



FROM THE ITALIAN OF LUIGI CAPUANA.



THOUSAND years ago there lived a King and a Queen. They had only one daughter, who was dearer to them than all the world. Now, when the

King of France sent to their Court to request the hand of the Princess, neither father nor mother would part from their beloved daughter, and they said to the Ambassador: "She is still too young!"

But as the girl became every day more beautiful, the next year the King of Spain's Ambassador appeared to request the girl's hand for his Sovereign. And again the parents answered: "She is still too young!"

Both the Kings were very angry at this refusal, and resolved to revenge themselves on the poor Princess.

As they were not able themselves to carry out their wicked resolve, they summoned a Magician and said to him: "You must devise for us some charm to be used against the Princess—and the worse it is the greater shall be your reward!"

With the words, "In one month your wish shall be fulfilled!" the Magician departed.

Before the four weeks were over, he appeared again in the castle of the King of Spain.

"Your Majesty, here is the charm!" he cried. "Give her this ring as a present, and when she has worn it on her finger for four-and-twenty hours, you shall see the effect!"

Now the two Kings consulted together as to how they should get the ring to the Princess. For they were no longer friendly with her parents, who would, consequently, become suspicious of any present sent by them. What was to be done?

"I have it! I have it!" the King of Spain cried, suddenly.

Then he disguised himself as a goldsmith, set out on a journey, and took up his position just opposite the palace where the Princess lived. The Queen noticed him from her window, and as she happened at that time to be wanting to buy some jewellery she sent for him. After she had bought from the stranger various bracelets, chains, and earrings, she said to her daughter:—

"And you will not choose anything among



all these fine things for yourself, little daughter?"

Then the Princess answered, "I see nothing especially beautiful among them."

Then the disguised King took the ring out of its case, which he had up to the present kept hidden, made it sparkle in the sun, and said: "Your Majesty, here is still a very rare jewel; this ring has not its equal in the world for beauty. And it does not please you?"

"Oh, how splendid! Oh, how beautifully it sparkles and gleams!" cried the Princess, entranced. "How much does it cost?"

"The ring has no price; I shall be contented with whatever you give me for it."

Then a great sum of money was paid to him, and he went his way. The Princess put the ring on her finger, and could not turn her eyes away from it, so charmed was she with its brilliancy. But four-and-twenty hours had not passed—it was just evening—when the poor girl uttered a terrible cry of anguish.

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" sounded through the whole palace.

The King, the Queen, and all the ladies of the Court ran, white with terror, and with candles in their hands, to see what had happened.

"Take away your candles! Take them away! Take them away!" cried the Princess, beside herself with despair. "Do you not see that I have turned into cotton-wool?"

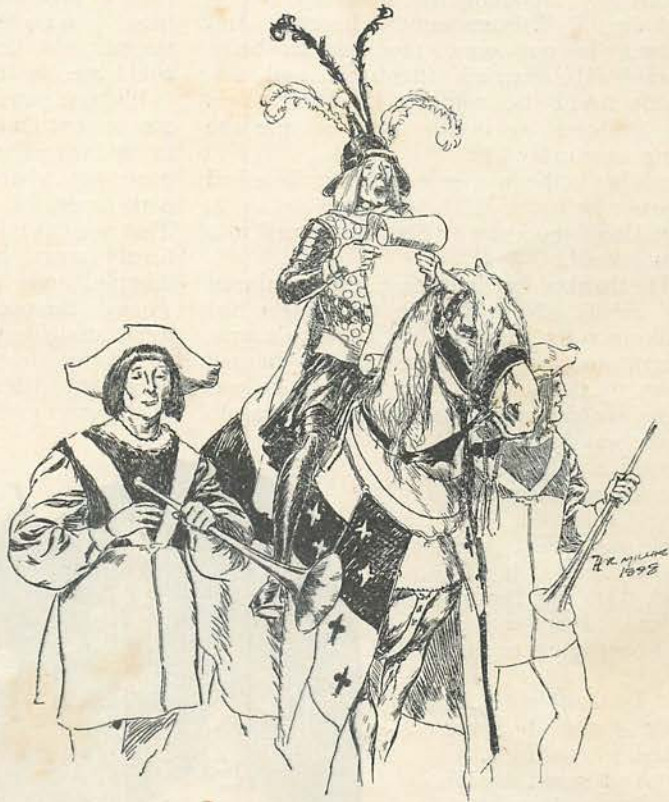
And her body had, indeed, suddenly changed into cotton-wool. The King and Queen were inconsolable at this terrible misfortune, and they at once summoned the wisest men of the kingdom to consult with them as to what was to be done in this extremity.

