

BOOKS FOR THE BAIRNS.—No. 169

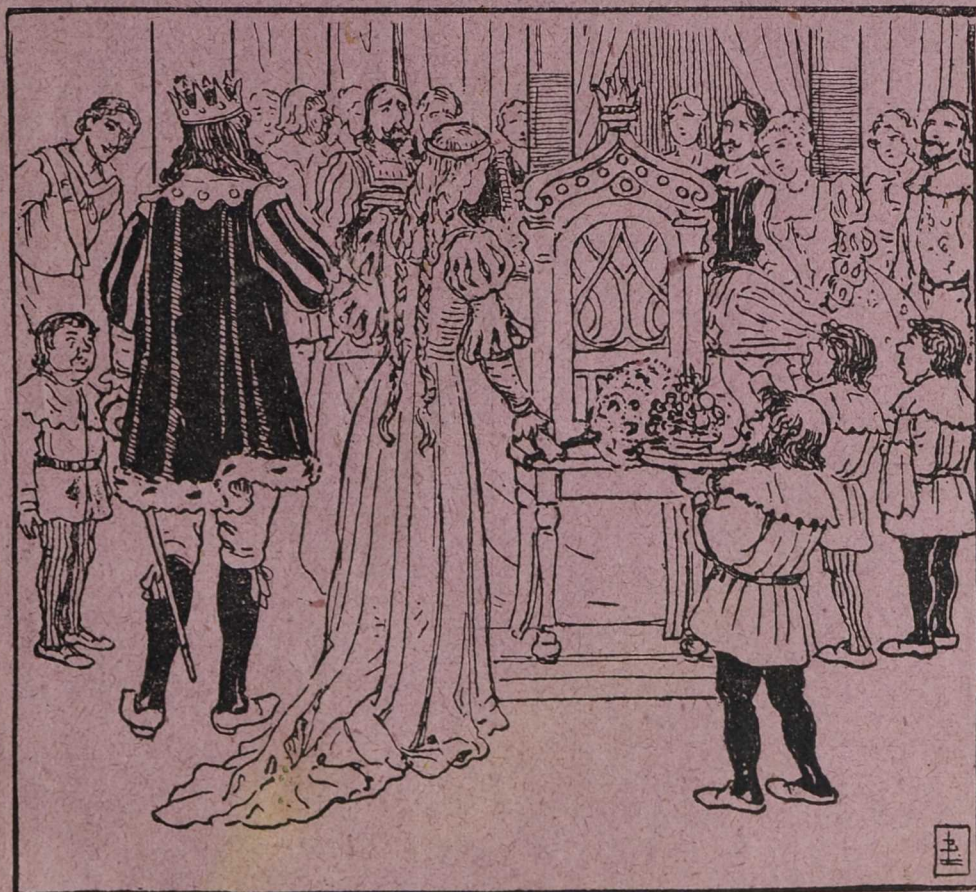
ONE PENN.

THE LITTLE GREY MAN

And other Fairy Tales.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF
ED. LABOULAYE.

Illustrated by BRINSLEY LE FANU.



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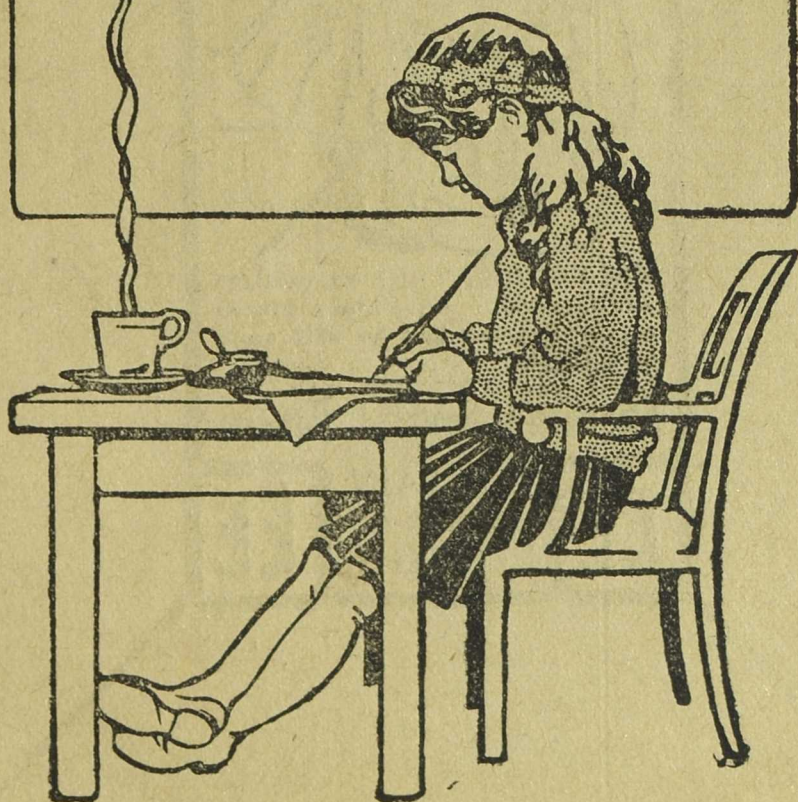
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We don't like the other
kinds now we've tasted
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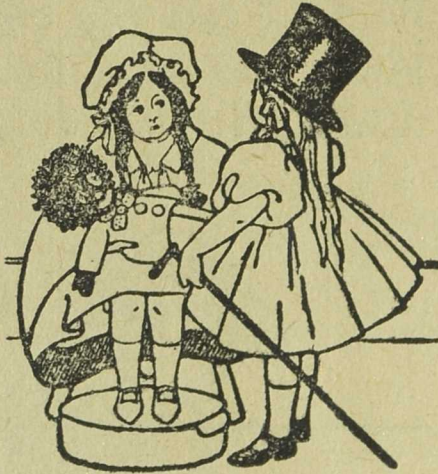


EE

SPEAKING
FROM

EE

EXPERIENCE



THE DOCTOR: "Ah! yes, restless
and feverish. Give him a Steed-
man's Powder and he will soon
be all right."

Steedman's Soothing Powders

EE

CONTAIN
NO
POISON

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THE
LITTLE GREY MAN

AND OTHER FAIRY TALES.

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ED. LABOULAYE

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1910.

STEAD'S PUBLISHING HOUSE,
LONDON.



The half-witted peasant.

THE LITTLE GREY MAN.

In former times (I am speaking of three or four hundred years ago), there was an old Iceland peasant who was no better off for wits than for this world's goods. One day at church the old fellow heard a beautiful sermon about charity. "Give, my brethren, give," said the preacher, "and the Lord will return you a hundredfold." These words, repeated over and over again, went into the old peasant's head, and confused what few brains he had. Hardly had he got home again, than he set to work cutting down the trees in his garden, digging a great hole in the ground, and carting stones and wood as if he were going to build a palace.

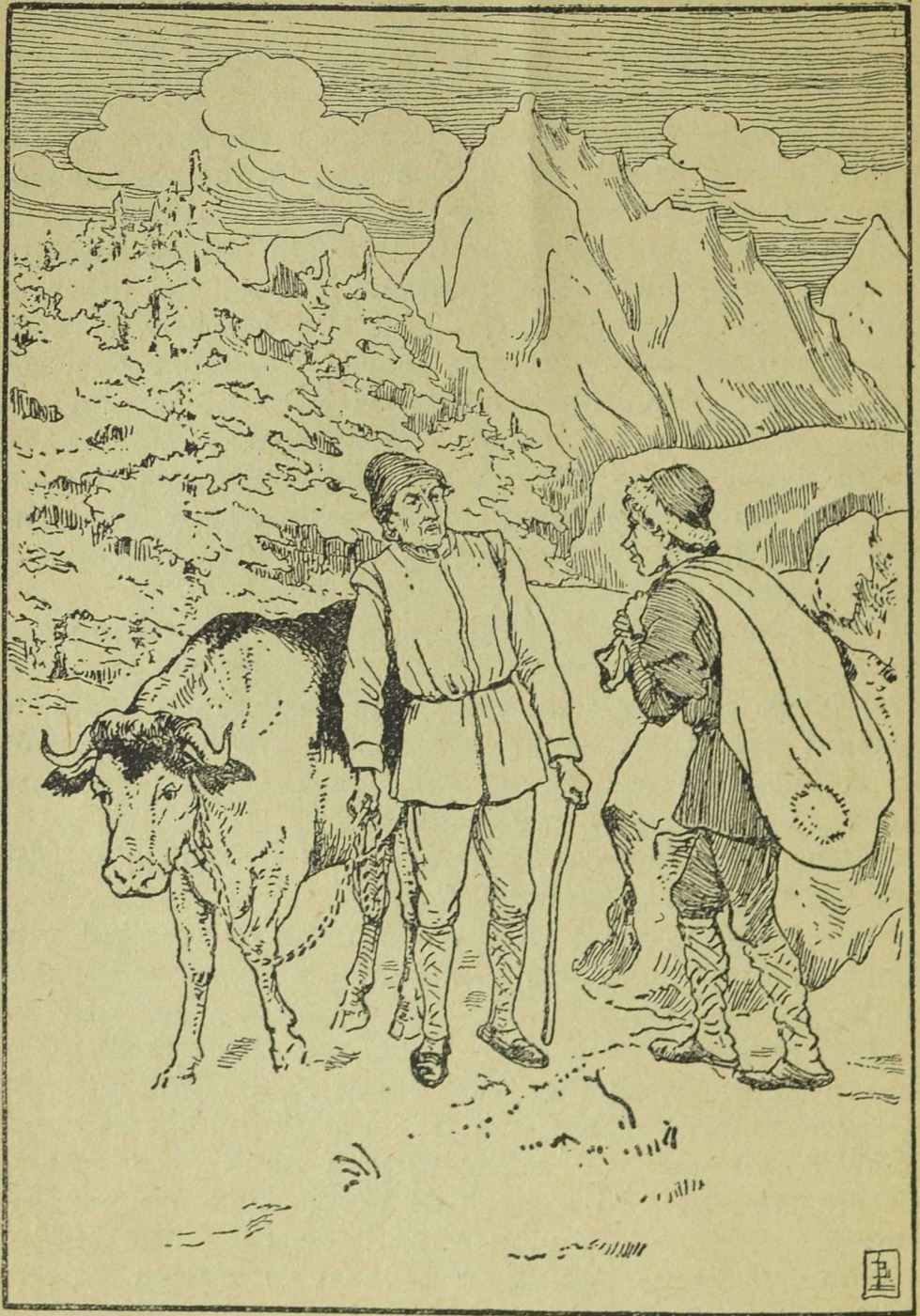
"My poor man," said his wife, "what are you doing?"

"Don't call me 'my poor man' any more," said the peasant solemnly. "My dear wife, we are rich folk, or at least we are going to be rich. In a fortnight I mean to give away my cow——"

"Our one means of livelihood!" said his wife. "Are we to die of hunger?"

"Be quiet, you foolish woman!" replied the peasant. "Any one can see how little you understand of the parson's sermon. If we give away our cow, we shall receive a hundred cows as a reward. The parson said so; it's in the Gospel. I shall put fifty of them in this stable which I am building, and with what I get for the other fifty, I shall buy enough pasture-land to feed the whole herd, both summer and winter. We shall be richer than the King himself."

And, without paying the least attention to his wife's entreaties or reproaches, the foolish old fellow set to work to build his stable, to the great astonishment of the neighbours.



"You had better make an exchange with me."

When he had finished, he put a rope round his cow's neck, and led her straight to the parson's house. He found him talking to two strangers, at whom our good man scarcely glanced, in such haste was he to make his present and receive his reward. You can guess how astonished was the pastor by so novel a kind of charity. He talked long to this foolish member of his flock, trying to show him that our Lord's words referred only to spiritual rewards; but all in vain. The peasant said over and over again: "But you said so, parson, you said so."

At last, tired of reasoning with any one so densely stupid, the parson became righteously angry, and shut his door in the peasant's face. The latter still remained standing in the road, stupidly repeating over and over again: "But you said so, parson, you said so."

At last he had to return home; but this was not easy, for it was spring-time: the ice was melting, and the wind blowing up the snow in great gusts. At every step the old man slipped, and the cow lowed, and refused to go on. At the end of an hour, the peasant had lost his way, and was afraid he might lose his life as well. So he stopped, in great perplexity, lamenting his ill-luck, and quite at a loss to know what to do with the unwilling animal he was leading. While he was thinking in distress what to do, a man carrying a big bag came up to him, and asked him what he was doing out of doors with his cow in such bad weather.

