

“WITTY-SPLINTER”

A
STORY
for
CHILDREN

FROM THE GERMAN OF
CLEMENS BRENTANO.



ONCE upon a time there was a King of Roundabout who had, among many other servants, a page-boy who was called Wittysplinter,

and he preferred him above all the others, and showered upon him honours and presents, because of his uncommon skill and cleverness, and because everything the King gave him to do he always accomplished successfully. Now, because of the great favour which the King showed to Wittysplinter, all the other page-boys and servants were jealous of him; for, if his cleverness were rewarded with money they generally received nothing but scoldings for their stupidity—if Wittysplinter received praise from the King, they generally received a blowing-up—when Wittysplinter got a new coat to his back, they got instead the application of a stick to theirs, and if Wittysplinter were permitted to kiss the King's hand, they were only allowed to touch it when they got a smack from it.

On account of all these things, therefore, they got very angry with Wittysplinter, and went about murmuring and whispering the whole day long, and putting their heads together and plotting how best they could deprive Wittysplinter of the love of the King. One of them scattered a lot of peas on the steps up to the throne, so that Wittysplinter might stumble and break the glass sceptre which he always had to present to the King; another nailed pieces of melon skin to his

shoes, so that he might slide along and make a dreadful mess of the King's gown when he was handing him the soup; a third put all sorts of horrid flies in a straw, and blew them into the King's wig when Wittysplinter was dressing it; a fourth played some other nasty trick, and everyone sought to do something to deprive Wittysplinter of the King's favour. Wittysplinter was so cautious, however, and so clever and watchful, that everything they did was in vain, and he brought all the commands of the King to a successful issue.

Well, when they found that all these manœuvres were quite useless they determined to try something else. Now, the King had an enemy, whom he could never get the better of, and who was always doing him some mischief. This was a giant who was called Sleepyhead, and who lived in a large mountain, where he had a splendid palace, surrounded by a thick, gloomy wood; and with the exception of his wife, Thickasmud, no human being lived with him; but a lion who was called Hendread, and a bear called Honeybeard, and a wolf called Lamb-snapper, and a dog called Harescare, acted as his servants. He had also in the stables a horse called Flyinglegs.

Now, there dwelt in the neighbourhood of

Roundabout a very beautiful Queen, Madam Flosk, who had a daughter, Miss Flink, and the King of Roundabout, who wanted to possess all the land adjoining his own, was very anxious to marry Madam Flosk. But she was proud, and let him know that many other Kings were also anxious to marry her, and that she would accept in marriage that King only who was most expeditious, and that he who was first by her side when she went into church next Monday morning at half-past ten should have her as his wife, and all her possessions into the bargain.

Thereupon the King summoned all his household, and put the question to them: "How am I to manage to be first in the church on Monday morning next, and so gain Queen Flosk for my wife?"

Then his servants answered him, and said: "You must gain possession of the horse Flyinglegs, belonging to the Giant Sleepyhead; if you once get astride of it, no one can possibly get there before you; and to get this horse for you no one is more suited than Wittysplinter, who is so successful in all he undertakes."

Thus spoke the wicked servants, in the hope that the Giant Sleepyhead would kill Wittysplinter. The King, accordingly, commanded Wittysplinter to bring the horse Flyinglegs to him.

Wittysplinter got a hand-barrow, and placed a bees' hive on it, then a sack into which he thrust a cock, a hare, and a lamb; and laid it on the barrow; he took with him, also, a long piece of rope, and a large box full of snuff; slung round him a riding whip, fastened a pair of good spurs to his boots, and quietly set off, pushing his barrow in front of him.

