

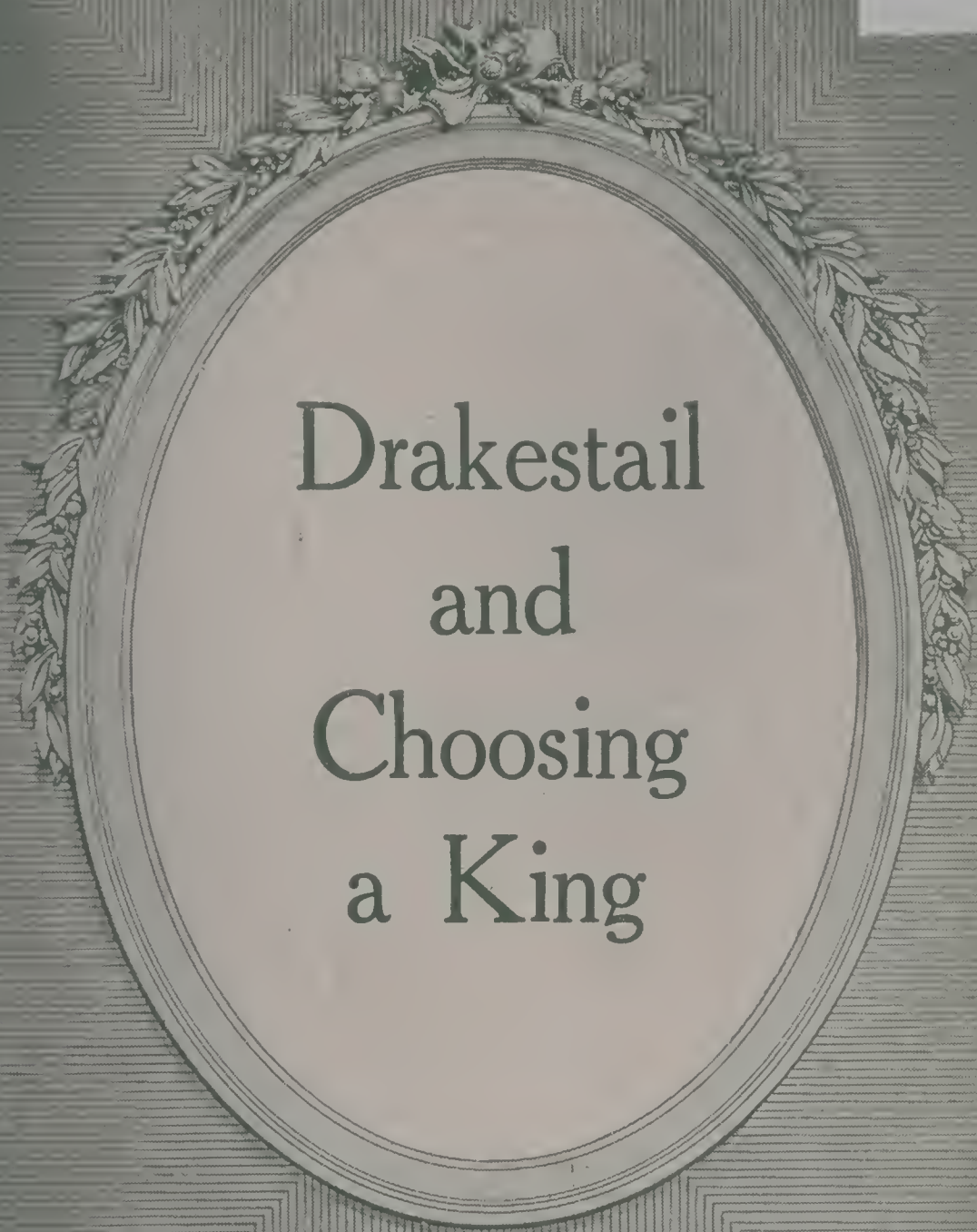
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THE LITTLE CLASSIC SERIES



Drakestail
and
Choosing
a King

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DRAKESTAIL
AND
CHOOSING A KING

alhamill
ADAPTED BY
N. MOORE BANTA

1923

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DRAKESTAIL

ONCE upon a time Drakestail lived in a country village near the sea. Drakestail was very little. That is why he was called Drakestail. Tiny as he was, he had brains, and he knew what he was about. Having begun with nothing he became very rich. He had a million dollars.