When the peasant had told him his troubles, the stranger said: "My good man, I have a piece of advice to give you, and that is to make an exchange with me. I live near here. Hand me over your cow, for you'll never get her home again, and take my bag from me. It's not so very heavy, and everything in it is good: it's flesh and bones."

So they struck a bargain; the stranger drove off the cow, while the peasant hoisted the bag on to his back. It weighed terribly heavy. Once at home again, fearing lest his wife might scold him and laugh at him, he talked much on all the risks he had run, telling her how, like the clever man he was, he had exchanged an almost dying cow for a bag full of treasures. As she listened to this fine tale, his wife began to show her teeth; but her husband begged her to keep her ill-temper to herself, and put her largest saucepan on the fire.

"You shall see what I've brought you," he kept on repeating to her. "Wait a bit, and you'll be very grateful to me."

So saying, he opened the bag, when out stepped a little man, dressed all in grey, like a mouse.

"How do you do, good people?" said he, so grandly he might have been a Prince. "Ah! what's the meaning of this? I hope you are going to give me something to eat, instead of having me boiled in that pot. My little journey has made me very hungry."

The peasant sank down on to his stool as if he had been struck by lightning.

"There!" said his wife, "I knew this was some new piece of folly. But what can be expected of a husband, except something silly? My lord has got rid of the cow, which gave us something to live on; and now, when we've nothing left, my lord brings us one mouth more to feed! If only you'd stayed under the snow, you and your bag and your treasures!"

The good lady would have been talking still if the little grey man had not shown her, three times over, that cross words fill no saucepans, and that the most sensible thing to do was to go out and hunt for some animal that could be killed and eaten.

So he went out immediately, although it was dark,



"How do you do, good people?"

and blowing, and snowing. After a time he came back with a large sheep.

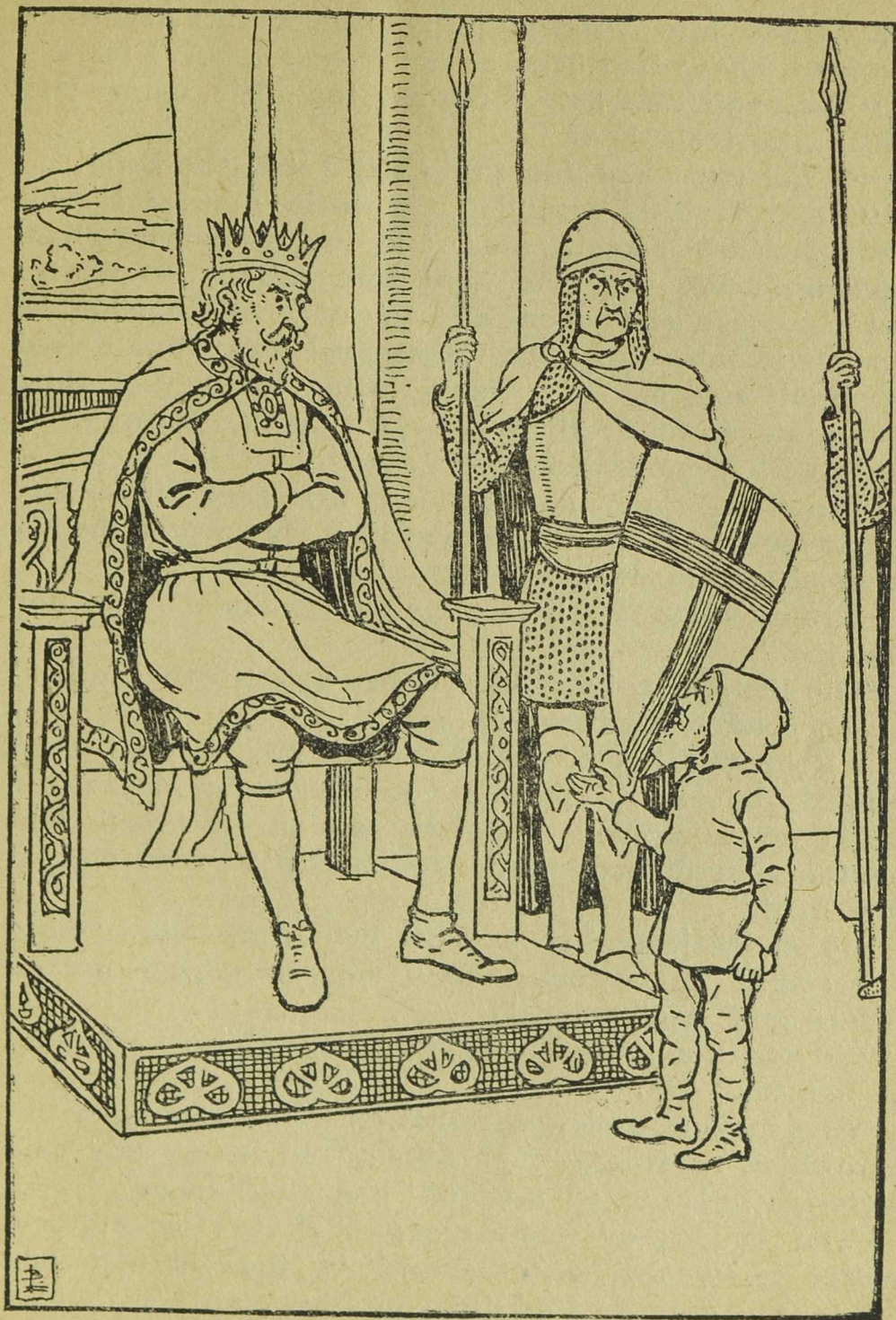
"There!" said he, "kill this creature, and don't let us die of hunger."

The old man and his wife looked suspiciously at the little man and his booty. This unexpected gift, which had fallen from the clouds, as it were, yet looked very much as if it had been stolen about a mile or two away. But when hunger cries, it is good-bye to scruples; and, rightly or wrongly, the sheep was soon devoured.

From this day forth plenty reigned in the peasant's cottage. One sheep was brought in after another, and our good man, more gullible than ever, was wondering whether he had not profited by his exchange, when heaven had sent him so clever a servant as the little grey man, even although it had not sent him the hundred cows he was expecting.

But every medal has two sides, and while sheep increased in number at the old peasant's cottage, they were visibly decreasing in the royal flock which was grazing near by. The head shepherd was becoming very uneasy, and he informed the King that for some time past, although the flock was twice as strictly guarded as before, the finest heads of sheep disappeared one after the other. Some expert thief must have come to live in the neighbourhood; and before long it was known that in the peasant's cottage there was a new-comer, arrived from no one could say where, and whom nobody knew. The King at once ordered the stranger to be brought before him. The little grey man went off without showing the least surprise; but the peasant and his wife began to feel some remorse when they reflected that receivers of stolen goods and the thieves themselves were hanged at the same gallows.

When the little grey man appeared at court, the



"It was I who took them," said the little grey man.

King asked him whether he had chanced to hear that five large sheep had been stolen from the royal flock.

"Yes, your Majesty," replied the little man. "It was I who took them."

"What right had you to do so?" said the King.

"Your Majesty," replied the little man, "I took them because an old man and his wife were half starving, while you, the King, are rolling in plenty, and cannot spend even a tithe of your income. I thought it quite right that these poor folk should live on what you did not want, rather than that they should starve to death, while you do not know what to do with your wealth."

The King was dumfounded by such boldness. Then, looking at the little man in a way which boded no good to him, he said:

"From what I see, your chief talent is for thieving."

The little man bowed. Rather proudly than otherwise, he admitted that this was so.

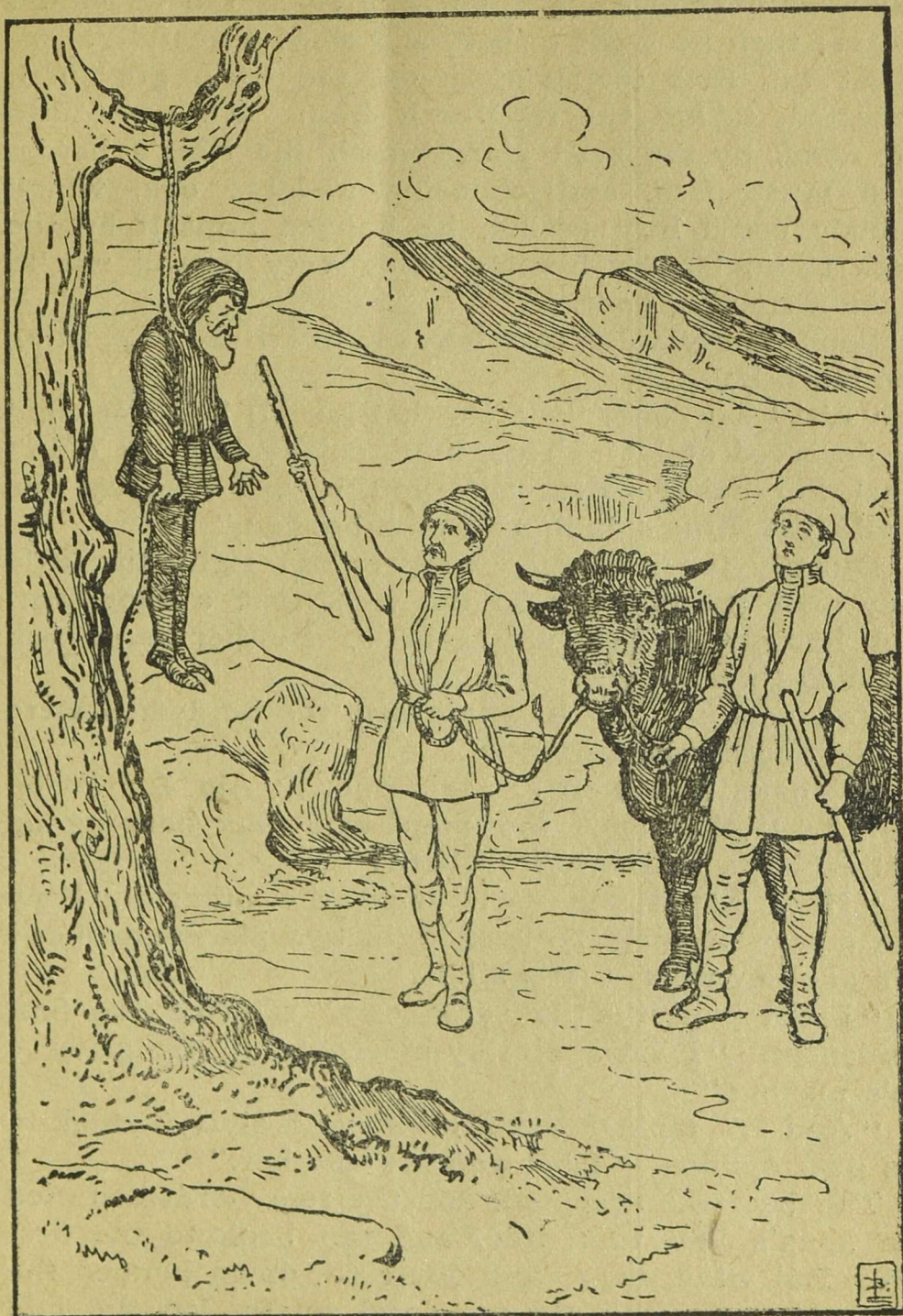
"Very well," said the King. "You deserve to be hanged, but I will pardon you on condition that by this time to-morrow you have stolen my black bull from my herdsmen, who have orders to take special care of it."

"Your Majesty," replied the little grey man, "what you ask is impossible. How do you expect me to escape such vigilance?"

"If you don't do it," retorted the King, "you will be hanged."

And making a sign with his hand, he dismissed our hero-thief, to whom, as he went out, every one said under their breath: "Hanged! hanged! hanged!"

The little grey man went back to the cottage, where he was kindly received by the old man and his wife. But he told them nothing, except that he wanted a rope, and that he was going somewhere at



"There's that rascal: he's got what he deserved."

daybreak next morning. He was given the cow's old halter; then he went to bed, and slept peacefully.

