



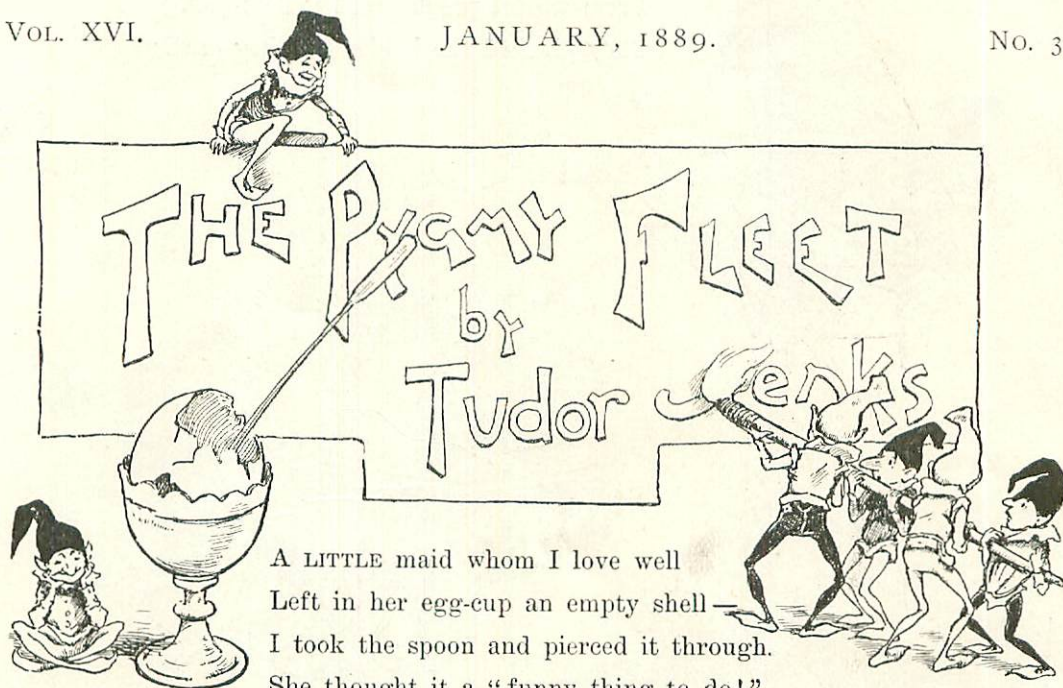
"REMEMBER THE TALE OF THE PYGMY FLEET."

ST. NICHOLAS.

VOL. XVI.

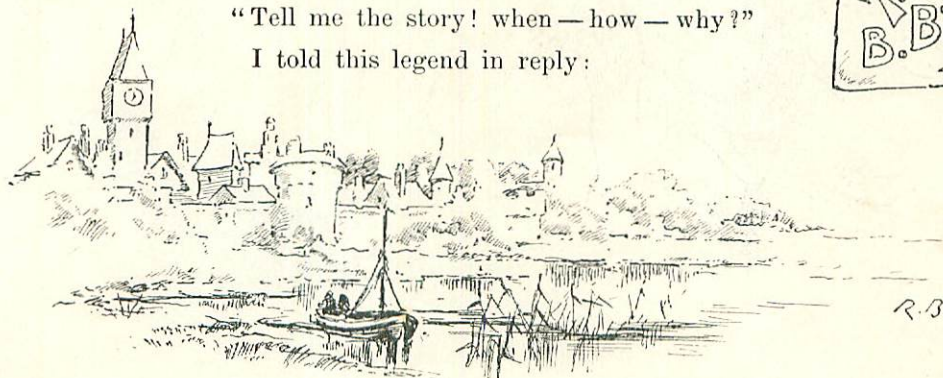
JANUARY, 1889.

No. 3.



A LITTLE maid whom I love well
Left in her egg-cup an empty shell —
I took the spoon and pierced it through.
She thought it a “funny thing to do!”
But I said, “It is best to be discreet;
Remember the tale of the Pygmy Fleet!
I shall obey the King’s Decree.”

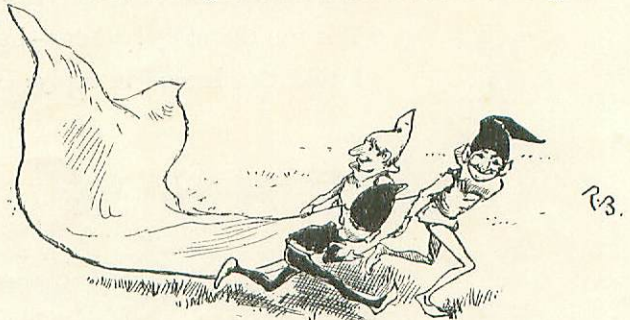
Up she clambered to my knee —
“Tell me the story! when — how — why?”
I told this legend in reply:



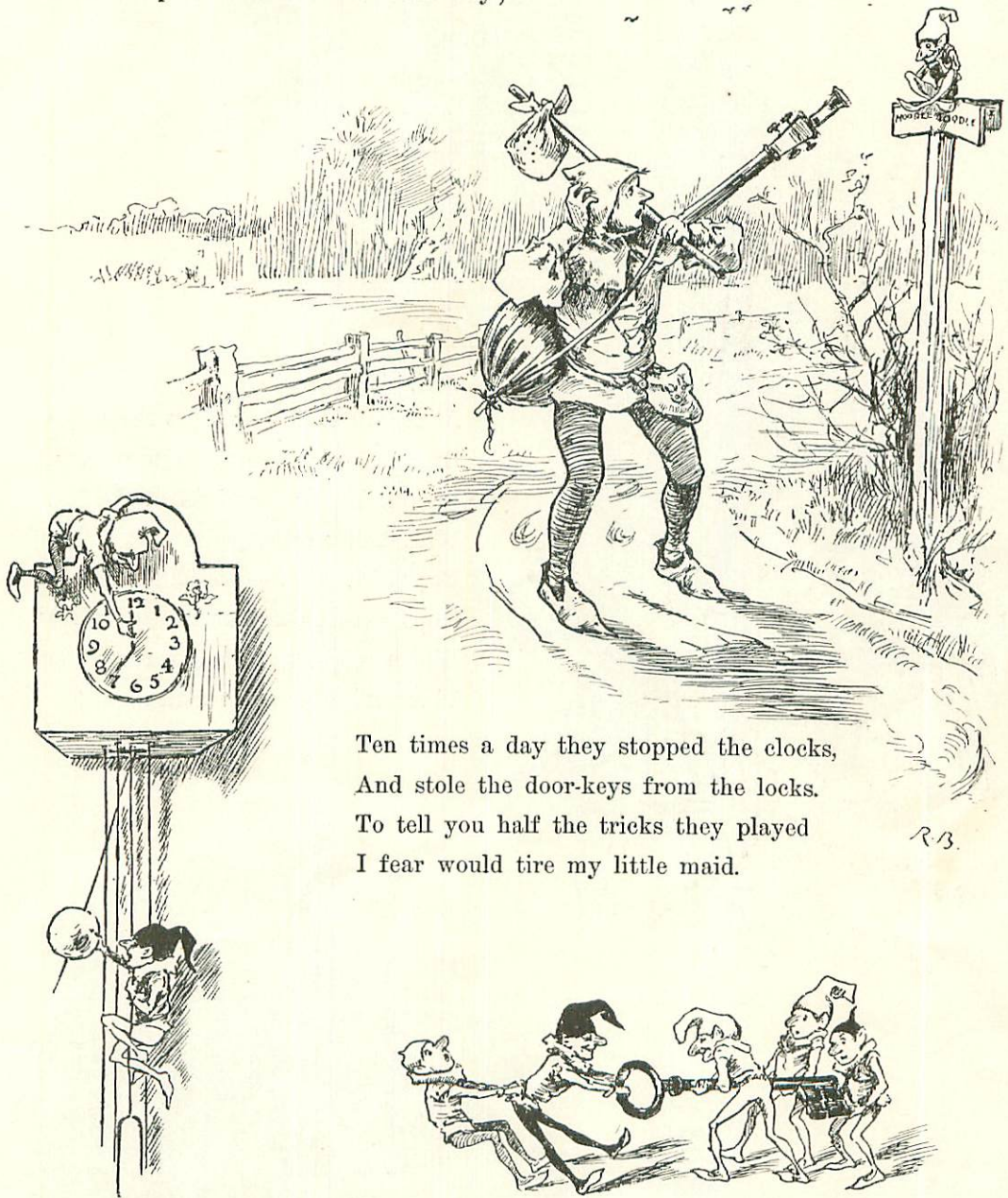
Meddlesome pygmies long ago
 Swarmed in a little kingdom so
 That night or day there was no rest
 From willful prank and heedless jest.
 They pinched the babies till they cried;



The hives they robbed, the bees defied;
 They stole the clothes hung out on lines,
 And changed about the merchants' signs.

