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ENGLISH
FAIRY TALES







FRYER.

English Fairy Tales

FROM THE NORTH-COUNTRY.

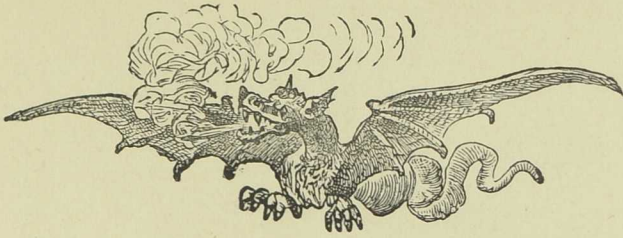


"THE CLUB PURSUED HIM EVERYWHERE, AND CONTINUED TO RAIN
ITS BLOWS." (See page 114.)

English Fairy Tales.]

[*Frontispiece.*

*A remembrance from Dr Alfred C. Fryer
June 1884*



BOOK
OF
English Fairy Tales
FROM THE NORTH-COUNTRY.

BY
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1884.

Dedication

TO

MY YOUNG FRIEND,

JOHN GRATTON BRIGHT,

AND

ALL OTHER GOOD LITTLE MEN,

THIS

Book of English Fairy Tales

IS INSCRIBED.



Preface.

TO MY LITTLE READERS.

MY DEAR YOUNG FRIENDS,

You are all doubtless familiar with the charming fairy tales of Grimm and Andersen ; but perhaps you do not know that your dear native land has a fairy literature of its own, full of beauty and romantic interest. In the belief that you will not despise the offering, but may find herein something worthy of your attention, I have selected a few stories—favourites, all of them, with the boys and girls in the north of England—which I now venture to present to you.

In writing these stories I have not confined myself to any one version, but have gathered my materials from various sources. Among

the wild moors of Yorkshire, on the bleak Northumbrian coast, in the smiling valleys of the Wear and Tees, they had their origin and their early home. They are interesting, because they present pictures of a bygone age, and deal with places that still exist. Bamborough and Dunstanborough Castles yet survive. At Spindleston, near the former, the Dragon's Cave and Trough were, until recently, shown to visitors: they have, alas! been destroyed in making a quarry. At Lambton, eight miles from Durham, a curious conical mound still stands on the north bank of the Wear. It is known as the "Worm" Hill; and a well, about thirty paces distant, which has now disappeared, was called the "Worm" Well. Why, the readers of the Lambton legend will discover for themselves.

A word or two about the Dragon-stories. We need not ask whether they are to be taken in a literal sense; whether, with all their exaggerations, they depict real monsters,—nowadays, perhaps, feebly represented by the water-snakes of South America, or the great sea-serpent itself! A dragon, as you know, was the name given to a fabulous

reptile, something between a crocodile and a snake, which was supposed to haunt tangled forests and undrained swamps. Sometimes it had feet and wings, and was called a "wyvern," or flying dragon; sometimes it breathed smoke and flame from its nostrils, and was called a "fire-drake;" sometimes it crawled serpent-like on the ground, and was known as a "worm." Under all these names it flourishes in the legends of the north-country.

The story of the Spindleston Dragon is very old—much older, probably, than the reign of Henry III., when it is said to have been written in rude rhymes by a shepherd poet of the Cheviots. The version, as we now have it, is certainly more modern.

In connection with the Lambton legend, and the hero's strange vow, it may be noted that nine generations, counting back from a General Lambton, who lived about the end of last century, bring us to Sir John de Lambton, Knight of Rhodes, and, according to the Durham registers, slayer of the worm. In all this period no owner of Lambton Hall died a natural death, as the Sibyl had prophesied.

The Lambton worm finds a curious parallel in the Sockburn dragon. Sockburn is an ancient lordship on the Tees, near Darlington, where the river forms a curve in the shape of a horse-shoe. Sir John Conyers, the lord of the manor, is said to have slain, at a spot called the Greystone, a monstrous worm or serpent. The stratagem by which he overcame the monster is also attributed to the young heir of Lambton, and is described in that legend. The lands of Sockburn, in memory of the exploit, were held by Sir John's descendants on the easy condition of presenting a sword to the Bishop of Durham whenever he came that way. A falchion, of antique shape, affirmed by tradition to be the very blade by which the dragon perished, is still in the keeping of Sir Edward Blackett, the present owner of the estate.

A Scottish legend tells how the Baron of Lariston killed a monstrous dragon at Linton, in Roxburghshire, by thrusting down its extended jaws, with his lance, a peat which had been dipped in tar and set alight.

Apart from their antiquity and romantic interest, these stories are valuable because

they hold up to our admiration the unselfish qualities and heroic actions, which have helped to form the English character. Childe Wynd and the young heir of Lambton are real heroes. They were as skilful as they were brave, and dared more than their fellow-men to free their country from the evils that oppressed it. When they were dead, they were honoured because they had undergone risk and made sacrifices to leave their country better than they had found it. "We call such men" (to quote the words of Charles Kingsley) "heroes in English to this day; and call it a heroic thing to suffer pain and grief that we may do good to our fellow-men. We may all do it, my children, boys and girls alike; for it is easier now than ever, and safer, and the path is more clear."



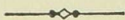
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ENGLISH FAIRY TALES

FROM THE NORTH-COUNTRY.



The Fish and the Ring;

OR,

THE SORCERER KNIGHT AND THE
BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN.

I.

MANY hundred years ago there dwelt in the city of York a very poor man. His home, if that comfortable name could be given to the tumble-down cottage which he occupied with his wife and family, was close to the grey old Minster: so close indeed, that the high walls of that time-honoured church cast a shade, even in the brightest summer day, over the quaint gables and thatched roof of the worthy tradesman's dwelling. For he was a tradesman, this poor man, though in a very small way. In front of his little cottage, under a sloping

penthouse, were a couple of wooden stalls, on which were displayed the few wares that constituted his stock-in-trade. Two oaken benches completed the furniture of what he called his "shop;" and if the shop was small, it must be confessed that the profits were also small; and what was worse, were daily growing smaller.

But while his profits were diminishing his family was increasing; and if he had only had a prospect of filling the little mouths that looked to him for their daily food, our poor tradesman would have been quite contented; for he loved little children, and held the opinion that they were real "blessings from the Lord." Alas, this was not always the case. At the time when our story commences he had already (speaking for a poor man) a pretty large family to take care of. Three little girls and two fine boys called him father; and now, in the hard winter season, when bread was dear and money scarce, another little daughter had been born to him—another little mouth to feed and body to clothe. Poor man, he was sorely perplexed and almost at his wits' end, when one day his wife going out left him in charge of the

chubby little babe scarce two months old. He brought it into the dingy shop and laid it down upon the wooden counter. Tears filled his eyes and rolled slowly down his cheeks as he gazed on the sleeping child; and he groaned deeply; for he marvelled much how he would ever be able to support a sixth child,—tiny mite as it was. The struggle had been hard enough before, God knew (so his thoughts ran); but now,—what should he do? what would become of the poor babe?

At this moment, while the poor man's heart was troubled with these sad reflections, a knight, clad in shining armour, which was covered with a rich velvet cloak, and riding on a magnificent coal-black charger, turned the corner of the narrow street. In face and figure this knight was what is termed a fine-looking man; but there was a sneer on the thin lips, and a sinister gleam in the dark eyes, and a false ring in the smooth voice which made him be trusted by few, though he was feared by many. Our poor tradesman, however, was too simple, and, besides, too absorbed in his own grief to observe very closely; and when the handsome stranger drew rein in front of the

shop, and bending down inquired in soft and courteous tones what his sorrow was, he only thought it very kind of the finely-dressed knight to sympathize with one so far beneath him in rank. Drying his tears and bowing low he pointed to the babe, which was sleeping as soundly as if the hard wooden counter had been a couch of down, and began to tell the story of his troubles.

Now this knight was a cunning wizard, and in the Book of Fate which he possessed, he had read how a daughter would be born to a humble shopkeeper of York, and how this girl, when she grew up, would marry his only son. When the wicked knight heard this he frowned, and his cheeks grew pale with anger at the thought that a poor man's child should ever be the bride of his son. He bethought himself of a plan to prevent it; and therefore it was that on this day he rode past the tradesman's shop, and stopped as if by chance to speak feigned words of sympathy.

When the knight had heard the poor man's story he pretended to think for a few minutes, and then said, "My friend, you are poor, and have already as large a family as you can well

support. I have no child, and am very rich. Give me, therefore, this babe, and I will adopt it as my own and leave it all my riches when I die."

The poor tradesman's heart leaped for joy on hearing this generous offer: though in the midst of his delight he felt a pang of sorrow at parting with the babe, and wondered what his wife would say when she returned. But he did not hesitate long. Giving the little innocent one last fond kiss he placed it tenderly in the stranger's arms and breathed a blessing over it. Then he watched the knight ride away, and turned into his shop with a lighter heart than he had had for many a day.

Meanwhile the crafty sorcerer rode on, his heart full of hatred to the helpless babe which he bore before him on the saddle, hidden by his long velvet cloak. Past the grey walls of the old Minster, and the towering ramparts of the Castle, through the narrow streets and out at the Fishergate Bar he rode. When he was clear of the town he struck spurs into his horse's flanks and dashed like an arrow along a path which followed the windings of the Ouse. The gentle breath of the south wind fanned

his hot brow ; but he felt it not, for a cruel thought had suddenly filled his soul. Halting at last at a lonely spot beside the margin of the river, and springing from his saddle he grasped the poor babe and flung it far out into the middle of the stream. There was no human eye to behold the deed ; no sound to be heard but the sighing of the wind and the sharp rustle of the pine sprays as they nodded to and fro. Without staying even to look round, he remounted and rode away as fast as his steed could gallop. But in his bosom he bore a conscience blacker than the darkness around him ; knowing that from that night forth he was a murderer—a murderer, at least, in intention.

The poor babe, however, which after one sharp cry floated silently down the current like a drifting water-lily, upborne by its buoyant drapery, was not destined thus to perish. Perhaps the kind hands of the good river fairies held the little head above the dark green water. Onward it floated past the tall pines and ferny banks, and waving grasses where the night wind whispered. The moonbeams fell on the sweet innocent face, kissing the rosy lips,

and at last the babe was stranded on a strip of meadow land, where the trembling willows were mirrored in the slowly moving current. Then the child, awaking as from a happy dream, in which it had been lulled by fairy music breathed from pearly shells, cried in a feeble voice. The cry reached the ears of a fisherman who had come to the river bank to visit his eel-traps; and gently raising the babe in his strong arms, as a shepherd would lift a tender lamb, he bore it home to his good wife.

II.

Fifteen long years came and went. For fifteen springs the primroses and daffodils brightened the banks of the deep-flowing Ouse; for fifteen summers the dragon-flies sported above its placid surface; the chill breezes of fifteen autumns stripped the hedgerows of their crimson and yellow leaves; and the snows of fifteen winters whitened the broad meadows. During all this time the little waif which had been cast ashore at the fisherman's feet dwelt with her preserver

and his wife, and grew up to be a fair and winsome maiden.

One bright April morn the notes of a silver bugle echoed down the peaceful valley. Ere the sound died away a gallant band swept along the river bank, and drew rein before the honeysuckled porch of the fisherman's cottage. Among the company was the sorcerer-knight, whom we last saw as he fled, fifteen years before, from the scene of his crime. The fisherman knelt on one knee, and offered to supply them with the best he had. Beside him stood the maiden, holding a platter heaped with the fish whose scales glittered like gold in the sunshine, which her adopted father had caught that morning. All the company were struck with her exceeding beauty, and as they rode away they talked of nothing else, saying that such charms should win her a husband above the humble rank in which she was born. The sorcerer-knight laughed inwardly; he knew he had only to search in the Book of Fate, and therein he would learn who was to be the husband of the beautiful maiden. When he read, however, in its mystic pages, he dis-

covered that she was no other than the child he had cast into the Ouse fifteen years before. Moreover, it was still written in the book that she should be his son's bride. "This may not be," he muttered; "a girl of low birth is no fitting match for the heir of my name and wealth. She has escaped me once; she will not escape me a second time."

A few days later the wily knight returned, and asked the good fisherman if his daughter might bear a letter of great importance from him to his brother, who dwelt at Scarborough by the sea, and to whom his son was then paying a visit. The fisherman dared not refuse the request; and the cruel knight wrote on a slip of parchment: "Dear brother,—Take the bearer of this and put her to death immediately." Then he sealed the letter and gave it to the girl, who at once set out upon her journey. The way was long, the roads rough; and when night fell she took shelter at a wayside inn.

Now it chanced on this very night, when everybody was asleep, that a robber broke into the little hostelry. He crept softly from

room to room, seeking for plunder. At last he entered the chamber where the maiden was sleeping, and looking into her purse discovered the letter. He opened it, and by the light of a lantern which he carried read its contents. Then he looked upon the beautiful features of the sleeping girl, and though he was a robber, his heart was full of pity for her. "How sad it is," he said to himself, "that so beautiful and innocent a damsel should be the bearer of her own death-warrant. There is some treachery here. Methinks the owner of so sweet a face deserves a better fate." Then, taking a pen and ink-horn from his girdle, and tearing the parchment in halves, he wrote another note, as if it came from the wicked knight, requesting that the beautiful damsel who was the bearer might be honourably entertained and married to his son. The robber, having sealed up the note, put it back into the girl's purse, where he had found it, and went away quietly, taking nothing with him.

The next morning, when the sun shone out brightly, the maiden proceeded on her way, unconscious of what had happened while she

was asleep. At the end of her journey the knight's brother, after reading the letter, made her welcome, and gave instant orders for the celebration of her marriage with his nephew. You may be sure the young squire made no objections, for he lost his heart to the beautiful maiden as soon as he saw her; while she, on her part, loved him quite as much. Merrily the bells rang out, and gay and light were the hearts of all the company who were invited to wish joy and prosperity to the fair young bride and her gallant husband.

Some weeks later the sorcerer-knight arrived at Scarborough, and you may imagine his rage, though he was cunning enough to conceal it. But in secret he knit his brows and bit his lips with anger and perplexity, when he found his plan to frustrate the decree of fate defeated for the second time. "The prophecy has come to pass," he said to himself, "but I will bide my time. It will go hard, but I will yet find means to bring this wretched marriage to nothing." So, smiling on the youthful couple, he waited patiently for a chance to carry out his wicked designs.

