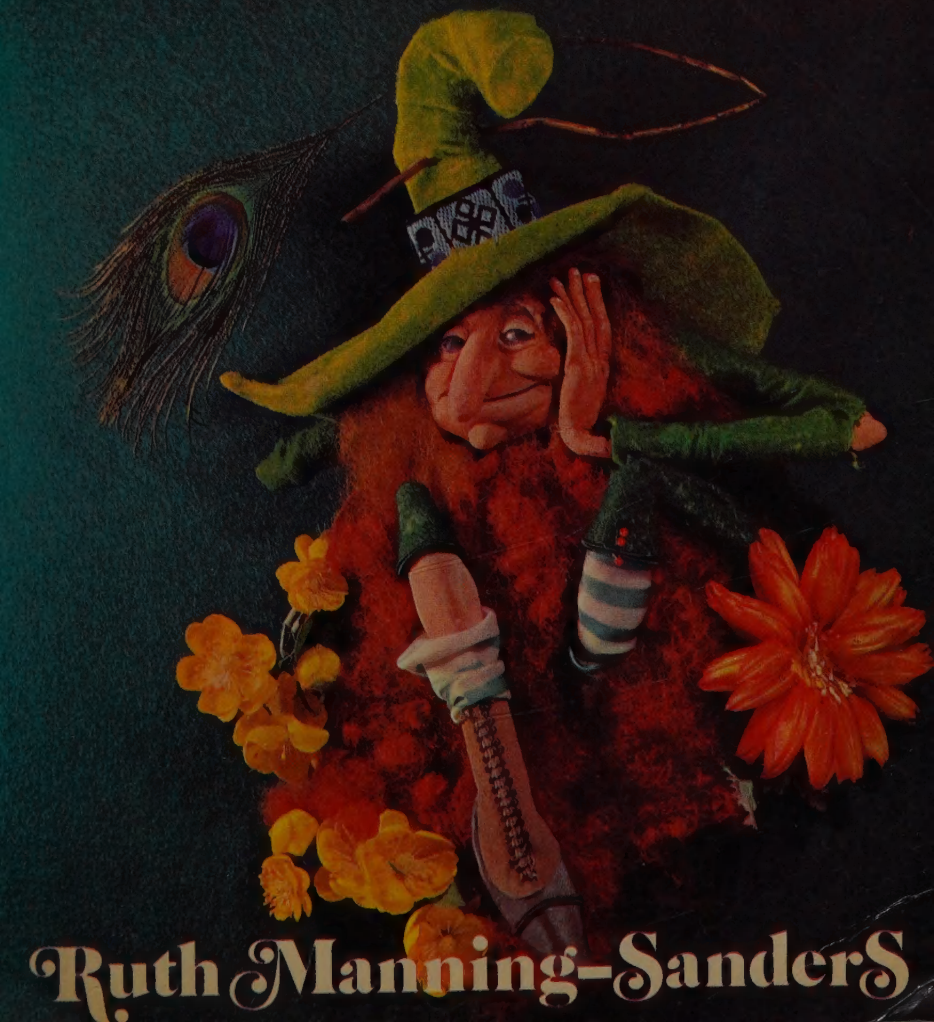
Piccolo

A BOOK OF DWARFS

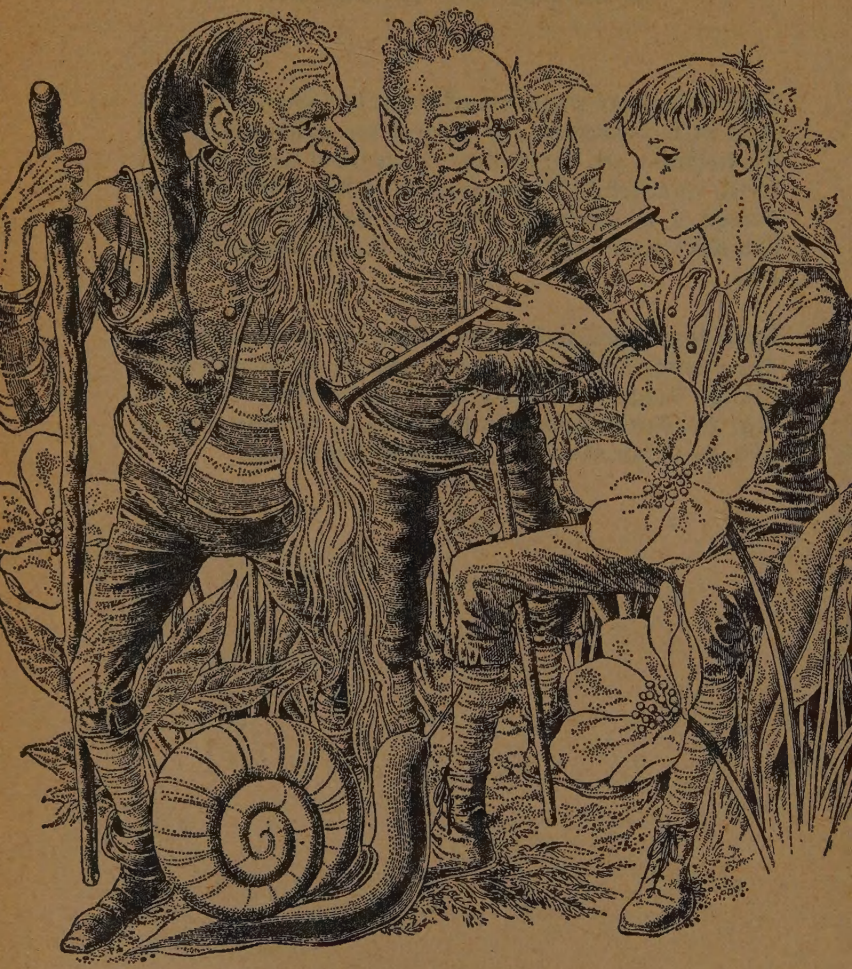


Ruth Manning-Sanders

A BOOK OF DWARFS

Some dwarfs are small enough to sit in a horse's ear or to sleep in a cockleshell. All of them are quick-witted and the majority are kind; if you treat them well, they will lavish wonderful gifts on you. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* is of course famous, but many of the stories, like *Knurremurre* and *The Girl who Picked Strawberries*, are new.

Ruth Manning-Sanders was a Shakespearean scholar at Manchester University. She is married to Cornish artist George Manning-Sanders, and together they have covered the British Isles in a horse-drawn caravan and for two years shared the life of a travelling circus.



RUTH MANNING-SANDERS

A BOOK OF DWARFS

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A Piccolo Book

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A BOOK OF GIANTS

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FOREWORD

MOST STORIES about dwarfs come from the northerly parts of the world. In this book you will find only two dwarfs living in more southerly countries: Timimoto in Japan, and Little Mukra in Arabia. Of the other stories, *Snow White*, *The Girl who Picked Strawberries*, *Thumbkin*, *The Three Little Men in the Wood*, *The Cobbler and the Dwarfs* and *Fir Cones* all come from Germany; *Freddy and his Fiddle* from Norway; *The Skipper and the Dwarfs* from Jutland; *The Silver Bell* from Rügen; *Maia* from Denmark; *Knurremurre* from Zeeland; *The Field of Ragwort*, *Bottle Hill* and *The Adventures of Billy MacDaniel* from Ireland; and *The Hazel-nut Child* from Bukovina.

Now there are many kinds of dwarfs. There are dwarfs with big heads and little bodies, like Mukra; and there are tiny beings like Maia, and Thumbkin, and the Hazel-nut Child. And all these, though different from us in size, are, in their nature, just like ourselves. But there are other dwarfs – the little fellows who hide under hills or in forests, and they are not like us, because they possess magic. There is an old legend that explains these things, and here is the legend:

Mother Eve had a great many children; some were good and some were naughty. One day an angel flew down to say that the good God was coming to visit the children. So Mother Eve began in a great hurry to bath them and dress them in their best clothes. She began with the good children; and she had only just got the last good child ready when the good God arrived. So she hid all the naughty ones in the cellar. The good God was pleased to see the good children, with their shining faces and their clean white pinafores; and he blessed them and gave them each a gift.

'But, Mother Eve,' he said, 'surely you have more children?'

Mother Eve admitted that there were some more in the cellar.

'But oh, dear Lord,' she said, 'they are not fit for you to see!'

'Call them up,' said the good God.

Mother Eve opened the cellar door; and up they all scampered, pushing and jostling, and grubby and tattered, and laughing and shouting, and behaving with no respect at all.

The good God wasn't exactly angry, but he wasn't exactly pleased.

'If they are not fit for me to see, they are not fit for any one to see,' he said. And he sent them away to live underground or in the deep forests. These children never grew any bigger. But to make up to them for being dwarfs, the good God gave them many gifts: they could change themselves into any shape they wished; they could make themselves invisible; they could live for hundreds of years; they could make wishes come true; and they possessed all the gold and the silver and the precious stones that were buried in the earth.

Mischievous they have remained from that day to this; but most of them are good-hearted, and if you treat them well they will lavish wonderful gifts and kindnesses upon you. But beware of taking liberties, even with the best of them! Of course a few of them are bad-tempered and as for these – well, keep out of their way, if you can. But if you *can't* keep out of their way, try pitting your good feelings against their bad feelings, and you will generally come off best. At least that is what the story books say.

A BOOK OF DWARFS

1 KNURREMURRE

There was once a little dwarf man called Katto, and there was once a little dwarf woman called Ulva; and like many a pair of little dwarfs before and after them, Katto and Ulva fell in love with one another. They should have been happy, and they could have been happy, had it not been for Knurremurre. They should have got married, and they would have got married, had it not been that this same Knurremurre fancied the little dwarf woman for himself. And Knurremurre was a terror!

Of all the dwarfs that lived under the hill, he was the strongest; and of all the dwarfs that lived under the hill, he was the richest and the fiercest and the most ill-tempered. In fact, he was a horrible little fellow, and all the other dwarfs were afraid of him.

So when Knurremurre said he was going to marry Ulva himself, what could poor Katto do but bow his head and hide his grief? And what could poor Ulva do? True, she didn't bow her head and hide her grief: she clung to Katto, and threw back her head, and howled long and loud. But that didn't do her any good. Knurremurre seized her by the hair and dragged her away from Katto, and he got an iron ring and pushed it on her finger, and called all the dwarfs together to witness the marriage ceremony.

'So now you are mine!' he snarled at poor Ulva. 'And don't you ever forget it!'

Katto felt that he couldn't stay there under the hill, looking forever at Ulva with longing eyes, and have Ulva forever looking with longing eyes at him. He thought it would be better for them both if he went away. So he changed himself into a fine tortoiseshell cat – perhaps it was his name that gave him the cat idea; at any rate he was a very special-looking cat, with a handsome

coat and the most beautiful brown and yellow markings: a cat that anyone would be proud to possess. So he thought he would have no difficulty in finding a good home.

And he did find a good home. He went and rubbed himself against the door-post of a house belonging to a man called Plat. Plat and his wife were delighted to see him, and they took him in and buttered his paws and gave him a dish of cream. And then he sat in a warm armchair by the stove and purred.

Well, if he could have forgotten Ulva he would have been happy. He had milk and he had bread and he had meat, and he wasn't expected to do anything except look handsome and catch a few mice when he felt inclined. But he couldn't forget Ulva; and so, though he wasn't exactly unhappy, he wasn't exactly happy.

And he lived like that for quite a long time.

Then one morning early, Mr Plat set out for market. There was nothing unusual about that, because Mr Plat always had set out for market every Wednesday of his married life. He always set off at eight o'clock in the morning, and he always came back at six o'clock in the evening. And on the Wednesday I'm telling of, he did just that: except that the old clock over the dresser said maybe a few minutes past six when he walked in.

His wife set his supper on the table, and put a saucer of milk on the floor; and Plat sat down at the table, and the tortoiseshell cat jumped out of the armchair, and gave a stretch to his front legs and a stretch to his back legs. And then he settled himself to lap up the milk in his dainty way.

Plat ate a few mouthfuls, and then he put down his knife and fork and laughed.

'I've had a bit of an adventure this evening, that I have,' he said.

'Tell about it,' said his wife.

And the tortoiseshell cat went on lapping up the milk.

'You ever seen a dwarf?' said Plat.

'No, nor wish to,' said the wife.

The tortoiseshell cat stopped lapping the milk for a moment, and lifted up his green eyes to Plat.

'Nor I haven't seen one, neither,' said Plat.

'Then why speak of them?' said the wife.

And the tortoiseshell cat went on lapping up the milk.

'I'm coming to that,' said Plat. 'Now listen, old woman. I was walking across the moor, pleasant as you please, and I came by a bit of a hill, something hit me on the knee.'

'That would be a pebble you kicked up,' said the wife.

And the tortoiseshell cat went on lapping up the milk.

'No, it wasn't a pebble I kicked up,' said Plat. 'It was a pebble thrown at me.'

'No, not *thrown* at you!' said the wife.

'Yes, thrown at me,' said Plat.

And the tortoiseshell cat went on lapping up the milk.

'Who threw it?' said the wife.

'I'm coming to that,' said Plat.

'Well then, come to it!' said the wife.

'So I stopped for to rub my knee,' said Plat. 'And I heard a squeak, squeak, squeaking.'

'That would be a bat flickering by in the air,' said the wife.

And the tortoiseshell cat went on lapping up the milk.

'No, it wasn't a bat flickering by in the air,' said Plat. 'It was a voice coming up from the ground.'

'No, not a *voice*!' said the wife.

'Yes, a voice,' said Plat.

And the tortoiseshell cat lifted his chin from the milk and stared at Plat out of his great green eyes.

'A little bit of a squeaky voice,' said Plat, 'and it was speaking words.'

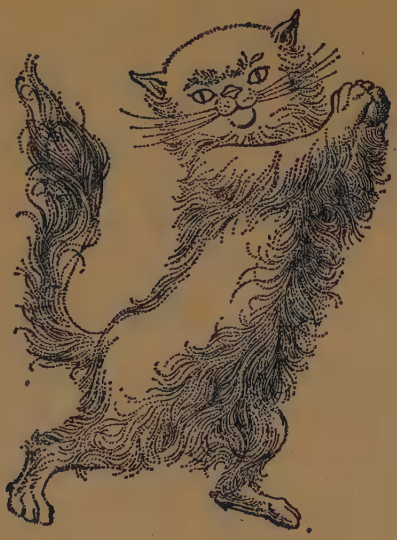
'No, not *words*!' said the wife.

'Yes, words,' said Plat. 'I heard 'em plain.'

The tortoiseshell cat was still staring at Plat, and Plat stared back and said, 'Seems like our puss is listening.'

'No, our puss isn't listening,' said the wife. 'Tell what the voice said; if it was a voice, which I'm not believing.'

'It was a voice,' said Plat, 'and this is what it said:



"Hark'ee, Plat,
Tell your cat
That Knurremurre's dead."

Now why should I go for to tell our cat a thing the like of that?'

'It doesn't make sense,' said the wife.

It didn't make sense to them, but it made sense to the cat. He jumped up in such a hurry that he overset the saucer of milk. Then he stood on his hind legs and clapped his paws in the air.

'What! Is Knurremurre dead?' he cried in a shrill voice. 'Then I may go home as fast as I please!'

And he began to dance round the room and sing,

'Knurremurre is dead! Knurremurre is dead!
So I thank you for board and I thank you for bed,
And Katto and Ulva this night shall be wed.'

And with that he gave a leap through the window, and galloped off towards the dwarfs' hill, with his tail sticking up like a flag pole.

Plat stared at his wife, and his wife stared at him.

'Did you ever?' said Plat.

'No, I never did,' said his wife.

2 FREDDY AND HIS FIDDLE

There was once a cottager who had an only son. The boy never grew big and he never grew strong, and every one called him Little Freddy.

Now the time came when the cottager wanted to put Freddy out to work, but no one would employ him. 'What use is a little shrimp of a thing like that?' everyone said. But at last an old skinflint of a sheriff said he would take him, because he thought he would get him cheap, and he would do to run errands. So Little Freddy went to live with the sheriff.

The sheriff gave him his food, and that was all he did give him; and Little Freddy served that sheriff for three years, till his clothes were hanging in rags and tatters about him. The sheriff was too mean to buy him any new clothes, and yet he felt ashamed to have such a ragged-looking servant about the house; so, after those three years, he told Little Freddy he had better go home.

'And shan't I have any wages at all to carry home to father?' said Freddy.

The sheriff hummed and hawed a bit, and then took three pennies out of his purse.

'Here you are,' he said, 'a penny for each year, and you're lucky to get that, I can tell you!'

Little Freddy was delighted; he had never had any money in his life before, and he thought he was now rich. He set out on his journey home with a merry heart; and every now and then he put his hand in his pocket to make sure his pennies were safe.

He was feeling so grand and rich that he forgot to notice where he was going. And by and by he lost his way, and found himself in a narrow valley with high, bare hills rising all round him. There

didn't seem to be any way out of the valley, so he set to work bravely to climb one of the hills. And when he got to the top he saw nothing before him but a great plain, stretching away and away, and all covered with moss.

By this time he was very tired, and his little legs were aching; so he sat down on the moss and took his three pennies out of his pocket to cheer his eyes with the sight of them.

'One, two, three! One, two, three!' he counted them over and over. And when he looked up from counting them, what should he see standing by his side but a queer little old dwarf.

The dwarf was very thin, and his clothes were even more ragged than Freddy's own, and he held out his knobbly little hand, and said, 'Please spare one of your pennies for a poor old man who hasn't a crust in the world!'

'Well,' said Freddy, 'I *was* taking them home to father; but yes, I expect you can have one of them.'

So the dwarf took the penny, and he didn't even say thank you. First he was there, and then he was gone. And Freddy got up and walked on his way.

He walked along and along over that plain till he felt tired, and his little legs were aching again, so he sat down to rest once more. And he took his two pennies out of his pocket to cheer his eyes with the sight of them. He counted those pennies over and over, 'One, two! One, two!' And when he had done counting them and looked up – well, if he didn't see another little old dwarf standing by his side!

This little dwarf was even thinner and raggeder than the first one had been, and he held out his skinny little hand and whined, 'Please spare one of your pennies for a poor old man whose clothes are in rags and whose stomach is empty!'

'But,' said Little Freddy, 'I was taking them home to father.'

'Has your father a roof over his head?' said the dwarf.

'Yes, he has,' said Freddy.

'And has he a bite of meat and a crust of bread to put inside him?' said the dwarf.

'Yes,' said Freddy, 'I think he has.'

'Then I need your penny more than he does,' said the dwarf.

'I think you must be right about that,' said Little Freddy. 'Here, you can have it.'

So he handed the dwarf one of his two pennies, and the dwarf didn't say a word, he just snatched it and vanished. And Little Freddy got up and went on his way.

He came to the end of the plain at last; and there below him in another valley he saw the roofs and chimneys of a town.

'I will go to that town and ask my way home,' he thought, and he began going down a path into the valley. But the path was rough and steep, and he wasn't more than half way down it when his little legs ached again, so he sat on a stone to rest them.

And, sitting there, he took his last penny out of his pocket to cheer his eyes with the sight of it. There was no need to count now, so he just turned that penny over and over in his hand; and by and by he put it back in his pocket. When he looked up – heaven help us! – there was yet another little old dwarf standing in front of him. If the other little dwarfs had been ragged and thin, this one was so much raggeder and thinner that he was nothing but a little bag of bones with a bit of sack tied round him. He held out a shaky little scarecrow of a hand and whimpered, 'Please spare a penny for a poor old man!'

'But it's the only penny I've got,' said Little Freddy, 'And I'm taking it home to father.'

'Oh, oh!' whimpered the dwarf, 'and isn't my need greater than his?'

'I suppose it is,' said Little Freddy.

'Then give it to me, give it to me!' cried the dwarf. 'For a penny should go where there's greatest need of it.'

'I suppose that's right,' said Little Freddy.

And he handed his last penny over to the dwarf.

This dwarf didn't vanish, but he did something even more astonishing. First he changed himself into the second dwarf, and then he changed himself into the first dwarf, and then he changed

himself into a plump, handsomely dressed little fellow in a green velvet coat with diamond buttons. And then he went off into a peal of laughter. Freddy laughed too, he didn't quite know why, except that it was all so surprising.

'You have a good heart, Little Freddy,' said the dwarf when he had done laughing. 'You gave away all you had in the world, but you'll never regret it. Now I will give *you* something. I will give you three wishes – a wish for each penny. What will you have?'

'Since you're so kind,' said Little Freddy, 'I would like a fiddle. I've always liked to hear a fiddle going, and to see people so merry that they couldn't stop dancing. So, if I may really choose, let me have a fiddle that everything alive must dance to as long as I play it.'

'That's a simple enough wish,' said the dwarf. He flicked his fingers in the air, and *flumperty-flump*! – down dropped a fiddle and a bow into Freddy's lap.

Freddy chuckled with delight. He took up the bow and was just going to draw it across the strings when the dwarf cried, 'No, no! *I* don't want to dance for you! Second wish!'

'I have always admired the big strong fellows who go out with their guns to shoot game,' said Little Freddy. 'But because I am small and weak, I have never been able to fire off a gun myself. So now I would like a *little* gun, just the right size for me: a little gun that would bring down anything I aimed at, however far off it might be.'

'Not much of a wish,' said the dwarf, 'but granted.'

He flicked his fingers in the air, and *flipperty-flip*! – down fell a handsome little gun into Freddy's lap.

'Third wish,' said the dwarf. 'And make it a good one for the last.'

'I have always had a longing to be with people who are kind and generous, and would say "yes" when I asked for things,' said Little Freddy. 'But it's been "no, no, no, you little shrimp" for me, all my life. So if I may really have what I like, I would wish that no one would ever say "no" to me again.'

'That is a good wish,' said the dwarf, 'and it is granted. So goodbye to you, and good luck.'

It seemed to Freddy that the dwarf then turned a somersault and sank into the ground; at any rate he disappeared. And, as it was now evening, Freddy lay down on a clump of heather and fell asleep.

When he woke in the morning he thought he must have been dreaming; but no, there was the fiddle, and there was the bow, and there was the handsome little gun. So he picked them all up and went down into the town.

'But can it really be that no one will say "no" to me?' he asked himself. And as he was passing an inn, he went inside, and said to the landlord, 'I would very much like some breakfast, but I have no money.'

'Oh, that doesn't matter at all, sir,' said the landlord, bowing low. 'It will be a pleasure to give you breakfast.'

And he served Little Freddy with the best of all he had.

After that, Freddy went into a outfitter's shop, and said, 'You see I am all in rags, and I very much need some clothes, but I have no money.'

'It will be a pleasure to set you up like a gentleman, sir,' said the shopman, bowing low. 'And I think we can fit you, for we have a little suit here that was made for a young prince, only unfortunately the king went bankrupt.'

He brought out a rich suit of clothes trimmed with pearls, and a fine little cloak edged with ermine, and a cap of peacocks' feathers, and Freddy put them all on, and walked out of the shop feeling grander than grand.

'If I had a carriage to ride in, now,' thought Freddy, 'my legs wouldn't ache any more.'

So he went into a livery stable and said he would very much like a horse and carriage, and they gave him a carriage and a pair of horses. Then he asked his way home, for he thought he would now drive back in style to his father.