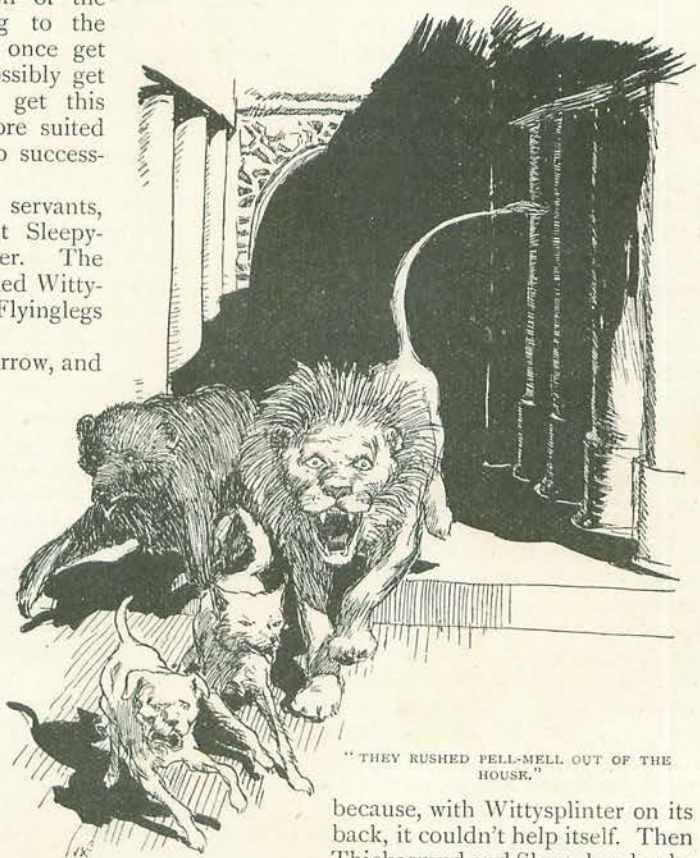
Towards evening he had reached the summit of the high mountain, and when he had traversed the wood he saw before him the castle of the giant Sleepyhead. Night drew on, and very soon he heard the giant Sleepyhead and his wife, Thickasmud, and his lion, Hendread, and his bear, Honeybeard, and his wolf, Lambsnapper, and his dog, Harescare, all snoring loudly; only the horse, Flyinglegs, was still awake, and stamping the floor of the stable with its hoofs.

Then Wittysplinter took the long piece of rope very quietly from the sack, and stretched it across in front of the door of the castle from one tree to another, and placed the box of snuff in the middle; next he took the beehive and placed it in a tree by the side of the path, and then went into the stable and undid the fastenings of Flyinglegs. He placed the sack with the lamb, the hare, and the cock on its back, and jumping up himself and using his spurs, he rode out of the stable.

But the horse Flyinglegs could speak, and screamed out quite loudly:—

Thickasmud and Sleepyhead!
Honeybeard and Hendread!
Lambsnapper and Harescare!
I'm being stolen, so pray beware,

and then it galloped off as hard as it could,



"THEY RUSHED PELL-MELL OUT OF THE HOUSE."

because, with Wittysplinter on its back, it couldn't help itself. Then Thickasmud and Sleepyhead woke up and heard the cry of the horse Flyinglegs. Quickly they awakened the bear Honeybeard, the lion Hendread, the wolf Lambsnapper, and the dog Harescare, and altogether they rushed pell-mell out of the house, to try and catch Wittysplinter with the horse Flyinglegs.

But in the darkness the giant Sleepyhead and his wife Thicks mud stumbled over the rope which Wittysplinter had tied in front of the castle door, and, splosh!—they fell with their eyes and noses right into the box of snuff which he had placed there. They rubbed their eyes and sneezed one time after another, and Sleepyhead said: **“Your good health, Thicks mud.”* “I thank you,” answered Thicks mud, and then said: *“Good health to you, Sleepyhead.”* “I thank you,” answered he; and so on, until they had wept the snuff out of their eyes and sneezed it out of their noses, and by the time this had happened Wittysplinter was clear of the wood.

The bear Honeybeard was the first after him, but when he came to the bees’ hive the smell of the honey enticed him, and he wanted to eat it; then the bees came buzzing out, and stung him all over the face to such an extent that he ran back half blind to the castle. Wittysplinter had already got some distance out of the wood when he heard the lion Hendread coming bounding after him, so he quickly took the cock out of his sack, and when it flew up into a tree and began to crow, the lion got so dreadfully frightened that it ran back again.

