

A FAIRY TALE FOR CHILDREN.

FROM THE FRENCH.

BY CHARLES SMITH CHELTNAM.

What they had seen was, in truth, the shadowy form of Orientalla, a fairy, who had taken under her protection the Queen who was to succeed Cinderella, and to whom she purposed giving the little glass slipper which had brought so much good fortune and happiness to her predecessor. As soon as the affrighted servants were all out of the room she opened a splendid coffer that stood near the bed, and soon found what she was seeking—the beautiful little fairy slipper of glass which Cinderella had dropped from her foot when escaping from the ball at which the charming young Prince had fallen in love with her, and by the aid of which he was enabled to recover her and make her his wife.

But, by some unaccountable lapse of memory, the fairy Orientalla had forgotten that the Princess she wished to favour had feet far too large to be contained in Cinderella's tiny slipper, and she was extremely vexed with herself for her oversight. She determined, however, that the trouble she had taken should not be fruitless, and at once set off to scour the world in search of somebody, Princess or peasant, whom the slipper would fit.

East, west, north, and south she journeyed during a whole year, exploring even China unsuccessfully, though there, as everybody knows, ladies' feet are made small, because a tiny foot is regarded as an essential to beauty.

YEARS and years after the charming young Prince married Cinderella his father died, and he became King and she Queen, and the two reigned long and happily, her first sorrow coming upon her when he, too, died. Nothing could induce her to marry again, and she lived to be very, very old—so old that all who knew of her wonderful adventure with the little glass slipper had either become too old to remember it, or were no longer living. And then, at last, it came to be her turn to die.

Something occurred at the moment of her death which spread alarm through the palace. Hovering about her bed, a dark and vaporous figure was seen. Those who should have watched by her side through the night fled from the room in terror, to gather together in a remote part of the building to talk of the phantom, as they conceived it to be, that was haunting the chamber of their departed mistress.

At last she grew so tired of her vain search that she took her way back home. She was quite disheartened and felt almost inclined to destroy the glass slipper as no longer of any use; in fact, she was only restrained from doing it by the reflection that such a proceeding would have been nothing else than an admission of her weakness as a fairy.

One day, as she was going to see the new Queen, whom, of course, she had no reason for neglecting, she noticed, on the side of a grassy hill, not very far from the palace, a small cottage, sheltered from the winter winds and rain by the wide-spreading boughs of some very aged oaks—the dwelling-place of a poor girl of fifteen, who had neither mother nor father and lived there quite alone. She was very pretty and modest, was this poor girl, and passed her time in spinning flax, which she cultivated and prepared with her own little brown hands—rising with the dawn and going to bed as soon as the evening star, after casting on her a friendly look, said “Good night” to her through her rose-garlanded casement.

She associated very little with girls of her own age, rarely quitting her cottage—indeed, was hardly ever seen abroad, if it was not at the village fountain. It was not because she was ashamed to show her face that she led this retired life; for not a girl in all the country round was prettier than she, with her eyes the colour of the summer sky, and her hair in which the sun seemed to have lost some of his golden rays.

As Orientalla approached the cottage she was seized with intense thirst, for the day was hot and the hill steep from which she had descended. On the threshold of the little house she found its little mis-

stress—“Susanne of the Poppy-fields,” as she had come to be called, because, in the season when the fields in front of her home were scarlet with the glowing hues of that gorgeous flower, she loved to be in the midst of them, clothed as it were in their splendour.

“Can you give me something to quench my thirst, my dear?” asked the fairy.

“I have no water that is quite fresh, for I have not yet been to fill my pails at the fountain, my good woman,” replied Susanne; “but if you will come with me into my little fruit-garden I will pluck for you the most beautiful peach that ever grew on an espalier.”

“Oh, yes, I will come with you,” said the fairy, resting on her little guide’s arm—for she had made herself to appear quite like a very old and infirm woman that day. “Your fruit-garden is a very small one, my dear,” she added, on reaching it.

“It’s large enough for me, as there’s nobody else here to eat the fruit that grows in it,” Susanne said, cheerfully.