Now, the King of the country was very extravagant. He never kept any money. When he heard Drakestail had a million dollars he went in his own person to borrow his hoard. And my word, in those days Drakestail was not a little proud of having lent money to the King.

But after the first and second year went by Drakestail received no interest. In fact, the King never even dreamed of paying any interest. At last Drakestail became uneasy,



“‘Quock, quack, quack, I want my money back’”

so much so that he resolved to go and see the King himself and get repaid.

So one fine morning Drakestail, very spruce and fresh, took the road, singing:

“Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back!”

He had not gone far when he met friend Fox, on his rounds that way.



“Make yourself quite small”

“Good-morning, neighbor,” said the friend;
“where are you off to so early?”

“I am going to the King for what he owes
me.”

“Oh! take me with thee!”

Drakestail said to himself: “One can’t have
too many friends.” Aloud he said, “I will,
but going on all fours you will soon be tired.
Make yourself quite small, get into my throat
—go into my gizzard and I will carry you.”

“Happy thought!” said friend Fox.

He took bag and baggage, and, presto! was
gone like a letter into the mail-box.

And Drakestail was off again, all spruce
and fresh still singing:

“Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back.”

He had not gone far when he met his lady friend Ladder, leaning on her wall.

“Good-morning, my duckling,” said the lady friend, “whither away so bold?”

“I am going to the King for what he owes me.”

“Oh! take me with thee!”

Drakestail said to himself: “One can’t have too many friends.” Aloud he said: “I will, but then with your wooden legs you will soon be tired. Make yourself quite small, get into my throat—go into my gizzard and I will carry you.”

“Happy thought!” said friend Ladder, and nimble, bag and baggage, went to keep company with friend Fox.

And “Quack, quack, quack.” Drakestail was off again, singing and spruce as before. A little further he met his sweetheart, my friend River, wandering quietly in the sunshine.

“Thou, my cherub,” said she, “whither so lonesome, with arching tail, on this muddy road?”

“I am going to the King, you know, for what he owes me.”

“Oh! take me with thee!”

Drakestail said to himself: “We can’t have too many friends.” Aloud said he: “I will, but you who sleep while you walk will soon be tired. Make yourself quite small, get into my throat—go into my gizzard and I will carry you.”

“Ah! happy thought!” said my friend River.

She took bag and baggage, and glou, glou, glou she took her place with friend Fox and friend Ladder.

And “Quack, quack, quack.” Drakestail was off again singing.

A little further on he met comrade Wasp’s-nest, maneuvering his wasps.

“Well, good-morning, friend Drakestail,” said comrade Wasp’s-nest, “where are we

bound for so spruce and fresh?"

"I am going to the King for what he owes me."

"Oh! take me with thee!"

Drakestail said to himself, "One can't have too many friends." Aloud said he: "I will, but then with your battalion to drag along, you will soon be tired. Make yourself quite small, go into my throat—get into my gizzard and I will carry you."

"By Jove! that's a good idea!" said comrade Wasp's-nest.

And he took the same road to join the others with all his party. There was not much more room, but by crowding close they managed. And Drakestail was off again singing.

He arrived thus at the capital, and made his way straight to the King's palace, singing:

"Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back,"

to the astonishment of all the people.

He knocked upon the door of the King's

palace with the great knocker: "Toc! toc!"

"Who is there?" asked the porter, putting his head out of the door.

"'Tis I, Drakestail. I wish to speak to the King."

"Speak to the King! That's easily said. The King is dining, and will not be disturbed."

"Tell the King that it is I,
And I have come he well knows why."

The porter shut the door and went to tell the King, who was just sitting down to dinner. He had a great napkin round his neck.

"Good, good!" said the King, laughing. "I know who it is. Make him come in, and put him with the turkeys and chickens."

The porter came again to the door.

"Have the goodness to enter."

"Good!" said Drakestail to himself. "I shall now see how they eat at court."

"This way, this way," said the porter. "One step further. There, there you are."

"How? what? in the poultry-yard?"

Imagine how vexed Drakestail was!

“Ah, so that’s it,” said he. “Wait! I will compel you to receive me.

“Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back.”

