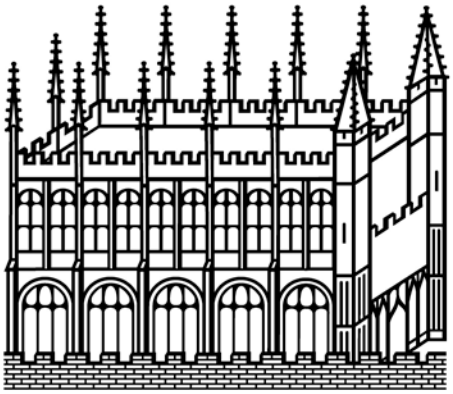
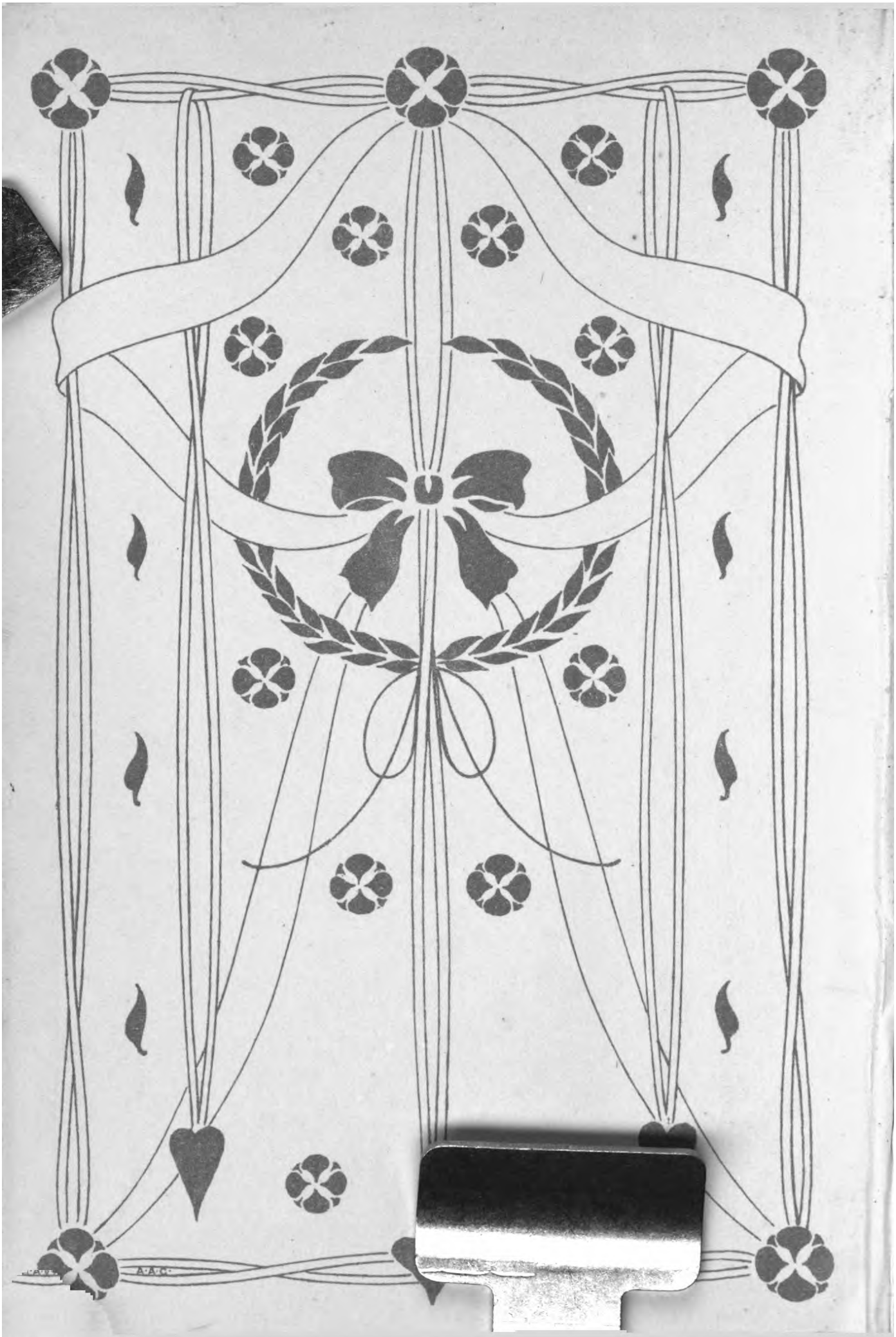
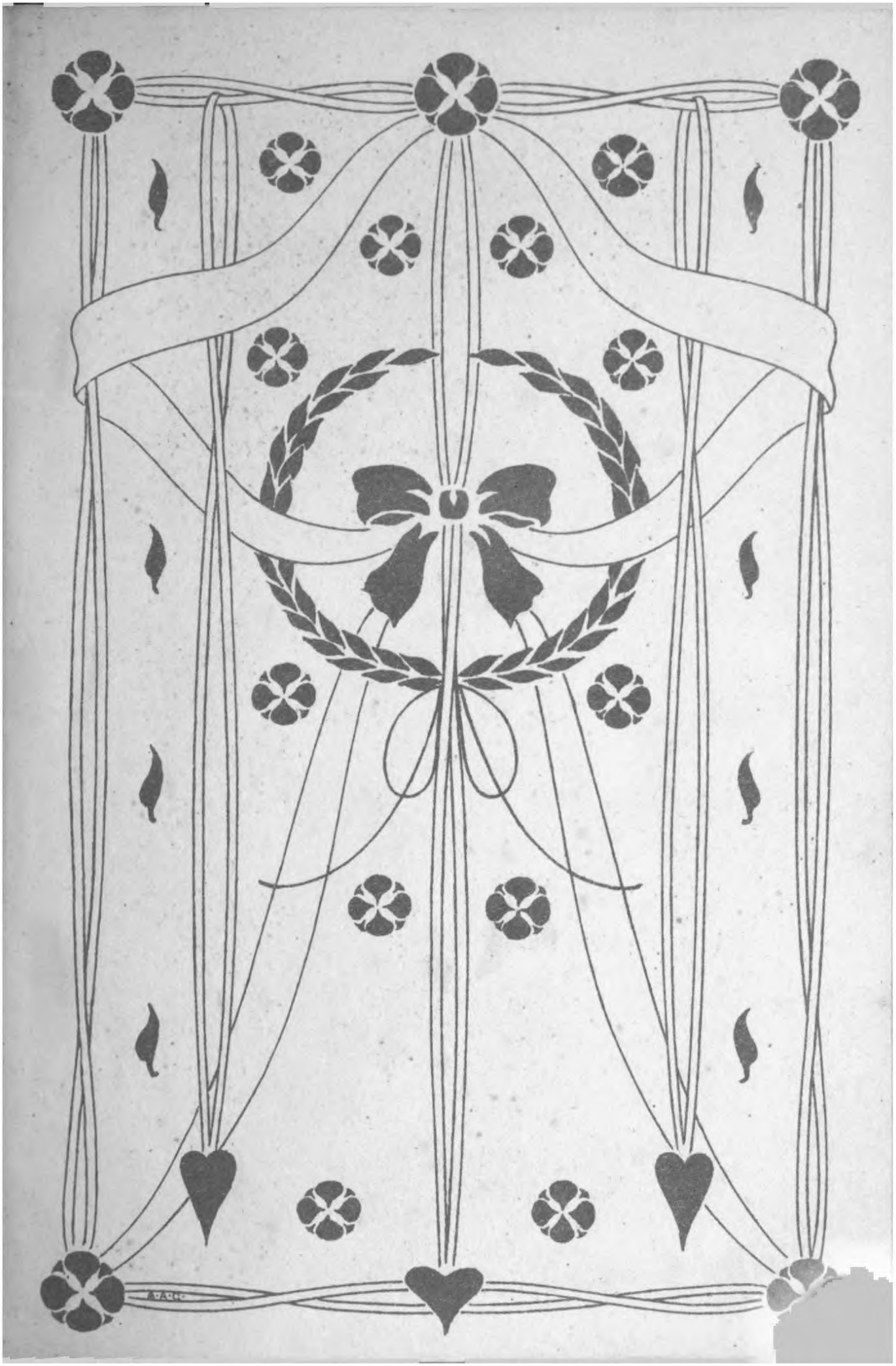


Mr. Wind and Madam Rain





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THE BLACK CAVALIER BEHAVES RIGHT VALIANTLY

Page 123

MR. WIND & MADAM RAIN

From the French of

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STORIES OLD AND NEW

A small chosen library is like a walled garden where a child may safely play. In that charmed seclusion the love of books, like the love of flowers, grows of itself. If the reading habit is to be acquired, the child ought from the first to be given real *books, which may be handled with pleasure and kept with pride—books containing literature suited to its own age.*

This volume belongs to a series of "Stories Old and New" which has been prepared specially for children. The books have been carefully chosen so as to include, along with many charming stories by the best children's authors of to-day, a due proportion of those older tales which never grow old.

To secure simplicity and right gradation, the text has been prepared to suit the different ages of readers. Care has been given to the illustration, print, and binding of the series, for it is believed that this is the best way to secure from the children that careful handling of the volumes which is the mark of the true book-lover.

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MR. WIND AND MADAM RAIN

CHAPTER I

A GUSTY GUEST

In the days of the good King Robert of France there lived in Brittany a poor miller. John Peter, for that was his name, had nothing in the world to bring him wealth but a mill, a tumble-down hut, and a kitchen-garden in which he planted cabbages and carrots. But John Peter was very unlucky; for he often saw his neighbours' mill-sails turning round on the hills, while his own stood still, because the wind never blew in his direction. And the vegetables in his garden dried up and died for lack of rain, in spite of the pains he took to water them.

The poor miller had not much spirit to face his ill-luck bravely, and so he spent his time in crying: "Alas! Mr. Wind, why won't you blow on my mill? And alas! Madam Rain, why won't you fall on my garden, so that I may have some means of gaining a living?" His cries of sorrow, however, were of no use; the wind did not listen, and the rain troubled itself very little about him.

In order to drive away his sadness, the miller married a pretty country girl named Claudine, who was as poor as himself, but quick and clever, and a good housewife. Claudine cleaned the house, mended the linen, put everything in order, kept poultry, and carried the eggs to market. Then, after a while, just when her household matters began to turn out fairly well, she had a little son, who was given the name of Peter.

All the money that Claudine had saved since her wedding was scarcely enough to buy clothes and a cradle for her baby. Indeed, when these things were bought her last farthing was spent. To add to her

troubles, she was now taken ill, and the village doctor had to be called in. John Peter was forced to leave his work that he might wait on Claudine, for he could not pay for a nurse for her. And thus these poor people found themselves all at once in great distress.

One night, while John Peter was sitting up watching near his wife and child as they slept, and thinking of their unhappy state, he said to himself:

" If all my troubles had come upon me alone, I should not have minded so much, for I am strong enough to bear cold and hunger. But my wife will need fire to warm her, good food to make her strong, and medicine in her sickness. And I have neither wood to put upon the fire, nor meat to make broth with, no, nor money to pay the doctor.

" I love my Claudine and our child more than all the treasures of the world; and I am not sorry that I married a girl as poor as myself. The want of wind and rain is the sole cause of my trouble. If only the wind would blow on my mill I

Mr. Wind

should soon be able to get myself out of this scrape."

As John Peter spoke these last words, he saw the flame of the candle flicker, and heard the rusty weathercock turning on the top of the cottage. The wind was just beginning to blow. The astonished miller ran quickly to his mill, and put grain enough into the wooden trough for the night's grinding. He untied the rope which held fast the mill-sails, and then they began to turn round, and the mill set to work to grind the corn into flour and bran.

John Peter now went back to his wife, who was still sleeping, and he rubbed his hands together when he thought of the good news he had to tell her when she awoke.

