The Old Dragon's Story.

NOW, while the boy and the dragon sat blowing a cloud together, and were chatting in a very sociable manner, the wicked enchantress, who had rendered herself invisible, sat close by on the stump of an old tree, sadly disappointed at finding she could not destroy the virtuous Edilswag. She had calculated that the lion would have torn him to pieces, or that the dragon would have swallowed him up; but she had forgotten the virtues of the keen sword, and never had any idea of the extraordinary powers of tobacco smoke. As the dragon continued to smoke, he became very cosy indeed, and a vast deal more communicative, and after drawing from Edilswag some account of his birth, parentage, and education, with which he was very well pleased, he commenced giving some account of himself.

"You must know," said he, "that I was not always a dragon, such as you now see me. I was once a good little boy,

as you are; but, alas! I became changed through my own wicked folly, and by the powerful spells of an arch old enchantress, the wife of the King of the Goblins. Her name



was 'Yellow Eye,' and she and her husband, 'Green Eye,' had conceived the most violent hatred for the Dwarf King, 'Smalldody,' in consequence of the mines of gold and gems of which he was lord and master. Various were their plans

for obtaining the wealth of their rival, but without effect; and, alas! I, in an evil hour, became a victim to their cruel sorcery. Unfortunately, I had a touch of the same fever that possessed my enemies; I longed to be rich and powerful, and scorned honest industry and economy, the only two powers by which riches ought to be obtained. I fancied that wealth and power might be had by scheming and trickery, or by necromancing; and often did I dream of gold hidden in the earth, and of jewels and gems to be found by holding converse with the gnomes and fairies; so I went into lonely woods and caverns, and hideous glens and thickets, and tried to invoke their aid by magic spells and incantations. At last, one moonlight night, just after an eclipse of that luminary had taken place, I buried myself in the darksome shadows of a wood, and after having called upon 'Hecate' nine times nine times, and upon 'Lycorax,' and invoked 'Puck' and Robin Goodfellow to the same tune and quantity, I was surprised at finding an enchantress (and it was the odious Yellow Eye) close by my side. A bat of enormous size was at this moment flitting across the moon, and the enchantress commanded me to kneel beside her, and to call upon it for its aid. I was so astonished and alarmed, that I scarcely knew what I did, but my voice of adjuration joined with that of the sybil; and the '*bat*' which flitted across the disc of the moon, grew nearer and nearer, and at last spread forth its wings towards earth, and settled down on the ledge of a rock close before us.

"'What do you want?' said the bat to me.

"I was terribly frightened, but not so much but I knew

'what I wanted,' and so told him plainly that 'I wanted to be rich.'

"'Ho! ho!' said the bat, 'the old story over again; all want to be rich. Then do,' said he, 'as "Yellow Eye" would have you.'

"'Very well,' said I, 'with all my heart. Shall I be rich if I do?'

"'That will depend,' said the bat—

"'On me,' said the enchantress. 'Look up to me, and you shall be rich. Do as I tell you.'

"'I will,' said I.

"So then the wicked old creature told me that I was close to the regions of the 'Dwarf King,' whose riches were enormous; that his wealth, consisting of gold, gems, and precious stones, would buy all the rest of the world out and out. She then put into my hand the 'sword of invisible sharpness,' and told me to go on through this very valley till I came to a lonely cottage. I did so, and when I got to the door, she whispered in my ear: 'Kill all therein, and you will find the entrance to the Dwarf King's mine of wealth under the fire-place.' She then left me.

"So with my sword in my hand, and a good deal of courage in my heart, I opened the door of the cottage. What was my surprise at beholding a very happy family. There was an old man and woman sitting before a blazing fire; the man was reading a goodly book, while the woman was spinning flax; and beside them, on a little stool, sat a pretty little cherub of a child, nursing a kitten almost as pretty as herself.

"As soon as I entered, the little girl, putting her kitten on her shoulder, came to meet me. 'Oh, good little boy,' said she, 'I am so glad you are come; you can help me to play with my kitten.' The old man also saluted me by asking, 'Where I was travelling?' and telling me to walk in and take some refreshment; at the same time the old woman rose and went to the larder, and brought me some pumpkin-pie; while the child, whose name I found was 'Cherry,' brought me some cowslip wine, and I sat down to the table, and made myself very comfortable. I was very hungry, and ate and drank till I felt refreshed, and then—ay, alas! that was a bitter then."

"What did you do then?" Edilswag inquired.