One evening he contrived to entice the

young bride beyond the castle gates. "Now I have you in my power at last," he hissed between his clenched teeth; and grasping the frightened girl by her long flaxen hair he dragged her to a steep rock which overhung the sandy shore. His intention was to slay her and cast the body down upon the beach below, where the rising tide would soon carry it away and remove all traces of the crime. The moon shone out suddenly from behind the dark clouds as the cruel knight drew his dagger and raised his arm to deal the fatal blow. Not a shriek escaped the pale lips of the young bride, but she prayed earnestly that he would spare her life. At last the knight relented. Taking a golden ring from his finger he threw it into the foaming waves, which were beginning to creep up the shore, and spoke sternly to the trembling girl: "Swear to me by all that you hold most sacred, that you will not come into my sight again until that ring is on your finger. On that condition alone do I consent to spare your life." The poor girl, half dead with fear, took the oath he required; and the knight returned to the castle to tell his son

that his young wife had fled away from the man she loved. After vainly seeking for her everywhere, the unhappy bridegroom was forced to believe the false story; while his no less unhappy wife wandered far and wide, begging from door to door, till her feet were blistered and her face tanned and roughened by the sun and wind. She did not dare to complain or seek her old home with the fisherman and his wife, for the knight was powerful, and she feared to incur his wrath again. At last, when she was ready to drop with fatigue, she came to the gate of a splendid mansion, and meeting the lord who was its owner she said, "Have pity, noble sir, on a poor stranger who, driven from her home, has nowhere to lay her head. Only let me have the shelter of your roof and I will be your servant. I will serve you well, for I can spin and cook as well as any maid in the north-country."

"Poor child," replied the old lord, "do not fear. You are welcome to my hall, and if you list to stay here, be it as you will." Then he brought her into the stately mansion and bade his servants bring food and set it

before her. When she was refreshed she went into the kitchen and prepared spiced meats and dainty dishes to be served up in the great banqueting-hall. So she remained as a servant; for she was a proud and honest girl, and did not choose to receive food and shelter without doing something to earn them in return.

III.

In this way nearly a whole year passed; when one day, looking from a window, she beheld the wicked knight and his son, her own dear husband, among a party of guests who were dismounting at the castle gate. She ran down into the kitchen and hid herself; her hands trembled, and she could not restrain her tears. Presently a fisherman came to the door, holding in his hand a magnificent turbot. He also had seen the guests arrive, and had hastened to bring the noble fish with him for the banquet. The poor sorrowful wife gave him a piece of gold and dismissed him. She then began to dress the turbot; but when the huge fish was cut open she perceived something glittering inside it.



"WHEN THE HUGE FISH WAS CUT OPEN, SHE PERCEIVED
SOMETHING GLITTERING INSIDE IT."

What do you think it was? Why, nothing else but the knight's golden ring, which he had taken from his finger and cast into the sea. Then she remembered the words he had spoken, and her heart, so heavy a moment before, grew light as a feather. She felt that she could sing for joy, and her tears were lost in smiles, like dewdrops in the sunshine of a summer morn. That day she cooked the dinner so well that the sorcerer-knight asked the old nobleman who had prepared it.

"A strange girl," he replied, "who came begging to my door some months ago. I offered her food and shelter; and she chose to remain here as a servant. Ho varlet!" he shouted to a serving-man who stood behind his chair. "Run to the kitchen, and bid the cook come hither."

When the young girl received the summons of her noble master, she washed her face and hands, and braiding her long flaxen hair, put on her best dress. Then she slipped the knight's golden ring on the middle finger of her left hand, and came into the grand banquetting hall where the old lord and his guests were feasting. All eyes were fixed upon her, for her beauty

was greater than ever. The wicked knight at once recognized his daughter-in-law, and carried away by passion he put his hand on the hilt of his dagger, as if he would have drawn it to stab her to the heart. But as she passed him she held up her hand so that he could see his gold ring upon her middle finger, the same ring which he had cast into the sea. Her husband, too, knew his gentle bride again, and clasped her to his breast with tears of joy. Then the sorcerer-knight knew that it was useless to resist the decree of fate. He therefore acknowledged his offences, and the young couple, who had been so cruelly parted and were now so strangely reunited, forgave him; the more readily that after all no real harm had been done. So the knight brought them back with him to his castle, where they dwelt ever after in peace and plenty; and his son's wife was famous through the north-country for her beauty and her goodness, and for her kindness to the poor, who were never turned away empty from her gates.



Habetrot.

ONCE upon a time there lived in the north-country a widow who had an only daughter, as beautiful as the dawn. Her ruddy cheeks were like the first glow of sunrise, and her sloe-black eyes peeped from under their fringe of jetty lashes, like the eyes of a young gazelle, they were so large and soft and bright. She was a good-hearted, modest, well-behaved young girl; but she had one great fault—she was not industrious. Play in her opinion was better than work. She loved to wander all day long in the warm summertide through fields and meadows, gathering flowers and weaving them into wreaths and garlands to deck her glossy hair. Seldom could she be persuaded to sit long at the spinning-wheel; and it sorely troubled her good mother's mind; for in those days

every maid knew how to spin as well as how to bake and brew, and a hundred other accomplishments, which, wisely or not, we now leave to our servants. Without industry, her mother well knew that her beautiful daughter, clever as she was in other respects, had little chance of obtaining a good husband, or ever being mistress of a household of her own. She often spoke to her daughter seriously, giving her good advice; but all to no purpose. The maiden turned a deaf ear to warnings and scoldings alike, and went on in her own way, wandering through the green lanes and flowery meads, while her distaff lay idle at home.

The more the widow thought of this fault in her daughter's disposition, the more cross and unhappy she became. At last, one bright morning, when the girl was putting on her cloak to go out as usual, she called her back and said: "I will not excuse your idleness any longer. Here are nine heads of lint; before you are four days older you must spin them into yarn. So be off to your chamber at once and set to work."

The poor girl cried and shook her head, but she saw that her mother was quite in earnest. So with a heavy heart she took off her cloak

and sat down to the task. The time passed slowly, and the minutes seemed like hours, as she wearily plied the distaff; but, though she spun her best, her soft hands were unused to the work, and she seemed to make no progress. For three days she worked hard till her fingers were covered with blisters, and so stiff that she could scarcely hold the spindle. At the end of that time she had only spun two heads of lint into yarn. The third night she cried herself to sleep, and next morning, when her mother had gone away to the neighbouring market-town, she abandoned the unwelcome task in despair and went out for a walk in the fields, where the larks were singing sweetly and the grass was gemmed with dewdrops that sparkled like diamonds in the sunshine.

Onward she roamed through the meadows and into the beech-woods, where the turf made a beautiful green carpet for her feet; and at last she came to a little hillock covered with lovely wild flowers. But she was tired, and the recollection of her unfinished work made her very miserable; so that she scarcely noticed the sweet-scented blossoms, which at another time would have delighted her. Sitting down

under a wild rose bush, and burying her head in her hands, she gave way to her grief, sobbing as if her heart would break. At the foot of the little knoll flowed a crystal streamlet, and beside it was a piece of rock with a hole through the centre of it, which the folk of the north-country call a "self-bored" or "bore-stone." Looking up the girl perceived a diminutive old woman seated upon this rock. She held a distaff in her hand, and was very busy drawing out the thread. The young girl's curiosity was roused, and going up to the old woman she said, "Fair day, good dame."

"A fair day to you, child," responded the old woman, in a kindly voice.

"May I ask," continued the maiden, a little shyly, "why you have such long lips?" She felt somewhat afraid as she said this, lest the old woman should think she meant to be rude. But the latter only smiled, and seemed as pleased as if a compliment had been paid her.

"No offence at all, dearie," she replied. "It comes from spinning so much: for you see as I draw my thread from the rock I wet my finger on my lips: that is the reason why they are so long and thick and ugly."

"Alas!" sighed the girl, "I ought to have been spinning just now. But it is of no use; I can never finish my task,"—and the tears stood on her cheeks like dewdrops on the petals of a rose.

"Don't cry your pretty eyes out, dearie," said the old woman, in a coaxing tone. "Fetch your work here to me; I will finish it for you."

Rejoiced beyond measure was the girl on hearing this kind offer: and running quickly home she brought back the heads of lint that had not been spun. The old dame took them with a smile, and before the maid could thank her, or so much as ask her name, she vanished out of sight among the bushes. The girl ran up and down seeking for her, but could not find her anywhere. Coming back at last, weary with her wanderings, to the spot where she had first met the old woman, she lay down on the soft sward by the bank of the stream and fell asleep.

When she awoke it was evening. The sun had set; the last streak of his golden glories had faded out of the west, and the shades of night were creeping over the ground. Causleen, the evening star, shone bright and

clear; but when the moon rose above the trees its radiance paled before the flood of silvery light. Suddenly, as the young girl rose to run home, she fancied she heard the hum of voices proceeding from the bore-stone. Leaning down she placed her ear to the rock, and as she listened, she distinctly heard the words,—

“Little doth the maiden wot
That my name is Habetrot.”

Then she peeped through the hole in the bore-stone. In a deep cave under the surface of the earth, she saw the old dame who had taken her flax, walking backwards and forwards. Round her were gathered a number of ugly old women, all of whom were busily plying their spindles. They were seated on “colludie-stones,” which you must know are large round white pebbles, found in the channels of streams.

It was certainly a strange sight. Each of the party had long lips, just like Habetrot, but more or less twisted and disfigured: and they were all busy working like a hive of bees. One old dame, with a hooked nose and grey eyes that seemed to be starting out of

their sockets, sat in a corner, reeling off the yarn as fast as the others spun it. Habetrot turned to her, and said,—

“Scantlie Mab, thou hadst better bundle up the yarn. It is high time the young maid had it, and ran home to her mother.”

No sooner did the poor girl hear those words than she turned and ran away through the wood as fast as she could: for she was frightened, and did not know what to think. But Habetrot overtook her, and putting the yarn into her hand, said kindly, “Now, dearie, make haste home as fast as Shank’s ponies can trot.”

“What can I do in return for so much kindness?” said the girl, who began to be ashamed of her fear.

“Nothing, child, nothing,” was the reply. “Only mind this—don’t tell your mother who spun the yarn.” Without waiting for a word of thanks the old dame, who, as you have doubtless already discovered, was a friendly fairy, faded out of sight among the trees, in the same mysterious way as she had done before. But the maiden tripped homewards with such a light heart that she sang for very joy. She

could hardly believe the good fortune that had befallen her.

Meanwhile, her mother, who had returned late in the afternoon, had been busy making "sausters," and had hung them on one side of the large open chimney to dry above the flickering embers of a peat fire. When the girl slipped quietly into the cottage, her mother, who was too tired to sit up and ask any questions about her work or where she had been, had already gone to bed. Now the poor girl was very hungry, for she had tasted nothing all day since the morning, so she took down one of the "sausters" and ate it. It tasted so nice, and she was so hungry, that she was tempted to eat a second. Another and another followed till she had devoured nine. Then she stole upstairs to her little snow-white bed, and was soon fast asleep.

Early in the morning the widow rose, but as soon as she entered the kitchen she perceived that nine of her "sausters" were gone. On the oaken table, however, lay nine hanks of yarn all smooth and bright and neatly tied. She hardly knew what to do: whether to be cross because her "sausters" had disappeared,

or to be pleased that her daughter had finished the task she had set her. The latter feeling gained the day; and proud of her daughter's skill, she ran out of the cottage, crying at the top of her voice,—

“My daughter's spun nine, nine, nine;
My daughter's eaten nine, nine, nine;
And all before daylight!”

Now it happened that just at that moment a young nobleman was riding past. He had been hunting that morning, and was returning alone to his castle. Hearing the strange outcry he drew rein to ask what was the matter. The widow, for answer, continued to shout as before, as if her house were on fire,—

“My daughter's spun nine, nine, nine;
My daughter's eaten nine, nine, nine;
And all before daylight!”

Then she added, “If you don't believe me, come in and see.”

The young nobleman's curiosity being awakened, he dismounted quickly and entered the kitchen. There the good woman showed him the yarn. He admired it greatly, and begged to be allowed to see the fair young spinner. With a great deal of trouble the

widow persuaded her daughter to come down to the kitchen. No sooner did the young nobleman fix his eyes on the modest, blushing girl, than he felt he had never seen such beauty in his life, and that he loved her from the bottom of his heart. He was weary of the lonely life he led in the old castle with nothing better to pass the time than hunting or fishing: so it ended in his declaring that he wanted a wife, and would be glad to marry one who was so beautiful and such a clever spinner. The maiden, you may be sure, said nothing about Habetrot, Scantlie Mab, and the cave under the bore-stone; but as she felt she loved the gallant young nobleman, it was not long before she became his bride.

It was not long, also, before she required the old dame's help again. She disliked spinning just as much after her marriage as she had done before. But in those days not even the noblest lady in the land could be ignorant of the art; and the young bride soon saw that she would be expected to keep up her reputation as an industrious spinner. One day, while she was walking in the park, pondering these matters with a heavy heart, old

Habetrot suddenly appeared before her and said,—

“Don’t grieve, honey. Bring your bonny bridegroom to my cave, and I’ll warrant you, when he sees what comes of spinning, he will never tie his pretty bride to the wheel.”

The next day about sunset the young bride and her noble husband stood at the foot of the flowery knoll beside the bore-stone. She bade him peep through the hole, and asked, “What do you see, love?” At first he did not answer. She observed his surprise, and repeated the question. Then he replied,—

“I see an ugly old woman dancing round the cave and jumping over her distaff. While she sings her sisters keep time with their spindles.”

“What is she singing?” asked the young wife.

“A strange ditty, truly,” replied the nobleman; and he repeated the words of Habetrot’s song:—

I.

We who dwell in dreary den
Are both rank and foul to see;
Hidden frae the glorious sun
That gilds the fair earth’s canopie!
Ever must our evenings lone
Be spent on the colludie-stone.

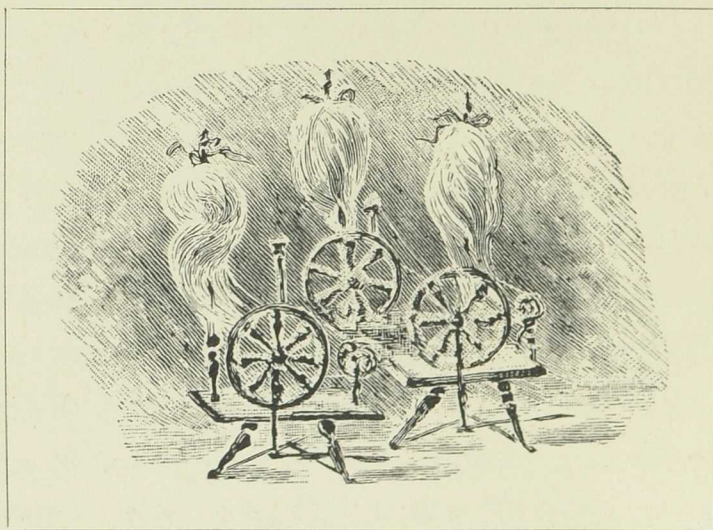
2.