The rusty weathercock, however, creaked louder and louder. The candle had to be placed behind a curtain, to prevent its being blown out, for there were so many holes and chinks in the walls of the cottage that the draughts came in everywhere. The window shook, the door

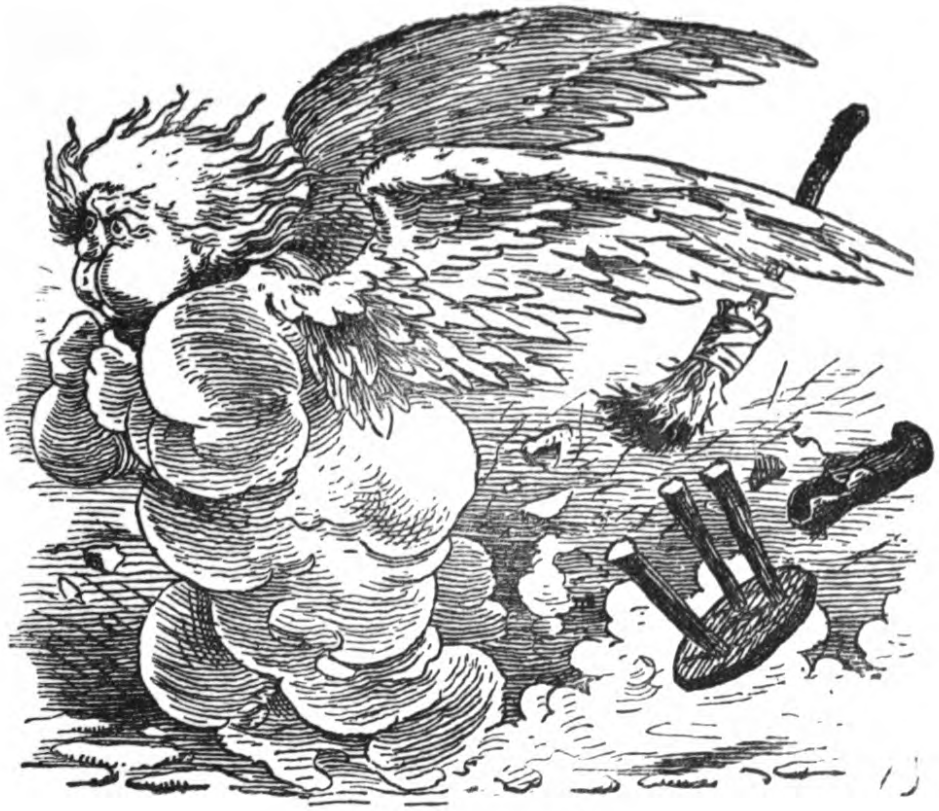
moved on its hinges, and the ashes from the hearth flew all about the room.

In the midst of all this noise and flurry John Peter thought he heard the voices of the wind-spirits whispering these words in his ears:

"Let us whistle," they said, "let us whistle through this broken pane, and let us try to tear off the paper that stops it up. Let us moan, let us moan through this hole. Let us cling to the thatch of this tumble-down hut. Let us push against this ill-fastened door. Let us murmur, let us hum in this chimney."

In spite of the wonder which the miller felt at hearing such strange voices, he was not afraid. So he answered: "Whistle, moan, hum as much as you like, so long as my mill turns." At the same instant the latch went up and the door burst wide open, and John Peter saw a most wonderful figure enter.

It was a person who looked more like a giant or a spirit than a man. His body would swell or shrink, whenever he chose, and could bend itself in every direction.



Mr. Wind pays a Visit

His eyes shone like balls of fire, and his great chest sent forth a noise like the sound of a smith's bellows. There were wings on his shoulders so large that they could not spread themselves out in the cottage.

A red mantle of thin stuff floated around him, falling into so many folds that the shape of his body could not be seen clearly. His feet glided lightly over the floor; yet he seemed rather tired, as though he had come a long distance.

" Give me a chair," said he to John Peter, " so that I may rest a moment with you before going on my way."

The miller eagerly offered his best straw-bottomed chair. " Sit down, my lord," said he, " and rest yourself as long as you like in my cottage. But have the goodness not to speak so loudly, or you will awaken my wife, who is ill."

" Fear nothing," replied the stranger, " the murmur of my words will make her sleep more soundly. I am Mr. Wind. You have called upon my name many a time. You will not wonder at my being a little out of breath when I tell you that in less than an hour I have visited the whole sea-coast of Brittany, and have travelled a long way over the ocean.

" Your lord, the great Baron, who lives at the castle yonder, would not receive me. His servants have shut all the doors and windows, and fastened them with heavy bolts and strong shutters. I have scarcely been able to get to the staircases through a skylight in one of the towers, or into the kitchen through a little air-

hole. But I had my revenge upon the sentinels who are on guard in the courts of the castle, for I threw down their sentry-boxes.

" At your cottage, however, I found the walls in ruins, and the latch without a fastening. I had only to push your door, and I entered at once. This is just the sort of cottage I like. You have but one poor straw-bottomed chair, and that you most willingly offered to me when I came in. I thank you for this kindly welcome. Ask, therefore, some boon of me, John Peter, and I will grant it to you readily."

" Mr. Wind," said the miller, " all I ask of you is to blow for three or four hours a day on my mill."

" My poor John Peter," replied Mr. Wind, " I am not allowed to go out every day. Madam Rain fills the sky for a third part of the year. Like an ungrateful creature, she drives me away after I have brought on her clouds; and the Sun agrees still worse with me. I sometimes live shut up in my cavern for months.

" But I will take care to send you soft

breezes and little spirits, who go out at my bidding all over the country morning and evening; and I will order them not to forget your mill. Whenever you are in trouble or unhappy, come and see me at my cavern, and I will give you help. I live up above there, at the top of the Southern Mountain."

"Ah! Mr. Wind," cried John Peter, "I am unhappy and in trouble at this very moment. If you would but come to my help at once!"

"It is too late for me to do so to-night," replied Mr. Wind. "I must start this moment for Paris, where I have a dozen chimneys to throw down, and in half an hour I must be at home, for here is Madam Rain, close at my heels. Good-bye, John Peter!"

As he spoke, Mr. Wind sprang at one bound out of the cottage, spread his wings, and vanished. At the end of half an hour the whistling, the moaning, and the humming grew less, and afterwards died away altogether. The miller then knew that Mr. Wind had returned from his journey,

and had gone home to his cavern in the peak of the Southern Mountain. But the little wind-spirits he had left behind him were strong enough to keep the mill going.

CHAPTER II

A DAMP VISITOR

Mr. Wind had no sooner left the cottage than rain began to fall. It came gently at first, and afterwards in torrents; and the brooks were swelled to overflowing. When the dried-up earth had drunk its fill, pools were formed here and there, into which the rain dropped with a sound like little bells. Then John Peter fancied he heard the voices of the rain-spirits, saying:

" Let us fall, let us fall on this thatched roof; let us wet, let us wet the whole of this cottage. Let us drench the leaves of the cabbages; let us cover these pebbles with water. Let us rush in this spout; let us run along this beam; let us jump through this hole. Let us fall, let us wet all that we can. Little drops, drip, drip, drop!"

Instead of being afraid, John Peter said aloud: " Fall, wet; water as much as you please! To-morrow my garden will be greener, and my cabbages the better for it."

Mr. Wind had broken the latch, and gone out without shutting the door. It stood three or four inches ajar, and through this narrow space John Peter now saw a tall lady enter.

She was a very odd-looking person, more like a fairy than a woman; and one of the strangest things about her was, that one could see almost straight through her! Her face was pale and thin, as if she had been ill, and her damp, straight hair fell down to her feet. Her eyes were dimmed by two streams of tears, and her nose was a little swelled from a cold in the head. Her dress and mantle were grey. Upon her silken scarf shone the seven colours of the rainbow.

The lady came in slowly, without seeming to move her feet, and stretched her arms, and yawned, as if she were weary of everything in the world.

" Give me a chair," said she to John

Madam Rain

Peter, " so that I may rest for a moment before I go down into the valley."

" Sit down, ma'am," said the miller. " But be kind enough to speak a little lower, for my wife is ill, and my child is asleep."

" Fear not!" replied the lady, " the sound of my words will make them sleep more deeply. I am Madam Rain, whose name you have so often called upon. Only five minutes ago I was eighteen hundred fathoms above the earth, and I came down in such a hurry that I am a little giddy. The lord of the castle yonder has shut his doors and windows in my face, but I have had my revenge by drenching his sentinels to the skin. I found chinks in the walls of your cottage, and the window-panes broken, and the door open. So I like this hut of yours; and I will remember your kind welcome. If I can serve you in anything, take your chance now, and ask me for whatever you wish, and I will give it to you."

" Madam Rain," said John Peter, " what could I ask of you but to be kind enough

to fall two or three times a week on the vegetables in my garden?"

"Alas! friend," said the lady, "I do not go out and enjoy myself as often as I should like. The glorious time of the Great Flood is past, and Mr. Sun is stronger than I. When I am out he is always driving me back to my cave. And then there is my Lady Moon. Ever since the time of Adam I have been trying to find out whether she means to be friendly to me or not, and I have not yet been able to settle the question. But, with the help of those wise men who know so much about her, I hope to know exactly, in three or four thousand years, how she has really made up her mind to treat me.

"Except at your cottage, I am looked crossly upon everywhere, and am shut up about two-thirds of the year. But I will send you my morning dews, and the little clouds to which I give the key of the fields between the gleams of sunshine. And should any bad fortune befall your wife or child, do not fail to tell me, and I will take care of them."

"Ah! Madam Rain," replied John Peter, "take care of them now! My wife is very ill, and if she dies my little Peter will die too."

"You ought to have told me that at first," replied the dame. "You are nothing but a clumsy fellow, after all, John Peter. I am forced to set off at once to wet the plains of Normandy and Beauce. The Sun, too, is coming soon to dry all my work. So farewell, honest John Peter! I live in my Western Cave by the seashore."

As she spoke, Madam Rain slipped through the partly-opened door, and glided down to the bottom of the valley. At the end of an hour the dawn began to show in the sky, and the rain-spirits murmured less loudly. The brooks became threads of water, and were quiet; and the sound of the little bells died away. A flood of sunshine soon drove away the clouds, and the miller then knew that Madam Rain had gone back to the Western Cave by the seashore.

John Peter left his cottage and went to his mill, where he found enough flour to

fill two sacks. He then went to his garden and took up armfuls of cabbages and lettuces, which the rain had quickly made fresh and green and ready for gathering.

The flour he carried to a farmer, who gave him two crown pieces for it; and the vegetables he sold in the market. His wife was still sleeping when he returned home, with a faggot of wood on his shoulder, good food in his basket, and money in his pocket.

CHAPTER III

MR. WIND AT HOME

John Peter's wife, having slept till morning, had heard neither wind nor rain. So, when she awoke, she was surprised to learn the glad news that the mill had been turning all night, and to see the money and food which her husband had brought home. Her long sleep had already done her a great deal of good, and the joy she now felt made her quickly quite well again.

John Peter, however, did not say a word to his wife about the two strange visitors who had been at the cottage. " Claudine," thought he, " has more sense than I have. But then she is rather fond of gossiping, and she would go and tell my secrets to her neighbours, and that might bring trouble upon me."

On the following days the mill turned

morning and evening; the dew came down on the garden; and, with food in the cupboard and a good fire on the hearth, John Peter and his wife fared pretty well. Claudine was now as strong as she had ever been, and little Peter looked fresh and blooming, like a rosy apple. In short, there was once more happiness and cheerfulness in the miller's home.

One day the lord of the nearest castle, as he was going out hunting, passed John Peter's cottage. Now, lords at this time had great power. When they were good they made their tenants and servants happy; but when they were bad they were severe and unjust towards them, and treated the poor people very cruelly. This lord, the Baron, to whom John Peter was tenant, or vassal, as it was called, was very hard-hearted. He was far too fond of money also, and, in order to get it, he burdened his people with heavy taxes.

He made them pay a poll-tax—that is, a tax for every person, poll being an old word for head—which was a tenth part of all that they had. Nor was the poll-tax

all they were forced to pay him; he found out for them a hundred other vexations. The miller, on seeing his lord, was struck with dismay, for he thought the visit would bring him no good.

"Ho, there! John Peter," cried the Baron, without getting off his horse, "you owe me six months' taxes, and to-morrow I shall send my steward to you for the sum of ten crowns."

