred pounds — oh, the wickedness of it! Send for all the chemists in the city, — those who are known to be the cleverest of their kind, — and let the fish be sent to me.”

When the chemists, twenty in number, had gathered together in the Royal study in obedience to his summons, the King said: —

“Gentlemen, please look carefully at the turbot before you, and let me know what kind of poison there is in it.”

“It is poisoned?” they all cried together.

“Yes, it is poisoned.”

“Oh, very good!” answered the doctors, and fell to work straightway.

Whilst they were examining the fish Renardino was in a great state of uneasiness. He feared that the trick which he had thought to play on Pierrot would surely be found out. What, then, was his



surprise and joy, when the learned men, having finished their task, announced that the turbot proved to have been poisoned in no less than twenty different ways!

The twenty chemists had each found a different poison!

Having given their opinion the men of science bowed and trooped out very solemnly, one after another.

Two hours later Renardino sent with great pomp to Pierrot a state paper signed by the King, ordering him to pack up immediately, and set off to the court of Prince Azor, to arrange a peace between the two countries. It was really a sentence of death.

The same day the Queen was arrested, and in spite of her daughter's tears was carried away, strongly guarded, to an old tower at the further end of the city.

Now, all this was due to Renardino's wickedness. He had several times in a morning heard the Queen call to her little bird, and he had made use of this fact to excite the King's jealousy, already aroused by the affair of the capsized boat.

The poisoned turbot was a tale of the ex-Minister's own invention, but the fable was ever afterwards celebrated in the country, and acted each year on the First of April under the well-known name of "April fish!"¹

So you are warned, my dear little readers, — don't place any trust in the Renardinos of the world.

CHAPTER VIII—*"My Candle is out: I have no more Light!"*

PIERROT read the Royal message and sat down to think it over. It was clear that in sending him to Azor's court they meant him to come to harm.

"But, bah!" he cried, snapping his fingers, "it will be all right!" And he went to his dressing-room, singing gaily, and took over two hours to dress, which was a thing he never did.

Before leaving Bohemia he wanted to take leave of the King, but His Majesty shut his door in the little man's face, as one does with

¹ The French way of saying "April fool."



all courtiers in disgrace. He went to the Princess's rooms so as to carry away in his heart at least the echo of her adorable voice.

“Stand back!” cried Cœur D’Or, who was on guard, and who set his pike point at the little man’s breast. “You can’t pass here!”

So poor little Pierrot was forced to go away.

He went out into the palace gardens and tenderly embraced the good woodcutter and his wife, who with tears in their eyes packed him a basket filled to the brim with all good things to eat.

“Good luck, Sir Ambassador!” cried Renardino to Pierrot. He was leaning from one of the palace windows watching the little man’s departure. “A thousand compliments to the Prince!”

“I will not fail to deliver them, Sir Minister,” answered Pierrot, who would not be behindhand in politeness.

Then turning on his heel he marched away stoutly enough, with his basket on his arm.

It would weary you, dear readers, to tell you of the many halts our hero made by the wayside. Every time he came to a green patch of grass he sat himself down cross-legged, spread a snow-white napkin out before him, and set out an enormous pie that made one’s mouth water to look at, with a bottle of Hungary wine on either side of it. He ate and drank so heartily that when he was only half way through his journey all his food was eaten—the basket was empty!

“Now,” he said to himself, “we must hurry!” And he marched forward with such doughty strides that he arrived at Prince Azor’s court that night.

He came at an unlucky time, for the whole palace was topsy-turvy. The Prince had swallowed a fish-bone at supper, and in his fury had just strangled with his own hands a famous doctor who had failed to take it out of his throat.

Next, as the doctor’s death had not relieved his pain to any extent, the Prince thought of another and more useful plan. This was, to make his Prime Minister swallow a fish-bone just like the one that was troubling him, and to try on his Excellency’s throat all the ways that the doctors could think of to get it out again.

He was just going to send for the Minister when the officer on guard ushered Pierrot into the room.



“Who are you?” asked Azor, who was obliged by the bone to speak through his nose, “who are you who dare to come before me?”

“I am Pierrot,” answered our hero, “Ambassador of His Majesty the King of Bohemia, and I have been sent to arrange a peace with Your Highness.”

“By my hump!” cried the Prince, “you couldn’t have come at a better moment! After all, it had much better be you than my Prime Minister! Sit down at that table—good! Now, eat that fish that you see there, and above all, take care to swallow all the fish-bones—all, do you hear?—or I’ll have you killed like a dog!”

Pierrot, who was very hungry, did not wait to be bidden twice. He set to work with such an appetite that an enormous pike which had covered the whole table disappeared in the twinkling of an eye as if by magic. There remained nothing but the backbone. Pierrot, raising his sleeved arm, took the bone ’twixt finger and thumb, put it gingerly into his mouth, and then, with a big gulp and a wry face—swallowed it whole!

“Prince,” he said, with the air of a conjurer who has just caused his last ball to disappear, “it is done!”

“Impossible!” cried Azor, who had watched the whole affair closely. “Come here—open your mouth! Prodigious!” he added, as he took a light and searched every nook and corner of Pierrot’s mouth. “It has gone! By Jove, I’ll try it!”

Saying which he took a deep breath, gave a great gulp and a horrible grimace—and the bone passed down out of his gullet.

“Saved!” he cried, “I’m saved! Ah, my little friend, you’ve just done me a great service! To show my gratitude, I’ll let you choose whatever death you like best. You see, I am a good sort of a Prince!”

“Sire,” answered Pierrot, “I did not expect anything less of your kindness, but Your Highness would do best to choose yourself. I leave it to you entirely.”

“Ah, my little man, you jest with me, do you?” answered Azor. “Very good, then; I think that after having seen you eat with such gusto just now, I should like to see you die of hunger.”

In spite of the control that our hero kept over himself, he could



not help giving a start as he heard these words. "To die of hunger!" he said to himself; "I had n't thought of that!"

He would perhaps have taken back his rash words if the Prince had not at that moment ordered the guards to seize the prisoner and throw him into one of the dungeons of the castle.

This, my dear children, was a frightful prison, where no air or light could come, except through a very narrow hole, strongly barred, and so high up that the wretched little captive could not see the least patch or corner of sky. There was nothing in the way of furniture but a vile straw-bed, a stool, an earthen jar, and an iron candle-stick which the gaoler filled night and morning.

When the door of his cell was closed upon him Pierrot, weary with his long walk, lay down on the bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Next morning at daybreak a creaking of hinges and clanking of keys made him wake and sit up suddenly. It was the rusty door opening, and the gaoler who entered.

"Here, comrade," he said, "here's a jug of fresh water that I've just drawn from the fountain. I need n't give you another candle, because you have n't even lighted the one I left you yesterday."

Pierrot struck his forehead, as a man does when an idea comes to him, but he never said a word.

The gaoler went out and fastened the door with three bolts. The sound of his footsteps had barely died away when Pierrot sprang from his pallet, seized greedily on the candle, and ate it, tallow, wick and all.

This done he took his stool, placed it in the pale ray of light that struggled into the cell through the air-hole, and began to carve a charming toy out of a piece of wood, with a penknife he carried. By night the piece of wood had become a little dancing-man, who frisked his arms and legs about in a delightful fashion, when you pulled a string.

"By Jupiter, but that's pretty!" cried the warder, when he came that evening. His fat jovial face reddened like a peony with pleasure as he saw the toy. "You must really give me that, comrade, to amuse my little boy with."

"Willingly," answered Pierrot, "and I could make him lots more like this, — better ones even, — if I could only have more light. But this cell is so dark —"



“That sha’n’t hinder you, prisoner,” answered the other, who naturally thought Pierrot only wanted them to burn; “I’ll bring you candles enough, so that your cell shall be as light as day.”

Five minutes later Pierrot had five or six candles left in his cell, and you can guess now, as well as I can, what he did with them! I will only add that whenever his strange larder was empty, the prisoner went to the door and sang through the bars, —

“My candle’s gone out,
I have no more light!”

And the turnkey would run as fast as his legs could carry him to renew his captive’s candles.

After a fortnight of this life the number of toys which Pierrot had carved was so great that the gaoler began to make money by them, and rented a shop in the city where all the little urchins stood gaping from morning till night, never being able to open their eyes wide enough to admire such beautiful toys.

But there came a day when the Prince thought he would like to see with his own eyes how his prisoner was getting on.

He took a torch and went down into the cell, and nearly fell backward with astonishment to see his captive so full of life and health.

“What, you scamp! Aren’t you dead?”

“I’m very well, thank you, Heaven be praised!” answered Pierrot.

“Ah, you’re very well, thank you,” repeated Azor in a threatening tone. “Very good. We’ll have a laugh together, you and I.” And he strode out of the cell.

Now I ought to tell you, my dear children, that the Prince had been reading a book the night before called “The Adventures of the Clever Princess,” a very pretty fairy story, and it had made him laugh till he cracked his sides, by telling of a horrible punishment which befell one of the story-people. He had even laughed so much that the fish-bone had come back into his throat. Ever since he had read the story he had neither eaten nor slept, so impatient was he to try the same sort of death on somebody.

Pierrot was not dead: here was the very chance he wanted!

Immediately he gave orders that a barrel should be made, brist-



ling inside with spikes as sharp as needles, and that it should be carried to the top of a high mountain which rose up outside the city gates.

At the same time Pierrot was taken out of his cell and led to the top of the mountain also, and there the executioner, taking him by the hand, begged him — oh, so politely! — to kindly step inside the barrel.

“He will! He won’t!” cried the crowd, who had hurried there in thousands to see the strange sight.

Pierrot entered.

When all was ready Azor gave the signal, and the executioner pushed the barrel down the mountain slope.

At the sight of this human avalanche, which whirled downward with terrible swiftness, bounding from rock to rock, and carrying along with it all that it met on its way, a mournful silence fell upon the crowd. It was broken only by the sobs and tears of the little children, who were heartbroken to think of such a sad end to the little white man who made them all those pretty toys.

But what was everyone’s surprise, when the barrel reached the foot of the mountain and broke in two, to see Pierrot jump out, fully armed, as Minerva sprang from the head of Jupiter!

Yes, my dears, in armour from head to foot, in a coat of mail of the finest steel, and as fully equipped as a knight about to fight in the tourney! It was an under-garment which he had thought it best to wear, when sent on his errand to Azor’s court. As for his tunic, not a scrap of it was left upon him: it hung in shreds from the tips of the barrel-spikes.

“Hurrah! Hurrah!” cried the people, as soon as their breath returned.

“Down with Prince Azor!” cried the children, who stamped their feet and clapped their hands, so pleased were they to see their dear Pierrot still alive.

All this time Azor was making a furious fuss, and sent men-at-arms to seize upon Pierrot. He would greatly have liked to put him through the ordeal again, but the barrel was smashed and the people murmured so loudly that to avoid a riot His Highness found it best to get back into the castle without delay.

Pierrot was taken back to his prison, and in less than an hour



the gaoler brought him a costume all complete, and just like his old one, which the children of the town had put their pocket money together to buy him. Pierrot was so touched by this mark of affection that the tears came to his eyes. He blessed the little ones, in his heart, and vowed to love them all his life.

He had scarcely fastened the last button of his new clothes when a man entered the cell and beckoned to him to follow. It was the executioner again.

Pierrot answered by a nod that he was ready to obey; and the two set out to thread the dark underground passages of the castle. They went up and down countless stone steps, and came out at length into a courtyard in the middle of which was a sunken space like a great well. Down in this pit was a great white bear, which was known for fifty miles around for its savage nature.

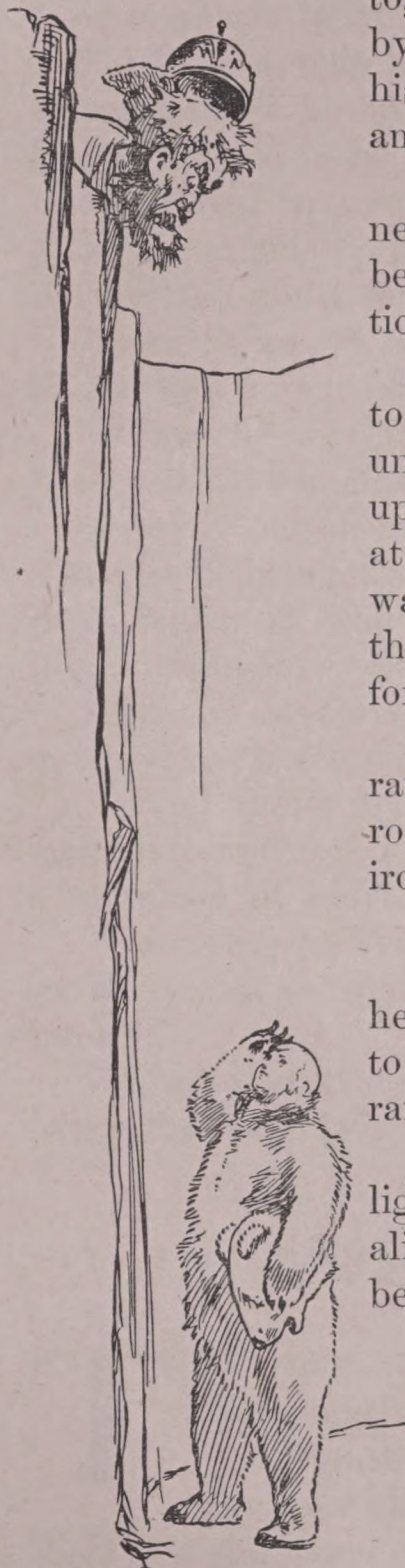
When the two reached the iron railing which ran round the well-top, the executioner drew a rope-ladder from his pocket, tied it firmly to the ironwork, and signed to Pierrot to go down.

Pierrot went down.

The bear was sleeping soundly and did not hear him, but the scent of fresh food which came to his nostrils at length disturbed his sleep. He raised his head heavily, and sniffed.

Suddenly his eyes opened wide, and a sombre light burned and flashed in them. Pierrot had just alighted on the ground, and the rope-ladder had been withdrawn.

Instead of pouncing upon his prey, however, as an unskilful beast would have done, the bear pretended not to see him. He rose slowly, stretched his languid limbs one after the other; and then, standing on his hind-legs, advanced softly, softly — swaying his head slightly from side to side, and assuming



"Greeting to Prince Azor!"



the most innocent appearance. He looked to be so simple, so good-natured, that if you had seen him, my dear children, you would most certainly have curtsied to him out of very politeness.

But Pierrot, who knew bears by heart, was not taken in by this clever acting: he lay stretched out on the ground, held his breath, and pretended to be dead.

The bear approached, and for some moments looked down suspiciously at this body which lay so still on the ground before him. He sniffed at it, and turned it over, and back again; and then, believing it to be dead, he turned away disgusted, and went back to his den and to sleep, at the same slow, easy pace.