At the first streak of dawn, the little grey man departed, taking the rope with him. He went into the forest by the road along which the King's herds-men must pass, and choosing a large oak, which nobody could help seeing, he hanged himself by the neck to its biggest branch, being very careful not to make a running knot.

Soon afterwards, two herds-men arrived, escorting the black bull.

"Ah!" said one, "there's that rascal; he's got what he deserved at last. This time, at any rate, he didn't steal his halter. Farewell, you rogue! If any one steals the King's bull, it won't be you."

Directly the herds-men were out of sight, the little grey man got down from the tree, took a short cut, and hanged himself up again to another large oak close to the road.

You can imagine how amazed the herds-men were to see another hanged man.

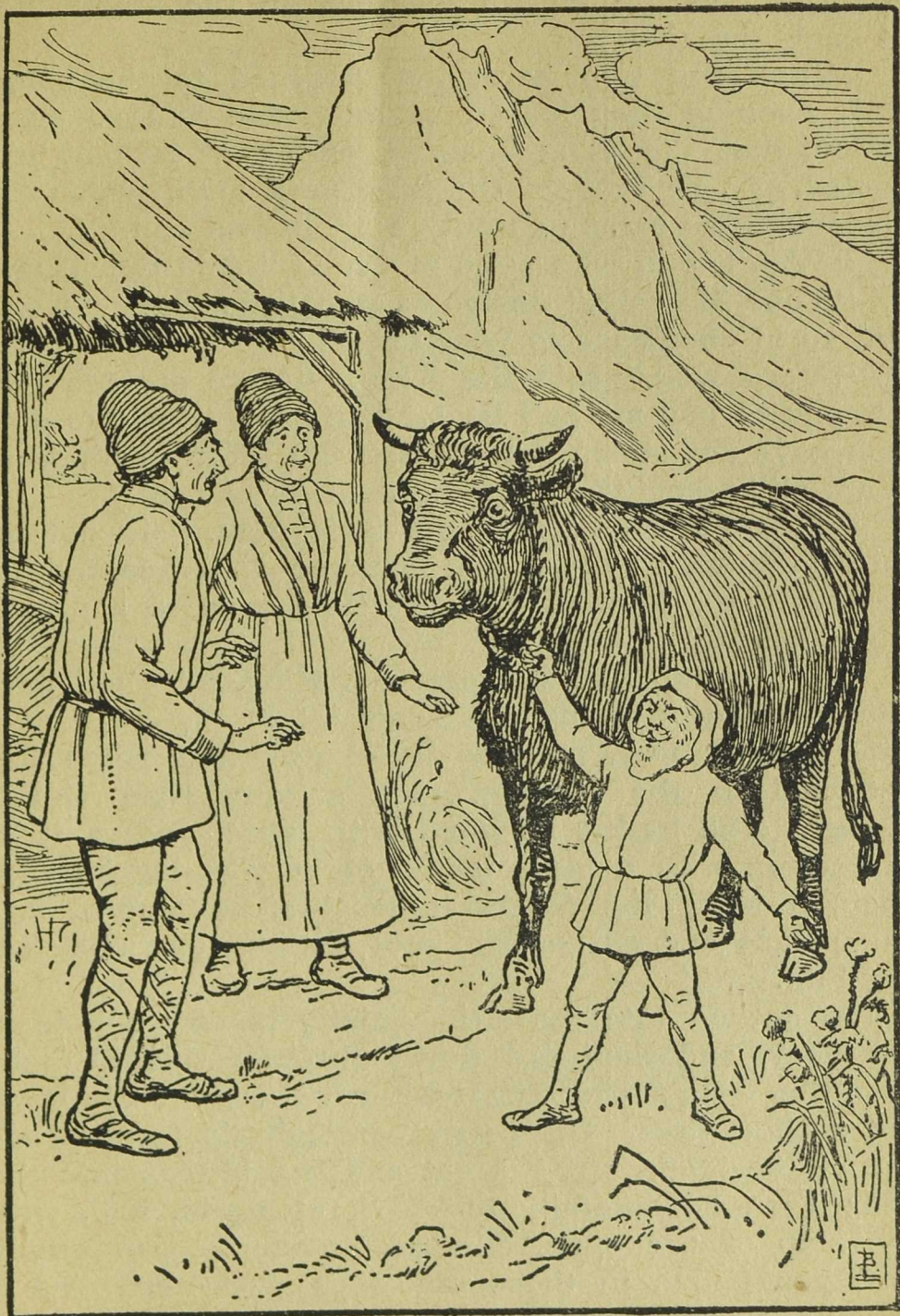
"What's that there?" said one. "Am I growing blind? If that isn't the man who was hanging up further back, and now he's here!"

"How stupid you are!" said the other. "How can a man possibly be hanged in two places at once? It's another thief, that's all."

"I tell you it's the same one," retorted the first herdsman. "I know him by his coat and the grimace he's making."

"And I," replied the second, who always stuck to his own opinion, "I bet you it's another."

The bet was accepted, and the two herds-men tied the King's bull to a tree, and ran back to the first oak. But while they were doing so, down jumped the little grey man from the tree, and quietly led the bull to the peasant's cottage. There was great rejoicing



He captures the black bull.

over it, and the animal was put in the stable until it could be sold.

When the two herdsmen returned to the palace that evening they looked so miserable and so crest-fallen, that the King knew at once that he had been fooled. So he sent for the little grey man, who came in looking as serene as only a great soul can.

"Was it you who stole my bull?" said the King.

"Your Majesty," answered the little man, "I only did so in obedience to your orders."

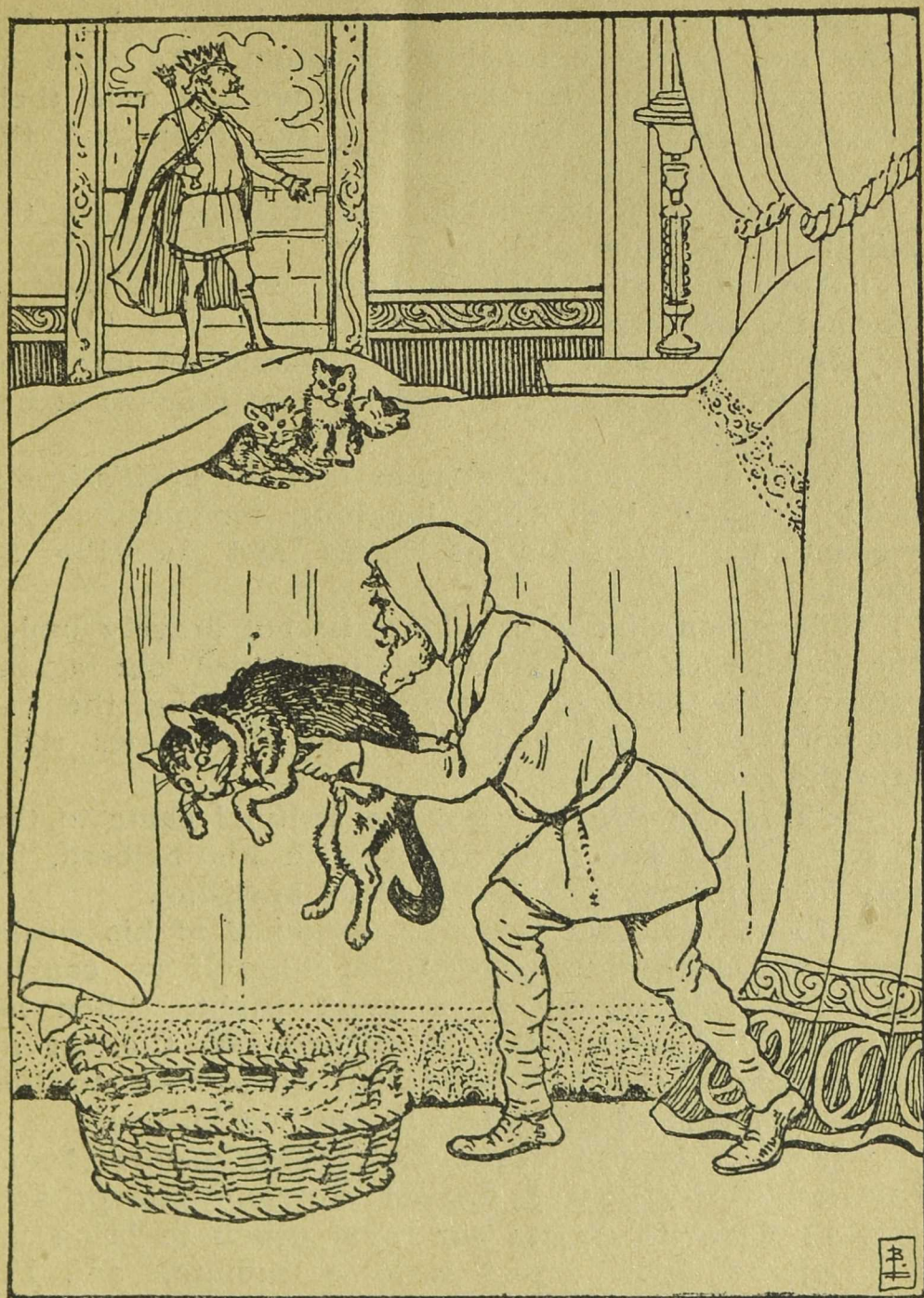
"Very well," said the King. "Here are ten gold crowns to buy my bull back again; but if in two days you have not stolen the sheets from off my bed, while I am still sleeping in it, you shall be hanged."

"Your Majesty," said the little man, "do not ask such a thing of me. You are too well guarded for a poor man, such as I, to be able even to approach your palace."

"If you don't do it," said the King, "I shall have the pleasure of seeing you hanged."

Evening came, and the little grey man, who had returned to the cottage, took a long rope and a basket. The basket he lined with moss, and in it he put a cat with a large family of very young kittens; then, it being the darkest of nights, he slipped into the palace and got on the roof without any one seeing him.

To get up into the attic, quietly to saw a hole in the floor, and then get down through this skylight into the King's bedroom took our clever little man but a short time. Once there, he daintily turned back the clothes, and put the cat and her kittens into the bed; then he carefully tucked it up again, and, with the help of the rope, climbed up on to the canopy (for, you know, in those old days every bed had a canopy over it). From this elevated position he awaited events.



He put the cat and the kittens in the bed.

The palace clock was striking eleven when the King and Queen entered their room. As soon as they were undressed, they knelt down and said their prayers. Then the King put out the lamp and the Queen got into bed.

Suddenly she screamed, and bounced into the middle of the room.

"Are you mad?" said the King. "Do you want to alarm the whole palace?"

"My dear," said the Queen, "don't get into that bed. I felt it burning hot, and my foot touched something hairy."

"Why don't you say at once that the devil's in my bed?" replied the King, laughing for pity. "All women are as timid as hares and as silly as sheep."

