

FROM THE

SPANISH.

**I**N a town of the ancient kingdom of Castile there lived, in former ages, a youth called Bartolo, who tried to eke out a living by making cages for birds, and taking them round to sell at the neighbouring villages. But his trade was a poor one, and he judged himself in luck if he sold one cage in the day, and, as may be supposed, he knew what sorrow and privation were.

One day as he was proceeding to a village he heard sounds of revelry, the buzz of many people, and the strains of a band of music. This merry-making was a procession of children dressed in white, carrying in their midst a beautiful child crowned with roses, in a chariot covered with white satin, and ornamented with acacia and myrtle. This procession was in honour

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of *Maya*, the personification of Spring, and took place to announce the entry of Spring. In front of the little chariot some children danced and held in their hands tin platters for contributions, and, as may be imagined, all, or nearly all, the spectators dropped their coins into them.

Bartolo moved away in a desponding mood, saying to himself as he walked on: "Is this the justice of the world? There they are, flinging their money into these platters just because these children come in procession to announce to them that it is the month of May, as though they could not know it by looking in an almanac. They barter and grind me down to the lowest price for my cages, even when I chance to sell one!"

Full of these bitter thoughts he walked on sadly, for the voices of two importunate

enemies were making themselves heard within him—these were *hunger* and *thirst*: the one clamoured for food and the other for drink. Bartolo had nothing in his wallet but his clasp-knife, and had had nought for his breakfast but *hopes*, and these made him sharp and active.

He had reached a plantation when he perceived a well-dressed individual coming towards him. Pressed by hunger, Bartolo, taking his cap off respectfully, approached and said: "Excuse me, sir, but could you kindly give me a trifle? I promise I will return it as soon as I earn some money."

"Don't you think that it is a shameful thing for a man like you, young and with a good, healthy appearance, to be demanding charity of people? Does it not strike you that you have a duty to earn your living by working at your trade?"

"Yes, sir, certainly, but my trade does not fulfil its own duty. Most people like to see the birds flying about free rather than in cages, and, therefore, day by day I find myself poorer than before."

At first the stranger doubted what he heard, but the bird-cage maker gave him so detailed an account of his work and the small profits he derived, that he became interested and sympathized with his ill fortune. Bartolo was a man who always knew how to excite great interest in himself.

"Come, come," the stranger said, smiling, "I will do something for you. As I cannot find customers for your cages, I will afford you a powerful means by which you shall never more be in want."

He then blew a whistle, and Bartolo saw flying before him a bird blue as the sky, which came and perched on one of his cages.

"See here," added the stranger, "what will compensate for all your past misery. From this day forward you have only to

formulate a wish and say slowly and distinctly: *Bluest of blue birds, do your duty!* and your wish will be granted to you."

"By my faith!" cried the bird-cage maker, "but I will try it at once. For the last twenty years I have wished to kill hunger: '*Bluest of blue birds, do your duty!*'"

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth than he saw suddenly spread before him on the grass a breakfast fit for a prince, laid on a service of exquisite silver and glass and the whitest of cloths. Bartolo, astonished, flung himself on his knees before his benefactor to thank him, but he raised him up, saying:—

"I am the good genius of the honest working men of Castile. Sit down and eat without fear. Take advantage of your lucky star," and then suddenly disappeared.

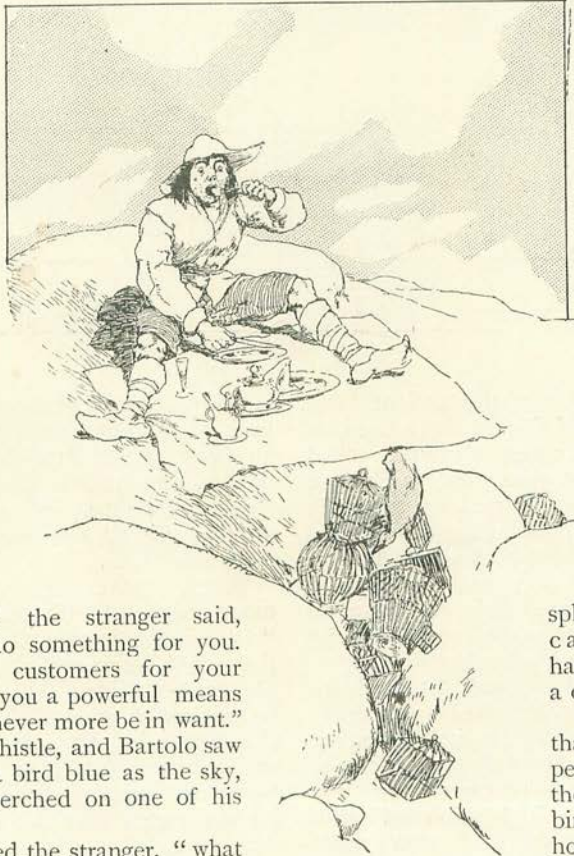
Bartolo reverently bent down and kissed the spot upon which he had stood, unable to find adequate expression of his gratitude. He then sat down and ate his breakfast.

