

A STORY FOR CHILDREN.

BY MARGARET MAITLAND.



ONCE upon a time a King, on his death-bed, sent for his two sons and said to them: "My sons, promise me one thing before I die. Your sister, whom you have never seen, is shut up in a tower, and you must promise never to let her out of it. The day she was born your mother and I put her there, because we were warned she would bring trouble on her brothers."

But, having said this, the King died so quickly that his sons had no time to promise him anything. And directly he died all the great men in the kingdom assembled round the new King and put the crown on his head, and clothed him in the Royal purple mantle sparkling with diamond stars and moons and suns, and cried, "Long live our King."

No sooner was this ceremony ended than the two brothers, who were in the greatest hurry to see their sister, ran to the tower,

which had neither door nor stairs, so they jumped into the big basket fastened to a pulley, in which provisions were hoisted up, and went straight to the Princess Rosetta's chamber. She and her little dog Frettillo were sitting there, and the Princess was embroidering a beautiful brocade, but she threw down her work the moment she saw the King in his Royal robes and crown, and, falling at his feet, besought him to let her out of her prison.

"That's just what we've come here for," cried both the brothers together. "We are going to take you away with us and find you a husband and make you happy for ever."

And though there was very little room in the big basket for a King in his Royal mantle and a Prince and Princess and a little dog as well, they all loved each other too much already to bear parting, even for a few minutes, so somehow or other they squeezed in and went down all together.

The tower was in a fine garden, and when

the Princess saw flowers and fruit and fountains, for the first time in her life, she was delighted, and ran hither and thither picking things and playing with Frettillo, who barked and frisked round her as happy as she was. He was a very odd-looking little dog, for he was green and had only one ear, but he was so clever and good-tempered that no one could help loving him.

Presently he ran ahead of his mistress into a wood, and she went after him, and there she saw a peacock with his tail spread out in a huge circle behind him. And he was so handsome that she stood stock-still looking at him until her brothers found her, and then she pointed at the peacock and said:—

“What is it?”

“A peacock,” they answered; “a bird that is served at Royal tables on great feast days.”

“What,” cried Rosetta, “people are wicked enough to kill—to eat such a creature? I for my part vow that I will have no husband but the King of the Peacocks, and he shall pass a law that he who kills or eats a peacock shall die!”

“But, dearest sister,” said her brothers, “where shall we go to find you such a husband? We know neither who he is nor where he lives.”

The Princess did not know either; so she said: “All that kind of thing I leave entirely to your Majesty. But I will marry no one else.”

Then the Princes and their sister and Frettillo and the peacock (whom Rosetta refused to leave) all went to the palace, and the peacock and Frettillo had quarters in the Princess's own room.

All the Court came, of course, to pay her their respects, and the great ladies brought her sugar-plums and tarts and gowns and ribbons, and shoes embroidered with precious stones; and her manners to everyone were so gracious, and she curtsied so politely when thanking people, that the whole kingdom rang with her praises.

But all this time her poor brothers were in great trouble, not knowing in the very least where to turn their steps to find the King of the Peacocks. But they agreed that the first thing to do was to have Rosetta's portrait painted to take with them, and the artist made such a perfect picture of her, that could it but have talked it would have been the Princess herself.

“Good-bye, sister,” they said to her; “since you will have no husband but the King of the Peacocks, we will travel all over the world to look for him. If we find him it will make

us very glad, and meantime you must govern the kingdom well.”

Rosetta thanked them and promised to do what they asked, and said that her only pleasure, while they were away, would be in looking at her peacock and playing with Frettillo.

The two Princes asked everyone they met the same question: “Can you tell us where His Majesty the King of the Peacocks lives?” And everyone answered “No, no.” So on and on they travelled until, at last, they got so far away that never had anyone been so far before.

And one fine day they came to the kingdom of cockchafers, where there were shoals and shoals of cockchafers, all buzzing, and buzzing, and making such a noise that the poor King nearly went deaf. But one cockchafer looked rather wiser than the rest, and him the King asked if he could tell him where to find the King of the Peacocks.

“Sire,” said the cockchafer, “his kingdom is thirty thousand miles from here, and you have, unfortunately, come a roundabout way to look for it.”

“And how do you know that?” asked His Majesty.

“Because we know your Majesty very well indeed,” said the cockchafer. “Every year we pay your gardens a visit, and spend three or four months there.”

On hearing this the King and his brother felt, at once, that they were among old friends, and they made themselves quite at home with the company and visited all the sights of the kingdom. The smallest little leaf is a curiosity there and worth a great deal of money.

