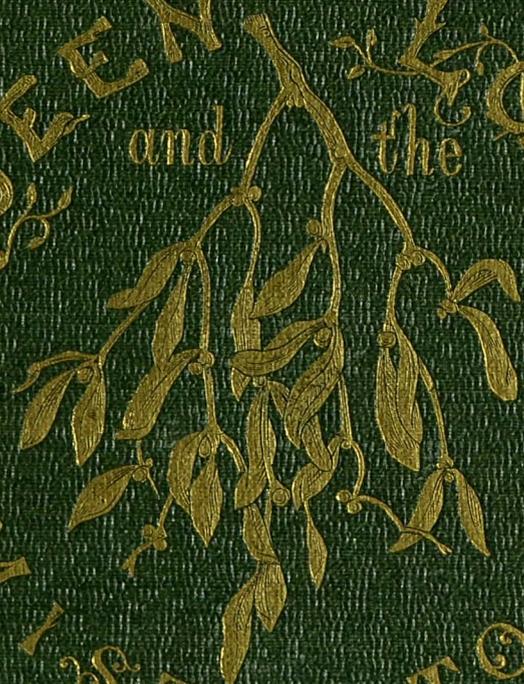


QUEEN and the ROYAL
MISTLETOE





O. Harding
Bath



Sleeping Minnie.



QUEEN LÆTA and the MISTLETOE

A
FAIRY RHYME
for the

FIRE SIDE



Thus and thus!



Halse

QUEEN LÆTA
AND
THE MISTLETOE.

A Fairy Rhyme for the Fireside.

BY GEORGE HALSE.

With Illustrations on Steel by the Author.



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INTRODUCTORY.

“PHEW-EW! How the wind whistles to-night!” exclaimed Mr. Doughty, addressing his son and daughter, as he chafed his hands before the fire on an evening towards the close of the year. “How it blows! Most assuredly, Christmas is coming, children, Christmas is coming!”

“Brave old Christmas! with his frosts and his snows!” cried his son, looking up from his book.

“Merry Christmas! with his holly and his ever-green,” rejoined Amy, rising from her chair, and passing her arm gaily through her father’s.

“And his Mistletoe?” added Mr. Doughty, inquiringly,—“Eh, Puss?”

“I did not say ‘*Mistletoe!*’” retorted Amy, quickly.

“But you *looked* ‘*Mistletoe,*’” said her father, with a merry twinkle of his eye; “for I caught you furtively glancing upwards. There, don’t toss your head, rebellious child!” And Mr. Doughty impressed a kiss upon his daughter’s glowing cheek.

“Well, if you will have it so, Papa, I confess I *love* the Mistletoe,” she answered, after a pause; “I love it for its grace, and for its green leaf, as it were, out of season; I love it, too, for its associations.”

“Associations! Ah!” replied Mr. Doughty, railingly. “Then my random shot has hit the mark! And, pray, with what is the Mistletoe associated in your mind?”

“Doubtless with that little affair of New Year’s Eve last,” interposed Frank, “when Cousin Gabriel—”

“Hush! Frank, for shame!” cried Amy, clapping her hand to her brother’s mouth. “I should hardly have expected you to array yourself with Papa against me. Fie! I mean, of course, its associations with olden

times; for you know very well that the Druids held the Mistletoe in high veneration."

"Then the Druids were merrier dogs than I took them to be, if they were in the habit of practising such stratagems upon the young ladies of the period," answered Frank, dryly. "For my part, I respect a birch-broom quite as much as the Mistletoe; indeed, I never could see much difference between them."

"You are determined to misinterpret me, Sir, I'll therefore say no more about the Druids; but I cannot help expressing my surprise at your want of poetical interest in the Mistletoe. I, on the contrary, never could divest my mind of the idea that charms hang about this curious plant."

"Charms!" ejaculated Mr. Doughty, with irony. "What does your sister allude to now, Frank?"

"I can only suppose she still refers to last New Year's Eve, when Cousin Ga——"

"Frank! you are absolutely cruel to me this evening, and bent upon tripping me up. Perhaps I had better

say at once, plainly and emphatically, that I believe *Fairies* have a good deal to do with the Mistletoe. There—FAIRIES!”

Mr. Doughty gazed at his daughter with a comical expression of mingled surprise and pity; for he was one of your plain, practical men, whose ideas were facts, and whose facts were slow, solid convictions. ‘Fairies,’ forsooth! He had never speculated in Fairies; had not even heard the word since his nursery days and ‘Cinderella.’ Fairies! True, as a City man, he had indeed been occasionally involved in airy nothings. There were the Rip-Myth Iron Mines, in Wales; and, again, his interest in the Hotch-Potch and Crankie Railway, in the North,—both creations of inventive minds; then, again, there was that famous piece of villany, the Skittish Bank, with branches everywhere, root nowhere, and fruit (as regards shareholders) also in the vocative case. But Fairies! Bah! So Mr. Doughty’s jocosity at his daughter’s expense gave way to paternal anxiety for the health and balance of her mind.

His first impulse was to crush the dangerous notion in the bud, with "*Let me see a fairy, and I'll believe in it.*" But what was the use of dealing a blow at a butterfly? Besides, these ideas were often peculiar to childhood and youth (like the measles), and served as safety-valves against worse disorders; so Mr. Doughty determined to deal tenderly with Amy's distemper, contenting himself with—"Fairies, ay! and pray what are your fairies like, Mademoiselle?"

"That depends upon the mind that conceives them," answered Amy; "there is no orthodox recipe for fairies that I'm aware of. Frank, describe to Papa the fairies which *your* 'imagination bodies forth.'"