"Your Majesties," the councillors concluded, after long deliberation, "have it proclaimed in all countries that whoever restores your daughter may wed her."

And then messengers with drums and trumpets went round the whole kingdom and far beyond it, and proclaimed:—

"He who restores the Princess to health may become the King's son-in-law."

About this time there lived in a small town the son of a shoemaker. There was great want in his father's house, and one day, when not even a crust of bread re-



"THE PROCLAMATION."

mained, and both would have had to die of hunger, the son said, "Father, give me your blessing; I will go out into the world to seek my fortune."

"May Heaven be gracious to you, my son!" said the father, and the youth took his staff and set out on his journey.

He had already left the fields of his native district far behind him when he met a band of rough boys, who were making a fearful uproar and throwing stones at a toad to kill it.

"What harm has the poor animal done you? Is it not as much God's creature as you are? Let it live!" he exclaimed,



indignantly. But when he saw that the hard-hearted fellows paid no attention to his words and did not desist from their intention, he rushed angrily at them and gave one a sound box on the ears, and another a mighty punch in his ribs. The boys scattered in a tumult, and the toad quickly used the opportunity to slip into a hole in the wall.

Then the youth went farther and farther on his way. Suddenly the sound of trumpets and the roll of drums came to his ear. And listen! Is not some proclamation being made? He listened attentively and distinctly heard the words: "He who restores the Princess to health may become the King's son-in-law!"

"What is the matter with her?" he asked a passer-by.

"Don't you know? She has turned into cotton-wool."

He thanked his informant and continued his travels. Now, by the time night had sunk upon the earth, he had come to a great desert, and he determined to lay himself down to sleep. But how terrified he was when, on turning his head to look once again at the way he had come, he saw a tall, beautiful woman standing at his side.

He was about to spring quickly away when she said, "Do not be afraid of me. I am a Fairy, and have come to thank you."

"To thank me? And what for?" the youth asked, in confusion.

"You saved my life! My fate ordains that I shall be a toad by day and a fairy by night. Now, I am at your service."

"Good Fairy," then said the youth, "I have just heard of a Princess who has turned into cotton-wool, and whoever heals her may become her husband. Teach me how to restore her to health. That is my most ardent wish!"

Then the Fairy said, "Take this sword in your hand and walk

straight on until you come to a dense forest, full of snakes and wild animals. However, you must not be afraid of them, but must bravely continue your journey until you stand in front of the Magician's palace. As soon as you have reached it, knock three times at the great gate . . ." And she described to him fully what he was to do.

"If you ever need my help, come to this place at this same hour, and you will find me here!" and giving him her white hand in farewell, she disappeared before the youth could open his mouth to thank her.

Without pausing to consider, the cobbler's son set out and went straight on, according to his instructions. He had already gone a good way when his path led him into a dark forest, into the midst of wild animals. That was awful! They filled the air with fearful roars, gnashed their teeth blood-thirstily, and hungrily opened their jaws. Though the poor youth's heart thumped, he went straight on, making as if he did not notice them. At last he reached the Magician's palace, and knocked three times at the great gate.



"THE MAGICIAN, IN A GREAT FURY, RUSHED OUT."



