



THE FIRESIDE FAIRY.

THE PRINCESS OF BABYLON AND THE CEDAR
PEACOCK.

HE next night Pansy waited with impatience until the ill-tempered cook and the proud housemaid had gone to bed, leaving her—as they never failed to do—to sit up to open the door. We can hardly take it upon ourselves to set down the number of lodgers accommodated in the house of Mrs. Mew, Pansy's high-bred mistress. We should as soon try to count the bees of a swarm. Mrs. Mew was the majestic widow of an officer of militia; and had, on one occasion, awed Pansy with a sight of the cocked hat, and real sword of the deceased soldier. As an officer's lady, Mrs. Mew exacted the fullest measure of respect; as an officer's lady, she ruled her innumerable boarders with the prettiest mixture of assurance and good-humour. After awhile the boldest lodger bowed and said nothing at the decisive, jocund will of Mrs. Mew. To the poor, parish child, Mrs.

Mew, in her worst tyranny, was the embodiment of all earthly cleverness. Could the Queen herself know more than Mrs. Mew?

Mrs. Huff, the cook, considered Pansy—the workhouse wench—a thing especially supplied by Saint Martin's parish for the exercise of cooks in their privileged violence. Hence, implements, varying from a pot-lid to a rolling-pin, would, at least thrice a day, fly levelled at the little wretch, whose constant address in avoiding the missile was, as Mrs. Huff would declare, enough to provoke a saint. Pansy had had the audacity to duck her head at a thrown candlestick, suffering the weapon to pass with a crash through the kitchen window, to the indignation of Mrs. Mew, and particularly to the disgust and astonishment of the erring markswoman the cook, who thereupon protested that if that imp of a girl did not leave the house—she, Mrs. Huff, the best of cooks, should and would.

Judith, the housemaid, was the daughter of a tradesman of thirty years' standing: yes, of a tradesman who had paid poor's-rates nobody knew how many years, to feed and bring up bits of things like that scrub of a girl,—and therefore, she, Judith, was never to demean herself by any act of civility towards Pansy. She, Judith, knew *her* father and mother; she had not been picked up in a basket, and christened after the parish.

And these attacks and taunts had fallen with more than usual severity upon Pansy the day after the fairy's visit. And Pansy, full of the past night and the night to come, went about her work with a smiling face, and answered the harshest and unkindest words with the music of

sweetest patience. The cook declared that "that girl had not a bit of feeling—you might as well abuse a post;" and the housemaid asked, with a toss of the head, "what could be expected from things brought up in a workhouse?"

Again and again had Pansy looked at the clock. At length, the cook and maid departed for bed, Mrs. Huff having locked the coal-cellar. There was scarcely a ray of fire in the grate; but quite enough for such an audacious creature as Pansy, who was good for nothing but to break windows, and to care nothing afterwards. But all the unkindness of the day was forgotten, and Pansy—trimmed and tidied to her best—sat, scarcely breathing on her stool, listening to the clock, whose every tick seemed like a solemn march to tell the coming of the fairy.

Suddenly, the dim, dark fire threw out jets of white flame; the coals, heaped up, roared most comfortable music; and Hob, the fairy, flourishing his steel poker, stood upon the hearth. Little Pansy, clapping her hands, sprang to her feet.

"How d'ye do, child?" asked Hob. "But why do I ask? Better and better. Not even the candlestick has frightened you. 'Twas a near miss, that. Had I not jumped astride it as it flew, and carried my brass horse through the window, the filthy thing had marked my little Pansy."

"Oh, good sir, and was it you? Well, I thought it was all my own doing—and were you in the kitchen then—and was it you that saved me?"

"I've not been far off all the day," said Hob. "And you've been a good girl—yes, a very good girl. As for the pride of Judith, that shall be duly rewarded; and Mrs. Huff, never fear it, shall have her recompense. In the meanwhile, Pansy, patience. Patience is the surest of all conjurors. Patience turns little acorns into large ships."

"How, sir?" asked Pansy. "And what is an acorn? I don't know that I ever saw an acorn?"

"Look at that, then," said the fairy, and in a trice he threw up an acorn into Pansy's hand.

"How pretty!" said Pansy, and she never had seen an acorn. "A ship in this!"

"Just as in you, a little simple child, there is a noble, beautiful, excellent woman, with patience and wisdom to grow and shape you. But then there must be no conceit—no folly to spoil you. Your affections must not be trimmed and fashioned to seem what they were never intended to be; you must not depart from what is natural, to make yourself appear a wonder. You must leave your heart in the hands of Heaven, and not try to make a mere thing of it for the astonishment of the world. I've known a young, beautiful thing trimmed and shaped into nothing better than a lovely monster. Do you understand me, Pansy?"

"A little, sir—not all," replied the child, and the dawn of mind seemed breaking through her looks.

"Well, then, Pansy, I'll try and make my meaning better known by a little story."

