



By E. NESBIT.



HE dark arch that led to the witch's cave was hung round with a black and yellow fringe of live snakes. As the Queen went in, keeping very carefully exactly in the middle of the arch, all the snakes lifted their wicked, flat heads and stared at her with their wicked, yellow eyes. You know it is not manners to stare, even at a Queen. And the snakes had been so badly brought up that they even put their tongues out at the poor lady. Nasty, thin, sharp tongues they were, too.

Now, the Queen's husband was, of course, the King. And besides being a King he was an enchanter, and considered to be quite at the top of his profession: so he was very wise, and he knew that when Kings and Queens want children, the Queen always goes to see a witch. So he gave the Queen the witch's address, and the Queen called on her, though she was very frightened and did not like it at all. The witch was sitting by a fire of sticks, stirring something bubbly in a shiny, copper cauldron.

"What do *you* want, my dear?" she said to the Queen.

"Oh, if you please," said the Queen, "I want a baby—a very nice one. We don't want any expense spared. My husband said——"

"Oh, yes," said the witch; "I know all about *him*. And so you want a child? Do you know it will bring you sorrow?"

"It will bring me joy first," said the Queen.

"Great sorrow," said the witch.

"Greater joy," said the Queen.

Then the witch said, "Well, have your own way. I suppose it's as much as your place is worth to go back without it?"

"The King would be very much annoyed," said the poor Queen.

"Well, well," said the witch; "what will you give me for the child?"

"Anything you ask for, and all I have," said the Queen.

"Then give me your gold crown."

The Queen took it off quickly.

"And your necklace of blue sapphires."

The Queen unfastened it.

"And your pearl bracelets."

The Queen unclasped them.

"And your ruby clasps."

And the Queen undid the clasps.

"Now the lilies from your breast."

The Queen gathered together the lilies.

"And the diamonds of your little bright shoe-buckles."

The Queen pulled off her shoes.

Then the witch stirred the stuff that was in the cauldron, and, one by one, she threw in the gold crown, and the sapphire necklace, and the pearl bracelets, and the ruby clasps, and the diamonds of the little bright shoe-buckles, and, last of all, she threw in the lilies.

And the stuff in the cauldron boiled up in foaming flashes of yellow, and blue, and red, and white, and silver, and sent out a sweet scent, and presently the witch poured it out into a pipkin and set it to cool in the doorway among the snakes.

Then she said to the Queen: "Your child will have hair as golden as your crown, eyes as blue as your sapphires. The red of your rubies will lie on its lips, and its skin will be clear white as your pearls. Its soul will be white and sweet as your lilies, and your diamonds will be no clearer than its wits."

"Oh, thank you, thank you," said the Queen, "and when will it come?"

"You will find it when you get home."

"And won't you have something for yourself?" asked the Queen. "Any little thing you fancy—would you like a country, or a sack of jewels?"

"Nothing, thank you," said the witch. "I could make more diamonds in a day than I could wear in a year."

"Well, but do let me do some little thing for you," the Queen went on. "Aren't you tired of being a witch? Wouldn't you like to be a duchess or a Princess, or something like that?"

"There is one thing I should rather like," said the witch, "but it's hard to get in my trade."

"Oh, tell me what," said the Queen.

"I should like someone to love me," said the witch.

Then the Queen threw her arms round the witch's neck and kissed her half a hundred times. "Why," she said, "I love you better than my life. You've given me the baby—and the baby shall love you, too."

"Perhaps it will," said the witch, "and when the sorrow comes send for me. Each of your fifty kisses will be a spell to bring me

to you. Now, drink up your medicine, there's a dear, and run along home."

So the Queen drank the stuff in the pipkin, which was quite cool by this time, and she went out under the fringe of snakes, and they all behaved like good Sunday-school children. Some of them even tried to drop a curtsy to her as she went by, though that is not easy when you are hanging wrong way up by your tail. But the snakes knew the Queen was friends with their mistress; so, of course, they had to do their best to be civil.