“But you have only one peach hanging on your tree!”

“To that you are quite welcome,” replied Susanne, plucking the juicy fruit and holding it to the fairy’s mouth.

Never did lips taste a more delicious peach. The fairy ate it with delight, promising herself to pay for it with more than its weight in gold; but no thought of staying at the cottage to try on the glass slipper entered her mind until, with the passing of a light gust of wind, she suddenly caught sight of Susanne’s foot—a foot of ideal grace—the foot of a peri—the foot of a fairy: the foot of a second Cinderella!

Throwing herself on her knees on the grass, she produced the little glass slipper from her pocket with



H. K. H. 1900

"SHE PLACED THE SLIPPER ON SUSANNE'S TINY FOOT."

one hand and with the other placed the slipper on Susanne's tiny foot. The slipper fitted it as perfectly as if it had been made for it!

"My pretty maiden," she said, "keep this little shoe, and every year, on the return of this day, if you put it on, thinking of me, every wish of yours shall be gratified all through that day."

Saying that, the fairy kissed her on the forehead and disappeared, leaving her in doubt as to whether all she had heard and seen was more than a dream. But when she looked down at her feet and saw on one of them the beautiful little slipper she ceased to doubt, and walked about her fruit-garden thinking—thinking of what she could desire to have.

"I know," she said to herself, at last. "I wish I had a pretty ribbon to tie up my hair."

She had hardly done speaking ere a beautiful poppy-coloured ribbon fell upon her arm. Delighted, she hurried indoors and bound up her golden-hued hair with it; but when she had done this, and saw the effect it produced, she said, sadly:—

"I look better with a rose from my garden or some poppies from the hill-side. I should have done more wisely to have wished for something more useful—a cow, for instance, to stand in my empty stable."

Turning her eyes to the window as she spoke, what was her astonishment at seeing the most beautiful cow imaginable, with silky coat and great, soft velvet eyes, cropping the green sprays of the creepers that covered the front of her cottage! She hastened to receive her guest—the best cow in the world—and, talking kindly to it and caressing its shining neck, led it gently to its stall.

"But, dear me!" she meditated, "now that I have a cow, I ought to have a big field of clover for it to feed in."

And the wished-for field of clover, all green and rose, lay stretched in the sunlight before her.

"Oh, it's enchantment!" she cried, clapping her hands with delight. "How happy I shall be when, little by little, with the sale of the milk of my beautiful cow, I am able to buy myself a shelf-ful of pretty painted plates and dishes, to ornament my dresser, and some nice linen, smelling of lavender, to fill my wardrobe, and frocks of many colours to go

to church in on Sundays and to dance in of an evening at fair-time. And when my backyard is filled with fowls and ducks and pigeons I shall feel as proud—as much a Queen—as the farmer's wife of Bois-au-Loup! And when my friend Jacques, the school-master's son, comes to see me in the midst of all this, shall I not be the happiest girl in the world?"

Wonder upon wonder! On going back into her cottage she found the shelves of her dresser laden with beautiful Delft-ware and



"WONDER UPON WONDER!"

dishes and plate of glittering pewter. Her wardrobe was filled with sweet-smelling linen and dresses of every sort for all times and seasons.

While she was examining her treasures she was attracted by unusual sounds at the back of her house—to discover there a crowd of fowls of all kinds, clucking and quacking their astonishment at finding themselves so suddenly brought together! She called them about her with petting cries and

scattered handfuls of barley amongst them.

At the same moment her friend Jacques, the schoolmaster's son—who was making holiday—appeared, having come to enjoy a pleasant chat with her; that being his idea of spending his holiday in the most agreeable way possible. He was a very sensible as well as a learned youth—and one of the best-hearted in the world, into the bargain; but all his learning, added to all his other good qualities, did not prevent him from being dumfounded by the sight that met his eyes. Wholly bewildered and just a little alarmed, he hesitatingly asked her the meaning of the great change that had come to her.

"All has come from the good fairy!" she cried, falling on her knees in gratitude.