But turkeys and chickens do not like people who are not just as they are. When they saw the new-comer and saw that he was different, they all rushed at him together to overwhelm him with pecks.

“I am lost!” said Drakestail to himself. And then he remembered his friend Fox, and cried:

“Reynard, Reynard, come out of your earth,
Or Drakestail’s life is of little worth.”

Then friend Fox, who was only waiting for these words, hastened out. He threw himself upon the wicked fowls. At the end of five minutes there was not one left alive.

And Drakestail, quite content, began to sing again:

“Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back.”

The King, who was still eating dinner, heard the song of Drakestail. And when the porter came and told him what had happened, he was very angry.

He ordered the porter to throw this tail of a drake into the well.

And it was done as he commanded. Drakestail did not see how he could ever get out of such a deep hole, when he remembered his friend Ladder.

“Ladder, ladder, come out of thy hold,
Or Drakestail’s days will soon be told,”

Friend Ladder, who was only waiting for these words, hastened out. She leaned her two arms on the edge of the well, and Drakestail climbed nimbly on her back. Hop! he was in the yard again and began to sing louder than ever.

When the King, who was still eating dinner and laughing at his funny trick, heard the song again, his face became red with rage.

He commanded that the furnace be heated, and Drakestail thrown into it.



“His face became red with rage”

The furnace was soon hot, but this time Drakestail was not afraid; he knew his dear friend River would help him out.

“River, River, outward flow,
Or to death Drakestail must go.”

My friend River hastened out, and errouf! she threw herself into the furnace. She flooded the furnace and all the people who had lighted it. Then she flowed, growling, into the hall of the palace to the height of four feet.

But Drakestail, of course, could swim, and

began swimming about singing again at the top of his voice:

“Quack, quack, quack,
I want my money back.”

The King was still eating his dinner. He liked plenty of nice things to eat, and took many hours for his dinners. But when he heard Drakestail's song again he jumped from the table, very furious.

“Bring him here, and I'll cut his throat! Bring him here quick!” cried he.

And quickly two footmen ran to bring Drakestail.

“At last,” said poor Drakestail, “they have decided to receive me.”

Imagine his terror when he saw the King and his angry face, with all his ministers, each with a sword in his hand. Unless Drakestail's one remaining friend could help him, he knew he had not much longer to live.

“Wasp's-nest, Wasp's-nest, make a sally,
Or Drakestail nevermore may rally.”



“They all jumped pell-mell from the window”

And then everything changed!"

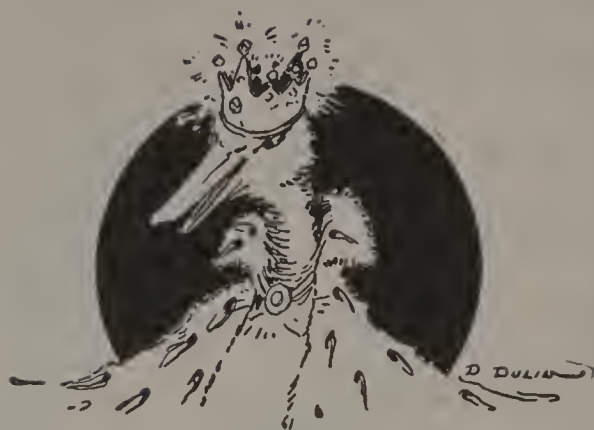
"Bs, bs, bayonet them!" The brave Wasp's-nest rushed out with all his wasps. They threw themselves on the angry King and his ministers and stung them so fiercely, that they did not know where to go or what to do. They all jumped pell-mell from the window and broke their necks.

And there stood Drakestail in the King's dining room, all alone.

Pretty soon he remembered what he had come for and began to hunt for his dear million dollars. He looked everywhere, but could find nothing. All the money had been spent.

In searching from room to room he finally came to the throne room. He felt very tired so he sat down upon the throne to think over his adventure.

It was not long until the people found their King and his ministers with broken necks, on the ground below the window of the castle. They hastened inside to find out the



“He became king”

trouble. There in the throne room they found Drakestail sitting in the seat of the King. And they all cried out in surprise and joy:

“The King is dead, long live the King!
Heaven has sent us down this thing.”

