

HANS FINGERHUT'S FROG-LESSON.

A FAIRY TALE.

Long ago, almost out of recollection, there lived in a small town in a woody German valley a poet named Hans Fingerhut. He had come from the far north somewhere, and had travelled many years with his harp from court to court and hall to hall, buying his bread with songs that the gentlefolk at first were never tired of hearing. But Hans Fingerhut's desires were of the largest. He longed for unlimited good living, sympathy, and above all, for praise. But it seemed to him that the further he travelled the less the world had to give him. Other poets received as much praise as he; and those who were of better figure and bearing were more successful in many things than he. Many a rebuff and many an ill deed befell him. Then his songs began to grow peevish and querulous, and men would no longer listen to them as they had done to the fresh and joyous ones of his youth. His querulousness grew to anger. His harp-strings no longer trembled to the recital of wonderful and beautiful things; but shrieked and thundered with songs full of wrath and bitterness. The great people turned him from their gates; and in despair he broke his harp, rented a stall in the town, and became a tailor—for he had been apprenticed to that trade in his youth. All day he sewed and stitched, and scowled at the passers-by, and half the night he wandered about the streets, scrawling satires on the gates of all whom the people honored. Nothing prospered with him. Often as he sat and sewed, great songs seemed to come to him, beautiful visions and thoughts that dawned on him and strove to combine with the restless melody in his soul; but the remembrance of his disappointments and forlorn condition always turned them into chants so dreadful and ferocious that little children were afraid to pass his door. At such times his cutting and sewing all went wrong, and people refused to pay him for his shapeless work.

At last one day, driven to distraction, he left his stall and passed away out of the town, determined never to return. Everything seemed to mock him as he walked; the blue sky and the fresh green earth, the song of the birds, the piping of the crickets and grasshoppers, the wind in the trees and the clink of the cow-bell, all so full of fair delight and contentment. The farther he went the fiercer he grew. He cursed the heavens and the earth and all happy and beautiful things in them.

At last he came to a forest and then to a little stream running among stones and fallen moss-grown trees. More than ever the cheery ripple and murmur of the water angered him. It seemed to say to him—"How very miserable you are, to be sure, Hans Fingerhut, you dishevelled outcast; see how happy I am and how delightfully I sing." And Hans Fingerhut began to fling stones into the stream; but never heeded. Every stone that he

flung made the water ripple and dance and sing the merrier, and the bigger the stones the louder the song. Then he seized a great stick and stirred the stream, and raised thick clouds of mud, so that the water ran away yellow and foul; but the song never ceased. At last in his rage he leaped into it himself, and kicked and danced, and lashed the water with his stick till he was tired. But when he was done the stream still rippled round his legs in perfect contentment. Weary, wet and distracted, he laid himself down on the bank among the ferns, and after a long while fell into a sound sleep.

He had not been long asleep, he thought, when something pricked him sharply on the end of the nose, and he awoke with a great start, for behold, there stood beside him a more curious and beautiful little elf than he had ever described in any of his old time songs. He was not more than a foot high. He wore for a hat a big thistle bloom, hollowed out on the underside so as to fit his head. His jerkin was made of the white petals of the water-lily, wonderfully pieced together, and buttoned with crimson seeds. His hose and stockings were made of the down of the most delicate alder catkins, woven in an elfin loom; his shoes of the thickest golden petals of the marsh-marigold, laced with silver threads of flax, around his shoulders was cast for a mantle a great leaf of the water-lily, and in his hand he held a sprig of thistle, with the spiked blade of which he had pricked Hans Fingerhut on the nose. He had little keen, calm blue eyes, a soft yellow beard that reached to hip waist, and long yellow hair that hung and curled in delicate fringes over the great green water-lily mantle.

The elf looked very sternly at Hans Fingerhut. "Wretched mortal" he said, "you have disturbed my beautiful stream, because it retains forever the peace and gladness which you by your own fault have lost; because it sings to you, as you once sang imperfectly in your youth; because it teaches you a wonderful lesson which you are now too blind and degraded to understand. In your songs long ago you interpreted the song of the stream more than once, but not rightly. Do you know it now?" "No," answered Hans Fingerhut, "I have no heart nowadays to interpret anything but what is dark and dismal." "Then," said the elf, "I will turn you into a frog and you must remain a frog until you find out the meaning of the stream-song." So saying he pricked the poet again with the end of the thistle-staff and Hans Fingerhut sank down into a great frog, with webbed feet, wide ugly mouth, and staring eyes.

The elf was gone and for many hours Hans sat on the bank of the stream utterly stunned and wretched, he felt himself so clumsy and ugly, and more than ever useless. The grass, which a few hours ago he had brushed aside with his strong feet, now towered high above his head, and the thick weeds hung so close and rank around and above him that he could scarcely think of penetrating them. At last, however, he grew very hungry and fell to snapping at