Cheerless falls the twilight grey
When Causleen's spark hath died away ;
But ever fresh and ever fair
Are they who breathe the evening air
And lean upon the self-bored stone,
Unseen by all but me alone !

When Habetrot had finished her song, Scantlie Mab asked, in a squeaky voice, what she meant by saying "unseen by all but me alone."

"There is one," answered Habetrot, solemnly, "whom I bid come here at this hour ; and he has heard my song through the hole in the bore-stone." Then, opening a door which was cunningly hidden under the roots of a rose-bush, she invited the nobleman and his bride to enter the cave. A strange sight it was the youthful pair beheld on that evening in the underground cavern. The old women sat in a row as before, and worked as busily as bees, only stopping for a moment to answer when the nobleman spoke to them.

"How did your lip become so distorted ?" he inquired of one old woman ; but her twisted mouth could not utter a word distinctly, though she wished to tell him that it was caused by



“THE FLAX WAS QUICKLY CONVERTED INTO WELL-SPUN YARN.”

constant spinning ; so she muttered, in a hoarse whisper, "Na-ka-sind." Another, in reply to a similar question about her hump-back, stammered out "Owk-a-sind ;" and a third, with great difficulty got out the word "Oo-a-sin."

Then Habetrot, glancing slyly at the young bride, replied for them : "You must know, noble sir, that all those crooked backs and twisted mouths, sore lips and bleared eyes, are caused by continual spinning. If ever you permit your fair bride to spin, her pretty lips will soon grow out of shape, and her face become as ugly and deformed as mine and my sisters !"

"Never shall my wife touch a distaff again !" exclaimed the horrified nobleman ; and the story tells that he kept his word. Often, in after days, would she wander by his side through the green meadows, or ride on a palfrey behind him as they followed the chase with hawk and hound, through the woodland dells. But her soft fingers never more touched a spindle ; her sweet lips were not disfigured by drawing threads, for all the flax that grew upon their land was sent to good old Habetrot and her weird sisters, who quickly converted it into well-spun yarn.



The Master and his Pupil ;

OR,

THE MAGIC BOOK.

THERE lived long ago in the north-country a man who was so learned that it was said of him he knew every language that was spoken, and all the mysteries of the universe. Now, this wise man had a book, bound in rough black leather, studded with brass nails, and fastened at each corner with iron clasps ; and for further security it was chained to a heavy table which was made fast to the floor. Whenever the wise man desired to read in the book he unlocked it with an iron key, which he always kept hanging at his girdle. He was the only person who ever glanced at its wondrous pages, for they contained secrets that other men might not know. Among other marvels it told how evil spirits might be held in bondage and become the slaves of men ; and in the book were written

the names of good spirits, what they did, and how they went about their work secretly, invisible to the human eye.

It was a queer old room in which the book was kept, and where the old magician—for that is what the wise man was—passed the greater part of his time. In one corner was a large stone furnace, fitted with a rusty iron grate and a deep copper. On the top of it, and on a row of shelves hanging above, was piled a confused heap of metal crucibles, pipes and tubes twisted into odd shapes, and squat bulging bottles of all the colours of the rainbow. This was the apparatus which the magician used in his experiments. Stuffed snakes, hedgehogs and bats, and bunches of dried plants and grasses hung from the ceiling or were suspended from nails driven into the walls. In the dim light which struggled through the one-barred window these objects could not be clearly seen; this added to the awe which was felt by the few visitors who came at times to consult the great magician.

A strange figure, too, was the old sorcerer himself, clad in a long robe, once black, but now of a rusty brown hue, which fell to his feet, and with a little velvet skull-cap drawn tightly over

his head to his ears. A long white beard floated to his waist, but his eyebrows were as black as jet, and the deep-set eyes beneath them flashed with a keen and hawk-like glance, as if they could read the very secrets of the heart through its fleshly covering.

Now this learned magician had a pupil, and a very stupid boy he was. He usually acted as a servant to prepare his master's meals, or fetch him his cloak and staff when he went abroad. It was rarely that he entered the private chamber where the magic book was kept, and he was never by any chance permitted to peep into its contents.

One day, however, when the wise man went out as usual to visit the dwarfs in their mountain caves, or gather the plants of which he used to make his magic draughts, or some such errand, whatever it was, the boy ventured to enter the private chamber, as he had never before dared to do, except in obedience to his master's summons. With eager curiosity he gazed upon the marvellous objects which surrounded him. There was the apparatus for changing common metals into gold and silver. On the wall hung the magic mirror in which

everything that was passing in the world was reflected, and beneath it was the magic shell, which, if held to the ear, repeated every word that was spoken anywhere. In the centre of the room, upon a heavy table, fastened by strong iron bolts to the floor, lay the magic book.

The boy lighted a fire in the rusty grate, and having heated a crucible to redness, mixed together a lot of different ores; but he got neither gold nor silver. The copper remained copper still, and the lead remained lead; he only scalded his fingers and burned great holes in his clothes with the hot coals and fuming acids. Then he turned to the magic mirror and gazed long and steadily upon it. But he saw nothing clearly, only clouds and mist and smoke flitted over its shining surface. Then he took up the wonderful shell and held it to his ear; but he could only hear a confused medley of sounds, and a hoarse indistinct murmur like the breaking of waves on a distant shore.

“Oh, dear, how provoking!” cried the lad at last. “If I only knew the right word I would soon hear and see everything the same as my master does.” He happened, as he spoke, to

look in the direction of the magic book, which contained the spell that could render him as potent a wizard as his master ; and he skipped with joy to perceive that the volume was unfastened. The magician had forgotten to lock it before he went out. Quickly he ran up to the massive table, opened the book and turned over its mystic pages, inscribed in black and red ink with strange characters. The language was unknown to him ; but putting his finger at random on a line, he began to spell the words aloud.

Immediately the room became as dark as if a thick cloud had suddenly overspread the sun's bright disc. The house trembled and rocked as if shaken by a mighty earthquake. A loud peal of thunder followed, and ere the echoes died away a hideous and gigantic shape stood before the terrified youth. It breathed fire from its mouth and nostrils, and its deep-sunk eyes flashed and burned like lightning or the gleaming of a meteor. This was an evil spirit—the Slave of the Book—which the boy had unwittingly summoned from the dark shades in which it dwelt by pronouncing the magic spell.

"Set me a task, master!" cried the monster, in a deep, hoarse voice, like the roaring and rumbling of a hidden furnace; but the rash pupil, who now thoroughly repented of his curiosity, trembled violently, unable to utter a word. His tongue clove to the roof of his mouth; his hair bristled, and cold drops of perspiration trickled down his face. He longed for the earth to open under his feet and swallow him up that he might escape from the dreadful sights.

Then the evil spirit, perceiving his terror, grew bolder and more threatening. "Set me a task at once," he repeated, in angry tones; "else will I strangle thee as a foolish impostor, who has dared to wield a power to which he can lay no claim!" The lad was still silent, and the hideous monster stretched forth his arm, till his fingers touched the boy's throat, and seemed to burn him.

Then he shouted for the third time, in a voice which resembled the bellowing of a maddened bull, "Set me a task!" But, as the burning fingers clasped his throat, the poor boy managed to stammer out, "Water that flower!" pointing to a plant with bright

scarlet blossoms that stood in a corner of the room.

The spirit was pacified. His brow became smoother as he flew away to obey the order. He quickly returned, bearing upon his broad shoulders a barrel, the contents of which he poured upon the plant. Again he vanished and again reappeared, bringing with him a fresh barrel of water, which he poured upon the plant as before. When this operation had been repeated several times the room was flooded ankle-deep.

“Enough! enough! You may stop now!” cried the boy, in a new agony of fear. But, alas! he knew not the magic word wherewith to dismiss his terrible servant. So the spirit still went and came, pouring out fresh supplies of water, till the boy screamed with fear; for he saw that unless he could control the evil spirit, and make him cease his task, he would soon be drowned. Higher and higher in the room the water rose. The boy climbed upon the table, but inch by inch the water rose from his knees to his arm-pits, till at last it swirled and gurgled round his neck. Vain were his cries for help; vainly did he seek to dismiss



"THE SPIRIT STILL WENT AND CAME, POURING FRESH
SUPPLIES OF WATER."

the monster, who still plied his task, heedless of the youth's despairing shouts. To this very day probably the spirit would have gone on pouring water, and the water would have continued to rise, and all Yorkshire certainly would have been drowned as deep as the bottom of the sea, if the old magician had not luckily taken it into his head to return. In the middle of his journey he suddenly recollected that he had left the magic book unlocked; so he hurried back as fast as he could, and arrived just in time to utter the words of power which alone could dismiss the evil spirit, and thereby save the life of his inquisitive pupil.

What punishment was awarded to the latter the story does not tell. But one thing is certain, from that day forward the youth never entered the mystic chamber in the absence of his master, and the old magician, on his part, was very careful, before he took his walks abroad, to close and lock securely the clasps of his magic book.



The Golden Ball.

AWAY back in the olden time, the good old time when fairies still haunted the green woods, and danced in the moonlit meadows of Merry England, two sisters, one bright summer afternoon, were returning from the fair. They walked along cheerfully, and as they drew near the humble cottage which was their home, they perceived standing beside the door a very handsomely dressed man. In fact they had never seen any one half so fine before. He wore gold on his coat, gold on his cap, gold rings on his fingers, a thick twisted chain of gold round his neck, and what was best of all, had plenty of gold in his pockets. In either hand he held a golden ball, which glittered in the sunlight; and he offered one to each of the sisters. At the same time he bade them

beware of losing their gifts; for they were magic balls, and the penalty for losing them was death. But in the joy of possessing such beautiful playthings, the happy girls paid little heed to this terrible condition. And so the handsome stranger, who, you must know, was a powerful magician, went his way, after promising to return and pay them a visit on that day twelvemonth.

Opposite the cottage in which the two sisters dwelt with their parents, was a large park, surrounded by a high paling and a hedge of thorny bushes. In the centre of the park was an old hall—now a mere ruin,—which had once been a noble and stately building. Nobody lived in it; and report said that it was haunted by elves and goblins and wicked spirits.

Time passed on, and one day the younger sister had the misfortune to lose her ball. She was playing with it, tossing it up in the air, and catching it as it fell. But after a higher throw than usual, it did not come back into her hands. It had fallen over the paling of the park. Climbing to the top of it she looked over, and there to be sure was the golden ball; but it was rolling quickly over

the smooth sward in the direction of the old hall, and presently it rolled into the open gateway and was lost to sight. Then the maiden remembered the fatal condition that was attached to the gift: and she remembered likewise, that it was a year that very day since the stranger had given it to her. Even as she wept he suddenly appeared, and asked her if she still had the ball. With tears she confessed her loss. But her grief was of no avail. She had to pay the penalty for losing the ball; so she was dragged away to prison, and condemned to be hung.

There was one, however, who dearly loved the unhappy maid; a gallant youth, who was ready and willing to save her life, if it were possible, even at the risk of his own. While her sister and her parents were vainly weeping and imploring mercy, he set out, resolved to find the lost ball; for he wisely reflected, that if it could be recovered and restored to its owner, the maiden might escape the doom which was hanging over her.

He went first to the park gate, but it was shut and barred; so there was nothing else for it, but to climb the high paling, and force

his way through the prickly hedge and into the park beyond. As he was struggling through the hedge, an old woman rose suddenly out of a ditch on the other side, and said to him, with a kindly smile, "I know what it is that you are seeking, and why you are seeking it. But if you would find the golden ball you must first sleep three nights in the old hall."

The youth, who had the courage of a lion, replied that he would willingly do that and more, if he could only regain the lost ball. Then he went across the park and through the mossy porch into the ruined hall, which was a strange old building with oddly-shaped turrets and gables, and quaint carved windows of stone. From one room to another he passed, searching every nook and corner carefully, but nowhere could he find the precious ball. In this way the whole of the afternoon was spent, and when the sun had set and the shades of night began to fall, he went up to one of the bed-chambers, and stretched himself on a couch beside the window to rest, for he was very tired. But he could not sleep; he was so anxious and unhappy on account of the

danger which was threatening his gentle sweetheart. Presently a great noise arose in the courtyard below. Looking out of the window he beheld a troop of elves and goblins, who shouted and jumped about, playing with the lost ball.

He looked on quietly without saying a word: but the sound of heavy steps ascending the winding staircase diverted his attention. He had just time to hide himself behind the door, when a big giant, more than five times his height, stalked into the room. The brave youth's heart beat fast, but he had the good sense to remain quiet and watch what happened. The giant went straight to the window, and putting his head and shoulders out, leaned his elbows on the sill. Then the gallant lad drew his sharp sword, and stealing up behind the giant, dealt him such a mighty blow that his body was cut clean through the middle into two halves. The upper part fell into the yard, but the legs and waist remained in the room.

The goblins in the courtyard below raised a great outcry when the giant's head and half of his body came tumbling down among them,



"A TROOP OF ELVES AND GOBLINS PLAYING WITH THE
LOST BALL."

and one of them shouted, "Here is half of our master; pray give us the other half that we may bury him." Then the youth said, grimly addressing the legs, which still stood at the window, "It is no use standing there as if you had eyes to see with; go and join the other half." With these words he threw the remainder of the giant's body out of the casement. No sooner had he done so than the goblins ceased their shrill clamour and all was quiet; and the youth stretched himself on the couch again, and fell asleep.

On the following evening, after a vain search for the ball, he was about to lie down again and sleep in the same chamber, when there entered a second giant, bigger than the former. Just as he stepped over the threshold our young hero cut him in twain with a dexterous blow; but the legs walked on, as if nothing had happened, as far as the fire-place, and vanished up the chimney.

On the third night the lad was in bed and asleep before anything strange happened. Suddenly he was awakened by a great noise under his couch, which became louder every

moment. The goblins were there. They had stolen quietly into the chamber, and were playing with the golden ball. The clear moonlight streamed into the room, and illumined every object distinctly. The youth watched his opportunity, and whenever an arm or a leg was thrust from under the bed, he brought down his sharp sword and severed it at a blow. In this way he contrived to maim them all, and one by one they went away, wailing and crying piteously. Then the youth picked up the lost ball, which was left behind, and ran down the stairs, out of the gateway, across the park, to seek his sweetheart and restore it to her.