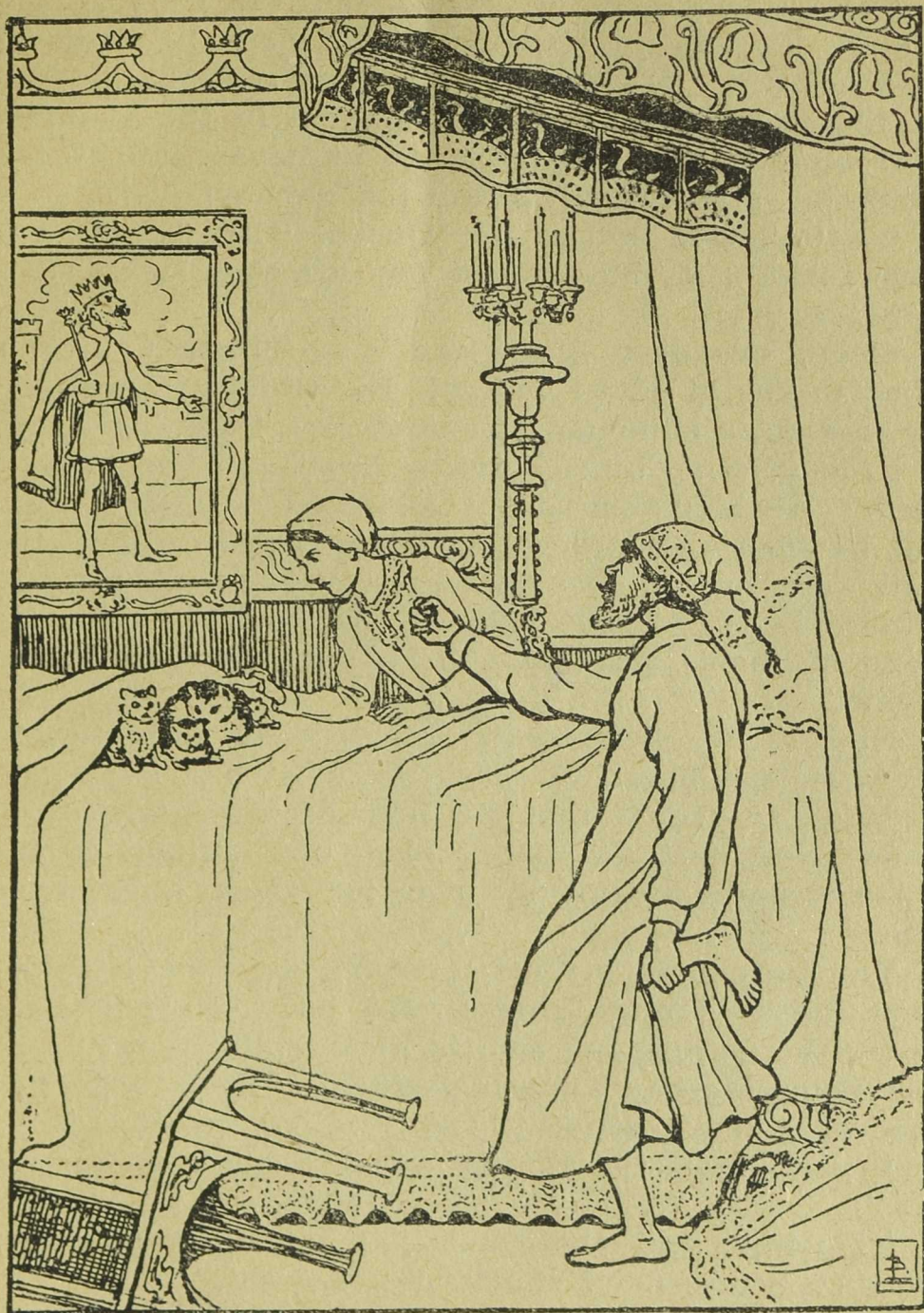
Whereupon, like a true hero, he got bravely under the bedclothes, but immediately jumped out again, uttering the wildest of cries and pulling the cat out with him. She had stuck her four claws right into the calf of his leg.

Hearing the King's cries, the sentinel came to the door, and knocked three times with his halberd, by way of asking whether he could do anything.

"Hush!" said the monarch, ashamed of his weakness, and determined not to let himself be caught when he was plainly in a great fright. Then he struck a light, re-lit the lamp, and saw the cat in the middle of the bed. She had gone back to her place, and was affectionately licking her kittens.

"It's outrageous!" cried he. "That insolent beast has not the slightest respect for our crown, and actually dares to choose our royal couch to bring up her kittens upon! Just wait a minute, and I'll treat you as you deserve!"

"She'll scratch," said the Queen. "She might be mad."



The King uses bad language.

"Don't be afraid, my dear," said the King kindly. And, picking up the sheet by the corners, he wrapped up the cat in it and all her kittens with her, rolled up the parcel he had made of them in the counterpane and under-sheet, made an immense ball of the whole lot, and threw it out of the window.

"Now," said he to the Queen, "let us go into your room, and, having had our revenge, let us sleep in peace."

Sleep, my dear King, and may pleasant dreams come to you in your slumber! But while you are resting, a man is climbing over your roof, fastening a rope to it, and letting himself gently down into your courtyard. He is feeling about for some invisible object; this he puts on his back, and then he skips over the wall and hurries away across the snow. If the sentinels are to be believed, a ghost passed in front of them, and they heard a new-born child crying.

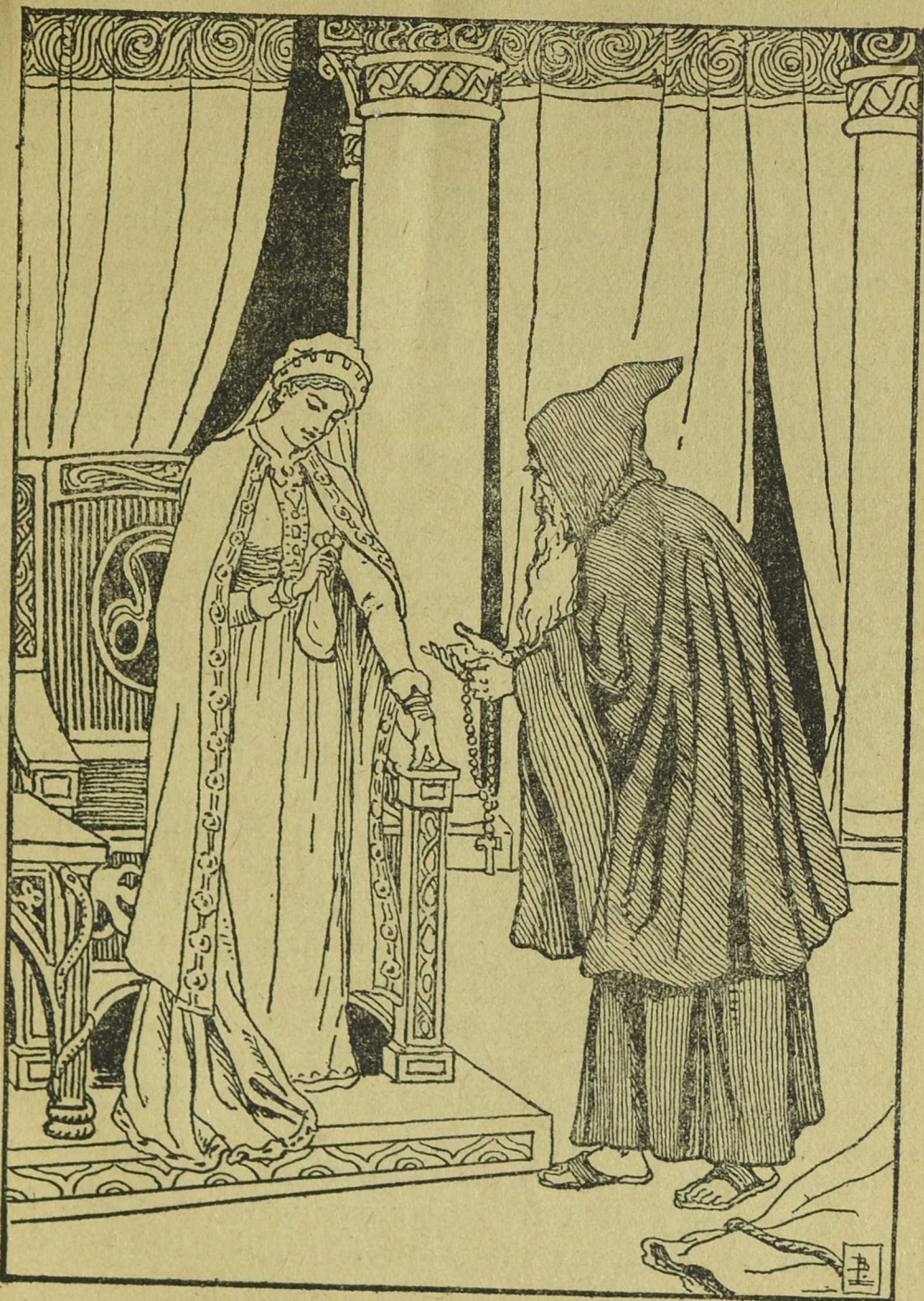
Next morning, when the King awoke, he collected his wits, and began to reflect on what had happened. He now suspected that he had been the victim of some trick, and that very likely the author of the crime was the little grey man, for whom he at once sent.

The little man arrived, carrying over his shoulder some freshly ironed sheets. He knelt on one knee before the Queen, and said in a respectful tone:

"Your Majesty knows that all I have done has been only in obedience to the King. I therefore hope that your Majesty will be good enough to forgive me."

"I will," said the Queen; "but don't play any more such tricks. I should die of fright."

"But I don't forgive you," said the King, much vexed at the Queen's presuming to show mercy without consulting her lord and master. "Listen to me,



"Madam, God will reward your charity."

you threefold knave. If, by to-morrow evening, you have not stolen the Queen herself, in her own palace, to-morrow evening you shall be hanged."

"Your Majesty," cried the little man, "have me hanged at once, and spare me twenty-four hours of misery. How can you expect me to succeed in such an enterprise? It would be easier to take the moon in one's teeth."

"That's your affair, not mine," retorted the King. "Meanwhile, I am going to have that gibbet put up!"

The little man went out in despair. He put his hands up to his face, and his sobs were heartbreaking to hear. For the first time the King laughed.

Towards dusk, an aged and holy friar, with his rosary in his hand and his wallet on his back, came, according to the custom of friars, to beg at the palace on behalf of his convent. When the Queen had given him her alms, he said:

"Madam, God will reward such charity as yours. Even now, indeed, I bring you a reward. To-morrow, as you know, a poor wretch, doubtless most guilty, is to be hanged in the palace precincts."

"Alas!" said the Queen, "I forgive him with all my heart, and I wish I could have saved his life."

"That cannot be," said the monk; "but that man, who is something of a sorcerer, is able to make you a most valuable present before he dies. I know that he is in possession of three marvellous secrets, one alone of which is worth a kingdom. To any one who had pity on him he might bequeath one of these three secrets."

"What are the secrets?" asked the Queen.

"The first will tell a woman how to make her husband do whatever she wants," replied the wandering friar.

"Oh," said the Queen, pouting, "that's nothing very wonderful. Ever since the time of Eve, of

blessed memory, that secret has been handed down from mother to daughter. What is the second secret?"

"The second secret is that of wisdom and goodness."

"That's very nice," said the Queen, in an absent-minded tone. "And the third?"

"The third," said the friar, "ensures to the woman possessing it peerless beauty and the power to charm till the day of her death."

"Holy father, that's the secret I would like to know."

"Nothing could be easier," said the friar. "All that is necessary is that before he dies, and while he is still enjoying full liberty, the sorcerer should take you by both hands and blow three times into your hair."

"Let him come here," said the Queen. "Holy father, go and fetch him."

"That I can't do," said the old man. "The King has given strict orders that he is not to enter the palace. If he sets foot inside its walls, he is a dead man. Do not grudge him the few hours he has left."

"But what about me, holy father? The King has forbidden me to go out till to-morrow evening."

"That's tiresome," said the friar. "I see you will have to give up this priceless treasure. Still, it would have been very nice never to have grown old, and always to have remained young and beautiful, and particularly always to remain charming."

"Alas! holy father, you are quite right. The King has no business whatever to forbid me to leave the palace. But if I attempted to go out, the guards would not let me. Don't look surprised. That's the way the King treats me when he takes fancies into his head. I am the most unhappy of women."

"I am most distressed about it," said the artful

friar. "How tyrannous! How barbarous! Poor woman! But indeed, madam, you ought not to give way to such unreasonableness. Your duty is to do what you please."

"And how shall I do it?" said the Queen.

"There is a way, and it is the only way I know. Get into this bag, and, at the risk of my life, I will get you out of the palace. And fifty years hence, when you are still as youthful and beautiful as you are to-day, you will still be congratulating yourself on having braved your tyrant."

"Very well," said the Queen. "But this isn't a trap being laid for me?"

"Madam," said the holy man, raising his arms to heaven, and striking his breast, "as truly as I am a monk, you need not fear anything of the sort. Besides, all the time that poor wretch is with you, I shall be there too."

"And you will bring me back to the palace?"

"I swear to do so."