The two Princes now knew the direction to take, so they started on their travels again in much better spirits, and it was not so very long before they found the country they were looking for. They knew, at once, that it was the right place, because on every branch of every tree was perched a peacock, and for miles round they could be heard calling and screaming to one another.

“What shall we do, brother,” said the King, “if His Majesty turns out to be a peacock himself? Our sister cannot possibly marry him in that case!”

The Prince was quite as much troubled as his brother by this dreadful idea.

“It is most unfortunate,” he replied, “that she ever took this strange fancy into her head. I can't imagine how she could ever have guessed that there was any such a King in the world.”

But when they arrived at the chief town in the kingdom they found the inhabitants were real men and women, just like other people, but all dressed in peacock feathers, and wherever peacock feathers could be stuck for ornament, there they were.

The King himself the Princes met, driving in his golden chariot studded with brilliants, and drawn by twelve magnificent and very fleet peacocks; and he was so handsome that they were delighted with him. His hair was fair and curly and his complexion like white marble, and on his head he wore a crown of woven peacock feathers.

He saw the Princes, and knowing by their

picture is the portrait of our sister, the Princess Rosetta. We have travelled all the way to your kingdom to ask you if you would like to marry her. She is good as well as beautiful, and we will give her a sack full of gold for her dowry."

"Very well," said the King of the Peacocks. "I am quite willing to marry her. I love her very much, indeed, and will give her everything she wants. But I am determined you shall not cheat me about her beauty, and I warn you that, if in the very least thing she is less beautiful than her portrait, I will have you both put to death. Do you agree?"

"Oh, yes," said the Princes, "we gladly agree."

"Go to prison, then, at once," said the King, "and stay there until the Princess arrives."



"THE KING THEN SAID: 'I DON'T BELIEVE THERE IS A GIRL SO BEAUTIFUL IN THE WHOLE WORLD.'"

dress that they were strangers he stopped his chariot and beckoned to them to come and talk to him.

"Sire," said the brothers, "we have travelled far to show your Majesty a picture."

And with that they took Rosetta's portrait out of their carpet-bag.

The King looked at it for a good long time, then said: "I don't believe there is a girl so beautiful in the whole world."

"Ah, your Majesty," they answered, "she is a hundred times lovelier than this picture."

"You are making fun of me," said the King of the Peacocks.

"Sire," said the Prince, "my brother here is a King like you, and I a Prince. This

The two Princes didn't mind this in the least, because they knew for certain that Rosetta was far more beautiful than any picture, and every day the King came to visit them and sent them all they wanted, and they were waited on as became their high rank.

They wrote to Rosetta and told her to pack her things and come at once, because the husband she had chosen was waiting for her. Only they said nothing to her about being themselves in prison for fear of alarming her.

Rosetta was in great delight when she got this letter, and lost no time in announcing to all the King's subjects that the King of the Peacocks was found and was very anxious to marry her.

There were great rejoicings all over the kingdom at this good news, and for a few days there was nothing but feasting and dancing and firing of cannons; and at the palace itself, by order of the Princess, the most delicious drinks and sweetmeats were given to all comers. And as she was going to be married, and wouldn't want her dolls and playthings any longer herself, she gave them all away in the most generous manner.

Besides which she handed the government of the country over to the six wisest men in it, charging them to take great care of it and spend as little and save as much as they could, for her brother when he came back. She also left her peacock in their care and took only Fretillo and the sack of gold and her old nurse and the nurse's only daughter and enough dresses for two changes every day for ten years.

The journey was made in a ship, and the Princess enjoyed it very much, laughing and talking and amusing herself all the day long.

But every morning the nurse used to say to the boatman, "Are we nearly there?"

And he always answered, "Not yet, not yet."

Till, at last, one day he said, "Yes, soon now, soon."

And then the nurse put her mouth close to his ear and said, "Do you wish to be rich?"

"Yes," said he.

"There's money to earn," said she.

"I'm the man for that," said he.

"Then to-night," said she, "we will throw the Princess overboard, and when she is drowned I will dress my daughter in her fine clothes and take her to the King of the Peacocks to be his bride. And for your reward you shall have as many diamonds as you can carry away on your back."

The boatman was not quite so wicked as she was, however, and he answered that it would be a pity to drown such a pretty Princess; and he certainly never would have consented to such a thing if the cruel nurse hadn't given him a drink of some kind that had a very good taste, but made him feel so

queer that at last he didn't know when he was saying yes and when he was saying no.