When the Queen got home, sure enough there was the baby lying in the cradle, with the Royal arms blazoned on it, crying as naturally as possible. It had pink ribbons to tie up its sleeves: so the Queen saw at once it was a *girl*. When the King knew this he tore his black hair with fury.

"Oh, you silly, silly Queen!" he said. "Why didn't I marry a clever lady? Did you think I went to all the trouble and expense of sending you to a witch to get a *girl*? You knew well enough it was a boy I wanted—a boy, an heir, a Prince—to learn all my magic and my enchantments, and to rule the kingdom after me. I'll bet a crown—my crown," he said, "you never even thought to tell the witch what kind you wanted! Did you now?"

And the Queen hung her head and had to confess that she had only asked for a *child*.

"Very well, madam," said the King, "very well—have your own way. And make the most of your daughter, while she *is* a child."

The Queen did. All the years of her life had never held half so much happiness as now lived in each of the moments when she held her little baby in her arms. And the years went on, and the King grew more and more clever at magic, and more and more disagreeable at home, and the Princess grew more beautiful and more dear every day she lived.

The Queen and the Princess were feeding the gold-fish in the courtyard fountains with crumbs of the Princess's eighteenth birthday cake, when the King came into the courtyard, looking as black as thunder, with his black raven hopping after him. He shook his fist at his family, as indeed he generally did whenever he met them, for he was not a King with pretty home manners. The raven sat down on the edge of the marble basin and tried to peck the gold-fish. It was all he could do to show that he was in the same temper as his master.

"A girl indeed!" said the King, angrily. "I wonder you can dare to look me in the



"HE SHOOK HIS FIST AT HIS FAMILY."

face, when you remember how your silliness has spoiled everything."

"You oughtn't to speak to my mother like that," said the Princess. She was eighteen, and it came to her suddenly and all in a moment that she was a grown-up: so she spoke out.

The King could not utter a word for several minutes. He was too angry. But the Queen said, "My dear child, don't interfere," quite crossly, for she was frightened.

And to her husband she said, "My dear, why do you go on worrying about it? Our daughter is not a boy, it is true—but she may marry a clever man who could rule your kingdom after you, and learn as much magic as ever you cared to teach him."

Then the King found his tongue.

"If she *does* marry," he said, slowly, "her husband will have to be a *very* clever man—oh, yes, very clever indeed! And he will have to know a very great deal more magic

than *I* shall ever care to teach him."

The Queen knew at once by the King's tone that he was going to be disagreeable.

"Ah," she said, "don't punish the child because she loves her mother."

"I'm not going to punish her for *that*," said he; "I'm only going to teach her to respect her father."

And without another word he went off to his laboratory and worked all night, boiling different coloured things in crucibles, and copying charms in curious twisted letters from old brown books with mould stains on their yellowy pages.

The next day his plan was all arranged. He took the poor Princess to the Lone Tower, which

stands on an island in the sea, a thousand miles from everywhere. He gave her a dowry, and settled a handsome income on her. He engaged a competent dragon to look after her, and also a respectable griffin whose birth and bringing-up he knew all about. And he said:—

"Here you shall stay, my dear, respectful daughter, till the clever man comes to marry you. He'll have to be clever enough to sail a ship through the Nine Whirlpools that spin round the island, and to kill the dragon and the griffin. Till he comes you'll never get any older or any wiser. No doubt he will soon come. You can employ yourself in embroidering your wedding gown. I wish you joy, my dutiful child."

And his car, drawn by live thunderbolts (thunder travels very fast), rose in the air and disappeared, and the poor Princess was left, with the dragon and the griffin, in the Island of the Nine Whirlpools,

The Queen, left at home, cried for a day and a night, and then she remembered the witch and called to her. And the witch came, and the Queen told her all.

"For the sake of the twice twenty-five kisses you gave me," said the witch, "I will help you. But it is the last thing I can do, and it is not much. Your daughter is under a spell, and I can take you to her. But, if I do, you will have to be turned to stone, and to stay so till the spell is taken off the child."