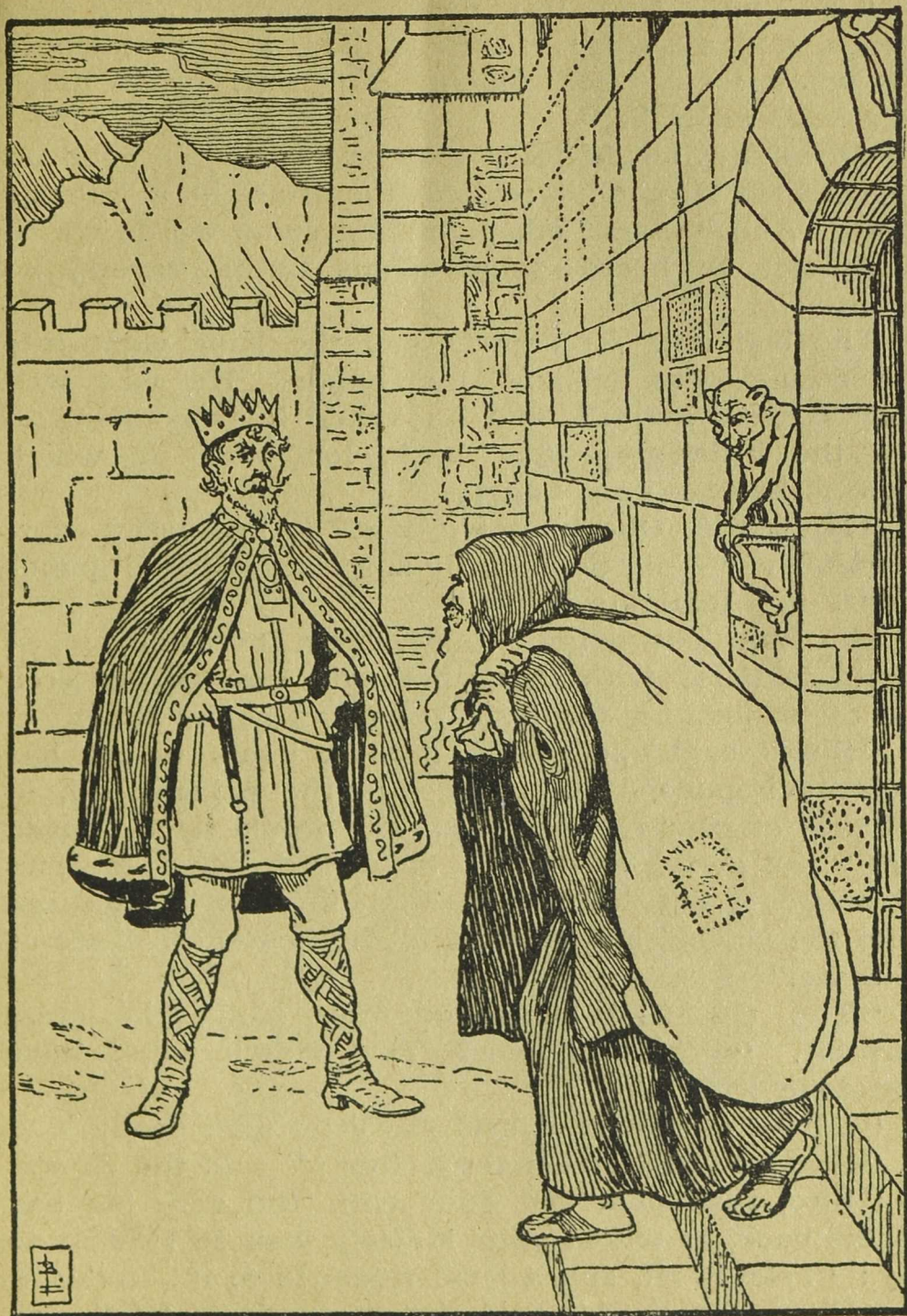
"And with the secret?" added the Queen.

"With the secret," replied the monk. "But, after all, if your Majesty has any doubts, let matters go no further, and the secret will die with him who found it, unless he prefers to part with it to some more trusting woman."

For an answer the Queen bravely got into the bag; the friar drew the strings, hoisted the load on his shoulder, and went with measured steps across the courtyard. On the way he met the King, who was taking a turn about the palace.

"You seem to have had a successful time," said that monarch.

"Sire," answered the monk, "your Majesty's charity is boundless, and I fear I have been abusing it. Perhaps I had better leave this bag here with what is in it."



"Take it away," said the King, "and good riddance!"

"No, no," said the King. "Take it all, holy father, and a good riddance to it! I don't suppose the whole lot is worth much. You won't make much of a feast off it."

"I wish your Majesty may sup with as good an appetite as I shall," replied the friar, in a fatherly tone. And he went off, mumbling some words which could not be heard—some of his Latin prayers, no doubt.

The bell rang for supper, and the King went into the dining-room rubbing his hands. He was well pleased with himself, and he hoped he was going to pay the little grey man back, for both of which reasons he was very hungry.

"Isn't the Queen down yet?" he asked sarcastically. "Well, that hardly surprises me. Unpunctuality is a feminine virtue."

He was just going to sit down to table, when three soldiers, with their halberds crossed, entered the room, pushing the little grey man before them.

"Sire," said one of the guards, "this rascal has had the impudence to come into the palace-yard, in defiance of your royal orders. We would have hanged him right away, so as not to disturb your Majesty at supper; but he insists that he has a message from the Queen, and that he is the bearer of a secret of State."

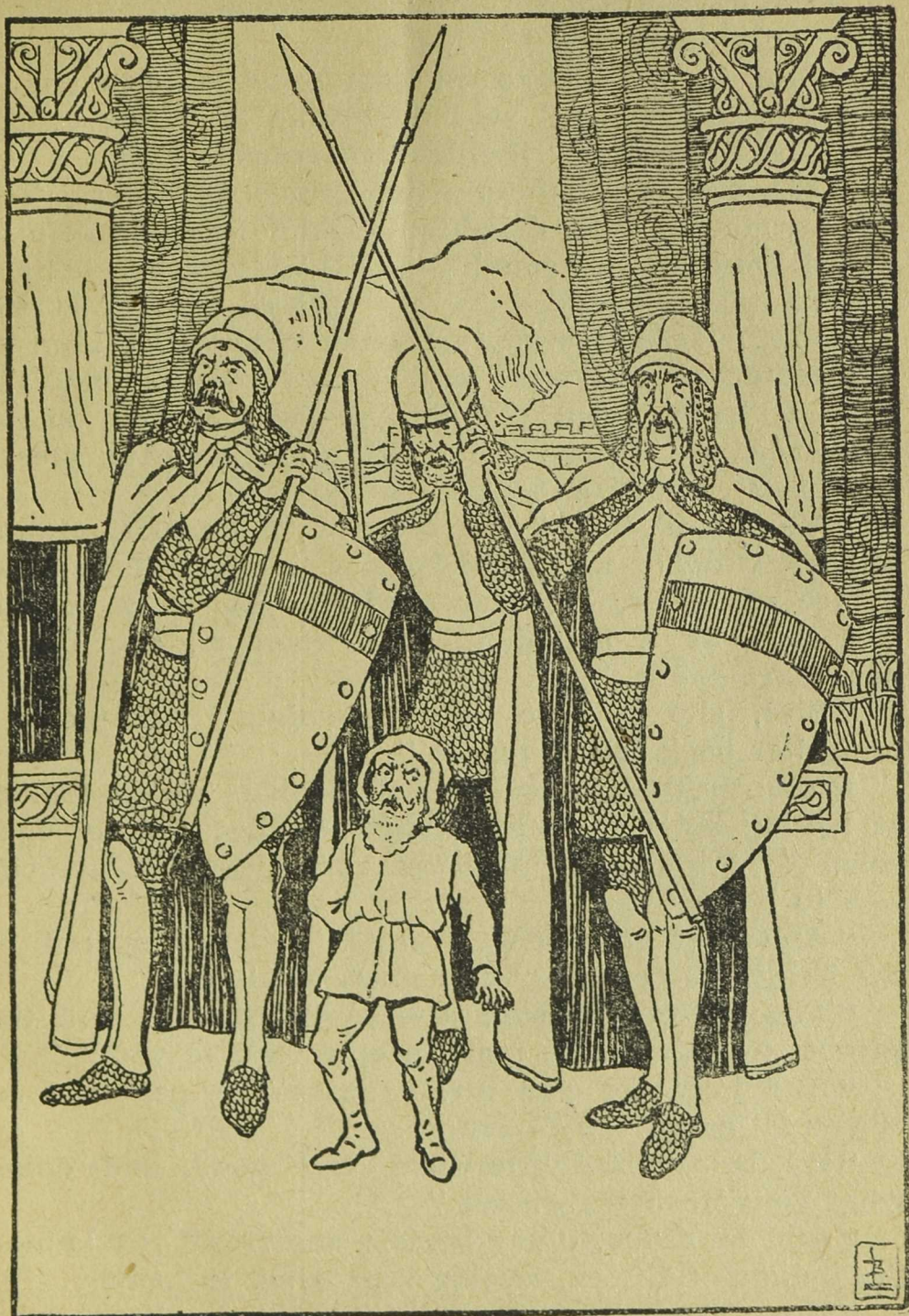
"The Queen!" exclaimed the King, in great surprise. "Where is she? You wretch, what have you done with her?"

"I have stolen her," said the little man coolly.

"And how did you manage that?" said the King.

"Sire, that poor old friar with the very big bag on his back, to whom your Majesty was so kind as to say: 'Take it all, and a good riddance to it!—'"

"That was you!" said the monarch. "Well, you wretch, then even I am not safe any longer. One



The little grey man is arrested.

of these days you'll carry me off, me and my kingdom into the bargain."

"Sire, I am going to ask something more of you."

"You alarm me," said the King. "Whoever are you? A sorcerer, or the devil in person?"

"No, sire, I am merely the Prince of Holar. You have a marriageable daughter; and I was just coming to ask you for her hand, when bad weather obliged me to take shelter, with my faithful squire, at the parson's. Here it was that chance put that idiot of a peasant in my way, and forced me to play the part I have been playing, of which you know. However, all I have done has only been to please and obey your Majesty."

"Very well," said the King. "I understand—or, rather, I don't understand; but it doesn't matter. Prince of Holar, I prefer to have you as a son-in-law than as a neighbour. As soon as the Queen has come——"

"Sire, she is here. My attendant undertook to bring her back to the palace."

Presently the Queen came in, looking rather foolish at having been so easily taken in, but greatly consoled to think what a clever sort of son-in-law she was to have.

"And that wonderful secret?" she whispered to the Prince of Holar. "You must tell it me."

"The secret of being always beautiful," said the Prince, "is always to make people fond of you."

"And how are you always to make people fond of you?" asked the Queen.

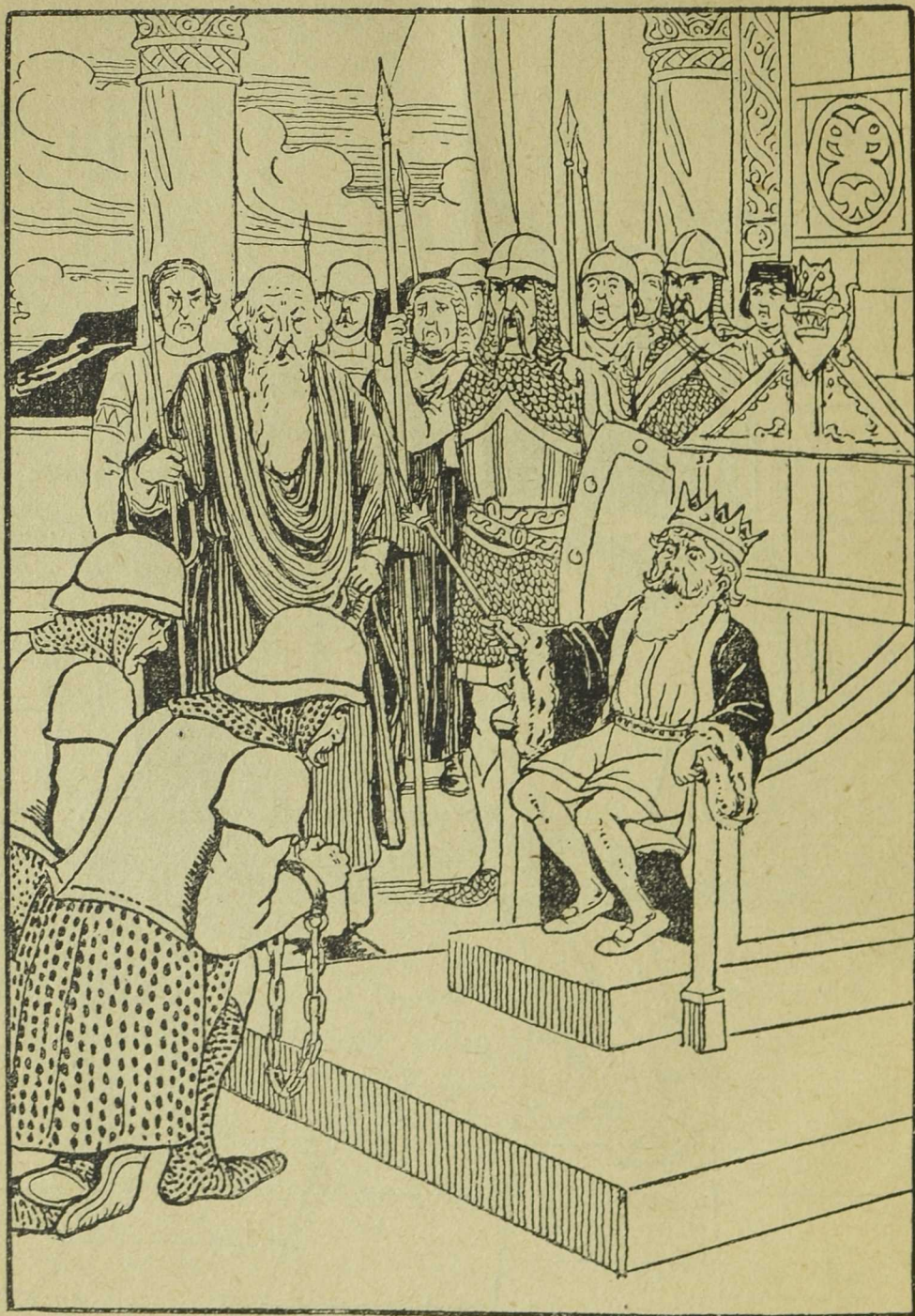
"By being straightforward and good, and doing what your husband wishes."

