

A STORY FOR CHILDREN, FROM THE HUNGARIAN.

**M**ARZI had been a soldier for many years, and was much beloved by his comrades, for he was as merry as he was brave, and generous almost to a fault; but, unfortunately, the king under whom this popular soldier served never went to war with any of his neighbours; so, seeing that he was not likely to make a career in the army, Marzi determined to buy his discharge and to return to his relations.

He arrived at home to find that his father was just dead, and his goods were in the act of being divided among his heirs. Although the soldier had never expected a large inheritance, still he was a good deal surprised to receive as his portion nothing more nor less than a silver penny. But he accepted this fresh stroke of ill luck as cheerfully as he had done every other; and, turning his back on his old home, he set out on his travels very little richer than when he returned to his father's house.

He wandered on for some time through field and meadow, till he reached a wood. Here he was stopped by a poor old beggar

with grey hair, who begged him pitifully for alms. Without a moment's thought, Marzi plunged his hand into his pocket, and presented the old man on the spot with his whole inheritance.

The beggar thanked him gratefully, and said—

“Your generosity shall be richly rewarded. Joy and blessing shall follow you wherever you go. Only speak, and whatever you wish shall be granted to you.”

Marzi was much astonished at the old man's words, but answered promptly—

“Since it is only to wish I have, I would rather have the power of changing myself at will into a dove, into a hare, and into a salmon than anything else in the world.”

“Your desire is granted,” said the beggar. “Go your way, and think sometimes of me.” And hardly had he said these words than he vanished.

The sudden apparition and the strange words of the old beggar so filled the soldier's mind that he never noticed that he had passed over the boundary of his native country. Before sunset Marzi found himself in a strange capital, where all was

uproar and merriment ; and, in the midst of dancing and singing, soldiers in glittering uniforms were persuading young men to enlist in the army, for the king of the country had entangled himself in a war, and had not enough men to carry it on successfully.

The smart appearance of the recruiting-sergeants, their fine uniforms, the glittering heaps of shillings on the table, round which the crowd danced, together with the sound of fiddles and the clinking of glasses, delighted the soldier so much that, in spite of his fatigue, he joined the dancing and merry-making, and drank one glass after another to the King's health. Before he knew what he had done he had a shako with a waving plume on his head, and a silver shilling in his pocket.

The next day he found himself once more installed in his former life, and soon after his regiment was ordered to advance and attack the enemy.

As Marzi was a very fine-looking man, and knew his duty well, he was very soon selected for the King's Body Guard. But this mark of favour made him many enemies among the other soldiers, for they did not see why a stranger who had not distinguished himself in the King's service should be chosen before them.

Now the King had once upon a time been given a magic ring, which made its possessor invincible while he wore it. Unfortunately it happened that just at this crisis when it would have been of most use to him, for his foe was a very formidable one, the King found that he had left his ring at home. The enemy's army marched against him, and fell on his men so suddenly that he was obliged to retreat in order to assemble fresh troops, and although he soon filled up his ranks, and led them once more against the foe, keeping up the spirits of his soldiers by his own brave example and by dazzling promises for the future, his efforts were fruitless. His hitherto unfailling luck seemed to have utterly deserted him, and his army suddenly becoming aware of their evil plight, saw that they would soon be completely defeated and taken prisoners, along with their leader.

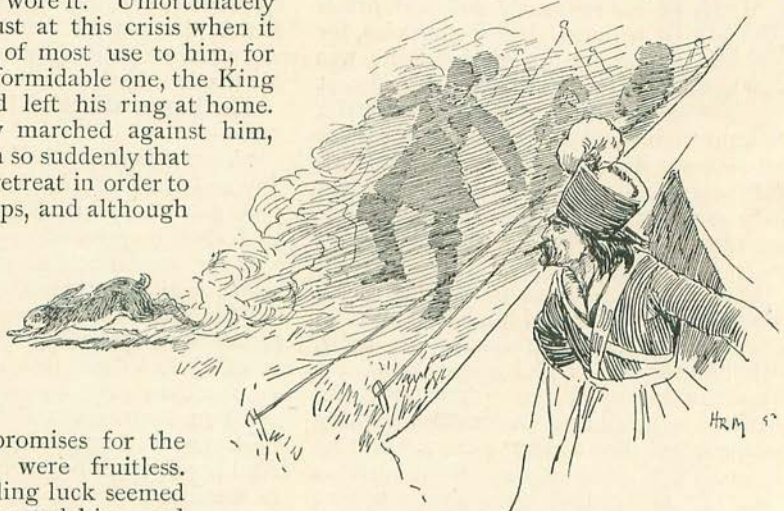
Then the King called out in despair,

"The man who fetches me my ring before we are overpowered by the enemy, shall have the hand of my only daughter as his reward."