"Why, first," continued the dragon, "I began to think of the 'wealth' of which I was in search; and then I thought of the means of obtaining it. I cast my eyes towards the fire-place. 'That is the spot,' said I to myself, 'where the treasure lies;' and so I took an opportunity, when the old woman's eyes were turned another way, to fumble with the poker for the 'trap-door' which led to the mines of wealth; and, to my astonishment, inserted my instrument into a hole which immediately raised the door; and there I saw, although but for a moment, a hoard of glittering gold, and a long avenue which seemed studded with precious stones, and the glare of the fire upon them made them sparkle like stars in the firmament of heaven. 'I shall be as rich as a nabob,' said I; and I then felt for my sword, which upon my entrance to the cottage I had put under my doublet. I then turned

towards the little girl, who was still nursing her kitten very lovingly. 'Kill all in the house,' were the words of the enchantress. I had not forgotten her injunction, but I knew not how to begin.

"'Kill all in the house!' that was indeed a cruel thing to do—but I felt I must do it—and I knew it would be easy with my sword of sharpness. 'With whom shall I begin,' I thought to myself; 'shall I begin with the old man or woman, or the little child?' I felt that I could not kill the dear little child, till I had got a little used to murder. At last, after a few minutes' consideration, I thought I would try my first stroke on the kitten.

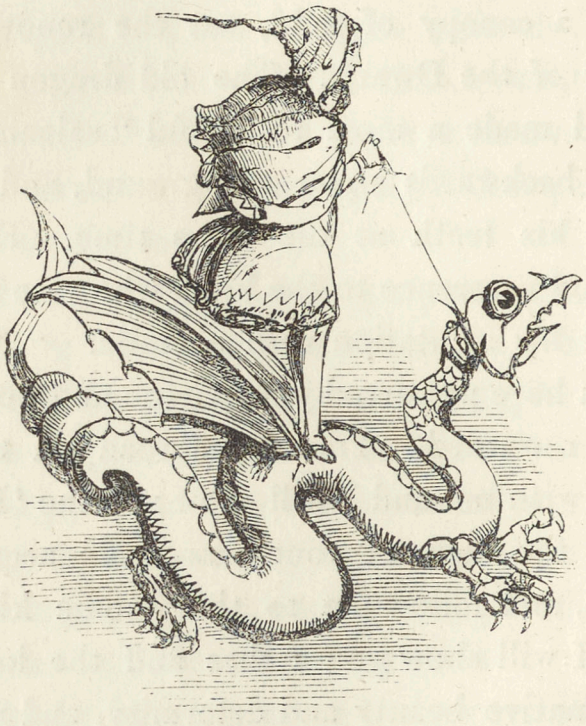
"So I said to 'Cherry,' 'Lend me your kitten, dear, and I will show you a "funny stroke" with it.' The little girl only said, 'Pray do not hurt my "Petty,"' and without further hesitation gave into my hands the juvenile cat. I immediately whipped out my sword, and drew it across the neck of 'Petty;' at the same moment a loud clap of thunder shook the building, and a flash of lightning annihilated everything around me. A mist of blindness for a moment came over my eyes, and when I recovered my eyesight the cottage and all its inmates had vanished, and I, alas! alas! was changed into the wretched form you see me."

When he came to this part of his story, the dragon asked for another mouthful of cigars, and just as he had stuck his teeth full, there appeared at the gorge of a huge cleft in the rock, a little way down the vista of the valley, the heads of two of those monsters of the olden world which we read of in

geology, called "megatheriums." They bellowed loudly, and as they issued from the rock, it was soon seen that there was a team of them, no less than eight yoked to a gorgeous car of malachite, set with gems, gold, and precious stones. In it sat the driver, with reins of asbestos in his hands, and a long whip of the same material; and behind him, quite at his ease, on a throne of beautiful emeralds studded with rubies and overhung by a canopy of gold, sat the renowned "Smalldody," King of the Dwarfs. The old dragon rose up at his approach, and made a most respectful "salaam," bowing his horned nose backwards upon the ground, and knocking the cigars out of his teeth at the same time. Edilswag made also a profound reverence to the king, who rose in his chariot, and returned his salutation with a smile. "Noble youth," said he, "you have preserved your virtue and honour in a way worthy to be rewarded. You are abroad on the search for riches; come with me and I will show you the 'Land of Gold.' Mount upon the back of your new-made acquaintance the dragon there, and follow me to the gnome kingdom below ground, and I will show you riches and the lovers of riches in all their native beauty and deformity, and you shall then be rich if you will."