Drakestail had had so many surprises, that he was not even excited when the people called him their King. And they thought him very dignified and wonderful. They thought a wise Drakestail would make a better King than the spendthrift who was dead.

And so Drakestail became King. A jewelled crown was placed on his head and everybody waited for his word.

“Now,” said he, after the ceremony, “ladies and gentlemen, let’s have some supper. I’m hungry.”



CHOOSING A KING

IN the Once Upon a Time days, every sound in nature had a sense and meaning of some sort. When the hammer of the smith sounded it was as if it said, "How I strike! How I strike!" The sound of the plane on the table said, "I scratch. I scratch."

The rush of water over the mill wheel had a meaning. If the miller was a cheat it seemed to say, "Who cheats? Who cheats?" Then it seemed to reply, "The miller! The miller!" When the mill went very fast it seemed to say, "Who cheats? Who cheats?" Stealing six out of eight."

In these good old days, also, the birds had a language of their own. Everyone could understand them, too. Although their talking sounded only like twittering, screaming, and whistling, yet it was really music with

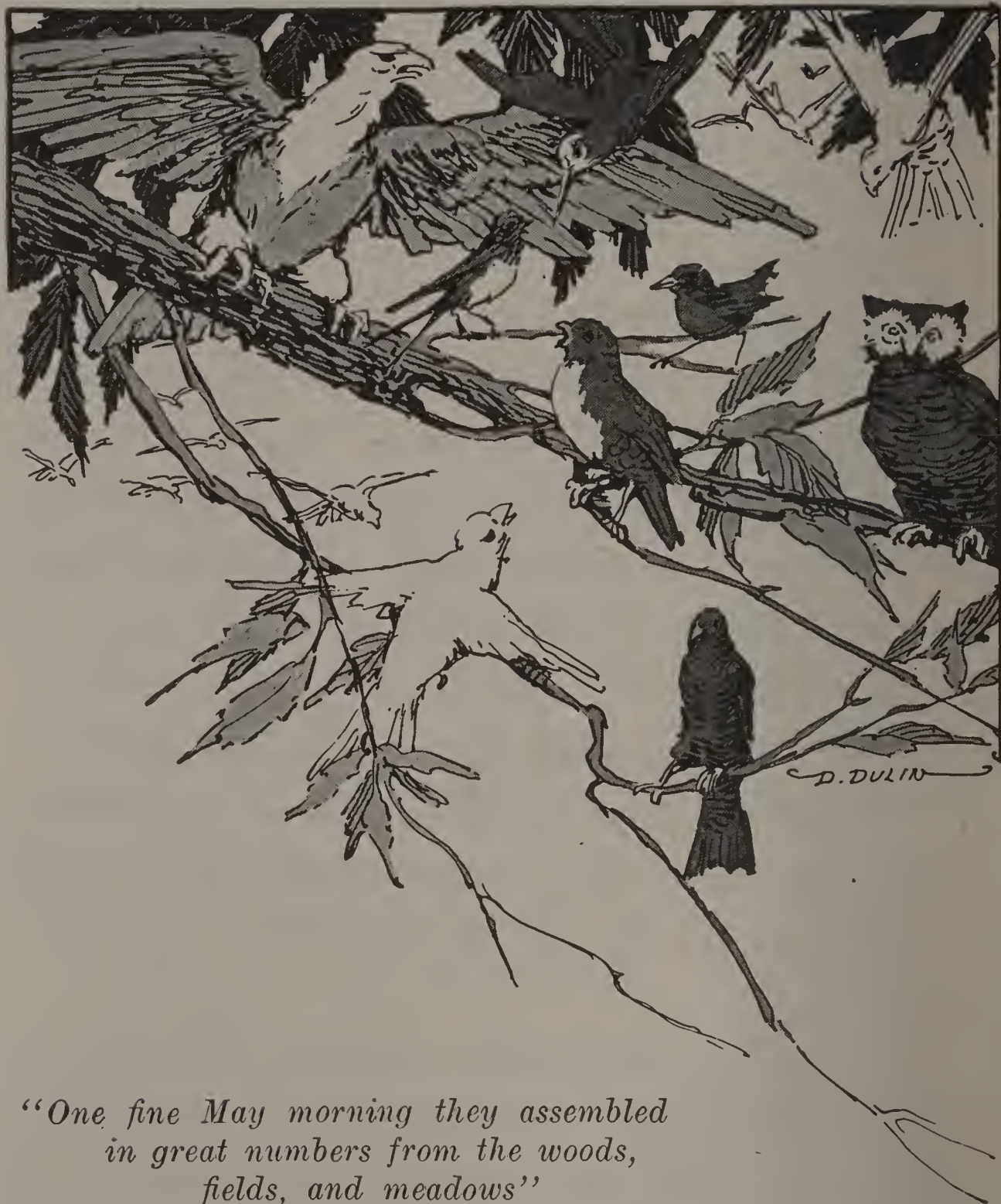
words and understood in the olden times.