But the danger that threatened them was so immediate, and the distance from the capital so great, that the quickest rider would not trust himself to be back in time, for at the very shortest it would take seven days and seven nights to cross the rivers, and mountains, and plains that separated the capital from the camp. Everyone was fully aware of this, and no one offered to attempt the ride.

Then Marzi, remembering the three magic gifts the old beggar had endowed him with, stepped forward, and, saluting the King, he said : "Your Majesty shall have your ring immediately, and then I beg you will remember your promise;" and in a moment he shook himself and fled as fast as lightning through the tents of the warriors in the shape of a hare. He ran so quickly that the dust rose in great clouds behind him, which astonished everyone not a little.

Soon he came to a broad river, where he shook himself again, and swam across it in the shape of a silver salmon, and when he had reached the other side he shook himself once more, and flew in the shape of a dove, quicker than the wind, over hill and dale. Before the King in his camp could have



"IN THE SHAPE OF A HARE."

dreamt it possible, Marzi had reached the palace ; and, flying through an open window into the room of the beautiful Princess, he perched upon her knee.

The King's daughter caressed the tame dove, and was giving it milk and sugar, when suddenly it shook its feathers violently, and Marzi in his own natural form stood before the astonished eyes of the Princess. He told her at once for what purpose he had come, and when she had heard his story she was delighted to think she was to have such a brave and handsome soldier for a husband.

She gave him the wonderful talisman, and warned him at the same time to beware on his return to the camp of the envy and jealousy of his comrades.

For fear he should be robbed of the ring on his way back, or lest any other misfortune should happen to him, Marzi begged the Princess to keep three tokens of him to show the King. Then he shook himself, and became a dove once more, which perched on her knee, and said :

"Princess fair, before me kneel,  
And from my wings two feathers steal."

The Princess did as she was bid, and pulled two beautiful feathers out of the dove's wings. When she had done so, the dove shook itself, and a lovely silver salmon lay before her and said :

"Princess, with your finger nails  
Scrape off eight of my silver scales."

And the Princess took eight lovely silver scales from the fish's back. In a moment the salmon shook itself also, and turned into a hare, which said :

"Princess mine, yet one demand—  
Cut off my tail with your own fair hand."

The Princess took a pair of scissors and cut the hare's tail off, and put all three tokens in a little box, which she placed under lock and key among her other treasures. In the meantime the hare had shaken itself, and standing once more in his proper character before her, Marzi bade the Princess a tender farewell.

Thereupon he again changed himself into a dove, and, seizing the magic ring in its beak, flew with all haste out of the window. The long journey back to the camp, together with the weight of the ring, tired the poor little creature dreadfully ; but it put forth all its strength, and flew cheerfully in the direction of the camp, where the King sat eagerly awaiting Marzi's return. But just as the dove came in sight of the camp a wind suddenly arose, and beat so violently against its wings that it was obliged to give up flying, and turn itself into a hare. Then taking the ring between its teeth, it ran as fast as its legs could carry it, till it was close on the King's tent.

But Marzi soon found out that the Princess's fears had not been groundless. One of his comrades, who had seen him run away in the shape of a hare, was so filled with jealousy that he determined to waylay the gallant soldier on his way back, and to seize from him the magic ring which he had promised the King. He hid himself therefore behind a bush, and when the hare passed by he

shot it on the spot, and, taking the ring out of its mouth, he brought it to the King, who was greatly delighted at getting his magic talisman again, and repeated once more the reward he had promised to the bringer.

Hardly an hour had passed when the fortune of war changed, and success was henceforward on the King's side. The enemy's army was vanquished, their prince slain, all the weapons of war and many costly treasures were captured, and the whole country was conquered with very little difficulty.

When the war was over, the King set forth with his army to his own country, and arrived at his capital amid the joyful acclamation of his people. The Princess rejoiced greatly over his return, but her



"SHE CUT THE HARE'S TAIL OFF."

eyes sought in vain, among the ranks of brave warriors who assembled round the palace waving their triumphant banners, for her bridegroom.