"My lord Baron," replied the miller, "grant me three months' grace. My wife has been ill; and if I give you ten crowns, which is all that I have, I shall have no money left for myself."

"I will not grant you even three days," replied the Baron. "If you do not pay to-morrow, all that you have shall be sold. You shall be dragged from your cottage, and I will make you work in my fields under the whip."

The Baron then galloped away without waiting to hear anything more.

On the following day the Baron's steward came to the cottage, carrying a money-bag, and John Peter was forced to pay him the

ten crowns. This sum was all that the miller had been able to put by during a month; so all the kindness that Mr. Wind and Madam Rain had shown to him was now thrown away, and Claudine began to weep bitterly.

"Do not cry," said John Peter to her; "everybody is not as wicked as the Baron. Give me my hob-nailed shoes, my stick, and my woollen cloak; I have a visit to pay. Do not be uneasy if I do not come home until late to-night; I shall have some good news to bring you."

Claudine guessed at once that her husband was keeping a secret from her. She therefore dried her tears, and began to ask the miller a thousand questions in order to draw this secret from him. But he would tell her nothing; and he set out with his hob-nailed shoes, his stick, and his woollen cloak.

He crossed some fields and meadows, and at length he reached the foot of the Southern Mountain. After climbing for about three hours through a wood of fir trees, he came to wild heaths, and at last

to steep rocks. Up these rocks he scrambled with the help of his hob-nailed shoes and his stick, and before sunset he got to the top of the mountain. Seeing the entrance to a cavern, he thought it must surely be the home of Mr. Wind.

The Miller seeks Mr. Wind

The cavern looked deep and gloomy, and John Peter, at the sight of so dark and dismal a place, did not feel at all bold. As bravely as he could, however, he went in, slowly feeling along the ground with his stick. He had scarcely taken five-and-twenty steps before he heard the voices of the little wind-spirits.

"Let us blow upon this stranger," said these voices. "Let us tear off his cloak; let us blow off his hat."

But John Peter held his hat on firmly with one hand, and his woollen cloak with the other. At length he espied a light, and a moment later he saw Mr. Wind, who was seated before a table eating his supper. Jack-o'-lanterns danced round the table to light it, whilst other spirits brought dishes and flagons of wine from the bottom of two great holes which were used for the kitchen and the cellar.

" Who goes there?" cried Mr. Wind.

" It is I," replied the miller. " I am John Peter. Your lordship was pleased to rest yourself at my house about a month ago."

" Well, what do you want with me?"

" I don't know, my lord," replied the miller, stammering.

" You stupid fellow!" cried Mr. Wind. " You come here, and disturb me when I am at table, and you do not even know your errand! I see very well that I have promised to be good to a simpleton."

" Excuse me," replied John Peter; " you are so great and terrible, my lord, that I was afraid to tell my errand at first. Since

you caused my mill to work twice a day, I have gained ten crowns. This morning my lord Baron sent his steward and took them away from me, saying I owed him that sum as a tax. I beg your lordship,

Mr. Wind disturbed at supper

therefore, to help me, for I have nothing to trust in but your kindness."

" I have no time to bother myself with your affairs, nor to give you advice," said Mr. Wind in a cross tone. " Try to find out what you want, and let me know in a few words."

" What I want?" replied the miller,

" why, whatever you are pleased to give me, so long as it keeps me from dying of hunger, which is what will happen to me if I cannot find help."

" You shall not die of hunger," said Mr. Wind, more gently. Then he turned to the spirits. " Give this creature here my little silver cask," he ordered.

A spirit with wings like a bat at once brought a pretty silver cask, and another spirit brought a wand, also of silver, which he laid on the table.

" Here, take this cask and this wand," said Mr. Wind, " and when you are at home, strike the cask with the wand, and you shall see what you shall see. Now be off with you, and leave me to get my supper in peace."

CHAPTER IV

THE WONDERFUL CASK

Night had fallen when John Peter left the cavern of Mr. Wind. He nearly broke his neck among the rocks; his woollen cloak was torn by the bushes, and his feet got wet in a marsh in spite of his hob-nailed shoes. But he never lost hold of either the cask or the wand. He got to his own house at nine o'clock in the evening, and found his wife beginning to feel uneasy about him.

"What is that?" asked Claudine, as soon as she saw the little cask. "Where have you got this fine thing from? I knew very well that you were keeping a great secret from me. Now you must explain everything to me at once. Are there any precious stones in the cask? Even if there were nothing in it, the silver alone

would be worth, at least, a hundred pounds, without reckoning the workmanship. A goldsmith would give a large sum for it. Speak, then, John Peter! I am dying to know the secret."

The miller then told how he had received a visit from Mr. Wind, and how that powerful person had promised to be good to him, and had given him the cask and the wand, and had told him how to use it. John Peter warned his wife not to speak a word of all this to the gossips of the neighbourhood. But instead of listening to his advice, Claudine began to chatter again.

"You see," she said to him, "how wrong it was of you to keep this secret from me. I am cleverer than you are, and I should have given you good counsel. Then you would not have stood with your hands before you, looking stupid, as you did when Mr. Wind asked you what you wanted. I should have told you to reply, without stopping to think for even a moment, 'Give me ten thousand silver pieces'. So you would have returned

with a bagful of money, instead of this silver cask, which will cost us some trouble to get rid of."

"Who knows?" replied the miller. "My cask may be worth more than you think. Let us first of all give it a trial."

John Peter placed the little cask upright on the floor, and then, with a trembling hand, struck it with the silver wand. The barrel at once opened in two parts, like a cupboard. On one side there was a little kitchen, and on the other side a very small pantry. In the kitchen were seen spits about the size of needles, pots like thimbles, and tiny saucepans and frying-pans, that were enough to make one die with laughing even to look at.

There was a cook, three inches high, with a cotton nightcap hanging over his ear. Two little cooks'-boys, also, were seen moving about before the kitchen-stove, blowing the fire, turning the spits, and tasting the sauces. They were roasting turkeys about as large as bees, and chickens no bigger than flies. They were also frying fishes that were thinner than silkworms

just hatched, and cutting cabbages which looked like pins' heads.

All this time two men-servants, of the same height as the cook, were setting the plates and dishes in order in the pantry. They were wiping little china plates the

The Silver Cask

size of threepenny pieces, and glasses which seemed made for Jenny Wren to drink from. They filled the bottles with two drops of wine, and put two drops of water into the crystal jugs, and dinner was ready in a trice.

The miller and his wife stood amazed, watching these little folks, who were so quick and handy. Their wonder was much greater, however, when they saw

the two dwarf men-servants come out of the little cask, jump upon the table, place on it all the smoking dishes, and lay covers for two. Then, having set the first course in order, they put the bottles and the jugs in their proper places. They afterwards set out the second course and the dessert in a corner of the room, and went into their small pantry again.

The little silver cask shut up at once, and John Peter and Claudine saw nothing more. But, at the same instant, the dishes upon the table became real dishes of the usual size; and the roasted chickens, real roasted chickens. The fish were seen to be fine large fish; the bottles, large bottles filled with sweet wine; and the cover-dishes, big, handsome ones of good silver.

John Peter and his wife found themselves suddenly before a splendid supper, served for two persons, but enough for four. They placed themselves at table and ate heartily, for they were hungry. The meats were perfect, and the fowls done to a turn. John Peter drank Mr. Wind's health three times, and afterwards, content and happy,

he went to bed, fell asleep, and snored loudly.

Claudine went to bed also; but she did nothing but turn first on one side and then on the other, and could not go to sleep. She could hardly wait for morning to come, so eager was she to go and tell the adventure to her neighbour the milkwoman.

The milkwoman opened her eyes wide when she heard the story. Then she said several times, with a sigh, that Claudine was very happy to be the friend of Mr. Wind and the owner of the silver cask.

As soon as the miller's wife had left her, the milkwoman put her basket on her head and went to carry her butter and cream to the castle. There she did not fail to tell all that she had heard to her friend the cook. The cook told the news to the Baron's man-servant, and he, while he was helping his master to dress, told him of what had happened to John Peter. The Baron at once made up his mind that he would get the little silver cask for himself. So he mounted his horse and rode off to the mill.

When he got there, John Peter was only just up, and Claudine had not yet returned home. For, on leaving the milkwoman's, she had run to tell the adventure to the washerwoman, then to her other neighbour the woodman's wife, and then to her cousin the milkmaid.

"John Peter," said the Baron, "Mr. Wind, who is a friend of mine, told me this morning that he had given you a little silver cask, in which there was a magical kitchen. Now, what need have you of eating roast turkeys in such a miserable hut as this, in ragged clothes, and with worm-eaten furniture? It would be much better for you to get your tumble-down house mended by the mason and carpenter, and to buy warm clothing for your wife, and cupboards, and linen, and armchairs to furnish your cottage.

"Sell me your magical kitchen, then, and I will give you ten thousand silver pieces for it. With that sum you can build another house, buy fields, cattle, and horses; and so you will become a rich landowner."

"My lord Baron," replied the miller, "when I have spent my ten thousand silver pieces I shall have nothing left. But with my little cask, I shall have good food and drink every day as long as I live."

"What!" said the lord; "is it nothing to have a good house and to farm your own lands?"

"That is true," said John Peter; "rich land is worth more than roasted fowls. Besides, my wife scolded me for not asking Mr. Wind for ten thousand silver pieces. So, since you say you will give me this sum, why, I will take your offer."

"Well and good," said the Baron; "your wife is a sensible woman. Here are a thousand silver pieces, which I have brought with me. I will pay the rest in a fortnight, and will at once make you a written promise for it. Now, give me your silver barrel."

The miller gave up the cask, and took the bag of silver pieces; and, as he did not know how to read, he took his lord's written promise without knowing what was set down in it.

Soon after the Baron had gone off with the little silver cask, Claudine returned home, and John Peter told her what a good bargain he had just made. She began at once to utter the most woeful cries and to tear her hair.

" Ah!" said she, " must I then have for my husband a man who lets himself be tricked like a simpleton? Unhappy that I am, to have married such a blockhead!"

John Peter went into a dreadful rage. " You tiresome woman!" cried he, " did you not blame me yourself for not having asked Mr. Wind for ten thousand silver pieces instead of the cask?"

" You great goose!" replied his wife. " When I said that, I did not know what the wonderful cask was worth. Don't you see that the little dwarfs have left us plates and dishes? Every day they would have given us good silver spoons, which we might have sold to the goldsmith. Why do people wish to have lands and houses and cattle? Is it not that they may have roasted fowls to eat? Since we had these roast fowls, what need was there to run after

fields and cattle? The crops might be ruined by hail, and the cattle might die of the plague. But with the little silver cask we should have been certain of never wanting anything.

" The Baron has played a trick on you. He does not know Mr. Wind; he cheated you when he said that he was one of his friends. Very likely he will never pay you the other nine thousand silver pieces which he promised to pay in a fortnight."

John Peter now began to see how foolish he had been; but instead of saying so, he only became more angry than ever. " Then," said he, " it is by your gossiping that the Baron has got to know my secret. You went off this morning to spread the news about."

Claudine, instead of owning her fault, wept and scolded more and more. She called her husband a dolt; John Peter called his wife a minx; and then they quarrelled as millers and their wives do: after which they were friends again. For, as a rule, the miller was a good husband, and Claudine a good wife.

CHAPTER V

MR. WIND'S SECOND GIFT

Matters turned out just as Claudine had said. The Baron, having got the magical cask, troubled himself very little about his promises. When the miller went to the castle with the paper his lord had written, he was turned out, and told that he was a saucy fellow for daring to ask his lord for money. So John Peter received only one thousand silver pieces instead of the ten thousand which he had been promised.

His anger and sorrow became greater than ever when he was told that the wonderful little barrel gave splendid dinners every day, in the dining-room of the castle, to the Baron and his guests. This lord now no longer wanted a cook, and turned away his kitchen-boys.

At every feast the little dwarfs brought

out new table-linen, plates, dishes, and silver spoons and forks. And, though very mean and greedy, the Baron often asked his friends to dine with him, for the sake of getting such costly leavings. Thus he soon had so many forks and spoons that he did not know what to do with them.