As he was bowling merrily along the road, he met with a car-

riage coming in the opposite direction, and in the carriage was the sheriff with whom he had served.

Freddy pulled up and took off his cap. 'Good day, master!' said he.

The sheriff also pulled up. 'Good day to you, young lord,' he said. 'But why do you call me master?'

'Don't you remember?' said Little Freddy. 'I served you for three years, and you gave me three pence.'

'Heaven above!' said the sheriff. 'You *have* got on in a hurry! And pray how did you manage it?'

'It's surprising what three pennies can do for a man,' said Freddy.

The sheriff felt so curious that he got out of his carriage to look at Freddy more closely. He peered at Freddy's clothes, and he peered at the horses, and he peered into the carriage.

'Ah, I see you have a fiddle with you,' he said.

'That is to make people dance,' said Freddy.

'*And* a little gun,' said the sheriff.

'A most wonderful little gun,' said Freddy. 'It will hit anything I aim at, however far off it may be.'

'That I believe to be impossible,' said the sheriff. 'Near at hand, yes, perhaps. But not at *any* distance. You couldn't, for instance, bring down that crow that has just flown over our heads, and is now far away.'

'What will you wager?' said Freddy.

'If you have a hundred pounds, I will wager the same,' said the sheriff, for he felt sure that Freddy would be the loser.

'Done!' said Freddy.

The crow was now but a speck in the distance; but Freddy stood up in the carriage and aimed his gun, and down fell the crow into a bramble thicket.

'I don't believe it!' exclaimed the sheriff.

'Come and see then,' said Freddy. And they drove off to the bramble thicket. And when they reached it, what must the sheriff do but push his way into the thicket to see if the crow was really

there. So then Freddy took up his fiddle and began to play, and the sheriff began to dance, and the thorns began to tear him.

'Stop! Stop!' cried the sheriff.

But Freddy played on, and the sheriff danced and cried, and danced and cried, and the brambles tore his clothes to shreds.

'Now you are about as ragged as I was when I left your service,' said Little Freddy. He stopped playing, and the sheriff crawled out of the thicket. He didn't want to pay Freddy the hundred pounds, but Freddy said he must have them to take home to his father. The sheriff couldn't say 'no'. So Freddy took the hundred pounds and drove away; and the sheriff, all tattered and torn, drove off in the opposite direction.

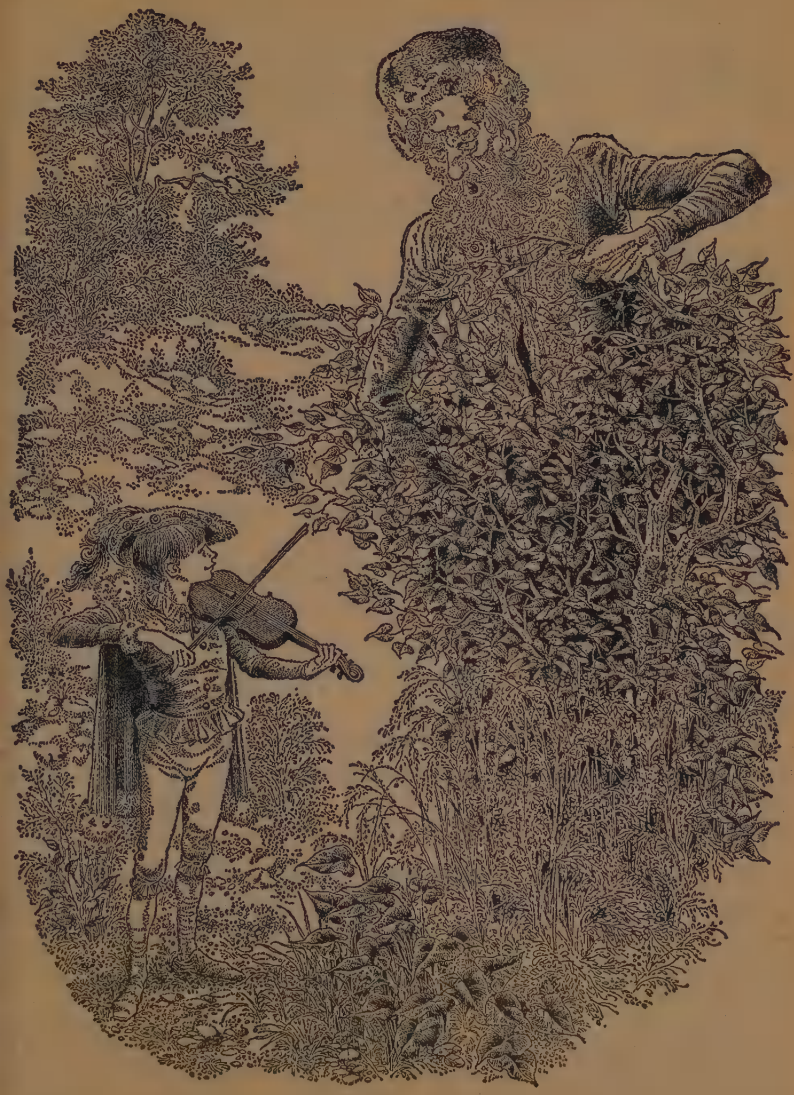
By and by Freddy came to another town, and as it was now late, he put up at an inn. After he had eaten, he played on his fiddle, and had all the people dancing. But he stopped before they were tired out, and they enjoyed it so much that in the morning they asked him to play again.

They were in the midst of their fun when in came two watchmen to drag Little Freddy off to the town hall; for the sheriff had laid a charge against him, and said that Freddy had waylaid and robbed him and nearly taken his life. And that was likely to be a hanging matter for Little Freddy.

But Freddy played on his fiddle, and there were the watchmen dancing with the rest; and they danced round the room and out through the door, and had to dance on till they were out of hearing of the fiddle. Then they went back to the town hall.

So next they sent soldiers to arrest Little Freddy. But Freddy played on his fiddle, and the soldiers had to dance, and they were weary of dancing long before Freddy was weary of playing; and they, too, danced themselves out of the inn, and made their way back to their barracks.

But in the end Little Freddy was caught, for men came by night and took him in his sleep, and bound his hands together and carried him off before he had a chance to draw his bow across the fiddle. Only he asked if he might take the fiddle along with him;



and since they couldn't say 'no' to him, he carried the fiddle under his arm.

He was tried and condemned to death, and a great crowd gathered in the market place to see him hanged. The sheriff was there amongst the others, and he was grinning with joy to think he had got the better of Little Freddy.

It was slow work for Little Freddy mounting up on to the scaffold, because, as he explained, his legs were aching. And when he got to the top he sat down, and asked if he might have leave to play just one last tune on his fiddle.

'No! No! *No*!' shouted the sheriff. 'NO! *Don't let him!*'

'I don't see why he shouldn't,' said the hangman. 'The poor little fellow won't be with us much longer, and after all it's not much to ask.'

For you see, the hangman couldn't say 'no'.

'Then for mercy's sake bring some stout rope and tie me to the market cross!' cried the sheriff.

So they tied the sheriff to the market cross, and Little Freddy began to play.

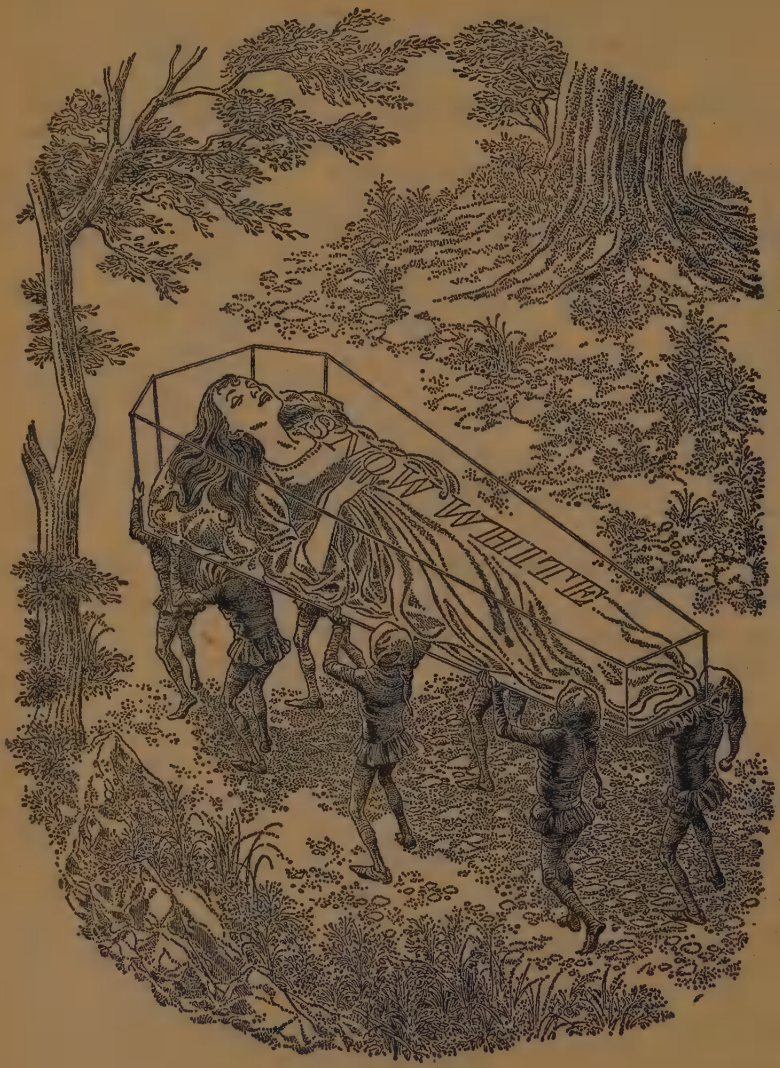
Well, you can guess what happened: every one fell a-dancing; the hangman and the parson, the lawyer and the bailiffs, the soldiers and the watchmen, men and women, boys and girls, dogs and cats – even the mice came out of their holes and danced, and the beetles, that were scurrying about in the gutter, stood up on their two back legs and waved their other legs in the air and danced with the rest.

The whole crowd danced and laughed and shouted to one another, and the sheriff, tied to the market cross, danced and screeched inside his ropes. They danced till they fell to the ground; but Little Freddy still played on, and they had to get up and dance again.

And Little Freddy came down from the scaffold and marched away, still fiddling, through the crowd; and thankful they all were when the sound of that fiddle died away in the distance. There

was no more thought of hanging him then; they were only too glad to be rid of him.

So he got into his carriage and drove home to his father. And there he lived merrily all his life, for there was not a soul could say 'no' to anything he asked for.


SNOW WHITE

3 SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

Once upon a time a queen sat at her window, sewing. She was stitching a piece of embroidery that was stretched over an ebony frame. It was winter, snow had been falling, and now all the world was white and still. The queen leaned from the window to look down at the glistening white garden, and as she did so, she pricked her finger with her embroidery needle, and three drops of blood fell on to the snow.

'How beautiful it is!' thought the queen. 'If I have a baby daughter, I would like her skin to be as white as snow, and her cheeks and lips to be as red as blood, and her hair to be as shining black as my ebony frame.'

Soon after this, the queen did have a baby daughter; and, sure enough, the child's skin was white as snow, and her lips and cheeks were red as blood, and her hair was as shining black as ebony.

'My little Snow White!' said the queen.

But, alas, the poor queen was very ill; and she had scarcely more than time to kiss her baby before she died.

In about a year, the king married again, for that is what his people told him he must do. The new queen was very beautiful, but she was also very vain; she thought no one in the world could be as beautiful as she was. Hanging in her bedroom was a magic looking-glass, and every morning she used to stand before this looking-glass, and say,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Am I the fairest one of all?'

And the looking-glass always answered,

'So fair you are, my lady Queen,
None fairer in the world is seen.'

And that delighted the queen.

But little Snow White, with the white skin, and the red lips, and the black shining hair, was growing every day lovelier and lovelier; and when she was seven years old she was more beautiful than the queen herself.

So one day, when the queen stood before the looking-glass, and said,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Am I the fairest one of all?'

the looking-glass answered,

'My lady Queen, you are fair, 'tis true,
But Snow White is more fair than you.'

And when she heard these words, the queen turned quite green with rage and jealousy, and didn't look beautiful at all.

She sent for a huntsman; and when he came, she said to him, 'Take Snow White over the mountain and into the forest and kill her. Bring me her heart so that I may know she is truly dead. If you do this I will reward you with a purse of gold. But if you dare to disobey me, I will have you hanged.'

You may be sure the huntsman didn't want to kill Snow White; but then he didn't want to be hanged, either. So he took Snow White up over the mountain and into the forest. And under a big dark tree he drew out his dagger and said, 'Little Snow White, now I must kill you, or the queen will have me hanged.'

But Snow White knelt at his feet, and clasped her white arms about his knees, and sobbed out, 'Oh dear, good huntsman, please don't kill me! I have never done you any harm! Let me run away into the wood. I promise I will never, never come back!'

'Run away then, poor little one,' said the huntsman. But he

thought 'The wild beasts will soon eat her up.' All the same, his heart was glad that he had not killed her. So he shot a deer, and took out its heart, and carried it back to the queen. The queen gave him a purse full of gold, and she had the heart cooked for her dinner, and ate it all up; and though she had a bad pain from eating too fast, she didn't mind, for she said to herself, 'That is the end of little Snow White.'

But of course it wasn't the end of little Snow White. Snow White was running away through the forest as fast as ever she could run. She ran and she ran till twilight fell, and the forest grew dark and frightening. And just when she thought she could go no farther, she came to a little house.

The door of the house wasn't locked, so she pushed it open and went inside. And what did she see but a dainty little room, clean as a new pin. In the middle of the room was a tiny table, covered with a white cloth; and on the table there were seven little plates, and seven little knives, and seven little forks, and seven little goblets, all set out very neatly, with bread and meat on each little plate, and wine in each little goblet. There were seven little chairs round the table; and against the wall there were seven little beds, each covered with a white counterpane.

Snow White was feeling very hungry and very thirsty, so she ate a morsel of meat from each little plate, and then she took a sip of wine from each little goblet; and then she felt so tired and sleepy that she thought she would lie down on one of the beds. She tried all the beds in turn: but one was too soft, and one was too hard, and one was too long, and one was too short, and one was too broad, and one was too narrow; but when she came to the seventh bed, it was exactly right. So she lay down on it, and fell fast asleep.

Outside the forest grew darker and darker; and when it was deep night, and the stars were shining through the trees, the seven little masters of the house came back. They were seven dwarfs who spent the day digging for gold, deep inside the mountain.

Well, in they all came, and lit their seven candles; and now

there was light in the room, and they saw that things were not quite as they had left them.

And the first dwarf said, 'Who's been sitting in my little chair?'

And the second dwarf said, 'Who's been nibbling my little loaf?'

And the third dwarf said, 'Who's been tasting my meat?'

And the fourth said, 'Who's been eating out of my little plate?'

And the fifth said, 'Who's been using my little fork?'

And the sixth said, 'Who's been cutting with my little knife?'

And the seventh said, 'Who's been drinking out of my little goblet?'

Then the first dwarf looked at his bed and saw a hollow in it.

'Somebody's been lying on my little bed!' said he.

The second dwarf ran over to *his* bed, and saw that the counterpane was crumpled.

'Somebody's been lying on my little bed, too!' he said.

'And on mine, and on mine, and on mine, and on mine!' cried the third and the fourth and the fifth and the sixth dwarf.

But the seventh dwarf stood by his bed, and whispered, 'Somebody *is* lying on my little bed. And if the dawn is lovely, she is lovelier far!'

Then all the dwarfs crowded round the bed, and held up their candles, and peered at Snow White. She looked so beautiful lying there asleep that they wouldn't wake her for the world. As they ate their supper, they spoke in whispers; and after they had eaten, six of the dwarfs crept into six of the little beds; but the seventh dwarf had to share each of the six beds in turn, lying one hour in each, so he hadn't a very good night of it.

In the morning, when Snow White woke up and saw the seven funny little men, all with long white beards, and all tiptoeing about in their night caps and night shirts, she felt frightened.

But they all smiled at her; and the first dwarf asked her her

name so gently and kindly that she was able to answer, 'My name is Snow White, if you please, sir.'

'And why have you come to our house?' asked the second dwarf.

So then Snow White told them all about her stepmother and the huntsman, and how he had spared her life, and how she had run through the forest all day, till she came to their little house.

'And where will you go now?' asked the third dwarf.

Snow White said she had nowhere to go. So the dwarfs whispered together. And then the first dwarf said, 'Will you stay and keep house for us – make our beds and cook our supper, and sweep and dust, and wash our clothes and mend them? All these things we have had to do ourselves before we went to work; but if you will be our housekeeper we shan't have to get up quite so early, and that will be a great treat.'

Snow White said she would gladly be their housekeeper. They all had breakfast; and after that the dwarfs went off to work, singing a rollicking song about the beautiful Snow White, and how lucky they were to have found her.

Every evening, when the dwarfs came back from the mountain, Snow White had their supper ready for them, and the beds made, and the little house clean and tidy; so they went on thinking how lucky they were, and they were all as happy as happy could be. Except for one thing: they were afraid the stepmother queen might somehow find out that Snow White was still alive, and might come looking for her.

'So when we are away,' they said, 'promise that you will never, never let anyone into the house.'

And Snow White promised.

Now the stepmother queen was so angry with her looking-glass that for some days she didn't speak to it.

'Snow White is dead,' she said to herself. 'So now of course I am the fairest of all. I don't need the stupid mirror to tell me that!'

But one morning, after her waiting women had bathed her in

scented water, and combed and brushed her glittering golden hair, and dressed her in her silken robes, and she stood looking at her beautiful reflection in the glass, she felt so charmed with what she saw in the glass, that she couldn't help murmuring,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Am I not fairer far than all?'

And what was her rage and horror when the looking-glass answered,

'Lady Queen, you are fair, 'tis true,
But there's one more fair than you.
Snow White over the mountain bare
Is a thousand times more fair,
A thousand times more fair.'

And it kept on repeating 'a thousand times more fair . . .'

Now the queen knew that the huntsman had tricked her, and she sent for him to have him tortured; but he had long ago fled with his purse of gold, and was safe beyond the sea.

So the queen got some walnut juice and stained her face and hands, and dressed herself up as an old pedlar-woman, and made herself look so different that nobody could have recognized her. She put some bright-coloured stay laces and other pretty things into a basket, and with the basket on her arm, she stamped off over the mountain and through the forest. It was a long way, but her rage kept her from feeling tired; and so at last she came to the dwarf's house.

'Fine wares to sell! Fine wares to sell!' she called.

Snow White peeped out of the window.

'Good day, mother,' said she. 'What have you got in your basket?'

'Pretty things, and cheap things,' said the pedlar-woman queen. 'Look, here is just the thing for a lovely little lady!' And

she rummaged in her basket and held up a coloured stay lace, made of the finest silk.

Snow White thought it *was* just the thing for her; but she remembered her promise to the dwarfs, and she shook her head, and said no. But the pedlar-woman queen kept holding up the lace in front of her eyes, and it shone in the sun like a rainbow. So then Snow White thought, 'Well, though I'm sure she's an honest old woman and no harm could come of it, I won't let her in. I'll just open the door and stand on the threshold, and she can stop outside.'

So she opened the door and stood on the threshold, and the pedlar-woman queen put the shining lace into her hand.

'But I have no money!' said Snow White.

'Bless your lovely face, you shall have it for luck,' said the pedlar-woman queen. 'But what a slovenly little figure you have, my child! Come, turn round, and let us see if we can't lace you up properly for once.'

So Snow White turned round, and the pedlar-woman queen laced her; but, as she laced, she pulled the lace tighter and tighter, till at last Snow White couldn't breathe. And she fell down there on the threshold, and lay as one dead.

'Ho! ho! ho!' laughed the pedlar-woman queen. '*Now* who is the fairest?' And off she stamped, back to the palace.

In the evening, when the dwarfs came home, they found the door of their house open, and Snow White lying across the threshold. Weeping bitterly, they lifted her up. And then they saw the tight stay lace, and they cut it in two, and Snow White gave a tiny breath. Still weeping, but now with joy, they chafed her hands and put wine to her lips and called her name; and by and by she came to herself and was able to tell them what had happened.

'The pedlar-woman was your wicked stepmother, that's certain!' they said. And they scolded her a little, and told her she must be more on her guard in future.

When the queen got back to the palace, she washed the stain

from her hands and face, and bathed and scented herself, and put on her richest robes and stood before the looking-glass. And she said,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is fairest now *of all?'*

And she smiled in her triumph as she said it.

But to her horror the looking-glass answered as before,

'Lady Queen, you are fair, 'tis true,
But there's one more fair than you.
Snow White over the mountain bare
Is a thousand times more fair,
A thousand . . .'

'I won't listen to you!' screamed the queen. And she rushed from the room.

'I'll outwit that silly little brat yet!' she said.

And she made a poisonous comb, and disguised herself as a young gipsy girl, and hurried over the mountain and through the forest till she came to the dwarfs' house.

'Pretty combs to sell! Pretty combs to sell!' she sang outside the window. 'Who'll buy my pretty combs?'

Snow White looked out of the window. 'Please go away,' she said. 'I mustn't let anyone in.'

'Lean a little farther out of the window then, till I show you a pretty comb,' said the gipsy-girl queen. 'Surely that's not forbidden!'

Snow White leaned a little farther out of the window; and the gipsy-girl queen held up a comb that shone with gold and sparkled with diamonds.

'Now wouldn't that look pretty in your bright dark hair?' she said.

'Yes, it would, oh it would!' said Snow White. 'But I can't buy it.'

'No harm, dearie, in seeing how it looks,' said the gipsy-girl queen.

Snow White leaned a little farther still out of the window. The gipsy-girl queen dug the comb into her head; the poison began to work, and Snow White staggered back from the window, and fell down on the floor in a faint.

'I've done for you this time, you little brat!' said the queen with a wicked laugh. And off she went, back to the palace.

Now the dwarfs were feeling so worried that day that they came back earlier than usual; and lucky it was that they did so, or poor Snow White would have been really done for. When they saw the house door still safely shut, they laughed at their fears; but when they went in and found Snow White lying on the floor as if dead, they didn't laugh any more. They didn't waste time in weeping, either. They saw the comb glittering in her hair, and they quickly pulled it out.

Then Snow White came to herself again; and though she felt very sick and giddy, she was able to tell them all about it. You may be sure she got a scolding! And the scolding would have gone on much longer if she hadn't looked so ill and pale. So they tucked her up in bed; and in the morning she was quite well.

'But you must never, never be so foolish again,' they said to her as they went off to work. And Snow White said no, she never, never would be.

Meanwhile the queen, having got back to the palace, washed off her disguise, and bathed and scented herself, and decked herself as before, and went to stand before the looking-glass, and said,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Now am I not more fair than all?'

But the looking-glass, just as if it was made of clockwork and could say nothing else, came out with the same old words,

'Lady Queen, you are fair, 'tis true,
But there's one more fair than you,
Snow White over the . . .'

But the queen wouldn't listen to any more. She flew out of the room chattering with rage, and heard from far off the words of the looking-glass softly mocking her,

'A thousand times more fair.'