The dragon seemed pleased at this proposal, and instinctively wagged his tail. Edilswag, after several vain efforts, succeeded at last in getting upon the back of the dragon, and setting his two feet on the shoulders of his wings instead of stirrups, felt firm in his seat, and he had as much confidence as a lad might be supposed to have in his peculiar condition;

for he did not exactly know whether his friend might not take to flying,—although his wings, such as they were, seemed more like fins than wings, and better adapted to enable the monster to swim. However the Dwarf King turned his chariot round towards the mouth of the cavern from whence he had issued, and, as "advised," the dragon fell in at the



rear, following on with a slow, stately march. As to Edilswag, he never felt so proud of his position in his life.

After entering the cavern, the cavalcade proceeded for some distance in darkness—or what would have been darkness but for the sparkling of the gems with which the Dwarf King's chariot was bedizened;—for more than a mile they passed

through this tunnel of twilight, which as they proceeded became more and more expanded. Beautiful stalactites and sharp masses of glittering rock depended from the roof, while the sides bristled with huge spars and gigantic crystals. At last the cavern opened into an enormous hall with a capacious dome, measuring at least half a mile in circumference, and lighted up by burning masses of coal, or rather by the gas exuding therefrom. Ten thousand bright lights glittered on every side, and a noble vista of flaming jets led to an immense castellated gateway. It was built of black, shining basalt, had a portico of jasper, a huge portcullis of iron, and a massive gate of gold. As they drew near to it, the shrill notes of a bugle caused the portcullis to be raised, and the gates flew open. The Dwarf King entered in his car, and Edilswag and his dragon-horse closed up the rear. But how astonished was the lad at the gorgeous beauty and grandeur of the place! Little did he imagine that such glorious regions could be found under-ground. He had always supposed that amid the deep caverns of the earth, gloom and darkness reigned, and that those who descended to the regions below would have as little use for eyes as the pioneer mole; but here was light, and air, and beauty. It is true there were no flowers or trees like those above-ground, but there were great and grand productions like those belonging to the ancient and most remote periods of the earth's history. Gigantic trees of the fern species, and of the horsetail family; also enormous palms, fungi of extraordinary shapes and of expansive dimensions, and mosses large and numerous, and congregated,

as are the forests of the upper earth. There were also magnificent pines and fir trees; and, among the numerous varieties of cryptogamous plants, there were many that shone with the most brilliant lustre, both in leaf and flower, although vitality had left them for ever. There was no blue sky, such as that we are used to on the outside of the earth; but, instead, a universal purple light, which gave to every surrounding object a most subdued and pleasing effect. The light was something between sunlight and moonlight,and everything in which it was viewed partook of a sublime and grand character. Nor were the animal productions at all inferior to the vegetable ones; for here were to be seen, roving about at their will, the stupendous monster forms of the ancient earth, living amid coral caves and diamond mines, and sporting freely among rocks and deep lakes, and shallow seas and rushing rivers, and amid beautiful shells and marine productions of great variety and beauty. Sharks of all sizes, from that of a herring to that of a whale; tortoises and turtles of gigantic proportions; crocodiles and other saurians; and the mighty plesiosaurus,—an animal with the head of a lizard, the teeth of a crocodile, and a neck of enormous length, like that of a serpent, and the extremities of a whale. There were birds, too, huge flying creatures of the bat family, measuring ten or fifteen feet between their wings. Among the swamps and marshes waded the hippopotamus, rhinoceros, and the stupendous mastodon, with other large animals, cased in plated mail; and there were serpents also, of tremendous length and size, and dragons without number, many

of which were trained to useful purposes, both of draught and burden. Edilswag viewed all with the greatest astonishment, and, while he was wondering at what he saw, he found himself approaching a most gorgeous pile of architecture, which seemed to glow and glitter in its own light, as, indeed, well it might, for it was called the "Diamond Palace," and was the residence of the "Dwarf King." It was built on a huge rock, which stood upon the margin of a capacious lake. Its approach was by a bridge of rubies, and a noble flight of a thousand steps of purest agate and most costly pearls. At the two ends of this bridge were placed four golden griffins, and over its centre arch was erected a high tower of the brightest rock crystal, having above it a spire of amethyst. This tower and spire were, indeed, glorious to look upon, but sank into insignificance before the elaborate and beautiful architecture of the palace itself, which was one blaze of brilliance. It was built in the form of a square, and from its centre arose a dome a thousand yards in circumference, surmounted by a statue of the Dwarf King. The dome was of the purest gold, and it was supported by a hundred pillars, each a perfect six-sided crystal of emerald, which stood upon a basement of white marble, inlaid with turquoise, and ornamented with silver stars. The façade of the centre, in which the grand entrance was placed, consisted of twelve malachite steps leading to a broad platform of jasper studded with sapphires. Twenty-four pillars of pink opal formed the entrance to the portico, which comprehended three golden gates, curiously carved and of exquisite device; and entering