And then she spent all the rest of that, to her, most precious day in relating to him the circumstances of the fairy's visit, and all that had come of it.

"Heavens!" she cried, at last, on seeing the sun go down, "you have made me forget! One year must pass now before I can get anything more I may wish to have!"

"Well," he said, after a moment's consideration, "I don't know what more you can want."

On thinking over all that had come to her she clearly saw that she already had a hundred times more than she had ever, before that day, dreamed of possessing.

"Nothing is worth having that does not bring us happiness we have not, or that does not add to happiness we already possess," said her friend Jacques, who was wise beyond his years. "Contentment is better worth having than millions," he added, "and he who wishes for nothing more than he has got is as rich as a King."

The year passed delightfully for her, all her thoughts given to the smiling task of deserving the happiness promised by her friend Jacques.

When the anniversary of the good fairy's eventful visit came round, as soon as it was dawn she earnestly prayed to Heaven to inspire her, so that she might not express any but good wishes. Jacques, who had read many, many books, had told her about wonderful countries that daring travellers had explored or discovered, and of amazing sights and adventures that had rewarded them. And sometimes, in the excitement which the recital of these

things caused him, he had been prompted to exclaim:—

"Ah! travellers have great advantages over us home-stayers!"

"Yes!" she cried, sharing his enthusiasm, "I should like to travel and see some of the wonderful sights about which you have told me—great cities, thronged with people, mountains so high that they touch the sky, forests filled with birds that flash in the air like flowers with wings!"

Hardly were the words out of her lips than she was suddenly carried away into space by a multitude of tiny-winged fairies and laughing elves, who promised her a thousand joys only known to travellers and never thought of by her. So sudden was her carrying off that she had not time to put on either her hat or cape. She even let her Cinderella slipper fall from her foot; but her attendant elves picked it up and brought it with her, respectfully packed in a magnolia-blossom, which held it nicely.

First of all she was taken to see all the chief cities of the world, where, naturally,



"SHE WAS TAKEN TO SEE ALL THE CHIEF CITIES OF THE WORLD."

everything appeared marvellous to her inexperienced eyes ; but she speedily grew oppressed — and just a little frightened, perhaps—by the hurry and noise with which the life of the crowding populations was carried on, so different from the peaceful methods of living with which only she had till then been acquainted.

So she desired to be taken elsewhere ; and, in a breathing-space of time, her fairy attendants transported her to China, to India, to Africa, as she changed her wishes. But her impressions of these lands were not, upon the whole, delightful—the peoples she saw in them for the most part repelled and terrified her ; and, as the sun declined, she was overtaken by an unendurable dread of finding herself at night in some dark, fear-inspiring part of the world, and, with all her heart, wished herself safe back in her own secure cottage. In a moment she found herself there !

“ Ah ! ” she said, “ when this day which I have so stupidly wasted comes round again I shall know better than to wish to be taken so far from my pleasant little home.”

Jacques, as I have said, was wise beyond his years, but his experience of life did not go beyond that of the villagers amongst whom he had lived from the hour of his birth ; hence he was led, quite naturally, to accept the general belief that the expressions “ Happy as a King,” “ Happy as a Queen,” were perfectly correct ; and Susanne believed it as much as he.

So, when the next day for wishing arrived the wish she formed was to be made a Queen, with Jacques to be with her as King, though she hardly expected it to be realized.

Realized her wish was, however, and instantly she found herself with Jacques, both crowned monarchs, on a splendid double throne in the midst of a resplendent Court—crowned, not with fresh-gathered roses



or daisies, but with heavy diadems of gold and glittering jewels that weighed oppressively upon their brows.

Susanne's first experience of Court life was the passing of two hours in being dressed by twenty ladies, who wrangled all the time over their rights to do this or that portion of the dressing, and all wanting to make out that she owed her beauty entirely to their taste and skill. Whether it was to make her look better, or to make her look less well, she could not discover—she was made to wear a trained dress that entirely hid her pretty feet and caused her infinite discomfort by squeezing her waist. Then her arms were so loaded with jewellery as to prevent her raising either of her hands to her head; while she who was used only to smell the scents of the fields—of wild thyme, sweetbrier, or lavender—was so drenched with perfumes as to make her almost faint.