Now Wittysplinter heard the wolf Lambsnapper behind him. He quickly let loose the lamb out of his sack, and the wolf galloped after it, and let him ride off in safety. He was by this time quite near the town when he heard a bark behind him, and looking round saw the dog Harescare coming tearing after him. Quickly he let loose the hare out of the sack and the dog ran after it, and he arrived safely in the town.

The King thanked Wittysplinter very much for the horse, but the wicked servants of the Court were very much annoyed that he had come off with a whole skin. On the following Monday the King mounted upon his horse Flyinglegs and rode off to Queen Flosk, and the horse galloped so quickly that he was there long before any of the other Kings, and had already danced several of his wedding dances when they arrived. Just when he was about to start off home with his Queen his servants said to him: *“Your Majesty has indeed the giant Sleepyhead’s horse, but how much more splendid it would be if you had his clothes as well, which are*

said to surpass anything that man has ever seen. The clever Wittysplinter would, no doubt, very soon bring them to you if you commanded him to do so.”

The King was at once possessed with a great desire for Sleepyhead’s clothes, and again gave the commission to Wittysplinter. When the latter had started off upon the road the wicked servants rejoiced, and thought that this time he would surely not escape the clutches of the giant Sleepyhead.

On this occasion Wittysplinter took nothing with him but a few good strong sacks. On arriving at the giant’s castle he climbed up into a tree, and lay hid until everyone was in bed. When everything had become quiet he climbed down again. Just then he heard Madam Thicks mud calling out: *“Sleepyhead, my pillow is very low; fetch me a bundle of straw from outside.”* Thereupon Wittysplinter quickly slipped into a bundle of straw, and Sleepyhead carried him, along with the straw, into his room, shoved him under the pillow, and then lay down in bed again.

As soon as they had fallen asleep Wittysplinter packed all Sleepyhead’s and Thicks mud’s clothes into his sack, and very quietly and very carefully tied it to the tail of the lion Hendread; then he tied the wolf Lambsnapper, and the bear Honeybeard, and the dog Harescare, who were lying about asleep, fast to the giant’s bed, and opened the door very wide. So far he had managed everything just as he would have wished, but he wanted to take away the giant’s beautiful bed-cover as well. So he gave the corner of it a slight tug, then another, and another, and so on, until it fell on the floor. He immediately wrapped himself up in it, and seated himself on the sack containing the giant’s clothes, which he had tied to the lion’s tail. Soon the cool night wind began to blow through the open door and over Thicks mud’s legs, and waking up, she cried, *“Sleepyhead, you’ve pulled all the bed-clothes off me. I’ve nothing at all over me.”* *“Thicks mud, you’ve pulled all the clothes off me,”* and thereupon they began to belabour each other, so that Wittysplinter began to laugh loudly at them. As soon as they heard this they called out *“Thieves, thieves! Up Hendread! Up Lambsnapper! Up Honeybeard and Harescare! Thieves, thieves!”* At this all the animals woke up, and the lion sprang forth out of the door. Now Wittysplinter, wrapped up in the bed-cover, was sitting on the bundle of clothes tied to the lion’s tail; and as soon as the lion began

*NOTE.—The custom of wishing one *“Good Health”* after a sneeze, prevalent in Germany and other European countries, is supposed to have origin in the fact that the crisis, or turning-point for better or worse of a certain fever, is indicated by a sneeze from the patient, and hence the natural expression of a hope for a favourable recovery.