When he was fast asleep Pierrot rose quietly, drew near the beast on tiptoe, and drawing his little knife from his pocket, he very neatly cut off its head before the poor bear had time to awake. Then he lit a big fire with straw, and cut up and roasted delicious bear steaks, off which he dined that night and for some days following, without interruption.

But one day, a week later, the Prince ran to the pit and looked down at his fierce pet.

“Well done, my pretty fellow!” he cried to the bear, which ambled to and fro below him. “I was sure you would only make a mouthful of him!”

“Greeting to Prince Azor!” answered the bear, which removed its head, and showed the startled visitor the floury face of Pierrot himself.

“Confound it!” yelled the Prince, “it’s not the bear that has eaten the man, it’s the man who’s eaten the bear!”

CHAPTER IX—*Renardino’s Treason*

THE state of affairs between the Prince and Pierrot was becoming more ridiculous every hour.

“I must finish him to-day with my own hand,” thought the hunchback, when he awoke the next morning, “or I shall lose the name of Azor.”

So he armed himself with a magnificent Turkish scimitar which had been presented to him by the Sultan Mustapha, sent for Pierrot,



forced him to his knees, and whirling the sword above his head, dealt a terrible blow at his victim's neck.

The head disappeared.

When he saw how clever he had been the Prince could not resist a smile of pride, and leaning on his weapon, the other hand placed proudly on his hip, he stood for a long time, posing before his soldiers.

"Will he soon be finished?" muttered the executioner to himself, for this sort of play was tiring him. "Sire," he went on aloud, "excuse me if I disturb you, but I should like to point out to you that the prisoner's head has disappeared."

"Ods bodikins, man, I know that!" answered the Prince, with a graceful sweep of his scimitar.

"But what perhaps you don't know, is, that we can't find it anywhere!"

"Come, come, you're joking with me!" And quitting his heroic attitude, the Prince himself searched the room, but found nothing.

Suddenly his red hair stood on end all over his head, and his eyes grew fixed with terror. He had just seen something very like a pair of eyes, a nose, and a mouth, which were slowly appearing out of the dead man's shoulders, and quietly taking their proper place on his body. It was the head for which he had been looking — the same head that he thought he had cut off! But Pierrot, by a trick which he alone knew, had craftily withdrawn his head into the shelter of his jacket, and kept it there, safe and sound.

At the sight of this miracle, Azor felt that he had shown himself very stupid, and he was so ashamed that he let the scimitar fall from his grasp, and it snapped in two on the stones, for it was pure steel.

"Sire," said the executioner, "do you really wish this man to die? Yes? Well, then, let me do it, and I'll be hanged if he escapes *this* time!"

"It's a bargain, my friend!" said Pierrot, shaking hands on it.

Immediately a gibbet was set up in the castle courtyard, and Pierrot was taken up to the platform, which at a signal was to give way beneath his feet.

When all was prepared the hangman mounted the ladder, rope in hand. Once on the planks he made a running noose and stooped down to slip it over his victim's neck.



But just when the man least expected it, Pierrot took him by the waist, and tickled him so artfully in the ribs that the poor wretch, seized with a silly fit of laughing, let go the rope in his helpless mirth.

Quick as lightning Pierrot seized upon it, slipped it neatly round the other's neck, kicked away the ladder, tipped over the plank, and the laughing hangman found himself hanged!

"Off you go!" cried Pierrot. "You've lost, old fellow!"

At this unexpected end to the affair, the Prince foamed at the mouth with rage. Drawing his dagger, he was just about to throw himself upon the little man and stab him to the heart, when a man rushed in, covered with dust, and stopped the Prince in the act by handing him a letter.

"My lord, — a message from Lord Renardino!" cried the courier. "Take it and read it!"

Azor broke the seal and read.

"Hooray!" he shouted, flinging his turban in the air, "Hooray! Bohemia's ours!"

The messenger then stepped forward and pointed out to His Highness that there was a P.S. to the letter.

"The dickens!" said the Prince, scratching his head; "the old miser wants 300,000 sequins of me — but, after all, the kingdom's cheap at the price! To arms, soldiers, to arms!"

At this summons the whole castle was filled with bustle and fuss, and no one thought any more about Pierrot, who slipped away, nor of the executioner, who remained hanged, — a lucky thing for the Prince's subjects, who hated him heartily, and with good reason.

Whilst all this was happening, the King of Bohemia sat at dinner in his palace, with his daughter Fleur d'Amandier, Renardino his Prime Minister, and Cœur d'Or, who had been made Commander-in-Chief of the Royal Army.

The meal was a very dull and silent one. The old King, who had never laughed once since his Queen was imprisoned and Pierrot banished, was even sadder than usual.

He had been dreaming all the night before that he had died a violent death, and that he was being buried.



No one else felt any more cheerful. Fleur d'Amandier was thinking sadly of her mother, and Cœur d'Or sighing hopelessly for Fleur d'Amandier. Renardino himself was very uneasy, and with his ear turned to the door, trembled at the least noise from outside.

Suddenly the door was flung open wide, and the old beggar of the wayside appeared on the threshold.

"Fleur d'Amandier and Cœur d'Or," she said, "come with me! Her Majesty the Queen wishes you to join her."

At the sound of her mother's name, Fleur d'Amandier rose from the table, ran to embrace her father, and hurried away. Cœur d'Or followed her, and the door closed once more.

Renardino was left alone with the King.

"My stars!" said the Premier to himself; "that old witch came just in the nick of time, just when I wanted to get rid of those two! Everything prospers as it should."

"Come, Sire," he said aloud, "drive away all these sad thoughts from your mind with a glass of good old Hungary wine! It has n't its equal in all the world! Here's to your better luck! Death to Prince Azor, and prosperity to the Royal house of Bohemia!"

The King, without thinking, carried his glass to his lips and emptied it at a draught.

"Oh, good Heavens!" he stammered, and fell heavily out of his chair as if struck by lightning.

"Good!" said Renardino, rubbing his hands. "The powder has done its work well. And now, to keep our word to the Prince!"

And drawing a cord from his pocket he bound the King hand and foot.

If he had not been so entirely wrapped up in his wicked work, the villain might have seen a face watching him from the opposite window — a white face, with wide-open eyes, which followed all his actions with a look of wonder and affright. It was Pierrot, who had flown back to Bohemia immediately he had escaped, and whose first thought on entering the palace had been to see what was happening in the dining-hall.

All in a moment cries were heard without; a sound of footsteps and the clanking of swords echoed through the rooms of the palace, and Azor burst open the door and darted in.



“Where’s the King?” he asked in a deep voice.

“There, in his chair, well tied up,” answered Renardino.

“By my hump, you’re a man of your word!”

“And the 300,000 sequins?”

“Here they are.”

Just at this moment a white shadow glided swiftly between the two speakers, seized upon the bag of money which the Prince was offering to Renardino, and blew out the candles, leaving the room in darkness. At the same moment the Premier, who had held out his hand for the gold, received a sharp smack on the cheek, which he answered with an angry blow of his fist, which fell full on Azor’s nose.

Then followed a terrible struggle, — yells, bites, kicks, and oaths — for the two gripped each other and rolled over and over, clutching each other as closely as two snakes in combat.

Startled by the horrible noise the soldiers ran into the room with torches, and the light showed the two fighters each other’s face.

“What! It’s you!” they both cried, recognising each other, and sitting up dazed with surprise.

But their amazement was greater still when, on looking round the room, they discovered that both the King and the money-bag had disappeared!

CHAPTER X — *The Death of Prince Azor*

THAT very night the Prince and the Premier gave themselves up to searching the palace from top to bottom, the one to capture the King, the other to recover the sequins which had been stolen from him. But all their trouble was in vain.

The King was no longer in the palace. Carried off by Pierrot, he was sleeping like a log in the woodcutter’s little cottage. His bonds had been cut, and from time to time the good dame Marguerite applied a bottle of smelling-salts to his nostrils — salts so strong and severe that the poor King made the most awful faces, and even in his sleep punched his own nose with the most savage vigour.



Meanwhile the woodcutter, seated at his table, was gloating over a dazzling pile of sequins, which shone brightly in the rays of the lamp.

Soon Azor began to feel uneasy. He set guards at all the palace gates, and spent the night in planning with Renardino. One thing, above all, troubled him: it was that the King's army was nowhere to be found. Cœur d'Or, on the advice of the old witch, had taken it away, the night before, to guard Fleur d'Amandier.

Renardino, who did not know this, tried vainly to guess where it could have got to, and although he said nothing, he feared some misfortune would happen.

Day was just breaking when the captain of Azor's army entered the Prince's bedroom to make his report.

"What news?" asked his master.

"Sire, the night has passed quietly enough," answered the captain; "but the men on the watch have seen a ghost wandering all night through, about the palace. One of them vows he knew it for the little white man who called himself the King of Bohemia's Ambassador, and whom you wished to put to death. But whether it was he or no, I won't disguise from Your Highness that the vision has had a bad effect on the soldiers."

"What! The cowards are afraid of a ghost!" said the Prince, laughing loudly. "Well, Captain, we must make short work of things. Out of the palace with all your men, and put the city to fire, sword and pillage!"

The officer saluted and went out, but a minute afterwards he returned, looking very scared.

"Prince," said he, "we are shut in. The King of Bohemia at the head of his army has surrounded the palace, and summons Your Highness to surrender!"

"Blood and bones! Who talks to me of yielding!" answered Azor in a terrible voice. "Bring me my armour and my lance, open the palace gates, and I'll scatter the dogs with a sweep of my sword!"

"My lord, you don't understand," stammered the captain. "I tell you we're trapped. The keys of all the palace-gates have been stolen in the night and we can't get out."

"The keys stolen! Who has dared —"



“The little white man that I told you about just now, and who was prowling about all night. He has just handed them over to your enemy, the King.”

“Down with your arms!” cried a threatening voice at this moment, — “down with your arms, or you’re all dead men!”

It was Cœur d’Or who rushed into the room, followed by the King and his army.

Furious at having been thus entrapped, Azor set his back against the wall and prepared to sell his life dearly. But Renardino, who had just entered, seized his arm and whispered, —

“Gently, Prince, gently! Sheathe your sword, and let me do the talking: the game is n’t lost yet.”

Then, advancing towards the King he said, —

“Sire, I am lost in amazement. What has happened, and what does all this warlike preparation mean? Is this the way to receive a Prince who comes to seek the honour of an alliance with your Royal house?”

“Eh? What’s that you say, my lord?” cried the King.

“I say,” repeated the Premier very solemnly, “that Prince Azor is here to settle terms of peace between the two countries, and has the honour to ask in marriage the hand of Her Royal Highness the great and powerful Princess, Fleur d’Amandier.”

At this unexpected proposal everyone cried out in surprise, whilst Pierrot appeared quite dumfounded, and whistled a tune to appear more at his ease. But the King asked him in a low voice, —

“What tale was that that you spun last night, my lord Pierrot, about a drug and ropes and the rest of it?”

“Prince Azor awaits your reply, Sire,” added Renardino.

At these words the old beggar-woman, who had drawn near to the King, whispered in his ear, —

“Answer quickly that you accept, but claim the right of combat according to the laws of Bohemia.”

“That’s it: I never thought of that!” answered the King. “Thanks, my good woman!”

Then, turning to Renardino, he added, —

“I gladly agree to the offer of alliance which our good cousin Azor makes us, but on one condition — that he obeys the old Hun-



garian custom, and holds the list, this very day, with all kinds of weapons, against all comers."

"Agreed!" cried the Prince.

"Very well! Then, Prince Azor, I challenge you!" cried Cœur d'Or and Pierrot both together, and they flung, one his iron glove, the other his white felt hat, at the Prince's feet.

"Madmen!" thundered Azor, "woe to ye both!"

And he picked up the tokens of combat.

An hour later all was prepared for the tournament. The two armies gathered round the field, in battle array, and the King, with Fleur d'Amandier on his right and Renardino on his left, took his place on a raised stand which had been set up midway.

Prince Azor, seated proudly astride his war-horse, his lance in rest, stood stock-still and waited the signal to begin.

Suddenly the bugles rang out, and at one end of the lists there appeared a slight figure, mounted on an ass, and with no other weapon than a pitchfork, borrowed from the Royal stables. It was Sir Pierrot, helmet on head and armour on back.

Having gracefully saluted the King, he set spurs to his steed and darted towards Azor, who in his turn was upon his foe in a flash.

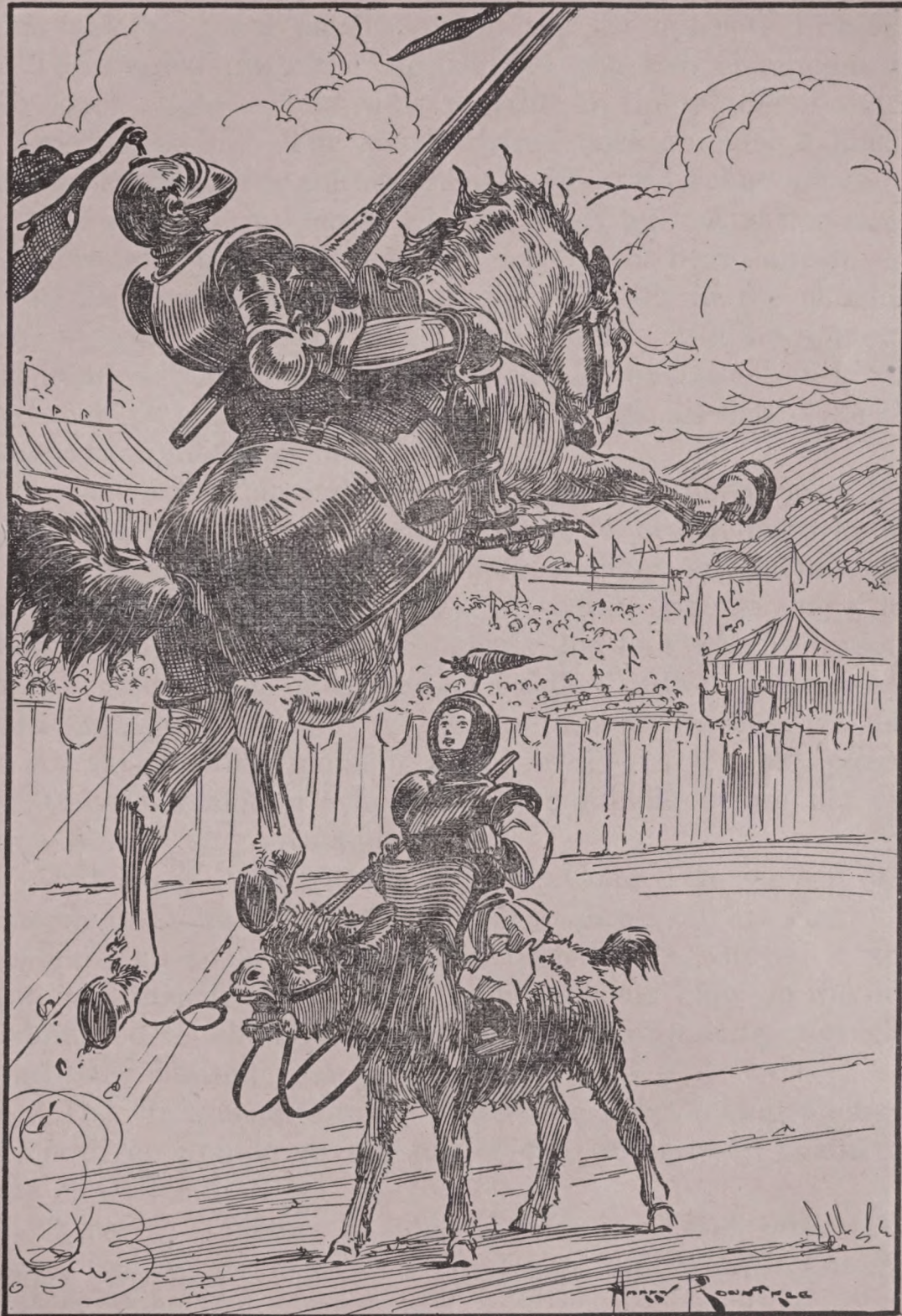
Our hero would certainly have been dashed to pieces straight-away, if his poor donkey, which was not used to such encounters, had not suddenly begun braying with such startling vigour that the Prince's mount reared with fright, and sprang clean over the ass and its rider.