The queen shut herself up in a turret, and there she made a most lovely-looking apple, rosy on one side and golden yellow on the other. And she filled the rosy side with deadly poison. Then she disguised herself as a farmer's wife, with a kind, smiling face, and went to the dwarfs' house.

She knocked at the door, and Snow White put her head out of the window. 'You must please go away,' said Snow White. 'I mayn't let anyone in.'

'But I don't want to come in,' said the kind, smiling-faced farmer's-wife queen. 'I only want to sell my apples. Look, here is a beauty! I'll make you a present of it.' And she held out the poisoned apple.

'Oh, no thank you,' said Snow White. 'I mustn't take it!'

'Why, are you afraid it will poison you?' said the farmer's-wife queen. 'See, I will cut the apple in two. You shall have the rosy side, and I will eat the yellow one.'

So she cut the apple in two, and it sent out such a delicious smell that Snow White longed to taste it.

'Oh, how good it tastes, how good!' said the farmer's-wife queen, munching away at the yellow half.

'Well, if it doesn't do you any harm, I don't see how it can harm me,' said Snow White, and she reached out her hand for the rosy poisoned half. But with the first bite she took of that rosy apple, she fell dead to the ground.

'Ha! ha!' laughed the farmer's-wife queen. 'White as snow, red

as blood, black as ebony – *this* time the dwarfs won't wake you!'

She hurried back to the palace, washed off her disguise, and stood before her looking-glass:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest now of all?'

And the looking-glass answered in a little sad whisper,

'You, Queen, are fairest now of all.'

So then the queen was satisfied.

When the dwarfs came home that evening, they found Snow White lying on the floor, and she neither breathed nor stirred. They lifted her up and searched to see if they could find what had poisoned her. They unlaced her bodice, combed her hair, sprinkled her with water, poured wine down her throat. But still she neither stirred nor spoke. Yes, she was dead this time, dead as dead could be. So they laid her on a bier, and round that bier they all seven of them sat watching and weeping for three whole days.

'Now we must bury her,' said the first dwarf at the end of the three days.

'But she is still so beautiful!' said the second dwarf.

'We cannot hide that beauty away in the black earth,' said the third dwarf.

'Then let us make a glass coffin,' said the fourth dwarf.

'So that we can still see her,' said the fifth dwarf.

'And we will write her name on it in letters of gold,' said the sixth dwarf.

'And put it on the mountain,' said the seventh dwarf. 'And one of us in turn will stay by it to guard it.'

So they made the glass coffin, and laid Snow White in it, and carried her to the top of the mountain. And every day and every night one of the dwarfs sat by the coffin to guard it.

And Snow White lay in the coffin for days and years; and still her skin was white as snow, and her cheeks and lips as red as blood, and her hair as black as ebony, so that she looked as if she slept.

Now it happened that after those days and years, a prince came hunting over the mountain, and saw the coffin and the beautiful Snow White lying in it. And he read what was written in gold letters on the coffin, and said to the dwarfs, 'Give me the coffin. I will pay you whatever you ask for it.'

'Oh no, no!' cried all the dwarfs together. 'We will not sell it for all the gold in the world!'

'Then give it to me for nothing,' said the prince. 'For if I cannot look upon Snow White I no longer wish to live.'

So the little dwarfs pitied him, and gave him the coffin. And six of the prince's servants hoisted it carefully on their shoulders, and set off down the mountain with it. But half-way down, one of the servants stumbled over a bush, and gave the coffin a violent jolt. And with the jolt, the piece of poisoned apple flew out of Snow White's throat, and she opened her eyes, lifted the lid of the coffin, and sat up. 'Ah dear, where am I?' she cried.

'You are with me, a man who loves you better than his life,' said the joyful prince, and he told her all that had happened. 'Will you come with me to my father's palace, and be my wife?'

'Yes, I will,' said Snow White.

So the Prince set her on his horse and took her home, and they were married, and the seven dwarfs came to the wedding. They brought with them two chairs of solid gold as wedding presents; and at the wedding feast the prince sat in one of the golden chairs, and Snow White sat in the other.

Now whilst the wedding feast was going on in one kingdom, the stepmother queen stood in front of her looking-glass in the neighbouring kingdom, and said,

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Am I the fairest one of all?'

And the looking-glass answered,

'Lady Queen, you are fair, 'tis true,
But there's one more fair than you.
Snow White sits in her golden chair,
And she's ten thousand times more fair.
Ten thousand times more fair.'

'You lie! You lie!' shrieked the queen. But she knew the looking-glass never lied; so she picked up her golden sceptre and flung it at the glass, and smashed it into a hundred splinters. The splinters flew out into the room, and the biggest pierced the queen's heart. Try as she would she couldn't pull that splinter out, and so she died.

Meanwhile, at Snow White's wedding feast, there was laughter and merriment and much rejoicing.

4 THE FIELD OF RAGWORT

There was once a young man called Tom, and he worked for a farmer. One fine day, when the harvest was all gathered in, the farmer gave Tom a holiday. So Tom went out to see what he could see, and hear what he could hear. And he walked along the sunny side of a hedge.

Well, he didn't see anything, except the sun and the stubble and the shining green hedge. But he heard something: *clack, clack, clacketty-clack*, coming from the other side of the hedge.

'Save us!' thought Tom. 'What can that be?'

Clack, clack, clacketty-clack: the sound went on for a moment or two, and then it stopped, and all was silent. Tom peeped through the shining green leaves of the hedge, and what did he see but a bit of a dwarf sitting on a wooden stool. The dwarf was wearing a leather cap; he had a leather apron tied round his middle, and on his lap lay a bit of a shoe, with a hole in it. By his side was an earthen pitcher, and in his hand was a bit of a goblet, and he was dipping the goblet into the pitcher, and turning the goblet over his long nose, and drinking his fill of the goblet.

And when he had done this a time or two, he set down the goblet, wiped some drops off his beard, picked up a bit of a hammer that was lying by the pitcher, and began to hammer a sole on the shoe.

Clack, clack, clacketty-clack: that was the sound Tom had heard before.

Tom felt a bit scared, but he thought to himself: 'These little fellows know a lot, so folk say; and if I can catch him, I won't let him go till he's told me where I can find a buried treasure.'

So he pushed his way through the hedge.

'Good day, master,' said he.

'Good day to you, Tom,' said the dwarf.

'What might you have in that pitcher then,' said Tom, 'if I may make so bold as to ask?'

'You may ask with pleasure,' said the dwarf. 'And I'll tell'ee with pleasure. 'Tis beer. Like a drop, would you?'

'I would so,' said Tom.

The dwarf filled the bit of a goblet from the pitcher and handed it to Tom. 'Drink up,' said he.

Tom drank up. He drank it all up in one mouthful; but though there wasn't much of it, it sent a warmth rushing through his blood, and a tingling through all his body down to his very toes.

'My days!' said he. 'That's beer! Where did you get it?'

'I made it,' said the dwarf.

'What did you make it of?' said Tom.

'Of heath,' said the dwarf.

'You won't get me to believe that,' said Tom. 'But I'd like another thimbleful, if it's all the same to you.'

'It isn't all the same to me,' said the dwarf, getting angry. 'If you don't believe me, you can take yourself off, and not waste any more of my time.'

And he began again, *clacketty-clack*, hammering at the shoe.

Now the heat of the beer had made Tom feel bold. He made a grab at the dwarf and held him tight in his two hands. The dwarf squirmed and spat and hit at Tom with the hammer. But Tom wrenched the hammer from him and tossed it away; and it fell on the pitcher and broke it, and all the beer soaked away into the earth.

'Now you little go-by-the-ground,' said Tom. 'I've got you fast, and I won't let you go till you say where your treasure lies buried. For all your kind have buried treasure, and well I do know it.'

'I haven't any treasure,' screamed the dwarf. 'I'm a poor man, I am!'

'Say that again,' said Tom, 'and I'll bang your little old bit of a noddle on a stone, see if I don't!'

Tom used the poor little dwarf so rough that at last he was squealing and begging for mercy. 'Leave me go,' he begged, 'and I'll show you where a pot of gold lies buried.'

'That's talking!' said Tom. 'But no fear, I won't leave you go. You just come along with me and show me where that pot of gold is.'

So off they went. Tom held the dwarf fast by the hand, and the dwarf led him a dance, across a meadow, and down by a stream, and over a bog, and over a stone wall, and down into a ditch and up again, and round some rocks, and through a hedge, and down into another ditch and up again, and across a moor, and through another hedge, and into a forty-acre field all full of yellow ragwort.

The dwarf pointed to a ragwort plant and said, 'Dig under that one, and you'll find a big pot full of gold pieces.'

'Then I must go home and fetch my spade,' said Tom.

And to make sure he'd know the place again, he took off one of his red garters and tied it round the ragwort plant.

'Swear you'll not take that garter off the ragwort,' said he.

The dwarf swore he wouldn't touch it; and that made Tom feel easy, for he knew that no dwarf ever breaks his word.

'May I go now, if you please, sir?' said the dwarf.

'You may,' said Tom. 'I've no further use for you.'

'Nor I for you,' said the dwarf. And off he scampered.

It took Tom a long time to get back to the farm for his spade, and a long time to get back to the field again, though he ran till he had a stitch in his side. But when he did get back to the field, what did he see? Not one red garter, but hundreds and thousands of them! Believe it or not: every ragwort plant in that forty-acre field had a red garter tied to it, and every garter was the very model of Tom's own, so that he couldn't tell one from the other. Still, he thought he knew whereabouts he had tied his garter, so he began to dig under one ragwort.

But he found nothing.

'Or a bit more to the south?' thought he. And he dug under another ragwort.

But he found nothing.

'Or maybe a bit more to the north?' he thought, and he dug under another ragwort.

But still he found nothing.

He dug to the west, and he dug to the east, and he dug to the right of him, and he dug to the left of him, and he dug in front of him, and he dug behind him; but still he found nothing. He got angry: he dug all day by the light of the sun, and he dug all night by the light of the harvest moon; and when the sun rose again he had made hundreds of holes, and dug up hundreds of ragworts, but there were still hundreds of thousands of yellow ragworts standing up with the red garters fast to them.

So then he put his spade over his shoulder and went back to the farm, in a very bad temper.

And he never found that pot of gold.

5 THUMBKIN

Once upon a time a peasant sat by his fire in the evening, and his wife sat by him. He was doing nothing, she was spinning; he was sad, and his wife was no happier.

'How quiet and dreary it is here!' said the peasant. 'All our neighbours have children to play and jump about and keep things lively. But we have none.'

'Yes,' sighed his wife. 'If only we had but one child, how happy we should be! I wouldn't mind if it were no bigger than my thumb.'

And that is what happened; the wife had a child. It was a beautiful little boy, but he was just the size of a thumb, no bigger. And he never grew any taller. So they called him Thumbkin.

If Thumbkin didn't grow in body, he grew in brains; he was the cleverest little fellow ever you came across.

One day the peasant was going to the forest to fell wood, and he said, 'I do wish there was someone who could drive the wagon after me, to bring home the wood when I have felled it.'

'I'll do that, father,' said Thumbkin.

'*You*, my little son!' said the peasant. 'You couldn't even hold the reins!'

'If I can't hold the reins,' said Thumbkin, 'I can drive the horse. Let mother harness it to the wagon this afternoon, and I will sit in the horse's ear and tell it which way to go.'

The peasant laughed. He thought it was a good joke. 'Do as you wish,' he said.

And he took his axe and walked off into the forest.

In the afternoon the wife harnessed the horse to the wagon, and led it round to the door.

'Now mother, lift me up,' said Thumbkin.

So she lifted Thumbkin into the horse's ear.

'Gee up!' cried Thumbkin, and off went the horse drawing the wagon.

'Gee up! Gee whoa!' cried Thumbkin; and he told the horse which way it was to go. And the horse went steadily along the road, and took the right way towards the forest.

Now it happened that just as the wagon was turning a corner, it passed two travellers who were resting by a mile-stone.

'What in the name of fortune is this?' said the first traveller. 'Here is a wagon coming along the road, and I can hear the driver calling out to the horse. But there isn't any driver!'

'There's certainly something very queer going on,' said the second traveller. 'I suggest we follow the wagon and see where it stops.'

So they followed after the wagon into the forest, and came to a clearing. In the clearing the peasant was standing, leaning on his axe, with the felled trees all round him. And there the wagon stopped.

'Here I am, father!' called Thumbkin. 'You see I've brought the wagon. Now, lift me down.'

So the peasant lifted Thumbkin out of the horse's ear, and set him down on a dried leaf.

The two travellers began whispering together. 'That little fellow would make our fortunes,' said one. 'We could carry him round with us and show him in the big towns.'

'Well, let us buy him,' said the other.

So they stepped up to the peasant and asked if he would sell Thumbkin.

'Not I!' said the peasant. 'Not for all the gold in the world!'

But Thumbkin climbed up the skirts of his father's coat, and whispered in his ear. 'Father, sell me to them. I'll soon come back to you, never fear!'

Then the peasant sold Thumbkin to the travellers for a piece of gold; and they carried him away.

'I should like to see the world!' said Thumbkin.

So one of the travellers put him to sit on the brim of his hat. And Thumbkin walked up and down on the brim and said, 'Oh, how big the world is!'

They travelled till evening, and came out of the forest and into a road that led to a big town. And Thumbkin called out, 'Put me down, put me down! The world is making me giddy, I want to rest!'

'No,' said the traveller, 'you must stay where you are. You can rest when we get to the town.'

But Thumbkin bounced on the hat brim and called out, 'I must rest now, put me down, I must rest now!'

And he bounced the hat brim over the traveller's eyes, and the traveller got vexed, and said, 'Well, you can get down and rest for a few minutes.'

The traveller took off his hat and put Thumbkin down by the roadside on the edge of a field. Thumbkin ran about calling out, 'I'm still giddy! I'm still giddy! Oh, the big world is spinning round me!' And he ran scrambling about among the clods of the field, till he found a rabbit hole; and into that rabbit hole he slipped.

'Good night, my friends!' he shouted.

'Come out at once!' cried they.

But Thumbkin only laughed and ran farther down the rabbit hole. And the men got sticks and tried to poke him out, but they couldn't reach him. And by and by it got dark, and they had to go on their way, properly fooled.

Thumbkin crept to the entrance of the hole and peered out. 'It's very dark, and very dangerous,' he said to himself. 'A fellow might break his leg stumbling among these clods at night. I must wait till daylight.'

So he curled himself up, and was just going to sleep when two robbers came by. And one said to the other, 'In that house across the field lives a very rich parson. He has plenty of gold and plenty of silver. But his windows are barred, so how shall we manage to rob him?'

'I can tell you!' cried Thumbkin.

'What in the world is that?' exclaimed one of the robbers. 'A voice, but no man!'

'Take me with you!' called Thumbkin. 'I'll help you!'

'But where are you?' cried the robbers.

'Here at your feet,' shouted Thumbkin.

The robbers felt about their feet; and one of them found Thumbkin and picked him up.

'It's a kind of – a frog!' he said, holding Thumbkin out to the light of the moon, which had just risen.

'Frog indeed!' cried Thumbkin. 'Don't you know a man when you see one?'

'Oh ho! A man!' laughed the robber. 'I never saw a man your size before in all my born days. Why, you little pigwidgeon, how can you help us?'

'Like this,' said Thumbkin. 'When you come to the parson's house, put me in through the bars of the pantry window. Then I can hand out the gold and silver to you.'

'Bless me, so you can!' said the robber.

And they carried Thumbkin with them to the parson's house, and pushed him in through the bars of the pantry window.

But as soon as Thumbkin got inside the house, he began to bang things about; and he called out at the top of his voice, 'Will you have the gold first, or will you have the silver?'

'Speak lower,' whispered the robbers. 'You'll wake the house!'

But Thumbkin pretended not to hear them, and went on calling, 'What shall I hand out first? Shall it be the gold, or the silver?'

Now there was a servant girl sleeping in a room next to the pantry, and the noise woke her, and she sat up, listening.

And Thumbkin was silent for a moment.

'It was the old rats,' thought the servant girl.

She lay down again, and the robbers whispered to Thumbkin, 'Stop fooling and pass us out something.'

Then Thumbkin shouted as loud as ever he could, 'Hold out your hands, and I'll pass you everything!'

This time the servant girl did hear, and she jumped out of bed and lit a candle. The robbers saw the light and ran off, and Thumbkin crept back through the window bars and into a barn, where he lay down on some hay and fell asleep. The servant girl searched about, but she found nothing; so she went back to bed again, and thought she must have been dreaming.

In the morning, she rose early, and went to the barn for hay to feed the cows. Thumbkin was still fast asleep, and when she picked up an armful of hay, she picked up Thumbkin too. When he woke he was inside the cow's mouth. One minute he was jumping around to keep clear of the cow's teeth, and the next minute down he went into the cow's paunch.

'Well, here we are in a room without windows,' said Thumbkin. 'But it's a big room, and that's something.'

It wasn't a big room for long, because as the cow swallowed more and more hay the space got narrower and narrower. Thumbkin thought he was being smothered, and he called out, 'Don't bring me any more food! Don't bring me any more food!'

The servant girl, who was by this time milking the cow, jumped up in a fright and upset the milk pail. She ran indoors to the parson, crying out, 'Master, master! One of the cows is talking!'

'You must be out of your senses,' said the parson. But he went to the milking shed, and he had scarcely got inside when Thumbkin shouted again, 'Don't bring me any more food! Don't bring me any more food!'

The parson was as frightened as the servant girl. He said the cow must be possessed of a devil, and he ordered it to be killed. And when the poor thing was killed, its paunch was thrown out on a dung hill.

Then by came a wolf and swallowed down the cow's paunch with Thumbkin inside it. 'This won't do,' thought Thumbkin, 'I must get out somehow.' And he began to talk to the wolf.

'Dear wolf,' he said. 'Are you hungry still?'

'Of course I'm hungry still,' said the wolf, who thought it was his stomach talking. 'You're not half full yet.'

'I know a house where you can creep in by the drain,' said Thumbkin. 'And inside you'll find bacon and cakes and strings of sausages.'

'Where is this house?' said the wolf, licking his lips.

So Thumbkin directed him to his father's house, and the wolf crept in through the drain. He got into the store room, and ate till he could eat no more; and then he was so fat that he couldn't get back through the drain.

'Hurrah, *hurrah*, HURRAH!' shouted Thumbkin.

'Be quiet,' snapped the wolf. 'You'll wake the people up.'

But Thumbkin kept on shouting, 'Hurrah! Let's wake the people up! *Hurrah!* HURRAH!'

And his father and mother woke up and ran to the store room and peeped through a crack in the door. When they saw the wolf, the man fetched an axe and the woman a scythe.

'Keep behind me,' said the man. 'I'll give him a blow with the axe, and if that doesn't finish him, you rush in with the scythe and cut him to pieces.'

But Thumbkin called out, 'No, don't do that, mother. *I'm* here! I'm inside the wolf's stomach!'

'Heaven be praised!' cried Thumbkin's father, and he rushed into the store and gave the wolf such a blow on the head with the axe that the wolf fell down dead. Then the mother put down the scythe and fetched a pair of scissors, and they cut the wolf open, and out jumped Thumbkin.

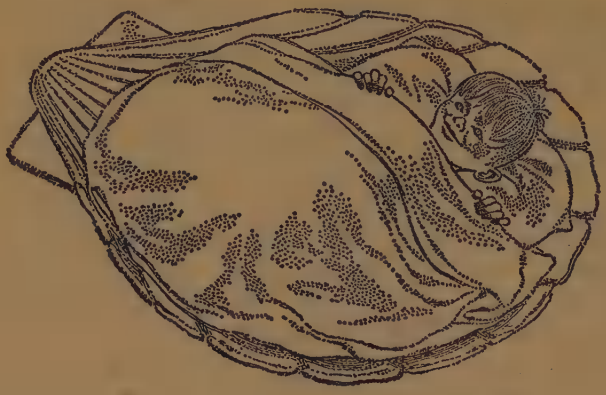
'Oh father,' said he, 'I *have* been seeing the world!'

'And where have you been?' asked his father.

'I've been in a rabbit's hole, and I've been in a cow's paunch, and I've been in a wolf's stomach,' said Thumbkin. 'But east, west, home's best; and I shan't go travelling any more.'

'And I wouldn't sell you again for a king's ransom!' said Thumbkin's father.

And his mother carried Thumbkin into the kitchen, and gave him a bath in a tea cup. And then she brushed his hair with a feather, and gave him some broth in a thimble, and put him to bed in a scallop shell; and said, 'Goodnight, Thumbkin!'



6 THE GIRL WHO PICKED STRAWBERRIES

Once upon a time a pretty girl went into the wood to pick strawberries. In the wood there was a little mound, and in the mound there was a little house, and in that house there lived three little dwarfs.

Now it happened that as the girl wandered here and there, picking strawberries and filling her basket, one of the dwarfs stepped to the door of the little house and put out his head to look about him.

'Oh! oh!' cried he. 'What a pretty girl! Brothers, come and see!'

So the other two dwarfs stepped to the door and put their heads out.

And there they were, all three, looking at the pretty girl.

'One of us must have her for his bride,' said the second dwarf.

'*I* must have her,' said the first dwarf, 'I saw her before you did.'

'Yes, that's fair enough,' said the third dwarf.

And they ran out and caught hold of the girl, and dragged her into their house under the mound.

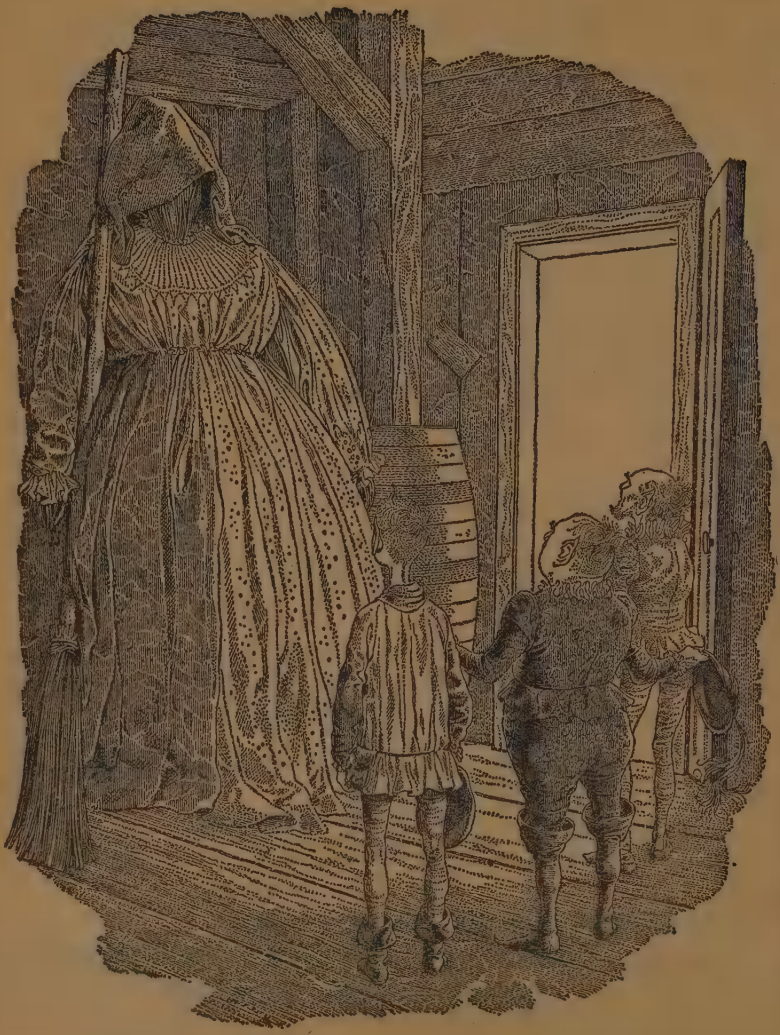
The girl sat down in a corner and cried bitterly.

