



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY CHARLES SMITH CHELTNAM.

THERE was once a King and Queen who, having everything a King and Queen could reasonably desire, might have been as happy as the day was long—if they had only taken the right means for making the best of their good fortune.

The King was a pattern of amiability, and, as to wisdom, could have held his own in comparison with any crowned potentate on earth; but of the Queen not half as much could be said in praise. As a girl, her beauty had been renowned, and had brought to her Princes by the score as wooers; but to their suits she had, as the phrase is, turned a deaf ear, regarding men as creatures made wholly of ill qualities, and marriage with them a debasement of herself in every sense; and it was not until her father threatened to imprison her for the rest of her life in a town built of steel and adamant, that she could be induced to accept a husband.

The amiability of her spouse was often

sorely tried by her constant disparagement of men; but, being founded upon exceptional goodness of character, he did not allow it to be overcome, and schooled himself to bear with her fantastic ideas, rewarding himself for his leniency by sometimes laughing in his sleeve at the more preposterous of her pretensions.

A great many years passed without their having any family until, one day, the Queen had a baby girl, and consoled herself by reflecting that that, at least, was better than having a boy, "to grow up into a horrid man," as she expressed herself.

It happened that, at the moment of the little Princess's birth, the fairy Gaieia was passing the palace, and, as she had no particularly pressing business on hand, slipped in, and, after congratulating the Queen on the beauty of her offspring, constituted herself the infant's godmother—as was the fairy custom at that period—at the same time laughingly predicting that she would prove to be "the joy of her parents."

It hardly needs to be recorded that, with her very peculiar views as to what a woman's conduct in life ought to be, the Queen did not permit her daughter to receive instruction of any kind from anybody but herself; the King, consequently, rarely saw his child, and knew nothing of the character which had been made for her by her mother, rather than allowed to come to her and develop itself in the natural order of things.

In this way the Princess Disdainana—so her mother had insisted on naming her—was brought up until she had reached her seventeenth year. If the youthful beauty of her mother had been renowned, that of the Princess was celebrated far and near as being nothing less than marvellous, and a hundred of the richest and handsomest Kings and Princes in the world vied with each other in their endeavours to obtain her hand; but to not one of them would she deign to listen even for a moment, regarding all men as a sort of natural excrescence, whose only fitting place in the world was in companionship with the horses and dogs, or, at most, as ugly and repulsive creatures necessary for the performance of the most unpleasant labours. It was on this account that she had become universally known as "The Princess Who Despised All Men."

This state of things became, at last, a cause of extreme uneasiness to the King. By the time she had arrived at a marriageable age, the fact that he, too, was year by year growing older began to recur to his mind with disquieting persistency; for, having no son to succeed him, he saw that, if his daughter's disinclination to marry were maintained, his dynasty was in danger of coming to an end—and that is a prospect which no King can be expected to contemplate with equanimity.

One day, therefore, when the subject was worrying him very much, he sent for his wife and daughter and explained to them the extreme dis-

comforts of the situation which had been brought about by the obduracy of the Princess.

"My daughter, I am happy to say, knows her duty to herself," replied the Queen, proudly.

The King was about to retort, "But she does not appear to know anything whatever about her duty to her father"; but, as it was a rule of conduct with him never to use that form of contradiction in any discussion he had with his wife, he held his peace.

"Rather than become the wife of an ugly, coarse, bearded man, I would die a hundred deaths!" cried the Princess, vehemently.

As the last syllable left her lips, a gay laugh rippled through the air of the room.

"May I ask what you find to laugh at in what my daughter has said?" demanded the Queen of her husband, indignantly.

"Nothing whatever, my dear—and, consequently, I did not laugh," replied the King, mildly.

"What! Perhaps you will say that it was I who uttered that insolent sound?" cried the Queen.

"Now I come to recall the fact, I don't think I ever heard you laugh, my dear; but I am sure the voice that laughed a moment ago was not in the least like yours," said the King.

"It was more like my daughter's, perhaps



"SHE HURRIED THE PRINCESS BACK TO HER OWN APARTMENT."

you will say?" remarked the Queen, sarcastically.

"Not in the least—I should imagine, for I never had the advantage of hearing her laugh any more than yourself," replied the King.

Again the gay sound of a musical voice, laughing lightly, rang through the room.

"Oh! This is too insulting!" cried the Queen. "Come with me, my love—out of such an unendurable atmosphere of coarseness."

And, without deigning to listen to a word of remonstrance from the King, she hurried the Princess back to her own apartment—followed by another silvery peal of laughter.

The King was equally puzzled and vexed by the abrupt termination of what he had hoped would have been a conference resulting in relief to himself from pressing anxieties. Now—knowing his wife's absolute and unyielding temper, and the complete control she exercised over her daughter—he saw no way but one (that of using his extreme parental authority) to bring the Princess to obedience; but that measure he was too kind-hearted to resolve upon applying.