The Prince was so rudely shaken that he was forced to cling to his horse's mane, so as not to lose his seat; but Pierrot rode on in triumph, trotting nimbly forward on his ass, fork in rest.

Once again at the further end of the lists, the two warriors turned about and set spurs to their chargers. But this time the shock of encounter was so severe that Pierrot, struck full in the chest by his enemy's lance, shot from his saddle and rolled a hundred paces away. Neither ass nor rider showed any sign of life. Azor's army shouted with delight.

"Silence in the ranks!" cried the King. "Let another champion be summoned."

Cœur d'Or, covered with magnificent armour and mounted on a milk-white horse, next entered the arena. He courteously saluted



"Sprang clean over the ass"



the King and Fleur d'Amandier by lowering his lance-point, and then took his place at the end of the list opposite Prince Azor.

The bugles gave the signal, and the two champions charged upon each other. They came together in the middle of the list like a clap of thunder. The steeds reared back on their haunches, and the lances flew into splinters, but neither rider had given way.

"To it again, my heroes!" said the King. And two new lances were brought to the fighters, that they might begin afresh.

In the new encounter Cœur d'Or was hit in the shoulder, and Prince Azor, unsaddled, rolled in the dust. But he sprang to his feet in an instant, seized on his battle-axe, and stood on his defence.

Cœur d'Or, throwing aside his lance, took his battle-axe also, and sprang from his courser's back.

It was a terrible fight; blows were dealt fierce enough to split mountains, but neither warrior seemed to be so much as shaken.

The two fought on for an hour without any advantage being gained by either, when Cœur d'Or, whose wound made him feel weak, began to give way. Suddenly his foot caught in something on the ground; he stumbled and fell. With a bound Azor was upon him, gripping him by the throat, and drawing his dagger.

At this terrible moment a cry arose—a terrible, piteous cry, like that of a mother who sees her child die before her eyes. It came from Fleur d'Amandier.

At the sound of her voice in agony Cœur d'Or seemed to recover himself, and found strength enough to throw off his enemy. Then he sprang up, took his hatchet in both hands, whirled it about his head, and struck Prince Azor such a violent blow on the head that it shattered his helmet into a thousand fragments, and clove the hunchback himself from head to foot.

"Ah! It was quite time!" cried the King, taking a long breath, like a diver coming to the top of the water once again. "Cœur d'Or is well out of it!"

"Victory! Victory! Long live Cœur d'Or!" cried the King's troops, but Azor's men stood dumb and still, gnawing their lances in their anger.

The conqueror was borne in triumph to the foot of the Royal dais, amid a flourish of trumpets, but he had lost so much blood through his wound that when the King, with the touch of a sword on the



shoulder, knighted the young hero, he fell forward fainting into the monarch's arms.

The good King, moved to pity, seated the youth on his throne and was just going to tickle him with a feather to bring him to his senses, when Fleur d'Amandier, looking as pale as a lily, doffed her scarf, and falling on her knees bound the bleeding wound with her own fair hands. Whether it was that this was the best cure for his pain, or whether the touch of his loved one thrilled the youth back to life, I do not know, but true it is that Cœur d'Or moved and opened his eyes. A gleam of joy shone in his face when he saw the young and blushing Princess on her knees before him.

"Oh, for pity's sake," he murmured, "stay as you are! If this be a dream, let me not wake!"

I do not know how long they would have remained thus, if the old beggar-woman, who seemed to have the power of appearing everywhere, had not touched the young warrior's shoulder with her hand, whereupon he rose to his feet, cured and strong in an instant.

Fleur d'Amandier could not help giving a cry of joy when she saw this miracle. For the second time that day she had betrayed her secret. It could no longer be hidden or denied: she loved Cœur d'Or.

Let us now return for a moment to Pierrot.

We left him, you remember, stretched out on the field with his ass, which lay with all its four feet sticking up in the air. Neither moved all through the rest of the fight; but at the sound of the joyful hurrahs uttered by the Bohemian army Pierrot sat up suddenly, ran to the spot where the dead man lay, and took from his helmet a little note folded into four.

"This is it!" he cried, and hurried to show it to the King.

But His Majesty, now at his ease about Cœur d'Or, was discussing the events of the day with Renardino. Suddenly the Premier turned pale: he had just seen the note which Pierrot was carrying.

"Give me that letter!" he cried hastily, "give it to me!" And he threw himself upon the little man, to snatch it from him.

"After His Majesty, please, Mister Minister!" our hero answered.

"Pierrot's right," said the King. "So many strange things have happened to-day that I want to see everything now with my own eyes."



And he took the letter to read it.

In a flash Renardino had drawn his dagger, and was just going to stab the King in the back when Pierrot, who still carried his fork, pinned the Premier by the neck to the back of the Royal stand.

“Now, Sire,” he said, “you can read it at your ease.”

And the King read in a low voice the following letter :

“To Prince Azor, from Albertini Renardino.

“Prince, — All my preparations are made. I will hand the King over to you to-night, bound hand and foot. (The poor old man can never see further than his nose, and suspects nothing.) I will tell you when I see you all the silly suspicions that I’ve put into his head about the Queen and Pierrot. You will have a good laugh over them!

“Quick, quick to horse, noble Azor, and Bohemia is yours!

Your faithful servant,

RENARDINO.”

“P.S. Above all, don’t forget to bring the 300,000 sequins agreed upon.”

“Ah, traitor! ah, scoundrel!” cried the King, turning upon his Premier, purple with anger, and shaking his fist under the prisoner’s nose. “Ah, I am a poor old chap, am I? Ah, I see no further than my nose, don’t I? By my beard, you shall pay for this!”

And he bade his men load the Minister with chains and lead him away.

Cœur d’Or and Fleur d’Amandier were talking together all this time, and neither saw nor heard what was passing around them. Indeed, if a thunderbolt had fallen at their feet, I doubt if they would have noticed it.

“Now let’s be off! March!” cried the King. “We must put things right straightaway! Let us haste to the tower and release the Queen!”

At the sound of her mother’s name Fleur d’Amandier trembled.

“Oh, my dear mother!” she cried, clasping her hands, “Pardon! I had forgotten you!”

And leaning on her lover’s arm she joined the procession, which was already on the road to the tower.

The King marched at the head of the army, which followed in



single file, and as he went, he appeared to be in deep thought. Evidently he was reckoning something up, for every now and again he could be seen counting on his fingers.

Suddenly he stopped dead, and so unexpectedly that he upset the captain of the guards, who marched behind him, sword in hand. The captain in falling naturally knocked down the soldier behind him and he did the like with the third, and so it happened to all along the line, one after another, until the whole army lay strewn in a string across the plain.

“Very nice, very proper, my children,” said the King graciously, for he thought they had fallen down before him to show their admiration. “Get up.”

Then, turning to Fleur d’Amandier, he added, —

“Is my history-maker here?”

“Yes, Father. You know that he goes wherever you go!”

“Let him come here and bring his note-book. I have resolved to do a good action to-day, and desire it should be written in letters of gold, so that my people in days to come shall admire it.”

“That is a good thought, Father, worthy of your good heart.”

“Flatterer!” answered the King, patting his daughter’s cheek. “But now I come to think of it, *you* must be the one to do it.”

“And you, Father?”

“Oh, it is not in my line. I do these things so bluntly, as you know, but you have such a sweet voice, there is such a note of tenderness in your tone when you give to the poor, that they feel themselves comforted, only to listen to you. And then, you have such a delicate way of doing things, that you double the worth of your gift —”

“Father!” cried Fleur d’Amandier, looking down in confusion.

“Oh, it is nothing to blush for, my child. Listen! Directly we get back to the palace you will take a thousand golden sequins from me to the good old dame who gave me such excellent advice to-day, and tell her that it is only the first quarter’s payment of a pension which I shall allow her every year so long as she lives —”

“I thank you, O King,” said a voice which seemed to come from a neighbouring bush.

The King started at the sound of that familiar voice and pressed closer to Cœur d’Or.



“Who was it who spoke?” he asked; “wasn’t it the little red fish?”

“No, Sire, it was the old beggar-woman,” answered Cœur d’Or.

“No, Cœur d’Or,” said Fleur d’Amandier, smiling as she spoke; “it was the fairy of the lake.”

“She speaks truth,” added a voice from the thicket; “I am the fairy of the lake, but be easy, King of Bohemia; the fairy has forgotten the wrongs of the little red fish, and only remembers your kindness to the old beggar. You shall be repaid for it. I know that you long to have a son —”

“Oh, yes, yes!” cried the King, who could not help giving voice to his desire.

“Your wish shall be granted. A year hence the Queen will present you with a Prince who will be as beautiful as the day; and when he becomes a man will do wonders in the world, by the help of this magic talisman.”

And as she spoke a magnificent golden ring, set with sapphires, fell clinking on the road before the King. He sprang upon it, and placing it on his finger cried, —

“Oh, you good little fairy, thanks! I shall have a son! I shall have a son!”

And he took to his heels, eager to announce the good news, that was almost too good to be true, to the Queen.

All this time Prince Azor’s soldiers remained in the field of tourney. You never saw such sheepish-looking fellows in your life. There they stood, dumb and open-mouthed, resting first on one foot, then on the other, not knowing what to do with themselves.

“Are you men or only cardboard?” cried their captain suddenly in a rousing voice. “Must I put you in a box, to be played with by children? What! Your Prince is killed before your very eyes, and you look on and twiddle your thumbs! Ods-fire-and-brimstone, are you or are you not the terrible army of Prince Azor? Do you not hear his blood crying to you to be revenged? Good, I see that courage awakens in your hearts! Come, then — march!”

At this fiery speech the soldiers shook themselves together, and set off, left foot foremost and with drums a-beating, in chase of the King and his men.

“Soldiers of Prince Azor, halt, or you are all dead men!” cried



the beggar-witch sternly. She had suddenly appeared on the city walls, her white crutch in her hand.

But the soldiers, once started, went on marching.

Then the old dame waved her stick and muttered a few words.

Suddenly the terrible creatures painted on the walls shot forth sparks from their eyes, nostrils, and jaws — a cloud, a torrent of flame!

There were terrified shouts of “Fire! fire!” and the good people of the city ran to the ramparts with buckets of water.

They looked down, but saw nothing but a heap of armour, helmets, and spear-heads.

It was all that was left of Prince Azor’s army!

CHAPTER XI—*Pierrot’s Vow*

WHILST the King was hurrying to tell the Queen of the fairy’s wonderful promise, Pierrot, who had stayed behind on the field, sought everywhere for his ass, to set it on its feet if it still breathed, and return to the cottage of his adopted father, the woodcutter.

But he sought in vain; look where he would, not even the tip of its dear little ear could he spy.

“Oh, my poor Martin!” he cried anxiously, “where are you?” And in his despair he took to shouting, “Martin! Martin!”

Then he held his breath, to listen for an answering sound, but he only heard the echo’s mocking voice crying, “Martin! Martin!” as if there were some rude urchins behind the rocks.

Pierrot was going to shout out a second time, when he chanced to catch sight of the wild beasts which had been painted on the city walls to frighten the foe. These intelligent creatures thought, no doubt, that as Azor was dead, and they had destroyed his army, a savage mien was no longer needful; and they subdued their looks to such a degree, and took on such a mild, good-humoured appearance, that one could have fancied them a flock of little lambs going to pay a call upon M. Florian, the gentleman who wrote such pretty fables.

But Pierrot, whose wits were not very clear, did not notice this change, and cried out indignantly, —



“Oh, the monsters! They have eaten my poor Martin, I know they have!”

Then drawing near the foot of the wall, he chose for attack a tiger, with a rather more beaming smile than the others, and hoping to make him thoroughly ashamed of himself cried, —

“Fie, what an ugly creature! Oh, it is naughty, naughty, to do such a thing — you ought to know that!”

And in his anger he was raising his fingers to his nose, when he spied his missing ass on the top of a hillock, quietly browsing on a clump of prickly furze.

Pierrot started at the sight, and forgetting the tiger, was quickly at the hill-foot. But the ass, who was really not such a donkey as he looked, did not wait for his master. Whether he feared being taken back to fight again, whether his hour or so of liberty had already given him a taste for a wild life, or whether, again, he was obeying some strange unearthly power, I cannot say. But he trotted across the plain, neighing till the hills rang again, and kicking up his heels in the fulness of his joy.

Our friend Pierrot hurried in chase of him, but great as his strides were, he could not come up with the beast.

“Very good! Very good!” he cried to the ass, which-kept a hundred paces ahead.

“I didn’t know you could run so fast and so well: I’ll keep it in mind, my fine fellow!”

After two hours of this vain chase Pierrot came to the foot of a mountain. Any other ass but Martin would have taken this chance to get away entirely, but he was a well-educated animal and knew the proper thing to do. So instead of hurrying away he paused and waited until his master had got his breath. Meanwhile he filled in the spare time by lightly cropping with the tips of his lips a thistle which had been foolish enough to push its head through the crevice of the rocks, and which he began to chew with his white teeth.

After resting half an hour Pierrot rose. The truce was over, and he resumed the chase more eagerly than ever. It lasted all night, and Pierrot, exhausted and sleepy, was giving it up as a bad job, when he saw his beast enter a cave hollowed out in the heart of the mountain.



“ Ah, I have you this time ! ” he cried, and holding his head down he darted into the dark recesses of the rock.

He had not gone a hundred paces before he felt a hand laid on his arm, and heard a voice which murmured in his ear, —

“ Come in, Pierrot, you are welcome ! I want to speak with you. ”



“ He felt a hand laid on his arm ”

“ Who is it that speaks ? ” asked Pierrot, trembling all over.

