



A STORY FOR CHILDREN : FROM THE  
RUSSIAN.

**T**HERE was once a King named Kojata. Married for three years to a Queen whom he greatly loved and by whom he was beloved, he was yet childless. This was a subject of much distress to him. In the hope of diverting his mind from the contemplation of this source of regret, he set off on a visit to the divers provinces of his kingdom. After travelling for several months, he turned towards his capital.

One day, fatigued by the heat, he had his tent set up in the open country, intending to await there the coolness of the coming evening. He was thirsty, and not finding any water near him, he mounted his horse to go in search of it. At a short distance from his encampment he discovered a limpid spring, on the surface of which a gold cup was floating.

He hurried towards the attractive water and tried to seize the cup, but it escaped his grasp. He made new attempts, now with the right hand, now with the left ; the cup, however, defeated all his efforts to grasp it.

"Wait a bit," he said ; "I shall be able to get hold of it presently."

And, seeing the water calm, and the cup floating motionless upon its surface, he stretched forth both hands to seize it ; whereupon the cup vanished from his sight.

"The plaguey thing !" exclaimed Kojata ; "I'll give it up, and do without it."

Saying this, he knelt upon the ground and began to drink by dipping his lips in the water. But when his thirst was assuaged, and he tried to rise, he felt himself held by the chin, and vainly endeavoured to release himself.

"Who is it ? who is holding me in this way ?" he cried.

Nobody answered ; but before him, in the crystal of the spring, he beheld a frightful face, two great eyes as green as emeralds, a large mouth grinning in a strange fashion, and two claws clutching his chin like a pair of iron pincers, from the grip of which he found it impossible to free himself. At length, from the depths of this enchanted spring, an invisible being cried to him :

"All your efforts are useless ; you can only recover your liberty on one condition : it is that you will give me the thing about which you know nothing, and which you will find on arriving at your house."

"With pleasure," replied Kojata, think-



ing that he knew quite well all that his house contained.

"Remember your promise," said the voice of the invisible being, "or you will repent of it."

At these words the claws relaxed their hold. The King remounted his horse, and continued his journey. When he arrived near to his capital, all the people hurried forward to meet him, and made the air ring with their shouts and cries of delight. On the threshold of the palace was the Queen, and near her was a Minister holding in his arms a cradle in which there was a baby, a rosy and superb boy.

The King gave a start on seeing it.

"That," he said, "is the thing about which I knew nothing, and with which I must part!"

And great tears ran down his cheeks. Without revealing to anyone the cause of his cruel emotion, he carried the child to his chamber. Afterwards he tried to continue his customary mode of life, and the pleasant and peaceful course of his reign: a vain endeavour—ceaselessly he was haunted by the memory of the fatal promise he had given. At every instant, day and night, he trembled lest someone should come and carry off from him his peerless treasure, his only and so-long-desired son.

Little by little, however, the recollection became less tormenting, his fears less acute. His son grew up, and everybody admired his grace and strength; he was loved, too, and universally called "Handsome Milan."

One day, while hunting, he allowed himself to be drawn far away from his companions, in pursuit of a wild animal, and presently found himself alone in the midst of a dense forest, where neither path nor sign of human life was visible. In a sort of clearing, surrounded by pine trees, stood a tall lime tree thickly leaved. Suddenly the foliage of this tree became agitated, and from the bole came forth a strange old man, with green eyes and a round chin. He