About this time a grand idea arose among the birds. They thought they should be no longer without a master. They determined to elect one of their number to be King.

One voice only was raised against this proposal. The plover declared that he had lived free, and he would die free. He was much troubled about this matter of having a King. He flew about here and there among the birds crying, "Don't have a King, don't have a King. Be free! Be free!" But nobody noticed him or paid any attention to him. He therefore flew back to his lonely home in the marshes. Ever since that time he has refused to join in the meetings of the other birds.

The birds, meanwhile, decided to have a general meeting on the subject of electing a King. One fine May morning they assembled in great numbers from the woods, fields, and meadows.

Here came the eagle and the hawk, the owl



*“One fine May morning they assembled
in great numbers from the woods,
fields, and meadows”*

and the crow, the lark and the sparrow, the
robin and the goldfinch, the wren and the
bluebird, and many more that could not be

named. Even the cuckoo was present and a great number of little birds.

An old hen, who, as it happened, had heard nothing of the whole matter, wondered greatly at such a large gathering. "Cluck, cluck, cluck," said she. "What in the world are they going to do?" But the cock told his dear wife to be quiet and not make such a noise. He explained to her what the birds were about.

The assembly debated a long time about how a King should be chosen. Finally it was decided that the bird who could fly the highest should be chosen King.

The green frog who sat in the bushes, when he heard this, croaked dreadfully. He said, "There will be a great many tears shed over that arrangement."

The crow, however, said "Caw! Caw!" for he wished it to be all settled in a friendly manner.

They agreed to make the experiment of flying the next morning. They decided it

should be done in the morning so that none should be able to say afterwards, "I could have flown higher had it not been evening and I was too tired to do any more."

Next morning, bright and early, the whole flock rose in the air. There was a great cloud of dust, and such a rustling noise of flapping wings that it sounded like the coming of a storm. The small birds very wisely did not try with the others, but sat in the bushes and watched. The large birds flew for a long time, but finally only the eagle remained in the sky. He had flown so high the other birds could not see him.

When the eagle saw that he was alone, he thought to himself, "I need not fly any higher. I am sure to be chosen King!"

And the birds beneath him cried out, "You must be our King! none can fly as high as you do!"

And just then a small voice said, "Oh, I can fly much higher." The little wren had crept unseen among the feathers of the great



“Only the owl stayed awake”

eagle and now that he had been carried so high he could fly still higher and higher, until the eagle himself could not see him. Finally the little wren folded his wings and let himself come down to the earth, singing at the top of his voice, “I am King! I am King!”

“Indeed you are not our King,” said all the birds. “You have not been fair.”

So they hurried the little wren into a mousehole, and shut the door and locked it. The owl watched to see that he did not get away. They hoped the wren would starve.

When evening came all the birds went home to rest, for the day had been a great

day. They had all worked very hard and were tired. Only the owl stayed awake at the door of the mousehole.