John Peter vowed most solemnly that never again would he let himself be tricked by the offers of his lord; and Claudine firmly made up her mind never more to tell any secret to her gossiping friends. But unhappily these wise resolves could not undo their past foolishness, or bring back the magic barrel.

With the thousand silver pieces they had received, the miller and his wife had their cottage mended a little by the mason and the carpenter. They also bought a few household goods; and then, by being very careful, they were able to live on the rest of the money for a year.

At the end of the year the money was all spent; and John Peter no longer had the heart to work. Claudine, too, grieved and fretted, and cared no more for her

needlework or her poultry-yard. The thought of the happiness they had lost made the lives of the poor people very sad; and they found themselves more miserable and more cast down than ever.

At last John Peter made up his mind to pay another visit to Mr. Wind; and, in order not to be blamed, he asked his wife's advice.

" This time," said Claudine, " you must try to reach Mr. Wind's cavern before his supper-hour. Do not tell him how foolish you have been, but say that the Baron came and took the silver cask away by force. If he asks what you want, answer at once that you would like another little cask, or something else just as wonderful."

The miller, having his lesson ready, set out at break of day, with his hob-nailed shoes, his stick, and his woollen cloak. As he knew the way, he lost no time, and reached the cavern by six o'clock in the morning.

But the sky was covered with red clouds as far as he could see all around him, and a storm was coming on. The spirits of the

cavern were all speaking at once. Mr. Wind was calling for his travelling-dress, and was getting ready to go out. When he caught sight of the miller, he cried out in a loud voice:

" Master John Peter, you have a most awkward habit of always coming at the wrong time! In a quarter of an hour I must be in the middle of the ocean, where I have two ships to wreck. So be off with you this instant, or else I will throw you down from the top of the mountain into the plain below."

" Oh! my lord," said John Peter, " instead of harming those poor vessels that have never hurt you, listen to me. I am unhappy and have been very badly treated. The Baron came to my house this morning with his men-at-arms, and took away from me by force my little silver cask."

" That cannot be," roared Mr. Wind. " If anybody had tried to take the little silver barrel by force, it would have become so large that they would have been unable to get it out of the house. So that you have either sold it or given it away

willingly. You are an untruthful fellow and a rascal, and I do not know what stops me from breaking your head!"

John Peter fell down on his knees. " Forgive me, my lord," said he, whimpering. " If I have said what is not true, it was because my wife told me to do so. I am sorry with all my heart that I have made you so displeased and angry with me."

" Well, and what do you want of me now?" asked Mr. Wind.

" I should like another wonderful little cask," said John Peter.

" Let my little golden cask be given to him," said Mr. Wind to his spirits. " But mind, it is my last present. If he ever puts his foot in my house again, let his neck be wrung at once."

The spirits brought a pretty little cask, and a wand. John Peter put them both under his arm, hastily thanked Mr. Wind, and ran off. He was scarcely out of the cavern, when the storm broke out; and he heard Mr. Wind flying over his head at a fearful speed. The spirits of the storm

followed the miller home, with bursts of laughter.

" How happy he is!" said they. " How happy he is to have the little golden cask!"

" Yes, I am happy," replied John Peter. " You may laugh as much as you like: I don't care for you."

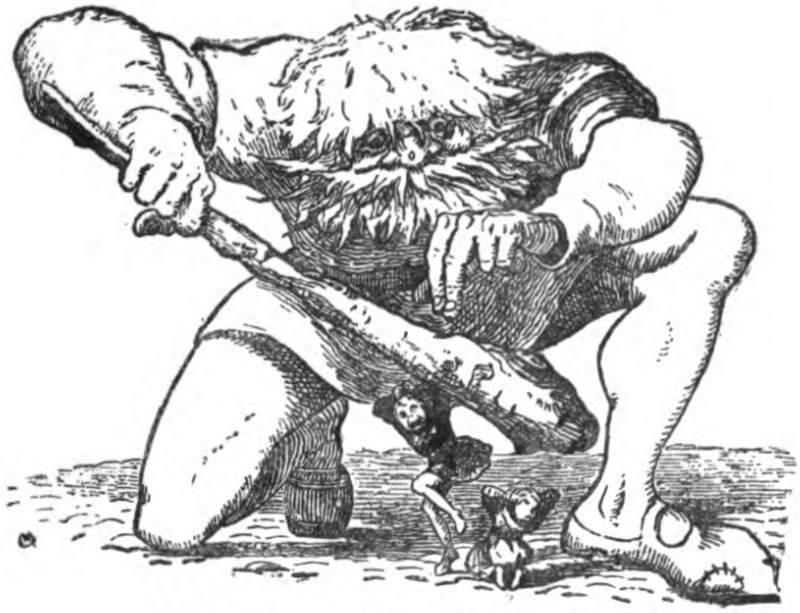
Claudine was eagerly waiting for her husband's return; and when she saw the little golden cask, she clapped her hands and jumped for joy.

" Here we are," said she, " rich for the rest of our lives. 'Tis not silver services we shall have now, but forks and spoons of gold. We will sell them, and with the price we shall be able to buy lands, and houses, and castles. And though the Baron should offer us a hundred thousand crowns, we will not let him have this little golden cask. Make haste, John Peter, make haste, and strike it with the wand! For I have not got any dinner ready, because I was so certain that Mr. Wind would be good to us again."

John Peter put the little barrel down on the floor, and struck it hard with the golden

wand. The iron hoop flew off, and the barrel opened; and out came a black smoke, which rose to the ceiling.

This smoke took a man's form. John Peter and his wife could see a head and



The Giant of the Golden Cask

then a body: but such a head! as large as a pumpkin, with a terrible face; and a body like the trunk of an oak. A moment later the miller found himself standing before a huge giant of tremendous strength, who was armed with a great club.

As soon as the giant could stand upon his feet, he ran to John Peter, and caught hold of him by the collar of his coat with

one hand. Then, with the other, he gave him five-and-twenty blows on the back with his club—such heavy and dreadful strokes that the poor man roared out aloud in his pain and terror.

When the beating was over, the giant vanished into smoke again, and went back into the little cask, as he had come out of it.

CHAPTER VI

A VISIT TO MADAM RAIN

The miller and his wife were filled with grief and fear. John Peter lay groaning on his bed for an hour; Claudine wept bitterly, and little Peter screamed with all his might. The miller's wife was just putting on her things to go and tell the sad adventure to her neighbour the milk-woman, when the Baron called at the cottage on his return from the hunt.

"Why, what do I see there?" said he. "Is that little golden barrel a fresh present from Mr. Wind?"

"Just so, my lord," replied the miller. "I have only just returned with my wonderful cask, and do not yet know what is inside it."

"You must sell it me, friend," said the Baron.

"No, no, my lord," said John Peter with a cunning look. "It is enough to have sold the little silver cask. I am not going to be so foolish a second time."

"But if I were to offer you a larger sum than I did before—twelve thousand silver pieces, for instance?"

"I would not let you have it for fifteen thousand!" answered John Peter.

"Well, then, I'll give you eighteen thousand for it."

"And I," returned the miller, "will not take less than twenty thousand."

"The sum is enormous," said the Baron, "but as I am really fond of you, I am willing to give it up to you. Here, you shall have two thousand crowns in ready money, and I will let you have a written promise for the rest."

"No, indeed, my lord; I know too well what happens with your written promises. You shall give me twenty thousand good crown pieces in ready money, or you shall never have the little golden cask; for perhaps I am again making a bad bargain."

The Baron was so afraid of losing his

chance that he sent off a special messenger to the castle, to ask the steward for the twenty thousand silver pieces. In a quarter of an hour twenty sacks full of money were brought. John Peter counted the sum, placed the sacks in order in his cupboard, locked it, and popped the key into his pocket. He then gave up the cask to the Baron, who set off delighted with his prize.

On his return to the castle the Baron shut himself up in his own room, in order to try the wonderful little cask. He struck it with his wand, and at once out came the smoke, taking the form of a giant; and the giant gave the Baron twenty-five blows with his club.

The Baron's servants heard him screeching at the top of his voice. When they ran in, they found their master stretched on the floor. But the giant had already gone back into his dwelling, and there was nothing left of him in the room except a slight smell of smoke.

As the Baron's back was not as tough as the miller's, he was forced to stay in bed for

two days with the pain. But he knew better than to speak of the blows he had received, so not a word did he say to anybody of his adventure. He even pretended to be very pleased indeed to own the little golden cask.

In the meantime the miller and his wife put their twenty thousand crowns to good use. They bought fields and cattle; and they pulled down their miserable hut. In its place they had a beautiful farmhouse built, with barns, cow-sheds, and stables; and a sheepfold besides, where they put a flock of sheep. John Peter had also ploughmen and day-labourers, and a man to attend to the mill.

Instead of grinding corn for others, he made flour of the grain which he reaped. Claudine bought herself a silk dress to go to church in on Sundays. As soon as Peter was big enough he was sent to school to learn to read; and at nine years old he knew more than either his father or mother.

These good people might have lived peacefully and happily had it not been for the wickedness of the Baron. He could

not forget the blows he had received, and the twenty thousand silver pieces he had paid for them. He amused himself by letting game loose on John Peter's land, and then, whilst pretending to hunt there, he, with his dogs, horses, and huntsmen spoiled and ruined the fields. In vain did the miller complain; nobody paid the least heed to him.

One day the Baron had a quarrel with a lord who was one of his neighbours, and he vowed that he would go to war against him. This was only an excuse for getting more taxes from his vassals. He burdened John Peter most heavily with them, and took away his ploughmen to be soldiers, and his horses to carry his soldiers to battle.

The miller, seeing that he was likely to become as poor as he had been before, bethought himself of the promises made to him by Madam Rain. So, without saying a word to his wife, he took his hob-nailed shoes, his stick, and his woollen cloak, and, setting off, he travelled a long distance until he came to the seashore and the Western Cave.

There was a grey light in this cave; a thin fog hid the entrance, and the damp oozed out from between the rocks. Little spirits, with fin-like wings, fluttered about. In passing John Peter they threw water on his nose, and whispered:

"Let us wet, let us pour down upon this silly fellow. Let us drench his cloak for him. Let us soak through his shoes and stockings."

But John Peter turned up the collar of his cloak, and walked boldly on till he reached the end of the cave. There he found Madam Rain, with her grey water-maidens round her, all as damp and drooping, and with as bad colds, as herself.

As it was the middle of summer, the lady was very busy laying in her stores. Little spirits were bringing one by one the drops of water which the sun had caused to rise from the sea, the rivers, the woods, the marshes, and the meadows. These drops the water-maidens put into golden cups, and then threw them into a large tank.

When Madam Rain saw John Peter she

began to yawn. Then she blew her nose, and said in a doleful voice:

" Who is this tiresome fellow who comes to disturb me in my work?"

The Miller discovers Madam Rain

" Madam!" replied John Peter, " a long time ago you rested yourself awhile at my house, and then promised that you would some time or other be good to my child. Little Peter will soon be ten years old, and I have come to beg of you to do something for him. He deserves it for his good con-

duct, for he already knows how to read and write as well as a grown-up man."

"What do you want me to do for him?" asked the lady.

"Madam," answered the miller, "I am a poor country fellow with no ideas in my head, and I cannot think of anything. So I will leave it all to you."

"Booby that you are!" said Madam Rain, sneezing, "to come here disturbing me, and not to know what you want! However," she went on, turning to her spirits, "I must get rid of this man. Since his son knows how to read, let my large copper box be given to him, with the wand and the gilt-edged book. If little Peter is less stupid than his father, it will be quite enough to make his fortune."

The spirits brought the large copper box, the wand, and the gilt-edged book. John Peter put them all under his arm, thanked the dame, and ran off as fast as his legs would carry him.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAGIC PUPPET-SHOW

" Wife!" said the miller, as he reached his own house, quite out of breath, " look, here is a fine present which Madam Rain has just made me! And she told me that, if our little Peter should turn out less stupid than I am, there was something inside it which would make a fortune for him."