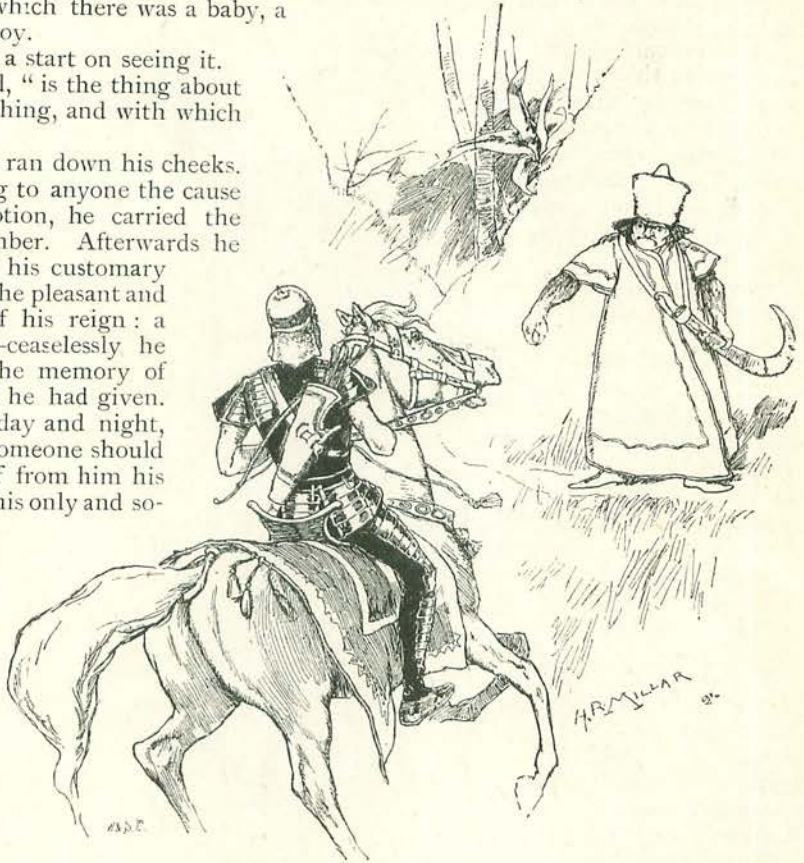
advanced towards the young huntsman, and said:

"Good-day, Prince Milan. I have for a long time been hoping to see you."

"Who are you?" asked the Prince.

"You shall know that later. For the present, go back to your father, and tell him to make haste to pay his debt. Good-bye, till we meet again."

The old man disappeared. The Prince returned to the palace, and hastened to relate his adventure to the King.



"FROM THE BOLE CAME FORTH A STRANGE OLD MAN."

"Oh!" cried the King, pale and trembling. "What a misfortune! My dear son, we must part!"

And, weeping, he told him the terrible promise he had given.

"Do not weep, good father!" replied Milan. "The evil, I am sure, is not irremediable. Have a horse got ready for me, and I will set off—to return speedily, I hope. Tell nobody our secret, least of all my mother, whom it would greatly distress,



If in the course of a year you do not see me again, it will be because I shall be dead."

Kojata, giving way to his wishes, gave him a fine horse, with golden stirrups, and a good sword. The Queen sobbingly gave him her blessing, and he rode away from the palace.

For three days he rode forward without knowing whither he was going. On the evening of the fourth day he stopped at the foot of a mountain on a silent and desert plain, in the midst of which, shining in the light of the setting sun, a mirror-like lake lay spread.

He approached this mysterious basin, and beheld thirty beautiful ducks bathing and disporting themselves in its liquid waves, and thirty white robes lying upon the shore. The Prince dismounted, and slipped into the midst of a cluster of reeds, taking with him one of the snowy garments spread upon the ground.

A few minutes later, the ducks, having sufficiently enjoyed their bath, returned to the shore to retake possession of their clothes, and immediately transformed themselves. In place of twenty-nine web-footed ducklings appeared nine-and-twenty beautiful young girls, who rapidly dressed themselves and hurried away. The thirtieth, unable to find her white robe, remained in the water, turning from one side to the other, scared, bewildered, weeping and sobbing.

The Prince took pity on her. He put aside the reeds and rose. The poor terrified duck saw him and cried to him :

"Prince Milan, give me my robe. For that good act you shall be rewarded."

The Prince obeyed. He put down the fairy linen on the shore of the lake and then discreetly retired from the spot.

