

marvelously beautiful in the moonlight ; and the murmur of the water, mingled with the sigh of the midges, seemed to him the loveliest song he had ever heard ; neither merry nor sad, but happy and peaceful. Then he wept, and the tears ran down over a stone into a dark eddy, and gathered against a small jutting ledge. And Hans did not see for a long time that from each tear drop sprang a delicate little fairy no larger than a gnat, and that they formed a ring on the stream, shining in the moonlight, and that the ring grew ever wider and wider as the drops ran down. At last he heaved a great sob and two specially large tears, trickling down and joining together, passed out into the middle of the ring and became a fairy much larger and even more beautiful than the rest. Hans started and looked down wonderingly into the glimmering ring and heard a sweet small voice come up from the shining water. What it said was this : " Poor Hans Fingerhut, you have endured enough and are very weary. Shall we sing you the song of the stream in your own mortal tongue ? " Hans Fingerhut's eyes looked down now bright and wet with joy and gratitude, and he tried to smile, forgetting that he had a frog's mouth, which is not made to smile, so he contented himself with saying, " Ah, I must die soon, if I do not hear the stream song. "

And the fairy ring widened till it touched either bank, and began to go round with a motion so soft and delicate, and each link was so small and beautiful that Hans would have been entranced and stupified with wonder and delight had his mind not been set with all its faculties to catch the fairy song. Then the fairy who stood in the middle waved her wand and the little song rose up scarcely louder than the voice of the midges, yet so distinct that Hans Fingerhut's frog-ears caught every word of it. This was the song they sang—the song of the water drops ; for Hans used often to repeat it afterwards, and all the good children in the town knew it well :—

By silent forest and field and mossy stone

We come from the wooded hill and we go to the sea ;
We labor and sing sweet songs, but we never moan,
For our mother the sea is calling us cheerily ;
We have heard her calling us many and many a day,
From the cool grey stones and the white sand far away.

The way is long, and winding and slow is the track ;
The sharp rocks fret us ; the eddies work us delay ;
But we sing sweet songs to our mother and answer her back,
Sweetly we answer our mother, gladly repay,
Oh, we hear her, we hear her, singing wherever we roam,
Far, far away in the silence calling us home.

Poor mortal, your ears are dull and you cannot hear ;
But we, we hear it, the breast of our mother a-beat,
Low, far away, sweet and solemn and clear,
Under the hush of the night, under the noontide heat.
Gladly we sing for our mother, for we shall please her best,
Songs of beauty and peace, freedom and infinite rest.

We sing and sing through the grass and the stones and the reeds,
And we never grow tired though we journey ever and aye,
Dreaming and dreaming, wherever the long way leads,
Of the far cool rocks and the rush of the wind and the spray.
Under the sun and the stars we glitter and dance and are free,
For we dream and dream of our mother, the width of the sheltering sea.

As the last echoes of the song died away the fairy ring faded off into the quiet moonshine. Only the larger fairy remained in the middle, and it was no longer the fairy but the little elf of the thistle, looking more beautiful and wise than ever. " Do you know the stream song ? " said he, and no frog's voice ever sounded so sweetly as Hans Fingerhut's as he repeated word for word the fairy song of the stream. " Was I not right, " said the elf, " when I said that the water drops sing forever as you, too, once sang imperfectly in your youth ? Night and day, as they journey, they feel the far off strength and grandeur of the sea, calling and beckoning them on, and the song that they sing is neither weary nor sad, but perfectly happy and peaceful. So everything in the world has something great and noble to strive towards. You, too, Hans Fingerhut, gifted above most men, have your sea to seek without ceasing—a wondrous and absorbing sea of strength and beauty and peace. You can never come to it, but you can approach ever nearer and nearer. If you understand this rightly, the troubles and vexations of life, all its trials and difficulties will no longer fret you, but only arm you with the wide knowledge and power. " So saying the elf once more pricked Hans Fingerhut on the nose with his thistle-staff and Hans again became a man.

All night long Hans sat beside the stream in the moonlight, very quiet and thoughtful, listening to the eternal ripple of the water. It seemed to him that he could now render the sweet, joyous voice distinctly into words, and the murmur ever seemed to say :—

" Oh, we hear her, we hear her, singing, wherever we roam,
Far, far away in the silence, calling us home. "

At last the dawn came and Hans Fingerhut went down to the stream and bathed his face and hands, taking the utmost care never to disturb its clearness, and he blessed the stream and turned away homeward through the forest. The voices of the birds came soft and muffled out of the cool trees, and the bells of the waking cattle sounded fitfully across the far off hills. As he passed out of the woods the sun rose, and the birds broke into full chorus ; the labourers began to go afield and anon the grasshoppers piped in the warm grass. All these things no longer made Hans Fingerhut angry, but only seemed to him so many different versions of the stream song. They seemed to say to him, " Ah, Hans Fingerhut, you have changed and become like us again. We are all happy and peaceful, for we have all something noble and beautiful to work for. We long to hear you sing. " So Hans came to the town, and the noise and stir of the streets were become quite pleasant to him. He no longer walked with his usual defiant stride, downcast face and scowling brow. The portly figures and round faces of the busy burghers, and the well-filled purses at their girdles no longer made him fierce and envious, but he greeted them all with a quiet and pleasant " good morning. "

All that day, and many days, he sat in his stall and sewed and stitched diligently and sang so many glad,