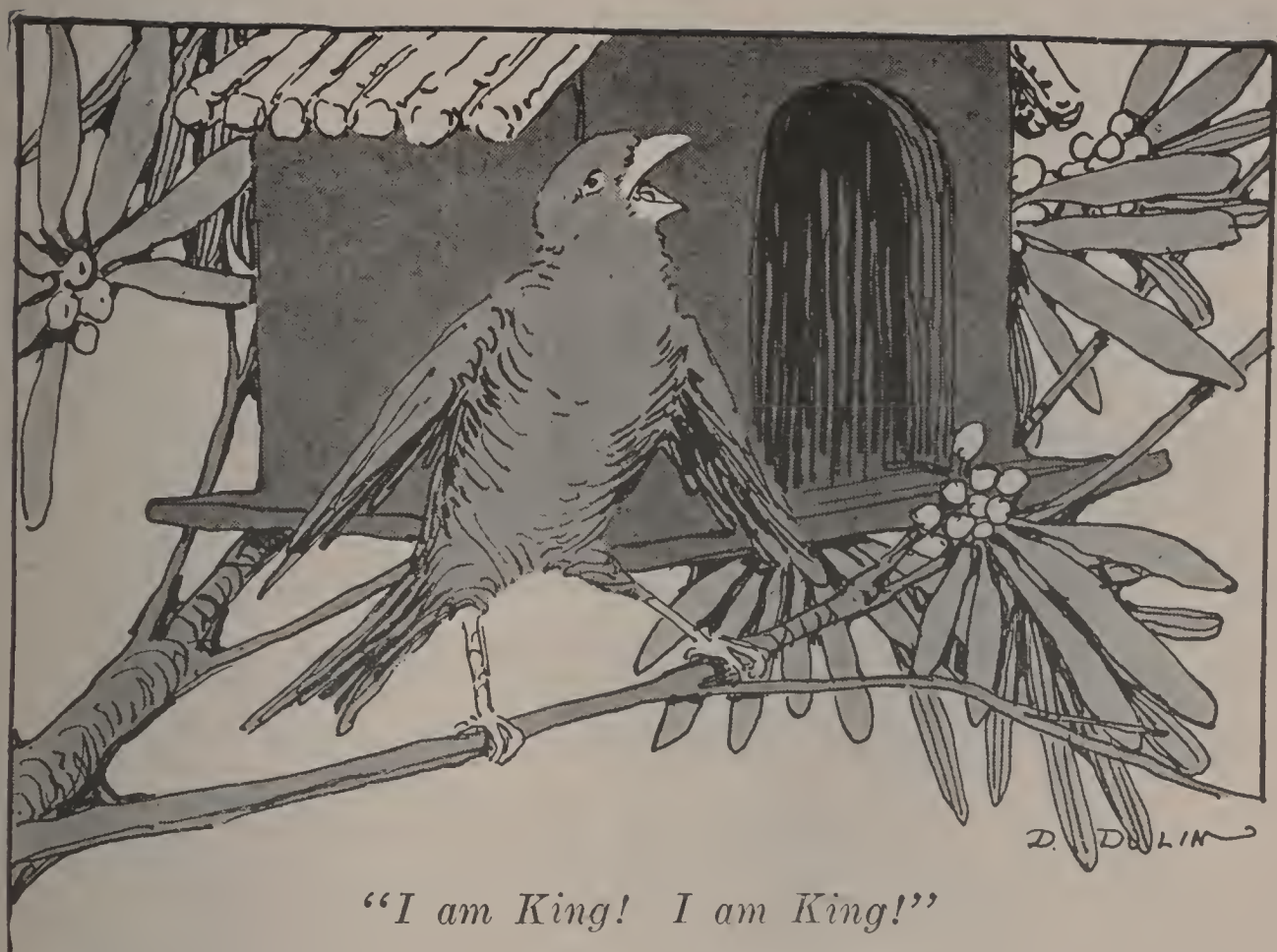
Pretty soon the owl became so tired and sleepy she could hardly keep her eyes open. And she said to herself, "If I sleep with one eye and watch with the other, I may rest and the prisoner cannot get away.

So the owl went to sleep with one eye and watched very hard with the other one.

The little wren inside the mousehole peeped out and saw the eye of the owl that was sleeping. He thought he could slip away, but the owl saw him with her wide-awake eye. And the little wren changed his mind.

Soon the owl decided to rest one eye and let the other one sleep. By taking turns with her eyes she thought she could sleep and watch at the same time.

But, of course, when the other eye was closed, the owl forgot to open the sleeping eye, and soon she was fast asleep.



"I am King! I am King!"

You may be sure, the little wren inside the mousehole was not sleeping, and when he saw the old owl with two eyes shut he slipped out and flew away.

The next morning when the other birds found the owl sleeping, and the mousehole empty, they were very angry. They scolded the owl and pecked at her feathers.

And to this day the owl hides herself all day long and only flies at night when the other birds are asleep.