And then she led him to where the Princess lay asleep in her bed, and Fretillo curled up at her feet, sound asleep, too. And the cruel pair lifted up the feather-bed, the mattress, the sheets, the quilt, the pillows, Rosetta, and Fretillo so softly that neither the Princess nor her little dog woke, and threw the whole thing overboard.

But, most fortunately, the bed was stuffed with Phoenix feathers, which are very rare, indeed, and never sink; so the bed floated, and Rosetta and Fretillo were as safe as if they still were on the ship.

The only thing was that the spray of the waves kept dashing over them and at last woke them up, and then they couldn't imagine what made them so wet, nor where they were, nor what had happened to them. Fretillo, whose nose was very sharp, smelt soles and cod, and he barked so loud that he disturbed all the fishes in the sea, and they kept tumbling up against the bed, sending it twisting and turning this way and that, in such an extraordinary manner, that Rosetta thought she had never spent such a queer night in her life, for being dark she didn't see the sea.

The cruel nurse heard the barking too and said: "He's wishing us good luck. Let us hasten to go and be Queens and Princes."

Soon after that the boat landed at the kingdom of peacocks, where fine preparations had been made for the bride's arrival.

A hundred carriages were waiting on the beach drawn by lions, bears, wolves, oxen, asses, eagles, peacocks, and horses. The Princess's own carriage was drawn by six blue monkeys in crimson and gold harness, and dancing all the time on tight-ropes, besides many other wonderful tricks. Round this carriage stood sixty lovely young ladies, chosen by the King himself to wait on his Queen, and dressed in every colour of the rainbow, not to speak of gold and silver.

The wicked nurse had spared no pains in dressing up her daughter. She had Rosetta's diamonds on her head and all over her, and wore the very finest of all Rosetta's seven thousand three hundred dresses. But her finery only made her look uglier than ever. Her hair was dull and coarse, she squinted terribly; she had bandy legs and was hump-backed, and had a nasty cross expression, and never stopped grumbling.

When the King of the Peacocks' people saw her land from the ship they were struck dumb with amazement, and they were still more astonished (if that were possible) when



"NEITHER THE PRINCESS  
NOR HER LITTLE  
DOG WOKE."

the first thing they heard her say, screaming as loud as she could, was this:—

"What does this kind of thing mean? What does it mean? Have you all lost your senses? Here, wretches, bring me something to eat or I'll have everyone of you hanged."

"Oh, oh, oh," cried everybody, "what a horrid creature, as wicked too as she is

ugly! Never will our King marry a horrid thing of this sort! It was worth while to send to the end of the world for her, indeed!"

And everything they said made her angrier and angrier, and everyone within reach of her arm she hit at with her fist, as hard as she could, lolling back all the time in her carriage and making believe she was accustomed to one.

It moved along rather slowly, as orders had been given by the King that the people were all to have time to see the bride. But when it passed under the trees, covered with peacocks, waiting to cry, "Long live our beautiful Queen Rosetta!" instead of crying what they intended, they all began to hiss: "Oh! the ugly, ugly thing!"

"Kill them," shrieked the false Princess. "Kill them! Wring their necks, the beasts! They insult me, insult me!"

At which the peacocks flew away as quick as they could, laughing at her.

Meantime the wicked boatman whispered to the nurse: "I say, mother, we haven't managed this affair so cleverly as we should. You ought to have had a prettier daughter for it!"

"Hush, hush, you fool," she answered. "Hold your tongue if you don't want to get us all into trouble."

Messengers had run on ahead of the procession to warn the King that his bride was coming, and the first thing he said to them was: "Did her brothers speak the truth? Is she more beautiful than her picture?"



H. R. MILNER, 1901

"EVERYONE WITHIN REACH OF HER ARM SHE HIT AT."

"Sire," was the reply, "to be as beautiful, is to be beautiful enough."

"That is true," said the King; "I will be satisfied with that. But I hear a noise in the courtyard. The Princess has no doubt arrived; let us go and welcome her."

There was plenty of shouting and talking. The King could hear the people saying: "Oh, the ugly thing," and words of that sort, but he only thought they were laughing at the Princess's dwarf, or some other queer creature she had brought with her; for, of course, he never dreamt that it was the Princess herself they meant.

The Princess Rosetta's portrait, mounted on a long gold stick and carried like a banner, was borne in front of the King, and he marched in a dignified manner after it, followed by all his barons, all his peacocks, and all the Ambassadors from foreign lands. He was very impatient, indeed, to see his beloved Rosetta; but when he saw the creature that was there in her place he nearly died of grief and rage. He tore his clothes, he stamped his feet, he would not go near her, and she was frightened out of her senses at seeing him in such a passion.