"I would be a stone for a thousand years," said the poor Queen, "if at the end of them I could see my Dear again."

So the witch took the Queen in a car drawn by live sunbeams (which travel more quickly than anything else in the world, and much quicker than thunder), and so away and away to the Lone Tower on the Island of the Nine Whirlpools.

And there was the Princess sitting on the floor in the best room of the Lone Tower, crying as if her heart would break, and the dragon and the griffin were sitting primly on each side of her.

"Oh, mother, mother, mother," she cried, and hung round the Queen's neck as if she would never let go.

"Now," said the witch, when they had all cried as much as was good for them, "I can do one or two other little things for you. Time shall not make the Princess sad. All days will be like one day till her deliverer comes. And you and I, dear Queen, will sit in stone at the gate of the tower. In doing this for you I lose all my witch's powers, and when I say the spell that changes you to stone, I shall change with you, and if ever we come out of the stone, I shall be a witch no more, but only a happy old woman."

Then the three kissed each other again and

again, and the witch said the spell, and on each side of the door there was now a stone lady. One of them had a stone crown on its head and a stone sceptre in its hand; but the other held a stone tablet with words on it, which the griffin and the dragon could not read, though they had both had a very good education.

And now all days seemed like one day to the Princess, and the next day always seemed the day when her mother would come out of the stone and kiss her again. And the years went slowly by.

The wicked King died, and someone else took his kingdom, and many things were changed in the world; but the island did not change, nor the Nine Whirlpools, nor the griffin, nor the dragon, nor the two stone ladies. And all the time, from the very first,



"THE LONE TOWER ON THE ISLAND OF THE NINE WHIRLPOOLS."

the day of the Princess's deliverance was coming, creeping nearer, and nearer, and nearer. But no one saw it coming except the Princess, and she only in dreams. And the years went by in tens and in hundreds, and still the Nine Whirlpools spun round, roaring in triumph the story of many a good ship that had gone down in their swirl, bearing with it some Prince who had tried to win the Princess and her dowry. And the great sea knew all the other stories of the Princes who had come from very far, and had seen the whirlpools, and had shaken their wise heads and said: "Bout ship!" and gone discreetly home to their nice, safe, comfortable kingdoms.

But no one told the story of the deliverer who was to come. And the years went by.

Now, after more scores of years than you would like to add up on your slate, a certain sailor-boy sailed on the high seas with his uncle, who was a skilled skipper. And the boy could reef a sail, and coil a rope, and keep the ship's nose steady before the wind. And he was as good a boy as you would find in a month of Sundays, and worthy to be a Prince.

Now there is Something which is wiser than all the world—and it knows when people are worthy to be Princes. And this Something came from the farther side of the seventh world, and whispered in the boy's ear.

And the boy heard, though he did not know he heard—and he looked out over the black sea with the white foam horses galloping over it, and far away he saw a light. And he said to the skipper, his uncle:—

"What light is that?"

Then the skipper said, "All good things defend you, Nigel, from sailing near that light. It is not mentioned in all charts; but it is marked in the old chart I steer by, which was my father's father's before me, and his father's father's before him. It is the light that shines from the Lone Tower that stands above the Nine Whirlpools. And when my father's father was young he heard from the very old man, his great-great-grandfather, that in that tower an enchanted Princess, fairer than the day, waits to be delivered. But there is no deliverance: so never steer that way; and think no more of the Princess, for that is only an idle tale. But the whirlpools are quite real."

So, of course, from that day Nigel thought of nothing else. And as he sailed hither and thither upon the high seas he saw from

time to time the light that shone out to sea across the wild swirl of the Nine Whirlpools. And one night, when the ship was at anchor and the skipper asleep in his bunk, Nigel launched the ship's boat and steered alone over the dark sea towards the light. He dared not go very near till daylight should show him what, indeed, were the whirlpools he had to dread.