Now, Amy knew that Frank's mind had the same poetical twist as her own; moreover, it was an opportunity for snug, quiet reprisals for his ungallant conduct; she therefore very adroitly drew him into the question.

At any other time Frank would have been ashamed or afraid to acknowledge a leaning in a direction which

found little favour in the eyes of his worthy Sire ; but Amy's intrepidity was a kind of challenge to him, so without flinching he gave his adhesion to her proposition regarding fairies in general, and mistletoe fairies in particular.

Mr. Doughty's forbearance towards Amy hardly extended to his son ; but Amy's merry laugh at his manifest concern warded off the rising rebuke, and he good-humouredly replied,

“ Ah, well ; I'm afraid you'll never take after your old father, Frank ; ”—and Mr. Doughty relapsed into the ‘ Times.’

Not so, Frank and Amy. The conversation had awakened in both new and fascinating ideas. Being equally ardent and imaginative, the subject of the Mistletoe was presented to their minds at a moment when it was not likely to pass unheeded.

Had the Mistletoe received due attention at the hands of poet, poetaster, or poetitoe ? No. Here was a thing of universal favour, of eccentric growth ; femi-

nine in its grace and frailty, masculine in its powers of endurance; and, above all, there was a certain interesting custom in vogue amongst us at Christmas time, (Amy thought of Gabriel)—in vogue all the year round amongst the Druids, Frank insisted; and it bore a white berry,—emblem of all kinds of pretty things. How was it that such a fruitful subject for poetical treatment had not been used and exhausted, like almost every other visible or conceivable thing? Most assuredly the Mistletoe had been cruelly neglected.

The subject was too tempting for the poetical infirmities of Frank and Amy to be resisted. They discussed it eagerly, while Mr. Doughty was deep in the abstract question of the Peace and Russian hides. Their fancy once called into play, their canvas was soon crowded with images. Shall they fuse their ideas? Christmas is coming; the Mistletoe is coming; (Gabriel is coming.) Shall they unite their several conceptions and make a book,—a fact for Papa (and a fiction for Gabriel)? Agreed.

Some few weeks afterwards, as the first mantle of snow covered the earth, and the herald blasts of winter whistled through the bare trees, Mr. Doughty was again at the fireside, reading facts, and his son and daughter fiction.

“Phew! how it blows again! Verily, winter is upon us, children, winter is upon us! By the way, where are your fairies now, Amy? I sincerely hope they’re housed!” and Mr. Doughty laughed maliciously.

“Yes,” replied Frank, quietly, “they’re comfortably housed, Pater, here in my portfolio,—and not bad quarters either!” and he drew forth a goodly parcel. “Amy and I have trapped the fairies for your especial delectation; and, if quite agreeable to you, we purpose putting them through their paces this very evening.”

Mr. Doughty was so utterly puzzled at Frank’s retort, backed as it was by the production of a copious manuscript, that he remained speechless, looking over his spectacles at his son with the kind of curiosity

mixed with compassion that he would have felt in viewing a dangerous lunatic. Amy saw their advantage.

“You see your random shot has again hit the mark, dear Papa,” said she coquettishly. “You’re quite a wizard! To think that you should have penetrated our little secret, and discovered that Frank and I have ‘housed’ the fairies! Why, ’tis as good as spirit-rapping!”

“At all events,” added Frank, “it is a clear case of table-turning, at your expense, Pater; and there is no alternative for you but to make a virtue of necessity, and listen to the spirits which you unwittingly conjured up.”

Mr. Doughty went through a perfect little pantomime, offering Amy his watch, his purse, his coat—anything rather than his ears. Fairies, indeed! fiddlesticks! but he expostulated in vain. Amy must and will have his ears: he shall be the Public. He may cut it up, root and branch,—they’re callous, dead to shame,

reckless of consequences, read it they will, instead of an article on the Budget from the 'Quarterly.'

Mr. Doughty good-humouredly surrenders himself into the victorious hands of his daughter, who consigns him to his easy chair, and takes her seat by his side, while Frank proceeds at once to read the following rhyme for New Year's Eve :

Queen Læta and the Wistletoe.

QUEEN LÆTA

AND

THE MISTLETOE.



“By the sunshine of the hearth,
And the Love that gives it birth ;—
By the icicles and snow ;—
By the beaded Mistletoe ;—
By December’s passing bell,
Thus and thus I wind a spell !
—Here shall very Gladness dwell !”

BAR OUT THE WINTER ! Set the curtains free,
And bring the kingliest log to crown the blaze.
Pile high ! for ’tis the last the year shall see ;
Pile high ! and watch the fiery-cloven maze,
Till the wished chime upon the midnight swell,
The New Year’s welcome, and the Old Year’s knell !

The dial's hand moves stealthily along,
 And, hark! the very breezes sigh a dirge,
 The mind oppressing; while reflections throng,
 Of joys—of life—thus narrowed to the verge,
 And passing swiftly hence.—Harsh Truth, away!
 And, gentlest FANCY, aid a roundelay!