'Cheer up, sweetheart,' said the first dwarf. 'I'm going to marry you.'

But that didn't make the girl feel any happier.

However she dried her eyes and pretended to be pleased; for she saw that if she was ever to escape, she must use her wits, and not just sit there crying.

'We will have a grand wedding feast,' said the second dwarf.



'And invite all our neighbours to it,' said the third dwarf.

So they gave the girl a broom and told her to sweep the house and make everything tidy; and away they scampered to invite all the other dwarfs to the wedding feast.

The girl put the broom to lean in the corner, and looked about her. The first thing she saw was a great bundle of straw. And the second thing she saw was a big tub of honey. And the third thing she saw was a huge tub of feathers.

So she took off her dress.

What did she do that for? Wait and see.

She took up the bundle of straw and stuffed her dress with it, sleeves and all. Then she tied up the top ends of the straw into the likeness of a head, and drew her hood over it. And she put the stuffed image of herself to stand in the corner, and leaned the broom against it.

And what did she do next?

She jumped into the tub of honey, and rolled in it till she was sticky all over. And then she got out of the honey tub, and jumped into the tub of feathers, and rolled in that. The feathers stuck to the honey on her, and out she scrambled, completely covered with them. Then she ran out of the dwarfs' house, and climbed up among the branches of a tree, and waited.

By and by she heard the quick pattering of little feet, and little shoutings and hurrahings; and a company of dwarfs came running through the wood, led by the three dwarfs whose house she had just left.

The three dwarfs looked up into the tree, and saw something sitting there all covered with white feathers. And they said,

'Whither and whence, thou pretty feathered bird?'

'I come out of the dwarfs' hole,' said the girl.

'And what does the pretty young bride?' said the dwarfs.

'She stands with the besom and sweeps the house,' said the girl.

'Hurrah!' cried the dwarfs. *'We'll go there too!'*

And they all ran into the house.

When they got inside, and saw the stuffed image of the girl standing in the corner with the broom, they took off their caps and said, 'Good morning, pretty bride!'

But the stuffed image made no answer.

'Good morning, pretty bride!' they said a bit louder.

Still the stuffed image made no answer.

'GOOD MORNING, PRETTY BRIDE!' they screamed.

And then, as the stuffed image still made no answer, the dwarf who was going to marry the girl flew at the image and boxed its ears. And down tumbled the image flat on the floor.

'You've killed her! You've killed her!' shouted the dwarfs. And they all sat down and howled, 'Boo! hoo! Boo! hoo!'

But the girl climbed down from the tree and ran home, fast as her legs would carry her.

And she never went into that wood again.

7 LITTLE MUKRA

Once upon a time, and a long time ago, there lived in Arabia a good man who had a son called Little Mukra. He was called *Little* Mukra because he was a dwarf, with a very big head and a very little body. And, because he was queer-looking, people laughed at him.

The good man, his father, did all he could to protect Little Mukra, whom he loved dearly; but, when Little Mukra was about fourteen, and still no bigger than a child of five, the good man died, and there was Little Mukra alone in the world.

His clothes were all in rags, because during his father's illness there had been no one to see to him. And in these rags he went to call on his father's relations to ask if they would help him.

Would they? No, they wouldn't! They felt ashamed of him.

'Be off with you,' they said, 'and don't come pestering your betters, you hideous dwarf!'

So Little Mukra went back to his father's house.

'Well, if no one will help me, I must go out into the world and seek my fortune,' he thought. For he was a brave little fellow.

But to go out into the world he must have some clothes to wear. So he found a shirt of his father's, cut off the tail of it with his father's dagger, and put it on. And he found a pair of his father's trousers, and cut the bottom off the legs, and pulled *them* on. He took a sash of his father's and wound it many times round his waist. He stuck his father's big dagger into the sash, and put his father's turban on his head. And then he looked at himself in the glass.

'The turban seems to fit me at any rate,' he thought. But, if

anything, the turban was a little too small for him, because his head was so *very* big.

'Now we are ready to seek our fortune,' he said to his image in the glass. And he went out of his father's house, and shut the door behind him.

So on his tiny legs, with the big dagger bumping against his tiny ankles, Little Mukra walked out into the wide world.

He walked for three days, and he got very tired. He asked for work at many houses, but nobody would employ him. He looked so queer that people just laughed at him, and told him to take himself off. But one or two people, kinder than the rest, gave him some bread to eat; and so, with the bread and an occasional drink of water, he was just able to keep himself alive.

On the third day he came to a town; and there all day he asked for work, and found none. In the evening he was walking through a narrow street with high houses on either side. There was no one about, and he was thinking he would just have to curl up in a doorway and die, for he was quite worn out, when he heard the ringing of a bell.

Tang, tang, tinkely, tinkely, tang!

The sound came from a house at the end of the street; and when the bell stopped ringing, a loud voice called out, 'Supper, supper! supper! Everyone who's hungry come to supper!'

That was an invitation not to be refused! Little Mukra started running towards the house at the end of the street. But he wasn't alone in the street now: there were running feet all round him – not the feet of human beings but of dogs and cats! Big cats and little cats, rough-coated dogs and smooth-coated dogs – the street was echoing with mews and yelps and joyous barking.

The door of the house stood open; and because the cats and dogs ran faster than Little Mukra, they reached that door before him. In they all pelted, with Little Mukra toddling along behind them on his tiny legs, and the big dagger swinging against his ankles and threatening to trip him up at every step.

Then, just as the last cat's tail whisked through the door, Little

Mukra reached it: the door was closing, but he went at it like a bull with his head down and got through somehow, before the dagger caught between his ankles and sent him spinning, and the door banged shut behind him.

Somebody gave him a shake and pulled him to his feet. He was in a big bare room, and it was full of cats and dogs; and every cat and every dog had its head down in a bowl of food, and was gobbling away for all it was worth.

But somebody was giving him another shake; and that was a tall woman, dressed very grandly in a long silk robe all covered with pictures of cats embroidered in many colours.

'What are you doing here?' shouted the tall woman.

'I came for supper,' said Little Mukra.

'I don't feed *people*,' shouted the tall woman.

'But please, I'm so hungry,' said Little Mukra.

'Oh, very well,' said the tall woman, 'I suppose you can have something to eat.'

She thrust a bowl full of bits of meat and broken biscuit at him and Little Mukra ate it all up. And then, he didn't know quite how it happened, but he fell asleep, and didn't wake up till morning.

The tall woman was shaking him again. He opened his eyes and looked about him. He wasn't in the big bare room, but in a much smaller and grander one. There were silk curtains and gold pillars and looking-glasses in ivory frames with carvings of cats on them, and there were lots of little red velvet sofas. He himself was lying on one of the little red velvet sofas, but the tall woman pulled him off it. And then he saw that every other sofa had a cat or a dog curled up on it; mostly there were cats, but there were a few little dogs.

'This is my drawing-room,' shouted the tall woman. 'And these cats and little dogs are my darling little children. The ones you saw last night are just rubbish that I let in at night because I've a kind heart . . . But what am I going to do with *you*?'

'I don't know,' said Mukra.

'But I must do *something* with you!' shouted the tall woman. She shouted so loud that Little Mukra said, 'Please, I'm not deaf.'

'I don't suppose you are,' shouted the tall woman. 'I'm only whispering.'

'Well, if that's whispering, what must her shout be like?' thought Little Mukra. But he didn't say anything.

'I've never seen anything like you before,' went on the tall woman in her loud shout. 'You're not a man, you're not a child, you're not a dog, and you're not a cat. *What* are you?'

'Please, I'm a dwarf,' said Little Mukra.

'Oh, a dwarf are you?' shouted the tall woman. 'Do dwarfs eat breakfast?'

'Oh yes, they *do*!' said Little Mukra.

Then the tall woman gave him some bread and milk, and all the time he was eating she was staring at him. But she hadn't once laughed at him, and that was a pleasant change for Mukra.

And after she had stared at him for a long time, she shouted, 'I'm going to keep you!'

So Little Mukra lived with the tall woman. But he didn't live in idleness. He worked very hard, for he had to look after all the drawing-room cats and dogs. He had to brush them and comb them and sprinkle them with scent, and clean their gold and silver eating bowls, and shake up the cushions on their little red sofas. And he had to prepare their mid-day meal also; for the tall woman went out every morning and didn't come back till evening.

Then, whilst she shouted about the kindness of her heart, she and Little Mukra filled up the bowls with food for the big bare room downstairs. And then she leaned out of her bedroom window and rang the bell, and shouted 'Supper, supper, supper!' and pulled the front door open with a cord, and let in all the stray dogs and cats – the 'rubbish', as she called them – who curled up and slept in the big bare room, and were shooed out into the street by her next morning.

The tall woman used to shout at Little Mukra about the big wages she was going to give him; but she never gave him any. However, he had plenty to eat, and that was something. But his slippers wore out with running about so much; there was only half a sole left on one, and less than half a sole left on the other; and his bare toes were poking through the front, and his bare heels were showing at the back. So he asked the tall woman if she would give him some new slippers.

'Certainly not!' she shouted. 'You can buy them for yourself out of your wages.'

'But—' began Little Mukra.

'What now?' she shouted.

'Nothing,' said Little Mukra. He had been going to say that he hadn't any wages, but she showed her teeth at him and looked so fierce that he didn't dare say anything.

She was often fierce with him. When she was angry, she would grasp him with her large hands and shake the breath out of him. Poor Little Mukra didn't like that at all; and it wasn't his fault that she was angry; it was the cats' fault. When the tall woman was in the house the cats were as good as gold, purring and rubbing their heads against her legs; but when she was out they were very badly behaved. They scrambled up the silk curtains and tore them, and they kneaded the red velvet sofas with their sharp claws and made holes in them; and they sharpened their claws on the sofa legs, and they scratched the walls, and they dragged the cushions about and played with them as if they were mice. But when the tall woman came home in the evening, they were all curled up on their cushions and smugly purring. And for all the havoc they caused, Little Mukra got the blame, for the tall woman wouldn't hear a word against her 'darling children'.

'A dwarf, are you?' she shouted at him, shaking him so hard that his turban fell off. 'If I'd known that a dwarf was such a raging tiger of a thing, I wouldn't have let you into my house!'

And she threatened to turn him out; but she didn't. Of course

she knew in her heart that the cats were to blame; only she liked bullying Little Mukra.

But by and by Little Mukra felt he couldn't stand it any longer, and he thought he would run away. Only he had no money, and his slippers were worn out. And how could he go out into the world with no money and no slippers? He stood at the window in the tall woman's drawing-room, and looked down at the street. He remembered how hungry he had been before he came to the tall woman, and he didn't want to go out and starve again.

'Yes, they are quite worn out,' said a quiet little voice at his feet.

'I beg your pardon?' said Little Mukra.

'I said they were full of holes,' went on the quiet little voice.

'I don't—' began Mukra. 'Who's speaking?'

'*I* am,' said the quiet little voice. Mukra looked down at his feet, and there was a small white dog, gazing up at him.

'I didn't know you could speak,' said Mukra.

'I *can*,' said the small white dog. 'But I don't very often.'

'I'm so unhappy,' said Little Mukra. 'I don't know what to do.'

'Why not run away?' said the small white dog.

'But I've no money,' said Mukra.

'Why not take your wages?' said the small white dog. 'You've earned them. Come, I'll show you.'

He led Mukra into the tall woman's bedroom. Behind the head of the bed there was a little curtain, and behind the little curtain there was a little door. Mukra opened the door, and they went through into a garret. The garret was full of things: moth-eaten clothes, and worm-eaten furniture, and mouldy old trunks. But standing on a table in the middle of the room was a most beautiful crystal vase. The vase sparkled and shone with a myriad delicate colours, and Little Mukra couldn't take his eyes off it. He just stood and stared.

'Don't waste time looking at that thing,' said the small white dog. 'The money's in a bag hanging on the far wall.'

But Mukra didn't move. He stared and stared at the vase. It was so beautiful that he wanted to hold it in his hands and look at it more closely.

'You'd better not,' said the small white dog.

But Mukra already had his hands on the vase . . . And after that he scarcely knew what happened. It seemed to him that the vase gave a scream and jumped out of his hands; and the next moment there it was lying on the floor in a hundred thousand glittering fragments.

'Now the tall woman will surely kill me!' said Little Mukra, and he didn't think any more about his wages; he just snatched up a pair of big old slippers that he saw lying in a corner of the room, thrust them on his feet, and ran out of the garret, and through the tall woman's bedroom, and down the stairs, and out into the street.

It seemed to him that the small white dog called something after him; but it was such a quiet little call that he didn't hear the words, and he didn't dare stop to listen. He just ran on and on.

He ran to the end of the town, and he ran out of the town – if it could be called running, for it was more like a kind of a shuffle, because the slippers were so much too big for him. But shuffle or run, he kept on, down a long sandy road, and across fields, and through orchards, and along more roads. He was tired out, and yet he couldn't stop running; he wanted to sit down and rest, but his feet wouldn't let him. Or was it his feet? No, it wasn't. It was the slippers.

'Whey-hey! Whoa-hoa!' cried Little Mukra in desperation. And the slippers stopped running, and down he plumped, all of a heap.

'Well!' thought Little Mukra, as he kicked the big slippers off his feet and stared at them. 'Now I *am* in luck! I can earn my living as a messenger!'

And he tucked the slippers under his arm, and went to sleep by the side of the road . . .

Something was scratching at his sleeve. He woke up, and there

was the small white dog, with his tongue dripping and his sides heaving, and pants coming from him a hundred to the minute.

'Ha-ah-ah-ah-ah-!' panted the small white dog. 'I've been all the ni-ight ca-atching up with you. I had so-omething to tell you, but you wouldn't sto-op to listen. Wa-ait till I get my breath.'

He dripped and panted a bit longer. Then he gave a big swallow and said, 'There! Now listen. Those slippers won't only run, they'll *fly*. All you have to do is to put them on, spin round three times on your left heel and wish; and they'll fly with you wherever you want to go.'

Little Mukra put on the slippers and stood up. He tried spinning round on his left heel, but the slippers were so big for him that he couldn't manage it.

'Practice makes perfect,' said the small white dog in his quiet little voice. 'Try again.'

So Little Mukra tried again and again, till at last there he was spinning round and round beautifully on his left heel.

'I wish, I wish,' he said. 'Oh where shall I go?'

'I don't know where *I* shall go,' said the small white dog in a small sad voice. 'I daren't go back to the tall woman.'

'No, you shall come with me,' said Little Mukra. And he stopped spinning round, and took the small white dog up under his arm.

'I wish,' he said, 'I wish – oh what shall I wish? Ah, I know! I wish I was standing outside the Sultan's palace.'

Immediately the road began whizzing backward from under him at a terrific pace. Whether the road ran flat, or up hill or down hill, the slippers kept him just a few inches above it; and in less than no time he saw the great gates of the Sultan's palace rising in front of him.

'We'll bump into them!' he cried in terror. But the slippers gave a little jerk and set him down gently at the feet of a big, fierce-looking warrior who stood guarding the gates.

When the big, fierce-looking warrior saw the queer little object, with its great head and its tiny body, bundled up in clothes much

too big for it, with the small white dog clutched under one arm, and the great dagger hanging down to its ankles, and the huge slippers on its baby-sized feet – well, that big, fierce-looking warrior just burst out laughing.

'You needn't laugh,' said Little Mukra with dignity. 'I want you to announce me to the Sultan. I wish to be one of the Sultan's messengers.'

'Here, take your jokes somewhere else,' said the fierce-looking warrior. 'If I wasn't such a good-tempered fellow, I'd give you a good beating!'

'I'm not joking,' said Little Mukra. 'You can tell the Sultan from me that I will race the fastest messenger he has – *and win.*'

The guard thought this such a good joke that he went to tell the Sultan, and the Sultan ordered Little Mukra to be brought before him. And when Little Mukra came toddling along the floor of the hall of audience, and made his bow before the throne, the Sultan, too, burst out laughing, and so did all the courtiers.

Now the Sultan liked being amused, and he thought the race that Little Mukra suggested would be the funniest sight in the world. So, still roaring with laughter, he bade his servants give Little Mukra some food and a bed, and sent out his heralds to announce the race for the next morning.

A huge crowd gathered on the big open space in front of the palace to watch the race. The course was marked out with coloured stakes and flags, and there at the starting post stood the Sultan's Chief Messenger, a tall, tall fellow with long, long legs. But when Little Mukra came toddling out, with the small dog under his arm and the big slippers flapping on his feet, the laughter that rose from the crowd was like all the waves of the sea thundering together: for the top of Little Mukra's turban didn't reach to the Chief Messenger's waist.

The Sultan, seated high on a golden platform, dropped his handkerchief, a drum sounded, and the race began. Off darted the Chief Messenger on his long legs. But Little Mukra stood by the starting post spinning round on his left heel.

'Ha, ha! ha, *ha*!' roared the crowd. And then all at once there was silence. Little Mukra was off, skimming over the ground like a swallow. He passed the Sultan's Messenger, and reached the end of the course, and was skimming back again, almost before the crowd had time to draw breath. But when they *had* drawn breath, and saw Little Mukra again at the starting point, they burst into shouts and cheers.

'Hurrah for the little dwarf! Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live Little Mukra!'

Three times Little Mukra skimmed down the course and back again, and still the Chief Messenger, running with might and main, had not reached the end of it. The Sultan ordered the race to stop, and Little Mukra bowed low before the golden platform.

'Oh Sultan, live for ever!' he said. 'May I be counted among your royal messengers?'

'No,' said the Sultan, 'you shall not be counted among them. You shall be chief over them all. You shall be my special courier, entrusted with my most important concerns. Come, we must see you suitably clad and housed.'

So the Sultan had Little Mukra dressed in fine garments, and he gave him a suite of little rooms all for himself, and servants to wait on him. And Little Mukra carried all the Sultan's most important messages for him: whether near or far, over sea or over land, it made no difference to Little Mukra; he was there and back almost before you could wink your eyes. And everywhere he went the small white dog went with him, tucked under his arm. So they both lived in happiness and comfort ever after.

But what happened, you ask, when the slippers wore out? If that's a riddle, the answer is easy. They never did wear out, because, you see, they were magic slippers.

8 BOTTLE HILL

Once upon a time there lived in Ireland a man called Mick Purcell. He had a wife and a lot of children, and it seemed to him that the children were always hungry and that he hadn't enough meat to put into them. He rented some little fields, but the land was poor and stony, and his landlord was always clamouring for the rent, and he hadn't enough money to pay it.

Well, he had a pig, and he sold that; and there was one quarter's rent paid. But it was a bad year with him: first came drought, and then came rain; his hens got the pip and died, and his little field of oats was first so dry that the straw wouldn't grow, and then so sodden that the ears went black. And now there was another quarter's rent due.

'Molly, my heart,' said he to his wife, 'what'll we do?'

'I'm thinking you'll take the cow to market and sell her,' said Molly.

'So I will then,' said Mick. 'But sorrow is on me that I must do it.'

Next morning he set out, driving the cow before him. The way was long and lonely. Six miles he had to go on the flat, and six miles he had to go up the hill; and when he got near to the top of the hill he was tired, and the cow was tired. So, as he stopped for a minute to rest himself, a little man stepped from behind a bank.

'Good morrow to you, Mick Purcell,' said the little man.

'Good morrow to you, then,' said Mick. But he began to shiver and shake. He didn't like the look of that little man – no, he did *not*. The little man was buttoned up in a long coat to his feet, and he had a face like a withered cabbage, with a little sharp nose stuck on it, and the shock of hair that was on him was like withered

gorse, and the little red eyes in his face were never still for a moment, but were winking up at Mick's head and then down at Mick's feet, and then up again and down again.

'Sure and he's not of this earth,' thought Mick. 'I must haste to get past him.'

He began driving the cow on. But the little man kept beside him – though you couldn't say he was walking, for he didn't seem to put one foot before the other, but to glide along that rough road as if he were being blown by some wind that no one else could feel.

'Where might you be going, Mick Purcell?' said the little man.

'To market then,' said Mick, hurrying on. 'And how the devil should he know my name?' he thought.

'And why are you going to market, Mick Purcell?'

'To sell the cow, surely,' said Mick. 'Why else?'

'Sell her to me,' said the little man.

Mick didn't want to say 'yes', but he was afraid to say 'no'. He was afraid to open his mouth. But he did open his mouth at last, and said he, 'What will you give me for her?'

The little man pulled a bottle from under his coat.

'I'll give you this bottle,' said he.

Mick had to laugh then, frightened though he might be. 'An empty bottle for a cow?' he said. 'Is it myself would be so stupid?'

'You'd better take the bottle and give me the cow,' said the little man. 'How do you know that the cow won't die before you get to market?'

'Arrah! but he's for putting a curse on the beast!' thought Mick. And he wanted to cross himself, but he didn't dare with the little man's red eyes on him.

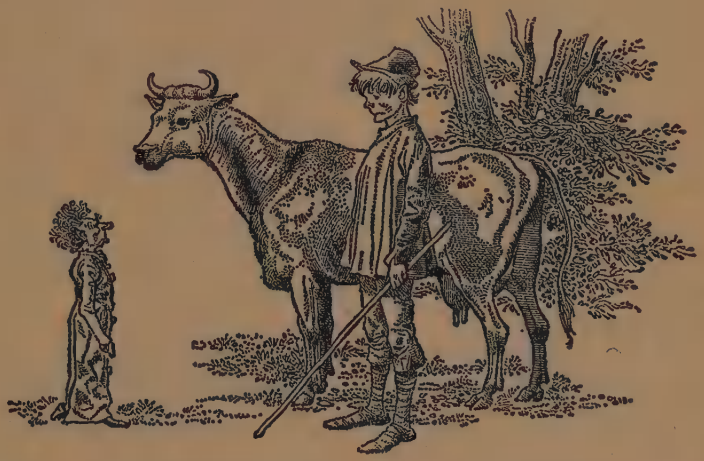
'And if she gets there,' said the little man, 'she's but a poor thin creature, and you'll be getting no good price for her at all. And how do you know but coming home you won't be robbed of that little in these lonely parts? Come, you be taking the bottle now, and giving me the cow – you'll not be sorry for it. I have a warmth

in my heart for you, Mick Purcell, and my bottle will bring you luck.'

'Luck!' said Mick. 'It's myself is in sore need of it! But I don't like the looks of that empty bottle. And what will Molly say?'

