THE KING OF NO-LAND.

BY B. L. PARJEON.

X.

(*Continued.*)

"Speak low, or the old fellow will hear you."

"What old fellow?" asks Robin with a laugh.

"The old fellow who is hiding behind that clump of trees beyond. Did you not hear him call out to us to hush? You look incredulous. Because you do not see him, you think there is no old fellow there. But I declare he is there—an old, gray-haired man, with serious eyes and a long beard. He bade us hush, because we were too merry. He has been there ever so many hundreds of years. The wood is haunted, and the old gray-beard is but one of a great army of spirits who retreat into the hollowness at the first sound of human footsteps. *His* voice is harsh and strong, but he has children whose softer voices mock the sighing wind as it glides past them."

"A pretty fancy," says Coltsfoot, regarding Sassafras with tender interest, and yet with a strange admixture of seriousness.

A solemn look is in Bluebell's eyes as Sassafras describes the echo-king, and Sassafras, seeing this, breaks into a laugh, which is so contagious that, like magic, the hollow is filled with merry sound.

"Hark!" he cries, holding up again a warning finger. "Those are the young spirits who are laughing. There are merry ones and old ones, if we could only see them."

"What are they like?" asks Bluebell, bending toward him, her face flushed with excitement. "What are they like?"

"Some of them are almost as pretty as Bluebell here. They have sparkling eyes, and in the golden hair which floats down to their feet sun-sparkles chase each other. In the summer they sing with the birds. It is they who drink the dew from the leaves."

"And in the winter?"

"They bind their hair with garlands of holly and laurel, and enchant into beautiful devices the hoar-frost on the branches of the trees. They peep into the icicles, and melt them with the fire of their eyes. If they hear any one laugh, they laugh and are happy. Then the old fellow with the long beard shivers and grunts and stamps his feet and blows upon his fingers. I like best to hear the young spirits. One night we will come here and watch them when they do not think we are looking."

Then Sassafras turns to Bluebell, and asks in a tender tone if she will sing a song, and Bluebell in a sweet voice sings, and the hollow echoes her song, but not so sweetly:

"All things are fair:
Nature rejoices:
Valley and hill
Thrill with sweet voices—
All things are fair.

"Sweet is the air
Now and forever;
Heart whispers low.
Change will come never—
All things are fair.

"Look where I will,
Sunlight's bright glances
Fill me with joy.
How my heart dances!
All things are fair!"

"That is my son's song," says Dame Endive to Sassafras, with a proud look at Coltsfoot; "he wrote it for Bluebell."

"Your son is a poet."

"He is anything he likes," responds the fond mother; "he knows a mighty deal. He's a man; there isn't a cleverer in No-land. Where he got all his learning from, gracious only knows, for I'm no scholar. But knowledge comes to him as seeks, I suppose. Ah, the nights he sat up when he was a boy!"

"You must not credit all that my mother says about me," said Coltsfoot, joining them. "Mothers are overfond. I guess she is speaking of me."

"Tian't me, my son," says Dame Endive; "'tis him. He says you're a poet, and he says right. He's a lad of sense."

Coltsfoot shakes his head.

"Because of my simple lines! Nay, if there is a poet among us, it is our dear friend here, who has just woven such pretty fancies out of the echoes. There is nothing fanciful in my verses. They fit Bluebell. All things *are* fair to her. I wrote them when I was in a happy, hopeful mood."

He utters these last words in a saddened tone, which, as the breeze awakes the lyre, stirs the mother's heart, and causes her to look with sudden apprehension into the face of her son; from his face her eyes wander to the face of Sassafras, and a frowning light shines in them. Coltsfoot, self-engrossed in a painful thought, does not observe these signs. "Come, mother," he says, "you and I will stroll to some shady nook, and sit there; I want to talk to you where there are no echoes."

"Ay, my son," she replies, tenderly and piteously; "a mother's love 'll not fall you."

Mother and son walked away; Robin is wandering by himself in the woods; Sassafras and Bluebell are left alone.

"This sweetest of days," murmured Sassafras, in a tone which trembles from excess of feeling, "has filled my life with tender memories."

They walk slowly, as in a dream, and Bluebell presently seats herself upon the mossed outspreading trunk of a grand old tree; Sassafras lies on the ground at her feet. A spiritual beauty dwells in Bluebell's face; her soul is in perfect harmony with the beauty of the day. Her hands are resting on her lap; Sassafras, timidly and with beating heart, lays his hand upon hers, and softly imprisons it. She trembles and looks down, but she does not shrink from him. Her pure soul trusts in him utterly. Thus they sit in silence for fully half an hour, which seems but a few moments, the time flies so swiftly. But when a falling leaf, or the fluttering of a bird's wing, disturbs the fine current of her waking dream, Bluebell sees the eyes of Sassafras gazing so earnestly and tenderly into hers that a new-born joy awakes in her heart, and her gentle breast is stirred by an emotion so exquisitely sweet as to border almost upon pain.

"If it *were* so, Bluebell," whispers Sassafras: "if it were so! Now and forevsr, heart whispers low, change will come never! If change would never come! If we could remain thus forever! How fair, how beautiful is the world!"

Bluebell looks upward.

"There is a fairer world even than this," she says, softly.

"I could kneel at your feet, and pray."

He does kneel at her feet, and clasps her hands, which she yields willingly to him.

"If during the moments that are now passing we ourselves should pass away, then death would surely be beautiful."

"Why speak of death?" says Bluebell. "Why wish for it? The world is very good. God saw that it was so."

They fall into silence again for a brief space; but the lengthening shadows of the trees warn Sassafras that they must soon depart. He raises himself closer to Bluebell, and invites her to stroll to a peep of sunlight in the distance. They walk hand in hand toward a small glade; the trees, which form a semi circle, throw quaint shadows on the ground.

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THE Subscriber, having leased the above well known House on Prince William Street, and furnished it throughout, is now prepared to accommodate Transient and Permanent Boarders, on the most favorable terms.

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