In the meantime the maiden had been taken away to York, where she was cast into prison. When the scaffold was built, she was brought out to be hung: that was the penalty she had to pay for losing the golden ball. There was a crowd round the scaffold to see her die; her father and mother and sister and brother and all her relatives and friends were there, weeping and imploring mercy. But all in vain; nothing could avert her doom. "Now, my lass," said the Doom-

ster, as the hangman was then called, "art thou ready?" But she cried out, "Stop! stop! I think I see my mother coming. Oh, mother, hast thou brought me my golden ball, and come to set me free?" But her mother shook her head and wrung her hands, weeping bitterly, as she replied,—

"I've neither brought thy golden ball
Nor come to set thee free;
But I have come to see thee hung
Upon the gallows-tree!"

Then the Doomster said, "Now, lass, say thy prayers quickly, for thou must die." But again she cried out, "Wait one minute; I see my father coming. Oh, father, hast thou brought my golden ball, or come to set me free?" But her father only wept and said,—

"I have not brought thy golden ball
Nor come to set thee free;
But I have come to see thee hung
Upon the gallows-tree!"

Then the Doomster stamped his foot impatiently, and shouted angrily, "Hast thou done saying thy prayers?" But she answered, "Wait only a moment longer, I see my brother coming." But neither her

brother, nor her uncle, nor her aunt, nor her cousin brought the golden ball.

The old hangman could not control his rage, and he shouted, "Thou art making game of me, and I won't wait any longer. Put thy head into the noose; thou must be hung at once." But even while he was speaking, the crowd in front of the scaffold parted on either side, and through the opening bounded a gallant youth. It was her own true lover, and high above his head, in one hand, he held the golden ball. Then the maiden cried, "Stop! stop! I see my sweetheart coming! Sweetheart, hast thou brought me my golden ball, and come to set me free?" Then he threw the golden ball to her, and his face beamed with love and joy, for he had saved her life by his brave deeds. And he said,—

"I've not come here to see thee hung
Upon the gallows-tree;
But I have brought thy golden ball,
And come to set thee free!"

The crowd cheered heartily, and the old hangman hobbled away from the scaffold, angry and disappointed. The cords that

bound the maiden's arms were quickly cut, and in the midst of a circle of dear friends and relatives, who now wept for joy, the lovers kissed and embraced each other; while the maiden promised to marry the brave youth who, to find the golden ball and save her life, had not shrunk from risking his own.





The Grocer and his Parrot.

THERE was once a grocer in a small country village—I am not going to tell you where—who possessed a lovely parrot. With its long scaly claws, curved beak, and bright beady eyes, which beamed and twinkled with an expression of sly humour, it very much resembled any other parrot. But the distinguishing beauty of this particular Poll, which rendered it so costly in price and invested it with such a charm in its owner's eyes, was its magnificent grass-green plumage, as long and soft and glossy as silk or spun glass. Like other birds of its kind, this parrot had been trained to speak, and much it loved to exercise its tongue. But as it also had a habit of speaking the truth, it

sometimes happened, as we shall presently see, that poor Polly got into serious trouble.

The grocer had provided for his pet a neat wire cage, which, in fine weather, was hung above the shop door. There, through the long summer afternoons, Polly would sit for hours motionless on her perch, enjoying the warm sunshine, and noting, with keen restless glances, everything that passed in the busy little world around. Out in the street, or in the shop, nothing escaped Polly's observation.

One day, when business was slack, and few customers disturbed the quiet of the grocer's shop, Polly watched her master, who paid little heed to the sharp eyes that were looking on, busy himself in mixing sand with his stock of brown sugar. Just as he had finished the dishonest task, an old woman entered and asked for some of that very article. The grocer was preparing, scoop in hand, to weigh out the exact quantity, when suddenly the honest bird cried out, as loud as she could speak, "Sand in the sugar! Sand in the sugar!" Both the grocer and his customer were astounded; but the old woman was the first to recover from her astonishment, and, pick-

ing up her money, she walked out of the shop.

Then the grocer flew into a rage, as people generally do when they are found out in a mean or wicked action; and taking down the cage, he shook it furiously, till quite a cloud of feathers floated about the shop, like leaves in an autumn gale. Poor Polly, with plumage ruffled, and half dead with terror, cowered in a corner of the cage, while her master shouted, "You abominable bird! If you ever again tell tales of me I will wring your neck; so take warning once for all!"

A few days afterwards, in the early morning, just before the shop was opened, Polly saw her master scrape some brick-dust and mix it up with powdered cocoa which he took out of the packets in which it had been sent to him. Then he tied up the packets again and took down the shutters. It was not long before a customer entered—a young workman, with a basket on his arm. He was purchasing articles for his breakfast, and wished to buy a packet of cocoa. But what was his surprise, and the grocer's vexation, when Polly, forgetful of everything but her desire to tell the truth,

exclaimed shrilly, "Brick-dust in the cocoa! Brick-dust in the cocoa!" The workman, seeing the guilty expression of the grocer's face, smiled shrewdly as if he quite understood the parrot's hint, and left the shop without making his purchase.

The cruel grocer was ten times more angry than before, and shook the cage till his arm was tired, exclaiming, "You wicked, ungrateful bird! Would you drive away all my customers? Have you forgotten what I told you? The next time you serve me such a trick I shall kill you without mercy!"

Poor Polly was thoroughly frightened, and resolved never to speak out again, whatever she might see. But, like some featherless parrots, she found it harder to keep silence than she expected. Time passed, and one day, after her master had been busily engaged for some hours in manufacturing "shop" butter, which was nothing else than lard artfully coloured with a little turmeric, a gaily-dressed lady entered and asked for a pound of fresh butter. "This is really beautiful butter, ma'am," said the deceitful grocer; "it

is the best quality, and fresh this morning from the dairy."

On hearing this wicked untruth the parrot could control herself no longer, and cried out, loudly, "Lard in the butter! Lard in the butter!"

"Scoundrel of a parrot!" shouted the enraged grocer, and rushing to the cage he drew forth the trembling bird, and hastily wringing its neck, flung the body on an ash-heap in the yard at the back of the shop. Polly, however, was not dead; though that was not the fault of her master's intention, for he quite meant to kill her. In a few minutes she began to revive, and venturing to lift up her head, saw beside her the body of a cat, which had also been thrown upon the ash-heap. "Hullo!" she whispered, in rather hoarse tones. "What is the matter with you?" But the cat made no reply; for in truth it had not heard the question, its heart having long ceased to beat. "He is dead!" sighed Polly; "poor fellow! perhaps he, too, was afflicted with a love of truth." Then she got upon her feet and tried her wings. "They are sound, at

all events," said she, with delight; "I will be off while I can. I will leave this dingy England, and seek some country where truth is venerated." With these words Polly spread her wings and flew swiftly away towards the sun, till she became a mere speck in the distance.

Did she ever reach a land where truth is universally venerated? We know not, and we fear not, for it is said that she flew twice round the world and did not find the object of her quest. Perhaps she is flying on still.





Saint Barnabas' Day ;

OR,

THE BLACK POOLS OF DARLINGTON.

IT was Saint Barnabas' Day (the eleventh of June), many hundred years ago. The roses were in full bloom, scenting the warm air, and the honeysuckles trailed their fragrant blossoms in heavy festoons over the thick hedgerows which divided the cottage gardens. There was scarcely breeze enough to stir the nodding plumes of the tall grass in the meadows ; and from the woodland came, like a silver bell, through the heat and silence of the summer noon, the clear low note of the blackbird.

Now there dwelt, not far from Darlington, an old farmer, who owned many an acre of rich pasture land, and many a broad field of uncut grass and waving corn. He was no

worse, perhaps, than his neighbours ; jolly and hearty and happy enough when all went well with him. But on this particular morning a shade rested on his sunburnt brow, which was puckered into a thousand little wrinkles, telling of fretfulness and discontent. The cause of it was not far to seek ; his muttered speech betrayed it.

“’Tis a fine day, sure enough. We mightn’t have the like again this season. Pity ’tis a saint’s day. If it were not I could get in my hay nicely ; and now I mun stand here idle, and the crop be spoiled as like as not. Bother these saints’ days ! What have those old saints done for me that I should lose my hay for their sakes ? Well, I won’t. I’ll just set to work and get in my hay, and nobody will be a bit the wiser ; and if they are, I don’t care !”

Why should he not make his hay ? it may be asked. Well, for this reason. In those times people kept the saints’ days and other church festivals just as we keep Sunday. It was a good old custom, for it brought needful rest to the weary labourer, and enjoined due reverence to the bountiful Creator whose hand

bestowed the blessings of the sunshine and the harvest.

When the neighbours, passing on their way to church, beheld the old farmer with his coat off and his sleeves rolled up, surrounded by his unwilling servants, and toiling to get his hay cut and stacked before sunset, they shook their heads with grave faces. Some even ventured to tell him plainly that he was doing very wrong, and would not prosper in the end.

The farmer, however, had made up his mind. To all their remarks he replied by loud laughter or jeers, and getting angry at last, he said,—

“Barnaby nay, Barnaby yea;
I’ll get in my hay
Whether God will or nay!”

Then the neighbours left him, and the old farmer, harnessing his finest team of horses to his biggest cart, drove to the hayfield, laughing to himself over the clever rhyme he had made, and thinking how foolish his friends would look, when they rose on the morrow, and beheld all his hay nicely stacked, and no harm come of it.

But after all, that eleventh of June turned out a sorry day for the farmer. As the long trusses of hay were raked together and pitched into the cart, the ground suddenly began to shake and heave; while the little haycocks tumbled about as if they were having a game at leap-frog all to themselves. Then it seemed to the farmer's troubled vision as if the field had all at once become a hill. From the summit where he stood beside his cart and horses, he could see the whole country spread out below him like a map.

"Am I dreaming?" he muttered; "or is this reality that I see? Maybe the mead at breakfast was a little too strong for me, and I cannot see distinctly."

His men had ceased work and fled at the first trembling of the earth, and the old farmer, after vainly calling to them, began to fill the cart himself. He grumbled all the time, however, that he should be left to do the work by a pack of lazy, foolish rogues, and repeated his rhyme,—

"Barnaby nay, Barnaby yea;
I'll get in my hay
Whether God will or nay!"

Scarcely had he uttered the last word than the trembling of the ground recommenced worse than before, and the hill began to sink slowly. Down, down it went, in the sight of all the people, who had left their cottages and were gathered in the fields around, watching, with awe-struck gaze, the foolhardy farmer on the top of the hill. When it had sunk below the level of the soil, making a great gap as it descended into the bowels of the earth, water began to well up, and gradually filled the hollow to the brim. As the frightened rustics gazed into this strangely-formed lake, far down in its lowest depths they fancied they could discern the old farmer and his cart and horses floating, still and motionless.

The original lake has long since shrunk into smaller dimensions, and a number of lesser pools, with water of an inky hue, mark its former position and extent. And there to this day the folks of Darlington will tell you the old farmer remains, and can be clearly seen when there is no breeze to ruffle the dark, still surface.



The Enchanted Princess ;

OR,

THE DRAGON OF SPINDLESTON HEUGH.

I.

BRIGHT shone the beams of the summer sun on tower and town, and gaily sang the birds in their woodland bowers ; but the heart of the Princess Margaret was heavy and sad. A light breeze crisped and curled the foam-tipped billows, which rolled in with a surly murmur on the beach below the old grey castle ; and far in the distance, as she stood on the topmost tower, her eye caught the white sails of the fishing barks that floated ghost-like over the surface of the ocean. On the other side was a belt of smiling meadows and green leas, hemmed in by the dark forest, where the wild boar and wolf had their lairs ; and farther

inland, forming a background to the landscape, rose the rounded summits of the distant Cheviots. It was truly a lovely scene, and one on which the fair maiden had often gazed with glee; but now neither the sparkling sea nor the waving woodland, neither the bright sunshine nor the gay carols of the innocent warblers, could chase the gloom from her brow, or awake a responsive chord in the heart which beat so heavily beneath her silken bodice.

In early youth the princess had lost her own dear mother, but the healing hand of time had softened the affliction; and as she grew to the full stature and beauty of a glorious maidenhood, she saw with delight that she daily took more and more the place in her father's heart, which had been filled by the bride of his youth. A few years before the opening of this tale her brother, the gallant young Childe Wynd, had left the old castle, with a chosen band of knightly companions, to travel out into the great world, and, after the fashion of those days, seek adventures and push his fortunes. But although the pang of parting with her dear brother was keen, it was not the thought of

his absence that dimmed her bright eyes and chased the wonted smile from her sweet face. No; the reason was far different. It was her father's absence that she mourned, and, more than all, the cause of it. For the old king had gone south, many weeks before, to fetch another bride back to his castle of Bamborough,—another mistress to share with him the ruling of the broad domains that stretched away on every side.

A beautiful maiden she was, in truth, this Princess Margaret! The wind played with her long flaxen tresses, which, escaping from the network of silver that generally confined them, flowed over her shoulders in heavy waves to her slender waist. A short straight nose, eyes of the deepest blue, and a ruddy mouth, which had been so often kissed by her father and her brother, made up a picture that might well have turned the head of any brave young knight, had such been present to behold her. Nor did the pensive cast, which at this moment overshadowed her lovely features, though it robbed her cheeks of their usual shell-pink hue, in the least detract from her charms. A grass-green gown with puffed sleeves fringed

with costly fur, and tightly girded at the waist with a broad golden zone, revealed the outlines of her supple young figure; while sandals of yellow leather, studded with precious, though roughly-set gems, served only to enhance the beauty of her small white feet. Over her left shoulder was cast carelessly a knotted cord, from which hung the keys of the different rooms in the castle—for in her father's absence Margaret was *chatelaine*. The busy preparations of the last few days had kept her sad thoughts at bay, but now everything was ready for the reception of the old king and his bride, and Margaret had ascended the highest turret of the sea-worn fortress to discover, if possible, some traces of their approach.

And now the loud blast of a horn startled the princess from her reverie. Forth from the forest avenues issued a noble train of lords and ladies, clad in gallant attire, and attended by men-at-arms, who bore long spears and rustling banners. Foremost, with his grizzled beard sweeping down over his broad breast-plate, rode the old king, still hale and vigorous, as his nut-brown cheek, bright eye, and upright seat in the saddle betokened. Close behind

him in a litter, upheld by four handsome young squires, was borne the lovely bride, somewhat dusky of skin and hawkish of aspect, but still fair to look upon. Then the cloud disappeared from the Princess Margaret's brow, and the colour came back to her cheek, and the sparkle to her eye. "Dear father," she murmured, "I will do my duty." Then, hurrying to the staircase, she descended quickly to the courtyard, and ordered the great gates to be flung open.

The gay train wound slowly along through the green meadows and over the old draw-bridge that spanned the moat, and under the massive doors, strengthened with oaken beams, and studded with iron nails, and so onward to the courtyard in the centre of the castle, where at the head of the steps that led to the great banqueting hall, the Princess Margaret stood ready to receive them.