“ Have no fear, my friend, ” continued the voice, “ you are in the home of the old beggar-woman. ”

“ The old beggar-woman ! ” repeated the little man, feeling rather more comforted.

“ Yes, my friend, and I am very anxious to have a talk with you. ”



“You honour me, my good woman,” replied Pierrot, who always made it a rule to speak politely to the poor. “But first tell me, did you see an ass come in here, only a minute ago?”

“Yes, my dear,” answered the old dame, “and I have just taken it to a well-filled manger, where it will be quite willing to wait until we’ve had our chat, and won’t feel the least bit dull.”

“Oh, how splendid!” cried Pierrot, jumping for joy, to know that his ass was not lost, after all. Then turning to the old woman he added, —

“Now, my good dame, say what you wish to say, I’m all ears; although, to be candid, it would perhaps be as well to wait until another day. The hour and the place —”

“Are not very well chosen, you think? But be easy, my friend, I expected you to-night, and all is ready to receive you.”

As she spoke the witch struck the rock where she was standing with her crutch. Immediately the cave split into two, and instead of the gloomy narrow passage in which he had been groping, Pierrot saw a great palace, built all of white, such as one sees in dreams or reads of in fairy-tales.

It was an immense building, carved out of one huge block of marble. Its vast cupola sparkled with diamonds and was supported by double rows of alabaster columns, wreathed together with garlands of pearls and opals, lilies, magnolias, and orange-blossoms interlaced. Quaint ornamentations carved by clever sculptors ran spirally up the pillars, covered with capitals, clung to the projections above, and hung from the borders like icicles of snow.

As far as the eye could see fountains met the view, whose glittering waters shot skyward out of sight and fell again in showers of diamonds into their basins of rock-crystal, where shoals of silver-scaled fish darted about the dreaming swans. The floor, which was formed of one huge piece of mother-of-pearl, was covered with a carpet of ermine, strewn with clematis, jasmine, myrtle, narcissus, Easter-daisies, and white camellias, and in each flower hung a bead of dew.

But the most wonderful thing of all — you would not believe it if I did not tell it to you myself — was, that through all this the light shone! The whole palace was pierced with light — but its beams were so pale, so calm, so soft, that you could have fancied it was



night in the upper world, and the moonlight was sleeping on the dewy grass.

In the centre of the palace, seated on a silver throne richly chased, was the Queen of the land, a beautiful white fairy, with a smile so sweet that one had only to look at her to love her.

It was the fairy of the lake, she whom we have seen in the form of a little red fish, and in the disguise of a beggar. She was now clothed from head to foot in a cloud of light gauze. Her thoughtful face was half-hidden by the hand on which it rested. Suddenly she arose.

“Draw near, my friend,” she said in a gentle voice to Pierrot, who was standing apart.

But Pierrot, dazzled by her beauty and the magic of the scene, did not move. He stood staring with wide-open eyes.

“Come, my friend,” the fairy repeated, “come here to me,” and she beckoned him to the first step of her throne. Then, as Pierrot still made no movement, she added kindly, —

“Have no fear of me. Do you find me less to your liking in this dress than in the old beggar-woman’s rags?”

“Oh no, do not change!” cried Pierrot at last, clasping his hands imploringly.

“You are so beautiful, so!” And coming nearer he threw himself at her feet.

“Rise, Pierrot,” said the fairy smiling, “and let us talk together. I have a great sacrifice to ask of you: do you feel you have the courage to make it?”

“I am your slave,” answered Pierrot; “and whatever you bid me to do I will do for love of you.”

“’Tis well: I expected no less from your kind heart. But before pledging yourself further, listen.” Then, with the sweet smile which became her lovely pale face so well, she added, —

“You see in me the friend of little children. Will you love them, too?”

“Willingly, and with all my heart,” replied Pierrot, who remembered the new clothes which the little ones had sent him when Prince Azor held him captive.

“But will you give up your life to amusing them and making them happy?”



“Yes, I will,” he answered firmly.

“But take care! They are not always grateful, the little ones; they have their good and bad days, like the rest of us. Sometimes they are fickle, discontented, ungrateful — they will make you suffer.”

“I will suffer, then,” answered the little man bravely.

“But think it over well, my dear friend. Your task of resignation and self-sacrifice would begin to-morrow, and then it would mean good-bye to all you have loved in the other world; you must leave Bohemia, the good people who took you in, the King and Queen, Fleur d’Amandier — ”

“Fleur d’Amandier!” cried Pierrot in a low voice, “she, too!”

“You waver, now, I see, my poor boy!” said the fairy in a pitying voice, pressing the little man’s white hand in her own.

Pierrot did not answer.

“But be of good cheer, friend Pierrot,” she continued, “I shall be there to protect and console you, and I will repay you in full for all the suffering that the little children cause you.”

Pierrot was still silent.

“Ah, you suffer already, I see! Well, my friend,” she added, touching his shoulder, — “look before you!”

Pierrot raised his eyes, and his thoughtful face suddenly broke into a smile.

He saw, contrived in a recess of the wall, a pretty little theatre, shining with gold and ablaze with light, and crammed from floor to ceiling with little children. They were indeed a charming sight to see, all those little heads, dark and fair, cheeks pale and rosy, eyes blue or black, that laughed and grew happy in this golden clime, — like a bed of flowers giving out their scent and beauty to the summer sun.

Drawn thither by some strange inward power, Pierrot found himself on the stage.

At the sight of his face the little ones shouted with joy and clapped their hands in glee. As he sang and danced for them there followed peal on peal of laughter, as clear and silvery as the song of birds at dawn. Then came bouquets and wreaths, falling like a shower of blossoms about Pierrot.

He strove to speak, but tears choked his voice: he could only put his hand to his lips and fling a thousand kisses to his little friends.



Then, in a moment, the theatre vanished from view.

“Well, my friend,” said the fairy, “are you still in doubt?”

“Oh no!” answered Pierrot quickly, and wiping away a tear that trembled on his eyelid, “I will go to-morrow!”

Scarcely had he said these words than the marble palace crumbled away, the scene was blotted out, and he found himself astride his ass once more, on the threshold of the cave.

The sacrifice had been made. Pierrot had vowed to give his life to amuse the children.

CHAPTER XII—Conclusion

THAT evening the Queen re-entered the palace in triumph, borne by the thirty-two black slaves, who were very loath to take to the tiring work of carrying a litter once more after several months of idleness.

Her Majesty held in her hand a pretty, silver-wired cage, in which the little sparrow, who had been re-captured, chirped sadly, looking out at the free blue sky which he had lost.

The King, mounted on a great white horse which had been brought to the tower for his use, ambled alongside the litter and as close as possible to it, for he felt so happy at seeing his wife again after their long separation that he could not take his eyes off her all the way.

Next day Cœur d'Or was married to Fleur d'Amandier, and received as a marriage dowry Prince Azor's kingdom. The wedding was as gorgeous as they always are in fairy-tales, whether a King marries a shepherdess or a Princess a shepherd. The lake-fairy, who drove up to the palace early in the morning in a diamond car drawn by two snow-white swans, attended the service and blessed the happy pair with her golden wand, solemnly promising before all present to be godmother to their first-born.

Lord Renardino was punished as he deserved for his wickedness and treason. All his riches were taken from him, and given back to those from whom he had stolen them, and he himself, disgraced from his titles and rank, was clothed in the coarsest of liveries and set to do the lowest, vilest work in the palace.



"He hugged the old folk, who wept over him"



The King in gratitude for the fairy's many kindnesses ordered that plentiful alms should be given to the poor of his country, and had a beautiful porphyry fountain erected in the palace gardens, where pretty little red fishes were boarded and lodged at the expense of the state.

As for Pierrot, my dear children, he had taken care not to show himself during the marriage service, lest his good resolution should be broken, but he appeared at the wedding feast, and his white face, which till then had worn a shade of sadness, shone out with all its old mirth and happiness. When the dinner was ended he tore himself away from the table, and hurrying to the woodcutter's little home, begged the loan of a pen to write a letter.

In this he left to the good folk, to ease their declining years, the 300,000 sequins which he had so cleverly conjured from Azor's possession, and which the King had begged him to keep as a reward for his services.

This done, he hugged the old folk, who wept over him and took a tender farewell of him. Then, drying his eyes with his sleeve, he took his basket on his arm and left the little cottage.

Suddenly the revellers at the palace heard a voice singing in the garden the little ballad which they all knew so well, —

“ In the light of the moon, Pierrot, my friend,”

and all the court listened, silent and sad, they knew not why. Little by little the voice grew faint and died away in the distance.

It was Pierrot, setting out upon his new life, and taking leave of the old.

THE COUNTESS BERTHA'S HONEY-FEAST

The
Countess Bertha's Honey-Feast

CHAPTER I—Who the Countess Bertha Was

ONCE upon a time there lived in Germany a gallant Knight named Osmond of Rosenberg, who took for wife a beautiful young girl called Bertha.

Now, Bertha, I know, was not fit to compare with the grand ladies of to-day, although she was as well-born as the highest in the land. She only spoke her own tongue; she did not sing in Italian, never read English, and danced neither the galop, the waltz, nor the polka. But to make up for all these terrible drawbacks she was kind, gentle, and pitiful, and took care that not a breath of scandal should dim the bright mirror of her honour. When she wandered through her domains, not in an elegant carriage with a little King Charlie on the cushions before her, but on foot, alms-bag in hand, the voice of her grateful poor murmuring "God bless your Ladyship!" sounded sweeter in her ears than the most exquisite ballad sung by the most famous singer, — although many of her class will pay good gold for such a song who would refuse even a farthing to the poor beggar pleading before them on the road, half-naked and shivering, and fumbling his tattered cap in his hands.

CHAPTER II—The Cobolds

AND so the praises and thanksgivings of the country-side fell like a blessed dew upon the good Count and his wife. Golden harvests grew thick in their meadows; their vines groaned beneath the weight of the great juicy bunches; and if ever a black cloud filled with hail and lightning threatened to fall upon the castle, a magic breeze turned it swiftly away towards the



abode of some hard-hearted lord in the neighbourhood upon whose homestead it burst, carrying destruction with it. What unseen power averted the black cloud and saved the lands of the Count and Countess from the thunder and storm? I will tell you.

It was the dwarfs of the castle.

I ought to explain that in those days there lived in Germany a race of kindly little elves who have unfortunately fled from it long ago. The highest of these dwarfs was barely six inches in height, and they were called cobolds. These good little people, as old as the world itself, loved to dwell in the castles of those who lived good lives after God's own heart. They hated wicked people and visited them with all the little punishments that such small folk could inflict; but on the other hand they protected with all their powers — and they had command over earth, air, fire, and water — all those whose goodness appealed to their warm little hearts.

That was why these tiny folk, who had dwelt in the old castle from time immemorial, felt a special fondness for Osmond and Bertha, whose fathers and grandfathers they had known and loved, and that is why they blew far away from this favoured spot all threatening storms and foul weather.

CHAPTER III—*The Old Castle*

ONE day Bertha called her husband to her and said, —
“My dear lord, our castle is very old and threatens to fall in ruins about us. We can no longer live in safety within these crumbling walls, and I think — and hope you will think the same — that we should build a new one.”

“I am quite of your opinion, wife,” answered the Count, “only one thing troubles me.”

“What is it?”

“Although we have never set eyes on them, you must for all that have heard tell of the good cobolds who live in the depths of the castle. My father heard his grandfather — who had it in his turn from one of his forefathers — say that these little elves are the guardian angels of the castle. Now, perhaps they have grown so used to their old home that if we remove, and pull it down, they will be



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"A deputation from the cobolds"



"A reputation from the robots"

angry and cease to watch over the welfare of the family, and then our good luck would go with them."

Bertha agreed with her lord's wise words, and the two decided to live on in the castle and make the best of it, rather than disturb and alienate the good little dwarfs.

CHAPTER IV—The Embassy

THAT very night, as the Countess Bertha and the Count Osmond lay in their great four-poster bedstead with its twisted columns, they heard a sound as of a myriad little feet approaching their room. The next moment the door opened and a group of elves entered, evidently a deputation from the cobolds of whom we have just heard.

The spokesman who strode at their head was richly dressed in the fashion of the time. He wore a fur mantle, a close-fitting velvet coat, hose of two colours, such as a jester wears, and little shoes with very, very long pointed tips. At his side he carried a sword of the finest steel, its hilt carved out of a diamond. He held his plumed hat politely in his hand as he stepped up to the bedside where the astonished couple lay, and spoke to them in the following words:

"The news has just come to our ears, friends, that you,
In the hope that the Fates would be kind,
Have to-night felt an earnest desire to renew
The old home that your fathers designed.

"And you will do well, for the castle is old, —
Age has weakened this giant of stone, —
And the rain in the winter days stormy and cold
Makes its way through your roof, ivy-grown.

"Let the old castle, therefore, be thrown to the ground;
In its place raise another more fair;
And the luck that your fathers have hitherto found
Shall follow and stay with you there!"

Count Osmond was too much surprised by what he saw and heard to give any answer other than a friendly wave of the hand; but the

leader of the dwarfs was quite content with this sign of goodwill, and retired, after saluting the noble pair with the utmost gallantry.

Next day the Count and Countess awoke well pleased that their chief cause of anxiety was removed. Strong in the approval of their kind little friends, Osmond sent for a clever architect and bade him begin the work at once. That gentleman, having condemned the old home to be pulled down, employed part of the men at his command upon the task, whilst the rest were set to hewing new stone from the quarries, cutting down oaks for the beams and pines for the rafters of the new home. In less than a month the old building was levelled to the ground, and as the new one could not be finished in less than three years, so the architect said, the Count and Countess took up their abode meanwhile in a little farmhouse of theirs, in the neighbourhood of their charming estate.

CHAPTER V—*The Honey-Feast*

BUT the building of the new castle went forward very rapidly; for if the masons worked hard all day, the little elves were just as busy all night.

At first the workmen were terribly frightened when they returned to work in the morning, to find that several layers of stones had been added since the evening before. They spoke of this to the architect, who in turn told the Count. Osmond confessed that although he was not absolutely sure of it, everything pointed to the fact that this was the work of his little friends the dwarfs, who, knowing how great a need there was for haste, had taken upon themselves this midnight labour.

As it happened, a tiny trowel was found one day on the scaffolding, — a little thing no larger than one's hand, but so beautifully made, with its handle of ebony bound with silver, that it looked like a toy fit for a King. The mason who found the trowel showed it to his companions and took it home in the evening to give to his little boy; but the moment that the lad stretched out his hand to take it, the little tool began to move of itself, and flew out through the door so quickly that although the poor workman rushed after it as fast as he could run, the thing had disappeared in a second. At the same mo-

ment he heard shrill, mocking laughter in the air all about him : the elves were laughing at his discomfiture !