'Let her say what she will,' said the little man. 'Let her screech herself blue. You take the bottle and do as I say, and before you know, you'll be a rich man.'

So they went on arguing it out for a long time, the little man trying to make Mick give him the cow for the bottle, and Mick



objecting, till at last the little man got angry, and stood still, and stamped with his feet, and said, 'For the last time I'm asking you, Mick Purcell. Will you be giving me the cow and taking the bottle with the luck inside it; or will you be selling the cow for little money, and when that little's gone, be hearing your children cry for bread?'

Mick could stand no more of it. He snatched the bottle and said, 'Arrah then, take the cow! And if there's no luck in this bottle, may the curse of the poor light on you!'

The little man was smiling now. 'It's not lies I've been telling you but the truth,' he said. 'And that you'll find if you do as I say.

When you get home, pay no heed to your wife's screechings, for screech she will. Bid her sweep the room clean and spread a clean cloth on the table. Then do you stand the bottle on the floor and say, "Bottle, do your duty!"

'And what then?' said Mick.

'You'll see,' said the little man. 'And now good day to you, Mick Purcell, for you are a rich man.'

Mick wasn't liking any of it. But the little man had the cow now, and Mick had the bottle. So he turned back on his way home. And when he had gone a few steps, he looked over his shoulder, but neither man nor cow could he see. Fear got hold of him then, and he began to run, and got home quicker than you'd think possible.

'Well, Mick,' said Molly, when he got into the house, 'It's yourself that is a quick walker! Give me some money now, that I may go out and buy bread.'

'I have no money at all,' said Mick.

'No money? Then you brought back the cow?'

'I did not,' said Mick very loud. 'I sold her. And this is what I got for her.'

And he showed Molly the empty bottle.

Well, well, Molly screeched till she was purple in the face; and Mick told her the whole story, but that didn't stop her screeching. She called him every bad name she could think of. But by and by she got a bit quieter, and took a broom and swept up the room, and set a clean cloth on the table.

'And now,' said she, still sobbing and wailing, 'it's the old bottle, I suppose, will make our fortunes?'

Mick stood the bottle on the floor, as the little man had told him.

'Bottle, do your duty!' said he.

And, hey presto! Out from the bottle came two tiny manikins carrying plates of silver and dishes and goblets of gold, all full up with good things to eat and drink. They set the plates and dishes and goblets on the table, and when all was done they went back into the bottle.

Molly laughed for joy, and Mick laughed for joy. 'Why then, it was no lie the little man was telling me about that bottle!' said he.

So Molly and Mick and all the children sat down to table, and ate such a meal as they'd never had before in their lives. And when they could eat no more, Molly looked at the bottle and said, 'I wonder now, when will the kind little gentlemen come for the dishes?'

But the bottle stood on the floor, and there was no stir nor sign of life in it.

So Molly washed the dishes and left them tidy on the table for the manikins to carry away when they thought fit. And by that time it was late, and they all went to bed.

'They'll come for them in the night, I'm thinking,' said Molly.

But, in the morning, there were the gold and silver dishes on the table, just as Molly had left them. And as Mick felt hungry again, he said to the bottle, 'Bottle, do your duty!' And, hey presto! out came the manikins carrying more gold and silver dishes full up with good things to eat, and the family sat down to breakfast. And so it was with every meal that day and in the days that followed: the manikins didn't carry away any of the empty dishes, but they brought more full ones, so that the room was soon filled with the gold and the silver.

'Mick Purcell,' said Molly. 'I'm thinking these fine dishes are meant as a present to us; and if we're not rich now, it's rich we can be by selling them.'

So Mick went off to town and sold the dishes. And first he bought a horse and cart, and then he bought land, and more land; and then he built himself a bigger house; for always there were more and more of those gold and silver dishes to sell. And he became a rich man.

Well, he couldn't become a rich man without folk getting to know of it. And one day in came Mick's former landlord to ask the meaning of it all. Mick didn't see why he shouldn't tell him, so tell

him he did; and the landlord asked for the loan of the bottle.

'Sure,' said Mick. 'But have a care not to break it, and bring it back to me in a week's time.'

The landlord agreed and went off with the bottle. And for that week he was getting the good meals for himself, and the gold and silver dishes. And when the week was out, did he want to return the bottle? No, he did not. So he got another bottle, the very like of Mick's bottle, but without the magic in it, and he took it to Mick and said, 'The bottle doesn't seem to work any more.'

Mick wasn't willing to believe him. But when he stood the bottle on the floor, and said, 'Bottle, do your duty!' nothing happened.

'Oh well,' said Mick, 'it's no great matter. It's rich I am now, and I'm not to be any richer, it seems.'

But Mick didn't stay rich. He had got used, now, to spending like a lord; and though at first it seemed there was no end to his money, that money did come to an end. And when he had sold his horses, and his castle, and this, that and the other thing, he woke up one morning to find himself with but one cow left, and the family with but a dish of porridge for breakfast.

'Musha then, Molly my heart,' said he. 'What'll we do?'

'I'm thinking you'll take the cow to the little man and ask for another bottle,' said Molly.

'So I will then,' said Mick. 'But will he give me one?'

'You can but ask him,' said Molly.

So Mick set off, driving the cow along the six miles of flat and up the six miles of hill. And when he got near the top of the hill, the little man stepped from behind the bank and greeted him.

'Good morrow to you, Mick Purcell,' said he. 'And wasn't it true what I was telling you – that you would be a rich man?'

'It was true,' said Mick. 'But the bottle has lost its power, and now I am a poor man again. And here is my last cow; and I was thinking you might find it in your heart to take her in exchange for another bottle; for it's in sore need I am, and that's the truth.'

The little man smiled. 'I have a warm heart towards you, Mick

Purcell,' he said. 'I'll take the cow, and here is another bottle. You know what to do with it?'

'I do surely,' said Mick.

And he took the bottle, and off he set back home.

He hadn't gone many steps, when the little man called after him, 'Mick Purcell, my bottles never lose their power.'

Mick wondered what he meant; but he didn't trouble then to think it out. He was in haste now to get home and give his family a good meal.

'Molly, my heart,' said he. 'I've got another bottle.'

'Sure and it's a lucky man you are, Mick Purcell!' said she.

She took the broom and swept up the floor, and spread a clean cloth on the table. And Mick stood the bottle on the floor and said, 'Bottle, do your duty!'

And, hey presto! Out of the bottle jumped two huge black men with big cudgels. And *thump, thump, thump* went those cudgels on the backs of Mick and Molly and the children, till they all lay flat on the floor and roaring.

And then the two huge black men went back into the bottle.

The cudgels had nigh beaten the life out of Mick, but they had beaten some new sense into his head. He lay on the floor and thought; and it came to him how the little man must have been speaking truth when he said, 'My bottles never lose their power'; and how, if that were so, the landlord must have deceived him.

So he tucked the new bottle under his coat and went to knock on the landlord's door. And a servant came to the door, and told him his master was giving a party.

'I would wish to speak with him all the same,' said Mick. 'About a bottle.'

The landlord, on hearing the word 'bottle', came out in a hurry. He thought Mick was going to accuse him of stealing.

'What do you want?' he said fiercely.

'Not so much,' said Mick. 'I have another bottle, and I thought maybe you'd like to borrow it.'

'Is it as good as the first?' said the greedy landlord.

'Faith, it is,' said Mick. 'And better.'

'Come your ways in then, Mick Purcell,' said the landlord. 'We'll show all these ladies and gentlemen what it can do.'

So Mick went in, and saw all the gold and silver dishes, with the good food on them, standing on the table. And he saw the ladies and gentlemen sitting round the table, with the servants waiting on them. And he saw his old bottle, too, standing high on a shelf and nearly out of sight.

'Ladies and gentlemen,' said the landlord, 'we have a pretty surprise for you.'

Mick stood the new bottle on the floor and said, 'Bottle, do your duty!'

And, hey presto! out came the two huge blackamoors with the big cudgels, and set about them. In a moment the landlord and the ladies and gentlemen and the servants were running and roaring and screaming and tumbling to the floor, and being beaten till they had scarce breath to roar with; and all the gold and silver dishes were clattering down on top of them, and the good food was spilling about.

'Mick Purcell,' gasped the landlord, 'stop these black devils, or I'll have you hanged!'

'They shall never stop,' said Mick, 'till I get back my own bottle that's standing yonder on the shelf.'

'Take it,' screamed the landlord, 'before we are all murdered!'

Mick reached up and took down his old bottle. The two blackamoors went back into the new bottle, and Mick put both the old and the new under his coat, and went home. Soon he got rich again, and rich he stayed to the end of his life. But when, in the fullness of time, he and Molly died, the servants got fighting at his wake, and threw the bottles at each other and broke them.

That was the end of the bottles, nor have there been any like them in the world since.

But the hill where Mick met up with the little man got a new name to it. It has been called *Bottle Hill* from that day to this.

9 THE SKIPPER AND THE DWARFS

Once upon a time, in Jutland, there was a miller who had a field, and he took his plough and ploughed it up. In the middle of the field was a mound where the dwarfs lived, and people told him he should leave that mound alone. But he said, 'What good are the dwarfs to me?' And he ploughed over the mound with the rest.

So there was the dwarfs' home in ruins. They decided they would go across the sea to Norway. Now they must find a skipper to ferry them over, but no one would take them. But at last one of the dwarfs came to a very poor skipper.

'I would gladly take you,' said the skipper, 'but I have no boat.'

'I will find you a boat,' said the dwarf. 'Come with me.'

So they went together to the sea shore, and there the dwarf showed the skipper an old wreck of a boat lying on its side on the sand. Its mast was broken, and it had no sail, and the cracks in its hull were showing the daylight through them.

'But the boat is not seaworthy!' said the skipper.

'Leave that to me,' said the dwarf. 'You go and hire a sailor and meet me here on the sea shore in three days' time.'

The skipper tried to hire a sailor, but the sailors laughed at him. 'What,' said they, 'put to sea in that leaky old tub, and be drowned for our pains? No, thank you!'

Now there was a poor hungry boy listening to the sailors, and the boy came to the skipper and said, 'I will go with you, for perhaps then I shall get something to eat.'

So the skipper hired the boy, though he did not know how he was going to pay him. But he hoped the dwarfs would give him something. In three days' time they went down to the sea.

The wreck of a boat was floating in the shallow water, but it didn't look much less of a wreck. The mast had been mended with a broomstick, the cracks in the hulls were stuffed with twine, and there were some rags run up for sails. The dwarf was sitting in the stern of the boat smoking a pipe, and he called to the skipper and the boy to wade in and come aboard.

'But where are the passengers?' said the skipper.

The dwarf made a fierce face, and told him to ask no questions, so the skipper and the boy waded out to the boat and climbed in. They pulled up the anchor and pushed off out of the shallow water, a fair wind filled the rag sails, and they glided swiftly on their way.

'But I wonder where the passengers can be?' thought the skipper, though he didn't dare to ask again.

The boards of the deck were all rotten, and there was a gaping hole in one of them; so, when he thought the dwarf wasn't noticing, the skipper peered down through this hole, and there down below – ugh! the place was swarming with rats and mice, and there was a great pile of dead black beetles in one corner.

But the dwarf *was* noticing, and he came over to the skipper and said, 'Here, take my hat.'

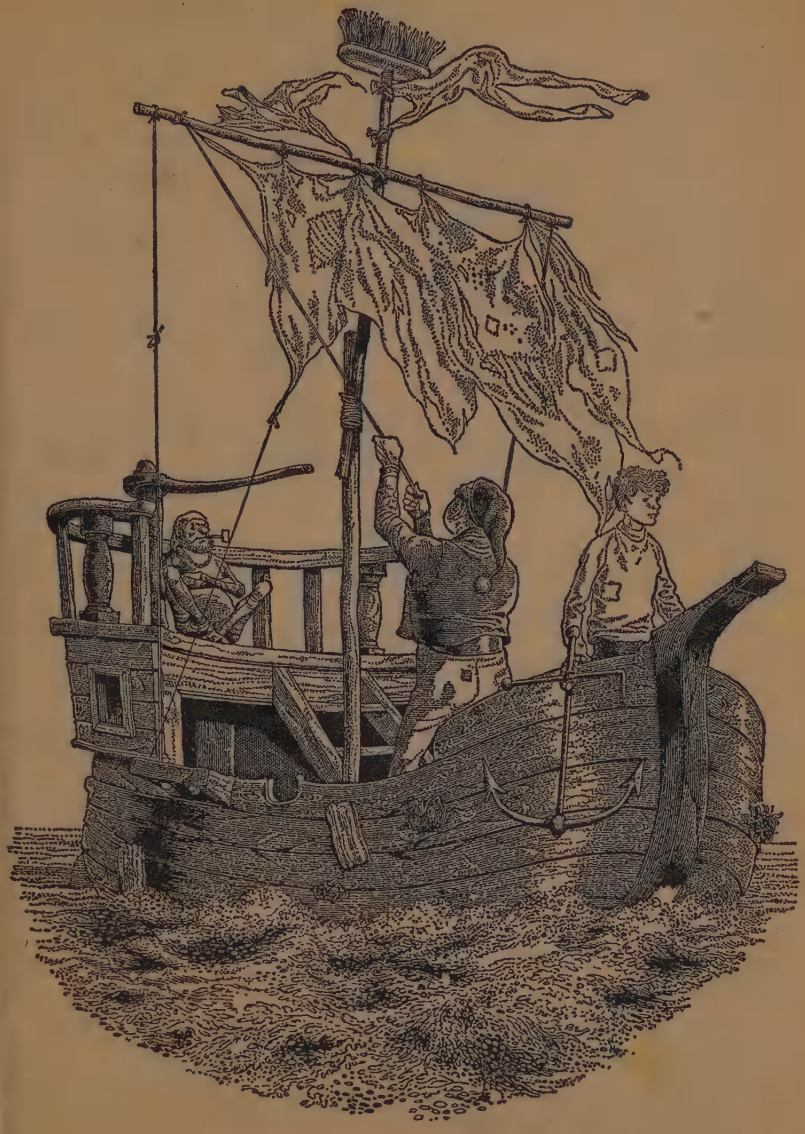
So the skipper took the dwarf's hat and put it on his head, and lo and behold, what he had taken for rats and mice was a company of little dwarf men and women, in travelling dresses of warm squirrel skin; and what he had taken for a pile of dead black beetles was a pile of gold and silver and shining jewels.

'Give me my hat,' said the dwarf, 'and go about your business.'

There didn't seem much business to go about. The boat was flying over the water; the sea was calm, the sun shone, and the wind blew steadily behind them. Very soon they reached Norway and ran in to a deep blue bay between some mighty cliffs.

'Now,' said the dwarf, 'do you and the boy go ashore and amuse yourselves for one hour, and I will unload the vessel.'

The skipper went ashore with the boy. And when they came



back to the boat after an hour, the dwarf was sitting in the stern smoking his pipe. 'Now,' said he, 'we will go back for another load.'

And they set sail, and the wind blew behind them, and they were very soon back in Jutland.

They made a second voyage, and they made a third voyage.

When they had landed safely for the third time in Norway, the dwarf said again to the skipper, 'Go you and the boy on shore for an hour whilst I unload the cargo.' And when the skipper and the boy came back to the boat, the dwarf wasn't sitting in the stern smoking, but was standing on the shore, dressed in a travelling suit of warm squirrel skin.

'Your work is ended,' he said to the skipper. 'And where I go now is no concern of yours. Take your wages and sail home. And give the boy his share.' He handed the skipper two bulging sacks.

The skipper took the sacks and thanked the dwarf. He carried the sacks down to the edge of the water, and when he looked round the dwarf had vanished. So the skipper thought he would see what was in the sacks. And when he opened them, he found one was full of coal, and the other full of shavings.

'Oh,' said he, 'truly a sorry reward for my services!'

And he got grumpily into the boat, and the boy followed him carrying the sacks, and they set sail for home.

They didn't make so much speed as they had on their other voyages; in fact, the boat now sailed heavily like the old tub she was. The sun was scorching, and there was scarce a breath of wind.

So when they had been labouring on their way for a long time, the skipper's throat was parched, and he said to the boy, 'Boy, go and make us a drop of tea.'

'Yes, master,' said the boy. 'But we have no fuel for the fire.'

'Take a handful of shavings out of the sack,' said the skipper.

The boy went to open the sack of shavings, and in a moment he cried out, 'Master, they shine!'

'What shines?' said the skipper.

'The shavings, master, they are hard and they shine!'

'Then take some coal out of the other sack,' said the skipper.

So the boy went to open the other sack, and in a moment he cried out again, 'Master, it shines!'

'What shines?' said the skipper.

'The sack of coal, master!'

So then the skipper went to look into the sacks himself; and what he had thought to be shavings was a sackful of silver pieces, and what he had thought to be coal was a sackful of gold coins.

'Truly a rich reward for my services!' cried he joyfully. 'Boy, do you take one oar and I'll take the other, and we'll get this old tub home as fast as we can.'

They got home at last, but slowly; and carried their precious sacks up on to the sand. And when they turned round to look at the boat, the boat wasn't there. There were only a few bits of driftwood, floating in the shallow water.

The skipper carried the two sacks to his home, and counted out the gold coins and the silver pieces. It took him a long time, there were so many of them. Then he gave half to the boy, and kept half for himself, and they were now both rich.

But as for the miller who had ploughed up the dwarfs' home, first he sowed his field with corn, and then he planted it with cabbages, and then he sowed it with grass seed. But nothing ever came up in that field but thistles.

There was once a widower who had an only daughter. She was a pretty girl, and a good girl; she baked for her father, and she brewed for her father, and washed and mended for him, and kept his house all shining clean. But that wasn't the same thing as having a wife, and the man often wondered if he would marry again. But he couldn't make up his mind.

So one day he gave his daughter a boot with a hole in it, and said to her, 'Take this boot to the hay loft and hang it on a nail. Then get a jug and pour water into the boot. If the water stays in the boot, I will marry again. But if the water runs out, I will stop as I am.'

The girl took the boot to the hay loft, hung it on a nail, and poured water into it. The water made the leather swell, the hole closed up, and the boot was full of water. She went to tell her father, and he climbed up into the hay loft to see for himself.

'Then that settles it,' he said. 'I must go and woo the widow across the way.'

He hadn't to woo for long; the widow, who also had a daughter, was glad enough to have him. And so they were married.

But the new wife hated her stepdaughter because she was pretty and sweet-tempered, whereas her own daughter was ugly and bad-tempered.

'I don't want her here,' thought the stepmother, 'Putting my daughter into the shade!'

And she began to think of ways to get rid of her.

So one day in winter, when the mountains and valleys were covered with snow, and the ground was frozen hard, the woman made a dress out of paper, and said to the girl. 'Put this on.'

And the girl put it on.

'Take this basket,' said the stepmother.

And the girl took the basket.

'Now,' said the stepmother, 'go out into the wood, and fill the basket with strawberries; for I have a longing for them.'

'But stepmother,' said the girl, 'strawberries don't grow in the winter!'

'Don't you dare argue with me!' said the stepmother. 'And don't you dare to show your face here again till the basket is full of strawberries.'

She gave the girl a dry crust of bread. 'That will be enough to feed you for today,' she said. 'Now, be off with you!'

She pushed the girl through the door, slammed it behind her, and thought, 'She will perish of cold out there in the snow.'

The girl walked off in her paper dress. The hard frozen snow was everywhere, and not even a green blade of grass was to be seen. She was shivering with cold, and she knew she could never find any strawberries.

When she got into the wood, she saw a little house. The window was open, and three little dwarfs, with red caps on their heads, were peering out at her. She wished them good day, and tapped timidly at the door; and they called out to her to come in.

So she went in, and sat down by the fire to warm herself, and to eat the crust of bread.

'Will you give us some of your bread?' said the dwarfs.

'I will gladly,' said the girl. And she broke the crust into four pieces and gave them each a piece.

Then they asked her what she was doing out in the frozen wood in her paper dress.

'Oh,' said the girl, 'I must pick this basket full of strawberries for my stepmother; and I mustn't go home till the basket is full. And so I suppose I shall never go home any more.'

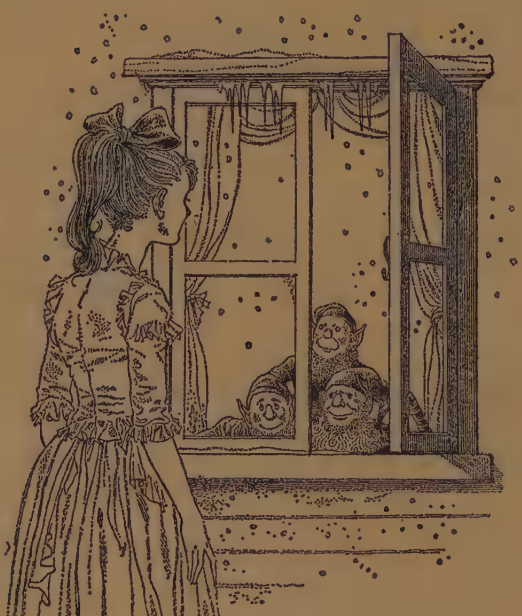
The dwarfs looked at each other, and one of them said, 'You see we are very small, and our arms are stiff. Will you sweep away the snow from the back door for us?'

'I will gladly,' said the girl.

And she took a broom from the side of the fire, and went out at the back door.

Whilst she was outside, the dwarfs said to one another, 'What reward shall we give her for being so sweet and good and sharing her only crust with us?'

The first dwarf said, 'Every day she shall grow prettier.'



The second dwarf said, 'Every time she opens her mouth to speak, a piece of gold shall fall out of it.'

The third dwarf said, 'A king shall come and marry her.'

Meanwhile, the girl had swept the snow away from the back door into a tidy heap, and there under the snow, what did she find but a little garden full of the reddest, biggest strawberries she had ever seen. She quickly filled her basket; and when it was full she

went back into the little house, shook hands with each of the dwarfs and hurried joyfully home. She didn't feel cold now; and that was strange, for she was still wearing the paper dress.

She walked into the room where her stepmother was sitting; and as soon as she opened her mouth to speak, a gold coin fell out of it. She began to tell of what had happened in the wood; and at every word she spoke, out fell a gold coin, till the floor was strewn with them.

'Did you ever!' cried the stepsister. 'Showing off, and flinging money about like that!'

She was jealous as fire, and said she too must go into the wood and look for strawberries.

'No, no, my dearest daughter,' said her mother. 'It is much too cold. You will be frozen to death!'

But the girl said she *would* go. And she kept on saying so until at last her mother gave in. She wrapped her in a beautiful fur coat, and gave her bread and butter and meat and cakes and a bottle of wine to take with her.

And the girl set out.

She went straight to the little house in the wood; and there were the three dwarfs in red caps looking out of the window. She didn't even glance at them, she pushed the door open, marched into the room, sat down by the fire, and began to eat the good things her mother had packed up for her.

'Will you give us some of your food?' asked the dwarfs.

'Give you some!' said the girl rudely. 'I should think not, indeed! I've scarcely enough for myself.'

When she had finished eating, the dwarfs asked her if she would sweep away the snow from the back door.

'Sweep away the snow!' said the girl. 'I should think not, indeed! I'm not your servant. Are you going to give me any strawberries?'