Stepping forward before her bower-maidens, she ran up to the side of her father's steed, and kneeling lightly for a moment, delivered the keys of the fortress into his hands. Then, as he dismounted, she flung her arms round his neck, exclaiming, with a gush of happy tears—

“Welcome, dear father ; welcome home to your halls once more.” Then, turning with graceful courtesy to the queen, she bowed her head, with its bright crown of golden curls, and said, “And you, my father’s bride, are also welcome. All that is here is heartily at your service.”

While the attendants and men-at-arms shouted till they were hoarse, re-echoing the welcome to their noble lord and his new bride, one of the squires who bore the queen’s litter, whispered to his comrade, “Truly there is no princess in all the north-country—nay, in all Christendom—so beautiful and so courteous as the Lady Margaret.” But the envious queen overheard the whisper, and turned a withering glance on the speaker, as she muttered beneath her breath, “Methinks he might have excepted me. But I will have revenge, and ere long this maiden’s pride will be brought low enough, else there is no power in my magic spells.”

The rest of the day was spent in feasting and merriment ; and dancing was kept up to a late hour. The first faint streaks of dawn were beginning to appear ere the last torch was extinguished in the banqueting hall, and silence

brooded o'er the old castle. When the next day's sun poured his bright rays over the blue ocean, and the birds warbled their morning carols, one by one the weary revellers awoke ; but where was the Lady Margaret ? Her chamber, situated in a wing of the building overlooking the sea, was empty. Her bower-maidens told how she had parted with them on the previous night at the door of her room, singing gleefully, and apparently in high spirits. And now she was missing ! At first the old king was almost distracted with grief ; but as time passed on, and no traces of her flight were discovered, he became wrathful ; for he began to believe the artful suggestions of his bride, that the fair princess, jealous of her stepmother, had fled for ever from his court. Then her name ceased to be mentioned, though her memory lingered in the hearts of a few faithful dependents. There was no one to tell her royal sire how, through the unholy spells of his wicked queen, a deep sleep had fallen on all the inmates of the castle ; and the beautiful princess, transformed into a monstrous shape, had passed out of the gates and rushed away to the gloomy forest.

But soon after her strange disappearance a rumour began to spread through the country that a terrible dragon had taken up its abode in a cave at the foot of a cliff in a dell of the forest called the Spindleston Heugh. For seven leagues in every direction the green grass and the golden corn were withered and blighted by its fiery breath. Awful tales were related of its gigantic size, its fearful aspect, and the wide-spread devastations it committed. Its scaly hide, covered as if with plates of mail, offered an impenetrable resistance to every weapon; and all efforts to ensnare or destroy it utterly failed. Then the people in the outlying districts fled, deserting their fields and houses, and flocking to the town of Bamborough for protection. The dragon was in everybody's mouth. Fathers spoke of it in whispers to their awe-stricken wives, and children, cowering in dark corners, overheard the tale. The very name of the monster carried terror with it.

In a mossy dell in the heart of the forest, so overshadowed by lofty trees that, even on the brightest summer day, scarcely a ray of sunlight penetrated the gloom, was a high cliff; and at the foot a cavern, with many turns

and windings, opened as if into the interior of the earth. The mouth of the cave was blocked up with stones and fallen branches and thorny brambles, whose interlaced stems made a formidable bulwark. Here the dragon slept during the day—for its roving expeditions were always made under the cover of night. Near the entrance of the cavern was a monstrous stone, rudely hollowed into the shape of a trough, which the country people took care to keep well filled with milk. Seven good cows scarcely sufficed for the daily supply, which was brought with fear and trembling to the dragon's cave. But as long as it was supplied with milk, which it drank eagerly, the monster seemed to be appeased, and the havoc which it made ceased for a time.

II.

Far and wide, over mountain and moor, the story of the terrible dragon was noised abroad, and it was generally agreed that unless its destruction could be in some way accomplished, the fair north-country would

soon be utterly ruined. The Childe Wynd was now returning from his distant wanderings, and in a far off land he heard the story of his father's second marriage; of the sudden disappearance of his beautiful sister; and finally of the danger and disaster that were threatening his native country. He said little, but pondered much over the strange tale. At last he made up his mind to return to Bamborough, and, if possible, deliver his father's kingdom from the terrible scourge. He accordingly called his comrades together, and said,—

“We have no time to lose, my merry men. We must set sail for Bamborough soon; for sadly do I fear some foul wrong has been done to my sister Margaret.”

Then they set to work to build a stout ship. Night and day they laboured, felling the tall trees, and cutting them into planks, which were fitted neatly together, till the ship lay on the beach ready to be launched. A noble vessel she was! Her mast was made of the magic rowan tree, against which neither witches nor serpents have power. The fluttering sails were woven of the finest silk, and the bulwarks were cased with shining

silver. Moreover, she was well stored with food and water.

“Now,” cried Childe Wynd, “is our good ship ready to bear us over the dancing billows. Let our oars keep time while the wind overhead whistles a brave song through the rigging. Let us set sail on this adventure, and win undying fame, proving ourselves worthy sons of the old hero-kings.”

His comrades applauded this speech, and the brave vessel was launched. With her gallant crew on board, thirty-three men, all told,—with fearless hearts, strong arms, and sharp weapons—she plunged through the flying foam, breasting the long rolling waves like a swan. The spectators on the cliffs shouted and clapped their hands, but the women wept as Childe Wynd and his brave men rowed out into the misty darkness. Then they drew in their oars and hoisted the broad sail; soon it was only a dim speck in the distance, and when morning came it had vanished altogether out of sight.

Onward sailed the heroes. The sea was as clear as crystal, and quite smooth. In less

than a week after leaving the coast, the well-known square tower of King Ida's ancient keep, and the smoke from the chimneys of the royal town of Bamborough, came into view.

It was lonely in the castle; the old king was away at the wars, helping another monarch, his friend and ally, whose territories had been suddenly invaded; and he had taken nearly all the fighting men with him, leaving only as many as barely sufficed for the defence of the castle. So the queen spent the long days in weaving tapestry, or hearing the tales of wandering gleemen, or the music which her maidens made for her.

One day she sat at the window of her bower, in a chamber, once the Princess Margaret's, that overlooked the sea. In one hand she held a mirror, and with the other smoothed the thick plaits of her long black hair, while the murmur of the tide lapping against the rocks beneath mingled with the clear notes of a harp that one of her bower-maidens was playing. Suddenly she started from her listless attitude, and exclaimed, "See ye not yonder gallant ship with silken sails

and pennons streaming, steering to the shore?" Well she knew it was Childe Wynd returning; her magic art forewarned her of the fact. She knew also that it was written in the Book of Fate, that through him danger threatened her, and her wicked schemes might be overturned. Only to him could the secret of his sister's transformation be revealed, and he alone would have the power to set her free from the enchantment which bound her. So when the wicked queen saw the white sails of his ship gleaming in the noon-day sun, she knit her brows in an ugly frown: for she foresaw there would be a desperate struggle, and either she or Childe Wynd must perish. First of all she dismissed her attendants, and resolved by her black art to raise a tempest, which would sink the ship in the sea, and drown the gallant prince and his crew.

A dark cloud overspread the sky. The wind rose and the glassy surface of the ocean, which a moment before had been as smooth as a mirror, was lashed into foaming billows, that rolled rapidly to the shore, each one higher and more threatening than its pre-

decessor. The thunder pealed in loud and frequent claps, and the lightning flashed, while the frightened sea-mews, wheeling in wide circles round the turrets of the castle, added, with their unearthly screams, to the horror of the storm. In the village under the cliff, the fishermen barred their doors and windows, and cowering in superstitious terror over their fires, listened to the wild riot without. And a strange, weird scene they might have witnessed, had any of them been outside to see! The wind, which had now increased to a gale, whistled and roared round the weather-beaten towers of the castle; and on the crags which overhung the beach was gathered a host of witches, summoned by the magic spells of the wicked queen. They cursed the ship and its brave crew, tossing their skinny arms menacingly. But all their efforts were vain. The gallant vessel was proof against their unholy charms and muttered imprecations. With her mast of the good rowan tree, and silken sails widespread to catch the breeze, she bore rapidly onward, breasting the frothing billows as if they were merely swansdown, and



"POLLY SAW BESIDE HER THE BODY OF A CAT, WHICH HAD
ALSO BEEN THROWN UPON THE ASH-HEAP."

shaping her course steadily for the little haven below the castle.

Then the queen changed her plan, and reversed her spells. The wind sunk as suddenly as it had arisen, and the sun shone out brightly again. She ordered a number of men-at-arms to embark in boats, and attack the approaching vessel, which she declared was that of an enemy, or some piratic rover who had taken advantage of the old king's absence to make a descent on the coast. A desperate conflict ensued. Their eyes, dazzled by the queen's false magic, did not recognize the banner of their young prince, or the familiar faces of their former comrades. But their efforts were fruitless. Childe Wynd and his brave crew defended themselves stoutly, and repulsed their antagonists, sinking several of the boats.

Meanwhile the dragon, in its distant cave at Spindleston, was roused by the storm. Speeding swiftly to the coast it arrived on the beach at the head of the harbour just as Childe Wynd's vessel, with sail lowered, and urged only by the oars of the crew, was

entering its mouth. The body of the dragon, of enormous length, was covered with impenetrable scales in the form of knobs and bosses, and as hard as iron. Two fiery eyes, in deep-set sockets, glowed and sparkled under the bony ridge of its broad forehead. A huge mouth, garnished with a triple row of sharp teeth, and wide nostrils breathing smoke and flame, completed the dreadful aspect of the monster. A pair of immense wings, at present closely folded to its body, served it for flight.

Thrice did the stout oarsmen, striving their utmost, impel the vessel through the shallow water; and thrice the monster, pushing with snout and fore-paws, hurled it back again into the waves. In vain the crew assailed it with slings and arrows; the stones rebounded from its body, and the barbed points of the arrows could not pierce its horny hide. Then Childe Wynd ordered his men to turn the vessel round and row out into the open sea. The dragon, as if satisfied with having gained its object, did not attempt to pursue them, but remained on the beach. Then the helmsman directed

the prow towards the Budle Sands, where the water was shallow, for the tide had now turned. Childe Wynd, springing out, bade his comrades moor the ship and await his return, while he pursued the adventure alone.

Wading ashore opposite the mouth of a little stream which flowed over the silver sands, he followed its winding course inland, and in a short time arrived at the gloomy dell in the forest where the dragon's cave was situated. As it was impossible any longer to follow the banks of the stream on account of the thick brushwood and bramble which overgrew the path, Childe Wynd made a circuit and ascended the cliff above the cave. He had barely reached the summit when the air was darkened, and he beheld the dread monster flying to its lair. Perceiving the young prince standing alone on the cliff it altered its course, and flew close to him, almost scorching him with its fiery breath. But the sprig of rowan which he wore in his cap protected him from its blighting power. The gallant Childe's heart beat quickly as he surveyed the huge proportions and outspread claws of his terrible antagonist;

but breathing a short prayer for aid he drew his keen sword and prepared to defend himself. "Back, monster, I defy thee!" he exclaimed; "and if thou seekest to do me harm I will smite off thy head at a single blow." His sword, which had been presented to him by a foreign prince, was an enchanted one, forged by cunning dwarfs in the recesses of their mountain home; and when rubbed with a certain ointment became so sharp that nothing could resist its power.

To his surprise, however, the dragon did not attempt to assail him: and as it hovered in the air above his head, addressed him in gentle tones, which seemed strangely at variance with its loathsome appearance,—

"Fear not, brave prince, I will do thee no hurt. But if thou harmest me, thou wilt be sorry afterwards for thy sister's sake. Sheathe thy blade, therefore, and grant me the boon I ask of thee. If thou truly lovest thy dear sister, and hopest ever again to behold her, bend over the crag and give me kisses three on my mouth."

This strange request filled the prince with astonishment, but mechanically he returned



"GRASPING A BRANCH WHICH OVERHUNG THE EDGE, THE BRAVE YOUNG CHAMPION
STOOPED DOWN AND KISSED THE HIDEOUS MONSTER."

his glittering blade to its scabbard. Then the dragon spoke again, in accents of passionate entreaty.

“Hear me, Childe Wynd, and do not refuse my request. Grant me, for thy dear sister’s sake, but three kisses. If I am not won ere the sun has set, I shall never be won, and thy good sister, the Lady Margaret, will never again appear on earth in her own form.”

Even as the monster spoke, the prince fancied that he beheld tears tremble in its eyes; and a dim idea of the truth dawned in his mind. The dragon now flew close to the cliff; and grasping a branch which overhung the edge, the brave young champion stooped down and kissed the hideous monster. As his lips touched its scaly mouth, the dragon spread its wings and flew out from the cliff, while the sky grew dark, and the thunder growled in the distance. Then it flew back again, and a second time Childe Wynd bent over the crag and kissed it. The dragon flew away and again returned, while the darkness increased, and the roll of the distant thunder grew louder and more

threatening. As the third kiss was given, a terrible peal burst overhead, and a vivid flash of lightning dazzled the eyes of the young prince for a moment. When he recovered himself, the dragon was gone; and in place of the scaly monster, there stood by his side a beautiful maiden—his own dear sister Margaret, whom his courage had delivered from the enchantments of her wicked stepmother.

Tenderly did they embrace each other, and Childe Wynd, folding his mantle around her, led her towards the castle. As they went the sky cleared, and the setting sun shone out, flooding in radiance heath and rock, trees and meadows, and tipping with a crimson hue the wings of the sea-gulls as they hovered over the yellow sands.

When they crossed the drawbridge, they found the old king, their father, surrounded by his men-at-arms. He had just returned from the wars, and right glad was he to behold his gallant son, and clasp in his arms once more the beautiful daughter whom he had mourned as dead. Few words of explanation were needed. The wicked queen well

knew that her magic power was for ever gone, and sought to escape. But she was soon discovered and dragged forth from her hiding place into the courtyard, where Childe Wynd, fixing his eye on her shrinking form and pale face, as cold as the wintry moon, pronounced her doom in the words, which we quote, of an old ballad:—

“Woe be to thee, thou wicked witch,
An ill death may'st thou dee;
As thou my sister hast lik'ned,
So likened shalt thou be.

“I will thee turn into a toad
That low on ground doth wend,
And won, won, shalt thou never be
Till this world hath an end.”

Now on the sand, near Ida's tower,
She crawls, a loathsome toad,
And venom spits on every maid
She meets upon her road.

The virgins all of Bamborough town
Will swear that they have seen
This spiteful toad, of monstrous size,
When walking they have been.