Telling of yonder home-loved Mistletoe,—
 Mirth's harbinger on revel winter nights;—
 Of wondrous doings years and years ago,
 And gentle lovers' stolen sweet delights;—
 And what a Fairy did, and when, and why,
 With all the consequences by-and-by.

~~~~~

'Twas NEW YEAR'S EVE, and the broad firelight shone  
 Level upon a comely knot of friends;  
 The dance was over, and the feast was done,—  
 For night advances and the revel ends.  
 'Tis wishing-time, and Fortune favours those  
 Who wish in secret ere the vigil close.

Love laughed in many a dimpled rosy cheek,  
His keenest shafts were shot from brightest eyes ;  
And all the thousand arts which can bespeak  
The passion which, created, never dies,  
Had utterance there ; and many a whispered vow  
Pleaded a secret hope, untold till now.

Yet, where the hearth so tranquil and secure  
That Sorrow will not dare to venture in ?  
Amid that careless throng two hearts endure  
Pangs that defy the ease they strive to win.  
The feeble laugh—the effort to be gay—  
Betrays the grief they cannot chase away.

This youth has, on a point of classic lore,  
In academic contest, met defeat.  
His one ambition, foiled, allures no more ;  
No more makes Hope the midnight labour sweet :  
A rival bears the hard disputed prize,  
And with it life's one aspiration dies.

A maiden too sits solitary there,  
Her heart fixed on a joy for ever gone ;  
But hers is not the grief of a despair ;  
Some sorrows have no language,—hers is one—  
It is the Orphan's. They have borne to earth  
That loved and loving one who gave her birth.

Mutely the watchers scan the embers' glow,  
Till Silence tempts the wary Cricket forth ;  
A Beetle soon, with halting step and slow,  
Emerges from a fissure by the hearth ;  
A Mouse, too, flits across their very feet,  
But, sighting Puss, he beats a swift retreat.

The watchers heed them not. With vacant eye,  
Won to the quaint devices in the fire,  
They muse with one accord—yet know not why—  
On joys to which their wildest hopes aspire.  
Another object still escapes their sight,  
*A bough is hanging overhead that night !*

(For little MINNIE, tripping o'er the lea

At morn, and through the coppice and the snow,  
Spied a gay sapling on a naked tree,

Beaded and green,—it was the Mistletoe.  
She coveted the bough—its charm unknown :  
A leap—the fragile trophy is her own !

She twined it round her bonnet, and away

Over the frosty glebe the maiden sped ;  
Then home, and by-and-by, in wanton play,  
She flung the slighted chaplet overhead,  
When, as it chanced, a splinter in the roof  
Caught the light bough, and held it high aloof.)

The watchers saw it not, but wishes made,

And then unwished their wishes, while a band  
Of Spirits did their very hearth invade ;

Yea, danced a measure there, and, hand in hand,  
Compassed their ankles round, or lightly slid  
Down soft prunella shoon, or polished kid.

These fairies were not such as sing and sleep  
Whole days in kingcups and the lily-bell;—  
That chase the labouring honey-bee, or keep  
Guard over dewdrops in the shady dell;—  
That smooth the ruffled feathers in the breast  
Of their companion, Robin, gaily drest;—

Nor like those fays that watch by fountain-side;—  
Nor those that revel on a moonlight night,  
Dancing round mushrooms;—nor like those that ride  
On a bat's woolly back;—nor those that fright  
Bewildered butterflies from underneath  
Dock-leaves far spreading, or the shadowy heath;—

Nor such as gem the spider's web with dew,  
And guide to fertile spots the feathered seeds;—  
Nor those whose task 'tis nightly to renew  
The faded verdure of the pasture meads,  
And build again the fungus, white or dun,  
Between the setting and the rising sun.

These were the genial spirits of the Hearth,  
Wakeful and watchful, consecrate to home ;  
The harbingers of concord and of mirth ;  
Endowed with wings, and yet forbid to roam.  
—If they neglect their trust, and take to flight,  
Their wings may on the instant fade outright !

For in this rigorous, iron world of ours,  
Gladness and Good, alas ! are transient things ;  
So 'twas decreed by higher fairy powers,  
To charm the spirits' light, uncertain wings,—  
Wings that so often tempted them to stray,  
And at a breath bear Happiness away.

\* \* \* \* \*

The moon is high, and Darkness from her gaze  
Crouches away to pits and antres void ;  
While Frost with his fantastic art arrays  
The plant which he has ruthlessly destroyed ;  
And the rough winds that scourge the wold appear  
To howl the requiem of the dying Year.

Hark! a voice thrills the fairies with delight!

'Tis LÆTA's—'tis the Queen, who, self-sustained,  
Floats like a lovely vision into sight,

And onward, onward, till the hearth is gained;  
When presently, in sweetest tones of song,  
Thus she addresses the expectant throng:—

“ My minions, grace and airy pure delights

Be yours! On kindly errand bound,

We compass round

With our thrice-hallowed rite

This favoured hearth, on this auspicious night!

Your daily mission is to thwart the schemes

Of Ill or Harm

That aye perplex the path of youth and love

With dire alarm;

'Tis yours to catch and keep the scanty gleams

Of sunshine as they shimmer from above;

To chase Regret,

And soothe the fret

'That tortures Life's first dreams ;  
      'Tis yours to speed,  
      Or stay, if need,  
Those moments,—ah how sluggish !—ah how fleet !  
      When lovers wait,—when lovers meet.  
'Tis yours to wipe away the maiden's tears,  
And waft afar the youth's heart-laden sighs,  
      When favours go amiss, and fears  
      And doubts arise,  
Darkening their little world's unclouded skies ;  