"What! what!" he cried, "those two scoundrels that I have locked safe up in prison have dared to play me a trick? They had the impertinence to invite me to marry a horror of this kind? I'll have their necks wrung, and this wretch's,

too, and her nurse's, and the old fellow's who came with them! Clap every one of them into the darkest dungeon at the foot of the tower this moment," he said, turning to his soldiers.

Meantime, the real Princess's two brothers in prison, having heard that their sister had come, were waiting, dressed in their very best, to be released. But instead of letting them out their gaoler came with a troop of armed soldiers and thrust them down into a dark cellar, full of noisome reptiles and with water in it up to their necks.

The poor Princes were terribly astonished at this cruel treatment.

"Alas!" they said to each other, "what a wedding feast we are celebrating. What can be the reason we are treated so ill?"

But all the talking in the world didn't explain anything. On the third day, however, the King of the Peacocks came and called out very insulting things at them through a hole.

"Wretches!" he cried. "Impostors! King and Prince indeed! Beggars is really what you are! You thought you'd trick me into marrying your sister, did you? You will be hanged

for it—the rope is being spun to do it with. Your trial won't take long with the judges I mean to give you!"

"King of the Peacocks," said the other King, very angry in his turn, "take care what you do to us, or you'll live to repent. I'm as good a King as you are, and have as good a crown and kingdom and clothes and money. Hang us, indeed! What for, if you please? Have we stolen anything from you?"

But in spite of all they could say the trial took place next day, and the King and his brother were sentenced to be hanged for telling the King of the Peacocks a lie. But when this sentence was read out to them they said so convincingly that they had told no lie, and begged so earnestly for a short delay to give them time to prove their innocence, that at last the King of the Peacocks consented to a week's respite.

To return now to the Princess Rosetta. When daylight came she and her little dog were one as much surprised as the other to find that they were afloat on the wide sea, but it was the Princess who was the most frightened, for Fretillo always had a plan or two up his sleeve.

"Alas! alas!" cried Rosetta. "The King of the Peacocks must have sent orders that I should be drowned. He has changed his mind, and doesn't want to marry me now. But what a pity! what a pity! I should have been a good wife to him, I promise him."

Two whole days they floated on the sea, hungry and drenched to the skin, and so cold that the Princess must have died if Fretillo had not lain in her arms and warmed her as best he could. The only food they had were oysters, which Fretillo particularly disliked.

All night the Princess kept saying to him, "Bark, bark, my little dog, to keep the big fish away, or else they will come and swallow us up."

So all night long Fretillo barked, until at last an old fisherman in his cottage by the sea-shore heard him, and put his head out to see what it was, for no one ever passed that way and he never heard dogs barking. And when he saw the bed floating near the shore he got his long boat-hook and drew it up on the beach high and dry.

"Good man," said the Princess, "we have been two days floating hither and thither on the ocean, cold, and hungry, and wet. Can you give us something to eat and let us dry ourselves by your fire?"

And he took them into his cottage and,

being a kind old man, did the best he could for them. And when he began to dry the mattress and feather-bed he saw that the sheets were the finest lawn and the coverlids made of gold and silver thread, and he knew that Rosetta must be some great lady by that and her manners, so he begged her to tell him her history. And when, with many tears, she had told him, he said to her:—

"Princess, you are accustomed to delicate food and beautiful clothes, and can't live in this poor hut with a rough old man like me. With your permission I will go and tell the King of the Peacocks that you are here, and he will hasten to come for you and marry you."

"No, no," said Rosetta, "he will kill me rather. And, as for food, all we need do is to tie a basket to my little dog's neck and he will be sure to bring it back full."

And the old man gave her a basket, and, tying it to her little dog's neck, she said:—

"Go to the best kitchen in the city, Fretillo, and bring me what you find there."

Now, in all the city there was no kitchen so good as the King's, so Fretillo hastened there, lifted the lid off the pot, and slipped all that was in it into his basket, and hurried home again.

And his mistress said to him: "You are a good dog, Fretillo. But hurry back now to the store-room and bring me the best you find there."

So off went Fretillo, and brought home some white bread, some muscat wine, and such a load of sweet things that he could hardly carry his basket.

But when the King's dinner hour arrived there was no dinner in his kitchen and nothing in his store-room, and he fell into a great rage.

"If I can have no dinner," he said, "I will have a good supper at any rate, so put plenty of joints on the spit." That night, however, Rosetta said to her little dog: "Go to the best kitchen in the city and bring me all the roast meat you find there."