" Good gracious!" cried Claudine. " Then you had another secret that you did not tell me about! How could you have kept it to yourself for so long? Who is Madam Rain? And what is this copper box? But be quick and speak! I can scarcely wait a moment longer, for I am dying to know all about it!"

John Peter then told of the visit he had received from Madam Rain upon the very

night that Mr. Wind came to their hut. He told how she had promised that in time to come she would help little Peter. Then he said that he had just been to see her at the Western Cave; and that she had given him the copper box, with the wand and the gilt-edged book.

"Good! good!" said Claudine, trembling, "if only there is not another giant in the box, to wind up the whole matter with a second beating."

"Give me the book, Mother!" said little Peter. "I will see what is written inside."

Peter opened the gilt-edged book, and read the title on the first page. It was: "Twelve Plays, written by Madam Rain for Little Boys and Little Girls, and acted by the Wonderful Puppets in the Copper Box."

"Strike the box with the wand, Father!" said Peter. "Don't be afraid; this box is a puppet-show."

The miller put the copper box on the table, took the wand, and struck the lid. The box opened at once, a separate part in front fell down, and they saw a stage

with a red curtain before it, and little lighted wax tapers for the footlights. The bell which gave notice of the beginning of the piece was heard to ring three times. Then the curtain was raised, and they saw beautiful stage scenery, made to look like a forest.

A puppet, or little wooden figure, five or six inches high, came out from the side-scenes. It began to move about in such a life-like manner that Peter knew at once that it was acting the first part of the play, the words of which were in the book before him. He went behind the table, and read aloud the part of the little actor.

Soon after, another puppet entered, and Peter, changing his tone, read its part also. In this way he went through the whole of the first play, which was called "The Adventures of Merlin the Enchanter." At the close of the last scene the little wooden actors bowed to the audience, the curtain fell, and the copper box closed smartly.

"Father," said Peter, "strike the copper box again; then we shall be sure to see the second play, which is called 'The Adven-

tures of Sir Jessamine and the Princess Eglantine'."

John Peter struck the box again with the wand. The theatre opened, and, sure enough, they saw the beautiful Eglantine appear, dressed in her rose-coloured robes. Peter read the parts, putting on a softer tone of voice when the princess spoke, and a deeper one when the knight was supposed to be speaking.

After the second play the box shut up, as before; but John Peter struck it again with the wand, and they saw the third play, called " The Gifts of the Fairy Fly-foot ". The miller and his wife sat up till midnight to see all the twelve plays, and Peter read so many fine speeches that he made himself quite hoarse.

" These plays are very amusing, to be sure," said John Peter. " Still, this theatre is nothing but a toy after all, and I cannot understand how it is going to make a fortune for Peter."

" I understand well enough—that I do!" cried Claudine. " Everybody will wish to see our wonderful show. Peter will have

to go to all the castles in the country, with his copper box, his wand, and his gilt-edged book. He will amuse the children of the great folks; they will feast him, and he will have fine presents made to him. And who can tell but that some day he may marry a Princess Eglantine, just like Sir Jessamine?"

"Pack of nonsense!" muttered John Peter, dozing off to sleep.

CHAPTER VIII

PETER'S PRESENT

The next morning Claudine rose at daybreak, put on her bonnet, and went out of the farm to go and tell the news to her neighbour the milkwoman. But in her story she so jumbled together Madam Rain, the Western Cave, and the water-maidens, with Merlin the Enchanter and the Princess Eglantine, that her neighbour thought she was crazy.

The milkwoman, however, when she took her butter and cream to the castle, did not fail to tell the adventure, as well as she could, to the cook. The cook spoke of it to the Baron's man-servant, and he went off at once in search of the Baron. Soon after, John Peter saw his lord ride up to the farm.

" Master miller," said the Baron, " I

have just met Madam Rain, who is my wife's friend, in the wood yonder. She spoke to me about a copper box, with a puppet-show in it, and she told me to buy it from you for my children."

"But this box does not belong to me," said the miller. "It was given to my boy Peter."

"Well, then, I will buy it from Peter," replied the Baron. "What do you want with a puppet-show, Peter? It is all well enough for people as rich as we are. But will you throw all your time away in looking at dancing dolls, instead of minding your work? A hundred crown pieces would be worth more to Peter than all the dolls in the world."

"That is just what I say," said John Peter. "But my wife scolded me so much for selling you the little silver cask, that I shall do nothing without asking her first."

Claudine came in at this moment, and the lord offered her first a hundred crowns for the magical theatre, and then a thousand, and at last two thousand. But she

would not hear a word. The Baron grew quite angry, and said that they refused his offers just for the sake of vexing him. However, he said, he would take care to have his revenge.

Little Peter, hearing these words, pulled off his cap, and, bowing to the Baron, said: "My father has told you, my lord, that the puppet-show belongs to me. If you and the Baroness will allow me, I will bring my theatre to the castle and make my actors play before your children as often as you ask me to do so."

"Well, then, be it so," said the Baron. "You are a fine little fellow. Bring your show this evening after dinner, and I will pay you for your trouble."

When evening came, Peter put the copper box into a wheelbarrow and trudged off with it to the castle. The Baroness was a wise and beautiful lady, good and kind-hearted, and she tried, as far as she could, to make her husband kind-hearted too. She had three lovely children—a girl and two boys. Peter was welcomed in the kindest manner: he was fondled and had

cakes given to him, and the Baroness slipped some money into his hand.

That first evening Peter made his puppets act the first play only, and it was found so delightful that he was begged to come back on the morrow. The next day he showed the second play, and so on, one after the other, till the twelfth day. When the plays were finished, the children would have them all over again.

So for many weeks Peter began to go every day to the castle. He never went back to the farm without having received kind words, cakes, and money. And the miller, seeing his son return home every evening with his pockets full, began to understand at last what a great deal Madam Rain's present was worth.

The Baroness's little daughter, who was two years younger than Peter, was very fond of the puppet-show. Her name was Margaret. She had the prettiest blue eyes and the most beautiful light hair ever seen. But she was good, gentle, and always sweet-tempered, which is even better than being beautiful. Peter loved her very much, and

little Mistress Margaret was very friendly towards Peter.

One evening, after the play, she sighed and said: " You are a very lucky boy, Peter, to have such a wonderful theatre. Madam Rain has given you a toy fit for a princess."

" Why, Mistress Margaret," replied Peter, " I am very happy to have something that you like, so that I may give it to you. If my theatre is fit for a princess, perhaps you will take it as a present from me; and so I will give it to you with all my heart."

Margaret wished very much to have such a splendid present; but the Baroness would not say " yes ".

" Peter," said she, " you are too kind. Keep your magical box; my little girl does not wish you to lose it."

" Leave him alone," said the Baron. " If it suits him to give his theatre to Margaret, no one must stop him. Make yourself easy, my boy; my daughter will take your present without any pressing."

" Mistress Margaret," went on Peter,

" the theatre is yours, and here is the wand. Now you may play with the puppets as often as you like."

When John Peter heard that his son had given the copper box away, he went into a great rage.

" Don't be angry, Father," said Peter. " It is true I have given the copper box and wand away. But I have kept the gilt-edged book, and you will see that they will send for me again to-morrow to read the plays."

The miller, however, would not hear a word, and he would have given his son a sound beating if Claudine had not taken little Peter in her arms.

" John Peter," said she to her husband, " our boy is a good deal cleverer than you are; what he says is very sensible. Wait at least till to-morrow before you whip him."

The next day a servant from the castle came to fetch Peter as usual, for he was wanted to make the puppets talk. After the play, little Margaret again sighed and said:

" Dear Peter, if you do not give me the gilt-edged book, your pretty present will be of no use to me."

" Here it is, then," replied Peter. " I kept it only because I wanted to read the plays to you myself. But since you wish so much to have the book, I am quite willing to give it you."

John Peter again went into a dreadful rage when he knew that his son no longer had the gilt-edged book.

" Father," said Peter, " I wanted so much to be kind to Mistress Margaret, and I hope we shall be the better for what I have done. My lord will not vex us any more, you will see. My lady will speak kindly of us, and take our part, and I shall always be the friend of the dearest little maiden in the world."

The miller, however, quite made up his mind to whip his son. But Claudine carried Peter away, saying: " Wait a while, John Peter; stop, at least, until we see whether what our child says will happen or not."

But the next day the servant from the castle did not come as usual.

" They do not want me any more," said Peter; " they have forgotten me. But I am not really sorry that I have given up my puppet-show, because I have been able to please little Mistress Margaret."

CHAPTER IX

A NEW TOY

It was not little Margaret's fault that Peter came to the castle no more. She wanted him to be sent for to read the plays. But the Baron's reply was, that it would be better to get the children's governess to read the pieces, and thus they might do without Peter altogether.

Now, the governess was old, and wore large spectacles which pinched her nose, and had a voice that was broken and drawling. When she read the plays, they did not seem half so amusing, or so delightful to listen to, as they had been before. The children never ceased to wish for Peter, and Margaret was very sorry indeed that she had asked him for his gilt-edged book.

One day a visitor came to the castle—

the little daughter of a great lord in the neighbourhood. To amuse her, Margaret and her brothers had one of the plays of the puppet-show acted. Their guest was filled with delight at the wonderful theatre. She clapped her hands when she saw the little actors, and talked so much about it all that at last Margaret said:

"As you like my theatre so much, Helen, I will give it to you as a present. And so you may take it home with you."

The Governess

Little Helen danced for joy, hugged her friend and thanked her many times, and soon after carried away the copper box, the wand, and the gilt-edged book. The Baron, who was out hunting, went into a terrible rage when he came home and heard what Margaret had done. He would have whipped her there and then, but the Baroness stopped him.

" If our Margaret is rather too ready to give her things away," she said, " that is a good fault, and I will not allow her to be punished for it."

The children, however, felt very lifeless and sad now that they had their theatre no longer. Their other games seemed dull, and gave them no more pleasure, and they did nothing but sigh and yawn from morning till evening.

" At least, if Peter were here," said they, " he would tell us the story of the Knight Jessamine and the Princess Eglantine." So at last Peter was sent for.

" Never mind about losing your theatre," said he to the children. " It was good of you to give the wonderful puppet-show away, and you must never be sorry that you have been kind to someone else. I work, you know, at a carpenter's, and I will make you a theatre of wood myself. It will not be so fine, of course, as the other, and the little actors will not move about so well. But I will try to remember the play of the Knight Jessamine, and I may still say it for you, putting words of

my own in place of the words I have forgotten."

So Peter went to fetch his carpenter's tools; and then he sawed some planks, and made a theatre, with side-scenes and footlights all complete. He painted the scenery on paper. An empty jam-pot, on which he drew stone-work, was made to look like the tower of a castle. While he worked, the Baroness made linen dolls, and cut out satin and muslin in which to dress the little actors.

The Knight Jessamine had a pretty white cloak, and the Princess Eglantine a dress of rose-coloured silk. All the other dolls were soon finished, and each had a piece of wire fastened at the top of the head. The stage-curtain was made out of the red lining of a dressing-gown.

At last, when all was ready, the wax candles were lighted, and Peter collected his actors. Then he gave the usual three taps, and the play, for which we must turn to another chapter, began.

CHAPTER X

THE PLAY

THE KNIGHT JESSAMINE AND THE PRINCESS EGLANTINE

A Play in Three Acts for the Puppet-show

By MADAM RAIN

Persons in the Play

ARTHUR, *King of England* (a deep voice).
EGLANTINE, *his Daughter* (a high voice).
CHRISTIAN, *Prince of Denmark* (a squeaky voice).

SIR JESSAMINE (a natural voice).
MARIE, *Waiting Maid to the Princess* (a shrill voice).
HANSO, *a General of the Danish army* (a gruff voice).
English courtiers and Danish soldiers.
The Lion of the Zoo.

(NOTE.—The Danish army may be shown by a dozen puppets held together in one hand by the wires.)

ACT I

Scene: The garden of KING ARTHUR'S palace in London.

SCENE I

(NOTE.—As the Princess does not move during the first three scenes, she may be fastened to a nail.)