THE HALL OF THE DIAMOND PALACE.

these, you came to the grand hall of audience. It was entirely of crystal; fifty double pillars on either side separated

two isles from the centre nave. The ceiling was a mosaic of diamonds, set with sapphires; the basement or pavement was of the purest rock crystal, and at the further end of this great hall, which was three hundred feet long by a hundred broad, was erected a throne of burnished gold.

The Dwarf King had dismounted from his car and entered the palace. Edilswag dismounted from his horse dragon, and entered the palace with the king by the grand entrance; and while he stood amazed at the glorious prospect before him, the sound of martial music was heard, "a flourish of trumpets and drums." This was thrice repeated. The hall gradually filled with priests in their holy habiliments of white; senators and councillors in robes of red; and a numerous and brilliant company of ladies, among whom the "elves" and "fairy nymphs" shone conspicuous. Another flourish of trumpets and drums, accompanied with a noise like thunder, shook the palace. A cloud of incense rose before the throne, and in the midst of it appeared the Dwarf King, NUGGET THE GREAT, king of the mines and lord of the underground world. He wore a crown of diamonds, and held in his hand a ruby sceptre; and while Edilswag stood wondering and almost overpowered with what he saw and heard, the Dwarf King thus spoke:—

"Sublime nobles, great councillors, and mighty senators! I greet you all well. I have to-day revisited the outer earth; but it is still full of evil influences. There is but little work among the sons of men. Our great enemy 'Yellow Eye,' who has an eye upon our gold, is still busy in deluding the

wealth-coveting mortals, and driving them into her cruel snares of wickedness and sin. One is now present with you, who has nobly resisted her temptations, destroyed the lion she sent against him, and tamed the 'Great Dragon of the Wealden.' He has followed me here at my command, and is now before you—say what shall be done to him."

Edilswag was mightily surprised at what the king said, and tried to withdraw himself among the crowd, but in his attempt to do so, was prevented by two grand officers of the court, who conducted him along the broad way of the hall to the steps of the throne, before which he was told to prostrate himself. This he did, and while he was in this posture of humiliation, the king continued his oration.

"Say," said he, "what shall be done to the noble youth who has triumphed over Yellow Eye."

"Make him one of us," uttered a thousand voices. "Show him the true value of riches, the real use of gold."

"It shall be done," said the king. "Come, youth, and stand at my right hand till I can show and teach thee more than thou couldst ever learn in the wicked upper ground of earth." The king then made his obeisance to his nobles, and having taken Edilswag by the hand retired to the inner court of the palace.

When the king had passed through to his inner room, which was called the "Pearl Chamber," he immediately summoned his chief favourite and councillor, Merlin, to whom he presented Edilswag, with this direction: "Take this youth," he said, "initiate him in our mysteries, show him the use of riches,

the danger of riches, and the true value of gold; that he may return to the wicked upper world fit to live and to do good in it."

Merlin made a very handsome bend, and took Edilswag by the hand. "Peace be with thee," said the king, placing his right hand on the head of the youth as he retired.

When the king was gone, Merlin turned to his young charge, and taking him by the arm, said to him, "Fear not. Look upon me as thy guardian spirit; learn of me and I will teach thee; follow my footsteps and I will show thee much; be docile and patient, and thou shalt have wisdom given thee worth more than all the glories that thou seest around thee, and ten times more valuable than all the riches either above or below ground."

Edilswag uttered in a subdued voice, "I will be patient, and humble, and teachable;" and immediately Merlin led the way, commanding the youth to make himself assured, and to listen to what he should say.

The youth and the sage passed through the beautiful gardens of the palace, rich in cryptogamous plants, and abounding in the most delicious grottoes. Elegant cascades of the purest water dashed glittering over rocks of seinite and serpentine, and, in their course among the limestone and other rocks, strewed the ravines and crevices through which they bound with grains and small nuggets of gold. How did the boy long for a few handfuls of the precious metal. "How happy," said he to himself, "would only one cap full of those nuggets make my poor father, mother, brothers and sisters!"