And from the hearth to keep those shocks away  
Which may, alas ! beset a later day.

“Spirits ! beyond all this, I have a rare  
      And special project of delight  
For these assembled mortals, unaware  
      That Lœta visits them to-night !  
For round about this hearth I find  
Congenial beings, heart and mind,  
—Fit subjects for our friendly rite.

Therefore, ere Time fulfil his round,  
And ere the noisy midnight sound,  
    Their hearts shall own a new delight,  
Their joy with other joy be crowned !

    While those in sadness  
    Shall yield to Læta's healing power ;  
    And ere the middle hour  
    Sadness shall turn to Gladness,  
    And Sorrow fade away,  
As darkness flies at the approach of day !”

The fairies then are ranged on either side,  
    For each one has to play a special part :  
These o'er the graces of the form preside,  
    Those watch the subtler graces of the heart.  
A tiptoe they await the Queen's commands,  
And on a given signal all join hands.

    “Spirits of rarest essence ! overhead  
There hangs a bough, a green and jewell'd bough ;

Here lies the berry which it shed,—  
A berry of unsullied shell,  
The choicest of the cluster whence it fell!  
Spirits! this plant hath seemed till now  
Like any other common bough:  
This morn it grew, despite the frost and snow,  
In a secluded dell. A child,  
By Sin or Sorrow undefiled,  
Snatched from the foster-tree the bough,  
And flung it where you see it now.  
— The why and wherefore would ye know?  
Then list! Thus grew the earthless Mistletoe:—

'Twas long ago; one clear and stilly night,  
There came upon a mission through the air  
A Spirit winged. By chance she did alight  
Upon an agèd oak, to rest her there;  
For she had journeyed from a far-off clime,  
All golden in the wealth of sickle-time.

She was the SPIRIT OF GROWTH,—upon her way  
To meet the SPRING upon a sea-girt isle :  
Her journey thither through the WINTER lay ;  
And there it was the Spirit paused awhile,  
And sorrowed to behold the earth so bare,  
For not a leaf or blade of grass was there !

“ How welcome here would be a spray of green,  
To kindle gladness in the heart of man,  
And lend a leafy promise to the scene  
Till Spring ! ” As thus her meditations ran,  
The Spirit, from her bosom, teeming life,  
Drew forth a germ, with future promise rife.

“ Take this into thy keeping, brave old tree ;  
And thou, despite the killing frost and snow,  
Shalt nurture it, and I will nurture thee,  
Till thou outlive all other trees that grow !  
Nay, thrice a hundred winters more, old oak,  
Shall crown thee ere thou yield to mortal stroke !

“ And when thy hoary honours kiss the earth,  
A second epoch—glorious as the first—  
Shall dawn upon thee : thou shalt be, thenceforth,  
The bulwark of the isle where thou wert nurst,  
And many generations pass away  
Ere thy stout heart shall crumble in decay !

“ Grow, favoured germ ! and cheer the wasted land,  
Till thou, perchance, art culled upon a day  
And carried hence ; and if it be a hand  
Unknown to Sin that beareth thee away,  
From that time be thy spotless fruit of snow  
The source of many a rare delight below !”

The Spirit then pursued her onward flight,  
While the frail germ took root, and grew, and grew.  
In vain the bleak winds and the frosty blight,  
A bough, with jewel-berries, sprung to view ;  
And while all verdure perished and decayed,  
Its oak-protected leaf rejoiced the glade.

Spirits and Graces! denizens of air!

Light as Fancy, and as rare!

A mortal hath begun the task,  
And, as I told ye, snatched the bough  
Which overhead is hanging now.

Propitious Chance! I only ask  
That what a child so well began  
May not be marred while we are bent  
Upon the full accomplishment  
Of blessings yet undreamed by man.

Fairies! if ye this night be true,  
Gladness shall reign the whole year through;  
These hearts shall be as strange to care  
As ye are now, and ever were.  
This hearth shall be a sacred spot,  
Where Guile and Sorrow venture not.  
No murmur shall be uttered here;

No heart-ache sigh escape ; no tear ;  
    No cruel word  
    Be breathed or heard  
Throughout the livelong coming year,  
    If ye be true and faithful found  
This night, and pass not the appointed bound !

    Within this ivory berry lies  
The charm from which great issues shall arise.  
    I therefore do command—appoint—  
That with its precious juice ye straight anoint  
    Each loving maiden's lip !  
Fetch therefore each her brush of thistle-down,  
    Caught floating on the perfumed summer air,  
And spotless as the snow on mountain crown ;  
    Then three times dip  
    Its feathery tip  
    Into the charm'd juice with care,  
And with it quickly moisten rosy lip !  
    But, oh, beware, beware !

I saw just now pass by a thing  
 Of ugly and portentous wing.  
 Alas! I know the creature well:  
 'Tis KAKOS, the Obstructor fell!  
 He watches to perplex,—betray.

Beware! Beware!

For potent charms are in the air!

I say again, if ye be true,  
 Gladness shall live the whole year through;  
 But if ye for an instant stray,  
 Ye bear the bless'd boon away!  
 Anoint no lover with the juice,  
 Lest misadventure ye produce;  
 And quit not for a moment's space  
 Your charge, lest evil seize your place.

Away! . . . . .

At the same instant thou, swift-winged IDEA,  
 Each loving youth search out, and, soft as air,

Stealing into the hollow of his ear,  
Thus whisper there ;  
And ere thou canst depart  
Thou'lt hear the rapid throbbing of his heart :—

‘ Watcher of yon fitful light,  
Thou, at witching hour to-night,  
Wilt surely claim a sweet delight,  
True lovers’ due ;  
