

A FAIRY TALE.

BY THOMAS HOOD.

Ox Hounslow heath—and close beside the road,
 As western travellers may oft have seen,—
 A little house some years ago there stood,
 A milkkin abode,
 And built like Mr. Birkbeck's, all of wood;
 The walls of white, the window shutters green :—
 Four wheels it had at North, South, East, and West,
 (Tho' now at rest,)
 On which it used to wander to and fro,
 Because its master ne'er maintain'd a rider,
 Like those who travel in 'aternoster Row;
 But made his business travel for itself,
 Till he had made his pelf,
 And then retired—If one may call it so,
 Of a roadsider.

Perchance, the very race and constant riot
 Of stages long and short, which thereby ran,
 Made him more relish the repose and quiet
 Of his now sedentary caravan;
 Perchance, he loved the ground because 'twas common,
 And so he might impude a strip of soil,
 That furnished, by his toil,
 Some dusty greens, for him and his old woman :—
 And five tall hollyhocks, in daisy flower,
 Howbeit, the thoroughfare did no ways spoil;
 His pence,—unless, in some unlucky hour,
 A stray horse came and gobbled up his bow'r !

But tir'd of always looking at the coaches,
 The same to come,—when they had seen them one day—
 And, used to brisker life, both man and wife
 Began to suffer, N U E's approaches,
 And feel retirement like a long wet Sunday,—
 So, having had some quarters of school breeding,
 They turn'd themselves, like other folks, to reading;
 But setting out where others nigh have done,
 And being ripen'd in the seventh stage.
 The childhood of old age,
 Began as other children have begun,—
 Not with the pastorals of Mr. Pope,
 Or Bard of Hope,
 Or Paley, ethical, or learned Porson,—
 But spelt, on Sabbaths, in St. Mark, or John,
 And then relax'd themselves 'with Whittington,
 Or Valentine and Orson—
 But chiefly fairy tales they loved to con,
 And being easily melted, in their dotage,
 Slobber'd,—and kept
 Reading,—and wept
 Over the White Cat, in their wooden cuttage.

Thus reading on—the longer
 They read, of course, their childish faith grew stronger
 In Gnomes, and Hags, and Elves, and Giants grin ;—
 If talking Trees and Birds reveal'd to him,
 She saw the flight of Fairyland's fly-waggons,
 And magic-fishes swim
 In puddle-ponds, and took old crows for dragons,—
 Both were quite drunk from the enchanted flaggons;
 When as it fell upon a summer's day,
 As the old man sat a feeding
 On the old babe-reading,
 Beside his open street-and-parlour door,
 A hideous roar
 Proclaim'd a drove of beasts was coming by the way.

Long-horned, and short, of many a different breed,
 Tall, tawny brutes, from famous Lincoln-levels
 Or Durham feed;
 With some of those unquiet black dwarf devils,
 From nether side of Tweed,
 Or Firth of Forth;
 Looking half wild with joy to leave the North,—
 With dusty hides, all mobbing on together :—
 When,—whether from a fly's malicious comment
 Upon his tender flank, from which he shrank;
 Or whether
 Only in some enthusiastic moment,—
 However, one brown monster, in a frisk,
 Giving his tail a perpendicular whisk,
 Kick'd out a passage thro' the beastly rabble;
 And after a pas seul,—or, if you will, a
 Horn-pipe before the Basket-maker's villa,
 Leapt o'er the tiny pile,—
 Back'd his beef-steaks against the wooden gable,
 And thrust his brawny bell-ropes of a tail
 Right o'er the page,
 Wherein the sago
 Just then was spelling some romantic fable.

The old man, half a scholar, half a dunce,
 Could not peruse, who could !—two tales at once;
 And being huff'd
 At what he knew was none of Riquet's Taft,
 Bang'd to the door,
 But most unluckily enclosed a morsel
 Of the intruding tail, and all the tassel :—
 The monster gave a roar,
 And bolting off with speed, increased by pain,
 The little house became a coach once more,
 And, like Macheath, "took to the road" again !

Just then, by fortune's whimsical decree,
 The ancient woman stooping with her crupper
 Towards sweet home, or where sweet home should be,
 Was getting up some household herbs for supper;
 Thoughtful of Cinderella, in the tale,
 And quaintly wondering if magic shifts
 Could o'er a common pumpkin so prevail,
 To turn it to a coach ;—what pretty gifts
 Might come of cabbages, and curly kale.
 Meanwhile she never heard her old man's wail,
 Nor turn'd till home had turn'd a corner, quite
 Gone out of sight !

At last, conceive her, rising from the ground,
 Weary of sitting on her russet clothing;
 And looking round
 Where rest was to be found,
 There was no house—no villa there—no nothing !
 No house !

The change was quite amazing;
 It made her senses stagger for a minute,
 The riddle's explanation seem'd to harden;
 But soon her superannuated nous
 Explained the horrid mystery ;—and raising
 Her hand to heaven, with the cabbage in it,
 On which she meant to sup,—
 "Well ! this is Fairy Work ? I'll hot a garden,
 Little Prince Silverwings has ketch'd me up,
 And set me down in some one else's garden !"