Then a voice came from the interior of the castle: "Woe to you, rash stranger, who have the boldness to come to me! What is your wish?"

"If you really are the Magician, come out and fight with me!" cried the youth.

The Magician, in a great fury at this audacity, rushed out, armed to the teeth, to accept the challenge. But as soon as he saw the sword in the youth's hand, he broke out into pitiable lamentation, and, sinking trembling on to his knees, cried:—

"Oh, woe to me, unfortunate creature that I am! At least spare my life!"

Then the youth said: "If you will release the Princess from the spell your life shall be spared."

Then the Magician took a ring out of his pocket and said: "Take this ring and put it on the little finger of her left hand and she shall be well again."

Not a little rejoiced at the success of his journey, the youth hastened to the King and asked, just to satisfy himself of the truth of what he had been told: "Your Majesty, is it true that he who restores the Princess to health will be your son-in-law?"

"It is verily true!" the anxious King assured him.

"Well then, I am ready to accomplish the task!"

Then the poor Princess was brought in, and all the ladies of the Court, as well as the servants, stood round her to witness the miracle.

But no sooner had she put the ring on her little finger than she burst into bright flame and stood there, uttering heartrending cries. Everything was plunged into confusion, and the horrified youth seized the opportunity of escaping from the scene of the disaster as fast as his legs would carry him. His one wish was to get to the Fairy, and he did not

stop running until he had come to the place where he had seen her the first time.

"Fairy, where are you?" he cried, all in a tremble.

"I am at your service," was the answer.

Then he told the Fairy of the misfortune which had happened to him.

"You have allowed yourself to be deceived! Take this dagger and go again to the Magician. See that he does not fool you this time!"

Then she gave him all sorts of good advice for his dangerous journey and bestowed on him her blessing. Arrived at the great gate of the palace, he knocked three times. Then the Magician cried, as before: "Woe to you,

bold stranger! What is your wish?"

"If you are really the Magician, you are to fight with me!"

The Magician, armed to his teeth, came rushing out, in a rage. But when he saw the dagger he sank trembling on his knees, and begged piteously: "Oh, spare my life."

"Good-for-nothing Magician!" the youth cried, angrily; "you have deceived me! Now I will keep you in chains until the Princess is freed from the spell!"

Then he put him in chains, stuck the dagger into the earth, and fastened the chain to it so that the Magician could not move.

"You are mightier than I! Now I realize it!" cried the enchained Magician, gnashing his teeth. "Take the goldsmith's ring from the Princess's finger, and she will be released from the spell."

Not until the youth had learnt that the Princess had escaped with only a few burns on her hands, owing to the promptness of the bystanders in extinguishing the flames, did he summon up enough courage to appear before the King again.



"THE POOR PRINCESS BURST INTO FLAME."



"Your Majesty, I implore your pardon!" he said. "The treacherous Magician, not I, was the cause of the disaster. Now I have completely overcome him, and my remedy will succeed. I have only to draw the goldsmith's ring from your daughter's finger and she will be all right again."

And so it happened. As soon as the ring was taken off, the Princess at once changed back to what she had been before. But who would believe it to be possible? Her tongue, eyes, and ears were missing; they had been consumed by the flames! The youth's perplexity at this new disaster was indescribable. Again he applied to his guardian Fairy for help.

"You have let him make a fool of you a second time!" she said, again giving him advice, to help him towards the fulfilment of his wish of becoming the King's son-in-law.

When he came to the Magician he shouted at him: "You miserable deceiver! Now my patience is at an end! But eye for eye, tongue for tongue, ear for ear!"

With these words he seized the Magician to strangle him.

But the latter cried, in the utmost peril of death: "Have mercy! Have mercy! Let me live! Go to my sisters, who live a little farther back than this."

Then he gave him the necessary directions so that he might find the way there without delay, and also the magic word which he had to pronounce at the gate. After some hours he came to the gate of a palace, which was in every respect like that of the Magician. He knocked, and in answer to the question, "Who are you, and what do you want here?" He answered, "I want the little gold horn."