"Thank you, sir," cried Pansy; and the child, with a sweet seriousness deepening her face, listened.

"Once upon a time," said Hob, with a sparkle of the eye at the musical old words—words that, like silver bells, have rung millions of little hearts to earnest, solemn worship of the strange and beautiful—"once upon a time, there was a Princess of Babylon. Now this Princess was so lovely that, when a child, the people would, on certain festivals, crowd to the gardens of the palace only to behold her. It was thought a long holiday, only for one moment to look upon her. And the Child-Princess grew up, and as she grew, she became still more and more beautiful; and she was worshipped with devotion deeper and deeper. And as the Princess ripened towards womanhood, her increasing beauty became a trouble to the wise men and counsellors of the king her father. 'Our Princess is of such surpassing beauty,' they would say, 'there is no prince, or lord of the earth, worthy to be her husband. Alas! that our Princess should be so perfect that no man may hope to wed her!'—A sad condition for a Princess, was it not, Pansy?"

Pansy coloured, but could find no answer. The fairy Hob, with a smile, continued.

"But, as time passed, the Princess promised to make less and less the difficulty of the wise men, the counsellors of her father. For the poor Princess had suffered the evil of greatness, and had been worshipped out of flesh and blood, into an idol of herself. You may think it sad, child, in your hours of drudgery, sad and hard to rise in cutting winter mornings, and in bitter cold to do your work; to clean and scrub, and feel the frost biting your fingers' ends; to have harsh, screaming words early and late, and scarcely ever to look upon a face that meets you with a smile. Nevertheless, creeping from your garret, shuddering at the winter air, and doomed to drudge under sharpest tongues, you are happier than was this poor Princess of Babylon. Better sometimes is it for a human creature to sit among the ashes than to be lifted to a throne; for this poor Princess, feeding upon the worship that was every day offered to her, believed she was no longer a creature of this world; and so, in the folly of her illusion, she thought, the more she took upon herself, the more she showed her greatness. There was nothing so rich, which by wastefully destroying it, she would not show her contempt of. She would, in the fury of her conceit, throw golden coin to the fish in the river. Fish she fed upon, she would say, should taste of gold. She would have all kinds of birds caught, and collars of precious stones, with her name cut in them, hung about their necks; then the birds set free again, that they might carry the glory of her name to all the ends of the earth. And doing these things, the Princess of Babylon came to full womanhood. And, truly, there was no king, no prince, who sought her for his wife; for though all men wondered at her marvellous beauty, all men feared her—her vanity had made her loveliness so terrible.

"Now, in the royal gardens there was a glorious cedar. No man knew the age of that mighty tree. Story ran that it was as old as the world, its roots twisting deep about the heart of the earth; the heart, whose first pantings had beat under the twig cedar. That tree was solemn as a temple. Thousands and thousands of years had died and been buried beneath its sanctifying boughs. The silver wings of angels had glanced adown its everlasting green, and been folded below its branches. Poor was the heart that did not swell with natural worship at that tree—so calm, so solemn, so religious in its shadow and mightiness."

"Can a tree be so beautiful?" asked Pansy, the fairy pausing. "I should like to see such a tree," and the child's eyes glistened with a tender devotion. "I feel that I could love such a tree—love it almost as if it was a living thing."

"It is a living thing," said Hob. "There is a spirit in every tree, a spirit that looks and speaks, if you will but teach your eyes and ears to see and listen to it. And this cedar looked like a guardian genius of the gardens, and low and solemn were its sometime sighs. Well, the poor beautiful Princess had no eyes, no heart for the cedar. To her, it was ugly and monstrous as it grew—growing after its own heart. The Princess resolved that the cedar should be cut, dwarfed and fashioned into a certain shape. No sooner was her will made known than sorrow possessed all Babylon. The wise men and counsellors of the king besought him to check the fury of the Princess. The cedar was a sacred tree; some grievous judgment would follow its profanation. The people rose and clamoured; come what might, the cedar should remain sacred!"

"Now this contention of the people was a new pleasure to the Princess. It gave zest to her desire—it made conquest delicious. She would work her will with the cedar, even were she determined to consume it with fire, and scatter abroad its ashes. The king, her father, wept and prayed; but the selfish, beautiful Princess, who thought nature never comely in her own attire, would have her way with the cedar.

"Well, certain artists were commanded to the task.

Mourning was upon Babylon ; for ruin was at work amid the sacred branches of the mighty cedar. The Princess rejoiced in herself, and day after day, saw the tree cut and trimmed, and fashioned ; and in a month the tree that, for thousands of years, had been a growing and still growing wonder, was now debased, degraded, outraged, violated. The solemn cedar was become of the shape of a Peacock ; and the foolish and beautiful Princess laughed and clapped her hands in the folly and wickedness of her triumph.

"Short hour of rejoicing! Miserable victory! Most blighting conquest! Who shall profane nature, and escape the retribution?"