All folks believe within the shire
This story to be true,
And they have run to Spindlestone
The cave and trough to view.

This fact now Duncan Frazier,
Of Cheviot, sings in rhyme,
Lest Bamboroughshire folk should forget
Some part of it in time.



Sir Guy the Seeker.

LOUD whistled the chill breeze over the open moorland; and between the gusts the rain fell steadily in heavy drops. The black clouds, as they scudded swiftly across the midnight sky, took strange forms and phantom shapes. Treacherous bogs and deep mossy tarns made the track a difficult one to follow even in daylight; at such an hour, and in such weather, it was almost invisible. Through the wind and rain, and the white mist that began to creep down from the hill-sides and wrap the ground as in a winding-sheet, rode a gallant young knight. Since early morn he had followed the chase with a few trusty followers: and farther and farther had they penetrated among the upland slopes and dreary moors that fringe

the south-eastern base of the Cheviots. His steed, of nobler mettle and purer blood than those of his companions, had borne him far in advance; and when the sun was setting he found himself alone, lost in the midst of a desolate district whose features were unfamiliar to him. One thing alone could he do: and heading in the direction, as well as he could determine, of the coast, he gave his horse free rein while the last glimmer of daylight sufficed to show the rough pathway. But with the sunset a storm began to rise, and he was forced to slacken his pace; and with wet garments and drooping plume, dank with the drizzling rain, he rode slowly onward, trusting every moment to catch a glimpse of some welcome lights which would denote the habitation of human beings, and give promise of shelter and hospitality.

At last the hollow murmur of ocean waves rolling in upon a rocky shore, reached his ears. A welcome sound it was, for he knew that if he could strike the coast at any point, he would be able to find his way back to the castle from which he had started that

morning. He was not destined, however, to reach home that night without an adventure.

The young knight—Sir Guy was his name—had dismounted, and, with the bridle over his arm, was groping his way cautiously along the rugged path, which seemed to wind over the top of a high cliff. At the base of it he plainly heard the breaking waves. Suddenly, through the thick fog, loomed the dim outlines of a massive building. No light shone from its windows, and no oaken gates, bolted and barred, kept out the cold blast that swept shrieking through its deserted halls. Dunstanborough Castle—for by that name it was known—had been long a ruin; but Sir Guy, as he passed through the broken gateway, leading his weary steed, thanked Heaven devoutly: for he trusted to find within its mouldering walls at least a shelter from the storm.

A voice at his elbow startled him. "What seek you here, brave knight? Few guests venture to Dunstanborough, and in such weather. Nevertheless, you are welcome."

At the words Sir Guy turned and beheld a strange figure by his side. It was an old

wizard who thus addressed him. Clad in long black garments, girdled by a leathern belt on which magic signs and letters were traced, he peered at the young knight with bright, beady eyes, like those of a bird of prey. His face, in colour resembling yellow parchment, was withered and wrinkled, and a snow-white beard flowed to his waist. He carried neither lamp nor torch, nor needed to, for his long elf-locks and matted beard were aflame with a bluish, flickering light that added to his weird appearance. Before the astounded knight could reply, the wizard resumed, in slightly mocking accents,—

“Have you come hither to seek an adventure, brave knight? If so, methinks I can fit you well. Have you courage to release a fair young princess, imprisoned within these walls, and win a lovely bride?”

Then Sir Guy, stung by the irony of his tone, found his speech. “Courage enough,” he cried. “He who comes hither in dead of night, and in such a wild storm, and abides to look on thy hideous face and flaming locks, might well dare to rescue an imprisoned damsel.”

“Thou speakest boldly,” replied the wizard, with a sneer; “but thy courage shall be put to the test. Follow me.”

Leaving his steed in the gateway, Sir Guy followed his strange guide, without hesitation, into the dark recesses of the ruined castle; but his heart, it must be confessed, beat somewhat quicker than usual.

Onward they went through damp, flagged passages and vaulted underground cells, and up winding stairs, till they came to a brazen door, guarded by a huge serpent. The reptile reared its head menacingly at their approach; but the wizard muttered a few magic words, whereupon it ceased to hiss, and, sheathing its sharp fangs, laid its flat head, with cold, glittering, watchful eyes, on its scaly coils again. The brazen door swung round on its hinges, and the young knight, still preceded by his weird conductor, passed into a large hall, which was ablaze with light, though not a single ray penetrated through the deep mullioned windows.

A wondrous sight it was that met Sir Guy's astonished gaze. A hundred stalls of black marble, fifty on either side, extended

the whole length of the hall. In each stall was a coal-black steed, equipped with saddle and bridle, as if ready for mounting. Heavy maces of a bygone fashion hung at the saddlebows, and the horses wore frontlets of steel to protect their heads in battle. On a marble bench at the foot of each stall sat a knight—one hundred they were in all; and every knight was clad in polished armour, save the head alone. So motionless were they—both the knights and their steeds—that you would have supposed them to be carved out of the marble of which the stalls were wrought. Only their eyes were fixed and glassy, like those of people who walk in their sleep; and the glare of those unwinking eyes struck a chill to the young adventurer's heart.

At the farther end of the hall, on a raised daïs, was a tomb of rock crystal, guarded by two gigantic skeletons, each of whom held a dart poised in his right hand. In the tomb reclined a beautiful maiden, who, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, addressed the stranger in passionate accents that strangely thrilled his heart,—

“Oh, brave young knight, I know not how thou hast come hither, or what errand may have brought thee. But sure I am thou art sent to my aid. Deliver me, I pray thee, from this dreadful peril—from this hideous enchantment.”

As she spoke the grisly skeletons started till all their bones rattled, and brandished their darts with threatening gestures. Sir Guy's blood ran cold, but he faced them dauntlessly.

On a marble slab in front of the tomb were placed a large two-handled sword, of antique form and rusty with age, and a handsome bugle, adorned with silken tassels, and its surface chased with pictures representing scenes of sport.

“Behold,” said the wizard, in solemn tones, “that falchion and that horn. Choose carefully, young knight, for on your choice depend the lady's fate and your own fortunes.”

For a moment Sir Guy hesitated. A whirl of thoughts swept through his heated brain. The grinning skeletons, the motionless figures around, with their fixed, stony eyes, and the

weird figure of the wizard, who seemed to smile as if in anticipation of triumph,—all this helped to bewilder and confuse him. “Why trust to a rusty old blade,” he thought, “while my own good sword, oft tried and proved in time of need, hangs in my belt? Rather let me blow one clear blast on yonder bugle; and perchance the sound may reach the ears of some of my merry men, who are even now seeking me, and bring them to my aid.”

Stepping boldly forward, he grasped the horn and put it to his mouth. A blast, louder than ever yet was breathed by mortal lips, re-echoed through the hall. The walls of the old castle rocked to their foundations; the earth trembled under his feet, and the mocking laughter of the old wizard seemed to mingle with the whistling of the wind and the gibbering of goblin voices. As the last note died away a stern voice spoke in ringing accents,—

“Woe, woe betide that foolish knight,
That ever he was born,
Who did not think to draw the blade
Before he blew the horn!”

Then the beautiful lady, uttering a piercing shriek, "Lost, lost! for ever lost!" sank back into the crystal tomb, which closed over her lovely form. The horses awoke in their stalls and neighed loudly, champing their bits; and the armed knights sprang up with a shout, clashing their gleaming swords. At the same moment one of the two skeletons which guarded the tomb, leaping forward touched Sir Guy on the breast with its keen dart. An icy chill crept over the unfortunate knight; the sweat broke out in heavy beads upon his pale brow; his tongue clove to his mouth. Then, in an instant, everything seemed to reel around him; sight and hearing failed, and he fell to the ground at the feet of the wizard, without sense or motion.

When Sir Guy awoke from his swoon the storm had ceased; the stars were shining brightly in a cloudless sky, and the silvery moonbeams illuminated the ruins of the old castle. He was lying in the gateway, where he seemed to have fallen, and his good steed was quietly cropping the scanty grass. But no traces of his vision—whether dream or

reality—were to be seen. Sword in hand he explored the ruin, passing from chamber to chamber, and omitting none in his search. Neither sight nor sound, however, did he meet to scare him, or give any clue to the spot where the beautiful princess was imprisoned.

The day was breaking when he desisted from his quest, and mounting his good steed rode away from the silent ruins of Dunstanborough, a sadder, if not a wiser man.

Often, in later days, did he renew the search; and his comrades jestingly bestowed upon him the name of "Sir Guy the Seeker;" but though he sought carefully and repeatedly he never found a trace of his beautiful princess. He was faithful, however, to her memory, remaining to the last day of his life unwedded for her sake, and bitterly regretting the error by which he had lost her for ever, and which fate had not given him another chance to repair!





Jack's Luck ;

OR,

THE ASS, THE TABLE, AND THE STICK.

LONG ago—I cannot tell you how many hundred years—there lived an old farmer in Yorkshire, who had an only son named Jack. So unkind was the farmer to his son, that the poor lad at last made up his mind no longer to endure the scoldings and beatings which were his daily lot, but to leave home and seek his fortune in the wide world.

So one fine morning off Jack ran as fast as his legs could carry him. He was so afraid of being overtaken and brought back that he kept on running all day, only stopping now and then to take breath. Suddenly, in the middle of his career, while he was looking back over his shoulder to see if

any one was pursuing him, and not heeding what might be in front, he came bump against an old woman who was gathering sticks by the roadside. He nearly upset the old dame, and quite upset her bundle of sticks. As he had no breath left to apologize he held his tongue, and busied himself in picking up the fagots, which he tied up neatly and handed back to their owner. The old woman, however, seemed very good-natured, and told Jack, with a smile, that she thought he was a promising lad. After a little more talk she offered to take him into her service, and pay him liberally. As Jack was tired and hungry, for he had not thought of bringing any food with him when he ran off, he readily agreed to the old dame's terms, and accompanied her home to the cottage in which she dwelt. It was situated in the middle of a wood at some distance from the highway, and there Jack lived very comfortably for a year and a day.

At the end of that time the old dame called Jack to her and said, "Thou hast worked well for me, Jack, and now thou shalt receive good wages for all thy toil. In the

stable thou wilt find an ass, which I bestow upon thee for thy pains. When thou hast need of money pull his ears till he brays, and thou wilt find that silver and gold will drop from his mouth."

Jack thanked the old woman heartily, and, overjoyed with the splendid prize, he rode away, intending to return home and astonish his father with his good fortune. When night fell he was still some distance from home, so he halted at a wayside inn. Here he gave such liberal orders that the landlord began to think he must be a rogue who wished to cheat him, and refused to supply what was ordered till he should see some of the money that was to pay his bill. Then Jack went to the stable and pulled the donkey's ears till it brayed, and as it opened its mouth money in silver and gold, half-crowns and guineas, dropped upon the ground. The innkeeper watched the whole proceeding through a chink in the door, and when Jack came out and pulled the coins out of his pocket he pretended to be quite satisfied, and served up a good supper. Jack ate and drank heartily of the best; and, going up to

bed, was soon fast asleep. The cunning inn-keeper, as soon as the house was quiet, slipped round to the stable, and leading out the precious animal put another ass, which exactly resembled it, in its place.

In the morning Jack, having paid his bill, rode away, unsuspecting of the trick that had been played upon him. He soon got home, and was welcomed by his father, who had missed his help a good deal in the farm work. At no great distance from the farm, across the fields, was a little cottage, tenanted by a poor widow, who had an only daughter. Jack and she had often played together as boy and girl; and as they grew older a strong affection had sprung up between them. One day, soon after his return, Jack began to tell his father how much he loved the maiden, and finally asked his consent to their marriage.

"Rubbish!" said the old farmer. "Time enow to talk o' that, I reckon, when you've plenty o' cash to keep a wife."

"Oh, I've lots of money, dad," Jack replied; "come with me and see." Off they went together to the stable, where Jack set

to work to pull the donkey's ears. But though he tugged till his arms ached, and he nearly pulled its ears off, and the ass opened its jaws as wide as a church door, and brayed loud enough to be heard twenty miles away, no money fell from its mouth—not even a single penny! Then the old farmer became very angry, for he thought his son was making sport of him; and, catching up a hay-fork, he ran at him as if he would kill him. Poor Jack was bewildered, but he thought the loss of his money was quite misfortune enough without being beaten into the bargain. He therefore took to his heels without a word, and ran down the road quite as fast as on the former occasion.

Over ditches and stiles, across fields, through farmyards and gardens he flew at the top of his speed, and never ceased running till he found himself in the main street of a little village several miles away from home. Running up against a door, he burst it open and stumbled headlong into a joiner's shop.

He picked himself up, and begged pardon, and would have gone out again as quickly

as he had entered, but the good-natured carpenter said, "Stay a moment; you seem a promising lad. I am in want of an apprentice, and I think you will just suit me. If you agree to serve me well for a twelvemonth I will pay you equally well on my part." The upshot was that Jack stayed and worked for the carpenter.

When a whole year had come and gone his master called him into the shop one day and said,—

"You are an honest lad, Jack, and have served me well and faithfully. I am going to pay you your wages. Do you see this table? Simple as it looks it is a wonderful table; for, if at any time you are hungry, you have only to say, "Table, be covered!" and it will at once be spread with a magnificent repast."

Jack thanked his master heartily; and, hoisting the table on his back, trudged away homewards along the dusty road. The sun was hot, the way long, and the table, as you may suppose, no light weight; so by the time that Jack came in sight of the inn, where he had stayed before, he was very tired, and not

at all disposed to go a step farther. The landlord was standing in the doorway, and recognized Jack as he came up.

"Good day, landlord. What have you in the house to eat?" said Jack, when he was shown into his room. "I want something very nice for supper."

"Well," replied the landlord, as he slowly stroked his beard. "I can give you ham and eggs"—

"Ham and eggs!" cried Jack, with contempt. "I can do better than that myself. Look here!"—and turning to the table, which he had set down in a corner of the room, he said, "Table, be covered!" No sooner were the magic words spoken than invisible hands spread a snowy damask cloth; knives and forks, plates and dishes were laid; and a savory banquet of roast beef and plum pudding smoked on the board!

The innkeeper opened his eyes to their widest extent, and ran his fingers through his hair in great astonishment; but he said not a word. When Jack had supped and retired to his bed-chamber, and the inn was locked up and quiet for the night, the crafty

rogue crept downstairs on tip-toe, and removed the magic table. In its place he put an old deal table exactly resembling it, which he brought from the lumber-closet at the top of the house.

Next morning poor Jack, ignorant of the change which had been effected while he was asleep, paid his bill and walked off with the worthless table on his back. He did not get a very cordial greeting from the old farmer, who had not forgotten the former offence; but Jack was too happy and full of his own plans to care much about that.