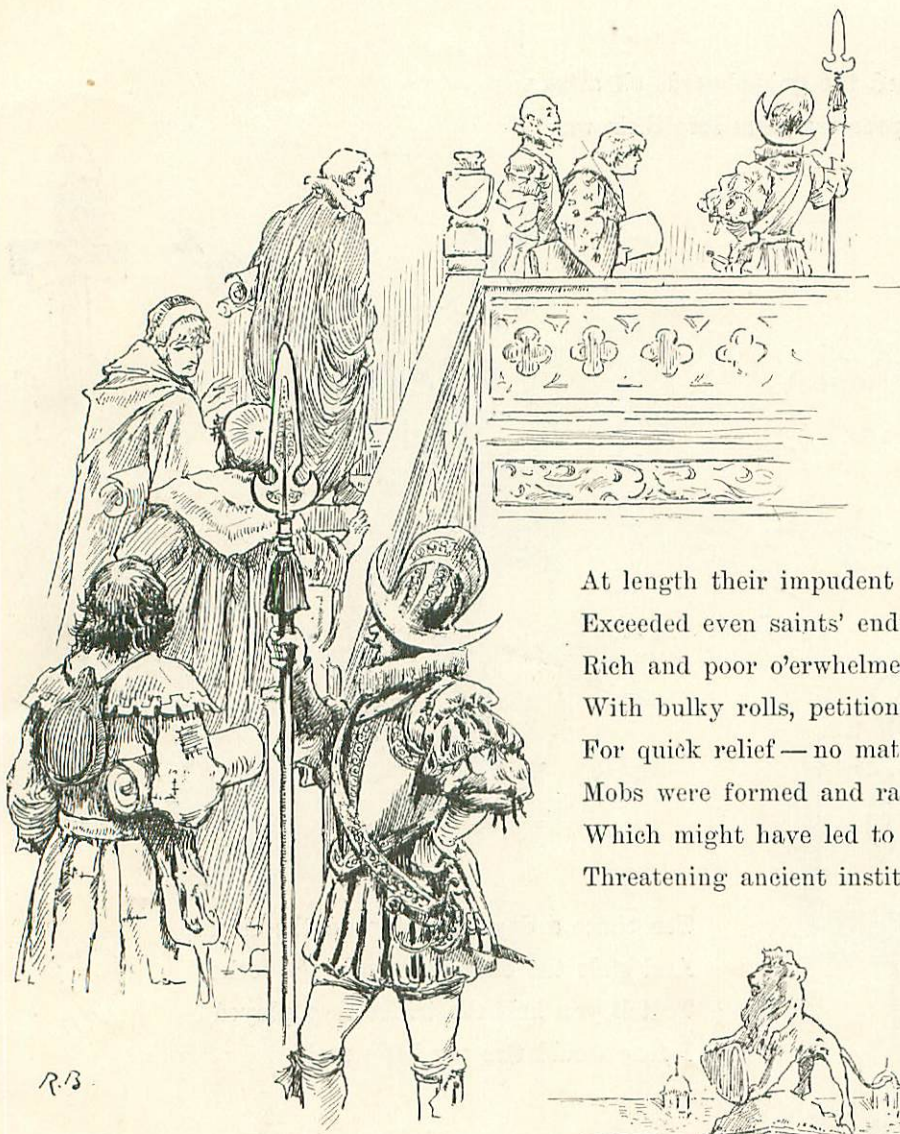


They turned the guide-boards all astray,
To make poor travelers lose their way;



Ten times a day they stopped the clocks,
And stole the door-keys from the locks.
To tell you half the tricks they played
I fear would tire my little maid.

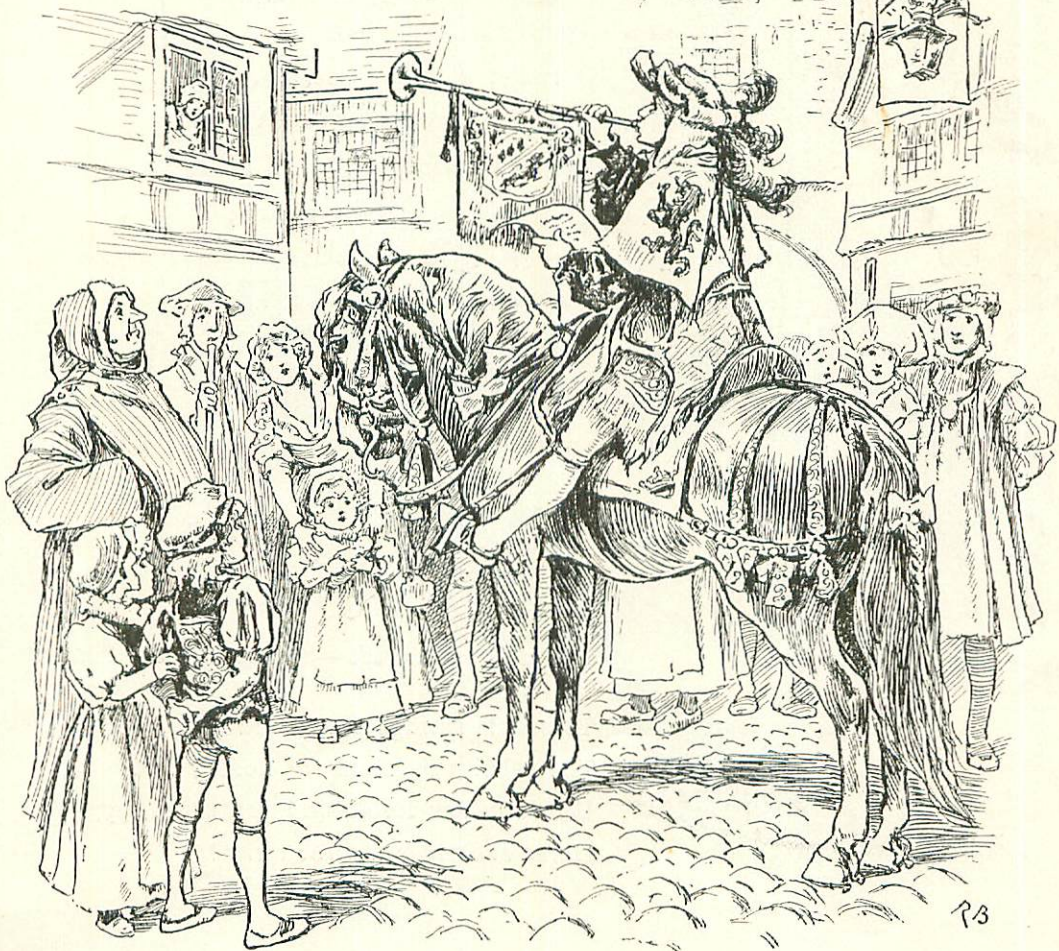
R.B.