"And he dares to say he is a sorcerer!" exclaimed the indignant Queen, raising her hands to heaven.

"Now, no more mysteries," said the King, who was already becoming alarmed. "Prince of Holar,



"All I have done has only been to please your Majesty."



The little grey man becomes King.

when you are our son-in-law, you will have more time than you want to talk to your mother-in-law. Supper is getting cold. Come along. We'll have some fun this evening. Make the best of your time, my future son-in-law. To-morrow you'll be married."

At this speech, which he thought very witty, the King looked at the Queen; but the sight of her face made him begin rubbing his chin hard and admiring the flies on the ceiling.

* * * *

Here end the adventures of the Prince of Holar. I do not continue the history of his life, for happy days have no history. I can tell you, however, that he succeeded his father-in-law, and was a great King. Rather a liar, and rather a thief, very daring and cunning, he had all the qualities which go to make a great conqueror: and accordingly he took from his neighbours more than a thousand acres of snow, which he lost and won again three times, using up six armies in doing so. His name and his glorious deeds fill many pages in the famous annals of that part of Iceland; and it is these chronicles which you must now consult, if you wish to know what further befell the Prince of Holar.





The widow and her two daughters.

THE TWELVE MONTHS.

There was once a peasant woman, a widow with two children. The elder, who was only her step-daughter, was called Dobrunka, and the name of the younger, who was as unkind as her mother, was Zloboga. The woman adored her own daughter, but could not bear Dobrunka, simply because Dobrunka was as lovely as her sister was ugly. The good-hearted Dobrunka did not even know that she was pretty, so she could not think why her step-mother flew into a rage at the mere sight of her. It was this poor child who did everything in the house. It was her duty to sweep and cook, to wash and sew, to spin and weave, to mow the grass, and look after the cow. Zloboga lived like a princess; that is to say, she never did anything.

Dobrunka worked very willingly, taking her scoldings and beatings with the gentleness of a lamb. But nothing softened the step-mother's heart, for every day the elder daughter grew lovelier and the younger uglier.

"They are grown up now," thought the woman, "and soon suitors will be coming for them. They will not have anything to do with my daughter when they see that dreadful Dobrunka, who gets handsomer and handsomer on purpose, just to annoy me. At all costs I must get rid of her."

One day, in the middle of January, Zloboga had a fancy for some violets.

"Now, Dobrunka," she said, "go and get me a bunch of violets in the woods. I'll put them in my waist-belt and smell them."

"My dear sister," said Dobrunka, "what can

you be thinking of? Are there violets under the snow?"

"Hold your tongue, you silly, ugly thing," replied the younger sister, "and do what I tell you. If you don't go to the woods and bring me back a bunch of violets, I'll beat you black and blue."

Her mother then took Dobrunka's arm, pushed her out of doors, and double-bolted the door.

The poor girl went to the woods crying. Everything was covered with snow, and there was not even a path. Dobrunka lost her way, and after a time she grew hungry and shivered with cold, so that she prayed to God to take her away from so wretched a life.

Suddenly she caught sight of a light in the distance. She walked on, and climbed up a rock, on the top of which there was a big fire. Around the fire there were twelve stones, and on each stone somebody sat, motionless, and wrapped in a big cloak, with a hood over his head, which came right down over his eyes. Three of their cloaks were as white as snow; three were as green as the grass of the field; three were as golden as sheaves of ripe corn; and three were as purple as bunches of grapes. These twelve figures, looking silently at the fire, were the Twelve Months of the year.

Dobrunka recognized January by his long white beard. He alone had a stick in his hand. The poor girl was very much afraid, but she went up to the Months, and said timidly:

"Kind sirs, will you let me warm myself at your fire. I am frozen with cold."

January nodded, and said:

"Why come here, my dear? What are you looking for?"

"I am looking for violets," replied Dobrunka.

"It's not the right time of year; there are no



At the top of the rock there was a big fire.

violets when there is snow on the ground," said January, in his gruff voice.

"I know," replied Dobrunka sadly; "but my mother and sister will beat me black and blue if I don't bring some back. Kind sirs, please tell me where to find some."

Old January got up, and turning to a young man in a green hood, he put his stick into his hand, and said:

"Brother March, this is your business."

March in his turn got up and poked the fire with the stick. Up shot the flames; the snow melted, the buds reddened the branches, the grass grew green beneath the bushes, the flowers burst their green sheaths, the violets came out: and it was spring.

"Make haste, my child, and gather your violets," said March.

Dobrunka picked a large bunch of them, thanked the Twelve Months, and ran joyfully home again. You can guess how astonished the sister and the step-mother were. The scent of the violets filled the house.

"Where did you find such nice things?" asked Zloboga, in a scornful tone.

"Up in the mountains," answered her sister. "They are like a blue carpet under the bushes."

Zloboga put the violets in her waist-belt, and did not even thank the poor child.

Next day the unkind sister, as she sat doing nothing by the fireside, took a fancy for some strawberries.

"Go and get me some strawberries in the woods," she said to Dobrunka.

"My dear sister," said Dobrunka, "what can you be thinking of? Are there strawberries under the snow?"

"Hold your tongue, you silly, ugly thing, and do



March poked the fire with his stick.

what I tell you. If you don't go to the woods and bring me back a basket of strawberries, I'll beat you black and blue."

Her mother then took Dobrunka's arm, pushed her out of doors, and double-bolted the door.

The poor girl went towards the woods again, looking everywhere for the light she had seen the day before. She had the good fortune to see it again, and, shivering and half frozen, reached the fire. The Twelve Months were in their places, silent and motionless.

"Kind sirs," she said, "will you let me warm myself at your fire? I am frozen with cold."

"Why have you come back?" said January. "What are you looking for?"

"I am looking for strawberries," she replied.

"It's not the right time of year," answered January, in his gruff voice; "there are no strawberries under the snow."

"I know," replied Dobrunka sadly; "but my mother and sister will beat me black and blue if I don't bring some back. Kind sirs, please tell me where to find some."

Old January got up and turning to a man in a golden hood, he put his stick into his hand, and said:

"Brother June, this is your business."

June in his turn got up, and poked the fire with the stick. Up shot the flames; the snow melted, the earth grew green, the trees were covered with leaves, the birds sang, the flowers came out: and it was summer. Thousands of little white stars spangled the turf; then they turned into strawberries, and there were the berries in their green calices, looking like rubies set with emeralds.

"Make haste, my child, and gather your strawberries," said June.



The poor girl was pushed out of doors.

Dobrunka filled her apron with them, thanked the Twelve Months, and ran joyfully home again. You can guess how astonished Zloboga and the step-mother were.

The scent of the strawberries filled the house.

"Where did you find such nice things?" asked the sister, in a scornful tone.

"Up in the mountains," replied her sister. "There are so many that it looks as if some one had been spilling blood about."

Zloboga and her mother ate the strawberries, and did not even thank the poor child.

The third day, the unkind sister wanted some red apples. She said the same unkind things as before; and, as before, Dobrunka was pushed out of doors. She ran off to the mountain, and had the good fortune to find the Twelve kind Months again, sitting still, warming themselves in silence.

"You here again, my child?" said old January, making room for her at the fire.

Then Dobrunka told him, crying, that if she did not bring back some red apples, her mother and sister would beat her to death.

Kind old January did just as he had done the evening before.

"Brother September," he said to a greybeard in a purple hood, "this is your business."

September in his turn got up and poked the fire with the stick. Up shot the flames; the snow melted, the trees put forth some yellow leaves, which fell one by one when the wind blew: and it was autumn. There were no flowers, except a few late carnations, and some Michaelmas daisies, and everlastings. Dobrunka saw only one thing, and that was an apple-tree, on which the fruit was getting red.

"Make haste, my child, and shake the tree," said September.



"Shake the tree," said September.

Dobrunka shook it, and an apple fell down; she shook it a second time, and another fell down.

"Make haste, Dobrunka, make haste home!" cried September, in a tone of command.

The kind-hearted girl thanked the Twelve Months, and ran joyfully home again. You can guess how astonished Zloboga and the step-mother were.

"Fresh apples in January! Where did you gather those two apples?" asked Zloboga.

"Up in the mountains there is a tree which is all red with them, like a cherry-tree in August."

"Why have you only brought two apples? You ate the others on the way."

"I?" said Dobrunka. "I never touched them. I was only allowed to shake the tree twice, and only two apples fell down."

"Plague take you!" cried Zloboga; and she struck her sister, who ran crying away.

The unkind girl then tasted one of the apples. She had never eaten anything so delicious; neither had her mother. What a pity there were no more apples!

"Mother," said Zloboga, "give me my cloak, and I'll go to the woods and find the tree; and whether I am allowed or not, I'll shake it so well that we'll have all the apples."

Her mother had some objections to make; but a spoilt child attends to nobody; so the girl muffled herself up in her cloak, pulled the hood well over her head, and ran off into the woods.

Everything was covered with snow, and there was not even a path. Zloboga lost her way, but greed and pride urged her onwards. She saw the light in the distance, ran and climbed towards it, and found the Twelve Months each sitting on his stone, all motionless and silent. Without asking permission, she went up to the fire.



Lost in the wood.

"What are you doing here? What do you want? Where are you going?" said old January shortly.

"What does that matter to you, you foolish old man?" replied Zloboga. "You've no need to know where I come from, nor where I am going." And she plunged into the woods.

January frowned and raised his stick above his head. In the twinkling of an eye the sky became overcast, the fire went right out, the snow fell, and the wind blew. Zloboga could no longer see where she was going, lost her way, and tried in vain to retrace her steps. The snow fell, and the wind blew.

She called her mother, and cursed her sister. The snow fell, and the wind blew. Zloboga was frozen; her limbs became stiff, and she sank down. The snow still fell, and the wind still blew.

Her mother kept going from the window to the door, and from the door to the window; but the hours passed and Zloboga did not return.