But when the dawn came he saw the Lone Tower stand dark against the pink and primrose of the east—and about its base the sullen swirl of black water, and he heard the wonderful roar of it. So he hung off, and all that day and for six days besides. And when he had watched seven days he knew something. For you are certain to know something if you give for seven days your whole thought to it, even though it be only the first declension, or the nine-times table, or the dates of the Norman Kings.

What he knew was this: that for five minutes out of the 1,440 minutes that make up a day the whirlpools slipped into silence, while the tide went down and left the yellow sand bare. And every day this happened, but every day it was five minutes earlier than it had been the day before. He made sure of this by the ship's chronometer, which he had thoughtfully brought with him.

So on the eighth day at five minutes before noon Nigel got ready. But when the whirlpools suddenly stopped whirling and the tide sank, like water in a basin that has a hole in it, he stuck to his oars and put his back into his stroke, and presently beached the boat on the yellow sand. Then he dragged her into a cave, and sat down to wait.

By five minutes and one second past noon, the whirlpools were black and busy again, and Nigel peeped out of his cave. And on the rocky ledge overhanging the sea he saw a Princess as beautiful as the day, with golden hair and a green gown—and he went out to meet her.

"I've come to save you," he said. "How darling and beautiful you are!"

"You are very good, and very clever, and very dear," said the Princess, smiling and giving him both her hands.

He shut a little kiss in each hand before he let them go.

"So now, when the tide is low again, I will take you away in my boat," he said.

"But what about the dragon and the griffin?" asked the Princess.

"Dear me," said Nigel; "I didn't know about them. I suppose I can kill them?"

"Don't be a silly boy," said the Princess,



"HE SHUT A LITTLE KISS IN EACH HAND."

pretending to be very grown-up, for, though she had been on the island Time only knows how many years, she was still only eighteen, and she still liked pretending. "You haven't a sword, or a shield, or anything!"

"Well, don't the beasts ever go to sleep?"

"Why, yes," said the Princess, "but only once in twenty-four hours, and then the dragon is turned to stone. But the griffin has dreams. The griffin sleeps at tea-time every day, but the dragon sleeps every day for five minutes, and every day it is three minutes later than it was the day before."

"What time does he sleep to-day?" asked Nigel.

"At eleven," said the Princess.

"Ah," said Nigel, "can you do sums?"

"No," said the Princess, sadly. "I was never good at them."

"Then I must," said Nigel. "I *can*; but it's slow work, and it makes me very unhappy. It'll take me days and days."

"Don't begin yet," said the Princess; "you'll have plenty of time to be unhappy in when I'm gone. Tell me all about yourself."

So he did. And then she told him all about herself.

"I know I've been here a long time," she said, "but I don't know what time is. And I am very busy sewing silk flowers in a golden gown for my wedding-day. And the griffin does the housework—his wings are so convenient and feathery for sweeping and dusting; and the dragon does the cooking: he's hot inside, so, of course, it's no trouble to him; and though I don't know what time is I'm sure it's time for my wedding-day, because my golden gown only wants one more white daisy on the sleeve, and a lily on the bosom of it, and then it will be ready."

Just then they heard a dry, rustling clatter on the rocks above them and a snorting sound.

"It's the dragon," said the Princess, hurriedly. "Good-bye. Be a good boy, and get your sum done." And she ran away and left him to his arithmetic.

Now the sum was this: "If the whirlpools stop and the tide goes down once in every twenty-four hours, and gets five minutes earlier every twenty-four hours, and if the dragon sleeps every day, and does it three minutes later every day, in how many days

and at what time in the day will the tide go down three minutes before the dragon falls asleep?"

It is quite a simple sum, as you see: *you* could do it in a minute because you have been to a good school, and have taken pains with your lessons; but it was quite otherwise with poor Nigel. He sat down to work out his sum with a piece of chalk on a smooth stone. He tried it by practice and the unitary method, by multiplication, and by rule-of-three-and-three-quarters. He tried it by decimals and by compound interest. He tried it by square-root and by cube-root. He tried it by addition, simple and otherwise, and he tried it by mixed examples in vulgar fractions. But it was all of no use. Then he tried to do the sum by algebra, by simple and by quadratic equations, by trigonometry, by logarithms, and by conic sections. But it would not do. He got an answer every time, it is true, but it was always a different one, and he could not feel sure which answer was right.