"Now, father," he said, as they sat by the fire next morning after breakfast. "I have come home to marry my own true love."

"Better see you can keep her first," grunted the old man.

"I am sure I can," replied Jack, with a smile. "Do you see this table? I can make it supply me with whatever I wish;" and he described the fine dishes he could get by only ordering them, till the old farmer's mouth watered.

"Seeing is believing," said his father. "Let me see first what you can do." Then

Jack brought out the table into the middle of the room. "Table, be covered!" he cried; but, alas! no white cloth, no plates and knives and forks, no dainty viands made their appearance. In vain Jack repeated the magic formula till he was nearly hoarse. Nothing came of it. At last the old farmer, half distracted with rage and disappointment, grasped the warming-pan, which happened to be hanging from the wall, and beat his son with it till his arm was weary, and he was forced to let him go. Poor Jack lost no time in hurrying out of the door and away down the lane, his bones aching and his heart swelling with mingled anger and grief. In this way, crying as he went, he ran on till coming suddenly to the bank of a stream he plunged in over head and ears. As the river was both swift and deep, and Jack could not swim, he would certainly have been drowned if a man passing by had not jumped in and pulled him safely ashore.

"Now you must do a service for me in turn," said his deliverer, when Jack had got the water out of his eyes and mouth, and recovered his breath. "You must help me

to make a bridge across the river." He bade Jack climb to the top of a tall tree which grew close to the water's edge, and began to cut round its roots. When the tree was nearly uprooted it began to totter and sway, but the weight of Jack's body helped to make it bend right across the stream, so that the top of the tree by degrees drooped over and touched the opposite bank, thus forming a natural bridge. The stranger thanked Jack and said, "For the good service you have rendered I will now reward you." Breaking off a branch he shaped it into a rough club with a few strokes of his knife. "Take this stick," he continued, presenting it to Jack. "Whenever you say, 'Up stick, and fell him!' it will fly out of your hand and knock any one down that offends you."

Jack thanked the stranger, who went his way; and, rejoiced to become the owner of such a marvellous club, he set out at once in the direction of the inn. In fact he began to have an inkling of the truth, and was eager to recover his stolen property. He found the landlord in the stable-yard; and as soon as he pronounced the magic words,

“Up stick, and fell him!” the cudgel flew out of his grasp and began to belabour the rascal soundly about the head and shoulders. In vain did the innkeeper seek safety in flight. The club pursued him everywhere, and, as if plied by invisible hands, continued to rain its blows, till spent with pain and fear he fell on the ground and begged piteously for mercy. “Give me back my ass and my table first,” said Jack; and the wicked landlord, though much against his will, was forced to surrender them. Then Jack, mounting his donkey, with the precious table securely fastened behind him, trotted out of the inn yard, leaving the crafty landlord to nurse his bruises and reflect that honesty would have been, after all, the best policy.

Jack was not long in getting home; and the first thing he did was to put up his four-footed friend comfortably in his father’s stable, and give him a good feed of oats and bran-mash. Then he pulled its long ears till it brayed melodiously, and the manger was full of silver and gold, enough to satisfy the old farmer that his son had brought home fortune with him that time at all events.

The news of Jack's return soon spread abroad; and rumour, you may be certain, did not diminish the extent of his good luck. It was soon known all over the neighbourhood that he was rolling in wealth, and was looking out for a wife who would bring an ample dower with her.

"Yes," said Jack, when the rumour was repeated to him, "it is quite true. I have made my fortune, and I intend to marry the wealthiest maid in the town. So let all the girls who want a rich husband come up to the farm to-morrow, and bring their money in their aprons."

The next morning the farm-yard was full of girls, all attired in their best, and as soon as Jack appeared each held out her apron that he might count the glittering heap of gold and silver coins which formed her dowry. Among them, shrinking shyly back, was Jack's own true love; but her apron only contained two copper pennies, and a crooked sixpence which Jack had given her when he was a poor boy. "Stand aside, lass," said Jack, pretending to speak in a rough voice, "thou hast neither gold nor

silver, so stand apart from the rest." While the other girls giggled and jeered, she obeyed his order without a murmur, though the tears started to her eyes and ran down her face. But, lo! strange to relate, for every tear that fell, a diamond remained in her apron!

Then Jack could restrain his feelings no longer. "Up stick, and fell them!" he cried, and immediately the club darted from his hand and began to beat and knock the jeering girls, till they dropped the contents of their aprons and ran off as fast as they could. Jack gathered up the coins that were scattered over the ground, and poured them into the lap of his own true love. "This is thy dowry, lass," he said; "and, dear heart, thou art now the richest maid in the town, as thou wert always the best and prettiest, and I shall marry thee."

So they were soon married, and lived happily ever after.





The Heir of Hambton ;

OR,

THE DRAGON OF WEARSIDE.

I.

ONE fine summer morning—nearly as many centuries ago as you could count on the fingers of both hands—a handsome youth might have been seen strolling along the green banks of the Wear. Overhead, the drooping boughs of the old elms stretched far out, casting a chequered shade on the rippling water. Blackbirds flashed on quick wing from coppice to coppice, and the lark's sweet song filled the air with a flood of melody.

It was the Sabbath morn, holiest of all days, ushering in welcome rest from the toils of one week, and preparation for the labours of another ; but the youth seemed either

forgetful or heedless of the fact, for he bore rod and net slung carelessly on his arm, as if bound on an errand of sport. A tight-fitting cloth jerkin of Lincoln green, with hose to match, and fastened at the waist, as the fashion was, with leather points, displayed to advantage his slender but supple figure, undeveloped as yet (for his years numbered barely eighteen), but giving promise of great strength. The jerkin was edged with fur, and in the bonnet that covered his clustering brown curls, was stuck a golden brooch, —sure tokens of rank and wealth in those days, when the different grades of society were sharply marked by the quality of their apparel. From his belt hung a poniard in a velvet sheath, and a tasselled pouch filled with bait.

Both rich and well-born was the youth. He was the only son of the old Baron of Lambton Hall, and his father's estate stretched away over wood and wold, park and pasture, on the south bank of the Wear, as far as the eye could range. With his fine face and shapely figure, the young heir of Lambton was one who might well

have gained the heart of any fair maiden in the country round. But the haughty careless expression which marred his handsome features, was a true index of his character. Heedless he was of everything but the gratification of his own will, and utterly indifferent to the opinion of others. To his father's counsels he turned a deaf ear, pursuing his own pleasures, and openly flouting the pious monks who would have taught him better. What well-trained maid would look with favour on a youth whose selfish disposition and reckless life were slowly breaking his fond old father's heart?

As he strolled onward, humming a gay tune, the bell of the little chapel at Brugeford tinkled forth its summons on the quiet morning air. From the old hall came a troop of servitors, wearing the baron's badge embroidered on their sleeves; while over the fields, from the rustic hamlet and scattered cottage-homes, trudged the humble tenants of Lambton. Scarcely deigning to acknowledge their salutations, and quite indifferent to their sidelong glances and whispered remarks, the young heir did not pause till

he arrived at a spot where the river made a sudden bend, and its waters, sweeping round a projecting cliff, formed a deep pool. Here he halted, and ere the bell of the chapel had ceased to toll, he had baited his hook and cast it into the stream.

For a long time he fished without success; not a fin appeared above the glittering surface, not a single bite rewarded his exertions. At last, however, as he was about to give up the sport in disgust, a tremendous pull caused his bait to disappear entirely. Grasping the line tightly and hauling with all his strength, he succeeded in dragging ashore a strange-looking creature. It was uglier than the most hideous fish his fancy had ever pictured in dreams. A huge mis-shapen head, more than a span in breadth, was garnished with a pair of jaws which opened and shut continually, as if they sought something to devour. Two flaming red eyes, and a bulky body of an olive-green hue, glistening with slime, completed its dreadful appearance.

The young baron tore it from the hook, and carrying it to a well close at hand, which

was used as a fish-pond by the monks of the chapel, he dropped it in, muttering, "'Tis an ugly brute, but it may serve at least to scare those pious shavelings my father dotes on; I wish them joy of it."

Returning to the bank, he baited his hook afresh and resumed his sport. But nothing more did he catch. An old white-bearded shepherd, crook in hand, passed along.

"Give you good day, my lord," he said; "may I ask what sport you have got?"

"Nothing to speak of," replied the young heir, in a surly tone. "But a little while ago I caught the strangest fish I ever set eyes on." Then he added, "Go to the well over yonder and judge for yourself."

The old man peered solemnly into the depths of the fish-pond, where the strange fish swam slowly about, its red eyes glowing like live coals, and its huge jaws opening and shutting continually, as it devoured, at every gulp, numbers of the fine carp and tench and trout with which the pond was stocked. Long did the old shepherd look, and at last he spoke,—

“Never have I seen the like of that before, my lord, and I have seen many a strange sight in my day. It’s neither eft nor eel; for it is ever so much bigger: nor is it an adder, though its body be like a snake’s. I have seen them often on the moorland. Mark its broad head with nine holes on each side of the mouth. Marry, my good lord, much I fear it bodes no good—such an uncanny monster!”

In the well, however, the strange creature remained; and as time passed on it grew larger and uglier and fiercer-looking. When it had eaten up all the fish in the pond, its dimensions had increased to such an extent that the well could no longer contain it. One night it slipped out and made its way down to the river. There it lay all day, coiled round a rock in the middle of the stream; but at night it left its river home, and wound its long, snake-like tail round the base of a knoll near by: and still it went on daily growing, till its coils at last encircled the knoll three times!

It was nothing more or less, as everybody now knew, than a fearful dragon—one of the

largest that had ever been seen or heard of. Its huge head, shaped like that of a crocodile, was of a grass-green colour. Two eyes, in fleshy protruding sockets, seemed all aflame, and glowed like carbuncles. Its enormous bulk trailed on the ground in serpentine folds; and if its activity had been in proportion to its size, nothing could have escaped its ravages. As it was, the whole country-side was kept in constant terror. The cattle on the meadows and the lambs on the hills were devoured in hundreds. At last the people began to flee from their farms and dwellings. As yet the dragon had not attacked human beings; but when all the sheep and kine were consumed, none knew what it might do next if urged by hunger.

When the northern bank of the Wear had been in this way laid waste, the dragon crossed the stream and began to ravage the lands of Lambton. The old baron still lived; but he was sad and lonely, for his wild son, who, with all his faults, possessed the virtue of courage, was absent, wandering in distant lands. His chair was empty

in the hall, and at the daily meals the old baron alone sate under the daïs at the head of the long table. Age had dimmed his eyes and unstrung his once strong arms : and there was no one to go forth in his place and deliver the helpless tenants from the dreaded monster.

When the dragon's approach, therefore, was announced, a panic seized upon the inmates of Lambton Hall. The women wrung their hands, wailing loudly, and the stoutest of the retainers trembled with fear. One proposed that they should bar the gates, block up the windows, and withdraw to the flat roof as the safest place of refuge. Another declared that the underground cellars were more secure, and being well stored with food and wine, would be more convenient in case of their having to stand a siege. A third suggested that they should all seek safety in flight, and leave the dragon sole possessor of the hall. But the steward, an aged and experienced man, paid little heed to their idle debate ; and calmly gave orders that a large trough in the courtyard should be filled with fresh milk. "And do it without delay,"

he added, emphatically. You may be sure no time was lost. The roaring of the dragon, which resembled the bellowing of a herd of maddened bulls, proclaimed that it was close at hand. When it entered the deserted courtyard and began to range round in quest of a victim, its flaming eyes soon beheld the stone trough, brimming over with new milk. This it speedily swallowed, and retiring quietly across the river coiled itself round its favourite knoll.

On the following day, however, the dragon returned; and the same scene was enacted. The trough was a very large one; the milk of nine cows barely sufficed to fill it. One morning, finding it empty, the monster roared angrily, and wrapping its tail round some of the tallest trees in the park, tore them up by the roots as easily as a child would pull the rushes by the bank of a stream. The frightened servitors, looking on from the roof and windows of the hall, took care that ever afterwards the trough should be full: and from that time the monster was appeased, and his ravages among the sheep and cattle ceased.

The Lambton dragon was now the talk of the whole north-country. Reports of its immense size and rapacity spread far and wide. Many gallant knights came to the hall with the full purpose of slaying it; but none were found, after viewing its terrible aspect, stout enough of heart or limb to venture the encounter, and the dragon was left unmolested in its rocky stronghold. Once a chosen band of brave men surprised the monster by night as it slept, and succeeded in cutting some of its coils asunder. But wonderful to relate, the severed pieces immediately joined together again; and the enraged dragon put its assailants to flight. Some were crushed to death, others drowned in the river; and after the failure of that attempt all hope of destroying the monster was abandoned.

II.

Seven years had now elapsed since the fatal morning when the young heir of Lambton had cast the hideous worm into the well. But where was he, the cause of all

this trouble—the introducer of this terrible scourge—the reckless young baron? In the market-place of a quiet country town in France he had heard an old man, with high bald forehead and flowing grey beard, denounce in eloquent language the cruelties practised on helpless pilgrims by the infidel possessors of the Holy City. All France and the most of western Europe was quickly ablaze. Thousands, giving up their occupations, volunteered to join the armies that were raised to deliver Jerusalem from the power of the Saracens. And among a company of English knights rode the young heir of Lambton, the cross on his shoulder and strange feelings stirring in his heart. How he fared on the crusade we have no space to tell. Enough to say he returned an altered man. Scarred with wounds and thinned by wasting fevers, he bore little resemblance to the handsome youth who seven years before had left the banks of the Wear. But the inward change was even greater than the outward. Grave of aspect, courteous of tone, and truly devout, he deeply repented of his former reckless life, and

resolved to be a wiser and a better man for the future. So, dight with the belt and spurs of knighthood, Sir John returned at last to his father's hall; but how different was the scene! The fields he had rambled over as a boy lay waste and desolate. The smoke no longer rose from the chimneys of the deserted hamlet; the song was hushed in the rustic homestead; no longer from valley and hillside came the lowing of kine or the bleating of folded lambs. His poor old father welcomed him with tears of joy; but when the young knight learned the sad cause of all this change, he was smitten with bitter remorse, and vowed to take no rest until he had delivered the country from the terrible scourge he had brought upon it.

Vainly did the old baron seek to shake his son's determination. Vainly did the faithful steward tell him how many brave knights had failed, and how some had even lost their lives in the attempt to overcome the monster. His resolve once taken, he suffered nothing to alter it. He crossed the Wear that night in a boat, and surveyed the dragon as it slept coiled round the knoll.