In the utmost perplexity of mind he had paced his study for several minutes, without noticing that he was grasping in his right hand a scroll of parchment. On becoming aware of this fact, he stopped suddenly and gazed on the document with bewildered astonishment. It was absolutely certain that he had never seen it before, that it was not in his hand when the Queen and Princess quitted his presence, and that nobody else had entered the room.

While he was thinking of all this, the gay laugh, which had been heard three times before, rang through the study again, only more gaily than ever—for a moment angering the King, though he was one of the most placable of Sovereigns, and causing him to ferret in every possible hiding-place in his study in search of the daring jester. But not a trace of an intruder was discoverable. When he had perfectly assured himself of this, he unfolded the mysteriously-conveyed parchment.

The opening words of the document caused him to turn pale, and the sight of the signature at the end of it sent a thrill of terror through his frame. It was nothing less than a formal demand for the hand of the Princess Disdainana, on the part of Kloxooskin the Ninety-ninth—one of the ugliest and most belligerent monarchs in the world—the document being drawn in the form of an ultimatum, calling upon the King to give his

daughter to the said Kloxooskin in marriage, within two hours of the receipt of this demand, or, failing compliance therewith, to surrender his throne to the said Kloxooskin, who would, at the time specified, come, supported by his invincible army of one million nine hundred and ninety-nine veteran warriors, to receive the said King's answer.

In his moments of worst apprehension, the King had never thought of anything so terrible as this. He called his wife and daughter back to him, and made them clearly understand the crisis that had come to him and them; but though the Queen was inclined to save her share of the throne by submission, the Princess declared that no consideration would induce her to give herself to any man—to such a human monster as Kloxooskin least of all.

From that resolution her father tried to move her, but she was inflexible against all his arguments and prayers; and when the two hours' grace was spent, the King found himself in the presence of the redoubtable Kloxooskin the Ninety-ninth, a prisoner in his palace, and wholly at the mercy of his all-powerful conqueror.

Realizing the peril in which she stood, the Queen did her best to persuade her daughter to submit to the inevitable; but the Princess quickly silenced her by giving her back the arguments that had all her life been used in the cultivation of her detestation of all men.

But though she had no misgiving as to her moral strength, the Princess could not but contemplate with alarm the danger of a personal encounter with King Kloxooskin, so she determined to seek safety in flight, and, as soon as dusk came, contrived to slip unperceived from the palace into a dense forest which grew at no great distance from the walls of her father's capital.

For a long time she pressed farther and farther into the depths of the forest, growing every moment more and more relieved from the apprehension that she might be pursued.

Pausing at length to rest, she noticed that night had thoroughly set in, and that it would be impossible for her to go any farther in the darkness. At the same moment a terrible sound fell upon her ears—the roaring of wild beasts of some kind, coming rapidly nearer and nearer. For an instant her heart stood still, but she was not wanting in courage or resource, and, observing that she was at the foot of a giant oak-tree, she lost not a moment in climbing to the shelter of its spreading boughs.

Choosing the securest position she could



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"AT THE MERCY OF HIS ALL-POWERFUL CONQUEROR."

find, her alarm of the moment subsided ; but though she was greatly fatigued, the memory of the peril from which she was endeavouring to escape, coupled with anxiety as to the trials which might be awaiting her, all night prevented her from going to sleep ; and, when morning dawned, she prepared, tired and hungry, to descend to the ground and continue her undefined journey.

But she found that climbing was a far easier matter than descending from her place of refuge ; for she now observed that the tree sent out, on nearly all sides of its gnarled trunk, the remains of huge jagged and lifeless branches, to avoid which would require a skill which she did not possess. She had no choice, however, but to make an attempt to get down, and had nearly succeeded in reaching the ground when, to her consternation, the full skirt of her splendid dress caught upon an enormous splinter, and held her hanging helpless some feet in the

air, all her efforts to free herself proving unavailing.

Hours passed by. The sunlight pierced some of the neighbouring tree-tops ; but the return of day brought her neither comfort nor the hope of release, and she was giving way to the horrible idea that she would have to endure all the torments of a lingering death, when she heard the voice of a woodman, whistling on his way to his work, and called to him.

The man came towards her out of the underwood.

"Assist me down," said the Princess, in her habitual tone of disdain.

"Not I," replied the woodman. "I recognise you : you are the Princess Who Despises All Men ! Ho ! ho ! — I'm a man, remember !"

That said, he went on his way, whistling cheerfully, leaving the Princess to think, for a moment, that her rooted antipathy to men

was amply justified by the brutal conduct of this coarse and ugly wretch.