The little wren still thinks he is King for
from his nest he cries out to all that pass,
“I am King! I am King! I am King!”

THE RHINE GOLD

MY father was a dwarf, and belonged to a race of dwarfs called the Nibelungs. He had three sons, Fafner, Otto, and myself. Fafner was the eldest; I was the youngest. Otto, my second brother, was very fond of fishing, and liked nothing better than to spend whole days at the sport.

My father had a magic cap called a tarn-helm. Any one who put this cap on could make himself invisible, or assume any form he desired. Otto would borrow this tarn-helm, and assuming the form of an otter, he would go to a waterfall near our home to fish. He would go right into the water, and catching the fish in his mouth, would lay them down on the bank, one after another, until he had enough. Then he would become himself once more and would carry the fish home for supper.

Near this waterfall there lived another dwarf, named Alberich, who also belonged to the race of the Nibelungs. He possessed a great treasure of gold, which he had captured from the nymphs of the Rhine. The father of the nymphs, the God of the Rhine, had entrusted the treasure to their care.

Alberich gained possession of the Rhine gold, but in doing so he lost everything which helps to make life beautiful. Like my brother, he was very fond of fishing, and taking the form of a huge pike, he would go with Otto to the waterfall, and fish all day.

One day Wotan, the King of the Gods, was wandering through the forest with Loki, the God of Fire. They were both very tired and hungry, and as they came near the waterfall, what should they spy but an otter in the water, with a large salmon in its mouth. Here was a chance not to be missed.

Seizing a big stone, Loki hurled it with all his might at the otter, killing it instantly.

Then they carried it to my father's house, and begged for a night's lodging.

As soon as my father saw the otter, he told them that they had killed his son. Both Wotan and Loki were very sorry to hear this, and regretted that they could not restore my brother to life. To make up to my father for what they had done, they agreed to fill the otter skin with gold, and also to cover the outside of it with the same precious metal. Then Wotan sent Loki out in search of gold.

Now Loki knew that the dwarf Alberich possessed the Rhine gold; so he hastened to the waterfall, and demanded the entire treasure.

At first Alberich refused to part with the gold; but Loki threatened to kill him unless he gave it up. So Alberich unwillingly gave the treasure to Loki—all except a ring of gold, which he kept hidden in his hand. But the god's eyes were sharp, and he saw what Alberich had done.

Now this ring was a magic ring, and whoever owned it might claim all the gold in all the rivers and mountains upon earth. Alberich believed that if he kept it he could some day get back his treasure through its magic power.

Loki commanded him to give it up, and the dwarf refused to do so. Seeing that words were useless, the god snatched it from Alberich's hand, and started off. Alberich fell into a terrible fury, and cried:

“A curse upon the gold! Death to all its possessors!”

But Loki had obtained that which he set out to get. The gold was not to be his, and he cared nothing for the dwarf and his curses. He only laughed at Alberich, and hastened with his burden to my father's house.

When Wotan saw the gold ring, he was so pleased with its beauty that he placed it on his finger, intending to keep it for himself. Then they filled the otter's skin with gold, and also covered it over, according to their

promise. When they had finished, my father discovered one spot on its head upon which there was no gold. He insisted upon having this covered up, and since there was no more gold to be had, Wotan unwillingly took the ring from his finger, and placed it there.

Loki was displeased, and cried:

“Now, you ingrate, you have the most enormous gold treasure in the world, and I hope you are satisfied! But remember what I say: The gold will prove your ruin, and it will also cause your son to fill an early grave.”

Then the gods took their departure.

Fafner and I asked our father to give us each a share of the gold; but he only laughed in a disagreeable way, and declared his dead son was far more precious to him than were his living sons. He said that every hair on Otto's head was dear to him. Then he ran after us with a stone club, and swore that he would kill us if we said another word. We said no more, and crept away in fear.

But that night as my father lay asleep,

Fafner stole into his room and slew him. Then I came forward, and told my brother that I had witnessed his evil deed, and demanded that he give me half of the gold. But he turned upon me in a blind rage, and cried:

“Flee for your life ere I smite you dead!”

I fled in fear, without another word. Then Fafner put on my father's tarnhelm and escaped with his treasure to the heath, where he hid it in a cave among the rocks. But, fearful lest it be taken from him, he assumed the form of a frightful dragon, that he might protect it better.