EGLANTINE and MARIE

Marie. Ah, dear Princess, pray do not turn your back so upon me! Do look at me a little: I am your Marie, your friend. Will you not tell me what is troubling you? You do not reply. For the eight days that you have stayed in this garden you have not once so much as opened your mouth, even to eat. This may hurt you: and indeed, I can see that your face is very pale. You must be very sad, to keep silent so long. At least move your little finger, that one may see whether you are dead or

alive. It is to-day that the prince who is to marry you comes to the court. . . . Ah! what do you say? I thought I heard you sigh. Is it this wedding that is troubling you? But Prince Christian is such a kind and handsome lord! He has sent you some beautiful presents from Denmark, though you have not even looked at them. How can you dislike this prince, when you do not even know him yet? Come, come, Your Highness, do not stand so, as still as a statue. The King, your father, will be very angry with you; and, if you will not stir, he will put you into a dark cupboard. Here he is, I declare, coming this way! I shall run off, for I can see plainly by the shaking of his body that he is in a rage. [*Marie runs off.*

Scene II

Eglantine, King Arthur

King. You annoying girl! How much longer do you mean to keep up this stupid silence? Will you not make even a little movement, and reply at least to your

father? Tell me the cause of your grief. Speak: I am listening to you. You will not? This foolishness is getting worse and worse! I have no more patience with you! Take care, child: do not force me to punish you, or you may be sorry for it. Prince Christian has landed from Denmark, and is coming to ask for your hand. Make yourself ready to meet him politely. Here he is, coming this way. Now, Eglantine, I beg you to answer him when he speaks to you.

Scene III

The same. Prince Christian

King. Come forward, son-in-law. My daughter is as happy as myself to see you in London.

Christian (*bowing*). O lovely Princess! The flower of Great Britain! The whole of Denmark bows before you in my royal person. War is now for ever at an end between our countries. In future I shall never draw the sword except to let all the world know that you are the fairest of the

fair; as I am myself the bravest of knights.

[*Whirls round on his toes.*

King (*in a low voice to his daughter*). Curtsy to him, Eglantine—answer him at once. (*Aloud.*) My Lord Christian, my daughter is so touched by your politeness that she is too shy to answer. Excuse her, I pray you. Leave me alone with her for an instant, and I will make her find her tongue.

Christian. Willingly, my lord. I will return in a moment, when the fair Eglantine has found her tongue.

[*He twirls round several times as he goes out.*

Scene IV

The same. King Arthur. Eglantine

King. Unhappy child! Do you mean to drive me crazy? See in what a dreadful fix you have placed me. If I have to own to the Prince of Denmark that I cannot make my daughter either speak or move, I shall fall ill with shame. You deserve to be shut up in a dark dungeon, underneath

my castle, along with spiders and wood-lice. But, first of all, I have quite made up my mind that your wedding shall take place: and I shall order you to be led to church by force. If you will not say the " Yes ", I shall say it myself; and you shall be married whether you like it or not.

Eglantine (*throwing herself at the King's feet*). Ah, dear Father! have pity on your daughter! Do not force me to marry this prince whom I hate; or else you will see me die before your eyes.

King. Is this the cause of your silence, then? Why do you hate this young prince? He is not very plain, and he says himself that he is brave and clever.

Eglantine. Father, I think he is frightful. And if he were really brave and clever, he would not say himself that he was. Did you not notice his silly airs and graces?

King. There is nothing to find fault with in his twirling himself round and round. That is what folk do at the theatre, and everyone claps to see them. It is a sign that the prince has graceful manners, and that he has been well brought up.

Eglantine. After all, my dear Father, if I am able to show you plainly that this prince is nothing but a silly, boasting fellow, will you excuse me from marrying him? I must tell you, besides, that the fairies themselves do not wish this marriage to take place.

King. Oh ho! There is a mystery in all this! What will become of us if the fairies meddle in these matters? But how can you show me that the prince is foolish and a boaster?

Eglantine. Leave that to me; let him come now.

King (*calling*). Come here, my Lord Christian. My daughter wishes to speak with you. She has found her tongue at last.

Scene V

The same. Christian. Eglantine

Eglantine. Great prince, before marrying you, I ought to tell you of a strange thing that happened soon after I was born. My nurse was carrying me in her arms, when she saw a fairy come out from

the wall; the fairy touched me with her wand, and gave me several gifts. Then she said that I should marry a knight who was as clever as myself, and who should save my life on our wedding day.

Christian. Charming Eglantine! What you say does not alarm me at all. Let us try our wits together: I am quite willing. My courtiers say I am made of wit. Does any danger come near you? I am ready to save your life.

[*He skips forward and whirls round.*

Eglantine. The fairy will no doubt give you a chance to save my life to-day. As to our trying our wits together, we will do so now, for I am going to ask you a riddle. If you guess it, we shall be married; but if you cannot find it out, nothing in the world will ever make me be your wife. Pray tell me, then, what is that short-lived flower which has no scent when it blooms alone, but only when it is placed along with other flowers? It is brighter than all other blossoms, but it is the first to fade, whilst those around it live for a much longer time. A vain and beautiful

maiden will wish to have this flower only. A wiser maiden will choose others.

Christian. Dear Eglantine, I am not a gardener; I have not studied plants. But if you will give me a quarter of an hour to think about it, whilst I walk in the garden, I shall be sure to find out this strange flower.

Eglantine. Go and walk, my lord; I will wait for your answer.

[*Christian goes out skipping*.

King (*coming forward*). Daughter, how can you expect the prince to guess what this flower is? There are so many in my garden that I should not be able to find it myself.

Eglantine. Well, the prince must find out the riddle if he wishes me to marry him. For these were the fairy's last words: " If Eglantine marries a prince who cannot find out the riddle, and who does not save her life, she shall be turned into a statue ". You have already seen, my dear Father, how very near I have been to becoming dumb. Be careful, then, how you go against the fairy. What she has said must come to pass.

King. Alas! what a strange thing! Still, if seeing you dumb were all, one might in time get used to it. But to have a statue for a daughter! I could never bear that! I feel quite overcome with grief, and I will go and try to weep in my own chamber.

[*He goes out.*

ACT II

Scene: Another part of the Garden

SCENE I

EGLANTINE, the KNIGHT JESSAMINE

Knight. Princess, what have I heard? That you are going to be married to-day to a strange prince! You promised to choose me for your husband; but, alas! I am only a poor knight, and you wish to be Queen of Denmark. I see there is no longer any hope for me. I have therefore come to bid you farewell, and to look at you for the last time. To-morrow I set out for the Holy Land, and I shall seek death in battle with the Turks.

Eglantine. You unkind man! How dare you blame me so, when I am giving myself

so much trouble to get this stupid prince out of the way? Instead of setting off for the Holy Land, you ought rather to be thinking of the way in which you might win my hand.

Knight. What must I do, then, beautiful Eglantine? I could do anything. I would swim across rivers; I would dash into fire. Give me lions to fight, or serpents and dragons to cut to pieces with my sword.

Eglantine. What you have to do is just to wait for the chance of saving my life, as the fairy bade. You must keep yourself still: do not bound in that way over the trees and flower-beds. Be wise, and keep as quiet as you can whilst Prince Christian is here.

Knight. Ah! How can I do so, Princess? Love makes me bound; I am so jealous and so full of care that I must jump over the trees and flower-beds. I cannot help it.

Eglantine. Jump, then, if you like. Everybody will see your love and jealousy; my father will be told of it; I shall be put in

prison in the dungeon; you will never be my husband; and I shall die of grief.

Knight. Ah, then I see I must obey you, dearest Eglantine! I will be quiet in order to win you. See! I have already left off jumping; and I keep myself as steady as a rock on my legs. Let me, at least, throw myself at your feet and kiss your hand.

Eglantine. No, Sir Knight; that would not be proper. Besides, the gold lace on your cloak would get tangled up with the fancy-work on my dress. We should not be able to get them apart; and so it would be seen that you had thrown yourself at my feet. However, I am very pleased with you now. Farewell, Sir Knight. I am going to sigh a little in my chamber, for I really feel very much disturbed.

[*She goes out.*

SCENE II

The same. KNIGHT JESSAMINE. CHRISTIAN, chasing a butterfly

Knight (*in a low tone*). Who is this stranger running after a butterfly? I mean to keep quiet and watch him.

Christian. There, it has settled on a flower. It is a tulip. The butterfly ought to know: I will tell the Princess that her strange flower is a tulip. But here is a person belonging to the court.

Knight (*coming forward*). You are a stranger, Sir, no doubt?

Christian. Yes, Sir; I am one of the officers of the Prince of Denmark, and I am delighted to meet you. I was amusing myself by trying to find an answer to a riddle: perhaps you will be able to help me. What flower is that which has no scent unless it is placed among other blossoms less bright than itself? A beautiful and vain maiden longs for it more than for its neighbours. But a wise maiden will wish rather to have the other flowers which live longer.

Knight. It must be *youth*, Sir. It is doubly bright when the flowers of sense and goodness are with it. It passes away whilst the other flowers remain. The foolish maiden will wish to be only young and bright, and gay, and fair. The wise one would rather have sense and

goodness, for these things outlast youth.

Christian. I thank you very much, Sir. You are right. That's just it. I will go at once to find the King and the Princess. What happiness! I have guessed the riddle! Oh! how lucky a Prince of Denmark is in having such great cleverness!

[*He goes out, twirling himself round.*

Scene III

The same

Knight (*alone*). What did he say?—find the Princess?—guessed the riddle? Have I been working against myself all this time, then? Is this stranger the Prince of Denmark? If this should be so, I have nothing to do but to drown myself. Oh, oh! How jealous I am! In spite of my promise to the beautiful Eglantine, I cannot hide my feelings any longer. They are dreadful—I must jump about! (*He jumps over trees and flower-beds*.) I can bear all this no more! I will go; I will fly in search of the Princess, and get before this stranger if there is yet time. [*He goes out.*

ACT III

Scene: A Castle

SCENE I

The KING and several Courtiers, PRINCE CHRISTIAN, and the KNIGHT JESSAMINE on the top of the castle. EGLANTINE at the foot of the tower.

Eglantine. Oh dear! What will become of me? The Prince of Denmark has already found out the riddle. Now he has nothing to do but to save my life in order to win my hand. The fairy has been to see me in my chamber, and has told me to fear nothing. But if she means to make me wed this Christian, whom I do not love, I shall be the most unhappy of queens. I will never marry him! I would rather become a statue!

King (*from the top of the tower*). My dear son-in-law, have we not a fine view from this tower? Look at those plains that stretch far out there, and the sea, which you may notice beyond them. Is it not fine?

Christian. Very fine indeed, Sire. The keen air we breathe up here will make us

enjoy the wedding-feast. We will amuse ourselves again soon by guessing some more riddles: I am really very clever at that game.

Eglantine. Oh dear! Oh dear! I see my Jessamine up above there, jumping about like mad! He will be doing something silly if he is not stopped! The fairy is not helping me at all. Alas, alas! There is nothing left for me now but to die!

SCENE II

The same. MARIE running

Marie. Oh, lady, lady! fly quickly! The lion from the Zoo has broken loose from his cage! He is coming this way! He will eat you up if you do not run away!

[*She runs out.*

Eglantine. Help! help! the lion has broken loose from his cage! He is coming towards me! I am lost! He will eat me up! Help, help, my dear Papa!

King (*from the top of the tower*). Wait a moment, daughter. I am coming down with my soldiers, and we will slay the lion.

Eglantine. Alas! my Father, it will take you a quarter of an hour to get down, and the lion is only two steps off. He will have time to eat me. Jump down from the tower, or I am dead!

King. My poor daughter, I am no longer nimble enough to jump a wall two hundred feet high.

Eglantine. Prince Christian! Prince Christian! Now is your chance to save my life!

Christian. Oh, but, Princess, if I jump, I shall break my arms and legs. Could I kill a lion with broken legs and arms?

Eglantine. And you, Knight, my dear Jessamine, my old playfellow, will you leave me to be eaten up by this terrible lion? Hark to his roaring! Here he is! Here he is!

[*The lion roars behind the scenes, and comes bounding on to the stage.*

Knight (*from the tower*). Calm yourself, Princess; I am coming to help you, though I should break all my bones.