The dwarfs said they hadn't any. So she flew into a temper, and went off on her way home.

'What reward shall we give *her*?' said the dwarfs.

The first said, 'She shall grow uglier every day.'

The second said, 'Every time she opens her mouth to speak a toad shall jump out of it.'

The third said, 'She shall live an unhappy life.'

When the girl got home, she began to tell her mother what had happened in the wood; but at every word she spoke, out hopped a toad. The toads were crawling all over the floor, and the mother was kept busy picking them up with a shovel and putting them out of the house, until at last she had to beg her daughter to keep her mouth shut.

Now the woman hated her stepdaughter more than ever. The girl was growing more beautiful every day; and though she spoke very little, every time she did speak, out dropped a gold coin. The stepmother had a big sack full of the gold, but she didn't like the girl any the better for that. She was determined to get rid of her. So she got some twine, hung it over the girl's shoulder, told her to take an axe, go to the river, break a hole in the ice, and fish.

'And don't you dare come back till you have caught as many fishes as there are days in the year,' she said.

The girl took the axe and went to the river. And whilst she was stooping over it to break a hole in the ice, the king came riding by in a golden coach. And he stopped the coach and said, 'My dear child, who are you, and what are you doing there?'

'I am a poor girl,' she answered. 'And I am breaking a hole in the ice that I may fish with this twine.'

The king laughed. 'How many fish do you expect to catch?' he asked.

'Three hundred and sixty-five,' she answered. 'Or I dare not go home.'

Now all the time the girl was speaking, gold coins were dropping out of her mouth. The king was astonished. Also she was the most beautiful maiden he had ever set eyes on. So he said, 'Will you leave your fishing and come away with me?'

'I will gladly,' said the girl, for she never wished to see her stepmother again.

So she got into the coach and drove away with the king to his palace, and the next day they were married. So everything turned out just as the dwarfs had wished.

But at the girl's old home, the stepmother raged, and her daughter raged, and the place swarmed with the toads that fell from her mouth. At last the husband could stand it no longer. He drove both mother and daughter out of the house, to wander unhappily about the world. So that, too, turned out as the dwarfs had wished.

11 THE HAZEL-NUT CHILD

Once upon a time a fairy disguised herself as a beggar, and knocked at the door of a labourer's cottage, and asked for a night's lodging. The labourer and his wife took her in and treated her kindly.

In the morning, as she pulled on her tattered cloak to leave the cottage, she said, 'I thank you good people. And now tell me the dearest wish of your hearts.'

'Oh,' said the wife, 'I wish we had a little son, even though he were no bigger than a hazel-nut.'

'You shall have your wish,' said the fairy. 'May it bring you good fortune.' And off she hobbled.

Neither the man nor his wife thought anything more about it. The fairy was just a poor old woman to them, and doubtless she talked nonsense. But one day, when the labourer came in from the fields, his wife was standing at the door smiling. She had her two hands cupped together, and she held them out to him, and said, 'That old woman must have been a fairy. See what she's sent us!'

And there, lying in her hands, was a little boy, exactly the size of a hazel-nut.

The man scratched his head in amazement, and then he laughed with pleasure.

'Well, yes, now we have a little son,' he said.

'And how pretty!' said his wife.

'Pretty as a peach,' said the man, and they both laughed.

The child never grew any bigger; when he was fifteen he was still the size of a hazel-nut, but he was very good-tempered and very clever, and both the labourer and his wife loved him dearly.

Only one thing troubled them, and that was how he was to earn a living for himself.

'For we shan't be here forever,' said his wife. 'And when we are gone, what will become of him?'

The Hazel-nut Child was at that moment sitting on the table in a little chair he had carved for himself out of a peach stone.

'Don't you trouble about me, mother,' he said. 'I am going to be an explorer. Very soon now I shall set out on my travels.'

Well, of course his father and mother just laughed. They thought it a big joke. But one night in autumn, when his parents were asleep, the Hazel-nut Child crept up on to the roof, where some storks had made their nests. The storks were fast asleep also; so the Hazel-nut Child climbed up on to the back of the biggest bird, and hid himself under the feathers of its wing. Then he, too, fell asleep.

Early in the morning, the storks spread their wings, and flew away towards the south. And the Hazel-nut Child flew with them. Up, up, and high up into the clouds they went, and across the sea, till they came to a country where the sun shone hotly, and the people were black as coal. And there the storks flew down close to the king's house.

Gabble, gabble, gabble, went the guards in front of the king's house.

They were saying, 'Here are the storks come again!' But the Hazel-nut Child couldn't understand that; so he stood up on the top of the biggest stork's head, and waved.

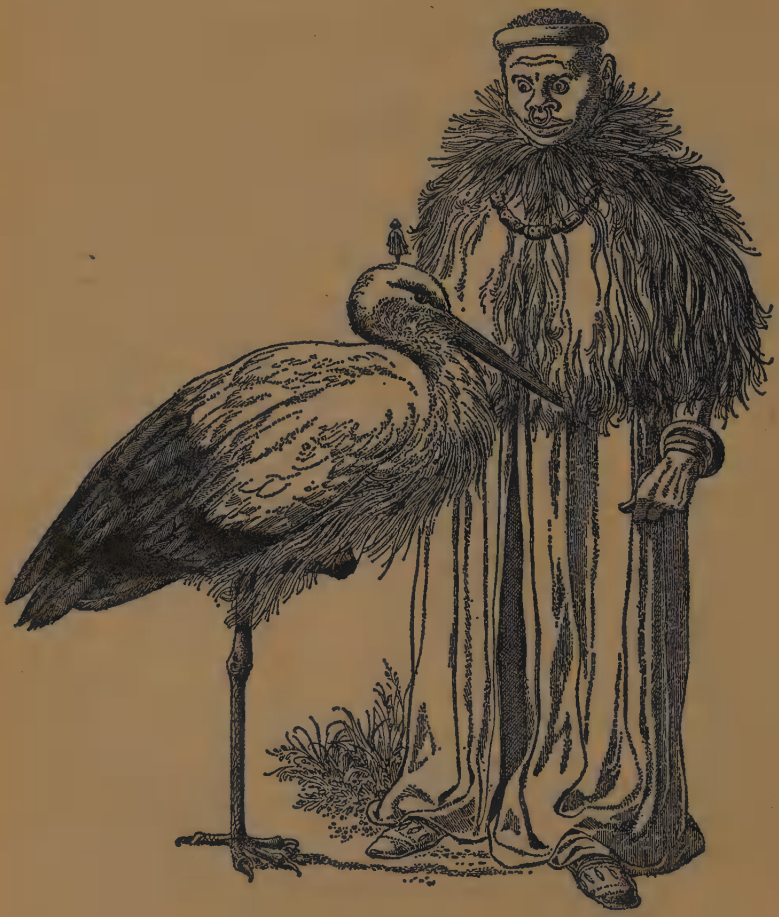
The guards couldn't believe their eyes. They caught the stork, and carried it to the king, with the Hazel-nut Child sitting proudly on its head.

Gabble, gabble, gabble, went the guards.

And, *Gabble, gabble, gabble*, went the king.

'I am a great explorer,' said the Hazel-nut Child. 'And you, I see, are a great king. How do you do?'

Of course the king couldn't understand that. He took the Hazel-nut Child up in his hand, and goggled and grinned at him,



showing all his great white teeth. He looked rather frightful, because he had a huge gold ring in his nose, but the Hazel-nut Child wasn't a bit afraid. When the king put his head down close to look at him better, the Hazel-nut Child jumped up into the ring and sat there, and swung himself backwards and forwards. And all the guards stamped their feet, and clapped their hands, and roared with laughter.

The king was very proud; he was sure nobody else in the world had a little white manikin for a nose ornament. He carried the Hazel-nut Child about with him everywhere, sometimes on his head, and sometimes on his shoulder; but on all state occasions he wore him in his nose-ring. One day he gave the Hazel-nut Child a diamond, six times as big as himself; but the Hazel-nut Child asked him to tie it round the biggest stork's neck, for by this time he could speak the king's language.

So the king had the diamond tied round the stork's neck with a silk cord.

The stork didn't like it; he tried to get it off, but however much he twisted his head about he couldn't reach the cord with his long beak, so there the diamond stayed until the spring.

In the spring the storks got ready to fly north, and the Hazel-nut Child said goodbye to the king. The king didn't want him to go, he sobbed and howled; but the Hazel-nut Child explained that he must go home and see his parents.

'I'll come back and visit you again, some day,' he said.

And with that the king had to be content.

So the Hazel-nut Child climbed on to the biggest stork's back, and took a tight hold of its feathers, and up and away they flew – and flew, and flew, and didn't stop flying till they came to the Hazel-nut Child's village.

Then the Hazel-nut Child cut the cord round the stork's neck, and the diamond fell to the ground. The stork was so astonished to feel the weight gone from his neck that he dropped to the ground himself to see what had happened; and there he stood, cocking one eye at the diamond. But the Hazel-nut Child slid from his

back, and covered the diamond with earth and little stones, so that no one should make off with it. And then he went to call his parents, because he couldn't even lift the great diamond, much less carry it home.

His parents were rejoiced to see him, and when he told them they were now rich, they rejoiced even more. They sold the diamond for a big price, and thereafter lived in great comfort. Every few years the Hazel-nut Child flew with the storks to visit the black king, and always he came home in the spring with some big jewel or other.

'So you see I *am* an explorer,' he said; 'an explorer who sets out with nothing, and comes home laden with treasure.'

THE SILVER BELL

Once upon a time a young shepherd was driving his flock over a green meadow; and feeling tired, he stopped to rest beside a grassy mound. And there, lying at his feet, he saw a little silver bell.

The shepherd picked up the bell and tinkled it; and it gave out the most lovely little music he had ever heard – a tiny little silver rain of music, it was, like a lark singing far away, only much sweeter. And the strange part of it was, that though the shepherd had been feeling footsore and weary, he now felt so refreshed that it seemed there was no such thing as weariness in all the bright world.

'This is a treasure of a bell!' said the shepherd. And after ringing it to his heart's content, he put it in his pocket.

Now you must know that this bell belonged to one of the dwarfs who lived under the green mound in the middle of the grassy meadow. The dwarfs had been dancing in the meadow; but when the shepherd came along with his sheep, they had all run down into the mound to hide. All these little dwarfs wore silver bells in their caps. But the last little dwarf, as he scampered away, had caught his cap in a thistle, and the thistle tore the bell off. This was a terrible loss, because it was the tinkling of the bells that sent the dwarfs to sleep; without his bell the little dwarf couldn't sleep a wink, and he always felt tired. So of course he was searching everywhere for the lost bell that the shepherd had carried off in his pocket.

The dwarf changed himself into all sorts of shapes: now he was a sparrow, pecking among the grasses; and now he was a dog, sniffing here, and sniffing there; and now he was a girl walking along the lanes, and asking every one she met if they had found a

little bell. But the dwarf never met the young shepherd with the bell; because the shepherd had taken his sheep over the hills and far away, to a place where the pasture was better.

The poor little dwarf got thinner and thinner, and more and more tired through lack of sleep. 'I wonder now,' he thought, 'if a raven or a jackdaw has picked up my bell and carried it away to his nest? For such birds are fond of things that are bright and shining.' So then he changed himself into a little singing bird, and searched in all the nests far and near. But he didn't find his bell.

And one evening, in his flying here, and flying there, he came over the hills and far away to the place where the young shepherd was tending his flock. The shepherd was lying lazily on the ground with his head on his arm, and his dog was lying beside him with his head on his paws. The sheep were wandering about, and the bells on their necks were tinkling. The little bird who was flying over them, thought of his own lost bell, and sang sadly,

'Chipper, cheep, and weep, weep,
Hearken, hearken, little sheep,
Hearken, little ram as well:
Lost, lost my silver bell.
Gone my rest, gone my sleep –
But if my little bell you keep,
Little ram and sheep too,
None so rich as you.'

The young shepherd looked up. 'Little singing bird,' he said, 'Don't you see the sun has gone down? It's time you were asleep! But why do you say my sheep are rich? It's true they have bells round their necks; but their bells are made of common metal, and can only go *clinkety-clink*. Now *I* have a bell that's worth hearing!'

And he took the silver bell out of his pocket and rang it.

'Oh the *sweet, sweet*! Oh the *sweet, sweet, sweet*!' sang the little

bird joyfully. And he flew away and hid in a bush. There he drew off his feathered dress, and turned himself into an old woman in a blue cloak and a red petticoat.

The shepherd was still ringing his bell, and wondered what had become of the bird. The old woman tottered up to him. She was sighing and groaning, because she said her legs were bad.

'But what have you got there?' said she. 'My! what a pretty little bell! Never in all my life have I seen anything so pretty! Hark'ee, my darling, I have a sixpenny bit in my pocket. And I have a little grandson at home that I must buy a present for, because it's his birthday tomorrow. Now be a kind lad and sell me your little bell; and then I shan't have to drag my poor legs any farther.'

'Oh no,' said the young shepherd, 'this bell is not for sale. I don't believe there's another bell like it in the world. I have only to give it a little tinkle, and my sheep run of themselves wherever I would have them go. And what delightful music it makes! Just you listen, mother!' And he rang the bell again. 'There is no weariness in the world that this little bell can't put to rest, and no dullness that doesn't take wing at the sound of it. Why, I think it can even charm the pain from your legs, and take the stiffness out of your bent back!'

'So it can, so it does!' cried the old woman. 'Hark'ee, my darling, let me have the bell! I won't give it to my grandson, I'll keep it for myself. I need it more than you do. And I'm not so poor as I look. Here, I'll give you five silver shillings for it!'

'No,' said the shepherd. 'I will not part with it.'

'Ten silver shillings!' said the old woman.

'No,' said the shepherd.

'Gold then, gold!' cried the old woman. And she fumbled in her pocket and brought out a handful of gold.

'Gold is dirt, and will not ring,' said the shepherd.

'Ah,' said the old woman, 'but you don't know who I am. Hark'ee, my darling, I am not what I seem. I am a white witch, and I can bring blessings on those who please me. I can bless your

sheep, and their wool will be whiter, and their flesh fatter, and their lambs more sturdy and numerous than any other man's.'

'I would like that,' said the shepherd.

'And your little flock shall become a great flock,' went on the old woman, 'And you shall be the richest sheep-master in the whole country. Here is a little white stick, my darling, that I will give you in exchange for the bell. Take it in your hand, and look at it.'

The shepherd took the stick and looked at it. It was made of ivory, and on one side of it was carved a picture of Adam and Eve tending their flocks in Eden. Adam was playing on a pipe, and Eve had a crook, and little fat lambs were dancing round them. On the other side of the stick was a carved picture of the shepherd David, with his sling in his hand, shooting a stone at the giant Goliath.

'It's certainly a pretty stick,' said the shepherd.

'As long as you drive your sheep with it,' said the old woman, 'they will always thrive. There will be no sheep like them in the wide world. And as for the lambs they will bring you, they will be like the stars in heaven for multitude and beauty.'

The shepherd could no longer hold out against her. If she was a witch, she certainly had him in her power. He felt he must have that stick, come what would.

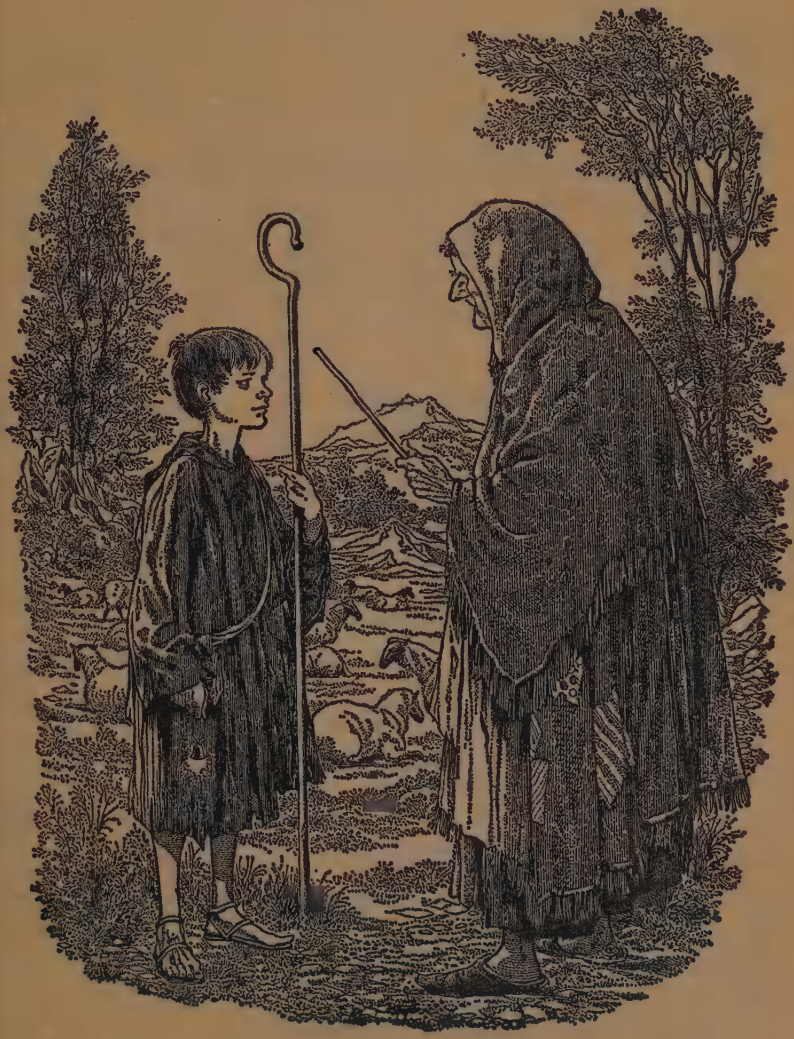
'Done!' he cried. 'The bell for the stick!'

And he kept hold of the stick and handed her the bell.

The old woman took the bell. And first she was there, and then she was gone. There was a little whizzing sound, and a little whistling sound; and all that was left of the old woman was a tiny trail of mist, floating away and away and away, till it vanished from the shepherd's sight behind some bushes.

'And if I've been fooled, I've been fooled,' thought he, looking at the stick.

The mist floated on till it came to the green mound in the grassy meadow, where the dwarfs lived. And then it turned into a dwarf with a green cap. Jumping with joy, the dwarf fastened the silver bell into the front of his cap.



'Sleep! Sleep! Now I can sleep!' he shrilled, as he scampered down to his bed under the mound.

But the shepherd had not been fooled. The dwarf kept his word. The shepherd's flock increased in number and strength from year to year, until there were no sheep to match them for beauty, and size, and whiteness of wool, and fatness of flesh, in all the country. And still the flock increased.

The shepherd became a rich man; and as he was always kind and charitable, and never looked down on his poorer neighbours, but helped them all he could, everybody respected him. And when, one fine morning, the king made a knight of him, people said it was no more than he deserved.

13 THE ADVENTURES OF BILLY MACDANIEL

Once upon a time – in winter time it was – Billy MacDaniel was crossing a moor by moonlight. The night was cold and the way was long, and Billy said to himself, 'A drop of good liquor now would keep a man's soul from freezing on him!'

And when he said that, what should happen but that a voice answered him, 'Never say it twice, Billy!'

So Billy looked up, and he looked round, and he looked down, and there at his knee stood a dwarf of a man, dressed up grand as grand, in a green coat with twinkling buttons, and little sky-blue knee-breeches. He had a three-cornered hat on his head, and great silver buckles on his bits of shoes, and the buckles shone like diamonds in the moonlight.

The little man was holding up a glass full of liquor as big as himself, and the liquor was as good as ever eye saw or tongue ever tasted. Billy took the glass and said, 'Your honour's health!' And then he drank off the liquor in one swallow, wiped his mouth on his sleeve, and said, 'Thank'ee kindly.'

'Now,' said the little man, 'come on, Billy! Out with your purse, and pay up like a gentleman. You can be slippery with many a man, by what I hear; but never think you can be slippery with me!'

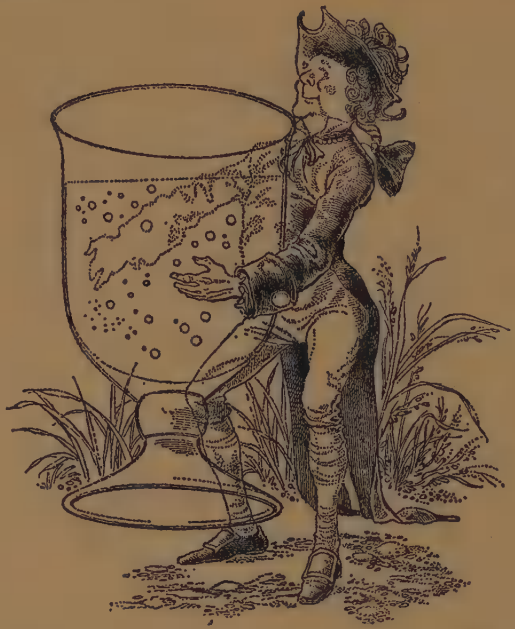
'Is it pay you're after asking?' said Billy. 'And me without a penny to my name!'

'Penny or no penny, it's pay me you must and shall, Billy,' said the little man. And he stamped his foot and looked mighty fierce.

So then Billy laughed. 'Threatening me, is it?' said he. 'And me that could pick you up and put you in my pocket as easy as a blackberry!'

Now the little man stamped till the ground shook under him, and blue fire came out of his eyes. So Billy felt frightened, and said, 'No offence meant, your honour.'

'If you can't pay in money, you must pay in work,' said the little man. 'For a year and a day you are my servant. So now get ready to follow me.'



Billy didn't want to follow him, but somehow he had to. He followed him all through that night. The little man went up hill and down hill, through hedge and ditch and bog and brake, with Billy trailing after him as if he was being pulled on a chain: till the moon went down and the sun came up, and the little man said, 'You may go your ways home now, Billy. But don't fail to meet me at moon-rising again, or it will be the worse for you.'

'Asking your worship's pardon,' said Billy, very meek, 'where would I be meeting you?'

'Where you first saw me, to be sure,' said the little man. And he spun round on his heel and made off. And Billy went home.

That evening, though Billy didn't want to go and meet the little man, somehow he had to. He went to the place, and there was the little man waiting for him.

'It's a long walk you had last night, Billy MacDaniel,' said the little man; 'and it's a longer way we have to go this night. So, as I'm thinking you'll be tired, just saddle one of my horses for myself and another for yourself.'

'If I may make so bold, master,' said Billy, 'where will I find the stable? For it's no stable I'm seeing here, but only the moor about us, and it sloping away to that old thorn tree yonder, where the stream squelches out into a bog.'

'Ask no questions, Billy,' said the little man. 'Go down to the bog and bring me two of the strongest rushes you can find.'

So Billy went to the bog and picked two strong rushes, each with a little bunch of brown blossoms stuck fast to it. And he brought the rushes to his master.

The little man took one rush and set his legs astride of it. 'Get up, Billy,' said he.

'Where will I get up, please your honour?' said Billy.

'Why, a-horse back,' said the little man, 'same as myself.'

Now Billy felt vexed, for never a horse could he see. 'Is it making a fool of me you are?' said he.