And again Fretillo went to the King's kitchen; and when the cooks were not looking that way, he snatched the roast meat off the spits and ran off with it. It smelt so good it was enough to make anyone hungry. And, as before, the Princess sent him straight back to the store-room, and he brought her all the preserves and sugar-plums he found there.

So that day the King of the Peacocks got neither dinner nor supper, and the same thing happened three days running, until at

last his best friend thought, if that sort of thing went on much longer, the King would die, so he went himself to watch in the kitchen what became of all his Royal master's dinners and suppers. What was his astonishment to see a little green-eared dog softly steal in and lift the lid of the pot, take out what was in it, and run off with it in a basket! He followed him as fast as he could to see where he took it, and on and on he went, away out of the town to the fisherman's hut on the beach. And after that he went and told the King all he had seen.

And the King commanded him to take soldiers and go at once and seize the old man whose dog stole his dinners and suppers and robbed his store-room. And when the courtier and the soldiers came to the hut and found the fisherman, Rosetta, and Frettillo eating up the King's soup, they laid hold of them, bound them with cords, and dragged them away.

"They shall all be put to death to-morrow," said the King, "together with the two impostors who have not proved their innocence in the seven days' respite they begged for."

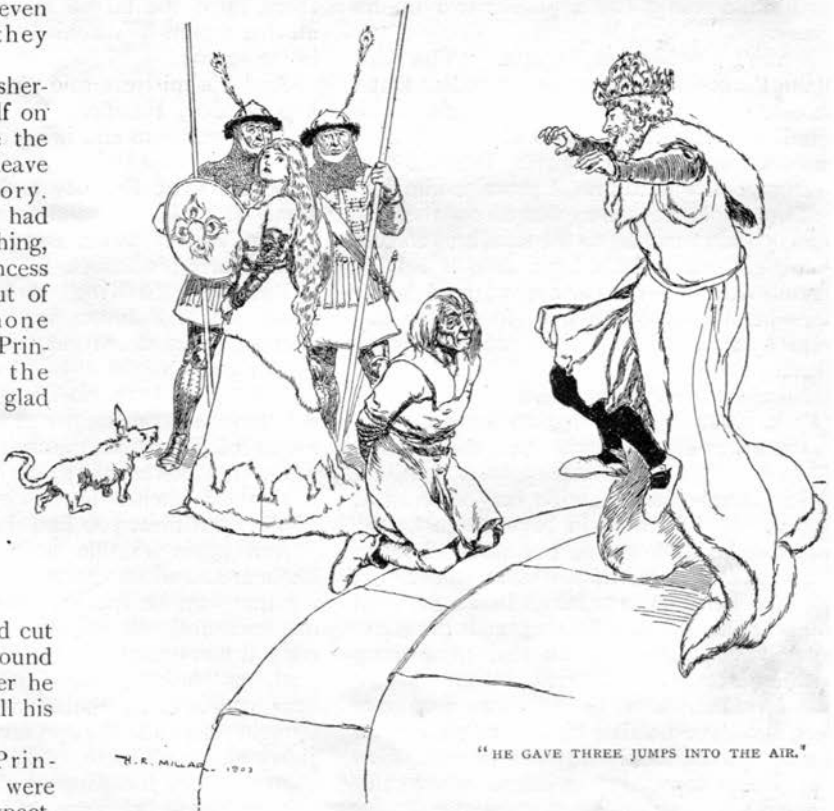
But the old fisherman cast himself on his knees before the King and asked leave to tell his story. And when he had told him everything, and that the Princess he had fished out of the sea was none other than the Princess Rosetta, the King was so glad that, weak as he was after his three days' fast, he gave three jumps into the air, and then ran to kiss Rosetta and cut the cords that bound her, and told her he loved her with all his heart.

Then the Princess's brothers were sent for, and, expect-

ing to be hanged, they came looking very miserable. The nurse, the boatman, and the daughter were sent for. And everyone recognised one another, of course.

The Princess embraced her dear brothers. The nurse, her daughter, and the boatman fell on their knees and begged to be forgiven, and in honour of the joyful occasion their lives were spared at Rosetta's request. As to the kind old fisherman, he spent the rest of his days in peace and happiness in the palace.

And for the Princess's brothers, the King seemed as if he didn't know how to do enough to make up to them for his former unkindness. Of course, the Princess got back the sack of gold and the seven thousand three hundred dresses that the nurse had stolen; and the wedding festivities took place with great rejoicing and lasted a whole fortnight, and everyone was happy ever after, not forgetting Frettillo, who had roast partridge wings and breast for his dinner every day all the rest of his life.



"HE GAVE THREE JUMPS INTO THE AIR."

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