



A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

By AMY F. CACKETT

ONCE upon a time (that always means a very long time ago) there lived some people who ought to have been very, very happy. They had everything to make them glad and joyful—a lovely, smiling country with an abundance of fruit and flowers, rich houses and raiment, and beautiful children. Yet they were always mourning and always sad, for there was an awful curse over their land.

In the very midst of the country was a huge, black forest, in the middle of the forest was a great castle, and inside the castle dwelt an ogre who had a dreadful power over them. Whenever he came amongst them he played some wonderful music on a flute, and as soon as he piped all the people of the country became as stone, unable to move hand or foot.

But if the ogre beckoned to any of them they had to follow him. They could not help doing so; as soon as his finger pointed the way they moved towards him as if drawn by cords. Whoever followed him went into his castle and was never heard of any more.

And so these people who ought to have been so happy were always sad, for the ogre had lured away many of their most beautiful maidens.

As soon as the music passed out of their

hearing anyone was free to follow; but nobody had ever been brave enough to do so, for at the entrance to the forest which surrounded the castle an awful monster with many heads and eyes of fire was stationed.

Tradition said that if you succeeded in passing it you only lost your life in the forest, which was pitch dark, for the trees closed up and crushed you as you tried to pass. And, even if you did get past the dragon and through the forest, the castle was guarded by bad spirits who would not let you enter. These dangers took away all the courage of the people, and they did nothing but weep for those taken from them.

Ruling over this land was a lovely Princess called Vilette, whose father and mother had died when she was quite young. And as the years went by she grew more and more beautiful, and the people loved her very much, but were always afraid that she might be taken from them by the dreadful ogre.

Vilette had recently been betrothed to a Prince named Boldheart, who lived in another country a long way off. The people loved him, too, and when he married Vilette they were to be crowned King and Queen.

Boldheart left his country so as to stay near Vilette and watch over her. He would never let her go outside the palace grounds, for he feared that the ogre might see her, and he had sworn that if ever she was lured away to the castle he would brave all the dangers and attempt to rescue her. But the people only smiled and prayed that he might not be put to the test, for many of them had sworn

the same vow, but no one had ever passed the terrible dragon at the entrance to the forest.

One day, after he had been out hunting, as Boldheart was getting near the palace he heard the dreaded music and at once became as if chained to the earth. His heart sank within him, for the music came from the palace, and a moment afterwards he saw his lovely Princess being led away to her awful doom. For everyone was quite sure that the fate of those who went within the castle must be awful. His rage and horror were useless, as he could neither move nor speak.

As soon as the music had passed away and he was free he rushed to the palace to prepare to keep his vow and endeavour to rescue his beloved Princess. The people all flocked around him to try to dissuade him by telling him that they would not only lose their Princess, but him also. They begged him to listen to them and to stay and rule over them. But he would not listen; he could not live without his beautiful Princess, he said.

So he entered the palace to prepare himself. He buckled on his sword and armour; but his great dread was of the mystic music. Of what use was his good sword and all his courage if he should hear that and be rendered powerless and unable to move? He rushed out of the palace so that his misgivings should not make a coward of him.

Outside the people stopped him and brought to him a strange old man who had asked to see the Prince. The old man was

all red—long red beard and hair, rich ruddy skin, and long flowing red robes. He made everything look quite bright and cheerful. He said his name was Encourage, and that he had come from afar to try to help these people. He told Boldheart that he would give him

a phial which contained a liquid, and if he was a really brave man it would make him impervious to the influence of the music. But if he was a coward at heart it would be of no use to him whatever.

Boldheart asked him why he had not given this liquid to others, and the old man replied sadly that he had given it to many, but that they must have been weak-hearted, because it had never done any of them any good. Boldheart took the phial gladly. Then the people sorrowfully wished him good-bye, but none dared to follow him.

When he reached the place where the dragon stood his heart sank, for the monster was truly terrible to look at with its many heads and flaming eyes. He stepped back afraid, and as he did so the monster became bigger and fiercer than ever.

Poor Boldheart felt that he could never kill that awful thing, so he sat down and looked at it and wept. The more he looked and wept the bigger and bigger grew the monster. It made no attempt to touch him, it only grew, and grew, and grew, becoming more dreadful every moment, glowing with angry fire from every point, so



"HE SAW HIS LOVELY PRINCESS BEING LED AWAY TO HER AWFUL DOOM."

that Boldheart could feel the heat even from afar off, and snorting so loudly that it shook the earth on which the Prince stood.

At last Boldheart remembered his vow. He sprang up and cried, "Is this how you love your Princess? Coward! you can but die, as she will surely do if you do not rescue her."

His eyes flashed and he looked brave once more as he turned to the monster with defiance. And then he fancied it did not look quite so big.