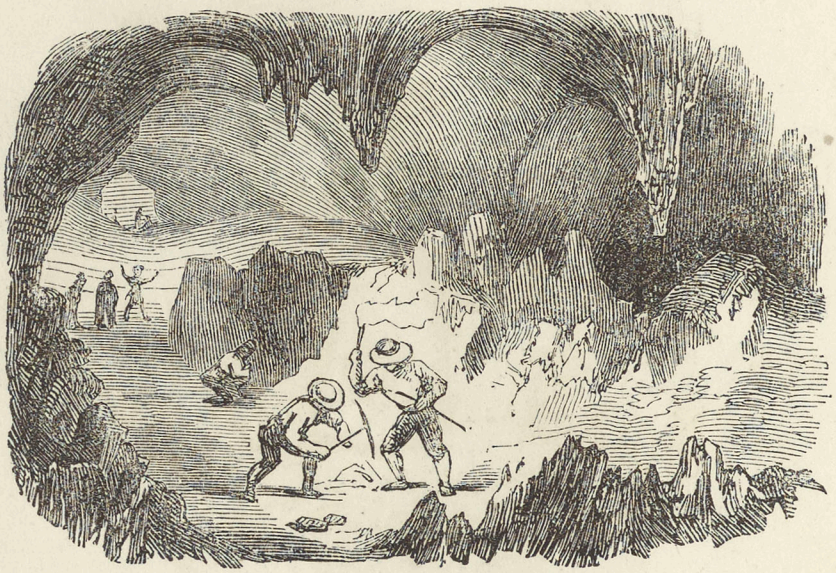
He could not refrain from expressing his feelings to Merlin, and told him, in the end, the object of his adventure, and all his travels' history, from the time of his first following the yellow Cockatoo.



"I knew it all," replied the sage. "I know that thou still hast a lust of gold; but be not deceived, think not that a source of good or of happiness. In your upper world it has been the source of the greatest calamities that have ever fallen on the human race, and is of equal misfortune to individuals in every stage of life's fitful history. I have many

moving monuments to this effect, and thou shalt see them soon."

They now entered the "open country," if the country of mines and caverns can be called open. However, they came to a land of considerable extent, and passing over a rock bridge entered through a golden gate to a noble mansion.



The mansion, like the gate, was of gold, the trees around it bore golden fruit, the servants who came out to greet the sage wore golden liveries, the furniture of the house was gold; the dishes, pans, cups, jugs, and every thing else that could be seen, were gold—all gold! gold! gold! bright, precious glittering gold. The stables were gold, the horses ate gilded oats, like those of the Roman Emperor; in short, all around, above and below, was nothing but gold.

Presently crept forth an old, lean, withered, hollow-eyed, spindle-shanked, feeble, tottering man, dressed in a golden robe; his other habiliaments, from the slippers on his feet to the cap upon his head, were gold also. He had a golden set of false teeth, a golden ear trumpet, a golden guard chain (Albert pattern), a golden eye-glass, and a golden false eye. He came forward with a trembling step, and bending before Merlin, said, "Sir, noble Sir, give me an appetite! Give me a relish! Give me love in my heart! Give me pleasure in what surrounds me! Give me a clear conscience! Give me youth! Give me contentment! Give me, oh, give me, the power only of shedding tears, for I am a miserable wretch!"

"Thou hast gold enough," replied the sage, "go buy what thou wantest."

"I want that which gold cannot buy. Thou thinkest," said he, addressing Edilswag, "thou thinkest I am rich; but know, youth, that he who has nothing but riches, such as gold, is miserably, miserably poor."

"Thou madest the acquisition of gold while on earth the sole object of thy life," replied the sage; "for *that* thou speculated, for *that* thou scraped, for *that* thou denied thyself common necessaries, for *that* thou robbed the fatherless children and the widows, for *that* thou circumvented goodness and undermined worth, and overreached honour and honesty. For this thou gavest up all the noble sentiments, the holy thoughts, the tender sympathies of thy nature—all to be thought a '*millionaire*,' and to *die rich*—to *die rich*. Now

thou hast gold enough, thy coffers are full enough, thou hast house, servants, steeds, and chariots—and yet thou art miserable."

"Wretched! wretched! wretched!" said the old man as he turned away with a groan; "I have none to feel for me, none to comfort, none to pity me." So saying, he knocked his head against the golden portals of the door of his house in frantic madness, and disappeared.