The little man flew into a rage then – he was easily put out. 'Up, up, up!' he shrieked, 'and ask no questions of your master!'

So Billy got astride the other rush.

'*Borram, borram, borram!*' cried the little man, and when he said that, Billy felt the rush swelling under him. It swelled and it stirred and it gave a jump; it shook out four legs, and it tossed up a fine great head on the one end of it, and it whisked out a fine long tail on the other end of it, and there was Billy sitting astride a great green horse, with his master sitting astride another.

'Ho and away!' cried the little man.

And there were the horses scampering through the air, and kicking the clouds out of their way like puff-balls.

Now it happened that, in his confusion, Billy had got astride his rush with the blossom end at his back, so now he was sitting on his horse backwards. He couldn't hold fast to the mane, but hold fast to something he must, for they were going like the wind. So he shut his eyes for the giddying speed they were going, and held fast to the horse's tail.

'Journey's end!' cried the little man, and the horses came down on the ground again. And there they were standing in front of a fine great house, with rows of windows, but never a light in one of them. So they both got off their horses.

'Not borram but small,
Down to nothing at all!'

said the little man. 'And you say as I say, Billy.'

'Not borram but small,
Down to nothing at all!'

said Billy. And when he said those words he was shrinking and shrinking. He shrank till he was no more size than a tiny fly; and as for his master, he was no bigger than a pin's head to look at him.

'Follow close, and do as I do,' said the little man. And he crept through the keyhole of the front door. And Billy went after him. They crept through one keyhole after another, till they came to the wine cellar. And what did they do then, but spend a pleasant night drinking from one wine barrel and from another wine barrel, till there wasn't a barrel they hadn't had a good pull at.

'Well!' said Billy. 'This is the best job ever I had, and your honour is the best of masters!'

'I'm glad you're thinking that way,' said the little man.

By now the night was gone, so they went back the way they had come, creeping through one keyhole after another, till they stood

outside the great house, and found the rushes lying on the door slab. So they got astride the rushes.

'*Borram, borram, borram!*' said the little man.

And '*Borram, borram, borram!*' said Billy.

And there they were astride of their two green horses, and the horses were scampering back through the air, and kicking the clouds out of their way like puff balls. Billy had remembered to get astride his rush the right way this time, so he journeyed back in more comfort than he had journeyed forth. And they came to the moor and got off their horses, and the horses were no more than two bits of rushes with the brown blossoms on their heads.

The little man told Billy he could now go home. So Billy went home, feeling full and contented, with his head spinning round, and the good taste of the wine on his lips.

Night after night Billy met his master on the moor; and night after night they mounted their rushes and scampered away through the air, east, west, north and south, till they had visited every gentleman's wine cellar in all the country, and there wasn't a wine in the country they couldn't tell the flavour of. Billy thought that when the year and a day was up he would take service for another year, for it was a service more to his heart than any he had yet happened on.

But one evening, when Billy met his master on the moor, and was going to pick two rushes out of the bog, the little man said to him, 'Billy, we shall want three horses this night. For maybe we shall bring back more company than we take.'

Billy wondered at that, but he knew better by now than to ask questions; so he picked three rushes, and the little man said, '*Borram*', and the rushes turned into three fine green horses, and away they scampered through the air, the little man on one horse, and Billy on another horse, and leading the third horse.

This night they came down outside a farm house, and the windows weren't dark, they were all lit up. So the little man crept to a window and peered through.

'Billy,' said he, 'I shall be a thousand years old tomorrow.'

'God bless us, sir!' said Billy in surprise.

The little man gave a shudder and said, 'Never speak those words again in my presence, Billy; or it will be the worse for you, and the worse for me. Now then, Billy MacDaniel, when a man is a thousand years old, I'm thinking it's time he got married.'

'I'm thinking the same, your honour,' said Billy. 'I'm in no kind of doubt that if you are to get married, it's time you set about it.'

'Well then,' said the little man, 'that's why we're here. In this house tonight there's a betrothal party going on. If you listen, you can hear them making merry. There's a lad in there called Darby O'Riley, and he's betrothed to a tall comely lass that goes by the name of Bridget Rooney. And it's this Bridget Rooney that I'm thinking of taking for myself.'

'Asking your pardon,' said Billy, 'but what will Darby O'Riley have to say to that?'

'Silence!' said the little man. And shook the ground with his stamping, and the blue fire came out of his eyes.

'Not borram but small,
Down to nothing at all!'

said the little man, when he came out of his rage. And Billy said the same; and they went through the keyhole and got up into the rafters over the farm kitchen. And there they came back to their natural sizes, and the little man perched himself on one of the beams, with his legs crossed under him as neatly as a tailor; and Billy sat on a beam facing him, with his legs dangling. And they looked down on the heads of the people that were gathered at the long kitchen table.

There was the dark head of Darby O'Riley, and the fair head of Bridget Rooney, and the brown heads of Darby's two brothers, and the grey heads of his father and mother, and the grizzled heads of Bridget Rooney's father and mother, and the bald head of a priest, and the red head of a piper; and there were the heads of Bridget's four sisters, who were wearing caps with ribbons on

them; there were the heads of Bridget's four brothers, too, and the heads of uncles and aunts and cousins and neighbours.

There were so many heads that Billy gave up the counting of them; and the talk and the laughter and the jokes that were flying among them made him want to shout 'hurrah' and laugh himself. But the little man had his finger to his lip, and he was frowning at him. So Billy kept quiet.

Mrs Rooney was at the hearth, dishing out pig's head and greens; and she dished out the priest's portion first, as was only right. So she set the priest's plate in front of him, and he didn't waste any time, he began to eat. And she set the plates before the rest of the company, and none of them wasted any time; they all began to eat.

Then Billy heard a little rustling noise close by him, and he took his eyes away from the company, and looked out of the side of them at his master. And what was the little man doing but taking a screwed up bit of a paper bag out of his pocket. And out of the bit of a paper bag he took a pinch of powder, and he dropped that powder down on to Bridget Rooney's nose. And she sneezed.

Now you know, or if you don't know, I'm telling you, that when a person sneezes you must say 'God bless us!' or else that person won't have any luck at all. So Billy listened for someone to say it; but nobody did. It was the priest should have said it, but his mouth was too full of pig's head and greens to speak a word; and the rest of the company was silent, not liking to speak before him.

So there was a moment when nobody said anything; and then they all began to laugh and talk again – those whose mouths weren't too full to let them, that is.

'I wonder now,' thought Billy, 'why master did a thing the like of that?'

And then he looked and saw that the little man was holding his sides, and half splitting himself with silent laughter. He rocked himself on the beam till it was a wonder he didn't fall off; and his eyes were sparkling fire – not blue fire, because he wasn't angry, but green fire, because he was pleased.

'Billy MacDaniel,' he whispered, 'half of her is mine already; and if it happens twice more, the whole of her is mine, and Darby O'Riley and the priest and mass book and all can go to blazes!'

So then Billy knew what his master would be at. He was to make Bridget sneeze three times, and trust to his luck that no one would say, 'God bless us!' If nobody did, then Bridget would be his.

And now the little man had the bit of a paper bag in his hand again; and he took a nip of powder between his finger and thumb, and leaned forward and dropped the nip of powder on to Bridget Rooney's nose.

Bridget didn't want to sneeze. She thought it wasn't good manners. She pinched her lip, and shut her eyes, and looked down and blushed; but she couldn't help sneezing all the same. Only it was such a little sneeze, that what with her politely putting up her hand to her nose, and what with everybody talking so loudly, that little sneeze went unnoticed. And nobody said 'God bless us!'

'Billy MacDaniel,' whispered the little man, 'three quarters of her is mine!' And if his eyes were sending out green sparks before, they were sending out green *flames* now; and he was nodding his head like a miser who sees a bag of gold at his feet.

Billy took a glance down at the girl; and there she was, with her large blue eyes and her dimples, and the roses in her cheeks, and the health and joy and youth that was hers, fair bursting out of her. And then Billy took a glance at his master; and there *he* was – a nasty little bit of a shrivelled-up manikin, a thousand years old all but a day, and looking every hour of it. And he thought it a shame, did Billy, that the ugly old manikin should have the pretty young girl, and no one stir a finger to save her.

So when, for the third time, the manikin out with his paper bag and dropped a whole handful of powder on to the girl's nose and she gave a tremendous sneeze, Billy couldn't stand it, and almost before he knew what he was doing, he roared out 'God bless us!' in a voice that made the plates on the table rattle.

The manikin sprang from the beam on which he was perched,

and gave a shriek like the wind whistling in the chimney.

'You are discharged from my service!' he screamed, and gave Billy such a kick in the back that he fell sprawling on his hands and knees bang in the middle of the supper table. And if Billy was astonished, you may be sure the company was more so.

So then Billy told his story from the beginning. And when he had done, the priest laid down his knife and fork in a hurry, and stood up. 'Bridget Rooney and Darby O'Riley,' said he, 'things being the way they are, we must marry you this minute.'

And he took his book and married them then and there.

There was piping and dancing at that wedding. Billy danced a jig, and everyone said what a pretty dancer he was.

14 TIMIMOTO

Timimoto lived in Japan. He was the smallest little fellow you ever saw in your life, for he was only two inches high. He ate out of a nutshell and slept in a bowl; and when he was in the house he sat on his mother's shoulder, and when he went out he rode in his father's pocket.

One day he said, 'My dear parents, I am now grown up. It is time I went into the world to seek my fortune.'

'But, my dear son, you cannot walk about the world!' said his mother. 'You will be trodden under the feet of men and be killed!'

Timimoto looked down from his mother's shoulder to the little stream that flowed past their house.

'I do not intend to walk about the world,' he said. 'I will let this great river carry me on my way.'

Well, his parents did not want to part with him. But when a body has made up his mind, what can you do? And Timimoto *would* go! So his mother gave him her bodkin for a sword, and her rice bowl for a boat, and his father gave him two chopsticks for oars. And Timimoto waved goodbye to them, and floated away down the stream.

The sun was shining brightly, and the bowl went dancing along among the tiny wavelets of the stream. Sometimes Timimoto rowed with his chopsticks, and sometimes he rested on his oars, and looked about him, and said, 'What a joyful thing it is to be out in the world!'

By and by the bowl bumped against some large-leaved weeds, and on one of these leaves sat a great frog, bigger, far bigger, than Timimoto.

'Ha!' said the frog, 'here comes my dinner!' And he opened his wide mouth to swallow down Timimoto.

But Timimoto gave the frog a poke in the belly with one of his chopstick oars. The frog tumbled backwards off the leaf, the bowl gave a leap and a curtsy, danced round the large-leaved weeds, and floated merrily on down stream.

The stream grew wider and wider; soon it was a smooth fast-flowing river, and other boats were sailing up and down it. Timimoto called good day to the men in the boats, and waved to them; but his little voice did not reach to them, and his little waving hand was not seen by them. And as to Timimoto's boat . . .

'There goes some woman's rice bowl drifting out to sea,' said one sailor to another.

But the bowl didn't drift out to sea. It was washed up against a jetty post of a big port, and there it stopped. So Timimoto stepped out of it. Now he thought he would go and explore the town. But he soon got tired of that. He could see nothing but great legs – it was like being in a forest of moving trees, and he had to keep jumping to prevent himself from being trampled to death under all the big moving feet at the end of the great big legs. If he hadn't been as nimble as a fly, those moving feet would have been the end of him.

So, when an ox-cart came lumbering by, Timimoto took a jump and landed on the hub of one of the wheels, and there he sat, like a king on his throne, and was carried through the town, and had a fine view of the streets and houses, and people buying and selling.

When the ox-cart at last stopped in a quiet alley, Timimoto jumped down from the hub of the wheel. 'A thousand thanks for my pleasant ride,' he called up to the driver.

The driver, who had got down from the cart, heard the tiny little voice, and he looked about in surprise; but he couldn't see Timimoto.

'Are you so blind that you can't see your own boot?' said Timimoto.

The driver looked down at his boot, and there on the toe of it stood Timimoto, waving to him.

So then the driver picked Timimoto up in his hand, and stared at him.

'You'd best be getting home,' he said, after a while.

'Getting home!' said Timimoto. 'I've only just left home! No, no, I am come out into the big world to seek my fortune.'

'Listen,' said the driver. 'Take my advice, little fellow, and hide yourself in some safe crack. Look, the sun is setting. Now is the time when everyone must hide. For every night an ogre comes out of the shadows and walks through the town. And whomsoever he finds, he eats.'

'Why should I be afraid of an ogre?' said Timimoto. 'Take me to him.'

But just then the sun went down, and the driver scrambled back into his cart, and drove away as fast as he could.

Timimoto looked about him. There was no longer a forest of moving legs. Timimoto listened. There was no longer a sound of great big feet. Here and there was the sound of the door slamming: and after that there was no sound at all. For all the people had run into the houses to hide.

'Well, fancy!' said Timimoto. 'Everyone afraid of a stupid ogre! *I'm* not afraid of him!'

And then out of the shadows stepped the ogre, waving his huge sword.

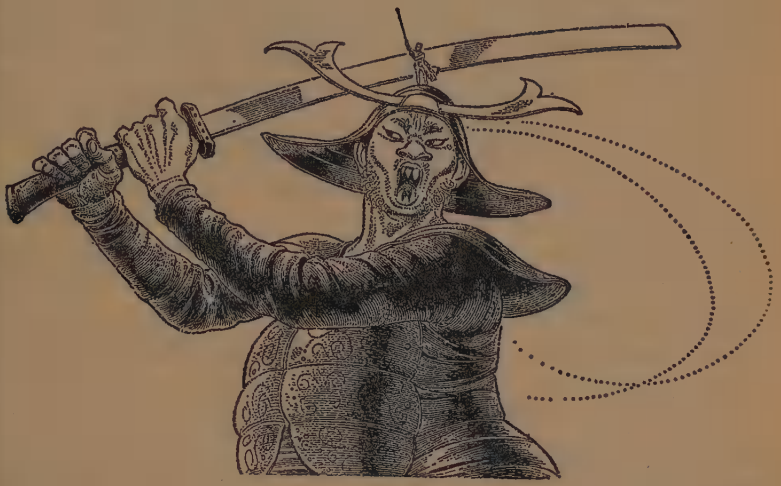
'Who says he is not afraid of me?' bellowed the ogre. 'Who dares to say it?'

'The great Timimoto says it,' called Timimoto. 'And he says the truth.'

'Take this, take this, take this!' bellowed the ogre, whirling his great sword in the air, and down on the ground, and round and round. The sword whistled, and the ogre bellowed, but he couldn't see Timimoto, because Timimoto was so small. And when the sword whirled along the ground, Timimoto hopped like

a grasshopper on to one of the ogre's feet; and of course the ogre wasn't going to cut his own feet off.

From the ogre's foot, Timimoto gave a big jump and landed on the ogre's knee; and from the knee he gave another big jump and landed on the ogre's hip; and from the hip he gave a third big jump and landed on the ogre's shoulder; and from the shoulder he took a fourth jump and landed on the ogre's head. And all this time the ogre was bellowing and making passes with his sword at an enemy he couldn't see.



And Timimoto drew his bodkin sword out of his belt and thrust it between the ogre's eyes. The ogre gave a roar, and his hot breath went up into Timimoto's nostrils. But that was the last roar the ogre ever gave; he reeled and he staggered and he tumbled down. And Timimoto gave the biggest jump he had ever jumped, and landed on the ground beside the ogre's dead body.

'Now nobody will be afraid of *him* again,' said Timimoto. 'But in the name of all that's merciful, what is happening to *me*?'

He might well ask! He felt most extraordinary. For the ogre's last breath had blown through Timimoto's body, carrying with it

a wave of strength and bigness. For the first time in his life, Timimoto was growing. Now he was a foot high, and now he was two feet high: his chest was broadening, his limbs were lengthening, and still he went on growing. Now he was three feet high, and now he was four feet, and now five, and now six . . .

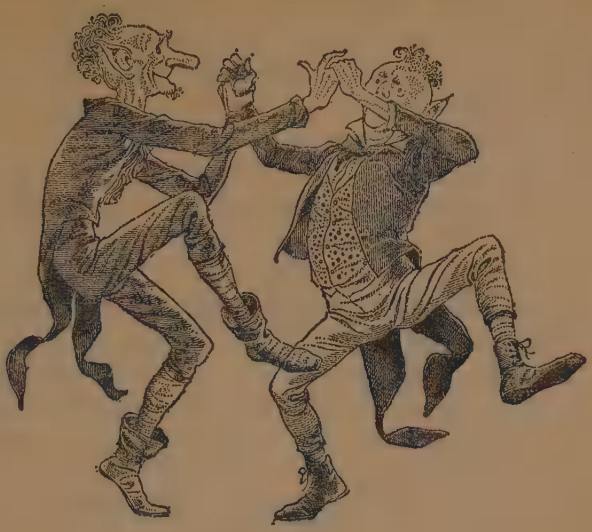
'Stop! Stop!' cried Timimoto. 'I don't want to be an ogre and frighten people!'

And with that he puffed a great breath out of his strong lungs; and so blew the last of the ogre's breath out of himself, and stopped growing. And there, beside the ogre's dead body, instead of the tiny Timimoto, stood a fine, strong, handsome young man.

'Now you can all come out of your houses again!' he called.

And when the people came out of their houses and saw that the ogre was dead, they cheered and cheered. They wanted Timimoto to stay and rule over them; but he said no, he must go back to his parents at once, and show them how big and strong he had become. So they collected a great pile of treasure, everyone giving what he could afford, and they loaded up an ox-cart with the treasure and presented it to Timimoto.

And Timimoto went home a rich man; and he and his parents lived in happiness and prosperity all their days.



15 THE COBBLER AND THE DWARFS

There was once a poor cobbler who spent his last penny on a piece of leather, and that piece of leather was only just big enough to make one pair of shoes. Last thing at night he cut out the leather, left it on his work-table ready to be stitched up in the morning and then went to bed.

But in the morning, when he looked at his work-table, instead of the pieces of leather, he found a pair of shoes, all ready made. He picked up the shoes in amazement: they were the most beautiful shoes he had ever seen in his life. Whilst he was still staring at them, a customer walked into the shop, and seeing the shoes, he was so taken with them that he paid the cobbler a big price.

Now the cobbler had enough money to buy leather for four pairs of shoes. 'This is indeed a piece of luck!' he said to his wife.

That evening he cut out the four pairs of shoes, and left them on his work-table, ready to be stitched in the morning. But in the morning the four pairs of shoes were finished; and again the workmanship was so fine and neat that the cobbler had never seen anything to equal it. As soon as he opened his shop, a crowd of customers came in, wanting to buy the shoes; for the customer of the day before had spread the cobbler's fame abroad. The people bid one against the other, they were so anxious to buy these wonderful shoes, so that the cobbler got a good sum of money. That day he was able to go out and buy enough leather to make twelve pairs of shoes. That evening he cut out the twelve pairs of shoes.

'I shall have a busy day tomorrow, stitching up twenty-four shoes,' he said to his wife; for he could not believe that his luck would go on like this.

But, in the morning, there were the twenty-four shoes standing in a row on his work-table, all beautifully finished. And again a crowd of people came in to buy them.

And so it went on with the cobbler day after day: all the leather he cut out in the evening was made up into shoes by morning, and he was able to buy more leather, and cut out more shoes, and sell them for more money. And his business prospered exceedingly.

One day, just before Christmas, he said to his wife, 'I *should* like to see whose neat hands those are that are helping us. Suppose we sit up tonight and watch?'

So they lit a candle and left it on the work-table, and hid themselves in a cupboard, and hung an old cloth in front of it, and peeped through the holes in the cloth. They had to wait until midnight before there was anything to see; but, just when the church clock struck twelve, the window opened of itself, and in came two tiny men. They were so small that you could have stood them on the palm of your hand, and they had no more clothes on them than a new-born baby.

Down they sat, cross-legged on the cobbler's table, and they took the cut-out leather that was lying there into their little hands, and began stitching and hammering so fast that it seemed no time

before the table was covered with beautifully made shoes. And when they had finished, they left the tools tidy, blew out the candle, and went again through the window.

The cobbler and his wife came out of the cupboard.

'Husband,' said the wife, 'those little men have made us rich. And there they are, poor little souls, in this cold weather without a rag to keep them warm! Now I will make them each a shirt and coat and trousers, and you shall make them each a nice little pair of shoes.'

The cobbler agreed; he made his shoes, and the wife made the little garments. And on the night when everything was ready, they put a lighted candle on the table, laid the little shoes and the little clothes beside it, and went to hide in the cupboard.

As soon as the church clock struck twelve, the window opened, and in came the little naked men. They looked on the table, and what did they see? No cut-out leather, but only the two little suits of clothes, and the two little pairs of shoes. And didn't they laugh, and didn't they jump for joy! They laughed and jumped and dressed themselves up, and then they took hands and danced on the table. And as they danced they sang,

'Shoes and trousers, coat and vest,
Each little man so smartly dressed
Need work no more and now can rest.'

And then they blew out the candle and danced away out of the window.

After that night they never came again. But the cobbler now had a thriving business; and he had learned a thing or two from watching the dwarfs work, so that he was able to make shoes better than anyone else in the world.

16 THE STORY OF MAIA

Once upon a time there was a woman who lived alone on the edge of a forest. She had a pretty cottage and a pretty garden, and all through the summer she worked in her garden and was happy. But when the winter came, and the birds stopped singing, and the garden was covered with snow, and the wolves howled in the forest, the woman felt lonely and frightened.

'If only I had a little daughter,' she thought, 'we could sit by the fire together, and I would play with her and tell her stories, and I shouldn't mind the long dark nights, and the snow, and the wolves' howling.'

So one winter day she set out for the village to see if she could find a little girl to adopt.

The snow lay so deep on the ground that it reached above her ankles, and she was floundering slowly through the forest when a witch came swooping down from the tree tops on a broomstick.

'My dear good woman,' said the witch, getting off her broomstick, 'what a day to be out walking! Are you going far?'

'I want to get to the village,' said the woman, 'but it seems to me it will be dark before I reach it.'

'And why go to the village?' said the witch.

'Oh, because I am so lonely!' said the woman. 'I can't bear to sit at home by myself. I am going to see if I can find a little girl to adopt.'

'If that is all,' said the witch, 'you needn't go any farther. That is, if you have a shilling in your pocket? Here is a barleycorn for you, and one shilling is the price of it. Take it home, plant it in a flower pot, water it carefully, and in three days – well, you will see what you will see. But I promise you won't be lonely any longer.'

So the woman gave the witch a shilling and took the barleycorn and went back to her cottage. She planted the barleycorn in a flower pot, and watered it carefully, and waited. On the third day when she went to look at the flower pot, she found that a plant had grown out of it: a plant with a red flower, something like a tulip. The flower had its petals closed tightly together, but it smelled most sweetly, and glowed as if there was a flame inside it.

'Oh what a beautiful flower!' cried the woman. And she kissed the flaming red petals.

As she kissed them, the flaming red petals burst open, and in the midst of them was a tiny, lovely girl, only an inch high. The tiny girl was lying on a mattress of violets, and she had a quilt of rose petals drawn over her to keep her warm.

'Oh, oh, *oh*!' cried the woman. 'Oh you darling! Now I shall never be lonely again!'