Thy doubts dismiss,—thy fears allay,  
Thy loved one will not say thee ‘*Nay*,’  
For this is lovers’ holiday,

Where hearts be true.

The hour shall strike, and then, eftsoon,  
Or e’er a cloud hath crossed the moon,  
Thou mayest snatch the honeyed boon,  
Nor the deed rue ;—

For spirits have busied them, and left  
Thy neighbour’s lips ripe for the theft ;  
Snatch boldly ! gentle be, and deft.

Adieu ! adieu !’

Thus breathe into the faltering Lover's ear,  
And thus anoint the Maiden sitting near. . . .

But, ah! I do descry  
Within this company  
Those upon whom such charm would surely fail!

And why?  
Sorrow without measure  
Hath bowed to earth,  
And crushed the sense of pleasure  
With cruel pressure,  
And who shall give the dead sense a new birth?

I! Læta, I!  
Yonder a maiden grieves, and there  
A youth is sunken in despair.  
Come, HOPE, here let thy radiance shine,  
Here let thy kindling voice be heard,  
And to the mourning heart thy word  
Thus breathe benign:—





"Dark Enchantress, fly!"

‘ Be this breast of Sadness eased,  
From its leaden thrall released ;  
    —Pensive, moody Sorrow, fly !  
Spirits from a brighter sphere  
On thy sickly track appear,  
    Therefore, thou with sullen eye,  
    Sorrow, dark enchantress, fly !

Mourner for ambition thwarted !  
Mourner for a love departed !  
Near ye beats a heart is born  
To replace the joy ye mourn,—  
    Youth regretful ! Maid forlorn !  
Youth ! who griev’st a prize denied thee,  
Richer prize is here beside thee !  
Maid ! of kindred desolated,  
Here it may be recreated ;  
    So it shall be—it is fated !  
Midnight comes : and ’mid the clashing,  
And the chiming, and the flashing,  
Hope shall pierce with sudden gleam,  
Ye shall wake as from a dream,—  
    Joy shall follow pain supreme.

Midnight comes: and ye in sorrow  
 Shall forget your pangs tomorrow;  
 Eyes and hearts which bleed apart,  
 Shall to sudden contact start,—  
     Eye to eye, and heart to heart!

Henceforth be of Sadness eased,  
 From its cruel thrall released;  
     —Pensive, moody Sorrow, fly!  
 Gladness, born in brighter spheres,  
 On thy sickly track appears,  
     Therefore, thou with vacant eye,  
     Sorrow, dark enchantress, fly!

Thus, Spirits, to your several tasks begone!

The issue shall be seen anon.

Away! . . .

Yet, stay—

In yonder glimmer I descry  
 A mortal pledging deep the festive cup;  
 Behold already the carnation dye,—  
     The blood-shot eye!

Shall he defeat  
With sottish riot or unjoyous mirth,  
Our purpose sweet?  
No! be his eyes in stupor seal'd up!  
—Unworthy guest at Lœta's hearth.  
Thus write upon his brow,  
OBLIVION, thou:—

'SLEEP, leaden Sleep,  
These eyelids keep,  
These senses steep in blackest night;  
Permit no dream,  
No starry gleam  
To lend its peaceful beam of light!  
But, DARKNESS, hold  
In triple fold  
And gloom untold this throbbing sense;—  
Sweet EASE, away,  
Nor gently sway  
This riot-giddy clay.—Hence! hence!'

She scarcely ended ere Oblivion sped

Like a swift shadow o'er the reveller's eyes ;

The word is writ, and straightway droops his head ;

His tongue its office instantly denies ;

He folds his arms upon his heaving breast,

And Stupor yields him to uneasy rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

The better-missioned fairies are, meanwhile,

At work. With brush held at the finger-tip,

Perched in the dimpled corner of a smile,

They paint in turn each maiden's rosy lip :

No easy task ! for oft a wayward pout

Would tumble half-a-dozen of them out !

But watch ! Upon a secret mission sent,

A bright and hooded fairy hovers by ;

And as the tincture to the lips is lent,

She takes her veil of warm and rosy dye,

And spreads it on each cheek with pious care,

Leaving the blush of INNOCENCY there !

Now, if it chanced one fairy's task was done,  
She straightway flitted to a neighbouring pair  
Of maiden lips, to aid the sister one,  
Less active than herself in such affair.  
So far, so good; until they reach, forsooth,  
A face, nor know if it be maid or youth.

There is, 'tis true, the maiden's fair, round chin;  
The eyes are closed, fast, fast; but yet the cheeks  
Are not so smooth,—at least, they're dimpled in,—  
And such a brow as that a boy bespeaks.  
The fairies are at fault, all unaware  
That the Obstructing Spirit has been there!

If they should breathe the amatory verse  
In maiden ears!—they tremble at the thought.  
Again, the consequence were even worse  
If on wrong lips the charmed juice be wrought;  
And pass so sweet a face they're well aware  
They dare not,—it might spoil the whole affair!

One dainty fairy, shrewd beyond her size,  
Opines that silken tresses, rich as those,  
Are maiden attributes ; another tries  
Conclusions with her bearing on the nose,  
And wishes she may never more know joy,  
If that bold feature doesn't mark a boy !

Who shall decide when fairies disagree ?  
The question unresolved, some disappear  
And paint the sleeper's lips, whiche'er it be,  
And others breathe the verse into the ear ;  
Whilst little MINNIE, fairly worn with play,  
Heavily sleeps the witching night away !

Thus on the Spirits pass. Swift-winged Idea,  
Unerring, doth her delicate behest ;  
While Hope the mourners seeks, and, drawing near,  
Her solace breathes into each troubled breast.  
CARE hears, and spreads her sable wings for flight,  
For, owl-like, she abhors the dawn of light.





H. B. C.

*Upward she wends.*

Thus on they pass.—Yet lingers one behind,  
While her companions to their duties prest,—  
A fairy, doubtless, of inquiring mind,  
And gifted with research beyond the rest ;  
