

Introduction



TRUE fairy stories are always better than fairy stories that are made up, and real kings are greater than those who never lived at all, so that the true stories told here at the real court of Old King Cole are surely worth your while to read. Where his kingdom lay is difficult to tell, because nearly all the travellers and ambassadors who went there found so much pleasure at the court that they nearly always forgot to come away. To walk into Old King Cole's country was easy enough, but to walk out again was a very different thing. You felt so happy at such a court that it was difficult to tear yourself away.

These stories are true stories told by real people at a real court. Some of them may have been heard by you before, but that proves all the more that the stories are true, for they wouldn't have been told since if they had been found out to be false. Some, indeed, of these stories have been told by dear old Hans Anderson, and some by the brothers Grimm, while others are to be found in the *Arabian Nights' Entertainments* and in the *Fairy Mythology* of Keightley, and Dean Swift more than a hundred years ago told the tale of the Brobdingnag giants, and Mary and Charles Lamb re-told the story of *Prospero and Miranda*.

"Is Old King Cole still alive?" you ask.

Well that is a hard question to answer, as it is so long since the last traveller came back. The king, however,