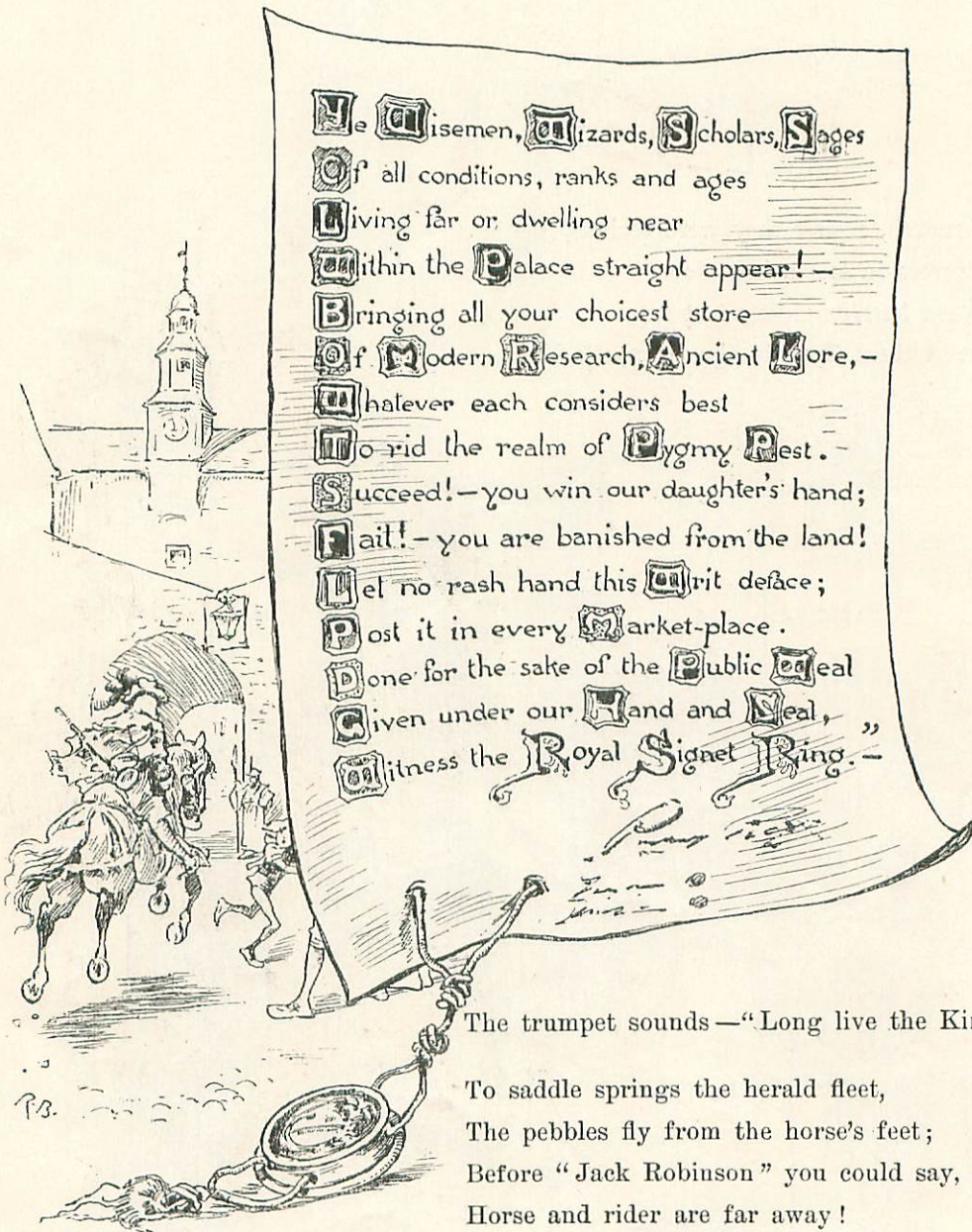
At length their impudent assurance
Exceeded even saints' endurance.
Rich and poor o'erwhelmed the King
With bulky rolls, petitioning
For quick relief — no matter how !
Mobs were formed and raised a row
Which might have led to revolutions
Threatening ancient institutions !



The monarch, seeing they were serious,
Sent decrees in terms imperious,
By chosen heralds riding fast
Who read them thus, to the trumpet's blast:

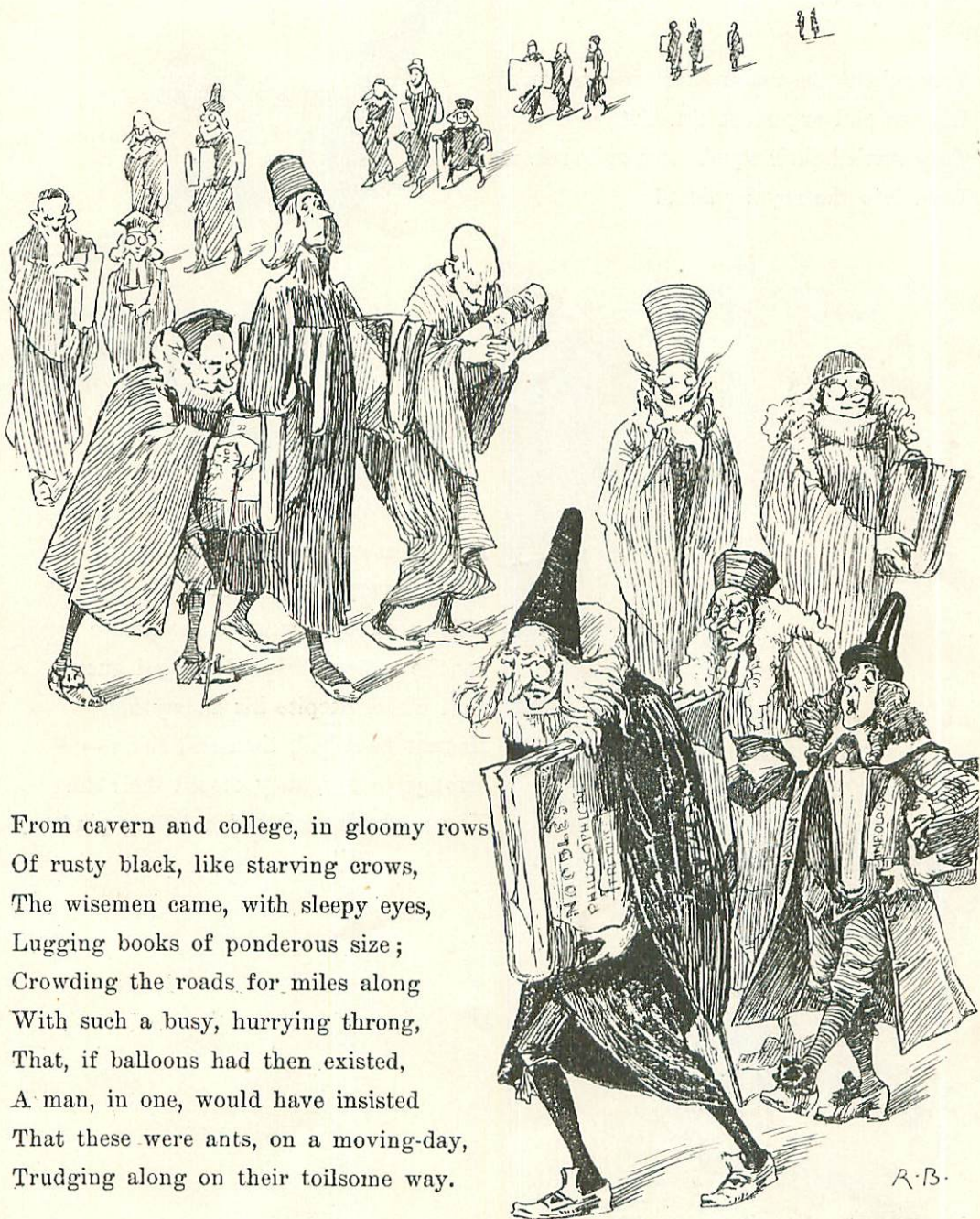


"Oyez!—Oyez! Now draw ye near,
The sovereign's gracious words to hear!



The trumpet sounds—"Long live the King!"

To saddle springs the herald fleet,
The pebbles fly from the horse's feet;
Before "Jack Robinson" you could say,
Horse and rider are far away!