In a moment the metamorphosis was completed ; he saw before him, dressed in a white robe, a young girl of matchless beauty. She held her hand out to him, and, lowering her eyes and blushing, said to him, in a gentle tone of voice :

"I thank you for having done what I asked of you. You could not have done anything better for yourself, and I hope that you will be content with me. My name is Wellena. The young girls you

saw bathing with me are my sisters. Our father is the enchanter Czernuch, who governs the subterranean world. He is possessed of rich treasures and a large number of castles. For a long while he has been waiting for you and is very angry at not seeing you arrive ; but have no fear, and follow my advice punctually. When you come in face of this powerful sovereign, cast yourself upon the ground and approach him crawling on your hands and knees. If he stamps his foot with rage, if he threatens you, go still nearer to him. I do not know what he will order you to do, but whatever it may be, I shall be near to assist you. Now let us part."

Giving the ground a tap with

her little foot, the earth opened, and the beautiful Wellena and the Prince descended into the subterranean region and entered the palace of Czernuch, a palace constructed entirely of carbuncles, and shining like the sun. Czernuch was seated on his throne. His eyes were as green as the leaves on the trees, and his hands were claws.

Following the instructions of his protectress, Prince Milan threw himself down with his face towards the ground. The



"THE PRINCE SLIPPED INTO THE MIDST OF A CLUSTER OF REEDS."



terrible magician was in a state of rage. His eyes darted flames, and he gave utterance to such horrible cries that the roof of his palace trembled as if it were going to collapse. The Prince crawled humbly towards him. At length Czernuch burst into a fit of laughter, and cried :

" 'Tis well ; I shall not be your enemy. But, nevertheless, you must be punished for not having come sooner. To-morrow you shall know my will."

Two servants politely conducted the Prince to the chamber which had been reserved for him ; and, being fatigued, he immediately went to sleep.

Next day the enchanter sent for him, and said :

" I want to ascertain what you can do. This evening you must set to work, and during the night you must build me a palace, the roof and walls of marble, and the windows of crystal. Around this palace there must be a large garden, waterfall, and a lake with fish in it. If this work is well executed, I shall be good-natured towards you ; if not, you will have your head chopped off."

" Accursed magician !" the Prince said to himself, on returning to his chamber ; " he condemns me to death, and laughs at me while doing it."

He sat with his head between his hands all day, absorbed in the thought of his cruel destiny.

At last evening came, and with its coming a little bee tapped at his window, and said to him :

" Let me in."

He opened the window. The bee transformed itself : Wellena stood before him.

" Good evening," she said ; " why are you so downcast ?"

" Do you not know that your father has condemned me to death ?"

" And what are you going to do ?"

" Submit to my fate."

" What an idea ! Don't let yourself be so easily conquered. Go to bed, and sleep in peace. To-morrow morning rise early ; your palace shall be built ; go round it, a hammer in your hand, as if you had just finished constructing it."

The next morning, on rising, Prince Milan beheld the palace completely built. Czernuch examined it minutely, and was astonished by it.

" Ah," he said to the young Prince, " you are a skilful artist. I must now try the penetration of your mind. I have thirty

daughters. To-morrow they shall be drawn up before you ; you shall look at them once, twice, and, the third time, you shall tell me which is the youngest, or you shall have your head chopped off."

" Very good," said the Prince to himself ; " that's an agreeable task. Why, at the first glance, I shall recognise Wellena ! Nothing could be easier to do."

" It's not so easy as you think," said the little bee. " My sisters and I are so much alike, that my father himself can hardly tell which of us is the oldest and which the youngest. But, so that you may not make any mistake, I will, on your third examination, wear a patch on my right cheek."

The next day the magician's thirty daughters were ranged in a single line. The Prince looked at them attentively, and could not distinguish which of them he loved. He examined them again, without lessening his embarrassment. Finally, at the third trial, he perceived on a white cheek a tiny rose-coloured patch, and turned towards Czernuch :

" This," he said, " is the youngest of your daughters, the Princess Wellena."

" He's protected by Satan himself !" muttered the magician, grinding his teeth in fury at the defeat he had sustained. " I admit your ability," he said to Prince Milan ; " but I must try you once more, and in a different fashion. Come back to me at the end of three hours. I will then set fire to a match, and, before it is burnt out, you must make me a pair of boots reaching to my knees. Go and get ready for this new piece of work, and return to me at the time I have named."