[*He jumps from the tower, rushes on the lion, and slays it.*

Eglantine. You have saved my life, dear Jessamine; you deserve to be my husband. But alas, alas! Why did the Prince of Denmark guess the riddle?

Knight. It was I who guessed it. I told him the answer a little while ago.

Eglantine. Oh, how glad I am! The fairy has spoken truly, after all! You shall be my husband! You may now throw yourself at my feet, Sir Knight, and if your cloak does get tangled up in my robe, it will not matter.

Christian. It shall never be said that the Knight Jessamine has outdone me in courage. Since he has jumped, I am going to jump too.

[*He throws himself headlong down, and lies still at the foot of the tower.*

King. Oh dear! Oh dear! the Prince has broken his head, and I very much fear that no one can mend it again. Though one sees fathers marrying their daughters to men with no head, it would not be a very wise thing for me to do the same. But I can see an army marching towards us. It is the Danes coming to revenge the death

of their Prince. Alas! they will have time to spoil and ruin the whole of my kingdom before I can reach the bottom of the tower. I can hear their trumpet sounding the attack already. [*A trumpet is heard.*

Knight. I am ready to fight them, Sire. I will beat them, and kick them back to their own country again.

Scene III

The same. General Hanso at the head of the Danes

Hanso. Give us back our Prince, or we will set fire to the city and slay all your people.

Knight. There is your Prince: carry him away, and be off with you at once.

Hanso. We will not have that Prince. We must have a Christian who is not broken, with a whole head, and not a split one. Soldiers, strike this knight; take him prisoner; throw him to the ground! Long live Denmark! Revenge! revenge! Let us burn the city of London!

Knight. I'll take good care you don't. Long live old England! (*He rushes against*

the Danes and kicks them all away.) Sire, your kingdom is now free from all its enemies.

King (*from the top of the tower*). Brave Jessamine! You have won my daughter's hand, and I give her to you. But I am afraid Denmark will begin a terrible war against me.

Eglantine. Oh no, dear Father, we shall have no war, for the play is finished. The curtain is going to fall, the candles are dying out, and I have scarcely time to bow to the audience and beg their pardon for all the nonsense we have just been saying.

CHAPTER XI

BRAVE PETER

A few days after the play, the Baron's children went out for a ramble in the country with their governess. The old lady sat down on the grass, while the children played near her, or ran about the meadow.

To pass away the time, the governess, putting on her spectacles, drew a newspaper from her pocket, and began to read a story. It was a long tale which had been going on for at least three years, and had reached the eight hundred and thirty-sixth chapter. As the story never seemed to get any nearer its end, but stopped always at the same point, the governess began to nod over it, and at last she fell sound asleep.

Whilst she slept, the two boys climbed

trees to gather apples, and little Margaret roamed away to the far end of the meadow to look for flowers. There she found herself on the brink of a streamlet which ran gently between banks of long grass.

On the other side of a thorn-hedge was a path, along which, just at that moment, Peter was passing on his way to the village. Suddenly he heard loud cries of fear coming from the meadow, and he stopped to listen in alarm. It was Margaret who was calling for help: Peter knew her voice.

"Help! help!" he could hear her cry. "Here is a horrid snake crawling in the grass; it is coming to bite me! Governess! —brothers!—come and save me! Oh, they do not hear me! What shall I do? What shall I do?"

Peter rushed through a gap in the thorn-hedge, and ran into the meadow. "Don't be afraid, Mistress Margaret," he said. "That is not a snake—it is only a little adder. But you need not fear, for I am going to kill it." And with the heel of his shoe he crushed the head of the adder.

" Oh, how brave you are!" cried Margaret. " Come home with me," she went on; " I want to tell Mamma that you have saved my life."

" What I have done is really nothing at all, Mistress Margaret," said Peter. " I must go now to my master the carpenter's house, but I will come and see you at the castle some other time."

" Go to your work, then, dear Peter," replied Margaret. " I shall never forget what you have done for me just now. Here, give me a kiss, for I see that your face is not too dirty for me to kiss to-day."

Peter kissed the little girl on both her cheeks, and Margaret, kissing him in return, said:

" Perhaps you shall one day be my Jessamine, and I will be your Eglantine."

The next day the Baroness came to the farm. She, too, kissed Peter, and gave him a box of carpenter's tools, and some books which for a long time he had wished to have. Afterwards she put a well-filled purse into Claudine's hands, and told her to use the money in paying a good master

to teach her son all that he wanted to learn.

Peter, very pleased and grateful, opened the books as soon as the Baroness had gone. Then he set himself to study at once, in order to become soon as wise as he was brave.

By the end of six months he knew all the books by heart; others were given him by the Baroness, and these he learnt just as quickly. Time went by; Peter worked and studied hard, growing taller and stronger day by day, and soon he became the cleverest and quickest boy in the countryside.

CHAPTER XII

MR. WIND A PRISONER

One night John Peter and his wife were sitting quietly in the chimney-corner of a snug room. The shutters were closed, and the windows hung with thick curtains. The room and the hall outside both had double doors, so that not the least draught was to be felt.

Owing to the kindness of the Baroness, the miller and his wife were now living in much greater comfort. On this night, however, they felt that they enjoyed their comfort more than they had ever done, as they heard the wind howling over the chimney and shaking the doors and windows.

The little wind-spirits were not able to find the smallest hole by which they could enter the farmhouse. But as she listened,

Claudine thought she could hear them speaking.

"Thankless John Peter!" they said, "You owe everything to us, and yet you refuse us a shelter. No more broken panes, no more chinks in the walls where we may sigh and hum! Now it is as much as we can do to whistle softly through the key-hole."

"Does Mr. Wind want to come into our house again?" cried John Peter in alarm.

"There would be no great harm in that," said Claudine. "If he has a mind to do so, let him. Perhaps we shall find ourselves as much the better for it as we were the first time."

As she said this, she flung open all the doors. At the same instant Mr. Wind appeared, and came rushing and whirling himself round and round into the house. The train of his long robe rose to the ceiling, and his two large wings filled half the room.

"Oh!" said he in his gruff voice, "there's a change here! You've made your fortune, then, after all, in spite of

being so stupid, Master John Peter. Why, your house is as warm and cosy as a lord's. Give me an easy chair, so that I may rest myself on your cushions, my lord miller."

Mr. Wind burst out laughing with such a roar that the window-panes shook, and little Peter woke up suddenly out of his sleep.

Mr. Wind laughs

"Ha! ha!" went on Mr. Wind, "how very comfortable one is in this easy chair! Well, you are a good fellow, John Peter; I forgive you your faults, and I thank you for your kind welcome. But as you are rich now, I shall not give you anything. So, good-bye, friend!"

At the very moment that Mr. Wind was about to fly away, Peter, who had slipped downstairs from his bed, shut all the doors of the room and hall.

Then, suddenly, Mr. Wind was seen to totter on his legs, and fall back again into

his easy chair. His fat cheeks sank in, making a thousand wrinkles. His broad chest shrank up, his body became thinner and thinner, and his wings smaller than a sparrow's. He would have cried out, but only a faint, husky sound came from his throat, as though he had grown suddenly hoarse.

"My friends," he whispered, "do not keep me here. It would be a very mean trick to do so. Give me some air—I am stifling! For pity's sake, open the window! You cannot wish to kill me, surely?"

"Mr. Wind cannot

Mr. Wind cries

die," said Peter. " We are only going to keep you a prisoner, and you must make terms with us to be free again."

" Good people," replied Mr. Wind, " what do you want of me?"

" I want a great deal of money," said John Peter.

" We must have something which will make up to us for the blows that were given to us by the giant who was shut up in the golden cask," said Claudine.

" And I," said Peter, " must be made a knight or a baron."

" Alas! alas!" murmured Mr. Wind, " how foolish I was to come into this house! My friends, I will give you plenty of money and magical casks; but it is only the King who can make knights and barons. Let me go."

" No, you shall not!" cried Claudine. " Peter is right—you must give in to us."

Mr. Wind tried hard to escape, but John Peter, Claudine, and Peter all began to blow upon him, and he found himself so weak that he could no longer stand against them.

By this time he had become so small and light that they made him fly all about the room like a feather. At last they drove him into an air-tight cupboard, with two doors and no window, and they double-locked him in.

John Peter had scarcely taken the key out, and stopped up the hole with putty, when the noise outside ceased. For, now that Mr. Wind was not there to keep it going, the storm sank into quietness at once. The clouds could no longer race along. The leaves of the trees stirred no more, and the mill-sails stopped.

CHAPTER XIII

ANOTHER PRISONER

The miller, his wife, and little Peter were planning how they might get a large ransom from Mr. Wind, when rain began to fall in torrents. Then they heard the chattering of the little rain-spirits on the roof.

" Ungrateful John Peter!" said the spirits. " We have made your fortune, and yet now you will not let us come into your house. We slip over the slates, we flow from the spouts into the gutters; but there are no more broken panes—no more holes in the walls. So we can no longer wet your chairs and tables, nor jump into your room. It is in vain that we fall by thousands, we little drop-drop-drops."

" Does Madam Rain wish to come in again?" said the miller.

"Let us open the window for her at once," cried Claudine.

As soon as the window was opened, Madam Rain stepped in. Floods of tears fell down from her eyes, her clothes were more drenched than at her first visit, and her nose was more swollen by the cold in her head.

Poor Madam Rain

"What has happened here?" said she in a whining tone. "I did not know the house again. Let me rest in a good arm-chair, John Peter; for I am very tired, and want to yawn and lounge for a while in this nice room. From what I see, I suppose it is I who have brought you this good luck. The copper box and the gilt-edged book have served little Peter a good turn. You have now no more need of me, so I will go and do good to others. Good-bye, my friends!"

She was going to slip out at the window, when Claudine hastily let down the blinds,

closed the shutters, and drew the thick curtains. Madam Rain at once fell back into her arm-chair fainting. Her tears ceased to flow, her swollen nose shrank to its proper size, her clothes became dry, her face smiled, and she seemed almost rosy.

" Oh dear!" she cried, in a less drawling voice, " I am caught! Do not kill me, my friends—do not shut me up in this hot house. I am drying up!—help!—help! For pity's sake, open the window!"

" Madam Rain cannot die," said Peter. " She shall not go out of this house without paying for her freedom."

" Pay! Good gracious! and what do you want me to pay? Speak quickly, for I cannot bear this much longer!" cried the lady. " If you do not give me back my tears and my cold in the head I shall have a fit."

" That won't do," said John Peter. " When the fit comes on, I will throw a glass of water in your face, for that is the way I treat my wife when she takes it into her head to faint. You must make terms

with us at once. I want some money from you; Claudine asks for a magical gift; and Peter wishes to be made a baron."

"You shall have money," said Madam Rain, "and the magical gift as well. But Peter will not become a baron until he has made himself famous by performing some very brave or clever deed. Let me go. Oh, what a foolish, thoughtless woman I was to let myself fall into this snare!"

Madam Rain sobbed aloud, and raised her hand to her eyes to find a tear; but there was not water enough to make one. Then she tried to make her escape. But John Peter opened an umbrella, Claudine took up the warming-pan, and Peter threw a towel, which he had been warming at the fire, over the dame's shrunken nose.

Down she fell on the hearthrug in a faint, and Claudine at once took hold of her round the waist and threw her into the kitchen sink. They heard her slip down the leaden pipe and fall into the cistern at the bottom. Then John Peter carefully closed the lid, by putting a large flag-stone on the top of it.

At the same moment, the spouts became empty, the streams ceased to murmur outside, and the leaves of the trees dried. The earth sucked up all the water that had fallen, the sky put off its mantle of clouds and put on that with stars all over it, and the moon shone out clear and bright far away over the plain.

CHAPTER XIV

PETER'S MESSENGER

At that time William Duke of Normandy made up his mind to conquer England. So he gathered together all his soldiers, and called under his banner the lords from every country who were willing to take part in the war.

The Baron, who had begun to feel weary of the life he led at his castle, decided to join Duke William, and he rode away to Caen where the Duke and all his men were. The army soon afterwards set forth in a number of small ships and landed in England.