But on the whole the little dwarfs who had charged themselves with this labour of love were very kindly and good-humoured ; and if



“ The poor workman rushed after it ”

they had not done a good share of the work, the castle would not have been built in six years. This was just what might have been expected of the architect, for those gentry have a habit of telling only half the truth. At last, however, towards the end of the third year, at the season when the nightingale, having deserted our windows, at

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length takes leave of our climate, and the other birds who are forced to stay the winter in our cold countries lose their melodious gaiety and are seen and heard more and more rarely, the new castle began to take its proper shape, although it was still far from being finished. The Countess Bertha saw this, and one day, whilst watching the workmen at their labours, she said to them in her sweet voice, —

“ Well, my good friends, does the work really go forward as quickly as you can make it? Here is winter at our doors; and the Count and I are so badly lodged in our little farmhouse that we are anxious to leave it as soon as possible for the beautiful home you have built for us.

“ Listen! If you will work hard and try to be ready for us in a month from now, I promise you that the day when you lay the bouquet on the last stone of the topmost tower, I will give you all such a honey-feast as you have never known the like of in all your days. What is more, I will take a vow that each year when that day comes round, you, your children, and your children's children shall receive the same gift from me and mine henceforward.”

An invitation to a meal of honey-broth was not as paltry a courtesy in those days as it would seem to be now. It was not an offer to be scorned, for it was a way of asking a guest to a choice and ample feast. Folks said to one another, “ Come and take a dish of honey-broth with me to-morrow,” just as we should say to-day, “ Come and take your soup with me.” In both cases the rest of the dinner was meant also, with only this difference, that the broth came at the end of the meal, whilst we take our soup at the beginning.

So this promise set the mouths of the workmen watering; they redoubled their efforts, and got on so well that on the first of October the castle of Wistgaw was finished.

The Countess Bertha, faithful to her word, caused a splendid feast to be prepared for all who had taken part in the work, and so great was the number of guests that they were obliged to serve it in the open air.

When the soup was on the table, the weather seemed all that could be desired, and no one thought of the discomfort of dining without shelter; but just when fifty enormous bowls filled with smoking-hot honey-broth were brought on, snowflakes began to fall thickly on the chilled plates.

This incident, which spoilt the best part of the dinner, so upset the Countess Bertha that she resolved in future to choose the month of roses for the celebration of the *fête*; and so the anniversary of the dinner when the famous honey-broth was to be served was fixed for the First of May.

And the good Countess insured the observance of this pious and solemn custom by a deed of gift in which she pledged herself, and all masters of the castle who came after her, however it might come into their possession, to give a honey-feast to the villagers and tenantry every First of May, declaring that she would not rest easy in her grave if this sacred duty were not faithfully fulfilled.

This deed was duly written out by a lawyer on parchment, signed by Bertha, sealed by the Count, and placed among the family papers.

CHAPTER VI—*The Ghost*

FOR twenty years Bertha herself presided over the annual feast, which she maintained with the same generosity and magnificence as on the first occasion. But, alas, during the twenty-first year she died in the odour of sanctity, and was laid in the tomb of her fathers, mourned by her husband, and regretted by all the country-side. Two years later the Count Osmond himself, having religiously observed the custom founded by his wife, died in his turn, and left an only son Ulrik, who, as he possessed all his father's and his mother's virtues, not only kept the family pledge towards the peasants, but even did all that he could to better the gift.

But one day a great war broke out in Germany, and large armies of Ulrik's foes, fighting their way up the Rhine, seized upon the castles on its bank. They came from lower Germany; for the Emperor was making war on his lords.

Ulrik could not withstand the invaders, but as he was a thoroughly brave warrior, he would willingly have defended his home and fallen fighting amongst its ruins, if he had not bethought himself of the misery which such a step would bring upon the neighbourhood. So, to save his tenantry from pillage and suffering, he took refuge in Al-

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sace, leaving old Fritz, his steward, to look after the castle and lands which he was forced to leave at the mercy of the enemy.

The General who led the troops in this part of the country was called Dominik. He occupied the castle, which he found greatly to his liking, and sent his men to quarter themselves on the neighbouring peasants.

This General Dominik was a man of low birth, who had begun as a simple soldier, but had risen, more by favour than courage or merit, to the rank of general. I tell you this so that you sha'n't think I would sneer at those who make themselves somebody, having been born nobody — on the contrary, I think very highly of such men, when they have deserved their honours. There are two kinds of fortune-makers, — those who gain success, and those who earn it. Now, this general was a vulgar, brutal upstart. Having been brought up on ration-bread and spring-water, he now tried to make up for lost time by demanding the choicest foods and the rarest wines in absurd quantities, and gave the leavings to his dogs, instead of sharing with others.

The very day of his arrival at the castle, Dominik sent for old Fritz and made the poor man draw up a list of the levies to be made upon the people, — a list so long and so cruelly heavy that the steward fell upon his knees before the tyrant, and begged him not to place so terrible a burden on the poor peasantry. But the General simply replied that as there was nothing he hated to hear so much as grumbling, he should double his demands the moment he heard a single complaint. The General was the stronger man: the spoils belonged to him as the victor; and the people were forced to submit.

It will readily be guessed that such a man as General Dominik received the steward very unkindly indeed when the time came for Fritz to speak of the honey-feast. Indeed, he burst into a fit of scornful laughter, and replied that it was the duty of the tenants to maintain their lords, and not the lords to nourish their poor. He should therefore invite the Countess Bertha's guests to dine where they chose on the First of May, warning them frankly that it would not be with him.

Therefore for the first time for twenty-five years that auspicious day passed without the joyous peasantry gathering round the



hospitable table of the Rosenbergs. The terror which Dominik caused, however, was so great that no one dared to protest; besides, Fritz had obeyed the orders given him, and the people were well aware that their new master did not intend to keep up the good old custom.

Dominik ate and drank at supper with his usual greediness, and having placed sentries on watch in the corridors and at the castle gates, he went to bed and slept.

But contrary to his habit, the General awoke in the middle of the night. He was so used to sleeping the night through that at first he thought it was to-morrow morning; but he was mistaken. It was not yet light, and through the bars of the shutters he could see the stars sparkling in the sky.

Besides, he was not only wakeful, but troubled. A vague fear chilled his heart; he was filled with a foreboding that something unearthly was going to happen. The air seemed to quiver around him, as if some spirit of the night hovered above, fanning him with its pinions; his favourite dog, chained in the court below his window, howled mournfully; and at the sound of that sinister noise the new lord of the castle felt his brow grow damp with sweat.

At that moment midnight began to boom slowly forth from the castle clock; and at each stroke the listener's terror increased to such a pitch that at the tenth he could no longer endure the anguish which had seized upon him. He raised himself upon his elbow, ready to spring to the door and summon the sentry.

But as the last stroke of midnight died away, and the frightened man's foot touched the floor, he heard a door open, — a door which he remembered to have fastened on the inside. It swung apart of itself, and moved on its hinges as if there were no such things as bolts or locks. Then a pale light filled the room, and a gentle step which set the listener shuddering to the marrow of his bones seemed to draw near to him. And now there appeared at the foot of the bed the figure of a woman wrapped in a great white shroud, holding in one hand a copper lamp, such as was in those days placed in the tombs of the dead; and in the other a parchment, written, signed, and sealed.

She drew near slowly, her gaze fixed, her features void of life or expression, her long hair flowing clammily about her shoulders.

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When at length the phantom reached the watcher's side, she held the lamp close to the paper so that the light fell full upon it, and said in a terrible, unearthly voice, —



“Do what that writing bids you!”

“Do what that writing bids you!”

And she held the lamp close to the paper, whilst Dominik, with staring eyes and haggard face, read the deed which established firmly and for ever the custom which he had dared to defy.

When this terrible reading-lesson was over, the ghost, mournful, silent, and cold as ever, withdrew as she had come. The door

closed behind her; the light disappeared; and the wicked successor of Count Osmond fell back on his bed, where he lay with wide-open eyes till dawn, pinned to the bed and unable to stir, filled with a fear of which he was ashamed, but which he was powerless to overcome.

CHAPTER VII—Ration—Bread and Water

BUT with the first rays of daylight the spell lost its charm. Dominik sprang from his bed; and, all the more furious because he could not hide from himself that he had been most horribly frightened, he ordered that all the sentinels who had been on guard at midnight throughout the castle should be sent to him.

The wretches entered his presence trembling. At the very moment when twelve had sounded, each one had felt himself seized by a sudden overpowering drowsiness, and had slept to awaken some time later without being able to guess how long he had slumbered. Luckily, as they all met outside the door together, they agreed among themselves that they had kept good watch; and as they had been wide-awake enough when the next sentry came to relieve them, they hoped that no one had noticed their little lapse from duty.

Accordingly, they replied to all the General's questions that they did not know what woman he was speaking about, and had seen nothing of her. But the steward, who was present, declared that it was no living woman who had visited the General, but a ghost,—the ghost of the Countess Bertha.

The soldier frowned, but being impressed in spite of himself by what Fritz said, he dismissed the sentries, and when alone with the steward questioned the old man. He learned that the feast had been imposed as a solemn duty on the master of the castle for the time being, however he came to be lord of it, by a deed duly prepared, and now amongst the family papers. Dominik ordered Fritz to fetch the paper, and at a glance recognised it as the parchment which the ghost had held before his eyes. Until now the General had had no dealings with this document, for though he had strictly enforced all deeds which gave him power over others, he was by no means anxious to do as he would be done by.

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But in spite of the behest clearly set forth in the deed which he had so carefully read, and in spite of all that Fritz could say, urging him to profit by the warning he had received, Dominik determined to take no notice of what had happened, and that very day invited all his officers to a grand banquet, which was to be even more gorgeous than any he had yet given.

So great was the fear which the wicked soldier had caused, that at the time appointed the table was covered with the most delicate and appetising feast, although the orders had been given only that morning. The daintiest dishes, the best wines of Rhineland, France, and Hungary, were set before the guests, who placed themselves at table, loudly praising their General's hospitality.

But Dominik had no sooner taken his seat at the head of the table than he grew pale with rage, and cried with a frightful oath: "What stupid ass has set ration-bread before me?"

For there, on the table before the General, was a loaf of the kind of bread which they served out to the common soldiers in those days, and of which Dominik himself had eaten so much in his youth!

Everyone stared in astonishment, unable to believe their eyes. They could not have thought there was a man in the world rash enough to play such a joke on so proud, cruel, and savage a man.

"Come here, idiot!" cried the General to the servant nearest to him, "and take away this bread!"

The man obeyed with all the eagerness of fear, but he tried in vain to lift the bread from the table.

"M — my lord," he stammered, after several useless tugs, "someone must have pegged the loaf down. I cannot budge it!"

Then the General, who was known to be as strong as any other four men, seized the loaf with both hands and struggled in his turn to lift it. But he only raised the table instead, and at the end of five minutes he fell back in his chair, exhausted, his brow damp with sweat.

"Drink, rogue — bring me drink — and of the best!" he cried in a choking voice, holding out his goblet as he spoke. "I'll find out, I promise you, who has played this scurvy trick on me, and he shall be paid for it, let him be sure of that. Help yourselves, gentlemen, help yourselves; I drink to your good appetite!"

And he raised the cup to his lips, but instantly spat out its contents, crying, —

“Which was the scoundrel who poured this villanous liquor into my cup?”

“It w-was I, m-my lord,” said the trembling servant, who still held the bottle in his hand.

“And what have you got there, miserable villain?”

“Tokay, m-my l-lord!”

“You lie, you rogue! It’s water in my cup!”

“It must have changed from wine to water on its way from the bottle, then,” protested the man, “for I have just poured these two gentlemen a goblet full apiece from the same flask, and they will tell your Lordship that it is Tokay they’re drinking.”

The General turned to his friends, who confessed that what the servant said was true.

Dominik frowned. He began to see that the joke was perhaps a more serious one than he had at first expected. He had fancied that it was merely some one’s practical joke; now it seemed as if supernatural beings were at work.

Wishing to assure himself of the truth, the General took the bottle from the lackey’s hand and poured out a glass of wine for his neighbour. The Tokay took its ordinary colour, and shone like a liquid topaz. Then he helped himself from the same flask; but as fast as it fell into the goblet the wine lost its colour, and became as transparent and tasteless as water.

Dominik smiled sulkily at this double allusion to his low origin and early training; and anxious to get away from the sight of the black bread which seemed placed there on purpose to vex and humble him, he beckoned to his *aide-de-camp*, a young man belonging to one of the best families in Germany, to change places with him. The young man obeyed, and the General seated himself at another part of the table.

But he fared no better in his new place than in the old. The young soldier removed the loaf from the table without any difficulty, and found it to be ordinary white bread once more, whilst every scrap of food which Dominik took up changed to ration-bread, and the wine still continued to turn to water before his eyes.

At last the General, hungry and impatient to be eating, stretched

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out his hands towards a dish of roasted larks; but no sooner had he touched them than the birds flew up from the dish, fluttered out through the window, and fell into the open mouths of the peasants who were looking on, gaping with wonder at the splendid feast.

Guess how astonished they were, to receive such a windfall! Such a miracle rarely happened, and this one made a great stir in that part of the world; so that even to-day they say of a man who indulges in foolish hopes: "He expects larks to fall into his mouth ready cooked!"

Meanwhile Dominik, who had had the honour of giving rise to this miracle and proverb, became more furious still; but as he saw that it was useless to fight against fairy powers, he protested that he was n't a bit hungry or thirsty, and that he would be content with doing the honours of the feast, which, however, was not a great success, for the guests felt awkward, not knowing what to say or do.

That same night the General announced that he had just received a letter from the Emperor ordering him to change his headquarters; and as the command was very urgent, he set off at once.

I need n't tell *you* that the story about the letter was a mere fib, and that this doughty gentleman scuttled away in such great haste, not on account of any orders from his master, but because he was afraid of another visit from the Countess Bertha, and dreaded still more being condemned to a diet of bread and water for all the rest of his stay in that accursed castle.

Scarcely had the General decamped when the steward, chancing to look into a cupboard (which had been empty the night before), came across a heavy bag full of money on which was a label bearing the words

"FOR THE HONEY-FEAST."

The old man was very much frightened at first; but recognising the Countess Bertha's writing, he hastened to lay out the magic money in providing the annual feast, which was all the more delightful for having been delayed a few days.

And the same thing occurred every First of May, the money being always provided by the Countess Bertha, until the Emperor's troops were at length withdrawn, and Waldemar, son of Ulrik de Rosenberg, came back to live in the castle, twenty-five years after his father had quitted it.

CHAPTER VIII—*Waldemar of Rosenberg*

BUT the Count Waldemar lacked the virtues of his father and grandfather. Perhaps his life in exile, away from his home and country, had soured his heart. Happily he had a wife who did much to soften and sweeten his harsh, bitter nature by her gentleness and goodness; so that on the whole the people, ruined by twenty-five years of war, looked upon the return of Count Osmond's grandson as a blessing and boon.