"This is the 'Bliss of Gold' observed Merlin. "Art thou not taught, youth, that 'all is not gold that glitters?' Wouldst thou be further admonished? Look yonder."

So Edilswag cast his eyes a little in advance, and thence he beheld two fierce griffins in most furious combat. One, which was a female, was of a golden colour; the other was of brass, but polished so as to look like gold. Now they withdrew a little apart, and then mustering up all their strength, sprung together with redoubled violence, tearing each other with their teeth and claws, and scattering their scales about like sparks from a blacksmith's forge. Then they growled, hissed, snarled, and grinned hideously; then they flew at each other again, rolling and tumbling over among the rocks, and lacerating themselves woefully, only pausing when they were quite exhausted and out of breath.

"What horrible animals!" cried the youth. "How dreadful to look upon!—they will tear each other to pieces. Why is this?"

"It is a simple case," said Merlin. "These two griffins, in the upper world, were man and wife. The male, which is the

brazen one, thought that gold was to give him happiness. He was what is called a fortune hunter, and married an heiress for the sake of her money; they lived a cat-and-dog life above ground, and now they live a kind of Kilkenny-cat life; and the male griffin constantly utters—

> She had money, I had none,
> That's the way the quarrel begun.

And it is in this manner that they fight from day to day, without the least hope of their ever being reconciled. They are condemned to everlasting discord for the sake of gold, for there is no divorce court here.

The youth and sage went on a little further. At last they came to a small circular lane. They entered it, and, passing through a narrow passage, came into a large domed cavern. It was dark and gloomy—nothing was to be seen; but cries of woe and anguish were heard, truly frightful—"Oh! oh! oh! ah! ah! ah!"—then groans of *bass*, then shrieks of *treble*, then moanings, *tenor* and *counter tenor*, then sighs *sotto voce*, and at last the mad outrage of a whole orchestra, with the rolling and rumbling of stones and brickbats, after the manner of "Der Freischütz."

"What can this mean?" said Edilswag.

"Thou shalt see," said Merlin, who, with a wave of his staff, struck a light in the place, and there was discovered a poor wretch standing, or rather capering about, in the middle of the space, while from every side of the cavern, its top, and even its bottom, numerous fiends stood pelting him with

"nuggets of gold," from the size of oranges to that of pumpkins; and as every glittering missive struck him or glanced by him, the unfortunate wretch capered about in the most grotesque antics, uttering by turns cries of anguish or terror, while the fiends around him mingled their hootings and gibberings with his lamentations.

"What can this mean?" inquired the youth, of Merlin.

"This wretched being," replied the sage, "was one who, having taken up that heavenly religion whose great principle is that of self-sacrifice and poverty, and the scorn of worldly riches, pandered to the insane cupidity of the world, and preached for filthy lucre's sake, and even went so far as to renounce the very essence of his creed, and to pray to the Supreme for wealth, for riches, for gold. And here he has what he prayed for—an increasing accumulation flowing upon him from every side. That sharp lump which you saw strike him on the side of the head, and made him roar so, represented a 'living' that fell in and made him a pluralist. The great nugget that felled him to the gold heap was a 'rich bishopric;' and the last one that struck him, and made him kick and howl so, was a 'cardinal's' income. He has now gold at every turn, more than he knows what to do with, and he will have more and more till the 'day of doom' shall come."

"Oh! give me not *gold*," cried the youth, terrified by what he had seen, "Give me not *gold*—give me not *riches*—give me not *wealth!* Oh! Mighty One, who givest all, give me *contentment*—give me *peace!* fill my heart with *love*—fill


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my eyes with tears of *sympathy*—fill my mind with *faith and trust in Thee*—and give me a desire for cheerful *industry*, so that the labour of my hands may provide things honest in the sight of men."

The instant the youth uttered this prayer a fragrant smoke, like incense, arose from the spot on which he stood, and filled the whole cavern and hall. Sweet sounds of delicious music took the place of the yells before heard; a bright white cloud encompassed him. In a few moments that white cloud beamed with all the colours of the rainbow, and from it a voice was heard, saying. "Thy prayer has come up as a sweet memorial before me." The cloud now dispersed—the songs of angels gave place to those of birds—and Edilswag found himself, waking as from a delicious sleep, under the wide-spreading branches of one of the forest trees, with his father at a small distance, pursuing his usual work. He awoke as from a dream; but he awoke with a lesson which he never forgot. He pursued honest labour like a man. He gained a competency enough for a poor man, and he enjoyed domestic happiness, and a clear conscience, and the blessing of God gave him a perpetual peace.