Prince Harold, the English chief, gathered his troops in London, and marched with them to meet Duke William in defence of his kingdom. The two armies met on the plain of Hastings, and a dreadful battle was expected.

All this time the Baroness was very uneasy about the safety of her husband, who had not sent her any tidings. The children, seeing their mother's grief, were too sad to play together, and little Margaret cried every day when she thought of the dangers which her father was perhaps meeting in a strange land.

One day Peter went to the castle and found everybody there in a most sorrowful state.

"Do not grieve, my lady," said he; "and you, dear Margaret, dry your tears. In one hour we shall have news of the Baron."

Peter ran home to the farm, and, going into Mr. Wind's prison, found him stretched on a sofa quite numb and still. He had shrunk so much by this time that his body could scarcely be seen amid the folds of his mantle.

"Get up, Mr. Wind," said Peter; "I have an important piece of work for you to do. Would you not like to take a little air, and to go free over the seas?"

"Yes, with all my heart," replied Mr.

Wind. " I should be delighted to do so, for I am wasting away in this horrible dungeon."

" Well," said Peter, " I will set you free for one hour. But you must promise to do something which is very important for me, and to return within the hour."

" What must I do?" asked Mr. Wind. " Answer me quickly, and make haste to open the doors, for I am ready to start."

" In a minute," said Peter; " but you are not to set out on a journey in this off-hand way. First promise me that you will return within one hour."

" And what need is there for me to promise you that?"

" Why, if you don't promise, I shan't open the door."

Mr. Wind made the promise at once.

" Now," said Peter, " go to England; fly as fast as you can to the camp of Duke William; notice what is happening there, and bring me news of the Baron. You have no need of more than one hour for all this; but I give you a quarter of an hour's grace to play truant a little."

Peter then opened the door; Mr. Wind took one great breath of air, and his breast swelled out at once like a balloon. Then he opened his large wings, and darted away over tall trees and church steeples, making a most terrific whistling.

He had been gone about an hour and a quarter when Peter saw him coming back.

"Oh," panted Mr. Wind, "what a fine journey this has been for me, and what a lot of things I have seen! The two armies fought on the plain of Hastings. Duke William won the victory, and Harold was killed. The Normans, when I left the plain, had begun to march towards London. The Baron fought very gallantly in the battle. He is quite well, and the Duke has promised him lands and honours as a reward for his bravery."

"Very good, very good indeed!" said Peter, shutting the doors. "I thank you for what you have done, and for being so quick about it. Go to sleep now till to-morrow."

Peter then rushed off to the castle to give the Baroness and her children this

glad news; but he would not say who had brought it to him. The news was so good that it was believed at once.

At the end of fifteen days the Baroness

Mr. Wind at liberty

received a letter from her husband. In this letter she was surprised and delighted to read word for word all the news that she had heard from Peter so many days before. She rewarded the miller's son by loading him with rich presents, and she gave him leave to come to the castle every day to see his friend Margaret.

CHAPTER XV

HOW PETER WENT TO SEEK HIS FORTUNE

Months and years had passed away, and by this time Peter was sixteen years old. As he was now a fine, tall, strong lad, he wished to go and seek his fortune in England.

So he said good-bye to the Baroness, and kissed the children. He had everything that was needful for his adventure—money, food, clothes, and a good horse. Margaret gave him a beautiful handkerchief, worked by herself, as a token of her friendship. John Peter wished him good luck, and Claudine pressed him in her arms and wept.

"Don't cry, Mother," said Peter. "I shall return to you very soon, after becoming perhaps a rich and great lord.

Now, mind, do not let Mr. Wind and Madam Rain escape, whatever you do. Send them to England every morning, and they will bring you back some news of me. I shall make good use of them in the service of Duke William. And above all, before you let them go out, do not forget to make them promise to return to you."

Claudine replied that she would be sure to do all that her son told her.

Peter then mounted his horse and set off. He travelled through a part of Brittany, and at the end of three days reached Caen. Here he found some Normans who were just about to sail for England. They took him into their ship, and Mr. Wind, whom Claudine had let out, very kindly filled their sails.

On the fifteenth day from the time he left his home, Peter entered the great city of London, where Duke William was living. Peter took lodgings at a small inn, and waited for a chance to present himself at court.

One morning, as he was looking out of his window, Peter saw Mr. Wind coming

swiftly towards him. When he reached the window he said: " Peter, your mother has sent me to know how you are, and to ask if you need me to do anything for you."

" Give my love to my mother," said Peter, " and tell her I am quite well. I have no other orders for you to-day, but do not fail to come to me again to-morrow."

Madam Rain could not travel so fast as Mr. Wind, and did not reach London before the afternoon.

" Have you any orders to give me?" said she.

" No orders to-day," replied Peter; " but be sure to return to me to-morrow."

CHAPTER XVI

PETER'S REWARD

Duke William had left his wife at Caen. She was called the Princess Matilda, and her husband loved her most dearly. Every week he sent her a letter; but as eight days went by before the return of the messenger, he was never able to receive the very latest news of her.

So one day Peter went to the Duke, and, kneeling down before him, said: "My lord, I have at my command a much swifter messenger than any one of those you employ. If you will entrust your letters to me, they shall be carried to your palace at Caen, and answers to them shall be brought to you every day."

The Duke was quite willing to make trial of Peter's services. On the morrow Mr. Wind came at the same hour as on

the day before, and Peter at once sent him off to Caen with a message for the Princess.

A moment had scarcely passed before Mr. Wind returned, and Peter was told everything the Princess had been doing during that morning. He took the tidings to the Duke, who was very pleased and surprised. But William was even more full of wonder when, a few days later, his own messenger came back to London, bringing him letters which proved the truth of all the news that he had heard from Peter.

The Duke now wished to have such a swift and skilful messenger always at hand to do his bidding. He therefore took Peter to his own house to live, and made use of him every day. But he did not guess the means which Peter used to carry tidings to and fro over the sea. Other noblemen, also, went often to Peter, in order to learn what their wives were doing, and by this means he soon began to make his fortune.

Time went on, and the miller's son managed to save one hundred thousand

crowns. He sent this sum to his father and mother, begging them to buy the first castle for sale in their neighbourhood. Then he wrote a very kind and loving letter to Margaret, in which he told her that he had but one step more to make, and then he should become a knight, like Jessamine.

After a while, Duke William was crowned King of England. But just as he was about to settle down to rule in peace over the land, he learnt that the Danes and the Saxons were each sending a large fleet against him. His ships and soldiers were made ready at once to prevent these foes from landing in the country.

But one day Peter went to the King, and said: " Sire, do not waste your money and lose your soldiers for nothing at all. I will save you from the Danes and the Saxons before their fleets come near the English coast. You need not send out a single ship to meet them."

" What! Are you a wizard, then, young man?" said the King, laughing.

" No, Sire," replied Peter; " I am a

good Christian. But trust everything to me, and in four-and-twenty hours you will have no more enemies."

"Well, I will wait four-and-twenty hours before I give orders to send out the men and the ships," said the Duke.

Next morning Peter was very early at his window, looking out in the distance for Mr. Wind, and he soon saw him coming with great speed.

"Do not lose time in resting yourself, Mr. Wind," said Peter, "but go and meet the Danes and the Saxons. Blow with all your might on their ships, and scatter them over the ocean. Do not let them come near England, but drown as few of the men as possible."

"That is a piece of work I shall enjoy with all my heart!" said Mr. Wind in a gleeful tone. "I will go and do it thoroughly, you may be sure."

Off he darted, swift as an arrow. He puffed out his cheeks, and blew up waves as high as mountains; and in less than an hour the ships of both the fleets were scattered and destroyed.

The very same evening a messenger carried to court tidings of all that had happened. The King was so overjoyed that he took Peter by the hand and made him sit beside him. But just as he was about to give him a magnificent reward, another messenger, covered with dust, entered the King's chamber. He brought news that the people of Cornwall had risen up against King William, and that thousands of armed men were then on their way to surprise the city of London.

The King now commanded the trumpets to be sounded; and all his lords armed themselves, and mounted their war-horses. The soldiers marched out of the city, and arranged themselves on the plain in battle array. The enemy had now come into sight.

These Cornish rebels were very fierce. They uttered wild yells when given the signal to attack, and they killed most savagely all those who fell in their way. The great King William, though a brave man, began to feel a little uneasy at the sight of so many furious foes.

Just as the two armies were about to give battle, however, he saw near him a knight in black armour, with the visor of his helmet down.

"Who are you?" said the King to the knight, "and why do you place yourself so near to me?"

"I am one of Your Majesty's servants," replied the black knight. "I am watching over you, and I have come here so that you may win this battle."

"And what are those strange persons whom I see behind you?" asked the King. "Who is that tall figure in a mantle, and that woman with a scarf bearing rainbow colours upon it?"

"One is my officer, and the other my servant," said the knight. "It is to them that we shall presently owe our safety."

The King gave the signal for combat; the enemy came on with fearful yells, and the black knight turned to the two figures behind him, and shouted: "Do your duty!"

In a moment both armies saw the two

strange persons soar to a tremendous height in the air. Then a terrible wind blew in the faces of the enemy, mingled with a pelting rain which drenched their very skins. This sudden and dreadful storm drove them back and scattered them, for they were quite unable to stand against it; yet it did not harm the Norman army in the least.

At the first charge the rebels were beaten by the King's men. In the thickest part of the battle the King saw the black knight fighting very gallantly, and dealing terrible strokes with his sword upon the enemies around him. Ten thousand rebels were slain on the spot, and the rest fled away from the battlefield.

The King ordered the black knight to be brought before him. Then, in the presence of all the lords and barons, he said to him:

"Young stranger, it is to you that I owe this day's victory. I command you now to make yourself known to me, and for the great service you have done me I give you leave to ask of me some great favour.

Whatever it may be, I promise you beforehand that it shall be granted."

The black knight then raised the visor of his helmet, and the King and all his court saw Peter standing before them.

"Sire," said he, "I am Peter, your humble messenger. Since you wish to reward me for my poor services, I beg you to make me a real knight and a nobleman."

The King at once took Peter in his arms, and then, with his own sword, he made him a knight. On returning to his palace his Majesty made the miller's son a nobleman, and Peter was called Sir Peter, the Knight of the Black Arms.

"And now, Sire," said he to the King, "if Your Majesty wishes to make me the happiest of all men, Your Majesty has only to ask the Baron, whose vassal I am no longer, to give me his daughter in marriage. I am rich enough now to ask for the hand of so noble a maiden."

William the Conqueror demanded Margaret of the Baron, and gave Peter a hundred thousand crowns as a wedding

present. The knight then took leave of the King, and returned to his own country with a great following of squires and servants.

The Baroness gladly agreed to give her daughter to Peter for a wife, and the wedding took place with great splendour at the castle. Sir Peter and Lady Margaret soon after went to live in a beautiful castle which had been bought by John Peter with the money sent from London.

Mr. Wind and Madam Rain wished to make the young couple a wedding present. The knight received from Mr. Wind a magical golden ring. This gift, which Peter ever afterwards wore, made his wife seem to him always just as beautiful, even after twenty years had gone by, as she was on the day of her wedding. As for Madam Rain, she put on Margaret's neck an enchanted necklace, which made her see her husband always young and handsome and good-tempered.

Having received these precious gifts, Peter had no longer any excuse for

keeping Mr. Wind and Madam Rain as prisoners. So the doors of the farmhouse and the lid of the cistern were opened, and they returned, the one to the Southern Mountain, and the other to the Western Cave.

However, they had got so much into the habit of crossing and recrossing the English Channel, that they have still a special liking for England, though William the Conqueror no longer needs their services. And this is the reason why mackintoshes are worn so much in London all the year round, and why an Englishman never goes far from home without taking his umbrella with him.

The newly-married couple lived happily, and as time went on they had a great number of children—strong, handsome sons, and beautiful daughters. The knight and his wife never quarrelled but once, and then only because they had forgotten on that day to wear the magical ring and the enchanted necklace. Ever after Lady Margaret was fair and kind, and beloved by Sir Peter, whom she thought the best,

the bravest, and the handsomest husband in all France.