And just as he was feeling how much more important than anything else it is to be able to do your sums, the Princess came back. And now it was getting dark.

"Why, you've been seven hours over that sum," she said, "and you haven't done it yet. Look here, this is what is written on the tablet of the statue by the lower gate. It has figures in it. Perhaps it is the answer to the sum."

She held out to him a big white magnolia leaf. And she had scratched on it with the pin of her pearl brooch, and it had turned brown where she had scratched it, as magnolia leaves will do. Nigel read:—

AFTER NINE DAYS

T 11. 24

D 11. 27 Ans.

P.S.—And the griffin is artificial. R.

He clapped his hands softly.

"Dear Princess," he said, "I know that's the right answer. It says R, too, you see. But I'll just prove it." So he hastily worked the sum backwards in decimals and equations and conic sections, and all the rules he could think of. And it came right every time.

"So now we must wait," said he. And they waited.

And every day the Princess came to see Nigel and brought him food cooked by the



"EVERY DAY THE PRINCESS CAME TO SEE NIGEL AND BROUGHT HIM FOOD."

dragon, and he lived in his cave, and talked to her when she was there, and thought about her when she was not, and they were both as happy as the longest day in summer. Then at last came The Day. Nigel and the Princess laid their plans.

"You're sure he won't hurt *you*, my only treasure?" said Nigel.

"Quite," said the Princess. "I only wish I were half as sure that he wouldn't hurt *you*."

"My Princess," he said, tenderly, "two

great powers are on our side: the power of Love and the power of Arithmetic. Those two are stronger than anything else in the world."

So when the tide began to go down Nigel and the Princess ran out on to the

engines all letting off steam at the top of their voices inside Cannon Street Station.

And the two lovers stood looking up at the dragon. He was dreadful to look at. His head was white with age—and his beard had grown so long that he caught his claws



"HE BREATHED FIRE TILL THE WET SAND HISSED AGAIN."

sands, and there, full in sight of the terrace where the dragon kept watch, Nigel took his Princess in his arms and kissed her. The griffin was busy sweeping the stairs of the Lone Tower, but the dragon saw, and he gave a cry of rage—and it was like twenty

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in it as he walked. His wings were white with the salt that had settled on them from the spray of the sea. His tail was long and thick and jointed and white, and had little legs to it, any number of them—far too

many—so that it looked like a very large fat silkworm; and his claws were as long as lessons, and as sharp as bayonets.

"Good - bye, love!" cried Nigel, and ran out across the yellow sand towards the sea. He had one end of a cord tied to his arm.

The dragon was clambering down the face of the cliff, and next moment he was crawling and writhing and sprawling and wriggling across the beach after

Nigel, making great holes in the sand with his heavy feet—and the very end of his tail, where there were no legs, made as it dragged a mark in the sand such as you make when you launch a boat; and he breathed fire till the wet sand hissed again, and the water of



the little rock pools got quite frightened, and all went off in steam.

And still Nigel held on and the dragon after him.

The Princess could see nothing for the steam, and she stood crying bitterly, but still holding on tight with her right hand to the other end of the cord which Nigel had told her to hold; while with her left she held the ship's chronometer, and looked at it through her tears as he had bidden her look, so as to know when to pull the rope.

On went Nigel over the sand, and on went the dragon after him. And the tide was low, and sleepy little waves lapped the sand's edge.