She longs to see the sapling, sprung of oak,  
Which is to do so much for mortal folk.

Upward she wends, and, in a moment's space,  
Attains the bough of such mysterious birth ;  
But finds, at last, 'tis wondrous commonplace,  
And turns to join her fellows on the hearth.  
But, ah ! her wings are gone ! and she shall soar  
With sister-spirits never, never more !

And then she felt that she had been betrayed,  
And peered aghast into the depth profound ;  
No power at hand to rescue or to aid,  
And twenty mortal feet above the ground !  
She dares not leap ;—a fall from such a height  
Had dashed her to a thousand rays of light !

She turned and saw, asquint in hideous glee,  
The fell Obstructor crouched. She shrunk away,  
Loathing the sight, and gladly would she flee,  
When thus the elfin cried :—“Thou needs must stay,  
O bright creation ! for the power of flight  
Is vanished with thy other gifts to-night !

“Thy charm is gone for ever ! When I saw  
Ye linkèd Graces like a glory shine  
Upon this hearth, I feared,—I stood in awe,  
Lest such a power should mar or conquer mine !  
I lured thee ; thou didst stray. Farewell thy plan,—  
I thwart it as I thwart the schemes of man !

“Frail Virtues ! did your Queen indeed believe  
That she could here bestow undying mirth ?  
Did she forget that *I* can also weave,  
And spoil such pretty projects in the birth ?  
For, lo ! though ye were cleverly arrayed,  
Thou, brightest, rarest, at my beck hast strayed !

“ And, now, since thou of virtue art despoiled,  
O Spirit of CONSTANCY, thou may'st away !  
Stript of thy native grace, thy lustre soiled,  
Begone ! . . . Fix here thy kirtle to the spray,  
Unweave the knitted thread, and with the clue  
Straightway thy downward, subtle flight pursue !”

Then the lost Grace snatched off her skirt of rare,  
Ethereal web, and fixed it to the roof ;  
And all unweaving with the nicest care,  
She glided like a moonbeam down the woof,  
And ran to join her sisters at their play,  
When Lœta's voice arrests her by the way :—

“ Unhappy, truant Spirit !  
Hop'st thou mine eye thus boldly to evade ?  
Thy wings are withered,—thou hast disobeyed !  
Lost is the gift thou didst inherit  
But dost no longer merit !  
From fairydom, for thine offence,

Frail, disobedient Spirit,  
 Thou art excluded. Hence !

“Thou forfeitest  
 Thy rare intelligence, thy limnèd grace ;  
 These I efface,—  
 Spirit unblest !  
 And since with spider-art thou didst unknit  
 Thy kirtle, which thou canst not wholly quit,  
 But holdest still the clue,  
 I do assign to thee the Spider’s nature,  
 His form and feature !  
 Wherein thou shalt renew  
 Eternally thy cunning and its rue !  
 Weaving thy fatal thread into a snare  
 To trap the hapless wanderer unaware. . . .  
 Hence ! oh, for ever, hence !  
 Bitter thy doom, but bitter thine offence.  
 I warned thee not to cross the bound,  
 I warned thee of the foes around ;

Alas! that thou,—that even thou,—  
 The fairest daughter of a brighter sphere,  
 O Constancy! shouldst fail me here,  
     As thou dost now!

    Never shall joy  
     Exist unmingled with alloy,  
     —Uncertain at the best!  
 Never shall peace be lasting, for the morrow,  
     Darkling, may bring a sorrow! . . .

    “Farewell, lost Grace,  
     Spirit unblest!  
     I disanoint thee thus,—  
     No longer one of us!  
 Since spider-like thou hast been, such thou art!  
     Henceforward and for ever take, in place  
     Of thine aerial essence, form, and trace,  
 The Spider’s nature. Perish! and depart  
     Thus!—thus!”

The fatal words are breathed. As Læta speaks  
 The fairy's shape dissolves away to air ;  
 And on the spot a little creature takes  
 The pendent thread, and slowly mounts it there,  
 Up to the roof. . . . Since then that fairy-sinner  
 Is called by children little "MONEY-SPINNER."

" Ah me ! alas !

That this should come to pass,  
 When perfect Gladness seemed to be in sight !  
 'Tis thus the brightest things subside to vile  
 At touch of earth, and the Obstructor's guile !  
 'Tis ever so :

When Gladness quits her native realms of light—  
 Realms of unsullied bright—  
 She finds but little fellowship below,  
 Where day, alas ! is but another night !"

And Læta mourned that her benignant scheme  
 Had thus in its perfecting come to nought :

“ Must Gladness still be wanton as a dream,  
    Inconstant, vague, and with illusion fraught?  
Must, then, be lost all echo of the mirth  
Which I to-night invoke upon this hearth?

“ Alas! my vassal spirits, I designed  
    The benison of Gladness, ne'er to die,  
For these true hearts. 'Tis past! Too late I find  
Such gifts are foreign to the human mind,—  
    Foreign to earth,—  
Foreign to man, whose joys take wing and fly!  
    Sorrow must aye succeed to Mirth,  
    Death follow Birth,  
And earth-clouds veil the glories of the sky!

“ Albeit, would I establish here  
    A thing of gladness that shall rarely stray;  
    A kindred, genial thing of earth,  
That still, day after day, year after year,  
    Will bid the hearthside care away,—

The hearthside merriment appear,—  
Memorial of my visit here. . . .

Some earth-born creature must be found,  
And brought within the fairy bound!

“Spirits! methinks that hereabout  
A Mouse, a Beetle, and a Cricket dwell.  
Go, seek them out,  
And greet them well,  
And hither bid them to assist our spell.”

The Spirits to the Beetle first proceed,  
And pray him come and aid the Fairy Queen;  
But from his dark recess he bids them speed,  
And mutters words of venom and of spleen:  
For he hates Gladness as the light of day,  
And tells them they had better flit away.