And there he lies day and night, guarding the entrance of the cave, and leaves it only when he goes to drink at a neighboring spring. No one has dared attack him, for no one has the strength to match him.

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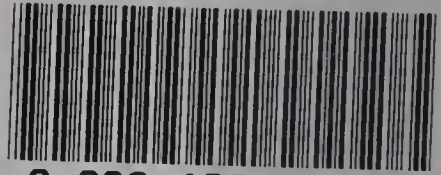
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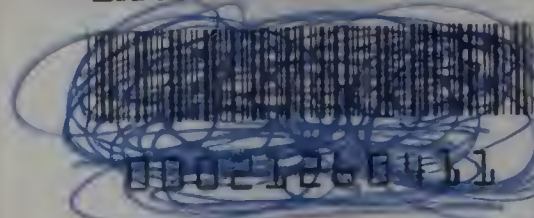
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| 3019 | The Story of Steam. | | |
| 2944 | The Story of Printing. | | |
| 3013 | Father Marquette. | | |
| 2945 | The Story of Newspapers and
Books. | | |
| 3007 | The Miraculous Pitcher. | | |
| 3025 | The Story of Robinhood. | | |
| 3001 | The Story of La Salle. | | |

Sixth and Seventh Grades

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| No. | | No. | |
| 3026 | The Story of Motors. | 3035 | American Railway Systems. |
| 3014 | Famous Poems of Famous Poets—
For Sixth Grade. | 3018 | The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. |
| 3016 | Rip Van Winkle and Author's Ac-
count of Himself. | 3010 | Evangeline. |
| 3008 | The King of The Golden River. | 3036 | Horatius at the Bridge, and Other
Poems. |
| 3027 | The Story of Glass. | 3012 | The Cotter's Saturday Night and
Other Poems. |
| 2941 | The Golden Fleece. | 3037 | Lowell's Poems. |
| 3028 | The Meat-Packing Industry. | 3004 | Thanatopsis and Other Poems. |
| 2942 | Whittier's Poems. | 3006 | The Deserted Village (Goldsmith)
and Gray's Elegy. |
| 3029 | Tennyson's Poems. | 3038 | Washington's Farewell Address
and Other Papers. |
| 3015 | The Legend of Sleepy Hollow. | 3122 | The Vision of Sir Launfal and
Other Poems. |
| 3030 | Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare—
Part I. | 3039 | Prisoner of Chillon and Other
Poems. |
| 3031 | Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare—
Part II. | 3017 | Snow-Bound and the Corn Song. |

Seventh and Eighth Grades

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| No. | | No. | |
| 3035 | American Railway Systems. | 3115 | The Magna Charta. |
| 3018 | The Rime of the Ancient Mariner. | 3040 | Sir Roger De Coverley Papers. |
| 3010 | Evangeline. | 3041 | Carrying the U. S. Mail. |
| 3036 | Horatius at the Bridge, and Other
Poems. | 3108 | Speeches by Lincoln. |
| 3012 | The Cotter's Saturday Night and
Other Poems. | 3005 | Enoch Arden. |
| 3037 | Lowell's Poems. | 3101 | Sohrab and Rustum. |
| 3004 | Thanatopsis and Other Poems. | 3042 | Navigating the Air—Electric Rail-
ways. |
| 3006 | The Deserted Village (Goldsmith)
and Gray's Elegy. | 3107 | Famous Poems of Famous Poets—
Eighth Grade. |
| 3038 | Washington's Farewell Address
and Other Papers. | | |
| 3122 | The Vision of Sir Launfal and
Other Poems. | | |
| 3039 | Prisoner of Chillon and Other
Poems. | | |
| 3017 | Snow-Bound and the Corn Song. | | |
| 3115 | The Magna Charta. | | |
| 3040 | Sir Roger De Coverley Papers. | | |
| 3041 | Carrying the U. S. Mail. | | |
| 3108 | Speeches by Lincoln. | | |
| 3005 | Enoch Arden. | | |
| 3101 | Sohrab and Rustum. | | |
| 3042 | Navigating the Air—Electric Rail-
ways. | | |
| 3107 | Famous Poems of Famous Poets—
Eighth Grade. | | |

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