When she asked to see her friend Jacques she was told that he was presiding at a council of Ministers, or giving audience to foreign Ambassadors, or otherwise engaged in State affairs.

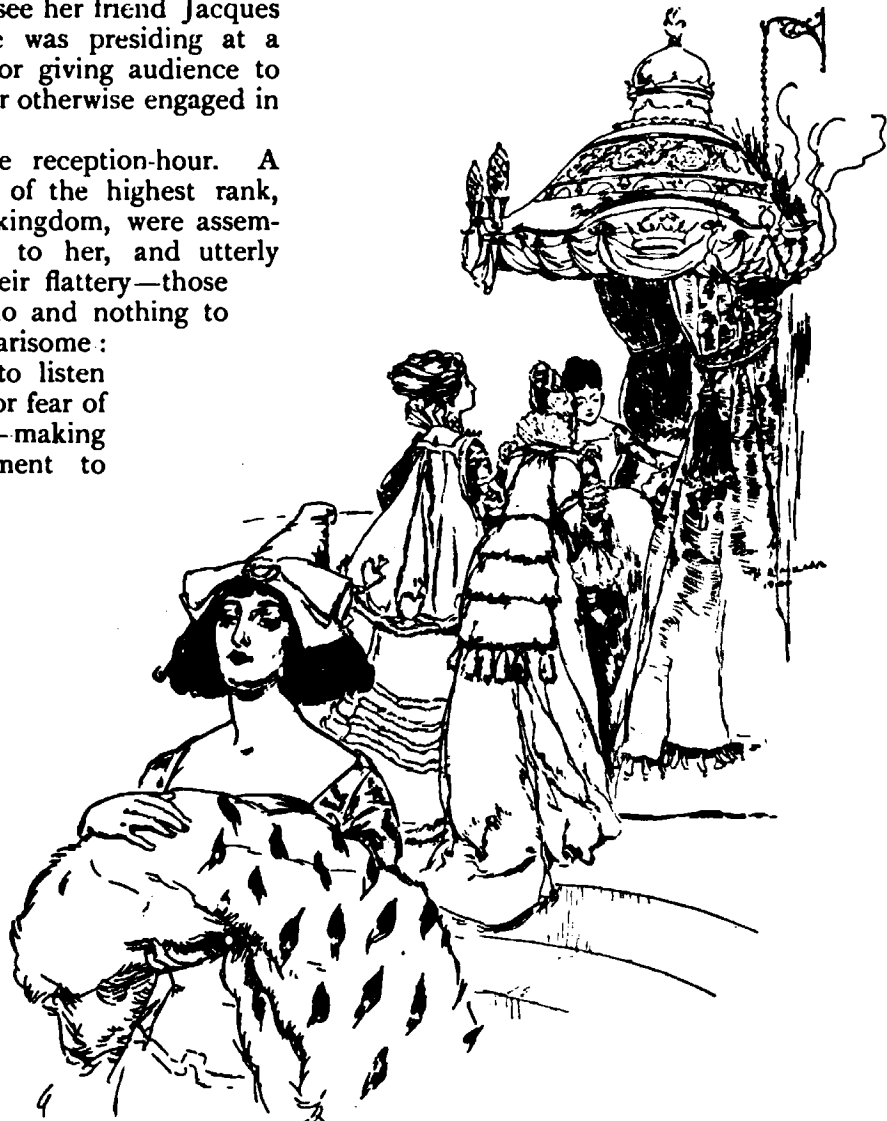
At length came the reception-hour. A crowd of her subjects of the highest rank, from all parts of the kingdom, were assembled to pay homage to her, and utterly bewildered her by their flattery—those who had nothing to do and nothing to say being the most wearisome: and to all she had to listen and smile graciously, for fear of giving them offence—making promises of advancement to some who had no need of any more than they already possessed, and doing nothing for others who needed all the assistance they could get.