And, besides, the holy vow taken by the Countess Bertha was still kept in memory by the family, in spite of their long absence; and when the First of May arrived (which the peasants always awaited eagerly at such times, that their new master and mistress might be tested and judged by it) the Countess Wilhelmine persuaded her husband to give the *fête*, and even to preside over it. As the Count was a most charming fellow when he liked, all passed off wonderfully well, and the people began to think that the golden age had dawned once more, — the days of the Count Osmond and Countess Bertha, of whom their fathers had so often spoken.

The following year the honey-feast was given as usual, but this time Waldemar took no part in it, declaring that it was lowering for a gentleman to sit down to table with his people. So Wilhelmine alone did the honours of the day, and it may be confessed that in spite of the Count's absence the dinner was by no means a sad one; for the people had already discovered that they owed this bounty entirely to the Countess's kind heart and good influence over her husband.

Two or three years rolled by thus, and the poor peasants saw more and more clearly that it needed all the Countess's heavenly goodness to soften her lord and master's harsh nature. Her unwearying sweetness acted as a shield between the unkind lord and his subjects; but unhappily for them, Heaven soon took away their protectress, and she died in giving birth to a charming little baby boy named Hermann.

One must have had a heart of stone indeed not to sorrow for that angel from heaven who had borne on earth the name of Wilhelmine;

and for some days the Count sincerely mourned the good wife he had lost. But he was not one to give way to tenderness for long, and when he did feel such a weakness, it did not keep any hold upon him. Oblivion springs up about a grave as quickly as the grass itself, and at the end of six months the Count had forgotten his beloved Wilhelmine and taken a second wife.

Alas! poor little Hermann was the one to suffer by this second marriage. He had crossed the threshold of life, to find it draped with mourning, and before he could know a mother's love, he was an orphan. His stepmother shrank from accepting the charge of a child who was not her own, and who, as the eldest, would be the heir to the estate, whatever others she might bear. So she placed the boy in charge of a careless nurse, who neglected little Hermann for hours together, leaving him to sob his little heart out alone in his forgotten cradle, whilst she went off to gossip, to feast, or to dance.

CHAPTER IX—*The Watches*

ONE evening, thinking it much earlier than it really was, the nurse stayed out in the garden chatting and leaning on the gardener's arm. Suddenly she heard midnight strike, and recollecting that she had left little Hermann alone since seven o'clock, she ran back hurriedly, and under cover of the darkness managed to cross the courtyard without being seen.

She reached the staircase, mounted it, and gazed around her uneasily, muffling the sound of her footsteps and holding her breath; for in spite of the fact that the indifference of the Count and the hatred of the Countess saved her from reproaches, her conscience assured her that what she had done was very wicked.

However, she felt comforted when, on nearing the door of her room, she heard no sound or cry from the child within. No doubt, she decided, he had cried so much that he had fallen asleep. It was with a feeling of relief, therefore, that she drew the key from her pocket, carefully placed it in the lock, and turning it as quietly as possible, pushed gently at the door.

But as it opened and she glanced round the room, the wicked

woman turned paler and paler and trembled from head to foot, for she saw a sight as awful as it was strange.

Although, as we have said, she had kept the key of the room in her pocket, and she was perfectly sure that no other key existed, some one had entered the room during her absence. A woman, pale,

sad, and silent, was seated by little Hermann's side, gently rocking his cradle, whilst from her cold lips, white as marble, came a lullaby, which was uttered in no mortal tongue.

Notwithstanding and however great her terror, the nurse thought she had only to deal with a living creature like herself, so she took a step or two towards the strange woman, who seemed to be unaware of her presence

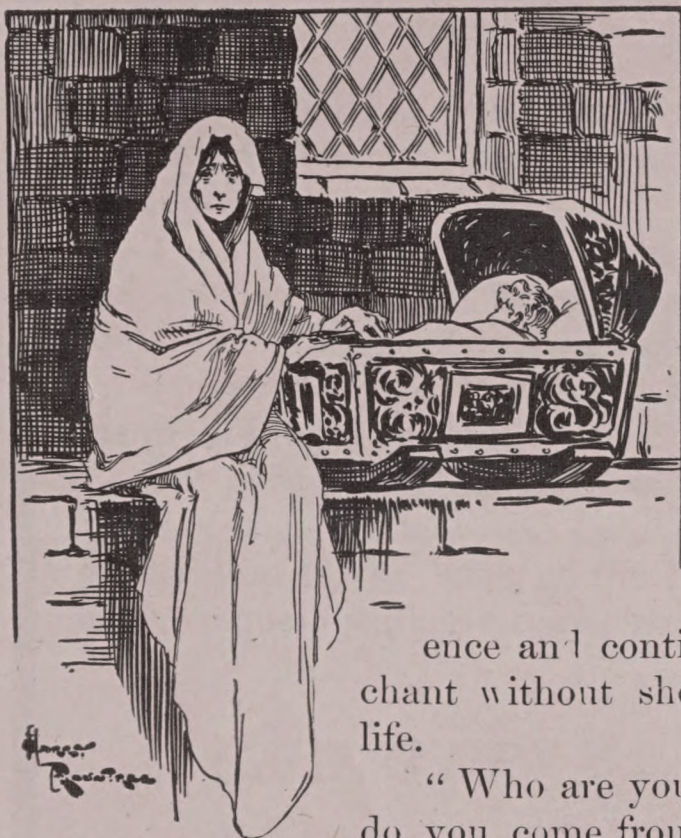
and continued her terrible, monotonous chant without showing the least other sign of life.

"Who are you?" asked the nurse. "Where do you come from? And how have you managed to get into this room when I have the only key in my pocket?"

Then the unknown stretched forth her arms solemnly and answered:—

"I am of those to whom no door is closed.
From the tomb where for fifty years I have reposed,
My ears caught the sound of this child's helpless moan;
My heart on a sudden leapt up where it lay,
Though it crumbled to dust in my icy-cold clay
As I slept on my sad bed of stone.

"Poor child! Fate has spun thee a dolorous thread:
Thy father is wicked; thy mother is dead;
Thou art left to coarse hands whose vile touch does thee wrong;



"Gently rocking his cradle"

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Thou canst not fight even with fingers so frail ;
Thou must needs fall asleep to the dirge of thy wail
As a bird falls asleep in its song !

“ Then sleep on this earth for but one sad night more,
When day dawns to-morrow thy woes will be o'er ;
For an angel from heaven will fly down to thee ;
To free thee for ever from man's harsh despite,
And bear thee away on her pinions of light,
To bring thee safe homeward to me.”

And with these words the ghost of the Countess (for she it was) bent over the cradle and embraced her great-grandson with infinite tenderness.

The little one had fallen asleep with a smile upon his rosy cheeks, but the first rays of morning, gliding through the window-panes, found him white and rigid as a corpse.

The next day he was laid in the family vault near to the body of his great-grandmother.

But poor little Hermann was not dead. The following night the spirit of the Countess rose once more, and taking him in her arms, carried him to the King of the Dwarfs, a good and clever elf, who at her request willingly took charge of the child.

CHAPTER X—*Wilbold of Eisenfeld*

GR^EAT was the stepmother's joy when she heard of the death of the sole heir of the Rosenbergs. But God deceived her in her hopes ; she had neither son nor daughter, and at the end of three years she herself died. Waldemar only lived three or four years after her, and was killed in the hunting-field, some said by a boar which he had wounded, others said by a peasant whom he had ordered to be beaten with rods.

So the castle of Wistgaw with all its villages and estates fell into the hands of a distant member of the family called Wilbold of Eisenfeld. This man was not a wicked person : he was worse than that ; he was one of those men who, careless of their souls, are neither good nor bad, who do right or do wrong without earnestness or zest, who



listened to everybody's tale and was always of the same opinion as the last person who had spoken to him.

He was brave and admired bravery, but he was easily taken in by a show of courage, just as he was by a pretence of wit or of virtue.

And so the Baron Wilbold came to live in the castle built by Count Osmond and the Countess Bertha, bringing with him a charming girl, still in the cradle, called Hilda.

The first thing the steward did was to tell the new master all about his rights and duties, and amongst these, of course, was the honey-feast, which custom had been kept up, more or less, ever since it was founded.

Now, as the steward urged upon the Baron that all the previous masters of the castle had looked upon the feast as a most important affair, and as the old man himself firmly believed that Heaven itself had blessed the kindly custom, Wilbold not only offered no opposition, but even gave orders that the ceremony should take place every First day of May with all the old pomp and grandeur.

Several years rolled by, and the Baron gave such a good and bountiful feast every spring that the people forgave him his faults, which were many, in consideration of his obedience to the commands of the Countess Bertha. What is more, several other lords, either from goodness or because they thought it prudent, followed the Baron's example, and founded, either on their birthday or the day of their patron saint, a honey-feast more or less tasty.

But there was one of these gentry who not only did not copy this good custom, but tried to keep others from doing so. This man, who was one of the Baron's greatest friends, one of his most regular guests, and one of his favourite advisers, was called the Chevalier Hans de Warburg.

CHAPTER XI—*The Chevalier Hans de Warburg*

THE Chevalier Hans de Warburg was a giant in size, being some six feet two inches in height, and tremendously strong. He always went armed with a great sword, which he slapped fiercely whenever he threatened a foe with his anger; and he carried a dagger, too, which he was fond of drawing from time to time, to give fierceness to his boasting words. In reality the man was the biggest coward the earth ever bore, and whenever the geese on his estate ran hissing after him, he took to his heels as if the devil were at his coat-tails.

Now, as we have said, the Chevalier Hans had not only refused to give a honey-feast of his own, but had prevented others from adopting the custom whenever he could persuade them so to do. But that was not all, for, excited by his success in this matter, he undertook to cure Wilbold of his allegiance to this good old custom.

“Swords and daggers, my dear Wilbold!” he said; “you must agree that it is very kind of you to waste your money in filling the vile bodies of a set of lazy rogues, who laugh at you as soon as their backs are turned, with the last morsel of your feast still in their throats!”

“My dear Hans,” answered Wilbold, “I have often thought over what you say, I can assure you; for although this feast is only given once a year, it none the less costs as much as fifty ordinary dinners. But what would you have me do? They say that the good luck of the castle goes with it.”

“And who told you such fairy tales, my dear Wilbold? Your old steward, I expect. I know why: he makes a good thing out of it every year, so no wonder he begs you to keep it up!”

“But there’s another point,” continued the Baron.

“What’s that?”

“The Countess’s anger.”

“Who is she?”

“The Countess Bertha.”



"He took to his heels"

❖ THE COUNTESS BERTHA'S HONEY-FEAST ❖

“You believe in those nursery stories, at your time of life?”

“Well, they are well founded; and there's a deed in the family papers —”

“What! Are you afraid of an old woman?”

“My dear Chevalier, I am afraid of neither man nor woman living, neither you nor anyone else; but I own I *am* a little afraid of shadowy creatures without flesh or bone, especially when they take the trouble to come from another world on purpose to visit me.”

Hans burst out laughing.

“Then you think you would be braver if you were in my place?” asked the Baron.

“I fear neither god nor devil!” cried the Chevalier, drawing himself up to his full height.

“Very good; so be it,” said Wilbold. “The First of May, the day of the feast, will soon be here. I will leave it off for once and see what happens.”

But between then and the First of May the Baron had another talk with the steward, with the result that he went back on his rash resolve of stopping the celebration altogether, and ordered that instead of a honey-feast of the old sumptuous kind, the people should receive an ordinary meal and nothing more.

The peasants were astonished by this niggardly treatment, to which they were quite unaccustomed, but they did not grumble, for they thought that perhaps their lord, who was usually generous enough, had his own reasons for spending less money this year.

But the change was received very differently by the little elves who knew the reason of it, and who were guardians of the fortunes of the castle of Wistgaw.

All through the night following the wretched apology for a meal they kicked up such a frightful hullabaloo that no one in the castle could sleep a wink; and everyone passed the night opening doors and windows, to find out who was knocking at the one or tapping at the other. But no one set eyes on the disturbers, not even the Baron. It is true that he pulled the clothes over his head (as you do, my dear children, when you are frightened), and kept snug and close under the sheets!

CHAPTER XII—*Hilda*

WILBOLD, like all weak people, soon turned stubborn when he was thwarted, and in this case he was encouraged by having got off so cheaply, — for it was no great punishment to be deprived of a night's sleep; and if one came out of the affair a thousand florins the richer, the bargain was still a good one.

Encouraged by Hans' approval and advice, and yet not wishing to give up a good old custom all at once, the Baron called his people together, the following First of May; and without saying a word about the feast which had always gone before it, he served them with simple honey-broth and no more, without even meat or wine, — and those who had a keen taste in such matters noticed that there was less sugar in the honey than usual. Not only had Wilbold done away with all the other parts of the feast, but he had contrived to save money over the honey, too.

This time the midnight visitors showed their temper in downright earnest. All through that night there was a fiendish commotion in and out of the castle, and next day the windows, the chandeliers, and the china were found smashed to pieces. The steward drew up a bill of the damage done in the night, and found that it came to the exact amount which the lords of Wistgaw usually spent over the honey-feast.

The steward saw at once what this hint on the part of the dwarfs meant to show, and did not fail to point out to the Baron that the two accounts — the money saved and the money that he would have to spend — tallied exactly.

But this time Wilbold in his turn was angry in downright earnest. Besides, although he had heard the awful hubbub which had turned the castle topsy-turvy, he had seen nobody. He hoped, therefore, that the Countess, who had never reappeared since the night when she had visited earth to watch over little Hermann, had now been dead too long to come out of her tomb again. And as he seemed obliged to spend a certain sum of money one way or another, he pre-

ferred to renew his furniture rather than to feast his peasantry. So the following year he resolved to give his people nothing at all, not even the honey-broth; but as he guessed that this total disobedience of the Countess Bertha's will would bring upon his head all the wrath that such a deed was likely to arouse, he made up his mind to leave the castle on the twenty-eighth of April, and not return until the fifth of May.

But this wretched scheme met with at least one protest.

Fifteen years had gone by since the Baron Wilbold of Eisenfeld had taken up his abode at the castle; and during that time the pretty little babe that entered its walls in her cradle had grown both tall and beautiful. She was now a charming young girl, pious and loving, who had lived so much of her life alone that solitude had given her an air of sweet, settled sedateness which admirably matched her pale face and nun-like name. To see her walking by day in her garden, listening to the songs of the birds, which she seemed to understand so well, or sitting by night at her window, watching the moon as it peeped out after every passing cloud, as if she were listening to its story or telling it her own, — all this was enough to teach the hardest heart the truth and the value of love, and to set the more passionate hearts a-loving at once.

When Hilda knew that her father was set upon giving up the honey-feast altogether that year, she said all that her sense of duty and respect as a daughter would allow her to say, in gentle remonstrance; but neither her soft voice nor her pleading looks could move the Baron's heart, which had been hardened by the bad counsels of his friend Hans.