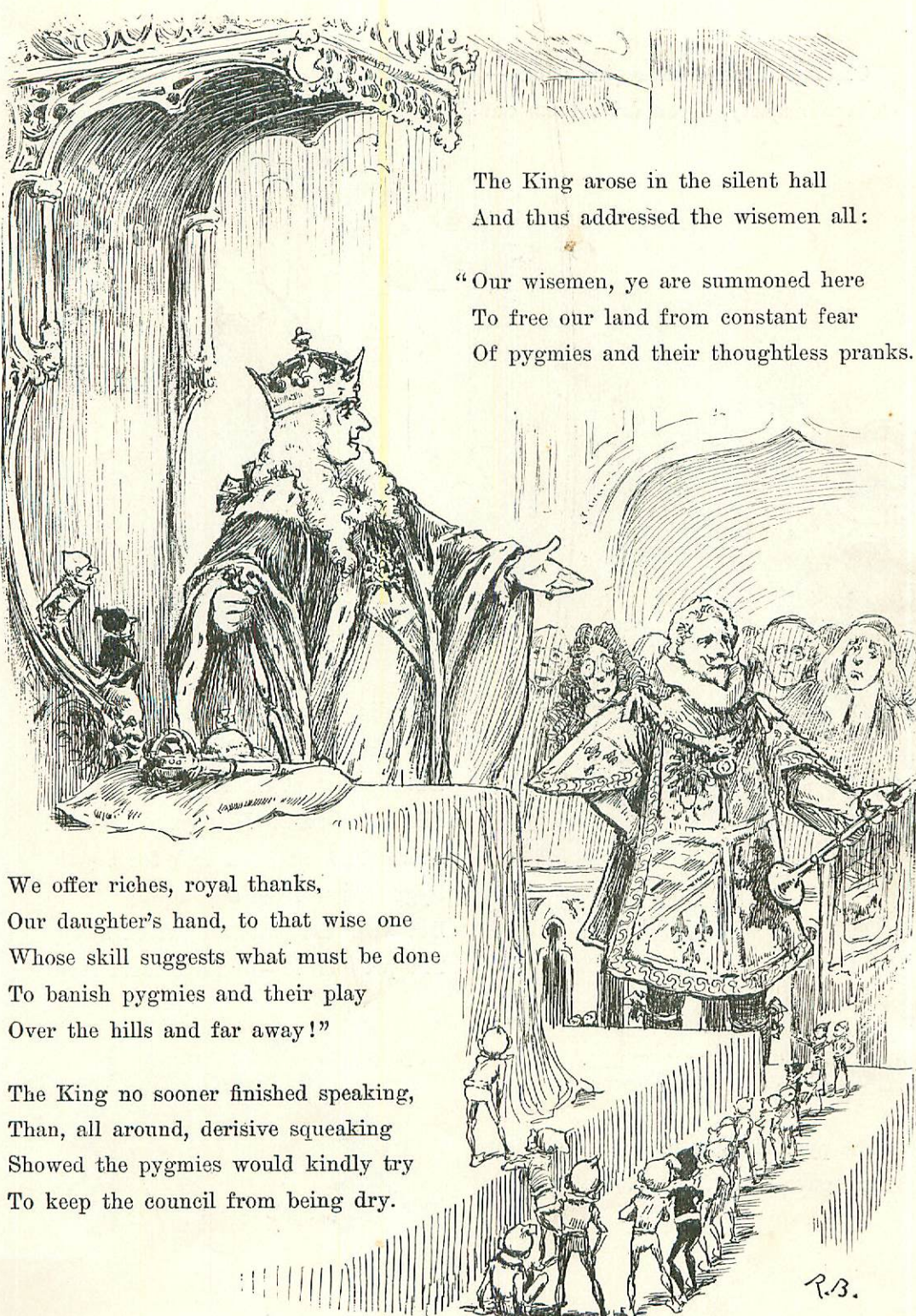


Throughout the realm there was no quiet;
 Dispute and argument ran riot;
 They carried their squabbling and their malice
 Even into the royal palace!



But when one dotard with the gout,
 Though very lame, walked quickly out
 (His speed was great to the palace yard
 By the zealous help of a royal guard),
 And when, despite his snowy hair,
 He was banished, then and there—
 Strange to say, they ceased their din;
 You might have heard a falling pin!





The King arose in the silent hall
And thus addressed the wisemen all:

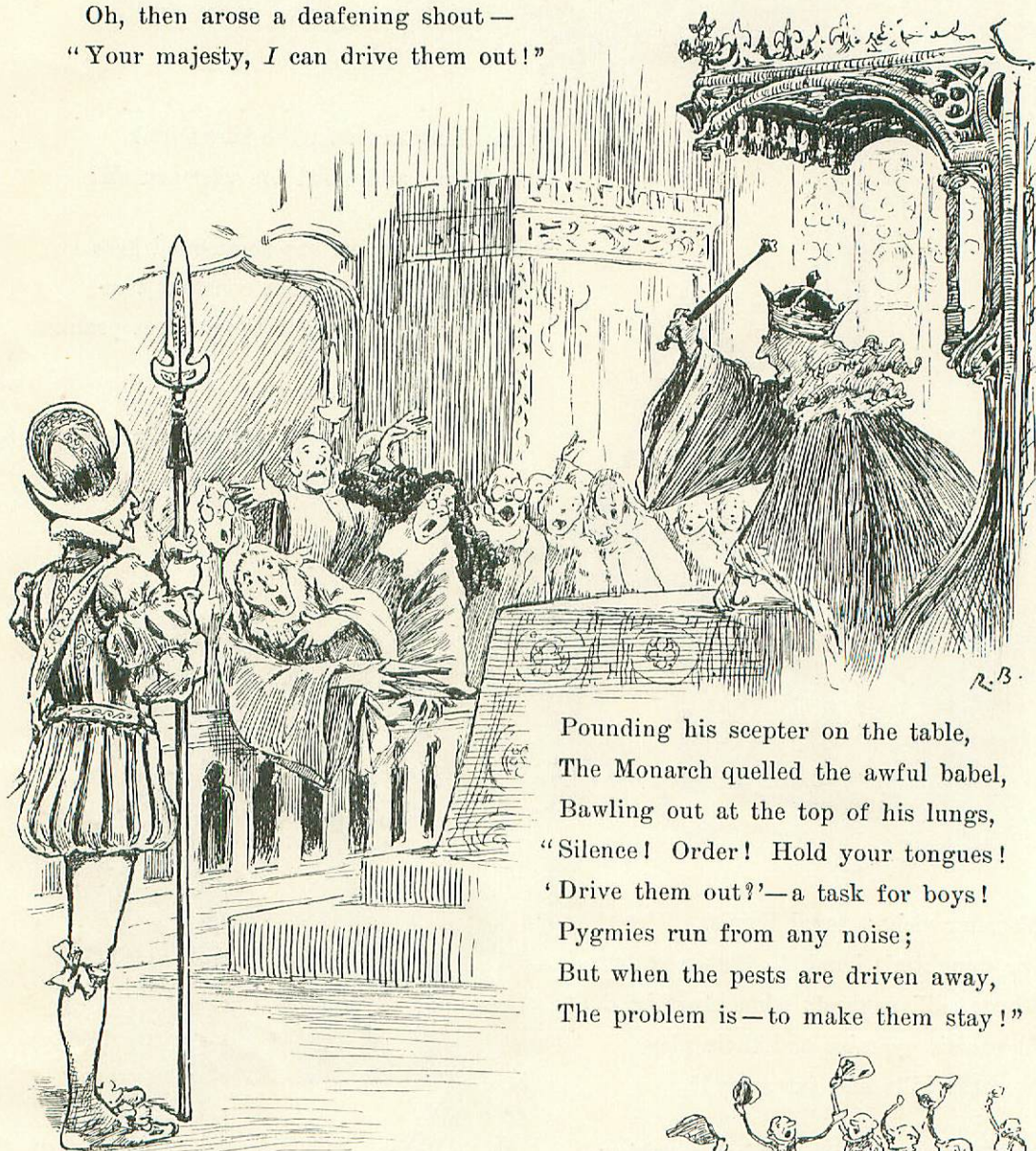
"Our wisemen, ye are summoned here
To free our land from constant fear
Of pygmies and their thoughtless pranks.

We offer riches, royal thanks,
Our daughter's hand, to that wise one
Whose skill suggests what must be done
To banish pygmies and their play
Over the hills and far away!"

The King no sooner finished speaking,
Than, all around, derisive squeaking
Showed the pygmies would kindly try
To keep the council from being dry.

R.B.

Oh, then arose a deafening shout —
 "Your majesty, *I* can drive them out!"



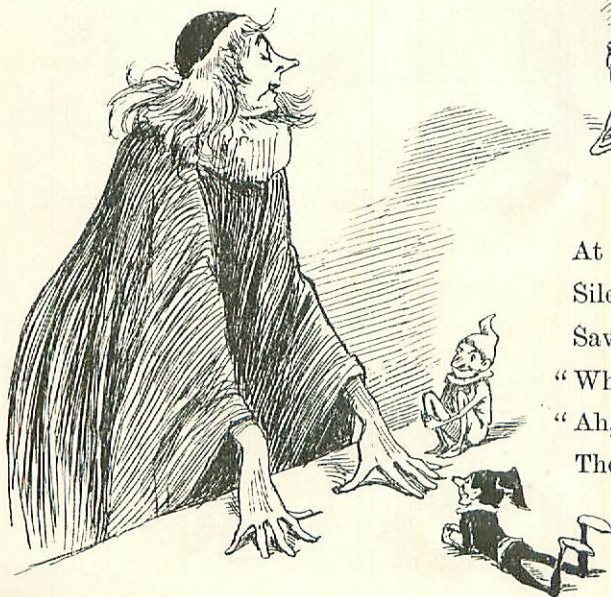
Pounding his scepter on the table,
 The Monarch quelled the awful babel,
 Bawling out at the top of his lungs,
 "Silence! Order! Hold your tongues!
 'Drive them out?'—a task for boys!
 Pygmies run from any noise;
 But when the pests are driven away,
 The problem is—to make them stay!"