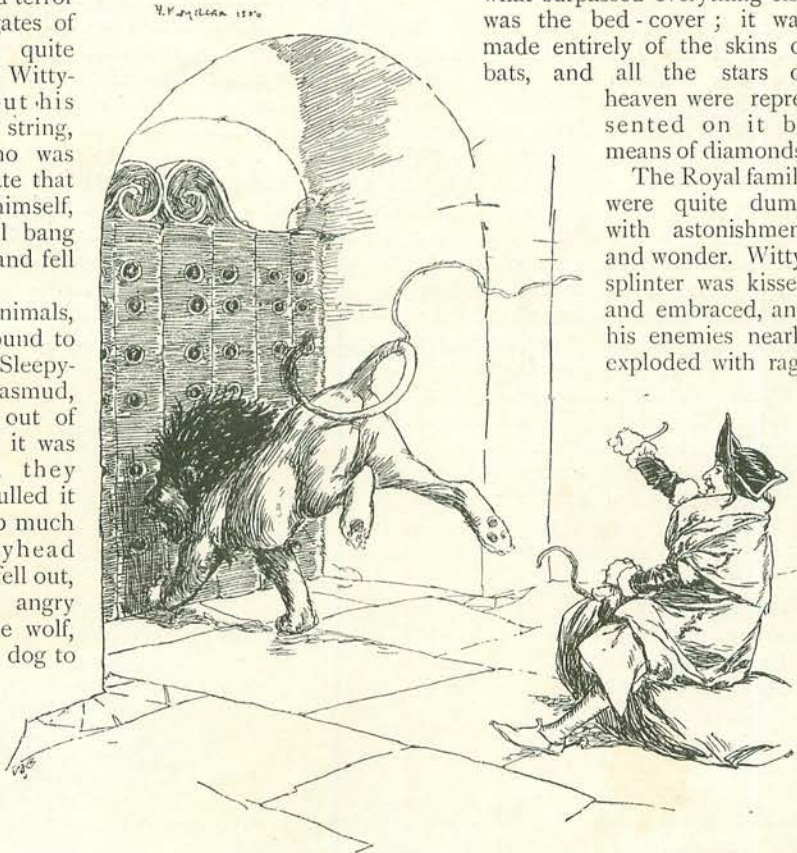
to run, he was driven along just as if he was in a carriage. He began to cry out several times "kikriki-ki-kri-ki," just like a cock, and the lion got such a fright at this that he ran in mad terror right up to the gates of the city. When quite near to the gates, Wittysplinter took out his knife and cut the string, and the lion, who was going at such a rate that he couldn't stop himself, ran his head full bang against the gates and fell down dead.

The other animals, who had been bound to the bedstead of Sleepyhead and Thickasmud, could not get it out of the door because it was too wide, and they dragged it and pulled it about the room so much that both Sleepyhead and Thickasmud fell out, and became so angry that they beat the wolf, the bear, and the dog to death, although the poor animals really couldn't help it.

When the watch in the city heard the noise of the great blow which the lion had given to the gates, they opened them, and Wittysplinter carried the clothes of Sleepyhead and Thickasmud in triumph to the King, who nearly jumped out of his skin with joy, for such clothes had never before been seen. There was, among other things, a hunting-coat, made of the skins of all the four-footed animals, and so beautifully sewn together that one could see the whole story of Reynard the Fox depicted on it. Also a bird-catcher's coat, made of feathers from all the birds in the world, an eagle in front and an owl behind; and in the pockets there were a musical box and a peal of bells, which made music just like all kinds of birds singing together. Further, there was a bathing-dress and a fisher's-dress, made from the skins of all the fish in the world, sewn together so that one saw a whale-hunt and a

great catch of herrings on it. Then a garden-dress of Madam Thickasmud's, on which all sorts of flowers and fruits, salads and vegetables, were embroidered. But what surpassed everything else was the bed-cover; it was made entirely of the skins of bats, and all the stars of heaven were represented on it by means of diamonds.

The Royal family were quite dumb with astonishment and wonder. Wittysplinter was kissed and embraced, and his enemies nearly exploded with rage



"HE COULDN'T STOP HIMSELF."

to see that he had again escaped without hurt from the hands of Sleepyhead.

Even yet they did not despair, and put the idea into the King's head that nothing was now wanting to his dignity, but that he should possess the castle of Sleepyhead itself, and the King, who was a very child in these matters and always wanted to have whatever took his fancy, said immediately to Wittysplinter that he wanted Sleepyhead's castle, and that as soon as he got it for him he would be rewarded.

Wittysplinter did not take much time to think about it, and for the third time ran off to the abode of Sleepyhead. When he arrived there, the giant was not at home, and he heard something in the room crying like a calf. Then he looked through the window, and saw Dame Thickasmud chopping wood, and at the same time nursing a little giant on

her arm, who was showing his teeth and bleating like a calf.

Wittysplinter went in, and said: "Good-day, my great and beautiful, broad, and portly dame! How is it that you have got to do so much work and have to nurse your child at the same time? Have you no maids or grooms? Where is your husband, then?"