Wilbold accordingly left the castle on the day appointed, telling his steward that the stupid superstition of the honey-feast had been kept up quite long enough; and that from the First of May henceforth it would be abandoned, not only because it was costly in itself, but because it set a bad example to others.

The young girl, seeing that she could not bring back her father to his better self, gathered together all her little savings, and as they amounted in all to the sum which was usually spent on the yearly feast, she journeyed forth on foot through the estate, telling the people everywhere that as her father was obliged to go away for a little while, he was unable to keep the First of May that year, but that he

had charged her to give away the money which it cost to the poor and the sick amongst his people.

The peasants believed her, or at least pretended that they did ; and as they had no very pleasant memories of the last year's feast, they were delighted to exchange a poor dinner for a rich gift, and blessed the hand that Wilbold had chosen to scatter these benefits upon them.

Only the little guardian angels of the castle could not be deceived thus, and were not for a moment blinded by the pious trick played by the beautiful Hilda.

CHAPTER XIII—The Hand of Fire

ON the fourth of May Wilbold returned to the castle. The first thing he did was to summon the steward and inquire whether all had been quiet during his absence. Then, when he learnt that things had gone on as usual, that his people had not complained, that the "spirits" had made no disturbance, he was more than ever sure that he had tired them out, and that he had got rid of them, once and for all. So, having bidden his daughter good-night, and given his orders for the morrow, he went to bed in great content of mind.

But scarcely had he got between the sheets than there arose in and about the castle the most horrible row that ever you heard. Outside the dogs howled, the howlets shrieked, the horned owls hooted, the cats miaowed, and the heavens thundered. Within, there was a noise as of chains rattling along the floors ; the furniture was overturned with a crash ; stones rolled heavily down the corridors, — it was a rumpus, a hullabaloo, a shindy, a hubbub, loud and terrifying enough to make one fancy that all the witches and goblins in spirit-land, with the King of Hell at their head, had deserted their wonted place of meeting on the Brocken¹ and had come to hold their unholy revels in the castle of Wistgaw.

At midnight the noises ceased, and a silence fell, — a stillness so

¹ The top of a mountain in Germany which (it was supposed in older days) was haunted by evil spirits who held nightly revels there.

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complete that one could clearly hear the twelve strokes as they rang out solemnly, one after another. As the last of them died away Wilbold, feeling a little relieved, popped his head out of the bed-clothes and ventured to look about him.

Suddenly his hair bristled and stood on end, and a cold sweat rolled down his face!

A hand of fire had appeared through the side of the room opposite his bed; and using the tip of its finger for a pen, it wrote these words in glowing letters on the dark wall of the bedchamber:

“To keep the Countess Bertha's rule
Kind Heaven gives thee seven days' grace;
If thou shouldst fail — self-ruined fool! —
The castle passes from thy race!”

Then the hand disappeared, and one after another, in the order in which they had been written, the letters grew fainter and fainter and passed away. When the last of them went out, the room, which had been lit up brightly by this sort of poetic fire, became once again wrapped in darkness.

Next morning all the Baron's servants, from the highest to the lowest, came to give their master notice, declaring that they dared not stay in the castle another day. Wilbold, who in his heart was as anxious to get away as they were, replied that rather than part from his good servants he would go and live elsewhere, and give up Wistgaw to the demons, who seemed to want it entirely to themselves.

That very day, in spite of Hilda's tears, the Baron with his household left the old fortress in a body, and went off to take up their quarters in the castle of Eisenfeld, which had been left to Wilbold by his father, and which was only half-a-day's journey from Wistgaw.

CHAPTER XIV—*The Chevalier Torald*

THE whole country-side had two pieces of news to talk about just then. The first was the departure of the Baron Wilbold of Eisenfeld; the second, the arrival of the Chevalier Torald.

The Chevalier Torald was a handsome young man, twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, who, although still young, had lived in all the chief courts of Europe, and had already earned wide fame by his courage and courtesy.

He was truly one of the most accomplished of Knights, and wonderful stories were whispered about concerning his youth and upbringing. It was said that he had been left when quite a baby to the care of the King of the Dwarfs, who, being himself a very learned Prince, had vowed to make his young charge a paragon and a prodigy. He had taught the boy to read all the learned writings of the ancients, to speak all kinds of languages, living and dead, to paint, play the lute, sing, ride, fence, and joust. Then, when the lad was eighteen, and the King his tutor saw that Torald had become all that even he could have hoped, he had given the young Knight as equipment the renowned horse Bucephalus, which would never grow weary, however much he was ridden; the famous lance of Astolpho, which threw from his saddle any foe whom its owner touched with its diamond point; and, lastly, the wondrous sword Durandal, which shattered the strongest and newest armour into fragments, so keen was its edge. To these gifts, which were rare, and welcome enough, he added another even more desirable; namely, a purse which always contained twenty-five golden crowns, however often you dipped into it.

One can easily understand what an excitement the arrival of so famous a Knight caused in the neighbourhood. But scarcely had the young Chevalier passed through the village of Rosenberg mounted on his horse, armed with his magic lance, and with his famous sword tapping his side, than he disappeared, and no one heard or saw anything more of him. Of course such a mystery only made everyone all the more curious about the wonderful stranger.

Folks certainly did say that he had been seen that night standing below the castle walls of Wistgaw, in a boat which floated in mid-

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stream as if at anchor, although the Rhine ran fiercely past its sides. They vowed, too, that he had been espied, lute in hand, at the peak of a high rock facing the castle, where only the talons of falcon or eagle had hitherto trod.

But all these tales were treated as only idle rumours, and no one could say outright that he had seen the Chevalier Torald since the hour when he passed through the village of Rosenberg, clad from head to foot in armour, and mounted on his horse.



“In a boat which floated . . . as if at anchor”

CHAPTER XV—*The Slayer of Ghosts*

THE fiery hand had given the Baron Wilbold seven days in which to repent; but the foolish man, urged on by his evil adviser, had made up his mind not to go back on his decision; and in order to bolster up his courage he resolved to spend his three last days of grace in feasts and riotous living. He had one excuse for these rejoicings in the fact that Hilda's birthday fell on the eighth of May, — for the fair maiden had been born in the month of roses.

Now, Hans had another reason for visiting his good friend of Eisenfeld more and more frequently. He had fallen desperately in love with the beautiful Hilda; and although he was quite forty-five years of age — that is, three times as old as the young girl — he dared to suggest the marriage to his friend.

Hilda's father knew little of the tender secrets of a maiden's heart, of the delicate threads of hope and fancy from which she weaves her day-dreams of sadness or delight, misery or happiness. He had wedded his own wife without being in love with her, and yet had been perfectly happy in his married life, for the Countess was truly a saint. So he never dreamed that Hilda would wish to love her husband in order to be happy in her future life. Add to this ignorance Wilbold's great admiration for Hans' swaggering ways, his knowledge of the Chevalier's fortune, which was at least as great as his own, and, lastly, the constant pleasure that he found in Warburg's society, for that lively braggart amused the Baron immensely with his stories of battles, tourneys and duels, in all of which, of course, Hans had come off best.

So the Baron neither accepted nor refused the Chevalier's offer; but he hinted that he would be glad if the would-be suitor found favour in Hilda's eyes, which should surely be an easy task for so brave, gallant, and witty a Knight.

Thenceforth Hans showed himself more and more attentive towards the fair lady of his hopes, who listened to all his compliments with her wonted gravity and modesty, as if she had no idea what they meant to convey.

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The fifth day after the vision of the fiery hand, then, was Hilda's birthday, and, faithful to his intention, Wilbold had invited all his friends to a grand dinner, and, as will readily be guessed, had taken good care that his boon companion and fast friend Hans was one of them.

The guests had gathered together, and entered the dining-room to take their allotted places at table, when the blast of a horn was heard without, and the major-domo announced to his master that a Knight had presented himself at the castle gates and craved the Baron's hospitality.

"By my sword!" cried Wilbold, "here's a gallant with a keen scent! Go, tell him he is welcome, and that we await him before sitting down to dinner."

Five minutes later the young stranger entered the hall. He was a handsome young fellow, twenty-one or twenty-two years of age, with black hair and blue eyes; and he greeted the company with an ease and grace which showed that he had been used to the society of the highest in the land.

His noble bearing made an instant impression on the other guests; and the host himself, seeing with what a distinguished stranger he had to do, offered the young man his own seat. But the Unknown declined the honour, and having thanked the Baron in the most courteous fashion, took a humbler seat at the table.

No one knew the young stranger by sight, and all stared curiously at him save Hilda, who kept her eyes downcast. Yet had anyone watched her closely when the new-comer appeared on the threshold of the hall, they would have seen her blush deeply.

The feast was ample; and the feasters were noisy, for the wine flowed freely. Wilbold and Hans attracted everyone's notice by the frequency and heartiness with which they drank each other's health.

It would have been strange if the meal had passed without some mention of the haunted castle; and soon the Chevalier Hans began to poke fun at his friend for being so frightened of ghosts, — a terror which Wilbold frankly owned to feeling, like the brave man that he was.

"Faith, my dear Chevalier," added the Baron, "I should have liked to see *you* in my place when that terrible hand of fire wrote those never-to-be-forgotten lines on the wall."

“Fudge and fancy!” roared Hans. “It was a nightmare, or your wits were wandering. I don’t believe in ghosts myself!”

“That’s because you’ve never seen one. But if you did, what would you say then?”

“I would deal with it in such a way that it would never trouble me again, I promise you!” shouted Hans, slapping his sword noisily.

“Very good,” answered Wilbold. “Then I’ve a proposal to make, Hans.”

“What is it?”

“You lay the ghost of the Countess Bertha so that she never walks in Wistgaw castle again, and I’ll grant any favour you choose to ask.”

“Whatever I ask?”

“Yes,” answered the Baron, firmly.

“Mind what you’re saying!” cried Warburg, laughing.

“Lay the Countess Bertha’s ghost, and then ask boldly what you will.”

“And whatever I ask you’ll grant?”

“On my word of honour as a gentleman.”

“Even the fair Hilda’s hand in marriage?”

“Yes, even my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

“Oh, Father!” cried the young mistress of the castle, in a tone of gentle reproach.

“Well, child,” retorted the Baron, somewhat heated with the wine he had drunk, “what I have said, I have said. Hans, I never go back on my word. Lay the Countess’s ghost, and my daughter is yours.”

“And would you give the same reward, my Lord Baron, to whomsoever should succeed in the task when the Chevalier has failed?” asked the young stranger, suddenly.

“‘When I have failed’?” repeated Hans, rudely. “Oho! So you think I shall fail, do you, mister?”

“I do not *think* so, Chevalier,” answered the Unknown, in a voice so gentle and sweet that it might have been a girl’s.

“You mean to say you’re sure of it? Ghosts and goblins, Mr. Unknown!” cried Hans, raising his voice; “do you know that what you say is very impertinent!”

“Whatever happens, the favour which I asked of the Baron can-

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not affect your chances of success, Chevalier, since my turn would not come until you have had yours."

"But before I give you my promise, my dear guest," said the Baron, pleasantly, "I must first know who you are."

"I am the Chevalier Torald," answered the young man.

This name had already become so renowned throughout the country that at the sound of it all the guests started to their feet, to bow their acknowledgment of the young man's fame. Wilbold himself felt that he could do no less than make a pretty speech to so noble a guest.

"Chevalier," he said, "young as you are, your name is already so well known that any father might be proud to have you for a son-in-law. But I have known the Chevalier of Warburg for twenty years, and have the honour of meeting you now for the first time. Therefore I could not in any case accept your offer without first laying it before my daughter for her approval."

Hilda blushed to the whites of her eyes.

"I have vowed never to take to wife a maiden of whose love I am not assured," said Torald, proudly.

Ever since the young stranger had made known his name, Hans had kept wonderfully silent.

"Very good, Chevalier," said the Baron; "since you leave the matter to my daughter's choice, and yield the first turn to my friend Hans, I don't see why I should n't offer you the same reward as I have offered to him, if your birth proves to be all that I can desire."

"My family ranks as high as the greatest nobles in Germany, my lord. And what is more," added Torald, with a smile, "I may add, what perhaps you don't know or even suspect, that we are in a way related."

"What! we're related?" cried Wilbold, in astonishment.

"Yes," answered the young Knight, "as you shall know, one day. Meanwhile, let us keep to our point, — the laying of the Countess's spirit."

"Yes, I confess that I sha'n't be sorry to see that matter settled once and for all," said Wilbold, candidly.

"Very good. Let the Chevalier Hans stand the test to-night, and I will take my turn to-morrow night."

"Now, that's what I call talking!" cried the Baron, heartily. "I



like to see the thing faced in such a bold fashion. Chevalier Torald, you are a fine young fellow! Shake hands." And Wilbold stretched out his hand to the young man, who gripped it with a bow of acknowledgment.

Still Hans held his tongue, and looked glummer than ever. Wilbold now turned to his friend, and noted his paleness with amazement.

"Come, Hans," he said, "there's a proposal that should please you well; and since you're in such a terrible hurry to meet the spirits face to face, you ought to thank the Chevalier for offering you the chance this very night!"

"Oh, yes, yes, of course!" cried Warburg; "yes, yes! But it will be no use! I shall only waste my time, for the spirits won't come."

"You are mistaken, Chevalier," replied Torald, with the air of a man who knows what he's talking about; "they *will* come."

Hans turned gray and green.

"However," continued the Knight, "if you would like to give up your turn to me, I shall be very glad to take it, and will bear the first onslaught of the mysterious spirits. Perhaps they won't be quite so terrible at a second meeting."

"Oh, well," said Hans, "whether I'm first or second is all the same to me, so if you'd like to take first turn —"

"No, no, not so fast!" cried Wilbold. "I intend that all shall be as we at first arranged. Keep to your order, gentlemen, — Hans to-night, the Chevalier Torald to-morrow night."

He filled his cup and rose, crying, —

"To the health of the ghost-slayer!"

All the guests drank to the Baron's toast; but that nobleman noted with surprise that his friend's hand trembled as he raised the goblet to his lips.

"Then that's agreed!" said Wilbold; "we start after dinner."

Poor Hans was caught like a mouse in a trap. He had thought, when he undertook the task, to get out of it in his usual way, by bluffing. He had meant to pretend to visit the castle, but to pass the night somewhere in its neighbourhood, and describe his terrible combat with the evil spirits to his friends next morning, at his ease. But there was no longer any chance of that; thanks to the meddling

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interference of the young stranger, the matter had taken a serious turn, and he saw that either his host or his rival would take care that he was not allowed to shirk the task. And, sure enough, when the Baron rose from dinner he announced that he would himself go with Hans, and in order that there should be no getting out of it he would lock the door of the haunted bedroom each night, and place his seal upon it.

There was no drawing back. Hans asked leave to go home and don his armour, so as to be able to defend himself against the enemy if any of the spirits dared to attack him. He did so, and returned, armed from head to foot, and the party set out for Wistgaw.