(The pygmies here renewed their jeers
 And gave three faint, sarcastic cheers.)

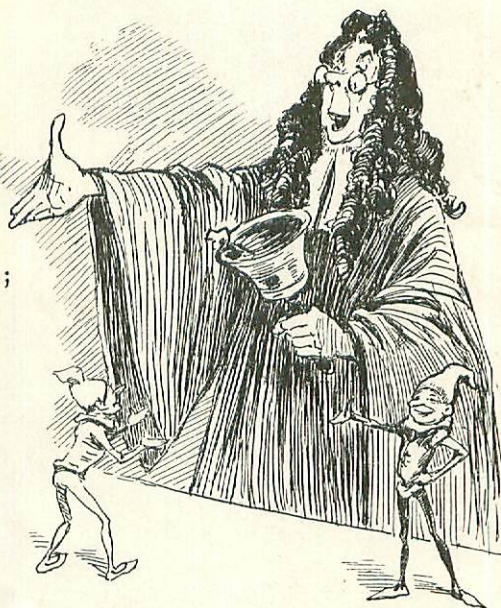




Pygmies clinging to roof and walls
 Received these plans with sneering squalls:
 Laughed at horseshoes, chuckled at bells,
 Mocked the charms and mimicked the spells;
 Crying, "Louder!"—"Slower!"—"Faster!"
 Pelting them all with bits of plaster!



According to age the sages spoke
 In senile wheeze or youthful croak,
 Advising horseshoes, tolling bells,
 Ancient charms, old witches' spells,
 Hazel rods and boiling water,
 Or, "seventh son of seventh daughter,"
 Would surely keep the pygmies quiet
 If His Majesty would but try it.



At last the youngest sage had spoken
 Silence reigned for a time unbroken,
 Save that a pygmy called aloud:
 "Who ever saw such a stupid crowd!"
 "Ah," said another, "they 'll feel sick;
 They 'll be banished pretty quick!"

P.B.

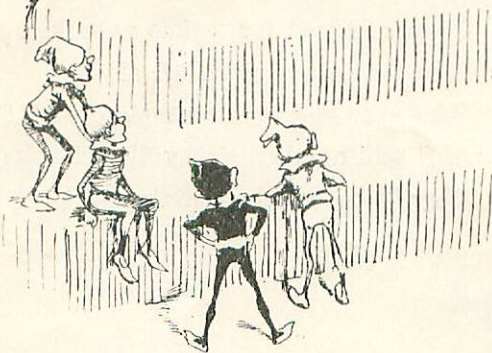
In richest robes with rubies blazing
 The Princess sat. The sages, gazing
 (Each one sure that he would win her),
 Forgot that it was time for dinner.

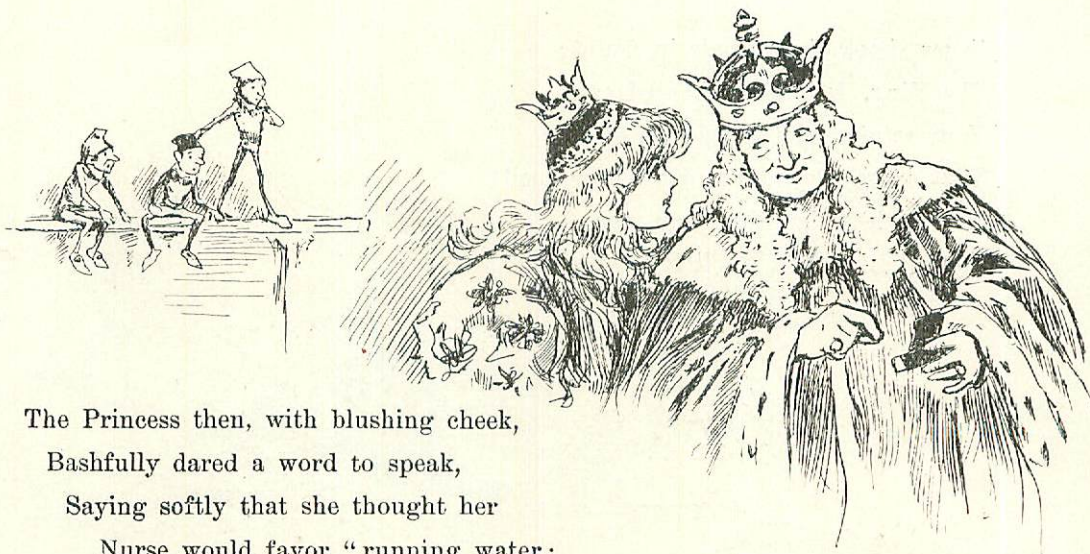


Not so the King. "These plans are old —
 Our royal dinner 's getting cold;
 Unless some new device we see,
 Quick as a wink you 'll banished be."

The pygmies cried with cruel joy:
 "You 'll be quite right, my royal boy!"

Despairing silence, like a pall,
 Settled on the wisemen all.

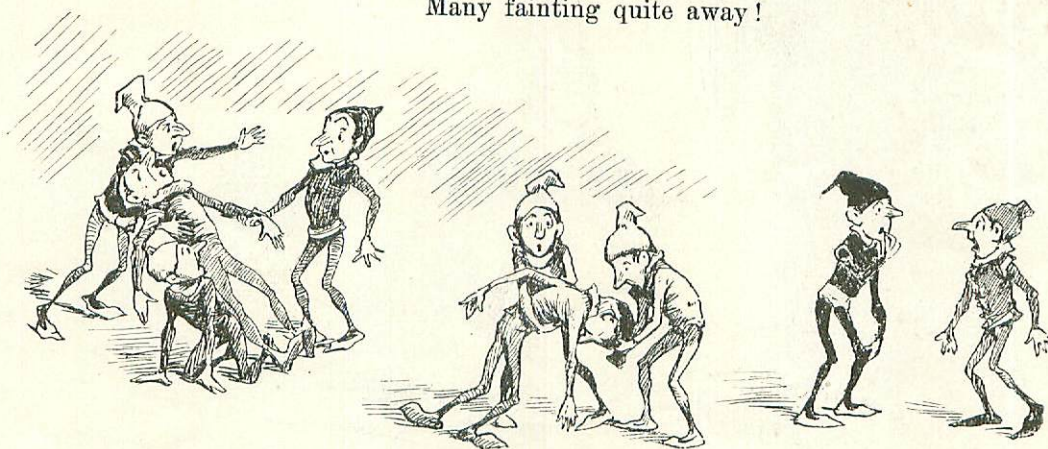




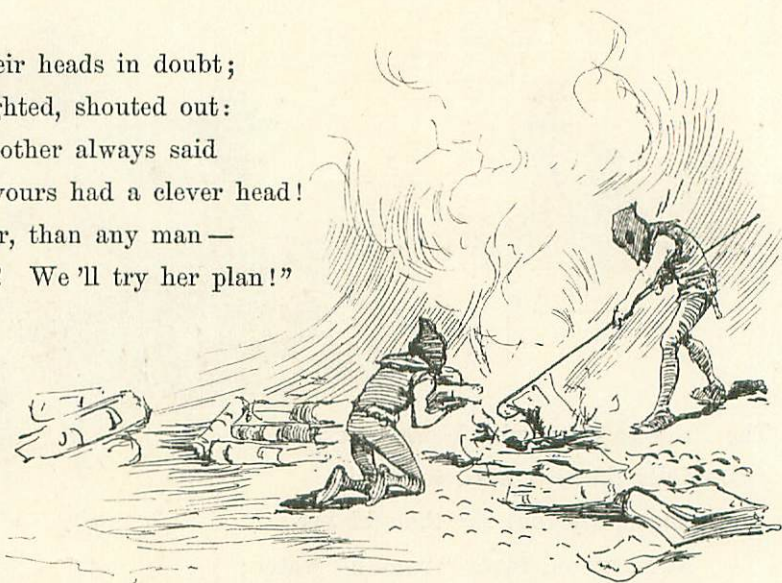
The Princess then, with blushing cheek,
 Bashfully dared a word to speak,
 Saying softly that she thought her
 Nurse would favor "running water ;
 For pygmies, fays, and elves, it seems,
 Can not cross the running streams.
 Perhaps a ditch, if deep and wide,
 Would guard the land on every side."