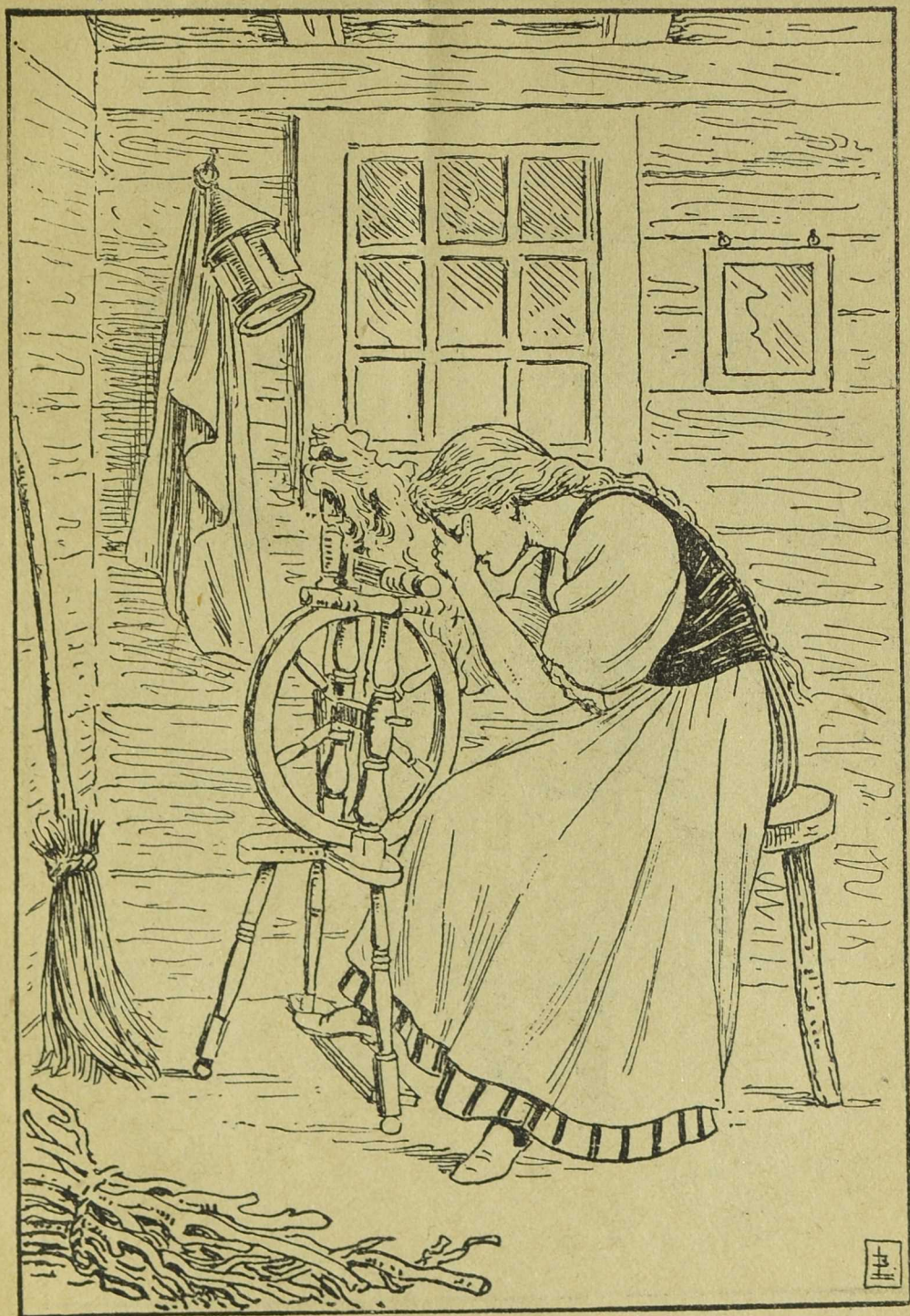
"I must go and find her," said she. "The child must have stayed too long getting those wretched apples."

Then she took her cloak and hood, and ran towards the mountain. Everything was covered with snow, and there was not even a path. She walked far into the woods, calling her daughter. The snow fell, and the wind blew. She walked on in a fever of anxiety, calling at the top of her voice. The snow still fell, and the wind still blew.

Dobrunka waited all the evening and all night, but no one came back. In the morning she took her spinning-wheel, and she sat spinning for a long time: still no news.

"Oh dear! what has happened?" said the kind-hearted girl, crying.

The sun was shining through an icy mist; the snow covered the ground. Dobrunka knelt on the



Still no news came.



A young farmer goes a-courting.

kitchen floor, and said the Lord's Prayer for her mother and sister. But they never came home again; and it was not till the spring that a shepherd found the two bodies in the woods.

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Dobrunka remained sole mistress of the house, the cow, and the garden, to say nothing of a bit of meadow in the front. But when a nice, pretty girl has a field just beneath her window, the first thing to come into the field is a young farmer, offering her everything he has, with his heart and his hand as well. So Dobrunka was soon married. But the Twelve Months did not forsake their child. More than once, when the north wind blew too hard and the windowpanes shook in their leaden frames, kind old January came and stopped up all the cracks in the house with snow, so that the cold could not get into that peaceful and happy home.

Thus Dobrunka spent her life. She was always kind and always happy, and, as the proverb says, she had winter at her door, summer in her barn, autumn in her cellar, and spring in her heart.

THE GOLDEN BREAD.

There was once a widow who had a very handsome daughter. The mother was lowly and modest; but the daughter, Marie, was proud as a peacock. Suitors came from all directions, but not one would do for her, and the more they strove to please her, the more scornful she became. One night, when her poor mother could not sleep, she rose from her bed and began praying for the soul of a daughter who gave her more than one cause for anxiety. Marie was sleeping in the same bed, and the mother looked lovingly at her beautiful child. And then suddenly Marie laughed in her sleep.

"What can she be dreaming about to make her laugh like that?" the mother wondered.

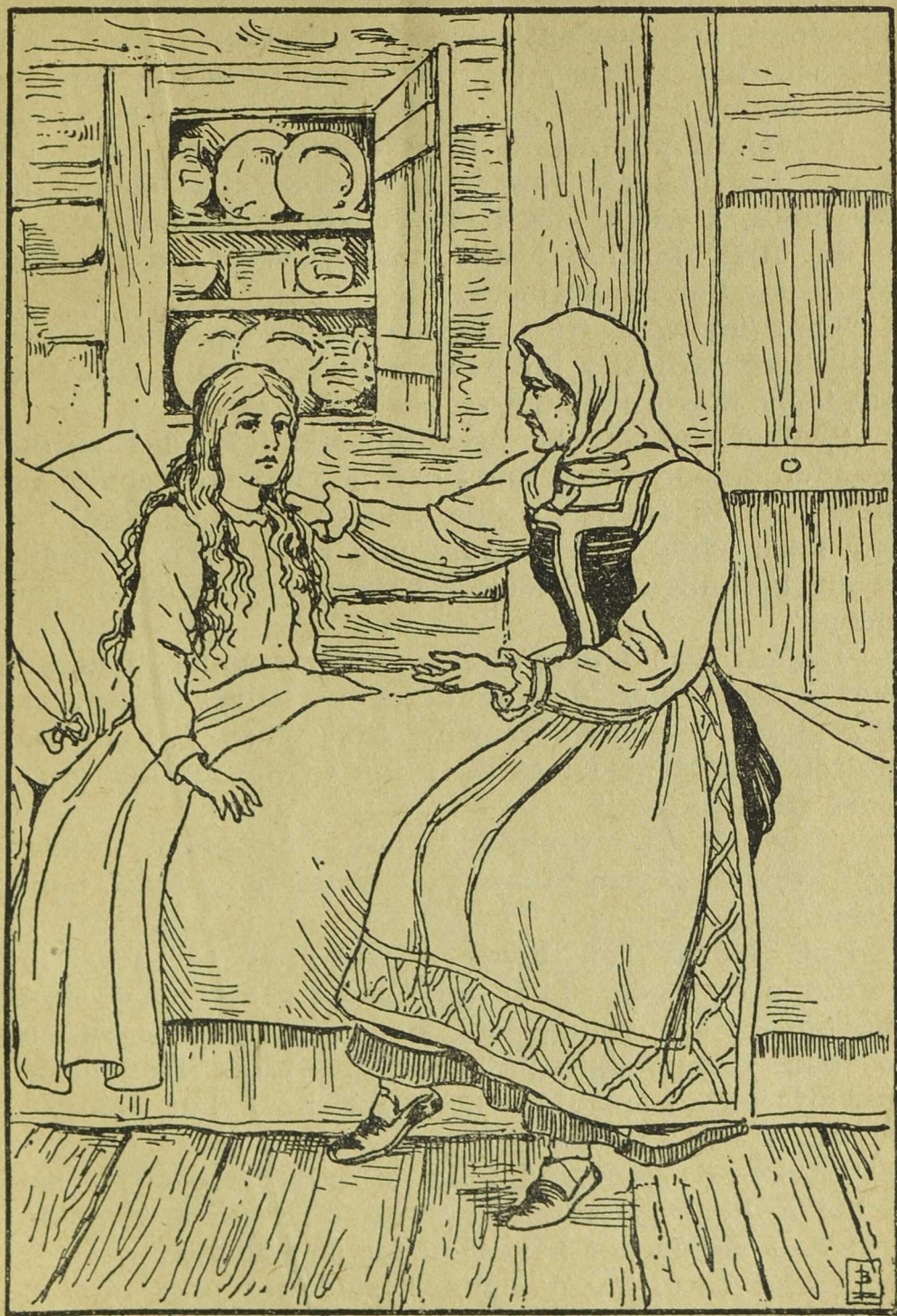
Then she finished her prayer, and, laying her head close to her daughter's, she fell asleep. In the morning she said to her daughter:

"Dear child, what were you dreaming about last night to make you laugh as you did?"

"What was I dreaming about, mamma? I dreamt that a lord came driving here in a copper coach, and he put round my finger a ring with a stone which shone like the stars. And when I went into church everybody looked only at the mother of the Lord and at me."

"My daughter, my daughter," said the poor mother, shaking her head, "how puffed up with pride you must be to have such a dream."

Marie went out of the room singing. That very day a chariot drove up to the house. A good-looking young farmer, very well off, had come to ask Marie



Marie tells her mother of her dream.

to share his peasant's bread with him. The suitor pleased the mother, but the haughty Marie rejected him, saying:

"Even if you came in a copper coach, and put round my finger a ring with a stone that shone like the stars, I would not have you for a husband."

So the farmer went away, very angry with Marie for her haughtiness.

That night Marie's mother woke up and prayed still more earnestly for her daughter's soul. And then suddenly Marie laughed aloud in her sleep.

"What can she be dreaming about?" her mother wondered, and went on praying, for she could not sleep. In the morning she said to her daughter:

"Dear child, what could you have been dreaming about last night? You were laughing aloud in your sleep."

"What was I dreaming about, mamma? I dreamt that a lord came driving here in a silver coach, and offered me a golden crown. And when I went into church people paid less attention to the mother of the Lord than to me."

"Hush, hush, my child! That is blasphemy. Pray, my daughter, pray that you enter not into temptation."

But Marie ran away so as not to hear her mother's reproofs. That very day a coach drove up to the house. A young lord had come to beg Marie to share his nobleman's bread with him. Her mother said it was a great honour for her; but vanity is blind.

"Even if you came in a silver coach," said Marie to her new admirer, "and offered me a golden crown, I would not have you for a husband."

"Take care, my daughter," said her poor mother; "pride leads to hell."

"Mothers don't know what they're talking about,"



A young lord comes to the cottage.

thought Marie; and she went out, shrugging her shoulders.

The third night her mother was so uneasy that she could not sleep at all. She was praying again for her daughter's soul, when suddenly Marie burst out laughing very loud indeed.

"Oh," said the mother to herself, "what is that unhappy child dreaming about now?" and she continued praying till daybreak. In the morning she said to her daughter:

"Dear child, what could you have been dreaming about last night?"

"You'll only be angry again if I tell you," said Marie.

"Never mind, tell me," replied her mother. "Always tell me."

"I dreamt that a noble lord came with a large suite of followers, to ask me to marry him. He was in a golden coach, and he brought me a dress all of gold lace. And when I went into church nobody looked at any one but me."

Her mother looked much distressed, and Marie jumped out of bed and went into another room, so as not to hear what she said.

The next day three carriages drove up to the house, one of copper, one of silver, and of gold. The first had two horses, the second four, and the third eight; and all were richly adorned with gold and pearls. From the copper coach and the silver coach there got out pages dressed in red knee-breeches, green doublets, and green pelisses, while out of the golden coach there got a handsome nobleman all in cloth of gold.

He went into the house, and, kneeling on one knee, asked Marie's mother for her daughter's hand. "What an honour," thought the poor woman.

"What I dreamt has come true," said Marie.



Another grand visitor arrives.

"You see, mother, that, as usual, I was right and you were wrong."

And she ran at once to her room, made up a bunch of flowers, and, all smiles, offered it to the handsome nobleman.

For his part, the handsome nobleman put round her finger a ring with a stone which shone like the stars, and presented her with a golden crown and a dress all of gold lace.