The little procession consisted of Baron Wilbold of Eisenfeld, Hans de Warburg, the Chevalier Torald, and three or four other guests, who, foreseeing sport in the contest, whichever way it turned out, accompanied their host, who was to sleep in a farmhouse of his own, half a league from the castle.

CHAPTER XVI—The Duel

THE party arrived at Wistgaw about nine in the evening, just at the right time for carrying the business through comfortably.

Hans was very uneasy in his mind, but he tried to bear up against his ill luck, and put a bold face on the matter.

The castle was plunged in darkness, and so silent and shadowy did it seem that you might have taken it for a phantom itself.

The men entered the hall, traversed the great silent rooms, hung with gloomy tapestry, passed along endless corridors, and at length opened the door of the fatal room.

It was as cold, dark, and silent as the rest of the deserted castle. A great fire was soon built on the hearth; the candles were lighted in the sconces and sticks; and then, the company having bidden Hans good-night, the Baron locked the door on the outside and sealed it to the frame with a strip of paper and two seals bearing his arms.

The guests shouted a final farewell to the prisoner and hurried away to the farmhouse and their beds.

Hans, thus left alone, thought at first of escaping through the window, but soon found that there was no chance of that. It looked out upon a precipice, which the darkness made more deep and terrible.

He tapped the walls, but they sounded dull and thick, showing that there was no secret door hidden in them. Whether he would or no, he was a prisoner for the night.

The Chevalier tested his armour from head to foot, to make sure that it was well fastened, — felt for his sword, saw that his dagger slipped smoothly in its sheath and that his visor moved freely. Then, satisfied that in that respect, at least, all was as it should be, he seated himself in a great armchair in front of the fire.

The hours passed by without any disturbing sound or sight, and presently Hans began to feel more cheerful. In the first place, he told himself, since there was no secret door, and the only entrance to the room was safely locked, the ghosts would be as bothered to get in as he had been to get out. True, he had heard that spirits take little heed of such obstacles, and pass through walls or keyholes without so much as a "With your leave" or "By your leave," but still he felt himself more secure.

We ought to set it down to the Chevalier's credit that he was even beginning to doze, when suddenly he heard a loud noise in the chimney flue, and quickly flung more wood on the fire, thinking to roast the legs of any visitors who might try to come down that way.

The fire, it is true, blazed up anew, and mounted higher at the back of the hearth, crackling and hissing; but all in a moment the Chevalier saw the tip of a plank coming out of the chimney. It was a board about a foot wide, which moved outward, growing longer and longer, without anything to show what was pushing it. It came on slowly and slantingly, and, reaching the floor, formed a sort of bridge over the flames. At the same instant a crowd of little dwarfs came sliding down it, like boys on a snow-hill. At their head was the King of the Dwarfs, who was clad in full armour, like Hans himself, as if he were leading his people to battle.

As fast as the little army poured into the room, Hans started farther back, pushing his chair on its castors; so that by the time the King and his men had ranged themselves in battle array, he had reached the far end of the room, and only stopped when the wall for-

❖ THE COUNTESS BERTHA'S HONEY-FEAST ❖

bade his further retreat. As a result, a large clear space stretched between the giant and his little foes.

And now the King of the Dwarfs, after consulting his officers in a low voice, marched forward alone into the arena. Then, with hand on hip, he said in a mocking voice, —

“Chevalier Hans, I have often heard tell of your wonderful bravery. It is true that it has always been yourself who has boasted of it; but a good Knight should never lie, and I must believe therefore that you have spoken the truth. So it occurred to me to challenge you to single combat; and having heard that you valiantly offered to rid the Baron of the ghost that haunts the castle, I have persuaded that lady, who is a great friend of mine, to let me take her place to-night. If you are the victor, she promises through me to leave the castle and never appear in it again; if you are conquered, you shall honourably confess your defeat and yield place to the Chevalier Torald, whom I have no doubt I shall easily overthrow, for I have never heard *him* boast of having ‘cloven’ anybody ‘in twain.’ So, as I do not doubt that you will accept my challenge, there is my glove!”

And with these words the King of the Dwarfs flung his gauntlet proudly at the Chevalier’s feet.

Whilst the tiny monarch was making this declaration in his clear little voice, Hans looked at him keenly, and having made sure that the speaker was no more than six-and-a-half inches high at most, he began to feel more at his ease. He could surely have nothing to fear from such a foe! So he picked up the glove with something of his old swagger, and set it on the tip of his little finger, to see it more closely. It was made from the skin of a musk-rat, and was skilfully covered with fine scales of steel.

The King let Hans examine the glove at his leisure, and then after a pause added, “Well, Chevalier, I await your reply. Do you accept or refuse?”

Hans cast his eyes once more over the little champion who had challenged him to fight, and who did not stand even as high as his calf. Reassured by this fact, he answered, —

“And what shall we fight with, my little Hop o’ my Thumb?”

“With our own weapons, — you with your sword, I with my whip.”



“What! With your whip!”

“That is my usual arm. As I am little, I need one that will reach far”

Hans burst out laughing.

“What! you’ll fight me with your whip,” he asked, “and no other arm?”

“No other.”

“You swear it?”

“On my honour as a gentleman and a King.”

“Then I accept,” said Hans, flinging down his glove in turn.

“Good!” answered the little man, skipping aside so as not to be crushed by the great iron gauntlet. “Trumpeters, sound a flourish!”

Twelve dwarf-heralds, mounted on a stool, blew a warlike blast, and other attendants brought their King the weapon with which he was to fight.

It was a little whip, and the butt of its stock was carved out of an emerald. Five steel chains hung from the handle, each three feet long and tipped with sparkling diamonds as large as a pea. Except that it was costly, the whip was just like a toy cat-o’-nine-tails.

Meanwhile Hans, full of conceit in his strength, had drawn his sword.

“When you are ready?” said the King to the Chevalier.

“At your service, sire,” answered Hans.

Instantly the trumpets blared forth again, in a still more martial fashion, and the fight began.

But no sooner were the first blows delivered than the giant saw that he could by no means afford to laugh at his little enemy’s weapon. Protected though he was by his breastplate, he felt the sting of the lashes as if he had been naked, for wherever the diamonds touched, they pierced the iron as if it had been no more than pie-crust.

Soon Hans thought no more of attacking, or even defending himself. He began to yell, to howl, to run round the chamber, jump over chairs, and spring upon the bed, pursued wherever he went by the pitiless whip, whilst the warlike air which the trumpeters played kept time to the combat, and so became more and more rapid and more and more like a gallop than a march.

After five minutes of this kind of sport the big coward fell on his knees and whined for mercy.

The King of the Dwarfs gave back the whip to his attendants, and, resuming his sceptre, replied, —

“Chevalier Hans, you are nothing better than an old woman! You ought to carry a distaff and spindle instead of a sword and dagger!”

With these words he touched the giant with his sceptre, and Hans felt a great change come over him. Then the dwarfs with one accord burst into loud laughter and disappeared in a flash.

CHAPTER XVII — *The Knight of the Distaff*

HANS looked around him. He was alone. Then he looked at himself, and started back in amazement.

He was dressed exactly like an old woman. His breastplate had turned into a striped thick-flannel smock; his helmet was now a mob-cap; his sword had changed to a distaff, and his dagger to a spindle.

You quite understand that along with his new costume Hans was still wearing his beard and mustaches, and that the Chevalier looked very comical and very ugly, accordingly.

When he saw himself decked out thus, Hans made a wry face, which caused him to look more ugly and more comical still; but he immediately thought to undress and get into bed, so that no one should be able to guess what had happened. He set the distaff down on a chair and was about to snatch the cap from his head, when the former sprang up again and rapped him so sharply on the knuckles that he found himself face to face with a new foe.

Hans tried to defend himself, but the diabolical thing fenced so well that he was soon obliged to put his hands into his pockets out of harm's way.

Immediately the distaff placed itself in his belt once more and became still. The Chevalier took the opportunity of the pause to examine it more closely.

It was a real distaff enough, exactly like all other distaffs, except that it was rather more elegant than most, and was topped by a gro-

tesque little head, which seemed to mock the Chevalier and put out its tongue at him.

Hans pretended to grin back at it, but he slyly sidled towards the fireplace, and, watching his opportunity, he plucked it from his belt by its waist and flung it right into the middle of the fire.

But no sooner was the distaff on the blaze than it stood on end, covered with flames, and began to run after the Chevalier, who this time was not only beaten, but burnt, before he could cry, "Mercy!"

As soon as he did so, the flames went out, and the distaff modestly took its place in his girdle once more.

The affair was becoming serious. Day began to dawn, and Hans knew that the Baron, Torald, and the others would soon return. He racked his wits to think of a way in which to rid himself of the cursed distaff, and at last decided to throw it out of the window.

He lounged up to the casement, carelessly humming a tune, so as not to arouse the creature's suspicions; and then, opening the window as if to look out at the view and get a breath of the fresh morning air, he suddenly seized upon his strange foe, flung it down the precipice, and shut it out quickly. The next moment he heard a crash of glass, and, looking towards the other window, he saw that the distaff had returned by that route.

This time it was really furious at this second piece of treachery, and fell upon the unhappy Hans, thumping him savagely with its head until he was bruised all over. He howled again with anguish and at last he fell exhausted into a chair. His tormentor, taking pity on him, was content to slip back into its place.

Presently the Chevalier thought to soften the strange creature's heart by pretending to do something for it, and so he began to spin. The distaff indeed seemed very well pleased. Its little head nodded with satisfaction, its eyes sparkled with delight, and it began to hum a low song.

Suddenly Hans heard a noise in the corridor, and wanted to stop in his work; but that did not suit the distaff, which tapped his knuckles so smartly that he was forced to go on spinning. The steps came nearer and nearer, and stopped at the door. Hans was furious at the thought of being caught in such a guise, and at such an employ, but there was no help for it.

In another moment the door opened, and the Baron, the Cheva-

lier Torald, and the rest of the guests stood on the threshold, amazed at the strange sight which greeted their eyes.

Hans, whom they had left overnight fully armed, was sitting there dressed like an old woman, spinning with distaff and spindle.

The new-comers burst out laughing. As for Hans, he did not know what to do, or where to hide himself.

“By Jove!” cried Wilbold, “it seems that the spirits who have visited you have been merry fellows indeed, comrade! I am curious to hear all about your adventures.”

“Well, this is how it happened,” answered Hans, who hoped to bluff his way out of his plight, — “this is how it happened. Oh, yes; it’s a bet —”

But at that the distaff, who saw that he was going to tell stories about the affair, dealt him such a violent blow on the fingers that he yelled aloud.

“Confound the distaff!” he muttered. Then he continued, —

“It is a bet I’ve made. Thinking that as the ghost was only an old woman, it was useless to prepare to meet her with other arms than a distaff and spindle —”

But here again the magic thing, unheeding the pleading look that Hans gave it, began to bridle up and play such a tune upon his knuckles that Wilbold cried, —

“Come, friend Hans, I see that you’re lying, and that’s why the distaff beats you so. Tell us the truth, and it will let you alone.”

As if it perfectly understood what the Baron said, the distaff bowed low to him and nodded its head as if to say that he had guessed rightly.

So Hans was willy-nilly forced to confess all that had happened from beginning to end. Every now and then he tried to stray from the truth, and touch up the facts so as to make himself less cowardly and ridiculous; but the distaff, which remained quiet so long as he behaved honestly, fell upon him directly he began to invent, and so he was obliged to return to the path of truth once more.

When the whole story had at last been told, the distaff rose from its place, made Hans a mocking reverence, bowed to the rest of the company politely, and marched towards the door, hopping on its stalk and leading the little spindle, who followed it as meekly as a child follows its mother.



“ Followed by a hooting crowd of . . . ragamuffins ”

No sooner did Hans see that the magic thing had relieved him of its presence than he himself hurried out by the door also and ran home to his castle, followed by a hooting crowd of all the ragamuffins in the neighbourhood, who took him for a guy.

CHAPTER XVIII.—*The Treasure*

THE following night it was the Chevalier Torald's turn to keep watch, and he prepared for the midnight encounter with as much care and humility as Hans had shown carelessness and contempt. He was led to the bedchamber, and locked and sealed in it. He had gone unarmed, for he declared that earthly weapons were useless against spirits, who were the servants of Heaven itself.

As soon as he was alone, the young knight said his prayers devoutly, and, seating himself in the armchair, awaited the moment when the ghost should choose to appear.

For some hours he sat thus, his gaze fixed on the door, without seeing anything remarkable. Then suddenly he heard a slight noise behind him, and something touched him lightly on the shoulder. He turned. The ghost of the Countess Bertha was standing in the middle of the room.

"Torald," she said, "you have grown to be all that I have hoped you would become,— a good, brave, pious young knight. You shall be rewarded as you deserve."

So saying, she made him a sign to follow her, and, going to one side of the chamber, touched the wall with her finger. It opened, and displayed there the treasure which Count Ulrik had hidden in former days, when war had forced him to abandon his home.

"That treasure is yours, my son," said the Countess; "but lest anyone should dispute it, no one but yourself shall have power to bid the wall open, and the word with which to work the magic spell shall be the name of your well-beloved, Hilda."

At the sound of the word, indeed, the wall closed again, so perfectly that not a sign of seam or hinge was to be seen.

Then the shade, with a last smile and kindly motion of the head, disappeared like a mist that melts away.

Next morning when Wilbold and his companions entered the room, they found Torald sleeping peacefully in the armchair. The Baron awoke the young man, who smiled as he opened his eyes.

“Friend Torald,” said Wilbold, gravely, “I had a dream last night. I dreamt that you were called, not Torald, but Hermann; that you were the great-grandson of Count Osmond, whom everyone believed to be dead, and that your great-grandmother Bertha had appeared to you in the night and shown you a treasure.”

Torald understood by this that the vision had been sent to the Baron from heaven that he might doubt no more. So he rose without answering, and, beckoning to the other to follow him, stepped up to the magic wall.

“Your dream was a true one, my lord,” he said; “I am indeed that Hermann whom you thought dead. The Countess, my great-grandmother, *did* appear to me in the night and show me the treasure; and the proof is — here!”

As he spoke, he uttered the name of Hilda, and as the ghost had promised, the wall opened. Wilbold stood agape at the sight of so much treasure, for it was not only money that lay heaped there, but rubies, emeralds, diamonds!

“Come, Cousin Hermann,” he cried at last, “I see you have told the truth. Wistgaw and my daughter are both yours on one condition.”

“What is that?” asked Hermann, anxiously.

“That you undertake to give the people every First of May the honey-feast of the Countess Bertha!”

And as you may easily guess, Hermann gratefully agreed.

A week later Hermann of Rosenberg was married to Hilda of Eisenfeld; and so long as the castle remained standing, they and their children and their children’s children celebrated regularly and generously, on every First of May,

THE COUNTESS BERTHA’S HONEY-FEAST.

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