'No, of course you won't,' said the lovely, tiny girl. 'My name is Maia, and I have come to live with you. Please lift me down, and take me on your lap and tell me stories.'

The winter didn't seem long and dreary to the woman after that. She didn't listen to the wolves howling, or think of the darkness and the snow. She sat by the hearth with the tiny Maia on her lap, and looked into the bright fire; and the fire was full of pictures, and out of the pictures she made stories to tell to Maia; and every spark as it flew upwards seemed just another story. She was never tired of telling them, and Maia was never tired of listening; and so the long winter passed away like a happy dream.

At night Maia slept in a satin-lined walnut shell, with her mattress of violet petals to lie on, and her rosebud quilt to cover her. And the woman put the walnut shell on a chair by her own bed, so that they might be close to one another. They both of them felt so cosy and companionable that neither of them thought of danger.

But one night in spring, when the woman was asleep, and Maia was asleep, a big green frog hopped in through the open window and on to the chair by the bed.

'What have we here?' thought the frog, goggling out of her yellow eyes at the tiny Maia. 'Dear me! Quite a pretty girl! She would make a capital wife for my son.'

And she picked up the walnut shell and hopped with it out of the window and down to the stream that flowed through the garden.

'Come and see what an elegant wife I've brought you!' she called when she reached her home under the stream's bank.

'Croak, croak, croak!' said her son, for he was a very stupid fellow, and that's all he could say.

'Hush! don't make so much noise or you'll wake her!' said the old frog. 'We must make a nice little room for her down in the mud. And whilst we're making it, we'll put her on that water-lily leaf in the middle of the stream.'

So the old frog lifted the sleeping Maia out of the walnut shell, and swam with her to the water-lily, and laid her down on one of the leaves. And Maia woke up and cried out, 'Where am I?'

'Now don't be alarmed,' said the old frog. 'Everything is *quite* all right. You are going to marry my son, and he is a very handsome fellow. Look, there he is on the bank.'

The tiny Maia stood up on the leaf and looked towards the bank. By the light of the moon she saw the frog's son grinning at her. He had his fingers in his mouth, and he looked awkward and silly.

'I don't want to marry him!' cried Maia. 'Oh please take me home!'

'I shall do no such thing!' said the old frog. 'You must stay where you are until I've made your married quarters ready for you under the mud.'

She swam away, and Maia sat on the water-lily leaf and cried.

'What a shame!' said the fishes who were swimming about in the stream. 'She shan't marry that stupid young frog!' And they gathered round the stem of the lily leaf and nibbled and nibbled until they had nibbled it right through. Then they gave the leaf a push, and it floated away down the stream.

By and by the sun came up, and the dew glittered on the banks of the stream, and the birds sang among the bushes. 'Oh what a pretty little girl!' they sang, flying over Maia's head.

'Oh what a pretty little girl!' said a blue butterfly. He fluttered down and came to rest on the lily leaf, that he might look at Maia more closely. 'Take off your sash,' said the butterfly, 'and tie one end of it round my waist; I will be your little horse and will fly just above the water, and your chariot will travel quicker that way.'

So Maia tied her sash to the butterfly, and away he fluttered, drawing the lily-leaf chariot along over the water; and it sailed on and on, past towns and villages and fields and farms, whilst the sun rose high in the sky, and the larks flew up singing. And the tiny Maia sang too, because she was so happy to have escaped from the frogs.

'Oh what a pretty little girl! What a pretty little girl!' twittered the swallows, skimming low over the stream.

And 'Oh what a pretty little girl!' boomed a great cockchafer that came blundering across the water. He seized up Maia in his claws. Maia screamed and let go her end of the sash. The butterfly was terribly frightened: he struggled and struggled till the sash bow came undone, and then he flew off across the meadows.

But the cockchafer carried Maia up into a tree, and set her down on a leaf, and brought her some honey. He wanted to be kind, but she felt too frightened to touch the honey.

'You are the prettiest thing I ever saw,' he said, 'although you are not a bit like a cockchafer. Come, cheer up! I'll fetch my sisters to play with you.'

So he buzzed off and fetched his sisters, and they all sat round on the twigs of the tree and stared at Maia.

'Why, she has only two legs!' exclaimed one of them.

'And no feelers at all!' exclaimed another.

'And no wings!' cried a third.

'And she's so thin through!' said a fourth.

'I can't think what you wanted to bring such an ugly creature here for!' said a fifth. '*We're* not going to play with her!'

And they went on and on, saying how ugly Maia was, till the cockchafer came to believe it, and he changed his mind about keeping Maia, and snatched her up out of the tree, and set her down on a daisy. And then he flew off.

The little inch-high girl thought of all the miles and miles that lay between her and her home. She knew it was no use trying to find her way back, so she decided she must stay where she was and make the best of it. And there she remained for the whole summer. She plaited a hammock for herself out of some blades of grass and hung it up under a clover leaf; and she gathered honey from the flowers and drank the dew out of the little cups of the lichen.

That was all very well as long as the summer lasted. But then came winter, the flowers withered, her clover-leaf tent dried up, instead of dew there was snow, and every flake that fell on the tiny girl covered her like a huge cold mantle from head to foot. She tried to wrap herself up in a withered leaf, but it was so brittle that it cracked from end to end.

'I must find some shelter or I shall die,' she thought, for she was shaking with cold.

She wandered off across a field where corn had once been growing, but now the bare stubble stood up stiffly on the frozen ground. It was like walking through a forest for the tiny Maia, and she was feeling lost and hopeless when suddenly she came upon a little door in the ground.

'Oh please, please let me in,' she cried, knocking on the little door.

It was opened at once by a field mouse.

'Good gracious! What are you doing out there, you poor little thing?' said the field mouse. 'Come in at once! I have just been baking a cake. You shall sit by my fire and thaw yourself, and eat as much cake as you like.'

She bustled Maia into her cosy kitchen, and gave her a big slice of cake and a hot drink made of corn milk.

'Do you know any stories?' said the field mouse, after Maia had eaten and drunk and warmed herself.

Yes, Maia said she knew quite a lot.

'And would you say you were handy about the house?' asked the field mouse. Yes, Maia said she thought she might be.

'Well then,' said the field mouse, 'if you will amuse me by telling stories, and help to keep my house tidy, you may stay with me till the world gets warm again. I have plenty of room as you will see.' And she showed Maia over her house which was quite a large one, with a dining-room and a bedroom, and two store-rooms, one full of corn, and the other full of straw and hay and thistledown – besides the kitchen, which was a big room too.

So Maia lived with the field mouse. Each morning she swept and dusted and polished, and when everything was clean and tidy she sat in a big arm-chair by the kitchen fire and told stories to the field mouse, who sat in another arm-chair and knitted, and sometimes fell asleep and snored.

One afternoon the field mouse said, 'Today we are going to have a visitor, a very grand gentleman, who lives in a much bigger house than mine, and wears a beautiful velvet coat. I would like him to fall in love with you, for he would make you a splendid husband; but unfortunately he is so short-sighted that he will not be able to see how pretty you are. But we must hope for the best; you must tell him all your most interesting stories, and sing him all your prettiest songs. And, who knows, we may make a match of it. His name is Mr Mole. Ah, there he is!'

And she bustled to the door and opened it; and in walked Mr Mole. Mr Mole was very stiff and conceited. Maia didn't like him; but it seemed that he liked Maia, even though he couldn't see her, for he took to calling every day.

One morning he said, 'I have a surprise for you, my child. I have made a tunnel from this house to my own, so that we may visit each other with less inconvenience. But a huge dead creature has fallen through a hole in the tunnel roof. Dear me,' he went on in a tone of disgust, 'I all but stumbled over the thing myself!'

'What kind of a creature is it?' asked Maia.

'A most revolting object,' said Mr Mole. 'It is covered with

something which I believe to be feathers, and it has two thin useless legs, and a sharp kind of a claw thing sticking out of its face.'

'It's a bird!' cried Maia. 'Oh, poor thing, it must have died of cold! Please, Mr Mole, take me to see it!'

'Very well, *ver*-y well,' said Mr Mole. 'And Mrs Field Mouse, you had better come along too, and bring a light with you. For you poor things, with what you call your good eyesight, get lost in the dark.'

The field mouse lighted a taper, and they all set out. Mr Mole led them down a long dark tunnel. In the middle of the tunnel he stopped, kicked at something with his crooked feet, and said, 'Here it is! Dear me, so that's a bird, is it? I've never been close to one before. Well, Mrs Field Mouse, I think we may thank our stars that *we* are not birds?'

'Good gracious, yes!' said the field mouse, who thought Mr Mole very clever, and so liked to agree with him in everything.

Maia took the lighted taper from the field mouse and held it close to the bird. It was a swallow. Its eyes were shut, its wings were pressed against its sides, its legs stuck out stiffly, and its little weak feet were all crumpled up. Maia kissed its closed eyes and stroked its feathers, and that night she could not sleep for thinking of it there in the dark, lying on the cold bare earth.

So she got up and tiptoed into the field mouse's store-room. She had only a piece of rotten wood for a lantern, but it served her well enough, for it shone in the dark. In the store-room she sat and wove a thick blanket of straw. Next she gathered up a big armful of thistledown, and then she carried the blanket and the thistledown into the tunnel, and covered the poor swallow with them.

'Now at least you are warmly buried,' she whispered. 'I shall never, never forget you. Goodbye, poor pretty bird!'

And she laid her cheek against the swallow's soft breast, and wept to think that it would never sing again.

What was this? Surely something was stirring in the swallow's breast? Yes, his little heart was faintly beating. He was not dead,

after all. He had been frozen, but now Maia had warmed him, and he was coming to life again.

Maia jumped up and ran to the kitchen, and came back with some water and corn milk and cake. She dripped water into the swallow's beak and he opened his eyes; and then she sopped some cake crumbs in the corn milk, and he opened his beak and swallowed the crumbs.

'Thank you, little Maia,' he said.

'Hush!' whispered Maia. 'Make no noise! Mr Mole doesn't like birds, and his ears are very sharp. You must lie as stiffly as you can, and pretend you are still dead. Tomorrow night I will bring you some more food. I will take care of you, and you will grow well and strong again.'

In the morning, when the field mouse woke up, she said, 'My dear child, how bright your eyes are! They are shining like the buttons on Mr Mole's coat. Well, well, we shall have a wedding by and by, depend upon it!'

But Maia only laughed. She was so happy about the swallow that she couldn't be bothered thinking about the conceited Mr Mole.

Every night she carried food to the swallow and talked to him in whispers. Very soon he was strong enough to tell her about himself. In the autumn he had torn his wing on a bramble, and so he couldn't keep up with the other swallows when they flew away to the warm south. He had struggled on alone until the bitter cold came, and then he had dropped down exhausted, and must have tumbled through a hole into Mr Mole's tunnel.

'And now you are getting well again,' said Maia, 'and when the spring comes you will fly out again into the sunshine. Oh, how lovely that will be!'

'And you shall come with me,' said the swallow.

But little Maia shook her head. 'No,' she said, 'the field mouse has been very good to me, and she will be sad if I leave her. No, I must stay.'

So the winter passed; and one morning when Maia opened the

door of the field mouse's house, such a flood of light came streaming in that it made her eyes water. Yes, the stubble field was glittering in the sunshine, the sky was blue, and the thrushes were singing.

'Spring has come! Spring has come!' she cried. And she ran to the swallow to tell him the glad tidings.

The swallow flew up to the roof of the tunnel and pecked a big hole in it; and the sunlight poured in and lit up his glossy blue wings and the tiny Maia's golden head.

'Get on my back and fly with me, little Maia,' he said. 'How can you stay here in the dark when the world is rejoicing?'

'No, I cannot come,' said Maia sadly. 'But go you quickly, before Mr Mole catches you. Goodbye, dear swallow!'

'Goodbye, goodbye, dear little Maia,' said the swallow, and he flew up through the roof and away and away into the bright sunshine.

For a little while Maia was able to go out of the field mouse's door and rejoice in the sun, though she couldn't stay out for long, because the field mouse was very fussy about having the house cleaned, and having stories told to her. Sometimes she grumbled.

'Your stories are not as interesting as they used to be,' she said. 'You are getting quite dull. I think you must be in love.'

And Maia *was* in love; not with the tiresome Mr Mole, as the field mouse thought, but with the sunshine and the flowers and all the beautiful world of out-of-doors. But by and by she could see that beautiful world no longer, for the field was sown with corn again, and the corn sprang up thickly all round the house, and over the house, and the poor little inch-high girl couldn't struggle through it, and so must remain indoors.

One day, when Maia was sweeping the kitchen, the field mouse, who had been out visiting, came bustling in and said, 'Here is great news! Now you are to be a bride! Mr Mole has made me an offer for you – what a piece of fortune! We must set to work on your linen at once, for I have promised Mr Mole that

you shall come to him well supplied. You must be fitted out with elegant dresses, too; for Mr Mole is particular about such things. Now here is a spinning wheel. Come along. Get busy, get busy!'

'But I don't want to be married,' said Maia.

'Nonsense!' snapped the field mouse. 'Don't be foolish! Every girl has to get married. And Mr Mole is a prize for any girl.'

So all day long Maia had to sit spinning; and every evening Mr Mole came to visit her, and grumbled about the hot weather and the sunshine and the stupid singing of the birds and the silly flowers – all the things that Maia longed to have about her and rejoice in.

'I am making a new home for us, deep under ground,' he said, 'where we shall be cool and comfortable, and where no light can bother us. If there's anything I detest it's this thing called sunlight! But you won't need your eyes much longer; in our new home you will lose the use of them, and be blind, as all the best people are.'

So Maia sat and span, and the tears trickled down on to the spinning wheel, and the field mouse scolded and told her she was an obstinate girl and deserved to be bitten.

'If you go on at this rate we shall never have your trousseau ready,' she said.

And she hired four fat spiders to come and weave the thread into delicate fabrics, and to make the fabrics up into tiny garments. The garments were very pretty, but Maia took no joy in them; she dreaded the day when they would all be ready, and she would have to go with Mr Mole into his dark house.

But the days sped on, however much Maia wished to hold them back, and now it was autumn again. The corn was reaped and gathered in, and the field mouse was busy folding up the clothes that the spiders had made, and packing them in tiny boxes.

'Everything is ready,' she said to Maia. 'And tomorrow is your wedding day.'

'Oh not so soon!' cried Maia.

'If I hear another word, I *shall* bite you!' said the field mouse.

Maia ran to the door of the house and held up her arms to the

sun. 'Goodbye, goodbye!' she cried. 'I shall never see you again! Oh, if my swallow would come now, I would fly with him to the ends of the earth!'

Twit, twit, twit, twit! There *was* the swallow: he circled over Maia's head, and fluttered down on to the ground beside her.

'You *shan't* marry that horrid old Mole!' he said. 'Get on my back and I will carry you over the woods and over the hills and over the sea to a flowery land where the sun is always shining. But come quickly, for I smell the breath of winter to the north, and we have no time to lose.'

'Yes, I will come!' cried Maia, and she got on to his back and he flew with her away and away over woods and hills and the waves of the sea, and brought her at last to a land glittering with sunshine and bright with flowers. And still he flew on till he came to a blue lake over which myriads of swallows were skimming and twittering. Beside the lake stood a palace with white marble pillars, and the swallow flew up on to one of the pillars.

'This is my home,' he said, 'but it would not do for you. You have no wings, and you might fall and be killed. So choose one of the flowers down below, and you shall have it for your own, and it will fold its petals round you at night and make you a pretty bed.'

'I will have that one,' said Maia, pointing to a white flower shaped like a star, that seemed to be nodding to her as it swayed in the warm breeze.

So the swallow flew down towards the flower. And there, standing on one of its leaves, was a tiny winged man, no bigger than Maia herself. The tiny man had a gold crown on his head, and his wings were transparent, and they glimmered now gold, now silver, as the light fell on them.

'That is the king of the flower-spirits,' whispered the swallow. 'See, he is beckoning to you!'

The little king held out his hand to Maia, and helped her to jump off the swallow's back.

'So you have come at last!' he said. 'I have waited for a long,

long time. Now you shall be my queen. That is, if you are willing?'

Was Maia willing? Of course she was! This was a very different husband from a damp, croaking frog, or a pompous old mole who loved the dark!

So Maia became the queen of the flower-spirits. She wore a tiny gold crown, and on her shoulders the king fastened a pair of rainbow wings, so that she could fly with him about their flowery world; for, as she had come from a flower, so now, after all her perils and journeyings, she had returned to the flowers, to live with them forever and a day.

But what about Maia's foster-mother, the woman who now lived lonely again, in her cottage in the far north? Had Maia forgotten all about her? No, indeed she hadn't. When spring came again to the north country, and the swallow was ready to fly back there, Maia wrote a letter on a rose leaf, and the swallow carried it in his beak over the sea and over the hills and over the fields and the woods, and dropped it into the woman's lap.

'Dear mother, I am so happy, won't you come to me?' Maia had written.

'Yes, I will,' said the woman.

She sold her cottage and set out on her travels, and reached the country where Maia lived. There she built herself a new cottage by the blue lake. The cottage had a most wonderful garden, because the flower-spirits helped the woman to make it. Maia and her flower-king husband came to live in the garden; so the woman never felt lonely again.

17 FIR CONES

Once upon a time there was a man who had seven little children, and he fell sick. Now what were they to do? They hadn't much meat, and they hadn't much fire; and by and by, as the days went on and the man didn't recover, they had no meat, and no fire.

So then the man's wife said, 'I will go into the forest and gather fir cones. With some we will make a fire, and the rest I will sell and buy meat.'

She took a big basket and went into the forest, and picked up a few fir cones. And then her troubles came over her, and she sat down on a tree stump and wept.

'Who is that stealing my fir cones?' said a fierce voice.

The woman looked round, and saw a dwarf with a long white beard, and he was frowning at her, so that she felt afraid. And she fell on her knees before him, and said, 'Oh dear little sir, please don't be angry! We are very poor, and my husband lies sick in bed, and we have seven little hungry mouths to feed beside our own, and nothing to make a fire with.'

'By my beard and my boots, good woman!' said the dwarf, 'troubles come to all of us. These few fir cones belong to me, and you must leave them where you found them. But go into the next forest and there you may pick up as many as you please.'

So the woman laid down the fir cones she had picked up, and went into the next forest. It was a long way, and she felt tired. But as soon as she put her basket on the ground, the fir cones came tumbling like hail out of the trees. And they filled the basket.

The woman felt afraid, for the fir cones were still rattling down and covering all the ground. So she took up her basket and ran, to get home as fast as she could. And on the way the basket grew

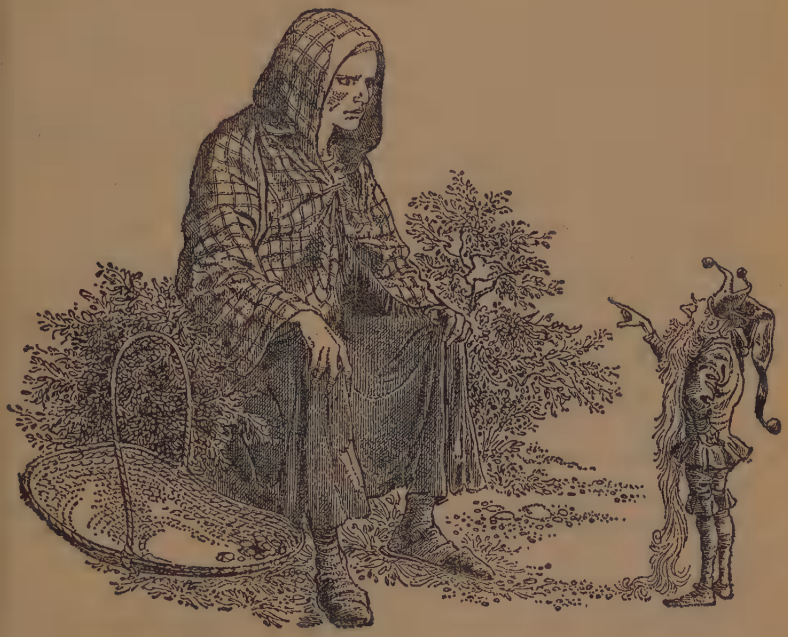
heavier and heavier, till her back ached and her arms were cracking; and still the basket grew heavier and heavier.

'I shall never get it home!' she thought.

But she did get it home, and stumbled with it into the wood shed, and emptied it out on the ground.

And a glitter came up and dazzled her eyes; for every one of those fir cones was made of shining silver.

The woman ran in and told her husband.



'The fir cones are all turned into silver!' she said. 'But we can't keep them. For that little dwarf must surely be Satan himself, and the silver is cursed and will work our ruin.'

'No such thing,' said her husband. 'That little man must be Gubich, the King of the Dwarfs, and he is good, and is known to

help poor people. Pluck up your courage, wife! Take some of the fir cones to the town and sell them, and buy us meat and bread, and all the things that we need. But tomorrow you must go into the forest again, and find the dwarf and thank him.'

So the woman took three of the fir cones and went to the town, and all the children went with her to help carry the parcels. And she sold the three silver fir cones for a great price, and bought meat and bread and all the things they stood in need of: and that night the family went to bed with light hearts and full stomachs. Only the husband still lay ill in bed and could take nothing but a little milk.

'Now, wife,' said he next morning, 'go you again into the forest and thank the dwarf, for that is only seemly.'

The woman went into the forest and sat on the same tree stump; and she hadn't been sitting there long before the dwarf came from among the trees and stood beside her.

'Well,' said he, 'and did you find some beautiful fir cones?'

The woman fell on her knees, and poured out her thanks; but the dwarf laughed and stopped her.

'By my beard and my boots, good woman,' said he, 'thank me no thanks! It's all a matter for laughing.'

Then he picked a plant from the ground, and said to her, 'Take this home and strip it of leaves, and put the leaves into a pot and boil them. And when the water in the pot turns green, give it to your husband to drink.'

So the woman took the plant and went home and told her husband.

'But what if the plant is poison?' she said.

'Would he give us silver and then poison us?' said the husband. 'Pluck up your courage, wife! Boil the leaves, and give me to drink of the green water; for Gubich, King of the Dwarfs, means well by us.'

The woman took a little pot and filled it with water, and put it on the fire. And when the water boiled, she dropped in the leaves of the plant; and by and by the water turned green. And she

strained off the water and put it in a pitcher, and took it to her husband.

'Will you drink?' she said. 'Or will you not?'

'I will drink,' said he. 'Where is your faith, woman?'

And he drank of the green water till the pitcher was empty.

The woman stood by his side with an anxious heart. And first the colour came back into his pale lips, and then the colour came back into his pale cheeks, and then the light came back into his dull eyes; and then the strength flowed back into his weak body, and he leaped from the bed a strong, sound man.

That is the end of the story. Except that the family were never in want again. For the man was now strong and could work, and they still had plenty of silver fir cones to sell. They never saw Gubich, King of the Dwarfs, again. But they blessed him daily, and kept one of the silver fir cones on the dresser to remember him by. And after them their children kept the fir cone, and after their children, their children's children kept it.

So the kind deed of Gubich, King of the Dwarfs, is never forgotten; and the silver fir cone stands shining on the old dresser to this very day.

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