"The first night that saw the change complete—the first night the melancholy stars wept on the outraged tree—the first night the winds murmured among its boughs of mockery—the Princess gave a feast, and, in the madness of a revel, thought to hush reproach. How thousands danced around the Cedar Peacock—the work of the Princess! How they praised the majestic port of its neck and head—how they lauded the interminable sweep of its mighty tail! Never before had human art so beautified and exalted nature! Thus cried the slaves of the Princess; but there was mourning for the fall of the cedar in every house in Babylon.

"The revel ended, and there was silence in the palace. Suddenly, as from the bowels of the night, there issued a scream, at which the very walls seemed to shudder! Again and again that scream—a peacock note of ten thousand thousand times the power of peacock might. A scream that seemed to tear earth and sky with its rending harshness.

"All rushed from the palace, when, behold, the Cedar Peacock had flown from its root—flown close to the chamber window of the Princess. Her wickedness had given a voice—a crying and appalling voice—to the profanation. She had outraged nature, and nature clamoured against her!

"Unhappy Princess! She travelled from Babylon—the Cedar Peacock flew with her! It was not in the power of steel or fire to destroy that still tormenting bird. Wherever the Princess lay—on highest mountain or in deepest vale—there, every night, roosted the Cedar Peacock. There the Peacock, to its open-eyed victim, screamed and screamed.

"The Princess travelled all over the earth, and still with her flew the Cedar Peacock. She returned to Babylon to die; and with her returned the Cedar Peacock.

"In a few, few years, the Princess was become a withered, haggard woman. It seemed that every scream of the Cedar Peacock jagged a wrinkle in her cheek. The Princess died; and from that hour the Cedar perished.

"Who shall profane nature, and escape the retribution? Who?"

But here a lodger knocked at the door, and the Fireside Fairy vanished.

THE CARRIER PIGEON.

SPEED, speed upon thy way!
I send thee on a gentle errand,—fly,
And work my bidding ere the parting ray
Fades from the western sky.

The summer woods are dark,
And murmur lovingly, yet pause not thou
That bearest tokens onwards to thine ark,
More sure than leaf or bough!

In sunshine bathe thy breast,
Stay not within the swift and glancing rill
To dip thy wing; for thee a sweeter rest
Is waiting,—onward still!

Forth from the casement—there
She leans to gaze upon the sky; and now
The evening light lies golden on her hair,
Lies warm on cheek and brow.

She looks unto the west,—
It is for thee she watches: thou wilt be
Soon by her hand, her gentle hand, carest,—
How softly, tenderly!

But first beneath thy wing
It trembles, while she seeks my letter; well
She knows, ere yet she frees the silken string,
All that it hath to tell!

And yet the heart would fain
Hear what it best hath loved repeated oft;
It falls and rises, beating with the strain,
In measured cadence soft.

Like childhood's ear that drinks
Some oft-told story, some remembered rhyme,
It knows and greets each coming word, yet thinks
Them sweeter every time.

Ah! would that to *her* heart
She chanced but once to press the folded line,
Then all the warmth to sudden life would start
I breathed on it from mine!

The love, the tenderness,
That found in words no kindred language, *there*
Would seek a fond interpreter to guess
All they may ne'er declare.

I do but stay thy flight,—
Speed on thy way! The summer Heavens are wide,
Yet through their broad and untracked fields of light
Thou wilt not need a guide.

My thoughts before thee fly,—
Thou needest but to follow where they lead;
They have *one* way—ah, would that with thee, I
Might also follow!—Speed!

THE ADVENTURES OF CARLO FRANCONI,

AN ITALIAN PEASANT. RELATED BY HIMSELF.

Translated by Mrs. JAMES WHITTLE, late Miss CATHERINE TAYLOR.

(Continued from page 89.)



UR way lay through France; and the kind-hearted peasantry, who were then busied in the vintage, often invited us to join their noon-day meal. It was a lovely autumn, and as yet we had experienced no severe weather; an occasional storm drove us to seek shelter beneath some shed, or wide spreading tree, but we were too well inured to a mountain life to fear what rain or wind could do to us. At length we reached Boulogne, and by this time our little stock of money enabled us boldly to take our passage in a vessel that was sailing for London. Poor Nanina was terrified when she saw the steam-boat, and was told that in it she would sail away on to the wide sea. I comforted her as best I could, hiding my own fears that I might not add to hers. We had a fine passage, and about noon entered the Thames. The sight of the numberless vessels that crowded the noble river filled us with astonishment, and Nanina's exclamations of natural and unfeigned delight interested many of the passengers for us. One young lady came to us, and sitting down by Nanina began to speak to her; but, alas! not one word could we understand; we could only shake our heads in reply, when much to our surprise she addressed us in our own beloved language, asking where we came from, and what we were going to do. Nanina simply replied, that we were come from Campiano to London, to make our fortune; at which the young lady smiled. We told her that we were going to see a friend of our father's, who lived in London, and who would, we were