But the distress of her position became every moment more and more acute, and, seeing that it was hopeless to anticipate the assistance of any chance passer, she made one more effort to free herself, and by exerting all her remaining strength, succeeded in tearing herself from the offensive bough—at the cost of a great rent in her beautiful dress and a fall, which left her for a few minutes lying insensible on the ground at the foot of the tree.

After returning to consciousness, and sitting for a while to recover her presence of mind, she rose and continued her blind way through the forest, always hungry, and many times faint with fatigue—all day long, until once again she found the shades of evening closing about her.

Just before night had actually come, she reached a spot at which a party of charcoal-burners were seated about a cheerful fire in front of their hut, eating their supper of bread and potatoes, roasted in the embers at their feet. The appetizing scent of these well-cooked roots provoked the starving Princess's hunger in an almost unendurable degree.

"Give me one of your potatoes," she said, still unable to modify the disdainful tone of her voice.

"Not we!" replied the head charcoal-burner. "I recognise you: you are the Princess Who Despises All Men! Ho! Ho! We are men, remember!"

More than ever disgusted with men, the Princess wandered all night through the forest, afraid to lie down, lest she might fall asleep and become a prey to some prowling wild beast.

As the dawn of another day was becoming visible, she found herself on the border of a meadow, and saw a young farmer drawing water from a well for some horses which were waiting near him.

"Give me some of that water—I'm thirsty!" she said, imperiously.

"Aha," said the young farmer. "I recognise you: you are the Princess Who Despises All Men! If you want water, dig a well for yourself, as I have had to do."

"Loathsome creatures, one and all!" the Princess said to herself, as she turned away from the spot. "My good mother was right in teaching me to despise them."

She presently reached a more open part of the country, though she was still near the forest through which she had passed, and, towards noon, when she was almost overcome by the sun's heat, she came upon a

rising ground, whence she beheld, afar off, a great stretch of water, and, on what seemed its most distant reach, an opalesque haze.

Then there suddenly came to her mind a story she had heard of the existence of an island-kingdom peopled by women who, like herself, held all men in disdain, and would never permit one of them to set foot where they were. And she was overtaken by a burning desire to reach that island, which



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she fancied must be hidden in the midst of the opalesque haze on which she was gazing.

So she hurried on and on, sustained wholly by the intensity of her desire, till she came upon the sea-shore—for the great water she had looked upon was the wide ocean.

Alongside his boat, and busy with his nets, she found a fisherman, and at once accosted him.

"Is yonder mist-enveloped island the kingdom of Diaphanosia?" she asked him.

"Yes," he answered.

"Then row me over to it in your boat," she said, eagerly.

"Not I," he replied. "I recognise you: you are the Princess Who Despises All Men, and I am a man, you know. If you want a boat, make one for yourself, as I had to do. Over there, in the forest, you will find plenty of wood for your purpose, only you will have to cut it down."

To get out of the sun's burning rays, and to give herself time for reflection, the Princess retired into the forest and sat down at the foot of a hollow tree, by the side of which a rusty axe was lying, as if it had been left there by some woodman and forgotten.

Strange! A merry laugh came out of the thicket near to her; but though she searched with her eyes in every direction she could discover nobody who could have given it utterance.

Strange again! It flashed upon her mind that the mere expression of disdain for men was wanting in force if it were not emphasized by the demonstration of woman's power to do absolutely without them.

Upon the strength of this reasoning, she at once seized the axe, and, after many days of hard work, succeeded in felling the hollow tree and giving to it something of the shape of a boat, in which, by the aid of a roughly-fashioned pair of oars, she rowed herself across to the island-kingdom, where she hoped to find the realization of all her aspirations for a state of existence in which men were wholly ignored.

Not once or twice, but over and over again, she succeeded in reaching the border of the opalesque haze in which the kingdom of Diaphanosia was perpetually veiled; but she was as often beaten back by an irresistible current which set towards the shore from which she had started.

On one of these fruitless voyages her strength utterly left her, and she sank down in the bottom of her boat insensible, the oars dropping from her nerveless hands and

drifting away; so that, even if she had immediately returned to consciousness, she would have found herself helplessly at the mercy of the sea.

When she *did* recover from her state of insensibility, it was to discover herself lying upon a mossy bank on the skirt of the forest, a handsome and superbly dressed young man tending her with delicately eager solicitude.

She did not attempt to rise or to speak; she thought she was sleeping and dreaming—the only thing strange in her state of feeling being that the near presence of a man provoked no sense of repugnance or resentment.

"Thank Heaven!" said the young gentleman, in a tone of intense relief, as he saw her open her eyes. "For awhile I have been terribly afraid that my efforts to rescue you had been unavailing."