But now the King advanced to meet her, and, leading Marzi's murderer before her, said :

"Here is he to whom I have promised your hand ; the brave soldier who brought me the ring. To-morrow your wedding shall be celebrated at the same time as a feast in honour of our conquest."

When the Princess heard these words she burst out crying, and didn't cease all day or night. So unhappy was she, that she became very ill. But she never revealed the cause of her suffering to anyone, only she steadily refused to take any nourishment, and she never stopped crying for a minute, in consequence of which both the wedding and banquet had to be put off. Day after day the King grew more alarmed ; the suffering of his daughter made him very unhappy, and neither he nor the doctors could discover the cause of it.

In the meantime, Marzi was lying on the ground, and was very nearly becoming food for the crows, when one day the old beggar who had given him the three magic gifts in exchange for his silver penny happened to come along the field, and found the poor little hare lying stiff and stark on the ground. He recognised Marzi at once, and said :

"Hare, get up and live again. Shake yourself, and go as fast as your legs will carry you to the Palace, for another stands there in your place. Make haste, or you will be too late."

Then the hare sprang up alive and well, and hastened with all its might over moor and heath, and when it came to the banks of the broad river it turned itself into a silver salmon and swam across. Then it transformed itself once more into a dove, and flew swiftly over hill and dale till it reached the King's palace. Here it shook itself, and Marzi the soldier stood once more in his Sovereign's presence. But the King wouldn't listen to his story, and told him that he was telling a lie, at the same time confronting him with the man who had brought the magic ring.

This encounter so upset Marzi that he could hardly restrain his tears ; but he plucked up courage, and said :

"Grant me, gracious King, leave to prove to you that I am no impostor and have spoken the truth. Let the Princess be called, and hear from her lips who is her rightful bridegroom, I or that deceiver !"

The King looked at him narrowly as he said these words, and as he looked he remembered that it was Marzi and no other who had offered to go and fetch the ring ; but he said nothing, and led the poor soldier at once into the Princess's presence.

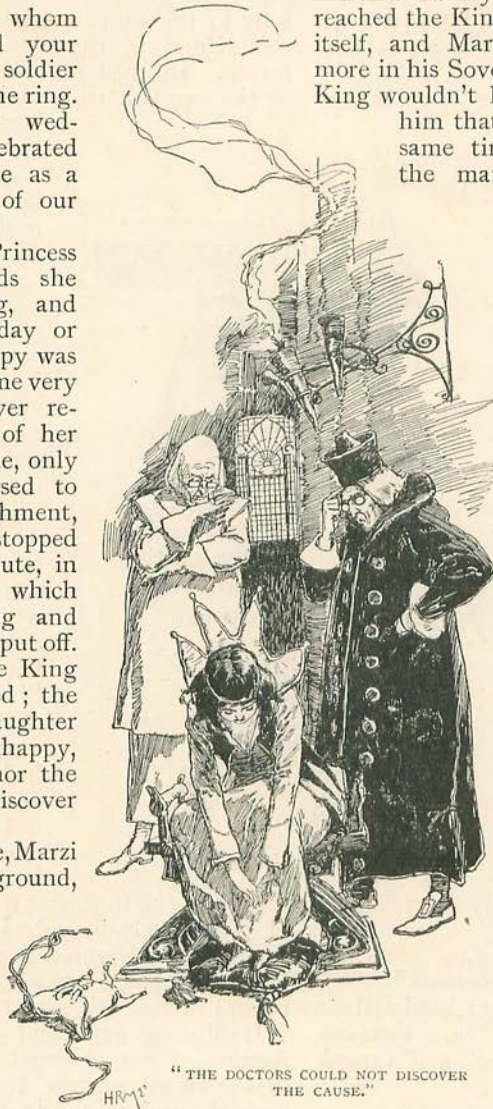
They found the Princess still in the deepest grief, but the moment her eye lighted on Marzi she sprang up and ran joyfully towards him, crying :

"Here is my real bridegroom ; it was to him I gave the ring, and

to him alone the defeat of the enemy was due."

This declaration astonished everyone greatly ; the King was very embarrassed as to how he was to act, for he only knew that one of the men had offered to bring the ring, and that the other had actually brought it.