Swelling with pride, Marie went to dress for her wedding, while her mother, who was still uneasy, asked the bridegroom:

"If you please, my lord, what kind of bread will you give my daughter?"

"With us," he said, "the bread is either copper, silver, or gold. She can choose whichever she likes."

"What does that mean?" thought the mother.

Marie had no misgivings. When she came back she was as beautiful as the sun. She took the hand her bridegroom offered her, and set out for the church, without even asking her mother's blessing. The poor woman was left praying at the church door, and when Marie got into her coach, she went away without turning round to look after her mother, or even thinking of saying good-bye to her.

Away galloped the eight horses, till they reached an enormous rock, in which there was a hole as big as a town gate. The horses dashed through this into the darkness, the ground trembled, and the rocks cracked and fell to pieces. The bride seized her bridegroom's hand.

"Don't be afraid, my beautiful bride," he said. "It will be light again in a minute."

Suddenly there were a thousand torches moving about. It was the mountain dwarfs, who, with torches in their hands, had come to greet their master, the



The coach dashed into the darkness.

King of the Mines. Then Marie knew who her husband was. Whether he was kind or unkind, he was so rich that his bride was quite content with her new lot.

Now that they were out of the darkness, they were going through grey-white forests and mountains whose bare misty forms towered up to the sky. Firs, beeches, birches, oaks, rocks—all were of lead. At the end of the forest there was a long meadow, the grass in which was of silver; and at the end of the meadow was a golden castle set with diamonds and rubies. It was here that the coach stopped. The King of the Mines gave his bride his hand, to help her down, saying:

“My beautiful bride, all this belongs to you.”

You can imagine how delighted Marie was; but no one can take so long a journey as she had done without getting hungry, so she was not sorry to see the mountain dwarfs laying a table all glittering with gold, crystal, and precious stones. Wonderful dishes were served; the entrées were of emeralds, and the joints of gold; the dinner-service was of silver. Every one ate with excellent appetite, except the bride, who asked her husband for a little bread.

“Bring the copper bread,” said the King of the Mines.

But Marie could not eat this.

“Bring the silver bread,” said he.

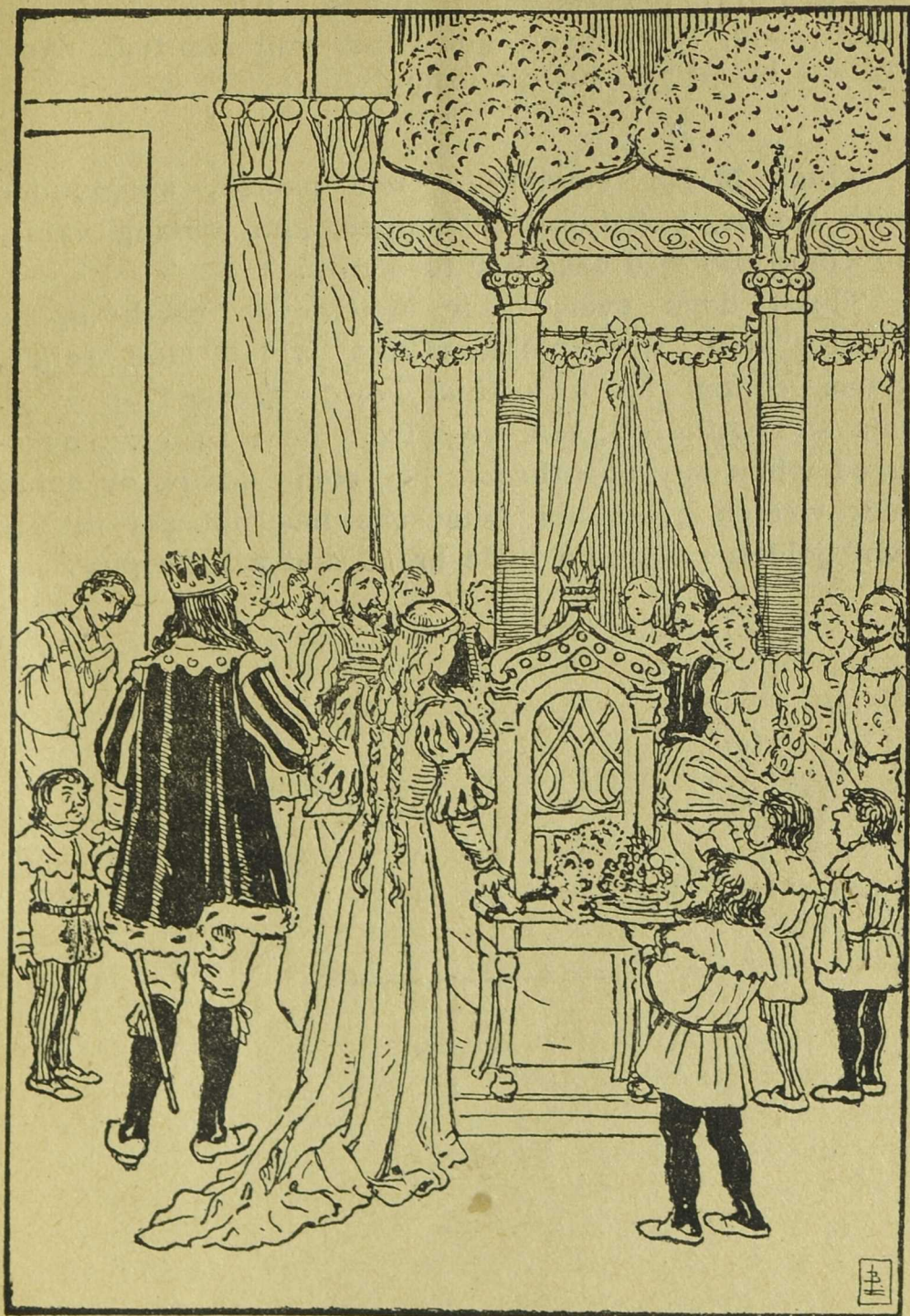
But Marie could not eat this.

“Bring the gold bread,” he said, at last.

But Marie could not eat this either.

“My beautiful bride,” said the King of the Mines, “I am sorry, but what am I to give you? We haven’t any other bread.”

The bride burst into tears, but her husband went into peals of laughter, for his heart, like his kingdom, was of metal.



The King leads Marie into the dining hall.

"Cry if it pleases you," said he; "it won't do the least good. You have got what you wanted. Now eat the bread you have chosen."

* * * *

Thus Marie stayed in her palace, surrounded with riches, but dying of hunger, and looking vainly for some roots to ease her torments.

Three days every year, when the earth opens slightly with the abundant rain which God sends, Marie comes up into this world, dressed in rags, pale and withered; she begs from door to door, overjoyed when any one throws her some scraps or some poor wretch gives her what she has not got in her own golden palace—a little bread and a little pity.

A TALE ABOUT NOSES.

At Dewitz, not far from the city of Prague, in Bohemia, there was once a farmer. He was a rich man and a funny man, and he had a pretty daughter, old enough to be married. In those days there were about 25,000 students at Prague University, and they used often to go to Dewitz, and more than one of them would gladly have followed the farmer's plough if he might have become his son-in-law. But this was not an easy matter, for every time the farmer engaged another man to work on his farm, he made this bargain: "I will engage you for a year," he said, "until the spring comes round again and the cuckoo is calling; but if between now and then you tell me one single time that you are dissatisfied, I'll cut off the end of your nose." "But," he added, smiling, "if I'm not satisfied with you, I give you the right to cut off the end of mine."

And he did as he had said. For Prague was soon full of students who had lost the tips of their noses. This did not improve their appearance, and caused many unkind jokes to be cracked at their expense. Moreover, when they came back from Dewitz, looking ridiculous, their passion for the farmer's daughter had cooled down very much indeed.

It happened that one young fellow named Coranda wished to try his luck with the farmer's daughter. He was rather clumsy-looking, but cold-hearted, sharp-witted, and cunning. The farmer received him good-humouredly as usual, and having struck the same bargain with him as with all the others, sent him to work in the fields. When luncheon-time came, the other farm hands were called in, but the new man was purposely forgotten. At dinner, the same thing hap-

pened. Coranda did not mind this in the least. He went back to the farmhouse, and while the farmer's wife was giving some corn to the fowls, he unhooked an immense ham from the kitchen ceiling, took a large loaf out of the bread-bin, and went off to the fields again to eat his dinner and have a nap. In the evening, when he came in, the farmer called out to him, "Are you satisfied?"

"Quite," replied Coranda. "I've dined better than you."

Just then the farmer's wife came running in crying "Thieves!" at which our hero burst out laughing. The farmer grew pale.

"You aren't satisfied!" said Coranda.

"A ham's only a ham," retorted his master. "I don't trouble about such a small thing as that."

But from that time they took care not to let Coranda go without his meals.

Sunday came, and the farmer and his wife got into their trap to drive to church, and said to Coranda: "You must look after the dinner. Put that piece of meat into the pot, with some onions, carrots, and parsley."

Now at the farm there was the daintiest little dog called "Parsley." Coranda killed it, skinned it, and boiled it nicely in the stew. When the farmer's wife came back, she called her pet. Alas! she found only its skin hanging by the window.

"What have you done?" she asked Coranda.

"What you told me to do, mistress," he replied. "I put some onions, carrots, and Parsley in the saucepan."

"You silly, cruel fellow!" cried the farmer. "Did you really kill that innocent creature, which was the household pet?"

"You are dissatisfied!" said Coranda, drawing his knife from his pocket.

"I don't say that," the old fellow replied. "A dead dog is only a dead dog." And he sighed.

A few days later the farmer and his wife went to market. As they did not quite trust their terrible farm hand, they said to him before going: "You must stay at home. You mustn't touch anything belonging to your master, and you must do just what the others do."

Now in the farmyard there was an old shed whose roof was nearly falling in. The masons came to repair it, and, according to their custom, they began by pulling it to pieces. Away went Coranda; he fetched a ladder and got up on to the roof of the house, which was quite new. Laths, shingles, nails, and cramp-hooks, he pulled them all out, and threw them to the four winds of heaven. By the time the farmer returned, the house was open to the sky.

"You rascal!" he cried, "what trick have you been playing me now?"

"I did what you told me, master," replied Coranda. "You told me to do whatever the others did. Are you not satisfied?" And he took out his knife.

"Satisfied!" said the farmer. "Satisfied, indeed! Why should I be dissatisfied? A few shingles more or less will not ruin me." But he sighed.

By the evening the farmer and his wife were agreed that it was high time to have done with such a terror as Coranda. But as they were sensible folk, they never did anything without consulting their daughter.

"Father," said Helen, "early to-morrow morning I'll hide in the big pear-tree and imitate the cuckoo. Then you must tell Coranda that the year is up, that the cuckoo is calling, and then you must pay him his wages and send him away."

No sooner said than done; and directly it was morning the plaintive cry of the cuckoo was heard in

the country side: "Cuckoo! Cuckoo!" You can guess how surprised the farmer was.

"Now, my boy," he said to Coranda, "spring has come. The cuckoo is calling in the pear-tree over there. Come and let me pay you, and let us part good friends."

"A cuckoo?" said Coranda. "I've never seen a cuckoo!"

And he ran to the pear-tree, and shook it with all his might. There was a cry, and suddenly a girl fell out of the tree, happily more frightened than hurt.

"Rogue!" cried the farmer.

"You are dissatisfied!" said Coranda, drawing his knife.

"Wretch!" said the farmer, "you are killing my daughter, and still expect me to be satisfied with you. I shall go mad with rage. Be off, if you don't want to die by my hand."

"I'll go when I have cut off your nose," said Coranda. "I've kept my word; now keep yours."

"Father," said Helen, "the mistake was mine, and I will repair it. Coranda, will you have my hand instead of my father's nose?"

"Yes," said Coranda.

"On one condition," said the girl. "I'm going to finish making the bargain. Whichever of us is the first to be dissatisfied with anything shall have his or her nose cut off."

"Very well," said Coranda; "I'd rather it was the tongue, but after the nose we'll come to the tongue."

Never had there been so fine a wedding at Dewitz as that of Coranda and Helen, and never was a happier couple seen. They were, indeed, a model husband and wife. No one ever heard either of them complain about anything; and thanks to their shrewd bargain, they managed to keep during a long married life both their affection for each other and their noses.

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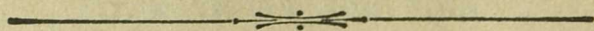
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