Now, in a cave in the forest—whose entrance was so narrow, and so choked up with tangled ferns and brambles, that few could find it—dwelt an ancient sibyl, and Sir John resolved to consult her before venturing on the perilous enterprise. He sought her solitary abode under cover of night. A dim blue light burned in the cavern, revealing, but indistinctly, its dark recesses, damp with the moisture that dripped constantly from the roof, and tenanted by myriads of bats, which flapped their broad wings and squeaked horribly like evil spirits. Dusky efts and bloated toads crawled over the slimy floor, and hideous adders in dark corners raised their flat heads, with gleaming eyes and forked hissing tongues. The young knight's heart was undismayed, though his face was pale, as he stood quiet and unmoved before the sibyl, who scanned him keenly with her bright black eyes.

“So thou art the man who hast brought this affliction on thy father's hall, and the tenants of his lands,” she spoke at last, in deep and solemn tones. “Shame on thee, that thou hast brought this curse on thy

country, and ruin to so many innocent folk. Now are thy lands ruined, thy people fled, and thyself a penniless heir!"

"Good dame," replied Sir John, calmly, "thy words are bitter as gall; yet will I patiently suffer them, for I deserve all the reproaches thou canst utter. For the evil deeds of thoughtless days it is just I should now drain the cup of sorrow. Yet, sibyl," he continued, in mournful accents that re-echoed in the vaulted cave, "I would that on me alone would fall all the sorrow and the suffering, as rightly falls the shame."

Then the aged crone gazed steadfastly on his face, as if she would read the inmost thoughts of his breast; and when she spoke again it was in a milder tone.

"'Tis well that thou repentest of evil done. But what has brought thee hither? Speak thy errand quickly and depart."

"I am ready," replied the young heir of Lambton, "to make any sacrifice—yea, even dear life itself—if only I might slay the dragon who lays waste my father's land."

The sibyl knew that his brave heart spoke the truth. "Thou wilt need," she said,

“the strength of the lion and the cunning of the fox; and, above all, the dauntless courage of a true man, to achieve that deed. Never before was such a monster created, and never had mortal man to contend with such a foe.”

“That I know right well,” replied the knight; “and my errand here was to ask thy counsel and aid.”

“And thou hast done rightly,” replied the sibyl. “I read an earnest purpose in thy looks; and, I tell thee, that thou alone canst undo the mischief thou hast done. Hear, then, what I say. Don thy best suit of mail; but see first that it be carefully studded with spear-heads and sharp blades, welded firmly into back and breastplate. Then, armed with thy good sword, take thy stand upon the rock in the midst of the river, which is the dragon’s lurking-place by day. There abide the conflict, and let not thine heart for a moment fail.”

“Fear not, good mother,” exclaimed the young knight, joyfully. “As thou sayest so will I do.”

“Hearken yet a moment,” continued the

sibyl, in lower and hoarser tones. "There is a condition—a terrible one—attached to thy success. Thou must solemnly vow that the first living thing thou dost meet on thy homeward way shall perish by thy victorious sword. Fail to keep that vow—(her eyes flashed and her form seemed to dilate)—and for nine generations no lord of Lambton shall die peacefully in his bed. By battle, by murder, by mishap shall they perish one and all!"

With these terrible words she dismissed Sir John, who repaired to the little chapel at Brugeford, and, kneeling before the altar, solemnly vowed to offer his life for the weal of his country; promising, in case of victory, to slay the first living creature he encountered on his homeward journey.

Two suns rose and set after his visit to the sibyl's cave. On the third morn at sunrise, the young heir of Lambton stood alone on a rock in the middle of the Wear, awaiting the approach of his terrible foe. His armour, according to the sibyl's advice, was studded with spear-heads and sharp dagger blades; his helmet was tightly laced, and his good sword firmly grasped in both hands.

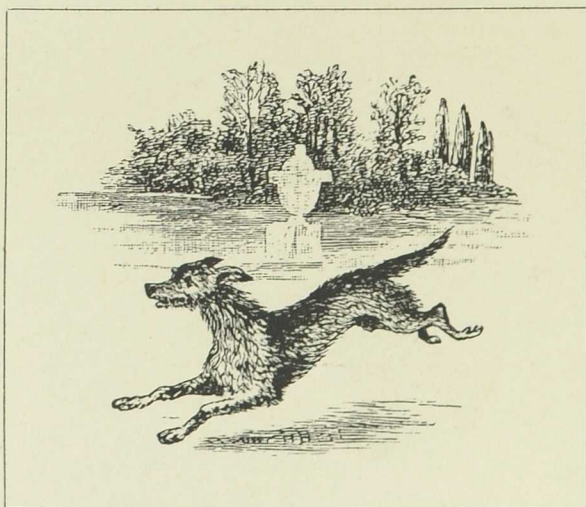
Slowly the dragon unwound its snaky coils, and turned as usual in the direction of the river. Plunging in it swam toward the rock, and as it drew nigh and reared its hideous head above the water Sir John aimed a blow with all his strength. A roar, like a clap of thunder, echoing over hill and dale, told that the monster had received a wound. Its tail was lifted high in the air, and its slimy folds wrapped round the gallant knight, as if it would stifle him in the foul embrace; but the closer it drew its coils the deeper cut the sharp lance-heads and dagger-blades with which his armour was studded, letting out its blood in numerous draining streams.

The river now ran red and was lashed into foam by the convulsive struggles of the wounded monster. As soon as it loosened its grasp, which it was compelled to do by pain and loss of blood, the young heir of Lambton wielded his heavy sword to good effect. With repeated blows he succeeded in cutting its writhing coils in twain. Then the wisdom of the sibyl's advice was apparent. The severed portions, as fast as they fell into the stream, were carried away by the

current without opportunity of uniting. The dragon grew every moment fainter and weaker. At last it entirely ceased to struggle, and its mangled carcase sunk slowly beneath the surface, never to reappear. Then the brave victor, putting his bugle to his lips, blew a loud peal. This was the signal of triumph for which the inmates of Lambton Hall, praying for their young lord's success, were eagerly listening. It was a signal also, privately agreed upon with the old steward, for the release of the young heir's favourite hound, which bayed hoarsely and strained upon its chain, hearing the well-known notes of its master's bugle.

But the old baron, unable to bear the suspense, had stolen forth secretly from the postern gate, and from a distance watched the terrible conflict. Ere the last silvery note died away, he ran forward to embrace his gallant son.

What sudden gloom in that hour of triumph cast its shadow on the young knight's brow? Why did his cheek turn pale and his arm tremble as it had never done in all the dread encounter? He remembered his solemn vow.



“THE BRAVE HOUND, RELEASED FROM ITS CONFINEMENT,
RAN SWIFTLY UP.”

For a moment his breast was torn by contending emotions. Then holding up his arm, as if to prohibit his father's near approach, he again placed his bugle to his lips and blew a louder blast. The brave hound, released from its confinement, ran swiftly up and leaped upon its master with a joyous bound. But with a shudder he sheathed his broad blade, yet wet with the dragon's gore, in its shaggy breast. Then, bursting into tears, he flung his arms round his father's neck, and told him all.

The vow was broken, and the stern prophecy of the sibyl was fulfilled. For nine generations no lord of Lambton died peacefully in the shelter of his own dear home.





The Sockburn Dragon.

ONCE upon a time a brave knight dwelt upon his estate in the county of Durham. His name was Sir John Conyers; and his lordly mansion stood on a strip of green land, which was nearly surrounded by the Tees. At this point, some six miles south-east of the modern town of Darlington, the river makes a curve, in the form of a horse-shoe, enclosing a semi-circular piece of meadow land. This was called Sockburn, and at the period of our story was the property of Sir John Conyers.

Very happy and prosperous was the lord of Sockburn. The Scots never plundered his rich lands, or drove his cattle over the border; for his estate lay out of the way of their forays. His hall was filled with faithful retainers; and its gates were always open to

the stranger and the poor. There he dwelt peaceably, and as the years succeeded one another, the hand of time passed lightly over him. At middle age he was still in the prime of his strength and vigour; his face bore the ruddy tints of health, and his thick black hair showed scarcely a thread of silver.

He was a widower, and all his affection was centred in his child, an only son. Merrily passed the days in the old hall of Sockburn. The long winter nights, when the snow lay in heavy wreaths on field and moor, and the ice bound the sluggish current of the Tees, were spent in harmless mirth and revelry. Sometimes a benighted pilgrim, in wide-flapped hat and loose brown robe, with the scallop badge brodered on his shoulder, would enliven the group gathered round the hearth with strange tales of foreign travel, and of the weary wars waged with infidel pagans for the possession of the Holy City. And as the wassail-bowl passed round, and the great logs were piled on the blazing fire, till the crackling sparks flew up the wide chimney, some wandering harper would gratefully pledge the health of the lord of Sockburn, and sing the praises of

his hospitality. When spring loosed the icy fetters of the mountain brooks, and the lengthening days of summer returned with all their wealth of warmth and sunshine, the boy would wander through the meadows, knee-deep in sweet grass ; or in the shady depths of Dinsdale Woods, or under the old wishing-tree, would gather daisies and bluebells and primroses, and weave them into flowery chains and chaplets.

But his favourite resort was the top of the great red cliffs on the opposite bank of the river. There he would lie for hours on the grassy slope, watching the mysterious depths below, only ruffled by the fin of passing trout or salmon, where the wall-like precipice was mirrored in the crystal flood. He could see his own smiling face, like that of a little water-baby, looking up out of the deep green water. Strange thoughts and fancies often filled his busy little brain ; for him the river possessed a strange, mystic charm.

One midsummer day, never to be forgotten in all the rest of his life, instead of his own bright face, deep down in the pool under the cliff, two flaming eyes met his terrified gaze.

There he saw a monstrous head, shaped like a crocodile's, with wide jaws and gleaming fangs, and dimly outlined against the sandy channel, a long dark form, with winding serpentine coils. The eyes seemed to flash and burn with a fiercer and redder glow, as the huge head slowly rose to the surface; but ere it emerged, the frightened boy, pale and trembling in every limb, withdrew his fascinated gaze, and ran to the hall as fast as his little feet could carry him.

There his story was treated by his father's servitors with laughter and unbelief. One called him a "dear little goose;" another said he was a "day-dreamer, whose fancy had deluded him." But even as they spoke a dreadful noise seemed to fill earth and sky. It came from the direction of the river, and was louder than the roaring of twenty bulls. At the dread sound the colour left the cheeks of the mocking servants; they shook with fear. Again and again the roar was repeated, dying away in hollow echoes among the distant hills. "It is the roar of a dragon," was the cry, as they fled for safety into the great banqueting room of the hall, where Sir John was

seated in one of the deep-mullioned windows. As he saw his little son a ray of pleasure lit up his grave face, and gently stroking the boy's flaxen curls, he bade him repeat his tale.

When the little boy had told all that he had to say, Sir John's brow grew gloomy and thoughtful, for he knew the peril in which all were placed by the presence of the terrible monster.

Summoning his faithful squire, he bade him straightway take his best suit of mail to the armourer, who was instructed to rivet a number of keen razor blades into the back and breast. Meanwhile, taking his little son's hand, he passed into the private chapel that abutted on the hall. There, kneeling before the altar, he solemnly vowed, in the event of his being victorious in the coming strife, that he would dedicate his only son as a priest to the service of God; and with him the broad lands of Sockburn would pass into the hands of the Church. For a moment, as he rose from his knees, he gazed intently on the tombs of his ancestors around the walls, and thought mournfully that no other lord of Sockburn, when he was gone, would be laid beside

them. Then kissing his little son, who wondered at the scene, he said, "Dear boy, go now within, and await my return—if ever I do return."

His trusty squire now appeared, and helped him to buckle on the armour, all studded with sharp-edged blades; and the brave knight having ordered his serving-men to bar securely the doors and windows of the hall, stepped out upon the terrace, from which the dragon could be seen at some distance slowly approaching.

Sir John at once formed his plan. Coming in full sight of the monster, he pretended to flee; but this was only a stratagem to draw it away from the hall. On the top of a flat rock, called to this day the Grey Stone, in the middle of an open field, he halted, and drawing his good sword, awaited the onset.

As the monster drew near, and raised its hideous bulk to climb upon the rock, a burst of flame and smoke seemed for an instant to darken the sun, while its sonorous bellows shook the earth. But it recoiled, a flood of gore rushing from its extended jaws, as Sir John thrust his falchion vigorously into its

gaping throat. Lashing its serpentine tail, and uttering roar after roar, like thunder-claps, the dragon returned to the attack, and soon its coils were flung around the gallant knight. But as it sought to tighten the clasp, and wrap its victim in a death-embrace, the keen razor blades cut deeply, inflicting a thousand wounds, from which the blood gushed freely, and compelling it to loosen its hold. Again it rushed upon its puny antagonist, and Sir John stooped to allow the sulphurous vapour that streamed from its outspread nostrils to pass over him. Suddenly, through the smoke and flame, he caught a glimpse of the hideous head bent above him, and in an instant he buried his sword to the hilt in one of its fiery eyes. The conflict was over. With a last expiring roar, and a lash of its tail, that tore up the ground as if it had been furrowed with a plough, the loathsome dragon fell back in the agonies of death.

Its body was buried where it perished, beneath the Grey Stone; and the prowess of Sir John Conyers became a household word in the north-country. Whether the vow was kept the legend does not tell. Per-

haps it was not, for the lands of Sockburn seem to have remained in the possession of his descendants for many generations after the exploit of their gallant ancestor. But the family fortunes did not flourish in proportion to its fame, and the name is now extinct, and the estate has passed into the hands of strangers.

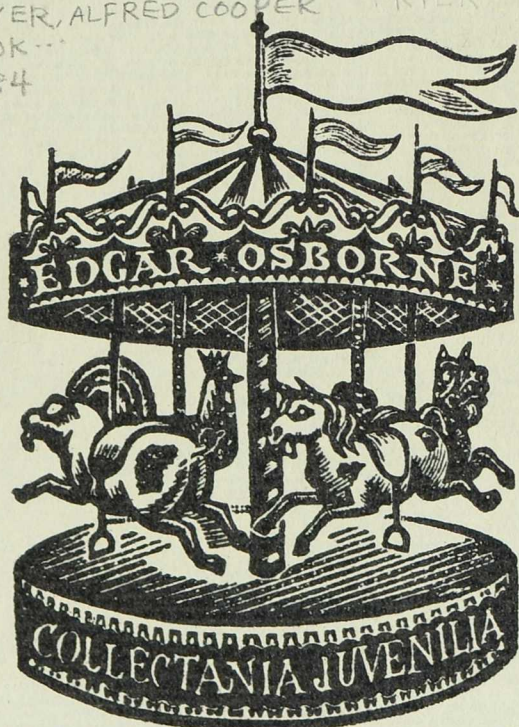






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