The Mouse they visit next. He vows his heart

For fun inclined,—but yet he must refuse ;

'Tis supper-time, and he's about to start

For quite another quarter, on a cruise.

Besides, if he may trust his open eyes,

A Kitten, winking, yonder he espies.

Lastly, the Fairies supplicate the Cricket,

Beseeching him to join the mystic rite ;

But he objects to quit his quiet wicket,

His wings, he says, are seldom used for flight ;

And, as to dancing with a frolic fairy,

Though he can jump—his step is aught but airy.

The Fairies vow, upon their bended knees,

That Lœta will not bid him fly or dance ;

Though he at both is skilful, if he please,

For they can see his talents at a glance.

They add, that, by the twinkle of his eye,

They're sure he means to aid them by-and-by.

Crickets are no more proof than mortal men  
Against the flatterer's well-appointed dart.  
He says he really can't be churlish when  
They weep so, for it quite afflicts his heart;—  
Then polishing his eyes with two front knees,  
He says, that they may lead him where they please.

The stolid Beetle sees the joyous throng,  
And mutters hatred upon Cricket kind;  
The Mouse peeps slyly as they pass along,  
And now regrets that he is left behind;  
While the blithe Cricket, fondled and caressed,  
Trips on to Lœta, and is thus addressed:—

“ Cricket, when other neighbours turned away  
In scorn or hate,  
Whom we petitioned here to stray,  
Thou hast not answered ‘*Nay*,’  
Therefore more favoured be thy fate!

The Beetle, in his sooty garb of woe,  
Shall be a hated thing and feared,  
Dull-eyed and bleared,  
Halting and slow ;  
He scorns the proffered Gladness. Be it so !  
The Mouse hath turned a disregarding ear,—  
He likewise shunneth Gladness. Be it so !  
Himself, henceforth, a prey to fear  
Of danger ever near,  
From many a watchful foe,  
Security and peace shall never know !  
But thou, good Cricket, thou  
Waitest on Gladness,—she shall wait on thee !  
Henceforward and for ever be  
A guest familiar where we find thee now !  
While the grim Beetle and the hunted Mouse  
In darkness lurk, or, timid, venture forth,  
Be thou the denizen of every hearth !  
The cause of Lœta evermore espouse,  
And Melancholy into Gladness rouse !

Shrill be thy welcome voice,  
    Heard far and near,  
    Bidding all hearts rejoice !  
And when the sad thy merry carol hear,  
Joy shall return, and Sorrow disappear !”

The Cricket feels a glow about his heart,  
    He feels his tongue inspired by Læta’s sway,  
And, on the instant, pipes with mimic art  
    The burden of a song which floats that way ;  
And “ *cheer-up ! cheer-up ! cheer-up !*” loud and long,  
Is, and shall ever be, the Cricket’s song !

The sorrowing youth and maiden heard the note,  
    And Care of half her rigour was disarmed ;  
The song was shrill,—now near and now remote,  
    Till the roused listeners vowed the place was charmed.  
Meanwhile the Fairy Læta, overhead,  
Waving her hand, thus softly breathing said :—

'By the hour,—the fleeting year ;—  
By the precious name I bear ;—  
By the icicles and snow ;—  
By the beaded Mistletoe ;—  
By December's passing knell,  
Thus and thus I weave a spell !

—Here shall very GLADNESS dwell !

Gentle Spirits, far and near,  
I charge ye to your mission here !  
Fill the breathèd air around,  
Tread and occupy the ground !

Evil Spirits hence, away !  
Shall ye hither dare to stray ?  
No ! Mine influence, like a star,  
Chases Darkness far and far !

Though my purpose to bestow  
On created things below  
Gladness of a brighter sphere  
Fails, from adverse nature here ;

Graces to the home assigned!—  
Graces of the heart and mind!—  
Live ye here, and then shall flow  
Gladness more than I bestow!

Hope and Pity warm the breast;  
Love take shelter here and rest;  
Truth thy bless'd lustre give,  
For in thee the others live;  
Then indeed, though side by side  
Mirth and Sorrow may abide,—  
Though the cherished things of earth  
Perish when of greatest worth,—  
Graces! where ye meet shall flow  
Gladness more than I bestow!

Come then, gentle Spirits, come!  
Cheer the hearth and guard the home;  
Watch the portals of the ear;  
Close the eye when ill is near;—  
But be the lips your chiefest care,  
For the danger lieth *there!*  
If a bitter thought escape,  
Seize! ere words can give it shape;

Bind the monster foot and crown,—  
Bury it a fathom down!  
Then, indeed, shall grow and grow  
Gladness more than I bestow!

By the hour in which I came;  
By the virtue of my name;—  
By the sunshine of the hearth,  
And the Love that gives it birth;—  
By the icicles and snow;—  
By the beaded Mistletoe;—  
By December's passing bell,  
Thus and thus I wind a spell!  
—Here shall very GLADNESS dwell!

This incantation Lœta uttereth,  
And choral voices catch the sweet refrain;  
For, hark! as if with one united breath,  
“GLADNESS!” resoundeth o'er and o'er again!  
The cricket hears it, and his shrill reply  
Startles the watchers musing silently.

Hark ! hark ! the Chimes ! it is the witching hour.

The log burns brightly, 'tis its dying spark,  
And from it flies a bright and burning shower,  
As the mad bells clash to the midnight.—Hark !  
What grateful murmur stills their frantic voice ?  
'Tis Læta's, who, departing, breathes "*Rejoice !*"

And joy indeed is there amongst that throng,  
Grouped underneath the charm'd Mistletoe ;  
For at that word each lover, silent long,  
To impulse yielding, feels his bosom glow,  
And into willing ears (no fault of his !)  
He breathes his vow, and seals it with a kiss !

And there is joy where sorrow was before,  
And hearts pulse into gladness, full and free.  