Then the Princess went and got her box



"THE DOCTORS COULD NOT DISCOVER THE CAUSE."

in which she had treasured up Marzi's tokens, and said to her father: "Command the rivals to change themselves in turn into a dove, a salmon, and a hare."

The King did as she asked, but the false bridegroom stood motionless, and as if paralysed by fear and terror.

But of a sudden Marzi shook himself, and changing into a dove he perched on the Princess's knee, and said:

"Princess dear, put my feathers back;  
One in each wing you'll find I lack."

Then the Princess took the two feathers out of her box and stuck them into the dove's wings, so that everyone saw they belonged to the bird.

In a minute the dove had shaken itself and a silver salmon lay in its place, which said:

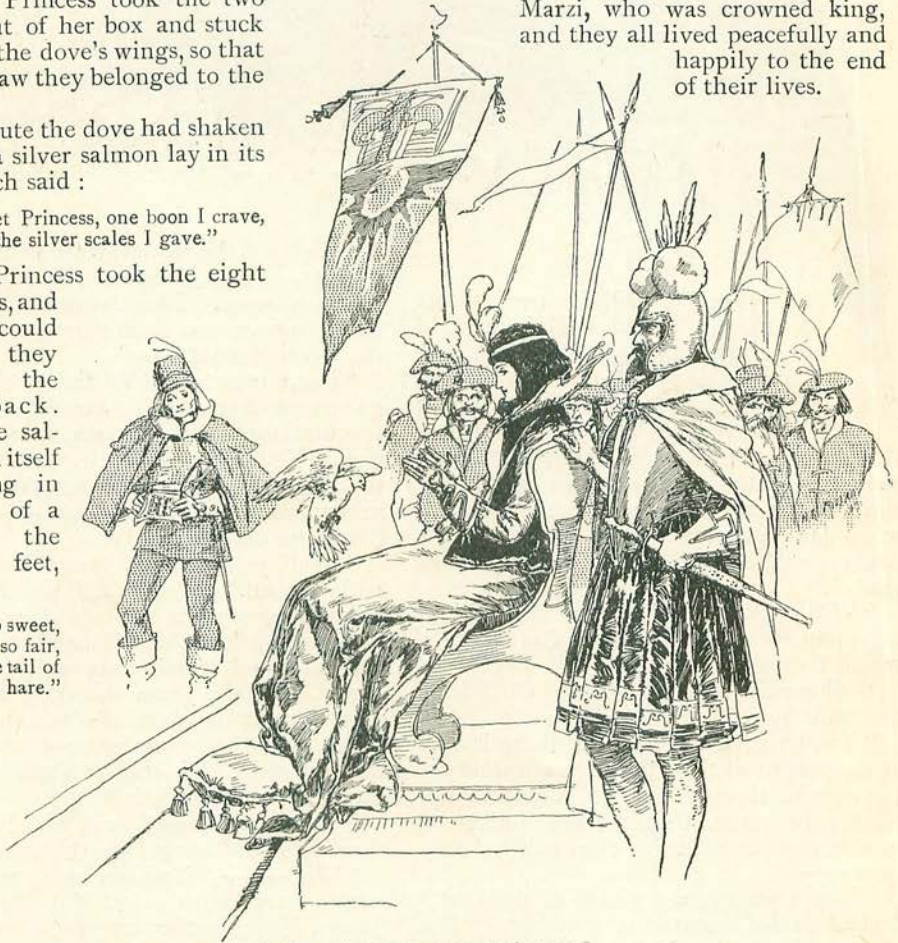
"Now, sweet Princess, one boon I crave,  
Put back the silver scales I gave."

And the Princess took the eight silver scales, and all eyes could see that they came off the fish's back. Finally the salmon shook itself and sprang in the form of a hare to the Princess's feet, and said:

"My bride so sweet,  
Princess so fair,  
Give up the tail of  
the little hare."

Then everyone saw with their own eyes that the hare had lost its tail, and that the one the Princess took out of her little box fitted it exactly. And, last of all, the hare shook itself also, and Marzi stood before them all in his natural form.

As soon as the King had heard his story, he had the false bridegroom caught and hung on the nearest gallows. The very next day the Princess was married to her brave soldier, and never was there such a merry wedding. The King presented the kingdom he had conquered to Marzi, who was crowned king, and they all lived peacefully and happily to the end of their lives.



"HE PERCHED ON THE PRINCESS'S KNEE."