"I perceive that my brother has sent you to me. What does he want of me?"

"He wants a little piece of red cloth; he has torn a hole in his cloak."

"Here's a piece, and now get you gone from here!" a woman in the palace cried angrily, at the same time throwing into his opened hands a

little piece of red cloth, which she had cut in the shape of a tongue.

He journeyed on for several hours, and at last came to the foot of a high mountain. On a spur of rock was a castle, which looked exactly like that of the Magician. Then he knocked at the great gate, and a voice came from the interior, saying, "Who are you, and what is your desire?"

"I want the little gold hand."

"That's all right. I perceive that my brother has sent you. What does he want from me?"

"He wants two lentil-grains for soup."

"What rubbish! Here, take them and make yourself scarce!"

Then the owner of the castle threw him two little lentil-grains, wrapped in a piece of paper, and noisily closed the window.

At last he came to a wide plain, in the middle of which a castle exactly like the Magician's was built. When he knocked he was asked what he wanted, and answered: "I want the little gold foot."



"THE OWNER OF THE CASTLE THREW HIM TWO LITTLE LENTIL-GRAINS."



"Ah! my brother has sent you to me! And what does he wish from me?"

"He wishes you to send him two snails for his supper."

"Here they are, but now leave me in peace!" a woman called out, ungraciously, from the window, at the same time throwing him the two snails he desired.

Now the youth returned with the things he had collected to the Magician, and said: "Here I bring you what you wished for."

Then the Magician gave him all the necessary instructions as to the use of the three things. But when the youth turned his back to go away, the captive cried, imploringly, "And you are going to leave me lying here?"

"It would be no more than you deserve. However, I will release you. But woe betide you if you have deceived me again."

After the youth had released the Magician from his chains, he hurried away to appear before the Princess.

Opening her mouth, he put in it the little piece of red stuff which he had brought with him, and she at once had a tongue.

But the first words which came from her mouth were: "Miserable cobbler! Out of my sight! Begone!"

The poor youth was motionless with painful amazement, and said to himself: "This is once more the work of the faithless Magician."

But he would not let this bitter ingratitude prevent him from completing the good work. Then, taking the two little lentil-grains, he put them into the blind pupils of the girl's eyes, and at once she was able to see as before. But no sooner had she turned her eyes upon him than she covered her face with her hands and cried, scornfully, "Oh, how ugly mankind is! How horribly ugly!"

The poor youth's courage nearly vanished, and again he said to himself, "The worthless Magician has done this for me!"

But he would not allow himself to be put out. Taking the empty snail-shells from his pocket, he put them very skilfully where the girl's ears had once been, and behold! the Princess had back again her sweet little ears.

Then the youth turned to the King and said, "Your Majesty, now I am your son-in-law!"

But when the Princess heard these words she began to weep like a spoilt child, sobbing, "He called me a witch! He said I was an old witch!"

That was too much ingratitude for the poor youth. Without saying a word, he hurriedly left the castle, to seek out his Fairy.

"Fairy, where are you?" he cried, still trembling with anger and vexation.

"I am at your service."

Then he told her how shamefully he had been treated by the Princess, who was now restored to health.

The Fairy said, laughing: "You probably forgot to take the Magician's other ring from her little finger?"

"Oh, dear! I did not think of that in my confusion," exclaimed the youth, seizing his head between his two hands in mingled terror and shame.

"Now hasten and repair the mistake!" advised the Fairy.

Sooner than he had thought possible, he was standing in front of the Princess and drew the evil ring from her little finger. Then a lovely smile spread over her beautiful features, and she thanked him so sweetly and kindly that he became red with embarrassment.

Then the King said, solemnly: "This is your husband."

And the youth and the Princess embraced one another in the sight of all, and a few days afterwards the wedding was celebrated.