"Either I get past you, or you shall kill me," he shouted.

As he said that the monster certainly became smaller.

Boldheart grasped his sword and ran towards the dragon, and at every step he took the monster became smaller and smaller and smaller, until at last,



"BOLDHEART GRASPED HIS SWORD AND RAN TOWARDS THE DRAGON."

when Boldheart was quite near it and struck at it with his sword, the beast had become so tiny that he had not the heart to kill it. So he walked by it and entered the great dark forest.

After he had gone a few yards everything became black, blacker even than the darkest night or a blackbird's wing. The Prince could find no path, and at every step he stumbled and bruised himself against the trees and tore himself amongst the thickly-tangled brambles. The more he tried to pass, the closer the brambles twined round his feet. He struggled and struggled, but could not move.

Boldheart felt that he would never reach

the castle and his Princess at this pace. He must think of a better way. As soon as he thought a thought the whole wood became quite light and the brambles cleared before him. You see, it was one of those bright, luminous thoughts, and they do light up tangled ways. Boldheart rejoiced and thought and thought, until a clear, straight path was before him, which he hoped would lead to the castle. He went quickly along it, sword in hand, so as to be strong against sudden danger.

As he strode along a sweet fragrance filled the air. The path led on and on; and the farther he went the more scent-laden became the atmosphere, until at last he reached a lovely scene.

Before him lay a beautiful blue lake with the most wonderful flowers growing everywhere out of it, and right in the middle rose the gabled and turreted castle, looking a mighty stronghold as the sun shone upon it.

Boldheart paused to admire the scene and to inhale the languorous perfume in the air. He had never seen flowers growing out of the water like that before, and

they were such wonderful flowers too, all of them being nearly as tall as he was. They all had their heads bent one way, as if asleep or listening to something.

He put out his hand to bend one towards him, so as to find out if the fragrance came from them. To his astonishment, instead of meeting the soft, yielding stem of a flower, his fingers felt a hard substance like wood, which resisted all his efforts to try and bend it.

Then Boldheart knew that the gentle flowers heard the cruel music, and he pitied them, and was glad to think that he was strong against it. The thought of the music

reminded him of his Princess, whom he had forgotten for a moment. He told himself that he must not tarry, but he felt strangely tired and sleepy.

He walked round and round the lake, trying to find a way across, but no way could he find. Then he prepared to swim to the castle and leapt into the water. But when he tried to swim he found that he could not move his limbs. The water seemed so heavy, and although he tried hard to keep above it he was sinking fast and the heavy fragrance was taking away his senses.

He roused himself to another effort, and with much difficulty he struggled back to the bank. When he recovered his strength and his senses somewhat he found that he carried the heavy scent about with him, and then he discovered that the lake threw off the perfume into the air, and that the longer he stayed under its influence the weaker he became.

Boldheart tried to think how he could cross the lake, but his senses were so dulled that the thought was not a bright, path-clearing one. It only told him to cut down some of the flowers and bind them together, so that he could float on them to the other side.

He drew out his sword and slashed those nearest him. Then he dropped it quickly, for as he cut the stems of the flowers they quivered and bled rich, warm blood. A shudder that shook the air ran through all

the other flowers, as those he had cut down lay writhing on the bank.

The poor Prince's spirits sank with horror. He looked at the flowers, and as he looked they seemed almost to take human shape. He would have to cut down many to make his raft. Could he spill blood like that, even to save his Princess? It seemed rather a coward's way to cut down the harmless flowers. But what else could he do? So he shut his eyes and went forward once more, sword in hand.