Now at the lip of the water Nigel paused and looked back, and the dragon made a bound, beginning a scream of rage that was like all the engines of all the railways in England. But it never uttered the second half of that scream, for now it knew suddenly that it was sleepy—it turned to hurry back to dry land, because sleeping near whirlpools is so unsafe. But before it reached the shore sleep caught it and turned it to stone. And Nigel, seeing this, ran shoreward for his life—and the tide began to flow in, and the time of the whirlpool's sleep was nearly over, and he stumbled and he waded and he swam, and the Princess pulled for dear life at the cord in her hand, and pulled him up on to the dry shelf of rock just as the great sea dashed in and made itself once more into the girdle of Nine Whirlpools all round the island.

But the dragon was asleep under the whirlpools, and when he woke up from being asleep he found he was drowned, so there was an end of him.

"Now, there's only the griffin," said Nigel. And the Princess said:—

"Yes—only——" And she kissed Nigel and went back to sew the last leaf of the last lily on the bosom of her wedding gown. And she thought and thought of what was written on the stone above the griffin being artificial—and next day she said to Nigel:—

"You know a griffin is half a lion and half an eagle, and the other two halves when they're joined make the leo-griff. But I've never seen *him*. Yet I have an idea."

So they talked it over and arranged everything.

Then when the griffin fell asleep that afternoon at tea-time, Nigel went softly behind him and trod on his tail, and at the same time the Princess cried: "Look out! there's a lion behind you."

And the griffin, waking suddenly from his dreams, twisted his large neck round to look for the lion, and saw a lion's flank, and fastened its eagle beak in it. For the griffin had been artificially made by the King-enchanter, and the two halves had never really got used to each other. So now the eagle half of the griffin, who was still rather sleepy, believed that it was fighting a lion, and the lion-part, being half asleep, thought it was fighting an eagle, and the whole griffin in its deep drowsiness hadn't the sense to pull itself together and remember what it was made of. So the griffin rolled over and over, one end of it fighting with the other, till the eagle end pecked the lion end to death, and the lion end tore the eagle end with its claws till it died. And so the griffin that was made of a lion and an eagle perished, exactly as if it had been made of Kilkenny cats.

"Poor griffin," said the Princess, "it was very good at the house-work. I always liked it better than the dragon: it wasn't so hot-tempered."

And at that moment there was a soft, silky rush behind the Princess, and there was her mother, the Queen, who had slipped out of the stone statue directly the griffin was dead, and now came hurrying to take her dear daughter in her arms. The witch was clambering slowly off her pedestal. She was a little stiff with standing still so long.

When they had all explained everything over and over to each other as many times as was good for them, the witch said:—

"Well, but what about the whirlpools?" And Nigel said he didn't know. Then the witch said: "I'm not a witch any more. I'm only a happy old woman, but I know some things still. Those whirlpools were made by the enchanter-King's dropping nine drops of his blood into the sea. And his blood was so wicked that the sea has been trying ever since to get rid of it, and that made the whirlpools. Now you've only got to go out at low tide——"

So Nigel understood and went out at low tide, and found in the sandy hollow left by the first whirlpool a great red ruby. And that was the first drop of the wicked King's blood. And next day Nigel found another, and next day another, and so on till the ninth day, and then the sea was as smooth as glass.

The nine rubies were used afterwards in agriculture. You had only to throw them out into a field if you wanted it ploughed. Then the whole surface of the land turned itself over in its anxiety to get rid of some-

thing so wicked, and in the morning the field was found to be ploughed as thoroughly as any young man at Oxford. So the wicked King did some good after all.

When the sea was smooth, ships came from far and wide bringing people to hear the wonderful story. And a beautiful palace was built, and the Princess was married to Nigel in her gold dress, and they all lived happily as long as was good for them.

The dragon still lies, a stone dragon on the sand, and at low tide the little children play round him and over him. But the

pieces that were left of the griffin were buried under the herb-bed in the palace garden, because it had been so good at house-work, and it wasn't its fault that it had been made so badly and put to such poor work as guarding a lady from her lover.

I have no doubt that you will wish to know what the Princess lived on during the long years when the dragon did the cooking. My dear, she lived on her income: and that is a thing which a great many people would like to be able to do.



"LITTLE CHILDREN PLAY ROUND HIM AND OVER HIM."