"Ach," said Madam Thickasmud, "my husband has gone out to invite all his relations to a feast we are going to hold. And I have to cook everything for myself now, for my husband killed the bear, and the wolf, and the dog, that used to help us; and the lion has run off, too."

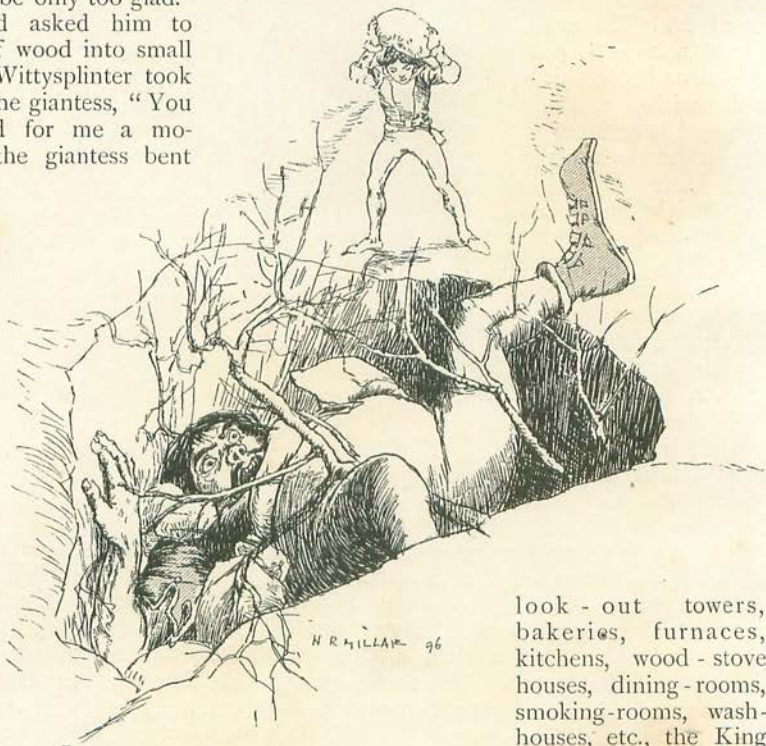
"That is certainly very hard lines on you," said Wittysplinter. "If I could do anything to help you I should be only too glad."

Then Thickasmud asked him to chop up four logs of wood into small pieces for her; and Wittysplinter took the axe and said to the giantess, "You might hold the wood for me a moment, please," and the giantess bent down and caught hold of the wood. Wittysplinter raised the axe in the air, and swish! down it came, and cut Thickasmud's head off and Mollakopp's at the same time, and there they lay.

The next thing he proceeded to do was to dig a large, deep hole right in front of the castle door, into which he threw Thickasmud and Mollakopp, and then covered over the opening with a thin layer of branches and leaves. Then he proceeded to light up all the rooms of the castle with candles and torches, and took a large copper kettle and beat upon it with soup ladles. Then he got a tin wine funnel, and blew a blast on it just like a trumpet, and between each performance he shouted, "Hurrah! Long live His Majesty the King of Roundabout."

When Sleepyhead was returning home towards evening, and saw all the lights in the windows and heard the shouting, he was mad with rage, and ran with such fury against the door that he fell through the hole covered with branches and lay there a prisoner, shouting and making a great noise. Wittysplinter immediately ran down and threw large stones on him, until he had filled up the hole.

And now Wittysplinter took the key of the castle and ran with it to King Roundabout, who immediately betook himself to the castle along with his wife Flosk and her daughter Flink, and Wittysplinter, and inspected all there was to be seen there. After they had spent fourteen whole days in looking at an immense number of rooms, chambers, cellars,



"WITTYSPLINTER THREW LARGE STONES ON HIM."

look-out towers, bakeries, furnaces, kitchens, wood-stove houses, dining-rooms, smoking-rooms, wash-houses, etc., the King asked Wittysplinter what he would like as a

reward for his faithful services. And Wittysplinter replied that he would like to marry the Princess Flink, if it were agreeable to her. The Princess very readily consented, and they were married and lived in the giant's castle, where they are to be found to this day.