After his meal, Bartolo judged that a man who had feasted in such an elegant manner ought to have other better clothing than his well-worn working suit; and, lifting his staff, he cried to the bird:

"*Bluest of blue birds, do your duty!*" In an instant his old suit became transformed into one of richest velvet, embroidered in gold and silver, and his rough staff into a

splendid horse fully caparisoned, and having round its neck a collar of silver bells.

More astonished than ever, Bartolo suspended to the saddle the cage with the blue bird, leaped on the horse, and went his way, as proud of his dress as a donkey of its ears.



"HE SAT DOWN AND ATE HIS BREAKFAST."

Setting spurs to his horse, he soon reached the gates of a splendid castle. Some feast was taking place within. The guests were all seated under a shady bower, deploring that they had been disappointed of the minstrels who were to have played.

Bartolo, on learning this, advanced to the bower, and, after elegantly saluting the lord and lady of the castle, in a most refined voice said :—

“If it be right for a simple knight to offer his services to such a distinguished company of rank and beauty, I think I could promise to provide what you are requiring.”

“Oh, do! at once, please!” cried all the ladies, who were longing to dance.

“Bluest of blue birds, do your duty!” said Bartolo.

Suddenly, in the distance, was heard the noise of many feet, and a troop of musicians with their instruments appeared, to the great delight of the company.

The lord of the castle thanked the stranger and desired him to open the ball with his eldest daughter, a maiden fair and lovely like a snow bird.

followed, and Bartolo, taking advantage of his good fortune, distributed among the ladies pearls, bracelets, and rings of precious stones. All those present were surprised beyond measure, because the lord of the castle was known to be extremely niggardly and mean.

The lord of the castle, who knew how all this had been done through the agency of the bird, and being himself of an inordinately avaricious nature, thought he might do a fine stroke of business were he to purchase the bird. Hence, calling his unknown guest away to his study, he proposed to him to purchase the bird for what price he should quote.

“You would never give me my price,” replied Bartolo.

“For it I would give my castle with its nine forests,” said the lord of the castle.

“It is not enough!”

“Very well, I will add my olive plantations and vineyards.”

“That is still insufficient!” cried Bartolo.

“I will add the orchards, gardens, and houses.”



“OPENING THE BALL.”

When the ball was at its height, the bird-cage maker ordered an elegant banquet to be served, during which the bluest of blue birds was commanded to sing some songs, which were very much admired. Games of chance

“I want something else!”

“What, still more? Why, man, you must want paradise itself!”

“Not so; I want what you can give me this very moment. I want your daughter with whom I danced just now! Let her be my bride.”

“What! my daughter,” cried the old miser, in an ecstasy of joy; “by my faith, we shall soon conclude the bargain. Why did you not say so before?”

He went to seek the girl, and told her of

the engagement he had entered into. But his daughter, in utter amazement, cried out:

“But what if he is a wicked elf and all he does be witchcraft?”

“You have an amulet of coral hanging

from your neck ; it is an antidote against all witchery."

"And what if he be Satan himself?"

"I will give you a piece of blessed candle, and he will have no power over you," replied the unrelenting father.

Taking her hand, he led her to the stranger, who was already on his horse, and assisted her to mount behind her future husband. Taking the cage with the bluest of birds, he watched the retreating forms of the pair as the horse carried them away swifter than the wind, and when out of sight, he proceeded to join his guests. The company were all gathered in knots discussing the extraordinary powers of the bird and all the events which had taken place.

"Peace! peace!" cried the lord of the castle, as he entered; "I will perform more marvellous things than ever he did. I have given him my daughter to wed in exchange for the bird, and this blue bird will render me more wealthy than the King of Aragon. Approach, and see the wonders I will work with it."

He took the cage, and lifting it up to look at the bird, was astonished to find that it was not blue at all, but a large grey bird, which turned to stare at him in an insolent manner, gave a fierce peck at the door of the cage with its beak, flung it open, and flew out of the window uttering a terrible screech.

The lord of the castle stood with open mouth, not knowing what to do or say. His guests broke out in peals of laughter at his discomfiture and the well-deserved punishment for his unseemly avarice of exchanging his beautiful daughter for a worthless bird.

Meanwhile, Bartolo was galloping on with his bride to the nearest town to be married, and when he arrived at the first hostelry, he wished to dismount and engage the most splendid suite of apartments for his intended bride, but he found himself utterly penniless. He had not calculated that in parting with the bird he had parted with his luck, and therefore as soon as he dismounted the horse disappeared, and his elegant dress became changed for the shabby one he had

worn before he met the kind individual who had wished to befriend him. When the beautiful daughter of the

lord of the castle beheld the transformation which had taken place she ran back to her father as fast as she could, fright lending wings to her feet.

Bartolo had to return to his old life of making cages and to his miserable existence.