It was past six o'clock before Jacques could come to see her—by which time she had been thrice dressed and re-dressed; but, even then, he had barely time to kiss the tips of her fingers before he, too, was hurried away, to be got into another suit of clothes to dine in.

At the gorgeous dinner-table there was a great crowd, but neither gaiety nor charm. Seated far apart, both Susanne and Jacques were obliged to say to their neighbours what they did not think, and listen to what they did not want to hear. It was a real punishment, and not the first or last they had to endure.

After dinner there was an official reception, at which the chief talk referred to rumours of war and rebellion—terrifying to both Susanne and Jacques. What was worse was that the rumours were well-founded, and it was not long before Susanne learned that everybody in her kingdom was discontented—even the Queen.

"Ah," she sighed, as she lay down in a magnificent bed, raised upon a dais of gold and hung with velvet curtains lined with satin, "why cannot I go to rest on my rustic bed of sweet-smelling broom-twigs?"



"SHE LAY DOWN IN A MAGNIFICENT BED."

But her sigh was uttered too late, and she could do nothing but resign herself to bear her troubles as well as she could during the year that was before her.

A terrible year for her it proved to be, every day of it filled with mortifications and disappointments—the crown she was compelled to wear, a veritable crown of thorns!

She had to witness with terror three or four rebellions of a starving people. She was forced to sell her jewels to pay the cost of a foreign war. She trembled every hour for the life of Jacques; for she had learned that, in a kingdom such as hers, there is always in the mind of the people an insane idea that when the King is assassinated or driven out of his country the people have nothing more to do than to cross their arms to earn their living.

Poor Susanne had to the full realized the vanity of human wishes, and that being "happy as a King" was nothing but the idle notion of poor, ignorant people, who think that if they were only richer everything in the world would be delightful to them. As to her golden crown, it so fretted her forehead that she would joyfully have given twenty such, had she had them, for one made of roses out of her own little garden, or for a circlet of the wild poppies that made the fields so gay on which her cottage window looked out in the bright summer-time.

So she counted every day—every day—till the happy one arrived when she could break away from the oppressive grandeur of her queenly state, by once more wishing for something she had not. At the first gleam of dawn she sprang from her great, unrestful bed, and raising her little glass slipper to her lips, kissed it with all her heart before putting it on her foot. And then she wished, with a longing more intense than she had ever felt before:—

"Oh, that I were, once more, in my lovely cottage on the hill-side with my friend Jacques to come and talk with me as often

as he is able—and my beautiful cow—and my yardful of pretty fowls and ducks and pigeons—my gay field of sweet-smelling clover—my flowers and my fruits—my vine and my bubbling spring!—there only I wish to be a queen!"

In a moment her wish was realized, and she found herself in the midst of the only happiness which, she now knew, was worth having, her brow invisibly circled by the only diadem of abiding brightness in the world—contentment. Then Jacques, who had been transported home with her, said:—

"What a fine school we've been in. Its teaching is a vast deal more instructive than any to be had at my father's, though his is the best in all the country. I had always been wanting to see the world, as it is called, and I've seen it. A lot of things I didn't know a year ago I now know better than I could have learned them from books—that grandeur is oftener pleasanter to see than to bear; that the cottage in which one is happy is better than the palace in which one is miserable. So, I am sure, I can ask for no greater good fortune than to be permitted to live quietly here in my village with you, my beautiful Susanne."

"Oh, how happy I am to see you so wise," she cried, throwing her arms about his neck.

"I congratulate you, my dear children," said the fairy Orientalla, appearing to them at that moment. "You could not possibly have better used the power I gave you. Cinderella's slipper, for which you have now no further need, I take back for the use of others, who probably will not get so much good from it as you have derived."

In all the country round there was not a soul who did not rejoice in the happiness of Susanne and Jacques when their wedding-day came; telling plainly of the esteem in which they were held by all who knew them, including even the girl with the largest feet in the village.