The Student now upbraids his lot no more ;  
The Orphan maid no more chides destiny ;  
For at the clash their eyes, downcast till now,  
A moment meet, they know not why or how ;

But there the student wins a costlier prize

Than in his visions he had ever known ;  
And in the maiden's soft and kindling eyes

He reads the hope which calls to life his own.  
While the fair orphan wonders by what power  
Love steals into the heart at such an hour !

\* \* \* \* \*

List ! the wind clamours through the opened door,

And lightly flings the Mistletoe to ground.

*“ Be this the type of Gladness evermore !*

*Be honest love beneath its berry crowned !”*

A lover cried, as he the garland saw,

And plaudits rang. THE STOLEN KISS WAS LAW !

From that time ever after spells have clung,

At Yule-tide, to the hallowed Mistletoe ;

From that time ever after, slyly hung,

Pendent o'erhead, with clustering beads of snow,  
The Lover plans some pardoned sweet surprise,  
The Maid askance the treacherous bough espies.

Then wakes the Toper, from enchantment freed,  
His visage throbbing to unwonted flush ;  
But SHAME makes more confusion than the mead,  
And DEGRADATION brings a deeper blush.  
To him alone the chime no gladness brings ;  
He feels no joy, albeit the cricket sings.

How fares young MINNIE ? To her feet she leaps,  
Laughing awake, as from a feigned repose ;  
And, like a wanton fly that pertly peeps  
Into each honeyed chalice, round she goes,  
And kisses she demands, and so they give them ;  
And kisses she must give, and so they have them.

All marvel at the freak ; but toast-and-ale  
Doubtless have wrought upon her sanguine mind,  
For so, in sooth, the double charms prevail,  
That beauty, long unbending, stoops resigned ;  
While the fair child flits like a tipsy bee,  
Giving and taking sweets, from knee to knee.

“ Sister ! ” she cried ; “ oh, I have had a dream :

I saw a crowd of creatures, all with wings,  
About my head ; and, Sister, they did seem  
To whisper in my ear most pretty things !  
I think I hear their loving voices now,—  
They seem to flutter still around my brow.

“ One said, ‘ Fair child ! be evermore a child  
In meekness and in gentleness and truth ;  
Be still, as thou art now, so pure, so mild,  
And Time shall never rob thee of thy youth ! ’  
Another said, ‘ May Care thy bosom spare ! ’  
But, Sister, what is Time ? and what is Care ?

“ Another said, ‘ Sweet sleeper, may the grace  
Of heart and feature which is thine to-day  
Through Sin or Sorrow never lose its trace,  
Or suffer early trial, or decay ! ’  
And then again she said it o’er and o’er ;  
Sister, I never heard these things before !

“ Another whispered, ‘ May thy joyful way  
 Be ever sunned by long-enduring love,  
 As true, as fond, and earnest as to-day ;  
 And Death forbear one friendship to remove !’  
 But what is this the pretty Spirit saith ?  
 What is it, darling Sister,—what is Death ?”

And loving little Minnie clapped her hands  
 With gushing laughters, while the watchers place  
 The chaplet on her brow, and, lo, she stands  
 Embodied happiness and childish grace !  
 . . . Must such bright lineaments of Gladness fade ?  
 Life’s uses such a thing of light o’ershadè ?

\*       \*       \*       \*       \*

And thus the New Year dawned upon the Old,  
 And thus those lovers had their wish, and parted. . . .  
 We too give place, our halting numbers told,  
 To Darkness and the Cricket, merry-hearted,  
 Whose “ *cheer-up ! cheer-up !*” sung with all his might,  
 Makes echo to the pulses of the night.

Frank and Amy looked up to ascertain whether applause or condemnation awaited their essay, when, to their surprise and mortification, they discovered their worthy father in the enjoyment of the most profound slumber. The cessation of Frank's monotonous voice, however, awoke Mr. Doughty, who, perfectly oblivious of the matter in hand, exclaimed, "What, children! not gone to bed yet? Fie! fie! 'Tis past midnight!"

In another moment his recollection returned, and, seeing Frank fold up the MS., he hazarded a jump as to the conclusion of the Poem, and, with the best gravity he could command, said, "Well, I'm truly glad the poor student married the pretty orphan, after all, for I must say their case was one deserving Amy's good auspices. . . . Jupiter! what a noise those horrid crickets are making below to-night! I'll get a bottle of the 'Exterminator' in the morning! If there is one thing

that irritates me more than another, it is the shrill note of those vermin,—a perfect nuisance!”

Frank and Amy, in spite of a sentiment of chagrin at the utter waste of their intellectual labours as regards their father, burst simultaneously into loud laughter.

Mr. Doughty perceived from this that he had not hit the mark this time, at all events; so, without appearing to notice their hilarity, said, “Frank, that latter portion was so highly interesting that I’ll get you to go over it again.”

“Impossible! quite impossible!” cried his daughter, with sudden energy.

“Why?”

“You see, it is past midnight.”

“What has that to do with it, child?”

“The charm has ceased!”

“Then we’ll have it to-morrow, tyrant.”

“No!” replied Frank, closing his portfolio, “I’ll read it again when Christmas comes.”

“When New Year’s Eve comes,” added Amy.

“And the Mistletoe, little shrew?” inquired Mr. Doughty, pinching his daughter’s ear.

“And Cousin Gabriel,” she rejoined, but in such a soft undertone, that the word reached neither her father nor Frank; but the blush that suffused her cheeks would have betrayed her, had she not hastily bade “Good night,” and quitted the room.

The End.

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