R.B.

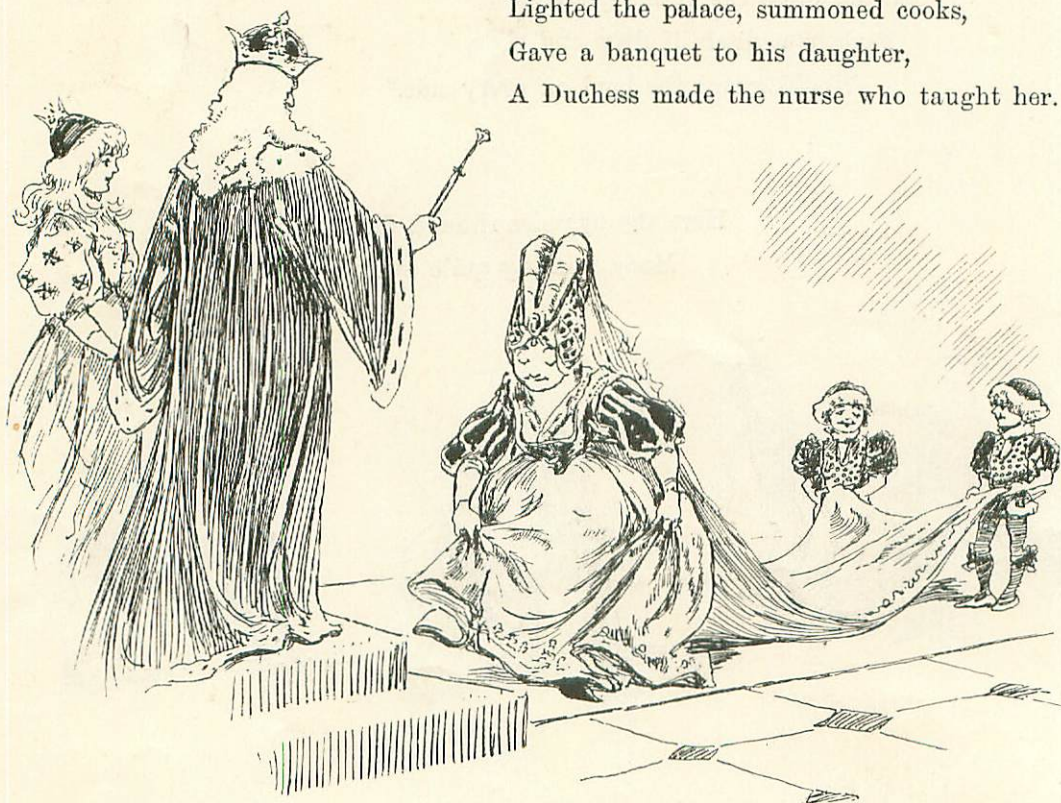
Here the pygmies showed dismay,
 Many fainting quite away !



Sages shook their heads in doubt;
The King, delighted, shouted out:
"Your sainted mother always said
That nurse of yours had a clever head!
She 's wiser, far, than any man —
Council 's over! We'll try her plan!"



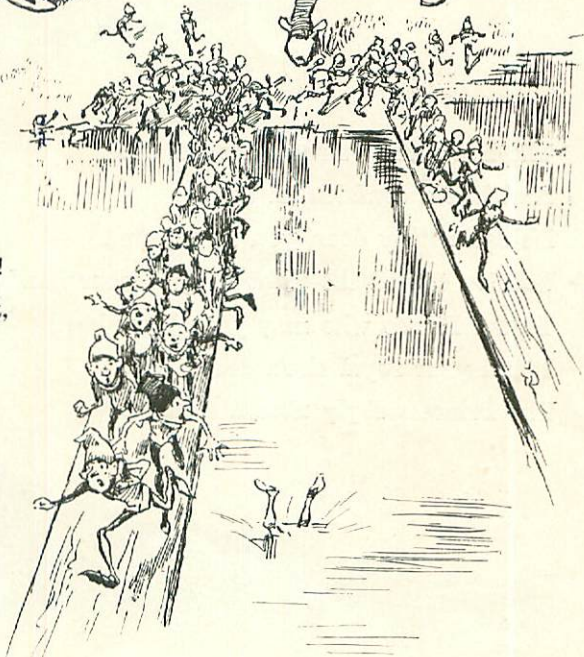
He banished the sages, burned their books,
Lighted the palace, summoned cooks,
Gave a banquet to his daughter,
A Duchess made the nurse who taught her.