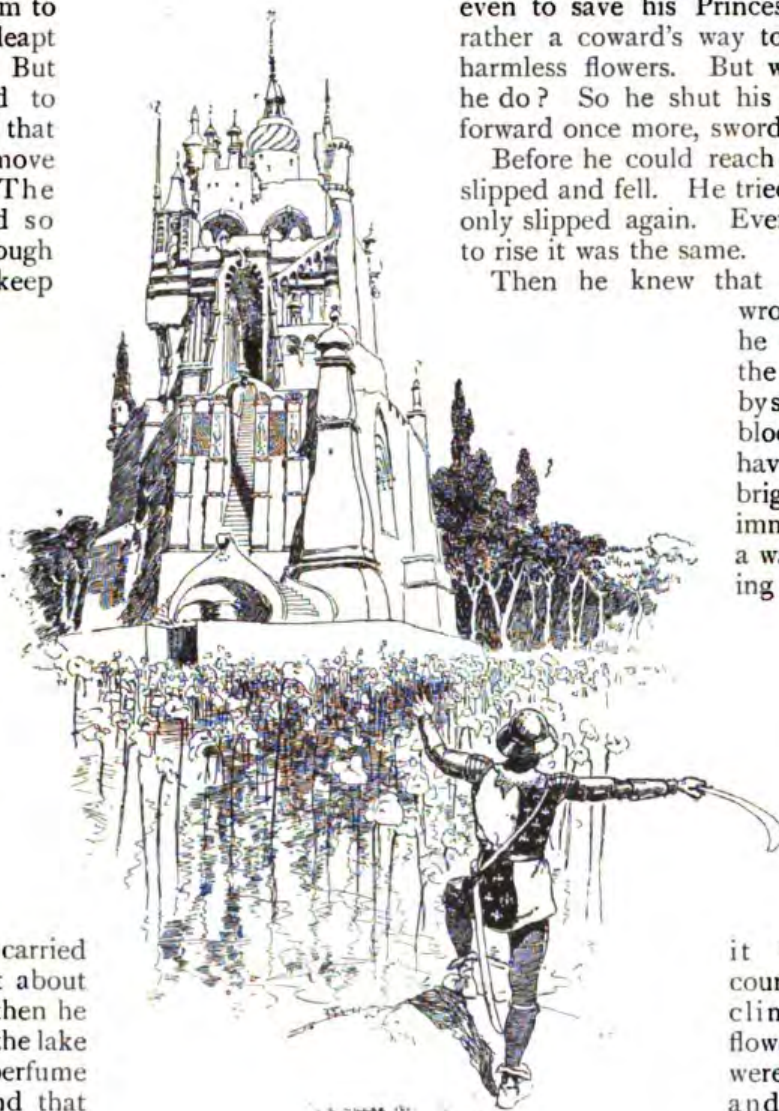
Before he could reach the flowers he slipped and fell. He tried to get up, but only slipped again. Every time he tried to rise it was the same.

Then he knew that he had acted wrongly, and that he could not win the crown of victory by spilling innocent blood. That must have been another bright thought, for immediately he saw a way of overcoming his difficulty, and then he found that he had left the slippery place and was able to get to his feet.

Why had he not thought of it before? Of course he could climb over the flowers. The stems were stiff like trees and would bear him.

So he removed his slippery boots and climbed on to the nearest flower. Then he sprang lightly from flower to flower, going as gently as possible, so as not to hurt them. Sometimes he forgot and tried to hurry. When he did that he was sure to slip and be in danger of falling into the drugged lake.

The Prince was becoming very weary when he reached the last flower, and he sat down upon it, for his feet were very sore, and the jump down into the courtyard of the castle looked very deep. As soon as he sat down and thought about the depth it began to get



"HE DREW OUT HIS SWORD AND SLASHED THOSE NEAREST HIM."

deeper and deeper, and the more he thought about his sore feet the more painful they became.

Boldheart remembered the dragon.

"This will never do," he exclaimed, and he did not look any more, but flung himself down from the top of the flower.

When his feet touched the ground there was a great shock like an earthquake, and for a moment he lay stunned. Then he rose and turned to look at the mighty castle. To his wonder and amazement he saw that it was rocking from side to side.

Boldheart rushed to the massive doors and beat at them with his sword. As he did so they fell in, and Boldheart ran back as the whole castle tottered and then fell with a mighty crash. It was only a cowards' castle made strong by cowards' imaginations, and it could not stand before the attack of a brave man.

When Boldheart recovered from the shock he went wildly among the ruins in search of his Princess. But nowhere could he see her. Crushed in the ruin of his castle, with the magic flute at his feet, the Prince discovered the evil ogre. He picked up the flute and went on vainly searching for his Princess, but at last, when he was sure that she was not there, he turned sadly away.

He was so sorrowful that he hung his head so as not to see the bright sun and the lovely flowers; but he had scarcely left the ruins when he felt soft arms around him and a warm kiss on his brow. He looked up quickly and found that he was in the midst of a number of beautiful maidens, and beside him was his own Princess.

He gazed around in wonderment, and then he noticed that all the flowers had gone. Boldheart then looked at the maidens again, and he saw many faces that he knew, for they were the long-mourned daughters and sweethearts whom the ogre had enticed away by his music.

There was great rejoicing when they all



"HE SAW MANY FACES THAT HE KNEW."

returned to the town. But the men also felt great shame, for they knew now that all their troubles had been of their own making because they had been too cowardly to fight against them.

The next day Prince Boldheart was married to Princess Villette. And then they took the magic flute and burnt it on the ruins of the castle. As it burnt a huge stone statue arose out of the ruins, and there it stands to this day.

The dragon (whose name, by the way, was Trouble-and-Care) they never quite got rid of. But when he appeared and they went to fight him he always ran away, so that they could not kill him.

He did not trouble them much, however, and at any rate he did not keep them from being very happy in their lovely land, now that the ogre and his magic flute had gone.