The Prince retired dispirited. The little bee flew to him.

" How melancholy you appear !" she said.

" Alas ! I shall never be able to do what your father demands, and shall have to die."

" No. I love you ; I am your affianced bride ; we must live or die together. And, now, we must fly."

Saying these words she licked the window, the moisture instantly congealing there. Then she took her lover by the hand and led him to the spot where they had descended together into the subterranean region, thence to the margin of the lake where she had first met him. There the Prince found his horse awaiting him. The animal neighed with delight on recognising his master. The two fugitives seated them-



selves on his back, and the gallant steed galloped away with the speed of an arrow.

At the hour appointed the enchanter waited for Prince Milan, and, not seeing him arrive, sent a footman in search of him. The door of his chamber was locked, and Wellena had thrown away the key. The servant knocked and delivered the message he was sent to give; the moisture on the window replied, in the tones of Prince Milan's voice: "I'm coming presently." Three times, at intervals of several minutes, the footman repeated the summons, and always received the same answer: "I'm coming presently." At last Czernuch cried furiously:

the first church which stands beside his road; he cannot pass that barrier."

A moment later, Czernuch, perceiving a hermit, said to him:

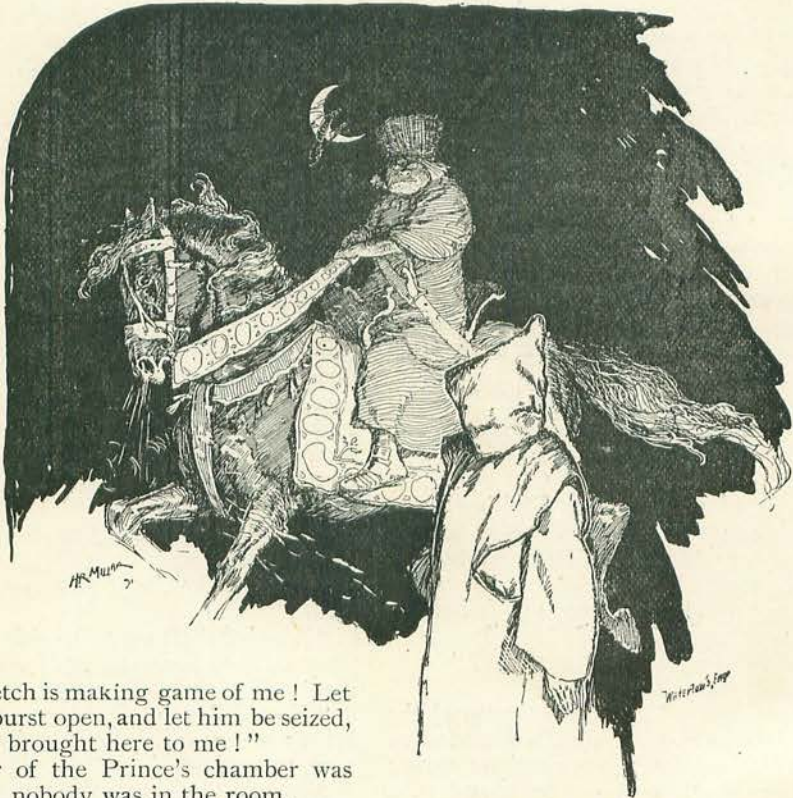
"Reverend father, have you seen a man and a woman go by on horseback?"

"Yes, Prince Milan and the Princess Wellena. They have dismounted to pray in this church."

"Oh! why cannot I wring their necks?" cried the magician, furiously.

He went back to his subterranean kingdom growling, and, to satisfy his anger, had his servants flogged all round.

The two lovers continued their way peaceably, and came to a beautiful city. Prince Milan wished to enter it.



CZERNUCH AND THE HERMIT.

"The wretch is making game of me! Let his door be burst open, and let him be seized, gagged, and brought here to me!"

The door of the Prince's chamber was burst open: nobody was in the room.