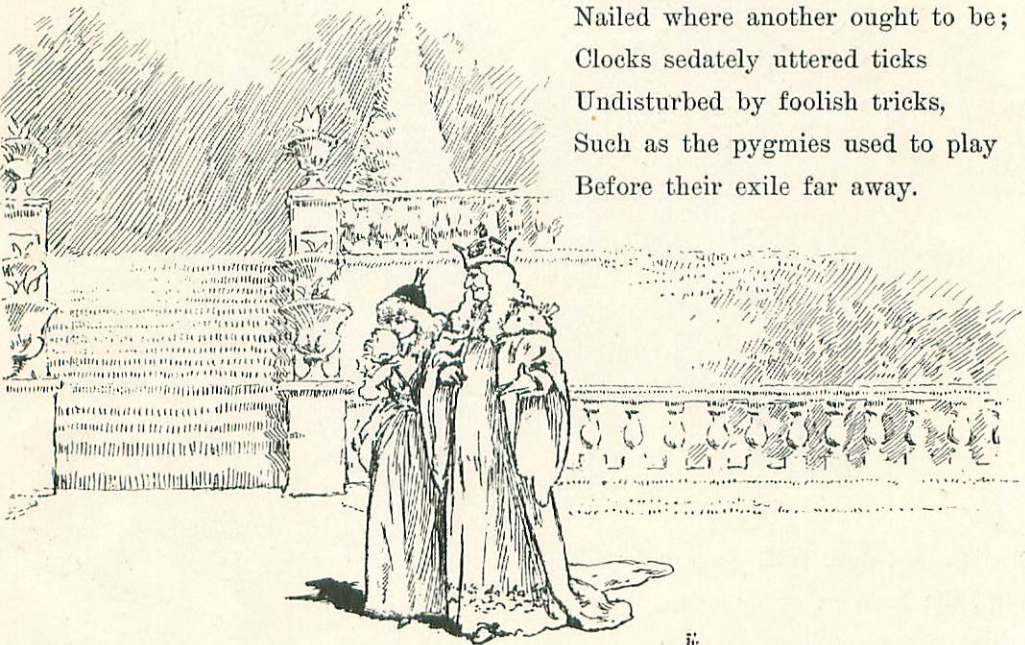


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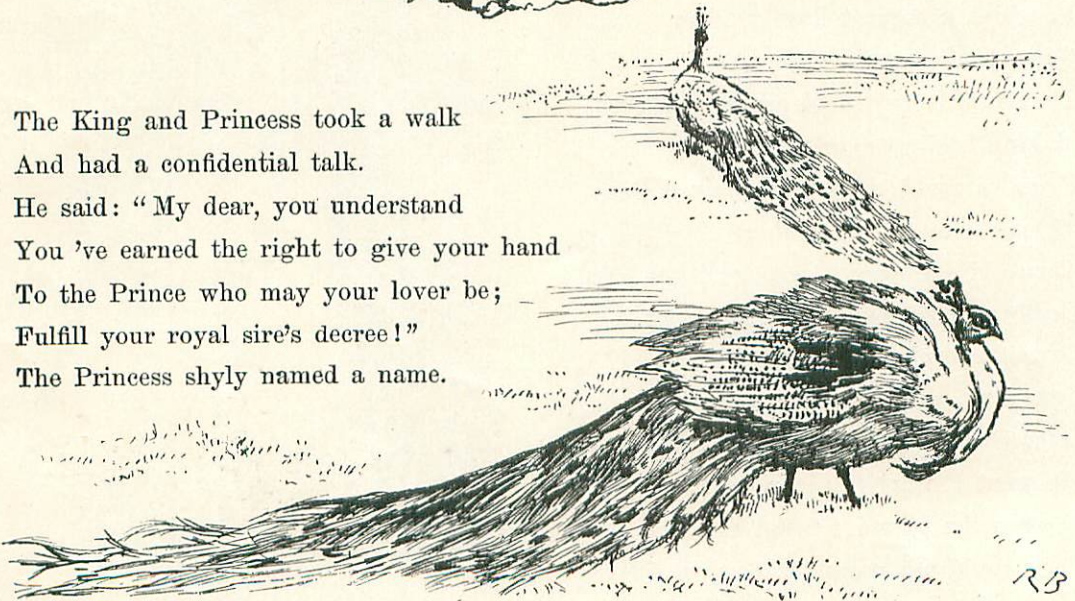
The ditch was dug, both deep and wide,
 Around the land on every side,
 In which a current flowing clear
 Came from a rapid river near.
 Then boards were laid across the ditch,
 Making bridges over which
 Pygmies could cross when driven away;
 These removed—why, there they'd stay!
 Then old and young, with yell and shout,
 Beating pans, soon drove them out.
 Over the bridges the pygmies ran
 Squealing, as pigs and pygmies can;
 Over they went like frightened mice—
 Up went the bridges in a trice!
 In vain the pygmies raged and cried,
 They could not cross the flowing tide!



Within the living water's charm
 The realm remained secure from harm.
 Babies led unruffled lives;
 Bees enriched unruffled hives;
 Merchants, now, no sign could see
 Nailed where another ought to be;
 Clocks sedately uttered ticks
 Undisturbed by foolish tricks,
 Such as the pygmies used to play
 Before their exile far away.



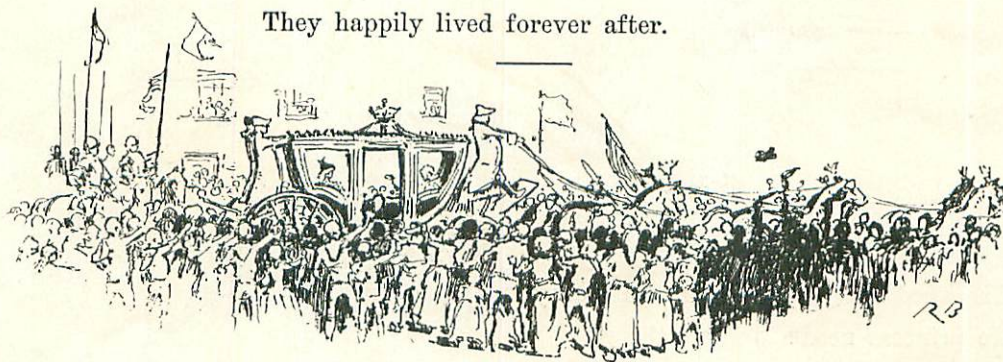
The King and Princess took a walk
 And had a confidential talk.
 He said: "My dear, you understand
 You 've earned the right to give your hand
 To the Princee who may your lover be;
 Fulfill your royal sire's decree!"
 The Princess shyly named a name.



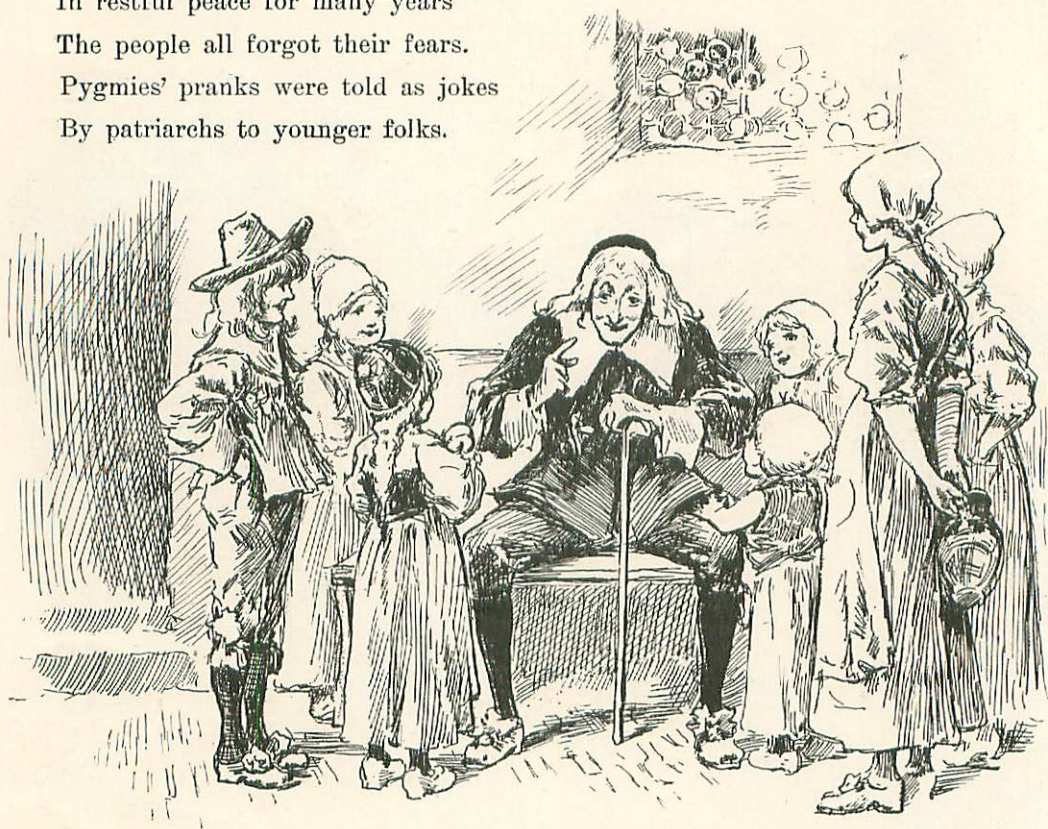


—A charming Prince to the palace came,
 Followed by nobles of high degree,
 In great procession, grand to see.
 A wedding took place, with joy and laugh-
 ter,—

They happily lived forever after.



In restful peace for many years
 The people all forgot their fears.
 Pygmies' pranks were told as jokes
 By patriarchs to younger folks.

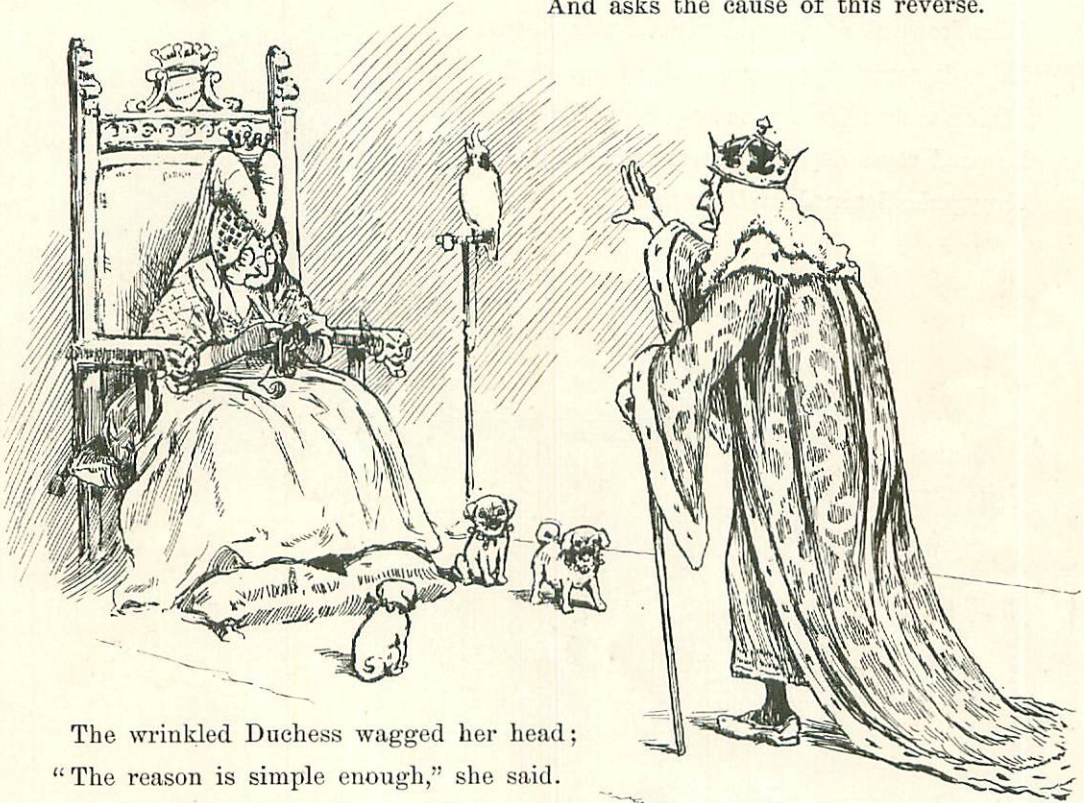


But, alas!—one day in the finest weather
 The babies' babies howled together!
 For pygmies re-appeared that night
 And played old tricks with keen delight.