Still held by the idea that she was dreaming, the Princess only continued to look into his face without replying to his words.

"Rest here for a short time, and sleep if you can, while I watch over you," he continued. "When you have become strong enough to travel, my horse shall carry you to my father's palace, which stands not very far from this spot: once there, my mother will be delighted to tend upon you as if you were her own daughter."

"Take me to your kind mother," she said, rising, the soft tones of her own voice sounding in her ears as if they came from the lips of some other person than herself.

The handsome young Prince—for he was no less—blew a golden whistle suspended to his neck by a jewelled chain, and in a few moments a splendidly caparisoned horse came to him from out the forest.

Upon the back of this noble steed the Prince gallantly lifted his beautiful charge, and taking the bridle on his hand, led him through the forest openings, walking by the Princess's side and relating to her how, while hunting, it had been his blest fortune to see her helpless condition in her boat, and, by swimming out to her, rescue her at the moment when her rude vessel was on the point of sinking with her beneath the waves.

She listened silently to all he said to her, filled with an inexplicable sense of wonder at herself in finding that ever the voice of a man could fall sympathetically on her ears! "I *must* be dreaming!" she said to herself again and again.

At last, on reaching an eminence, the Prince pointed to a noble pile of buildings on the outskirts of a great city, and said—

something of sadness coming into the tone of his voice :—

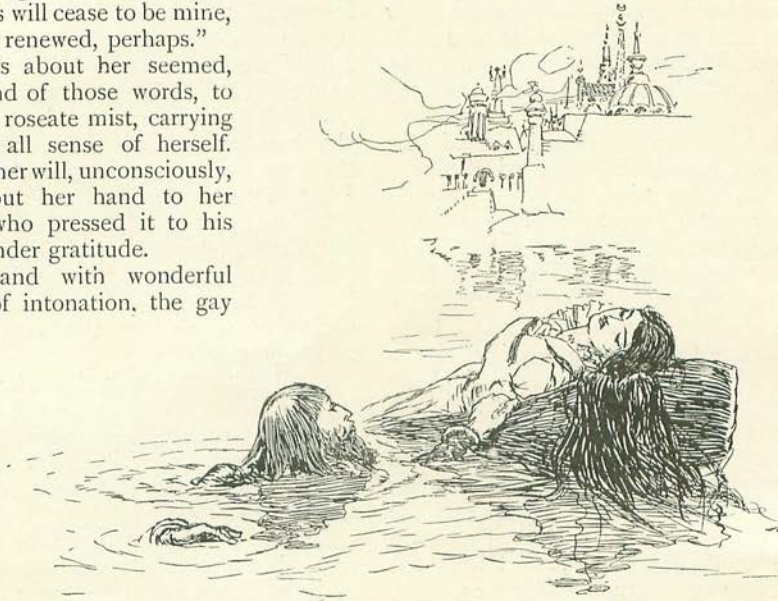
“Yonder is my father’s palace ; we shall reach it in a very little time—and then the happy privilege of these delightful moments will cease to be mine, never to be renewed, perhaps.”

All things about her seemed, at the sound of those words, to melt into a roseate mist, carrying with them all sense of herself. Apart from her will, unconsciously, she held out her hand to her preserver, who pressed it to his lips with tender gratitude.

Clearly, and with wonderful sweetness of intonation, the gay

which would certainly have overwhelmed him if he had persisted in forcing the Princess Disdainana to marry him.

More than that—a task much more



“HER RUDE VESSEL WAS ON THE POINT OF SINKING.”

laugh which had greeted her on so many eventful moments of her life once more rang in the Princess’s ears.

“Ah ! I recognise it now !” she cried—“the sweet voice of my fairy godmother ! Oh, wise and kind Gaieia, still be my guardian, as you have ever been, and make me in the future all that I have failed to make myself in the past !”

The laugh that answered her entreaty was as gay and sweet as ever, but came from afar ; for, in fact, the good fairy had sped away, having a great deal still to do for her froward godchild, and that without delay : amongst other things, to make King Kloxo-skin immediately evacuate the palace and dominions of the Princess’s father, under the idea that he was escaping from a great peril

difficult to accomplish—the merry fairy had to overcome the prejudice of the Queen, whose obstinacy had returned in full force as soon as she was once again able to exercise it on the side of her anti-matrimonial fancies. But, as everybody knows, nothing can permanently withstand the power and strategy of a good fairy ; so it came about—really as a matter of course—that, her daughter having accepted for her husband the charming Prince who had saved her life, the Queen consents to receive him as her son-in-law ; and it is a well-attested matter of history, that nobody ever heard her utter a single word in dissent from her husband’s freely-expressed delight at the saving of his dynasty from what had, for awhile, seemed its inevitable extinction.