"Ah, the scoundrel!" cried the magician, foaming with rage. "He has taken flight. I'll go and arrest the deserters."

A moment afterwards, the Princess said: "I hear the beat of a horse's hoofs."

"We are pursued, and someone is quite near to us," said Prince Milan.

"Woe to us!" exclaimed the young girl, "it is my father. But his power expires at

"I beg of you not to stop there," said the young girl. "I have a fatal presentiment as to that city."

"I only want to see it, and then we will continue our journey," replied the Prince.

"Alas! it is easy to enter, but difficult to leave it. But go, since it is your wish.



I will wait for you here, changed into a white stone by the wayside. Pray be prudent. The King of this city and the Queen will come forth to meet you—and with them a charming girl. Take care! if you kiss her, you will immediately forget all that has passed between us; and then I shall die of grief. Go; I will wait for you here three days. If, at the end of those three days, you do not return— But go, since it is your wish."

Transformed into a stone she waited as she had said, one day, two days, three days, but Prince Milan did not return.

The fatal prediction had been realised. On entering the city he saw the King, the Queen, and a beautiful young girl ad-

paused to look at the flower, on which a tear glistened like a dew-drop. The flower pleased him. He carefully detached it from the ground, and planted it in a pot, and took delight in tending it, without in the least suspecting the return it would make him. From the day it entered his rustic dwelling-place everything in it was each morning punctually set in order. At meal-times, by an invisible hand, his table was

spread with a spotless white cloth, and the nicest food was set before him. He enjoyed all these marvels; but he wished to know to whom he owed them, and how they were brought about. He therefore sought an old sorcerer, who said to him:

"Be awake tomorrow before cock-crow, before the break of day. Look carefully around you, and, wherever you see an object moving, throw a handkerchief over it quickly."

Next morning, on the first ray of sun appearing, the

little blue flower quitted her pot and flitted from one side of the room to the other, dusting the room and lighting the fire. The old man rose and threw over her a handkerchief which had been given him by the sorcerer, and in place of the little flower, a beautiful young girl appeared before him.

"Why have you recalled me to life?" she cried. "Prince Milan was to have been my husband, and he has completely forgotten me."

"Prince Milan," replied the old man, "is on the eve of being married; from all parts people are flocking to assist at his wedding."

The faithful Wellena wept bitterly, then, with sudden resolution, dried her eyes, and, in the dress of a peasant girl, went to the city. Entering the palace kitchen and modestly accosting one of the head cooks, she said to him in a gentle tone:



"HE KISSED HER."

vance to meet him. Dazzled by the look, by the smile, by the perfect beauty of this young girl, he kissed her on the cheek; and the memory of his dear Wellena instantly fled from his mind.

"Alas!" cried the poor girl, "he has deserted me. I have nothing more to hope for in the world, and have but to die. I will change myself into a little field-flower; I will stay by the wayside, and some passer by will crush me under his foot."

In a moment the transformation was accomplished.

Along the road plodded an old man who

"Will you allow me to make a wedding-cake for Prince Milan?"

The proud and self-sufficient cook was not in the least disposed to accept such a proposal; but when he saw how pretty and graceful this young peasant girl was, he replied to her politely:

"Yes, my pretty one, you wish it: make a wedding-cake. I'll present it myself to the Prince."

All the guests were seated at table. The head cook advanced with a solemn air, bearing upon a silver dish a cake made in the form of a crown. Everybody admired this piece of pastry, its elegant form, and its golden crust. The Prince, before whom the cook had placed

it, cut off a piece, and, from the opening, flew out a pair of turtle-doves, which wheeled in flight about the table, the female dove crying to her companion:

"Don't leave me! don't leave me! or you will forget me, as Prince Milan has forgotten his Wellena!"

At those words the Prince recovered his memory. He rose from his seat and hastened to the door, where he found his betrothed awaiting him.

Under the balcony of the palace stood his faithful horse, pawing the ground with impatience. He leaped into the saddle with his own true bride, and they soon reached the kingdom of Kojata. The King and the Queen received them with tears of joy, and their marriage was celebrated with a splendour never before seen.