The aged King now grown quite gray,
 No princess needs to show the way.

He seeks Her Grace (the former nurse)
And asks the cause of this reverse.

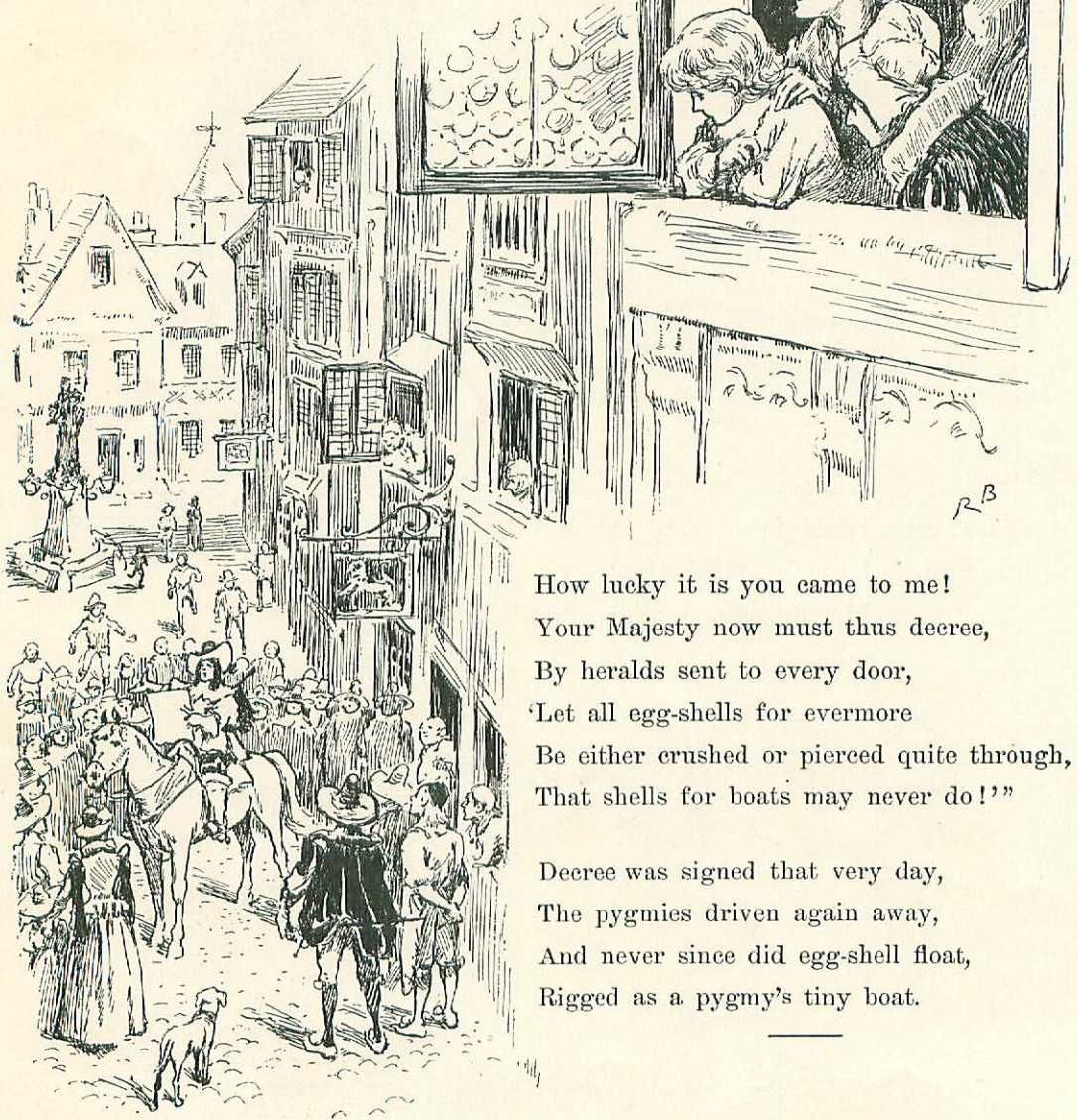


The wrinkled Duchess wagged her head;
"The reason is simple enough," she said.
"Go search along the ditch's side;
You 'll see how pygmies cross the tide!"

Pages run with twinkling legs
And find the empty shells of eggs,
Each equipped like a dainty boat,—
A fairy racing shell afloat!

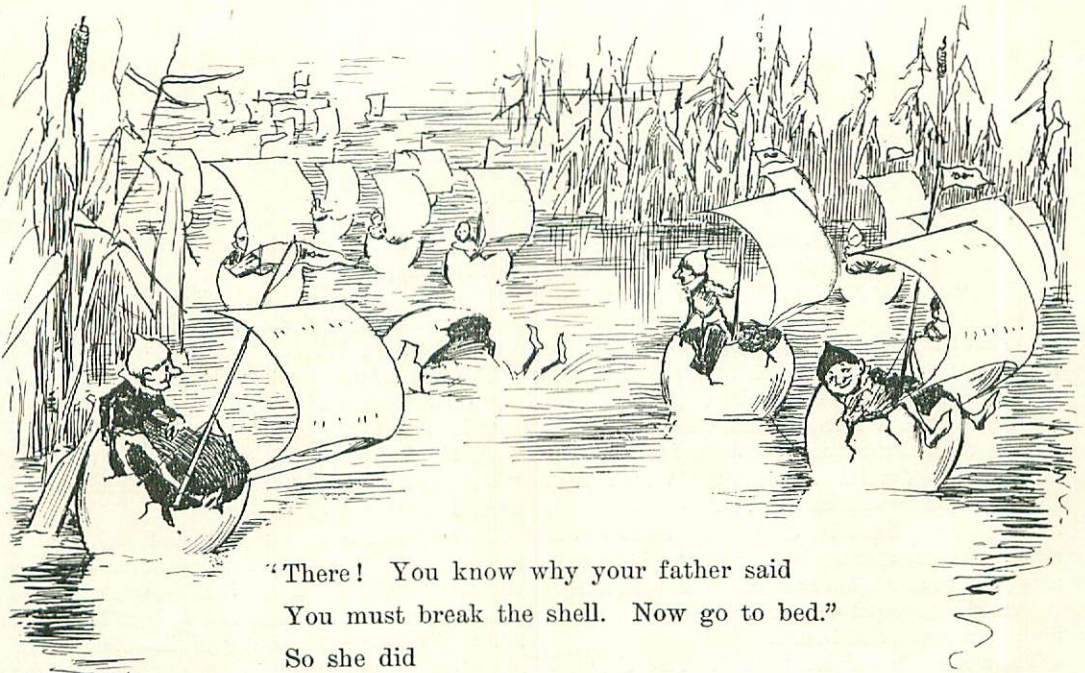


These were brought to the Duchess wise,
 Who frowned as she said with blinking eyes:
 "There 's something strange about egg-shells
 Which makes them proof against all spells.
 I feared some day the charm might fail,
 If pygmies learned in *those* to sail.



How lucky it is you came to me!
 Your Majesty now must thus decree,
 By heralds sent to every door,
 'Let all egg-shells for evermore
 Be either crushed or pierced quite through,
 That shells for boats may never do!'"

Decree was signed that very day,
 The pygmies driven again away,
 And never since did egg-shell float,
 Rigged as a pygmy's tiny boat.



"There! You know why your father said
 You must break the shell. Now go to bed."
 So she did
 As she was bid,
 And dreams of pygmies filled her head.

RB

